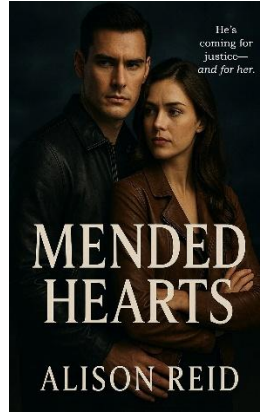


Mended Hearts

by Alison Reid



The courtroom was too cold.

Savannah Blake sat shivering in the witness box, though it had nothing to do with the air conditioning—and everything to do with the way her world had cracked open and never quite fit back together.

The oak-panelled walls pressed in like a tomb. Murmurs from the gallery blurred into static, drowned beneath the roar of her pulse. She clutched the edge of her seat like it might anchor her to something solid.

But nothing felt solid anymore.

Not since the night everything fell apart.

Not since Tyler died.

Not since they took him away.

Her gaze drifted—unwilling, unstoppable—to the defence table.

Jace Calloway.

He sat frozen beside his lawyer, fists clenched on the table. His face was pale, bruised, scraped from the arrest. His expression unreadable.

Except his eyes.

Dark. Wounded. Locked on her like a lifeline.

Savannah blinked hard. It hurt just to look at him.

He was the boy who used to carry her books in sixth grade. Who kissed her under the fireworks when she was sixteen. Who made her laugh when everything else felt heavy. Who knew every scar on her heart and never turned away.

The boy her brother had loved like family.

And now they were saying he'd killed Tyler.

The prosecutor stepped forward, heels silent on the polished floor. Her voice was steady, calm—almost kind.

“Miss Blake, on the night your brother, Tyler Blake, was murdered... did Jace Calloway argue with him?”

Savannah flinched. The words landed like a slap.

She hadn't wanted to testify. Had begged not to. She was eighteen—barely holding it together, torn in half by grief that hadn't stopped since the night of the sirens.

But the DA insisted: You're the only one who saw them together that night. The only one who can tell the truth.

But what if she didn't know the truth?

She remembered the raised voices. The slammed door. Tyler's anger. Jace's hurt.

But not what came next.

And Jace—her Jace—could never have done what they accused him of.

Could he?

Her throat closed. Tears burned behind her eyes. The courtroom swam.

Tyler had loved Jace. Trusted him. So had she. So did she.

“Miss Blake?” the prosecutor repeated, sharper now. “Did Jace Calloway argue with your brother that night?”

Savannah opened her mouth.

No sound came.

Her gaze locked with Jace's—and in his eyes, she saw no anger. No blame.

Only that quiet, desperate plea:

Tell them the truth. Remember who I am.

And yet...

And yet...

“Yes,” she whispered. “Yes, he did.”

Three words.

Just three.

But they crashed through the courtroom like gunfire.

She felt it—rippling through the gallery, shifting the air. Jace's eyes closed for one beat, just long enough for something to break behind them.

His shoulders didn't flinch. But she felt it.

Felt the fracture like it was her own.

And she knew—she had just destroyed him.

The silence that followed was unbearable.

She had spoken what they wanted to hear.

What they believed was truth.

But deep in her chest, something twisted and cried out:

What if I'm wrong?

What if she'd just condemned the only boy she had ever loved?

What if she had betrayed them both?

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