

# A Series of Unfortunate Events

COLLECTION: BOOKS 1-13  
with BONUS MATERIAL

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by

LEMONY SNICKET

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A Series of Unfortunate Events #1:  
The Bad Beginning



A Series of Unfortunate Events



Book the *First*

by LEMONY SNICKET

\* THE BAD BEGINNING \*



**A Series of Unfortunate Events**

*BOOK the First*

# **THE BAD BEGINNING**

*by* **LEMONY SNICKET**

*Illustrations by* **Brett Helquist**

 HarperCollins e-books



NAME

**Dear Reader,**

I'm sorry to say that the book you are holding in your hands is extremely unpleasant. It tells an unhappy tale about three very unlucky children. Even though they are charming and clever, the Baudelaire siblings lead lives filled with misery and woe. From the very first page of this book when the children are at the beach and receive terrible news, continuing on through the entire story, disaster lurks at their heels. One might say they are magnets for misfortune.

In this short book alone, the three youngsters encounter a greedy and repulsive villain, itchy clothing, a disastrous fire, a plot to steal their fortune, and cold porridge for breakfast.

It is my sad duty to write down these unpleasant tales, but there is nothing stopping you from putting this book down at once and reading something happy, if you prefer that sort of thing.

**With all due respect,**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lemony Snicket".

Lemony Snicket



To Beatrice—

*darling, dearest, dead,*





## CHAPTER

### One

*If* you are interested in stories with happy endings, you would be better off reading some other book. In this book, not only is there no happy ending, there is no happy beginning and very few happy things in the middle. This is because not very many happy things happened in the lives of the three Baudelaire youngsters. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire were intelligent children, and they were charming, and resourceful, and had pleasant facial features, but they were extremely unlucky, and most everything that happened to them was rife with misfortune, misery, and despair. I'm sorry to tell you this, but that is how the story goes.

Their misfortune began one day at Briny Beach. The three Baudelaire children lived with their parents in an enormous mansion at the heart of a dirty and busy city, and occasionally their parents gave them permission to take a rickety trolley—the word “rickety,” you probably know, here means “unsteady” or “likely to collapse”—alone to the seashore, where they would spend the day as a sort of vacation as long as they were home for dinner. This particular morning it was gray and cloudy, which didn't bother the Baudelaire youngsters one bit. When it was hot and sunny, Briny Beach was crowded with tourists and it was impossible to find a good place to lay one's blanket. On gray and cloudy days, the Baudelaire youngsters had the beach to themselves to do what they liked.

Violet Baudelaire, the eldest, liked to skip rocks. Like most fourteen-year-olds, she was right-handed, so the rocks skipped farther across the murky water when Violet used her right hand than when she used her left. As she skipped rocks, she was looking out at the horizon and thinking about an invention she wanted to build. Anyone who knew Violet well could tell she was thinking hard, because her long hair was tied up in a ribbon to keep it out of her eyes. Violet had a real knack for inventing and building strange devices, so her brain was often filled with images of pulleys, levers, and gears, and she never wanted to be distracted by something as trivial as her hair. This morning she was thinking about how to construct a device that could retrieve a rock after you had skipped it into the ocean.

Klaus Baudelaire, the middle child, and the only boy, liked to examine creatures in tide-pools. Klaus was a little older than twelve and wore glasses, which made him look intelligent. He *was* intelligent. The Baudelaire parents had an enormous library in their mansion, a room filled with thousands of books on nearly every subject. Being only twelve, Klaus of course had not read all of the books in the Baudelaire library, but he had read a great many of them and had retained a lot of the information from his readings. He knew how to tell an alligator from a crocodile. He knew who killed Julius Caesar. And he knew much about the tiny, slimy animals found at Briny Beach, which he was examining now.

Sunny Baudelaire, the youngest, liked to bite things. She was an infant, and very small for her age, scarcely larger than a boot. What she lacked in size, however, she made up for with the size and sharpness of her four teeth. Sunny was at an age where one mostly speaks in a series of unintelligible shrieks. Except when she used the few actual words in her vocabulary, like “bottle,” “mommy,” and “bite,” most people had trouble understanding what it was that Sunny was saying. For instance, this morning she was saying “Gack!” over and over, which probably meant, “Look at that mysterious figure emerging from the fog!”

Sure enough, in the distance along the misty shore of Briny Beach there could be seen a tall figure striding toward the Baudelaire children. Sunny had already been staring and shrieking at the figure for some time when Klaus looked up from the spiny crab he was examining, and saw it too. He reached over and touched Violet's arm, bringing her out of her inventing thoughts.

"Look at that," Klaus said, and pointed toward the figure. It was drawing closer, and the children could see a few details. It was about the size of an adult, except its head was tall, and rather square.

"What do you think it is?" Violet asked.

"I don't know," Klaus said, squinting at it, "but it seems to be moving right toward us."

"We're alone on the beach," Violet said, a little nervously. "There's nobody else it could be moving toward." She felt the slender, smooth stone in her left hand, which she had been about to try to skip as far as she could. She had a sudden thought to throw it at the figure, because it seemed so frightening.

"It only seems scary," Klaus said, as if reading his sister's thoughts, "because of all the mist."

This was true. As the figure reached them, the children saw with relief that it was not anybody frightening at all, but somebody they knew: Mr. Poe. Mr. Poe was a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Baudelaire's whom the children had met many times at dinner parties. One of the things Violet, Klaus, and Sunny really liked about their parents was that they didn't send their children away when they had company over, but allowed them to join the adults at the dinner table and participate in the conversation as long as they helped clear

the table. The children remembered Mr. Poe because he always had a cold and was constantly excusing himself from the table to have a fit of coughing in the next room.

Mr. Poe took off his top hat, which had made his head look large and square in the fog, and stood for a moment, coughing loudly into a white handkerchief. Violet and Klaus moved forward to shake his hand and say how do you do.

“How do you do?” said Violet.

“How do you do?” said Klaus.

“Odo yow!” said Sunny.

“Fine, thank you,” said Mr. Poe, but he looked very sad. For a few seconds nobody said anything, and the children wondered what Mr. Poe was doing there at Briny Beach, when he should have been at the bank in the city, where he worked. He was not dressed for the beach.

“It’s a nice day,” Violet said finally, making conversation. Sunny made a noise that sounded like an angry bird, and Klaus picked her up and held her.

“Yes, it is a nice day,” Mr. Poe said absently, staring out at the empty beach. “I’m afraid I have some very bad news for you children.”

The three Baudelaire siblings looked at him. Violet, with some embarrassment, felt the stone in her left hand and was glad she had not thrown it at Mr. Poe.

“Your parents,” Mr. Poe said, “have perished in a terrible fire.”

The children didn't say anything.

"They perished," Mr. Poe said, "in a fire that destroyed the entire house. I'm very, very sorry to tell you this, my dears."

Violet took her eyes off Mr. Poe and stared out at the ocean. Mr. Poe had never called the Baudelaire children "my dears" before. She understood the words he was saying but thought he must be joking, playing a terrible joke on her and her brother and sister.

"Perished," Mr. Poe said, "means 'killed.'"

"We *know* what the word 'perished' means," Klaus said, crossly. He did know what the word "perished" meant, but he was still having trouble understanding exactly what it was that Mr. Poe had said. It seemed to him that Mr. Poe must somehow have misspoken.

"The fire department arrived, of course," Mr. Poe said, "but they were too late. The entire house was engulfed in fire. It burned to the ground."

Klaus pictured all the books in the library, going up in flames. Now he'd never read all of them.

Mr. Poe coughed several times into his handkerchief before continuing. "I was sent to retrieve you here, and to take you to my home, where you'll stay for some time while we figure things out. I am the executor of your parents' estate. That means I will be handling their enormous fortune and figuring out where you children will go. When Violet comes of age, the fortune will be yours, but the bank will take charge of it until you are old enough."

Although he said he was the executor, Violet felt like Mr. Poe was the executioner. He had simply walked down the beach to them and changed their lives forever.

“Come with me,” Mr. Poe said, and held out his hand. In order to take it, Violet had to drop the stone she was holding. Klaus took Violet’s other hand, and Sunny took Klaus’s other hand, and in that manner the three Baudelaire children—the Baudelaire orphans, now—were led away from the beach and from their previous lives.



## CHAPTER Two



*It is useless for me to describe to you how terrible Violet, Klaus, and even Sunny felt in the time that followed. If you have ever lost someone very important to you, then you already know how it feels, and if you haven't, you cannot possibly imagine it. For the Baudelaire children, it was of course especially terrible because they had lost both their parents at the same time, and for several days they felt so miserable they could scarcely get out of bed. Klaus found he had little interest in books. The gears in Violet's inventive*

brain seemed to stop. And even Sunny, who of course was too young to really understand what was going on, bit things with less enthusiasm.

Of course, it didn't make things any easier that they had lost their home as well, and all their possessions. As I'm sure you know, to be in one's own room, in one's own bed, can often make a bleak situation a little better, but the beds of the Baudelaire orphans had been reduced to charred rubble. Mr. Poe had taken them to the remains of the Baudelaire mansion to see if anything had been unharmed, and it was terrible: Violet's microscope had fused together in the heat of the fire, Klaus's favorite pen had turned to ash, and all of Sunny's teething rings had melted. Here and there, the children could see traces of the enormous home they had loved: fragments of their grand piano, an elegant bottle in which Mr. Baudelaire kept brandy, the scorched cushion of the windowseat where their mother liked to sit and read.

Their home destroyed, the Baudelaires had to recuperate from their terrible loss in the Poe household, which was not at all agreeable. Mr. Poe was scarcely at home, because he was very busy attending to the Baudelaire affairs, and when he was home he was often coughing so much he could barely have a conversation. Mrs. Poe purchased clothing for the orphans that was in grotesque colors, and itched. And the two Poe children—Edgar and Albert—were loud and obnoxious boys with whom the Baudelaires had to share a tiny room that smelled of some sort of ghastly flower.

But even given the surroundings, the children had mixed feelings when, over a dull dinner of boiled chicken, boiled potatoes and blanched—the word “blanched” here means “boiled”—string beans, Mr. Poe announced that they were to leave his household the next morning.

“Good,” said Albert, who had a piece of potato stuck between his teeth. “Now we can get our room back. I'm tired of sharing it. Violet and Klaus are always moping around, and are never any fun.”

“And the baby bites,” Edgar said, tossing a chicken bone to the floor as if he were an animal in a zoo and not the son of a well-respected member of the banking community.

“Where will we go?” Violet asked nervously.

Mr. Poe opened his mouth to say something, but erupted into a brief fit of coughing. “I have made arrangements,” he said finally, “for you to be raised by a distant relative of yours who lives on the other side of town. His name is Count Olaf.”

Violet, Klaus, and Sunny looked at one another, unsure of what to think. On one hand, they didn’t want to live with the Poes any longer. On the other hand, they had never heard of Count Olaf and didn’t know what he would be like.

“Your parents’ will,” Mr. Poe said, “instructs that you be raised in the most convenient way possible. Here in the city, you’ll be used to your surroundings, and this Count Olaf is the only relative who lives within the urban limits.”

Klaus thought this over for a minute as he swallowed a chewy bit of bean. “But our parents never mentioned Count Olaf to us. Just how is he related to us, exactly?”

Mr. Poe sighed and looked down at Sunny, who was biting a fork and listening closely. “He is either a third cousin four times removed, or a fourth cousin three times removed. He is not your closest relative on the family tree, but he is the closest geographically. That’s why—”

“If he lives in the city,” Violet said, “why didn’t our parents ever invite him over?”

“Possibly because he was very busy,” Mr. Poe said. “He’s an actor by trade, and often travels around the world with various theater companies.”

“I thought he was a count,” Klaus said.

“He is both a count and an actor,” Mr. Poe said. “Now, I don’t mean to cut short our dinner, but you children have to pack up your things, and I have to return to the bank to do some more work. Like your new legal guardian, I am very busy myself.”

The three Baudelaire children had many more questions for Mr. Poe, but he had already stood up from the table, and with a slight wave of his hand departed from the room. They heard him coughing into his handkerchief and then the front door creaked shut as he left the house.

“Well,” Mrs. Poe said, “you three had better start packing. Edgar, Albert, please help me clear the table.”

The Baudelaire orphans went to the bedroom and glumly packed their few belongings. Klaus looked distastefully at each ugly shirt Mrs. Poe had bought for him as he folded them and put them into a small suitcase. Violet looked around the cramped, smelly room in which they had been living. And Sunny crawled around solemnly biting each of Edgar and Albert’s shoes, leaving small teeth marks in each one so she would not be forgotten. From time to time, the Baudelaire children looked at one another, but with their future such a mystery they could think of nothing to say. At bedtime, they tossed and turned all night, scarcely getting any sleep between the loud snoring of Edgar and Albert and their own worried thoughts. Finally, Mr. Poe knocked on the door and stuck his head into the bedroom.

“Rise and shine, Baudelaires,” he said. “It’s time for you to go to Count Olaf’s.”

Violet looked around the crowded bedroom, and even though she didn't like it, she felt very nervous about leaving. "Do we have to go right this minute?" she asked.

Mr. Poe opened his mouth to speak, but had to cough a few times before he began. "Yes you do. I'm dropping you off on my way to the bank, so we need to leave as soon as possible. Please get out of bed and get dressed," he said briskly. The word "briskly" here means "quickly, so as to get the Baudelaire children to leave the house."

The Baudelaire children left the house. Mr. Poe's automobile rumbled along the cobblestone streets of the city toward the neighborhood where Count Olaf lived. They passed horse-drawn carriages and motorcycles along Doldrum Drive. They passed the Fickle Fountain, an elaborately carved monument that occasionally spat out water in which young children played. They passed an enormous pile of dirt where the Royal Gardens once stood. Before too long, Mr. Poe drove his car down a narrow alley lined with houses made of pale brick and stopped halfway down the block.

"Here we are," Mr. Poe said, in a voice undoubtedly meant to be cheerful. "Your new home."

The Baudelaire children looked out and saw the prettiest house on the block. The bricks had been cleaned very well, and through the wide and open windows one could see an assortment of well-groomed plants. Standing in the doorway, with her hand on the shiny brass doorknob, was an older woman, smartly dressed, who was smiling at the children. In one hand she carried a flowerpot.

"Hello there!" she called out. "You must be the children Count Olaf is adopting."

Violet opened the door of the automobile and got out to shake the woman's hand. It felt firm and warm, and for the first time in a long while Violet felt as if her life and the lives of her siblings might turn out well after all. "Yes," she said. "Yes, we are. I am Violet Baudelaire, and this is my brother Klaus and my sister Sunny. And this is Mr. Poe, who has been arranging things for us since the death of our parents."

"Yes, I heard about the accident," the woman said, as everyone said how do you do. "I am Justice Strauss."

"That's an unusual first name," Klaus remarked.

"It is my title," she explained, "not my first name. I serve as a judge on the High Court."

"How fascinating," Violet said. "And are you married to Count Olaf?"

"Goodness me no," Justice Strauss said. "I don't actually know him that well. He is my next-door neighbor."

The children looked from the well-scrubbed house of Justice Strauss to the dilapidated one next door. The bricks were stained with soot and grime. There were only two small windows, which were closed with the shades drawn even though it was a nice day. Rising above the windows was a tall and dirty tower that tilted slightly to the left. The front door needed to be repainted, and carved in the middle of it was an image of an eye. The entire building sagged to the side, like a crooked tooth.

"Oh!" said Sunny, and everyone knew what she meant. She meant, "What a terrible place! I don't want to live there at all!"

"Well, it was nice to meet you," Violet said to Justice Strauss.

“Yes,” said Justice Strauss, gesturing to her flowerpot. “Perhaps one day you could come over and help me with my gardening.”

“That would be very pleasant,” Violet said, very sadly. It would, of course, be very pleasant to help Justice Strauss with her gardening, but Violet could not help thinking that it would be far more pleasant to live in Justice Strauss’s house, instead of Count Olaf’s. What kind of a man, Violet wondered, would carve an image of an eye into his front door?

Mr. Poe tipped his hat to Justice Strauss, who smiled at the children and disappeared into her lovely house. Klaus stepped forward and knocked on Count Olaf’s door, his knuckles rapping right in the middle of the carved eye. There was a pause, and then the door creaked open and the children saw Count Olaf for the first time.

“Hello hello hello,” Count Olaf said in a wheezy whisper. He was very tall and very thin, dressed in a gray suit that had many dark stains on it. His face was unshaven, and rather than two eyebrows, like most human beings have, he had just one long one. His eyes were very, very shiny, which made him look both hungry and angry. “Hello, my children. Please step into your new home, and wipe your feet outside so no mud gets indoors.”

As they stepped into the house, Mr. Poe behind them, the Baudelaire orphans realized what a ridiculous thing Count Olaf had just said. The room in which they found themselves was the dirtiest they had ever seen, and a little bit of mud from outdoors wouldn’t have made a bit of difference. Even by the dim light of the one bare lightbulb that hung from the ceiling, the three children could see that everything in this room was filthy, from the stuffed head of a lion which was nailed to the wall to the bowl of apple cores which sat on a small wooden table. Klaus willed himself not to cry as he looked around.

“This room looks like it needs a little work,” Mr. Poe said, peering around in the gloom.

“I realize that my humble home isn’t as fancy as the Baudelaire mansion,” Count Olaf said, “but perhaps with a bit of your money we could fix it up a little nicer.”

Mr. Poe’s eyes widened in surprise, and his coughs echoed in the dark room before he spoke. “The Baudelaire fortune,” he said sternly, “will not be used for such matters. In fact, it will not be used at all, until Violet is of age.”

Count Olaf turned to Mr. Poe with a glint in his eye like an angry dog. For a moment Violet thought he was going to strike Mr. Poe across the face. But then he swallowed—the children could see his Adam’s apple bob in his skinny throat—and shrugged his patchy shoulders.

“All right then,” he said. “It’s the same to me. Thank you very much, Mr. Poe, for bringing them here. Children, I will now show you to your room.”

“Good-bye, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny,” Mr. Poe said, stepping back through the front door. “I hope you will be very happy here. I will continue to see you occasionally, and you can always contact me at the bank if you have any questions.”

“But we don’t even know where the bank is,” Klaus said.

“I have a map of the city,” Count Olaf said. “Good-bye, Mr. Poe.”

He leaned forward to shut the door, and the Baudelaire orphans were too overcome with despair to get a last glimpse of Mr. Poe. They now wished they could all stay at the Poe household, even though it smelled. Rather than looking at the door, then, the orphans looked down, and saw that although



Count Olaf was wearing shoes, he wasn't wearing any socks. They could see, in the space of pale skin between his tattered trouser cuff and his black shoe, that Count Olaf had an image of an eye tattooed on his ankle, matching the eye on his front door. They wondered how many other eyes were in Count Olaf's house, and whether, for the rest of their lives, they would always feel as though Count Olaf were watching them even when he wasn't nearby.

## CHAPTER

### Three



*I don't* know if you've ever noticed this, but first impressions are often entirely wrong. You can look at a painting for the first time, for example, and not like it at all, but after looking at it a little longer you may find it very pleasing. The first time you try Gorgonzola cheese you may find it too strong, but when you are older you may want to eat nothing but Gorgonzola cheese. Klaus, when Sunny was born, did not like her at all, but by the time she was six weeks old the two of them were thick as thieves. Your initial opinion on just about anything may change over time.

I wish I could tell you that the Baudelaires' first impressions of Count Olaf and his house were incorrect, as first impressions so often are. But these impressions—that Count Olaf was a horrible person, and his house a depressing pigsty—were absolutely correct. During the first few days after the orphans' arrival at Count Olaf's, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny attempted to make themselves feel at home, but it was really no use. Even though Count Olaf's house was quite large, the three children were placed together in one filthy bedroom that had only one small bed in it. Violet and Klaus took turns sleeping in it, so that every other night one of them was in the bed and the other was sleeping on the hard wooden floor, and the bed's mattress was so

lumpy it was difficult to say who was more uncomfortable. To make a bed for Sunny, Violet removed the dusty curtains from the curtain rod that hung over the bedroom's one window and bunched them together to form a sort of cushion, just big enough for her sister. However, without curtains over the cracked glass, the sun streamed through the window every morning, so the children woke up early and sore each day. Instead of a closet, there was a large cardboard box that had once held a refrigerator and would now hold the three children's clothes, all piled in a heap. Instead of toys, books, or other things to amuse the youngsters, Count Olaf had provided a small pile of rocks. And the only decoration on the peeling walls was a large and ugly painting of an eye, matching the one on Count Olaf's ankle and all over the house.

But the children knew, as I'm sure you know, that the worst surroundings in the world can be tolerated if the people in them are interesting and kind. Count Olaf was neither interesting nor kind; he was demanding, short-tempered, and bad-smelling. The only good thing to be said for Count Olaf is that he wasn't around very often. When the children woke up and chose their clothing out of the refrigerator box, they would walk into the kitchen and find a list of instructions left for them by Count Olaf, who would often not appear until nighttime. Most of the day he spent out of the house, or up in the high tower, where the children were forbidden to go. The instructions he left for them were usually difficult chores, such as repainting the back porch or repairing the windows, and instead of a signature Count Olaf would draw an eye at the bottom of the note.

One morning his note read, "My theater troupe will be coming for dinner before tonight's performance. Have dinner ready for all ten of them by the time they arrive at seven o'clock. Buy the food, prepare it, set the table, serve dinner, clean up afterwards, and stay out of our way." Below that there was the usual eye, and underneath the note was a small sum of money for the groceries.

Violet and Klaus read the note as they ate their breakfast, which was a gray and lumpy oatmeal Count Olaf left for them each morning in a large pot on the stove. Then they looked at each other in dismay.

“None of us knows how to cook,” Klaus said.

“That’s true,” Violet said. “I knew how to repair those windows, and how to clean the chimney, because those sorts of things interest me. But I don’t know how to cook anything except toast.”

“And sometimes you burn the toast,” Klaus said, and they smiled. They were both remembering a time when the two of them got up early to make a special breakfast for their parents. Violet had burned the toast, and their parents, smelling smoke, had run downstairs to see what the matter was. When they saw Violet and Klaus, looking forlornly at pieces of pitch-black toast, they laughed and laughed, and then made pancakes for the whole family.

“I wish they were here,” Violet said. She did not have to explain she was talking about their parents. “They would never let us stay in this dreadful place.”

“If they were here,” Klaus said, his voice rising as he got more and more upset, “we would not be with Count Olaf in the first place. I *hate* it here, Violet! I *hate* this house! I *hate* our room! I *hate* having to do all these chores, and I *hate* Count Olaf!”

“I hate it too,” Violet said, and Klaus looked at his older sister with relief. Sometimes, just saying that you hate something, and having someone agree with you, can make you feel better about a terrible situation. “I hate everything about our lives right now, Klaus,” she said, “but we have to keep

our chin up.” This was an expression the children’s father had used, and it meant “try to stay cheerful.”

“You’re right,” Klaus said. “But it is very difficult to keep one’s chin up when Count Olaf keeps shoving it down.”

“Jook!” Sunny shrieked, banging on the table with her oatmeal spoon. Violet and Klaus were jerked out of their conversation and looked once again at Count Olaf’s note.

“Perhaps we could find a cookbook, and read about how to cook,” Klaus said. “It shouldn’t be that difficult to make a simple meal.”

Violet and Klaus spent several minutes opening and shutting Count Olaf’s kitchen cupboards, but there weren’t any cookbooks to be found.

“I can’t say I’m surprised,” Violet said. “We haven’t found any books in this house at all.”

“I know,” Klaus said miserably. “I miss reading very much. We must go out and look for a library sometime soon.”

“But not today,” Violet said. “Today we have to cook for ten people.”

At that moment there was a knock on the front door. Violet and Klaus looked at one another nervously.

“Who in the world would want to visit Count Olaf?” Violet wondered out loud.

“Maybe somebody wants to visit *us*,” Klaus said, without much hope. In the time since the Baudelaire parents’ death, most of the Baudelaire orphans’

friends had fallen by the wayside, an expression which here means “they stopped calling, writing, and stopping by to see any of the Baudelaires, making them very lonely.” You and I, of course, would never do this to any of our grieving acquaintances, but it is a sad truth in life that when someone has lost a loved one, friends sometimes avoid the person, just when the presence of friends is most needed.

Violet, Klaus, and Sunny walked slowly to the front door and peered through the peephole, which was in the shape of an eye. They were delighted to see Justice Strauss peering back at them, and opened the door.

“Justice Strauss!” Violet cried. “How lovely to see you.” She was about to add, “Do come in,” but then she realized that Justice Strauss would probably not want to venture into the dim and dirty room.

“Please forgive me for not stopping by sooner,” Justice Strauss said, as the Baudelaires stood awkwardly in the doorway. “I wanted to see how you children were settling in, but I had a very difficult case in the High Court and it was taking up much of my time.”

“What sort of case was it?” Klaus asked. Having been deprived of reading, he was hungry for new information.

“I can’t really discuss it,” Justice Strauss said, “because it’s official business. But I can tell you it concerns a poisonous plant and illegal use of someone’s credit card.”

“Yeeka!” Sunny shrieked, which appeared to mean “How interesting!” although of course there is no way that Sunny could understand what was being said.

Justice Strauss looked down at Sunny and laughed. “Yeeka indeed,” she said, and reached down to pat the child on the head. Sunny took Justice Strauss’s hand and bit it, gently.

“That means she likes you,” Violet explained. “She bites very, very hard if she doesn’t like you, or if you want to give her a bath.”

“I see,” Justice Strauss said. “Now then, how are you children getting on? Is there anything you desire?”

The children looked at one another, thinking of all the things they desired. Another bed, for example. A proper crib for Sunny. Curtains for the window in their room. A closet instead of a cardboard box. But what they desired most of all, of course, was not to be associated with Count Olaf in any way whatsoever. What they desired most was to be with their parents again, in their true home, but that, of course, was impossible. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny all looked down at the floor unhappily as they considered the question. Finally, Klaus spoke.

“Could we perhaps borrow a cookbook?” he said. “Count Olaf has instructed us to make dinner for his theater troupe tonight, and we can’t find a cookbook in the house.”

“Goodness,” Justice Strauss said. “Cooking dinner for an entire theater troupe seems like a lot to ask of children.”

“Count Olaf gives us a lot of responsibility,” Violet said. What she wanted to say was, “Count Olaf is an evil man,” but she was well mannered.

“Well, why don’t you come next door to my house,” Justice Strauss said, “and find a cookbook that pleases you?”

The youngsters agreed, and followed Justice Strauss out the door and over to her well-kept house. She led them through an elegant hallway smelling of flowers into an enormous room, and when they saw what was inside, they nearly fainted from delight, Klaus especially.

The room was a library. Not a public library, but a private library; that is, a large collection of books belonging to Justice Strauss. There were shelves and shelves of them, on every wall from the floor to the ceiling, and separate shelves and shelves of them in the middle of the room. The only place there weren't books was in one corner, where there were some large, comfortable-looking chairs and a wooden table with lamps hanging over them, perfect for reading. Although it was not as big as their parents' library, it was as cozy, and the Baudelaire children were thrilled.

"My word!" Violet said. "This is a wonderful library!"

"Thank you very much," Justice Strauss said. "I've been collecting books for years, and I'm very proud of my collection. As long as you keep them in good condition, you are welcome to use any of my books, at any time. Now, the cookbooks are over here on the eastern wall. Shall we have a look at them?"

"Yes," Violet said, "and then, if you don't mind, I should love to look at any of your books concerning mechanical engineering. Inventing things is a great interest of mine."

"And I would like to look at books on wolves," Klaus said. "Recently I have been fascinated by the subject of wild animals of North America."

"Book!" Sunny shrieked, which meant "Please don't forget to pick out a picture book for me."



Justice Strauss smiled. “It is a pleasure to see young people interested in books,” she said. “But first I think we’d better find a good recipe, don’t you?”

The children agreed, and for thirty minutes or so they perused several cookbooks that Justice Strauss recommended. To tell you the truth, the three orphans were so excited to be out of Count Olaf’s house, and in this pleasant library, that they were a little distracted and unable to concentrate on cooking. But finally Klaus found a dish that sounded delicious, and easy to make.

“Listen to this,” he said. “‘Puttanesca.’ It’s an Italian sauce for pasta. All we need to do is sauté olives, capers, anchovies, garlic, chopped parsley, and tomatoes together in a pot, and prepare spaghetti to go with it.”

“That sounds easy,” Violet agreed, and the Baudelaire orphans looked at one another. Perhaps, with the kind Justice Strauss and her library right next door, the children could prepare pleasant lives for themselves as easily as making puttanesca sauce for Count Olaf.

## CHAPTER

### Four



*The* Baudelaire orphans copied the puttanesca recipe from the cookbook onto a piece of scrap paper, and Justice Strauss was kind enough to escort them to the market to buy the necessary ingredients. Count Olaf had not left them very much money, but the children were able to buy everything they needed. From a street vendor, they purchased olives after tasting several varieties and choosing their favorites. At a pasta store they selected interestingly shaped noodles and asked the woman running the store the proper amount for thirteen people—the ten people Count Olaf mentioned, and the three of them. Then, at the supermarket, they purchased garlic, which is a sharp-tasting bulbous plant; anchovies, which are small salty fish; capers, which are flower buds of a small shrub and taste marvelous; and tomatoes, which are actually fruits and not vegetables as most people believe. They thought it would be proper to serve dessert, and bought several