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opening extract from

A Series of Unfortunate Events: Book the Sixth
The Ersatz Elevator

written by

Lemony Snicket

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CHAPTER
One

The book you are holding in your two hands right now—assuming that you are, in fact, holding this book, and that you have only two hands—is one of two books in the world that will show you the difference between the word "nervous" and the word "anxious." The other book, of course, is the dictionary, and if I were you I would read that book instead.

Like this book, the dictionary shows you that the word "nervous" means "worried about something"—you might feel nervous, for instance, if you were served prune ice cream for dessert, because you would be worried that it would taste awful—whereas the word "anxious"

means "troubled by disturbing suspense," which you might feel if you were served a live alligator for dessert, because you would be troubled by the disturbing suspense about whether you would eat your dessert or it would eat you. But unlike this book, the dictionary also discusses words that are far more pleasant to contemplate. The word "bubble" is in the dictionary, for instance, as is the word "peacock," the word "vacation," and the words "the" "author's" "execution" "has" "been" "canceled," which make up a sentence that is always pleasant to hear. So if you were to read the dictionary, rather than this book, you could skip the parts about "nervous" and "anxious" and read about things that wouldn't keep you up all night long, weeping and tearing out your hair.

But this book is not the dictionary, and if you were to skip the parts about "nervous" and "anxious" in this book, you would be skipping the most pleasant sections in the entire story. Nowhere in this book will you find the words

"bubble," "peacock," "vacation," or, unfortunately for me, anything about an execution being canceled. Instead, I'm sorry to say, you will find the words "grief, "despair," and "woeful" as well as the phrases "dark passageway," "Count Olaf in disguise," and "the Baudelaire orphans were trapped," plus an assortment of miserable words and phrases that I cannot bring myself to write down. In short, reading a dictionary might make you feel nervous, because you would worry about finding it very boring, but reading this book will make you feel anxious, because you will be troubled by the disturbing suspense in which the Baudelaire orphans find themselves, and if I were you I would drop this book right out of your two or more hands and curl up with a dictionary instead, because all the miserable words I must use to describe these unfortunate events are about to reach your eyes.

"I imagine you must be nervous," Mr. Poe said. Mr. Poe was a banker who had been put in charge of the Baudelaire orphans following the

death of their parents in a horrible fire. I am sorry to say that Mr. Poe had not done a very good job so far, and that the Baudelaires had learned that the only thing they could rely on with Mr. Poe was that he always had a cough. Sure enough, as soon as he finished his sentence, he took out his white handkerchief and coughed into it.

The flash of white cotton was practically the only thing the Baudelaire orphans could see. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny were standing with Mr. Poe in front of an enormous apartment building on Dark Avenue, a street in one of the fanciest districts in the city. Although Dark Avenue was just a few blocks away from where the Baudelaire mansion had been, the three children had never been in this neighborhood before, and they had assumed that the "dark" in Dark Avenue was simply a name and nothing more, the way a street named George Washington Boulevard does not necessarily indicate that George Washington lives there or the way Sixth

Street has not been divided into six equal parts. But this afternoon the Baudelaires realized that Dark Avenue was more than a name. It was an appropriate description. Rather than streetlamps, placed at regular intervals along the sidewalk were enormous trees the likes of which the children had never seen before—and which they could scarcely see now. High above a thick and prickly trunk, the branches of the trees drooped down like laundry hung out to dry, spreading their wide, flat leaves out in every direction, like a low, leafy ceiling over the Baudelaires' heads. This ceiling blocked out all the light from above, so even though it was the middle of the afternoon, the street looked as dark as evening—if a bit greener. It was hardly a good way to make three orphans feel welcome as they approached their new home.

"You have nothing to be nervous about," Mr. Poe said, putting his handkerchief back in his pocket. "I realize some of your previous guardians have caused a little trouble, but I

think Mr. and Mrs. Squalor will provide you with a proper home."

"We're not nervous," Violet said. "We're too anxious to be nervous."

"'Anxious' and 'nervous' mean the same thing," Mr. Poe said. "And what do you have to be anxious about, anyway?"

"Count Olaf, of course," Violet replied. Violet was fourteen, which made her the eldest Baudelaire child and the one who was most likely to speak up to adults. She was a superb inventor, and I am certain that if she had not been so anxious, she would have tied her hair up in a ribbon to keep it out of her eyes while she thought of an invention that could brighten up her surroundings.

"Count Olaf?" Mr. Poe said dismissively. "Don't worry about him. He'll never find you here."