

An uncomfortable silence filled the subway as Jessica finished her tale. Not many people could fully understand what she was going through, but they tried to be as sympathetic as possible and soon the air was full of people offering comments of compassion.

“Wow...”

“And she’s so young...”

“Oh, you poor thing!”

However, not everyone had the same sympathetic view. One man who up until now had remained silent had a slightly more optimistic view.

“At least you’re still alive...” he said barely audibly, with the air of knowing all too well that this was not always the case. “You should consider yourself lucky.”

“Lucky?” Jessica challenged. “Lucky to have been raped at my age? Lucky to be deserted by everyone I love? Did you even listen to my tale?”

“I did, and I admit it was an unfortunate series of events, but there are all too many people who don’t have the chance to live to tell such a tale.”

“Well, what do you know about it?” someone from the other end of the train called out.

“Yeah, if you’re such an expert...prove it!” Everyone on the subway agreed that it was time for Brett Evans to tell his tale. Evans ran a hand through his dark, unruly hair and slowly began.

“Ok, well...as you may or may not know, I’m a forensic scientist. I work in the field, searching for evidence, interviewing suspects, that sort of thing. After 5 long years of this work, I thought I had seen it all. People can come up with some pretty creative ways of murdering someone, I can tell you that. However, less than a month ago, I found that I was dreadfully wrong. I had definitely not seen it all. Now you may not believe my tale, you may choose to believe that I made it up or even dreamt it. Heh, I suppose that is your right. But, I’m not here to waste time trying to make you believe that all I say truly happened actually happened. I’m just going to share what I believe to be an interesting tale. So, here it is...”

“It all began with that fateful, albeit extremely annoying, ringing phone...”

‘Ugh...’ I groaned as I rolled over to face my clock, whose bright red digits had read 4:30. ‘Four–thirty in the morning.’ I said grumpily. ‘Who the hell would call me at this hour?’

Ring

‘For God’s sake, I heard you already!’ I exclaimed into my pillow tiredly. ‘Oh great, just great, it’s so early I’m talking to my phone.’

The phone began to ring again until I heard the muffled sound of the answering machine picking up in the next room.

‘Thank goodness.’ I thought. *‘Now I can finally get back to sleep.’*

Not five minutes later I was just about to fall soundly into a blissful state of sleep...when the phone rang shrilly and loudly...again.

'Are you kidding me?' I mumbled. I waited until it rang for the second time before crawling out of my warm bed as slowly as possible, unwillingly letting the frigid January air wash over me, waking me up slightly. As the phone rang for the last time and the answering machine picked up again, I yawned widely and tried to ignore my persistent annoyance with whoever kept calling.

I figured whoever was calling, however annoying it was to me, must have had an extremely important reason. I mean, most people don't call twice in five minutes at four-thirty A.M. just to say hello. With that in mind, I trudged across the navy blue carpet in my bedroom and into my small living room.

As I expected, the light on my answering machine was blinking wildly. I pressed 'Play' and half-listened as my boss's message from the night before explained again that I was to be in charge of the forensics team until he came back from his meeting the following week.

As that message drew to a close, I tried to stay awake in order to listen to the message from whomever had woken me up. However, when the new message began, I don't think I could've fallen asleep if my life depended on it. A loud, nasally, and quite hysterical sounding voice resounded throughout my living room in a very quick and panicky manner.

'I...I don't know what to do! My...my master... I ...I don't know how it happened! I hear you're the best there is, you've got to help me! Sh...she's dead! What if the killer is still here? Oh my God, what am I going to do? Help me...please! Could I be seeing things? No...that can't be it. Oh God, she's so cold! She's really d...dead...what kind of maid am I? How could I let this happen?' She hung up without even giving a number or address with which to reach her.

I had heard many panicked voices of people who had found a dead body, but for some reason this one seemed...different somehow. I reached up and ruffled my hair, a nervous habit I had picked up during my teen years.

Her second message came on and this time she gave a phone number, an address, and said that her name was Rosa Carmina. She was the maid to a rich young heiress named Virginia Foxx. Rosa ended her second message with a pleading beg for help. I decided to go against my yearning for sleep and head straight for the scene.

Within fifteen minutes I and everyone I needed were at Virginia Foxx's mansion ready to investigate.

At the unwelcome hour of Five A.M., The January sun had only slightly begun to peer over the horizon. The tall mansion sent uncharacteristically spooky shadows over the grounds. It had to be just about the antithesis of the typical house one would imagine a murder to appear in. It was painted white

with light blue shutters and seemed the sort of place where, under extremely different circumstances of course, an extremely happy and friendly family could reside.

However, at the moment that was definitely not the case. My coworkers and I, though ready to get to work, were not exactly morning people and seemed in no mood to act friendly to anyone. But, I suppose that is why most of us got into this business in the first place. Not for the money, and definitely not for the hours, but for the fact that most of your clients don't care if you're friendly or not. The dead obviously don't have feelings to be hurt and can't complain about one's manners, or lack thereof. "The Perfect Client"

I pondered this as I ran my hands through my messy hair and walked straight up to the door and grasped the big brass knocker. I had hardly begun to knock when someone, whom I could only assume was Ms. Rosa Carmina, opened the door.

'Oh goodness me! I'm so glad you're here!' She had calmed slightly since she had called but still had the remnants of her earlier hysterical manner.

'Not a problem at all,' I replied, trying to sound as though I sincerely meant it. 'Could you tell me where the body is?'

'The body...' Rosa said to herself as though she couldn't stand to have her former master labeled as 'The Body.' 'Oh, yes sir, Miss Foxx is in her library.'

'Have you moved her?'

‘No sir, she’s exactly as I found her.’

‘Thank you.’

The rest of the team agreed to begin scouting the perimeter for signs of forced entry. Meanwhile Rosa led me through the elaborately decorated mansion until at long last we reached the library.

Stories high, and filled to the top with books, this was the largest library I had ever seen. It would have been the perfect room, were it not for the dead body lying in the center of the floor.

I walked slowly up to the body of Virginia Foxx and hardly acknowledged Rosa telling me how she got up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom when she noticed the library light on and then found her master sprawled on the floor, a look of fear on her face. Virginia was a young lady of no more than 21 with dark red hair and dark brown eyes frozen wide in fear. What I noticed first was the blood, which was conspicuous only by its absence. I assumed she didn’t die of a heart attack, she was much too young and appeared to have been in very good health.

‘*Poison?*’ I thought to myself. I didn’t linger on it, the forensic anthropologist would determine the exact cause of death. I told Rosa to go outside and fetch him, describing Dr. Smith as well as I could. I would be finished soon and wanted the body to go into autopsy as soon as possible.

I took photographs of the body from every angle before thoroughly examining the area. Once I began to closely study the body, I noticed her left hand clutched an old hand mirror. I dismissed this, surely plenty of beautiful girls carry mirrors with them. Her right hand was clenched in a fist. Owing to the lack of blood, I doubted it was for self-defense. I bent down and picked up her fist. When I did I felt a strange material emerging through her fingers. It was a slightly yellowed bit of old parchment. I slowly pulled it out, careful not to rip it and found it was a page from a book. The top left corner had a picture of a large snake; it seemed to be some sort of encyclopedia entry on a specific breed of serpent. I looked around and saw, not 4 feet away from the body, lying open on a table, a book with a page missing. I took a picture of the page and placed it back in the book. I then packaged the book as evidence.

'Hey Evans, you just about done?' I turned to find the forensic anthropologist and the latent print examiner waiting behind me. 'I'm ready to do the autopsy if you're ready for me to take the body.'

'Oh sure no problem, Smith.' I took a few last minutes photos before letting Fred Smith take the body away.

'Thanks, I'll call you when I know the cause of death,' He called as he left the room with the body on a gurney. I turned to the latent print examiner, Sarah and realized she must want me to leave so she can go over the area for

fingerprints. I decided to examine the grounds for any evidence which could help me solve this case.

I started to leave the library when something by one of the many wide windows caught my eye. It was a single file line...of small, black spiders. They seemed to be trying to get out of the house as quickly as possible. I looked out the window and saw they were headed toward the forest which ran along one side of the house. I had never seen spiders act like this before. I took out my camera once more and captured the spectacle. I wasn't sure if it could be connected to the case in any way, but it wouldn't hurt to have it on film just in case. I tried to think of a possible reason for spiders to act that strangely, but could think of none, as I made the relatively long walk from the library to the outside.

When I reached the outside I realized the sun had risen enough to give me enough light to fully search the area around the house. I decided to start around the back of the house since the others were currently surveying the front and I preferred to work in silence.

I walked slowly, my body beginning to feel the effects of getting up at 4:30 in the morning. I took in the scenery of the forest near the house, the beautiful slowly lightening sky, even a couple of bluebirds playing in an ornate bird bath. I neared a chicken coop and vaguely wondered why no roosters were out crowing

when the sun was already rising. As I approached I realized there were feathers everywhere and not a single rooster out and about. There were plenty of hens and young chicks but no roosters. Sure, I'm no chicken expert, but I was pretty sure that was quite unusual.

'Rosa!' I called and listened as it echoed and caused birds to flutter out of the trees. Shortly, I saw Rosa coming as quickly as her forty-year-old legs would carry her.

'What? What is it?'

I wasn't sure how to phrase my question but the empty yard had aroused my curiosity enough that I simply asked, 'Aren't there any roosters in that coop?'

'Not anymore, sir.'

'Not anymore? Why not? What happened?'

'Well, two days ago I came out in the afternoon to feed the chickens and I found every last rooster dead.'

'Dead? All of them? What about the hens?'

'Every rooster was left dead and every hen was perfectly healthy. Yes, it was very strange,' she admitted, then, shrugging, added, 'I assumed it was just a fox or something.'

I said, 'Maybe,' but I didn't believe it was the work of a fox for a second. A fox would take one or two and run. It wouldn't kill a whole coop full of roosters

and then simply leave them there. There had to be another explanation...but what was it?

I wondered about it and saw no obvious explanation, so I decided to wander around the grounds to look for any other clues. Rosa went back to talk to other investigators while I walked along the edge of the forest. The forest ran along the perimeters of two sides of the land. The other sides belonged to the road and a neighboring house.

I had strolled along for about an hour until the sun had fully risen above the horizon before finding anything of interest. In the area of land just on the outskirts of the Foxx house, residing on the property which I assumed belonged to the neighboring house, was a rather large indentation. Almost instinctively I raised my hand to run it through my hair as I cautiously approached the area. It had to be almost fifty feet long and two to three feet wide.

'Hmm, it looks like some abnormally large creature was sleeping here...' I thought. *'But what monstrous animal would leave that large of an indent?'*

I stepped into the indent looking for anything that would help me determine what creature could have been sleeping there. I dropped to my knees and began to crawl slowly through it when suddenly my hand felt something that was most definitely not grass.

'Skin?' I asked no one in particular. 'Hmm it's snake skin...did a snake leave this huge mark? No snake is that enormous!'

My thoughts were interrupted by the ringing of my cell phone. I pulled it out of my pocket and saw on the caller I.D. that it was Dr. Smith, presumably with the results of the autopsy.

‘Hello? Smith? Well, that was fast. So tell me, how did our Ms. Foxx die?’

‘Wish I could tell you, Evans. I couldn’t find anything. No bruises at all to suggest blunt force trauma. No wounds either, she’s perfectly clean.’

‘What about poison? Heart attack?’

‘I checked her blood. It wasn’t poison. Her arteries are barely clogged at all and hormone levels are normal. Heart attack and the like are also out. In fact, she appears perfectly healthy.’

‘Except for the part where she’s dead.’

‘Yes, well, there is that small detail.’

‘Smith, are you trying to tell me you have no idea how she died?’ At this point I was getting more than a little frustrated.

‘None at all. She does have this abnormal look of fright on her face though...’

Now Smith was possibly the best forensic anthropologist in the world. He could find any cause of death including some most wouldn’t even check for.

How could *he* not find anything?

‘Well, there has to be something you missed...’ I knew this wasn’t the case the second it left my lips. Smith never missed anything. ‘Or are you trying to tell me she died of fright?’ I inwardly laughed at that until I heard his reply.

‘Well... actually... maybe she did die of some *form* of fright... I checked for everything else I could think of. She didn’t even have a cold. I’m sorry, Evans.’ He hung up and I closed my phone absentmindedly. I was suddenly more interested in the small square of snake skin in my left hand. I twirled it through my fingers as I wondered about it and the news of Virginia.

‘Could some sort of snake have done this to her?’ I wondered. *‘But what kind of snake is that large and can kill without leaving any marks?’* It took me about half of a second to think of a snake that fit those qualifications. It was a beast I had only read about in a book of legendary creatures.

‘Surely it wasn’t a basilisk...’ I said to myself. *‘Those don’t exist. They’re just legendary... but then the skin, the roosters and spiders, the look of fright...it all fits.’*

The basilisk. The King of Serpents. Possibly one of the deadliest creatures known to man, real or fictional, the deep green basilisk could kill its victim with its powerful venom or by simply looking someone in the eye. Those large yellow-green orbs were the last things a basilisk’s victim often saw. Spiders will flee from it for it is their mortal enemy. Though extremely deadly, if a basilisk so much as heard the sound of a rooster crowing it would suddenly go into strong convulsions and die.

I knew that most basilisks, even in legend, especially in a rural area such as this, did not simply run rampant. The basilisk, if it existed, most likely had been controlled by someone. That someone was our culprit.

I ran as fast as my shaky legs would carry me back to the house. Could a basilisk have truly killed Virginia Foxx? Who would she have known who could control a basilisk? What made that person want to kill her? Luckily, I didn't have to look far for Rosa as I accidentally collided with her in my haste.

'Rosa! I was looking for you!'

'You were? What can I do for you?'

'You wouldn't happen to know if Virginia had recently met any strange men, would you?'

'Well, Ms. Foxx didn't normally discuss her personal matters with me...however, I suppose you could check her diary. I'm sure anything important she would have written in there.'

'She kept a diary? That's perfect! Where is it?' With that, Rosa led me up to Virginia's bedroom on the top floor of the mansion. It was lavishly decorated with different hues of red and gold. There was a beautiful four-poster bed in the center with a small nightstand to the right of that. Sitting on top of the nightstand was a small, velvet, bright green diary.

Upon seeing that small book, with no conscious effort, I ran my hands through my hair in anticipation. I opened it up and flipped through several

pages of typical diary “junk” before getting to anything relevant. It had the date of two days prior and captured my attention instantly as it was the last entry.

‘Dear Diary,

Well, today was possibly one of the strangest days of my entire life. It didn’t start out weirder than normal. I woke up early so I could watch the sun rise while enjoying a cup of coffee. You know, my usual Saturday morning routine. But, when I was watching the sun come up I noticed there was a young man walking into the house next door with what seemed to be the last of his suitcases. That house had been empty for years. A new neighbor! I was so excited! He seemed to be no older than 25, dark-haired, tall, with a dark and mysterious physique. I have to admit, at first I thought he was extremely handsome. So, I decided to be a nice neighbor and go welcome him.

I walked up and knocked on the door. I put my ear up to the door so I would be able to listen to see if anyone was coming and I heard the strangest sounds. It sounded like he was gagging and hissing and sputtering. I thought he was imitating a snake. Through the window I saw he had about ten small glass cages each with a different snake in them. Some were bigger than others, but none looked too deadly. Imagine though, ten snakes just in one room! How many did he have in other rooms? Well anyway, he was patting one of them and making those awful noises. Then it hit me. He thought he could talk to snakes!

How ridiculous! I couldn't help it but I started laughing and I just couldn't stop.

Of course, just my luck, that's when he came to the door.

'What are you laughing at?' He practically hissed. I was still extremely giggly and barely choked out,

'Nothing...were...were you trying to talk to that snake?' Of course that set me off again, and I was hit with another bout of laughter. He didn't seem to like that very much...

'Why are you laughing? There's nothing funny, lady! You better quit it now! Or you'll be sorry!' His tone scared me but instead of making me shut my mouth like a normal person, it made me laugh harder.

'Oh no, will you send your big bad snake after me?' I mocked. I don't know what was wrong with me; I just couldn't stop.

'Hmm...' he began in a deathly serious tone. 'Maybe I will, I'll send my *basilisk* after you!'

'Ha! Yeah right, there's no such thing!' I replied through my slightly subsided giggles.

'You wanna bet?...You'll be sorry you made fun of me. Just wait.' he said in a tone so low and serious it made my laughter stop instantly.

I left as quickly as I could without seeming rude, which was pointless since I had already offended him. I don't know much about basilisks... I know they can kill you if you look them in the eye. Maybe I'll start looking around

corners with a mirror...you know just in case. Not that I'm scared...but it couldn't hurt... When I get around to it maybe I'll research the basilisk more thoroughly.'

After that she began to ramble on about things that I didn't care about. I whipped out my phone and called the police. I explained the situation to them, and they agreed to come over to interview the neighbor and search his house. I suggested bringing a mirror clarifying that a basilisk will die of fright if it sees its own deadly stare.

To this day I can't believe that Virginia was killed by a basilisk. I had known without a doubt that basilisks were fictional. They were in the same category as dragons, unicorns, and mermaids. They're legends; that's all. If a basilisk can exist what next? Will my next case include a dragon? I just don't know what to believe anymore.

One thing is for certain. Ms. Foxx might still be alive if she hadn't laughed at her neighbor's strange actions. I guess no one deserves to be laughed at. Even that nerdy kid in the class that everyone laughs at could one day decide he's had enough and get his revenge in the worst way possible."