

You Once Called Me Wife |

Chapter 15

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When I finally awoke, I was in my old bedroom at my parents' house. Someone had changed me out of my dress and put me in a T-shirt. Hearing voices coming from downstairs, I crept out of the room.

"What made you think it was a good idea to keep that from her?" my dad was yelling. "You could have saved her so much pain! You could have been with her sooner!"

"I didn't think she would believe me," Zane responded, sounding miserable. "I was this older guy who somehow knew her boyfriend—who had such a hold on her, by the way—was cheating on her with the town bicycle."

So, Chris was sleeping with Becky in high school. That shouldn't have surprised me. Though he never seemed interested in her, she always had a thing for him.

When I walked into the room, Zane rushed over to me, but I flinched back as he tried to pull me into a hug. Ignoring the surprise and hurt in his eyes, I sat next to my mother and Annabeth on the sofa. Erika moved from a chair on the other side of the room to the floor in front of me and took my hand.

"I need to understand why," was all I could say.

Zane ran a hand through his hair. "I found out he was cheating after the two of you had been dating a while. I caught them out in one of the fields one night going at it. He begged me not to say anything."

He sighed. "I told him I would have to tell you, but then he said that you would never believe me and that I was just a creepy older guy who stared at you. He made it sound like you thought I was some kind of weirdo who was stalking an underage girl."

His words hit me hard. I never thought that about him; I never even noticed him looking at me. I only saw him as the unobtainable guy who had a piece of my heart.

“Baby, he hit on every fear I had. I wanted to tell you, but I was terrified that someone would accuse me of being a pedophile, so I didn’t. I couldn’t risk my entire life on a secret that you might not believe. Plus, you were so wrapped up in him that I didn’t think you would listen, and I didn’t want you to hate me. It would have killed me.”

I believed him. I knew he feared being seen like that, and I knew fear could put crazy ideas into people’s heads. But we were both adults now. Couldn’t he have told me when we first started talking again? His waiting just made it look worse.

“When were you going to tell me?” I asked. “*Were* you going to tell me? Did you not think Chris would say something when we announced our engagement?”

“Engagement?” a chorus of voices asked.

“What engagement?” my mother demanded, looking between us.

“I asked Kenzie to marry me yesterday, and she said yes,” Zane told them. “We were waiting until after the party to tell everyone. We didn’t want to cause a scene.”

“That’s wonderful!” Mom exclaimed, then hugged me.

I didn’t know how to react. I was beyond angry at Zane for all the dumb choices he’d made, and I didn’t want how we decided to handle this situation to get rushed by everyone’s excitement about our engagement.

“Could you all give us a few minutes, please?” I asked.

As my parents and friends headed out of the room, Zane looked gutted. I was sure he thought this was the end. Maybe it was.

“I know you had your reasons, Zane,” I began. “I’m not saying that they were completely valid, but I do understand. But you should understand that I need some time to process this.”

“I can’t lose you again, baby,” he responded. “Please, I need you to know that I never did anything to hurt you.”

My anger flared at that. “I just learned the man I love knew my ex-husband was cheating on me for years and never said anything!” I screamed.

Zane blanched at my tone, looking like I gave him a death sentence. I didn’t know what made me more angry: that he looked like a victim or that I felt bad for yelling.

I took a deep breath to calm myself. “I need to think all this through. I’m not saying we’re over, but I’m not saying we’re staying together either. Zane, I love you so much that I can’t comprehend spending my life without you, but I also can’t imagine spending my life not sure if I can trust you.”

He walked over to me, pleading, “But you can trust me! I know I screwed this up, but that was the only time that I ever lied to you. I’ll never do it again—you have to know that.”

I held my hand out, trying to put some distance between us. “Right now, I don’t know anything. I don’t want us getting married while I have any doubts. I’ve already had my heart ripped out once, and I’m damn sure not going down that road again.”

“What can I do to prove that I’m never going to be like that asshole?” Zane gritted out.

He had always been the upstanding gentleman that most guys didn’t even think about trying to be, so the thought of being like Chris was clearly making him crazy. It was a blow to his pride.

“Give me the time I need, and don’t do anything stupid,” I said. “I’m not dumb; I know he wanted me to hear that fight, and we played right into his hands. Just give me time to get my head straight.”

I gave Zane a soft smile, but I could tell it didn’t reach my eyes. He walked over, obviously heartbroken, and wrapped me in his arms. This time, I let him because we both needed the connection.

This was going to be the hardest thing we had faced in our relationship so far. I just prayed we could make it through.

The next morning, I headed into work quickly. My house smelled like Zane, and I couldn't look anywhere without seeing something that reminded me he should be there.

I couldn't stop wondering whether Zane's offense was as bad as Chris's. *How do you even measure the seriousness of something like that? Damn them for putting me in this position.*

When I arrived at Dr. Hampton's office, Chelsea was getting a new patient chart system set up. As soon as she saw me, she asked, "Do you want to talk about what happened yesterday?"

"Let me guess. Everyone in town now knows about it?" I said, giving her a bitter look.

"Did you think they wouldn't?"

I snorted, then sighed. "No, Chelsea, I don't know what to think. How do you handle something like this?"

I really wanted to know what she thought. Chelsea had always been honest and wiser than her years. So many people would tell me what they thought I'd want to hear, but I knew she wouldn't sugarcoat her opinion.

"What reason did Zane give?"

After I told her what he'd said, Chelsea thought for a moment, then replied, "I'm not saying what Zane did was right because I think he should have told you. Hell, anyone that knew should have told you. That's not something you keep from somebody. But the way I see it, he was doing what he thought was right."

As she passed me a stack of files to start adding into the system, I said, "I think he was trying to protect me. Not only from the hurt of knowing what Chris did, but from the gossip it could have caused if he was accused of those things."

She looked at me hard. "What is it you want, Kenzie?" she asked.

I stopped filing and tried to think about it. "I want to know that I can trust Zane, but Lord knows I have trust issues now."

Just then, there was a knock at the door. When I opened it, my favorite coffee and a bag from the diner were sitting on the front step. I looked around but didn't see anyone, so I grabbed the items and locked the door behind me.

"What was that?" Chelsea asked.

"Coffee and food."

I opened the bag and saw a card inside. It read, *I'm more sorry than you'll ever know*. It wasn't signed.

There was another knock on the door, and Chelsea went to get it. When she came back, she was carrying an enormous bouquet of roses. Once again, there was an apology card that wasn't signed.

"Do you think they're both from him?" Chelsea asked while smelling the roses.

"Yeah. It's just weird that he didn't sign his name. But you know he can't let me go without the things I love." I smiled at the thought.

"Well, from the look on your face, I think you know how you want to handle this."

I knew she was right. Sure, I was upset by what Zane did and needed some time to get over it, but there was no way I could give up on him. Even when he was making the dumbest choices, he was still doing everything he could to protect me.

I pulled out my phone and sent him a text.

McKenzie
thank you