

The Day I Almost Jinxed Myself Into a Snake Bite

You know that saying, “Don’t tempt fate”? Well, apparently, I didn’t get the memo.

I’ve grown up in the bush and, along the way, collected a rather colourful list of misadventures and bush-related ailments. Tick bite fever? Had it three times. Malaria? Yep, got that ticked off the list too. Spider bites? Too many to count, from harmless ones that just left me itchy and swollen to those that made me look like I’d gone a few rounds with a boxer. At some point, I joked that the only thing left was for me to be bitten by a snake (only ever implying the small harmless one – nothing hectic at all!)

And that, my friends, was my mistake. Because if there’s one thing I’ve learned, it’s that the bush has ears. Say something like that out loud and suddenly, it feels like the whole ecosystem conspires to test your luck.

Fast forward a few days after that little joke, and Luca and I were off for a walk along the uMhlanga boardwalk. If you’ve ever been there, you’ll know it’s a stunning stretch, at the end of the promenade, that winds through the coastal forest shaded by big trees with the ocean just a short stroll away. We’d planned to grab a coffee or smoothie at the Forest Café afterwards, nothing too adventurous, just a casual outing.

The day before had been all rain, thunder, and grey skies. But when we woke up that morning, the sun was out in full force, turning the whole forest into a hot, sticky sauna. That’s snake weather. Rain brings them out to hunt, and the heat gets them moving and looking for a warm spot to bask. Of course, I didn’t think about that at the time.

We walked the boardwalk, chatting away, spotting a few birds in the canopy, enjoying the fresh air. Then, just before heading up to the café, I quickly popped into the bathroom behind the cafe. Normal, everyday stuff. When I came back out, I stepped back under the canopy of trees, walked a few steps towards Luca who was waiting for me, and then...

Boom. A snake fell from the tree above me.

Onto. My. Neck.

For half a second, my brain just froze. I remember the weight of it across my shoulders and that cold, scaley feeling against my skin. Then instinct kicked in and I did what anyone would do, I screamed and swatted at it like a lunatic. The poor thing went flying, hit the ground with a thud, and slithered off into the undergrowth just as Luca was able to get a proper ID, a harmless Natal Green Snake. (Please note, no snake was harmed in this sequence of events) All I saw was green and long. Not the most reassuring description when you’re in an area known for green mambas and that was all I could think of.

Luca’s face was priceless, somewhere between shock, horror, and trying not to laugh at how ridiculous the whole situation looked. I was shaking, my heart was racing, and all I could think was, “Well, Gabby, you asked for this.”

But the story doesn't end there. We still went to the café, because, let's be honest, after a near-death experience, one deserves a smoothie. So, there we were, sipping away, trying to calm down and laugh it off. I started to relax, and soon we were back on the path heading 'home' for breakfast. My eyes were now on high alert, scanning everywhere, and that's when I looked up and saw it.

A green mamba.

This time it wasn't falling out of a tree, but stretched out across the branches above us, almost as if it had been watching the whole scene unfold. At first I thought it might just be another harmless Natal Green Snake, but Luca stopped dead in his tracks and said, 'That's a mamba.' The people around us grew cautious, and soon a snake fundi came over to confirm it and sure enough, it was a green mamba. My stomach dropped. All I could think was, can you imagine if that had been the one to land on me instead of the harmless snake earlier? One bite and perhaps I wouldn't be here telling this story."

That was the moment the joke stopped being funny.

So, here's the moral: don't ever tempt fate by saying, "The only thing that hasn't happened to me yet is..." Because the bush has a wicked sense of humour, and you might just find yourself living out the very thing you swore was missing from your list.

I'm just grateful this time, fate decided to give me a scare rather than a snake bite. And, needless to say, I've officially retired that particular joke.