

You Once Called Me Wife | Chapter 22

Chapter 22

Chris opened his mouth and closed it again before managing to say, "Wait. What do you mean, Dad? I haven't been moving money around. I would never do that to you or Mom."

"Then who, Chris? You know your login is of the utmost importance," James said, sounding defeated. "It's been killing us to think that you would steal from us. Your mother hasn't been sleeping, and I can barely eat. Explain it to me, son."

My heart cracked at the sight of James with tears in his eyes.

"All that is happening," he continued, "and you and your mistress have done nothing but harass McKenzie and try to break up her marriage. What in the world do you expect from us? Hell, from all the people in this room? We are paying the price for your mistakes."

Chris sat on the floor and grabbed his hair. He rocked back and forth, seemingly wanting to search for answers but unable to face the reality of those answers.

Opal got up and walked over to Chris, trying to console him, but he shrugged off her touch like she burned his skin. "Chris?" she asked quietly.

"Have you gotten the police involved?" my dad asked James.

Chris looked up and stared at his parents, desperation in his eyes. He was clearly terrified that they had, but did that mean he was guilty?

"We turned everything over to them this morning. In our internal investigation, we could find nothing other than the transfers going through Chris's login. The accounts are offshore, so it will take some time to uncover everything." To Chris, he said, in a voice full of sorrow, "Son, if there's something you need to tell us, now is the time. I can't protect you from this."

It occurred to me then that whoever was at fault wasn't just stealing from James and Rachel; they were stealing from the entire town. Everyone banked with them, including me.

My mom must've realized this too because she asked, "James, has it started to affect people's accounts?" There was fear in her eyes. My parents' entire life savings was in that bank.

"Not yet," Rachel answered. "It's just been our personal and business accounts. James and I have lost about fifty thousand, and the bank has lost another hundred thousand."

"I swear, I never did anything like that," Chris said, his head still in his hands. "I would never betray you like that. How could you think that?"

"If you could betray the woman you claimed was the love of your life, then how can I trust you not to do the same to us?" James asked.

"What did you say?" Opal whispered, pulling away from Chris. "What makes you think that Chris could ever really love someone like her? She's nothing compared to me."

"You heard me. McKenzie and Chris were perfect for each other, and then you came along and ruined it all. He told everyone that she was it for him. That she was the love of his life. But it didn't take you long to sink your hooks into him and pull him away!"

"He was cheating on me in high school with Becky," I whispered.

"Oh, Lord!" Rachel yelled at her son. "What in the world is wrong with you? You had everything you ever claimed you wanted, and you did nothing but work to throw it all away!"

"She's the love of your life?" Opal screeched. She had done well keeping her cool, but apparently, Chris still caring for me was the last straw for her. "You told me she was boring and didn't give you what you needed. You said that I was the one who was your everything. Told me you wished you had met me first!"

Through all this, Zane's parents had been silent, but now Matilda called over the noise, "I think we're all forgetting about something here. Becky says that cousin is the one who paid her to do that to my son. I want to know why!"

The room was quiet for what seemed like an eternity. Opal looked around, no doubt trying to find someone to defend her, but she was surrounded by very angry people who all wanted answers from her.

I stepped forward and sat on the floor across from her, knowing she wasn't stupid enough to try to physically hurt me in front of everyone. I just hoped she also wasn't stupid enough to try to wiggle her way out of this.

"You and I aren't friends, Opal. I wouldn't even call us civil to one another. But right now, I'm laying all that aside and asking you to be honest with me. Are you protecting Douglas? Is he really the one who sent Becky here to cause problems?"

Opal chewed on her bottom lip, the first sign—other than her outburst—that she was cracking under the pressure. Something flashed in her eyes, but I couldn't place the emotion.

I didn't want to be manipulative, but we needed answers. James and Rachel were making themselves ill over everything happening in their lives, and I didn't want to see any other innocent people suffer because of someone being selfish.

"I don't know why she would say that," Opal finally said, shifting around. "She was probably just wanting to get out of trouble for what she did."

"Stop trying to avoid the question!" Chris screamed, making both me and Opal jump.

"Calm down. You aren't helping," I growled at him. Turning back to Opal, I said, "This isn't going to go away. You need to tell the truth so that we can put a stop to all this nonsense. There's something much worse going on for the Weston family, and you being stubborn isn't helping."

Opal sat still for a moment, her breathing shallow. I wondered if she was going to have a panic attack.

How in the world did I end up here? I wondered. I'm sitting here semi-comforting the woman who had an affair with my ex-husband. I should just forget it and go on with my life.

I looked at my happiness, who was watching everything with his arms crossed. If the tables were turned, he'd do anything to help me out.

Someone is messing with my man, and I'm not about to let it continue.

"Since Chris seemed to be stuck on you," Opal eventually said, "he suggested that I make you hate Chris even more. I'll admit that I was, well, jealous of the hold you have over him. He was willing to sleep with me and even said he would leave you for me, but we always fought about him getting a divorce and staying away from you."

Who suggested that she should make him hate me?

Tears formed in her eyes, "Chris said that he wouldn't act like he didn't care for you at all. That he might want me and care for me, but that the two of you had history."

Part of me wanted to believe she was being honest. I didn't want to think that he left because of me; I wanted to think that he left because the other woman loved him so much and he loved her. I felt sick in the head.

It was sad to know that even though I was happier than I had ever been, there would always be a part of me that questioned if I was worthwhile. It was a small part, but it was still there.

"I agreed to the ploy to make you angry at Chris. After everything he did, I knew you would easily suspect him. And once I learned about his history with Becky, it was like the universe was giving me the green light. I had Douglas pay her to frame your husband, then blame it on Chris."

Opal looked down at her hands. "I know that nothing I've done since I came to this town has been right, but you know what it's like to love someone. I mean, really love them. To feel like you can't breathe if they're not around. To crave their touch even if it's for only a second. I see it when you look at your husband. I see it whenever Chris looks at you."

She sighed. "I just wanted that for myself. Just once, I wanted to be selfish. To get the thing I wanted instead of doing what was right."

"So that's all there is to the story?" Zane's father, Randall, asked. "You wanted McKenzie to hate Chris so she would never go back to him?" He looked at his son with a raised brow, clearly not buying it.

“Of course. I didn’t want anyone harmed. I’m sure Douglas would have told her that. He did, didn’t he, Becky?” Opal’s voice sounded sweet, almost innocent, and Becky nodded.

Obviously, Opal was still protecting Douglas, but why? I knew people would often do anything to protect their family, but I felt like we were missing a piece of the puzzle.

“Opal, is Douglas someone that Zane and I need to worry about? I will not sugarcoat this. I don’t understand the relationship you have with him or with Chris, but I don’t want your issues spilling into my marriage. Please leave me and my husband out of whatever is going on.”

I looked at my ex. “Chris, you did me wrong in so many ways, but I don’t want you to live a miserable life. You wanted her, so figure it out. Just don’t let whatever is going on with her affect Zane or me.”

With that, I turned to my former in-laws. “James, Rachel, if there is anything that we can do to help you with the problem of the missing money, please let me know. I still love you both and want us to be close. We may not be family, but we will always be friends.”

They nodded, and then everyone sat in silence. After a few minutes, Chris announced that he was going to move in with his parents to help them restore the business and their trust in him. Opal tried to protest, but he ignored her, marching out of the house. The rest of the group slowly followed.

Once everyone was gone, Zane met my eyes. “I don’t like this at all. Opal’s hiding something, and I don’t know what Chris’s role in it is, but it’s far from over.”

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