



Episode: Forty-two

“Christ, no,” I mumbled. Bella glanced back at me with concern in her mismatched eyes. “Sorry, I have to, or she won’t stop,” I explained apologetically. She nodded her head, looking puzzled. “Hello, Mum. You’re up early today.”

My girlfriend started to cackle meanly, throwing her head back. “Oh, no...” She whispered to herself.

“Hello, Anthony! Happy Birthday!” My mother began loudly in her purposefully over-posh accent. She was putting an effort in to use her nice voice. It felt like a trap.

“Thank you,” I replied weakly. This was the last thing I wanted or needed.

“Are you at home?” She pondered.

“No,” I answered promptly, but she was already talking again by the time it came out of my mouth.

“We’re about to leave on our holiday today! I’m delighted.”

I rubbed my temple, my head already starting to ache. “Yes, I know. I don’t suppose I can call you back?” I asked as I followed Bella over to the shoes. It was quieter over there and had a lot of empty chairs to sit in. I had spoken to my parents the week before about their travel

plans. It was probably the seventh or eighth time. They were good at repeating themselves. Perhaps they just forgot which child they discussed it with.

“No, no, no,” she stated hastily. “You know how shotty mobile service is once you get on the road. It’s better if we talk now. I won’t be able to later most likely, and I have to speak to my son on his twenty-fifth birthday!”

I flopped into the seat, covering my eyes for a moment. “I see.” That was a shite excuse. I wouldn’t call her out right then. Life was too short to argue over stupid things. She was just my mother and wanted to talk to me, I reminded myself. I couldn’t blame her for it, even if she was being rude and ignoring me.

“Are you working? Where are you? At home?”

“No. I’m in New York this week,” I answered sharply. We had spoken about my trip at least twice, and I had talked to all of my sisters, grandparents, and father about it. There was no way that she didn’t know about it. I had even brought it up when she discussed her plans.

My mother drew in a sharp breath as if I had smacked her. “You didn’t tell me you were traveling for your birthday!”

Anger began to build in the back of my skull, but I needed to keep my cool. As if I had to tell her anything in the first place. I was an adult. “Yes. Yes, I did tell you.”

“No, you didn’t!” She spat back, her poshness dropping with her rising attitude.

I wanted to punch someone in the face. Her, preferably. But she wasn’t there. “No. No, Mum, I did. I swear, I did tell you,” I hissed through my teeth. There was no person on the planet that could push all of my buttons faster.

“Are you working?” She asked again, disregarding my tone. My mother had an inability to listen, at least to me. I couldn’t imagine a human wanting to be like that on purpose, but I didn’t think she was that dim, either. Perhaps it was me she had a problem with.

“No, I’m not working. No,” I repeated because I was annoyed. I was getting too old to feel this way. She was sucking all the joy out of my body. “I told you I was taking a vacation for my birthday,” I spoke the words slowly as if she was stupid. Maybe it would help. I was already starting to lose my patience. All the while, Bella was busily looking at stripper shoes.

“Are you traveling with someone or alone?” She said the word ‘someone’ as if it was venomous. She thought I was wildly partying with my friends. But I wasn’t sure why. I hardly did in school.

“Yes. With my girlfriend.”

There was a slight pause. “Girlfriend? You didn’t tell me you had a girlfriend,” my mother retorted.

“Yes, I’ve told you about her.” Bella glanced over her shoulder at me, smirking. Her attention went back to the boxes. She ran her finger over some as she looked for sizes.

“No, you didn’t.”

“Yes,” I stated shortly, interrupting her before she could catch her breath.

She huffed loudly. “No, you didn’t,” my mum repeated.

“Yes.”

“I swear, you purposefully keep these things from me-” She began to rant, but I wouldn’t have any of it. She was out of her damn mind.

“No. No, Mum-”

Of course, she spoke over me. “You didn’t-”

“Mum, I did.” She tried to speak again. “Mother!” I growled her, half tempted to just hang up on her. Pinching my nose, I covered my eyes as I struggled to take a deep breath. If I had a brain aneurysm, I wouldn’t have been surprised.

Bringing a pair of heels over with her, Bella sat beside me to try them on. She pouted her bottom lip a little, a bit concerned for me. My sanity was slipping, so she had a right to be. I was a weirdo who was arguing with my mother in the middle of the porno shop.

“Why? Why must you be so difficult?” Mum demanded. “If we just talked more often-”

Hell, no. We spoke too much, in my opinion. I could have done without hearing her shrill voice ever again. “It’s not my fault you don’t listen to me when I speak.”

“Anthony!” She hissed my name. “Ugh, this is not the right time to discuss this. We will go over this later.”

“Okay,” I mumbled like a fifteen-year-old. That meant nothing. She would bring it up whenever she was looking for another fight. It was just ammo.

She tried to ignore me, making her voice more cheerful. "So, are you free to talk right now?"

"No," I snapped loudly.

My mum paused. My answer confused her. I could almost see the way she turned her nose up. "Are you busy?"

"Yeah, Mum. Obviously, I'm busy if I asked to call you back, but you ignored me. I- I-... ugh, Mum. Please? I really can't talk," I sputtered out desperately, tiring of the conversation. My head was pounding, and my buzz was all gone. I could have used three more mimosas and a joint. This was why I had anxiety.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm shopping. Shoe shopping."

"Oh!" She said excitedly. She loved to shop. It was her favorite hobby. It's probably where I got it from. "Have you found yourself something nice for your birthday?"

"No. Not for me."

Bella finished putting the heels on and examined her feet before standing. Her eyes got big, and she glanced at me. "Oh, I'm almost tall."

I smiled. She was the cutest thing on the planet. Her joy made me forget about my mother for just a minute. "No, darling, you're not," I replied with a wink, teasing her. She prettily scrunched up her nose.

"What, sweetheart?" Mum asked in confusion.

My eyes rolled hard, shaking my head. "I was talking to Bella. My girlfriend." I would never call her 'darling' or any other pet name.

"I swear you've not told me about this person," she mumbled in annoyance under her breath. "Where is she? Hm? What is she doing right now?"

"Yes, I have," I pointlessly repeated. I wasn't certain why I bothered. "She's trying on shoes." I wasn't sure why she asked, either. It wasn't as if I would allow her to speak to her. Anyone else in my family, I would. My sisters, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends would eat her up like candy, but my mother lacked a sweet tooth. I couldn't do that to Bella.

She huffed. "And are you going to be buying her these shoes?"

The questions were only getting worse. I wasn't liking where this was heading. There was an insult just waiting under the surface. I frowned. "If she wants them," I explained slowly.

Obviously, she didn't like that. She made several unpleasant, judgmental noises under her breath. "You should be careful with women who-

I wouldn't let her put Bella down, especially when she didn't know her. "Actually. No, actually. She-

My mother interrupted before I could get the words out. "Is she at least British? Or Australian?"

"Bella is American. She's from Texas."

"Ah," she drawled as if something had left a bad taste in her mouth. "Texas. I see. Interesting. And what does she look like?"

"I'll send you a picture later." Nope, I would not. I had posted photos on my social media. If she wanted to get them, she could work for them. Honestly, the fact that she denied knowing about her was insulting. She knew how to use computers. We were friends on Facebook.

There was a second of quiet. "And does anyone else in the family know about this girlfriend you've gotten all of a sudden?" Mum asked sarcastically. "Has anyone met her?"

"Nana's spoken to her."

"In person?" She questioned in shock.

This woman was a judge. People spent time in prison because of her decisions. I knew she was smart, or at least could be.

I blinked slowly. "No. Of course, on the phone, you daft koala."

My girlfriend began to giggle. "You daft koala," she said to herself under her breath. She was walking around, stretching her arms over her head before looking at me playfully. Her ass looked incredible with the heels, her tight blue jeans giving me pause. Glancing over her shoulder at me, she raised an eyebrow. "Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?"

God, I wanted her. "You're not helping, first off. Second, the only woman I'm kissing with this mouth today is-

"Anthony, did you say something?" She interrupted our flirting.

“No, Mum.”

“Oh, your father just walked in. Would you like to speak to him?” She offered.

The relief was palpable.

“Yeah. Why don’t you put Dad on the phone, so I can say hello to him before you have to go?” Which I hoped was soon. I wished he would drop her off on the moon and leave her crazy ass there.

Bella sat back down beside me to take off the heels. They were incredibly sexy. I put them into the basket with the rest of the things. They would look amazing with any of the thigh highs that we had already picked out.

“Well, well, well!” My father started brightly, his accent thick. It always was when he first woke up. I used to make fun of him and say he sounded like a pirate. “There’s my only son!”

“Hi, Pops. How are you?” I smiled to myself.

“I’m exceedingly well. Thank you! Happy to go out and about on a lovely little holiday.”

“That’s good!”

This was a normal conversation with a parent. “So, how are you doing?”

“I’m very well. Thank you.”

“By the way, happy birthday, my brilliant boy!. Having fun? What are you doing?” He excitedly inquired. We didn’t get to talk that much. Mum usually spoke over us, even on the phone. She must have left the room.

“Oh, thank you! I am having a very good day. Me and my girl are out in Manhattan,” I informed him awkwardly. I couldn’t explain any of the ways we were really having fun.

‘Well, Pops, me and the missus went down to the ol’ toy store where I plan on spoiling her with a half a dozen vibrators at least. Mainly because I want to use them on her while we root around for bloody fucking hours. Should be legendary, mate.’ Nope, I couldn’t even say it to Jasper, and he would have found it brilliant.

He chuckled. “That sounds delightful. Are you going to party tonight?”

“We’re probably going to spend the evening in. I need a break,” I added quickly. My cheeks heated as I lied just a little.

“Well, nothing else matters as long as you’re having fun with your girl, right? Is she taking good care of you?”

I smiled to myself. “Yeah, she’s the best.”

“Good. Well, we need to head out soon. We have a drive ahead of us.”

“Alright, Dad.”

He lowered his voice some. “Do you want to talk to your Mum more?” She definitely wasn’t in the room, but she was somewhere close.

“No, don’t give me back to her. She’s fucking nuts,” I replied with a chuckle, making him laugh, too. Poor bastard. I didn’t envy him. “I’ll talk to you later. I love you both. Bye.”

When I hung up the phone, I closed my eyes tightly and put both of my hands over them. My head throbbed so much.

“Okay there, cowboy?” Bella asked teasingly as she put her thick black boots on.

I looked at her, frustrated. “I swear to Christ, one day she’s going to make me insane. It’s like seven in the morning there, and she’s arguing with me like a bloody lunatic. I am so glad I am on another continent right now.”

Her lips pursed with amusement. “She does have great timing.”

“Right?!” I whined as I stood up before I offered her my hand. I was determined to forget about the conversation. “Okay. Let’s try this again, shall we?”