EXCLUSIVE

BONUS Epilogue

FOR

Kept Promises

NEW YORK IS FULL
OF DREAMS.
SOME COME TRUE.
SOME ARE TESTED.
BUT THE ONES
YOU KEEP...
THE ONES YOU FIGHT
FOR AND CHOOSE
EVERY DAY...
THOSE ARE THE
PROMISES
THAT LAST FOREVER.

ALISON REID

Exclusive Bonus Epilogue

Kept Promises

by Alison Reid

Twenty-Five Years Later…

The Grayson estate was louder than it had been in years.

The dining table was set for eight, the smell of Stephanie's homemade lasagna drifting through the house despite the protests from the catering staff Trey had tried to hire.

"I have a chef," he'd reminded her.

"And I have children who prefer my cooking."

He'd surrendered immediately. Because he always did. Twenty-five years of marriage hadn't changed that. Neither had raising three children.

Their eldest, Michael, had inherited his father's height, broad shoulders, and calm confidence, but Stephanie liked to think he'd inherited her heart. At twenty-one, he was in his final year of a business degree and already had a natural instinct for leadership. Trey often joked that one day Michael would take over Grayson Global, though he never pressured him to do it.

Their middle child, Amy, had just turned eighteen. She had Stephanie's striking blue eyes, Trey's determination, and a fiercely independent streak that meant she questioned everything. University brochures had taken over half the house as she tried to decide where she wanted to study in the fall.

Then there was Jennifer—their greatest surprise and, in so many ways, their greatest blessing.

After nearly five years believing their family was complete, Stephanie discovered she was pregnant again. Jennifer hadn't been planned, but from the moment she arrived, neither of them could imagine life without her. Filling their home with even more laughter, noise, and chaos than either of them thought possible.

Now thirteen, she was bright, outspoken, endlessly curious, and convinced the world revolved around her—a theory the rest of the family rarely bothered correcting.

The front door swung open.

"Mom? Dad? We're here!"

Michael's voice echoed through the foyer, and Stephanie smiled before she even saw him. Their eldest son strode inside with the same quiet confidence that reminded Stephanie so much of his father.

Beside him stood a young woman with chestnut hair, kind hazel eyes, and an unmistakably nervous smile.

"Caitlyn," Michael said, slipping an arm around her shoulders. "This is the family I've been warning you about."

Stephanie laughed.

"You've been warning her?"

"A little."

Caitlyn smiled sheepishly.

"Only that everyone is very close."

Stephanie crossed the room and wrapped her in a warm hug before the poor girl could become any more uncomfortable.

"Welcome to the madness."

Trey joined them and offered Caitlyn his hand.

"It's nice to finally meet you, Caitlyn."

She shook it with a relieved smile.

"It's nice to meet you too, Mr. Grayson."

"Please," Trey said warmly, "call me Trey."

"I... okay. Thank you."

She visibly relaxed.

Satisfied, Trey slipped an arm around Stephanie's waist, his thumb absentmindedly rubbing small circles against her side.

Amy arrived moments later, juggling a stack of university brochures.

"I still think Columbia," Trey said.

Amy rolled her eyes.

"Dad..."

"What? It's an excellent school."

"You say that about every university."

"Because they're all excellent."

Jennifer wandered into the room with exaggerated boredom.

"No one even asked what I think."

"You're thirteen," Michael said.

"Exactly."

The room burst into laughter.

* * * * * * * *

Dinner was everything Stephanie loved.

Conversation overlapped. Jennifer complained Michael had stolen the last bread roll. Michael denied it. Amy immediately sided with Jennifer. Caitlyn laughed harder than she'd intended before quickly apologising.

Stephanie reached for her wine. At exactly the same moment, Trey reached for it too. Their fingers brushed. He smiled. She smiled back.

Twenty-five years later... and somehow they still managed to forget everyone else existed for a few seconds.

Jennifer groaned dramatically.

"Oh, seriously?"

Neither of them looked away.

"Dad."

Nothing.

"Mum."

Still nothing. Jennifer dropped her fork.

"Can you two stop making googly eyes at each other for, like... five minutes?"

The table erupted in laughter. Stephanie felt heat creep into her cheeks.

"We're not making googly eyes."

"You absolutely are," Jennifer declared. "It's embarrassing."

Trey looked entirely unapologetic.

"I've been looking at your mother like that since the day we met."

"And that's the problem!"

More laughter. Amy smiled across the table before looking at her little sister.

"No, Jen."

Jennifer frowned.

"What?"

Amy's expression softened.

"The way Dad looks at Mum..."

She glanced toward Trey, who was still watching Stephanie as though she were the only woman in the world.

"...that's exactly how a man should look at the woman he loves."

The room grew quieter. Amy continued.

"I've started dating a little."

Michael immediately sat forward.

"You've what?"

Amy ignored him.

"And every guy I've met so far..." She shrugged. "I compare them to Dad."

Trey blinked.

"You do?"

She nodded.

"Because Dad has spent my entire life showing us what love is supposed to look like."

Stephanie reached beneath the table and squeezed Trey's hand. Amy smiled.

"So, if a guy doesn't treat me the way Dad treats Mum..."

She shrugged again.

"...he's not the one."

Silence settled over the table. Then Caitlyn smiled.

"I think that's one of the sweetest things I've ever heard."

Michael slipped his arm around her. Jennifer looked around the table and sighed dramatically.

"So basically, my future husband has impossible standards."

Trey grinned.

"I make no apologies."

Stephanie laughed, resting her head briefly against his shoulder.

Twenty-five years had passed since the day she first walked into Grayson Global believing she was merely *passable*.

One man had spent years convincing her she wasn't enough. Another had spent the next twenty-five proving she had always been extraordinary.

Looking into Trey's eyes, Stephanie realised something she had known for a very long time.

Some promises really were kept forever.

* * * * * * * *

Hours later, the Grayson estate had finally fallen silent.

The dishes had been washed, the laughter had faded, and one by one their children had disappeared to their rooms. Michael and Caitlyn were staying in in the guest suite, Amy had claimed her old bedroom for the weekend, and Jennifer had reluctantly gone to bed after insisting she wasn't tired.

Stephanie smiled to herself as she stepped out of the ensuite.

She wore a pair of white silk pyjama shorts with a matching camisole, her blonde hair falling loosely over her shoulders after brushing it out. The warm glow from the bedside lamps bathed the room in soft light, making the master suite feel peaceful after the lively evening downstairs.

Trey was already waiting for her.

He sat on the edge of the bed, dressed in nothing more than a pair of grey lounge pants, watching her with the same expression he'd worn for more than twenty-five years.

Like she was the only woman in the world. Without saying a word, he held out his arms. Stephanie smiled.

Some things never changed.

She crossed the room and stepped effortlessly into his embrace.

His arms wrapped around her waist, drawing her close until she stood between his knees. He rested his forehead against her stomach for a moment before turning slightly and laying his head against her chest.

Stephanie immediately threaded her fingers through his thick dark hair—now touched with distinguished streaks of silver at the temples.

It had always been his favourite thing.

In the early days of their relationship, he'd confessed that whenever she played with his hair, every ounce of stress simply melted away. Twenty-five years later, nothing had changed.

Her fingers moved slowly through the soft strands, and she felt his entire body relax. He let out a contented sigh.

"I could stay like this forever," he murmured.

She laughed softly.

"You'd eventually get hungry."

"I'd survive."

"No, you wouldn't."

He smiled against her.

"Probably not."

Comfortable silence settled around them for a few moments.

Outside, the grounds of the estate were quiet, illuminated only by the moonlight filtering through the bedroom windows.

Finally, Trey spoke.

"Well?"

Stephanie looked down at him.

"Well... what?"

“What did you think?”

She smiled knowingly.

“Caitlyn.”

He nodded.

Stephanie continued gently running her fingers through his hair.

“I like her.”

“You do?”

“I do.” Her smile widened. “She’s sweet. Kind. Polite. She spent half the evening making sure Jennifer wasn’t left out of the conversations.”

Trey smiled.

“I noticed that too.”

“And...” Stephanie paused, amusement dancing in her eyes. “Did you see the way Michael looked at her?”

Trey chuckled.

“The poor boy never stood a chance.”

“He looked completely smitten.”

“He did.”

Stephanie leaned down and kissed the top of Trey’s head.

“It reminded me of someone.”

“Oh?”

“The way a young billionaire used to look at his executive assistant.”

Trey looked up at her, grinning.

“I have absolutely no idea who you’re talking about.”

She laughed.

“Really?”

“Completely.”

“You were hopeless.”

"I was captivated."

"Obsessed."

"I preferred captivated."

Stephanie smiled, shaking her head.

"You couldn't take your eyes off me."

"I still can't."

His answer came so quickly that it stole her breath. Twenty-five years. Three children. Countless memories. Yet he still looked at her exactly as he had the day she'd first walked into Grayson Global.

As though she were extraordinary.

Stephanie cupped his face, her thumb brushing across the light stubble on his jaw.

"I love you."

His brown eyes softened.

"I know."

She raised an eyebrow.

"That's all I get?"

He stood, bringing her effortlessly with him until they were face to face.

"No."

He slipped one hand behind her neck while the other settled against the small of her back.

"What you get..."

He kissed her slowly, tenderly, with all the love of twenty-five years behind it. When he finally drew back, their foreheads rested together.

"...is everything."

Stephanie smiled through happy tears.

"You know," she whispered, "Jennifer's right."

"Oh?"

"We really do make googly eyes at each other."

Trey laughed.

"I've been looking at you like this for twenty-five years."

"And you're never going to stop, are you?"

He looked into her eyes with the same unwavering devotion he always had.

"Never."

"And if we live to be a hundred?"

A smile tugged at the corner of his mouth.

"I'll still be looking at you exactly like this."

Stephanie's heart melted.

"You've always known exactly what to say."

"Only because it's true."

She smiled before kissing him once more. The kiss was soft, unhurried, filled with the kind of love that only decades together could create.

Before she knew what was happening, Trey slipped one arm beneath her knees and the other around her back.

"Trey..." she laughed.

"What?"

"You still insist on carrying me?"

"I've been carrying you for twenty-five years."

"And?"

"And I don't intend to stop."

He lifted her effortlessly into his arms, earning another laugh before gently laying her on the bed. A moment later he stretched out beside her, drawing her flush against his chest as though there was nowhere else in the world either of them belonged.

He brushed a strand of blonde hair behind her ear before kissing her again, slow and tender.

When he finally drew back, his lips remained only a whisper from hers.

"And," he murmured against her lips, "I will never stop wanting you."

Stephanie's eyes sparkled.

"That's good," she whispered, slipping her arms around his neck and pulling him even closer, "because I'll always want you just as much."

Trey smiled, brushing his thumb across her cheek.

"Best promise you ever made."

"I intend to keep it."

He kissed her again, and this time neither of them felt the need to say another word.

Some things, they both realised, weren't meant to fade with time.

Some loves simply grew stronger.

Some promises really were kept forever.

—The End—

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