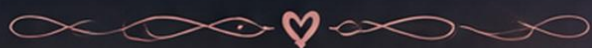
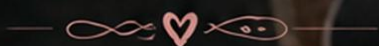


A BONUS EPILOGUE



Until You *Were Gone*

An Emotional
BILLIONAIRE
Marriage-in-Crisis
Second Chance Romance



The best
is yet
to come.



ALISON REID



Exclusive Bonus Epilogue

Until You Were Gone

by Alison Reid

Five Years Later...

“He’s looking for you.”

Harrison looked up from the graduation program he was pretending to read.

“I don’t know who you’re talking about.”

Paige laughed.

“Our son.”

“He’ll survive another two minutes.”

“He won’t if you keep hiding.”

“I’m not hiding.”

“You’re standing behind a pillar.”

“It’s a strategic position.”

“For what?”

“Observation.”

Paige shook her head, amusement dancing in her eyes.

“You’ve been doing that since we arrived.”

“I like to observe.”

“You like to avoid crowds.”

“That too.”

She laughed again, then slipped her hand into his.

Even after twenty-six years of marriage, he still reached for it automatically. Some habits, he had learned, were worth keeping forever. His fingers closed around hers, warm and familiar. He gave her hand a small squeeze. She squeezed back.

Neither of them needed to say anything. They had become fluent in the quiet things over the years. A hand reached across the table. A glance from across a crowded room. A cup of coffee left beside the other's chair. A kiss on the forehead before leaving for work.

The small, ordinary gestures that had somehow become the language of their marriage.

They stood together outside the law school auditorium, watching graduates in black gowns spill onto the steps. Families crowded around them, phones held high as proud parents called names and demanded photographs.

Laughter filled the air. There were tears, too. More than a few. Harrison glanced down at the program in his hand. Nathan Matthews. Law graduate. He still couldn't quite believe it.

It seemed impossible that the little boy who had once fallen asleep against his shoulder during family movie nights was now standing somewhere inside that building, wearing a gown and holding a law degree.

"I remember dropping him off at college," Harrison said quietly.

Paige smiled.

"And crying the entire drive home."

"I wasn't crying."

She turned her head slowly.

"You absolutely were."

"I had something in my eye."

"For three hours?"

“It was a particularly stubborn something.”

She laughed. Harrison smiled.

“You laughed at me.”

“I was trying not to.”

“You failed.”

“I was also crying.”

He looked at her.

“You were.”

“I was.” For a moment, they simply watched the graduates. Paige rested her head briefly against his shoulder. “I remember thinking the house felt so empty.”

“It did.”

She looked up at him.

“For about six months. Then Jessica moved back home for the summer. And filled every room with noise. And Nathan came home two weeks later. And he’d forgotten half his clothes.”

“He claimed he didn’t need them. He brought home three pairs of jeans. And somehow forgot his underwear.”

Paige laughed.

“I still don’t understand how that happened.”

“He was twenty.”

“That explains everything.”

Harrison laughed softly. She rested her head against him again.

“You’ve become impossible.”

“I’ve become honest.”

She looked up at him.

“I like this version better.”

“So do I.”

Five years had passed more quickly than either of them imagined. Their brownstone had become everything they had once hoped it would be. Warm. Lived in. Full of laughter.

There were photographs along the hallway now. Family holidays. Birthdays. Christmas mornings. Jessica’s graduation. Nathan’s first day of law school. Paige laughing with a glass of champagne in her hand. Harrison asleep on the sofa with their new dog curled across his legs.

The dining table was rarely empty. Jessica often stopped by after work, sometimes announcing her arrival and sometimes simply letting herself in. Nathan still raided their refrigerator whenever he visited, despite being more than capable of buying his own groceries.

Friends came for dinner.

Neighbours dropped in for coffee.

There were arguments about what to watch on television and debates about where to spend Christmas and last-minute invitations that somehow became evenings lasting until midnight.

It was a home. Not a showpiece. Not something designed to impress anyone. Just a place where people felt welcome. Exactly as they had dreamed.

Harrison still ran Matthews Global. He still led board meetings. Still made difficult decisions. Still travelled when he had to. But not every week. Not every month. And never without asking himself the same question.

Is this worth the time it costs?

Sometimes the answer was yes.

Often, it wasn’t.

The younger version of himself would never have understood that. Once, Harrison had measured success in numbers. Revenue. Deals. Growth. Profit. Now he measured it differently.

Dinner with Paige on a Tuesday night. Being home when Jessica needed him. Taking Nathan to lunch even when the meeting he was missing would have paid for another dozen family dinners.

Watching Paige fall asleep on the sofa because she had stayed up waiting for him. Being there. Simply being there. That was the part that mattered.

Paige still worked in real estate.

She had become one of Manhattan's most respected residential agents. Not because of her sales figures, although they were impressive enough. Because people trusted her.

She never lost sight of why she had loved the job in Boston. Helping people find somewhere to call home. Harrison had once teased her that she was incapable of walking past a house without wondering who lived inside it.

She had told him that was because houses had stories. He understood that now. So did she. Their own house had a story. And it was still being written.

Jessica had found her own path too. She had become a paediatric occupational therapist, working with children recovering from illness and injury. She adored every minute of it.

"I get to play all day," she had once told her parents. "They actually pay me for it."

Harrison had laughed.

"Your grandfather would've called that good business."

Jessica had grinned.

"Then Grandpa would approve."

Today, she stood a few metres away talking animatedly with Nathan's girlfriend, Sarah.

"I can't wait to hear how Nathan introduces himself."

Sarah smiled.

"He won't."

Jessica grinned.

"Oh, he absolutely will."

"Jessica."

"Counsellor Nathan Matthews," she declared dramatically.

Sarah laughed.

"He absolutely won't."

"He absolutely will."

"He doesn't have that big an ego."

Jessica smiled mischievously.

"He absolutely deserves to."

They both laughed. Paige smiled as she watched them.

"She turned out well."

Harrison followed her gaze.

"They both have." Then he looked at his wife. "So have we."

She slipped her hand into his and gave it a gentle squeeze.

"Yes." Her smile met his. "We have."

A familiar vibration buzzed inside Harrison's jacket pocket. He instinctively reached for his phone. Paige glanced at him. Neither of them said anything. He looked at the screen.

Simon.

Harrison sighed.

"Busy day?" Paige asked.

“It can wait.”

He silenced the phone and slipped it back into his pocket. Paige watched him for a moment. Then she smiled.

“You know...”

“What?”

“I don’t even notice anymore.”

He frowned.

“What?”

“That you choose us.”

He looked genuinely surprised.

“Really?”

She nodded.

“Because you do it every day.”

He glanced toward the auditorium. Then back at her.

“I suppose I do.”

“You do.”

He smiled softly.

“I guess that’s the point.”

She leaned against him.

“It is.”

For a moment, they stood quietly together. Then a loud cheer erupted from the crowd.

“There he is!”

They both turned. Nathan emerged through the auditorium doors, diploma in hand, grinning from ear to ear. His graduation cap was slightly crooked. His tie was loose. And he looked happier than Harrison had seen him in months.

Jessica ran to him first.

“You did it!”

“I did.”

She hugged him tightly.

“I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks.”

She pulled back and straightened his cap.

“You look ridiculous.”

“I’m a lawyer.”

“You’re still ridiculous.”

Nathan laughed. Then he looked over Jessica’s shoulder.

“Mum!”

Paige stepped forward and wrapped him in her arms.

“My lawyer.”

He laughed against her shoulder.

“I passed.”

“I never doubted you.” She kissed his cheek. “Not once.”

Nathan smiled.

“Dad?”

Harrison held out his hand. Nathan ignored it. Instead, he stepped forward and hugged him. For just a moment, Harrison closed his eyes. His son. His boy. The child he had once carried upstairs when he fell asleep on the sofa. Now a man.

“I made it,” Nathan murmured.

Harrison held him tightly.

“I’ve always known you would.”

Nathan pulled back but didn't let go immediately.

“I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Harrison blinked.

“What?”

Nathan shrugged.

“You answered every phone call.” Harrison stared at him. “You came to every moot court.” A lump formed in Harrison’s throat. “You never missed another birthday.” His son’s smile softened. “You never cancelled another family holiday.” Harrison swallowed. “You showed me what keeping your promises looks like.”

For a second, Harrison couldn’t speak.

Years ago, Nathan had stood in a small apartment in Boston and made him promise never to let Paige disappear again. He had been just a boy. Too young to understand the complexities of marriage. But old enough to understand that his mother had been hurting.

Harrison had made that promise. And he had kept it. Not perfectly. But consistently. Every day. In a thousand small ways. Nathan smiled.

“I’ve always wanted to be a good lawyer.” He glanced at his mother. “But mostly...” He looked back at Harrison. “...I wanted to grow up to be the kind of husband you’ve become.”

Harrison couldn’t speak. His throat tightened painfully. Paige reached for his hand. She felt it trembling. Her eyes softened.

“You’ve just made your father cry.”

Jessica laughed.

“Again.”

Nathan grinned.

“He does that a lot these days.”

“I do.” Harrison wiped at his eyes, laughing through the emotion. “I’ve become soft.”

“No,” Paige said quietly. She slipped her fingers through his. “You’ve become present.”

The words settled somewhere deep inside him.

Present.

It was such a simple word. And yet it meant everything. Harrison looked at Paige. At the woman he had loved for more than half his life. The woman who had once walked away because she refused to disappear. The woman who had found herself... and then found her way back to him.

He remembered the fear of losing her. The empty rooms. The silence. The realisation that having someone beside you was not the same as truly being with them.

For years, he had believed love was measured by what he provided. The house. The security. The opportunities. The life he could build. He had thought that if he gave enough, worked hard enough, protected enough, he was proving how much he cared.

He hadn't understood that sometimes love meant putting down the phone. Coming home early. Listening. Sitting at the kitchen table long after dinner was finished because Paige wanted to tell him about her day.

Showing up.

Choosing the people he loved over the things he thought he needed. Until she was gone, Harrison had never truly understood what it meant to love someone.

Now he did.

Love wasn't grand gestures. It wasn't measured in money or success or the size of the life you could provide. It lived in ordinary moments. Shared dinners. Walks through the park. Phone calls answered. Promises kept. A hand reaching

for yours beneath a restaurant table. A child coming home because they knew there would always be a place for them.

Time.

Especially time.

He looked down at Paige's hand in his. Twenty-six years. And somehow, he wanted another twenty-six. Then another. Then as many as life was willing to give them. Paige looked up at him.

“What are you thinking?”

He smiled.

“That I’m a very lucky man.”

Her eyes warmed.

“Yes.”

She squeezed his hand.

“You are.”

Nathan groaned.

“Are you two going to start kissing?”

Jessica laughed.

“They probably are.”

Harrison looked at Paige. She raised an eyebrow.

“Should we?”

“Absolutely.”

Nathan covered his face.

“Oh, God.”

Paige laughed as Harrison leaned down and kissed her. It was brief. Familiar. Perfect. When he pulled back, Paige was smiling. Nathan shook his head.

“You're both embarrassing.”

“You’ll understand one day,” Harrison said.

Nathan glanced at Sarah. She was smiling at him.

“I think I already do.”

Harrison followed his son's gaze and smiled. Perhaps that was the greatest gift of all. Knowing his children had watched. Knowing they had seen the mistakes as well as the changes. Knowing they had learned that love wasn't about getting everything right.

It was about choosing each other again and again.

Outside the auditorium, the afternoon sun spilled across the steps. Families gathered for photographs. Graduates threw their caps into the air. Someone shouted Nathan’s name. Jessica grabbed his arm.

“Come on. We need pictures.”

“How many?”

“At least fifty.”

“Fifty?”

“Mum wants some.”

Nathan looked at Paige.

“She does?”

“Of course I do.”

He laughed. Sarah joined them. Harrison stood back for a moment, watching the three of them. His family. His life. The ordinary, beautiful life he had once been too busy to notice. Paige stepped back toward him.

“Coming?”

He held out his hand.

“Always.”

She took it. And together, they walked toward their children. Because in the end, this was what Harrison had been searching for all along. Not a bigger company. Not another deal. Not another achievement.

This.

A woman holding his hand. Children who still wanted him beside them. A home filled with laughter. A life that didn't need to be impressive to anyone else. Just theirs.

And every ordinary day they shared after that became the life he had been searching for all along.

— The End —

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