THE BILLIONAIRE'S *Secret Baby*

EXCLUSIVE BONUS *Epilogue*

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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The Billionaire's Secret Baby

by Alison Reid

Eighteen Years Later…

The penthouse was quieter than it used to be.

Not silent—never silent with Jessica Werrington in existence—but quieter.

William had graduated from high school three months earlier and now spent most of his time pretending he wasn't preparing to eventually inherit part of Werrington Wealth. At eighteen, he had Adrian's height, Heidi's patience, and an alarming ability to dismantle an argument with a single raised eyebrow.

Jessica, meanwhile, had inherited none of that patience.

"Dad!" her voice echoed down the hallway the second the front door opened.

Adrian stepped inside the penthouse beside Heidi, loosening his tie as he exhaled heavily. "That tone usually means someone's either dead or expensive."

Heidi laughed softly beside him, slipping off her coat. Eighteen years later, she was still breathtaking. Still composed. Still the calm centre of every storm he'd ever walked through. As CFO of Werrington Wealth, she spent her days keeping billion-dollar disasters from erupting.

At home, she mostly managed Jessica.

"Jessica?" Heidi called. "What happened?"

Their sixteen-year-old daughter appeared at the top of the staircase clutching a folder dramatically against her chest. Her dark hair was slightly messy, her expression scandalized.

"Oh my God," she said breathlessly. "Dad was married before you."

Adrian stopped mid-step. Heidi blinked once. Then slowly turned toward her husband.

"Well," she said mildly, "looks like she found the family secret."

Jessica hurried downstairs. "You knew?"

Heidi stared at her. "Jessica… I was there."

"That's not the point!" Jessica dropped onto the sofa in outrage. "Why did nobody tell me Dad had another wife? There are photographs!"

William wandered into the living room carrying a bottle of water, took one look at Jessica's expression, and sighed.

"What did she find?"

"Our father had a secret wife."

Adrian muttered under his breath, "This feels unnecessarily dramatic."

Jessica ignored him completely. "There are articles online! Actual paparazzi photos! She was blonde and scary looking."

Heidi bit back a laugh as she walked toward the kitchen. "That's a terrible description of someone."

"It's an accurate description," William said calmly, sitting in an armchair.

Jessica opened the folder and started pulling out printed articles. "Look at this! 'Golden Couple of Manhattan Society.'" She looked personally offended. "Dad, you look miserable in every single picture."

"I was miserable in every single picture," Adrian replied dryly.

That made Jessica pause. Then her expression shifted again as she grabbed another stack of papers from the folder.

"And then I found this…"

She shoved one of the printouts toward them dramatically.

SOURCES SAY BILLIONAIRE ADRIAN WERRINGTON'S NEW CFO WAS MORE THAN JUST A COLLEAGUE—INSIDERS ALLEGE SHE'S THE REASON HIS MARRIAGE ENDED.

Jessica's eyes widened as she looked between them.

"Oh my God." She pointed at Heidi. "Were you having an affair with Dad while he was married?"

"Jessica," William muttered from the armchair. "Maybe don't accuse Mum of adultery five minutes before dinner."

Heidi, however, looked completely calm.

"Absolutely not."

The certainty in her voice made Jessica blink.

Heidi folded her arms lightly across her chest and leaned against the kitchen island. "Your father and I did not have an affair."

"Not even emotionally?" Jessica pressed suspiciously.

Adrian actually laughed at that.

"You sound like a lawyer."

"She watches too many documentaries," William supplied.

Jessica ignored him. "Well?"

Heidi exchanged a brief glance with Adrian before answering carefully.

"I liked your father long before his marriage ended," she admitted honestly. "And I think he liked me too."

Jessica gasped softly like this was already scandalous.

"But," Heidi continued firmly, "nothing happened between us while he was married. Nothing physical. No secret relationship. No sneaking around. In fact, I spent most of my time trying to avoid him."

"That's true," Adrian said, looking faintly amused by the memory. "She was extremely determined to behave professionally."

"I was behaving professionally."

"You practically fled every room I walked into."

"Because you were married," Heidi replied pointedly.

Jessica looked between them with growing fascination.

"So, when did you kiss?"

Heidi nearly choked on her own breath.

"Jessica!"

"What? This is relevant research material now."

William groaned. "Please never say 'research material' about our parents kissing again."

Adrian looked entirely too entertained now.

"There was no affair," he said calmly. "By the time I kissed your mother, my marriage was already over."

Jessica narrowed her eyes. "Emotionally over or legally over?"

"Both," Heidi answered immediately.

Adrian reached for her hand then almost absently, like after eighteen years it was instinctive. His thumb brushed across her knuckles once.

"I would never have disrespected your mother by asking her to be part of something like that," he said quietly. "And she would never have accepted it."

Jessica studied them both carefully. Then slowly, some of the tension left her face.

"So, the tabloids lied."

Heidi smiled faintly. “Sweetheart, tabloids once claimed your father secretly bought an island because he was preparing for the apocalypse.”

“I did buy the island,” Adrian admitted.

Jessica’s mouth fell open.

William closed his eyes. “Dad.”

“What? It was a good investment.”

Heidi laughed softly, shaking her head before looking back at Jessica.

“The point is,” Heidi said gently, “real life is usually more complicated than headlines.”

Jessica looked down at the articles again before sighing dramatically.

“Okay, but that still doesn’t explain why you married this Cleo person if you were so unhappy.”

The room quieted slightly.

Adrian leaned back against the counter, arms folding across his chest as he considered the question.

“Because,” he said finally, “I thought she was carrying my child.”

Jessica’s expression softened immediately.

“Oh.”

“I wanted children very badly,” Adrian admitted. “Probably more than anything else at the time.”

Heidi looked at him quietly. Even after all these years, there was still something in her expression whenever he talked about that period of his life. Something tender. Like she remembered exactly how lonely he had been.

Jessica frowned. “But you didn’t love her?”

Adrian was silent for a moment.

"No," he said honestly. "I thought I was doing the honourable thing… but I found out she couldn't be pregnant because she'd had a tubal ligation before we were married. Before she ever claimed she was pregnant."

Jessica stared at him.

"That's insane."

"It was," Adrian agreed quietly.

A shadow crossed his expression briefly—not pain anymore, not after all these years, but the memory of it. The betrayal. The humiliation. The grief over a child that had never existed.

"Unfortunately," he said calmly, "some people are manipulators. Cleo was one of them."

William, sprawled back in the armchair with complete confidence, snorted.

"Total bitch, if you ask me."

Heidi immediately looked at her son. "William."

"What?" he said innocently. "I'm just summarising the situation."

Jessica burst out laughing.

"He's not wrong," she muttered.

"Neither of you are helping," Heidi informed them.

Adrian, meanwhile, looked deeply entertained.

"I appreciate the loyalty," he told William.

"You're welcome," William replied. "Honestly, Dad, your twenties and thirties sound exhausting."

"I was thirty-six," Adrian corrected automatically.

"That somehow makes it worse."

Jessica shook her head slowly as she looked through the articles again. "I can't believe she thought she'd get away with pretending to be pregnant."

"She nearly did," Adrian said quietly.

That sobered the room slightly. Heidi moved closer beside him then, her hand resting lightly against his arm. A small gesture. Instinctive after all these years.

"But she didn't," Heidi said softly.

Adrian looked down at her for a moment, his expression easing instantly at her touch. No matter how much time passed, Jessica noticed that about them. Her father always softened around her mother. Like some invisible tension inside him disappeared whenever Heidi was close. Jessica suddenly looked emotional again.

"So, if you never found out the truth…" she said carefully, "you might've stayed with her forever?"

Adrian's expression darkened slightly at the thought.

"No," he said after a moment. "I was already miserable. I just didn't fully understand why yet."

"And then you met Mum."

A faint smile appeared on Adrian's face.

"Yes," he said simply. "Then I met your mother."

Heidi rolled her eyes lightly. "You make it sound very dramatic."

"It was dramatic," William said. "You two basically spent months staring at each other across conference tables."

Jessica gasped. "Oh my God, workplace slow burn."

Heidi closed her eyes briefly. "I regret telling either of you anything."

"She's not wrong," Adrian said dryly. "It was complete torture."

Heidi gave him a look. "You survived."

"Barely. Then you disappeared for two months. I was almost out of my mind." Adrian shook his head at the memory. "Poor Alan was the only person keeping me sane."

Jessica immediately straightened. "Wait. What do you mean Mum disappeared?"

William looked interested now too. "You never told me that part."

Heidi sighed softly, already regretting this entire conversation.

"When I found out I was pregnant with William," she explained carefully, "I panicked."

Jessica blinked. "Why?"

Heidi looked toward Adrian briefly before answering.

"Because of what happened with Cleo." Her voice softened. "Your father had just gone through someone pretending to be pregnant to manipulate him. I was terrified he'd think I was doing the same thing."

Jessica's face fell instantly. "Mum…"

"I know now it sounds irrational," Heidi admitted. "But at the time, I was scared. Your father was wealthy, powerful, newly divorced, and I was his employee. I thought if I told him I was pregnant too soon…" She exhaled lightly. "I thought he'd assume the worst."

Adrian looked genuinely pained even eighteen years later.

"She left without telling me," he said. "One day she was at work, and the next day she was gone."

Jessica stared at her mother in horror. "You ghosted Dad while pregnant with his baby?"

"I did not ghost him."

"You vanished for eight weeks," Adrian replied calmly. "That qualifies as ghosting."

Heidi folded her arms. "I left a resignation letter."

"That is not better."

William looked fascinated. "Dad, were you actually panicking?"

Adrian let out a humourless laugh.

"I searched half of Manhattan for your mother."

Jessica's eyes widened.

"What?"

"I hired private investigators," Adrian admitted. "Alan threatened to sedate me at one point because I was becoming impossible to deal with."

"That's accurate," William said solemnly.

Adrian ignored him. "I genuinely thought something terrible had happened to her," he continued quietly. "She wouldn't answer calls. Her apartment was empty. Her assistant didn't know where she went."

Heidi looked guilty now. "I went to stay with my mother and asked her not to tell him if he called."

Jessica stared at her mother. "You hid at grandma's?"

"I was emotional."

"You were carrying my son and vanished into the wilderness," Adrian corrected.

Heidi laughed softly despite herself. "You're still dramatic about this."

"Because it was dramatic."

Jessica looked between them, completely enthralled now.

"So how did Dad find you?"

Heidi smiled faintly. "I sent him an email."

Jessica stared. "An email."

"Yes," Heidi admitted. "I told him I was pregnant and that he didn't have to worry about me."

William burst out laughing immediately. "You informed Dad he was becoming a father through email?"

"In my defence, I was panicking."

Jessica leaned forward eagerly. "Oh my God. What did it say?"

Adrian pointed at Heidi. "Read your own incriminating evidence."

Heidi made a face at him. "I am not reading that email out loud."

"Oh, now you're embarrassed."

"I should hope so," she informed him. "It was written by a hormonal woman in the middle of an emotional crisis."

Jessica immediately brightened. "You still have the email?"

"Archived," Adrian said smugly.

"Dad."

"What? It's historically significant."

William looked horrified. "You archived Mum's panic pregnancy confession?"

"I archive everything."

"That's somehow the least surprising thing you've said tonight," Jessica muttered.

Heidi shook her head slowly before relenting with a sigh.

"It basically said…" She paused, clearly trying to summarise without dying of humiliation. "That I was pregnant with William. That I knew it was probably shocking. That I hadn't told your father because I was afraid after everything that happened with Cleo."

Jessica listened carefully now.

"I told him I didn't want anything from him," Heidi continued more quietly. "That I wasn't trying to trap him and that I would never stop him from seeing his son."

Adrian's expression shifted slightly at that part, some old emotion flickering through his face.

"I also told him where I was staying," Heidi admitted. "And that I was sorry for disappearing."

"You left out the dramatic parts," Adrian said.

Heidi narrowed her eyes. "I was trying to preserve some dignity."

"There was no dignity in that email."

Jessica looked delighted. "What dramatic parts?"

Adrian looked entirely too pleased with himself now. "She told me she didn't mean to fall in love with me."

Heidi covered her face with one hand immediately. "Oh my God."

Jessica let out a shriek. "MUM."

William looked deeply entertained. "That's brutal."

"I was emotional," Heidi mumbled through her fingers.

"You also told me not to feel obligated to love you back," Adrian continued.

Heidi pointed at him accusingly. "You are enjoying this far too much."

"Immensely."

Jessica was practically vibrating now. "This is the greatest family history project of all time."

"You are absolutely not putting any of this in a school presentation," Heidi warned immediately.

Jessica ignored her completely. "What happened after the email?"

Adrian's teasing expression faded slightly, replaced by something softer.

"I read it three times," he said quietly. "Then I got in my car and drove straight to New Jersey."

Heidi lowered her hand slowly.

"I genuinely thought he might never speak to me again," she admitted.

Adrian looked at her like the idea was absurd.

"Heidi," he said softly, "you told me you were carrying my son."

The room went still again. Even after eighteen years together, there was still so much feeling between them it almost felt private. Jessica looked suspiciously emotional now.

"And you loved Mum already?"

Adrian smiled faintly. "I think I loved her long before either of us admitted it."

Heidi's expression softened completely at that.

William leaned back in his chair with a sigh. "You two really are disgustingly in love."

"Yes," Adrian agreed calmly. "We are."

* * * * * * * *

Later that night, Heidi walked out of the ensuite wearing a very short black negligee, the silk skimming the tops of her thighs as she dried her hands on a towel. Adrian was already in bed, leaning back against the headboard in a grey T-shirt and lounge pants, reading glasses low on his nose as he looked over something on his tablet. Or at least, he had been reading.

The second he looked up and saw her, his attention vanished completely. Slowly, deliberately, he lowered the tablet onto the nightstand along with his glasses.

"Well," he said after a long moment, his voice roughening slightly, "that hardly seems fair."

Heidi smiled faintly as she crossed the room. "What?"

"You know exactly what."

His gaze moved over her unhurriedly, appreciating every inch of her with absolutely no shame whatsoever. Eighteen years later, the man still looked at her like she could destroy his concentration with a single glance.

Honestly, she probably could.

"You're staring," she informed him lightly.

"I'm your husband. It's literally one of my privileges."

She laughed softly under her breath before climbing onto his lap, straddling him easily. Her hands slid up his chest before linking loosely around his neck.

Adrian's hands settled instinctively on her thighs, his palms warm against the silk.

The penthouse was quiet now. William was probably gaming in his room, and Jessica was almost certainly still far too invested in her ridiculous genealogy project. And for the first time all evening, it was peaceful.

Then Adrian sighed dramatically. "I cannot believe our children know about our love life."

Heidi laughed properly then, warm and soft against his chest. God, he loved that sound. Adrian looked up at her, his expression easing into something quieter. More intimate. His thoughts drifted briefly back to that email. To the panic and heartbreak woven through every line.

"You really thought I'd reject you," he said softly after a moment.

The teasing faded slightly from Heidi's face.

"At the time?" She shrugged gently. "Yes."

Adrian's hand moved slowly along her bare thigh beneath the silk, absentmindedly affectionate.

"Heidi, I would've followed you anywhere after that email."

Her eyes lifted to his then.

“And besides,” he added quietly, “you were carrying William. I already loved both of you.”

Emotion flickered across her face so quickly it almost hurt to look at. Eighteen years later, he could still do that to her.

“You know,” she murmured, “our children are horrifyingly invested in our love story.”

“As they should be.”

She rolled her eyes lightly. “Jessica’s definitely romanticising the entire thing.”

“She gets that from you.”

“She absolutely does not.”

Adrian smiled before pressing a slow kiss to her lips.

“You disappeared for two months and still somehow expected me not to spend the rest of my life obsessed with you,” he murmured.

Heidi groaned softly. “You are never letting that go.”

“Never.” He kissed her again, lingering this time. “I suffered tremendously.”

A slow smile curved her lips. “And how exactly can I make it up to you?”

As she shifted provocatively against him, Adrian’s hands tightened instinctively on her waist, his eyes darkening.

“I can think of a few ways.”

Heidi laughed softly before sliding her fingers into his hair. Then she kissed him—slow and deep—her body moving deliberately against his until his breath caught.

“I love you, sweetheart,” he murmured against her lips.

A soft smile touched her mouth.

“I love you too.”

Then, with a teasing look in her eyes, she slipped the negligee up over her shoulders and let it fall away entirely, revealing bare skin beneath.

Adrian let out a low groan, his hands tightening instinctively on her waist.

"And," she whispered against his mouth, "I'm about to show you exactly how much."

Adrian's eyes darkened as he looked down at her sprawled across his lap, all soft skin and teasing smiles.

"Dangerous woman," he murmured.

Heidi only smiled wider. With a low groan, Adrian grabbed the hem of his T-shirt and pulled it over his head, tossing it carelessly somewhere across the room. Then his hands were on her again, firm and possessive as he shifted her beneath him.

In one smooth movement, he flipped her onto her back against the mattress. He hovered above her now, broad shoulders braced on either side of her body, his gaze locked onto hers with an intensity that still made her heart race after all these years.

Heidi's breath caught slightly as he lowered himself closer, his mouth brushing slowly against hers.

"Eighteen years," he murmured softly against her lips, "and I still can't get enough."

— The End —

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