



## Episode Sixty-four:

There were a ton of cars already around Tyler and Lauren's place when we showed up. They invited everyone they knew. I hurried to my girlfriend's side of the vehicle, so I could help her stand. She was dressed in her koala pajamas, and I loved it. Honestly, I didn't expect her to go through with it. But they were adorably baggy on her, and she looked so comfortable. I was wearing my new hat, even though it wasn't cold enough for it. I didn't care. She made it.

"I'll come back for the food," I informed her as I shut the door behind her. Nodding, she accepted my hand before she hobbled up onto the curb. She wasn't the most stable, taking a painkiller an hour before. It showed in her jittery movements. "Would you like me to carry you?"

"No," she laughed, then scrunched up her nose as she thought about it. "Maybe..." She trailed off with a smirk.

Scooping her up, I put her on my hip like one of my nieces. She giggled as she twisted her arms around my neck and her legs around my hips. I took her cane in my other hand. The only problem was that she was pushing my sleep trouser down a little. "Here, hold this." I gave it to her so I could pull them up in the back. It made her laugh loudly. "I'm losing my drawers, hang on," I said in a purposely bad southern accent. It got the exact reaction I wanted, making her snicker as she shoved her face in my collar. "Alright, Tiny Tim, let's go."

"Ha!" She barked out as her head fell back. "You should have worn a Steve Irwin costume," she mumbled just as I rang the doorbell. It made me sputter, turning my head away so I wouldn't laugh in her face. Lauren opened the door a second later. "HEY!"

Our friend chortled when she saw us. She was in pajamas, too. This wasn't planned, but I think everyone had the same idea. "I love it so much!"

"So, where can I put her down so I can get the stuff from the car?" I asked, bouncing my girlfriend like a toddler.

She hummed for a second. "Hey, get off the couch!" She shouted at Seth, who was playing video games with his best friend. He was in sweats and a comfortable hoodie, but they were both designer labels because that's who he was. "Make way for the injured woman. Let her put her foot up!" She fussed at him as we followed behind her. He got up wordlessly, his eyes never leaving the screen as he sat on the floor.

Gently, I placed her on the sofa before turning to look at the television. I didn't recognize the game. "What're you playing?"

"Spider-Man," Seth murmured. "I'm playing as Mile right now, though."

I hummed. "I haven't played that. I'll be right back. Bella's made you a load of goodies."

"Yesss," they mumbled in unison. They were like teenagers.

I glanced over at Tyler as I passed him. He was playing a different game on the Switch in his lap. He lifted it up to show me. "Look. Lauren got me the Lite and Breath of the Wild." It was teal- bright and colorful.

"Dope." I patted him on the shoulder. His partner followed behind me to help me with the stuff. It was probably for the best. I needed assistance. She gasped when I opened the trunk. "My girl knows how to overdo it with snacks. All of them are labeled. At least half are vegan."

"Wow!" She breathed as she looked at the stuffed laundry basket. She had also bought them Christmas gifts. "Eddie, she's fantastic. She's so thoughtful." She sniffled and pushed her thumb under her eyes. "It's actually making me tear up a little. Excuse me." She took a deep breath as I rubbed her shoulder. "I just get made fun of because of it, and I get it. Sometimes

vegans are kinda annoying or whatever, but I don't have a choice. I'm allergic to so much stuff and-" She fanned her face. "When someone takes that seriously, it's just nice, you know?"

"She wants to make sure you get plenty of treats. It's Christmas for you, too."

She put her arm around my waist and squeezed me. "You need to put a ring on it, or I will."

I laughed at her words. "I told her I loved her yesterday," I informed her with a grin. "For the first time, so I'm working on it. I even already have the ring, but don't tell anyone that." I didn't mean to share that part. It just came out.

She squealed and hopped in place. "No way!" I nodded. She smacked my shoulder. "That's great, honey! Oh, my god. I'm actually going to cry," she breathed, biting her bottom lip as it quivered. "What is wrong with me? Why am I so emotional?" Lauren looked away and sniffled again through a clogged nose.

"It's that time of year," I chuckled. I brought her into a hug for a brief moment and rubbed her back before pressing a kiss to the top of her curly head. "Happy Christmas, huh?"

"Merry Christmas," she grinned as she pulled away. Wiping her cheek with her palm. "Let's get this inside." Nodding, I picked it up and hefted it to the kitchen. Almost every surface was already covered with lots of good stuff. I began to pull things out so she could put them away. "Do you want anything to drink? We have eggnog, apple cider, sodas, beers, tea..."

"Eggnog. Please. That would be fantastic."

"Alcohol to spike it with is on the counter," she pointed out, one of her hands full as she pulled it out of the fridge.

"Bella, love, would you like some nog?" I asked, leaning out of the doorway to do so. She beamed, nodding quickly. "Bourbon or rum, or what would you prefer?"

Tyler looked up from his game. "May I suggest the pecan cream liqueur?" He lifted his cup.

Her eyes lit up. "I'll take that, just a shot. Don't go crazy."

He leaped up from his seat. "Here, I'll make it for you. I do them extra special." He almost tripped on his feet, catching himself on the arm of the chair. My friend was already half in the bag. His cheeks were so rosy. "Oh, is that homemade candy? Fuck yes, cookies." He popped one into his mouth as he pulled out a shaker like the kind used at a bar.

“Yes,” I drew out with a grin as he handed me the drink. “They’re all amazing, too -even the vegan stuff. Trust me. I have tested it all.” I sipped mine. “Oh, yeah. That’ll do, mate. Thanks.” I took my girlfriend’s cup to her, sitting beside her before I pulled her legs onto my lap.

“Can we open our gifts?” Lauren asked from the doorway with a big smile. She held up hers.

“Yes! Of course. Go ahead,” Bella grinned, raising her mug. “Go get Seth’s stuff, too.” She patted my leg to get my attention, then lifted her feet so I could get up.

She gave them all jams, jellies, and salsa in little jars, which were preserved for later, as well as other candy. They were all thoughtful. Everyone loved them. My gifts to them had been money- lots of it. And some of Bella’s prints from her site. None of them were unhappy with either.

We snacked and drank all afternoon while we played games, some on the television, then cards. It was so much fun. People came in and out all day. They had a ton of friends. My girlfriend sat on my lap almost the entire time, chatting and giggling as she charmed everyone. The more she drank, the more outgoing she became. I could see her being a partier in her twenties.

I could have watched her for days. It was hard to take my eyes off of her. I knew I wasn’t saying much, but I was happy in my own world.

“So, what did you get for Christmas, Eddie?” Lauren asked conversationally, sitting beside us as her husband and his friend duked it out in Mortal Kombat. There was a tournament going on. She was trying her best to be a good hostess.

“Loads of wonderful stuff. Bella got me three different ‘of the month’ club things. Food and liquor. I’m excited,” I chuckled. “She knows me well.” I kissed her cheek lightly. Grinning, she rubbed her fingers under my chin as she leaned into it. “And,” I pointed to my forehead. “It has a matching scarf, but it’s a bit warm for that, but it’ll be perfect for our trip.”

“Oh! That’s right! I remember Tyler telling me about that. You’re leaving tomorrow? Where are you going?”

I shook my head, my smile pushing to one side of my face. “I can’t say, but it’ll be cold. It’s a surprise.”

Bella pursed her lips as she pulled one of my arms around her stomach. “He’s so good at keeping secrets. I can’t keep that kind of stuff to myself. It was hard enough to keep a couple of mine a secret,” she giggled before brushing her nose against my jaw.

Lauren grinned. “And what did he get you?”

She pointed to the hood which was over her head, her curly hair pushing out the sides, then she showed our friend her right hand. “The big one. The little one was from my grandmother. Isn’t it beautiful?” Nodding, she brought it close to her eyes. Bella was gazing at me with a radiant smile. “He also got me this amazing camera lens that I’ve seriously always wanted but couldn’t afford, and a laptop. He spoiled me.” She pressed her hand against mine. “I feel bad. I didn’t get him nearly enough.” She pouted out her full bottom lip.

“Hey!” I laughed. “That last one would have been enough on its own,” I said before pressing a kiss to her temple. Curious, she was looking at us with raised eyebrows. “She gave me some gorgeous photos.” They didn’t need to know what they were. Smirking, she pulled my chin over so she could peck my lips. The look in her eyes was so sexy. My hand slid across her stomach, pulling her tight to me. She giggled, leaning her head back against my shoulder.

“Oh, what kind of pictures?” Lauren teased as she leaned forward.

Bending in, she lowered her voice. “Exactly the kind you’re thinking.” Her mouth formed a little O before they high-fived.

“Are they the size of the canvas you gave us?” Seth asked sarcastically.

I barked out a laugh. “I wish. No, actually, these are better. She’s acting like they’re raunchy, and they’re not. They’re tasteful and meaningful.”

“And what kind of meaning can nudes have?” Tyler dryly inquired without looking away from the screen.

She laid her hand on top of mine on her belly again, resting her cheek against my jaw. “He took them on his birthday. And they’re not... all nude. Most aren’t,” she smirked, then giggled wickedly. “And it’s proof that I’m in love with him because I wouldn’t give that to anyone else.”

A smile stretched across my face that pulled at my cheeks. I pushed my nose into her neck for a moment before kissing it. She tugged me to her for a very sweet, eggnog-y kiss. There was cinnamon on her lips.

“That must make shopping easier,” Lauren spoke into her drink. Bella nodded in agreement. It was purposefully funny, too big and dramatic.

I couldn’t help but laugh. “If she wants to give me that every birthday and Christmas, I am more than okay with that. Seriously, you don’t have to get me anything else.” It made her snicker, looking away from me. Her cheeks were bright red.

“Okay, wait twenty years, and you won’t be saying that.”

“Yes, I will,” I promised in a whisper before kissing her temple. “Even in sixty years.”

She rolled her eyes, but her smile was so sweet, her skin still sizzling pink.

Bella fell asleep on the ride home. My friends kept her nice and toasty, though. Carefully, I brought her to her feet in the garage before scooping her up like a princess. With a half-lidded gaze and a slight grin, she relaxed her head against my shoulder. I laid her on the edge of the bed before moving her suitcase into the corner. She finished packing it before we left so it would be ready the next day. Mine was prepared too. Hopefully, what I packed would be enough.

“I don’t even have to get changed,” she said with a smirk, watching me move around the room.

“You’re so cute in that.”

“It’s a little warm, though,” she sighed before zipping it down to just above her belly button. She was wearing a black bra underneath, lacy to match her panties. It made me pause to stare at her.

“Oh, I’m a pervert. Would you take some dirty pictures with that one at some point?”

Laughing, she pulled it open to expose her breast a bit more before moving her fingers down her stomach slowly. “Bra or no bra?”

“Both?”

Lifting up, she tugged it off her shoulders so she could take her bra off and threw it to the side. She laid back, so her pajamas only covered her lower body. We stared at each other for a long moment.

My phone rang. I pouted, but she winked playfully. It was from Jasper. Sighing, I plucked it from my pocket while going to my closet to pull out my luggage to have it ready for the following day. “Hello, lovey. Happy Christmas!” I spoke cheerfully. Though frustrated at being interrupted, I was never sad to talk to him.

“Happy Boxing Day,” he said jokingly. “How was your day, huh?”

I threw off my shirt after kicking off my shoes. “God, perfect. Just fantastic. How was yours?”

“Eh, I worked. So, terrible. Just awful,” he chuckled. “I’m glad you had a good one, though. That’s nice. I saw all those pictures. You look so happy.”

"I am." I pulled off my sleep pants before sitting on the edge of the mattress. Bella crawled to me, still only wearing the lower half. She rubbed her hands over my shoulders, pressing her breasts to my back as she kissed my neck. "Being able to spend time with the woman I love has that effect on me."

"You're going to say that every chance you get, aren't you?" She teased against my skin.

I chuckled. "Yeah, I am." I pulled her arm around my shoulder. "I'm talking to my best mate. Wanna say hi?"

"Hey! Merry Christmas, Jasper!" She sang loud enough for him to hear. "I'm going to get washed up," she mumbled in my ear, pushing herself up off the bed. Just as she got to the bathroom door, she let the koala onesie drop the rest of the way off her hips.

"Damn," I breathed.

"What?"

"She just stripped to her knickers and went to the loo. I think she's about to hop in the shower. And I do believe I will join her if she does," I said brightly. "I cannot wait to tell you about what she's gotten me. Holy shit," I whispered. "This woman. She gave me a bloody book of dirty photos just for me. Remember when I told you about my birthday?"

"Where she let you be the photographer? She made you a book of the pictures?" He scoffed. "Lucky bastard."

I snickered. "Yes, I am." The water turned on. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got to go wash my sexy girlfriend's back."

Huffing, he chuckled at my attitude. "Tell her I said Happy Christmas."