

# You Once Called Me Wife |

## Chapter 11

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Sometimes, I could swear the fates were against me. I'd always tried to avoid getting caught up in gossip or drama, but sitting there in my parents' house, it was thrust into my face.

Chris marched into the dining room, looking like the poster boy for *Anal Retentive Jackass Magazine*. It occurred to me then that the longer I was away from him, the better I felt. The more I acted like the old me.

"Is anyone going to answer my question?" he demanded like a petulant child.

"What exactly do you want to know, Chris?" I asked, sure I looked like I could run him over with a car at any moment. All the love and care I had for him was gone. "Because I thought that once I divorced you, I would no longer need to tell you a thing. So, why are you here?"

"I need you to sign this release to transfer my life insurance over to Opal. It's the policy we had together." He pointed to Zane. "But now I want to know what in the hell is going on with you and him?"

A deep chuckle filled the room, and I looked over to see Zane smirking. He had a rebellious look in his eye that made me shiver. I'd seen him get upset a few times but had only seen him fight once, and right then, he looked ready to fight.

"We were just discussing when I was going to marry McKenzie," Zane said. "Since we've been spending all our free time together and I've possibly even given her that baby she's wanted, I thought I'd just ask. I plan on making her mine in all ways."

Chris's left eye twitched. He looked like he might crush his paperwork.

"And what makes you think she's gonna marry you?" he finally gritted out. "She's probably just been licking her wounds since I left. She was always so attached to me that she didn't know how to function. Kenzie's downright thirsty for me."

I felt like someone had smacked me across the face. I'd never been a violent person, but I stood quickly, ready to slap him.

*How could I have never noticed how vengeful and hateful he is? I would give anything to go back in time and undo the last years of my life. I want to erase every year he was part of my life.*

"First off, you have no right to come in here asking about anything I do. Second, I'm not licking any wounds. I'm way better off without you. You did me a favor by cheating on me. Now, hand me those papers, and let me sign them."

Before Chris could respond, I snatched the papers out of his hand and looked over them. The paperwork would make it so that we had two separate policies. I gladly signed it, kissing the last thread that held us together goodbye.

Everything was so easy now that I finally understood what happened and why. Opal was everything I wasn't, everything Chris thought he couldn't have, so when he got her, I was old news. It was nothing I did.

Chris was a coward and a poor excuse for a man.

"Now get out and never show up in front of me again!" I shouted, throwing the papers at him.

"Kenzie, I didn't mean it. I was just upset, and I took it out on you. I should have never said those things." Chris tried to move toward me, but my father stood in his way, his hand held up. "Alex, come on, you know I would never hurt her."

"Don't lie. You've hurt her more than any physical injury could." Dad walked right in front of Chris. "I still want to beat you to nothing, but my wife doesn't want to visit me in jail."

Chris backed up and looked around at us, wide-eyed. My father had never spoken to anyone like that, and I was sure it was a shock to his system. Still, he had the nerve to make eye contact with me.

"Can we talk?" he pleaded. "You haven't let me talk to you since the night you found out. I just need to explain things to you. I'm sure once you hear me out..."

"What do you not understand about never showing up in front of her again?" Zane demanded, striding toward Chris. "Don't you understand?"

I grabbed Zane's hand and pulled him toward me. The last thing I needed was to have a fight break out in my parents' house.

"Chris," I began slowly, "there is nothing you can say that will ever make me forgive you. Your actions spoke for you, and there's nothing you can do to change them."

I took a deep breath. "You came here to get my signature to release the right to your life insurance, and I've given you that. I've given you all that your heart desired, so give me mine. Now please leave and forget you ever knew me."

With a look of shock, he turned around and walked to the front door. He slammed it shut, and I winced at the sound of everything on the wall rattling.

I looked over and saw Mom making sure nothing fell. *If he broke something, nothing can save him from her*, I thought. She was a holy terror anytime someone messed up something important to her.

When nothing crashed to the ground, I said, "I think I need a minute," and walked out the back door.

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I spent a huge portion of my childhood on the old tire swing in the oak tree in my parents' backyard. Sometimes, I would pretend to be on an airplane, flying away to some distant place; other times, I was a witch on her broom, causing chaos on Halloween night.

As I got older, I would come out here when I was feeling sad or angry. Something about swinging always made my problems feel smaller, so I decided to try it again.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Zane's voice cut through the silence like a beacon calling me to the shore.

I turned and saw that he looked worried. Since we'd been together, Zane and I hadn't fought or had any other problems. I knew I was probably blowing things out of proportion, but it felt like up until Chris showed up that night, everything was perfect.

"I'm overwhelmed," I said, climbing off the tire swing and making my way to the two-seater porch swing on the other side of the tree.

Zane followed and sat down beside me. "About what?" he asked.

"Before you got here, Mom had already started the marriage conversation. I didn't know how to react. I know I love you, and I know you love me, but we've barely been together. I didn't want her scaring you off by bringing all that up now. Then he showed up and you said all those things to get him worked up. I felt like a pawn in a pissing contest."

Zane sighed. "I'll admit, I shouldn't have thrown all that out there. That's between me and you. But he gets under my skin so easily that I find it hard to keep my mouth shut." Lower, he grumbled, "He may have asked for a divorce, but that man still has feelings for you."

I was so jolted by those words that I started to laugh. "Now I'm wondering if you've lost your mind," I said.

"I'm dead serious, McKenzie. He was practically begging you to talk to him. That man loves his cake and wants to eat it too. Maybe because of all the hurt, you can't see it, but everyone else does."

Lost for words, I thought back. *Am I missing something? But if he loved me, then he wouldn't have cheated or asked for a divorce.*

"I still don't see it," I finally said. "I could never love someone and do the things he did."

"That's because you have a heart. Chris is messed up in the head; to him, you can cheat and love your wife. But as I told you before, you deserve the love of a real man, and I'm going to give it to you forever."

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After the fiasco that was dinner with my parents, Zane came over to my house. He didn't bring Chris up again, and that was one of the things I loved most about him: he didn't push a subject down your throat. He talked about it, and then he was done.

We were sitting on my bed watching a movie when I heard something outside. I sat up, paused the movie, and listened. It sounded like someone was on the front porch, moving stuff around.

Zane stood and went to the front door. I followed, steeling my nerves. After the note from Opal, I'd been a bit on edge—just like the rest of the town.

Zane stopped as soon as he opened the door. As I walked up beside him, I saw a bundle of dead roses on the porch, tied together with a black ribbon. There was a card attached, and when Zane reached down to pick it up, I read it over his shoulders.

*It seems you haven't listened to my last warning. You are to stay away from Chris. If you don't, then you just may end up like these flowers—dead but still lovely.*

"I'm calling the police," he said before returning to my bedroom.

"Wait, Zane," I called. "I'm sure it's just Opal trying to scare me."

"Has something like this happened before, Kenzie? That note said something about you not listening."

I didn't want to answer him. I hadn't told anyone about the note or the fact that I'd been worried about it. I hadn't even admitted to myself that sometimes I felt like I was being watched.

"The morning after our first date," I began, "there was a note on my door. I didn't say anything because it seemed harmless, and I thought it was from Opal. I never thought something like this was going to happen."

"Baby, you can't do that. If anything happens or you don't feel safe, you have to let me know. I can't keep you safe if I don't know there's danger. I'm calling the police."

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Not long after, a deputy showed up at my house.

I watched Zane's face get redder and redder as he listened to the deputy take everything in stride. He acted like it was a prank, and he clearly felt no sense

of urgency about it. He simply took the card and flowers as evidence and said that someone would be in touch.

The problem was, things like that kept happening. Each time, it seemed a little more threatening, and each time, the law enforcement disregarded it as a prank.

We never saw anyone, and no prints other than ours ever showed up.

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