



Episode One-thirty-eight

Sarah stayed in the guest bedroom that night, sleeping off her liquor and weed. She had nothing to do that morning, only a photoshoot in the afternoon. She borrowed one of Edward's shirts to sleep in. It felt like an old-fashioned sleepover.

Edward had a thing with Disney during the day, so he woke up early, worked out, and showered while I got up to make everyone breakfast. Jasper offered to help. He was handy in the kitchen, despite being so distracting in his low hanging pajama pants. Our new friend was still asleep, and we wouldn't bother her yet.

Standing behind me as I made the scones, he kissed my neck and rubbed my back when he ran out of things to do. I was elbows deep in the dough and could do nothing but enjoy the attention. It was slow, gentle, and incredibly relaxing. I closed my eyes as I leaned against him. All the tension left my body. His big hand slid across my stomach as he pecked along my jaw.

"Would you like to go out today? I've got to work on editing this morning, but Tony will be gone all day. We could have lunch and do something in the afternoon," he spoke in my ear, soft and sweet. He nudged the lobe with his nose, his lips brushing my cheek. I turned my face to kiss him, his hand coming to my chin to hold it for as long as he could. He smiled against my mouth. "Is that a yes?"

“Absolutely,” I breathed. “Are you going to take me on a date?” I teased with a grin as I bumped my ass back against him. He was enjoying the kissing, too. Nodding, his fingers slid across my neck. “Where are you going to take me?”

He pecked my lips as his thumb moved over my jaw. “Aquarium? Make use of our memberships?” I smiled brightly. “Yeah, I like that idea, too.” He kissed me again, rubbing his nose against mine. I closed my eyes, savoring the contact. His hands were so delicious, his fingers curling against my stomach.

“Aw, you’re so cute together,” Sarah giggled as she came in. I couldn’t help but beam at her.

“Coffee, lovely?” Jasper questioned as he pushed away from me. She slowly nodded in answer as she walked to the island. She looked so sleepy, yawning widely.

I put the scones in the oven, placing the clotted cream, butter, jams, and jellies on the table outside after. She sat drowsily with her drink, her feet pulled up under the big baggy shirt. Sarah lifted her face to the sky, letting the sun soak in.

“This makes me wish I had roommates,” she mumbled as she glanced up at us. “This is delightful.”

Chuckling, he placed the sugar on the tabletop. “Yeah, but they rarely spoil you like this.” He sat down beside her. I was still fussing with the table. Playfully, I winked at him.

“That’s true,” she snorted, then shook her head. Huffing, she looked up towards the clouds with a deep pout. “Ugh, is it terrible that I was kind of hoping Eddie was stepping out so I could have a chance?” I stopped to look at her. “I would have given you time to heal,” she joked as she reached her hand out to me. “And when you were ready to move on, I’d be there waiting with open arms.”

I scoffed, shaking my head as I rolled my eyes.

“You’d have to pry her from my cold dead fingers,” Edward quipped as he came outside, wearing a slick suit. It was gray with a clean white button-down. He was yummy. Both of my men looked so good. “Even then, I doubt I’d give up without a fight.” Our boyfriend quickly poured him coffee, touching his arm to get his attention. He took it with a smile, leaning over to give him a quick peck. We all enjoyed being able to be ourselves around her. “I would never cheat on my partners.”

“Yeah, he felt guilty for dreaming about it.” I went back towards the kitchen as the timer dinged. Before I could go, he pulled me to him to give me a kiss. I giggled against his mouth, holding onto the lapels of his blazer. We all looked so sloppy next to him.

“Thank you for breakfast,” he whispered against my mouth. His knuckle dragged against my cheek. “Pretty girl.”

We couldn't sit for a long time like we had done the night before. Sarah's manager was bugging her, texting about her work that evening. She rushed through her food to get dressed. It was obvious she didn't want to.

“Do you need me to leave the car?” Edward questioned when he stood. He stretched his back and popped it, leaning his head from side to side to do the same to his neck. “I can get a taxi.”

Our boyfriend nodded quickly, wiping his mouth with his napkin. “Mm, if you don't mind. I'm going to take Bella out while you're at work. If that's okay,” Jasper added promptly.

Edward stopped mid-sip of his coffee. It was the last of it, and he was hurrying to finish it before he left. He looked at him curiously. “Why wouldn't it be?”

Flushing a little, he stared out at the mountains for a second then cleared his throat. “Because this is going to take some getting used to, and I don't want to upset you.”

He reached for his hand. “Darling, you're a couple as much as she and I are, or you and I are. We've talked about this. You don't have to ask my permission for anything.”

“I know. It just came out,” he mumbled, rubbing the back of his neck. “And it's better to be careful.”

He brought his fist up to his mouth to kiss. His lips rested against his knuckles as he gazed into his eyes. “Go out and have fun. I want you to.” He pulled out his keys and passed them to him. “I'll take an Uber. It'll be fine.”

“Where are you headed? Maybe I can take you,” Sarah offered as she came back outside, fully dressed with her purse. She had her keys in her hand.

Contemplating, he mentally deliberated her offer. “Not too far from here. It's about a ten-minute drive.”

“Oh, I got you then!” She promised before hurrying to me. Her bag rattled with keychains and pens as she rushed. She quickly brought me into a hug. “Thank you for such a great day. I had so much fun yesterday. I'll text you when I get back into town, and we'll go out with Lauren.” She kissed my cheek. “Have a wonderful time on your date!”

“Thank you! Good luck with your movie. I’ll text you when we’re in New York, maybe you’ll be able to meet up.”

Her eyes got wider with excitement. “Yes! Oh, and try to set me up with your friend!” She said with a grin. “Please.” I nodded wildly. “Thanks! Alright, Eddie, are you ready?”

“Yeah,” he grinned, giving us each a kiss and whispering his love in our ears after.

Jasper stretched his arms above his head. He was still shirtless. “I’ll do the dishes real quick, and then I need to edit for a few hours. We’ll want one of her episodes for the first day of the channel launch, I’m sure.”

“Okay,” I quietly remarked. “I have something I need to work on before tomorrow, anyway.” He raised an eyebrow. “I’m finally going to look at my account information. It’s probably something I need to get over before he gets home.”

He played with his mustache for a moment, twisting it. “Are you going to talk to him about it tonight?”

I shook my head. “We’re going to work on planning this weekend, and I don’t want anything to get in the way of that. I am after Zafrina tomorrow. I’m a little worried about getting overwhelmed, which has been why I’ve been so hesitant, and I need time to process my emotions.”

“It won’t hurt your relationship,” he swore as he took my hand that rested on the table. “I’ve fought with him over money for years.”

“That’s less reassuring than you think it is.”

He snorted. “Yeah. I’m sorry. Let me know if you need anything, okay?”

I went to get my computer and set myself up in the bedroom to look at the information. I stared at the email for a minute before I finally clicked on it. It started with a message I skimmed, along with a bunch of links. It was pretty standard.

Clicking on the first of them, it brought up a breakdown of each deposit. Another link was how much money I made per video and when I got the cash from them. I got a shitload from the older ones all at once. Thousands of dollars, all in a very short amount of time.

Edward retroactively upped the percentage of all the videos I was in to ten percent, more than doubling the amount before.

I hated it. Especially the oldest. All I did was show up and had fun, specifically back then. And I was getting paid to take the pictures. I did more work now, so it made sense if the newer ones received more. I would understand getting more on the cooking videos. But those were different. The wings, the tattoo, the haunted zoo were all just flirting. They were dates, and I didn't wish to profit from our relationship like that.

And I knew whatever I said, Edward would never see it that way. He didn't care about money. Easter had proven that. He had spent hundreds of thousands on a whim to please me. I didn't want to be his charity case. But he would never, ever, take it back. It was a drop in the bucket of our future.

I had made another ten thousand since the last time I checked, too. Part of it was my website, though. From what I could tell, he hadn't even started working on the investments I knew he wanted to do. He had been too busy. We all were.

Closing my computer, I laid back on the bed. My head hurt, and it felt like my blood pressure was skyrocketing. I was so exhausted.

I was dozing off when I got a phone call. It was a Washington number I didn't recognize. I answered it instantly. "Hello?"

"Isabella?" A man questioned gruffly. It was rough and older. I didn't know it right away. "This is your grandfather, Ephraim."

Gasping, I sat up quickly. "Grandpa!" I pushed my hair out of my face. "Oh, wow. Hi! How are you?"

"I'm well, thank you. I just wanted to call and let you know that I'm very excited about your visit."

My eyes automatically stung as my bottom lip quivered. "Me too! I can't wait to take pictures of Vanessa and Jake. It'll be amazing to be an aunt."

"That's very kind of you. I know they appreciate that. They're thrilled about the baby. It's my first great-grandchild, too. I never thought I'd get to see that. I wish your grandmother and father could be here for this, too." He paused for a moment before clearing his throat roughly and sniffing. "Anyway, I wanted to ask if you'd like to have dinner at the lodge with the entire family that Sunday? I want to give you something, and I want everyone to be there."

"Oh, I'd love to! Actually... I have something I wanted to give you, too." I thought about the money. Jasper was right. I could give it to them, and they could make improvements that would be better things for future generations of my family. Perhaps it was enough to replace the

office. I certainly hoped so. I couldn't change my past, but maybe I could improve someone else's prospects.

"Aw, you don't have to get me anything. You owe us nothing. We should have found-" he stopped himself. "We have so much time to make up for now. That's all I want, to make up for that lost time."

"Me too," I breathed. I pushed my lips together to keep in the sound that was trying to escape my mouth.

He cleared his throat again. "I need to head back to work. We'll see you soon?"

"Yes, sir," I promised. It was high-pitched and squeaky.

"I love you."

My breath caught in my throat, but I kept my voice even. "I love you, too," I whispered. We hung up after that. I began to cry, my hands going to my eyes. The tears just came, free-flowing and heavy. Doubling over, my face was on my knees.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Jasper said as he rushed into the room. "Why? What's wrong? Is it the money?" I shook my head, then shrugged. Maybe it was part of it. Everything was so intense in my brain.

"My grandpa called," I forced out. It didn't explain much.

He wrapped me in his arms, kissing my temple. Slowly, he nodded. "Is everything okay there?" I nodded in answer. "Okay. What's wrong, dove?" Shaking my head again, I was unable to get the words out even if I wanted to. "Tell me so I can help."

"I just feel... guilty. About so many things," I stuttered.

Gingerly, Jasper pushed my hair behind my ear. "Like what?"

Closing my eyes, I leaned into him. I couldn't look at him, my face hot and uncomfortable. "Um... I should have looked harder for my family and-"

He pulled my chin up. "What did you have to go on?"

My eyes stayed sealed. "I could have done the DNA thing sooner. Jake did every company that did it, just to look for me. Maybe I could have found him before my dad died." My tears rolled down my cheeks.

“No. You can’t go back and fix the past. You’re going to be an active member of the family now. That’s what matters. You can’t- You can’t linger on the past. It’ll kill your soul. Trust me, I know. You’ve got to live in this moment and appreciate it for what it is, which is good. Sure, things can always be better, but we can only work on improving the future.” He lifted my chin higher.

My lips were still trembling as I tried to calm myself down. “I feel like I don’t do enough to deserve all of this love and attention. I feel like I’m just soaking it up and not giving anything back.”

Jasper shook his head before leaning his forehead against mine. “That’s the trauma talking.” He put his palm on my cheek. “You spoil us, and you’ll never feel like it’s enough. But it is, and we adore you for it.” He pulled me fully to his chest, so I was on his lap. “You are safe. You are loved. And you are enough. The things you do are enough.”

He let me cry myself out, holding and rocking me until I settled. Then we laid there for at least another thirty minutes in silence. “Ugh, I’m sorry,” I finally whined. “I’m so tired. I feel like I could lie down and nap for a week.”

He moved the laptop onto the bedside table and pulled the covers over us. “Okay. Sounds marvelous.”

“But the aquarium,” I complained.

“It’ll be there later.”

“I want to go out with you, though. We haven’t been on a date before.”

Nodding, he puckered his lips slightly. “Well, I want to go out with my girlfriend too, but she’s emotional right now, and I don’t think she’d have a very good time. She would be distracted and probably not in the mood. So, what we’re going to do instead,” he kissed my forehead, “is lay down until she gets hungry or bored, and then we’ll do whatever makes her feel better.” He pecked my brow several times.

“You’re a wonderful boyfriend,” I murmured into his bare chest.

“I try. That’s all we can do. Now, relax. Let’s snuggle.” Gently, Jasper patted my butt until I dozed off in his grip. Only a soothing tap. It wasn’t sexual in any way.

My dreams were disconnected and dark, just out of my reach. I forgot them as soon as I had them.

When I woke up, he was still asleep. I smiled when I saw his peaceful expression. He could use a shave. Neither of us had showered, and it showed. Lightly, I kissed his cheeks. Grinning, he brought his hand up to the back of my head. He turned his face towards me and returned my affection. "Hi."

"Hey there. How are you feeling?" He questioned as he stroked my hair. His mustache tickled my skin.

"Better," I grinned slightly, pecking his nose. "How are you?"

"Hungry," he admitted as he stretched. When he did, his muscle flexed pleasantly. I loved watching his body.

Slowly, I lifted to look at the time. It was nearly four. "Oh, Jesus. It's late."

"Mm..." he yawned, rubbing his cheek. Jasper peered over at the clock. He smirked slightly. "Yeah, that was nice." He reached for me, pulling back into his grip. He pushed his face into my hair, keeping it there for a still moment. "Want to smoke a little and order something for dinner?" He looked at his watch. "I don't think I want Chinese again. I've had plenty." He pecked my scalp. "I wonder when Tony is getting off."

As if on cue, our phones beeped at the same time. We both smiled.