

12: Acting Like She Owns the Place

The little boy, with tears still clinging to his lashes, picked up the spoon and began eating the rest of the meal on his own.

“Howard!”

Caitlin’s heart swelled with a bittersweet ache. So that’s why he cried? It was the first time he’d ever eaten a meal his mommy cooked—it must have touched him deeply.

“If you like my cooking, Mommy will make it for you every day, okay?”

Howard glanced at her, lifted his little arm to wipe away his tears, and nodded.

I need to get it together! Howard thought. Why had he already cried twice since seeing his mommy? He felt like he wasn’t acting like a proper little man at all.

Seeing her son eat every last bite, not leaving even a single grain of rice on the plate, Caitlin clapped her hands in delight. She stroked his little head and said warmly, “Good job, Howard! You finished everything Mommy made for you. What a good boy you are!”

Sebastian, overhearing, couldn’t hold back his skepticism. “Impossible. You must have forced him to eat it.”

Caitlin turned to him, her patience already thin. “Mr. Vanderbilt, when did I force him to eat? Howard liked my cooking so much that he finished it all on his own. That’s proof that it’s delicious. Didn’t you smell the aroma of the food? Or has your nose been damaged along with everything else?”

Sebastian frowned, irritated. His sense of smell was perfectly fine—too fine, in fact. The scent of the meal had been tantalizing, making him swallow involuntarily more than once.

And his stomach? It was growling now, loudly protesting his earlier refusal.

Caitlin, noticing his discomfort, smirked. “Howard’s done eating. Should I bring you your meal, Mr. Vanderbilt? Or should I just clear everything away?”

Hearing her footsteps fade, Sebastian couldn’t hold it in anymore.

“Wait!” he called out, his pride wavering. “Did I say I wouldn’t eat?”

“You did, just a moment ago,” Caitlin teased, clearly enjoying his predicament.

“That was then; this is now!” Sebastian snapped, pounding the bed in frustration. “Bring me the food!”

Caitlin bit back a laugh as she set the food on the bedside table. She leaned in to prop him up, placing two pillows behind his back to support him.

As her arm brushed against his cheek and neck, Sebastian felt an electric jolt. Her skin was soft, her touch cool.

And then there was that scent—light, clean, and oddly familiar. He couldn’t place where he’d smelled it before.

“Open your mouth,” Caitlin instructed, holding a spoonful of rice porridge near his lips.

Sebastian stubbornly kept his mouth shut, his brows furrowed in defiance.

“What now, Mr. Vanderbilt? You were just demanding food, and now you won’t eat?”

“I don’t want you feeding me,” he grumbled, his pride flaring up again.

“Suit yourself,” Caitlin said, setting the spoon down.

Sebastian tried to grab for the bowl himself, only to flail helplessly in the air.

“Mr. Vanderbilt, you can’t see a thing, and you can’t even find the bowl. Are you really sure you want to feed yourself?”

His face darkened with frustration, and after a tense moment, he muttered, “Fine. Feed me.”

Caitlin chuckled and resumed her task. As Sebastian took his first bite, he frowned. “What is this?”

“Rice porridge.”

“That’s it? Just porridge? I don’t want this!”

Sebastian’s mind flashed to the aroma of beef and vegetables. Where was the delicious meal he’d smelled earlier?

“Mr. Vanderbilt, your doctor said you’re only allowed soft foods for now. You just woke up, remember?”

“…”

Sebastian scowled, convinced she was doing this on purpose. Didn’t anyone tell her he hated porridge more than anything?

Caitlin, noticing his displeasure, arched a brow. “Mr. Vanderbilt, if you don’t eat, how will you ever recover? Right now, you can’t move, you can’t see. You’re as good as helpless, waiting to be taken advantage of.

“Don’t you want to get better? Don’t you want to find out who sabotaged your car?”

Sebastian stiffened. “How do you know my accident wasn’t just an accident?”

“Mr. Vanderbilt,” Caitlin replied with calm certainty, “you’re an exceptional driver, with your own racing team. A man with your skills doesn’t just veer off the road without cause.

“The only explanation is that someone tampered with your car, causing the brakes to fail.”

Her reasoning was spot on, aligning with Sebastian’s own suspicions. Before the crash, his brakes had indeed stopped working. Since waking up, he’d already set Xavi on the trail to uncover the truth.

Whoever did this to me will pay dearly, Sebastian vowed silently.

“Feed me,” he ordered gruffly, his hunger finally overriding his stubbornness.

Though he hated porridge, he was surprised by how good Caitlin’s cooking was. Each bite was rich and satisfying, with a flavor he couldn’t quite describe.

How had he never realized porridge could taste this good?

After finishing one bowl, Sebastian shocked himself by asking for a second.

As Caitlin served him the second helping, the door opened, and two women entered.

Grace walked in first, her face tightening ever so slightly at the sight of Sebastian being spoon-fed by Caitlin. Behind her was a younger woman, Yasmin Xenos.

Grace quickly masked her displeasure with a smile. “Sebastian, how are you feeling?”

Hearing her voice, Caitlin turned to face the newcomers. Grace introduced Yasmin with a pleased smile.

“Sebastian, when I heard you were awake, I brought Yasmin to see you.”

Yasmin was Grace’s niece, hailing from the illustrious Xenos family. Like Jasmine, she was one of New York’s renowned beauties.

Her sharp eyes immediately zeroed in on Caitlin, radiating hostility. Striding forward, Yasmin gave Caitlin a pointed glare and said imperiously, “We don’t need you here. Leave.”

Her commanding tone left no room for negotiation, as if she were the true mistress of the Vanderbilt estate.

Caitlin noticed Yasmin’s hostility but chose not to engage. Picking up Howard, she quietly left the room.

Once they were gone, Yasmin turned to Sebastian, her voice softening. “Sebastian, I’m so relieved to see you awake. I was so worried about you.”

Sebastian remained cold and distant, offering nothing but a curt, “I’m not dead yet.”

Unfazed by his rejection, Yasmin continued, “I knew you’d pull through. I’ve been praying for you every day, hoping you’d recover soon.”

Sebastian’s indifference didn’t deter her. Yasmin had long set her sights on him, convinced she was the perfect match.

“Sebastian,” she said sweetly, inching closer, “now that you’re awake, why not send that woman away? Let me take care of you instead.”