

28: Offending Others to Protect Her Son

Caitlin's sharp voice echoed through the room, making everyone tremble.

"Quicklime? What do you mean?" Jonathan asked in confusion.

Caitlin picked up the urn and thrust it in front of him. "Look closely! Is this my mother's ashes? No, it's quicklime! How could you be so heartless? Not even leaving her remains intact? Are you even human?"

Her rage boiled over, and she flung the quicklime at Jonathan.

Jonathan raised his arm to shield himself, his face spared, but his body was coated in white powder. The sharp, acrid smell confirmed her accusation—it really was quicklime.

"How can this be? How could it be quicklime?" Jonathan stammered, his confusion apparent. "Caitlin, why would I switch out Kelly's ashes? When I collected the urn from the funeral home, I delivered it straight to the columbarium. I never even opened it!"

Caitlin's steely gaze bore into him, but Jonathan's panicked tone made it clear he wasn't lying. To prove his innocence, he raised his hand.

"Caitlin, if you don't believe me, I'll swear an oath right now! If I tampered with Kelly's ashes, may I be struck by lightning, hit by a car, and never find peace!"

The severity of his oath was enough to convince Caitlin he was telling the truth.

Her icy glare then shifted to Megan, who quickly shook her head, fear replacing her earlier humiliation.

"Caitlin, we had no idea about this! We wouldn't have known if you hadn't told us. This is serious—you must investigate thoroughly!"

"I will!" Caitlin vowed.

She had already resolved to get to the bottom of this, refusing to let any clue slip through her fingers.

"What funeral home cremated my mother's body?" she demanded. "Were you all present?"

"Of course, we were there," Jonathan replied. "It was the Third Funeral Home in New York."

"We all saw her body being pushed into the cremation chamber with our own eyes," Megan added, nodding in agreement. "There's no way there was a mistake. After the cremation, your father collected the ashes, and we placed them in the columbarium."

Caitlin's voice quivered with suppressed fury. "And afterward, you didn't even buy her a proper burial plot? You just dumped her in a columbarium? While you live in a luxurious mansion? How do you sleep at night?"

The guilt was palpable as none of them could meet her gaze. Caitlin picked up the urn and said coldly, "I'll investigate this thoroughly. If I find out who's responsible for this, I will tear them apart!"

The room fell silent, an eerie stillness settling over it. To the Lewis family, Caitlin no longer seemed like the same person—they felt as though they were facing a vengeful spirit risen from the depths of hell.

On the drive back, Caitlin sat in thoughtful silence.

If Jonathan hadn't tampered with the ashes, then the funeral home must have been involved. Her next step would be to investigate the Third Funeral Home. However, that would have to wait.

It was nearly time for Howard to finish school, and she needed to pick him up.

"Take me to Central Kindergarten," she instructed Quincy.

Central Kindergarten was the most prestigious institution of its kind in New York. Only the wealthiest families could afford to send their children there.

The Vanderbilt Family had enrolled Howard there, wanting him to receive the best education. However, they hadn't considered his unique circumstances.

For a child who had lost his ability to speak, fitting in was a challenge. Howard was reclusive and aloof, refusing to eat lunch, nap, or play with other children. He would sit alone in a corner, ignoring both teachers and classmates.

Eventually, the teachers stopped trying to include him. Howard became the school's "special case."

Today, he was causing even more headaches than usual. From the moment he arrived at school, he had stood by the window, staring outside with his backpack still on.

The teachers whispered among themselves, convinced something was wrong with him mentally. Were it not for his Vanderbilt lineage, they might have suggested his withdrawal long ago.

Unbeknownst to them, Howard was not broken—he was exceptionally intelligent. To him, the lessons and activities at school were childish, and the other children's behavior only deepened his sense of loneliness.

All he wanted was his mom. He had been waiting for her all day, worried she might not come to pick him up.

When school ended, Howard was the first in line, eagerly looking out for Caitlin.

However, to his disappointment, it was Yasmin who arrived.

"Howard, I'm here to pick you up. Let's go home," Yasmin said cheerfully.

Howard's face immediately fell, his small features crumpling in despair. A lump formed in his throat, and his heart ached with disappointment.

Mommy didn't come... she's never coming back...

Yasmin noticed his gloomy expression and tried to coax him. "Come on, Howard. I'll buy you something yummy, okay?"

But Howard yanked his hand away from hers, gripping the school gate tightly and refusing to budge.

"Howard, what's wrong? School's over—it's time to go home!" Yasmin was already struggling with two other children and was growing frustrated.

No matter what she said, Howard clung stubbornly to the railing, unmoving.

At that moment, a wealthy-looking woman passed by with her burly son. The boy pointed at Howard and exclaimed loudly, "Mommy, look! That's the mute kid from my class!"

The woman glanced at Howard disdainfully. "Stay away from him. That Vanderbilt child isn't normal."

Recognizing her as Mrs. Gray, the wife of a prominent politician, Yasmin stiffened. She couldn't afford to offend someone from the Gray family.

"Mrs. Gray, don't you think that's a bit harsh?" Yasmin said weakly.

Mrs. Gray scoffed. "It's the truth, isn't it? I don't want my son associating with someone like him."

As Mrs. Gray started to leave, her son turned back and pulled a face at Howard, taunting him.

"Howard's a dumb melon! Poor thing, no mommy! Go home, you loser!"

Howard's small frame trembled with rage. He couldn't bear to hear anyone say he didn't have a mom—he had Caitlin, and she loved him dearly!

His fury ignited like a spark to dry tinder, and he lunged at the boy like a ferocious little lion.

The two boys scuffled, and Howard clawed at the other child's face, leaving red scratches.

"Hey! Stop that! How dare you hit my son!" Mrs. Gray rushed to separate them, shoving Howard aside. "Who do you think you are, you little brat? I'll teach you a lesson!"

She raised her hand to slap Howard, but before her hand could descend, a sudden gust of cold wind swept through the air.

A firm grip clamped around Mrs. Gray's wrist, stopping her mid-swing.



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