EXCLUSIVE
BONUS EPILOGUE

Billionaire Bodyguard

ALISON REID

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by Alison Reid

Twenty-Five Years Later…

The executive floor of Morgan Security was as busy as ever.

Phones rang. Analysts moved between glass-walled offices. Security feeds flickered across monitors mounted on the walls. The company Chad Morgan had built from nothing now occupied three floors of a Manhattan skyscraper and protected everyone from Fortune 500 CEOs to foreign dignitaries.

Rebecca Morgan stepped out of the elevator and smiled. Some things never changed.

"Well, look who finally decided to visit."

Rebecca laughed as Jared looked up from behind the reception desk.

At fifty-nine, Jared's hair was completely silver now, but he still carried himself with the easy confidence that had made him Chad's right-hand man for decades.

"Hi, Uncle Jared."

Jared stood and came around the desk. Rebecca accepted his hug.

"How's law school?"

She groaned dramatically.

"It's been three weeks."

"And?"

"I already have three hundred pages of reading tonight."

Jared laughed.

"Sounds like your mother."

"That's exactly what Mom said."

"Smart woman."

"Traitor."

Jared grinned.

Rebecca had just started her first year at Columbia Law School. Her mother had pretended not to care when the acceptance letter arrived.

Then Violet had immediately bought her a set of law books, colour-coded study tabs, and a lecture about maintaining the highest ethical standards in the profession.

Rebecca suspected her mother had secretly been waiting for this moment her entire life.

"How's Judge Morgan handling having a future lawyer in the family?" Jared asked.

"She's trying very hard not to be excited."

"Which means she's impossible to live with."

"Exactly."

Jared laughed. The conference room door opened. Rebecca turned just as several men emerged. Her father came out first. The moment Chad spotted her, his entire face softened.

"There's my girl."

"Dad."

Too late. He wrapped her in a hug anyway. Rebecca sighed.

"I'm twenty-one."

"And?"

"I'm a law student."

"You'll still be my little girl when you're eighty."

Hunter appeared behind him.

"Told you."

Rebecca pointed at her older brother.

"See? This is why he's the favourite."

"I'm definitely the favourite," Hunter agreed.

At twenty-three, Hunter Morgan was the image of his father in his younger years. Tall, broad-shouldered and composed under pressure, he already worked for Morgan Security and had quickly become one of the company's most respected operatives.

Rebecca rolled her eyes.

"Mom says I'm the smart one."

Hunter smirked.

"Dad says I'm the useful one."

"You're both impossible."

"Runs in the family," Lance said from his wheelchair.

Hunter pulled Rebecca into a one-armed hug.

"Good to see you, Bec."

"You too."

The others followed. Sam hugged her next. Frank kissed the top of her head.

"How's my favourite niece?"

"You say that every time."

"Because it's true."

Lance rolled forward in his wheelchair, smiling. Despite the passing years, the old Marine still carried the same quiet strength he'd always possessed.

"Your mother's worried about you."

Rebecca groaned again.

"Not you too."

"Comes with being related to us."

Everyone laughed. For a brief moment, everything felt normal. Then the phone rang. Jared answered automatically.

"Morgan Security."

The smile faded from his face.

"What?"

The room immediately went silent. Everyone knew that look. Something was wrong. Jared listened for several seconds.

"When did this happen?"

More silence. Then he slowly lowered the phone. His face had gone pale. Chad's expression hardened instantly.

"What happened?"

Jared looked directly at him.

"There was a shooting at the courthouse."

The words hit like a bomb. No one moved. No one breathed. Then Chad spoke. One word.

"Violet."

Jared nodded.

"The courthouse is in lockdown. NYPD has the entire building sealed."

The colour drained from Rebecca's face.

"Oh my God."

Hunter was already pulling out his phone.

"When was the last contact?"

"About ten minutes ago," Jared said. "Nobody's getting in or out."

Chad looked like someone had punched him in the chest.

"Was it her courtroom?"

"We don't know."

The silence that followed was unbearable.

Violet had served as a judge for almost sixteen years now. She was one of the most respected judges in New York. But right now, none of that mattered. All Chad heard was shooting. Courthouse. Lockdown. And Violet trapped inside.

"No."

Hunter stepped forward.

"Dad—"

"No."

The single word came out rough. Dangerous. Hunter immediately recognised the look on his father's face. Panic. Pure panic. The same expression Chad wore whenever anyone he loved was threatened.

"We're going," Chad said.

"Dad, we don't know anything yet."

"We're going."

Hunter exchanged a glance with Jared. Neither argued. Because they were all thinking the same thing. If Violet Morgan was inside that courthouse, Chad wasn't staying here. Not for a second.

Lance wheeled forward.

"I'm staying here."

Everyone looked at him.

"Lance—"

"I'll just slow you down." His eyes found Chad's. "But you call me the second you know anything."

Chad nodded once.

"I will."

Lance's jaw tightened.

"She'll be okay."

It sounded more like a prayer than a statement. Chad didn't answer. Because for the first time in twenty-five years, he was terrified. Not of bullets. Not of enemies. Not of failure. He was terrified of losing Violet.

And as the group hurried toward the elevators, one terrible thought kept repeating inside his head.

What if he was already too late?

* * * * * * * *

The drive to the courthouse was the longest twenty minutes of Chad Morgan's life.

Nobody talked much.

Hunter sat beside him in the SUV while Sam and Frank followed behind in another vehicle. Rebecca was in the back seat, clutching her phone so tightly her knuckles had turned white.

Chad kept calling Violet. Straight to voicemail. Again. And again. And again.

"Dad."

Chad ignored Hunter and dialled once more. Voicemail. His grip tightened on the phone.

"Dad."

"What?"

Hunter's voice remained calm.

"The entire courthouse is locked down. Cell service is overloaded. It doesn't mean anything."

Chad stared out the windshield.

"It means I can't reach her."

Hunter didn't answer. Because there was nothing to say. Twenty-five years ago, Chad would have stormed the building without a second thought. Age had taught him patience. It hadn't made waiting any easier.

When they arrived, chaos greeted them. Police cruisers blocked every street surrounding the courthouse. Emergency vehicles lined the curb. News vans had already arrived. Officers had established a perimeter two blocks in every direction.

The moment Chad stepped from the SUV, a uniformed officer moved toward him.

"Sir, you can't go any further."

"My wife is inside."

The officer's expression softened slightly.

"I understand, but nobody is being allowed inside."

Hunter stepped between them before Chad could push the issue.

"Has anyone confirmed casualties?"

"No."

"Do we know where the shooter is?"

"Still searching the building."

Rebecca made a small sound beside him. Hunter immediately turned.

"Hey."

Her eyes were wide.

"They said shooter."

Hunter put a hand on her shoulder.

"I know."

"What if Mom—"

"Don't."

His voice was gentle but firm.

"We don't know anything yet."

For a few seconds Rebecca looked every bit of her twenty-one years. Scared. Vulnerable. Just a daughter terrified for her mother. Hunter pulled her into a hug. And Chad watched.

Watched his son comfort his sister. Watched police officers running in and out of the courthouse. Watched paramedics standing by with stretchers. Watched the building where his wife was trapped. His chest felt tight. Too tight.

"Chad."

Jared had arrived. Chad barely looked at him.

"What?"

"We have eyes on the security feeds."

That got his attention. Hunter turned too.

"How?"

"One of our clients handles courthouse security systems. They're feeding us what they can."

"Where's Violet?" Chad demanded.

Jared hesitated.

"We haven't found her yet."

Every muscle in Chad's body went rigid.

"What do you mean you haven't found her?"

"The cameras are limited."

"Find her."

Jared nodded immediately.

"I'm trying."

No one missed the edge in Chad's voice. The fear. Because that's what it was. Not anger. Fear. Pure fear.

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An hour passed.

Then another.

No updates. No answers. Nothing. The waiting became torture.

Rebecca sat beside Frank on a concrete bench, constantly checking her phone. Sam paced. Hunter coordinated with Morgan Security personnel who had quietly arrived on scene.

And Chad...

Chad wore a path into the sidewalk. Back and forth. Back and forth. Back and forth. Like a caged animal.

"Dad."

Hunter intercepted him for what felt like the hundredth time.

"You need to sit down."

"I'm fine."

"You haven't stopped moving for two hours."

"I'm fine."

Hunter folded his arms.

"No, you're not."

The words hung between them. Chad looked away. Across the street. At the courthouse. At the doors that remained stubbornly closed.

"I should be in there."

Hunter sighed.

"There is literally nothing you can do in there."

"She's in there."

"I know."

"No." Chad's voice cracked slightly. "You don't."

Hunter froze. Because his father never sounded like that. Ever. For a moment Chad's gaze remained fixed on the building. When he spoke again, his voice was rough.

"Your mother has been my whole life for over twenty-five years."

Hunter's expression softened.

"Dad—"

"What if she was hurt?" Chad asked quietly.

The question shattered something inside Hunter. Because it wasn't really a question. It was a fear. *The fear.*

"What if she's scared and I'm not there?"

Hunter swallowed hard. His mother was many things. Brilliant. Strong. Stubborn. Fearless. But to Chad? She was simply Violet. The woman he'd loved for almost three decades. The woman he still looked at like she'd hung the moon.

"Mom's tough."

Chad laughed bitterly.

"Yeah."

"She'll be okay."

"That's what I keep telling myself."

Hunter looked at his father. Really looked at him. At the grey in his hair. The exhaustion around his eyes. The terror he was trying so desperately to hide. And suddenly Hunter understood something.

Growing up, he'd always thought his father was fearless. Invincible. The strongest man he'd ever known. But standing here outside the courthouse, he realised that wasn't true. His father was terrified.

Because even after twenty-five years, the thought of losing Violet Morgan could still bring Chad Morgan to his knees.

* * * * * * * *

A sudden movement near the courthouse entrance brought everyone to attention. The massive front doors opened. For half a second, nobody moved. Nobody breathed. Then people began pouring out. Court staff. Lawyers. Clerks. Witnesses.

Police officers directed them toward waiting family members as the crowd spilled onto the courthouse steps.

"Mom," Rebecca whispered.

Chad was already moving closer to the barricade. His eyes scanned every face. Every single one. Not caring who saw the panic written all over him.

"Do you see her?" Sam asked.

"No."

The answer came immediately. Too immediately. Because Chad wasn't really seeing anyone except the one person he was looking for. A woman with dark hair emerged from the crowd. His heart jumped. Then sank. Not Violet.

More people followed. Dozens of them. The crowd growing larger by the second. Still no Violet. The knot in Chad's chest tightened.

"Dad—"

"Not now, Hunter."

His voice was strained. Sharp. Hunter fell silent. Because he understood.

Then Chad saw her. Near the back of the crowd. Walking beside another judge. Dark hair. Navy suit. Head held high despite the exhaustion written across her face.

Violet.

For one endless second the world seemed to stop. Everything around him faded away. The police. The crowd. The sirens. The reporters. None of it mattered.

She was alive.

Chad let out a shaky breath he hadn't realised he'd been holding.

"There she is."

The words barely made it out. Rebecca gasped.

"Oh my God. Mom."

Violet spotted them at the same moment. Her eyes found Rebecca first. Then Hunter. And finally, Chad. Everything else disappeared from her face. The professional composure. The judge's calm authority. The strength she'd carried out of the courthouse. All of it vanished. Leaving only relief. Pure relief.

The barricade was removed and families surged forward. Chad didn't wait. Twenty-five years of marriage. Twenty-five years of loving this woman. Twenty-five years of knowing exactly what she meant to him.

And none of it prepared him for the overwhelming wave of emotion that hit when he reached her.

He pulled her into his arms so hard her feet nearly left the ground.

"Chad."

Her voice cracked. His eyes closed. One hand buried itself in her hair while the other wrapped around her waist. Holding her. Making sure she was real. Making sure she was here. Making sure she was safe.

"Jesus Christ, Violet."

The words were rough. Broken. Unlike anything she'd ever heard from him.

"I know."

"No."

He pulled back just enough to look at her. His grey eyes were bright with emotion.

"What happened?"

"We were locked in chambers. Security got us out."

His hands moved over her face, her shoulders, her arms. Checking for injuries. The same way he'd done countless times throughout their marriage whenever she got so much as a paper cut.

"I'm fine."

His jaw tightened.

"You scared the hell out of me."

A watery laugh escaped her.

"I scared you?"

"You have any idea what I've been through out here?"

That made her smile. And suddenly, despite everything, despite the fear and chaos and hours of waiting, she looked exactly like the twenty-six-year-old woman he'd fallen in love with.

"I love you too."

Chad stared at her. Then shook his head.

"You are never allowed to do that again."

Violet laughed. Actually laughed. The sound instantly easing something inside him.

Rebecca crashed into them a second later.

"Mom!"

Violet wrapped an arm around her daughter. Then Hunter joined them. And for several seconds the Morgan family simply held onto one another. Together. Safe.

Across the street, Sam wiped at his eyes. Frank pretended not to notice. And Hunter caught his father's expression as Chad looked down at Violet. The way he still watched her. The way his hand never left hers. The way relief and love battled openly across his face.

Hunter smiled.

Some things never changed. Even after twenty-five years. Especially not the way Chad Morgan loved his wife.

* * * * * * * *

Later that night, the house was finally quiet.

Hunter had called to make sure they were both okay.

Rebecca had stopped by for one last hug before heading back to her apartment.

Even Lance had checked in three separate times before finally being convinced Violet was safe.

Now, for the first time all day, they were alone.

Violet rested her head against Chad's chest while his arm remained wrapped securely around her. The steady beat of his heart echoed beneath her ear.

Neither of them spoke for a long moment. The events of the day still lingered between them. The fear. The uncertainty. The overwhelming relief.

Chad pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

"You scared me today."

Violet smiled softly.

"I know."

"No." His arm tightened around her. "You don't."

She tilted her head back to look at him.

The silver at his temples had become more noticeable over the years. The lines around his eyes were deeper now. But to her, he was still the most handsome man she'd ever seen.

Still the man who made her heart race. Still the man she'd fallen in love with.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

His hand cupped her cheek.

"I spent hours thinking about what I'd do if I lost you."

Emotion thickened his voice.

"And I realised something."

A tear slipped down her cheek.

"What?"

His thumb brushed it away.

"I'd choose you all over again."

Her breath caught.

"Every single time."

A shaky laugh escaped her.

"That's good."

His eyes softened.

"Why?"

"Because I'd choose you too."

The smile that spread across his face was the same one she'd fallen in love with twenty-five years earlier. The one he reserved only for her.

“I love you, Violet.”

Three simple words. Words he’d spoken thousands of times. Yet they still meant everything. She reached for his hand, intertwining their fingers.

“I love you too.”

His forehead rested against hers.

“You know you’re my favourite person, right?”

She laughed.

“After all these years, that’s the best you’ve got?”

“It’s the truth.”

“More than Hunter?”

“Definitely.”

“Rebecca?”

“Don’t tell her I said that.”

Violet smiled.

“You’re terrible.”

“I know.”

For a moment, neither of them spoke. Then Chad’s expression softened.

“Remember the day you told me you never wanted to see my face again?”

Violet laughed.

“Yes. And you deserved it.”

A grin tugged at his mouth.

“Yeah, I probably did.”

“Probably?”

“Definitely.”

She laughed again. Chad brushed a strand of hair behind her ear.

“I’m just glad I finally came to my senses.”

Violet’s gaze softened.

"So am I."

Silence settled around them again. Comfortable. Warm. The kind that only came from a lifetime spent loving someone.

Outside, New York continued to move and breathe.

Inside, nothing else mattered.

Not the years behind them. Not the fears of the day. Not even tomorrow. Just this moment. Just each other. And the love that had survived everything life had placed in their path.

Chad kissed her forehead one last time and held her a little closer.

Exactly where she belonged.

— The End —

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