



## Episode One-hundred-Sixty-two:

“Oh! It’s perfect you showed up. I have something for you to look through. I was saving them for you because no one else is close to my size,” Esther gushed after we ate. Standing at the sink, I was just finishing the dishes. I wanted to help her clean the kitchen, and it gave me something to do. She rushed out of the room without waiting for me to say anything.

Drying off my hands, I glanced at my father-in-law. He rolled his eyes. “Why would she want them?” He yelled after her.

“Because she has good taste!” She countered, running up the stairs to their bedroom. “Helena, come help,” she snapped in a way only a mother could.

She rolled her eyes in the same way her dad did and pushed herself away from the table. When she passed, she rubbed my shoulder. I put my hand on hers for a brief second.

“Young man, would you like a beer?” Jonah questioned as he stood and walked to the fridge. He gave me one without asking if I wanted it, popping the top. It was a sign we were going to be there for at least a little while longer.

“Yes, please,” he said politely. He was trying to be on his best behavior, being quiet. He mainly chatted with Claire at dinner as she stared at him with wide-eyed wonder. He was great with kids, just like our love. They would both make phenomenal fathers.

It made me consider things I really hadn't before in greater detail. Edward would always be busy. That was the life he was choosing, and there would be so many times we would be without him because of it. Any child we had would be raised by both of them, but Jasper didn't want to be involved in the spotlight and was better behind the cameras. We were destined to pencil time in with our man, but he would be there every night to tuck in our baby. If we could even have one. For the first time, I could see it. A little girl with my tan and curls and Edward's nose smiling up at men that would adore her fully and treat her like a queen amongst princesses. It made me ache. The thoughts had swirled in my mind as I washed pots and pans.

“So, what else do you have planned while you're here?” He popped the top on another two and gave my boyfriend one.

Stretching, I took a big sip. I needed it. “Dancing and dinner with Al and Roe tonight. Then something touristy tomorrow. I don't know what. We'll have to see what the weather is like and how we feel. I'm getting too old to party all night.”

Shaking his head, Jasper laughed. “And what happened on Thursday? What did we do?”

“We made mistakes,” I sighed. “And Friday morning sucked because of it,” I complained before looking at the older gentleman. He seemed confused by our exchange. “Eddie's movie premiered last week, and there was quite the afterparty. It wasn't as crazy as the wrap party for the last one, but still too much after the week we've had.”

He nodded in understanding. “Esther has already pre-ordered tickets to see it next week when it comes out. I've never seen her this excited about a film before. It looks like James Bond, so I don't mind.”

Jasper stood too. “It is very much so. Mission Impossible vibes.”

“Will I be able to eat popcorn to it?” He joked.

Giggling, I leaned against the door frame. “I'd order a large. You'll need it. Candy, too. It's perfect for it.”

“Come here!” Esther called from the living room. Her voice was singsong. I turned to see three giant garbage bags on the couch. She was busily pulling them open. “I went through my closet recently, and these are all my older cocktail dresses and such from...” she waffled her hand, “the 70s to the early 2000s. I'm keeping my more recent ones.”

“Why would this child want a fifty-year-old dress?” Jonah questioned as he plopped down in his recliner before taking a sip. It creaked as he brought the footrest up.

“Shhhhh.” I waved him off. “They’re not old. They’re vintage.” She nodded in agreement, pleased I was on her side. I began to pull things out. At the very top was a scarlet sequined, very 80s dress. “Ooooo.” I held it up to my body. It was surprisingly short. I turned to look at my boyfriend. “Oooooo,” I repeated, swishing it around. All the clothes had been dry cleaned and had a pleasant floral aroma. “Think I can wear this on the red carpet?”

He bit his lip for a moment, looking me over slowly before meeting my eyes. “Yes, but you could wear anything and still be the most beautiful woman there.”

I felt my cheeks heat at his words. Grinning, I turned back to the plastic sacks.

“Aren’t you a sweetheart?” Esther patted his forearm, smiling cheerfully. “How long have you two been friends?” She was just as nosy when it wasn’t my romantic life, but I didn’t mind.

I don’t think Jasper meant to blurt out what he did. His skin was slightly pink. Clearing his throat, he pushed one over to sit on the couch. “Um, well, Tony and I have been best mates since we were wee babies. We went to the same boarding school. I’ve not known Bella long, but he literally told me about her the moment he saw her and how he’s going to marry her, but I’ve only been lucky enough to have met her in person at the end of February or early March.”

Esther gasped. “Are you getting married?” This got the attention of everyone in the room except for Mike, who was still deep into ESPN.

Taking a sip of my beer to buy myself time, I put it down on the coffee table. I shot a look at Jasper as I did, then I sighed. “Um... It’s complicated, but... Yeah. We’re not engaged, though.”

“He has a ring. She’s just making him wait,” he added for me. “She’s torturing him,” he slyly smirked. “I think it’s funny.”

“I’m not ready!” I lamented with a stomp of my foot. “This is going so fast. I want to marry him- I do. I want to say yes. But there is so much going on. I can’t get my mind around one thing before another one is happening. Him and the racist, then Australia and you and getting sick. Then my brother and sisters. Moving and Lay’s. And-” I closed my eyes as I started to feel a little overwhelmed. Taking a deep breath, I put another dress to the side that I liked. “It’s too much at once.”

“Aiden would want you to be happy,” she promised, rubbing my shoulders. “He would want you to move on.”

I smiled slightly. "I know. He'd be pleased for me." I shook my head as I sifted through the clothing. "He would be thrilled I found someone who has the same interests. Acting and music and such. He always knew we weren't very well matched, but he wanted some of my attitude to rub off on him."

Jonah chuckled, taking a sip of his beer. "I never knew how he landed you. That boy was as smooth as sandpaper."

Smirking, I put another to the side. "He had his moments, but I needed a stable adult male figure and a family. He provided both." I stared into the garbage bag, but I didn't really see anything, just a mix of vivid neon colors. "But I was too young. I'm surprised you didn't talk him out of it," I mumbled, folding one of the dresses that wouldn't be coming with me.

"But we loved you already!" Helena argued. "You were the best thing that ever happened to that man. I love my brother, but he was a dweeb." Claire giggled at her mother's words without looking up from her phone. They never really got along. She was younger by several years and considered him boring. Aiden thought she was rude and had the attention span of a gnat. They only became kinder to one another when his niece was born. He adored her, and it jump-started his desire for children.

Esther gave her a nasty look, then glanced at her husband for backup. He lifted his hands and shrugged. "What? He was!"

Nodding, I laughed. "And he was damn proud of it." I wrinkled my nose. "That's one of the few things he and Edward have in common. I love him, but he is a nerd. But I have to admit... he is smarter. Aid might have been a doctor, but he memorized facts. Eddie has a million things going on at once and makes money off of all of them. He has plans years in advance, and he's going to achieve them while still giving away most of his cash to charity. If he had wanted to be a physician, he'd be the youngest and best at anything he did."

"I'm glad he didn't go into politics," Jasper joked.

"He could have them all eating out of his palm and asking for more. If he did, it would at least make his mother happier," I grumbled to myself.

He had venom forming on his tongue before the sentence even finished coming out of my mouth. "He's a bloody millionaire doing piss all!" He argued, waving his arms in the air. His accent was thick. "She'll never be pleased with a thing he does because she's a witch who doesn't deserve all of her lovely children. She's miserable and wants them to be too because it makes her feel better about herself."

"Amen," I nodded.

Esther moved the bag I was finished with to the floor. "Is his mom not very nice?" She sat in the spot it took up, looking up at me curiously with her hands on her knees.

Jasper and I made the same disgusted noise at the same time. He shook his head, picking at his beer bottle. "She doesn't like Bella because she's a racist hag. Told her to leave her son right before she passed out sick. Then came to the hospital afterward to continue being evil. She's a word I won't say in front of sensitive ears. She doesn't like me either and said some very unkind stuff about me, my sexuality, and intelligence- amongst other things."

My mind came up with a dozen different names. Cunt, bitch, asshole, prick, knob, a bag of dicks...

"And then tried to ruin our last night with his siblings," I added in annoyance before looking at Esther. "I got so lucky with you guys. You're the best." I folded another and put it on the growing pile of 'coming with me.' "Will you still be my parents when I get married?" I asked playfully.

"Of course, baby!" She took my hand and squeezed it tightly. "You know that."

"It's still good to hear it," I replied as I added to the heap. I was getting quite a few. She had dozens of outfits in each one. "Eddie wants kids someday soon, and heaven above, that woman will not be their grandma. At least his grandparents and siblings are lovely."

My father-in-law chuckled. "Those are going to be some good-looking kids. Let's hope they get his height."

"Amen," I repeated under my breath. "But I'm definitely not ready for babies yet. Especially if they have his big ass head."

Jasper blew a loud raspberry to keep his laughter in but failed as his head fell back against the couch. "He does have a colossal head."

"He's got big everything, though," I replied with a roll of my eyes. "That man is enormous."

"Everything?" Helena asked with a raised eyebrow, then playfully wiggled them at me. Her mother sent her another look.

Almost doubling over, I laughed. Rubbing my cheek, I pursed my lips for a moment. "Yeah, his feet are gigantic!"

Claire looked up from her phone and glanced between us. "I know what that's supposed to mean." She lifted her nose in the air. It was a little smug.

Esther swatted at me, standing up to go to the kitchen as she shook her head in playful disgust. "Naughty girls."

I couldn't help but laugh again. "It was your child who started it!"

Jasper put his chin on his fist, then his elbow on his knee, and grinned innocently at Claire. "And what does it mean exactly? I don't know. Can you explain it to me?" It was so doe-eyed and innocent. He could be a good actor when he wanted to be too. It was comedy gold.

Her eyes grew wide as she turned scarlet. She had been so proud of herself only seconds before when she knew something but was regretting speaking up. "Ummmmm... It, uh... Well, you know." She scrunched her chin in, closing her eyes as her mouth opened and closed a couple of times.

"No, I don't," he continued in a dopey expression. His face tilted to the side.

I pushed my lips together to keep from giggling. It was a little mean how even he was playing it. The fear she might have to explain it because he was going to play it straight all the way through, or truly didn't know, was dancing in her big brown eyes. It was verbal chicken.

She blinked maybe twenty times a second as she tried to think of what to say in front of her parents and grandparents that wouldn't get her in trouble. And she definitely would not use the word penis in the presence of anyone adult. Her tongue darted out to wet her lips. "It's um..." She coughed. "Ah, haha," she laughed awkwardly. "A boy with big feet is supposed to be, well-" She stopped as she thought about her options. She then waved at her lap.

I would have died if she said well-endowed, but I doubted she knew the term. Still, I almost choked on my own spit. Mike scoffed, shaking his head. I smacked Jasper's forearm, making him break finally. His eyes glowed with mischief. "I'm sorry, I'm messing with you. You're too cute, though." He adjusted her hair over her shoulder as he leaned in to whisper to her. "I don't think it's true. It's an old wife's tale."

"Every person is different," I added. "And your mom was being a pervert because I wasn't even talking about that. He's so tall and broad. Plus, his personalities are crazy big... all like, six of them."

"They have medication for that," Jonah teased.

"It's not like that, but he really acts differently, though," our boyfriend agreed. "He's so different in front of the camera or alone. Or with his family. He's always been that way."

"Or when he's doing business," I continued. He nodded in agreement. "And I understand why. I don't think he has the energy to be those people all the time. It takes so much to be that

out there. Each side takes up a certain amount. Edward being the least, Eddie being the most stressful.”

“I’d argue Anthony is,” he grumbled as I pulled out a forest green number from the 70s. It went to the floor and was gauzy with long sleeves. It was also very low cut. “I like that one,” he commented, looking directly at me. I knew what his expression meant- the way his eyes moved over me and his slightly crooked smile. It was subtle, but it was for me. “It would look lovely on you. The color is stunning.”

“Esther, I’m going to take more of your clothes home with me than my own,” I called to her with a laugh, putting it on the pile. “Got any shoes to go with them?”

“Yes! I do! Do you want to see them? Jonah said you wouldn’t want them because of my gross feet. But I’ve cleaned them and kept them stored! Honey, go get them,” she declared quickly, waving her hand at her daughter. “They’re in the closet.”

I left with two garbage bags, heavy ones. It was so hard to go. Claire walked us to the door, and I hugged her tightly before I put my hands on her shoulders. “So, Eddie wants his nieces to come to visit so he can take them to Disneyland and the beach. And he’s already said he wants you to come too. So, when that happens, would you like to?”

“Yes!” She squealed, jumping up and down in place.

“He likes to make videos with them. Would you like to do that, too?”

She gasped. “Really?”

“Of course. You can make them with me too,” Jasper promised, winking at her. “Would you like to play video games with us?” She nodded vigorously. “I very much look forward to it.”

She hugged me again, tightly. She was already so much taller than me. “You’re the best. I miss you so much.”

“I miss you, too,” I breathed, embracing her completely. “Hey, I’ll send you another box soon, so keep an eye out. Want some candy from Australia? I’m going in a couple of weeks.”

“It’s way better than American,” he smirked, then glanced at me. “We’ll get her all the best kinds of Tim-tams.”

“Oh! I know what those are!” She said excitedly.

He leaned down and smiled a little. “And what are they?”

“Cookies,” she grinned, knowing he was teasing her about earlier. “Chocolate covered ones.”

“Yes, and they’re delicious,” he promised. “I’ll help your auntie pick out the best stuff.”

She hugged him, too. “Thank you!” She giggled as she hopped up on her toes to do so.

The taxi door was barely closed when I began to tear up. I couldn’t keep it in. When we turned off the street, I sobbed. My hands flew to my face.

It shocked Jasper, seemingly coming out of nowhere. “Oi, dove, what’s wrong?”

“They’re just so wonderful. And they like you and- I don’t know. I’ve been so emotional the past few weeks. And I think I’m about to start my period, or I would have one if I didn’t have the thingie,” I motioned at my stomach as I spoke and sniffled. “I’ve been so weepy lately. Stupid fucking annoying tears.” I dug my palms into my eyes, shaking my head.

He pouted a little. “It’s okay to feel your emotions. It’s not a shameful thing. You just might have had a lot to cry about lately. Good and bad.”

“But it’s been so great!”

“And you’ve cried a lot of happy tears.” He brushed one from my cheek with his knuckle. “It’s alright to be sad that you miss them, but you’ll see them again. I promise. We’ll come back plenty. I like them too, and so does Tony.”

“I know,” I sighed as I leaned my head against his shoulder. Taking his hand, I wove my fingers with his. “I am so glad you got to meet them, though. That was fun.”

He leaned his temple against mine. “And you got a bunch of sexy ass clothes out of it.”

“Right?! She had great taste back in the day. I’m excited. I’m going to do some vintage looks, whatever our next event is. And I won’t have to shop for ages either.”

“You should wear one of them tonight,” he whispered in my ear. I peeked up at him, and he had a sly smile. “That first one. The little red sequined number.”

“I think that can be arranged,” I smirked. “I even brought my Jimmy Choo’s to go to the club in. They should go perfectly together.”