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Opening extract from

A Series of Unfortunate Events 13: The End

Written by

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For Beatrice –
I cherished, you perished.
The world's been nightmarished.

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CARMELITA
Count Olaf

CHAPTER
One

If you have ever peeled an onion, then you know that the first thin, papery layer reveals another thin, papery layer, and that layer reveals another, and another, and before you know it you have hundreds of layers all over the kitchen table and thousands of tears in your eyes, sorry that you ever started peeling in the first place and wishing that you had left the onion alone to wither away on the shelf of the pantry while you went on with your life, even if that meant never again enjoying the complicated and overwhelming taste of this strange and bitter vegetable.

In this way, the story of the Baudelaire orphans is like an onion, and if you insist on reading each

and every thin, papery layer in A Series of Unfortunate Events, your only reward will be 170 chapters of misery in your library and countless tears in your eyes. Even if you have read the first twelve volumes of the Baudelaires' story, it is not too late to stop peeling away the layers, and to put this book back on the shelf to wither away while you read something less complicated and overwhelming. The end of this unhappy chronicle is like its bad beginning, as each misfortune only reveals another, and another, and another, and only those with the stomach for this strange and bitter tale should venture any farther into the Baudelaire onion. I'm sorry to tell you this, but that is how the story goes.

The Baudelaire orphans would have been happy to see an onion, had one come bobbing along as they traveled across the vast and empty sea in a boat the size of a large bed but not nearly as comfortable. Had such a vegetable appeared, Violet, the eldest Baudelaire, would have tied

up her hair in a ribbon to keep it out of her eyes, and in moments would have invented a device to retrieve the onion from the water. Klaus, the middle sibling and the only boy, would have remembered useful facts from one of the thousands of books he had read, and been able to identify which type of onion it was, and whether or not it was edible. And Sunny, who was just scarcely out of babyhood, would have sliced the onion into bite-sized pieces with her unusually sharp teeth, and put her newly developed cooking skills to good use in order to turn a simple onion into something quite tasty indeed. The elder Baudelaires could imagine their sister announcing "Soubise!" which was her way of saying "Dinner is served."

But the three children had not seen an onion. Indeed, they had not seen much of anything during their ocean voyage, which had begun when the Baudelaires had pushed the large, wooden boat off the roof of the Hotel Denouement in order to escape from the fire

engulfing the hotel, as well as the authorities who wanted to arrest the children for arson and murder. The wind and tides had quickly pushed the boat away from the burning hotel, and by sunset the hotel and all the other buildings in the city were a distant, faraway blur. Now, the following morning, the only things the Baudelaires had seen were the quiet, still surface of the sea and the gray gloom of the sky. The weather reminded them of the day at Briny Beach when the Baudelaires had learned of the loss of their parents and their home in a terrible fire, and the children spent much of their time in silence, thinking about that dreadful day and all of the dreadful days that had followed. It almost would have been peaceful to sit in a drifting boat and think about their lives, had it not been for the Baudelaires' unpleasant companion.

Their companion's name was Count Olaf, and it had been the Baudelaire orphans' misfortune to be in this dreadful man's company since they had become orphans and he had become

their guardian. Olaf had hatched scheme after scheme in an attempt to get his filthy hands on the enormous fortune the Baudelaire parents had left behind, and although each scheme had failed, it appeared as if some of the villain's wickedness had rubbed off on the children, and now Olaf and the Baudelaires were all in the same boat. Both the children and the count were responsible for a number of treacherous crimes, although at least the Baudelaire orphans had the decency to feel terrible about this, whereas all Count Olaf had been doing for the past few days was bragging about it.

"I've triumphed!" Count Olaf reiterated, a word which here means "announced for the umpteenth time." He stood proudly at the front of the boat, leaning against a carving of an octopus attacking a man in a diving suit that served as the boat's figurehead. "You orphans thought you could escape me, but at last you're in my clutches!"

"Yes, Olaf," Violet agreed wearily. The eldest

Baudelaire did not bother to point out that as they were all alone in the middle of the ocean, it was just as accurate to say that Olaf was in the Baudelaires' clutches as it was to say they were in his. Sighing, she gazed up at the tall mast of the boat, where a tattered sail drooped limply in the still air. For some time, Violet had been trying to invent a way for the boat to move even when there wasn't any wind, but the only mechanical materials on board were a pair of enormous spatulas from the Hotel Denouement's rooftop sunbathing salon. The children had been using these spatulas as oars, but rowing a boat is very hard work, particularly if one's traveling companions are too busy bragging to help out, and Violet was trying to think of a way they might move the boat faster.

"I've burned down the Hotel Denouement," Olaf cried, gesturing dramatically, "and destroyed V.F.D. once and for all!"

"So you keep telling us," Klaus muttered, without looking up from his commonplace book.

THE END

For quite some time, Klaus had been writing down the details of the Baudelaires' situation in this dark blue notebook, including the fact that it was the Baudelaires, not Olaf, who had burned down the Hotel Denouement. V.F.D. was a secret organization that the Baudelaires had heard about during their travels, and as far as the middle Baudelaire knew it had not been destroyed—not quite—although quite a few V.F.D. agents had been in the hotel when it caught fire. At the moment, Klaus was examining his notes on V.F.D. and the schism, which was an enormous fight involving all of its members and had something to do with a sugar bowl. The middle Baudelaire did not know what the sugar bowl contained, nor did he know the precise whereabouts of one of the organization's bravest agents, a woman named Kit Snicket. The children had met Kit only once before she headed out to sea herself, planning to meet up with the Quagmire triplets, three friends the Baudelaires had not seen in quite some time

who were traveling in a self-sustaining hot air mobile home. Klaus was hoping the notes in his commonplace book would help him figure out exactly where they might be, if he studied them long enough.

"And the Baudelaire fortune is finally mine!" Olaf cackled. "Finally, I am a very wealthy man, which means everybody must do what I say!"

"Beans," Sunny said. The youngest Baudelaire was no longer a baby, but she still talked in a somewhat unusual way, and by "beans" she meant something like, "Count Olaf is spouting pure nonsense," as the Baudelaire fortune was not to be found in the large, wooden boat, and so could not be said to belong to anyone. But when Sunny said "beans," she also meant "beans." One of the few things the children had found on board the boat was a large clay jar with a rubber seal, which had been wedged underneath one of the boat's wooden benches. The jar was quite dusty and looked very old, but the

seal was intact, a word which here means "not broken, so the food stored inside was still edible." Sunny was grateful for the jar, as there was no other food to be found on board, but she couldn't help wishing that it had contained something other than plain white beans. It is possible to cook a number of delicious dishes with white beans—the Baudelaire parents used to make a cold salad of white beans, cherry tomatoes, and fresh basil, all mixed together with lime juice, olive oil, and cayenne pepper, which was a delicious thing to eat on hot days—but without any other ingredients, Sunny had only been able to serve her boat mates handfuls of a bland, white mush, enough to keep them alive, but certainly nothing in which a young chef like herself could take pride. As Count Olaf continued to brag, the youngest Baudelaire was peering into the jar, wondering how she could make something more interesting out of white beans and nothing else.

"I think the first thing I'll buy for myself is

a shiny new car!" Count Olaf said. "Something with a powerful engine, so I can drive faster than the legal limit, and an extra-thick bumper, so I can ram into people without getting all scratched up! I'll name the car Count Olaf, after myself, and whenever people hear the squeal of brakes they'll say, 'Here comes Count Olaf!' Orphans, head for the nearest luxury car dealership!"

The Baudelaires looked at one another. As I'm sure you know, it is unlikely for a car dealership to be found in the middle of the ocean, although I have heard of a rickshaw salesman who does business in a grotto hidden deep in the Caspian Sea. It is very tiresome to travel with someone who is constantly making demands, particularly if the demands are for utterly impossible things, and the children found that they could no longer hold their tongues, a phrase which here means "keep from confronting Olaf about his foolishness."

"We can't head for a car dealership," Violet said. "We can't head anywhere. The wind has

died out, and Klaus and I are exhausted from rowing."

"Laziness is no excuse," Olaf growled. "I'm exhausted from all my schemes, but you don't see me complaining."

"Furthermore," Klaus said, "we have no idea where we are, and so we have no idea which direction to go in."

"I know where we are," Olaf sneered. "We're in the middle of the ocean."

"Beans," Sunny said.

"I've had enough of your tasteless mush!" Olaf snarled. "It's worse than that salad your parents used to make! All in all, you orphans are the worst henchmen I've ever acquired!"

"We're not your henchmen!" Violet cried. "We simply happen to be traveling together!"

"I think you're forgetting who the captain is around here," Count Olaf said, and knocked one dirty knuckle against the boat's figurehead. With his other hand, he twirled his harpoon gun, a terrible weapon that had one last sharp harpoon

available for his treacherous use. "If you don't do what I say, I'll break open this helmet and you'll be doomed."

The Baudelaires looked at the figurehead in dismay. Inside the helmet were a few spores of the Medusoid Mycelium, a terrible fungus that could poison anyone who breathed it in. Sunny would have perished from the mushroom's deadly power not so long ago, had the Baudelaires not managed to find a helping of wasabi, a Japanese condiment that diluted the poison.

"You wouldn't dare release the Medusoid Mycelium," Klaus said, hoping he sounded more certain than he felt. "You'd be poisoned as quickly as we would."

"Equivalent flotilla," Sunny said sternly to the villain.

"Our sister's right," Violet said. "We're in the same boat, Olaf. The wind has died down, we have no idea which way to go, and we're running low on nourishment. In fact, without a destination, a way of navigating, and some fresh

water, we're likely to perish in a matter of days. You might try to help us, instead of ordering us around."

Count Olaf glared at the eldest Baudelaire, and then stalked to the far end of the boat. "You three figure out a way to get us out of here," he said, "and I'll work on changing the nameplate of the boat. I don't want my yacht called *Carmelita* anymore."

The Baudelaires peered over the edge of the boat, and noticed for the first time a nameplate attached to the rear of the boat with thick tape. On the nameplate, written in a messy scrawl, was the word "Carmelita," presumably referring to Carmelita Spats, a nasty young girl whom the Baudelaires had first encountered at a dreadful school they were forced to attend, and who later had been more or less adopted by Count Olaf and his girlfriend Esmé Squalor, whom the villain had abandoned at the hotel. Putting down the harpoon gun, Count Olaf began to pick at the tape with his dirt-encrusted fingernails,

peeling away at the nameplate to reveal another name underneath. Although the Baudelaire orphans did not care about the name of the boat they now called home, they were grateful that the villain had found something to do with his time so they could spend a few minutes talking among themselves.

"What can we do?" Violet whispered to her siblings. "Do you think you can catch some fish for us to eat, Sunny?"

The youngest Baudelaire shook her head. "No bait," she said, "and no net. Deep-sea dive?"

"I don't think so," Klaus said. "You shouldn't be swimming down there without the proper equipment. There are all sorts of sinister things you could encounter."

The Baudelaires shivered, thinking of something they had encountered while on board a submarine called the *Queequeg*. All the children had seen was a curvy shape on a radar screen that resembled a question mark, but the captain of the submarine had told them that it was

something even worse than Olaf himself. "Klaus is right," Violet said. "You shouldn't swim down there. Klaus, is there anything in your notes that might lead us to the others?"

Klaus shut his commonplace book and shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he said. "Kit told us she was going to contact Captain Widdershins and meet him at a certain clump of seaweed, but even if we knew exactly which clump she meant, we wouldn't know how to get there without proper navigation equipment."

"I could probably make a compass," Violet said. "All I need is a small piece of magnetized metal and a simple pivot. But maybe we shouldn't join the other volunteers. After all, we've caused them a great deal of trouble."

"That's true," Klaus admitted. "They might not be happy to see us, particularly if we had Count Olaf along."

Sunny looked at the villain, who was still scraping away at the nameplate. "Unless," she said.

Violet and Klaus shared a nervous glance. "Unless what?" Violet asked.

Sunny was silent for a moment, and looked down at the concierge uniform she was still wearing from her time at the hotel. "Push Olaf overboard," she whispered.

The elder Baudelaires gasped, not just because of what Sunny had said but because they could easily picture the treacherous act Sunny had described. With Count Olaf overboard, the Baudelaires could sail someplace without the villain's interference, or his threats to release the Medusoid Mycelium. There would be one fewer person with whom to share the remaining beans, and if they ever reached Kit Snicket and the Quagmires they wouldn't have Olaf along. In uneasy silence they turned their gazes to the back of the boat, where Olaf was leaning over to peel off the nameplate. All three Baudelaires could imagine how simple it would be to push him, just hard enough for the villain to lose his balance and topple into the water.

"Olaf wouldn't hesitate to throw *us* overboard," Violet said, so quietly her siblings could scarcely hear her. "If he didn't need us to sail the boat, he'd toss us into the sea."

"V.F.D. might not hesitate, either," Klaus said.

"Parents?" Sunny asked.

The Baudelaires shared another uneasy glance. The children had recently learned another mysterious fact about their parents and their shadowy past—a rumor concerning their parents and a box of poison darts. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny, like all children, had always wanted to believe the best about their parents, but as time went on they were less and less sure. What the siblings needed was a compass, but not the sort of compass Violet had mentioned. The eldest Baudelaire was talking about a navigational compass, which is a device that allows a person to tell you the proper direction to travel in the ocean. But the Baudelaires needed a moral compass, which is something inside a person, in the

brain or perhaps in the heart, that tells you the proper thing to do in a given situation. A navigational compass, as any good inventor knows, is made from a small piece of magnetized metal and a simple pivot, but the ingredients in a moral compass are not as clear. Some believe that everyone is born with a moral compass already inside them, like an appendix, or a fear of worms. Others believe that a moral compass develops over time, as a person learns about the decisions of others by observing the world and reading books. In any case, a moral compass appears to be a delicate device, and as people grow older and venture out into the world, it often becomes more and more difficult to figure out which direction one's moral compass is pointing, so it is harder and harder to figure out the proper thing to do. When the Baudelaires first encountered Count Olaf, their moral compasses never would have told them to get rid of this terrible man, whether by pushing him out of his mysterious tower room or running him

over with his long, black automobile. But now, standing on the *Carmelita*, the Baudelaire orphans were not sure what they should do with this villain who was leaning so far over the boat that one small push would have sent him to his watery grave.

But as it happened, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny did not have to make this decision, because at that instant, as with so many instants in the Baudelaire lives, the decision was made for them, as Count Olaf straightened up and gave the children a triumphant grin. "I'm a genius!" he announced. "I've solved all of our problems! Look!"

The villain gestured behind him with one thick thumb, and the Baudelaires peered over the edge of the boat and saw that the CARMELITA nameplate had been removed, revealing a nameplate reading COUNT OLAF, although this nameplate, too, was attached with tape, and it appeared that yet another nameplate was underneath this one. "Renaming the

boat doesn't solve any of our problems," Violet said wearily.

"Violet is right," Klaus said. "We still need a destination, a way of navigating, and some kind of nourishment."

"Unless," Sunny said, but Count Olaf interrupted the youngest Baudelaire with a sly chuckle.

"You three are really quite slow-witted," the villain said. "Look at the horizon, you fools, and see what is approaching! We don't need a destination or a way of navigating, because we'll go wherever it takes us! And we're about to get more fresh water than we could drink in a lifetime!"

The Baudelaires looked out at the sea, and saw what Olaf was talking about. Spilling across the sky, like ink staining a precious document, was an immense bank of black clouds. In the middle of the ocean, a fierce storm can arrive out of nowhere, and this storm promised to be very fierce indeed—much fiercer than Hurricane Herman, which had menaced the Baudelaires

some time ago during a voyage across Lake Lachrymose that ended in tragedy. Already the children could see the thin, sharp lines of rain falling some distance away, and here and there the clouds flickered with furious lightning.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Count Olaf asked, his scraggly hair already fluttering in the approaching wind. Over the villain's nefarious chuckle the children could hear the sound of approaching thunder. "A storm like this is the answer to all your whining."

"It might destroy the boat," Violet said, looking nervously up at the tattered sails. "A boat of this size is not designed to withstand a heavy storm."

"We have no idea where it will take us," Klaus said. "We could end up even further from civilization."

"All overboard," Sunny said.

Count Olaf looked out at the horizon again, and smiled at the storm as if it were an old friend coming to visit. "Yes, those things might

happen," he said with a wicked smile. "But what are you going to do about it, orphans?"

The Baudelaires followed the villain's gaze to the storm. It was difficult to believe that just moments ago the horizon had been empty, and now this great black mass of rain and wind was staining the sky as it drew closer and closer. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny could do nothing about it. An inventing mind, the notes of a researcher, and surprisingly adept cooking skills were no match for what was coming. The storm clouds unfurled wider and wider, like the layers of an onion unpeeling, or a sinister secret becoming more and more mysterious. Whatever their moral compass told them about the proper thing to do, the Baudelaire orphans knew there was only one choice in this situation, and that was to do nothing as the storm engulfed the children and the villain as they stood together in the same boat.