

20: Truly Fond

The group gathered around to inspect the evidence Caitlin presented. Sure enough, Peter's shoe sole glittered faintly with the same powder Caitlin had used to mark the area.

"It matches exactly!"

This left no doubt—Peter had taken the snake.

Faced with undeniable evidence and the presence of the police, Peter crumbled. He fell to his knees, trembling as he confessed.

"I... I did it... I put the snake there... Beatrice... I'm sorry! Please forgive me!"

Beatrice's tone was as sharp as a blade. "Peter, when has The Vanderbilt Family ever mistreated you? Why would you commit such an inhumane act? What drove you to harm Sebastian?"

"I..." Peter's tearful eyes darted around nervously before he hesitantly admitted, "A while back, Mr. Vanderbilt scolded me harshly... I held a grudge and lost my mind. That's why I did it..."

At the mention of this, some Vanderbilt family members vaguely recalled an incident months ago. Peter had been caught harassing a maid, and Sebastian, upon discovering it, had berated him severely.

If not for Beatrice and Marcus intervening on Peter's behalf, Sebastian would have had him fired on the spot.

The Vanderbilt Family had been lenient, giving Peter a second chance, but instead of repenting, he had harbored resentment and sought revenge.

"Peter, oh Peter..." Beatrice's voice was thick with disappointment. "To think I trusted you, only for you to repay kindness with malice. And over such a trivial matter? Truly disgraceful!"

Regret now tinged Beatrice's expression. She turned to the police and declared, "Since you've committed this crime, you will bear the consequences. Officers, take him away!"

The police hauled Peter to his feet as he wailed, "Beatrice, I'm so sorry... I've failed The Vanderbilt Family... I'll take responsibility, but please... please spare my family..."

His plea rang out as the police led him away.

Beatrice heaved a deep sigh and turned to address the crowd. "Today, thanks to Caitlin's quick thinking, we've unmasked the culprit. Were it not for her, this criminal might still be free to harm others. Caitlin has done a great service to The Vanderbilt Family, and we owe her our gratitude!"

Beatrice's gaze softened as she looked at Caitlin, her fondness for the young woman growing.

The others also cast Caitlin admiring glances.

"It was nothing," Caitlin replied calmly. "I was simply doing my part."

Her nonchalance only made her more impressive.

Grace and William, however, exchanged wary glances. If Sebastian married an ordinary woman, they wouldn't mind. But Caitlin, with her intelligence and boldness, was a formidable presence. Her involvement would make any underhanded schemes far more difficult.

With the matter resolved, Beatrice dismissed the crowd. Caitlin returned to the Vanderbilt estate, accompanied by Molly.

At the entrance, Howard was waiting. Spotting Caitlin, he dashed over and wrapped his arms around her leg.

Caitlin lifted him into her arms and playfully pinched his nose. "Howard, are you hungry?"

Howard shook his head, his small arms clinging tightly to her neck. His dark eyes gazed at her unwaveringly.

Molly watched in astonishment. "Am I seeing things? Little Howard ran to you for a hug?!"

Howard was infamous for his aloofness. Even though he had a decent relationship with Molly, he had never initiated affection, let alone asked for hugs.

Molly was stunned. Who was this Caitlin? How had she managed to win over not only their stern elder brother but also their little troublemaker?

"Howard is just a child. Isn't it normal for him to want a hug?" Caitlin said with a smile.

"Normal? No way! This is a miracle!" Molly reached out tentatively. "Howard, come to Auntie. Let me hold you too, okay?"

Howard swatted her hand away and buried his face in Caitlin's shoulder, refusing to even glance at his aunt.

"I can't believe this!" Molly feigned a dramatic sob. "I'm your aunt! I changed your diapers when you were a baby! And now you're ignoring me like this?"

She clutched her chest in mock despair. "You've forgotten your dear aunt now that you've got a 'new mom'!"

Back at the estate, Molly relayed everything that had happened at the main residence to Sebastian, praising Caitlin as if she were a hero.

"She's just using some cheap tricks," Sebastian said dismissively, unwilling to give Caitlin too much credit.

"How can you say that? She's got the wit of Sherlock Holmes! Honestly, I think she's amazing. Grandma likes her, I like her, and even Howard is attached to her. So, get well soon, win her over, and give Howard a proper family!" Molly teased.

Sebastian: "..."

It seemed his sister had fallen under Caitlin's spell as well. At this rate, was there anyone left on his side?

"Isn't it strange, though?" Molly mused aloud. "Howard's so attached to her after just two days. What's her secret? What kind of magic does she have?"

Sebastian had had enough. "Get out! I'm trying to rest, and you're giving me a headache!"

"Fine, fine. I'm leaving!" Molly said, laughing as she left the room.

Not long after, Caitlin entered.

Sebastian scowled. "Didn't I tell you to leave? Why are you back?"

"Why so cranky?" Caitlin approached him, her eyes gleaming with amusement. She leaned in, studying his face. "What's wrong?"

Menopause? Or did your sister feed you gunpowder?"

Her playful tone made him even more irritable. "Don't think you can do whatever you want just because you've won some people over!"

Ah, so that was what was bothering him.

Caitlin smiled, her voice turning teasing. "Won them over? You mean your grandma, your sister, and Howard? Well, they've all fallen for my charms. But what about you, Mr. Vanderbilt? When are you going to fall for me?"

Her fingers lightly pressed against his chest. "What would you do if I decided to have my way with you right now?"

Sebastian swatted her hand away, his voice trembling with indignation. "Shameless woman! If you dare touch me again, you'll regret it!"

Caitlin chuckled, thoroughly enjoying his flustered reaction. "I didn't expect the great Mr. Vanderbilt to be so... pure. Haven't you ever been touched by a woman before?"

"Get out! You indecent woman!"

His angry outburst only made her laugh harder.

Sebastian looked like an aggrieved housewife, his sulking oddly endearing.

Regaining her composure, Caitlin shifted back to the matter at hand.

"Alright, enough joking. Your sister probably told you about Peter, right? He confessed to being behind the snake incident."

"You think Peter was the culprit?" Sebastian asked, his tone skeptical.

"He stole the snake and admitted to planting it. His motive matches the crime. Of course, he's the culprit."

Sebastian frowned. "He tried to kill me over a reprimand? Why wait so long to act? Doesn't his reasoning seem... flimsy?"

Caitlin paused, considering his words. "You're right. It doesn't quite add up. Maybe he was just following orders."

Sebastian fell silent.

Caitlin's mind raced. "If Peter was a pawn... then who's the real mastermind?"



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