

You Once Called Me Wife |

Chapter 25

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“McKenzie, I need you to come back up to the station,” Agent Matthews said over the phone several hours after we’d left the station.

Zane and I immediately headed back into town. When we pulled up in front of the station, Agent Matthews was standing off to the side, smoking a cigarette. He hadn’t noticed us, but I could see that he looked frustrated, even angry.

I could only hope that anger wasn’t aimed at me and Zane. I had asked him for a pretty large favor, after all, and I didn’t take that lightly.

Agent Matthews put out his cigarette and walked inside the station. Zane and I followed a few moments later, and when the agent saw us, he led us to an unfamiliar room.

“Have a seat,” Agent Matthews said. “I want to show you the tape of the interrogation. I don’t know how you knew the things you did, but I want you to see it for yourself.”

He turned on the wall-mounted television, and I saw Opal on the screen. I was surprised to see her so visibly stressed; I’d thought she would be calm given that she had been working with a crazy man. But her hands twitched, and her legs bounced.

“Ava, we know that’s your name, so can we stop all the lying?” Agent Matthews said.

She didn’t answer, so he continued, “We’ve already been over the bank issues, but there’s something else I want to talk about. Who is Douglas? Is he Gavin? Is he the one who’s been helping you steal the money?”

Opal shook her head, and anyone with eyes could see she was at her breaking point.

“How long had you been interrogating her at this point?” Zane asked.

“Seven hours. She broke easier than I expected,” he answered.

“If I tell you anything, he’ll kill me,” Opal whimpered.

“Who, Douglas?”

“No! Douglas has no idea about any of this. Gavin isn’t in this town, or he hasn’t been.” She took a deep breath, and tears fell down her cheeks. “If I tell you everything, will you promise me that Douglas will be safe? You’ll protect him from Gavin?”

I noticed she didn’t mention Chris. Was he just a means to an end for her? If Douglas was telling the truth about them being engaged, then did she really love him? That would explain a lot, though not what part Douglas played in setting Zane up.

“We will if you tell us everything,” Agent Matthews said. “Ava, we have to be able to bring in Gavin, and you’re the only person who knows who he really is.”

“I met Gavin when I was younger and struggling to make ends meet,” Opal whispered. “At first, he gave me small tasks like ripping off credit card companies. I knew he had a temper, but it wasn’t until I saw him kill a cop that I knew I was in way over my head.”

She swallowed hard and took a sip of the water. “He told me that if I didn’t play along, I would end up like that cop. So, that’s why I followed his plans when we started stealing from bigger places.”

“Did he ever hurt you physically?”

She nodded.

Though I knew she was a talented actor, something about the gesture rang true. I’d met people who had experienced physical abuse, and that kind of vulnerability was not something you could easily imitate. It was obvious that Opal—or, well, Ava—was terrified of this man. He must have done unspeakable things to her.

“After a while,” she said, “the hits came all the time. Nothing was ever enough, so we started working the long con with banks. I’d go in and seduce someone who had control over funds and would steal their information so that Gavin could start skimming the money. After a few months, we would move on.”

Her voice grew softer. “I met Douglas in the last town we worked. He was there on business, and since Gavin wasn’t with me, I was able to spend time with him. We fell in love.”

After a minute, Agent Matthews asked, “Then what happened?”

“I thought I could use my next job to get away from Gavin and be happy. I would get Chris to leave his wife and sign over his life insurance so I had a nest egg tucked away. Then, when the job was done, I would sneak away with Douglas and never look back.”

Opal started sobbing.

“And what was going to happen to Chris?” the agent asked. “How were you going to kill him to get the money?”

I felt my breath hitch and heard Zane gasp in surprise. Though I couldn’t stand Chris, I didn’t think he should die. His living a miserable life was enough punishment.

“I was going to tell Gavin that I loved Chris. Gavin would lose his mind and come after him, and I would send the police there. Then I would be free.” She sobbed harder with the admission.

“Shit,” Zane whispered.

“So, you’re telling me that Douglas knew nothing and did nothing to help with any of this?” Agent Matthews asked.

Opal tensed. “I...” She stopped, and I could tell it killed her to say this next part. “I needed to keep Chris away from his ex-wife. If I lost Chris’s attention, then there was no way for me to keep having access. Things would get traced more easily from a personal or community computer.

“I thought if I broke the two of them up that Chris would relax, and I wouldn’t need to feel so concerned about his need to keep her around. So, I sent an anonymous letter to Douglas with some doctored pictures that made it look like he was cheating on me.

“The letter laid out a plan to make it look like McKenzie’s new husband was cheating, and it said the doctored photos would disappear if he went through with it. That his fiancé would never be told.”

As Agent Matthews turned off the television, I sagged in my chair and let out the breath I was holding. I couldn’t believe all that I’d just heard.

“Now that we have this information,” the agent said, “we are going to have you protected all day every day. The same goes for Chris and his parents. I think we will be hearing from Gavin sooner rather than later. I want you to know how grateful I am that you came forward. I was so concerned with ending this case that I almost made a terrible mistake.”

He looked at Zane. “Do you think you and your parents will be all right?” he asked.

“Yes, and I think McKenzie and I will stay with them on their ranch for a while. I know the man could probably find us anywhere, but I’d rather have help if we need it.”

“Have you told Douglas and let him go?” I asked.

“We have, but he’s staying in a safe house for his protection. If Ava loves him, Gavin will most assuredly come after him.” Agent Matthews looked grim. “He told me to thank you for saving him. He was understandably upset by everything.”

Douglas had thought he’d met the love of his life only to find out she wasn’t who she claimed to be. He came to see her today and was left brokenhearted and alone. I couldn’t imagine what he was feeling, but I figured it was similar to what I felt when Chris cheated.

“Let him know that Zane and I are here if he needs to talk,” I said. “I’m sure he has a lot of questions and needs to work through some things.”

With that, we left the station, not knowing that the ending to all this was near.

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