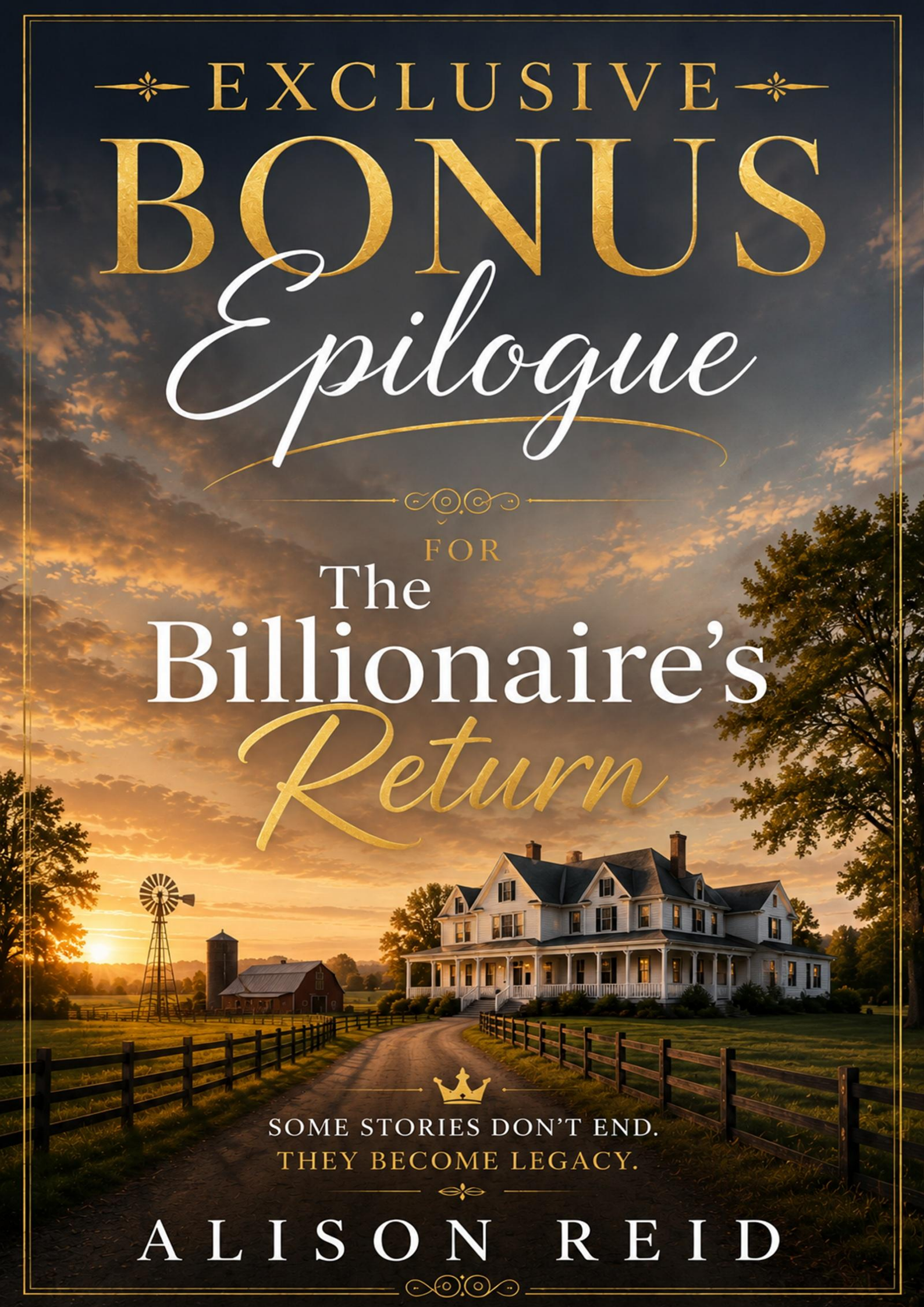
EXCLUSIVE

BONUS Epilogue

FOR

The Billionaire's Return



SOME STORIES DON'T END.
THEY BECOME LEGACY.

ALISON REID

Exclusive Bonus Epilogue

The Billionaire's Return

by Alison Reid

Twenty Years Later…

Sunday lunch at Calder Farm had become sacred.

No matter how busy life became, Luke insisted on it.

Some weeks Noah flew in from New York in the company helicopter straight from Calder Tower. Other weeks Luke and Emma travelled to the penthouse themselves for board meetings or charity events. But somehow, between billion-dollar deals and harvest schedules, they always found their way back to the long oak dining table overlooking the fields.

Today the farmhouse smelled of roast beef, fresh bread, and Emma's apple pie cooling near the kitchen window.

Luke sat at the head of the table watching his family with the same quiet satisfaction he still rarely admitted out loud.

Michael argued with Jane about crop rotation software while she rolled her eyes dramatically and stole potatoes directly from Emma's plate.

"At least I know how to run the irrigation schedules properly," Michael said.

Jane snorted. "You flooded the south paddock last month."

"That happened one time."

"It happened twice."

Luke hid a smile behind his wine glass.

Noah was in New York that weekend attending a friend's wedding, though he had already promised Emma he would fly home the following Friday. At twenty-five, he had grown into a man Luke trusted completely. Sharp. Controlled. Brilliant in business. He had taken to Calder Technologies with an instinct Luke recognised immediately because it mirrored his own.

But unlike Luke at that age, Noah laughed easily.

Emma claimed that was because Noah had been raised with love instead of survival.

Luke suspected she was right.

Michael and Jane were still at school but worked on the farm whenever they could because they genuinely loved it. Michael would leave for college in a few months, something Emma still struggled to think about for too long.

Jane would miss him terribly.

The two of them had always been inseparable. Even now, at seventeen and nineteen, they moved through life like a team. Jane pretended Michael annoyed her constantly, but Emma caught her following him around the farm almost every afternoon.

Across the table Emma caught Luke staring at her.

"What?" she asked softly, amused.

Luke leaned back in his chair, unable to stop the small smile that still appeared every time she looked at him.

"Nothing," he said. "Just thinking I got lucky."

Michael made a choking sound.

"Dad," he groaned. "You've been married twenty years. You're still disgusting."

Jane laughed while Emma's cheeks pinkened faintly.

Luke reached over anyway, sliding his hand over Emma's beneath the table like he had done thousands of times over the years. Because twenty years later, touching his wife still felt as necessary as breathing.

Emma squeezed his hand once before pulling away to stand.

"Dessert," she announced. "And if anyone touches the pie before I cut it, I'll disown you."

Michael immediately pointed at Jane. "She's the one you need to watch."

Jane gasped dramatically. "Traitor."

Emma laughed softly as she carried the pie to the table, sunlight spilling through the kitchen windows around her. Luke watched her move through the farmhouse they had rebuilt together, comfortable and warm in a way that still amazed him sometimes.

There had been years when he thought he would never have this.

A family.

Peace.

Emma.

And yet somehow she had given him all three.

His phone buzzed against the table.

Luke glanced down automatically, expecting another email from New York or an update from overseas investors. Instead, Noah's name flashed across the screen.

Luke answered immediately.

"Noah."

But instead of his son's voice, a stranger spoke.

"Mr Calder? This is Officer Reynolds with the NYPD…"

Luke's expression changed instantly.

The warmth disappeared from his face so fast Emma's stomach tightened before he even spoke.

Michael noticed it too. "Dad?"

Luke stood slowly from the table, one hand gripping the phone harder.

"Yes," he said into the receiver, voice suddenly cold and controlled. "Which hospital?"

Emma's pulse began to hammer.

Luke listened in silence, his jaw tightening with every second that passed. The colour slowly drained from his face.

"Noah was conscious?" he asked sharply.

A pause. Then—

"And now?"

Emma pushed back her chair. "Luke?"

Luke dragged a hand across his mouth, eyes fixed somewhere far beyond the kitchen walls.

"How bad is it?" he asked quietly.

The silence that followed seemed to last forever. Emma could hear her own heartbeat.

Michael and Jane had both gone completely still now, watching their father carefully.

Luke finally spoke again. "We'll be there immediately."

He ended the call. For one terrible moment, nobody moved.

Emma stared at him. "Luke."

His eyes lifted to hers. And Emma knew. Fear hit her so violently she had to grip the back of the chair to stay upright.

"What happened?" she whispered.

Luke crossed the room quickly.

"There's been an accident," he said carefully, already reaching for her hands. "Noah was in a car crash in Manhattan."

Emma made a small sound in the back of her throat.

"No…"

"He's alive," Luke said immediately, firmly. "Emma, listen to me. He's alive."

"But—"

"He's at NewYork-Presbyterian. They've taken him into surgery for a leg injury."

Emma stared at him blankly like the words would not make sense.

"Noah?" she whispered again.

Luke tightened his grip on her hands.

"He was coming back from the wedding reception. Another driver ran a red light."

Emma's breathing became uneven.

"No," she said again, shaking her head harder now. "No, no, no…"

Luke saw panic beginning to take over and immediately pulled her against him.

"Emma," he said firmly against her hair. "Look at me."

But she couldn't. All she could see was Noah as a little boy racing across the farmhouse kitchen in muddy boots. Noah asleep on her chest after nightmares. Noah laughing in the fields with Michael and Jane.

Her baby.

Her firstborn.

"Oh God…" she choked out.

Jane burst into tears instantly while Michael stood frozen in shock. Luke wrapped both arms around Emma as her knees nearly gave out beneath her.

“He’s going to be okay,” Luke said, though his own voice sounded strained now. “The officer said he was conscious before surgery. Emma, sweetheart, listen to me. Noah is alive.”

Emma clutched the front of his shirt with trembling hands.

“I need to see him,” she whispered brokenly. “Luke, I need to see my baby.”

“You will.”

Luke kissed her forehead quickly before pulling back just enough to look at Michael.

“Get the helicopter ready,” he said calmly, slipping fully into crisis mode despite the fear burning in his eyes. “Now.”

Michael nodded instantly and grabbed his phone.

Jane wiped at her tears frantically. “I’m coming too.”

Luke looked back at Emma. She was shaking so badly he could barely stand it. And suddenly, twenty years of success, power, and wealth meant absolutely nothing. Because all Luke Calder could think was please let our son survive this.

***

Emma sat rigid beside him in the helicopter, shaking so badly Luke could feel it through her coat.

“He’s going to be okay, sweetheart,” Luke repeated quietly, one hand wrapped tightly around hers. “They said he was alive.”

“But he’s in surgery,” Emma whispered, panic cracking her voice. “Luke… what if—”

“No.”

The word came instantly. Fierce. Absolute. Luke pulled her against his chest without caring who watched.

Michael and Jane sat opposite them in silence while the helicopter thundered through the darkening sky toward Manhattan. Growing up, they had always marvelled at the way their parents loved each other with such complete, unwavering focus. Even after twenty years, Luke still looked at Emma like she was the centre of his entire world.

And Emma looked at him the exact same way. Now, though, fear had stripped everything else away. Luke pressed his mouth against Emma's hair.

"He's coming home to us," he said firmly. "Do you hear me? Noah is going to be fine."

Emma's fingers twisted tightly into his jacket like she was holding herself together through him alone.

Jane wiped at tears silently while Michael stared out the helicopter window, jaw clenched hard enough to hurt. Neither of them had ever seen their mother this frightened before.

Emma buried her face against Luke's chest.

"He was just supposed to be at a wedding," she whispered shakily. "He was supposed to come home next weekend."

Luke closed his eyes briefly.

Images kept hitting him whether he wanted them or not. Noah at five years old asleep on his shoulders after long days in the fields. Noah learning to fly the company helicopters before he was old enough to tell Emma. Noah standing beside him in boardrooms with the same sharp Calder instincts and Emma's warmth steadying all the harder edges Luke had once carried alone.

Their son.

His chest tightened violently.

“He’s strong,” Luke said quietly, smoothing a hand through Emma’s hair. “He’s our son. Noah will fight.”

Emma let out a broken breath.

Luke hated this.

Hated the terror in her voice.

Hated the tears running silently down her cheeks.

Hated that he could not fix this instantly.

If he could have taken Noah’s injuries himself to spare her even one second of this fear, he would have done it without hesitation.

Michael finally spoke from across the cabin, his voice rough.

“Dad… should we call Calder Tower?”

Luke nodded once, still holding Emma tightly against him.

“Have security clear the hospital entrance,” he said calmly. “And tell NewYork-Presbyterian we’re twenty minutes out.”

Michael immediately reached for his phone.

The helicopter jolted slightly through turbulence and Emma flinched hard against him.

Luke tightened his arms around her instinctively.

“Hey,” he murmured softly, tipping her face up until she looked at him. “Stay with me.”

Her eyes were full of fear.

“I can’t lose him.”

The words nearly broke him. Luke pressed his forehead briefly against hers.

“You won’t,” he said firmly. “I swear to you, Emma… Noah is coming home.”

And God, Luke would carry every ounce of her fear if it meant she did not have to bear it alone. Twenty years later and he still loved her so much it frightened him.

***

The moment Emma saw Noah sitting up in the hospital bed, pale but conscious beneath the harsh hospital lighting, she burst into tears.

A strangled sob escaped her as she rushed across the room.

"Noah—"

He looked exhausted. Bruises shadowed one side of his face, a cut sat near his temple, and one leg was heavily bandaged and elevated, but he was awake.

Awake.

"Mum," Noah said weakly, his voice rough from pain medication. "Please don't cry. I'm okay."

Emma reached him a second later, clutching his face between trembling hands like she needed to physically reassure herself he was real.

"You were in surgery," she whispered brokenly. "Do you have any idea what you did to me?"

Noah winced slightly. "Apparently break my leg."

A shaky laugh escaped Michael from somewhere behind them while Jane covered her mouth, already crying openly.

"Idiot," Michael muttered thickly, scrubbing at his eyes. "You scared the hell out of us."

Noah gave him a faint grin. "You're just upset because now you'll have to do all my meetings."

"You nearly died and you're still annoying," Jane whispered tearfully before hurrying forward to hug him carefully around the shoulders.

Noah wrapped one arm around her gently.

"Hey," he murmured. "I'm okay."

Emma still hadn't let go of his face.

Luke stood beside her, one hand firm at her waist because he could feel how badly she was shaking.

For the first time since the phone call, he finally allowed himself to breathe properly.

Their son was alive.

The trauma surgeon standing near the bed smiled gently at the family.

"Your son was very lucky," he explained. "The fracture to his femur was severe, and there was significant blood loss at the scene, but surgery went very well."

Emma's knees nearly gave out at the words blood loss.

Luke tightened his arm around her instantly, grounding her against his side before she even realised she was swaying.

The doctor continued calmly.

"We inserted a titanium rod to stabilise the bone. He'll need physiotherapy and rehabilitation over the next few months, but we expect a full recovery."

"A full recovery?" Emma repeated immediately.

"Yes," the doctor reassured softly. "It will take time, but he should regain full function."

Emma closed her eyes briefly as relief hit her so hard it almost hurt. Luke felt her entire body sag against him.

"Thank God," she whispered.

Noah looked between his parents, guilt flickering across his face.

"I'm sorry."

Emma's eyes snapped open instantly.

"Don't apologise," she said fiercely, brushing trembling fingers through his dark hair. "You don't ever apologise for this."

Luke finally stepped closer to the bed, resting a hand carefully against Noah's shoulder. For a moment neither of them spoke.

The resemblance between them still hit Luke unexpectedly sometimes. Same steel-grey eyes. Same height. Same controlled expression whenever either of them was trying not to show pain. But Noah had Emma's heart. And right now Luke had never loved his son more fiercely than he did in this moment.

"You scared your mother half to death," Luke said quietly.

Noah gave a tired smile. "You too?"

Luke let out a breath that almost sounded like a laugh.

"Yeah," he admitted roughly. "Me too."

Emma leaned down carefully then, pressing a kiss against Noah's forehead exactly the same way she had when he was little. Luke watched her with an ache so deep it nearly overwhelmed him.

The doctor kept explaining rehabilitation schedules, follow-up surgeries, private recovery suites, and physiotherapy arrangements. Luke barely heard a word. Because Emma had finally turned fully into his chest, trembling softly now that the worst was over, and all he could think was thank God.

Not for the company.

Not for the money.

Not even for the empire he had built.

Just this.

His wife alive in his arms.

His children safe beside him.

His family still whole.

Luke lowered his mouth to Emma's hair and closed his eyes briefly.

Twenty years ago he had nearly lost everything that mattered because he had been too frightened to stay.

Now, standing in a Manhattan hospital room with Emma pressed against his heart and all three of his children surrounding them, Luke knew with absolute certainty that nothing in his life would ever matter more than this family.

Nothing.

***

Later that night, after endless conversations with doctors and finally convincing Noah to try to sleep, Luke brought the family back to the Manhattan penthouse.

Noah would remain at NewYork-Presbyterian for several days under observation before beginning rehabilitation.

Michael and Jane had fallen asleep almost immediately after they returned home, emotionally exhausted from the day. Jane had curled up beside Michael on the sofa for nearly an hour before Luke finally convinced them both to go to bed.

Now the penthouse was quiet.

The lights of Manhattan shimmered beyond the enormous windows while the city moved endlessly below them, distant and muted against the glass.

Luke lay stretched across the top of the king-size bed, still dressed in black slacks and a dark T-shirt, staring at the ceiling with one arm behind his head.

He looked tired.

Not physically.

Emotionally.

The kind of exhaustion that settled deep in the bones after fear finally loosened its grip.

The ensuite door opened softly. Luke turned his head. Emma stepped into the bedroom wearing a champagne-coloured silk nightgown that skimmed softly over her skin, her damp hair loose around her shoulders. The warm light caught the fabric every time she moved, making it glow softly against the dark room.

For a second Luke simply watched her. Twenty years later and she could still steal the air from his lungs without even trying. Emma crossed the room quietly toward him.

The moment she came close enough, Luke sat up on the edge of the bed and reached for her automatically, his hands settling on her hips before pulling her gently between his knees.

He rested his forehead against her chest like he needed the contact as much as breathing. Emma's fingers immediately threaded through his dark hair. The familiar gesture loosened something tight inside him. Neither of them spoke for a long moment.

The silence between them had never been uncomfortable. It was one of the things Luke treasured most about their marriage. Emma understood him without forcing words from him. She always had.

Emma's fingertips moved slowly through his hair.

"Thank you, sweetheart," she whispered.

Luke lifted his head slightly, looking up into her eyes.

"What for?"

Emotion flickered across her face.

“For being my anchor,” she said softly. “For loving me. For being the love of my life.”

Luke’s expression tightened almost painfully. He slid his hands further around her waist, holding her closer.

“You don’t need to thank me,” he murmured. “I should be thanking you for giving me this family.”

Emma’s eyes filled instantly. Luke brushed his thumb beneath one of them before the tear could fall.

“When I got that phone call today…” His voice roughened briefly. “Jesus, Emma.”

She swallowed hard.

“I thought we were losing him.”

Luke closed his eyes for a second.

“So did I.”

The admission sat heavily between them. Emma’s hand cupped his jaw gently.

“But we didn’t,” she whispered.

Luke turned his face slightly into her palm, pressing a kiss against the inside of her wrist.

“No,” he agreed quietly. “We didn’t.”

Emma looked at him for a long moment, her expression softening with love so deep it still undid him after all these years.

“You held me together today.”

Luke let out a quiet breath.

“That’s my job.”

A small smile touched her lips.

“You’ve always taken care of me.”

His arms tightened around her immediately.

"Always will."

And he meant it with every part of himself. Emma leaned down slowly until their foreheads rested together. Luke's eyes closed automatically.

For all the wealth surrounding them—the penthouse, the private helicopters, the empire bearing his name—none of it compared to this moment.

Emma in his arms.

Their children safe.

The family they had fought so hard to build still intact. Luke opened his eyes again and looked up at her.

"I love you," he said quietly.

Emma smiled then, soft and beautiful and still capable of wrecking him completely.

"I know," she whispered. "I love you too."

His eyes darkened instantly. Slowly, his hands slid down from her waist to cup her backside through the silk.

"You're still the sexiest woman I have ever met."

Emma laughed softly at that, a warm, cheeky smile curving her lips.

"Even after twenty years?"

Luke's gaze travelled deliberately over her, heat and devotion tangled together so naturally now they were impossible to separate.

"Especially after twenty years."

The look in his eyes made her breath catch. Because after everything they had survived together—heartbreak, fear, children, sleepless nights, building a life from almost nothing—Luke still looked at her like he wanted her with the same dangerous intensity he had at eighteen.

Maybe more.

Emma stepped closer between his legs, her fingers brushing lightly along the back of his neck.

"You know," she murmured teasingly, "most husbands your age would probably be asleep by now."

Luke let out a low laugh.

"Sweetheart," he said, voice roughening, "I'm still obsessed with my wife. That hasn't changed."

Emma kissed him then.

Slow at first.

Familiar.

The kind of kiss built from years of knowing each other completely.

Luke's hands tightened against her hips as she melted against him, the silk of her nightgown sliding beneath his fingers. He kissed her deeper a second later, all quiet heat and restrained hunger, and Emma smiled softly against his mouth like she could still feel exactly what he was thinking before he spoke.

She always could.

Luke stood suddenly, lifting her effortlessly against him despite her startled laugh.

"Luke—"

"You're beautiful," he murmured against her throat before kissing the sensitive skin there slowly enough to make her shiver.

Emma's arms slid around his shoulders automatically.

The city lights glowed around them through the penthouse windows while Manhattan carried on far below, distant and irrelevant compared to the two of them standing there together.

After all this time, they still gravitated toward each other instinctively.

Still touched constantly.

Still kissed like they had something to prove.

Still fell into bed together with the same certainty they had belonged there all along.

Luke carried her to the bed, his mouth brushing hers again as Emma laughed softly against his lips.

And later, long after the lights of the city blurred beyond the windows and the fear of the day finally faded away, Luke lay tangled beside the woman he had loved for more than half his life, holding her close while she slept peacefully against his chest.

Exactly where she belonged.

— The End —

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