

You Once Called Me Wife | Chapter 27 by Iandra Taylor

Chapter 27

Opal's trial went slowly, but it was understandable given all the crimes she had committed. At first, I felt bad for her; Gavin had forced her to do so many horrible things. But then I realized that she'd only recently tried to get away from him, even though they hadn't been in contact for a while, and that she'd planned to kill Chris for his life insurance money.

She deserved to be punished.

Getting up on the stand was hard for me. I had to relive the affair, the attempt at framing Zane, and everything else that had happened since she came into my life. By the time I finished, I was worn out, but Zane held me afterward. My rock.

Hearing Chris's testimony was almost just as bad. I'd already seen the cracks in their relationship, but now they looked more like gaping holes. Never looking me in the eye, he went into detail about the affair and what happened after they moved in together. He explained how he'd written down all his login information, which Opal must've stolen.

It was tough to listen to, both for me and for his parents. They could barely watch, probably wondering how their son could be so stupid.

I wanted to curse Chris for all that he'd done, but life was already doing that for me. So, instead of being angry, I was pained to hear about all the betrayals he'd experienced. Zane held my hand the entire time he was on the stand.

When Opal was called up, she told everyone about her relationship with Gavin. It was hard to hear the things she had gone through, but it became clear that there were plenty of times she'd done things that were almost as bad. She'd also covered for him, which made her an accessory.

The trial lasted for weeks, so I began attending less and less often. I couldn't stop going to work in order to sit in on everything, and neither could Zane. Plus, we were building a house on the ranch, and we needed to check in on its progress.

As much as I loved my house, I wanted something new to start our lives in. Too much had happened there between Chris's cheating, Zane's framing, and Gavin's threats. So, Erika was going to rent it when her current lease was up.

She'd started building a friendship with Douglas, helping him to understand that he had done nothing wrong with Opal. That there was life after tragedy. It was a lesson we were all learning.

One Friday afternoon, I received word from Agent Matthews that the jury was about to give their verdict. Relieved, I rushed to the courtroom. Closure was within my grasp.

Everyone was silent when I walked in, so I found an open seat and quietly sat down. Then the bailiff spoke. The jury entered the courtroom, and I felt the tension rise in the air.

"Has the jury come to a verdict?" the judge asked.

"We have your honor," the foreperson said. "We find both defendants guilty."

No one in the room made a sound except Opal, who cried quietly. Gavin sat like a stone that couldn't be moved by the worst of storms. I'd thought he would make a scene, but he was so indifferent that I realized he'd never understand how wrong his crimes were.

The details of the case had a strong effect on everyone else, however. Even though most were happy with the verdict, it was a solemn occasion.

The judge gave his sentencing, and it was more than I could have hoped for. Gavin would never see the sun outside of a prison ever again. Opal wouldn't be up for parole until her late nineties, and the chances of her making it that long were low. So, in the end, they were both going away, never to be heard from again.

After the trial ended, I learned that Weston's Bank had a type of insurance that would help them recover most of the funds they'd lost. The bank even managed to hang onto their good name throughout the trial, though Chris was not so lucky. His parents had no choice but to fire him, leaving him with no source of income.

At least Chris apologized to Zane and me for all the things he put us through. He claimed to have learned his lesson and said he would work on himself, starting with checking himself into rehab for some of the issues he was dealing with.

I thought it would be hard to talk to him, but at that point, I'd just had enough of all of it. I was ready for my new life to start and for my past to stay in the past.

Epilogue

"Isaac Templeton," I yelled, "if I find one more snake or frog in this house, you're never riding Signal again!"

That afternoon, in the laundry room, I had found a frog hopping around. I knew it hadn't just shown up in there because my seven-year-old had a bad habit of bringing in that sort of critter.

As I entered the hallway, I heard Isaac's pleas for forgiveness. Signal, his pony, was the only thing he really cared about.

"Like a turn signal?" I'd asked my then-two-year-old when he had told me the name he chose.

"Yeah!" he'd exclaimed before running over to his father.

Over the years, Zane had pleaded with Isaac to change the poor horse's name, but there was no changing my child's mind. He was more stubborn than his father and I combined.

"I swear, Momma, I won't do it again!" Isaac said now as he came running down the hall at full speed. "Please don't take Signal from me!"

"Then stop bringing these critters into the house," I said, getting down onto my knees so that I could look him in the eye. "I told you that you can't go around just playing with anything you see. What if you pick up something venomous and it bites you?"

"Daddy showed me what to look for," Isaac replied, twining his fingers. "He told me which shape of the head and colors to look for."

I rolled my eyes. "Go on. Get that frog and take him out to the pond. Then tell Daddy that dinner will be ready in a few minutes and come wash those hands. If you do that, then I'll let you keep riding."

I kissed his head, and he tore off, running to the laundry room and out the back door. I chuckled. The child wanted to be just like his father, and aside from having some of my features, he was.

Around the time I became pregnant, Dr. Hampton wanted to retire, so I stopped working for him and instead raised Isaac and helped on the ranch. Both my parents and Zane's had retired as well, and they were now enjoying their freedom.

The ranch now had a full-time staff and was more successful than it had ever been. Zane, of course, still ran most of it, but only as the boss. He'd gotten to the point where he didn't want to run after calves at all hours of the day, or so he said. He didn't know I knew he was still out there, riding off and on throughout the day to keep an eye on everything.

It was Friday, so I walked into the kitchen to pull out the roast I'd prepared. Erika, Annabeth, and their families were coming over for dinner, a tradition we'd started not long after Isaac was born.

"Kenzie, what in the world is Isaac talking about?" Zane asked as he entered the kitchen. "He says you are threatening to take Signal."

"Another frog in the laundry room. That child is going to be the death of me. He knows what to stay away from, right?" I asked, my eyebrow arched. "He said you taught him."

Zane walked over and wrapped me in his arms. Then he gave me a deep kiss that took my breath away. When he released me, he chuckled at my attempt to regain my composure.

"He knows, baby. Don't worry so much. I think it's just a phase, and he'll stop with all the reptiles soon. Everyone still coming tonight?"

"Yeah," I said with a giggle. "Erika said Sadie is dying to get over here and see her Isaac."

"Don't you start that, too. They're just kids."

Erika's daughter Sadie was only a few months younger than Isaac and had declared, back when they were only three, that they would be married one day. And she still had a crush on him. Everyone laughed about it, but Zane didn't want that kind of pressure on our son.

"No one really thinks they'll end up together," I assured him. "It's more fun to tease you than anything. If it happens, then good. If not, then that's the way it's supposed to be."

Still grumbling, Zane left to go wash up, and my phone beeped with a message. Mom was letting me know that she and Dad had arrived at their resort with James and Rachel. It warmed my heart that they were still friends even after everything.

The Westons sold the bank when they were ready to retire since Chris was never allowed to work in finance again. Last I'd heard, he was building custom furniture and had moved to a small town in Vermont. Rachel said that he wanted to start over and that he had no interest in any kind of relationship. He wanted to continue working on himself.

There were times when I wondered what my life would've been like if Chris hadn't cheated, but I still didn't think our relationship would've lasted. So, I had no regrets. Now, I just hoped that he could learn to forgive himself and live a happy life.

When Erika's family pulled into our drive, I watched Isaac run up to their car. Sadie jumped out, took his hand, and ran off, and at that moment, I saw Zane and me in them.

"They headed up to the treehouse?" I heard my husband ask as he wrapped his arms around my waist.

"Yup. I just hope they can find love like we did, no matter who it's with," I told him.

That was truly the only thing I still needed in life: to know my son was as happy as I was.

End of Book 1