



## Episode One-hundred-thirty-nine

After dinner, Edward and I worked on planning our trip for the weekend. I needed it like oxygen. I knew whatever heated discussion we had the following day wouldn't ruin it. We would both need to de-stress, probably for different reasons.

He had a quick early online meeting in the morning before we saw Zafrina, so Jasper was helping me cook for her. She enjoyed spicy food like me, so I was making it extra for her. I was whipping up breakfast enchiladas with chorizo and eggs in a cheesy nacho sauce. Everything was from scratch, including the tortillas.

"I can smell the spice from here!" Our boyfriend yelled from the office when he was done. "What are you cooking?"

"Tex-Mex," I explained as I continued to chop. There were things on the stove, the sausage, and fresh corn tortillas on the griddle. In front of me was the blender. I was keeping myself busy.

"Yes," he chuckled as he came into the living room. "Lovely." He was in a nice shirt while barefoot in jeans. He blew out a long breath with his hands on his hips. "Mate, pass me an

antacid?" He called to Jasper. He went to get it wordlessly, grabbing a bottle of water before he met him halfway. Edward pulled him in for a kiss before he took it, his hand on his waist.

Wrapping his arms around his neck, our man gazed up at him lovingly. He was a few inches taller, forcing his chin back slightly. Edward's palm slid down to his ass and gripped it tightly, the bottle in the other. They both looked as if they were ready to jump the other at any moment.

Smiling, I sighed as I cut up chilies for salsa. I placed them into the mixer with the onions, tomatoes, and garlic. "Watching you two make out while I cook is becoming my favorite pastime," I smirked as I squeezed in lime juice before dumping in the rest of the seasoning. "Do you think I can put it in my diary for my relaxation?"

"Hey, if it makes you happy, and you don't care if your therapist knows," Jasper chuckled as he leaned into him. He laid his head on his chest and closed his eyes.

"He already does," I admitted, turning on the blender for a few seconds. It didn't take long. "I'm not ashamed of being polyamorous. I've always been open about it if it comes up in conversation. It's not like I tell everyone. But it's kind of important that he knows."

"We still need to figure out therapy for us," Edward said as he gripped our boyfriend tighter. He loved their closeness and didn't want to let go. His chin rested on the top of his head. "It's probably not terrible if we all go to one together. We all need one. This is complicated, and there are a lot of things we need to figure out."

"Mm... like what?" Jasper kissed his jaw. It was light and gentle. He was in a good mood, relaxed. The evening before had been tranquil. Besides trip planning, they quietly edited until we went to bed early. Despite the nap, we were exhausted from our late night with Sarah.

Our boyfriend made a face as he considered what he wanted to say. His fingers curled around his shirt at the small of his back. "Our roles. I want us to feel like equal partners, but I don't think you feel like that, and I don't know how to prove it to you. She's my girlfriend, yes, but Bella is yours too. And you're mine, just as much as you are hers. I love and want that. I feel joy when I know you're together. And I don't want you to think you need permission to do anything together. You're both adults in a relationship, and you should decide what's best for it, separate from ours. And we should do the same. Because sometimes it won't always be identical. We'll need different things to make them grow and mature."

Smiling slightly, he shook his head as he rolled his eyes. "I agree. But we shouldn't pretend there isn't a hierarchy," he countered as he peeked up at him.

"There's not," he spouted right away.

“There is,” I replied as I washed my hands. Next, I began rolling the enchiladas to put them in the oven. “Even if we don’t want there to be. Even if we didn’t put it in place on purpose. Because we’ve been together longer, and our relationship started from different points.”

“Because you’re also engaged,” Jasper added with a little smirk.

“No, we’re not,” I blurted out, and I saw the sadness in Edward’s eyes. I hated it. “We’re engaged to be engaged. Pre-fiance. It’s different. I like that and want to be different. Please don’t call it that. I’m not ready.”

“Still above boyfriend,” he mumbled before he licked his lips. “It’s fine. I understand I’m the lowest man on the totem pole. I’m good with that spot.”

“You realize that the lowest is supposed to be the strongest, holding the rest of the village up?” I asked as I walked towards them once I was done, putting the dish in the oven. “You’re newest to the group relationship, yes. But you two have the longest affiliation. You know things about each other I’ll never know or understand. In that sense, I’m the newest.”

“Yeah, but that leaves us with a common denominator. He’s at the top.” He bowed his head toward our shared boyfriend. I nodded in agreement.

Automatically snorting, Edward’s cheeks flushed. “Oh, I’m pretty sure I’m a bottom. Or maybe a middle? Is that a thing? I like everything. Play with me?”

Rolling his eyes, he pushed away from him. Turning, Jasper gazed at me. “He makes jokes because he’s uncomfortable. One of those things I’ve learned from our many years together. Don’t worry. I’ll share this info as it comes.”

He pressed his lips together, not enjoying being teased. “I’m not. I’m... nervous.”

“Why?” I asked as I leaned against Jasper. He wrapped both of his arms around me and patted my ass.

“I don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings.” I shook my head. He was too sensitive to do that, especially on purpose. “Yes, I could hurt both of you, and I don’t want to do that. I just want everyone to be happy.”

Resting his chin against the top of my skull, he sighed. “You don’t have to worry about that. I’m concerned about overstepping my bounds.”

“There are none for me, though,” he said quickly.

His eyes rolled hard again as his grip tightened. "There will be, even if you don't see them yet. And what about hers? Hm?" Edward sulked, not answering. "Also, jealousy is a genuine issue."

His mouth got wide before the word even finished coming out. "I love seeing you together so much. I don't feel jealous at all. And I know how much she enjoys watching us. She brought us together. I don't think Bella has an envious bone in her body."

He grinned, then glanced at him for only a moment. "I do," Jasper breathed. "As much as I don't want to. I feel it."

I put my hand on his heart to get his attention. He peered back at me. "You can have as much time as you two need together," I promised as I gazed at him with a pout. "I want what's best for your relationship."

Jasper smiled slowly. "Who said I'm not jealous over you?" He asked as he stared into my eyes, holding my chin. His expression became impish. "I had the dope to myself for a decade, but I've just met you, and he gets to kiss you as much as he wishes and whenever he wants. He gets to brag. People aren't surprised when I gush over him like a little girl. They're used to it. He's my best mate. But... How am I supposed to keep it in? How into you I am? Do you know how hard it was not to kiss you all day while in the kitchen with the guys? Sure, I love him." He glanced at Edward and beamed. "And I am a bit the other way round too, but not as much."

"Why?" I inquired gently.

His rounded cheeks were a little pink. "You saw me that first day and went, 'aw, we can share,'" he laughed. "You automatically opened your heart. No questions asked and so fearless. And because of that, I've never felt more connected to someone so quickly. I want to explore it to its full potential because it feels like something."

"I can be because my relationship with him is secure. I know his feelings for me won't change because he has them for you." My fingers curled into his shirt.

"Yes, exactly. Same. But you and I are totally new. We've talked for a couple of months, but we've only been together in the same country for like five weeks. Our relationship is solid." He looked at Edward and held out his hand. He touched it and brought it to his lips to kiss. "But, we need to build ours." He caressed my cheek with his palm.

"You're making me feel guilty about not going on the date yesterday," I breathed.

He rested his forehead on mine. “No,” he laughed. “Are you kidding? I love napping so much. That was prime relationship-building right there. I’ve napped with him so many times. And you were stressed out. It’s fine.”

“Why were you?” Edward questioned as he touched my back.

Biting my lip, I gazed at him for a moment. “Um... it’s something we need to talk about today. In private.”

“Ah, so... I’m in trouble. Why?” He looked at me, then our boyfriend. He said it jokingly, and then he tilted his head to the side. “Do you know what I did?” Jasper nodded and shrugged only a little, barely moving his shoulders. “And you won’t tell me?”

He stared for a second, holding out his hand. “Oh, like you don’t know, you dumb pushy oaf.” Our man curled his arm around my waist and put his chin on the top of my head as he embraced me protectively. He rocked me for a moment. It was playful.

Edward stared out at the pool and frowned as he thought. “So, it’s something you agree with her about. It’s a money thing. What did I do?” The blond pulled back to look at me, pursing his lips. We said nothing as we both glared at him. “Jeez, I don’t like that. That’s kind of scary.” There was a knock at the door. “Oh, come on! Everything I do is out of love.”

“Which is why I didn’t pop off at you on the set,” I countered as I went into the kitchen to check on our brunch. “When I was first annoyed.”

“Dammit,” he mumbled under his breath but quickly forced a smile when he opened it. “Good timing.”

Zafrina was wearing a comfortable business suit with a busy, brightly colored blouse. She came in with a rolling suitcase of files. He took it from her grip right away, always the gentleman. “Who’s ready to make money?” She said enthusiastically, rubbing her hands together. Her nails were blood-red and sharp-tipped.

“Always, my dear. Always,” Edward remarked with a big sweeping hand gesture. He forced a perky grin. “Bella’s making you something extra spicy.”

“My favorite!” She cheered and then laughed. “Hello, Jasper.” She shook his hand. “It’s so good to see you again. I know Eddie is excited to have you join him, as am I. The more friends he has, the better his content.” He said nothing but smiled anxiously.

“Agreed,” he murmured as he went to the table. “So, straight away, I’m too antsy not to ask... What’s the most interesting? Just tell me now.”

Tilting her head to the side as she sat, she pretended to think. She definitely had something on her mind. "Mmmmm... Lay's would like to expand your contract. They loved your Super Bowl commercials. And they want to do an entire series with you doing voice-overs, with you and her, and they want you to do several sponsored cooking videos with the chips. They're offering you seven hundred fifty and Bella one hundred thousand for her part."

My knees buckled, and Jasper rushed up from behind me to keep me from going to the floor. I don't think anyone but him noticed. Thank goodness the food was already on the stove. I leaned against the counter with the mitts still on my hands.

"You can't be serious?"

"Mhmm," she nodded. "It would be, by far, the longest contract. And it would be exclusive. It will be over the next year. Kroger would be my second most intriguing, but it's a lot less. They're interested in sponsoring a cookbook, though."

My boyfriend sniffed almost dramatically. This was the businessman coming out. "I think it might be better to print that on our own. Do we need to find a publisher, or can we self-publish? That would be the most money."

"Could we do that on our own?" I questioned.

"Definitely," Zafrina answered with extreme confidence.

He tapped his chin in thought. "Jasper could design the book if Bella does the recipes and the pictures. Neither of which is a problem. They both have a beautiful eye."

"Do you think he can do that?" Our agent asked, looking at our boyfriend. He finally let me go when he was sure I wouldn't bounce to the ground. He almost forgot that his hands were on my ribs.

"Without a doubt," Edward swore with a smirk. "Bella's pretty good at bookmaking herself. She's made us several that I love."

"I think that's what we should do, too," she agreed right away. "We'll see how everything goes with the channel launch next week and start moving from there. We should know by the end of the month whether we should move forward getting a cookbook in stores for the Christmas season. How many cooking videos have you already done?"

"Close to a hundred. We'd also want to include exclusive recipes."

“Agreed. How many people do you think will join her channel from your subscribers?” She inquired next. She was doing some mental math that I didn’t understand. I brought the platter of food to the table.

“At least five million. Maybe more. She’ll get her own following, though. I doubt it’ll take more than a month, especially once I move the videos over from mine to hers. She’ll get a ton of traffic that way. Also, the ones we’ll put up with Ms. Jones will get plenty of attention.”

She grinned excitedly. “How did that go?”

I finally finished bringing everything to the table. Edward put his hand on my back, smiling at me. It was genuine. “They were amazing together. And she wants to do more. She wants to do drag.”

“Oh!” She clapped her hands as her face instantly lit up. “My brother is a drag queen. I can help you with that. He runs a show downtown. How far would you want to go? The full getup?” He stared at her. “You’re right. That is a ludicrous question. Would you do nails, heels, and wigs?” He just comically continued to stare. “Oh, my god. Yes, I realize. Stupid questions. How do you feel about it, Bella?”

I smirked a little. “Do I get to be a drag king?”

Zafrina pointed at me. “They can do that.”

“That hot,” Edward mumbled under his breath, blushing as he grinned at me. “You know I like you in suits. That one especially.”

“I’ll wear it to our wedding,” I joked. He beamed, nodding his head so hard that it made his hair bounce. I snorted and quickly shook my head. “I’m going to wear a dress, at least.”

“I don’t care what you wear,” he flirted. He was trying to suck up and soften my annoyance.

“Oh, in that case, I’ll wear the one you got me from Target,” I sassed back as I made everyone’s plate. “My old seven dollar dress and my new two thousand dollar shoes. I need something borrowed and blue now,” I continued dryly.

Our agent paused, her hands holding the tabletop. “Please tell me you’re getting married,” Zafrina commented hopefully. She leaned in and lowered her voice. “That would make us so much money.”

Edward and I looked at each other and made our eyes larger. He cleared his throat. "No. Just joking. Sorry," he breathed. "How would that make us money?" He leaned in as well to ask her.

She waved her hand. "We've gotten offers to televise your wedding-

"When hell freezes over. No," he said right away. She pouted and slouched into her seat. "I don't care about paychecks now. I'll continue to make Disney happy until I get all their cash, then I will do whatever the hell I wish. Weird indie shit and cartoons and fucking YouTube. And what I want is to never do bullshit like that," he ranted.

"Fine. I don't understand why you're so secretive. You're boring," she continued to mope. She put her napkin in her lap.

"Exactly. And if people know I'm boring, I'll be less mysterious," he joked. He took a bite of his food. He stopped and looked at me. His pale face turned red as his eyes widened. "Jesus, Mother of God," he wheezed. Hastily, he reached for the cup of coffee. "You're actually punishing me, aren't you?"

"I like it," Jasper stated with a smile, taking a big bite. "I'd prefer it a touch milder, but I like the heat." He held his gaze. Edward pushed his lips out in a pout, looking away for a moment.

Zafrina had scooped extra helpings of the spicy salsa and splattered some pepper sauce onto her entire platter. It was a mess, and she was destroying it. I smiled at my boyfriends.

"You can choose not to eat it," I replied once I hid my grin. "You knew it was hot."

He huffed. "I didn't say it wasn't good. That's part of the punishment."

"So, what you're telling me is that you enjoy being hurt?" Our agent teased after taking a big bite. Smirking, I played with my food. I swirled a loose bit of tortilla in the spicy nacho sauce. "Ugh, another dumb question. I know the answer to that, too. Anyway, if you do the Lay's, there might be some crossovers depending on how it goes. They own Pepsi, Nestle, and a bunch of others."

"Disney owns Coke. Is that a complication?" Edward said, scooping some sour cream from the bowl.

"No. Shouldn't be," she answered with a dismissive wave of her long fingers. "It happens. It's not an issue unless you shill for Pepsi and Coke at the same time. We'll work that out if there is a problem down the line."

He licked his lips and thought for a moment. "What's best for Bella's career? That's my primary concern with this. She's worried about it, and I want her to feel secure."

"Lay's."

"I'll be making a lot more than her. Do you think there was a way to lower my salary to give her an equal amount?"

"Edward," I breathed his name in surprise.

"Why not just give it to her?" She shrugged. "Why get them involved?"

He frowned. "She gets cranky when I do that," he glanced at me as he spoke. I returned a glare. "You do. It would be better if they looked at us as equal partners, anyway."

"That's not how that works." I rolled my eyes. "Lay's wants you because of the commercials."

"That doesn't mean they're not excited about you," Zafrina declared, putting her hand on my arm. "They want you to make ten videos and five commercials together. That's a big contract for a first-timer."

"How many voice-overs do they want me to do?"

"Ten. A day's worth of work. How long would it take you to make that many videos?" Shrugging, he didn't have a real good answer.

"Do they have recipes they want us to use, or do they want Bella to come up with them?" Jasper questioned. Edward pointed at him since he had a mouthful of food.

"They want her to come up with them. Ten recipes with different chips. They'll give you the entire line to experiment with, too. And they're giving you months to do it. November is the deadline. How hard do you think that would be?"

I bit my lip. "Um, well, that depends. I'll try to come up with as many as possible, and maybe they can pick the best. Does that work?"

"We're going to eat so many chips," Eddie smiled at me.

"Please don't gain too much weight," Zafrina sighed. "You want to look good for Dangerous Liaisons."

He looked directly at her and took a huge bite. Jasper poured him more coffee without being asked, smirking to himself. He quickly took a sip of the black drink, making a face. Our agent laughed.

“How long would it take to film that many commercials?” I inquired, still thinking about the work. It was a lot to consider.

“Two days?” Edward shrugged again, shaking his head. “Not long. Simple work. Your part will be harder, which is why I think you should get higher pay. It’s not like I’ll do anything other than snack on them. So... remember the other day at the neon museum when you didn’t think you were a producer? Well... They think you are.”