

You Once Called Me Wife |

Chapter 1 by Iandra Taylor

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The Friday I left work early to prepare the lasagna my husband had always loved, I caught him cheating.

I was on my way to the specialty grocery to grab what I needed to fix our dinner. As I walked across the town square, someone called my name. I turned to wave at them, and my eyes skated across the patio of one of the nicest restaurants in town. Sitting there, with his back to me, was Chris and a woman I'd never seen before.

His ring finger was bare.

I blinked several times, trying to wake myself up. But I wasn't dreaming.

Neither of them noticed me as I crept forward, their eyes and hands locked. I couldn't see my husband's expression, but the woman smiled and laughed, her eyes sparkling.

"I promise to love you forever and then some" was what he always told me. He was the only man I'd ever been with. The only one I'd ever loved. So, like a fool, I believed him.

My heart shattering, I leaned against a building for support. I was close enough to hear their conversation without being conspicuous, so I pulled out my phone and called him.

Chris pulled out his phone, looked at it, and rejected the call. His voicemail message rang in my ear.

"Everything all right?" the woman asked.

"Yeah," he replied, taking her hand again and kissing it. "It was no one important. Just a spam call."

I snapped a photo of them and turned around, unable to look anymore. Chris wasn't wearing his ring, and he kissed another woman's hand. I was no one important; I was just a spam call.

Abandoning the grocery, I got into my car, remembering how Chris had been such a gentleman on our first date. It was our senior year of high school, and I'd been reluctant to date because my friends said that guys always expected sex. But I'd known Chris for a while, so, when he asked me out, I said yes.

After our first date, he walked me to my door and pressed my hand to his lips, saying, "This is the only goodnight kiss I'm looking for tonight."

I fell head over heels in love with him right then.

For a long time, I was the happiest girl alive. Chris and I hardly fought, and we seemed to want the same things in life. When we graduated, he started working as a loan officer at his family's bank, and I started working in a chiropractor's office. We got married a year later.

Now, five years into our marriage, Chris was quiet at home. He was never mean, but he seemed distracted.

He told me it was because he'd been really busy at the bank. Apparently, a lot of people were refinancing and buying houses. But on my drive home that day, I wondered how much of what he told me was true.

As a teenager, I'd thought I had gotten my fairy tale. As a wife, I'd thought I could rekindle the spark between us with a romantic dinner. Now, I knew I was wrong.

When I returned to the home my grandparents had left me just outside of town, I set my things on the bar and sat on the sofa without bothering to turn on the lights. Several hours later, I still hadn't moved. I just watched as Chris's headlights flashed through the living room window.

The door opened, and I heard my husband's heavy footsteps. A minute later, he turned on a lamp and jumped.

"Shit!" Chris said, his hand clutching his chest. "What are you doing sitting here in the dark, Kenzie?"

I was too numb to say anything. In all that time, I hadn't screamed or thrown objects around. I hadn't even broken down and cried. I had literally just sat there, aching as the splintered pieces of my heart rolled around my chest.

“Kenzie?” Chris asked, sitting beside me. “Sorry, I didn’t get your call earlier. My phone was dead, and I couldn’t charge it until I got in the car. Dumbass me forgot my charger here.”

I still didn’t respond, didn’t move. I wondered if I was having a mental breakdown. Wouldn’t most women have stormed up to the table and confronted their husbands on the spot? Or at least berated them when they got home?

Yet I couldn’t do anything. It was like I thought the situation would go away if I didn’t acknowledge it.

“Kenzie? Are you awake?”

Chris took my hand, and I felt his wedding ring press into my fingers.

“No!” I said, jerking my hand back. I finally turned to look at my lying shit of a husband.

“Hey. Hey, what’s going on? Kenzie, are you all right? Are you hurt?”

For a moment, I almost tricked myself into thinking that there was concern in his eyes. Almost. But I couldn’t trust anything anymore. I’d been reading him wrong for God knows how long.

“Talk to me, Kenzie. You’re starting to scare me.”

“How long?” I managed, my voice scratchy. I felt like my throat and chest were burning.

“How long what, baby?” he replied, trying to tuck a strand of hair behind my ear.

I pulled away and moved to the chair next to the sofa.

“How long have you been fucking her?” I asked.

Chris looked just as surprised as I was that I put it so bluntly. I was never one to cuss much, but that day felt like the time to start. It was a day for firsts.

I watched as Chris’s face paled. His mouth opened and closed like he didn’t know if he should speak or not. The war in his eyes told me all I needed to know.

"I'm not sure what you mean," he said shakily.

At that moment, it was obvious that Chris couldn't lie very well. *How in the world did he keep this secret from me?* I wondered. *Oh yeah, he's been hiding at work.*

"The woman you were with today at the restaurant," I clarified. "How long have you been fucking her?"

"I don't know what you think you know, but there's nothing going on," Chris said quickly.

I pulled my phone out and showed him the picture I took of him kissing the woman's hand. "This should jog your memory," I seethed. "Remember, you said I was just a spam call?"

Chris rubbed his hand down his face, then looked back at me. His eyes were full of guilt and shame.

"I never meant for things to end up like this," he said. "I was going to talk to you about it soon. I was just working up the courage to tell you."

"Tell me what?"

Chris scratched the back of his neck. "I'm leaving you. I fell in love with Opal, and I want to be with her."

It was worse than I thought. Not only was he cheating, but he was also leaving without trying to work things out in therapy. He decided that we were over before I even knew anything was wrong.

"Better get packing then," I responded with all the venom I could muster. "I want you out of the house. I assume you're not going to try and take my dead grandparents' home from me, right?"

Chris sighed, probably surprised I didn't beg him to stay. But I wouldn't degrade myself like that.

"McKenzie, don't be like this. You know I would never do that to you. I know how much you love this house. I'm not a monster."

He stood up and walked toward me, but I put my hand up to make him stop.

“But fucking around behind my back makes you a saint?” I asked. “Don’t kid yourself, Chris. You might not have beaten me or stolen my home, but you crushed my heart and soul. So yeah, you’re a monster.”

I walked around him, heading toward the bathroom. I couldn’t stand the thought of looking at him another minute.

“Pack your stuff and get out. I’m sure Opal would love to have you at her place.”

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