

You Once Called Me Wife

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“You’ve been the talk of the town for the last month,” Mom said as we made pies together one afternoon.

I laughed. “And that’s changed since the month before?”

“Of course! People are now talking because you’re the one who finally tamed Zane. Before it was because of he-who-shall-not-be-named.” I rolled my eyes as she added, “It’s a good thing to hear about.”

I gave her a questioning look. My mother sometimes didn’t like to just come right out and say what was on her mind—I think because she was raised as a quiet woman.

She swatted me with a towel. “To hear that my daughter is happy, silly!”

“Well, I am happy. But part of me wonders what my life would have been like if he had told me his feelings when we were younger.” I smiled, thinking about a young Zane blushing while talking to me.

“Depending on when he told you, he could have gotten himself in a lot of trouble,” Dad said as he entered the room.

“I don’t think he understood it was love until I hit eighteen,” I assured him.

“From what he’s told me, he knew he was drawn to me but didn’t understand it. Then, when he figured it out, I was already with he-who-shall-not-be-named.” I winked at my mother.

Dad grunted and opened the fridge to get something out.

“What would you two have said if I came home with a boyfriend six years older than me?” I asked.

“Honestly?” Dad said. I nodded. “I would have been cautious, but I’ve known that boy his entire life. I would trust him with you, definitely more than the other one. There would have been rules, but I would have allowed it.”

I continued making the pies, thinking about what could have been, but I knew I couldn't change my past. All I could do was make this relationship the thing that it was meant to be, forever. Zane made no room for anything else. I was his, and he was mine. There was no changing that.

Zane's possessiveness wasn't something that scared me. It actually made me feel safe. He wasn't controlling—I could go out and do whatever whenever—he just wanted me and everyone else to know that I was his woman. And I knew he wouldn't step out on me.

"Have you heard anything else about the bank?" Mom asked as we set the table for dinner.

"No. Just a lot about the murder in the town over. Have you?"

Mom shrugged. "Things haven't been good for people around town. Nothing new about the bank, but there are a few people who have made some bad investments. The older couple on the outskirts of town lost about ten thousand dollars, and others have sold off their stocks. Word is that Opal gave them bad advice."

"Are they blaming her?" As much as I wanted to enjoy her downfall, I was worried about what she might be doing to the people of this town.

"Some are. Just make sure you or Zane don't do anything like that."

"You don't have to worry about that. Neither of us would trust her with a dime."

"How long do you think it will be before he proposes, anyway?" Mom asked with a sly grin.

I placed the last plate down. "We've only been together for a month, Mom. Wouldn't that be too fast?"

"Honey, the two of you have loved each other for years. Sure, you're only just now doing something about it, but that shouldn't matter. It's not like he's a stranger to you or us." She pointed a finger at me. "And don't think we don't know that he's been sleeping over every night. And don't think I have no clue about what's going on there."

I flushed, but Mom wasn't done. "You're glowing like a freshly wed woman who waited until her wedding night. It's not a bad thing, but don't pretend everyone in town can't see it."

"What am I? Twelve?" I mumbled as she headed back into the kitchen.

"I heard that," she called before returning to the dining room with silverware and napkins.

Mom handed me the napkins and said, "Honey, it's okay. I just always wondered if you were happy before. You never beamed like you do now... I didn't want to ask because it's not very becoming of a mother, but was the sex that bad?"

God, save me from my mother.

A knock on the front door signaled that Zane had arrived, and I worried that she would ask me about sex with Chris again in front of my new boyfriend. She lived to embarrass me, it felt like.

I heard Dad open the door, and soon, he walked into the dining room with Zane. I smiled when our eyes met, then noticed the two bouquets of wildflowers in his hands. He grinned like a young boy who had picked a flower for his mother—full of pride.

"Why, look at that. Zane, did you bring me flowers?" my mother asked coyly.

Dad and I both rolled our eyes. Mom loved to feel young, so Zane had just won her heart.

"I sure did, Miss Stella. A beautiful girl like you should always have flowers," Zane answered, handing one bouquet to my mom and the other to me. "And my girl will always have some."

It was true. Before we started dating, I could count on one hand the number of times I had been given flowers, but since becoming official, Zane had brought fresh flowers to my house or work every other day. And he always made sure to get different ones. He made me feel like a queen.

I stepped up on my tiptoes and gave him a quick kiss in thanks.

"So, what's for dinner?" Dad asked.

During the meal, Dad and Zane talked about sports some, and then we all talked about growing up around here. How even though some things changed over time, the important things stayed the same, such as children being taught to respect those around them.

It also became apparent that my parents liked knowing that Zane and I were on the same wavelength regarding most topics. Chris never wanted to discuss anything with them, and I often thought it set them on edge. Seeing how happy they were now, it dawned on me that maybe they had been worried about me.

“Zane, have your parents talked about when they want to retire?” Mom asked during a lull in our conversation.

So far, so good. She hasn't brought up marriage.

He chuckled. “They said they'd retire once I was settled down and married. They want grandchildren, so they're holding that over my head.”

At that moment, my mom looked like she was going to take flight to the heavens, shouting, “Hallelujah!” I could tell she was not about to keep her thoughts on this subject to herself.

I looked at my father, pleading for him to stop her, but he just smirked at me. Smirked! There was a wicked gleam in his eye, and I knew then that I would never live this night down.

For years to come, people would tell the story of how my mother single-handedly ran off the man who claimed to have loved me for years. I would sit on my porch, an old spinster, telling the neighbors' children how Zane had run faster than any man ever had before. All because my mother couldn't resist the temptation placed before her.

Then, as if the universe had said, “Too bad, Kenziel!” there was a knock at the door. My father got up to see who it was, and my mother took the opportunity to ask, “So, when can I expect to be planning a wedding? I know you've been working overtime on the grandkids.”

“What?” cried a voice that I had hoped to never hear again.

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