

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  
**If You're Reading This, it's Too Late**

Written by  
**Pseudonymous Bosch**

Published by  
**Usborne Publishing Ltd**

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

Please print off and read at your leisure.



## **AUTHOR'S NOTE:**

**PLEASE READ THE CONTRACT ON THE  
FOLLOWING PAGE VERY CAREFULLY AND  
COPY IT OUT IN YOUR BEST HANDWRITING.  
IF YOU REFUSE TO SIGN, I'M AFRAID YOU  
MUST CLOSE THIS BOOK IMMEDIATELY.**

**P.B.**

# BINDING CONTRACT

I, the reader of this book, certify that I am reading this book for entertainment only.

Or to avoid cleaning my bedroom or doing my homework.

I will not try to uncover the true identities or locations of the people described in this book.

Nor will I try to contact any secret society mentioned in this book.

Although the story may concern an ancient and powerful Secret, I hereby deny any knowledge of this so-called Secret.

If I am ever asked about it, I will run from the room.

Unless I am on an aeroplane, in which case I will close my eyes and ignore the person speaking to me.

And if all else fails, I'll scream.

I will not repeat a word of this book under any circumstances.

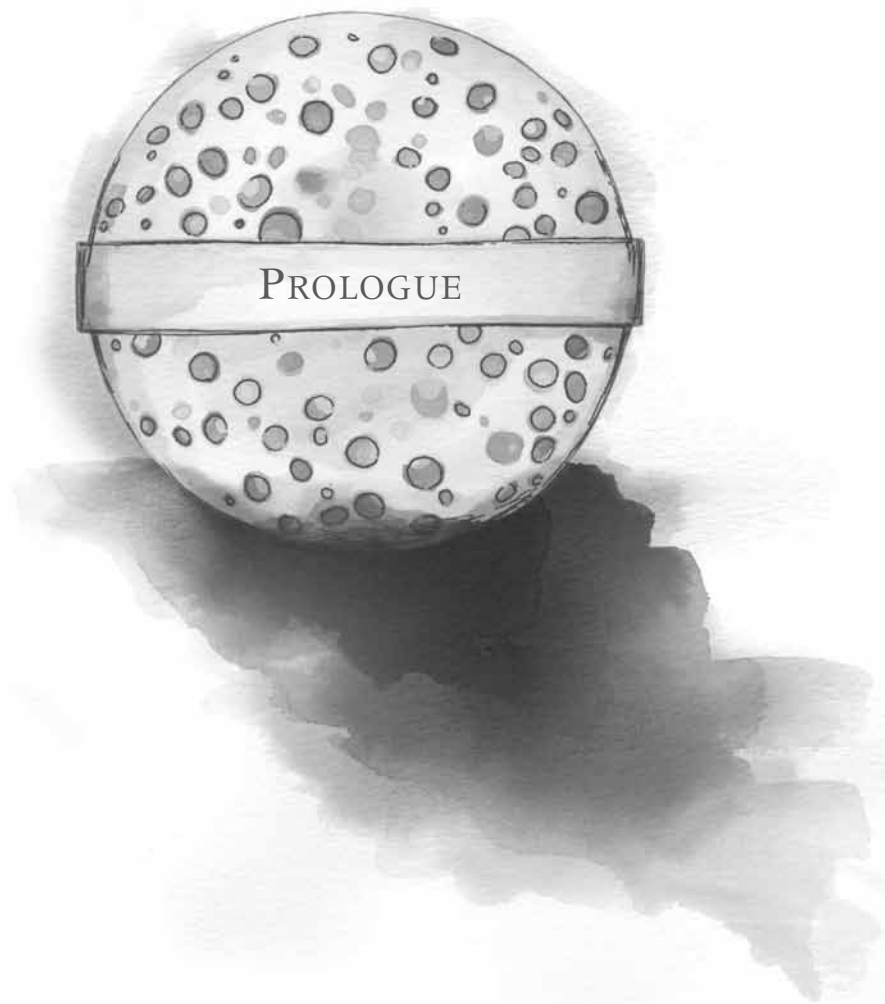
Unless I just can't help it.

Signed,

Reader \_\_\_\_\_ \*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\*NORMALLY, I WOULD ASK THAT YOU SIGN IN BLOOD. BUT LATELY I HAVE FOUND THAT KETCHUP WORKS JUST AS WELL – AND IT IS MUCH LESS PAINFUL.



PROLOGUE

~~The flashlight pierced the darkness~~

~~The flashlight slashed through the darkness~~

~~The flashlight beam sliced through the darkness like  
a sword~~

**T**he flashlight beam darted – yes! – across the dark hall, illuminating a wondrous collection of antique curiosities:

Finely illustrated tarot cards of wizened kings and laughing fools...glistening Chinese lacquer boxes concealing spring traps and secret compartments... intricately carved cups of wood and ivory designed for making coins and marbles and even fingers disappear... shining silver rings that a knowing hand could link and unlink as if they were made of air...

A museum of magic.

The circle of light lingered on a luminous crystal ball, as if waiting for some swirling image to appear on the surface. Then it stopped, hesitating on a large bronze lantern – once home, perhaps, to a powerful genie.

Finally, the flashlight beam found its way to a glass display case sitting alone in the middle of the room.

“Ha! At last!” said a woman with a voice like ice.

The man behind the flashlight snickered. "Who was it that said the best place to hide something was in plain sight? What an idiot." His accent was odd, ominous.

"Just do it!" hissed the woman.

Grasping the heavy flashlight tight in his gloved hand, the man brought it down like an axe. Glass shattered in a cascade, revealing a milky white orb – a giant pearl? – sitting on a bed of black velvet.

Ignoring the sharp, glittering shards, the woman reached with a delicately thin hand – in a delicately thin white glove – and pulled out the orb.

About the size of an ostrich egg, it was translucent and seemed almost to glow from within. The surface had a honeycomb sort of texture comprised of many holes of varying sizes. A thin band of silver circled the orb, dividing it into two equal hemispheres.

The woman pushed aside her white-blonde hair and held the mysterious object to her perfectly shaped ear. As she turned it over, it whispered like an open bottle in the wind.

"I can almost hear him," she gloated. "That horrid monster!"

"You're so sure he's alive? It's been four, five hundred years..."

"A creature like that – so impossible to make – is all

the more impossible to kill," she replied, still listening to the ball in her hand.

A small red bloodstain now marked her white glove where one of the glass shards had cut through; she didn't seem to notice. "But now he can escape us no longer. The Secret will be mine!"

The flashlight beam fell.

"I mean ours, darling."

Beneath the shattered display a small brass plaque gleamed. *The Sound Prism, origin unknown*, it read—

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA  
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRGH!

I'm sorry – I can't do it.

I can't write this book. I'm far too frightened.

Not for myself, you understand. As ruthless as they are, Dr. L and Ms. Mauvais will never find me where I am. (You recognized that insidious duo, didn't you – by their gloves?\*)

No, it's for you I fear.

I had hoped the contract would protect you, but now that I look the matter square in the face – it's just not enough.

What if, say, the wrong people saw you reading this book? They might not believe your claims of innocence. That you really know nothing about the Secret.

I regret to say it, but I can't vouch for what would happen then.

Honestly, I would feel much better writing about something else. Something safer.

Like, say, penguins! Penguins are popular.

---

\*IF NOT, YOU WERE PROBABLY LUCKY ENOUGH NOT TO READ MY EARLIER BOOK, *CASS AND MAX-ERNEST AND THE MYSTERY OF THE SECRET SPA*. ALSO CALLED *CASS AND MAX-ERNEST AND THE CURSE OF THE NOT-SO-ANCIENT PYRAMID*. YOU MAY KNOW IT AS *THE NAME OF THIS BOOK IS SECRET* – A TITLE THAT IS SO CONFUSING I SELDOM USE IT MYSELF. TO FIND OUT WHO DR. L AND MS. MAUVAIS ARE, AND TO CATCH UP ON THE STORY SO FAR, TURN TO PAGE 402. OR BETTER YET, KEEP READING IN IGNORANCE – IN THIS CASE, A MUCH SAFER COURSE.

No? You don't want penguins? You want secrets?

Of course you do. Me, too... It's just, well, what if I were to tell you that, after all, I was just the teensiest bit scared? For my own skin, I mean.

Let me put it this way: the monster Ms. Mauvais spoke of – that wasn't a figure of speech. She meant *monster*.

So how about giving me a break? Just this once.

What's that – it's too late? You signed a contract?

Gee. That's nice. I thought we had a friendly arrangement, and now you're threatening me.

Oh, sure. I know how it is. You want to laugh at my jokes. Maybe shed a few tears. But when it comes to having real sympathy for a terrified soul like me – forget it, right?

Readers, you're all the same. Spoiled, every last one of you. Lying there with your feet up, yelling for someone to bring you more cookies. (Don't tell me they're chocolate chip because then I'll be really mad!)

I'm sorry, I didn't mean that – this whole writing business is making me crazy.

Let's be honest – I'm stalling.

In a word: Procrastinating. Putting off. Postponing.

I'm draaaaaggggginnnnnnnggggg myyyyyy feeeeeet.

You're right – it's only going to make my job harder in the end.

Better to jump back in.

Never mind how cold the water is. Or how deep. Or how many man-eating—

The only way to write is to write and I'm just going to—

Wait! I need a second to settle my mind.

Two seconds.

Three.

There. I'm standing on the edge, pen in hand, ready to take the plunge.

And here I—



**HEY, DID YOU JUST  
PUSH ME?!?!?**

**WELL, I GUESS IT HAD TO HAPPEN.  
BY NOW, WE ALL KNOW I CAN'T KEEP  
ANYTHING TO MYSELF - NO MATTER HOW  
DANGEROUS OR ILL-ADVISED.**

**AND THE TRUTH IS:**

**IF  
YOU'RE  
READING  
THIS,  
IT'S  
TOO LATE.**