

## Chapter 9

### Chapter 3

The path James had led us on was no more than three meters wide, with a steep incline nearing forty-five degrees. It twisted unpredictably, making it nearly impossible for amateur skiers to stop abruptly.

Now, everyone was desperately trying to slow down, struggling to stop before reaching the cliff's edge.

Nora, who had initially been at the back of the group, now found herself at the front. She panted heavily, rolling across the snow in a frantic attempt to decelerate. Finally, she came to a stop, drenched in sweat.

She turned to me and yelled, "Couldn't you have helped stop me?!"

I nodded and replied indifferently, "Oh."

Then, I walked over to her.

Just as she had done to me before, I barely tapped her with my ski pole.

"I'm sorry, I can't push any harder."

Her face turned red with rage. She stomped her foot in frustration.

"Did you skip a meal? Put in some strength!"

Meanwhile, the others behind her failed to stop in time. One after another, they crashed into each other like dominoes.

Due to the force of the impact, Nora lost her balance and tumbled face-first into the snow.

"Ow! It hurts—stop bumping into me!" she shrieked.

When she finally got up, her ski suit was covered in snow, and she was limping. From the way she winced, her right ankle was likely injured. She shot me a furious glare, but I merely shrugged.

The others hadn't fared much better. In their panic to stop, they had all

suffered various scrapes and bruises.

At last, only James and Melissa remained on the trail.

"How could this be a cliff... The map clearly didn't show it!" Melissa exclaimed, her voice edged with panic.

James tried to calm her. "Don't worry. Let's stop first and figure it out."

I shone my headlamp on the trail, revealing Melissa's legs flailing helplessly as she slid down.

Oh my God.

She was going downhill headfirst.

For a moment, I was speechless.

On such a steep slope, the best way to avoid disaster was to maintain a controlled posture. Losing balance and sliding headfirst was the worst possible scenario.

James frantically reached out his ski pole, trying to catch her.

But the blizzard was relentless, the snow blinding. He couldn't see Melissa clearly, let alone save her. His desperate attempts only drained his energy.

Minutes passed.

By then, the others had recovered enough to help.

They took turns pulling on Melissa's snowboard, straining with all their might.

Melissa kicked her legs in an effort to push herself up.

But she was stuck against a protruding ledge, unable to budge.

After several failed attempts, the group was exhausted. They threw their hands up in frustration, panting.

"I can't do this anymore! I'm too tired!"

Nora, visibly shaken, stammered, "S-should we... call for help?"

James barked, "No need! We can figure this out!" His voice was loud,

forceful—desperate. "Don't worry, I've got it under control. Once we rest, we'll tie the safety rope to Melissa's leg and try again!"

The others, unwilling to admit defeat, agreed. They sipped hot water from their thermoses, massaging their sore muscles.

I took a chocolate bar from my backpack and glanced at my sports watch.

It was already 7:00 p.m.

Melissa had been trapped for half an hour.

After regaining their strength, the group followed James's instructions, fastening the safety rope to Melissa's legs.

"One, two! One, two!"

I stood at the end of the line, barely holding onto the rope, pretending to help.

Melissa let out a pained scream.

But after numerous failed attempts, she finally moved—just slightly.

"She moved!" someone shouted.

Encouraged, everyone pulled harder.

Melissa dug her hands into the snow, pushing with all her strength. Slowly, inch by inch, she inched upward.

Finally, they let go of the rope and grabbed her legs, yanking her the rest of the way up.

"Aaah!"

Melissa let out a bloodcurdling scream.

"What happened?!"

Nora rushed over. Her face paled as she took a closer look.

A deep gash ran across Melissa's face.

"The snowboard... it cut me!" Melissa sobbed.

The wound stretched from the corner of her eye to the edge of her mouth, deep and bloody.

"Does anyone have a first aid kit?!" someone shouted.

Silence.

The group—these so-called extreme sports enthusiasts—hadn't brought a single medical supply.

In the end, Melissa had no choice but to press a handful of tissues to her wound, crying softly.

When Melissa's emotions had stabilized somewhat, someone turned to James.

"James, can you handle this?"

"I'm fine! Is Melissa safe?"

Hearing that Melissa was out of danger, James finally let out a breath of relief.

With Melissa rescued, everyone shifted their focus to James.

The flashlight beams illuminated the scene.

Everyone craned their necks to see.

The snow walls on either side pressed tightly against James. His upper body was lodged deep in an unknown snow pit, leaving only his lower half exposed on the snowy trail.

From a distance, he looked like a human figure being swallowed by the snow itself. His situation was much worse than Melissa's.

There had once been discussions—

What was the most horrifying way to die?

The most upvoted answer came with a disturbing photo: a person forcibly crammed into a refrigerator, their body twisted into the confined space. A living person, squeezed in so tightly that they could neither move nor escape, simply waiting for death.


Right now, James's predicament felt eerily similar.

Trapped. Crushed. Helpless.

From the snow pit, James's voice broke the tense silence.

Chapter Comments



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