Helping your children choose books they will love



Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Hav3n

Written by

Tom Easton

Published by

Bloomsbury

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk



TOM EASTON

ANDERSEN PRESS

First published in 2012
by Andersen Press Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 2SA
www.andersenpress.co.uk

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system or transmitted
in any form, or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording
or otherwise, without the written permission
of the publisher.

The right of Tom Easton to be identified as the
author of this work has been asserted by him
in accordance with the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Copyright © Tom Easton, 2012

British Library Cataloguing
in Publication Data available.

ISBN 978 1 84939 418 5

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Bookmarque, Croydon CR0 4TD

The Hilton, Heathrow Airport, London
12 October, 7.43 a.m.

Rory Chambers stared at himself in the mirror and rubbed the back of his neck. He felt awful. His greying hair was dry and flaky, his skin sallow and waxy. He must have drunk too much last night, he told himself. How else to explain the dry mouth, the thumping headache, the nausea?

He took a shower, standing still, face upturned to the stinging hot water. The back of his neck tingled and he rubbed it again, feeling a spot developing there. Trying to squeeze it between finger and thumb caused a sharp pain and he decided he'd better leave it alone.

Wandering through into the bedroom, Rory flicked on the TV. They'd been banging on about bird flu the last few weeks: *AV3N*. In the last couple of days everyone had suddenly got very excited and the boffins were talking about the virus having combined with a human flu strain. Death rates were soaring. The anchors looked earnest, but didn't they always?

He coughed, feeling phlegmy, and turned the TV off. Media hysterics. He didn't have time to worry about a little cold. So what if a few grannies and sickly kids died? 'That's natural selection in action,' he said to himself, sniffing. Survival of the fittest. Pandemics were there to clear out the chaff.

His hand had found its way to the back of his neck again. The spot felt huge, and tight. He squeezed, and this time the thing burst. Warm fluid crept down his back. Inspecting his hand, he recoiled at the sight of a black, viscous mess coating his fingers. *What the hell?* He grabbed a tissue and dabbed the spot gently, wincing. Then he coughed again, his chest rattling.

'Come on, Rory,' he told himself. 'Get it together.'

He was on his way to a big meeting in New York, a huge meeting for him. If he pulled off this deal he'd be able to buy a yacht so big it would make Abramovich's look like a pedalo. He couldn't be sick for this, simply couldn't.

'I just have to get on the plane, then I'll take some pills and sleep it off,' Rory muttered to himself as he hauled on his trousers.

The coughing proper started as he was checking out. The procedure took a good ten minutes as every time he tried to say something to the pretty young receptionist, he exploded into a fit of hacking coughs, drawing up phlegm. She tried not to look disgusted as she handed him tissue after tissue. Eventually she just passed him the box and took a firm step backwards.

Rory staggered out into Terminal 4, blearily examining the boards for his gate. He'd checked in online the night before and carried just a bag.

Gate 13, the board told him. Unlucky for some.

Please allow 10 minutes to walk to your gate.

It took him seventeen, as he kept having to stop and gasp for air. His breathing was by now ragged, and the back of his neck itched and scratched like crazy. He was running a little late so he tried to speed up, but he stumbled, and burst into another fit of coughing as he passed an Asian family looking for Gate 9. They recoiled in distaste and he mumbled an apology.

On arrival at the gate he stood swaying for a minute. The lights hurt his eyes and the back of his neck was agony now. The flight attendant held out her hand for his boarding pass; then she shrank away, horrified, as she caught a look at his sweating face.

'What's wrong?' he tried to say as she swam in and out of focus, but it came out as 'Wassra?' He felt cold and hot at the same time, and suddenly, for the first time since he could remember, Rory Chambers felt very, very frightened. A warm trickle of urine ran down his leg as he sank to his knees, feeling an enormous cough rise in his chest. A security guard swam into vision and the last thing Rory saw, as he coughed up half a liquidised lung, spraying it over the guard and half the passengers in the lobby, was this poor man's face and torso suddenly turn bright pink.

Then the darkness claimed him.

1

Little Sheen, Surrey
14 October, 3.07 p.m.

Judith Pirbright pressed the red button and replaced the phone handset on its shoe. She did it carefully, as she did everything. It wasn't that she was overly neat, or obsessively tidy. Just that she seemed to think hard about everything, as if constantly trying to remember how exactly it was that one made a cup of tea, or turned on the television, or wrote a birthday card. It drove Josh mad. He liked the way his father did things. Casually, gracefully, almost without thinking. Which was strange when you considered what his job was. His father should be the perfectionist, the one who watched what he was doing. The careful one.

'Was that him?' Josh asked, though he knew it was.

His mum nodded, then turned to face him, refusing to meet his gaze across the cold kitchen.

'Well?'

Judith breathed in deeply, as if she were about to blow Josh away with her next sentence. *Hell*, he thought. *Maybe she is.*

'Your dad thinks we should set up barricades half a mile outside the village, on both roads,' she said.

'Barricades?'

'We need to block the roads,' Judith explained. 'Stop anyone from coming into the village.'

Josh nodded, trying to appear calm even though his insides churned. He was used to it now; his stomach had been churning since the state of emergency had been announced the day before.

His father had phoned from his laboratory in a remote part of Suffolk and spoken to Josh's mum for twenty minutes while she'd stood and listened quietly, just saying 'OK' from time to time. After the phone call had finished she'd sat for a few minutes in silence, before pulling herself together. She'd been careful with her words, but had left Josh and his twin sister Martha in absolutely no doubt just how big this was.

Now, suddenly, it seemed to have got just that much worse.

'It's that bad?' he asked.

She nodded. 'He told me to be honest with you . . . with both of you. It's actually very bad indeed. Much worse than the government said yesterday.' She sat down and Josh wondered if he should go over and . . . what? Put a hand on her shoulder? Hug her? They weren't a touchy-feely sort of family. He stayed where he was, telling himself that he had to stay strong. They all did. Hugs could wait.

'How did he sound?' he asked.

Judith looked up at him, disturbed. 'He . . . didn't sound like himself. He was almost gabbling. He's under so much pressure . . .'

She tailed off and Josh's stomach lurched. His father, Michael Pirbright, was not a man to let pressure get to him easily. If he was panicking, there was something to panic about.

'I can't put up barricades by myself,' he said. He sensed Martha appear in the doorway, knew she would be listening intently, and he could hear she had stopped breathing so as not to announce her presence. Martha liked to know what was going on. She listened, she read, she watched – it was why she did so well at school; not that she was clever, just that she paid attention. Josh, by contrast, tended to act first and think later.

'No,' his mother agreed. 'He said we need to tell everyone in the village. Make them aware of how serious it is. He said we need to make them listen, whatever it takes.'

She paused. He waited, knowing there was more.

'Otherwise people will try and let . . . others through. We can't let anyone back in. Not even loved ones. No matter how they beg. If we let them in we could all die . . .'

Josh's head reeled. His thoughts turned immediately to his friends in the villages and towns nearby, his grandparents in Scotland, his cousins in Kent.

Were they now building barricades of their own? Or were they trapped without? Or worse still, had they already succumbed?

'How long will this last? Did he say?'

His mum paused for a moment before shaking her head. 'I don't know, Josh.'

'Dad will come back, won't he? He'll be OK, in his lab?'

This time the pause was longer. 'There's always hope,' Judith said.

Martha's blonde cloud of hair, so like his own in colour, bobbed and she was gone. Back to her room to write in her diary, no doubt: *Dear Diary, Today the government disappeared and the world fell apart.*

Josh felt sick. Just four days ago the Department of Health had released a statement saying the bird-flu strain AV3N had combined with a human strain, creating a new, deadly virus – HAV3N. The BBC showed pictures of the molecular structure of the virus, saying that there'd never been anything quite like it before.

The science was lost on Josh – Martha was the scientific one, the analytical one. He had never done well in science, or maths for that matter, and there was no chance of him following in his father's footsteps. Michael, to his credit, never expressed disappointment in Josh's supreme lack of scientific *nous*, but encouraged him in his interests in photography, or motorbikes. However, the fact that their

father would heap praise on Martha's always-excellent results in chemistry or physics made Josh feel he was falling a little short of his father's expectations.

Within hours, the BBC reported, the virus had spread across the globe and now reports started arriving of deaths in the thousands. Most people in their village, Josh knew, had decided to stay in their homes, as advised, while schools and colleges were immediately closed and the trains began running a reduced service – none at all by the curfew today. Maybe two dozen villagers commuted to work in nearby Guildford, or London – about an hour away by train – and some had driven to work as usual, airily declaring it all media hype, another swine flu. But those people were now trapped in the cities since all travel had been forbidden when the state of emergency was declared.

Things were so desperate that the army had orders to shoot anyone not complying. But Josh had heard on the radio that many people were ignoring the instruction to stay put, desperate to escape the death trap that London or the other cities had become; they were risking the bullets to try and get back home to their loved ones.

'He said we should man the barricades with any guns we can gather,' his mother continued quietly. 'Hunting rifles, shotguns. I know Mr Mitchell has one he uses for pheasants . . .' Josh could hear her

picking her way through the minefield her sentences were laying down, leaving him to blunder in.

'So if the commuters try to return . . .?' he began, before trailing off.

She nodded.

'And what about Dad? He just waits at the lab? Is there any chance of his team coming up with a cure? A vaccine?' He immediately reached for his mobile, thinking to text his father, then remembered that the signal had been shut down the day before.

His mother's eyes filled and she looked away, through the window over the sink, out into the gloom of the October afternoon. 'He said there's always a chance. He said he thinks he's close to something. We need to do what we must to keep ourselves alive in the meantime.'

'He's going to come home?'

Judith turned, her blonde hair backlit by the picture window behind. She ignored his question. 'Go now, Josh. Go and get Sam. Then meet me down at the pub; that's where everyone seems to be congregating. I need to tell everyone what your father just told me.'

'What about Martha?' Josh asked.

'I'm going to ask her to wait here, in case your father phones again.'

Josh nodded, then went out through the front door and onto Highland Terrace. He paused for a moment, breathing in the earthy scents of autumn. Brown apples and wet leaves. How strange to think