



## Episode Fifty-one:

Alice texted me questions about the kinds of things she would need. There were lots of different crutches. I told her to get the nicest of the two different styles and the best regular wheelchair. A motorized one would do her little good in New York City.

We snacked for a long time on our meal. Bella saved Alice her lot, putting some of it to the side for her if she knew she liked it. There were a few desserts, and she was sampling them all, though. Flan, rice pudding, cookies, and tres leches cake. It was her favorite. She kept feeding me bites.

She even ate while getting her cast, offering to share it with the doctors and nurses. Alice came in with her bounty.

“Your lunch is here!” My girl spoke in an airy voice as she lifted her hand. “They brought everything.”

They were halfway through the process. One of the nurses laughed. “I guess we won’t need to get you crutches.”

“Nope, we got her covered,” her friend smiled as she rolled the stuff over. The bags were in the seat, the crutches needing to be put together. It made them easier to travel with them. She walked to the box. “Nice. What’s mine?”

“Your sandwich. Some of all the appetizers they sent.” She pointed to another bag. “Cookies and arroz con leche. Half a flan. I ate all the cake.”

“I don’t like it anyway,” she mumbled, looking at her container.

“I know,” she smirked. “That’s why I didn’t feel bad about it.”

“I hate to do this,” Alice said as she glanced at me. “But I need to get back to the office if you’re alright.”

“I’m fine,” she promised, high on the drugs still. She squeaked when they picked up her heel, though. “It’s just tender. I’m in amazing hands. You go back to work and tell everyone hi for me.”

Standing, I leaned over to kiss her forehead. “I’m going to walk her out and run to the loo. Do you need anything?”

“Nope.” She sipped her coffee with a smile.

Alice handed me my credit card with the receipt. I didn’t even look at it. “Thanks,” I breathed. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I just won’t do her any good. She’s great at pretending everything is fine, and I don’t want to break that illusion for her with my panic attack.”

“She will be, though.”

Her face was furious. “Eddie, he had a gun. She talked shit back to a man who could snap her neck with one hand, and he had a loaded weapon on him. That ballsy little idiot will get herself killed one day. I love her, but she needs to learn when to shut the fuck up.”

“No,” I argued. “He had no right to start that.”

“Right and wrong are not the same things as smart and dumb. Tiny girls can’t go around doing shit like that. We get murdered. Do you understand how many of us are assaulted every year? Bella is already one of those women-”

“I know,” I interrupted her. “I know... I wish it didn’t happen either, but it did. I should have protected-”

She shook her head. “No. This isn’t your fault, either. I’m sorry,” she paused to take a deep breath. “Bella is dealing with this by pretending she’s fine. The medicine is helping. But in

a few days, she'll freak out. I know how she works. And I just can't pretend right now. I'll be okay in a few hours, but it's too much right now."

I hugged her. "Don't feel bad. She's alright. I'll take care of her."

"I'm glad you're a better actor than me," she sighed. "You look so tired. How is your fever?" She touched my forehead. "Seems normal still."

"That's something, I guess."

I walked her to the door. On the way to the bathroom, I got a message from one of my sisters. Sasha asked how I was doing, hoping my sickness had gone away. She said she missed me too.

I missed my siblings more than words could say. I wished they were all around to help me. "I'm feeling fine, but we're in the hospital. It's a long story, but a racist attacked my girlfriend while ordering lunch. She kicked him unconscious but broke her foot."

The phone rang. "Are you shitting me?!" She shouted into the receiver. "Tony, what?!"

I leaned against the wall. "Nope. He called her an ugly wetback and tried to punch me. She legit pushed me out of the way and kicked him square in the goddamn jaw then the nuts. He went down like a sack of potatoes. But now we're here."

She gasped. "That's CRAZY. Oh, my god. I have to tell everyone."

"Really? That's what you have to do?"

My older sister snorted like I was stupid. "Uh, yes? This is interesting family news."

I sighed and laughed. "Sasha."

"Are you okay?" She questioned, ignoring me.

"Yeah," I promised quickly, lying. "Just stressed. Bella will be fine, though. She's a tough one. Part of the reason I'm so in love with her."

She softly giggled. "Aw. Well, that's sweet. I'm glad she'll be alright. But even so, her poor foot."

"I need to get back to her. I was escorting her friend out when you texted. She's kind of freaking out, but I think she just needs to process what happened."

"It's a lot to handle," she agreed. "Okay. I love you. Let me know if you need anything."

"Have fun gossiping!" I said sarcastically.

Sasha giggled again. "I will."

Bella was snoozing when I returned. They had finished with her cast, and we were only waiting on some sort of test before we could go. It took forever to come back. It was several hours later when we got to leave. Then we had to pick up her medication from the pharmacy beside the hotel. By the time we were finishing, she was getting cranky. Her foot hurt, and she needed a pill.

"I can't believe you bought me a wheelchair," she fussed as we came into the lobby. I was glad she wanted to come back here. It was more comfortable all the way around.

"You're going to be like this for a while."

"I'll get a walking boot next week. I'll be fine before Christmas," she snapped, then frowned. "Probably."

"It's not like wheelchairs go bad. You can keep it for a rainy day. Or give it to someone who needs it. Donate it. I've already bought it, and I'm not returning it," I told her with my chin in the air. I had thrown away the receipt, anyway.

"This is the worst. Literally, everything I wanted to show you was outdoors and sandy beaches," she whined as she leaned her head back.

"Well, tomorrow we'll take a break to keep your foot up like the doctor said, and then we can go roll around a museum the next. Where it's inside and warm." I didn't want to be outside in the cold, anyhow. The Northeastern nights were bitter, and I did not enjoy them.

"New York is not designed for wheelchair use."

I had thought the same. "Then why don't you come back to California with me until your foot is all healed? It's very accessible," I countered. My house was open, and everything in LA was modern.

"Oh, sneaky. I see. I'll only need a cane by next week. And I still have to work," she scoffed, then rolled her eyes. She was very dismissive.

"Would it be so bad to come home with me?"

Frowning, she glanced up at me. "No... Not at all. But I want to work. I need to. For me."

Money would be an issue with us, I realized. I could take care of her and all of her needs while she was healing, but she would never allow me. It was probably overstepping my bounds as well since we had only been dating for a short while.

“Okay. But the offer is there if you change your mind. Look, just say the word, and I’ll try my best to move heaven and earth to get whatever you want or need,” I promised as we rolled onto the elevator.

“Thanks,” she whispered.

I leaned down to kiss the top of her head, and she rubbed her fingers over my chin.

As we moved towards our room, my mobile began to sing to me. Glancing quickly up at the screen, I realized it was my grandmother. I never ignored her calls. “Hi, Nana.”

“Tell Nana hi,” my girl said with a smile.

The old woman was off right away like a shot. “Hello, my sweet darling. I heard about your drama today. Is your girlfriend well? How’s her foot? Are you with her?”

“Yes, she’s right here. I’m getting her back to the hotel to properly prop her foot up and pamper her.”

Bella gasped almost inaudibly. “She already knows?”

“I texted my sister Sasha.” She had been sending me tons of messages at the hospital after our brief conversation for more information.

“What happened to her? Does she have a boot or an old-fashioned one? She kicked someone in the balls?”

I loved it when my grandmothers said naughty words. It was always funny. I was a child. “She’s got a proper plaster cast to hold her foot still. She cracked the top of her foot. Oh, it was gorgeous, Nan. Right in the jewels. Bastard.”

“Isn’t she a spunky little one! She seems so tiny in your videos.”

“Yeah, she’s a scrapper.”

Bella’s face fell into her hands. “Oh, no. This is worse,” she complained under her breath. “Your family is going to think I’m trash.”

Clearly, she had never been to Australia. "How do you figure that? He attacked you while you were ordering your bloody food, the loathsome toad."

"What's that, lovely?"

"She thinks this is going to reflect poorly on her."

"This is in no way her fault! He assaulted her, and she defended herself beautifully," she fiercely declared.

"That's what I said! Such tosh," I replied as I passed my girlfriend the card so we could go inside.

As I did, I heard my grandpa wrestle the phone from my grandmother. "Tell her outstanding job kicking that right twatter in his bloody fucking face, dear."

Sucking in a breath, I would not laugh and give him the satisfaction. "My grandfather says... Well, I'm not going to say exactly what he said because he didn't say it so politely but good job, dear."

"That's not what I said!" He retorted. "You should tell her I think it's foxy when a lady is feisty."

"No, I'm not telling her that either, Grandpa."

"You don't think so?" He questioned in shock.

"Yes, it is kinda, but you're a dirty old bugger."

My Nan scoffed in the background. "Yes, he is."

"See, Nana agrees. I need to go and get her into bed."

He laughed loudly. "Ha. Good for you, boy! Do have fun, but be mindful of her foot," he cheered. My grandmother told him to stop being filthy.

"No, not like that, you cheeky bastard," I chuckled.

He wickedly snickered before becoming more serious. "I love you, Anthony. Be careful."

I smiled to myself. "Love you, too. I will. I promise. Goodbye."

Bella giggled. "Aw, your grandpa is fun."

“You don’t know what he said.”

Smirking, she brought her thumb up to her lips for a moment. “I can make assumptions.”

“And, you’d probably be right,” I responded as I put my phone down on the table. “But, I’m not going to take advantage of your doped-up state after such a trying day.”

Pouting and fluttering her eyelashes, she whined softly. “Aw.”

I made sure the bed was ready for her before returning to the chair. Carefully, I picked her up. “Alright there, princess. Neither one of us is up for that right now, I think.”

When she was settled in place, I laid down beside her and rested my cheek on her soft thighs. She played with my hair, twisting her gentle fingers through it. Everything that happened that day swirled in my head. It was so much. Too much.

“Like, what the actual fuck, Bella? I don’t understand why anyone would say such cruel things to you. You weren’t even doing anything!” I blurted out.

“It wasn’t the first time, and it won’t be the last,” she sighed, almost bored with the idea.

“It’s not fair.”

“Life isn’t fair. It’s... whatever,” she sighed again. She moved her fingers over my earlobe slowly, tracing it. “I’d like to ask him how he knows ‘where I’m from’ when I don’t even know, though.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“No, it doesn’t,” she whispered.

I glanced up at her and took a deep breath. “I had been thinking of an idea for a video, but I wasn’t sure how you’d feel about it. One of those kits. The DNA ones. But we can do it just for us. But it’s of course up to you...” I stuttered out nervously. “It’s just that I know you’d like to know, but I know it’s a sensitive topic for you.”

“You’re not wrong. I do want to know. I’ve considered doing it before,” she paused and shook her head. “It doesn’t matter where my family is from, really. It doesn’t change anything.”

I moved so I could look into her eyes. “No, it doesn’t. But it bothers you obviously a lot. And, since you don’t have a medical history, you can have your genes checked for certain

markers. I was going to do it with Seth and Tyler but, if you wanted, you could be a part of it, too.”

Bella nodded. “Okay. In December?”

“Yeah, I’ll get the kits, and then it takes a couple of months to get the results,” I breathed.

She smiled a little, dragging her nails over my five o’clock shadow. “It sounds like a good idea for a video.”

“We don’t have to worry about the video part.”

Carefully, she moved her fingertips over my chin with a smirk. “No. We can record it for prosperity,” she said absently. “I bet you’d look sexy as fuck with a beard. A neat one. In a suit. Mm...” She mused, her eyes going over my face.

It made me feel so good that she thought I was attractive too. It did so much for my confidence. “I’ll have to shave for the movie once I get home. I’ve not grown my facial hair since the first year of college. It was patchy back then.”

“Maybe after you can grow it out a bit for me,” she flirted. It was even better that she was thinking about hanging out for the months it would need to get that long. It improved my mood.

“It’s so rough right now,” I stated as I moved my cheek along her thigh. “Can you imagine that with no trousers on?”

She flushed a little, and I realized her nipples got visibly harder. “Mm, yes. Yes, I can,” she groaned the words. Since she liked it, I did it again more roughly. It made her giggle.

“I’d rub you raw,” I mumbled before I kissed her leg.

She pulled on my hair gently so I would look up at her. “You’d die right now, anyway. You can’t breathe through your nose still. You’d suffocate.”

She had a point there. I decided to be silly. It was what she needed. I breathed in deeply. My nostrils sealed almost instantly and whistled. A load of gunk went down my throat. “A worthy death.”

Laughing, she scrunched up her face. “Ew.”

I grinned at her expression. “Do you want to get something to eat, or are you ready for bed?”

“Let’s just go to bed.”

Sighing in relief, I pushed myself up to go fetch all the medicines both of us would need to rest peacefully. “Sounds good.”

**This episode goes with episode 34 of Imperfect Pictures.**