

# **The Slippery Slope Study Guide**

## **The Slippery Slope by Lemony Snicket**

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# Plot Summary

"The Slippery Slope" is the tenth installment of the "Series of Unfortunate Events" series of books. It relates another episode in the adventure of the Baudelaire children, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny, in their attempts to escape the evil Count Olaf, who wishes to steal the fortune left to the children after the death of their parents in a house fire.

The book opens as Sunny, the youngest of the three, is being taken up into the Mortmain Mountains by Count Olaf and his troupe of followers while Violet and Klaus are hurtling down the mountain in a runaway caravan wagon. The older children manage to stop the wagon and begin to make their way back up the mountain to find their sister. With the help of a boy named Quigley Quagmire, whom they meet on the way, they discover the ruined headquarters of a mysterious organization called the VFD where they decipher clues that may point to the possibility of their parents being alive. Quigley is also in search of family, having been separated from his siblings after it was thought he himself died in a fire. As the three children share their experiences they learn they have followed a similar path leading them to the VFD headquarters.

The VFD, the children determine, is a secret society to which their parents and Count Olaf belong, but which underwent a split with Olaf and his followers seeking to destroy the other members. As they learn more about the VFD it becomes clear that seemingly unimportant bits of information they were

made to learn as young children have significance in deciphering VFD codes.

While Klaus and Violet work on a plan for her rescue, Sunny, who is forced to act as a servant to Count Olaf and his troupe, learns what she can about his plan to thwart the VFD by destroying their last safe location at the Hotel Denouement. She also learns that Olaf holds a group of documents called the Snicket File, which was saved from the ruins of the burned down VFD headquarters and which may hold the explanation of where the Baudelaire's parents are.

Violet, Klaus and Quigley climb a frozen waterfall to the summit of the mountain where Count Olaf is camped and rescue Sunny, escaping by sliding quickly back down the icy slope. As they reach the bottom of the slope, the ice thaws and cracks, sending the Baudelaire children down one branch of a swift river and Quigley down another. The book ends on this note, setting the scene for the next installment in a subsequent book.



# Chapter One

## Chapter One Summary

Chapter 1 opens as Violet and Klaus Baudelaire, two of the three Baudelaire children, are racing uncontrollably down a steep path in the Mortmain Mountains in a large caravan wagon. Meanwhile, their younger sister, Sunny, is being carried up the mountain in a large car driven by the evil Count Olaf. Also in Olaf's car are his girlfriend, Esme Squalor, and several of Olaf's employees who come from a carnival and each have an unusual appearance. There are two ladies who keep their faces white with powder and a man with hooks for hands, among others.

In the runaway caravan, Klaus and Violet are desperate to find a way to stop the wagon before it plunges off a steep incline. Violet, who is skilled at improvising solutions to difficult situations, tells Klaus to look through the pantry of the wagon and mix together everything he can find that is sticky. Meanwhile, she takes some hammocks and fashions a drag chute, which she throws out the back of the wagon to slow them down.

Once they have started to slow, she tells Klaus to pour the sticky mixture out onto the wheels, which slows them down even more. Finally, Violet throws a table attached to a rope out the back to act as an anchor. The wagon finally stops just before it is about to fly off a cliff.

Klaus and Violet get out and begin to think of a way to get the wagon back up the hill so they can go after Count Olaf. They have stopped near a gray-colored river called the Stricken Stream. They begin to remove items from the wagon, spreading them out to see if anything might be useful. As they are looking over the things they have salvaged, however, the wagon breaks free and falls over the cliff, disappearing in the mist and smashing to the rocks below. Icy winds blow as the children look out into the mist and contemplate their narrow escape.

## Chapter One Analysis

This opening chapter transitions the story from the previous book, which ended with the fate of the Baudelaire children unknown. It also establishes the main characters and explains their relationship to one another. The Baudelaire children are orphans who have inherited a large fortune and Count Olaf and his followers are their enemy who wants to get his hands on their money.

The story is narrated by the fictional character of Lemony Snicket, who addresses the reader directly and makes reference to his own efforts in researching the events he describes. This character is also established in the first chapter.

Each of the three Baudelaire children has a special talent and Violet's is established here. She is inventive and resourceful, with an ability to solve difficult problems quickly using improvised devices and methods. Her skills will save the children more than once.



# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two Summary

Chapter 2 begins with Violet and Klaus going through the items they managed to save from the caravan in preparation for hiking back up the mountain. They take some warm clothing and other items and set out following the Stricken Stream. The children had recently learned from some friends of theirs at the Prufrock Preparatory School about a secret organization called the VFD which had its headquarters in the Mortmain Mountains in a place called the Valley of the Four Drafts. They hope to find the headquarters and perhaps get some help from the VFD. A document uncovered by the children in an earlier book suggests that one of their parents at least might be alive and somehow associated with the group. Their friends at the Prufrock school are called Isidora and Duncan Quagmire. Their parents, like the Baudelaire's parents, had been killed along with their brother, Quigley Quagmire.

As Violet and Klaus follow the stream, they notice that it appears polluted by something that makes the water dark and gray. Klaus thinks back to books he has read and wonders what might cause the pollution. The children walk mostly in silence, each wondering about what lies ahead and the possibility of finding their parents alive.

Ahead on the path, Violet notices an odd white cloud moving rapidly toward them. Klaus soon recognizes them as snow gnats, vicious biting insects. He recalls from his reading that they attack with no reason, are very organized in their attack, and can be repelled by fire or the smell of smoke.

The children hide under a large coat to keep the swarm away and make way toward a nearby cave. As they enter the cave, they hear a familiar but unwelcome voice call out in a harsh tone, "Hey, you cakesniffers!" (p. 45)

## Chapter Two Analysis

More of the background to the present story is supplied by the narrator in this chapter. The Baudelaire children have been on a quest for some time and have had some help in the past from the Quigley children, who have given them some important information. The VFD and its headquarters is mentioned here and the author engages in some wordplay. He mentions that the children have not determined what the letters VFD stand for, then immediately mentions that the group's headquarters are in the Valley of the Four Drafts. There will be more phrases with these same initial letters adding to the mystery.

The voice in the cave belongs to Carmelita Spats, a self-centered and mean girl the children know from their days at the Prufrock Preparatory School. Carmelita is mentioned briefly in the narrator's background to provide an introduction to the character when she is fully described in the next chapter.



The author is still establishing the main characters and the central conflict of the story at this stage in the book. Questions are being raised that will not be fully answered within this book, but will be left to future books in the series.

Klaus is a well-read person who has a good deal of information at his command that often proves crucial to solving a problem. His knowledge of snow gnats helps them escape the danger.



# Chapter Three

## Chapter Three Summary

The scene returns to Count Olaf and his troupe in Chapter 3, still driving toward the peak of the mountain. Sunny is sitting in the lap of Count Olaf's girlfriend, Esme Squalor, crying. She occasionally makes a short remark in her own special language, but none of the others in the car can understand the young girl, thinking she is just jabbering like a baby.

Sunny listens as the man with hooks for hands explains to Hugo, a hunchback, and Kevin, both new employees of Count Olaf, about the VFD and the Snicket File. The VFD, he tells them, is an organization that Count Olaf once belonged to but had left in order to pursue a life of crime. Evidence of his crimes have been written down by the VFD in a group of documents called the Snicket File, which is kept at the headquarters of the VFD in the Valley of the Four Drafts. Olaf intends to reach the headquarters and destroy them and the Snicket File.

The carload of people arrives at the summit of Mount Fraught where Olaf announces they will set up camp. Esme complains at the prospect of having to do any work, but Olaf tells her not to worry, as they will make Sunny do all the work. False Spring is coming soon, when it will grow warmer, and from the top of the mountain they will be able to see if anyone is coming for miles around.

Olaf tells Sunny to set up the large tents being carried in the trunk of the car and Esme tosses her outside while the others stay sitting in the warm car. Sunny takes the tents out and using her teeth to dig holes in the frozen ground of the summit, she sets up the tents. She looks around the flat, square summit and sees that a frozen waterfall originates along one edge, plunging down to a valley below. The waterfall is white, she notices, but the stream she recalls ran black.

Sunny is certain her brother and sister will come to save her, and she is glad to hear Olaf say that they can see everything from the top of the mountain, because it means that Klaus and Violet will be able to see her.

## Chapter Three Analysis

Some important background is revealed in this chapter. The author uses the device of introducing a new character to whom things must be explained by other characters in order to present this background about Olaf, his history, and his intentions.

Sunny's special talent is revealed in this chapter. She has enormous and very powerful teeth which she uses for many kinds of tasks. She also has a kind of built-in disguise, as she is actually far smarter and observant than she appears. Her unique way of



speaking appears to be gibberish to most people, but her siblings can understand her perfectly. This allows Sunny to observe and communicate without being noticed.



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Four Summary

Violet and Klaus are standing at the entrance to the cave as Chapter Four opens. The voice they heard is that of Carmelita Spats, an especially mean girl they know from Prufrock Preparatory School. Carmelita demands to know who they are, not recognizing them herself because they have kept their faces covered. They respond they are simply hikers who want to escape the snow gnats.

Carmelita and several other young people are seated back in the cave around a campfire. They are dressed all in white, with mesh masks over their faces that protect them from snow gnats. Their leader is a man named Uncle Bruce, who also wears a mask. He invites the Baudelaire's in over Carmelita's protests and gives them masks.

Uncle Bruce explains that he is the leader of the Snow Scouts, a youth organization that goes on hikes and does fun things. He leads the scouts in a ridiculously long pledge with an attribute for every letter in the alphabet. He explains that the scouts are hiking to the top of Mount Fraught to witness the False Spring and crown the False Spring Queen, who will be Carmelita, because she is crowned queen every year. The scouts wear white jackets with their long pledge written on the back in pink letters. One scout is not wearing the jacket but has a sweater on instead.

Bruce begins to tell the scouts that the caves in the Mortmain Mountains were once inhabited by bears, but the scout who is wearing a sweater and is seated near Violet and Klaus says that actually the caves were inhabited by lions who were detectives. "Volunteer feline detectives," he says meaningfully, and Violet and Klaus immediately recognize the initials VFD. The scout shakes his head at them to warn them not to say anything yet. Violet and Klaus join the conversation and use phrases of their own that begin with the letters VFD to send the signal that they understood the boy's message.

The Baudelaire children join the Snow Scouts for a meal of roasted marshmallows, taking care to keep their faces hidden so they will not be recognized. After everyone has gone to sleep, the boy in the sweater comes and quietly wakes the Baudelaire's, calling them by name and telling them to follow him because he knows how to get to the VFD headquarters.

## Chapter Four Analysis

This chapter contains a double surprise. First, the Baudelaire's discover a cave full of people they did not expect to find, including a girl they both know. Then the chapter ends with the revelation that one of the anonymous Snow Scouts seems to know their names and what they are looking for. The author uses the device of the snow gnat masks to keep everyone's identity hidden.



The author engages in more wordplay in this chapter with the ridiculously long pledge of the Snow Scouts, which takes a very long time to recite and makes little sense. The character of the narrator ends the chapter with a long aside about how he is going to skip the uninteresting parts of what happened while the Baudelaires were eating their marshmallow meal with the scouts and skip to the interesting part where the mysterious stranger wakes them up.



# Chapter Five

## Chapter Five Summary

The Baudelaires have many questions for the masked stranger in the sweater as Chapter Five opens, but he warns them not to wake Uncle Bruce, as he has already caused enough trouble for the VFD. The boy shows them that above the campfire, which has died down to embers, there is a long chimney that lets the smoke escape. This chimney is called the Vertical Flame Diversion, he tells them, and it leads to the VFD headquarters. It once had a pole running down through it, but it also has toeholds in the rock that lets a person climb up. The masked boy seems to know a good deal about the past adventures of the Baudelaires, but he again warns them not to talk until they reach the top.

The narrator at this point says that the climb through the smoky air and cobweb-filled chimney was not pleasant for the children, so he will not distress the reader by describing it in detail. Instead, he invites the reader to skip ahead to the next chapter to see how Sunny Baudelaire is getting along, or to jump to Chapter Seven to learn the identity of the masked boy.

In a seemingly unrelated aside, the narrator then includes the text of a letter he wrote to his sister, apparently from the VFD headquarters, thanking her for the idea of using a tea set as a hiding place for important information and mentioning he will see her soon at the Hotel Denouement.

## Chapter Five Analysis

The mystery of the masked boy deepens in Chapter Five and the Baudelaire children appear to be on the right track toward discovering the secret of the VFD. Little action takes place in this chapter, and a good deal of it is made up of a humorous aside by the narrator, who warns the reader that he will not describe the unpleasant climb up through the Vertical Flame Diversion, but then does describe it. The apparently unrelated letter inserted at the end of the chapter indicates that the narrator himself is somehow connected to the VFD. Two other references in this letter will have later significance. One is the reference to the Hotel Denouement, which the Baudelaires and Count Olaf will eventually learn is the location where the last of the VFD members intend to meet. The second reference is to the possibility of hiding something important in a tea set. The Baudelaires and Count Olaf will also learn that the time of the meeting at the Hotel Denouement has been hidden in the sugar bowl from a tea set, although none of them know where the sugar bowl is.

The author also makes an interesting comment that he has gathered evidence that shows that he was falsely accused of setting fires that had actually been started by Count Olaf.



# Chapter Six

## Chapter Six Summary

In Chapter Six, Sunny is put in charge of making a meal for Count Olaf and the others while they bicker among themselves. Finding only frozen food in the trunk of Olaf's car, she does the best she can. She chops frozen orange juice into a kind of sherbet, spreads jam on pieces of frozen bread, and, grinding coffee beans with her teeth makes iced coffee with melted snow. She sets out the meal attractively on a large flat rock, making occasional comments in her own personal language that the others interpret as gibberish. When one of the troupe asks for some sugar for her iced coffee Olaf becomes incensed and pulls everything off the flat rock they are using as a table.

Just then, two menacing figures appear atop the mountain, dressed in fireproof suit and pulling a toboggan. They are not named, but are described as The Man With A Beard But No Hair and The Woman With Hair But No Beard. They speak in a tone that even Olaf finds disturbing, and he seems nervous.

The man and woman inform Olaf that they have just come from burning down the headquarters of the VFD, which they burned in several parts so as not to draw too much attention with the smoke. Olaf is delighted, and they in turn are pleased to learn that Olaf has just come from burning down the Caligari Carnival. They present Olaf with a gift. It is the Snicket File, containing evidence of Olaf's crimes. It is complete, they say, except for page 13, which they understand was taken by the Baudelaires previously. Olaf explains that the two older Baudelaires are dead, and assumes the missing page is gone with them.

The man with a beard gives Esme a present of what seems to be a green cigarette. Thinking that smoking is fashionable, she lights the cigarette-like object and green smoke begins billowing out of it. She tries to inhale it, but is disgusted and throws it on the ground. Olaf, the man and woman, and Esme go inside the tent to read the Snicket File, leaving the others outside. Sunny is given a whole salmon and told to prepare it.

## Chapter Six Analysis

The reader is one step ahead of the older Baudelaire children after Chapter Six. While Klaus and Violet are still climbing toward the headquarters, it is revealed to the reader that the headquarters have been abandoned and then burned down by a mysterious and unnamed couple. The contents of the Snicket File are described in more detail after having been referred to in the narrator's letter to his sister in the previous chapter. The reader is now able to put together that the narrator and supposed author of the book is the same person who has compiled the Snicket File.

Esme's vanity is on display here as she tries to smoke one of the strange green "cigarettes" that she thinks are fashionable.



# Chapter Seven

## Chapter Seven Summary

Klaus, Violet and the masked boy reach the top of the chimney at the beginning of Chapter Seven and climb up into a long passageway that has a little morning light shining in through a hole in the ceiling. The masked boy explains that the passage leads to the center of the Valley of Four Drafts where the four winds disperse the smoke so nobody will notice it. He also shows them a small package of green cigarette-like tubes the same as those that Esme Squalor had tried to smoke in the previous chapter.

The tubes are not cigarettes, he tells the Baudelaires, but signaling flares called Verdant Flammable Devices to alert other members of the VFD, called "volunteers," that there is trouble. Violet and Klaus recall having seen such a device hidden in the drawer of their father's desk and wonder why he was keeping them secret.

The masked boy replies that the whole VFD organization is very secret and that he had a difficult time learning the location of the headquarters. Klaus adds that he and Violet had decoded a map to discover the location. The masked boy takes out a book he calls a "commonplace book" in which he draws maps and writes down important information. In it he has created a map drawn from information gathered from many places. He tells the others that if they follow the passage, they will arrive at the Vernacularly Fastened Door, which should lead to the kitchen of the VFD headquarters.

They proceed to the strange door, which has wires curling over the surface of it and a typewriter keyboard where the doorknob would be. Noting that "vernacular" refers to language, Klaus determines the device is a lock that uses language to open. The masked boy confirms this, referring to his commonplace book. He says the lock requires the entry of the answers to certain questions, which he has written in his book. The first two questions are fairly straightforward. One is the name of the scientist credited with the discovery of gravity. The answer is Sir Isaac Newton. The second question is the Latin name for the Volunteer Feline Detectives, which is *Panthera leo*.

The third question is more complicated and asks the central theme of Leo Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*. As it happens, this is a novel that Klaus has had read to him as a child and has read himself. He quickly types out "The central theme of *Anna Karenina* is that a rural life of moral simplicity, despite its monotony, is the preferable personal narrative to a daring life of impulsive passion, which only leads to tragedy." (p. 146)

At first it seems as if the lock is not working, but soon the wires begin to curl and the door pops open. The three of them walk through the door and discover what the reader already knows, the narrator explains, that the headquarters have burned down. The charred remains of the headquarters stand in contrast to the shining frozen waterfall nearby, which ends in a frozen pool that splits into two rivers. Klaus realizes the blackness they had noticed earlier in the Stricken Stream was ash from the fire.



Behind them, the door shuts and locks. As they look through the remains of the headquarters, Violet and Klaus begin to feel very alone. They had hoped to find one or both of their parents, and in desperation they begin calling out for their mother and father. Klaus shows the masked boy page 13 from the Snicket File, which has a photograph of his parents standing with Jacques Snicket and an unidentified man. Above the photograph is a sentence that reads, in part, "there may in fact be one survivor of the fire" that burned down the Baudelaire's home. (p. 156) Klaus tells the boy they had hoped to find the survivor at the headquarters.

The boy replies that they have found a survivor, and he takes off his mask and introduces himself. He is Quigley Quagmire, the brother of Isidora and Duncan Quagmire, who everyone had thought died in the fire that destroyed his own home. He escaped the fire and has been looking for his two siblings, he explains.

## Chapter Seven Analysis

Some of the threads from earlier in the book and from other books are brought together in Chapter Seven. The Baudelaire's search for their parents seems to suffer a setback when they reach the goal of their quest, the VFD headquarters, and find it has been destroyed by fire. They are given some hope by the masked scout, who is revealed to be Quigley Quagmire, a survivor of a fire very similar to the one that struck the Baudelaire's home.

The physical setting of the book is further described. The frozen waterfall that begins at the peak of Mount Fraught ends at a pool next to the VFD headquarters, meaning that Quigley and the Baudelaire's are not far from Olaf and Sunny. The two branches of the Stricken Stream are described here as well, a feature that will play part in the final scene.

The author uses absurdity to create a humorous situation as the children are unlocking the Vernacularly Fastened Door. While the first two answers are short, factual phrases, the third is a long and complicated phrase that it would be absurd to expect anyone to happen to know. As it happens, the phrase is well known by Klaus, who has learned it from his parents. This suggests that the Baudelaire's parents were teaching their children things that might later be useful as members of the VFD.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Violet and Klaus are stunned at Quigley's unmasking as Chapter Eight begins. They had learned from his brother and sister that he had died in a fire that also had killed the Quagmire's parents. Quigley explains that when his mother first smelled the smoke of the fire they tried to escape but the smoke had blocked the exit. His mother quickly took him to a secret door in the floor of the house and put him through it before closing it. There he stayed, but his mother did not return. Finding he was in a secret passage, he walked until he found himself at the house of a man named Dr. Montgomery.

The Baudelaires know Dr. Montgomery, because he was their uncle and they had lived with him for a time while Olaf was on their trail. The three quickly discover that they have been following much the same path as the Baudelaires have been searching for their parents and Quigley has been searching for his brother and sister. They put all their information together in an effort to learn all they can.

Quigley tells the Baudelaires that he had been discovered at Dr. Montgomery's by Jacques Snicket, who had given him valuable information about the VFD and the headquarters, and had also given him the Verdant Flammable Devices. Violet sadly informs Quigley and Jacques Snicket had been murdered by Count Olaf. Violet and Klaus tell Quigley that they had been at Prufrock Preparatory School with his siblings and had last seen them floating off in a balloon on their mission to look for him. They reassure him that they are most certainly still trying to find him.

Quigley says he had asked Jacques Snicket what VFD stands for, but that he would not say. He points out that many of the things associated with the organization share the same initials, such as the Verdant Flammable Devices and the Valley of Four Drafts. Quigley believes it stands for Volunteer Fire Department and that all their parents had belonged to it. He learned from Jacques Snicket and his research that the VFD had undergone a "schism," which he explains is a split where an opposing group split from the organization. Count Olaf and others had once belonged to the VFD but then left it and started fighting against it.

The Baudelaires do not think that Count Olaf burned down the VFD headquarters because he would not have had time since they last saw him. Quigley adds that it seems it was burned down in parts so as to avoid making too much smoke. They sit among the ruins and look up to the sky, where they notice, from the peak above the waterfall, a stream of green smoke.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

The characters continue to connect the dots toward solving the mystery of the VFD and provide each other with some hope that they may all find their missing relatives. As the



characters inform one another about what they know, the reader also becomes informed about how some of the characters are interconnected. The discussion among the characters also introduces some new unresolved questions, such as the fate of the two other Quagmire siblings, which will not be answered in this book but may be in later volumes.

The green smoke seen at the end of the chapter signals that the Baudelaires are about to discover the whereabouts of Count Olaf and Sunny.



# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Nine Summary

Atop Mount Fraught, Sunny is preparing the salmon as Chapter Nine opens. She has decided to smoke the salmon, and has pushed the burning green device discarded by Esme Squalor into a pile of brush, where she has placed the salmon in a large casserole dish. She hopes that her siblings will see the smoke. Olaf becomes angry when he suspects that Sunny might be sending a signal, but she acts innocent and convinces him she is just a simple child who could not possibly be spying on him.

Below the peak, Violet, Quigley, and Klaus discuss the meaning of the green smoke above. They wonder if it might be a volunteer who escaped the fire, or possibly a trap or a signal by the other side of the VFD. Using the sun reflected from the waterfall, Violet manages to light a Verdant Flammable Device to send back a signal. They are puzzled when the smoke at the top goes out.

Violet decides they should climb up the waterfall and find out for themselves who is at the top. Quigley is astonished at the suggestion, but Violet pulls her hair back and sets about inventing something that will allow them to climb the ice.

As she works, Quigley watches her with admiration while Klaus goes looking through the ruins of the library looking for any remnants of documents that might help them. He finds some charred papers that refer to a code hidden somehow in the refrigerator, one of the last items still standing after the fire. He opens the fridge and finds a variety of things one usually finds, but also a bunch of Very Fresh Dill, which seems to confirm there is a hidden code of some kind.

Klaus decides to stay behind and work on the code while Violet climbs the waterfall with the use of the device she has invented. Using ukulele strings to securely fasten forks to her shoes she has come up with a way to get traction on the steep ice. She picks up a candelabra to use to test the ice by tapping it, so as not to try to climb in ice that is soft.

Violet and Klaus thank Quigley for his help and tell him they will understand if he wants to leave to continue looking for his siblings. They are pleased when he says he wants to stay and help them.

## Chapter Nine Analysis

The plot is moved along toward the reunion of the Baudelaires and Count Olaf in this chapter as Violet works to find a way to get to the top of the slippery slope. Klaus has an opportunity to use his own special talents to work on decoding a possible message left behind in the VFD refrigerator. Sunny's skills are also on display when she uses her disguise as an innocent child to send a signal to her siblings, although she does not know for sure that it reaches them.



More is learned about Jacques Snicket, including the fact that he was working with at least one of his siblings, possibly a brother. This suggests that the narrator is possibly this brother. Jacques Snicket, Quigley tells the Baudelaires, was compiling as much information as he could about them and their family.

A budding romantic situation between Violet and Quigley is hinted at when Violet blushes at Quigley's compliments over her inventiveness.



# Chapter Ten

## Chapter Ten Summary

Violet and Quigley begin climbing the frozen waterfall in Chapter 10, using forks lashed to their shoes and forks in their hands to make their way up the ice. As the climb, they talk about the past and learn they share certain experiences, such as their parents using similar sayings and phrases. Knowing what they do about the VFD, they speculate that all of the adults they have been in the care of since the death of their parents were members of the VFD on one side or the other.

The two pause to rest on an ice shelf part way up the slope, and here the narrator interjects that he will leave this part of the story unexplained in order to provide them with some privacy. When he returns to the narrative, they have started to climb again, each with small smiles on their faces.

As they approach the top of the waterfall, Violet hears Sunny's voice and is delighted to see her when she lifts herself over the peak. Sunny is standing by Olaf's large car, which hides Violet and Quigley from the view of the others. Sunny quickly explains to Violet in her special one-word sentences that Olaf has the Snicket File and that he has learned there is one more safe place the volunteers will be meeting at, and that he intends to find it and burn it down. She tells them she has been made to do all the cooking and been given other impossible tasks like cleaning out Olaf's car. She also tells Violet about the menacing man and woman who arrived, and that they brought a large net with them. She has overheard plans that they intend to recruit new members to their cause.

Olaf calls for Sunny and Violet and Quigley duck underneath the car to hide. They overhear Olaf tell Sunny that the next day is False Spring and that he expects her to prepare a fashionable meal in honor of the event. They also overhear Esme ask the man with a beard if he has any more of the green cigarettes. She does not like them, she explains, and she knows smoking is bad for a person, but she understands that it is fashionable and so wants to find some more of them.

When they have a chance, Violet and Quigley sneak out from under the car and speak again with Sunny. They want to take her with them, but Sunny says she should stay. She wants to continue spying on Olaf to see if she can learn the location of the last safe place. Violet is reluctant, but understands that Sunny is no longer a baby. She agrees to let Sunny stay.

## Chapter Ten Analysis

Sunny is reunited with her sister in Chapter Ten and proves to be even more resourceful than her sister had suspected. Several of the events that will take up the end of the book are referred to in this chapter, setting the scene for the final resolution. False



Spring is approaching, which is the day on which the book will end. It also reminds the reader of the Snow Scouts, who are planning to reach the peak on the day of False Spring, suggesting an impending conflict.

The existence of a final safe meeting place for the VFD volunteers is confirmed by Sunny, providing some hope for the Baudelaires as well as a reason for Sunny to stay with Olaf to continue spying on him.



# Chapter Eleven

## Chapter Eleven Summary

Violet and Quigley climb back down the slippery slope at the beginning of Chapter Eleven, while Klaus shines a flashlight from below to help them find a path down the ice. As they near the bottom, Violet tells Klaus they have found Sunny and she is safe. She informs him of Count Olaf's plan to find the last safe sanctuary of the volunteers and about the strange man and woman with the large net who say they want to recruit new followers.

Klaus shows them what he has learned in their absence. He has taken the contents of the refrigerator and laid them out on the ground. Using the information from Quigley's commonplace book about VFD codes, he has determined that there is a message meant for Jacques Snicket that makes reference to the last safe place and says a meeting will take place there on Thursday. In a small scrap of poetry that has survived the burning of the VFD library, the children discover a lightly penciled reference to a sugar bowl. Quigley remarks that Jacques Snicket had been looking for a sugar bowl, and Violet recalls that Sunny mentioned that Olaf and the others had also mentioned a sugar bowl.

The three of them discuss what to do next. They are angry that Olaf has kidnapped their sister and they begin to think about taking something away from him in order to strike a bargain for her release. They decide they will try to capture Esme Squalor, then exchange her for Sunny. To lure her to the bottom of the slope, they will use a Verdant Flammable Device, which Violet knows she is eager to find more of. To trap her, Violet proposes digging a large pit and covering it with charred wood that will give way when she walks on it.

They dig all night and form the trap. In the morning, they have an uneasy feeling however that the scheme to trap Esme is the kind of thing that Olaf himself might have dreamt up. They wonder if they are becoming villains themselves.

## Chapter Eleven Analysis

The children learn one half of the mystery of the last meeting place of the volunteers when Klaus decodes the message in the refrigerator. They learn the time of the meeting, and Count Olaf is thought to know the location. The reference to the sugar bowl, which was hinted at in an earlier chapter, is made more clearly in this chapter. Its exact importance to the story will not be answered in this book, but the knowledge of its existence will help the Baudelaires escape a difficult situation at the end of the book.

One of the themes of the book is introduced in this chapter, which is whether it is always right to "fight fire with fire." The children build a dangerous trap with the intention to take Esme Squalor hostage and exchange her for Sunny. They are uneasy about this plan

after they have put it into action however and are left wondering if they have become like that villains they are trying to escape.



# Chapter Twelve

## Chapter Twelve Summary

It is the day of False Spring as Chapter Twelve opens. Sunny goes about preparing a special meal and is surprised to see that Count Olaf has dressed for the occasion, even washing his face. Esme Squalor comes from her tent dressed in an elaborate red dress with high black plumes that is meant to look like a fire. They talk excitedly about their plans, which include springing some kind of trap. Count Olaf also slips and says he cannot wait to see the Hotel Denouement go up in flames. Sunny withholds a gasp when she hears him say this, realizing the Hotel Denouement must be the last sanctuary of the volunteers.

Esme Squalor complains that she does not have any more of the fashionable green cigarettes and one of the white-faced ladies points out that there is a good deal of green smoke floating up from the base of the frozen waterfall. Esme takes the toboggan brought up by the strange man and woman and slides down the waterfall to see if she can find some more of the devices.

Sunny is disappointed that Esme takes the toboggan as she had hoped to use it herself to escape. She devises a different plan, which involves putting a large heavy eggplant into the large casserole dish in which Olaf has been making her sleep at night.

From the base of the waterfall, the children see Esme sliding down in her elaborate red dress. They take cover and watch as she reaches the bottom, but then Violet has second thoughts. She sees a motto inscribed on an archway that is still standing in the headquarters which reads "All is Quiet Here." She speaks with Quigley and Klaus who agree that if they resort to the same methods that Olaf uses, then there will be no end to the conflict and it will never be quiet. The VFD was devoted to putting fires out, they decide, not creating new ones.

As Esme approaches the trap, Violet puts one of the snow scout masks over her face and steps out to warn her. Esme is skeptical at first and asks Violet who she is. Violet replies that she is a volunteer and that Esme is about to fall into a trap. Esme investigates the wood over the pit and sees that Violet is telling the truth.

Klaus and Quigley also put on masks and step out. They explain to Esme that they had intended to trap her and trade her for Sunny Baudelaire. They have given up that plan, however, and Violet says instead they will simply go speak with Count Olaf and ask him to return Sunny. Esme thinks about this and says that it may be possible to get Sunny back if they will take her back to the top of the mountain to speak with Olaf.

The children agree, and Violet rigs up a way for the three of them to pull Esme back up the waterfall on the toboggan. While Esme irritatingly taunts them from the toboggan, the children discuss what they could say to Olaf to convince him to return Sunny. He





would not be easily fooled, they agree. At the top of the waterfall, they pull Esme onto the peak and find Olaf surprised to see what he thinks are snow scouts in their masks, which he has been expecting. Esme quickly corrects him and says the children are volunteers she found at the VFD headquarters.

Violet explains they had intended to trap Esme to exchange for Sunny, but decided not to. Esme contradicts her and says that she captured them all herself and forced them to carry her back up the mountain. Violet tells Olaf that they have come for Sunny and will not leave without her.

Count Olaf scoffs at Violet's demand and asks her why he should turn Sunny over to them. Violet thinks quickly. Inspired by the sight of Quigley's commonplace book that holds all the information they have learned about the VFD, and by the sight of Olaf's tea set, she tells Olaf that he will give them Sunny because they know where the sugar bowl is.

## Chapter Twelve Analysis

Chapter Twelve sets the scene for the final conflict in the book, which follows in the next and final chapter. Violet's quick thinking allows her to guess correctly that the missing sugar bowl is something Olaf knows about and will be very interested in. Her gamble will pay them time in the final chapter.

Olaf's remark that he was expecting some Snow Scouts to arrive, but by a different route, is a hint that he is expecting them and that his "recruitment" plan will involve capturing the scouts somehow.

The theme of "fighting fire with fire" is continued in this chapter as Violet and the others decide that resorting to evil methods like kidnapping is not the best path to follow.



# Chapter Thirteen

## Chapter Thirteen Summary

Count Olaf is astounded to hear Violet say she knows where the missing sugar bowl is as Chapter Thirteen opens. He insists that she give it to him, but she insists in return that he hand Sunny over. Violet is bluffing. She does not actually know where the sugar bowl is.

Esme tries to convince Olaf to let Sunny go, but he is reluctant. Getting the Baudelaire fortune is more important than the sugar bowl, he argues, but she replies that the sugar bowl is more important. They bicker back and forth until the man with the beard interrupts them angrily. He reminds them of their plan, which will soon allow them to steal the fortunes of many families. He tells Olaf's followers to bring Sunny to him, and they give him the large covered casserole dish inside which they believe Sunny to be sleeping.

The man with a beard takes out a small silver whistle and blows it. Instantly the sky is filled with eagles. The man explains that the eagles are trained to do whatever they are told. A large net is spread out on the ground, and when the Snow Scouts arrive the eagles will capture them all in the net. They will be given the chance to join the villains, he explains, then invites Violet and the others to join their side, as well. Violet, Klaus and Quigley decline.

Just then the Snow Scouts arrive, led by Uncle Bruce. They are surprised to see others at the peak, and Carmelita angrily orders everyone to leave so she can be crowned False Spring Queen. Olaf and Esme, with sinister smiles, welcome the scouts and invite them to come closer. Violet, Klaus, and Quigley try to warn the scouts, pointing out the net and the eagles, but Carmelita is skeptical, asking why she should trust these unknown strangers.

The three children decide to take off their masks and reveal themselves, surprising Olaf and the others who thought all three of them were dead. Realizing they are not actually volunteers, Olaf remarks there is no reason to keep Sunny around any more and he orders the white-faced women to throw the casserole with Sunny in it over the cliff. The women refuse, however, saying they have had enough of Olaf's evil schemes, and leave together down the path. Olaf, infuriated, rushes over to throw the casserole over himself, but just then Sunny reveals herself from under his car, where she has been hiding. She joins her brother and sister.

As the scouts are reciting their ridiculously long pledge, the nameless woman blows again on one of the whistles and the eagles swoop down and pick up the corners of the net, trapping all of the scouts except Carmelita and lifting them in the air. The eagles also pick up the man and woman, lifting them up and carrying all of them away.



Olaf and Esme invite Carmelita to join them, promising her fashionable outfits like Esme's. Olaf tells her they only need one of the Baudelaires left alive in order to claim their fortune. They tell her to pick which one should live and to push the other two over the cliff. Before she can, however, Quigley and the Baudelaires jump on the toboggan and begin sliding down the waterfall.

On their way down, they lose control of the toboggan. The False Spring has also started to thaw the ice and they crash into the pool at the base of the waterfall and are carried downstream. Quigley is carried down one branch of the stream, while the Baudelaires are carried down the other.

The narrator finishes the book, explaining that he has learned some of what happened next, but not everything. He mentions that the sugar bowl had floated down the stream in much the same way as the children did, and also remarks in passing that their father is dead, leaving open the possibility that their mother is alive.

## Chapter Thirteen Analysis

Chapter Thirteen is the dramatic conclusion to the story. Sunny is rescued and the Baudelaires are reunited, but just as quickly they are separated from their new friend, Quigley Quagmire. Olaf and Esme are temporarily defeated, but not stopped, and will certainly be faced again in the future.

The identities of the man and woman who burned down the VFD headquarters is never fully revealed, but their plan to capture the Snow Scouts appears to have been successful. It is implied that Olaf's method of operation is to capture wealthy children and burn down their houses, killing their parents so he can take over their fortunes. This appears to be what happened to both the Quagmire children and the Baudelaires. Not all of the children are opposed to the scheme, it would also seem, as Carmelita willingly joins Olaf and Esme.

The story is left unresolved at the end of the book so that it can be further explained in the next. The narrator offers some tantalizing hints about what happens next. It is known, for instance, that the Baudelaires know the time and place of the meeting of the volunteers, where they might expect to meet with Quigley again. The narrator also mentions with certainty that their father is dead, leaving open the possibility that their mother has survived the fire that burned down their house.



# Characters

## Klaus Baudelaire

Klaus is the middle child of the three Baudelaire siblings, whose parents are believed to have died in a house fire leaving them a large fortune. Since the death of his parents, Klaus and his siblings have undertaken a series of adventures in an attempt to solve the mystery of their parents' death.

Klaus is a very intelligent boy who has read widely and has a wealth of knowledge about literature, science and other subjects. In cooperation with his older sister, Violet, he is often able to solve complicated puzzles and escape seemingly impossible situations. In this story, Klaus puts his intelligence to work deciphering a code left by the VFD giving the time of their planned meeting at the Hotel Denouement. His knowledge of Russian literature allows him to help solve a puzzle lock that gives him access to the VFD headquarters.

Klaus is 13 years old and wears large, round glasses.

## Violet Baudelaire

Violet Baudelaire is the oldest of the three Baudelaire siblings. She is 14 years old. Along with her younger brother, Klaus, and younger sister, Sunny, she has been through a series of adventures since the apparent death of her parents in an unexplained house fire.

Violet is skilled at creating improvised devices made from found objects. When she is thinking especially hard about an invention or solution to a problem, she has a habit of tying back her long dark hair, which her siblings recognize as a promising sign that she will soon have solved any difficulty facing them. In this story, Violet stops the runaway wagon she and Klaus are in by creating a drag parachute and anchor using a table, and instructs Klaus to pour sticky substances found in the wagon over the wheels to slow them down. She also styles climbing devices out of forks that allow her to climb the icy waterfall to Count Olaf's camp.

Violet is attracted to Quigley Quagmire, one of the Quagmire triplets who helps her and Klaus rescue their sister. They are separated at the end of the story when they are washed down separate branches of a fast-flowing river.

## Sunny Baudelaire

Sunny Baudelaire is the youngest of the three Baudelaire children. Although she appears to be only a toddler, Sunny is actually quite smart and resourceful. She has an unnaturally large set of teeth which she uses to bite through things. Sunny speaks in a



way that only her siblings fully understand, using apparent nonsense words and one-word sentences. She uses her appearance as a kind of disguise, fooling Count Olaf and his followers that she has the intelligence of a baby when she is actually plotting to learn his secrets and help her siblings stop his plan. Sunny is taken hostage by Count Olaf, but with the help of Violet, Klaus, and Quigley, she escapes.

## Quigley Quagmire

Quigley Quagmire is one of a set of triplets. Earlier in the series of books he is presumed to have died in a fire, so Klaus and Violet are very surprised to meet him in the Mortmain Mountains. Like Violet and Klaus, Quigley has been investigating the secret society called the VFD and has found the secret passage through mountain caves to the valley where the VFD headquarters were located. He and the Baudelaires are able to provide one another with several pieces of missing information to gain a fuller picture of the secret society.

Quigley keeps a notebook he calls a "commonplace book" in which he stores all of the information he has learned. He is a skilled mapmaker. Quigley becomes interested in Violet and they share a private moment while climbing up the frozen waterfall to Olaf's camp. He is separated from Violet, Klaus, and Sunny at the end of the story when he is washed down the Stricken Stream.

## Count Olaf

Count Olaf is the main villain in the book and throughout the series. He intends to obtain the fortune left to the Baudelaire children after the death of their parents and has kidnapped Sunny Baudelaire while sending Klaus and Violet rushing down a mountain path in a wagon to their presumed deaths. He is shocked to find at the end of the novel that they had survived his attempt to kill them.

Olaf is the leader of a small group of people out to destroy some of the members of the VFD, a secret society to which Olaf belongs that split into two opposing factions. He intends to find the last sanctuary of the VFD and burn it down.

Olaf is a cruel and thoughtless man. He is also very vain about his own intelligence and appearance. He has a girlfriend named Esme Squalor who is even more vain than he.

## Esme Squalor

Esme Squalor is the girlfriend of Count Olaf. She is very vain and concerned about her appearance, wearing elaborate clothing and constantly talking about what is "in." Like Olaf, she is cruel and thoughtless.



## **Carmelita Spats**

Carmelita Spats is a self-centered girl that the Baudelaire children know from a previous encounter. She dislikes the Baudelaires and seems to join Count Olaf at the end of the novel.

## **Uncle Bruce**

Uncle Bruce is the uncle of Carmelita Spats and the leader of the Snow Scouts, a youth organization that climbs to the top of the Mortmain Mountain each year to crown a False Spring Queen.

## **The Man with a Beard but No Hair**

This nameless character is only referred to as "The man with a beard but no hair." He is the partner of "The woman with hair but no beard," and appears to be part of the same faction of the VFD as Count Olaf. This man frightens Olaf and makes him nervous. The man with a beard but no hair is responsible for burning down the VFD headquarters and for the plan to capture the Snow Scouts.

## **The Woman with Hair but No Beard**

"The Woman with Hair but no Beard" is the companion of the Man with a Beard but No Hair. She is also involved in the destruction of the VFD headquarters and the plan to capture the Snow Scouts

## **Snow Scouts**

This is a group of young people led by a man named Uncle Bruce who are hiking up the Mortmain Mountains for an annual ceremony to observe False Spring. Quigley Quagmire disguises himself as one of the Snow Scouts, as do Violet and Klaus. The Snow Scouts are captured at the end of novel by Olaf and his group with the plan to force the children to join them.

## **Hugo, Kevin, Collette, and the White-Faced Women**

These minor characters are followers of Count Olaf and accompany him to the top of the Mortmain Mountains. They are former members of the Caligari Carnival, a group that was described in the previous book.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Mortmain Mountains**

This is the craggy mountain range which is the main setting for the story.

### **Valley of the Four Drafts**

This is a valley in the Mortmain Mountains where the headquarters of the VFD is located.

### **The Stricken Stream**

This is a river that runs from the Valley of the Four Drafts down through the Mortmain Mountains. Violet and Klais follow the course of the stream to find the valley. At the end of the book, they along with Quigley Quagmire, are carried off down separate branches of the stream.

### **The VFD**

This is a mysterious secret organization known mainly by its initials, which may stand for Volunteer Fire Department, and whose members are called "volunteers." The group split into two rival parts with Count Olaf leading one faction which wants to destroy the other.

### **VFD Headquarters**

This is a large compound located in the Valley of the Four Drafts that is destroyed by fire. Violet, Klaus and Quigley search the burned out ruins of the headquarters to find clues to the organization's plans.

### **The Snicket File**

This is a group of documents taken from VFD headquarters which may explain the events surrounding the Baudelaire's parents' death.

### **Hotel Denouement**

This is the supposed last safe gathering place of the VFD. Olaf learns of the location and at the end of the book, all of the characters are heading there to either destroy it or try to warn the VFD members.



## **Snow Gnats**

These are fierce biting insects that attack in great swarms. They can be driven away by fire.

## **False Spring**

This is a phenomenon in the Mortmain Mountains when the weather becomes suddenly warm and springlike for a short time.





# Themes

## Fighting Fire with Fire

Fire is a recurring part of "The Slippery Slope." The Baudelaire children lost their home and their parents to fire, and Count Olaf and the others in his organization enjoy burning things down. Fire also seems to have something to do with the VFD, the secret organization that the Baudelaire's parents seem to have belonged to, and from which Olaf and others split. According to Quigley Quagmire, VFD may stand for Volunteer Fire Department, organizations that fight fires.

The reference to fires in the name of the VFD is probably not literal. To put out a fire can also be a figurative phrase that means to stop some potentially dangerous situation from getting worse. Fire is also used as an image in the figurative phrase to "fight fire with fire," which means that when a person is attacked, he uses the same attack methods on his attacker.

In this story, the main characters are given the option to use the same methods as their enemy, Count Olaf, and they briefly set out to try them. They make a trap to kidnap Olaf's girlfriend, Esme. Just before the trap is about to be sprung, however, they decide that it is not the best path. As Quigley suggests, if everyone were to fight fire with fire, then soon everything would be burned to the ground and nothing would be left.

Later, when Violet and the others are in danger of being pushed over the cliff, she briefly considers resorting to violence to defend herself. She decides against it, however, and the children manage to escape without it.

## Adult Conspiracies

As the Baudelaire children go through their various adventures, they learn more and more about the organization called the VFD. Before the death of their parents, they had never heard of the group but as they learn more they come to realize that their parents had belonged to the secret society, as had Count Olaf and others.

The children wonder at times why their parents would have kept the organization a secret from them. At the same time, however, there are hints that their parents were in fact teaching them about the organization from a very early age. When Violet sees the motto "All is quiet here" at the VFD headquarters, she has an unshakeable feeling that she has heard her parents use the phrase before. When knowledge of a certain book is needed to open a coded lock, Klaus knows the information because it is a book he has had read to him many times. Later, Esme Squalor, who was also a member of VFD, mentions that she, too had read the book.

"The Slippery Slope" is part of a series where uncovering these adult mysteries is a central part of the story. Children find secret passages under their own homes they never



knew existed. As they investigate this shadowy organization they constantly are finding clues that link back to their parents or their own childhoods.

## Language and Literature

The author uses wordplay frequently throughout, sometimes creating absurd passages made up of long, repeated lists, such as when he describes every ingredient in the sticky mixture that Klaus makes to slow the spinning wheels of the runaway wagon, or the ridiculous pledge of the Snow Scouts that has an adjective for every letter of the alphabet. At other times, he uses a single nonsense word uttered by Sunny to mean a long and complicated explanation. This playfulness with words is a stylistic choice, but it is also made part of the story itself.

One of the recurring humorous assumptions in "The Slippery Slope" is that well-read people are not likely to be evil. The joke is a kind of flattery to readers of the story, praising them for enjoying reading. The author makes numerous references to literature, quoting poetry and philosophy and integrating them into the narration. The VFD uses literature in the creation of its codes and had at one time an extensive library. Its members are presumed to be well-read and therefore not evil.



# Style

## Point of View

"The Slippery Slope" is narrated by the fictional character of the author, Lemony Snicket. The narrator describes the events of the story as if they are occurring in chronological order, but at times the narrator addresses the reader directly, explaining how he came to know about the things he describes and giving background information.

The narrator is apparently telling the story some time after the events occurred. Furthermore, he seems to have some connection to the events himself, as is suggested by the presence of something called the "Snicket File," a supposed account of the dealings between the opposing sections of the VFD.

The narrator appears to be on the same side as the Baudelaire children against Count Olaf, and the point of view is sympathetic to the main characters and promotes acting honorably over being deceitful or cruel. The narrator also sometimes appears to be giving advice to the reader in a humorous way, as if the events of the story are meant to serve as a lesson to the reader.

The narrator describes the events from the points of view of the Baudelaire children. As the setting shifts from the mountaintop where Sunny is being held captive to the base of the peak where Klaus and Violet are working to rescue her, the point of view shifts from sibling to sibling.

## Setting

"The Slippery Slope" takes place in the fictional Mortmain Mountains, a series of craggy, rocky peaks through which runs the Stricken Stream. High in the mountains is the Valley of the Four Drafts, the location of the headquarters of the secret organization called the VFD. These headquarters have been burned down before the older Baudelaire children reach them.

The headquarters sit alongside the Stricken Stream and at the base of a large frozen waterfall that originates on the high peak where Count Olaf and his followers have set up a camp. The waterfall provides a path for the Baudelaires to climb to Olaf's camp as well as a quick path of escape by sliding down. This waterfall is the "slippery slope" referred to in the title of the book.

The time and location of the story are completely fictional, with no specific reference to a real time or place. The descriptions and illustrations depict an old-fashioned setting similar to the 1920s or 1930s. The action takes place in a sparse, mountainous setting in the wintertime, adding to the often bleak tone of the story. There are dangerous drop offs, swiftly flowing rivers, dark caves, frozen ice slopes, and fierce biting insects as well, creating an inhospitable backdrop for the story.



## Language and Meaning

"The Slippery Slope" is written in an old-fashioned style that is meant to be humorous and ironic. The characters often do not speak to one another in natural conversation, but in pronouncements that explain elements of the story. The narrator digresses often and makes off-hand references to other stories and events. The author uses wordplay in the creation of secret codes the children must decipher and poses questions based on language, such as the mystery of the true meaning of the initials VFD. The author makes frequent use of alliteration, especially in names like Mortmain Mountains, Stricken Stream, Snow Scouts, Slippery Slope and Quigley Quagmire.

One of the recurring jokes in the book pokes fun at the use of unusual words. The narrator will use an uncommon word or phrase and then in an aside give another definition. For example:

"As Klaus typed the words 'a rural life,' a phrase which here means 'living in the country,' the wires began to curl and uncurl very quickly...by the time Klaus was typing, 'the preferable personal narrative,' a phrase which here means 'the way to live your life,' the entire door was quivering" (p. 147).

The author uses a similar joke with the character of Sunny, who speaks in a language of her own that consists of single-word sentences which the narrator translates as having long and detailed meanings.

## Structure

"The Slippery Slope" is the tenth book in a series featuring the same characters. It opens in the middle of a scene that was left unresolved in the previous book and ends with an unresolved situation that sets up the opening scene of the book that follows it. It is divided into thirteen numbered chapters.

The events of the story are related chronologically, shifting back and forth between the settings of the peak of the Mortmain Mountains, where Count Olaf and his followers are holding Sunny Baudelaire captive, and the mountainside below, where Klaus and Violet are working to reach her. The children are separated as the book opens, and Klaus and Violet must escape the runaway wagon before they begin their trek back up the mountain. The middle portion of the book describes Sunny's captivity on the top of the mountain and Violet and Klaus' adventures as they make their way back up, meet Quigley Quagmire, find the VFD Headquarters and come up with a plan to save Sunny. The elder Baudelaire children reach Sunny in the last third of the book and work with her to spy on Count Olaf until all three of them escape in the final chapter.

Each chapter begins with the narrator addressing the reader and providing commentary and background on what has happened recently and what is about to happen. There are occasional illustrations. In the back of the book is an illustration of a handwritten

letter that does not appear to be related to the present story, but may be explained in future volumes.



## Quotes

"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" (Chapter One, p. 1).

"Violet opened her mouth to answer, but at that moment another question immediately occupied the minds of the elder Baudelaires. It is a dreadful question, and nearly everyone who has found themselves asking it has ended up wishing that they'd never brought up the subject" (Chapter Two, p. 36).

"But if you are interested in knowing how Sunny Baudelaire spent her time while her siblings stopped the caravan, followed the path of the Stricken Stream, and struggled against the snow gnats, there is another story you might read that describes more or less the same situation. The story concerns a person named Cinderella" (Chapter Three, p. 48).

"... they each felt a hand touch them on the shoulder, and they quickly sat up and found themselves looking into the masked face of the sweated scout. 'Come with me, Baudelaires,' the boy said in a very quiet voice. 'I know a shortcut to the headquarters,' and this was an interesting part of the story indeed" (Chapter Four, p. 87).

"'I know that having a good vocabulary doesn't guarantee that I'm a good person,' the boy said, 'but it does mean I've read a great deal. And in my experience, well-read people are less likely to be evil'" (Chapter Five, p. 95).

"If you have ever slept in a covered casserole dish on the highest peak of a mountain range, then you know that it is an uncomfortable place to lay one's head, even if you find a dishtowel inside it that can serve as a blanket" (Chapter Six, p. 103).

"When the Baudelaires followed the mysterious scout through the doorway, they found themselves standing in what at first seemed to be a large field, growing a back and ruined harvest in a valley as cold and drafty as its name. but slowly, they saw the charred remains of the grand and impressive building that had stood where the three children were standing" (Chapter Seven, p. 150).

"It is one of the peculiar truths of life that people often say things that they know full well are ridiculous. If someone asks you how you are, for example, you might automatically say 'Fine, thank you,' when in fact you have just failed an examination or been trampled by an ox" (Chapter Eight, p. 157).

"The two elder Baudelaires stood for a moment with Quigley, gazing up at the small plume, a word which here means 'mysterious cloud of green smoke.' After the long, strange story he had told them about surviving the fire and what he had learned about



V.F.D., they could scarcely believe they were confronting another mystery" (Chapter Nine, p. 179).

"Sunny Baudelaire looked up at Quigley, and then at her older sister, and gave them both a big, happy smile that showed all of her impressive teeth. After spending so much time in the company of villains, she was happy to be with some people who respected her skills, appreciated her work, and understood her way of speaking" (Chapter Ten, p. 229).

"If you have ever found yourself sitting in darkness with a flashlight, you may have experienced the feeling that something is lurking just beyond the circle of light that a flashlight makes, and reading a poem about dead men is not a good way to make yourself feel better" (Chapter Eleven, p. 243).

"The Hotel Denouement, she realized, must be the last safe place for volunteers to gather, and Olaf was so excited that he had uttered the name inadvertently, a word which here means 'where the youngest Baudelaire could hear it' (Chapter Twelve, p. 264).

"But although I know exactly where the Baudelaires went, and can even trace their path on a map drawn by one of the most promising young cartographers of our time, I am not the writer who can describe it best" (Chapter Thirteen, p. 335).



## Topics for Discussion

How does the author use wordplay in his writing?

What role does the fictional narrator play in the tale?

Discuss the Baudelaire children's choice to choose a non-violent approach to their situation. Is violence ever justifiable?

"The Slippery Slop" is part of an ongoing series of books. What attributes do these kinds of books have that others might not?

The settings in the book are often very bleak. How does the author create this mood?

How does each of the main characters use their special talent?

Why does the author leave some questions unresolved at the end of the book?