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opening extract from

**A Series of Unfortunate
Events: Book the Seventh
*The Vile Village***

written by

Lemony Snicket

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**For Beatrice –
When we were together I felt breathless.
Now, you are.**

www.unfortunateevents.com

C H A P T E R

One

No matter who you are, no matter where you live, and no matter how many people are chasing you, what you don't read is often as important as what you do read. For instance, if you are walking in the mountains, and you don't read the sign that says "Beware of Cliff" because you are busy reading a joke book instead, you may suddenly find yourself walking on air rather than on a sturdy bed of rocks. If you are baking a pie for your friends, and you read an article entitled "How to Build a Chair" instead of a cookbook, your pie will probably end up tasting like wood and nails instead of like crust and fruity filling. And if you insist on reading this

book instead of something more cheerful, you will most certainly find yourself moaning in despair instead of wriggling in delight, so if you have any sense at all you will put this book down and pick up another one. I know of a book, for instance, called *The Littlest Elf*, which tells the story of a teensy-weensy little man who scurries around Fairyland having all sorts of adorable adventures, and you can see at once that you should probably read *The Littlest Elf* and wriggle over the lovely things that happened to this imaginary creature in a made-up place, instead of reading this book and moaning over the terrible things that happened to the three Baudelaire orphans in the village where I am now typing these very words. The misery, woe, and treachery contained in the pages of this book are so dreadful that it is important that you don't read any more of it than you already have.

The Baudelaire orphans, at the time this story begins, were certainly wishing that they weren't reading the newspaper that was in front

of their eyes. A newspaper, as I'm sure you know, is a collection of supposedly true stories written down by writers who either saw them happen or talked to people who did. These writers are called journalists, and like telephone operators, butchers, ballerinas, and people who clean up after horses, journalists can sometimes make mistakes. This was certainly the case with the front page of the morning edition of *The Daily Punctilio*, which the Baudelaire children were reading in the office of Mr. Poe. "TWINS CAPTURED BY COUNT OMAR," the headline read, and the three siblings looked at one another in amazement over the mistakes that *The Daily Punctilio's* journalists had made.

"Duncan and Isadora Quagmire," Violet read out loud, "twin children who are the only known surviving members of the Quagmire family, have been kidnapped by the notorious Count Omar. Omar is wanted by the police for a variety of dreadful crimes, and is easily recognized by his one long eyebrow, and the tattoo

of an eye on his left ankle. Omar has also kidnapped Esmé Squalor, the city's sixth most important financial advisor, for reasons unknown.' Ugh!" The word "Ugh!" was not in the newspaper, of course, but was something Violet uttered herself as a way of saying she was too disgusted to read any further. "If I invented something as sloppily as this newspaper writes its stories," she said, "it would fall apart immediately." Violet, who at fourteen was the eldest Baudelaire child, was an excellent inventor, and spent a great deal of time with her hair tied up in a ribbon to keep it out of her eyes as she thought of new mechanical devices.

"And if I read books as sloppily," Klaus said, "I wouldn't remember one single fact." Klaus, the middle Baudelaire, had read more books than just about anyone his own age, which was almost thirteen. At many crucial moments, his sisters had relied on him to remember a helpful fact from a book he had read years before.

"Krechin!" Sunny said. Sunny, the youngest

Baudelaire, was a baby scarcely larger than a watermelon. Like many infants, Sunny often said words that were difficult to understand, like “Krechin!” which meant something along the lines of “And if I used my four big teeth to bite something as sloppily, I wouldn’t even leave one toothmark!”

Violet moved the paper closer to one of the reading lamps Mr. Poe had in his office, and began to count the errors that had appeared in the few sentences she had read. “For one thing,” she said, “the Quagmires aren’t twins. They’re triplets. The fact that their brother perished in the fire that killed their parents doesn’t change their birth identity.”

“Of course it doesn’t,” Klaus agreed. “And they were kidnapped by Count *Olaf*, not Omar. It’s difficult enough that Olaf is always in disguise, but now the newspaper has disguised his name, too.”

“Esmé!” Sunny added, and her siblings nodded. The youngest Baudelaire was talking

about the part of the article that mentioned Esmé Squalor. Esmé and her husband, Jerome, had recently been the Baudelaires' guardians, and the children had seen with their own eyes that Esmé had not been kidnapped by Count Olaf. Esmé had secretly helped Olaf with his evil scheme, and had escaped with him at the last minute.

“And ‘for reasons unknown’ is the biggest mistake of all,” Violet said glumly. “The reasons aren’t unknown. *We* know them. We know the reasons Esmé, Count Olaf, and all of Olaf’s associates have done so many terrible things. It’s because they’re terrible people.” Violet put down *The Daily Punctilio*, looked around Mr. Poe’s office, and joined her siblings in a sad, deep sigh. The Baudelaire orphans were sighing not only for the things they had read, but for the things they hadn’t read. The article had not mentioned that both the Quagmires and the Baudelaires had lost their parents in terrible fires, and that both sets of parents had left

enormous fortunes behind, and that Count Olaf had cooked up all of his evil plans just to get ahold of these fortunes for himself. The newspaper had failed to note that the Quagmire triplets had been kidnapped while trying to help the Baudelaires escape from Count Olaf's clutches, and that the Baudelaires had almost managed to rescue the Quagmires, only to find them snatched away once more. The journalists who wrote the story had not included the fact that Duncan Quagmire, who was a journalist himself, and Isadora Quagmire, who was a poet, each kept a notebook with them wherever they went, and that in their notebooks they had written down a terrible secret they had discovered about Count Olaf, but that all the Baudelaire orphans knew of this secret were the initials V.F.D., and that Violet, Klaus, and Sunny were always thinking of these three letters and what ghastly thing they could stand for. But most of all, the Baudelaire orphans had read no word about the fact that the Quagmire triplets were

* A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS *

good friends of theirs, and that the three siblings were very worried about the Quagmires, and that every night when they tried to go to sleep, their heads were filled with terrible images of what could be happening to their friends, who were practically the only happy thing in the Baudelaires' lives since they received the news of the fire that killed their parents and began the series of unfortunate events that seemed to follow them wherever they went. The article in *The Daily Punctilio* probably did not mention these details because the journalist who wrote the story did not know about them, or did not think they were important, but the Baudelaires knew about them, and the three children sat together for a few moments and thought quietly about these very, very important details.