

Wrong Marriage. Right Bride (Wrong Vows Book 1) - Chapter 31[3,772 words]

Chapter 31

ELENA

Vincenzo's entire demeanor shifted in a heartbeat.

The raw vulnerability vanished, replaced by sharp alertness.

His body tensed despite the fresh wounds, guarded instincts snapping back into place.

The man who had just laid his soul bare was gone; the calculated leader resurfaced.

He frowned, jaw tightening. "Who?"

"The person asked me to keep their identity hidden,"

Renzo answered through the closed door, voice steady and professional. "Don't worry — I checked thoroughly. No security threat."

A pause.

Then footsteps retreating.

Leaving silence in their wake.

Vincenzo looked back at me, his dark eyes steady despite the pain etched into his face.

His hand tightened around mine once — firm, grounding, a silent anchor.

"We'll stay right here with our son until they clear him to go home," he said, voice low and resolute.

A promise. A plan.

"But first... let's go downstairs together."

His gaze held mine without flinching.

“Whatever — whoever — is waiting... we face it side by side.”

“And what if this anonymous person only wants you?” I asked softly, my voice deliberate as it cut through the quiet between us.

“Not your wife?”

Vincenzo’s steps didn’t falter.

Instead, something warmer shifted in his expression.

Almost boyish.

A small, unguarded smile curved his lips, the kind I had never seen before.

It wasn’t the cruel smirk he once wore when he held all the power.

It wasn’t the cold, calculating edge he used in negotiations.

This smile was real.

“We are one now, Elena,” he said simply, his voice deep and steady.

“Whoever needs to see me must see you too. Automatically. No exceptions.”

The words wrapped around me like a promise rather than a chain.

I let them sink in without immediately searching for the lie beneath them.

We walked side by side down the quiet hospital corridor, our fingers laced together — not just held, but intertwined with quiet intention.

There was something protective in the way he gripped my hand.

Something grounding.

Something that felt dangerously close to the word ‘lovers.’

We moved in perfect step.

His long stride shortened naturally to match mine, careful not to pull me forward or leave me behind.

Every few steps, his gaze dropped to me — not possessive, just checking.

Making sure I was still there.

Still upright.

Still breathing beside him.

The overhead fluorescent lights cast long, pale reflections on the polished floor, stretching our joined shadows ahead of us like a single path.

We reached the elevator bank.

Vincenzo pressed the call button, his thumb lingering there a second longer than necessary before he turned to face me fully.

“You’re still pale,” he murmured, his voice softer now.

He lifted his free hand and brushed a strand of hair from my forehead, his touch careful—almost hesitant—as though he was still learning where he was allowed to touch me.

“I’ll be fine.”

The elevator doors slid open with a soft chime.

Empty.

He guided me inside, his arm sliding around my waist again—firm but gentle—as if the walls themselves might reach out and take me away from him.

The elevator doors slid shut with a soft hiss, enclosing us in a small, quiet world.

We descended in silence, the only sound the low mechanical hum of the cables.

The fragile intimacy we had shared upstairs seemed to thicken in the confined space — heavier, more real.

When the doors opened again, the atmosphere shifted instantly.

Cool, damp garage air greeted us, carrying the faint metallic scent of exhaust and old oil.

Dim overhead lights buzzed overhead, casting uneven pools of sickly yellow across the concrete floor and creating deep pockets of shadow between the parked vehicles.

Vincenzo stepped out first, his body instinctively tensing.

Not with fear — with sharp, predatory awareness.

His free hand hovered near his side out of habit, even though he carried no weapon and was still heavily bandaged.

His gaze swept the garage in one fluid, calculating motion, analyzing every shadow, every possible angle.

Then he saw them.

Two figures emerging slowly from the far end of the dimly lit space, their footsteps echoing softly against the concrete.

At first, they were only silhouettes against the low light.

Then details emerged.

A young woman, roughly my age.

Dark hair pulled into a loose braid over one shoulder, a few strands falling loose around her face.

Her posture was upright, but her eyes... her eyes carried something heavy.

Grief. Fear.

And determination all at once.

Beside her stood a man.

Older. Still.

Dangerous in the quiet way storms are dangerous before they break.

He didn't rush. Didn't speak.

But everything about him screamed control.

I felt it immediately.

Instinct.

And I almost stepped back without realizing it.

My fingers began to slip from Vincenzo's.

A reflex.

A small instinct to give him space.

To let him face this alone.

But his grip tightened instantly.

A silent message pressed into my palm:

You stay.

We stop.

The pair halted at a respectful distance.

Not close enough to threaten. Not far enough to disappear.

The young woman spoke first.

Her voice was soft.

“Big brother...”

The word carried weight and history.

Vincenzo’s entire posture changed in an instant.

The sharp lines of his face tightened, then fractured—startled, almost disarmed.

For a moment, the powerful man who commanded every room looked strangely vulnerable.

“Loretta...” His voice was rough, edged with disbelief.

“What in God’s name are you doing here in Italy? No call. No warning. You came alone—without security?”

His gaze dropped suddenly to her flat stomach, lingering there with painful intensity.

“I kept asking you... if you’d had the baby.”

The words came out quieter, heavier. “You never answered me. Where is the baby?”

His voice dropped even lower, thick with an emotion I couldn’t quite name.

Loretta’s hands moved instinctively to her abdomen, rubbing slow, absent circles over the fabric of her shirt.

The gesture wasn’t conscious.

It was pure instinct.

And it was grieving.

“I—” Loretta’s voice fractured as she swallowed.

“The situation is urgent.”

Her gaze rose to meet his, eyes bright with unshed tears and something close to ruin.

“I lost the baby.”

The silence that followed was devastating.

Vincenzo remained perfectly still on the surface.

But I felt the storm beneath — the violent tension that seized his muscles, the way his fingers dug into my waist like I was the last tether keeping him grounded.

Loretta kept going, the words tumbling out faster, as though she could outrun the pain.

“But there was a child... I found her. Abandoned near a dumpster.”

Her voice broke completely.

“I’ve been raising her ever since. I never told the police.”

The confession settled over us, heavy and irreversible.

“Then her father showed up.” She clenched her fists at her sides, nodding toward the tall, imposing man beside her.

“He demanded her back, but I refused. I’ve grown too attached to let anyone take her from me—not even her biological father, who appeared out of the blue.

She lifted her chin, fragile defiance shining through her fear.

Vincenzo’s jaw tightened so sharply I felt it rather than heard it—a faint, dangerous tension that ran through him like a wire pulled to its limit.

“Loretta...” His voice dropped, controlled but edged with something volatile.

“What exactly are you driving at?”

“He says... the only way I can stay with the child is if I married him,” she rushed out.

“So I agreed.”

“Big brother... you must understand why. After I lost my baby, I went mad and ended up in the asylum.”

“You know what led to the pregnancy—everything was too much. When I got out two months later and found the child, I thought it was God’s miracle, replacing my lost baby with this one I found at the dumpster. I couldn’t part with her—that’s why I married her father.”

“What!”

Vincenzo’s gaze slid past Loretta and locked onto the man standing beside her.

“Rafael ‘El Mencho’ Pérez,” he said, voice low and edged with dark amusement.

“This is not how I imagined we would meet again.”

At the name, the atmosphere in the garage thickened instantly.

The air itself grew heavier, charged.

Loretta blinked, glancing between them in confusion.

“You know him?”

“We used to be best friends,” Vincenzo answered, the muscle in his jaw ticking.

“He lived here in Italy as a boy, with his parents.”

“They led one of the Spanish rebel factions operating in our territory.”

His voice dropped.

“During the war, we publicly executed his mother and father.”

“We left their bodies hanging for days. He was there. We were both thirteen. That day severed everything between us. Afterward, he was taken back to Spain.”

Vincenzo’s eyes narrowed on Loretta.

“You married a mafia boss without telling me?”

His jaw clenched so tightly the bone stood out.

Loretta took two sharp steps away from Rafael, finally understanding the gravity of what she had walked into.

“He’s a mob boss?”

“He rules the largest mafia empire in Spain,” Vincenzo said coldly, “and he is our greatest enemy.”

“Loretta... what the hell have you done? Please tell me the wedding hasn’t happened yet.”

Rafael’s lips curved into a slow, dangerous smile.

“Can’t you see the ring on her finger, Vincenzo?”

His voice was smooth, almost mocking. “I told you I would come back. If I couldn’t find your parents... well, your sister will bear the weight of the horror I was forced to watch that day.”

Vincenzo took one threatening step forward.

Rafael matched it immediately.

The two men faced each other like two alphas on the verge of violence — power radiating off them in waves.

“Loretta is my wife now,” Rafael said calmly. “I only came to show her off to you.”

“Guards!” Rafael suddenly shouted.

Eighteen armed men poured out from every corner of the garage, surrounding us in seconds.

Rafael stood relaxed in the center of it all, tall and broad-shouldered, immaculately dressed in a charcoal suit that fit him with expensive precision.

Not a single crease.

Not a single flaw.

His posture was casual, almost bored.

But his eyes told the real story.

Cold. Unforgiving.

The kind of eyes that didn’t offer mercy.

Only consequences.

“Big brother, I swear I had no idea,” Loretta said, her voice cracking with panic.

She backed up another step, but the eighteen armed men surrounding them closed in tighter, cutting off any escape.

“I only knew him as the owner of Spain’s largest tech company. I never knew he ruled the underworld. I had no idea—”

“Mr. Rafael...” She turned to him, betrayal flashing in her eyes.

“You lied to me. You knew exactly who I was, who my family is, and you still married me. Well, I’m in my territory now.”

“I’m not going back to Spain with you. I want no part of your world.”

Her voice trembled but held a quiet, desperate conviction.

“As for your daughter... I need her as much as she needs me. It breaks me that I won’t see her for a while.”

Rafael’s lips curled into a cold, mocking smile.

He looked at Vincenzo. “Is your sister truly so innocent she doesn’t understand the traditions that govern our marriages?”

He gave a sharp nod to his men. “Take my wife to the car.”

“Bind her carefully to the seat so she doesn’t cause trouble.”

As two of Rafael’s men moved toward her, Loretta bolted toward Vincenzo.

“Vin! Big brother—“ she screamed, voice raw with shock.

She fought desperately as strong hands grabbed her arms, dragging her backward.

“Don’t let them take me! Please! Vin, save me—help me! You can’t do this!”

Vincenzo turned his face away, jaw locked, unable to meet her eyes.

“Vincenzo! Please! Don’t let them—Vin!”

“Vin!!”

“Vincenzo!!” Her cries grew more frantic, breaking into sobs as they forced her toward the sleek black car Rafael had arrived in.

“Big brother, please—don’t do this! I’m begging you! Save me!”

Her voice cracked one final time before the heavy car door slammed shut, muffling her screams.

The sound of her desperate cries faded slowly as they locked her inside.

Vincenzo let out a low, painful grunt, his fists clenched so tightly his knuckles turned white.

He turned to Rafael, eyes burning.

“You will not hurt my sister, Rafael. She is innocent in all of this.”

Rafael’s expression darkened with contempt.

“Look who’s talking.”

“We all heard the stories of what you did to the woman standing beside you — all because of what her father did to you years ago.”

“No one stopped you then.” He stepped closer, voice low and venomous.

“And no one will stop me now.”

“Though unlike you, I’m not as heartless. I won’t throw my wife into an industrial cold room or make her kneel on a ridge until her knees bleed for weeks and scar forever. No. I have my own ways of reminding her—every single day—of her parents’ crimes.”

He smiled thinly.

“And you... you will hear every detail of her pain, her sorrow, her agony. And you won’t be able to do a damn thing about it.”

Vincenzo swallowed hard, his voice dropping to a raw plea.

“Rafael, listen to me.”

“Loretta is fragile. She was violated repeatedly by my father and his clients for almost her entire life before I saved her.”

“The pregnancy you overheard us talking about — it was the result of that violation. That’s why she’s so attached to your daughter. She has suffered enough. Please... don’t—”

“I will decide what I do with my own wife,” Rafael cut him off coldly. “I guess I’ll be seeing you in Spain sometime soon, no?”

He bent the corner of his mouth in a faint, knowing smile, gave a gesture, and his men fell into formation behind him.

He walked to his car approaching the same space Loretta had been confined to.

His men moved as if choreographed—falling in behind him, flanking him, opening the doors like attendants for a king.

The doors closed around him with soft, final thuds.

Engines purred to life in low, synchronized hums.

Tires rolled smoothly over the concrete in perfect, disciplined formation.

The convoy glided forward like a dark wave, heading toward the exit ramp.

Then they were gone — disappearing as if they had never been there at all.

Vincenzo didn't move.

He stood still, eyes locked on the disappearing convoy until the last red taillight vanished into the distance.

Only then did his shoulders drop slightly.

Just enough to reveal the truth beneath the surface.

Helpless.

A man who controlled everything—except the one thing that mattered.

“I have to save my sister,” Vincenzo said, his voice tight and grinding with barely restrained fury.

“Rafael will ruin her... It kills me that I stood there and did nothing while they dragged her away.”

There was something breaking beneath his words — a fracture he couldn't hide and couldn't fix.

I stepped closer, careful, as if approaching a wounded animal.

“I'll stay,” I said gently. “I'll help you figure out a way.”

He looked stunned, eyes widening with raw disbelief.

“Elena... you’re staying? With me?” His voice dropped, almost hoarse.

“You’re no longer divorcing me?”

“For now, yes,” I answered. “Until we get your sister out of the shackles of that marriage.”

“No one should ever have to experience what I went through under you.”

The words landed hard.

Guilt slammed into him visibly — a flinch in his jaw, a shadow crossing his face.

But he only nodded once, sharply.

His gaze flickered away from me, locking onto the empty space where Loretta had disappeared moments ago.

“She knows nothing of this life,” he said bitterly. “She’s too innocent.”

His fists tightened at his sides until the knuckles bleached white.

“Come, Elena,” he murmured at last, reaching for my hand.

Then—

Without warning—

He moved.

Before I could react, Vincenzo bent down and lifted me into his arms.

Bridal style.

I gasped, instinctively grabbing onto his shoulders.

“Vincenzo—”

But he didn’t answer.

Didn’t slow down.

He carried me across the garage with steady, confident steps, as though I weighed nothing at all.

As though I belonged there.

In his arms.

At the Lamborghini, he opened the rear door one-handed without setting me down.

Then carefully—deliberately—lowered me onto the leather seat.

Before I could speak again—

He leaned in.

And slammed the door shut behind him.

The world outside disappeared.

Then his mouth found mine.

The kiss hit hard.

Urgent. Unrestrained.

All the control he'd been holding onto—

Shattered in that one moment.

His hands gripped my waist, pulling me closer.

His lips moved against mine with desperation—teeth, breath, need tangled together.

A low sound escaped him—half groan, half relief—that vibrated against my mouth.

“Elena,” he rasped, pulling back just enough to speak.

His forehead rested briefly against mine, breath uneven.

““Let’s start over... our marriage, from the beginning.”

The words hung there between us.

“Properly this time,” he added.

His hand slid up along my side, slower now.

Intentional.

“My wife.”

A pause.

“I want to marry you again—this time with vows I mean, and rings I choose with care.”

His thumb brushed the underside of my breast, and heat spread through me in a way that felt almost unfair given everything we had just gone through.

Another breath.

“A ceremony where you walk toward me because you want to—not because you have to.”

My heart began to race.

Not from fear—

but from something dangerously close to hope.

“I can feel you want it too,” he murmured, his voice rough against my lips. “Let me show you how it should have been from the beginning.”

For a moment, I hesitated.

Then I slid my arms around his neck, drawing him closer.

“Then show me,” I breathed.

That was all it took.

He kissed me again.

Harder. Hungrier.

Like a man reclaiming something he thought he’d lost forever.

His hands moved over me with a strange combination of reverence and possession—like he was afraid and certain at the same time.

I arched into him, fingers threading into his hair, holding him there as if letting go might undo everything.

Vincenzo suddenly froze.

Not violently.

But with the kind of stillness that came from restraint—like a man pulling himself back from the edge of something he didn’t entirely trust himself with.

His lips hovered just a breath from mine.

Close enough that I could feel his breath.

Warm. Uneven.

His eyes—dark, heated—still held that intensity, but now something else slipped into them.

Control.

Caution.

And something quieter...

Concern.

“Elena,” he murmured, his voice rougher now, as if pulled from somewhere deeper.

“You gave birth just hours ago. As much as I want you... you need time. You need to heal. We have time. Plenty of time.”

For a moment, I just stared at him.

Then—

I exhaled sharply and nodded.

He brought his lips to mine.

The kiss lingered — slow, careful, less like hunger and more like an apology wrapped in quiet promise.

“Elena, I love you so fucking much,” he whispered against my lips.

His thumb traced lightly along my side, grounding me.

“And one day... I want to hear you say it back. I know I don’t deserve it yet. I know it’ll take time—for you to trust me again... to love me again. I’ll wait. However long it takes.”

He pulled back reluctantly.

Then, with deliberate care, he shifted us both until we were sitting upright in the wide backseat.

His movements were never rushed, never careless.

He guided me against his chest, drawing me in until I was curled into him.

My head rested beneath his chin.

My legs draped across his lap.

I let myself melt into him.

The last remnants of tension in my body slowly eased as I listened to the steady rhythm of his heartbeat beneath my ear.

He pressed a soft kiss to my hair, then another—slow, lingering, like a silent promise.

I tilted my face up, searching his expression, looking for something I wasn't sure I was ready to find.

“Do you regret what you did to Violet?”

“I regret nothing when it comes to us. I'd do the same to anyone who dares stand between us,” he said quietly.

“Elena... we'll grow old together. And I'll make sure the only thing you ever know is happiness. Even if I have to burn the world to give it to you.”

I let out a faint, trembling breath.

A small smile—uncertain but real—curved my lips.

Slowly, I lifted my hand and reached up to him.

My fingers found the short, dark beard along his jaw.

Rough. Coarse.

I ran my fingers through it gently.

Tracing the line of his jaw.

Feeling the contrast between the rough texture and the smooth skin beneath.

He closed his eyes for a second.

Just one.

But enough.

He leaned into my touch like a man who had been starved for something he didn't know he needed—

Until now.

His arm wrapped around me, tucking my head back beneath his chin as he adjusted us both into a more comfortable position.

His fingers slid into my hair.

Slow. Smoothing. Soothing.

The backseat of a Lamborghini shouldn't have felt like safety.

But with his arms around me...

His heartbeat steady beneath my ear...

It did.

For the first time in what felt like forever—

I let myself breathe without bracing for the next blow.

I closed my eyes and let myself imagine.

Not the past. Not the pain.

But the future.

Our son—soon out of that incubator, no longer fragile and distant, but warm, safe, and alive in my arms.

I imagined Vincenzo holding him for the first time.

His large hands, so accustomed to control, to violence, to precision, cradling something impossibly small and delicate with a care so profound it felt almost sacred.

His voice—usually low, commanding—softening into something I had never heard before as he whispered Italian lullabies.

I saw him teaching our child to walk, his steady hands guiding those tiny, uncertain steps across polished marble floors.

Always watching. Always waiting. Always protecting.

At night, I imagined him sitting beside a small bed, reading stories in that deep, gravelly voice—turning even the simplest fairy tale into something grand, something unforgettable.

I pictured him lifting our child onto his shoulders, carrying him through a garden in bloom, letting small hands reach for the highest gardenia flowers.

Protecting him with every ruthless instinct he possessed—yet softening, always softening, each time he looked at him.

And at me.

I saw myself there too.

Not in the background. Not as someone waiting to be chosen.

But as someone already chosen.

A partner.

A lover.

A wife.

Someone he came home to because he wanted to—not because he had to.

I imagined quiet mornings tangled in sheets, soft laughter and slower moments, kisses that lingered and deepened without urgency.

Evenings where we talked—really talked—about everything we had buried for so long.

Our fears. Our dreams. Our scars.

I pictured him in the kitchen on a Sunday morning, attempting breakfast with more determination than skill—burnt edges, a mess left behind—but all of it done with intention, just to see me smile.

I imagined him taking my hand in public without hesitation, without calculation or restraint—open, certain, real.

Looking at me from across a crowded room and letting the world see exactly who I was to him.

His wife. His equal.

His everything.

“The world could fall apart, and I’d still be the luckiest man alive—because you’re here.”

The words were quiet, but they carried weight.

“I swear on everything I am... on our son... on every breath I take from this moment forward, I will never cause you pain again. I’ll be the husband you deserved from the beginning—the father our son deserves.”

His hold on me tightened, just slightly—not possessive, but protective.

“I’ll protect you both, cherish you both... love you both. Every single day.”

For a moment, I didn’t speak.

Didn’t move. Just listened.

Just felt.

The warmth of his arms around me.

The quiet strength of his presence holding me together in a way I hadn’t known I needed.

Then I smiled.

Small. Tired.

But real.

I leaned a little closer into him, letting my fingers rest lightly against his chest.

And in the quiet of the backseat—

With his arms around me,

The faint scent of leather and him wrapping around me like a shield—I let myself imagine what might come.

Not a perfect happiness. Not effortless.

But a fragile kind.

A kind built on wounds survived, on betrayals endured, on apologies whispered and actions rebuilt.

The kind that demanded trust earned again and again.

We were not the people we had been.

He was the man who had broken me, and I was the woman who had chosen to stay

Yet here we were, choosing again.

Not as lovers fully healed...

But as two fractured people, daring to try.

Together.