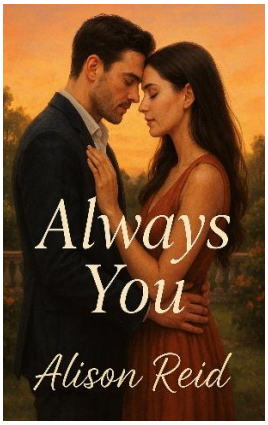
Always You

by Alison Reid



Whitaker & Steele Architecture occupied the upper floor of a sleek glass building in Surry Hills, the kind of place with polished concrete floors, oversized light fixtures, and abstract art in all the right corners. Jasmine always liked the atmosphere—modern, clean, purposeful.

William looked up from a drafting table when she walked into his office, grinning. "Is that a cinnamon scroll I see?"

"Baked fresh this morning," Jasmine said, holding up the white paper bag like a trophy. "And you're lucky. I nearly ate it on the drive over."

He came around the table to hug her, pulling her into a tight, familiar embrace. "You're the best," he murmured. "I mean it."

She smiled and kissed his cheek. "I know."

They sat near the windows, sipping coffee as the late afternoon light poured in, golden and lazy. Jasmine kicked off her shoes and tucked her feet beneath her, relaxing in a way she rarely allowed herself.

"Long week?" William asked.

"The usual," she replied with a shrug. "Bodies in pain, progress in inches, and a whole lot of emotional baggage that no one wants to talk about."

He laughed. "Sounds like architecture. Just with fewer lawsuits."

They were still chuckling when the glass door opened behind them.

Robert Steele stepped inside, his presence immediate and effortless.

He wore a tailored navy suit with the top button of his shirt undone, a touch of Friday casual that somehow made him even more dangerously attractive. His short black hair was artfully dishevelled, and those piercing green eyes swept across the room—first to William, then to Jasmine.

"Hey," he said, his voice smooth as silk. "Didn't know I was walking into a family meeting."

"Just Jasmine feeding my pastry addiction," William said, rising to shake his hand.

Robert grasped it firmly, then turned to Jasmine with a smile—warm, familiar.

"Hi, Jaz," he said, stepping close enough to kiss her cheek.

Her breath caught—just for a moment. It was supposed to be harmless. Just a greeting. But it lingered, far too familiar to be innocent.

The brush of his lips against her skin sent a ripple down her spine, and she hated how her heart responded—swift, sudden, uninvited.

He stepped back quickly, the contact over in seconds, but something lingered in the air. A subtle shift. A quiet pull.

Jasmine caught it. So did Robert.

But neither of them acknowledged it.

"How's the week been?" he asked, slipping one hand into his pocket, suddenly all charming distance.

"Busy," she said lightly. "You?"

He gave a quick nod. "Productive. Actually, I came by to tell Will something in person."

Jasmine tilted her head.

Robert turned to William, his voice calm, but there was weight behind the words. "Claire and I are getting engaged. I asked her last night."

Jasmine's heart gave a quiet, traitorous lurch. She barely let it show. Her expression held steady—cool, composed—but her fingers curled slightly where they rested at her side.

William blinked. "Seriously?"

The disbelief in his voice landed hard between them. He looked at Robert like he couldn't quite believe what he was hearing. Then his gaze shifted to Jasmine, and something darker flickered in his eyes—disgust, frustration, a silent *you've got to be kidding me.*

Jasmine didn't flinch. She'd gotten good at keeping things locked down.

Robert gave a small nod, not missing the shift in William's posture.

Jasmine managed a polite smile, her voice soft. "Congratulations, Robert. I hope you'll both be very happy."

Robert looked at her then—just for a second too long.

"Thanks, Jasmine," he said quietly. "That means a lot."

But William was still staring at him, arms crossed, jaw tight. "You're really doing this?"

"I am," Robert replied, holding his friend's gaze.

William exhaled, short and sharp. "Right."

Jasmine turned her eyes away, pretending to admire the artwork on the wall. Anything not to feel the weight of that moment pressing against her chest.

"Wow." William clapped him on the shoulder "That's… big news. Congrats, mate."

"Thanks," Robert said, but his smile didn't quite reach his eyes.

He cleared his throat and shifted slightly, then turned to face them both. "Actually, I meant to ask—Claire and I are throwing a small engagement party

next Saturday. Nothing too over the top, just close friends, a few industry people, family. I hope you'll both come."

William grinned. "Wouldn't miss it."

Robert's eyes flicked to Jasmine. "You too?"

Jasmine hesitated—only for a breath. "Of course," she said, her tone smooth. "I'll be there."

"Good," Robert replied, nodding once, though something unreadable passed across his face. "It'll be good to have everyone together."

Jasmine simply nodded. But her stomach had tightened, her breath shallow beneath the polite smile.

Everyone together.

As Jasmine disappeared down the hallway, her heels tapping a slow, fading rhythm, Robert watched the doorway for a beat longer than necessary.

William noticed. "You alright?"

Robert blinked and glanced away, slipping his hands back into his pockets. "Yeah. She just… looks good."

William smiled softly. "She does. Better than she has in a while."

Robert's brow lifted slightly. "She's still recovering?"

William nodded, folding his arms across his chest. "Yeah. From all of it. Losing Mum and Dad… it wrecked us both, but Jasmine—" he exhaled quietly, "—she was only twenty-two. And instead of falling apart, she built something. Her clinic's thriving, but I swear she's burying herself in work just to keep from feeling anything."

Robert's expression shifted, growing more thoughtful. "I always forget how young she was when it happened."

"She didn't get time to grieve," William said softly. "Not properly. She went straight into survival mode. Took care of everything—the house, the estate, me… even when she was the one who lost the most."

Robert didn't reply. Because he'd known Jasmine for years—and somehow, he'd never really seen that part of her.

"Is she still seeing that guy?" Robert asked, voice low. "Sean?"

William's mouth twisted in a grimace. "Unfortunately."

Robert turned, surprise flickering across his features. "Seriously? I thought that fizzled out months ago."

"I wish it had," William muttered. "I've told her—he's a tosser. Arrogant. Disrespectful. And frankly, I don't like the way he talks to her. Or looks at her, for that matter. It's like he sees her as a trophy, not a person."

Robert's jaw tightened. "I'm not a fan either."

William glanced at him, brow arched. "Well, don't let Claire hear you say that. She already thinks Jasmine is trying to steal the spotlight every time she walks into a room."

Robert let out a dry, humourless laugh. "Claire thinks everyone is trying to steal the spotlight."

William didn't laugh.

He just looked at Robert, something harder in his expression now. "It's not a joke, mate. She belittles Jasmine. Subtly, constantly. And you standing quietly next to her while she does it? That makes it worse."

Robert went quiet, a muscle ticking in his jaw.

William shook his head. "Jasmine deserves better. Better than Sean. Better than being treated like a threat just for existing."

Robert didn't answer right away. But in the silence that followed, something in his eyes shifted—just for a second.

Something that looked a lot like guilt.

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