

9: Shocking Everyone

Caitlin decided against escalating the conflict and didn’t resist. The guards quickly restrained her, pinning her arms behind her back.

Willa and Xylia grinned triumphantly, finally seeing this woman subdued.

“Mother,” Willa declared with satisfaction, “I’ll have her sent to the authorities right away. Let them investigate her thoroughly! If she’s a fraud, we’ll make sure she gets what she deserves!”

As Willa signaled for the guards to take Caitlin away, a sudden interruption shocked everyone.

Howard, usually distant and aloof, lunged forward and clung tightly to Caitlin’s leg, preventing them from taking her.

Although Howard couldn’t speak, his fiery gaze made his feelings clear. He didn’t want them to take his mommy.

In his desperation, Howard even jumped up to scratch and bite the guards trying to restrain her. Though the guards winced in pain, none dared retaliate against the young master. Finally, Howard threw himself onto Caitlin’s leg, hugging it as tightly as he could, as though he were anchoring her to the ground.

The sight left everyone stunned.

Everyone in the Vanderbilt family knew how unruly and reserved Howard was. He rarely spoke to anyone and never showed affection, not even toward his father or Beatrice. Hugging someone was simply unheard of.

Yet here he was, clinging desperately to a woman he’d met less than two hours ago.

It was a moment that shattered everyone’s expectations.

“Howard!” Beatrice exclaimed in disbelief.

Grace, putting on her grandmotherly demeanor, coaxed him, “Howard, what are you doing? Come to Grandma, sweetheart.”

But Howard ignored her. He remained glued to Caitlin, refusing to budge.

Caitlin felt the profound shift in her son’s heart. He had accepted her, and now he didn’t want her to leave.

For her son’s sake, Caitlin knew she had to fight to stay.

“Beatrice, please have them release me. I have something to say. If, after hearing me out, you still want me gone, I won’t resist.”

Beatrice gestured for the guards to release Caitlin.

Now free, Caitlin bent down and scooped Howard into her arms.

“Howard, it’s okay. Let go now,” she whispered gently.

Howard reluctantly loosened his grip, and Caitlin turned to face the room, her cold gaze sweeping over the gathered women before settling on Beatrice.

“Beatrice, there’s something you need to know. The astrological chart sent by The Lewis Family for Jasmine wasn’t hers—it was mine. If you send someone to investigate, you’ll see I’m telling the truth.

“Since it’s my chart that matches Mr. Vanderbilt’s, it makes sense for me to be here to fulfill the role. Besides, you’ve all witnessed it yourselves—when I arrived, Mr. Vanderbilt woke up. Doesn’t that prove I’ve already brought him good fortune?”

Caitlin’s calm and confident explanation made Beatrice pause. After a moment, Beatrice nodded slightly, acknowledging the logic in Caitlin’s words.

“Very well. I’ll verify your claims about the astrological chart. But why did you hit Kyle and Quinton? They’re just children.”

Caitlin took a deep breath and replied, “Beatrice, they may be children, but so is Howard. Do you know why I hit them? Because they ganged up on Howard and bullied him.

“Howard is younger, smaller, and unable to speak. Does that mean he deserves to be mistreated? Aren’t all your great-grandchildren equally precious? Shouldn’t someone ask Howard if he’s been wronged?”

Beatrice frowned, troubled by the accusation. “All three of them are my beloved great-grandchildren. They’ve grown up together, always playing as siblings. What bad intentions could Kyle and Quinton have? Why would they bully Howard?”

Beatrice’s impression of the three boys came solely from the times she saw Kyle and Quinton behaving kindly toward Howard. Unbeknownst to her, these displays were staged by Willa and Xylia, who had instructed their sons to act sweet in front of their great-grandmother.

Willa quickly interjected, “Mother, don’t listen to her lies! Kyle and Quinton are such good boys—they always look out for Howard. They would never bully him. This woman is twisting the truth!”

Xylia added, “Exactly, Grandma. You know how children are—they bicker a little but make up quickly. It’s this woman who’s blowing things out of proportion and falsely accusing my sons.”

Willa turned to Grace for support. “Sister-in-law, you’ve seen how well the boys get along, haven’t you?”

Grace nodded, siding with Willa. “Yes, they’re just kids. They couldn’t possibly have any malicious intent. This is all being exaggerated unnecessarily. And no matter what, hitting children is unacceptable.”

“Exactly!” Xylia exclaimed. “Look at Kyle and Quinton’s faces—they’re still swollen! How could she justify hitting them like that?”

The women collectively shifted the blame onto Caitlin, painting her as the villain.

But Caitlin refused to let the truth be buried.

Her gaze fell on Howard, who stood quietly nearby, his small face expressionless. Yet his eyes betrayed his disdain for the women arguing around him.

Caitlin stepped forward, her tone icy. “Beatrice, I’ve always heard that you’re a wise and fair matriarch. Today, I’m asking you to judge this situation fairly. Was Howard bullied or not? I have evidence. Let me show you.”

Pulling out her phone, Caitlin opened a video she had recorded earlier and held it out for everyone to see.

The room fell silent as the video played.

The audio filled the hall:

“Mute boy! Howard! Tagalong! Bastard with no mom, drinking pee every day!”

The footage clearly showed Kyle and Quinton shoving Howard, pushing him to the ground. Howard fought back bravely but was soon overpowered. The video continued, showing the two boys pinning Howard down, punching him, and stuffing dirt and leaves into his mouth before stomping on him.

“Hit us again, and we’ll crush you, mute boy!”

As the video ended, the room was deathly quiet.

Beatrice’s face darkened with anger, her hands trembling slightly.

“Did Kyle and Quinton really do this?!” she demanded.