



## **Key Outtake Two: Jasper's Point of View. Safe in the Closet.**

After Bella's birthday, I couldn't stop thinking about one thing... The ring. The ugly little one that my grandmother gave to me the Christmas before. My birthday made me question if we were ready. When the topic of marriage came up, she clearly panicked. It was the worst moment to bring it up, though. And that was my fault. She had been in the submissive mindset for a full day, not something anyone would want to connect to married life. But when she giggled and teased me about having kids someday on hers, I could see it in her eyes- that tiny sparkle. We were talking about time in terms of eternities.

I thought about it so much that I started to dream about it. And not always pleasant ones. My nightmares were mixed with King and her telling me 'no.' The bastard chasing us down was almost as chilling as her walking away silently. But he had no power. And even if she turned me down, she would do so gently and not break up with me in the process. But she wouldn't.

That's what I kept repeating to myself. It was my prayer. She loved me and wanted to be with me. She was proud to be by my side, just like I was to be by hers.

When October hit, I couldn't take it anymore and started to make plans. It was like an itch that never went away. I had to shoot my shot. She was it. There was no better woman for

me on the planet. Caring, tender, devoted, smart, hilarious, and beyond clever. She was breathtaking, and I needed her to be my wife.

Bella ran to the store for groceries after court one day. She needed a few minutes to herself, allowing me the opportunity to make a call. The trial had been tough on her. She was good at blocking out her unpleasant emotions most of the time, either through sleep or ignoring it, but this seemed to slap her in the face. Bree was no longer an abstract thought. She could see the pain her disappearance caused every single day in the mother. His other victims were all real, just like they had always been for me. Until then, it was only another story. The separation made it easier to look at it logically, but you couldn't do that when you saw their faces and when you felt their tears when they hugged you.

My love was an empathetic soul, and it hurt her heart to see people suffer. It's part of what made her so wonderful. She would do anything to help find Ms. Tanner if only to bring some relief to her mom. So would I, not that I knew where to even start. Searching through the files connected to King was like looking through mud- nearly impossible, and it made me feel dirty after.

As soon as my girlfriend left, I dialed my sister's cell phone number. Someone answered on the third ring, laughing. I could hear my mother in the background. "Heyyyy, bro," Emmett called. "What's up?"

"Can I talk to Rose?" I asked briskly.

"Everything okay?" He questioned a little more seriously.

I awkwardly cleared my throat. "Yeah, I just need to ask a favor."

"Oh?" He kept stalling to chat to me. We rarely got to hang out. We were always busy or surrounded by people. "Maybe I can help?"

"Uh, it's a Christmas gift for Bella-" I began to lie.

"Ah, nevermind. You need a woman, gotcha. Here's Rosie," he mumbled as he passed her the phone. My dad laughed in the background. I wasn't sure if it was at the conversation or something on the television.

"Yes?" She asked in a bored tone.

"Hey, is it possible for you to go somewhere private for a minute so I can talk to you about something? I need Mom to not know."

I heard her shift, and the sounds getting quieter. "Yeah. Y'all are loud. I'll be in my room," she informed them. "What do you need?"

Taking a deep breath, I licked my lips as I thought about how to start. "So... I'm going to ask Bella to marry me."

She gasped happily. "That's awesome! When?"

I hummed for a moment. "I was thinking either our anniversary or Christmas. December. But it depends on a few things. Um, but I was wondering if you could help me with something?"

"Absolutely! What do you need?" She was keen, which was great. Rosalie really liked her, as did my entire family. She fit in perfectly.

"Last Christmas, Mamaw gave me her old wedding rings. They're... outdated, to say the least. I was hoping maybe you could help redesign it? I don't even know where to start. You have more experience with these things."

My sister clapped her hands together. "That sounds like so much fun! Oh! Can I get Alice to assist? She has amazing taste."

"Sure. Just don't let Mama know. You know how she is."

"Cool! Got it."

"It's actually in my old room. It's in the safe in my closet. If you want to go get it, I'll give you the code right now."

She giggled, and I heard the door open so she could head down the hall to the next room. "Oh, do you trust me with it?"

"I've entrusted you to construct the ring I will use to propose to the love of my life. So, yes, I think I can," I replied dryly.

There was a long moment of silence. "Uh, wow. When you put it that way," she spoke more seriously. "Alright. What is it?"

"Zero-seven-eight-one." The numbers beeped, and there was a heavy metal sound. Softly, Rose sighed. "What?"

"I thought there would be something more interesting in here." There was a second of shuffling. There wasn't much there. Some files, a couple of important items from my

grandparents, like a watch and a pair of cufflinks. I didn't have many treasures of my own. "Oooo, shiny gun."

"Yeah. It's the one that Dad got me when I finished West Point," I explained. "It's been fired twice. I don't know what to do with it. I don't want to carry it everywhere when I travel." Briefly, I paused. "Do you see the ring box?"

"Yup. I found it." It creaked as it opened. "Ew, it's ugly as fuck. I didn't remember what they looked like. This is terrible."

I laughed. She was as blunt as a hammer. "And that's why I need your help."

"The diamonds are so small," she continued in disdain.

"I'm willing to buy more stones. Price is no object. She deserves the very best," I added hastily. "Make it as beautiful as possible."

"I'll see what I can do. I'll show you the designs first, of course." She hesitated for a moment. "So, you're really getting married?"

"I certainly hope so," I breathed. "Bella is my future. I want to spend the rest of my life with her. I love her with every ounce of my being."

She giggled again. "Aw, you're such a big softie now."

I chuckled too. "Yeah, well... Shut up. There is nothing wrong with being soft." I recognized my girlfriend's steps as she came up the stairs. "I got to go. I'll talk to you later. Thank you for this."

"Of course. I'll call you sometime this week when I'm not around Mom. Have a good night."

"You too," I said, hanging up just as Bella's keys rattled in the door. I hurriedly put it away and came to help her with the bags. Smiling, she accepted my kiss eagerly. She was still in the simple black skirt and button-down she wore to court, her braided hair frazzled. She looked like some secretary fantasy without even trying.

"What's that grin?" She questioned, putting her sacks down on the table before carefully pulling out the items she had purchased. Fruit, salad, and a couple of treats.

I quickly shook my head, embarrassed at being caught. "Just thinking how beautiful you are." Beaming as she bit her lip, her face flushed with her eyes still on the groceries. "You are the most gorgeous woman in the world, and I am so lucky to have you."

Her cheeks got darker. It even made her nose scarlet. "See? This is why I bought you cookies," she stated in a playful voice as she put them in the cupboard. "You're sweet, but I'm a mess right now. I need a shower," she complained as she shook her head. Kicking her shoes off in the corner, she rolled her shoulders to ease some stress stored in the muscles there.

Taking her hand, I tugged her towards the bathroom. "Then, let's go take one together."

A frown instantly pulled at her mouth. "I should make dinner."

I shook my head. "We'll do it together after. Or order a pizza. You don't need to take care of me."

Bella pouted a little. "But I enjoy taking care of you." Finally, she relented and followed as I backed up towards the door. I threw off my shirt, and her eyes raked over my body hungrily as her fingers made quick work of her buttons. She brought her lip between her teeth again, her teeth digging into it deeply. She was so good for my confidence. My scars bothered me in a way beyond vanity, but she loved them because they were a part of me.

"Mm, let me take care of you," I offered as I took over. She put her hands on my cheeks and pulled me down into a kiss. Lightly, she brushed her fingertips down my neck and over my shoulders. She swept them over my stomach before pushing my sleep pants down to the ground. Her shirt fell away with her skirt next.

We made out in the shower, then made love in our creaky bed after. Everything I gave, she returned with as much passion and desire. We could spend hours wrapped up in each other's embrace. It was like a little slice of paradise.

After, I brought her the sandwich I made, and we ate while still nude. She was only wrapped in a sheet. It was twisted tightly around her breasts and thighs.

"This is perfect," she said with a smile, leaning against me. "You know, I know every night won't be like this. You'll have to work evenings once we get back, but I love this. I want to spend every one we can like this for the rest of forever." She took a bite of her turkey and cheese and chewed thoughtfully for a moment. "Though, when we have children, that'll probably stop," she joked.

"I'm pretty sure babies don't mind eating naked in bed. I think they're the masters of that, actually," I teased right back.

She giggled, nibbling on a chip. "How many do you want?"

I shrugged. "Whatever number you want."

“No, no, no,” she laughed with a shake of her head. Her hair was pulled up messily at the top of her skull, bouncing around her ears. “Give me an actual number. Don’t do that psychological non-answer bullshit, Doctor.”

Taking a bite of my food to buy myself time, I chewed slowly. “I don’t know? Two? I guess. One may be lonely, three wouldn’t be bad, but probably a handful. But I’ll be happy with what I get. I never thought I’d start a family. You?”

“Two sounds good,” she agreed. “Heir and a spare,” she smirked. My phone buzzed, and Bella leaned over to pick it up for me. It was playing music on the bedside table quietly. “Oh, your mother heard us.”

I chuckled, taking it from her to read it. She wasn’t far off. It was asking why I called my sister. She was nosy. I answered that I wanted help with something for Christmas, but she demanded more information, so I simply typed ‘no.’ She replied with three angry emojis.

My girlfriend was just as inquisitive, leaning over to see. She was smirking. “She doesn’t even care that it could be for her, she still wants to know everything.” Bella took another bite. “She’s going to be so far up our asses when we have babies,” she mumbled through her food. “I hope you’re ready for that, Daddy.” She loved to call me that to rile me. I pulled her ponytail with a sharp yank like a child, not saying anything. It made her giggle and snort, still chewing. Playfully, she pressed a kiss to my cheek. “You’re going to be a fantastic father someday,” she declared sincerely out of nowhere, brushing a crumb away from my chin.

I felt my cheeks flush. It made some of my worries melt away. She continued to eat like she didn’t just fill me up with love and confidence. Leaning back into me, her temple resting on my shoulder as she looked away into nothingness.

“I love you, Goddess,” I blurted out.

Her head tilted back with a broad smile on her luscious kissed-red lips. “Mm, I love you, too, sir.” She nuzzled my jaw with her forehead for a moment. Her skin was silky soft and fresh from the shower still. The scent of her soap lingered on it pleasantly. “Would you like to share some cookies and a glass of milk with me before we go to bed?” She offered as she glanced up at me. Her expression was so innocent.

“Absolutely.” I wanted to share everything with her for the rest of our lives.

