



Season Two:

Episode Twelve

“Do you wish to press charges, Count?” Basil asked as everyone took in the devastation in his apartment. Jonie held the cane used to destroy the Count’s computers behind her back. Her face was so openly abashed that Percival could see the child she had once been.

“Press charges? It’s the Count who should be arrested,” said Tina.

“I’ve no wish to inform the police, Basil,” replied the Count, ignoring Tina. “I’m sure this is all a misunderstanding.” He wore such a magnanimous expression that Percival had to squash the impulse to punch him.

“As you wish,” said Basil. “I think it best if everyone return to their apartments. I would like to suggest that we all call it a night and get some much-needed rest. Dandy, I’ll contact one of our night staff to come clean up for you.”

“I’ll stay behind and help, if that’s alright,” said Percival. He was wringing his hands.

What’s he up to? thought Cordelia. She didn’t like the way the Count was smiling at him, as if he’d expected Percival’s offer. She turned and looked to Tina and Jonie, who looked equally dumbstruck. Millicent, however, was no longer by her side. *Where has she gone to?* Cordelia wondered.

She followed Tina and Jonie out and they made their way to their respective apartments. But Cordelia stood by her front door, waiting for Percival to pass. After several minutes, she saw him, his face pale, his expression nervous. She placed her hand on the doorknob, about to step out when Basil came into view, heading the opposite way of Percival.

She wanted to go see Millicent, but first she had to talk to Percival. Why would he offer to help the Count?

Percival didn't answer the door. "Percival," Cordelia called through the door. "Please let me in. I know you're in there."

On the other side, Percival wiped sweat from his brow. Why was Cordelia coming to see him now? If he opened the door, he wouldn't be able to look her in the eye. His heart was hammering, and his palms felt clammy.

But soon enough, the knocking stopped and when he checked the peephole, Cordelia was gone. He checked his watch – it was 9 p.m. He didn't have much time.

He thought back to earlier in the day, when he'd gotten the phone call from the police that Cordelia was at the station. When he arrived, he'd been escorted to the office of Lt. Danvers, a tall, imposing man with a scar over his left eye.

He motioned for Percival to have a seat and Percival sat back, feeling confident that things had gotten on the right track. He'd retired before Lt. Danvers joined the force, but the man seemed calm and capable. And a little intimidating, if Percival were honest with himself.

But Danvers didn't start off with any pleasantries. Instead, he folded his hands on the desk and leaned forward. "This will go better for you if you listen closely."

Percival shifted in his seat, caught off guard. "What?"

"I'm talking about an offer that will change your life."

"I don't know what's going on, but you must be confusing me with..."

Danvers slammed his hand down on the desk. "Not. Another. Word. I'm going to say this once and then you're going to leave my office and go home."

The look in the lieutenant's eyes was murderous. *This man's unhinged*, thought Percival.

"Have you heard of The Merry Foursome?"

"What's the Merry Foursome?"

"Let's just say it's a special interest group. And we've recently had a vacancy open. One of the members decided to put his needs above others. But loose lips sink ships, as they say, and he decided to confess to the wrong person." He slid a picture across the desk. It was from one of those instant cameras. The image showed the Maintenance Director, Philip Hedd, on the ground, his mouth open, eyes vacant of life.

"Oh my god," said Percival, putting a hand to his mouth.

"That wasn't the only mistake he made, but I'll spare you the details," Danvers continued.

"You're a murderer," said Percival, pushing the picture away.

“Very astute,” Danvers said sarcastically. “But I promise you it won’t be the last body you see tonight. It just depends on whose body it is. That’s entirely up to you.”

Danvers opened a desk drawer and pulled out two more photos. “This is who we’d like you to choose.” Percival stared at the photo of Countess Lily Rose Caruthers.

“Why?”

“She’s privy to certain secrets. It is doubtful that she has her husband’s best interests at heart.”

“This is insane, I can’t do that,” said Percival. He looked around the office. All the shades were drawn. Could he just get up and walk away? No, even if he were allowed to leave the office, he would likely not get the opportunity to live through the night. And he couldn’t just find the nearest cop in the station and tell them what he’d heard. If Lt. Danvers could be this brazen about murder, it was very likely that he had others on the force on his side.

“I thought you might say that,” said Danvers. He flipped the second photo over. In the image, Cordelia was in her bathroom, frozen in the act of brushing her hair. She was wearing a nightgown. This had to be an image from the cameras the Count had installed.

“We would hate for something to happen to your neighbor. Cordelia. She just escaped death, but what are her odds of surviving a second attempt?”

Percival leaned forward and put his head in his hands. “Why ask me?”

“Because we don’t have time to take care of everything ourselves, and we need someone who knows how to get away with murder.”

“I’ve never killed anyone. Hell, I’ve never even fired my gun at someone the entire time I was on the force. There was always a better way.”

Danvers sneered. “How admirable, a soft-hearted cop. No wonder they retired you early. Still, that must have hurt the pension, huh?”

Percival shook his head. “I do okay.”

“Not as well as you could be, though. Senior living is expensive, isn’t it? Swimming pools, theaters, first-class dining... I’m sure it all adds up. What if I were to offer you something else? Say, half a million dollars? You take care of the Count’s wife quickly and quietly, and *before* midnight, and by tomorrow you’ll find enough money to live out the rest of your days at Shady Bluff with Cordelia by your side.

“Otherwise,” said Danvers. “I will record her screams for you to hear. I will not be kind.”

Percival swallowed. The man was a monster. But the enormity of the situation had gotten through to him. He was being asked to trade one life for another. *What choice do I have? If I don't do this, Cordelia's blood will be on my hands...*

In his apartment, Percival took a deep breath and stepped out into the hall. The coast was clear. He had less than three hours to find the Countess.

Percival thought bitterly of the irony of his situation. He'd always dreamed of saving Cordelia, of her owing her life to him. Imagined that such a debt would finally help her realize how much he loved her and that she in return would love him. But not this way. He'd not wanted anything like this.

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