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Lemony Snicket

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For Beatrice –
You will always be in my heart,
in my mind,
and in your grave.

www.unfortunateevents.com


MEMENTO MORI

CHAPTER
One

If you were going to give a gold medal to the least delightful person on Earth, you would have to give that medal to a person named Carmelita Spats, and if you didn't give it to her, Carmelita Spats was the sort of person who would snatch it from your hands anyway. Carmelita Spats was rude, she was violent, and she was filthy, and it is really a shame that I must describe her to you, because there are enough ghastly and distressing things in this story without even mentioning such an unpleasant person.

It is the Baudelaire orphans, thank goodness, who are the heroes of this story, not the

dreadful Carmelita Spats, and if you wanted to give a gold medal to Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire, it would be for survival in the face of adversity. Adversity is a word which here means "trouble," and there are very few people in this world who have had the sort of troubling adversity that follows these three children wherever they go. Their trouble began one day when they were relaxing at the beach and received the distressing news that their parents had been killed in a terrible fire, and so were sent to live with a distant relative named Count Olaf.

If you were going to give a gold medal to Count Olaf, you would have to lock it up someplace before the awarding ceremony, because Count Olaf was such a greedy and evil man that he would try to steal it beforehand. The Baudelaire orphans did not have a gold medal, but they did have an enormous fortune that their parents had left them, and it was that fortune Count Olaf tried to snatch. The three siblings survived living with Count Olaf, but just barely,

and since then Olaf had followed them everywhere, usually accompanied by one or more of his sinister and ugly associates. No matter who was caring for the Baudelaires, Count Olaf was always right behind them, performing such dastardly deeds that I can scarcely list them all: kidnapping, murder, nasty phone calls, disguises, poison, hypnosis, and atrocious cooking are just some of the adversities the Baudelaire orphans survived at his hands. Even worse, Count Olaf had a bad habit of avoiding capture, so he was always sure to turn up again. It is truly awful that this keeps happening, but that is how the story goes.

I only tell you that the story goes this way because you are about to become acquainted with rude, violent, filthy Carmelita Spats, and if you can't stand reading about her, you had best put this book down and read something else, because it only gets worse from here. Before too long, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire will have so much adversity that being

shoved aside by Carmelita Spats will look like a trip to the ice cream store.

"Get out of my way, you cakesniffers!" said a rude, violent, and filthy little girl, shoving the Baudelaire orphans aside as she dashed by. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny were too startled to answer. They were standing on a sidewalk made of bricks, which must have been very old because there was a great deal of dark moss oozing out from in between them. Surrounding the sidewalk was a vast brown lawn that looked like it had never been watered, and on the lawn were hundreds of children running in various directions. Occasionally someone would slip and fall to the ground, only to get back up and keep running. It looked exhausting and pointless, two things that should be avoided at all costs, but the Baudelaire orphans barely glanced at the other children, keeping their eyes on the mossy bricks below them.

Shyness is a curious thing, because, like quicksand, it can strike people at any time, and

also, like quicksand, it usually makes its victims look down. This was to be the Baudelaires' first day at Prufrock Preparatory School, and all three siblings found that they would rather look at the oozing moss than at anything else.

"Have you dropped something?" Mr. Poe asked, coughing into a white handkerchief. One place the Baudelaires certainly didn't want to look was at Mr. Poe, who was walking closely behind them. Mr. Poe was a banker who had been placed in charge of the Baudelaires' affairs following the terrible fire, and this had turned out to be a lousy idea. Mr. Poe meant well, but a jar of mustard probably also means well and would do a better job of keeping the Baudelaires out of danger. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny had long ago learned that the only thing they could count on from Mr. Poe was that he was always coughing.

"No," Violet replied, "we haven't dropped anything." Violet was the oldest Baudelaire, and usually she was not shy at all. Violet liked to

invent things, and one could often find her thinking hard about her latest invention, with her hair tied up in a ribbon to keep it out of her eyes. When her inventions were done, she liked to show them to people she knew, who were usually very impressed with her skill. Right now, as she looked down at the mossy bricks, she thought of a machine she could build that could keep moss from growing on the sidewalk, but she felt too nervous to talk about it. What if none of the teachers, children, or administrative staff were interested in her inventions?

As if he were reading her thoughts, Klaus put a hand on Violet's shoulder, and she smiled at him. Klaus had known for all twelve of his years that his older sister found a hand on her shoulder comforting—as long as the hand was attached to an arm, of course. Normally Klaus would have said something comforting as well, but he was feeling as shy as his sister. Most of the time, Klaus could be found doing what he liked to do best, which was reading. Some

mornings one could find him in bed with his glasses on because he had been reading so late that he was too tired to take them off. Klaus looked down at the sidewalk and remembered a book he had read called *Moss Mysteries*, but he felt too shy to bring it up. What if Prufrock Preparatory School had nothing good to read?

Sunny, the youngest Baudelaire, looked up at her siblings, and Violet smiled and picked her up. This was easy to do because Sunny was a baby and only a little bit larger than a loaf of bread. Sunny was also too nervous to say anything, although it was often difficult to understand what she said when she did speak up. For instance, if Sunny had not been feeling so shy, she might have opened her mouth, revealing her four sharp teeth, and said "Marimo!" which may have meant "I hope there are plenty of things to bite at school, because biting things is one of my favorite things to do!"

"I know why you're all so quiet," Mr. Poe said. "It's because you're excited, and I don't

blame you. I always wanted to go to boarding school when I was younger, but I never had the chance. I'm a little jealous of you, if you want to know the truth."

The Baudelaires looked at one another. The fact that Prufrock Preparatory School was a boarding school was the part that made them feel the most nervous. If no one was interested in inventions, or there was nothing to read, or biting wasn't allowed, they were stuck there, not only all day but all night as well. The siblings wished that if Mr. Poe were really jealous of them he would attend Prufrock Preparatory School himself, and they could work at the bank.

"You're very lucky to be here," Mr. Poe continued. "I had to call more than four schools before I found one that could take all three of you at such short notice. Prufrock Prep—that's what they call it, as a sort of nickname—is a very fine academy. The teachers all have advanced degrees. The dormitory rooms are all finely furnished. And most important of all, there is an

advanced computer system which will keep Count Olaf away from you. Vice Principal Nero told me that Count Olaf's complete description—everything from his one long eyebrow to the tattoo of an eye on his left ankle—has been programmed into the computer, so you three should be safe here for the next several years."

"But how can a computer keep Count Olaf away?" Violet asked in a puzzled voice, still looking down at the ground.

"It's an *advanced* computer," Mr. Poe said, as if the word "advanced" were a proper explanation instead of a word meaning "having attained advancement." "Don't worry your little heads about Count Olaf. Vice Principal Nero has promised me that he will keep a close eye on you. After all, a school as *advanced* as Prufrock Prep wouldn't allow people to simply run around loose."

"Move, cakesniffers!" the rude, violent, and filthy little girl said as she dashed by them again.