

Episode One-hundred-sixty-five:

Nude, Alice was playing with my hair when I woke up. She was propped up against the headboard, leaning over me as she gently twisted a curl around her fingertip. It was dark, only a little gray light coming in underneath the thick fabric. I had no idea what time it was. The curtains were closed tight, and Jasper was out cold beside us. His arm was around my waist, his head close to mine. Slowly, I ran my hand over his forearm then turned to kiss his forehead. He didn't move. Then I pecked at her fingers, grinning up at my best friend. I enjoyed waking up with my favorite people, and it would have only been better if our sweet man was there. He would have lived for this.

She was so solemn, her blue eyes hauntingly sad. I reached up and touched her cheek, curling my fingers against her soft, smooth skin. Our gaze locked for a second before she glanced away. Her chin ducked as her lips trembled.

Then she began to weep, hard. It was so powerful it shook her entire body.

Quickly sitting up, I brought her into my arms. She coiled hers around me, pushing her face into my neck. Alice was shaking in my embrace as her tears dripped down my bare chest. We were all still naked from the night before. We were all so drunk and exhausted by the time we passed out that none of it mattered.

I rocked us back and forth, leaning my temple against hers. "What's wrong?" She shook her head. "No. Tell me. Please. I can't help if I don't know." Massaging her spine, I only wanted her to calm down.

She took a shaky breath. "... I-I just miss you s-so much," she barely got the words out as her fingers clutched my shoulders. Her blunt nails curled into my skin.

Twisting my face to the side, I kissed her cheek. Texting wasn't enough. We spent so much time together before, and I realized how much of a void there had been. I needed her. Edward recognized that. That's why he invited her and Rose to Washington. "I miss you, too."

Shaking her head, I pulled away some as she did, still refusing to meet my gaze. “No, you don’t,” she blubbered. “You’re obviously so happy and busy right now. You don’t need me. You’ve finally got everything you need. And it’s not me.”

Gasping, I took both of her hands. “Of course, I do! I miss you every day. God...” I felt my own tears stinging at the corner of my eyes. “Edward gave that money to CFA just so you might get to LA faster. And will keep giving. That’s how much I need you. There is a literal dollar amount on how much I need you. Millions.”

Pushing her palm against her forehead, her eyes were shut tightly. Then she shook her head again. “I know... It’s just so hard to be without you. I got so used to being around you all the time. It was like we were married, and there was always something good to come home to. But all I do now is work all the time because I don’t want to be alone. It feels as if we broke up.”

Brushing my fingers over her cheek, I tried to wipe away some of her tears. “I’m sorry-”

Alice pressed my hand against her skin. “No! No, I want you to be happy.” She smiled briefly. “And you obviously are. That’s good.” She swallowed hard. “That’s all I’ve ever wanted for you, but I haven’t been without you for this long before. And it- it hurts.” She took in a ragged breath. “I am so lonely and jealous. But I had you for years, and you were miserable. I don’t get to keep you for myself.”

“Honey, I was in mourning. That wasn’t because of you. You’re the only reason I’m sane.”

Her lips quivered as the bitter tone filled her mouth. “But I could have done more. I could have- I should have gone after you again. But you wouldn’t have been satisfied because what we had before was perfect for me. I could have tried to give you the things you need, but I didn’t. I was selfish, and I feel like I’m being punished for it now.”

“No,” I whispered. “I’m not-”

“Not by you. By the universe.” She waved her hand around her head wildly before wiping more tears and snot off her chin with a tissue from a box beside us. “You would never do that to me.” Leaning forward, she smoothed her thumb over my bottom lip to wipe away a tear. “You care about me too much to do that. You’re willing to love someone the way they need to be, even if it hurts you because you know what it’s like to be unloved.”

I hugged her tightly to me. “I’m sorry. I don’t want you to feel this way. I don’t-” I didn’t know what to say. “I am happy with them. More than I ever have been before. But I wasn’t ready for romance before.”

She kept shaking her head. “I know, but I could have started slow.” Alice closed her eyes as she tried to calm herself down. “You deserved that, and you found someone who would give

it to you, even if you weren't completely ready." She paused for a long moment before she whispered to herself, "I don't know what's wrong with me."

"Nothing! Nothing is."

Smiling wistfully, she moved her hand over my neck. "That's not true at all, and we both know it." Glancing down, she licked her bottom lip. "It makes me feel even worse since I like them both so much. They're incredible, Bells. They're both perfect for you. Loving, kind, generous. They are what you need."

"I agree completely," I giggled softly, then swallowed. "But I don't think they mind sharing that much." Bending forward, I kissed her forehead. I took her chin so I could look into her eyes. "I'm sorry I can't be what you need. I wish I could be."

Looking down at her lap, she laughed bitingly. "Same."

"It would have been so much easier for both of us. But neither of us could ever do things the easy way."

"Right," she scoffed as her tears doubled even though she forced a smile. Clutching her tight to me, we rocked for a moment. Her head rested on my shoulder as she whimpered. "I don't want you to leave tomorrow. Yesterday was so good for me." I stroked the back of her neck. "I'm just so... drained. Damn, I need a vacation. A real one where I don't work."

"Then come to LA with us," Jasper whispered as he rubbed a hand up and down her spine. I hadn't even noticed he was awake, but I was so focused on her. "It's okay to need a break and to need your friends." Sitting up, he put his arm around her comfortingly.

She stared at him in surprise. "What about my job?"

"Honey, they can do it all without you. You know they can because they do it when you head trips. You set it up that way. And anything you need to do, you can do remotely for a couple of weeks. You have fallbacks in place if you need to call in sick. You've been working sixty-hour weeks for a decade. Come get some sun and be in videos with us." I pecked her lips. "I'll cook for you. Let's play for a little while."

Alice tried to find another excuse. "What about Patty?"

"Bring her," he said, then shrugged. "We've got that big private jet all for us. There is more than enough room." He took her chin and lifted it up, so she met his eyes as I had done before, but his hand was so much bigger. His thumb brushed against her cheek. "Hey," he cooed, kissing her forehead tenderly. "We won't take her away from you because we want you to be happy too. We don't mind."

Then he kissed her lips. She melted against him for a moment. His kisses could convince a woman to do anything. Everything about Jasper was so comforting, though. It was his special power.

“Okay. Yeah.” Her eyelashes fluttered as she pulled back, trying to catch her breath. “You’re right. I need a vacation. It’s too much. I’m working too much. I’ll lose my mind if I don’t slow down.”

Leaning forward, I kissed her while he was still holding her. We fell back in the bed, everyone exhausted. We snuggled against her with Alice in the middle. She needed cuddles. Just like I did when I freaked out in Washington. His muscular arms weighed her down pleasantly, making her relax against his firm body. Our legs twisted together as we held hands.

“You know, I always knew it was going to happen, but I figured the combination would be different- at least the first time,” I said playfully after a few minutes.

My friend smirked. “I was going to pounce all three of you, but I’m not disappointed with how last night went. Better than I was planning.”

“And what was your plan exactly?” Jasper questioned, his tone joking.

“Get you high and drunk and rub against you until someone told me to stop, slapped me... or fucked me.” She shrugged her shoulder, looking at him over it.

I smacked her thigh hard. Giggling, she pushed her face into his chest as she rolled over in the other direction towards him. “You could have just talked to us.” She ignored me, pressing her ass against me.

After a moment, she huffed. “I was scared. You know how I am. I’m bad at sex.” She shoved her nose into his pec, breathing in his musky scent. We had quite an aroma about us. It wasn’t good. It stopped none of us. “Ugh, I need to get laid, though. Can we fuck a lot during?” She asked almost innocently as her foot dragged against my calf.

Biting my lip for a moment, I thought about it. “I’m not against it, but we need to talk about something. As much as I love you and always will, I don’t know if I have the energy to give you a long-term romantic relationship, especially if it’s long-distance.”

She shook her head, turning towards me again. “No, no. I don’t- I don’t even want that. Not all the time. Not the way you are. You’re so intense. I love it in short bursts. Honestly, I work too much for that, and I don’t think I can change now. But I miss the benefits of being your friend- the cuddling and nonsexual affection, too.” I pressed my body against hers. “Last night was- wow, though. Like, damn.”

“Mm, yeah. It was fun. Jasper is probably the best lover I’ve ever had,” I admitted. He looked at me in surprise. Glancing away, the admission slightly embarrassed me. “Well, he’s tied for first, anyway. You have distinct skill sets that you’ve perfected, but you’re the best together.”

“I feel rusty.” I laughed at her words. “I do!” She continued.

My hand slid between her thighs. “Well, we can give you a little practice.”

She spread them to allow me better access. “You don’t think Eddie will mind?”

Jasper chuckled as his hand moved over her hip. “He’ll love it. Trust me. He adores you. Are you kidding me?”

I smirked at my boyfriend. “We should just surprise him. He loves them.” Suddenly, I remembered something. “Oh, shit! We’re going to Sydney in like a week and a half.”

“Nevermind then-” she began to shake her head.

“She can come with us.” He shrugged again casually. “Tony can watch Ms. Kitty while we’re away. He won’t mind. She’s low maintenance. Or we’ll take her to a boarding house. We’ll have to do a wee bit of work when we’re there, but it won’t be too much. It’ll be fun.”

The idea made me so excited. We hadn’t gone together since we were teenagers in school for an orchestra trip. “You can see my place there! The one Edward bought for me. It’s incredible! Please?” I kissed her deeply, wanting to encourage her. I combed her thick black hair away from her face. “Come play with me in the sand. I’ll make it worth your while.”

Pouting for a minute, she thought about it. Pushing her onto her back, I straddled her waist. I pecked at her lips, hovering over her body. “Are you sure?” She looked up at me worriedly as her palms skimmed my legs from my knees to my hips. “I don’t want to impose.”

“Yes,” Jasper whispered in her ear, his hand smoothing over her stomach as he settled beside her on his side. Nuzzling her cheek, he peeked up at me with a slight smile after. Lightly, he swirled his nose in her curls.

“Let’s have an adventure,” I urged, kissing the other side. “I need you, too.”

Alice pushed her lips together. The silence hovered in the air for a long second. “Okay,” she finally conceded.

Happily, I giggled, then kissed her again as my hips settled between her legs. “So, can I fuck you whenever I want?”

Snorting, she nodded. "You always could if you really wanted to." Then she pulled me down to kiss me, one of her hands going to my ass. "You know you could talk me into anything."

As we made out, the alarm I set the night before went off. We would have to meet the movers in three hours. It gave us plenty of time to wake up, eat, and get there. I was expecting a hangover. "Let's get a shower together, and we'll go to the apartment. And you can pack."

My best friend smiled. "Sounds good. Let me run to the bathroom first. I'll buy breakfast."

She hopped out of bed, far more cheerful than she was before. My boyfriend pulled me close as the door closed behind her. His nose caressed the nape of my neck, lightly pecking kisses across my collarbone. "Are you sure?" I asked before his lips touched mine. He smiled against my mouth. "The other day you said you were overwhelmed-

He laid his forehead against mine. "Yes, of course! This is different. She just needs some friends for a little while. Something new. I feel that in the very depths of my soul." He pecked my nose. "We can give that to her. And you know our boy loves having friends around him. Real ones, like her. And I already love her to bits too, because of how much she cares about you. So does he. You're her Tony. How could I keep you from her after everything you've done for me?"

My arms wrapped around his neck as I pressed myself to him. "I love you," I breathed before kissing him. He grinned against my lips. It was long and slow, each touch lingering. "Our polycule is weird," I giggled.

Scoffing, his head fell back against the pillow. "Yeah, well, it's called a polycule, for one. Did you expect it to be anything else?"