



Episode Forty-nine

I could not believe I got that sick. I had never in my adult life gotten that ill. It was, without a doubt, the worst possible timing. It scared the hell out of me, not because I was on death's door, but I was frightened Bella would get too freaked out and break up with me.

And I had so many nightmares.

She never wavered in her care for me, though. She was gentle and sweet. Whenever I awoke, she would feed, pet, wash, and dote over me as if I was a child. Perhaps I was acting like it. I laid in her bed and watched dumb stuff on the internet when I was able, but the fever made it hard to focus.

It was dark when I woke up after a few days of suffering. A door had just shut, someone down the hall leaving for work for the day. When I looked over, my beautiful girl was sleeping on her couch. She was all curled up in a ball. It was so cute.

Slowly, I sat up. My nose was clogged, but my throat wasn't as sore. I went into the kitchen quietly to get myself something to drink and to take my temperature. It was back to normal.

My stomach gurgled. I didn't wish to raid her pantry, nor did I want to wake her while she was sleeping so peacefully. So I made myself a couple of slices of toast with butter and a pot of green tea. I could taste the lemon and honey in it this time.

Once I finished, I ran to the bathroom to shower for the first time in days. It felt so good to scrub the salt off. The one at the hotel would have been better, but it still felt like heaven. I couldn't wait to get back to it with her. We just had a few days left, and I didn't want to waste them being sick.

I went back into her bedroom to get dressed. She was shifting restlessly. Quietly, she moaned. "Aiden."

I wasn't jealous that she was dreaming about him, but worried about what it meant. I had a feeling that her dreams with him were rarely pleasurable. Her face scrunched up. "Don't," she whimpered.

Lightly, I touched her cheek. I just wanted to soothe her. Slowly, Bella's eyes opened. She automatically sat up and yawned widely.

"Would you like the bed for a while? I'm sorry." I had been hogging it for days.

"I normally sleep on the couch. How are you feeling?" She questioned as she rubbed her palms over her eyes. They dug in deep, trying to get the sleepiness out.

"My temperature is normal again. I woke up hungry, so I got some toast and got washed up. I think I've finally slept enough."

She smiled briefly. "That's good. Would you like to go back to the hotel today? It'll be more comfortable for you there." She yawned again, her eyelashes fluttering as her mouth opened in a big O.

"Yeah. That would be good." I felt terrible about all the stress I had put her through. I needed to make it up to her right away, and I needed to take care of her for a while. "Do you want to go to lunch? We've been cooped up for days now."

"That would be nice. We can go around noon. That would give me time to wash a load of clothes and get ready. Are you craving anything?"

"Mexican, maybe? Or something like that." I wanted something that would clear my sinuses more, and I knew she enjoyed it too.

"Oh. Hm," she drowsily hummed. "Have you ever had Venezuelan?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

She nodded. "Great. I have the perfect place." She lifted her head when she heard her roommate move towards the front door. "Mary Alice, do you want arepas, too?"

Her keys rattled as she fetched her purse. "Yes, please. I'll meet you there for lunch. Text me when you get there."

I laughed at their cute exchange. Finally, I sat down beside her. She glanced over at me bashfully. "It's her favorite, and it's right beside the office." Bella laid her head on my shoulder, her hand resting on my thigh. "I missed you."

"You were in all of my dreams," I flirted with her. It was the truth, even if they weren't all nice.

"Were they good?" She coiled her arms around mine, gazing up at me hopefully.

"Most of them were," I lied. "I had a few nightmares, but I don't think you can have that much medicine in your system and dream normal things. A lot of them were in color." I held her hand, pushing my palm against hers. It was soft and so tiny.

"Are your dreams normally black and white?"

Shaking my head, I glanced down at her. "No... They're normally more muted? Subtle? I just remember a lot of bold colors. Blues and reds. Too much cough syrup. I just remember a lot of the feelings in them, if that makes sense."

"It does." She yawned again. "I'm going to run to the restroom and start some laundry. Then I'll take a shower." Slowly, she stood and popped her back. The couch wasn't good for her spine.

It took her a few moments and some hot water to wake up, but once she did, she fluttered around her room to get ready. Though the laptop was open and something was playing, I was watching her style her hair and paint her face.

It wasn't that cold, and the air felt nice. Bella offered to order a car, even if it was only a quick jaunt, but I declined. I needed to stretch my legs. I knew I had to push myself to feel better. With some effort, I would be back to normal the following day.

The walk took us over a bridge. It was over an old train yard, and the Manhattan skyline was just beyond. Thick fluffy white clouds filled the horizon. The wind felt so good on my cheeks. I couldn't wait to explore all of New York with her.

Then I heard a little click, click, click.

I glanced behind me to see Bella hurriedly taking pictures with a grin. “But I look terrible right now.”

“You’re beautiful, and I want to remember this feeling,” she replied. I flushed as I looked away, unsure of what to say. It gave me hope that eased some of my fear.

“You’re the beautiful one in this relationship. Especially right now,” I informed her as I held out my hand.

Bella messaged her best friend to let her know we had arrived. She went to get a menu for me to study. Everything looked so delicious. Pulled pork, beef, chicken. Lots of cheese and plantains, too. There was also some type of rice and beans. Honestly, even the drink section was too much. I wanted to order everything. Maybe while filming, so I had a good excuse to be a pig.

“So, what’s an arepa exactly?”

“Think pita bread.”

“Oh, so it’s like a sandwich,” I mumbled to myself. “Yum. What kind of beans is it?”

She bit her lip. “Black beans, I believe. They’re tasty on them with the plantains.”

I was lucky Bella was a patient woman. She answered all the dozens of questions I had. Somehow, she didn’t roll her eyes when I just gave up sheepishly. “It all sounds good. Pick something for me. I’m overwhelmed.”

Right away, she knew what she would order for me. “Pulled pork arepa with fried plantains, black beans, and cheese. Garlic rice for a side? Let’s start with some yucca fries and some mini fried empanadas since we have to wait for Alice’s slow ass,” she concluded. It was a ton of food, and I was ready for all of it.

“That sounds perfect,” I laughed at her salty words toward her friend.

“Do you want a Jarrito or maybe fresh juice? I think they have passionfruit and a strawberry one. Oh, and dragonfruit. That’s new.” She made an ‘impressed’ face as she read.

“What are you getting?”

“A fruit punch Jarrito and a café con leche with raw sugar for dessert.”

“Same but the mandarin flavor, instead.” Hot coffee was the perfect way to end the meal. I could have used caffeine, too.

She touched my arm. "Why don't you go sit down and get us a table by the window? I'll order for us." I would have argued with her, but I was already starting to feel drained. My energy levels would need more than a day to get back to normal. I took out my wallet so I could give her some cash to pay. "No, I got it."

I wanted to argue again, but I didn't. She was sensitive about the issue, and I didn't want to push it. "When I feel completely better, I'm going to take you out somewhere really nice." I quickly pecked her cheek before going to find us a table in the sunshine by a window.

Pulling out my phone, I looked at my text messages. I had told Jasper and one of my sisters I was sick, so everyone knew I was ill. Everyone was sending me 'get well' messages. I would save those for later.

Instead, I read the one from my best friend. "How are you feeling, darling?" It was from not long before.

"I don't have a fever, so that's better. I'm out to lunch with Bella. We're getting Venezuelan!"

"Exciting! I've never had that before. Tell me how it is," he responded instantly. Smiling to myself, I missed him terribly.

When I glanced up at Bella, she was happily chatting with the young man at the counter. I couldn't really hear what she was saying, but I could tell it was in Spanish. It was so elegant, the way her mouth moved as she spoke. The boy was louder, laughing at something she said. I understood the word "Beuno!" She giggled in return.

I saw a man walk in the door and go behind her in line, but I thought nothing of it. I looked back down at my mobile to send Jasper another message. "It's got pulled pork and cheese, it can't be bad. Also, we're getting a ton of little fried things for appetizers."

"Oh, spoiling your lady, I see."

I chuckled. "Actually, she's buying me lunch. And yes, I'm very spoiled."

Once again, I glanced up at Bella to check on her. She had twisted around, and her face was furious. "First of all, it says 'Si, Habla Espanol' on the goddamn sign, so you came in here hoping to be all butthurt, you racist piece of shit. Second, you're willing to shove the food down your gob, but we should go back to our country? Sure, okay. I was born in Texas, and it's lovely this time of year, bitch," she said just loud enough for me to hear. Every word was calm.

Damn, she could be scary.

“Sir, you need to leave,” the boy behind the counter replied in English. He pointed towards the door.

“The fuck I do. Let me speak to your manager,” the man growled at him. I couldn’t understand what happened and how it did so fast, but it was clearly escalating.

“It’s his mom. So, good luck with that,” she informed him as she paid. Then she put a whole wad of cash into the tip jar to spite the prick. “Just leave. You’re embarrassing yourself.”

This riled him instantly, his cheeks going red as he screamed in my girlfriend’s face. “Shut your fucking mouth, you ugly wetback. Yeah, I bet you were fucking born in Texas. Did your mama shit you out on the border?”

Fuck. No.

“Really fucking classy, my friend. Been wanting to use that one for a while now?” She hissed back, unfrightened.

I have no idea how I got from the table to stand in front of her protectively. Something in my brain just took over, and I had to be there.

“Oi, mate. The only immigrant in this room right now is me. So, if you have a problem with them, why don’t you take it up with me?”

He waved me off. “I don’t have a problem with you. This is none of your fucking business.”

What a piece of shit. He wasn’t worthy of licking the bottom of Bella’s dirt-covered boots. Anger filled me in a way it never has before. “Why? Because I’m white? Or is it because I’m a male? And though my partner is more than capable of destroying you on her own, I find people harassing someone I love very much my business, wanker.”

The bastard didn’t give a shit what I had to say. “You speak English. If they spoke English, it wouldn’t be a problem.”

“What bullshit, you racist twat.”

Then there was a blur of movement. Everything happened so fast. He moved, as did Bella. She shoved me out of the way as he punched towards me. It landed on the glass case behind us, making it crack. Then my girlfriend kicked him twice before he hit the ground.

She wasn’t kidding about her fight or flight. Holy. Shit. She was maybe a third of his size.

“I told you she could destroy you,” I grunted at the cunt, but he wasn’t awake to hear it.

The police followed her roommate into the building. Alice was confused by what was going on. The cops pushed past her.

“He tried to sucker punch him! And he called me a spic. I’m not even Mexican! Dumb fucker. I’m Colombian! We have security cameras,” the boy squawked from behind the counter. His voice was breaking with the stress.

Everything was happening so quickly. It’s all I could keep thinking. I looked down at Bella. Her eyes were forward, staring blankly at the wall ahead of us. It didn’t seem like she was breathing. I placed my hand on her shoulder gently.

Slowly, she peered up at me. “Honey, are you alright?” She didn’t respond.

The female cop got our attention while the other was dealing with the scum on the floor. “What’s going on here?”

“He got mad because she was ordering in Spanish. They asked him to leave, and he became belligerent. He tried to attack me because I called him a racist. But my girlfriend pushed me out of the way right in time. And she kicked him. Once in the groin and in the face. It was self-defense. It just happened. Literally.” I kept looking at Bella, hoping that she would come out of her daze.

“Ma’am? Is that right?”

“I-” Her mouth hung open for a moment, then she slowly inhaled. “I think I broke my foot,” she finished emotionlessly.

Alice rushed around us. “Eddie, she’s in shock.” She took her hand. “I’m her sister,” she explained to the police. “Bells, honey. Let’s sit down.”

“I can feel some blood in my boot,” she informed the officer sedately. It was like it didn’t bother her at all.

The woman nodded in understanding. “Okay, there is an ambulance on the way, and it will be here shortly.”

Then Bella began to weave. I took her into my arms before she could fall. I rushed to take her to a chair. Placing the foot she used to kick him on the one beside her, I kneeled down to examine her. As I did, the racist shrieked crude insults at anyone in sight.

“Take her boot off,” Alice instructed. I nodded, doing it swiftly. Bella’s socks were thick fluffy white except for the tip that was already saturated with blood. Gingerly, I pulled her socks off to see the damage. As soon as I did, one of her nails fell to the floor. “Oh, Jesus,” she loudly gagged.

At least two of her toes were bleeding. I promptly got some napkins from the table to wipe some of it up. Her foot was swelling.

“Can I get some ice for her?” The young man behind the counter nodded before rushing away to go get it. Bella trembled, her arms encircling her torso tightly. I took off my jacket and wrapped it around her. “Don’t worry, love. It’s alright now.” Her vacant eyes gazed at me. Tears were streaming down her cheeks, soaking the fabric of her shirt. Pressing my lips to her temple, I need the reassuring contact. “It’ll be okay soon.”

This episode goes with episode 33 of Imperfect Pictures.