

17: Fierce Protection

Morning finally arrived.

The news that a venomous snake had entered Vanderbilt Manor overnight spread quickly.

Lucy and several maids came to the scene, each gasping in shock at the sight of the enormous dead snake.

"My God! Where did this snake come from?"

"If someone had been bitten, they'd be dead for sure!"

"Thank goodness Caitlin was brave enough to kill it. Otherwise, the consequences would have been unthinkable!"

Amid the buzzing discussion, Caitlin kept a close eye on everyone's expressions. Then, she spoke decisively.

"I'm hanging this snake outside the Vanderbilt Manor hallway. When Beatrice arrives, she'll see it, and I'm sure she'll demand an investigation. It won't take long to find out who's behind this."

Hearing Caitlin's plan, the staff nodded in agreement. She promptly hung the snake in the outer corridor, instructing everyone not to touch it to avoid exposure to its venom.

After finishing her arrangements, Caitlin went to prepare breakfast. Once the meal was ready, she fed both Sebastian and Howard.

Not long after breakfast, members of the Vanderbilt family began arriving to check on Sebastian.

The first to arrive were his stepmother Grace and her daughter Hazel.

"What's going on? I heard Sebastian was bitten by a snake! Is he alright?" Grace asked, feigning concern as she spoke to Lucy.

"Fortunately, Mr. Vanderbilt is fine, thanks to Caitlin killing the snake," Lucy explained.

"Where is the snake?" Hazel asked.

"Right over there!" Lucy pointed to where the snake was hanging.

Hazel followed the direction of her finger and gasped in horror. "Ah! That's terrifying! Why hang it out there?"

Grace was also unnerved, her composure faltering. "Such a disgusting, frightening thing. Why hasn't anyone disposed of it yet? What's the point of leaving it there?"

"Caitlin wants Beatrice to see it later. Beatrice will surely arrange for an investigation to find out who brought the snake here."

Grace and Hazel exchanged a brief glance before heading upstairs to visit Sebastian.

Upstairs, Caitlin was feeding Sebastian breakfast when Grace and Hazel entered the room.

"Sebastian, are you alright?"


Hearing Grace's voice, Caitlin turned to glance at the two women. She quickly recognized the younger woman as Hazel, Sebastian's half-sister.

"Mr. Vanderbilt is fine. Grace, what brings you here?"

"I heard about the venomous snake entering Vanderbilt Manor last night, so I came to check on Sebastian. I'm relieved to see he's alright."

Caitlin didn't respond to Grace's theatrics but silently admired the woman's skill at playing the part of a caring stepmother.

Grace had been humiliated by Caitlin the day before, yet here she was, wearing an air of benevolence and magnanimity as though nothing had happened.

This level of endurance and cunning made Caitlin certain Grace was no ordinary adversary—she was a master manipulator. 


Meanwhile, Hazel eyed Caitlin with thinly veiled jealousy. Caitlin's beauty was undeniable, and Hazel couldn't help but think her half-brother was ridiculously lucky to have such a stunning woman as his temporary wife.

"I heard Caitlin signed an agreement to leave Vanderbilt Manor once Sebastian recovers. Is that true?" Hazel inquired, her tone tinged with malice.

Caitlin smirked, easily reading her hostility.

"Grace and Hazel, you must be eager for me to leave Vanderbilt Manor."

Grace maintained her facade of politeness. "Not at all. Yesterday was just a misunderstanding. Caitlin, don't take it to heart."

"I'm not as petty as you think," Caitlin replied, her tone sharp. "While I'm here, I'll fulfill my duties. And let me make this clear—if anyone dares harm my man, I'll be the first to stand against them!" 

Her bold declaration stunned everyone in the room, including Sebastian.

My man?

Sebastian felt his chest tighten as if Caitlin's words had struck him with a sledgehammer. Her audacity left him momentarily speechless.

"Don't call him that! My brother belongs with Yasmin," Hazel snapped.

Caitlin didn't bother to argue about her and Sebastian's marriage certificate, which was still unknown to most of the family.

Sebastian, however, was visibly irked by Hazel's words. His hand shot out, knocking the bowl Caitlin was holding to the floor.

Crash!

The porcelain shattered, and Hazel jumped, clutching her head in fright.

Caitlin bent down to pick up the shards, unfazed. She knew Hazel's comment had triggered Sebastian's temper.

"Oh no! Mr. Vanderbilt's temper is flaring up again. You two should leave now," Caitlin said, making an excuse to usher them out.

Grace quickly grabbed her daughter and retreated.

As Caitlin cleaned up the mess, she remarked casually, "Your stepmother really seems to care about you. Always bringing her entourage to visit."

"Shut up," Sebastian snapped.

"Such a bad attitude! Is your temper really getting worse?" Caitlin teased as she tried to wipe his mouth, only for Sebastian to bat her hand away.

Before she could say more, a knock came at the door, followed by Lucy's voice.

"Mr. Vanderbilt, Caitlin, Dr. Griffin is here. Should I let him in?"

"Yes! Quickly!" Caitlin called back. "Maybe he can treat your temper, too."

Moments later, Dr. Griffin entered, accompanied by Sebastian's cousin William, the father of the two boys who had bullied Howard.

William strode toward Sebastian, placing a hand on his shoulder. "Sebastian, calm down. Dr. Griffin is here to check on you."

While Griffin examined Sebastian, William's gaze lingered on Caitlin. He had heard about how she'd stood up to his mother and wife, even leading to their punishment.

Curious, he invited Caitlin to step outside for a private chat.

"What do you want to talk about?" Caitlin asked, stepping into the hallway.

Inside, Sebastian strained his ears, trying to catch their conversation.

Outside, William studied Caitlin intently before speaking.

"You're quite remarkable, Caitlin. But tell me, why would someone like you agree to marry into Vanderbilt Manor and give my cousin a 'joyous union'?"

Sebastian listened closely, wondering the same thing. Why would she come here, especially when Jasmine had refused?