



Episode Sixty-two

I was almost too nervous to sleep the day before Christmas. I felt as if I was vibrating with excitement. It was the day. The day. I was going to confess my feelings to Bella. I was going to tell her I loved her at the place that was our real first date, the LA Zoo. They were doing a light display, and I bought tickets for it early. All I had to do was pick them up at the box office at the front.

When I was in the loo, I sent a message to Jasper that I was going to have a heart attack before the end of the day.

He called me a dumbass and told me I needed to calm down. He wasn't wrong about either thing.

When I slipped into bed, I kissed her awake with gentle kisses. It was early, but I had reservations for a bougie restaurant. Grinning, she stretched her arms above her head. She was nude except for the soft brace.

"May I take you out for breakfast, Ms. Swan?" I asked as I hovered over her. Nodding, she bit her bottom lip. "I've got a table at a place doing a special Christmas meal. And I've got a surprise for you tonight."

"Oh, a surprise, huh?" She lifted to kiss my lips. "Don't you think you've got enough surprises coming up with the trip and everything?"

I still hadn't told her where we were going, and it was eating her up. It was fun to see her try to guess, but she had been nowhere close.

"Nope," I chuckled. "This is just... date stuff, though. It's different. You'll see," I waved her off. "Why don't we get cleaned up, and we can take an Uber?"

"Sounds good." I helped her to stand. "You should at least tell me how to pack."

"There will be mountains of snow. Take from that what you will," I replied.

She nodded. "Okay. Fair."

I scooped her up and took her into the warm shower and placed her on the seat. For the third day in a row, she did her makeup. I really was beginning to love watching her do this simple task. It was extra special when it was for me. It made something swirl in the pit of my stomach, especially when she painted her lipstick across her full mouth.

Bella put on a little red skirt that went above her knees and long thigh high socks to keep the brace from rubbing her skin. They were white and from my birthday shopping trip. Her thin green sweater made it extra Christmas-y. It was so cute. Once again, she did her hair straight.

"Wait, before we go... Come take some pictures with me by the tree," I asked with a big smile.

"Oh! I should get my camera. I should bring it anyway."

"I'll get it," I said excitedly, rushing off to the office where it was sitting on the sofa. I had made sure I charged her batteries for our evening romp.

I passed the bag to her. "I want to take some with my phone, too."

She grinned. "K. Yours first."

Looking around, I pursed my lips. "How should we pose?"

"Sit on the couch... there," she pointed. "I'll sit on your lap. Angle a little that way," she instructed. I did what she said, and she crawled carefully into place. With my arm stretched out, I moved around until I found the best perspective.

First, we smiled with the glimmering tree in the background, the stunning clouds filling the blue sky beyond the mountains. Then she leaned in to kiss my cheek. With her fingers curled under my chin, she turned my mouth towards hers while we were both grinning. She

didn't kiss me, though. Bella just pecked my lips so as not to mess up her lipstick. It still left prints on my skin.

I loved them.

Taking her camera, I snapped more photos of us. She promised to send all of them once she edited them. They were going to be beautiful, and we looked so happy in them.

In the car, she relaxed against me. We were both looking at the Christmas displays as we made our way through the fancy neighborhood. They had gone all out.

"Oh, we should drop by a store. We're almost out of coffee and sugar. We might want that tomorrow," she blurted out as the idea popped into her head.

Nodding, I rubbed my hand over her stomach. I was more interested in her body than anything else. It was rather distracting. "Whatever you want, love." My fingers moved down her skirt to her knee, pushing the fabric up some. It was just enough to expose her bare thigh. Instead of telling me to stop, she nibbled on my ear for a moment before pulling on it with her teeth. She giggled and rested her head on my shoulder.

"A bottle of champagne and a carafe of orange juice, please," I said to the server as soon as we sat, pointing to the one I wanted on the menu. Just like the last time, I needed it for my nerves.

But unlike last time, we sat very close together and flirted and kissed the entire meal. We shared two bottles, making her very tipsy. She was cute and giggly, laughing her way through the grocery store while I pinched her ass and played with her skirt.

When we got home, I pulled her onto the couch, where we stayed for most of the afternoon. The television was on, but we weren't paying attention to it. It was just some nice, old fashioned making out.

Dinner was a grand affair of porterhouses topped with mushrooms, baked sweet potatoes with butter and brown sugar, and grilled zucchini. It was all incredible. She acted as if it was nothing, and it was easy. But skills have a sneaky way of making arduous tasks seem simple. The cherry pie I knew took two days to make from scratch, and it was one of the best I had ever stuffed into my face. I was nervously shoving food into my mouth, but when it tasted so good, it made it easier. She watched me the entire time with a smile.

"So, um... I'll put everything away. Why don't you get ready to go? We're going to be outside, so you may want to put jeans on. I don't want you to get cold."

"Okay," she nodded, standing. "No hints?"

Grinning, I shook my head. "You'll see."

My heart was beating so fast. I couldn't drink because I was driving, but I needed one. Or twelve. But I didn't want to botch this. It had been a perfect day so far. She was happy, and I wanted to keep it that way.

Stick to the romance, I repeated Jasper's words in my brain.

Hurriedly, I cleaned up the small mess we left behind. She had tidied up as she went, and Bella was much neater than I was.

On my Instagram and Twitter, I had posted pictures of our morning. In the message, I wished everyone a happy holiday season. They received thousands of likes. It made me smile. So many commented about how joyful I appeared, including my sisters and grandparents.

We held hands on the ride there while listening to Christmas music on the radio. As we got closer, she sat up and looked around. Her grin grew. She shifted to peer at me with excitement. "Are we going to the zoo?"

"Yeah," I smiled, nodding as I glanced at her. Quickly, I turned my eyes back to the busy parking lot, but I squeezed her leg.

After picking up our tickets, we strolled inside. She gasped softly as the lights came into view. "How beautiful!"

In front of the flamingos, I grabbed her by the waist and took her camera so I could snap a picture of us kissing. She kept giggling, having fun with my flirting.

"You are so beautiful," I sighed in her ear as I took one, making her flush. The warmth spread over her cheeks. After, she pulled me into a deep kiss.

"You make me feel that way," she admitted.

I looked at the results. "Because you are. Promise you'll send these to me too?" She nodded, grinning as she glanced away. I pecked her cheek. "Thank you."

As we moved further in, I became more and more nervous. I searched for my opportunity, but then she gave me the perfect opening.

"Is it okay if we sit for a few minutes?" She asked as she leaned against her cane. "This is a lot of walking on the hard concrete."

“Oh, yeah! Sure, sure.” I bobbed my head nervously. We were coming to the small outdoor area encircled with lights where they were serving treats. Surprisingly, it didn’t have a very long line. “Why don’t you get a seat, and I’ll get us something to drink?”

“Oh, yes, please. May I have a hot chocolate with a lot of whipped cream?”

“Coming right up, beautiful.”

She found a bench away from everyone between two tall palms draped in white fairy lights. I watched her while I waited in line. She looked so lovely wrapped in the glow. When she noticed, she grinned at me.

When I brought her the drink, I sat beside her and took her free hand. I was trying to calm my frantic heart, but I wasn’t doing an outstanding job. She noticed my trembling.

“Are you okay? You can’t be cold.”

“No... I mean, I’m fine,” I babbled. Pausing, I attempted to gather myself. I had a speech, and I was prepared. “The last time we were here, we weren’t together yet. I knew that I had feelings for you. I tried to talk to you the night before, and I guess I wasn’t coming on strong enough, but I didn’t want to scare you off by being too aggressive either. But I wanted to tell you the very same thing then that I want to tell you now.”

Tenderly, she brushed her thumb over my knuckles as she leaned in. “And what’s that?”

“That I’m in love with you. That I fell in love with you the very first second that I saw you. Before I opened the door. Before we even spoke to one another, I was in love with you. I didn’t know that I could feel this way about anyone or that love at first sight truly existed. But it does. And I do. Every day since then, I have just fallen more and more in love with you. Isabella, I love you.”

Her jaw dropped, and a strangled noise came out. She gaped like a fish. Blinking, she stared at me in surprise. “I don’t know what to say.”

Fuck.

Fuck- FUCK, fuCK, FUCKity.

“Damn, is it too soon? I’m sorry. I should have-” I thought- I- Dammit... My brain went into the alarm bell noises from Kill Bill.

She quickly turned to me. “No. No, Eddie. No, it’s not. I’m sorry. I should have started with, I love you, too. You just leave me speechless sometimes. I’m not as good with my words as you are.”

“Really?” I spun to look at her fully. “Do you mean it?”

She giggled. “Why wouldn’t I mean it?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know. It was what I was hoping for, but you threw me off at the beginning, and I think my heart is having a moment.” I laughed hysterically as I tried to keep my chest from cracking open. What a rollercoaster. “Oh, sweet Jesus. My heart hurts, Bella. I love you so much. I’ve been bursting at the seams to tell you this entire time. I was kind of worried I was losing my mind at first,” I rambled in relief.

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know. I literally just met this perfect, perfect stranger, whom I had fully thought was a man until the moment before I peeked out the window, and had a mild panic attack because I realized I hadn’t showered before I was meeting the love of my life for the first time,” I chuckled. “And then I had to try to play it cool and not fuck up my chance with you, which I was absolutely sure I didn’t have any at all.”

She shook her head as I spoke, her eyes rolling. “You’re so dramatic. Well... you played it off very well. I didn’t realize a thing. I just thought you were immensely charming. And I remember how good you smelled that first night, so don’t worry,” she admitted before biting her lip for a second. “When you leaned in to order that first time. You were so close. You had that sexy unshaven thing going on that I seem to like on you now. I don’t know why you thought you didn’t have a chance, though. Silly boy,” she teased as she moved her fingertips over my jaw. I was butter in her hands.

“I’m in no way good enough for you. For your generosity. For your kindness.”

“Try hard,” she complained. She would have none of my self-depreciation. “What are you talking about, anyway? I’m not going to have this argument with you again. First, don’t compare my nonprofit work to your own. At your age, I hadn’t done a tenth of what you have. Second, I’m a cranky bitch. I like maybe five people. You just happen to be one of them.”

I wouldn’t take hers either. “I can name a dozen people off the top of my head that love you and think you’re awesome. Seth, Tyler, and Lauren being three of them. You’re more personable than you feel.”

She looked away as she sighed. “And I like them, too. I really do. It’s kind of an act with everyone else, though. But I realize I am preaching to the choir with that. We’re both mainly introverts pretending to be extroverts.”

Huh.

“Oh, no. You’re exactly right. That’s why we get along so well, I think,” I laughed softly.

“Probably. And we’re both creative, but in different ways, so it’s always inspiring to be around you,” she continued.

The words struck me, making my heart speed up again for a different reason. “I didn’t realize you felt that way as well, too. I’ve been so vocal about it, I know.”

“Well, I probably am the quieter one in the relationship,” she countered playfully. She wasn’t wrong at all.

Resting my head against hers, I pressed a kiss along her jaw lightly. “Yes, I think I would agree with that. Well, most of the time.” Later, when we got home, I was going to make her scream. That was a guarantee.

She bit her bottom lip for a moment before peeking at me from underneath her thick eyelashes. “Was it really love at first sight? I don’t think that’s even possible.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Lust at first sight, maybe,” she teased in a mischievous voice.

“It can be both.” I stooped in so I could whisper in her ear. “You really can’t have one without the other, I think. Romantic love without at least some lust. I certainly can’t deny being thirsty for you from the beginning. I’ve wanted you more than I thought was possible. But can you really blame me? Our sex has been universe-altering for me.”

Bella had a naughty smirk. “You needed to have better sex.”

“You are not wrong,” I snorted. “I wish I were more experienced for you. I don’t know if I know what I’m doing.”

She made a face before turning to talk in my ear. “You have a massive cock and an oral fetish. And I’ll take determination over experience any day. I’m just glad I found you before you realized your gifts.”

My mind screamed fuck, but for a whole different reason.

“See? And then you say things like that, and my brain just shuts the fuck down. But, really, though? It’s okay for you?” I questioned seriously.

“If your other girlfriends were having more orgasms than me, then they were faking it because I don’t think that’s humanly possible otherwise,” she retorted biting.

“No. They weren’t. I mean, I don’t think they were faking it... at least most of the time? I don’t know. My ex was more of a one and don’t touch me type.”

“It’s different for everyone. I’ve never faked a thing with you. I do have to fake it with Al all the time. It does nothing for me at all,” she continued in the driest, funniest tone. I didn’t know how she didn’t laugh. “All the magic is gone after all these years.”

I couldn’t help it, though. “You’re mean.”

“No. It’s true. You’ll see for yourself one day whenever that threesome eventually happens. There is just no spice left.”

If I ended up having sex with those two women, my heart might not be able to take it. But if she could be funny, so could I.

“I know you’re fucking with me, but I’m not sure how much exactly.”

“Oh, you know this, do you?” She gazed at me, holding my stare, then took a comically long sip. “How sure are you that I am, in fact, fucking with you?”

I tried so hard to keep it together, but I couldn’t. Laughing loudly, I looked away before I peered back at her. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” she replied right away with a radiant smile.

Finally. It was music to my ears.

“Oh, that’s so nice. Can you say it again?” I begged as I moved in to kiss her mouth once more.

Bella beamed as her cheeks turned pink. She leaned in so we were almost touching, but not quite. “I love you.”

“Again, please.”

“I love you,” she stated seriously before taking my face in her hands and pulling me in the rest of the way. It was deep and passionate, her fingers in my hair. We were both panting when we drew apart.

“Shall we continue on now?” I questioned with a grin, nodding towards the trail.

“Yeah, just... Give me another kiss first.” I instantly obliged, and her arms went around my neck. “I love you, Edward,” she whispered when she pulled away, only a breath apart. “So much.”

