

# EXCLUSIVE BONUS *Epilogue*

FOR

## Reflections *of* Deception

SOME TRUTHS  
DON'T JUST STAY  
BURIED.  
SOME ARE  
BUILT ON LIES.  
BUT THE BIGGEST  
DECEPTION  
OF ALL...  
WAS BELIEVING  
HE WAS YOURS.

DISCIPLINE. STRATEGY.  
SUCCESS.

# ALISON REID

*Exclusive Bonus Epilogue*

# Reflections of Deception

by Alison Reid

*Ten Years Later...*

The gentle sound of waves lapping beneath the overwater villa stirred Penelope from sleep.

She smiled before she even opened her eyes. Warm arms were wrapped securely around her waist. Lucas. Ten years of marriage hadn't changed that. He still slept exactly the same way—holding her as though he never intended to let her go.

She shifted slightly, turning to find him already awake.

“Good morning,” he murmured, brushing a kiss against her forehead.

“How long have you been awake?”

“A while.”

“You should have woken me.”

“I'd rather look at you.”

She laughed softly.

“You've been looking at me for ten years.”

“And I'm still not tired of it.”

Her heart fluttered exactly as it always had. Some things never changed.

Sunlight streamed through the floor-to-ceiling windows, illuminating the crystal-clear turquoise water surrounding their private villa in the Maldives. It looked almost unreal, like something from a postcard.

Lucas reached for the phone on the bedside table.

“It’s nearly time.”

Penelope immediately sat up.

“The twins!”

Within seconds the video call connected. Patrick’s smiling face filled the screen.

“Well, if it isn’t my favourite son-in-law.”

Lucas grinned.

“I hope Michael can’t hear you.”

Patrick chuckled.

“He’s outside trying to convince your mother that a football belongs in the rose garden.”

“Grandad!” a young voice protested from somewhere off-camera.

Another voice quickly followed.

“Grandad! It’s my turn!”

Patrick laughed before turning the phone. The screen erupted into chaos.

“Daddy!” Michael shouted, waving so enthusiastically the camera shook.

“Mummy!” Michelle squealed, bouncing excitedly beside her brother.

Penelope’s entire face lit up.

“There are my beautiful babies.”

“We’re not babies,” Michael declared with all the seriousness an eight-year-old could manage.

Michelle folded her arms.

“I’m nearly nine.”

Lucas smiled.

“Our mistake.”

Michael leaned closer to the camera.

“Dad! Guess what!”

“What?”

“I lost another tooth!”

He proudly grinned, revealing the gap. Lucas laughed.

“Very impressive.”

Michelle immediately pushed her brother aside.

“I beat Grandad at Monopoly.”

Patrick appeared in the background.

“She absolutely did.”

“And Grandad still owes me two hundred dollars.”

“He does not,” Patrick objected.

“He landed on my hotel.”

Lucas burst into laughter.

“I think your grandfather has been hustled.”

Judy appeared beside Patrick, smiling warmly.

“Good morning, you two.”

“Morning, Mum,” Penelope said happily.

“You both look relaxed.”

Lucas slipped an arm around his wife.

“We’re trying.”

Michelle looked suspicious.

“Have you been swimming without us?”

Penelope exchanged an amused glance with Lucas.

“Maybe just once.”

Michael gasped dramatically.

“That’s not fair.”

“We’ll bring you both back one day,” Lucas promised.

“Really?” Michelle asked hopefully.

“When you’re older.”

Michael considered that.

“So... like next year?”

Lucas chuckled.

“We’ll negotiate.”

Michelle suddenly remembered something.

“Mummy! Don’t forget my shell!”

“And my shark!” Michael added.

Penelope frowned.

“A real shark?”

“No.” Michael rolled his eyes as though his mother should have known better. “A toy shark.”

Lucas laughed.

“I think we can manage that.”

For a moment everyone simply smiled at one another. The distance between the Maldives and Chicago suddenly felt very small.

“We miss you,” Penelope admitted quietly.

Michelle tilted her head.

“But you only left three days ago.”

“It feels much longer than that,” Lucas said.

Patrick placed a reassuring hand on each twin’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry about us. We’ve got everything under control.”

Judy nodded.

“They’ve been absolute angels.”

Michael looked horrified.

“I have not.”

Patrick winked.

“See? Honest, too.”

Everyone laughed.

“We love you,” Penelope said.

“We love you more!” both twins shouted together.

The call ended with an enthusiastic chorus of kisses blown toward the screen. As it faded to black, the villa suddenly felt much quieter.

Penelope stared at the phone for a long moment.

“I miss them already.”

Lucas wrapped both arms around her from behind, resting his chin lightly on her shoulder.

“I know.”

She leaned comfortably against him.

“I almost feel guilty being here.”

“You shouldn’t.”

She turned to look at him.

“They’re growing up so quickly.”

“They are.”

“But...”

He gently tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear.

“I’ve missed this.”

She smiled.

“You see me every day.”

“Not like this.”

“No school lunches.”

“No business meetings.”

“No football practice.”

“No dance recitals.”

“No bedtime negotiations.”

She laughed.

“I forgot about the bedtime negotiations.”

Lucas smiled.

“For the first time in years...” He kissed her softly. “...I have my wife all to myself.”

Penelope slipped her arms around his neck.

“I rather like that.”

“So do I.”

Outside, the Indian Ocean sparkled beneath the morning sun, stretching endlessly toward the horizon. For the next week, they had nowhere to be except with each other. And after everything life had thrown at them...

It was exactly where they belonged.

\* \* \* \* \*

After breakfast, Lucas disappeared for nearly an hour.

When he finally returned, he was wearing a grin that immediately made Penelope suspicious.

“What have you done?” she asked, folding her arms.

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

“Lucas...”

He laughed before holding out his hand.

“Come with me.”

She slipped her hand into his, allowing him to lead her to the private jetty where a small speedboat waited.

“Where are we going?”

“It’s a surprise.”

“You know I hate surprises.”

“You’ve never hated mine.”

She smiled.

“Fair point.”

The boat skimmed effortlessly across the crystal-blue water, passing tiny islands fringed with towering palm trees. The warm breeze danced through Penelope’s hair as she leaned comfortably against Lucas, enjoying the peaceful ride.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fifteen minutes later, the boat slowed beside what looked like a deserted island.

Soft white sand stretched along the shoreline, untouched except for the occasional seabird wandering near the water’s edge. There wasn’t another person in sight.

Lucas helped her onto the beach before leading her beneath the shade of a large palm tree. Penelope stopped walking. A beautifully arranged picnic awaited them.

A thick cream blanket had been spread across the sand, surrounded by oversized cushions. A wicker basket sat beside it, filled with fresh tropical fruit, artisan cheeses, warm bread, seafood, salads and a bottle of chilled sparkling cider nestled in ice.

Fresh orchids had been scattered across the blanket. She slowly turned towards him.

“You organised all this?”

Lucas rubbed the back of his neck.

“I might have asked the resort for a little help.”

“A little?”

He smiled.

“I wanted today to be special.”

Emotion welled in her chest.

“You’ve always made me feel special.”

His expression softened.

“You’ve always deserved to.”

She stepped forward and wrapped her arms around his waist.

“I love you.”

“I know.”

She looked up.

“That’s all you’re giving me?”

He chuckled before lowering his forehead to hers.

“I love you more than I thought it was possible to love another person.”

Her eyes shimmered with happy tears.

“That’s much better.”

They spent the next couple of hours talking, laughing and enjoying the incredible lunch. Between bites they reminisced about the early days of their relationship, the long hours spent building Bennett Industries’ new security systems together, their wedding, and the unforgettable day Michael and Michelle had been born.

“So...” Penelope smiled mischievously.

“Who cried first in the delivery room?”

Lucas looked genuinely offended.

“I did not cry.”

She raised an eyebrow.

“The nurse handed you a tissue.”

“There was something in my eye.”

“There were two babies in your eye?”

He laughed, unable to maintain the lie.

“They were perfect.”

“They still are.”

“They certainly keep us busy.”

“They definitely inherited your stubborn streak.”

“My stubborn streak?”

“You once spent two hours trying to assemble a bicycle without reading the instructions.”

“I was proving a point.”

“What point?”

Lucas shrugged.

“I honestly can’t remember.”

She burst into laughter.

God, he’d missed hearing that laugh without interruptions from conference calls or children needing their attention.

After lunch, Penelope kicked off her sandals and wandered towards the shoreline. The water was impossibly clear, warm enough to invite her in without hesitation.

She looked back over her shoulder.

“Race you.”

Before Lucas could answer, she sprinted into the ocean.

“Hey!” he called, laughing as he chased after her.

She squealed when he caught up, splashing him before diving beneath the surface.

Lucas reached her moments later, wrapping an arm around her waist as she resurfaced.

“There you are.”

“You cheated.”

“I won.”

“You tackled me.”

“I prefer the word rescued.”

She rolled her eyes affectionately.

“There was nothing to rescue me from.”

“There is now.”

“What?”

Without another word, he pulled her closer and kissed her.

The world seemed to disappear.

There was only the gentle rocking of the warm ocean, the distant cry of seabirds and the endless stretch of turquoise water surrounding them. Sunlight danced across the waves as Lucas held her against him, kissing her with the same tenderness he always had.

Ten years hadn't diminished what they shared. If anything, it had only made it stronger. The kiss deepened slowly, naturally, neither of them in any hurry to let the moment end. When they finally pulled apart, Penelope rested her forehead against his.

“You know...”

“What?”

“I think this is my favourite anniversary.”

Lucas smiled.

“It hasn’t even finished yet.”

She slipped her arms around his neck once more.

“Then I can’t wait to see what you’ve planned for dinner.”

His grin widened.

“Oh... you’re going to love dinner.”

She laughed.

“I’ve never stopped loving this life with you.”

Lucas kissed her again, holding her close as the gentle waves rolled around them.

Ten years had passed since they’d stood before their family and friends and promised each other forever.

Together they had built a life neither of them had dared dream was possible—a beautiful family, a marriage founded on trust, and a love that had only grown stronger with time.

As Lucas kissed his wife beneath the endless Maldivian sky, he realised something. He’d spent years building one of the most successful companies in the world. But that had never been his greatest achievement.

This was.

And he wouldn’t have changed a single moment of the journey that had brought them here.

**— The End —**

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