



Chapter Eleven: Against a Tree

“Good Lord above,” Jasper wheezed dramatically as he shoved the second of the massive boxes filled with gifts into the trunk. The back seat was already overflowing too. They were even on the floorboards. “Why, woman?” He put a hand on his spine, pushing his back forward to crack it.

“It’s not that much,” I argued. “They’re just big.”

“You’re so full of shit,” he mumbled under his breath. I smacked his ass as he walked past me to go get some stuff. He wiggled his hips as he went back into the house.

I carefully set the cookies I made on the front seat. They were in decorated boxes. “Some of this is yours! I didn’t buy everything!”

He came back with another armful. “Yes, some of it. Like a tenth of it.”

“It’s a small car, too. It makes it look like more,” I continued.

“Stop trying to justify your insanity, Isabella,” he said in a teasing voice. It was the final load. It barely closed. He shook his head as he rearranged some things. “I’m glad Dad has a dolly. Those keg things are heavy.”

Emmett and Justin were sitting outside when we arrived, smoking cigars and drinking eggnog in wooden lawn chairs. Caroline got him a fire pit, and they set it up for the day. He stood from his chair with the tobacco dangling from his mouth.

“Hey! Are you going to eat toasted marshmallows with me later?” My brother-in-law yelled as they walked to the driveway. His heavy work boots broke acorns and branches under his heels. His red Christmas sweater was beyond ugly, with tinsel and ornaments hanging off of it.

“Um, of course,” I declared sarcastically. “Oo, I brought chocolate chip cookies. We could make sandwiches with them.”

He put one arm around my shoulder. “I love how you think.” He patted it hard. His cheeks were so pink.

“How much eggnog have you had?”

“Uhhh...” He drew out in thought. “Two.” He held up three fingers.

“We also have hot apple cider with Crown in it,” Justin smirked, going around him. “They’ve both got a kick.” He leaned over and looked inside the back of the car. “Good grief! Did you buy the whole mall?”

“All of Fifth Avenue, actually,” Jasper sighed. “Merry Christmas,” he mumbled as he hugged his father. “That smells nice.”

“I got a couple with your name on it,” he promised. “Let’s get these things in the house.”

I went straight into the kitchen to put away the food. Rosalie and Caroline were busily heating the catering they got for the day. She got too much stuff, and it covered all the counters in foil trays. No one wanted to cook, and neither of them was that good at it, anyway. Maybe next Christmas, I could for my family if I had the time. I hoped so.

Mamaw smiled at me. “Hey, baby! Come on in,” she encouraged from her spot at the small breakfast table that took up one corner of the room.

My mother-in-law rushed to me, bringing me into a tight embrace. She smelled of cinnamon and sweet potatoes. She beamed. “There’s my new daughter! I missed you.”

Rolling her eyes, Rosalie shook her head. She didn’t look up for her task. “You’d miss us even if you saw us every day.”

She looked over her shoulder, scrunching up her nose. "Not every day. Maybe every other day."

I giggled softly at their exchange. "So, would you like one of your presents early?"

She turned her attention back to me. "Oh, baby, we can wait until everyone opens them. That's okay," she smiled as she patted my hand.

Pulling a flash drive with a red ribbon tied to it from my purse, I dangled it in front of my face. I swayed it back and forth. "Are you sure? You really, really certain you don't want this right now? Because I think you do."

Her eyes got big as she snatched it from my grip. "Your wedding pictures!" She held it to her heart in both of her fists.

"And video."

She instantly began to tear up as she looked down at it again. "We'll watch it after lunch, and then we can open presents. Thank you, sweetie." She kissed my cheek, then rubbed away some of her bright pink lipstick with her thumb.

"We haven't watched it yet, but the pictures are amazing," I told her. Jasper came into the kitchen. I turned to gaze at him. "I've never seen your son happier to take a photo."

"Well, I didn't want to forget a single detail of how beautiful you looked or how overjoyed I was to be sharing that moment with you," he answered smoothly. He went first to kiss his grandmother on the top of the head before hugging his sister.

"Awww!" Caroline and Rose said at the same time. One was sarcastic, and the other was not. I couldn't help but laugh. He smirked at his twin.

She patted his stomach. "I love how you've made my hardass boring brother just the softest-

"Hey!" He interrupted her. "I am not, nor was I ever, boring. Just because we have different interests-

"Both of you stop it," their mother said over them. She looked at her daughter. "Don't be sassy." Next, she gazed at Jasper. "You know to ignore her. They enjoy riling you. You always let them."

Mamaw and I could not stop snickering. They really were children.

“You are not helping,” he scoffed at me, poking my ribs.

“I agree with you, honey. You’ve never been boring. You are the most entertaining person I know,” I spoke in a big voice. His expression became more bemused as his mouth pushed to one side.

“You don’t have to lie,” he grumbled as he went to the fridge to get something to drink. He automatically picked out a beer since we were going to be teasing him. “Eric is a thousand times more entertaining than me, and you two could chat for hours. That screenwriter, too,” he paused as he opened the top. “I wonder if he practiced those speeches in the mirror or if he pulled them out of his ass.”

Playfully, I rocked back and forth with a cheesy grin. “Either way, tell me I’m smart and pretty and give me all the cash,” I mischievously giggled. “I’m going to have to learn to control my ego with all these people telling me how awesome I am. This is why celebrities become monsters.”

“They certainly won’t stop while you’re making them money hand over fist,” Jasper smirked. “Enjoy it, you deserve it.” He meant it. “You’ve worked hard for years for this.”

“You’re the worst all,” I pointed at him. He came to my side and wrapped his arms around my waist before giving me a gentle kiss.

“Yeah, I’m not going to stop either,” he whispered. My husband brushed his nose against mine.

“That honeymoon phase hit y’all like a sack of bricks,” Mamaw declared in a thick Texan drawl. I giggled again, leaning into her grandson happily. “Baby, can you get me a cup of eggnog?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he chuckled.

After we ate, Caroline wasted no time having Emmett set up the video for her on the big television in the living room. She was trembling in place with her impatient joy. Justin sat beside her, putting a box of tissues between them.

The video started with soft piano music in the background. Jasper got out of the limo first and turned to help me stand with a bright smile on his handsome face. I was glowing, and my grin was huge. The wind whipped my curls around my head. I had never been filmed like it before, but it made me look like a princess.

“You’re so beautiful!” His mother sobbed. His father instantly pulled a Kleenex from the box and passed it to her without moving his eyes from the screen. “What a gorgeous setting! Oh!” She whimpered, her bottom lip pouting out. Tears were already pouring down her cheeks.

“You really are lovely,” Rose complimented from her spot on the floor beside her husband. She glanced at me, then back to the TV. “That dress is stunning. I like how you didn’t wear white.”

“Yeah, I don’t think it’s my style,” I remarked as I laid my head on Jasper’s shoulder. We were holding hands too, a slight smile on his content face. He squeezed my palm.

The way we stared at each other made butterflies spin around in my stomach. I had never seen a video of us like that. We honestly didn’t have many photos of us together, either. He wasn’t the type for a selfie. I bit my lip to keep my emotions in. When he said ‘I do,’ I felt my own tears soaking my turtleneck. His thumb moved over my knuckles comfortingly.

“My beautiful bride,” Jasper whispered in my ear. I turned my face to look at him. His eyes were glossy, but he wasn’t emotional. He brushed his fingers under my chin. “Why are you crying?”

“Because I’m so happy,” I breathed. My lips quivered. “I get to watch the best moment of my life over and over again.”

“I am so jealous of you two,” Emmett uttered to himself. “God, that looks so much better. Why didn’t we do that?” He questioned his wife.

“Because we’re dumb,” she replied, then shrugged. “Next time.” He nodded in agreement.

Caroline didn’t like it one bit. “Stop it! Someone needed to have a wedding for me.”

“For you?” The twins said at the same time, both turning in their spot to look at her in shock. They had the same disgusted face.

Justin shook his head. “Hun, you’re not helping yourself.” He handed her another tissue. She took it from him with a frown, blotting her nose.

After the video, we opened gifts, which took forever since we had so many. I wasn’t the only one who went overboard. His sister and mother both gave me a run for my money. The men didn’t understand, but they weren’t unhappy with their loot.

Once we were done, Jasper and I decided to take a walk around their gated property to stretch our legs. He just needed some air, really. His mom was especially weepy. Our steps

crunched the broken brown leaves that littered the ground. It wasn't too cold, but we still needed our coats. The sun was setting, and we would eat dinner soon before watching a movie or maybe playing a game.

"You know," he began, looking at his feet as he spoke. His hands were in his pockets, my arms wrapped around one of his. "Last Christmas was the first time I seriously considered proposing to you. We really do keep coming full circle this month."

I laughed softly. "But we had only been together a couple of weeks."

Flushing, he chuckled. "Which is why I didn't. But Mamaw gave me the ring that night. When I took her presents into her place. She rushed off to get it. I wasn't going to accept it, but she said, 'Well, you're going to marry her, aren't you?' And I knew I was." He sighed, and his breath came out as steam. Shaking his head, we continued to stroll along. "When we got to the hotel, I could feel it burning a hole in my pocket, and I wanted to see it on your finger so bad. Even if it was ugly as hell."

Leaning against a tree, I gazed at him. "I don't know if I would have said yes, even if I loved you with all my heart," I told him truthfully.

"Good. That would have been the sensible thing," he stated sarcastically. It made me giggle. He moved his hand over my chin, making me look into his beautiful blue eyes. "I love you with my entire soul. You were worth the wait."

"I love you too," I replied, pecking his lips. "We're so sappy today," I teased, curling my fingers around his lapels as I dragged him towards me.

"Ah, it's the season for it," he chuckled, kissing my cheek. He leaned his forehead against mine. "Um, so I actually have another gift for you, but I didn't want you to open it in front of my parents."

Wickedly, I grinned. "Oo, is it dirty?"

"Probably only to us." He removed a large, flat square box from the inside of his coat pocket. I recognized the baby blue shade right away. Inside was a chain-link necklace with a heavy diamond-encrusted lock. I drew in a sharp breath. "It's platinum. I wanted to give you a collar you'd be proud to wear out when we play."

My eyelashes fluttered as I touched my heart in surprise. "It's so pretty, but I would be proud to wear whatever as long as it was yours."

"I know," he confidently smirked. "Will you wear it for me tomorrow, Isabella? Can we do a scene out? I'd like to take you somewhere and show you off." I nodded my head eagerly.

Jasper brought me into a kiss, pushing me against the rough bark of the tree. "As always, thank you for your submission," he breathed as his eyes peered meaningfully into mine.

"Hey!" Emmett called to us from the porch at least a hundred yards away. "Dinner's ready!" He waved his arm above his head. "I got the kegerator set up, too," he continued to shout.

My husband pulled away from me with a sly grin on his handsome face. I was already looking forward to whatever he had planned for us the following day. He offered me his hand, palm up. "Shall we, darlin?"