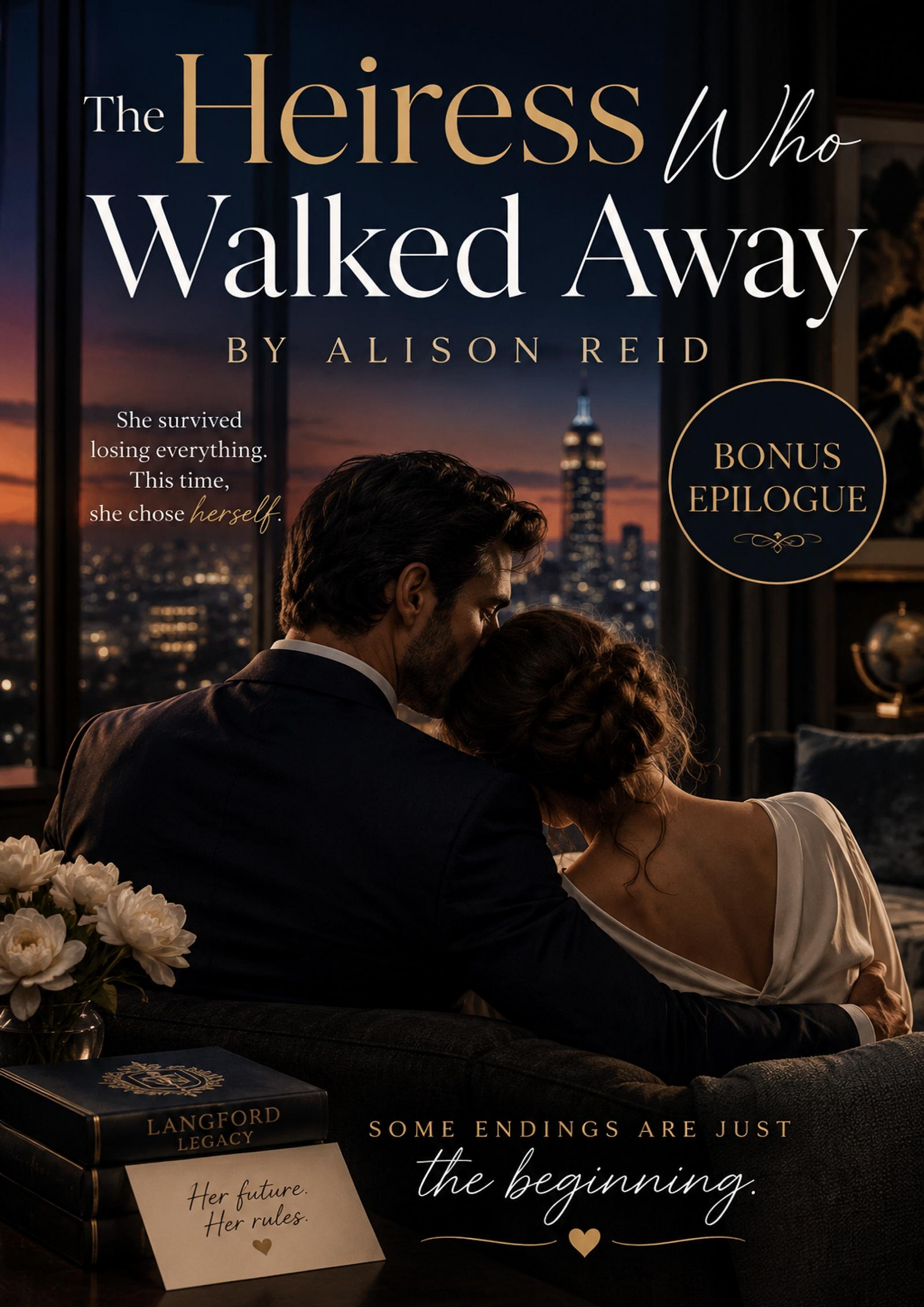
The Heiress Who Walked Away

BY ALISON REID

She survived
losing everything.
This time,
she chose *herself*.

BONUS EPILOGUE



SOME ENDINGS ARE JUST
the beginning.

Exclusive Bonus Epilogue

The Heiress Who Walked Away

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Four years later…

"She's your daughter."

Everett looked entirely unconvinced. Elise smiled from where she sat on the terrace.

"You say that every day."

"Because it's still surprising."

The answer came without hesitation. Without embarrassment. Without apology.

A tiny hand had wrapped itself firmly around his finger. The nine-month-old baby sitting on his lap appeared completely satisfied with the arrangement. Everett Maxwell—one of the most powerful businessmen in Europe—looked utterly defeated. By a baby.

The sight remained one of Elise's favourite things. Their daughter gurgled happily. Everett's expression softened immediately. The transformation never failed to amaze her.

Years ago, she would have struggled to imagine him holding an infant. Now she struggled to imagine him doing anything else.

"You're spoiling her."

His gaze lifted. Completely unapologetic.

"Yes."

The immediate answer made Elise laugh.

"At least you're honest."

"She's perfect."

As arguments went, it was difficult to challenge. Especially because he wasn't wrong. Charlotte Maxwell possessed her father's dark hair. Her mother's blue eyes. And apparently the ability to control an entire household with a single smile.

The staff had become hopeless. Mrs Tyson especially. The older woman treated Charlotte like royalty. Morgan wasn't much better. Neither was Everett. The truth made Elise smile. Life had become wonderfully chaotic.

And she loved every second of it.

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The estate looked different now.

Not physically. Emotionally. Alive. Laughter filled rooms that had once echoed with silence. Children's toys appeared in impossible places. Family photographs occupied shelves and tables. Evidence of a life being lived. A life being built. The transformation felt almost miraculous.

Because three and a half years earlier, neither of them had expected any of this. The marriage. The family. The happiness. Yet somehow they had found it. Together. The thought still amazed her. Movement near the gardens caught her attention. Everett followed her gaze.

"What is it?"

Elise smiled.

"Sophie."

Their friend crossed the lawn carrying several brightly coloured gift bags. Immediately behind her came Mrs Tyson. And between them—

Chaos.

Three-year-old Jordan Maxwell was attempting to escape. Again. Apparently an argument was already underway. The sight felt wonderfully familiar. The moment Jordan spotted his parents, he broke free and ran.

"Mummy!"

Elise barely had time to set down her tea before he launched himself into her lap. She caught him automatically. Years of practice. Jordan thrust a gift bag toward her face.

"Sophie made a special gift bag for me."

His excitement was impossible to miss. Elise looked inside. Matchbox cars. Chocolate. Lollies. More chocolate.

"Sophie."

She lifted an eyebrow. Sophie smiled without remorse.

"What?"

"He's three."

"Exactly."

Sophie dropped into a nearby chair.

"Prime lolly age."

Jordan was already digging through the contents. Everett reached over and confiscated half the chocolate. Jordan looked betrayed.

"Daddy."

"No."

"But—"

"No."

Jordan considered this. Then turned to his mother.

"Mummy?"

Elise laughed.

"No."

His shoulders slumped dramatically. At three years old, Jordan had already mastered the art of theatrical disappointment. Charlotte chose that exact moment to squeal happily from Everett's lap. Jordan immediately forgot about the chocolate.

"Charlotte!"

He scrambled over to his father and younger sister. Charlotte's face lit up the moment she saw him. The baby adored her older brother. The feeling was entirely mutual. Everett watched as Jordan carefully showed Charlotte one of his new toy cars. His large hand remained protectively behind the baby the entire time. Ready to catch her if she toppled. Ready to intervene if necessary.

Always watching. Always there. Elise felt her chest tighten. Not with sadness. With gratitude. Because this was everything. The husband she loved. The children they had dreamed about. The family they had built together. She caught Everett watching her.

The same look entered his eyes that always did when their gazes met. Love. Steady. Certain. Unchanged. After all these years, it still stole her breath.

"What?" he asked quietly.

Elise smiled.

"Nothing."

His eyebrow lifted.

"Liar."

She laughed. Perhaps. But some things didn't need to be said. The truth was already sitting right in front of her. A little boy proudly explaining toy cars to his baby sister. A husband who looked at his family as though they were the

greatest achievement of his life. And a future brighter than anything she had once believed possible.

As Jordan's excited chatter filled the terrace and Charlotte responded with delighted baby noises, Everett reached across and took her hand. The gesture was simple. Automatic. Years old. Yet Elise still felt the same warmth she always had. She squeezed his fingers. Everett smiled.

And in that moment, surrounded by the family they had created together, Elise knew one thing with absolute certainty. She had finally found everything she had ever wanted.

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Later that afternoon, the annual charity gala filled the estate grounds.

The event had expanded significantly over the past year. Partly because of Everett. Partly because Elise had transformed the foundation into something far larger than either of them had imagined. Mostly because they made a good team. The knowledge still pleased her.

Guests wandered through the gardens. Music drifted through the air. Laughter echoed across the grounds. The atmosphere felt light. Joyful. Celebratory. Exactly as intended.

Elise stood near the lake, Charlotte asleep in her arms and Jordan wrapped around one of her legs, while she spoke with several donors. The evening had been a success. The Maxwell Foundation Gala always was. Laughter drifted across the grounds. Music played softly in the background. Lights reflected across the water, turning the lake into a sheet of gold.

Jordan was becoming increasingly sleepy. Charlotte already was. Elise smiled as her daughter stirred slightly before settling back against her shoulder.

That was when she noticed him. Not nearby. Across the lawn. Near the entrance.

Gregory. The sight surprised her. Not because he was there. The event was open to invited donors, and despite everything, Gregory still moved within many of the same social circles.

No. What surprised her was how she felt. Or rather—how she didn't. No anger. No sadness. No resentment. Just recognition. As though she were looking at someone she had once known well. Someone who had once been important. Someone who no longer was. For a moment, she simply watched him.

Time had changed him—not dramatically, but enough. There was more grey at his temples now. More lines around his eyes. The easy confidence he had once carried seemed diminished somehow. Less certain. Less polished. As though life had become harder than he expected. Perhaps it had.

Then Gregory looked up. And saw her. Even from a distance, she recognised the moment. The instant recognition. The brief stillness. Their gazes met across the lawn. Years ago, that look would have carried a thousand complicated emotions. Now it carried none. Just understanding. And closure.

His gaze shifted to Charlotte sleeping peacefully against her shoulder. Then to Jordan, who was using her leg as a human support beam. Something flickered across his expression. Gone almost immediately. But not before she saw it. Regret.

The realisation settled quietly inside her. Not satisfaction. Not vindication. Just truth. Because Gregory had wanted success. Status. Control. And somewhere along the way, he had lost sight of what mattered most. The family he could have had. The life he could have built. The future he had chosen to thrown away.

Jordan tightened his arms around her leg.

"Mummy?"

She looked down.

"Yes?"

"I'm hungry."

The serious declaration made her laugh. Of course he was. Gregory was forgotten immediately. Because that was the thing about the past. Once you truly left it behind, it stopped demanding your attention.

She excused herself from the donors before shifting Charlotte slightly higher against her shoulder. Then she took Jordan's hand.

"Let's find you something to eat."

Jordan nodded enthusiastically. Food was a subject he took very seriously. A second later, a familiar arm settled around her waist. Everett.

The gesture was effortless. Automatic. As natural as breathing after all these years. Elise leaned into him without thinking. And smiled. His gaze followed hers briefly before finding Gregory across the lawn. Everett understood immediately.

"What do you want to do?"

The question made her smile. Still asking. After all these years. Still giving her the choice. Elise looked back once. Just once. Then shook her head.

"Nothing."

Because there was nothing left to say. The chapter had ended years ago. She turned away. Everett's arm tightened around her. Jordan took hold of his father's free hand. And together, they walked back toward the lights. Toward the laughter. Toward the life they had built.

Leaving the past exactly where it belonged.

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The sun was setting by the time the last guests departed.

Golden light spilled across the lake. The estate glowed softly in the evening warmth. Charlotte slept peacefully in Everett's arms, while Jordan was sprawled across Elise's lap, fast asleep. Both exhausted from a day of being adored. A difficult burden.

Elise smiled. The terrace remained quiet. Peaceful. Home. Everett settled beside her. Careful not to wake either child. His shoulder brushed hers. The familiar contact immediately settled something inside her. A habit now. A comfort. A certainty.

For several minutes, neither of them spoke. They simply sat together, watching the sunset. Watching the life they had built. Finally, Everett broke the silence.

"Happy?"

The question was simple. Yet she knew exactly what he meant. Not today. Not this moment. Life. Their marriage. Their family. Everything. Elise looked around. The estate. The lake. The sleeping children. The man beside her. Then she smiled. A genuine smile. The same smile that had first caught his attention all those years ago.

"Very."

The answer emerged softly. Honestly. Completely. Everett's hand found hers. Their fingers intertwined naturally. Effortlessly. As though they had always belonged there. Perhaps they had. A gentle breeze drifted across the terrace. The last rays of sunlight painted the water gold. Beautiful. Peaceful. Perfect.

Elise rested her head against Everett's shoulder, listening to the steady rhythm of his heartbeat. His hand tightened gently around hers. And for the first time since the accident that had changed everything, she realised there was nothing left to rebuild.

No pieces left to find. No life left to reclaim. She had done it. Not alone. But by choosing herself first. And in doing so, she had found everything she thought she'd lost. Everything she thought she'd never have. Love. Family. Home. The future stretched before them, bright and certain.

And this time, it belonged to her.

— The End —

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