



Episode Sixty: Sensitive

Bella whimpered in her sleep, especially whenever her foot moved. She had done a lot the past few days, and it was finally too much. I decided to keep her off her feet as much as possible the following day. We both needed a proper break. I didn't want her to do any more damage and be in pain for our trip.

She also moaned my name, grinning and giggling as she did. It made me beam. I kissed her forehead, and she sighed in pleasure. "Mm, Eddie..."

"Pretty girl," I whispered against her skin. "My love."

She pulled me into a kiss, still fully asleep. It wasn't gentle either. It was needy, her hand in my hair as she took it forcefully. I let her do whatever she wanted happily. Then she rolled over, so we were spooning, with a soft whine.

I adjusted the covers around her to make sure she was comfortable before drifting off back to sleep. When I woke up in the morning, we were in the same position.

Crawling out of bed, I went to the loo before washing up. It was just after seven. I was too awake to relax anymore. So I wouldn't bother Bella while she slept, I took the joints and went into the kitchen. I wasn't really ready to be up for the day, and I hoped they would put my ass back to sleep. Smoking as I searched through the cabinets to see what goodies she had gotten us, I grabbed a banana and a granola bar with a cup of milk before going outside to sit in the sunshine.

Jasper sent me a message in the middle of the night, letting me know his Christmas gifts had arrived and that he loved everything I had gotten him. Art supplies, new video games, and a couple of nice controllers- one for each system he had, both professional ones used in E-sports.

"I'm glad! Just promise to draw me a picture."

My phone rang, making me smile. It was around midnight there. It didn't surprise me he was awake. "What should I draw you, darling?"

"Oo," I drew out, taking a drag. "That's tough. Whatever you want. I trust your taste. Maybe something to put on my office wall."

"I can do that."

Then an idea popped into my head. "Oi! Or you could draw Bella. You've got plenty of pictures to choose from."

He hummed. "That might be easier after I see her in person."

"That's true," I smiled. "Soon, though! Just a couple of months, and we'll be able to spend time together."

"You're going to be too busy with your family and your girl for me."

"Shut up," I snapped. "We're not going over this again. You are family. We might not be related, but you mean everything to me. I would give my life to protect you- to make it even a little better. You know how much I care about you, don't you?" There was a moment of silence. "Oh, come on! You do. You have to."

He sighed. "I do, Tony. I just hate being alone at Christmas."

"I'd offer to buy you a ticket here right now if I didn't think it would make you mad."

"I know you would. And that means more to me than you know, but I wouldn't want to impose, anyway. You're a totally different man than you were a week ago. Happy and-

“And being around my best friend would make me even happier! Are you kidding me? What are you talking about?”

“You’ve just got enough on your plate without me in the picture. It’s okay.”

I huffed loudly. “You don’t add to my ‘plate.’ Jasper, you are not a burden. To me, or anyone else. What’s with this fucking pity party? You’re not alone. I know I’m not there, but you have people who care about you. Hell, go to my sisters! They love you, too. They’re your family. If you don’t wish to be alone, please call them. Or the lads or the twins. Lu.” I sighed. “We all love you.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” he sniffled with a slight laugh. “I get it. I do. Pity is the right word for it. I’m being a bit of a tosser right now because I need a fucking holiday. Sorry, I didn’t mean to pour this out on you like that.”

“Don’t apologize for needing to talk. You can call me at any time. Please do. I don’t want you to feel like this. You’re not a tosser or…” I trailed off, rubbing my hand over my mouth.

“And see, I’ve ruined your good mood.”

“No, you didn’t,” I argued. “You couldn’t if you tried. I’m just sad that you’re upset and need a shoulder, and I’m not there for you. But all you have to do is say the word and-”

He laughed again. “I know. The big man with all the money will take care of me.”

“It’s not-”

“I know,” he repeated. “This isn’t what I wanted when I called. I am so sorry. I really just wanted to thank you for the gifts and talk to you. They are so thoughtful, and they’re way too much, but I love them. Thank you for caring about me, too.”

I sighed again. “Oh, mate… Of course.”

“So,” he cleared his throat. “Where’s your girl? I hope she’s not listening to this.”

“Asleep still. It’s early here.” I lit the smoke again and inhaled deeply. “We did this extreme, high calorie-burning workout yesterday, and I’m in so much fucking pain right now. My calves are on fire.”

“Ouch.”

Snorting, I tapped the ash out. “Worst still, the bugger, the trainer, made rude comments about Bella to me. Bonehead didn’t realize I was her boyfriend. I’m starting to hate men. Are there no gentlemen in this world? It’s no wonder women are so scared of us. They should be.”

“They can’t all be you, Tony,” he teased. “Not all of us are raised around four of the strongest women I’ve ever met. You were either going to come out a perfect gentleman or totally frightened of girls.”

“Nah, I’m still petrified of them.” He laughed genuinely. “You know I am. If I wasn’t, I would have just gone after Bella that first week like a real man.”

“Eh, it worked out,” he paused. “Anyway, it’s late. I’m going to bed. I have work tomorrow. Have a good day, hm?”

Nodding to myself, I leaned my head back and closed my eyes. “Yeah, lovey. Call me later if you get a chance. Maybe on your break.”

When I crawled back into bed with Bella, she rolled over to snuggle with me with her head on my chest. Slowly, her eyes fluttered open, and she grinned. She licked the corner of her mouth before yawning. “Mm... hey, baby. What do you need to do today?”

I shook my head. “Not a damn thing. I just want to relax with you. I want to order some breakfast,” I mumbled as I kissed her cheek, then her nose. “I want to watch a movie. Or whatever,” I drew out before pecking her chin. She tilted her head back, giving me better access. “How does that sound?”

“Is that all you want to do?” She questioned with a cocky smile as her hand trailed down the back of my shorts then gripped my ass tightly.

Of course, my cock reacted right away. I could never deny her.

I kept her as comfortable as possible all day long, propping her foot up and fetching her whatever she needed. We fooled around more than once. After, with her head on my chest, we watched stuff on my laptop.

When it was getting later in the night, I started a bath for her in the big tub with lots of Epsom salts to help her injured ankle. I could see it was swelling, and there were still loads of deep bruises. She got undressed in the bedroom, taking off her brace and limping towards it. I helped her get in before I went back to relax on the bed.

For the first time since November, I was in the mood to write. I had attempted several times while we were apart, but it went nowhere. I had no imagination left once my depression ran through me.

Bella was quiet for a long time while I typed away. She had one foot hanging out of the tub, the unharmed one. It wiggled and flexed as she relaxed her head back against the lip. She appeared so comfortable.

“What shall we do tomorrow?” She questioned after maybe twenty minutes, finally breaking the silence.

I was in the middle of a sentence, so I continued typing. “You mean you don’t want to stay in bed and continue to be treated like the queen that you are?”

“Do you need to work on anything?”

I shook my head. “Only what I’m doing now. And I’ll be working on it every day for a while.” It wasn’t due until February, so it wasn’t a rush, but it was a priority.

“I’m sorry that I’m keeping you from working,” she said in a soft, almost sad voice.

I glanced over. “You’re not. It’s just something I need to stay on top of. It’s script stuff for a television project. I work it out in my head, then write until I’ve got it all down. And then I have to take a break and daydream all over again until I work out the next scene in my mind’s eye,” I paused my rambling. “That sounds convoluted. Does that make sense?”

Grinning, she nodded. “Yeah, it does. Let me know if there is ever anything you need help on. I’m a pretty good proofreader. I’ve been doing it for Alice for years. She writes a lot.”

Her words made me smile. I honestly would love her opinion, but I wasn’t to that stage yet. “You’re sweet. I might take you up on that offer when I get to that part. You’ll have to be brutally honest and tell me if it’s funny or not, though.”

“I’m not qualified for that last part. Just at finding typos.”

Oh, how wrong she was. “You’re funnier than me. If I had your sense of timing and were half as witty, this would be so much easier.”

“You only think I’m funny because you get to see my tits,” she replied in the driest tone as she shook her head.

“Wait- no. I-” I sputtered before I realized she was just fucking with me. “I don’t know. Let me see them again and check,” I clapped back. It made her naughty grin grow.

Bella sat up and jiggled her breasts as she wiggled her shoulders, biting her lip. Her gaze never left mine.

“Okay, maybe,” I stated wryly.

Laughing loudly, she fell back against the rim. With a playful pout, she covered her chest with her arms. There was a mild blush covering her entire body. “No more boobs for you.”

I chuckled and grinned, putting my laptop to the side. “Aw.” I reclined more comfortably on my side to watch her. This was more fun. “But, boobies. I like them so much.”

“Nope. Too bad, too. They’re warm and soft and all wet. And probably well seasoned at this point because I’ve been marinating in this salty water for a while now,” she joked with a playful smile.

My hands slid over my eyes as I tried not to snort stupidly. Clearing my throat, I peeked at her. “Shall I get you out then?”

“Hm, maybe.” She sat up, then pushed herself upwards after pulling the plug. I rushed towards her. She seemed fine, though. She pointed to the wall. “Pass me the towel.”

I snatched it from the warmer. Carefully, I dried her off. She grinned every time I pressed light kisses on her delicious skin. When the water was fully drained, and I had gotten most of the droplets, I lifted her from the bathtub.

Her arms automatically went around my neck as she laid her slightly damp hair against my shoulder. “Seriously, can’t tell you how much I like this. You’re the only guy I’ve ever dated that could do this on the regular.”

“But you’re so tiny!” I laughed softly, shaking my head. Some of my nieces were heavier. “There are ten years olds who weigh more than you. Are you even a hundred pounds?” She didn’t like my teasing, so she pouted. I knew I was right, so I went to my scale. She loudly laughed again. “Yeah, that’s what I thought. I’d say... ninety-five?”

She pretended to be offended. “I was one hundred and five last time I went. Last week or the week before. Whenever that was.”

In truth, I was worried about how tiny she was. I wanted to make sure she was well-fed and happy.

I laid her down on the mattress then went to get the lotion she used every morning- any excuse to keep touching her. Her eyes rolled into the back of her head with pleasure before fluttering closed at the sensation. She stretched until her arms were above her head, arching her back a little.

“What do you want to do tomorrow?”

She didn’t open her eyes. “Do you need to go Christmas shopping? Or get anything for the trip? I finished while you were working on Monday and Tuesday.”

“No, I’m good. I had a lot of downtime on set to shop online. I might have gone overboard. I did quite a bit of shopping on your page as well. Made that part easier.” I smiled to myself as I thought about it.

“Really?” She said in a small voice. “You could have told me, and I would have given it to you at my cost. I have a code. I gave a bunch to Esther for their Hanukkah silent action for their youth programs at her temple.”

“Well, maybe next time then.”

She looked up at me. “What did you get?”

“Oh, loads of things, actually. I sent a big canvas to a lot of my professional connections. Some of the directors and such that I’ve been working with lately. I sent some to my sisters, too. Because they really liked that one I sent of the beach scene with the sunset and the clouds, you know? I got some more with the cool clouds. And I got some posters of the cute animals for my nieces. The smaller ones. They’re their stocking stuffers from me. The ones that are old enough, anyway. I was thinking about getting some of the postcards so I could start to write to them regularly. They do so love getting things in the post from their uncle,” I babbled as I rubbed her calves with the cream.

“Eddie, that’s so much stuff. How many canvases did you get?”

Slowly, I realized I was getting myself in trouble. “Um... thirty or so? Give or take around that. I don’t remember. More of the posters, though. I got them a few each, and I have six to buy for. The youngest is too little for posters. As I said, I might have gone nuts. I like to spoil my girls.”

Bella flew upwards, the towel still wrapped tightly around her chest. “What? Which size canvas?”

“The biggest. Whatever that is. I don’t remember the exact numbers.”

“When?” She demanded, turning red.

Unable to meet her gaze, I rubbed my hands together because I had so much lotion still on them. And touching time was certainly over. “Um, last Tuesday. Why?”

Tears welled up in her eyes. “Why did you do that, Edward?” She whimpered.

“Are you mad?”

Her mouth opened and closed, looking down at her lap, then at me. “I- Yeah?”

“Why?”

“They’re two hundred apiece! Thirty, Edward. Thirty,” she raised her voice at me the first time.

“Yeah, and I get to write them off my taxes in a month because they’re for work reasons. It’s networking. That’s how that works. I have no doubt it’ll be worth the investment.” When I picked up the bottle again, she snatched it away from me. “I’d rather give you that money than a stranger.”

“How much did you spend?”

I bit my lip for a moment as I looked at her. “There isn’t a number where you’re not going to freak out, Bella. How much do you get from your sales? I know it’s a print as they order type thing.”

“Usually, around seventy-five percent after printing costs. It increases the more I sell, though,” she almost whispered. Her eyes were darting back and forth in thought. Then, suddenly, she balled up her tiny fist and popped me in the chest. “Why’d you do that? I don’t want your damn money.”

She wasn’t trying to hurt me. She was just annoyed. “Ow.” It made me laugh, the spot stinging with pain. I may have loved her, but she was acting crazy. “Because they made for good gifts. They’re so pretty. I don’t think that deserves a smack.”

“I don’t want your money,” Bella repeated, her brows furrowed with her lips pouted out.

“Next Christmas, you can give me the code then,” I said with a slight smile as I shrugged.

She kept shaking her head as I spoke. “I’m going to give it back right now.”

“No, you’re not.” Like hell. I would never accept it. “You can use it to plan our next little trip.”

“Edward, I’m doing fine right now. Really,” she continued with a quivering bottom lip. “You don’t have to give me money. Everything is different from two months ago.”

I wasn’t giving her anything. I was buying products she was creating. She was an artist, and I was purchasing her art.

“I am very pleased to hear that you’re doing better.”

She huffed. “Edward!”

Bella had all the ferocity of a freshly bathed kitten. She didn't have to prove to me she wasn't a gold digger. I believed her. "Stop saying my name like it's going to change my mind. It's your money now. And hey, two months exactly today!" I realized as I was speaking. It made me grin. She looked away, but her nose wrinkled because she thought I was cute. "That's nice. I should have taken you out to celebrate."

Flopping back, she covered her face with a pillow. "You ass. I need to look at my bank app. I don't think I can. Oh, god. My chest hurts."

She was going to give herself a panic attack. "You need to talk to your therapist about your money feelings." I grabbed her mobile for her.

"She needs to up my anxiety medication dosage next time I see her. Christ."

"Agreed."

She peeked at me. "Can you check for me?"

I laughed. "What is that going to do?" She ignored me and put in the information, then handed it back to me so I could see the numbers. "It would probably be helpful to know how much you had last time you checked."

"The bill's checking and my savings automatically get the same amount every month unless I do something to them, so I know how much is in those. It's the other one. It was like twenty-something thousand on Saturday when I bought my tickets. It should be the top one."

Ah, shit. Nope. I was not walking into this one.

"Hm. Oh. Well. I'd like to give you a number that would not trigger your money feels in a bad way, but you can check this yourself to see. So, I don't know what you want from me? Please don't shoot the messenger," I rambled.

"What does it say?"

"Forty-five. Thousand."

She sucked in a deep, shocked breath as her eyes got huge. "No."

I exited the app and put it to the side. "I didn't spend that much, I swear. That's not all me. I spent thousands, not tens of thousands."

A wild hysterical laugh ripped through her throat, but she looked as if she was going to cry. She brought the pillow over her face. "I could take the whole damn year off."

I yanked it away and tossed it to the floor so I could have her attention. "I realize you're not being serious, but... Do it. Move here and make videos with me. You can still do your store. You could be the photographer for the channel and help me expand the content," I blurted out, but the more I spoke, the more right it felt. "We'll go to a ton of amazing places, and you'll have more pictures than you know what to do with. And you can help me pick those places. You're so good at helping me come up with ideas. I swear I'll make sure it's the best decision you ever make."

"It's too soon," she whispered.

"Says who?"

"Me."

"When will it not be too soon? Because I hate this, Bella," I admitted, feeling the emotions suddenly overwhelm me. "I hate not being able to kiss you goodnight. I hate not waking up to you in the morning. Either I need to move to New York, or you need to move here because this is torture. Even if we don't live together, it would be better than this."

She was gazing at me with such a sad expression. "We're going to see each other a lot for a while. And then I figured we could make a quick trip early for our Valentine's. And then we're going to Australia for a full month. Isn't that a good start?" She didn't want to hurt me by saying no. She needed more time.

"It'll never be enough," I breathed.

"You're going to be busy in January, anyway."

It was almost spooky how much she was like Jasper. I just wished it wasn't in this way. "So? Why does it matter? I'd rather be worked to the bone with you here than have a vacation without you."

"You're so sweet."

I shook my head. "No. I'm very selfish. I want you all the time. Alright, look..." I swallowed, hoping she would agree to my next thoughts. "We'll have been together for almost five months when we get back from Australia. If you can still withstand me after and don't hate my family-

Bella put her hand on my shoulder. "I won't hate them. I couldn't. They love you."

Her words made me grin. I hoped that was true. "If it's not too soon, then... Move in with me after? We're going on a practice run in Australia, anyway."

“I’m pretty sure me being here right now is a practice run. That’s all we’ve been practicing.”

“Right. Exactly,” I hastily agreed. “We already know how well we do together. We’re very good at being roommates.” Laying down, I pecked her knee, then rested my head in her lap. I was suddenly exhausted and ready to go to bed.

She sighed softly as she petted my hair. “What if I end up breaking your heart with my craziness before then?”

Lightly, I kissed the inside of her thigh before looking up at her. “It’s yours to break. Whatever you decide, I understand. I just know how much I’m going to miss you when you’re gone.”

“Can I think about it?” She hopefully asked. Nodding, I smiled slightly. She leaned down to kiss my mouth. “It’s not no. It’s just a lot to consider- moving across the country away from my friends and home. But I want you to know that I love it here with you.”