



Season Two:

Episode Nine

When Cordelia arrived at the community, she found everyone waiting for her in the lobby. Millicent, Tina, and Jonie cheered. Percival, who had arrived a few moments before, burst into tears of joy. Cordelia flushed with pleasure at the reception. Then she motioned for everyone to follow her into the Welcome Room, a small, cozy space off the main entry where Sales would meet with visitors. Cordelia closed the door behind them.

“What happened, Cordelia?” Jonie asked. She and Tina were holding hands, their faces a mirror of the other’s concern.

“Philip Hedd tried to kill me,” Cordelia said point blank.

There were cries of surprise. “Why?”

“Because she knew too much,” Percival said.

“Hush, let Cordelia tell it,” said Millicent.

Cordelia told them about her ordeal – of what she found in the Count’s apartment being stuffed into a chest, the fear that she was to be buried alive, and the relief she felt when the chest was opened, and she saw the concerned faces of the police.

Percival nodded. “I found surveillance footage in Philip’s house.”

“When were you at Philip’s house?” Tina asked.

“Well, I saw Philip carrying out Cordelia’s hope chest. He was acting very strangely. When I realized Cordelia was missing, I decided to go to his house to find her.”

“I can see why you were a well-respected detective, Percival,” said Cordelia. “Thank you for trying to find me.”

Percival blushed so hard that Tina asked if he was alright, which made him blush even harder. Millicent rolled her eyes.

“I did find something that might prove interesting.”

They turned from Percival’s magenta face to see Cordelia holding up a small thumb drive. “What’s that?” Jonie asked.

“It’s a thumb drive. Philip put it in the cedar chest with me. My assumption is that it has something on it that he didn’t want people to find, although I don’t know why he wouldn’t just destroy it. I know I should have turned it in to the police, but...”

“I say we take a look at it right now. There won’t be anyone in the library at this hour. We can use the computer there.”

“Use the computer for what?” came a voice from the doorway. Everyone had been huddled so closely together they’d not see the door slowly open. The Count looked from one to the other with a look of weary patience, but Cordelia saw through it.

“Oh, just a little something that your buddy Phil left with me,” she said.

“Who?” The Count didn’t wait for an answer but turned to Millicent. “Am I to assume our dinner date has been prematurely canceled? First you take a call, then I see you smoking outside talking to that ridiculous Pippi, and now you’re engaged in whispers and machinations with these *friends* of yours.”

“I’m sorry, Count. But in light of recent events, I don’t think that it’s very wise for us to continue to see each other.”

The Count frowned. But before he could reply, Cordelia stepped forward.

“We know what you’ve been up to. Unfortunately, when you send someone to kill me, you should assign the task to someone more competent.” Her eyes were shining with fury, but the Count appeared undisturbed.

“Perhaps if you have accusations to make, you should make them to someone else. I don’t have any idea what you’re talking about. And frankly, I haven’t the patience to humor you.”

“I think that’s a great idea,” Millicent said. “Why don’t we take this to the new director, Dr. Forthright? I’m sure he’d be very interested to hear how one of the residents in his community is trying to kill people!”

The Count smiled with tightly pursed lips. “Because I care for you, Millicent, I will defer to your judgment.” He began walking away.

Cordelia and Millicent cast questioning glances toward each other, then caught up with the Count. “I believe I saw him head back to the Physician Office’s with another resident, perhaps we can catch him there.”

As they watched the trio walk away, Percival, Tina, and Jonie gathered uncertainly.

“Now what?” Jonie asked.

“I don’t know about you, but something seems off to me,” said Tina. “I think we should pay a visit to the Count’s apartment and see those cameras for ourselves. Cordelia and Millicent are going to need backup witnesses.”

“As much as I hate the idea of breaking the law, I agree with you,” Percival said.

“Didn’t you say you were in Mr. Hedd’s house earlier? I doubt he let you in.”

“Well, his door was open.”

“That doesn’t mean you have a right to just walk in,” Jonie said, but she smiled as she said it.

Percival chuckled. “Okay, I should have said breaking the law *again*. But we need to get up there quickly before he has a chance to go upstairs.”

When they were at the Count’s door, Jonie pulled out a tiny set of metal tools. “Are those lockpicks?” Percival asked, his eyebrows raised halfway up his forehead.

“We all have our secrets, Percy,” Jonie winked.

“It’s just a hobby,” said Tina. “She’s never used them on someone’s door before.”

“How hard can it be?” asked Jonie, her tongue sticking out of her mouth as she worked first one then another of the tools into the lock.

Tina looked up and down the hall. “I know these things take time, but you might want to hurry, honey.”

Jonie cast an annoyed glance over her shoulder at her wife, then closed her eyes in satisfaction as a soft click was heard. She stood up, pocketed the tools, and opened the door. “After you.”

“Wow,” said Percival.

“Why thank you,” Jonie said as she closed the door behind them, and they surveyed the Count’s apartment.

“Oh, what?” Percival asked. “Sorry, that was definitely amazing, Jonie, but I was talking about that.” He pointed at the closet’s contents. They stared at the rows of monitors, all sharing the private lives of their friends and neighbors.

“This is so wrong,” said Tina, her voice edged in anger.

Percival peered in at the equipment. “How does he save all of this footage? If he’s been recording each person for a week, there’s thousands of hours of footage.”

“More than 20,000 hours,” said Tina. “That’s a lot of proof.”

“Where are the tapes?” Percival asked, looking at one of the computers to which a few of the monitors were attached.

“It’s most likely a hard drive,” said Tina. “Or it’s being uploaded to a server somewhere offsite. But that would require a ton of data; I doubt the community could support that.”

“Unless they knew about it,” said Percival. “I mean, we know that Phillip was watching us from his home. Who knows who else has access to this footage?”

“Get out of the way!” Jonie yelled from behind them and they turned to find her running toward the closet, the Count’s wolf-head cane held high. Percival and Tina stepped back quickly. With a cry of fury, Jonie brought down the cane, smashing the monitors and hard drives, deaf to Tina and Percival’s cries.

After a few moments, she stepped back, panting, and brushed a lock of hair from her sweat-soaked forehead. “There.”

“Why did you do that?” Tina asked.

“To destroy it,” Jonie said. “Obviously.”

“Jonie, we were just saying everything is likely stored offsite. But if there *were* any files that could be used as evidence, you likely just smashed them to pieces.”

“Oh,” said Jonie. “Oops.”

Both Tina and Percival began to laugh. It was one tinged with the adrenaline of the moment, slightly hysterical, but a needed relief. Percival leaned forward, his hands on his knees and laughed until he cried.

“Can you... can you imagine the Count’s face when he finds this? He’s... he’s going to kill us,” wheezed Percival.

“Oh, I don’t know. Some might say you’ve done me a great favor,” came the Count’s voice. They turned to see the Count, Cordelia, and Dr. Basil Q. Forthright staring from the entrance. Cordelia’s mouth was hanging open in shock.

“Uh-oh,” said Tina.

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