



Episode Thirty-two:

I knew that I should have been asleep. I was exhausted, but my body was wound up so tightly that I couldn't relax. Bella was against my side, her head resting on my shoulder and her wild hair all around us. It was cold in New York, but we were under a few blankets, so she wasn't bothered. Our nude bodies were tangled together, her hand on my stomach and my arm around her back. There was the sweetest smile on her lips.

I missed her so damn much. Even being around her asleep was terrific. I didn't want to miss a second of it. Gently so as not to wake her, I began to play with her hair. Her smile grew.

The city lights were rather bright outside the glass door. We had forgotten to close the curtains, and it was casting streaks of red, blue, and white over her delicate features. I could actually see her eyes move behind her eyelids, her lashes fluttering in her very deep slumber. She was dreaming.

"Eddie," she breathed my name. I smiled to myself, leaning down to lightly kiss her forehead. Her fingers curled against my stomach, and she sighed. "Edward."

Bella had moaned very quietly and sighed in her sleep, but she had never spoken before. I loved that it was my name. It made me feel special. I wondered if she spoke often or if

she even knew that she did it at all. It was so cute. I pondered what sweet things she was dreaming about. It was obviously something pleasant.

Her breath caught in her throat, her back arching a little so that she pushed herself closer to my side. Her head rolled back onto my shoulder as her lips parted. I grinned, wondering if she was having a sex dream. I had plenty about her, so it was only fair.

“Edward,” she whimpered, pushing her face more into my arm as she did. “I love you. Edward. Edward.”

This time it was my turn for my breath to catch. I wasn’t sure if I heard what I thought I did. She was obviously asleep. Her leg drew up my thigh, her smooth calf dragging over mine as her hand moved up my chest. She whimpered again, biting her lip. Her chest heaved before her mouth pushed together, and her brow furrowed.

“Say it again,” I begged very quietly.

“Eddie.” Bella drew her head back again so that her mouth was uncovered. “I love you!” She nearly shouted in my face.

Laughing despite myself, I could have cried. Honestly, I was so happy. I didn’t care if she wasn’t actually saying it to me out loud. She was dreaming about it. She was dreaming about telling me the words. Just like I had about telling her. In the day and in the night.

“Shh,” I hushed gently, rubbing her cheek lightly with my fingers before pushing her hair back over her ear. Gingerly so as not to wake her, I kissed her forehead again. “I love you,” I whispered. “I will always love you.”

My girlfriend curled more into me, her hand moving to my neck. She tilted her face up and managed to kiss my lips, still very much asleep. “Mm... Edward, love you.” She kissed me again but got my chin. I smiled wildly. “So much.”

“Good. Now, tell me when you’re awake, please,” I chuckled, moving my hand over her jaw to draw her into a kiss on the lips again. She pecked at me three more times.

“Okay,” she answered before rolling over to her side with her tiny body still pressed against mine. Bella reached behind her and groped at my hip in the hopes of getting me to spoon with her, I think. I happily obliged, straightening the blankets around her so that she wouldn’t get cold. “Butt snuggles,” my sweet girl mumbled when we both got comfortable. She obviously enjoyed this position as much as I did.

I laughed a little again. She didn’t like the rumbling because she nestled in deeper, grabbing my arm and tightening it around her waist. She then let out an adorable tiny huff. Her

black curls were literally covering her entire face, her nose barely sticking out of the mess. Carefully, I adjusted it for her. She was smiling as I did.

I brought my lips to her ear. "I love you, too. I'm going to marry you."

She nodded her head solemnly. "Okay." And then let out a tiny snore.

Well, I wasn't going to sleep soon, but at least I was going to have something lovely to think about while I laid there with her in my arms. When I finally did, it was with my face purposefully shoved into her hair so that I could breathe her in completely.

When I woke up, I was alone. Glancing over at the bathroom door, I saw that the light was on. I waited a long time to see if she came out, but after fifteen minutes, I began to worry. Quietly, I walked up to the door. I was going to knock, but then I heard the crying.

When I opened it just for a peek, I found her sitting nude on the edge of the bathtub, weeping with her face in both of her hands. She was almost curled in on herself, her legs shaking.

There was a robe hanging up on a hook on the door, so I grabbed it and gently wrapped it around her so that she wouldn't get cold, at least. Bella pressed her moist cheek against my stomach, so I lightly began to play with her hair in the hopes of soothing her. It seemed to work.

Flicking on the shower, I adjusted the water's temperature. "Let's get washed up, okay? We'll pick up some flowers on the way, yeah?"

"Yeah." She nodded her head slowly, her voice barely an echo in her chest. Her eyes seemed so hollow, red-rimmed, and crusted with dried tears. I couldn't imagine her pain. The thought of losing Bella was torture, to the point where I couldn't even consider it. Her death would be my own.

Slowly, I brought her to her feet. "Then we can do whatever you need to. I wish you had told me, so I could have made sure to be here for you. I would have moved heaven and earth to not let you feel this way alone," I said with a sigh. All I wanted was for her to trust me so that I could help her. In any way that I could.

"You shouldn't have to go through this. It's not your problem to deal with."

That wasn't true in the least. Her problems were mine, too. "Well, that's your opinion, love. It's wrong and stupidly self-sacrificing, but you are entitled to it, I suppose." I reached under the water to see if it was ready for us. It almost was. I heard her scoff beside me, hugging the robe to her neck.

“We've been together a month, Eddie. Just a month.”

I wanted to say, so fucking what? That doesn't change the fact that I love you and want to be there for you. But she didn't know that yet, and it was definitely not the right day to tell her. “That doesn't change the fact that I want to be here for you, whether you think you need the support or not,” I told her instead. “Which you do, by the way. That doesn't make you less strong or capable. You don't have to be the stoic one all the time.” I would have never realized the date was approaching, though it had obviously been weighing on her mind. She was going to hide her pain from me, which I hated.

“Stoic? That's a nice way of saying kind of a cold bitch,” she countered biting, nibbling aggressively at the edge of her thumb.

Her anxiety was making her feisty, but I wasn't going to let it get to me. Or her. I moved her hand away so that I could kiss the red sore spot that she had already created. “Don't do that. It's okay to be sad. You're not a bitch. You're calm and collected, and that's good, but not at the cost of your mental health. Don't keep things like this to yourself. I want to know everything.” I brought my palm to her face, her mismatched eyes worriedly looking up at me. Lightly, I kissed her forehead. Her full pouty bottom mouth stuck out a bit as it quivered, her cheeks blotchy and sticky. I had never seen her more innocent. “And I know this is a serious moment, but I need you to know that when you cry, you stick your bottom lip out, and it's stupidly cute. It gives me feels,” I mumbled with my cheek still against her forehead. She laughed lightly as I hugged her to me. “Something is wrong with me. I'm sorry.”

This was not the right time to be a bumbling moron.

“No, you're the best,” she whispered back.

I decided to take care of Bella in every possible way that I could. She needed to be spoiled so that she could forget about her sadness for even a second.

She barely spoke when we stopped at the store. I could see in her eyes that she was barely coasting by, holding my hand and letting me lead the way when I could.

It was so fucking cold that the ground was rock hard. Even the grass was hardened little spikes. The weather said there was a decent possibility of snow in the next few hours, so it was for the best that we went in the morning. It was just going to get colder.

When we got to the gate of the cemetery, Bella began to walk ahead of me. I kept up easily, my hand on her back. Not looking up as she marched forward, she knew exactly where she was going. I saw his headstone from several yards away. It was already covered with flowers.

She put the autumn-themed carnations in the center of his grave and took a shuddering breath. Bella slowly turned to look back at me. "Is it okay if I have a few minutes?"

"Of course, darling. I'll walk around a little," I answered before I kissed her temple lightly. "Let me know if you need anything."

I wandered to the other side of the cemetery to give her the space she needed. She was sitting on the bench in front of his site. I could tell that she was already starting to cry again. Bella had pulled one of the tissues that I purchased from her pocket and was swiping roughly at her eyes and nose.

Then I spotted a tiny elderly woman in a big fur coat moving up behind her. The lady came to stand a couple of feet behind my emotional girlfriend. She turned and buried her face into her big jacket.

Aiden's Mother, I realized quickly. She was visibly trying to comfort Bella. I couldn't imagine her pain on these days either. He was her son. Clearly, the man was loved when he was alive.

His mother forced her to look up into her face from the bench. They were obviously talking, but I couldn't hear the words because it was so far away. She touched her hand to Bella's chest before my girl shook her head. She looked so young and sad. Almost broken.

All of a sudden, the biggest snowflakes that I had ever seen began to fall in huge white clumps. All I could hear was the sound of the precipitation, thick in the sky. It was almost gentle and peaceful, if not a bit creepy. I continued to watch them carefully, feeling very protective of Bella in a way that I couldn't understand. I knew the woman wouldn't hurt her, I just didn't want her to be more upset than she already was.

After a moment, Bella finally looked up at me and our locked eyes. She smiled just a little. They were both staring at me.

"Come here, young man!" The lady bellowed at me loudly in a thick New York accent. My girlfriend was clearly not expecting it because her hand flew to her eyes in embarrassment.

I walked back to them in a hurry. They were speaking to each other in whispers as I approached.

"Mrs. Esther Zucker, this is Edward Cullen," she gave my introduction when I got close enough.

"Hello, Edward. I'm Aiden's mother," she said excitedly, offering me a dainty hand.

Wrapping my fingers around hers, I shook back with a small nervous smile. "Hello, Mrs. Zucker. It's nice to meet you. Bella has said very kind things about you."

"He's foreign! Are you British?" Her eyes got wider like she was impressed somehow with where I was born. Bella sort of giggled under her breath, looking away.

"I'm from Australia. My dad is Scottish, and my mum is English, though, so I do have a funny accent," I explained.

Then the older woman leaned in and asked, "are you Jewish?"

Bella bit deeply into her lip, trying to hold in her laughter as her cheeks turned red. I had never been asked before.

"Um... No, ma'am," I finally replied, unsure what else to say. I was kind of stunned.

She leaned her head from side to side before nodding. "No? That's okay. Neither is she. We'll take you anyway." Mrs. Zucker put her arm around mine before offering her hand to my girlfriend. "We'll get you two some lunch."

"We've not even had breakfast yet," I admitted. She looked utterly scandalized.

"What? No, that's not acceptable. We can fix that, though. Come on. You two are coming to the house right now."

Bella and I realized at the same time that there was someone standing a couple of yards behind us. It was a rather skinny butch looking woman with short hair, thick black eyeglasses, and a heavy black woolen coat.

Rushing to the girl, my girl hugged her tightly. "Hey! What are you doing back there?"

"I offered to drive Aunt Esther. How are you doing? You look so good!" The woman responded with a smile.

She flushed, unable to take the compliment. "I look terrible, but I'm actually doing really well. I love your coat. Edward, this is Ash. Aiden's cousin. They were really close," she stated as she turned back to look at me.

"He was my best friend," Ash weakly added. "We lived on the same street growing up. He'd love this weather," she told me as she offered me her gloved hand. I shook it and gave her a smile.

"He'd love it inside." His mother complained loudly. "Shall we?"

This Episode goes with Episode Twenty-eight of Imperfect Pictures