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opening extract from

# **The Slippery Slope**

written by

## **Lemony Snicket**

published by

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# A Series of Unfortunate Events



BOOK THE TENTH

## THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

by

*Lemony Snicket*

Illustrated by  
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EGMONT

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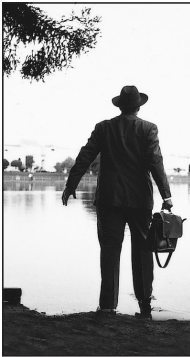
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**For Beatrice –**

**When we met, you were pretty, and I was lonely.**

**Now, I am pretty lonely.**



Until recently, Lemony Snicket was presumed to be 'presumed dead'. Instead, this 'presumed' presumption wasn't disproved not to be incorrect. As he continues with his investigation, interest in the Baudelaire case has increased. So has his horror.

[www.unfortunateevents.com](http://www.unfortunateevents.com)

Brett Helquist was born in Ganado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah and now lives in Brooklyn, New York. He earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Brigham Young University and has been illustrating ever since. His work deciphering the evidence provided by Lemony Snicket into pictures often leaves him so distraught that he is awake late into the night.



## C H A P T E R

# One

A man of my acquaintance once wrote a poem called “The Road Less Traveled,” describing a journey he took through the woods along a path most travelers never used. The poet found that the road less traveled was peaceful but quite lonely, and he was probably a bit nervous as he went along, because if anything happened on the road less traveled, the other travelers would be on the road more frequently traveled and so couldn’t hear him as he cried for help. Sure enough, that poet is now dead.

Like a dead poet, this book can be said to be on the road less traveled, because it begins with the three Baudelaire children on a path

leading through the Mortmain Mountains, which is not a popular destination for travelers, and it ends in the churning waters of the Stricken Stream, which few travelers even go near. But this book is also on the road less traveled, because unlike books most people prefer, which provide comforting and entertaining tales about charming people and talking animals, the tale you are reading now is nothing but distressing and unnerving, and the people unfortunate enough to be in the story are far more desperate and frantic than charming, and I would prefer to not speak about the animals at all. For that reason, I can no more suggest the reading of this woeful book than I can recommend wandering around the woods by yourself, because like the road less traveled, this book is likely to make you feel lonely, miserable, and in need of help.

The Baudelaire orphans, however, had no choice but to be on the road less traveled. Violet and Klaus, the two elder Baudelaires, were in a caravan, traveling very quickly along the

high mountain path. Neither Violet, who was fourteen, nor Klaus, who had recently turned thirteen, had ever thought they would find themselves on this road, except perhaps with their parents on a family vacation. But the Baudelaire parents were nowhere to be found after a terrible fire destroyed their home—although the children had reason to believe that one parent may not have died in the blaze after all—and the caravan was not heading up the Mortmain Mountains, toward a secret headquarters the siblings had heard about and were hoping to find. The caravan was heading down the Mortmain Mountains, very quickly, with no way to control or stop its journey, so Violet and Klaus felt more like fish in a stormy sea than travelers on a vacation.

But Sunny Baudelaire was in a situation that could be said to be even more desperate. Sunny was the youngest Baudelaire, still learning to speak in a way that everyone could understand, so she scarcely had words for how frightened she



was. Sunny was traveling uphill, toward the headquarters in the Mortmain Mountains, in an automobile that was working perfectly, but the driver of the automobile was a man who was reason enough for being terrified. Some people called this man wicked. Some called him facinorous, which is a fancy word for “wicked.” But everyone called him Count Olaf, unless he was wearing one of his ridiculous disguises and making people call him a false name. Count Olaf was an actor, but he had largely abandoned his theatrical career to try to steal the enormous fortune the Baudelaire parents had left behind. Olaf’s schemes to get the fortune had been mean-spirited and particularly complicated, but nevertheless he had managed to attract a girlfriend, a villainous and stylish woman named Esmé Squalor, who was sitting next to Count Olaf in the car, cackling nastily and clutching Sunny on her lap. Also in the car were several employees of Olaf’s, including a man with hooks instead of hands, two women who liked

to wear white powder all over their faces, and three new comrades Olaf had recently recruited at Caligari Carnival. The Baudelaire children had been at the carnival, too, wearing disguises of their own, and had pretended to join Count Olaf in his treachery, but the villain had seen through their ruse, a phrase which here means “realized who they really were, and cut the knot attaching the caravan to the car, leaving Sunny in Olaf’s clutches and her siblings tumbling toward their doom.” Sunny sat in the car and felt Esmé’s long fingernails scratch her shoulders, and worried about what would happen to her and what was happening to her older siblings, as she heard their screams getting fainter and fainter as the car drove farther and farther away.

“We have to stop this caravan!” Klaus screamed. Hurriedly, he put on his glasses, as if by improving his vision he might improve the situation. But even in perfect focus, he could see their predicament was dire. The caravan had

served as a home for several performers at the carnival's House of Freaks before they defected—a word which here means “joined Count Olaf's band of revolting comrades”—and now the contents of this tiny home were rattling and crashing with each bump in the road. Klaus ducked to avoid a roasting pan, which Hugo the hunchback had used to prepare meals and which had toppled off a shelf in the commotion. He lifted his feet from the floor as a set of dominoes skittered by—a set that Colette the contortionist had liked to play with. And he squinted above him as a hammock swung violently overhead. An ambidextrous person named Kevin used to sleep in that hammock until he had joined Olaf's troupe, along with Hugo and Colette, and now it seemed like it might fall at any moment and trap the Baudelaires beneath it.

The only comforting thing that Klaus could see was his sister, who was looking around the caravan with a fierce and thoughtful expression

and unbuttoning the shirt the two siblings were sharing as part of their disguise. “Help me get us out of these freakish pants we’re both in,” Violet said. “There’s no use pretending we’re a two-headed person anymore, and we both need to be as able-bodied as possible.”

In moments, the two Baudelaires wriggled out of the oversized clothing they had taken from Count Olaf’s disguise kit and were standing in regular clothes, trying to balance in the shaky caravan. Klaus quickly stepped out of the path of a falling potted plant, but he couldn’t help smiling as he looked at his sister. Violet was tying her hair up in a ribbon to keep it out of her eyes, a sure sign that she was thinking up an invention. Violet’s impressive mechanical skills had saved the Baudelaires’ lives more times than they could count, and Klaus was certain that his sister could concoct something that could stop the caravan’s perilous journey.

“Are you going to make a brake?” Klaus asked.

“Not yet,” Violet said. “A brake interferes with the wheels of a vehicle, and this caravan’s wheels are spinning too quickly for interference. I’m going to unhook these hammocks and use them as a drag chute.”

“Drag chute?” Klaus said.

“Drag chutes are a little like parachutes attached to the back of a car,” Violet explained hurriedly, as a coatrack clattered around her. She reached up to the hammock where she and Klaus had slept and quickly detached it from the wall. “Race drivers use them to help stop their cars when a race is over. If I dangle these hammocks out the caravan door, we should slow down considerably.”

“What can I do?” Klaus said.

“Look in Hugo’s pantry,” Violet said, “and see if you can find anything sticky.”

When someone tells you to do something unusual without an explanation, it is very difficult not to ask why, but Klaus had learned long ago to have faith in his sister’s ideas, and

quickly crossed to a large cupboard Hugo had used to store ingredients for the meals he prepared. The door of the cupboard was swinging back and forth as if a ghost were fighting with it, but most of the items were still rattling around inside. Klaus looked at the cupboard and thought of his baby sister, who was getting farther and farther away from him. Even though Sunny was still quite young, she had recently shown an interest in cooking, and Klaus remembered how she had made up her own hot chocolate recipe, and helped prepare a delicious soup the entire caravan had enjoyed. Klaus held the cupboard door open and peered inside, and hoped that his sister would survive to develop her culinary skills.

“*Klaus,*” Violet said firmly, taking down another hammock and tying it to the first one. “I don’t mean to rush you, but we need to stop this caravan as soon as possible. Have you found anything sticky?”

Klaus blinked and returned to the task at

hand. A ceramic pitcher rolled around his feet as he pushed through the bottles and jars of cooking materials. “There’s lots of sticky things here,” he said. “I see blackstrap molasses, wild clover honey, corn syrup, aged balsamic vinegar, apple butter, strawberry jam, caramel sauce, maple syrup, butterscotch topping, maraschino liqueur, virgin and extra-virgin olive oil, lemon curd, dried apricots, mango chutney, *crema di noci*, tamarind paste, hot mustard, marshmallows, creamed corn, peanut butter, grape preserves, salt water taffy, condensed milk, pumpkin pie filling, and glue. I don’t know why Hugo kept glue in the pantry, but never mind. Which items do you want?”

“All of them,” Violet said firmly. “Find some way of mixing them, while I tie these hammocks together.”

Klaus grabbed the pitcher from the floor and began to pour the ingredients into it, while Violet, sitting on the floor to make it easier to

balance, gathered the cords of the hammocks in her lap and began twisting them into a knot. The caravan's journey grew rougher and rougher, and with each jolt, the Baudelaires felt a bit seasick, as if they were back on Lake Lachrymose, crossing its stormy waters to try and rescue one of their many unfortunate guardians. But despite the tumult around them, in moments Violet stood up with the hammocks gathered in her arms, all tied together in a mass of fabric, and Klaus looked at his sister and held up the pitcher, which was filled to the brim with a thick and colorful slime.

“When I say the word,” Violet said, “I’m going to open the door and cast these hammocks out. I want you at the other end of the caravan, Klaus. Open that little window and pour that mixture all over the wheels. If the hammocks work as a drag chute and the sticky substance interferes with the wheels, the caravan should slow down enough to save us. I just need to tie



the hammocks to the doorknob.”

“Are you using the Devil’s Tongue knot?” Klaus asked.

“The Devil’s Tongue hasn’t brought us the best luck,” Violet said, referring to several previous rope-related escapades. “I’m using the Sumac, a knot I invented myself. I named it after a singer I admire. There—it feels secure. Are you ready to pour that mixture onto the wheels?”

Klaus crossed to the window and opened it. The wild clattering sound of the caravan’s wheels grew louder, and the Baudelaires stared for a moment at the countryside racing by. The land was jagged and twisty, and it seemed that the caravan could tumble at any moment into a hole, or off the edge of one of the mountain’s square peaks. “I guess I’m ready,” Klaus said hesitantly. “Violet, before we try your invention, I want to tell you something.”

“If we don’t try it now,” Violet said grimly, “you won’t have the chance to tell me anything.” She gave her knot one more tug and

then turned back to Klaus. “Now!” she said, and threw open the caravan door.

It is often said that if you have a room with a view, you will feel peaceful and relaxed, but if the room is a caravan hurtling down a steep and twisted road, and the view is an eerie mountain range racing backward away from you, while chilly mountain winds sting your face and toss dust into your eyes, then you will not feel one bit of peace or relaxation. Instead you will feel the horror and panic that the Baudelaires felt when Violet opened the door. For a moment they could do nothing but stand still, feeling the wild tilting of the caravan, and looking up at the odd, square peaks of the Mortmain Mountains, and hearing the grinding of the caravan’s wheels as they rolled over rocks and tree stumps. But then Violet shouted “Now!” once more, and both siblings snapped into action. Klaus leaned out the window and began to pour the mixture of blackstrap molasses, wild clover honey, corn syrup, aged balsamic vinegar, apple butter,

strawberry jam, caramel sauce, maple syrup, butterscotch topping, maraschino liqueur, virgin and extra-virgin olive oil, lemon curd, dried apricots, mango chutney, *crema di noci*, tamarind paste, hot mustard, marshmallows, creamed corn, peanut butter, grape preserves, salt water taffy, condensed milk, pumpkin pie filling, and glue onto the closest wheels, while his sister tossed the hammocks out of the door, and if you have read anything of the Baudelaire orphans' lives—which I hope you have not—then you will not be surprised to read that Violet's invention worked perfectly. The hammocks immediately caught the rushing air and swelled out behind the caravan like enormous cloth balloons, which slowed the caravan down quite a bit, the way you would run much slower if you were dragging something behind you, like a knapsack or a sheriff. The sticky mixture fell on the spinning wheels, which immediately began to move with less ferocity, the way you would run with less ferocity if you suddenly found yourself running

in quicksand or through lasagne. The caravan slowed down, and the wheels spun less wildly, and within moments the two Baudelaires were traveling at a much more comfortable pace.

“It’s working!” Klaus cried.

“We’re not done yet,” Violet said, and walked over to a small table that had overturned in the confusion. When the Baudelaires were living at Caligari Carnival, the table had come in handy as a place to sit and make plans, but now in the Mortmain Mountains, it would come in handy for a different reason. Violet dragged the table over to the open door. “Now that the wheels are slowing down,” she said, “we can use this as a brake.”

Klaus dumped the last of the mixture out of the pitcher, and turned to his sister. “How?” he said, but Violet was already showing him how. Quickly she lay on the floor, and holding the table by its legs, dangled it out of the caravan so it dragged on the ground. Immediately there was a loud scraping sound, and the table began

to shake roughly in Violet's hands. But she held fast, forcing the table to scrape against the rocky ground and slow the caravan down even more. The swaying of the caravan became gentler and gentler, and the fallen items owned by the carnival employees stopped crashing, and then with one last whine, the wheels stopped altogether, and everything was still. Violet leaned out of the door and stuck the table in front of one of the wheels so it couldn't start rolling again, and then stood up and looked at her brother.

"We did it," Violet said.

"*You* did it," Klaus said. "The entire plan was your idea." He put down the pitcher on the floor and wiped his hands on a fallen towel.

"Don't put down that pitcher," Violet said, looking around the wreckage of the caravan. "We should gather up as many useful things as possible. We'll need to get this caravan moving uphill if we want to rescue Sunny."

"And reach the headquarters," Klaus added.

“Count Olaf has the map we found, but I remember that the headquarters are in the Valley of Four Drafts, near the source of the Stricken Stream. It’ll be very cold there.”

“Well, there is plenty of clothing,” Violet said, looking around. “Let’s grab everything we can and organize it outside.”

Klaus nodded in agreement, and picked up the pitcher again, along with several items of clothing that had fallen in a heap on top of a small hand mirror that belonged to Colette. Staggering from carrying so many things, he walked out of the caravan behind his sister, who was carrying a large bread knife, three heavy coats, and a ukulele that Hugo used to play sometimes on lazy afternoons. The floors of the caravan creaked as the Baudelaires stepped outside, into the misty and empty landscape, and realized how fortunate they had been.

The caravan had stopped right at the edge of one of the odd, square peaks of the mountain

range. The Mortmain Mountains looked like a staircase, heading up into the clouds or down into a veil of thick, gray mist, and if the caravan had kept going in the same direction, the two Baudelaires would have toppled over the peak and fallen down through the mist to the next stair, far, far below. But to one side of the caravan, the children could see the waters of the Stricken Stream, which were an odd grayish black color, and moved slowly and lazily downhill like a river of spilled oil. Had the caravan swerved to one side, the children would have been dumped into the dark and filthy waters.

“It looks like the brake worked just in time,” Violet said quietly. “No matter where the caravan would have gone, we would have been finished.”

Klaus nodded in agreement and looked around at the wilderness. “It will be difficult to navigate the caravan out of here,” Klaus said. “You’ll have to invent a steering device.”

“And some sort of engine,” Violet said.

“That will take some time.”

“We don’t have any time,” Klaus said. “If we don’t hurry, Count Olaf will be too far away and we’ll never find Sunny.”

“We’ll find her,” Violet said firmly, and put down the items she was carrying. “Let’s go back into the caravan, and look for—”

But before Violet could say what to look for, she was interrupted by an unpleasant crackling noise. The caravan seemed to moan, and then slowly began to roll toward the edge of the peak. The Baudelaires looked down and saw that the wheels had smashed the small table, so there was nothing to stop the caravan from moving again. Slowly and awkwardly it pitched forward, dragging the hammocks behind it as it neared the very edge of the peak. Klaus leaned down to grab hold of a hammock, but Violet stopped him. “It’s too heavy,” she said. “We can’t stop it.”

“We can’t let it fall off the peak!” Klaus cried.



“We’d be dragged down, too,” Violet said.

Klaus knew his sister was right, but still he wanted to grab the drag chute Violet had constructed. It is difficult, when faced with a situation you cannot control, to admit that you can do nothing, and it was difficult for the Baudelaires to stand and watch the caravan roll over the edge of the peak. There was one last creak as the back wheels bumped against a mound of dirt, and then the caravan disappeared in absolute silence. The Baudelaires stepped forward and peered over the edge of the peak, but it was so misty that the caravan was only a ghostly rectangle, getting smaller and smaller as it faded away.

“Why isn’t there a crash?” Klaus asked.

“The drag chute is slowing it down,” Violet said. “Just wait.”

The siblings waited, and after a moment there was a muffled *boom!* from below as the caravan met its fate. In the mist, the children could not see a thing, but they knew that the caravan

and everything inside it were gone forever, and indeed I have never been able to find its remains, even after months of searching the area with only a lantern and a rhyming dictionary for company. It seems that even after countless nights of battling snow gnats and praying the batteries would not run out, it is my fate that some of my questions will never be answered.

Fate is like a strange, unpopular restaurant, filled with odd waiters who bring you things you never asked for and don't always like. When the Baudelaires were very young, they would have guessed that their fate was to grow up in happiness and contentment with their parents in the Baudelaire mansion, but now both the mansion and their parents were gone. When they were attending Prufrock Preparatory School, they had thought that their fate was to graduate alongside their friends the Quagmires, but they hadn't seen the academy or the two triplets in a very long time. And just moments ago, it had looked like Violet and Klaus's fate had been to

fall off a peak or into a stream, but now they were alive and well, but far away from their sister and without a vehicle to help them find her again.

Violet and Klaus moved closer to one another, and felt the icy winds of the Mortmain Mountains blow down the road less traveled and give them goosebumps. They looked at the dark and swirling waters of the Stricken Stream, and they looked down from the edge of the peak into the mist, and then looked at one another and shivered, not only at the fates they had avoided, but at all the mysterious fates that lay ahead.