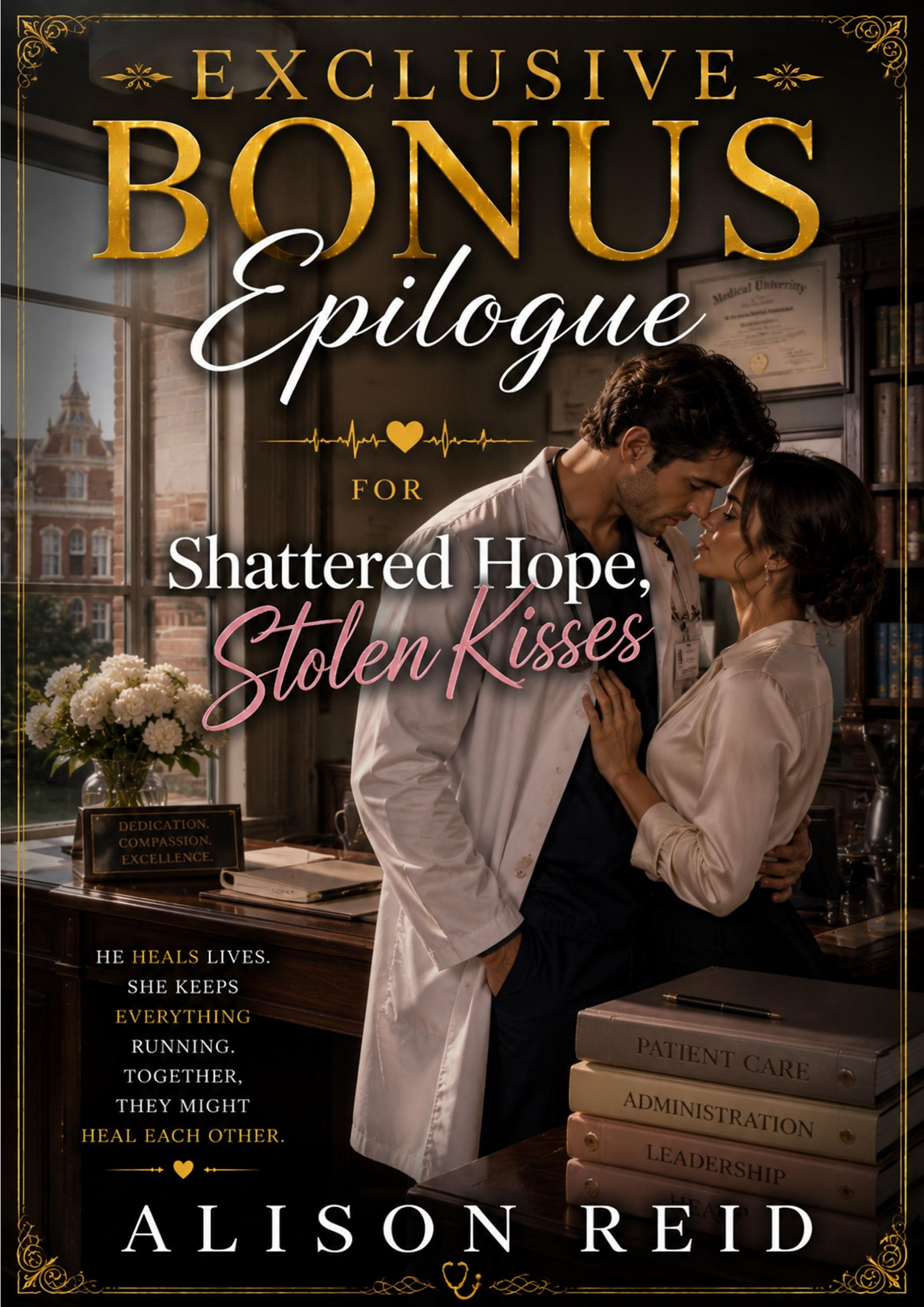
EXCLUSIVE

BONUS Epilogue

FOR

Shattered Hope, Stolen Kisses



HE HEALS LIVES.
SHE KEEPS
EVERYTHING
RUNNING.
TOGETHER,
THEY MIGHT
HEAL EACH OTHER.

ALISON REID

Exclusive Bonus Epilogue

Shattered Hope, Stolen Kisses

by Alison Reid

Five Years Later…

Anthony woke in darkness.

For a moment, he wasn't entirely sure what had woken him. The apartment was quiet, wrapped in the stillness that only existed in the middle of the night. Sydney glittered beyond the bedroom windows, the distant lights reflecting across the harbour like scattered diamonds.

Beside him, Aurora slept peacefully.

Anthony turned his head slightly, his gaze settling on her.

Moonlight spilled across her features, illuminating the soft curve of her cheek and the golden strands of hair spread across her pillow. She had shifted closer to him sometime during the night, one hand resting lightly on his chest.

His heart tightened.

Even now. Even after five years. There were moments when he looked at her and still couldn't quite believe she was real.

Carefully, so he wouldn't wake her, he brushed a strand of hair from her face. Aurora sighed softly in her sleep and instinctively moved closer. Anthony smiled.

His wife.

The word still carried a quiet sense of wonder.

Earlier that evening, she had handed him a small gift box after dinner. He'd opened it without suspicion. Inside had been a tiny pair of baby socks.

For a moment, he hadn't understood. Then he'd looked up. Aurora had been smiling through tears.

"We're having another baby."

The memory hit him with the same force now as it had then. The overwhelming joy. The disbelief. The gratitude.

He had laughed. Then cried. Then pulled Aurora into his arms and held her so tightly she had accused him of trying to crush her.

Their family was growing. Again.

His gaze drifted toward the bedroom door. Beyond it, down the hallway, Liam slept peacefully in his room. Four years old and already convinced he was destined to become either a doctor, a firefighter, or a dinosaur.

Anthony wasn't entirely sure how the last option fit into the career plan, but Liam seemed confident.

A smile tugged at his lips. His son. His wife. Another baby. Everything he had ever wanted. And so much more than he had ever expected.

A few years ago, he would never have imagined regular family dinners with his parents.

He and his parents had always loved each other, but distance and busy lives had a way of creating gaps. His mother had often complained that she barely saw him. Then Aurora had quietly stepped in. She called them. Invited them. Included them.

Before long, his parents were visiting from Melbourne every few months. Sometimes more. Other weekends, Anthony and Aurora packed up Liam and flew south.

His parents adored Aurora and they adored Liam.

And every time Anthony watched them together, he felt a quiet gratitude for the woman sleeping beside him.

Aurora hadn't just changed his life. She had strengthened every part of it.

The familiar memory arrived without warning. An alleyway. Blood on concrete. A broken young woman lying motionless beneath the harsh glow of a streetlight.

Anthony closed his eyes.

Even now, after all this time, he could still remember the terror that had gripped him when he first saw her. He remembered dropping to his knees beside her. Remembered feeling for a pulse. Remembered the overwhelming relief when he found one.

Weak. Fragile. But there. The image had never fully left him. Nor had the knowledge that if he'd chosen a different street that night… if he'd been a few minutes later…

His entire life would have been different. A warm hand slid across his chest. Anthony looked down. Aurora was awake. Her blue eyes met his in the darkness.

"You're thinking again," she murmured sleepily.

A quiet laugh escaped him.

"I didn't realise I was making noise."

"You weren't." She shifted closer, resting her head against his shoulder. "I just know you."

His arm slipped around her automatically. For a moment, neither of them spoke. The silence between them wasn't empty. It never was. It was comfortable. Familiar.

Home.

"What were you thinking about?" she asked softly.

Anthony looked down at her.

"The night we met."

Aurora's expression softened immediately. Neither of them spoke for several seconds. There was no need. Some memories would always belong to both of them. Finally, she reached for his hand and intertwined their fingers.

"I was lucky you found me."

Anthony shook his head.

"No."

Aurora frowned.

"No?"

His throat tightened unexpectedly.

"No," he repeated quietly. "I was the lucky one."

Emotion flickered across her face. Anthony lifted her hand and pressed a kiss against her knuckles.

"I found the love of my life that night."

Aurora's eyes filled with tears.

"Anthony—"

"I mean it." His voice was rough now. Honest. Unfiltered. "I know what almost happened. I know how close I came to never knowing you." He swallowed hard. "Every day I wake up beside you feels like a gift."

His hand drifted to her stomach. A tiny life growing there. Another miracle. Another future. Another reason to be grateful. A tear slipped down her cheek. Anthony brushed it away with his thumb.

"You saved me too, you know."

Aurora gave a watery laugh.

"I was unconscious when we met."

"Still true."

Her smile trembled.

"You gave me something worth fighting for."

For a long moment they simply looked at each other.

Five years. A marriage. A son. Another baby on the way. A family neither of them had dared dream about on that terrible night.

Anthony lowered his forehead to hers.

"I love you."

The words were as natural as breathing. As true as they had ever been. Aurora smiled.

"I love you too."

Anthony kissed her softly. Slowly. Tenderly. The way he always did when words weren't enough.

When they finally pulled apart, Aurora settled back against him, her head tucked beneath his chin. Within minutes her breathing deepened again. Sleep reclaimed her.

Anthony remained awake a little longer, holding her close. Listening to the steady rhythm of her breathing. Listening to the silence of the home they had built together.

The home that would never have existed if fate hadn't placed him in that alleyway on the worst night of her life.

He pressed a kiss to the top of her head. Then he closed his eyes. Every good thing in his life had begun with the woman he refused to leave behind.

— The End —

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