

You Once Called Me Wife |

Chapter 17

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Eyes followed us the rest of the day like the town was living to see what would happen next. I kept to myself, quickly adding the rest of the files to the office system so I could go home.

Zane refused to leave my side. In his mind, Chris was going to come back and start trouble, but I didn't think so. He could never tolerate pain, so he was probably a whining mess right then.

That day was the first time Zane had ever seen me so angry. I rarely lose my temper, but Chris had somehow managed to hit all my buttons over the past two days. I couldn't hold it in anymore.

When I left work early, Zane followed me home, and I called my parents to fill them in on what had happened. They had, of course, heard about it, but the stories going around were not completely true. Dad expressed regret that he hadn't gotten to hit Chris too.

Once home, Zane and I sat on the sofa. I leaned my head on his shoulder, relieved to have him next to me. The pain from missing him was huge, even if it was for less than twenty-four hours. I didn't think I could take being apart any longer than that.

I needed him just as much as he needed me, and I wouldn't let anger keep us away from each other. From then on, we would work through our problems and always come out better.

"You know," I said as Zane absently rubbed my thigh, "if we want everyone to shut up and leave us alone, we should get married soon."

His hand stopped moving. "Is that the only reason you want to get married?" he whispered.

I took his face in both my hands. "No! God, no! I want to be married to you. I want to call you my husband and know that you are mine from now to eternity. Getting everyone to shut up about me and him is just a bonus. Does that make sense?"

“It does. I just don’t want you jumping into something that you’re not ready for. You were really upset with me yesterday, and I don’t want the town gossip or Chris to be the reason you marry me. I want you to marry me because you love me.”

Zane looked at me with those eyes that always drew me in, and I was shocked that I was able to stay mad at him for as long as I did. That look of pure love never failed to make me fall apart at the seams.

“I do want to marry you because I love you,” I assured him.

“Then let’s do it. Let’s go get married.”

That afternoon, we got our marriage license and visited the sheriff, who was one of Zane’s friends. He told me that he was the only one who knew about Zane’s feelings for me growing up, that he would talk about me all the time. The story brought tears to my eyes.

The sheriff agreed to marry us right then, even though Zane was in his ranch clothes and I was in a pair of scrubs. He conducted a short ceremony, then said with a wide grin, “You may now kiss your bride, man.”

Zane kissed me like his life depended on it, and I lost myself in him, knowing that for the rest of our lives, he would be mine and I would be his. I would have his children. Grow old with him. Be one of those people who said they got to spend their life with their first love.

Zane and I spent only an hour as husband and wife before calling our families and friends over to share the good news. When they arrived, everyone filed into my living room with looks of confusion and apprehension on their faces. They were probably thinking that we were going to talk more about what happened with Chris this morning.

Since it was Zane’s first marriage, he really wanted to be the one to tell everybody. Before we visited the sheriff, he had assured me he didn’t care about having a big wedding—all he wanted was me—so I wanted him to get the most out of this moment.

“We have something important to tell all of you,” he began. “But first I want to apologize for all the pain I caused yesterday. I know it wasn’t right to lie to Kenzie, but I was only doing what I thought was right. She has found it in her beautiful heart to forgive me, and I hope you all will, too.”

Everyone nodded in agreement, though my dad seemed reluctant—probably because he guessed what was going on. He could always read a situation before anyone else, and once again, I wished he’d told me his suspicions that Chris was not who he seemed. Though he was also likely right that I wouldn’t have listened.

“Earlier today was rough on us both,” Zane continued. “Chris, and all the town gossip, has been an enormous problem for Kenzie, so we thought it best to forget everyone and their interest in our lives. We did something just for us, and we hope that you’re happy for us. That you’re not upset we didn’t wait for all of you to be with us...”

Zane looked at me and smiled, and I knew God made him just for me. I couldn’t be more thankful.

“Kenzie and I got married today,” he finished, and the room erupted with happy yells.

As everyone jumped up and swarmed us, the women declared how upset they were that we didn’t have a big ceremony. The men declared how thankful they were that we didn’t. They all cried tears of joy.

This is what family is all about, I thought. Sharing the good and the bad.

When my dad hugged me, he whispered in my ear, “Are you happy, kiddo?” and I felt all the love he had for me. I’d always been a daddy’s girl, so it was a relief to see how well he and Zane got along.

Even though I’d thought my dad liked Chris, they were just keeping it civil for my sake. But my dad and Zane genuinely had the kind of relationship that I had envisioned for my parents and spouse.

I smiled. “More than you’ll ever know.”

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