

Our Desired Secret

Bonus chapter

Rihanna

I never thought I'd cry over drywall.

But here I was—barefoot on the hardwood floors of our brand-new house, wearing Jonas's hoodie, staring at the sun-drenched living room walls with tears slipping silently down my cheeks.

The same Jonas Sullivan who used to make my blood boil. Who once acted like he didn't give a damn about anyone. Who I used to think was a stuck-up rich boy who had more money than sense.

That man was currently in the kitchen, shirtless and humming off-key while he tried to figure out the coffee machine we bought but never used because we'd been gone for three weeks in Patagonia.

Three perfect, adventurous, passion-drunk weeks.

Now we were home. And this? This was ours.

Our forever was built on an old rivalry, a fake relationship, and one stormy night when everything cracked open and the truth came pouring out. We'd both been afraid to hope.

But we weren't afraid anymore.

"Coffee's gonna taste like jet lag and my confusion," Jonas called from the kitchen. "Heads up."

I laughed and wiped the back of my hand across my cheek. "I'll take it. Long as you're the one making it."

He rounded the corner with two mugs and a smile that still made my pulse skip. He had a fresh tan from the glacier hikes, faint scruff on his jaw, and zero idea just how gorgeous he looked in sweatpants.

Jonas stopped in front of me, tilting his head. "You're crying."

“I’m not,” I sniffed. “I’m just... overwhelmed.”

“I told you that we could just pay someone to do all of this,” he said. It was maybe the fifth time he’d mentioned it.

“And I told you that I want our home to be full of love, and that means putting in the work,” I said with a laugh that helped stem my tears. “Besides, I’m not crying because of the painting and everything else we still need to do. I’m crying because this is ours. I still can’t believe it sometimes.”

“Darling, with the two of us in this house, it’s a miracle that the roof hasn’t blown off from all the love we fill it with,” he said, giving me that soft look that always melted my heart.

It still took me by surprise, these moments of love and vulnerability from the man I’d once thought of as the enemy. Tears began to leak from my eyes again. It happened a lot. Jonas blamed my hormones. I blamed him.

He handed me my mug and cupped my jaw with his free hand, brushing a thumb beneath my eye. “You should see what you look like right now. Standing in the house we’re going to bring our baby home to, wearing my hoodie, getting emotional over beige walls.”

I rolled my eyes. “They’re not beige. They’re sandstone.”

“Which is beige’s fancier cousin.”

I nudged him with my elbow, but the smile tugging at my lips was hopelessly sappy. “I just—this doesn’t feel real. You. This. Us. After everything.”

His hand slid to the small of my back. “It’s real, Ri. You’re mine. I’m yours. And we’re home.”

He looked around like he was still taking it all in too. Like the light bouncing off the floorboards and the creak of the front door and the faint scent of paint and pine were pieces of a dream he hadn’t dared believe in either.

“You want to know something ridiculous?” I whispered.

“Always.”

I set my mug down and slipped my hands around his neck. “I brought the speaker out of the suitcase last night. Just in case.”

“In case what?”

“In case I got the urge to dance with my husband in our new living room.”

His smile was slow and devastating. “God, I love you.”

I reached behind me, hit play, and let the first few notes of a soft acoustic love song drift into the room. The kind of song we never admitted we both liked before we fell in love. The kind of song that made slow dancing in your socks feel like magic.

Jonas took my hand and bowed dramatically. “Mrs. Sullivan, may I have this dance?”

“You may, Mr. Sullivan.”

He pulled me in close, one hand on the small of my back, the other threading with mine. We swayed in slow, lazy circles. No choreography. No footwork. Just the rhythm of

two people who knew each other's heartbeats better than any beat on a track.

"You remember the boat ride in Patagonia?" he murmured, voice low and close to my ear.

I smiled. "The one where you swore you weren't seasick, just 'wind-swept and emotionally moved'?"

"I was moved," he protested. "By the view. And your legs in those shorts."

I tilted my head to catch his smirk. "You puked into a glacier-fed lake."

"It was majestic."

I laughed, full and bright. "That was the first time I saw you vulnerable. Not the stomach part—the way you looked at me after, like you didn't care about pretending anymore."

He was quiet for a beat, our bodies still turning slowly in the soft light.

"I didn't care," he said. "Somewhere between your hands in my hair and that rock hard bench I lay on to recover I just... stopped fighting it."

I rested my cheek against his chest. “Same. It stopped feeling scary. Started feeling like coming home.”

He held me tighter, his voice softer now. “That night in the hot springs... when you climbed into my lap and kissed me like I was already yours? I swear, Ri, I forgot the rest of the world existed.”

I lifted my chin, grinning. “You mean after I made you wait because I didn’t want to miss the condors flying overhead?”

He groaned playfully. “You were naked. In the water. Sitting across from me. And you said, ‘Look, Jonas, birds!’ like we were in a damn nature documentary. I was a broken man.”

I laughed again, but there was heat beneath it. “You made up for it.”

“Oh, I did more than that.” His hand slid slightly lower, just a whisper of touch along my back. “You were glowing in the steam. Your skin was slick, your eyes glassy from the heat—and then you wrapped your arms around me and whispered that you loved me. I think

that moment broke me open in a way I didn't even know I needed."

The room faded around us. I tightened my fingers in his. "You kissed me like we had all the time in the world."

"We do," he said simply. Then he paused. "But just to be clear—if we ever go back there, I'm booking a private pool. Because the German couple who walked in after round two are probably still traumatized."

I gasped, scandalized. "You promised never to bring that up again!"

He leaned in close, lips brushing the shell of my ear. "I lied."

I flushed hot from the inside out, burying my smile in his shoulder. "You're the worst."

"I'm the best thing that's ever happened to you."

"You kind of are," I whispered, and the words didn't feel scary anymore. Just true. True and wild and soft all at once.

We danced like that until the song ended, then kept swaying through the silence, lost in the rhythm of a love that had bloomed from rivalry, burned through heartbreak, and now stretched into forever. The baby fluttered once in my belly—just the faintest whisper of movement—and I laid my hand there, letting the moment stretch and settle.

“You think our kid’s going to get your attitude or mine?” I asked quietly.

He let out a soft laugh. “That’s a lose-lose for teachers.”

“Maybe they’ll get your charm and my sass.”

“Or your fire and my stubbornness.”

“Definitely a heartbreaker,” I said. “Like their dad.”

He kissed the top of my head. “I just hope they dance. Like their mama.”

We stood there a while longer, the way people do when there’s nothing urgent pulling them away for once. Just the calm. The home.

The feeling that everything—finally—is exactly as it should be.

Eventually, I leaned into his chest and said, “You know Porter’s going to hate this.”

“What, happiness?”

“No. Us. Being disgustingly in love in front of him. You know how he is—he acts like romance is a virus.”

“He’s due for an infection,” Jonas muttered, then softened. “He works too hard. Like it’s the only thing keeping the world from spinning off its axis.”

I looked up at him. “You think he’ll ever let someone in?”

Jonas nodded slowly. “He will. Eventually. He’s a Sullivan. We all fall hard. Even when we fight it like hell.”

I smiled. “Maybe she’ll be the one person who doesn’t let him get away with his usual disappearing act.”

“Oh, she’ll have to be tough as hell.”

“And patient.”

“And probably gorgeous,” he added. “Porter might pretend he doesn’t care, but the guy has taste.”

We grinned at each other, both of us quietly excited for the next chapter—the Sullivan family was growing and we adding to it. I didn’t worry if Jonas’ two younger brothers would get married and fulfill Slater’s wishes. I knew miracles existed because I had Jonas. But I did wish everyone could have a love as profound as the one Jonas and I had.

“I hope he finds this,” I whispered.

Jonas kissed me again. This time soft. Lingered.

“He will.”

Outside, the wind rustled the trees lining our backyard. A new house. A new baby. A new beginning.

We didn’t need a perfect honeymoon photo or a flashy announcement to prove anything.

We had this—bare feet on wood floors, laughter echoing through empty rooms, and a

love that started in fire and bloomed into something softer, deeper, unshakeable.

Home wasn't a place. It was a feeling.

And I'd found mine in the last place I ever expected—wrapped in the arms of the man I once swore I couldn't stand.

Now I couldn't imagine a single day without him.