

26: Messing Things Up with Good Intentions

"Mommy! I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to...!"

Arthur lay on the ground, staring at the spilled ashes, his little face crumpled with regret. He had meant well but had messed up everything instead.

"Master Arthur!"

Quincy and the others were caught off guard. They froze for a moment before rushing forward, unsure how to respond.

Bruce sighed, shaking his head at his younger brother's clumsiness.

Caitlin frowned as she walked over, first checking Arthur for injuries. Once she was sure he was unharmed, her gaze shifted to the ashes scattered on the ground.

Tears streamed down her face.

Her heart ached deeply.

But how could she scold her own son? Arthur was already devastated.

"I'm sorry, Mommy..."

Caitlin knelt down and began to scoop the ashes back into the urn with her bare hands, her movements careful but heavy with grief.

Arthur, still trembling with guilt, cried out, "I'm so sorry, Grandma! I didn't mean to spill you! I'm sorry..."

Quincy grabbed some tools and stepped forward, ready to help. "Caitlin, let me—"

"Stop!"

Caitlin's sharp cry startled Quincy. He froze mid-motion, unsure what she meant.

Thinking she might want to do it herself, Quincy hesitated. But Caitlin's next action stunned everyone.

She brought her hands to her nose and began sniffing the ashes.

Once.

Twice.

Then several more times, each with greater intensity.

Arthur, Bruce, and Quincy stared at her in disbelief.

Why would she sniff the ashes?

Caitlin's expression suddenly changed, disbelief flashing in her eyes. "This... this isn't right."

Quincy furrowed his brow. "What's wrong, Caitlin? Did dirt get mixed in? Should I carefully sift through it?"

"No!" Caitlin's tone was grave as she gestured for him to stop. "'This isn't my mother's ashes. Something's wrong!"

Her sharp sense of smell had picked up something unusual.

"What do you mean? If it's not Kelly's ashes, then what is it?" Quincy asked, his face filled with shock. Arthur and Bruce stared at the ashes, their eyes wide.

Caitlin rubbed the powder between her fingers, then muttered in a low voice, "This is lime—quicklime, to be exact."

"Quicklime?"

Quincy and the workers gasped, disbelief written across their faces.

Quincy bent down and sniffed the powder himself. Indeed, there was a distinct smell of lime.

"How could this happen?" Quincy was baffled.

Caitlin's mind raced, her expression grim. "Get me some water, quickly!"

Quincy handed her a bottle of water. Caitlin scooped a small amount of powder into a container, then poured water over it.

The reaction was immediate.

The quicklime began to bubble and steam, releasing heat and white vapor as it reacted with the water.

Caitlin watched the reaction closely, her voice firm. "It's definitely quicklime. When quicklime reacts with water, it forms calcium hydroxide —slaked lime—producing heat and vapor. It's a chemical reaction."

As she explained, her eyes darted around, her thoughts churning. How had her mother's ashes been replaced with quicklime?

Had Arthur's accident not happened, she might never have discovered the switch.

"Mommy, what's going on?" Arthur asked, scratching his head in confusion.

Caitlin's expression darkened. She addressed her sons. "Arthur, Bruce, something's wrong with your grandmother's ashes. I need to find out what happened. I'll have someone take you back first."

"Okay, Mommy."

After arranging for the boys to be sent home, Caitlin turned to Quincy. "Grab the urn and the spilled lime. Let's go!"

A Confrontation at the Columbarium

Quincy kicked open the door to the columbarium's office, storming in with Caitlin close behind. He grabbed the administrator by the collar and slammed him onto the desk.

The man stammered in fear, raising his hands in surrender. "P-please, sir! Let's talk! Don't hurt me..."

"Listen carefully!" Quincy growled. "Caitlin has some questions for you. Answer honestly, or I'll make sure your fingers say goodbye to your hand!"

With a loud thud, Quincy drove a knife into the desk, its blade a mere two centimeters from the man's trembling fingers.

"Ahh! I'll talk! I swear I won't lie to Caitlin!" The administrator was shaking so hard he could barely speak.

Caitlin stepped forward and placed the urn on the desk. Her icy gaze pinned the man in place as she spoke, her tone sharp and unforgiving.

"This is my mother's urn, retrieved from your columbarium. But I've discovered that what's inside isn't ashes—it's quicklime. Tell me, did anyone here tamper with it?"

The administrator flinched under her glare, his voice trembling. "No! No, ma'am! We never tamper with clients' urns! Our policy is to store them securely and undisturbed. I swear on my life!"

Caitlin's hands slammed onto the desk, her eyes blazing. "Can you guarantee that no one has touched it since it was first stored here?"

"Y-yes, ma'am! I swear! We have strict rules here. No one would dare mess with the urns. There are even locks on the storage units!"

Caitlin's voice dropped to a deadly calm. "So you're telling me the urn

hasn't been moved since it was first placed here?"

"That's correct! I swear!"

"How long have you been working here?"

"S-six years, ma'am."

Caitlin signaled for Quincy to release the man. Then she ordered, "Find out who brought my mother's urn here in the first place."

The administrator scrambled to retrieve the records, flipping through a thick logbook. After a few tense minutes, he looked up. "It was... Mr. Jonathan Lewis. He delivered the urn himself. Here's his signature—there's no mistake."

Caitlin inspected the logbook. The date matched her mother's death anniversary five years ago.

"Pull up the security footage. I want to see who's been visiting her niche recently."

The administrator hesitated but complied, bringing up the footage. It showed a man dressed in a long black hooded coat and mask visiting Kelly's niche just the day before. He placed the bouquet of jacarandas and left quickly.

The footage was inconclusive. The man's identity was obscured, but his build suggested he was between 20 and 30 years old.

Who was this mysterious visitor?

Caitlin couldn't yet say, but she wasn't letting this go. As she left the office, she issued a chilling warning:

"I'm letting you off today. But if I find out that your negligence caused this, I'll raze this place to the ground. And you'll all pay with your lives for disrespecting my mother!"

Her voice was ice, her words a blade.

With Quincy in tow, she left the columbarium, her next target clear in her mind: Jonathan.

If he had dared to desecrate her mother's remains, he wouldn't live to regret it.



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