EXCLUSIVE

BONUS Epilogue

FOR

Trust in Time

SOME CASES ARE WON IN COURT. THE MOST IMPORTANT ONES ARE WON IN TRUST.

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Exclusive Bonus Epilogue

Trust In Time

by Alison Reid

Ten Years Later…

Adam walked through the polished marble hallway of Dawson-Cross Legal, ignoring the nervous looks from junior associates who immediately straightened the moment they saw him.

Some things never changed.

He reached the reception area outside Clair's office where Leon sat behind a sleek black desk typing rapidly on his laptop.

Leon looked up immediately. "Hello, Mr Dawson."

"Hello, Leon. Is my wife in?"

"Yes, she is. Go right in."

"Thanks, Leon."

Adam pushed open the office door without knocking.

Clair stood near the floor-to-ceiling windows with her phone pressed to her ear, one hand braced against her hip. Her dark hair fell in loose waves over the shoulders of an elegant cream blouse tucked into fitted black trousers. Sharp. Controlled. Beautiful. And furious.

"No," she said coldly into the phone. "You don't get to spring new evidence on me twelve hours before trial and call it an oversight."

Silence. Her expression hardened further.

“I don’t care what your client wants. If you pull something like this again, I will personally make sure the judge tears your entire case apart in open court.”

Adam hid a smile. The poor bastard on the other end clearly tried to interrupt. Clair cut him off instantly.

“No. You can explain it tomorrow morning in court. And I sincerely hope for your sake it’s convincing.”

Then she hung up sharply and tossed the phone onto her desk.

Adam leaned casually against the doorway. “You’re terrifying.”

Clair looked over at him and immediately softened. Completely.

“There you are,” she murmured.

She walked around the desk toward him and slid her arms around his neck. Adam’s hands settled automatically at her waist before he kissed her long and slow.

Ten years later and it still felt like coming home.

Clair melted against him briefly before pulling back just enough to smile up at him.

“What do I owe the pleasure?” she asked.

Adam kept his arms around her. “I just came from Samuel’s office. He’s on his way to pick up our daughter from the nanny.”

Clair laughed softly, already knowing exactly how the afternoon would go. Eight-year-old Jodie adored her grandfather and Samuel spoiled her shamelessly.

“So, she’s going to come home spoilt rotten again.”

“Almost definitely,” Adam agreed dryly. “Your father already promised her ice cream before dinner.”

Clair groaned. “Wonderful. Last time he did that she somehow convinced him to buy her a pony.”

Adam smiled against her hair. "To be fair, it was a very convincing argument."

"She told him the pony looked lonely."

"And your father nearly cried."

Clair laughed again, the sound warm and easy, and Adam found himself watching her for a moment longer than necessary. Because after everything they had survived together, he still couldn't quite believe she was his.

"I take it by that phone call, you're going to have a hard day in court tomorrow?"

Clair sighed dramatically and dropped her forehead briefly against his chest. "One of the prosecutors decided to conveniently discover new evidence less than a day before trial."

Adam winced. "Bold strategy."

"Idiotic strategy," she corrected. "The judge is going to destroy him."

His mouth twitched. "Should I feel sorry for the man?"

"No." Clair looked up at him with complete sincerity. "He deserves what's coming."

Adam laughed softly and brushed a strand of hair behind her ear. "Remind me never to end up across a courtroom from you."

"You wouldn't," she said confidently.

"Oh?"

Her expression softened slightly. "I'd never go against you."

Something about the quiet certainty in her voice settled warmly in his chest.

Ten years ago, words like that would have meant everything. Now they meant even more.

"How about I take you out to dinner?" Adam said softly, his hands still resting against her waist. "Samuel and Elizabeth told me not to pick her up too early. How about we go to that little Italian restaurant you love?"

Clair smiled instantly. "I would love that."

She glanced toward the clock on her desk and sighed. "Unfortunately, I still have work to do before I can escape."

Adam's mouth curved slightly. "How long?"

"Give me thirty minutes," she said. "I'll meet you in your office."

"Okay."

But neither of them moved.

Adam reached for her again, his hand sliding gently along her jaw before he bent down and kissed her once more. Slow. Thorough. The kind of kiss that made it very clear they had been in love with each other for a very long time.

When he finally pulled back, Clair looked slightly breathless.

"You know," she murmured, "my staff already thinks I'm intimidating."

Adam smirked. "Good. Maybe they'll stop staring every time I kiss my wife."

"They stare because they're shocked someone argues with me voluntarily."

"I enjoy the danger."

Clair laughed softly, her fingers smoothing his tie. "Go before I decide dinner can wait."

Adam kissed the corner of her mouth one last time. "Thirty minutes, counsellor."

Then he finally let her go and walked out of the office while Clair watched him leave with the same look she'd had for him for almost half her life.

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An hour later they sat in the cosy Italian restaurant tucked into a quiet corner of downtown Seattle.

Soft music drifted through the room while candlelight flickered across dark wood tables and bottles of wine lined the walls around them. It had become their place over the years. Familiar. Comfortable. The kind of restaurant where the owner greeted them by name and always kept Clair's favourite table free if he could.

Adam topped up her wine glass as she finished a bite of pasta.

"You look less murderous now," he observed.

Clair smiled faintly. "Give me until tomorrow morning. I'll probably wake up angry again."

"I feel sorry for the prosecution."

"You should."

Adam laughed quietly. For a moment they simply sat there together, relaxed in a way only came after years of marriage and knowing someone completely. Then Clair looked around the restaurant softly.

"I remember the first time you brought me here."

Adam's expression shifted instantly with memory.

"I remember too," he said. "That was the night you helped me win one of my cases."

Clair smiled properly then.

"We were just beginning then. Look how far we've come."

She reached across the table and took his hand, her thumb brushing lightly across his knuckles. Adam held her gaze steadily, warmth settling deep in his chest.

"I love you, you know," he said quietly.

Her expression softened instantly.

"And I love you."

Then a slightly mischievous look appeared in her eyes.

"Do you think Jodie would be upset if she stayed overnight at Dad's?"

Adam's mouth curved slowly. "No," he said, already suspicious. "What did you have in mind?"

Clair leaned forward slightly, lowering her voice so no one else could hear.

"I want to have my way with you."

Adam nearly choked on his wine. Clair laughed softly at his expression, clearly pleased with herself.

"Mrs Cross," he murmured, his voice roughening slightly, "you're supposed to warn a man before saying things like that in public."

"You'll survive."

"Barely."

Her eyes sparkled over the candlelight. "So… is that a yes?"

Adam looked at his beautiful wife across the table, confident and teasing and completely his after all these years. Then he reached for his wallet.

"We're skipping dessert."

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When they arrived at the penthouse, Clair barely gave him time to close the front door. The second it clicked shut behind them, she grabbed the front of his jacket and kissed him hard. Adam let out a rough sound of surprise as she pushed him back against the door, her mouth demanding and impatient against his.

"Clair…" he breathed against her lips.

"Don't talk."

Her fingers were already working at the buttons of his shirt, clumsy with urgency as she kissed him again. Adam's hands slid down to her hips, pulling her tightly against him, and suddenly ten years of marriage meant absolutely nothing compared to the fact that they still wanted each other like this. Desperately.

His jacket hit the floor first. Then her heels. Clair laughed breathlessly when he nearly tore open the remaining buttons of her blouse.

"You're ruining my clothes."

"I'll buy you more."

"That's not the point."

But she was smiling when she said it, and then she kissed him again before he could answer. They moved through the penthouse together in a chaotic tangle of hands and mouths and discarded clothing, stopping every few steps just to touch each other again. Adam backed her against the hallway wall, kissing her deeply while her hands slid into his hair.

God, he still knew exactly how to kiss her. Slow enough to make her weak. Deep enough to make her forget everything else. Clair pulled him toward the bedroom impatiently, both of them half laughing and half breathless by the time they reached it.

The city lights spilled through the enormous windows, casting soft gold across the room as Adam caught her around the waist again.

"You planned this all through dinner, didn't you?" he murmured against her throat.

"Maybe."

"You're dangerous."

Her eyes lifted to his, warm and wicked and completely in love with him.

"You like dangerous."

"I love dangerous."

And then neither of them managed another coherent sentence.

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The next afternoon, Clair stepped out of the elevator and into the offices of Dawson-Cross Legal feeling exhausted but satisfied. Court had gone exactly the way she expected. The prosecution's "surprise evidence" had been thrown out in under ten minutes and the judge had very nearly humiliated the assistant district attorney in front of the entire courtroom. Clair had enjoyed every second of it.

She slipped off her suit jacket as she walked toward her office, already planning on coffee before her next meeting. But as she approached the photocopy room, voices drifted through the half-open door. Giggling. Clair slowed automatically.

"Adam Cross is a hunk," Karen, one of the receptionists, said with a dreamy sigh.

Another laugh followed.

Jenna.

The same paralegal who had been working far too closely with Adam's legal team lately.

"He kissed me, you know."

Clair stopped walking.

Karen gasped immediately. "What? No way. He's obsessed with his wife."

Jenna gave a smug little laugh.

"The other night after the fundraiser," she said casually. "We stayed behind talking and one thing kind of led to another."

Karen sounded scandalised. "You're serious?"

"Mmm." Jenna lowered her voice slightly. "Honestly? I think he's bored with the perfect marriage image. Men like him always are eventually."

For one brief second, silence settled inside Clair's chest. Ten years ago, words like that would have destroyed her. Ten years ago, she would have spiralled instantly. Instead, she simply leaned one shoulder against the hallway wall and listened calmly. Because she knew her husband. Completely. And Adam Cross would rather set himself on fire than betray her.

Inside the room Karen whispered, "Does Clair know?"

Jenna laughed softly. "Of course not."

Clair pushed the door open before she could finish the sentence. Both women jumped violently. Karen looked horrified. Jenna froze. Clair's gaze settled on her evenly. Cold. Controlled. Dangerous enough that the entire room instantly fell silent.

"You're lying," Clair said calmly.

Jenna swallowed. "Excuse me?"

"My husband didn't kiss you." Clair stepped fully into the room now, setting her case files down carefully on the counter. "And if you're going to invent stories about him, at least make them believable."

Jenna's face flushed. "I'm not lying."

Clair held her gaze without blinking.

"Yes," she said quietly. "You are. And you need to be careful, Jenna. If you want to be a lawyer, lying is not the way to go about it. Especially when you're lying about one of the senior partners."

The younger woman opened her mouth again, but Clair had already picked up her case files. Then she looked at Karen.

"I'm sure you both have work to do."

Karen immediately looked down at the stack of papers in front of her. "Yes, Mrs Cross."

Jenna said nothing. Clair gave her one final measured look before turning and walking out of the room without another word. The moment she disappeared down the hallway, Karen exhaled shakily.

"Oh my God."

Jenna folded her arms defensively. "What?"

Karen stared at her like she'd lost her mind. "You just lied about Mrs Cross's husband to her face."

Jenna tried to laugh it off, but there was far less confidence in it now. "She doesn't scare me."

Karen looked genuinely alarmed. "She should."

* * * * * * * *

That night, after dinner and putting Jodie to bed, Clair walked into the bedroom to find Adam undressing beside the bed. He had already loosened his tie and unbuttoned most of his shirt, revealing the broad chest and lean muscle beneath. Time had changed him over the years, sharpened him somehow but at forty-three he was still magnificent. Still the most handsome man she had ever seen. Still entirely capable of making her heart race with one look. Clair leaned lightly against the doorway, a smile tugging at her lips.

"I can see why they gossip about you."

Adam glanced up with a laugh. "I beg your pardon?" He pulled his shirt off completely and tossed it onto a chair. "Who is gossiping about me?"

Clair crossed toward the ensuite casually. "I heard Jenna tell Karen that you kissed her the other night after the fundraiser."

From the bathroom, as she began cleansing her face in front of the mirror, she added lightly, "Apparently you're secretly tired of your perfect marriage."

Silence. Then Adam appeared in the doorway behind her, his expression unreadable as he watched her reflection in the mirror.

"You didn't believe her."

Clair looked amused by the question. "Of course not." She laughed softly. "I told her to stop lying, but I have a feeling she's not going to take my advice."

Adam didn't smile.

"You didn't believe her," he repeated quietly.

The weight behind the words made Clair stop. She finished rinsing her face before turning toward him fully.

"Ten years ago, I would've believed her," Clair admitted softly.

Adam's expression shifted almost imperceptibly.

"But ten years ago," she continued, "I was afraid to trust how much you loved me." Her eyes held his steadily. "I know you would never betray me."

For a moment, he just looked at her. Then he crossed the room slowly until he stood directly in front of her, his hand lifting to brush gently along her cheek.

"You have no idea what that means to me," he said quietly.

Emotion tightened unexpectedly in Clair's chest because she did know. Now she did. Adam leaned down and kissed her softly. Not frantic like the night before. Something deeper than that. Something that carried ten years of marriage, forgiveness and absolute certainty. When he pulled back, his forehead rested briefly against hers.

"I hated that you ever doubted it," he admitted.

Clair's fingers slid through his hair gently.

"I hated it too."

* * * * * * * *

The next day, Adam sat at the head of the conference table in his office reviewing documents with his legal team for an upcoming class action case. The atmosphere was focused and professional, laptops open, files spread across the polished table as final strategies were discussed. Jenna sat halfway down the table, speaking far more than necessary and laughing a little too eagerly at Adam's occasional comments. He barely noticed. His attention remained fixed on the case.

"All right," Adam said finally, closing the file in front of him. "We'll finalise the revised statements tomorrow morning. Good work, everyone."

Chairs scraped back immediately. The associates gathered their files and began filtering out of the office, murmuring goodbyes as they left. Adam turned back toward his desk, already reaching for another folder. Behind him, Jenna remained near the table slowly stacking papers.

Far slower than required. Adam didn't notice at first. He was skimming through notes when movement in his peripheral vision finally made him glance up. Jenna had moved much closer. Too close. Before he could properly react, she stepped toward him again, her intentions suddenly unmistakable as she leaned in to kiss him. Adam jerked backward instantly.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" he demanded sharply.

Jenna blinked but recovered quickly.

"Come on, Adam," she said softly, stepping closer again. "Clair doesn't have to know."

Adam stared at her in disbelief.

She moved toward him once more, lowering her voice. "You must know I'm attracted to you."

"Well, I'm not attracted to you."

The coldness in his voice hit like a slap. Jenna's expression faltered. Adam straightened slowly, every trace of warmth gone from his face now.

"And since we're being clear," he continued, "I love my wife. I would never betray her."

Jenna flushed deeply. "I just thought—"

"You thought very wrong."

Silence filled the office. Adam's gaze hardened further as understanding settled into place. Then suddenly, everything clicked together.

The gossip.

The lies.

What Clair had told him the night before.

His expression darkened immediately.

"You told people I kissed you," he said flatly.

Jenna's eyes widened slightly. Adam gave a short, humourless laugh.

"Incredible."

"Adam—"

"No." His voice cut through hers sharply enough that she stopped talking instantly. "You lied about me, attempted to involve yourself in my marriage and just threw yourself at me in my office during work hours."

Jenna looked shaken now. "I didn't mean—"

"I don't care what you meant."

Adam stepped toward the door and pulled it open. Clair stood there but Adam didn't notice her he was still looking at Jenna.

Jenna froze outright.

Adam's expression hardened even further.

"You're done here," he said coldly to Jenna.

Her face drained of colour. "You're firing me?"

"Yes."

"Adam, please—"

"I suggest you collect your things quietly before HR becomes involved."

The finality in his tone left absolutely no room for argument. Only then did he register Clair standing in the doorway. Jenna stared at him for one long, horrified second before grabbing her papers with trembling hands and hurrying from the office past Clair without another word.

The silence she left behind felt heavy. Clair watched Jenna disappear down the hallway before turning back toward Adam.

"That seemed unpleasant," she said calmly. "You okay?"

Adam stared at her for a moment, still angry, still tense from what had just happened. Then disbelief crept into his expression.

"You're seriously asking if I'm okay?"

Clair stepped fully into the office and shut the door behind her. "Well, you look like you're about three seconds away from murdering someone."

"That woman just tried to kiss me."

"I guessed that."

"And apparently told half the office I already had."

Clair's mouth twitched slightly. "Yes, I heard that part yesterday."

Adam dragged a hand through his hair in frustration. "Clair—"

But she crossed the room calmly and rested her hands against his chest.

"I love you," she said softly.

Just those three words.

No suspicion.

No doubt.

No fear.

Adam looked down at her and something inside him eased instantly.

"You really trust me now," he said quietly.

Clair smiled faintly. "Completely."

The emotion that crossed his face then hit her harder than she expected. Because for Adam, this wasn't just about Jenna. It was about the fact that once upon a time, this exact situation would have destroyed them.

Now it didn't even shake them.

Clair tilted her head slightly. "I won my case."

Adam blinked once, thrown slightly by the abrupt change of subject. "That was quick."

"I don't muck around," she said with a small smile.

That finally pulled a laugh out of him.

He leaned down and kissed her softly before murmuring against her lips, "I noticed."

— The End —

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