

10: What Beatrice Did to Keep Caitlin

Willa and Xylia were utterly stunned. They hadn’t expected Caitlin to have recorded a video.

Seeing the footage of their two sons bullying Howard so cruelly, the two women didn’t dare utter another word. Guilt was written all over their faces as they lowered their heads.

Beatrice stood up, leaning on her cane. She struck the ground with it sharply.

“Bang!”

The sound reverberated through the hall, startling everyone.

“Unacceptable! Absolutely unacceptable! Kyle, Quinton—how could you do such a thing to Howard?”

Her heart broke as tears welled in her eyes.

Grace, ever eager to play the role of the dutiful daughter-in-law, stepped forward to console her. “Mother, please don’t upset yourself. It’s not worth harming your health.”

She turned to Howard, feigning concern. “Howard, dear, are you alright? Come to Grandma. Let me see if you’re hurt.”

Howard didn’t move toward Grace. Instead, he shuffled closer to Caitlin, burying himself in her embrace.

Caitlin knelt to hold her son, silently comforting and encouraging him.

Kyle and Quinton, seeing Beatrice’s anger, dared not act up. Instead, they burst into tears.

“Look at you two!” Beatrice scolded. “You bullied your little brother, and he didn’t cry. But now, after being called out, you’re the ones crying first! Are you the ones who’ve been wronged?”

Her scathing rebuke left the two boys seeking refuge in Willa and Xylia’s arms.

Willa, protective of her grandchildren, tried to downplay the situation. “Mother, Kyle and Quinton are just kids. They didn’t know any better; they were just playing around. I’ll have them apologize to Howard right now.”

She turned to her grandsons. “Apologize to your brother.”

But Kyle pouted defiantly. “I won’t! Grandma and Mommy said Howard’s a bastard anyway. We didn’t say anything wrong!”

A simple apology might have smoothed things over, but Kyle’s careless remark exposed the truth.

Caitlin’s cold smile deepened. “Beatrice, you heard him, didn’t you? People always say children don’t lie. Kyle just repeated exactly what he’s been taught.”

Beatrice’s fury mounted. She turned to Willa and Xylia, her face livid. “So this is how you’ve been raising them? You dared to call Howard a bastard? Howard is a Vanderbilt, my blood, and you have the gall to insult him like that?”

Tears of anger streamed down Beatrice’s face.

Willa stammered, “Mother… I… it was just an offhand comment. I never doubted Howard’s lineage—”

Xylia chimed in desperately, “Grandma, it was a joke! We didn’t mean it!”

“An offhand comment? A joke? Teaching children to insult their own brother? And that’s supposed to excuse it?”

Beatrice struck her cane on the ground again.

“Enough! Even if the children didn’t know better, you, as their guardians, should have! You deliberately taught them to behave like this. If I don’t enforce discipline today, I’ll be failing the Vanderbilt name and our ancestors!”

“Mother, please—”

“Grandma, we’re so sorry! Please forgive us!”

The two women clung to Beatrice’s clothes, begging for mercy. But Beatrice’s expression remained icy.

“Marcus!” she commanded. “Fetch the family whip!”

The mention of the family whip sent Willa and Xylia to their knees.

“Thud!”

They dropped to the ground, wailing, “Mother, no! Please don’t!”

“Grandma, we’ll never do it again! Please spare us!”

Their pleas fell on deaf ears. Beatrice’s authority was absolute.

Moments later, Marcus returned with the family whip—a black leather lash with the Vanderbilt family’s motto engraved on the handle.

“Beatrice, the family whip is here,” Marcus announced.

“Good. Begin. Fifty lashes each!”

“No! Please, Beatrice—” Willa tried to appeal to Grace. “Sister-in-law, help me! Please speak up for me!”

Before Grace could say a word, Beatrice’s voice rang out sternly.

“Anyone who dares plead for them will join them in punishment!”

Grace quickly closed her mouth, unwilling to risk herself.

Marcus carried out Beatrice’s orders without hesitation.

“Snap!”

The first lash landed on Willa’s back.

“Ahhh!” Willa’s scream pierced the air.

“Snap!”

The next lash struck Xylia, drawing a similar shriek.

The whip struck again and again. Willa and Xylia’s cries echoed through the hall as the punishment continued.

Their clothes tore under the force of the whip, and the fire-hot pain left them writhing in agony.

By the time Willa had endured twenty lashes, she fainted from the pain.

Xylia lasted a little longer but succumbed before thirty lashes.

“Beatrice,” Marcus reported, “Willa and Xylia have both passed out. I believe they’ve learned their lesson.”

Beatrice waved her hand dismissively. “Enough. Take them away.”

The unconscious women were carried off, leaving the room heavy with tension.

Beatrice turned to Caitlin. “Child, does this punishment satisfy you?”

Caitlin nodded. “It does. Thank you, Beatrice, for upholding justice.”

She bowed respectfully and then picked up Howard. “If you’ll excuse us, I’ll take Howard back now.”

After Caitlin left, Beatrice examined Caitlin’s identification papers once more. Satisfied, she turned to Marcus.

“Marcus, verify Caitlin’s background thoroughly. If everything checks out, arrange for her and Sebastian’s marriage certificate to be finalized immediately.”

Beatrice had seen enough of Caitlin’s character to decide she was a good match for Sebastian.

True to form, Marcus completed the investigation swiftly. Caitlin’s identity and the astrological chart were confirmed, and the marriage certificate was processed without delay.

When Beatrice saw the completed document, she smiled. “I’ll visit the estate myself and tell Sebastian the good news.”

At the Vanderbilt estate, Caitlin was in the kitchen preparing food when she heard Beatrice had arrived. She greeted her politely and watched the matriarch head upstairs.

Looking down, Caitlin saw Howard seated in a small chair by the kitchen door, his big eyes watching her every move.

Her heart melted at the sight.

After everything they’d been through, Howard’s attachment to her had deepened.

Now, he stationed himself by the kitchen door like a little guard, determined to protect his mommy from anyone who might try to take her away.

Upstairs, Beatrice visited Sebastian and recounted everything that had transpired. She ended with a satisfied smile.

“Sebastian, I must say, choosing Caitlin to marry you turned out to be a blessing in disguise. She’s the perfect match for you. I’ve already had the marriage certificate processed. From now on, you and Caitlin are husband and wife. Together, you can give Howard the complete family he deserves!”

“Marriage certificate?”

Sebastian’s brow furrowed so tightly it seemed he could crush an ant.

He had accepted Caitlin’s presence as Jasmine’s substitute but never agreed to marry her.

What had that woman done to win over his grandmother?

While he owed her gratitude for protecting Howard, he couldn’t stomach the idea of being married to her—especially without his consent.

“Grandmother, I won’t marry her. I’d rather die than stay with that woman!”

As his voice boomed through the room, Caitlin entered, just in time to hear his vehement rejection.