



## Episode Forty-Seven

Bella had taken her hair down, and it whipped around us as we boarded the ferry. There were only a few people, and most of them looked bored and tired. They were going to work. She took my hand and led me to the balcony so we could see it properly. The sky was already starting to turn purple.

It wasn't as cold as it had been the days before. I was more prepared, even if the long underwear made me sweat my ass off in the club. My girl was chilly, though, not that she would have mentioned it. Wrapping her in my coat, I pulled her close to my chest with my arms around her back.

She peered up at me, a small smile on her face. Bella seemed so content. I leaned down and kissed her sweet lips that still tasted like coffee.

"I had so much fun tonight," she declared in a breath against mine. "I am so glad you could be here for it."

"Me too," I grinned. Dragging my nose across hers, I lost myself in the softness of her skin. I was still tipsy enough to be relaxed. "I like your friends."

"They like you, too."

“I’m so glad you’ll get to meet mine. Jasper will love you. My sisters, too,” I sighed in happiness.

“It’ll be exciting. I haven’t been to Australia since I was a teenager for a school trip,” she answered. “We went to Sydney for a week.”

I pressed my lips against her ear. “I’ll have to show you a really good time.” The Statue of Liberty came into view. Everything was glowing orange behind it. “Wow,” I breathed.

“Do you want to take a picture with me?” She questioned in a sweet voice.

“Absolutely,” I grinned in answer.

First, I took several on my phone before we switched to hers. I held it up in the air because I had such long arms. The light behind us was so beautiful, but it was nothing compared to her smile. She had me kneel in the last few so she could press a kiss to my cheek then lips.

I sent one of them to Jasper on the cab ride to the hotel. Bella had her head on my shoulder, her fingers dragging up and down my thigh as she did. With every pass, they would go lower and closer to my half-hard erection.

“Stunning view, darling,” he replied right away. “Are you staying up all night partying?”

“I only partied for the first part of the evening. Then we went to eat and took a ferry ride. We’re heading back to the hotel now.”

“Did you have fun?”

I grinned to myself. “So much fucking fun. We danced for hours. Oh, lol and a guy who looked just like you hit on me at the club. He had an American accent, and it was a little unnerving.”

“So, you’re saying he was sexy,” he joked.

I chuckled softly. Bella could read my conversation on the phone as I typed. She was smirking. “He was! But he didn’t have that stupid fucking mustache.”

He sent a picture right away of a closeup of said stache with his middle finger up in the center. The words ‘u r a cunt’ were in white lettering in the middle of his forehead. Bella giggled softly.

I slipped my phone into my pocket. "I am a bit of one to him. I hate his facial hair so much."

"Why?" She questioned, scrunching up her nose.

"Because it's part of a character he plays and not who he is. I don't like it. I like the real him."

She shrugged. "It's just hair."

"I realize, but it's what it represents. He started growing it after a nasty breakup, and the bigger it gets, the more he's hiding his feelings."

Bella made her eyes wide, looking away knowingly. "Ah. So, he was appeasing the personal crisis gods?"

I laughed at her way with words. "Exactly. But it's been a while. I guess he likes it. I just always imagine him without it. I don't know, maybe it's me."

We got out of the car and walked into the already busy hotel. I could feel eyes on us as we did. A few tourists looked at me as if they recognized me, but said nothing. Bella didn't notice. She pressed the button to the elevator as she gripped my fingers. We were shoved into the corner with a ton of other people. Her back was squeezed against my chest, and she held my hands as she leaned into me.

She kicked off her heels as soon as she came into the room. "Ow," she whimpered quietly.

I scooped her up into my arms after she got her coat off, so she didn't have to walk. Giggling, hers went around my neck.

"You're so sexy in this," I mumbled as I marched towards the bedroom.

"I'm so gross right now. I need a shower," she answered as she undid the top buttons of my shirt.

Instead of dropping her off on the bed, I took her into the bathroom. Carefully, I sat her down onto the vanity. She crossed her leg over her knees, leaning back on her hands. I went to flick on the water for us.

I returned to her and freed her tie from its Windsor knot. She went back to the buttons on my shirt. Her lip was between her teeth as she watched her fingers. When she pushed it to the

floor, I tossed off my undershirts too. Her cool palms went to my bare skin. The smell of sweat filled the space. She pressed her nose to my heart, deeply breathing me in.

“I love dancing with you. I’ve never had a romantic partner who was a good dancer,” she informed me as she undid the buttons of my trousers. “The way your hips move against mine is so sexy.”

Chuckling, I flushed at her compliment. I worked on her shirt next. As I moved my way down, I could see the red lace of her bra. “It helps when you’re hammered.”

Giggling, her head fell back a little. “Yeah, it does.” She pushed the fabric off her shoulders and onto the counter. She reached behind her and popped the hooks on her bra so they could come free. Running her fingers over her bare skin, Bella’s nipples hardened at her own touch. Then she hopped off the countertop to her feet to remove her pants. She looked me over, her eyes moving from my toes to my wild mane. “Wanna fuck around in the shower?”

I shoved my trousers to the ground, adding it to the huge pile of clothes. Eagerly, I followed behind her.

We crashed so hard. She was asleep within seconds of her head touching the pillow. She was naked and still slightly damp from the water. Her hair was sticking to her skin as she laid flat on her belly, not even bothering with the blanket. I pulled it around both of us, lying on my side close to her with my hand on the small of her back.

My dreams were wild.

We were at the club, but I couldn’t hear anything. I could just feel the beat in my body. The neon-colored lights were frantically moving around our heads. In the center of the dance floor was Jasper. I felt so drawn to him. Suddenly I was standing in front of him, and he was taking my hands. He placed them on his hips as we danced together. He was grinding on me like Bella had.

I pressed my body against him, his back to my chest. My fingers explored his own over his clothes. They slid down his stomach. One of them kept going until I palmed his erection.

The crowd parted as my girlfriend walked towards us. She danced with us with Jasper in the middle. My hand was on her hip, pulling her against him and his hard-on. He kissed her neck, both hands moving over her breasts. She was wearing the same sexy suit.

In my dream, I wanted to be alone desperately with both of them. We were covered in sweat, and I wanted to feel their own drip on my bare skin.

The beat got harder, my heart thumping in my ears. Jasper tilted his head back and kissed me on the lips. Soft, wet, warm, I felt on the edge of ecstasy. Bella's fingers grasped me through my slacks just as his tongue slid over mine.

When I woke up, my girl was curled around me with her hand on my balls. She was dead to the world, and her mouth was hanging open.

I laughed a little to myself and carefully moved it. Almost right away, she tried to put it back where it was. It made me snort. Turning over, I wrapped my fingers around hers to hold it. She smiled as she pressed closer to me. She pecked my nose. With her cheek on mine, I fell back asleep.

When I woke up again, I felt like shit. My stomach was gurgling, and my whole body hurt. The day before, I had been sore when I got up because of all the fucking, but this was worse. Bella was waking up beside me slowly, yawning and stretching with her arms above her head. Sitting up, she sulked when she looked at the clock.

"Damn."

"What?"

"We were supposed to do something today. It's like six, though."

I stretched and popped my back. "Whoops. We can do it tomorrow. It's okay," I promised, touching her thigh. "I'm hungover as fuck."

"Aw," she pouted. She nodded her head and pushed her hair out of her eyes. "Yeah, me too," she admitted. Bella glanced over her shoulder as she pulled one of the sheets up to her breasts because she was getting cold. "Netflix and chill?"

"Yes, please," I replied with a grin. "Room service?"

She got out of bed and went to get the menu for us. When she did, she also got the oil pen for us to share. Taking a big hit, she blew the smoke out in a long stream. Bella stole one of my button-down shirts from my luggage after passing them both to me.

I took a little drag, watching my beautiful girl get dressed. It went down to her calves. She twisted her curls into a wild bun. I couldn't take my eyes off of her.

"Why don't you get your laptop? What do you want to watch?" She questioned, crawling back into the bed.

“Oh. I don’t know.” I gave her the menu so I could do what she asked. I hurried to my bag to get some underwear, picking up my computer. “What are you thinking about eating?”

Bella flipped open the book, biting her bottom lip. “Mm... Cheese,” she mumbled to herself as she ran her fingers over the words.

“Cheese? I like cheese,” I remarked drowsily.

She allowed me to pick a movie from my list and was happy to indulge me. I just selected the first one I hadn’t seen before, Blade Runner. It had been on my ‘to-watch’ list for a long time.

She laid her head on my lap, smoking while we waited for the food to arrive. I hoped as I woke up that I would start to feel better, but I was disappointed. Maybe stupidly, I decided the hair of the dog was just what we needed. I poured us each a glass from a bottle she got me for my birthday.

Since I chose first, I insisted she picked the next one. I wasn’t surprised when she selected a documentary about murder. What shocked me was that I was enthralled by the end.

“Okay, your turn,” she said as she refilled my glass once it was done.

I put on another with a frown. “I hate it, but I need to know what happens next.”

We watched all the shows. There was no justice in the finale. My mouth hung open as the screen faded to black.

“What the actual fuck?!” I demanded angrily as I got up to throw away our second bottle of wine. “So, that motherfucker got away with it? Seriously? Clearly-” I growled brokenly. “They protected him simply because he was a man. And they treated her like she was insane because-”

“I know,” she smirked at me and sighed.

“If there had been a proper mental health care system in place to begin with, they would have seen that she was a victim of long-term abuse. And how the police handled it! It’s just so fucking careless. It can’t be that way when people’s lives are at stake.” She let me go on for way too long about it, pacing around the room in front of the bed. A pretty smile spread over her face, her knees were drawn up under her shirt. “I wish there was something that I could do.”

“Well, you know there are charities for all those things.”

“It’s not enough, though.” I could always do more.

“You’ve already given more than the average person does in a lifetime. Don’t stop now, of course.”

I shook my head. “Money is one thing, but look at how much time you’ve put in. Rosalie was telling me at the show that you helped Alice more than anyone with CfA and that you’ve given thousands of hours to help her. She said you put your career on hold to help Alice get started and that you gave her a lot of the money she needed.”

Her smile disappeared as she got more serious. “Aiden did that. And she got most of the money she needed from her dad when he died.”

“You were married. That was your money, too.”

Bella quickly shook her head. “Not really. I did help her get it started. Worked in the office. Me and Rose were her first leaders. It’s taken years to get it to this point. I’m glad Alice is so business smart because she’s just grown this thing to crazy heights. I don’t do as much as I used to, obviously, though.”

“Alice told me you did five big trips just this year and that you’ve done over thirty-day trips. Sometimes doing three or four a week,” I replied, thinking about one of the many conversations I had with her at Thanksgiving. She had brought it up casually when we spoke about Culture for All.

“To be fair, one trip was overnight, and another was two nights. I did do the long two weeks one this year. We went to Mexico. They needed translators. And, most of those day trips are only two hours long. It’s not entirely out of the goodness of my heart. I do get paid something,” she countered.

“Twelve a bloody hour. Is that even minimum wage here?” It wouldn’t even be enough to motivate me to get out of bed.

She pouted at being called out. “No. It’s fifteen, I think.”

“I thought not.”

Lifting her chin, she squared her shoulders. “But I do get pictures which I can make money off of. Nothing I’ve done will compare to the money you can give. I can see you in twenty years donating the kind of money that eradicates diseases. Or builds schools. Maybe make your own nonprofit to focus on whatever you care about.”

She was right. I loved the idea. We snuggled into bed again, my arms around her. Gently, I petted her curls. "Now that's a goal to work for. I'm glad I know someone who has experience starting a successful charity."

"I'm sure Alice would be happy to help," she said a bit sarcastically. Rolling my eyes, I ignored her. Instead, I kissed her lightly until Bella fell asleep with a smile on her face.