

Wrong Marriage. Right Bride (Wrong Vows Book 1) - Chapter 5[4,690 words]

Chapter 5

ELENA

My eyelids fluttered open to a harsh, blinding light.

For a moment, I couldn't understand where I was.

Sunlight poured over me like molten gold, too bright.

The air carried a sharp blend of ocean salt and something faintly masculine.

I inhaled sharply, my lungs aching as though I had been asleep far too long.

My body felt... heavy.

Disoriented.

I shifted slightly, and the silk beneath me rustled with a soft, delicate whisper.

Cool air brushed against my skin—and that was when the realization hit me.

I was no longer at the altar.

I wasn't even in a hospital room, as I had expected.

There were no walls.

No ceiling.

Endless, open sky stretched above me, vast and impossibly blue, framed only by a sleek glass railing that separated this place from the drop below.

Panic surged through me in a violent rush.

I shot upright, my heart slamming hard against my ribs.

My eyes darted across the space, searching frantically for anything familiar.

But everything was... foreign.

This was an expansive, luxurious rooftop terrace

Polished teak flooring stretched beneath me, warm under my feet as I swung my legs off the bed.

Modern loungers sat neatly arranged, their clean lines untouched.

Every detail screamed wealth.

This place...

It wasn't just high.

It felt like floating above reality.

My breath hitched.

I pressed a hand to my chest, trying to steady the violent rhythm of my heart.

Then I noticed the dress—my wedding dress, still on me.

Wrinkled. Slightly torn at the seam where I must have collapsed.

My gaze dropped to my hand.

The place where Vincenzo had forced the ring onto my finger was no longer bleeding, but a faint, angry scar circled the skin beneath it—a permanent reminder etched into flesh.

The ring itself sat there, unmoving, unyielding, as though it had fused to me.

My breath caught.

A quiet, heavy realization settled over me.

I was no longer a woman on the run.

I was a married woman.

Everything came rushing back.

The wedding. The eyes on me.

Vincenzo.

His gaze—cold. Unreadable.

The kiss.

The taste of peach spreading across my tongue.

Then the tightening in my throat.

The burning. The suffocation.

My body giving out.

Then—blackness.

A sharp, ragged inhale tore from my chest.

I spun toward the dark corner of the terrace, where I'd thought I'd glimpsed a shadow moments ago—and there he was.

A figure, unmistakably familiar.

Vincenzo Orsini.

Sitting in the shadows beneath a pergola draped in white jasmine vines, as though he had been waiting for me the entire time.

He lounged in a low wooden chair carved from dark, rich wood, the kind that looked handcrafted.

One leg crossed over the other with effortless elegance.

A newspaper rested in his hands, the pages slightly creased from use.

He looked... calm.

Black-rimmed glasses rested on the bridge of his nose, catching the light.

His dark hair was neatly styled, not a strand out of place.

In the early sunlight, his features were sharply defined—high cheekbones, a strong jawline shadowed with just enough stubble, lips pressed into a firm, unreadable line.

My chest tightened.

“Vincenzo...” My voice came out weak.

But he didn’t respond.

Didn’t move. Didn’t acknowledge me.

Only after a long, suffocating pause did he slowly lower the newspaper, folding it with deliberate precision.

The sound of the paper rustling seemed louder than it should have been in the quiet air.

He set it aside on the glass table.

Then, just as carefully, he removed his glasses and placed them atop the paper.

Every movement was intentional.

Finally, his gaze lifted to mine.

And something inside me went still.

Because whatever warmth I had once remembered from the boy I’d met in that cave eighteen years ago—the boy I’d spent fourteen hours with—was gone.

Completely.

“Vin...” My voice trembled, sharp and raw as I took a hesitant step forward, bare feet whispering against the polished wood. “Did you... try to kill me?”

A flicker—barely there—crossed his expression.

He leaned back slightly, studying me in silence.

My fists clenched at my sides.

“I—I don’t understand!” I forced the words out, trembling but rising in intensity.

“You knew how deadly allergic I am to peach, and you kissed me anyway, your lips carrying it! Why... why would you want me dead? I’ve done nothing to you—I never asked for this marriage, and yet here I am, at your mercy!”

Silence.

That same suffocating, infuriating silence.

My pulse pounded louder.

“Answer me, Vincenzo,” my voice broke.

“Why? What have I ever done to you? Why... why would you abandon your own bride just to marry me?”

I took another step forward, anger overtaking the fear.

“Do you even know what I’ve carried all these years? I never stopped thinking about you. Eighteen years, Vin. Eighteen years wondering where you were, if you were safe, if the world had been kind to you. I searched for you. I prayed for you. I never once forgot you.”

My voice broke. “And now... now that we finally meet again, you do this? You kiss me with peach on your lips—knowing what it could do to me? Tell me, Vin... why? Was it power? Revenge? Or... is this who you’ve become?”

My chest tightened painfully.

Still nothing.

Not a word.

Not even a shift in his expression.

My hands trembled.

“Sit.” His voice finally cut through the silence.

He leaned forward, forearms resting on his thighs, fingers steepled, eyes locking onto mine with that dark intensity.

I didn’t move.

My legs refused.

I needed answers—why he had married me out of nowhere, why he had kissed me with peach on his lips, why he had almost killed me.

He tilted his head slightly, as if weighing my defiance.

Then his words came, slow and menacing:

“It already took everything I have to make sure you wake up at all. You are alive because I allowed it,” he growled, teeth clenched. “So sit the fuck down!”

The velvet in his tone barely hid the steel beneath.

It pressed against me, demanding compliance.

I stiffened.

My chest tightened painfully.

Forcing myself to move, I slid to the edge of the bed, hands gripping the sheets.

I sat, but my gaze never left him, defiant and questioning, every nerve on fire from the mix of fear, and disbelief.

“Today, you become my wife,” Vincenzo said, his dark gaze boring into mine without a flicker of hesitation.

“Legally. Irrevocably. I do not give a damn how foreign that word is to you.”

The words sank slowly, like iron being pressed against my chest.

“You are mine,” he continued, each syllable deliberate. “To command. To punish. To break. To destroy. To end... if I so choose.”

My breath hitched.

“That woman whose place you took at the altar today... she is my first love,” he said, voice low.

“Violet,” he breathed the name, a flicker of something softer passing through, then vanished as his tone hardened.

“She was supposed to stand beside me today. Take my rings. Become my wife.”

“She was my first kiss,” he added, almost casually, as if reminiscing over a trivial memory. “My promised future.”

My stomach churned.

A future. One that I had clearly... disrupted.

“I refused to wed Violet,” he said, his voice dropping to a growl that seemed to vibrate through the air itself.

“Even though she stood there, dressed in white, ready to become my wife—the life she begged for... I denied her. Not because I hated her.”

He stepped closer, and the shadow of his immense frame swallowed mine. “Far from it. I denied her because you belong to me. Here. Under my roof. Under my gaze. And I will

break you, piece by piece. I will make you hurt—vehemently, completely—and every moment of it will happen while you are trapped... entirely in the palm of my hand.”

The words struck me like a fist.

My pulse raced, my breath caught in ragged, shallow gasps.

“What have I done to deserve this?” I demanded, my voice rising, trembling with rage and disbelief. “I wasn’t cruel to you in that cave—not in any way.”

My heart pounded, confusion and anger tangling until I couldn’t tell one from the other.

“Why... why would you want to break me?” I added, my voice cracking. “Why marry me if it was only to ruin me?”

For a long, suffocating moment, he said nothing.

Did nothing.

I froze, staring into the abyss of his dark gaze, terrified of the demon lurking beneath the surface—the part of him that could end me with a word.

Instinctively, I stood and stepped back.

He moved.

One deliberate step.

Then another.

Until the space between us shrank to nothing, until the air itself felt too thin to breathe.

For a heartbeat, he simply stared, silent, suffocating.

And then—

His voice, calm and controlled, carried through the tension like steel:

“You are innocent of your own deeds. Yet the blood in your veins binds you to the man who destroyed me—and that is enough.”

His eyes were dark storms, heavy with anger and ancient hatred.

“Eighteen years ago...” His tone sharpened, colder now, each word a blade. “I was kidnapped from my father’s home in Italy... and trafficked to California.”

My brows knit.

“Guess who kidnapped me?” His voice was rough, every word like a whip across my chest. “Who locked me in darkness, starved me, beat me... over and over, until I was nothing but blood and fear?”

I swallowed hard.

“You found me at that cave,” he continued, his presence suffocating. “Bruised. Broken. Bleeding. And you... you asked who did this, what had happened. But I was too scared. Too terrified to speak. Too haunted to tell the truth.”

He let the words hang in the air, sharp and cutting.

“You kept wiping the blood that wouldn’t stop—flowing, dripping, from between my legs. Even after two hours, it still poured. Do you even know where it came from? Do you know the source of the pain, the bruises that cut deeper than anything you could see?”

My chest tightened. Memories slammed back—

The heat. The hidden cove. A boy, pale, trembling, soaked in his own blood. My fear had been real. Yet something—something about him—had made me stay.

“Yes, I was beaten—whipped, flogged, scarred until my body was one raw, bleeding canvas. But that thick, unyielding blood you saw that day,”—his gaze drilled into mine—“the blood that refused to stop, that drained me of every ounce of strength...”

He paused, a shadow crossing his features, voice tightening as if the words themselves inflicted pain. “...that wasn’t from the whips, the slaps, the punches... no.”

He swallowed hard, jaw clenching, before the words finally fell like ice. “That came from... what they did to me... from the places they should never have touched.”

“I was violated.”

The words cut through the air like a blade.

My chest seized.

I choked, my voice trembling, faltering under the weight of what he had just revealed. “I... I didn’t know... Oh my... Vin... I—”

He cut me off with a growl that vibrated in the air between us.

“You think ignorance absolves you? No. You carry your father’s blood—the man who ruined me. You exist in the world he destroyed. And that... that makes you mine to punish.”

He stepped even closer, the heat from his body crushing me.

His eyes, dark and merciless, pinned me in place. “I don’t forgive. I don’t forget. And you... you will learn just how sharp my wrath can be, how complete my control is. Every moment. Every breath. You are mine, and I will make sure you never forget it.”

My knees trembled.

Fear, pain, and something darker crashed over me.

His jaw tightened—just slightly.

The only sign of something deeper beneath that cold exterior.

I wanted to speak.

To tell him none of this was my fault.

But my voice faltered—caught somewhere between my lungs and the fear choking my throat.

He stood too close.

Close enough that the air I breathed felt stolen from him.

When I finally forced the words out, they came unsteady.

“I... I am not my father.”

My knees threatened to give, but I held my ground.

Barely.

His gaze sharpened. “But you carry his blood.”

His hand lifted slowly, and came down above my shoulder, caging me in without effort.

“Day after day,” he continued, voice almost quiet—“Year after year...”

His fingers tightened. “You will carry your father’s sins like iron chained to your spine.”

A pause.

Long enough to suffocate.

“It won’t leave you.”

His head dipped closer.

“Not until the weight crushes everything else out of you and pain becomes the only thing you remember how to feel.”

“Vin, I understand your pain,” I said, my voice steadier than I felt. “But I didn’t survive this long just to become a tool for your revenge. I’m not paying for my father’s sins. Never.”

The word snapped out of me before I could stop it.

“I’m not your whipping girl.”

The defiance surprised even me.

I tried to twist away from his grip, but his other hand shot out, bracing against the wall on my other side—caging me in completely.

He stepped closer.

His chest loomed over me, forcing my head back just to breathe.

My fists clenched uselessly at my sides, nails biting deep into my palms as I fought the instinct to flinch.

“Let me refresh your memory, Vin—since you seem so determined to rewrite it.”

My voice hardened.

“Fourteen hours. That’s how long we were trapped in that cave.”

I held his gaze, refusing to look away.

“I tore my own shirt to stop your bleeding. I held your head in my lap while you drifted in and out, and I kept you talking—jokes, stories, anything—because if you went quiet, you were going to die.”

The word landed between us, heavy and undeniable.

“And now?” My lips pressed into something colder. “Now you want to turn me into a stand-in for a man I didn’t choose, for sins I didn’t commit.”

A quiet, humorless breath left me.

“No.”

I leaned in.

“You don’t get to break me to settle your score.”

My eyes didn’t waver.

“Because I’m not helpless, Vin.”

A pause. Then, softer—but far more dangerous:

“I was trained to kill before you ever learned to hate this well.”

Silence stretched.

“The CIA may have buried me. The world may think I’m dead. But I’m still very capable of putting bodies in the ground if I have to.”

The corner of his mouth twitched.

For a long, unbearable moment, Vincenzo simply stared, a predator savoring the sight of his prey testing the limits.

Then, almost imperceptibly, he took two measured steps back, creating the illusion of distance.

“I do not give a fuck if you’re CIA, FBI, Secretary of War, or the damn President.” He paused, letting the weight of his words sink in. “Titles mean nothing in my territory. This is Italy. You will forget who you were—and accept the reality you live in—or your pain will be unbearable.”

He strode to the desk, lifting a thick, folded paper.

He studied the drawing with a slow, almost predatory admiration before turning his piercing gaze back to me.

“As my new wife, you will learn the basics immediately.”

His tone was flat. Businesslike. Devoid of warmth.

Every word a decree. “First things first—Violet will not live under this roof with me.”

I stared at him, incredulous.

Is she supposed to live here with him?

He abandoned her himself—she’s not part of his life.

It’s just common sense she can’t live here.

“She will visit. Often. And you...” He jabbed the paper toward me. “You will welcome her with respect. Treat her with dignity and admiration. Hurt her, and there will be consequences—severe ones.”

“What the... hell,” I snapped before I could stop myself, defiance flaring in my chest like a live wire.

In an instant, he moved—faster than my brain could register.

One fluid, terrifying motion, and he was back in my space.

He bent down, his fingers clamping around my chin like iron, lifting my face until our eyes locked.

His warm, commanding breath brushed my lips—but there was nothing tender.

Only danger.

“You obey,” he said, each word sharp enough to cut glass. “Not question. Not deny. Not wonder.”

He leaned in closer, letting the words sink in like weight.

“Let me be clear. In this house, no one speaks out of turn. No one disrespects me. But my men know this—disrespect Violet, and you disrespect me. That is your fate. Every time she comes here, you will ensure she is happy. No excuses. No failures.”

I tried to jerk my chin free.

His fingers only tightened, the pressure sharpening into pain.

Panic flared, adrenaline spiking.

Only when I stopped struggling did he release me, straightening to his full height again.

The imprint of his fingers lingered on my skin, searing like fire, a mark I couldn’t ignore.

“The chefs are at your disposal,” he said, his voice shifting almost seamlessly

“The cleaners, the drivers—everyone. Ciro, my second-in-command, and Renzo, my third, will provide anything you require. They will treat you with the respect owed to my wife.”

I blinked, trying to process the weight of it all.

He let the silence stretch.

“The safety you crave,” he continued, voice almost seductive in the way it coiled around my fear, “is right here. Under my roof. As long as you remain my wife, no one touches you. Your needs will be met. Your protection will be absolute.”

I exhaled shakily, the promise of protection mingling with the sharp sting of his control.

My pulse throbbed in my ears, each beat a reminder of how utterly trapped I was.

“Before I leave you to adjust yourself to this new reality—to this house, to being my wife—there are three red lines I have drawn for you. One of them you must never, ever cross.”

His voice dropped, low and deliberate, each word heavy with warning.

My chest constricted.

“One,” he said, voice absolute.

“You must never attempt to escape from me. Elena, do not even think about it. I do not give a fuck if you are CIA, NSA, or the goddamn President’s personal assassin.”

His grip tightened on my chin, forcing my head back further, just enough to make the warning sink deeper.

“I rule territories that stretch from Sicily to the northern Alps. My reach is longer, deeper, and more ruthless than you could ever imagine.”

He leaned in until his voice was almost against my lips.

“You run, and every resource I command—every favor owed, every corrupt official, every shadow in Europe and beyond—will hunt you down. You will not make it past the front gate. Do you understand?”

I stiffened but didn’t answer.

My pulse hammered in my ears, my trained instincts screaming to react, to fight.

Yet here, in his domain, all my skills felt muted, powerless against the force that radiated from him.

His nearness pressed against my senses, intoxicating and threatening all at once.

I swallowed, forcing my face into a mask of neutrality, refusing to let him see the fear clawing up my throat.

“Second red line,” he said, his voice dropping into something darker. “You are my wife now—in every sense of the word. You will honor the vows you took before you passed out in that chapel. whether you remember them or not.”

His eyes narrowed, black fire burning in their depths.

“You will never cheat on me. Don’t think about it. Don’t even dare.”

“If you do...” His gaze narrowed.

“I won’t stop at the man you choose over me. I’ll make an example of him so complete that no one will ever dare stand where he stood.”

His voice lowered, turning colder.

“His entire family will pay the price for your mistake. Every name tied to his will be wiped out, piece by piece, until there is nothing left of them but a warning.”

The intensity of his eyes left no room for argument.

Only the heavy, repeated thud of my heart as it sank, a stone dropping into my gut.

“And the last red line you must never cross...”

His voice softened, almost imperceptibly, before dropping again into that lethal undertone that made my chest tighten.

He let the silence stretch, drawing it out until it felt like a blade pressed to my throat.

“While you remain my wife, while you perform your role dutifully and obediently... you will never, not even for a second, cause Violet any kind of pain. Not physical. Not emotional. Not a word, not a glance, not a single act. If you do... I will end you myself, brutally and instantly, without the slightest hesitation.”

The room seemed to shrink.

My knees trembled under the weight of reality, and my fingers dug into the silk of the comforter, desperate for something to anchor me.

The first two red lines... those I could choose not to cross, if it came to it. But the last?

The one about Violet—lit a flame of fury so bright beneath my fear that it almost made my head spin.

“I’ll keep the vows I made on that altar—as long as you keep yours,” I said, even as my voice betrayed me with a slight tremor. “I don’t have to cheat on you... unless you cheat on me first.”

His expression sharpened, something darker settling into his features.

“Test that logic,” he said quietly, his voice like iron dragged over stone, “and you’ll learn exactly what happens when you cross my red lines.”

My chest fell further.

The weight of it pressed on my shoulders, in my ribs, in the pit of my stomach.

Reality crashed over me in waves so sudden I almost swayed.

Was I really someone’s wife now?

Could I call myself married when, just hours ago, I had been running through rain-slicked alleys, heart hammering as Ruslan Baranov’s men chased me, shadows and footsteps closing in from all sides?

Now I was trapped in a gilded cage, overlooking the Pacific, bound to a man whose dominance was absolute and whose patience for my defiance was razor-thin.

He didn’t want me to escape.

He didn’t want me to cheat.

And above all, he didn’t want me to hurt Violet.

On the surface, those rules sounded almost reasonable.

But beneath them was restraint barely held in check, the promise of consequences I could barely imagine—and yet, feel down to my bones.

I swallowed, feeling bile rise in my throat.

My head swam with a mix of rage, fear, and reluctant awe.

His eyes—dark, unyielding, impossibly sharp—held me hostage far more effectively than any chains ever could.

I would watch this new world, this new reality, for a few days.

If it proved unbearable—if those red lines were truly unendurable—then damn them.

I would escape.

I'm better at that than he can imagine.

Even if he controls Italy—or all of Europe—I've evaded the strongest men, and I will do it again.

I will not be a prisoner forever.

I am not built to sit trapped under someone's roof, serving as a pawn in a revenge scheme against my father.

I spoke to myself with the quiet confidence that had kept me alive for years.

I had survived ambushes, traps, and hunters far smarter than any ordinary human;

I had disappeared into shadows that should have swallowed me whole, and I would do it again.

While I remain his wife, if he cheats... I will not hesitate. I'll cheat back—hundred percent, no regrets.

I could not care less about the consequences.

The only reason I wouldn't try to escape Vincenzo in the next few hours wasn't just to test what this marriage would demand of me—it was because running from him meant returning to my old life.

Back to being hunted, racing from pillar to post, fighting for every breath, every heartbeat.

Back into the crosshairs of Ruslan Baranov, a man who swore he would chase me until the day he dies.

And I know that if he ever catches me... he would deliver a punishment so brutal, so absolute, it would make history itself shudder.

"Ciro will arrive in a few minutes to show you to the room you'll be staying in. Basic necessities should already be there," he said, his tone clipped and impersonal, as if we were discussing logistics rather than the rules that would determine whether I lived or died under his roof.

It was jarring.

The ease with which he shifted from threats to normalcy.

From dominance to detachment.

As if everything he had just said—every warning, every promise of pain—meant nothing more than routine business.

He turned toward the heavy door that led away from the balcony, his broad back rigid beneath the black dress shirt, every line of his body controlled.

As his hand closed around the doorknob, something in me snapped—fear, defiance, desperation, all colliding at once.

“Erm... I don’t know what this new life holds for me, but I hate being idle... I hate being a housewife.”

I blurted out before I could second-guess myself.

My voice came out steadier than I felt, but my pulse betrayed me, hammering against my ribs.

“Is there any work I can take on? Anything around here that will keep me busy... sane?”

I held my breath, wondering if he would ignore me—or simply walk out.

For a moment, he didn’t move.

The pause stretched, thick with something unreadable.

Then—

Vincenzo stilled, his hand still resting on the knob, though he didn’t turn fully to face me.

Only his head shifted slightly, just enough for me to catch the sharp angle of his jaw in the dim light.

“You can’t work in my companies. It’s too dangerous. I don’t want you dead... not yet.” he said, his voice measured.

“But there is work in the family,” he added, letting the words hang in the air.

“Speak to Renzo,” he continued, his tone flattening. “He will run you through the basics.”

Renzo?

The same short man I had pummeled into near unconsciousness just minutes before I even walked up to the altar?

With that, he twisted the knob and pulled the door open.

He didn't look back.

He simply stepped out.

And the soft click of the latch behind him echoed through the room like a final verdict.

Silence followed.

I stood there for a moment, unmoving, staring at the closed door as if it might open again, as if he might walk back in and undo everything he had just said.

He didn't.

A long, shaky breath slipped out of me, my shoulders finally sagging as the full weight of the day came crashing down.

Married.

The word felt foreign.

Unreal.

Married to Vincenzo Orsini.

Of all people.

The boy from the cave.

The one I had held together with trembling hands and whispered reassurances.

The one I had thought about for years, wondering if he had survived, if he had found peace, if the world had been kinder to him than it had been that night.

Instead...

He had become this.

A man carved from violence.

A mafia kingpin feared across countries.

A man who could rewrite lives with a single decision—mine included.

My impromptu husband.

My stomach twisted.

My feet moved before I consciously decided to go anywhere, carrying me back toward the open balcony like I needed air—needed space—needed something that didn't feel like it belonged to him.

The cool night air greeted me immediately, brushing against my skin, slipping beneath the thin fabric of my dress.

I stepped forward, resting my hands against the smooth stone railing.

Below, the estate stretched out in perfect, manicured precision.

My eyes traced the perimeter instinctively, muscle memory kicking in before I could stop it.

Entry points. Exit routes. Blind spots. Guard rotations.

Nothing obvious.

Of course not.

This wasn't some sloppy safe house or temporary hideout.

This was Vincenzo Orsini's territory.

Every inch of it was designed for control—for surveillance—for containment.

For people like me.

The distant crash of waves filled the silence, steady and relentless, a rhythm that almost matched the chaos in my head.

I leaned forward slightly, letting the cool breeze brush against my face, closing my eyes for just a second.

What could this new life possibly hold for me now?

The question settled heavily in my chest, refusing to be ignored.

Safety... yes.

That much was undeniable.

For the first time in years, I wasn't looking over my shoulder every second, wasn't calculating exits in every room, wasn't listening for footsteps that didn't belong.

Under Vincenzo Orsini's roof, no one would dare touch me.

Not Ruslan.

Not his men.

Not anyone foolish enough to challenge the reach of a man like him.

But at what cost?

Luxury wrapped itself around me like silk—soft, beautiful, suffocating.

Every polished surface, every carefully placed detail, every quiet display of wealth whispered the same truth: this was not freedom.

It was a cage.

A gilded one.

And the rules he had laid down... they weren't just rules.

They were chains.

Carefully worded. Strategically placed.

Disguised as protection, but binding all the same.

I exhaled slowly, gripping the cool stone of the balcony railing as my thoughts spiraled.

Yet no matter how hard I tried to focus on the danger—on the reality of what I had just been thrown into—my mind kept drifting.

Back to him.

Not the man who had just stepped out.

The boy.

The one from the cave.

Those fourteen hours replayed in fragments.

A strange, fragile connection had formed between us in that cave.

Something raw and unguarded, born out of pain, fear, and survival.

It hadn't been love—not then—but it had been something just as powerful in its own way.

Those fourteen hours had been some of the brightest moments of my life.

Which was insane.

Because they had happened in the middle of hell.

And yet...

They had mattered.

They still did.

I let out a quiet, unsteady breath, my fingers tightening slightly against the railing.

Who could have guessed?

Who could have ever imagined that the broken, bleeding stranger I had tried so desperately to save would grow into the man he had become?

A man who now held my future—my life—in the palm of his hand.

And somehow...

Impossibly...

My husband.

For tonight...

I would breathe.

That was all I could do.