

EXCLUSIVE BONUS *Epilogue*

CEDAR RIDGE
FARMHOUSE

FOR

Mended Hearts

SOME HEARTS
AREN'T JUST BROKEN.
THEY'RE BRUISED,
BEATEN, AND BURIED
BENEATH YEARS
OF PAIN.
BUT LOVE...
LOVE HAS A WAY
OF FINDING WHAT'S
LEFT AND MAKING
IT WHOLE AGAIN.

home
heals
everything

ALISON REID

Exclusive Bonus Epilogue

Mended Hearts

by Alison Reid

Ten Years Later...

The house was alive with chaos.

Half-packed boxes lined the hallway. Bubble wrap littered the timber floors. The familiar scent of cardboard mingled with fresh coffee drifting from the kitchen, while the laughter of two little boys echoed through every room.

“Pirates!” eight-year-old Caleb yelled as he launched himself behind a stack of moving boxes.

“You can’t hide there!” his younger brother Ryan shouted, charging after him with a cardboard tube clutched like a sword.

“I absolutely can!”

“You cheated!”

“I did not!”

“You did too!”

Savannah laughed as the two boys tore through the house they’d called home since before either of them could remember.

“Slow down!” she called after them. “Those boxes have things that break.”

Neither boy paid the slightest attention.

“They definitely inherited your stubborn streak,” she muttered.

A deep chuckle came from the bedroom.

“I heard that.”

Jace emerged carrying their solid oak king-sized bedhead across one shoulder as though it weighed little more than a beach towel. At six-foot-three

with years of carpentry keeping him strong, he made impossible things look effortless. He eased the bedhead into the moving truck before stepping back inside.

“Anything else?” he asked.

Savannah smiled.

“Just about everything.”

He grinned.

“We’re nearly there.”

She watched him disappear down the hallway before allowing herself a quiet moment.

Ten years. Ten years since he’d walked free. Ten years since the state admitted they had imprisoned an innocent man.

The settlement—8.6 million dollars—had shocked everyone.

Jace hadn’t cared about the money. He would have traded every cent to have those stolen years back. Instead, he’d used part of it to buy this home and build the life they’d once believed had been stolen forever.

It had never been about the money. It had been about finally having the chance to live.

Her gaze drifted toward the workshop sitting beyond the garage. That little shed had become Jace’s sanctuary.

What had started as repairing old furniture had grown into something extraordinary. His handcrafted furniture and intricate wooden sculptures had earned a reputation across North Carolina. Collectors waited months for commissions, happily paying more than either of them had ever imagined possible.

Jace never talked about the money. He didn’t create because people bought his work. He created because working with timber brought him peace. Every

piece he carved felt like another part of his past finding its way into something beautiful.

Savannah couldn't have been prouder. Not because people admired his work. Because after everything life had taken from him, he'd found joy again. That meant more than any cheque ever could.

She had told him countless times to spend every dollar of the settlement if that was what he wanted. She'd never cared about the money. If the state had offered them nothing, she still would have chosen him.

She would have lived in a tiny apartment if it meant waking beside him every morning. Being his wife had always been enough. Everything else had simply been a bonus.

Her phone buzzed on the kitchen bench.

Another congratulatory message from one of the nurses at Asheville Memorial Hospital.

She smiled.

Head Trauma Nurse.

The promotion still didn't quite feel real.

She hadn't applied expecting to get it. But after years of experience, leadership, and more than a few recommendations, the hospital had offered her the position.

When she'd first told Jace, she'd worried about asking him to leave Cedar Ridge.

Instead, he'd smiled.

"If this is what you want, we'll make a new home together."

That had been the end of the discussion. He'd quietly started looking for properties. A month later he'd found the perfect one. A beautiful lake house just outside Asheville.

Peaceful. Private. Room for the boys to grow. Room for him to build an even bigger workshop. Room for all of them to make new memories.

“Mum!”

Ryan skidded into the kitchen wearing one of Jace’s old tool belts upside down.

“Caleb says he gets the bedroom with the lake view!”

Before Savannah could answer, Caleb appeared behind him.

“I’m older.”

“By two years!”

“That’s older.”

Ryan folded his arms.

“I wanted that room.”

Jace appeared behind them, unable to hide his smile.

“I’ve got an idea.”

Both boys looked at him hopefully.

“How about you unpack first...” They frowned. “...and then your mother and I decide who gets which room.”

Ryan sighed dramatically.

“That’s not very fair.”

Savannah laughed.

“It sounds perfectly fair to me.”

Jace slipped an arm around her waist, drawing her close as they watched their boys disappear into another game before either had a chance to argue.

He kissed the side of her head.

“Ready?”

Savannah looked around the house one last time. The home where they had truly begun. The home where their sons had taken their first steps. The home where laughter had finally replaced heartache.

She smiled.

“I’ve been ready for a long time.”

Jace squeezed her hand.

“I know.”

Together, they walked out the front door, following the sound of two excited little boys racing toward the future.

* * * * *

By late afternoon, the moving trucks had made the three-hour journey to Asheville.

The last of the moving boxes sat inside their new home. The furniture had found its place, but unopened cartons still filled the living room and lined the hallway. Plates, books, photo frames, toys—they could all wait.

Savannah didn’t have to start her new position as Head Trauma Nurse at Asheville Memorial Hospital for another week.

For the first time in years, they had nowhere they needed to be. Only a new life waiting to be lived.

Jace closed the front door behind the removalists before letting out a long breath.

“Well,” he said, looking around the sea of boxes. “Looks like we’ve got some unpacking to do.”

“Tomorrow,” Savannah replied with a smile.

He slipped an arm around her waist.

“I was hoping you’d say that.”

The boys had other ideas.

“Mum! Dad!” Caleb yelled as he burst through the back door.

“There’s a lake!” Ryan shouted, already halfway across the backyard.

Before either parent could answer, both boys were sprinting down the gently sloping lawn toward the timber dock stretching across the sparkling water.

Jace laughed.

“Hey!”

Neither of them slowed.

“Not in the water until Mum says so!”

The only response was two small figures running even faster. Savannah laughed, shaking her head.

“They definitely inherited your stubborn streak.”

Jace looked at her with mock offence.

“My stubborn streak?”

She smiled.

“No... that’s all you.”

He chuckled, taking her hand.

“Come on.”

They followed the boys at a slower pace, the grass soft beneath their feet as the afternoon sun danced across the water. The lake stretched endlessly before them, framed by towering pines whose reflections shimmered in the gentle breeze.

It was peaceful. Quiet.

Home.

Savannah stopped at the edge of the dock, taking it all in.

“It’s beautiful,” she whispered.

Jace watched her instead of the view.

“I bought this place because it reminded me of somewhere.”

She frowned slightly before looking around. The water. The weathered dock. The trees swaying gently along the shoreline. Recognition settled over her like a warm summer breeze.

Brush Hollow.

The place where two teenagers had fallen hopelessly in love beneath a sky full of stars. The place where they had shared their first kiss. Their first dreams. Their first forever. Emotion caught in her throat. He hadn’t just bought a house. He’d found them another beginning. A place where every new memory could slowly outnumber the painful ones.

Jace nodded toward a small wooden bench sitting beneath an old oak overlooking the lake. Together they walked over. Mounted neatly on the backrest was a small brass plaque.

Tyler’s Point

Nothing more. Nothing else needed to be said.

Savannah reached out, her fingertips brushing the cool metal before tears blurred her vision.

Jace slipped his fingers through hers.

“He brought us together once,” he said quietly. “I figured he deserved to come with us.”

A tear escaped despite her smile.

She leaned against him, resting her head on his shoulder as they stood together in comfortable silence.

Then two excited voices shattered the quiet.

“Dad!”

“Mum!”

They turned to find Caleb and Ryan waving wildly from the end of the dock.

“You’ve got to come see this!”

“I found fish!”

“And turtles!”

The boys were bouncing with excitement, pointing into the clear water. Savannah laughed through her tears. Jace squeezed her hand.

“Looks like we’re needed.”

They started walking toward the dock together. Halfway there, Savannah paused. She looked back one last time. Not toward the farmhouse they had left behind. Not toward Cedar Ridge. Not toward the years of grief, injustice, and heartbreak that had once defined their lives.

Not with regret. Not with sadness. Only with gratitude. Every heartbreak... every loss... every impossible obstacle had led them here.

Then she smiled. She turned toward her husband. Toward her sons. Toward the life they had built together. Hand in hand, they walked forward.

Together, they left the past exactly where it belonged—and stepped into the future they’d spent twenty years fighting for.

—The End—

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