



Episode Fifty-seven:

When I woke up, I was almost positive I was dreaming about the events of the previous night. It was too perfect, too fantastical to even imagine her just appearing in my bedroom like a fantasy. If it weren't for the pleasant weight of her body pressed against mine, I would have convinced myself it was the most vivid vision of my life. But there she was with her head on my arm, and her tiny fingers curled tightly around mine. I rolled so I could press my chest against her back. With a smile, I kissed her temple several times because it was the only spot I could reach. Slowly, she stirred with a slight grin on her face. Bella's eyes fluttered open, peering up at me.

"Good morning."

"You're really here," I said with a quiet sigh. My brain was still too hazy to control my mouth.

Giggling, she twisted around so she could look at me. Her injured foot was in a soft cast and rested over my calf on top of the blankets. She smoothed her palm over my chest. "Yes, I am. I couldn't wait another minute." She lifted to kiss me, her fingertips brushing through my hair. "Merry Christmas."

“Happy Christmas,” I chuckled, weaving my fingers into her curls as I brought her in for another. Then another, and another. My heart started beating faster, the emotions bubbling up in my throat until I laughed. “You don’t know how much this means to me. You coming like this.”

“Mm,” she hummed playfully. “I think I do,” she countered as she wrinkled her nose. “Because I know how much it meant to me in New York.” She pecked my bottom lip, then the top. It was so gentle. Her eyes glanced up at the clock for a moment. “How much time do you have before you go to work?”

Quickly, I grabbed my mobile to double-check. “I’ve got two hours before I have to leave the house.”

She swiftly rolled over onto her back. “And what do you have to do before then?” She began tugging on my shirt. When I sat up, she pulled it off and flung it to the floor without looking.

I grinned. “Just shower.”

Her answering smile was so sexy. She threw hers off too. “Oh, good.”

I barely made it there, but I did with a big ass grin on my face. My hair wasn’t dry, barely combed, and I hadn’t eaten, but I didn’t give a fuck. An assistant hurried towards me, gripping several files in her arms against her chest. “Mr. Cullen! Right on time! Would you follow me?”

“Sure,” I replied pleasantly, trailing behind. “Thank you.”

“Of course!” She glanced over her shoulder. “Can I get you anything?”

“I’d love some coffee, and if there is something like doughnuts. I... uh, overslept this morning,” I lied. “I had to film late last night.”

She understandingly grinned. “Yes, sir. Let me get you set up, and then I’ll get that for you.”

“Perfect! Great! Thank you so much.”

When she opened the door, the director was waiting for me. We were both ready to work.

When I got a break for lunch, I ordered something and sent a text to Jasper. It was a picture Bella had taken before I left. She was sitting on the vanity, wrapped in only a towel. She had just replaced her soft cast after drying off. Her wet hair was over her shoulder, dripping rivers down her chest to the fabric, and she had a pleased smirk on her face. I had my chin

resting on the other shoulder, my hand moving across her stomach. My gaze was on her, grinning like a fool.

“Look who crawled into bed with me last night,” I added after.

His reply was waiting for me when I got out. “Oh, wow!”

“She surprised me! Came right into my bedroom. God, I am so happy right now. She said she couldn’t stand to be without me,” I responded on my walk to the parking lot.

“Aren’t you two quite a pair?” His message was instant.

I chuckled. “I think so. I can’t wait to go home to her again. It doesn’t even feel real. Seriously, I keep pinching myself. I’m so excited. This is going better than I hoped already. It’s so tempting to tell her about my feelings earlier, but I’ve been planning this shit for a month, and I’m going to make it romantic,” I rambled.

“Yeah, stick to romance.”

When I got to my place, I could smell something cooking in the kitchen from the garage-baked goods of some sort. As soon as I stepped inside, I saw fresh food on the counters and shelves that had not been there the day before. She had been busy. Bella was standing in my living room by a small table. She was wearing the tiniest pair of shorts and a tank top that rose just above her belly button. On the tabletop was a short fake tree with lights. It was decorated in a candy theme in a bright variety of colors. It was glittery and full of sparkle.

She beamed when she saw me. “Hi, honey! How was work?”

This was exactly what I wanted to come home to every day for the rest of my life. She looked like an angel with the glowing lights around her body. It was dark outside, and the living room was dim except for the tree. It was quite the effect.

Quickly striding towards her, I pulled her into a kiss with my hand on her waist. She was using a crutch to keep herself upright. Leaning into me, she wrapped her other arm around me.

It took several minutes for me to pull away from her. “Fantastic. Super productive, but I don’t think nearly as much as you.” I glanced around. “Look at this! You did this for me? God, and you must be jet-lagged-”

She shut me up with a kiss. “Do you like it?” She whispered against my mouth.

“Yeah, I do! I wasn’t planning on doing anything, but- I’ve had nothing like this in- I don’t know.” I breathed. My emotions were in my throat. “You’re spoiling me so much.” I laid my forehead against hers. “Thank you, my love.”

She kissed me again with a big smile. "Are you hungry? I made chili and cornbread for you," she cooed, rubbing her fingertips over my jaw.

"That sounds incredible," I responded between kisses. I picked her up, grabbing her by the thighs to do so. She giggled as she wrapped her bare legs around me. Her cane toppled to the floor, but we both ignored it. "Does it need to be eaten right now or...?"

"The longer it sits, the better. It's in the slow cooker," she explained before pressing her mouth to mine.

"Oh, good." I stole her words from the morning before marching us purposefully towards the bedroom.

We didn't eat until a few hours later. Bella was wearing my t-shirt and nothing else as we sat outside with beers and smoked. Her legs were over my lap, and she was fully relaxed. Her messy hair was haloed around her head, curls in every direction. It was so cute. I pulled out my phone and filmed her because I couldn't resist.

She smirked slightly. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing. You're just so lovely." She clicked her tongue, not believing me. Looking away, she took a drag of the joint. "You are." She leaned forward to press a kiss to my mouth before blowing it out as she laid back. "And hot, too."

"The latest in women's lingerie," she teased, wiggling her shoulders for the benefit of the camera. I snickered as I continued to film. "This is so nice. One of my favorite meals with my favorite person. It's too warm to feel like Christmas, but it's perfect."

I chuckled a little. "Actually, this feels exactly like the holidays back home. It might be a touch hotter. Perhaps we'll get to have one there together. Spend it by the ocean."

"Ooo," she drew out. "I like that idea. Maybe next year. We can hang out with your family." Bella smiled at the idea, taking another hit before passing it to me.

"Once you meet my mother, it won't sound so nice," I informed her, making her chuckle. "You'll see."

"I'm sure she's not that bad."

When I scoffed, she laughed louder.

Before we went to bed, I sent the video to my best friend. He replied with only a simple message. "Oh, she'll see."

The next morning I didn't have to be at the studio as early. It gave me time to exercise. Bella worked on our breakfast while I did. She was in this tiny, silk crimson romper. It was short, sleeveless, and she was braless, which made her nipples visible through the fabric. I stopped for a full minute to gawk.

"Hey! Food will be ready in about twenty minutes."

"Do I need to do anything?" I offered, coming into the kitchen. She was sitting on a stool as she chopped vegetables.

She bit her lip in thought. "Can you start the coffee?"

Leaning in for a kiss, I brushed my fingers just over the curve of her breast. "Yeah, I can do that." She didn't look at me, but a smile tugged at her lips, and a soft blush covered her cheeks.

Once the kettle was on the stove, I moved in behind her so I could peck the back of her neck as she worked. Lightly, I trace my nail over the fabric, making her nipple taut. I smiled to myself. "I just want you to know," I whispered in her ear. "I can see through your outfit, and I love it."

She giggled softly. "It's actually warm enough to wear."

"I can't wait to see what you wear when it's hotter."

When I got a break at work, I called Jasper. Bella made me a lunch to take with me. It was chili sprinkled with cheese, cornbread, fruit, and homemade cookies. I lounged in a green room with a microwave, all alone.

"Hey, hey, hey," I said cheerfully when he answered. "Good morning, lovey!"

"Well, hello. Someone sounds a lot happier than they were a few days ago."

Quietly, I laughed. "I can't imagine why!" I took a bite of my cookie. "My gorgeous girl is where she needs to be, in my bed with me, and she's spoiling the fuck out of me. Yesterday, she got a Christmas tree for us and decorated it while cooking me dinner. And she made me lunch from the leftovers. Then, tomorrow, I get to film with her and my friends. The only way it could get any better is if you were here, too. I wish you were."

"Ah, you know I have to work."

"Bah," I complained, taking a sip of my tea. "You shouldn't work on Christmas."

He snorted. "The news never sleeps, and rent is still due on the second. We can't all be celebrities like you and take off for weeks at a time."

"Mmm," I hummed, then blew a raspberry.

"You wouldn't want me there to spoil your break with your girlfriend, anyway!" He snapped back.

"Um, yes, I would! Of course, I would! She's keen on spending time with my family."

"I'm not your family, though. I'm just-"

I interrupted. "Yes, you are. You are my brother as much as you are my best friend. I love you as much as my blood."

He huffed quietly. "I love you, too."

"Are you cross with me?"

There was a slight pause. "What? Oh, no. Why?"

"Why are you so snappy?" I questioned.

"Uh, just have a hangover. Had Christmas dinner with the lads last night," he explained, clearing his throat. "We did a pub crawl."

"Ah," I drew out. "How is everyone? Tell them I miss them next time you see them."

"They're good. I will. Hey, Tony, I need to go back to work. I'm so glad you're in a better mood. I hate it when you're in one of your funks."

"Me too," I agreed. "Have a good day and drink some liquid that isn't liquor, yeah?"

He chuckled. "I will."

When I arrived home, once again, it smelled amazing. Sitting in my car, I took a deep breath with a smile. The first thing I noticed was the addition of fairy lights around my living room. The overhead ones were off, and the beautiful colors blinked in a pattern. She was exactly where I left her, chopping vegetables. But instead of coffee, she now had a glass of wine.

Right away, my arms went around her waist from behind, and I kissed her cheek several times. "Have you been doing this all day?"

She shook her head. "Off and on. I'm prepping stuff for later in the week. And for the party. I don't want to cook more than I have to on Christmas."

"What have you made so far?" I questioned, just wanting to hear her soft voice. I dotted tender kisses on the back of her neck.

"Three kinds of salsa. Mild, super hot, and a green one. I canned them so they'll stay fresh- all vegan for Lauren. I'm going to make hummus, too. I got a bunch of chips to bring with us and Oreos. I know how much she loves those. And I'm going to take other stuff too, but I wanted to get a head start."

"You are so thoughtful. She'll love all of that." I squeezed her middle. "What do I need to do to help?"

Shaking her head, she glanced over her shoulder. "Nothing. I've got enchiladas in the oven. Beef and cheese in sour cream sauce. It should be ready in about ten minutes. I was just prepping some veggies while it's cooking." She leaned back into my touch, putting the knife down as she closed her eyes when I nibbled on the nape of her neck. I traced her nipple through the see-through fabric, enjoying her taste. "Mm," she giggled. "Go get cleaned up, and I'll get you a glass of wine. We don't have time to fuck around tonight. I don't want to burn it, and you'll want this hot and fresh."

I chuckled, finally kissing her lips. "Okay." I pinched one of her nipples before retreating towards my bathroom. It made her squeak. When I looked over my shoulder, she was watching me with obvious desire in her eyes.