



Pandemonium

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Storybook, fiction

Age: 7+

Johan wakes up feeling well-rested and ready to take on the world one morning. But where are his mom and dad? Why can't he smell a mouthwatering breakfast wafting from the kitchen? The boy discovers his mother making a crown in her bedroom and his father sailing paper boats in the bathtub. They're both behaving bizarrely and seem to have no recollection of who Johan is. What is he to do? The boy reckons his teacher can certainly help, so he hurries off to school. However, standing at the front of the room is Johan's classmate, who is ordering around old people sitting at the desks. The teacher herself has climbed up a tree outside with cat whiskers drawn on her cheeks. What the devil is going on? How can he get things back to the way they were?



Reading sample

pp 4-5

Now, looking back, the cause of all this confusion is plain to see, although at first it looked like it would remain a mystery. The great pandemonium began with worldwide discontent, followed by envy, spite, dirty tricks, double bluffing and double-dealing, people sticking their noses into other people's business and, of course, sheer silliness.

Suddenly huge numbers of children wouldn't eat eggs or porridge for breakfast, and at least as many again were fractious because they refused to go to bed at night. There were even larger numbers of Dads who were dissatisfied with their jobs. Countless Mums were dissatisfied with Dads. Grandads couldn't face reading their grandchildren bedtime stories any more, grandmas refused to bake cakes, teachers were fed up with teaching and police officers chucked their uniforms into a corner and went mushrooming in the forest even though the mushrooming season was long since over. There was even a Father Christmas who wouldn't give presents out to children.

"I won't go," was all he would say, then pursed his lips and started picking his nose.

One morning was so downright awful that the sun wouldn't rise. It merely peered out sluggishly over the horizon with one eye shut and the other half closed.

That day was grey, windy and bleak from start to finish.

Johan was the only one who woke up full of beans as normal.

pp 8-9

Johan left the room. What on earth was going on? Was this some kind of a joke or was Mom really sick? Like, really, crazily sick.

He needed to call Dad. He must have left for work really early without having the faintest idea that Mum had completely lost the plot.

Johan tramped downstairs to the telephone. The morning had begun so oddly that he hadn't even managed to make it to the toilet. He decided to go for a quick pee before even beginning to explain the complicated situation to his Dad.

"I wonder, if there's such a thing as an anti-queen ointment? Or will Mom have to take some kind

of pills? The main thing would be the taste – they mustn't be too bitter," brooded Johan as he nipped into the bathroom.

But there was a surprise waiting there for him too. Dad, who at this time of day during the week was always already at the office, was happily bent over a bath full of water, playing with paper boats. Instead of his suit he was wearing a stripy sailor's shirt.

"W-w-w-what are you doing?" stuttered Johan once the initial shock had died down.

"There's a storm," Dad replied and splashed his hands in the bathwater so that the boats bobbed about on the surface.

"Why aren't you at work? Are you sick too?"

"I'm a sailor, I'm awaiting orders to board the vessel," Dad said as he straightened up. "And now they've come and I'm off."

"Where are you off to?" squeaked Johan.

"A sailor's place is at sea."

Dad pulled a rubber ring over his chest, patted Johan on the top of the head and left the flat.

"Dad – you can't even swim!" Johan yelled after him. But Dad was already out of earshot.

pp 12-13

A strong wind tossed the ice cream wrappers, leaves and twigs around the garden.

Johan hadn't made much headway along the street where he lived when he had to stop for a speeding car. At the wheel was one of the lads from Year 6, sporting a pair of sunglasses. The first car was followed by a second, signalling wildly, then a third and a fourth, each driving seat occupied by an excited schoolboy. A race was under way on the road and pavement, between the trees.

Johan walked cautiously in the direction of school.

On his way through the park he saw two men with grey beards in the sandpit throwing sand in each other's faces, laughing, and playing with a tin toy train. A girl was wheeling a pink bicycle with an ancient, knobbly-kneed woman hunched in the saddle, clutching a balloon. A young man skipping among the bushes reminded Johan strongly of a crow and the maths teacher and the school head were dancing an Estonian folk-dance in time with the music booming out of some speakers.



Johan took refuge in his classroom. In front of the board, brandishing a large pointer, stood Matilda, his classmate.

"Why are you late?" she snapped as Johan quietly poked his head round the door. "Sit down immediately! You get an F!"

Just one face Johan knew looked back at Johan from the school benches – the school cook. The others were complete strangers: two women in late middle-age who'd braided their hair, an old man with thick glasses, a red-headed woman and three other elderly ladies. One of them had spread a selection of her knitting on the desk, while the others had lined up their medicine bottles.

Johan stumbled to the bench.

The window looked out onto a leafless maple tree where, snuggled down on one of its branches, he spotted the class teacher with black felt-tip whiskers adorning her cheeks.

"Hello!" mumbled Johan.

"Miao!" the teacher replied.