



## Episode One-hundred-sixty-one:

We took the tiny elevator up to my apartment. We were scrunched in there with so many plastic tubs, bubble wrap, tissue paper, and tape that my back was pressed to his chest, but he didn't mind. When I unlocked the door, the foyer was dark. Alice hadn't arrived home from the office yet. Pattie meowed loudly as she circled my legs in her excitement. I leaned down to scratch her, and she pushed her nose into my palm to smell. She grumbled, annoyed that I had been gone for so long.

"Aw, what a fluffy baby," he cooed at her, scratching her as she sniffed at his ankles. He probably already smelled like me. For a long second, she considered him. She approved, whipping her tail back and forth, so it wrapped around his wrist as he tried to pet her. She purred, spinning in a circle so she could nudge his hand for more.

"I swear she's gotten chubbier since I left," I mumbled as I went to my room. She noticed and instantly followed. "The answer is still no, girlfriend." I pointed at her cat tree.

She walked back to Jasper and pretended she wasn't interested. He brushed his fingers through her thick calico fur, wrapping his fist around her tail and smoothing it to the end. She liked it when anyone did that, and she booped his calf as she got louder.

As soon as I shut the door, two tiny paws poked under and dug at the hardwood. Her nails were barely out, just tapping on it.

Jasper looked around after setting the tubs down, not that there was much to see. He walked to the window and smiled at the view. He pushed the curtain a little more to the side. Edward had done the same thing. The city lights were the best.

“Feeling better about your old place yet?” I asked jokingly as I pulled items from the bag.

“It’s not bad at all!” He retorted right away, glancing over his shoulder at me. “I didn’t realize you could see the Manhattan skyline so well from here. It’s so beautiful.”

“I like it, too,” I admitted. “It’s definitely one thing I’m going to miss about New York, but hopefully, we’ll be able to visit lots. Next time with Edward. I have a thousand places I want to take you to.” Walking to him, I wrapped my arms around him from behind and pushed my face into his back to breathe him in. Once more, it reminded me of the first time that our boyfriend was in my room. It made me miss him more. I wanted him to squish me between them.

He twisted and pulled me close to his chest, then kissed my lips softly. “I can’t wait to go to them all with you both.” It slowly deepened, one hand on the side of my neck. “I love that I’m going to get to go on so many adventures with you.”

“Me too,” I responded, pecking at his ear.

Taking my mouth again, Jasper backed us up until my knees hit the little bed. Falling back, I giggled as he crawled over me, my hair fanned out around me. Slipping my hands into the back of his shirt, I let my nails drag down his taut muscles.

We knew we wouldn’t be alone for long, so it didn’t go very far, but soon enough, we were making out like teenagers. His hand pushed my shirt over my breast so he could fondle me through the satiny fabric of my bra while my legs wrapped around his waist. He really was the best kisser, so intense and demanding with the softest lips. We got so into it I didn’t hear the front door open.

Jarringly, my sliding doors flung open. “Bella!” My best friend shouted as she burst in. “Oh, shit! Heyyyy,” she laughed. Patty came in, meowing as she circled her mother.

He hurried off of me, resting on his knees on the mattress. I hopped off the bed, adjusting my blouse before rushing to her. “Hey,” I giggled, hugging her tightly. “Sorry,” I whispered in her ear.

“No, I didn’t knock. It’s my own fault,” she waved me off. “That was hot,” she leaned in to whisper back. It made me laugh, looking away as I smiled. “You must be Jasper!” She turned her attention to my blushing boyfriend.

He stood from the daybed, brushing his hands off before he offered one to her. “Yeah. Nice to meet you finally.”

“Fantastic to meet you, too.” She looked him over slowly as she took it. She glanced at me while still holding it. “How did you get two so pretty?”

Snorting, I pushed her shoulder with my hand. “Sheer fucking luck.”

“And here I thought it was your stunning personality and banging ass,” he countered as he put his other hand on my back.

My best friend giggled. “And that’s how you got the two of them.” She pointed at him, winking as she did.

I nodded in agreement. “Girl, you’re exactly right. It’s impossible not to fall in love with a man who is your biggest fan and best friend. And I have two!”

His palm smoothed up my spine before he kissed my temple. “I feel the same way.”

His sweetness made me feel a little hot under the collar, but I didn’t want to get too lovey-dovey in front of her. “So, why don’t you go get comfy, and then we can order some food. I’m starving,” I complained, touching her arm to get her attention. “Oh, and Eddie sent you a gift.” I pointed to the box on the couch. It sat beside the other tubs.

“What is it?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know. He didn’t tell me.”

“Oo, a mystery.” She lit up. “Alright, I’ll be right back. You pick whatever you want.”

I clapped my hands together. “The diner! I want some chop steak.” I pulled out my phone and went to sit on the sofa. After moving the storage boxes, I patted the spot next to me for my boyfriend. “You’ll love it. It’s got so many choices. Here, come look. The menu is like ten pages long.”

He quickly scrolled just to see how big it was. “Um, wow. You’re right.”

After she ran to her room, she returned in zipped up one-piece pajamas that were neon blue and had a hoodie with purple socks on her feet. She picked up the package and sat beside me. Lifting the lid, she laughed. “Oh, my god. I love that man.”

“What?” I questioned as I leaned over to look at what he had given her. He hadn’t spoken about it at all, and I wasn’t sure when he found the time to get anything.

It was crammed full of cannabis oil pens, edibles, drinks, and an assortment of other weed-related goodies. It was thousands of dollars of stuff that would get her high for months.

There was even some bud in it, stashed in a special smell proof bag. It was three different types- an ounce of each.

“Oh, look, my man made me a drug mule,” I joked in a dry voice. Jasper snorted.

She looked at me, her grin huge. “So, wanna take edibles tomorrow before we party? We could sneak them around with us for top-ups, too.”

Giggling, I picked up one of the bags of gummies so I could read the numbers on it. They didn’t really mean that much to me, but I knew the bigger the number, the better. “Sure, pothead. Sounds fun.”

“What about you, Jasper?” She looked at him with a coy smile.

“Baby, I never pass up a good time,” he grinned, then passed me the phone before putting his arm across the back of the couch. “I ordered what I want.”

I put mine in and gave it to Alice quickly. She was already smoking on one of the pens while still sorting through her goodies. She ordered the same thing almost every time, breakfast for dinner. But they did have great waffles.

“Bells, roll a few joints for tonight,” she requested as she passed me a baggie and the shiny new grinder that came with it. It was large and very heavy with an iridescent shine to it. There were several flavored rolling papers in the box, too. I choose fruit flavors- blueberry, cherry, and watermelon. I had never had any of them before, so it was going to be a novel experience. It had been years since I rolled, and it was a process to set up, which was why Alice never did it.

“It shouldn’t be so hot to watch you do that,” Jasper mumbled as he stared at me licking the joint to seal it.

My best friend shook her head, relaxing in her spot. “A naked woman rolling smokes is probably my favorite thing in the world. Especially Bella,” she teased as she ran her fingertips up my thigh.

“I don’t know when the last time I rolled one was, especially nude.”

“Those poor boys don’t know what they’re missing,” she cried in comical sorrow, blowing out the smoke. “You used to do it all the time in college.”

“You should get back into that habit,” my boyfriend teased, playfully licking his lips.

Alice giggled wickedly as she passed the pen to him. “She should do everything naked for the benefit of all humanity. How can anyone be mad when there’s an ass that fine to look at?”

Cackling at her teasing, I handed her the first finished one. “I couldn’t do that here. It’s too cold. Maybe in LA. If taking my clothes off helped anything, I would.”

Chuckling, he leaned over to kiss my cheek. “Test it out at home to see if it does. I don’t think Tony would mind at all.”

“Oh, I’m sure not. Will you two do it, too?” He nodded. Alice’s perverted smirk pushed to one side as he very obviously looked down my shirt.

Hopping up from the couch to grab her phone, she put on music while I finished rolling and we waited for our dinner. We got more than relaxed in the hour it took to come. We kept passing them around while I started sorting through my junk.

“Anything I’m leaving, you can do whatever with,” I explained to my best friend as I looked at my pile of linens. There was no need for me to take towels. Edward’s were much better, and I could afford to buy nicer ones there.

She shrugged. “I’ll keep it like this so people can visit. I don’t think I’m going to get another roommate. I can afford it on my own with no problems, and I’ve gotten used to the quiet.”

All of my clothes fit into one large tub. I put my jewelry into a smaller one to take with me personally. Then I placed my instruments in their cases, arranging tags on them with an address on the inside and outside, just in case they were lost in the moving process. They were the three things I cared about the most. As I looked at my books, I realized there were very few I wished to take with me. Most of my reading was done on my phone.

Carefully, I wrapped each piece of photography equipment I hadn’t taken with me. I had more of that than anything else, but it built up after years of collecting. Most of it, I hadn’t used in ages and were for very special circumstances. Jasper helped me, sitting on the floor beside me. He understood how delicate all of it was.

When the buzzer rang, Alice ran to get the food. We watched television and ate on my couch like it was old times. I was in the middle, my head resting on my boyfriend’s shoulder. We stayed until she was falling asleep on mine. I missed my best friend and didn’t want to leave her.

It was after midnight when we got back to the hotel.

"I like her," my man said abruptly as if it was swirling around in his head once we got into the room. "It was nice to be around someone who knows we're a couple from the beginning. It makes such a difference in how comfortable I am. It's-" He stopped himself as if he didn't know what he wanted to say.

"It is. She's always known about it when I dated anyone. I couldn't keep it from her, anyway. But she's cool with anything," I clarified as I put my purse down and kicked off my shoes. "Rose knows too. If we told her husband, he would be fine with it, too."

"Your friends are so chill. I can't imagine telling mine."

I looked over my shoulder at him. "Are you sure they're your friends then?"

He blinked, a little surprised by my cutting question. "You might have a point there. None of them have said anything about the video still."

"But are they not because they're not okay with it or because they're so okay with it, they're going to pretend it's nothing? The overreaction can go both ways."

"I don't know. I guess we'll find out."

"Well, if they don't like it, they can fuck right off. You're perfect exactly the way you are. You are an extraordinary man and deserve to be yourself and find your happiness."

His arms wrapped around my body from behind. "Yes, I do."

In the morning, we went back to the apartment and finished packing. It was mainly pictures and photo books. Then I spent the rest of the time cleaning since Alice wasn't very good at it. Everything was dusty. I put all the spare blankets and sheets I was leaving in a tub to keep clean in the closet for her to use. The room looked so boring when I finished. There was no trace of my personality left.

It was truly no longer my home.

I texted Helena when we were on our way after stopping to pick up a cake and flowers for my mother-in-law. It was from her favorite bakery that she went to regularly. There was no way I could go empty-handed. I was raised better than that.

Letting out a shaky breath, I knocked on the front door. My stomach twisted as my heart sped up for a reason I couldn't explain. My boyfriend held the dessert box while I had the bouquet in my trembling hands.

Jonah opened the door, and his face lit up with pure joy before wordlessly pulling me into a hug. "Hi," I breathed.

His arms tightened around me, pushing his cheek against mine. It was silky smooth and freshly shaven. They undoubtedly went to the temple that morning. "There's my girl. I've missed you." I could smell their traditional Shabbat lunch cooking in the background.

"I missed you, too," I whispered, trying not to tear up. Just seeing him was making me emotional. Unlike the apartment, this place felt like somewhere I belonged, no matter how much it, or I, changed.

He pulled back. "You are one of the prettiest women I have ever laid eyes on, and you get better looking every time I see you," he flirted like he always did. Giggling, I bit my lip. He leaned over to look behind me. "Who are you?" He asked my boyfriend in a totally different tone. "You're not the one from last time," he continued in a thick Brooklyn accent.

I laughed at his wording. "Um, Eddie is working right now. He's filming. This is Jasper." I put my hand on his arm. "He is our best friend and our roommate. And he's helping me pack the rest of my stuff."

Beaming, he held out his hand. "Well, a friend of Bella's is a friend of mine. Especially when he's holding a box from Martha's. Come on in."

Claire was on the couch, playing with her phone. She smiled. Her dad, Mike, was busy watching a vintage baseball game from the 80s on the big screen.

"Hey!" He grinned when he saw me. "Long time, no see."

"Who's there?" Esther shouted from the kitchen. I could just see her in front of the stove. I walked into the doorway, leaning against the frame. She turned and wailed in shock, crying right away. She wrapped me up tightly in her arms. "I didn't know you were coming!" It had been five months since I had seen her, though she was acting as if it was years. But it was the longest I had gone since Aiden died.

Helena took the cake from Jasper, smiling at him. "Nice to see you again."

"You too," he mumbled politely.

"I wanted to surprise you. I ran into Claire last night."

She pushed me back to look at me, making sure I was real. "When did you get into town? How long are you staying?"

"Yesterday afternoon. We're only here until Monday. I'm finally getting the rest of my things so I can move in completely in LA. These are for you," I explained before passing her the flowers.

She grinned as she brought them to her nose. "That is so exciting! I'm thrilled for you. I watch all of your videos now, and I am so proud. Jonah and I even made a YouTube account to subscribe. Well, Claire did for us, but you know what I mean." She turned to look at my partner, and her smile grew even wider. "You're one of the lovely young men she makes them with!"

"Yes, ma'am," he responded respectfully.

I put my hand on his shoulder, leaning into him. "This is Jasper."

"I'm the best friend and new roommate," he repeated the lie we told everyone. It really wasn't, though. He was those things, but so much more. I thought about what he had said the night before and wished I could say more, but it wasn't the right time, and I didn't want to make anyone uncomfortable.

"What a handsome boy!" She cooed, taking his hand. "Are you hungry? I hope you are because dinner is almost ready."

"Always," he promised with a charming smile.