

16: Drawing Out the Culprit

"Hey! Woman..."

Unable to move and blind, Sebastian had no choice but to wake Caitlin. "Caitlin! Wake up!"

"What's wrong?" Caitlin stirred, her hand reaching for the light switch.

The room filled with light, and she turned to see Sebastian sitting upright in bed. His features were taut with seriousness, his brows furrowed tightly, his entire body radiating discomfort.

"Mr. Vanderbilt, did you wake up because you need the bathroom? Should I help you?"

"No! Listen carefully, do you hear anything unusual?"

"Unusual? No, I don't hear anything."

Caitlin slipped on her slippers and walked over to him, leaning in to examine his face. "Did you have a nightmare or hear things?"

"It felt like something crawled in here. Look around."

Taking his words seriously, Caitlin scanned the room. It didn't take long for her to notice something that sent a chill down her spine.

A snake's tail slithered under the side of the small bed, its head climbing up a nearby column.

"Ah! A snake!"

The sight of the grayish-brown serpent made Caitlin's hair stand on end, fear rippling through her body.

How could there be a snake in the bedroom?

There was no time to wonder. The snake was only a meter or two away from Howard, who was sound asleep. If it moved any closer, it might strike at any moment!

Her maternal instincts overriding her fear, Caitlin grabbed her phone and hurled it at the snake, forcing it back temporarily. Then, she darted over to the small bed and scooped Howard into her arms, rushing to place him on Sebastian's lap.

"What kind of snake is it? Is it venomous?" Sebastian asked, alarmed by Caitlin's scream.

"It looks venomous! But I don't know the exact species!" Caitlin replied, trembling as she eyed the snake's patterned body.

Judging by its distinct markings, she was certain this was a highly venomous snake. A single bite could spell certain death.

Her chest heaved with fear, but Caitlin couldn't afford to let it paralyze her. Howard was too young to protect himself, and Sebastian was both blind and immobile. She was the only one who could face the danger.

"Call someone! Get help, now!" Sebastian urged, panicking at the thought of anyone getting hurt.

The snake had moved closer to the door. Caitlin wanted to leave the room to get help, but it was blocking her path.

Her phone, now lying near the snake, was also out of reach.

The snake turned its focus on Caitlin and began slithering toward her. Acting on pure instinct, she grabbed a porcelain vase from the nearby

cabinet and hurled it at the snake.

"Die, you monster!"

The sound of shattering porcelain filled the room.

Sebastian, hearing the noise, immediately understood. The woman was throwing his prized porcelain at the snake.

What she didn't know was that those were rare Yuan dynasty blue-and-white porcelain pieces, each worth a fortune and part of a complete collection he had painstakingly assembled.

Howard woke up amid the commotion, finding himself in his father's arms. His eyes widened as he saw his mother battling the snake with vases.

"Howard! Stay away! Go back to your dad! Mommy will handle this!" Caitlin yelled, her voice filled with urgency.

Reluctantly, Howard obeyed, but his worry for his mother deepened. He wished he could grow up instantly, like a superhero, to protect her.

"You're still not dead?" Caitlin growled, hurling another vase.

Crash!

Sebastian clenched his fists, silently mourning the destruction of his priceless collection. But he knew a person's life was far more valuable than even the rarest antiques.

The snake, enraged, raised its body half a meter high, hissing and preparing to strike.

Caitlin's vase struck the snake, knocking it to the ground. Seizing the opportunity, she grabbed a chair and slammed it down repeatedly on the snake's head until it stopped moving.

Finally, the room was silent.

Caitlin dropped the chair, her legs giving out as she collapsed onto the floor. Her entire body was drenched in cold sweat, her face pale as a sheet.

Howard ran to her and threw his small arms around her neck. Caitlin hugged him tightly, planting kisses on his cheeks.

It was over. They were safe.

If any one of them had been bitten by the snake, it would have been an irreversible tragedy.

"Caitlin, are you okay? Is the snake dead?" Sebastian's voice carried a rare hint of urgency and concern.

"It's dead," Caitlin replied, gathering her strength. She placed Howard back on the bed and began searching the room to ensure there weren't any other snakes.

After a thorough check, she confirmed that the one snake was the only intruder.

She retrieved her phone, snapped a picture of the snake, and used the internet to identify it.

It was a black mamba, a highly venomous snake from Africa known as the "Grim Reaper." A single bite could cause death within 15 minutes without antivenom.

Caitlin shared the grim details with Sebastian, who furrowed his brows deeply. "How could a foreign snake, especially one this dangerous, end up in my room?"

"It's obvious. Someone's trying to kill you," Caitlin replied bluntly. "If Howard and I weren't here tonight, you'd probably be reporting to the Grim Reaper by now."

"Who would want to kill me?"

"That's a question for you, Mr. Vanderbilt. Who have you offended?" Caitlin shot back.

Sebastian fell silent, his mind racing. Someone had tampered with his car's brakes, and now this? Who hated him so much they were determined to see him dead?

Caitlin, having calmed down, began sweeping up the shattered porcelain to prevent Howard from stepping on any shards.

Noticing the stamp on one of the fragments, she exclaimed, "Wait, was this a Yuan dynasty blue-and-white vase? Was it real?"

Sebastian's lips twitched. Whether it was real or not no longer mattered. The entire collection had been obliterated.

After tidying the room, Sebastian suggested, "If you're scared, you can call someone to dispose of the snake."

Caitlin smirked, her fear replaced by determination. "No need. I'll handle it myself. In fact, I'm going to use this dead snake to lure out the culprit!"

A plan was already forming in her mind.