

Chapter 10

That night, Klaus was the Baudelaire orphan sleeping fitfully in the bed, and Violet was the Baudelaire orphan staying up, working by the light of the moon. All day, the two siblings had wandered around the house, doing the assigned chores and scarcely speaking to each other. Klaus was too tired and despondent to speak, and Violet was holed up in the inventing area of her mind, too busy planning to talk.

When night approached, Violet gathered up the curtains that had been Sunny's bed and brought them to the door to the tower stairs, where the enormous assistant of Count Olaf's, the one who looked like neither a man nor a woman, was standing guard. Violet asked whether she could bring the blankets to her sister, to make her more comfortable during the night. The enormous creature merely looked at Violet with its blank white eyes and shook its head, then dismissed her with a silent gesture.

Violet knew, of course, that Sunny was too terrified to be comforted by a handful of draperies, but she hoped that she would be allowed a few moments to hold her and tell her that everything would turn out all right. Also, she wanted to do something known in the crime industry as "casing the joint." "Casing the joint" means observing a particular location in order to formulate a plan. For instance, if you are a bank robber-although I hope you aren't-you might go to the bank a few days before you planned to rob it. Perhaps wearing a disguise, you would look around the bank and observe security guards, cameras, and other obstacles, so you could plan how to avoid capture or death during your burglary.

Violet, a law-abiding citizen, was not planning to rob a bank, but she was planning to rescue Sunny, and was hoping to catch a glimpse of the tower room in which her sister was being held prisoner, so as to make her plan more easily. But it appeared that she wasn't going to be able to case the joint after all. This made Violet nervous as she sat on the floor by the window, working on her invention as quietly as she could.

Violet had very few materials with which to invent something, and she didn't want to wander around the house looking for more for fear of arousing the suspicions of Count Olaf and his troupe. But she had enough to build a rescuing device. Above the window was a sturdy metal rod from which the curtains had hung, and Violet took it down. Using one of the rocks Olaf had left in a pile in the corner, she broke the curtain rod into two pieces. She then bent each piece of the rod into several sharp angles, leaving tiny cuts on her hands as she did so. Then Violet took down the painting of the eye. On the back of the painting, as on the back of many paintings, was a small piece of wire to hang on the hook. She removed the wire and used it to connect the two pieces together. Violet had now made what looked like a large metal spider.

She then went over to the cardboard box and took out the ugliest of the clothes that Mrs. Poe had purchased, the outfits the Baudelaire orphans would never wear no matter how desperate they were. Working quickly and quietly, she began to tear these into long, narrow strips, and to tie these strips together. Among Violet's many useful skills was a vast knowledge of different types of knots. The particular knot she was using was called the Devil's Tongue. A group of female Finnish pirates invented it back in the fifteenth century, and named it the Devil's Tongue because it twisted this way and that, in a most complicated and eerie way. The Devil's Tongue was a very useful knot, and when Violet tied the cloth strips together, end to end, it formed a sort of rope. As she worked, she remembered something her parents had said to her when Klaus was born, and again when they brought Sunny home from the hospital. "You are the eldest Baudelaire child," they had said, kindly but firmly. "And as the

eldest, it will always be your responsibility to look after your younger siblings. Promise us that you will always watch out for them and make sure they don't get into trouble." Violet remembered her promise, and thought of Klaus, whose bruised face still looked sore, and Sunny, dangling from the top of the tower like a flag, and began working faster. Even though Count Olaf was of course the cause of all this misery, Violet felt as if she had broken her promise to her parents, and vowed to make it right.

Eventually, using enough of the ugly clothing, Violet had a rope that was, she hoped, just over thirty feet long. She tied one end of it to the metal spider, and looked at her handiwork. What she had made was called a grappling hook, which is something used for climbing up the sides of buildings, usually for a nefarious purpose. Using the metal end to hook onto something at the top of the tower, and the rope to aid her climb, Violet hoped to reach the top of the tower, untie Sunny's cage, and climb back down. This was, of course, a very risky plan, both because it was dangerous, and because she had made the grappling hook herself, instead of purchasing it at a store that sold such things. But a grappling hook was all Violet could think of to make without a proper inventing laboratory, and time was running short. She hadn't told Klaus about her plan, because she didn't want to give him false hope, so without waking him, she gathered up her grappling hook and tiptoed out of the room.

Once outside, Violet realized her plan was even more difficult than she had thought. The night was quiet, which would mean she would have to make practically no noise at all. The night also had a slight breeze, and when she pictured herself swinging in the breeze, clinging to a rope made of ugly clothing, she almost gave up entirely. And the night was dark, so it was hard to see where she could toss the grappling hook and have the metal arms hook onto something. But, standing there shivering in her nightgown, Violet knew she had to try. Using her right hand, she threw the grappling hook as high and as hard as she could, and waited to see if it would catch onto something.

Clang! The hook made a loud noise as it hit the tower, but it didn't stick to anything, and came crashing back down. Her heart pounding, Violet stood stock-still, wondering if Count Olaf or one of his accomplices would come and investigate. But nobody arrived after a few moments, and Violet, swinging the hook over her head like a lasso, tried again.

Clang! Clang! The grappling hook hit the tower twice as it bounced back down to the ground. Violet waited again, listening for footsteps, but all she heard was her own terrified pulse. She decided to try one more time.

Clang! The grappling hook hit the tower, and fell down again, hitting Violet hard in the shoulder. One of the arms tore her nightgown and cut through her skin. Biting down on her hand to keep from crying out in pain, Violet felt the place in her shoulder where she had been struck, and it was wet with blood. Her arm throbbed in pain.

At this point in the proceedings, if I were Violet, I would have given up, but just as she was about to turn around and go inside the house, she pictured how scared Sunny must be, and, ignoring the pain in her shoulder, Violet used her right hand to throw the hook again.

Clang! The usual clang! sound stopped halfway through, and Violet saw in the dim light of the moon that the hook wasn't falling. Nervously, she gave the rope a good yank, and it stayed put. The grappling hook had worked!

Her feet touching the side of the stone tower and her hands grasping the rope, Violet closed her eyes and began to climb. Never daring to look around, she pulled herself up the tower, hand over hand, all the time keeping in mind her promise to her parents and the horrible things Count Olaf would do if his villainous plan worked. The evening wind blew harder and harder as she climbed higher and higher, and several times Violet had to stop climbing as the rope moved in the wind. She was certain that at any moment the cloth would tear, or the hook would slip, and Violet would be sent tumbling to her death. But thanks to her adroit inventing skills-the word “adroit” here means “skilful”-everything worked the way it was supposed to work, and suddenly Violet found herself feeling a piece of metal instead of a cloth rope. She opened her eyes and saw her sister Sunny, who was looking at her frantically and trying to say something past the strip of tape. Violet had arrived at the top of the tower, right at the window where Sunny was tied.

The eldest Baudelaire orphan was about to grab her sister’s cage and begin her descent when she saw something that made her stop. It was the spidery end of the grappling hook, which after several attempts had finally stuck onto something on the tower. Violet had guessed, during her climb, that it had found some notch in the stone, or part of the window, or perhaps a piece of furniture inside the tower room, and stuck there. But that wasn’t what the hook had stuck on. Violet’s grappling hook had stuck on another hook. It was one of the hooks on the hook-handed man. And his other hook, Violet saw, was glinting in the moonlight as it reached right toward her.