34: "On the Basis of His Good Looks"

The day felt long, and Caitlin couldn't stop herself from fast-forwarding through the recorded footage of her son's day at kindergarten. The sounds of children laughing, the teachers' voices, and occasionally someone calling out Howard's name filled the air. But as she watched, she couldn't stop the tears from streaming down her face.

The silence of her son's world was heartbreaking.

She could hear the voices of other children, laughing and shouting, but she couldn't hear her own son. The cruel mocking of Howard as "the mute child," and especially the taunts from Audrey's son, cut deep into her heart. Her mind swirled with the thought of what it must be like for Howard: unable to speak, unable to express himself, being the target of others' cruelty.

She couldn't bear the thought. How would it feel to be a little child, having no voice to defend himself? He must feel so lonely, so helpless.

Her heart shattered as the tears kept flowing. She regretted everything, feeling that she had failed her son. She gave birth to him but hadn't been able to stay by his side to help him grow. And now, after years apart, he couldn't even speak.

She turned to Sebastian, who was lying on the bed, and asked, her voice thick with emotion, "Sebastian, you never told me why Howard can't speak."

Sebastian paused for a moment before replying. "Howard has already fallen asleep?"

"He's asleep now."

"'Two years ago, on a stormy night, Howard saw something—something that scared him so badly, he passed out. I rushed him to the hospital. He recovered physically, but after that night, he refused to speak. The doctors said it was aphasia."

Sebastian explained as calmly as he could. It was rare for the two of them to speak so openly about their past, especially when it involved their son.

Caitlin's tears flowed even more freely, but she wiped them away quickly. "So... you're saying Howard's condition was caused by trauma, not because he was born mute?"

"Yeah."

Caitlin's heart lifted slightly. If it was indeed due to trauma, then Howard still had hope. There was a chance for him to recover, and Caitlin was determined to do everything she could to help him.

She gazed tenderly at her son's sleeping face, her heart aching with love and sorrow. She only wished for one thing: that one day Howard would be able to recover and live like any other normal child.

But tomorrow's battle loomed over her, and she knew she needed rest. She turned to Sebastian and asked, "I'm going to sleep now. Do you need to use the bathroom?"

Sebastian hesitated for a moment, then reluctantly said, "Yes."

Caitlin got up, grabbing the bedpan and moving to his side. "It's late, and you're disturbing the others. Let me help you."

Sebastian, ever stubborn, grumbled, "No!"

"You're such a pain to serve," Caitlin muttered, but she still turned him so he could use the bedpan.

Suddenly, Sebastian grabbed her wrist with surprising strength, pinning her to the bed, his temper flaring. "I said no! Can't you understand that?"

"Let go of me! You're pinning me down!"

One of Caitlin's hands was trapped under his body, and the other still held the bedpan. If it weren't for the fact that he was good-looking, she might have been tempted to smash the bedpan over his head.

"What?"

Sebastian, who couldn't see, fumbled around until he realized what he was touching. His face went pale, and he quickly withdrew his hand, almost as though he had burned it.

"Had enough fun?" Caitlin mocked, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

Sebastian pulled back, clearly uncomfortable and flustered. "I swear I didn't do that on purpose!" he muttered, his face reddening in embarrassment.

Caitlin rolled her eyes and handed him the bedpan again. "Hurry up! Don't take your time, or I'll make you!"

"Don't look!" Sebastian demanded, a little embarrassed. "Go outside!"

"Fine! I'll go outside. Take your time!" Caitlin snorted and left the room, slamming the door behind her.

Once Caitlin left, Sebastian finished up quickly. Afterward, he called out, " Where did you go? You took forever."

"Are you seriously asking me where I went after all that?" Caitlin shot back. "Don't you have anything better to do than to micromanage?"

Sebastian was left speechless. He had no idea how to deal with Caitlin anymore. She was stubborn, rude, and completely unpredictable, and somehow, he found himself unable to deal with her.

Caitlin stepped into the hallway, but as she walked, she saw a figure lurking by the window at the far end of the corridor. Her instincts kicked in, and she followed quietly.

She approached quickly, but the figure darted away and tried to escape. Without thinking, Caitlin jumped out the window, landing on the air-conditioning unit below, and quickly ran after the figure.

She chased the shadow all the way to the backyard, where it disappeared into the trees. Caitlin searched around for a few moments but found no clues.

However, she did spot a small black building at the edge of the yard, with a light shining faintly through the window. Curiosity piqued, she headed toward the building.

As she approached the door, she heard faint sounds from inside— someone was crying. It was a woman's voice. The eerie sobs sent chills down her spine. The building seemed isolated, far from the main house, and the darkness around it made it feel like a haunted place.

Caitlin stood still for a moment, debating whether to investigate further. Her curiosity got the better of her, and she walked closer. Just as she reached the door, it suddenly swung open, and a familiar figure appeared.

"Marcus?" Caitlin gasped, surprised.

Marcus froze when he saw her. His eyes widened, filled with shock and fear. "What are you doing here?" he asked quickly, trying to hide his surprise.

"I heard crying from upstairs. Who lives here?" Caitlin asked, her curiosity getting the better of her.

Marcus hesitated, his eyes flickering nervously. "No one lives here. It's just... a servant who has gone mad. The master gave orders that no one is allowed here. You should go back."

"Why?" Caitlin asked, suspicious.

Marcus quickly locked the door and said, "It's dangerous, and the master doesn't want anyone near here. Please, just go back."

Caitlin raised an eyebrow. "Then why are you here?"

"I... I'm the one who's been taking care of her," Marcus answered awkwardly.

"Okay, I understand. I'll go back," Caitlin replied, sensing the tension in the air.

After leaving the small building, Caitlin walked back toward the Vanderbilt estate. She felt a sense of unease, but there was nothing more to be done. She had more important things to focus on, especially tomorrow's challenge with the Gray family.

When she got back to the house, Sebastian had already taken care of himself and was waiting for her. He asked, "Where did you go? It took so long."

Caitlin glared at him. "Don't ask. Some things are none of your business."