

You Once Called Me Wife |

Chapter 4

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I woke up the morning of my divorce date with a smile on my face. I was about to drop one hundred and eighty pounds' worth of deadweight off my shoulders. I would feel light as a feather.

At first, Chris and his new woman kept their relationship low-key. They were only seen out eating, and they avoided any kind of PDA during those outings. They were trying to be respectful of me.

That was what the town thought, anyway, but I knew better. Chris only wanted to maintain his reputation as a good man to the community. His bank needed their business.

I found it funny that people forgot they were trying to be respectful while eating at *my* favorite diner.

For a while, I stopped eating in the diner and just got to-go orders. Then I realized I wasn't going to let the asshole take anything else from me. So, I went and ate there every workday like normal.

Sometimes, I went with the girls; other times, Dr. and Mrs. Hampton; but most often, I went by myself. I sat at the counter and talked with all the guys eating there.

The men were mostly older, and they gave me all sorts of advice and tried to get me to date their sons. I laughed at that. I didn't want to move on completely while I was still married. It was like I needed that paper telling me it was all over.

Several men around town also asked me on dates, but I told them the same thing I told the guys at the diner: to ask again in a few months. Still, I didn't mind. Whether at the diner or around town, I enjoyed engaging in neighborly small talk. I would show the world I wasn't dead yet.

Over the past six months of soul-searching, I found that I needed loyalty, honesty, and respect. So, I started trying new hobbies and going out with my

girls more often. The last day of my married life, we even went on a regenerative hike that made me feel ready to divorce Chris.

When the judge took his figurative knife and cut the ties between us, I would be free to find love again. My husband and his mistress would become just some guy and his girl. The thought made me smile.

Despite my happiness, I couldn't help noticing a cloud forming over the town. Rumors were spreading about all kinds of crazy things happening, like the murder-suicide of a prominent family in one of the surrounding areas. Apparently, the husband lost everything in a bad investment.

What bothered me most about the story was that the company the husband was working with owned Opal's firm. I wasn't normally one to speculate, but people in the town had been investing a lot since her firm opened. I worried that something similar could happen.

Then there was the rumor going around that the crime wasn't what it seemed. Many people said that the husband would never have done something like that to his wife. There was talk that maybe someone else committed the crime and framed the husband.

Naturally, with all that running through everyone's minds, the town was on edge. Small towns like ours didn't often see that type of crime, and now you could see people looking at their neighbors in a way they never had before.

Sighing, I put on a nice dress that was appropriate for court but made me feel beautiful. I then looked in the mirror and noticed my skin glowing. I'd taken better care of myself during the past six months, and I felt confident that I would emerge from court a free, happy woman.

I hadn't noticed how much I'd given up while Chris and I were married. I hadn't let myself go, per se, but somewhere deep down I must've known something was wrong. Even at our happiest, I didn't feel as good as I felt the day we got divorced.

Now it was time to grab that happiness and run wild.

I walked into the courtroom with my lawyer, ready to get the divorce proceedings over with. The settlement that we reached was more in my favor, so I didn't see the point in drawing this out.

Because of Chris's cheating, I was going to be awarded the bulk of our assets. We weren't rich, but with the stocks and savings, I would be set for a long time. My plan was to do some renovations on my home and take a long trip. I hadn't had a vacation since our honeymoon.

A few minutes later, Chris and his lawyer entered the courtroom, followed by Opal. She smiled angelically at everyone.

Even though Opal had an affair with my husband, everyone in town thought she had only made the mistake of falling in love. Her investment company was busy, probably because Chris told all his clients at the bank to try their hand at investing. After all, he always wanted to invest our money, and I just let him do what he thought was best.

In any case, since Opal was making money for people, they had opened their arms to her and treated her as one of their own. I guessed loyalty didn't last long when there was money to be made. But I just kept my mouth shut whenever she was brought up, not wanting to come across as a bitter ex.

As much as I wanted to say I was completely over the asshole, there was still a part of me that would always care about him. Did I love him? No. My love was smashed into dust months before, but I would still be concerned about him, just like I would anyone else in town.

"I see that both parties have agreed to the settlement," the judge said, bringing me out of my thoughts. "Is there anything new that needs to be brought before the court?"

He looked back and forth between me, Chris, and our lawyers. I glanced at my attorney thinking that this was going to be it, but his attorney said, "My client would like assurance from Mrs. Weston that there will be no problems in the town for him, his family, or his friends."

What in the world is he thinking? Why would I ever cause problems for those people? All this time that we've been separated, I've never said a negative word about Chris, Opal, or anyone affiliated with them.

I have kept all my emotions in check, have never given in to the temptation to say things when I was approached by someone. Yet here I find myself being practically accused of running my mouth all over town.

“Your honor, my client has done absolutely nothing to warrant such a request,” my attorney said, standing. “This seems petty and downright childish.”

“Your honor,” Chris’s attorney continued, “my client is an upstanding member of this community. He and those close to him have businesses that need to survive. If Mrs. Weston tries to slander these people, their livelihoods could be taken.”

I snuck a glance at Opal, who was sitting there with a small smirk on her face. *She’s eating this up. Not only did she steal my husband, but now she wants to make it seem like I’m the bad guy in all this. Has she no shame?*

“Counselor,” the judge said, “I think we all know that this request isn’t something that is possible to enforce. Not only that, but I agree that it is a petty request.”

Chris and his attorney both looked like scolded schoolboys.

The judge nodded. “Divorce granted. And Mr. Weston, take time to consider what you’ve lost and try to not end up in this situation again. The next woman you scorn may not be as kind.”

My eyes widened, and I had to bite the inside of my cheek so that I didn’t laugh out loud. Chris looked shocked, then angry.

The judge dismissed us, and I left feeling relieved. But outside the courtroom, Chris’s parents were waiting. I hadn’t seen or talked to them since everything happened, not because I was mad at them but because it hurt knowing I wouldn’t be a part of their family anymore. They’d been a huge part of my life for a while.

“Kenzie,” Rachel called before I could get away.

Tears streaming down her face, she ran over and pulled me close. I hugged her back, tears pricking the corners of my eyes. James then wrapped us both up in his arms.

"You have no idea how sorry we are," James said into my hair. "We feel like our children have died. To lose you and know that Chris is the reason hurts so much."

"We can't stand her, and we hate what he's done to you," Rachel added before pulling back to look me in the eyes. "Please know that we will always be here for you."

Just then, Chris and Opal walked out of the courtroom. The woman clenched her jaw, apparently trying not to show how upset she was. My ex looked distraught.

"I'm always here for you as well," I said. "Don't give up on your son on my account. I'm not saying you have to tell him what he did was okay, but he still loves you both. Love him and maybe he'll grow from this."

I kissed both their cheeks and walked down the stairs, toward the door. On my way, I felt eyes on me, and it felt fantastic. I'd made it through the hardest time of my life and come out stronger than ever.

That was when Annabeth called me. "Can you come help me on the ranch this Saturday?" she asked.

I hadn't been out to the ranch since one of Annabeth's birthdays back in high school. We had spent the day swimming in the pool on the property. Come to think of it, that might have also been the last time I'd seen Zane. The thought made my heart flutter.

"Of course," I replied without hesitation. "I'll be there."

Next Chapter

Continue to the next chapter of [You Once Called Me Wife](#)