

Prose

9 - 10 years

an extract from
The Bad Beginning
by Lemony Snicket

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

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

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

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

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

Count Olaf turned to Mr Poe with a glint in his eye like an angry dog.

