



Episode Twenty-Nine:

It was well after sunrise by the time I checked into my very expensive suite in the middle of Manhattan. I arranged it to be filled with flowers, wanting to make an impression on Bella. It was just after ten, and I knew that she was probably at her practice still. So, I decided to get her a little gift from the store across the street from the hotel.

It was an antique jewelry store, the whole place stuffed from floor to ceiling with cases and cases stocked with dazzling pieces.

“Hello, hello,” an older man called to me from behind one counter. He dusted his hands off after putting his bagel down, taking a quick sip of his coffee. “How may I help you, young man?”

“I’m looking to get a gift for someone.”

“Oh,” he drew out, nodding his head. “A female someone?”

I glanced up at him for a moment. “Um... Yes,” I nodded my head, looking at my overwhelming choices.

“Wife, girlfriend, mother, or sister?” He asked next.

“Girlfriend,” I replied, stopping at the earrings. I knew that she liked pretty colored stones. Bella had left a pair of purple ones in the bathroom.

“So, a girlfriend but not looking for a ring?” He waved his hand at the case beside me. I kind of chuckled.

“Eh, though I may be ready for that, she’s not. But it’s only been a month.”

“When you know, you know,” he remarked, but then he nodded. “But maybe something else then. Are her ears pierced?”

“Yes. She’s got three in each ear.”

“Well, you should get her three pairs then!” He joked. “So, what kind of girl is she? Is she a classic, or maybe a more modern woman? What’s her style?”

I didn’t even have to think about it for a second. A smile came to my lips. “Unique. She’s an extraordinary woman. And modern.”

“Oh, unique! Let’s see what I have for that.” He looked around for a moment before pulling out a pair of large square cut lime green stones. “These are a carat each. They’re peridot. They’re a unique gem because they only come in one color, unlike say diamonds or emeralds, which can come in a variety of shades.”

I didn’t realize emeralds were any other color but green. Biting my lip, I looked over the earrings that he handed me. They were very pretty and were not unlike the ones she had left behind, simply bigger and probably much more expensive.

“You know what? Yeah, I like them.” I nodded my head swiftly, smiling at him. “I’ll take them.”

“Perfect! Let me ring you up!” He said excitedly, happy to make a sale so quickly.

As he went to register, I began to look at the next case. It was the one with all the engagement rings. Most of them were quite similar, boring even. None of them said Bella to me when I tried to imagine putting them on her finger. I walked past it to the next one. These were more fashionable and colorful. Some were very obviously antiques.

Then one made me stop. The inside was a perfect round diamond, at least two carats, maybe bigger. Wrapped around the edges were dark green emeralds, the border perfectly smooth and rounded as well. The setting was raised and twisted in leafy vines, the band a silver color.

The man came back with my bag and credit card, smiling to himself as he saw me looking at the ring. He brought it out without having to be asked. “This is a very unique piece. It’s four carats in total, the diamond is two and a half, and the rest are the emeralds. It’s from the Edwardian period.”

I sort of chuckled to myself. He gave me a curious look, and I shook my head. "My name is Edward. When I imagine myself proposing, I just can't with one of those," I admitted as I pointed my hand to the case beside us. "Now, something like this... Well, I can see this on her hand."

"Well, you said you were ready!" He encouraged, trying to make another sale. "It's always good to be prepared."

"I think that if I proposed now, she would run for the hills," I quipped, but it was probably true. "She would probably think that I'm nuts since I haven't even told her that I love her yet. She's not ready. But it's nice to dream."

Since I had Bella's address, I decided to head towards her place. I would wait all day if I needed to, just to see her. In the back seat of the car, I was practically jumping in place.

When I got out in front of her building, I smiled when I recognized some of it from Bella's pictures. She had so many from around her home. She was very proud of where she lived. Leaning against the solid brick wall, I took a deep breath and brought out my phone. My hand was actually shaking a little, but that might have been because it was incredibly fucking cold. So cold, in fact, my testicles were starting to painfully crawl into my body.

It only rang a couple of times. "You're up early," my girl started rather cheerfully as a way of greeting. I could hear her moving around in the background.

"Not too early."

"You must have slept well," she replied sweetly. Alice's cat meowed. She was at home. I fist-pumped in excitement silently. It was working out perfectly.

I kept my voice even. "I did indeed. So, what are you up to?"

"I'm going to go to a lunch meeting for CFA in a bit."

"Oh, can I come?" I hopefully asked.

Bella softly giggled. "Sure. They'd love to meet you. But you better hurry, I'm walking out the door right now. We're having Brazilian."

"That sounds great. I'm starving. Wait for me. I'll be there in a second," I joked as I went to stand behind the front entryway.

"Alright, I'll wait for you by the front door. I've got to order a car anyway. It's too cold to wait for the subway. Fucking climate change," she mumbled under her breath. "Here, let me call you back in a second, so I can do that."

"Okay."

Now, I assumed that she would walk right outside to wait for her car, and I could surprise her then. But Bella was smart and waited inside. I could just make her out as she walked into the lobby, standing to one side of the door by a window on the opposite side of me. She couldn't see me. Then I saw her bring her phone up to look at it and go to the door.

She took a step onto the stoop, pausing to look out onto the street for her car. Bella looked stunning, even in her heavy coat.

"You are right. It is too cold."

Turning, her eyes got wider with shock before she shrieked loudly. Then my girlfriend threw herself at me from the steps, wrapping both her arms and legs around me in the process. Quickly, I coiled my arms around her in support, her lips going to mine right away.

"Hey, you called for an Uber?" A man in a newer car called to us, interrupting the moment. "I'm George."

Slowly, Bella slid down to her feet, her eyes looking up at me in almost wonder. I realized that she hadn't heard him. She was too focused on me.

"Yes, we are," I replied with a smile. I ushered us to the back door to open it for her, my hand on Bella's back. She got in, sliding in so that I could get in beside her.

"You said the twenty-first!" She finally spoke again, the shock wearing off. She wasn't unhappy, though.

"I did. But... one of my meetings for Tuesday got canceled last night, so I decided to flake on what I needed to do today. It wasn't that important. That meeting was, but they rescheduled for next month. So, I decided to take a flight out last night last minute," I explained to her quickly.

"What time did you fly?"

"Around ten last night. I got here around seven this morning. I went ahead and checked into my hotel, so I could get cleaned up. I didn't want to ambush you that early," I chuckled. I felt literally giddy.

"I wasn't at home anyway. I was probably already in Brooklyn. It's already been a long day for both of us. Longer for you. Oh, my God, I can't believe you're here," she said she took both of my hands into hers and smiled. The look of wonder was still on her face, just for me.

Then I realized something. "Oh, wait." I took the box from my pocket and presented it to her. "I brought you a gift."

"Now, you really didn't need to do that." Bella bit her lip and slowly took it from me.

Then she opened it, her mouth opening up just a bit in surprise. She didn't say anything, and it made me anxious, so I began to babble. "I'm told these are peridots and that they are an

interesting gem because they only come in one color. Did you know there were green sapphires and diamonds?" I had googled it on the ride to Bella's place from the jeweler.

She nodded her head. "Sapphires and diamonds come in a bunch of colors. When I was a kid, we went digging for diamonds in Arkansas. They find brown diamonds there a lot," she explained as she put in her new earrings right away. "I love them. Thank you."

"You're welcome. You can dig for diamonds?" I blurted out.

"Yup, and it's fun because you play in the mud, then you can go to the water park afterward. They till up the soil every once in a while, and someone finds a karat or two. It's just a big mud field around the Ozarks," she informed me, her words starting to jumble together because of her excitement. I couldn't help but smile.

"Really? That does sound like fun," I replied as I brought her knuckles up to my mouth to lightly kiss. "You look so beautiful. I'm so happy. Is it really okay if I come along, though? I understand if not."

Her smile was huge. "Um, yes! Absolutely. There will probably be another spouse or two there. Probably a kid, too. You just have to buy your own dinner."

"Hm, I think I can handle that," I returned. She thought of me as her spouse. I was her partner. It made my heart thump hard in my chest.

As we walked into the restaurant, Bella held my arm with her whole body pressed against mine. There were a few people already there at the big table. One of them was a woman only a couple of inches taller than Bella with very long black hair and perfect brown skin. Her teeth were extra shiny white as she smiled, contrasting brightly against her dark lipstick. She was holding a very tiny pale white baby.

"Hi!" Bella greeted excitedly. "Nicole, he's beautiful!" She said to the woman who was sitting across the table. There were deep purple circles under her eyes, and she had her chin in her palm.

"Thank you," she murmured tiredly, smiling.

"Who are you?" The woman with the baby asked bluntly in a thick Jamaican accent, looking me over.

"Kebi Petrov, Eddie Cullen." She waved between us. "And That's Nicole." The tired woman curled her fingers at me.

"Oh, you're her new man. We've been watching all of your videos for weeks at the office," she stated with a laugh.

"Instead of working?" Bella snorted as she sat down. She was very close to me, leaning into my side but facing her friends so that she could talk to them.

"I can multitask," she teased.

My girlfriend leaned over to gaze at the baby and sort of sighed, a look of longing on her face. "He's so perfect."

"I want to keep him," her friend replied.

"I think that Nicole might mind that," she countered with a little smile.

The woman holding the baby shrugged. "I'll just kidnap him," Kebi insisted very seriously.

Bella rolled her eyes, then shook her head. "Okay. Who's going to keep him while you're working?"

"I'll hire a nanny," she answered quickly.

"Psh, when you could just let me watch him?" She responded, rubbing a finger over the baby's stomach.

"Oh, that's probably cheaper," the woman agreed with a smirk.

"Bella!" Someone shouted from behind.

There were a lot of greetings after that point. Everyone spoke warmly to my girl, hugging her as they laughed and smiled with her. Then they began to throw a million questions my way.

I wasn't nervous before, but they were making me that way. The excitement of the day had given me a confidence boost. I realized that I needed my mask and swiftly slipped it on so that I could answer anything that they wanted to know.

Everything from how old I was, to my family, to my acting career. Everything was inquired about. Bella didn't really seem to notice them, though. She was focused on playing with the baby while leaning back in my arms.

"I know. Sorry, sorry, I'm late. I know. I'm... me. I don't have an excuse," a woman with wildly curly black hair started as she hurried to the table.

"Don't say you're sorry. Say, thank you for your patience," Kebi insisted, patting the child's back while gently bounced.

My girlfriend sort of smirked as she rolled her eyes. "We lost all patience years ago."

"I know that's right," she snorted back, fist-bumping her for the mild burn.

Clearly, Alice was unamused, making a little face. "Some of us aren't anal assholes who have to be thirty minutes early to- Hey... You're new. I know you," she said in surprise as she pointed at my face.

I stood up from my chair so that I could properly greet her. She was Bella's best friend, and I wanted to make a good impression on her. She had beautiful, very shiny, curly black hair that just went past her jaw. "Your hair is so lovely!"

"Oh, thank you!" She giggled, blushing a little as she looked up at me.

"A couple of my sisters have black hair right now. They get theirs from a bottle, though. Of course, they're still lovely," I rambled nervously with a small laugh as I sat back down.

It was one of those places where the meat came to the table, but there was a big salad bar where you had to make your own plate. Everyone at the table was eager to get their food, except for Bella and Kebi.

"I'll hold the baby while you go get your food," my girl charmingly began in a sugary voice, holding her hands out a little.

"No, I don't mind. You can go."

She pursed her lips and then narrowed her eyes, the sugariness going away as she bluntly stated, "I'll give him back."

Kebi made her own face. "No, you won't."

"I will. He'll start crying at some point," she joked. They stared at each other for a long time before the woman gave in and handed her the baby. My girlfriend smiled in triumph, bringing him to her body to cuddle.

"I want him back," she pointed at Bella before standing up to get food.

I knew the look on her face as she peered down at him. Every one of my sisters had it at one point. Usually, while holding one of my sweet, brand-new nieces. It was so adorable, her expression full of gentleness.

Suddenly, I wanted that baby to be ours. I thought back to the ring at the jewelry shop earlier. But if it was too soon to tell her that I loved her, it was way too early to even think about bringing up the idea of babies.

I pressed a gentle kiss to her cheek.

"I'll go get us something to share."

She grinned, her forehead pressing against mine. "Thank you."

This Episode goes with Episode Twenty-six of Imperfect Pictures.