

Chapter 1: Divorce

"I want a divorce! I am now the CEO of the Thompson Group of Companies- the master of the Thompsons. My father can no longer control me. I am done with your selfishness!" Evan Thompson, her husband, towered over her as he yelled. "I thought I knew you. I thought you would change, but I was wrong to think that you deserved a chance!"

"Evan, please," Shantelle's words broke in and out. This wasn't the first time her husband had brought up the divorce in the past few months, but now he had the divorce papers in his hand.

Fear crept into Shantelle's heart, knowing how serious he was this time. She reasoned, "I thought you were cheating on me. So I did every married woman would do and confront a mistress whom you have been housing in a luxury apartment -"

"I was only helping her!" Evan insisted. "She isn't a mistress! Why are you so insecure?"

"Nicole has no one. I brought her here to Rose Hills, and she is my responsibility. Two years ago, Nicole quit her job in Lockwood to be with me. She has no one. Do you hear me? No one. You and father ensured she could not get a decent job!" Evan shot back.

With a frown, Shantelle said back, "She could have gotten a decent job if she stayed away from Rose Hills -"

"And with what? No money - in a new town without anyone she knows?" Evan retorted.

"Then, she could go back to Lockwood -" Shantelle tried to reason, but he cut her off again.

"That's not the point, Shantelle! Haven't you realized it? I do not like to be dictated!" Evan said. He pointed at her and described, "You think you can control my life? Who do I want to be acquainted with?"

"That's never going to happen, Shantelle! Never! I only permitted this marriage because of my father - because he threatened me with my inheritance, my birthright!" Evan added. "You realized how unfair that was for me?"

"And what if I cheated? Why would it matter to you? You forced yourself into this marriage - conspired with my father to trap me in this situation! You knew that I had my eye on Nicole, but did that matter to you? No! You had to squeeze yourself into my life!" Evan shot back, his voice strengthening.

'Forced myself into his life?' Shantelle silently asked. 'But we have known each other longer!'

Shantelle and Evan had been married for two years. Their parents were close friends and had always said that she and Evan were bound to get married.

Evan was the gentle older brother she looked up to when they were young. He treated her kindly and even blushed at her claims of marrying him.

She was five years younger than Evan, so her thirteen-year-old self did not hold back in expressing her love for him back then. Sadly, the time came

when Evan had to leave Rose Hills City for his college and master's degree.

Evan only visited Rose Hills during holidays since he was often busy, taking two majors in college and managing an off-shore branch near Lockwood City.

When Evan fully returned to Rose Hills, he was already twenty-five years old, ready to take on more responsibility in his father's company. He was mature, more brilliant, taller, better built, and absolutely good-looking.

However, when he came back, he brought someone with him, a friend whom he introduced as a potential girlfriend, Nicole Lively.

Shantelle never saw the signs. Whenever Evan visited Rose Hills, they chatted like old times. She was always very transparent about her attraction

towards him, yet he never shut her down. Imagine her surprise and dismay when he returned with a woman he was casually dating at that time.

The oddest part was how Nicole Lively looked somewhat similar to her. Nicole had long blonde hair, amber-colored eyes, and the same nose. If not for Shantelle's blue orbs, more prominent jawlines, and tall figure, they were almost the same.

It wasn't just Shantelle who was disappointed when Evan brought home a girl. His father, Erick Thompson, was so furious that he tried to push Nicole away. He paid her off to leave the city, but she never took the bait.

After some time, Evan's father forced him to marry Shantelle. He would have been disowned if he had not. It was Erick's way of declaring that Nicole Lively had no place in their family.

Yes, Shantelle was selfish. The thought of Evan being with another woman made her incredibly resentful. So when Evan's father insisted on their marriage, she... willingly agreed.

Shantelle was only twenty when she married Evan, still studying biochemistry at a local university that her father co-founded, but that did not stop her from being with the man she had loved. She thought this was her chance. Eventually, he would love her. She loved Evan so much and would do anything for him - to be with him, including working with Erick Thompson to keep Nicole Lively away.

Erick and Shantelle tried everything. With her own family's influence, they banned Nicole from entering the city. For over a year, Nicole was out of the picture. However, Shantelle had to admit the woman had her ways!

Nicole found her way back to Rose Hills with Evan's help.

"Now that I hold power and my father can no longer run the company, I can finally make this decision with no one to threaten me," Evan coldly said. "I want you out of my life, Shantelle!"

"But Evan, I love you," she admitted, water welled in her eyes this time. "I did everything for you to love me. Since I was young, you knew I have always loved you."

She kneeled in front of Evan and wrapped her arms around his knees. She begged, "Please don't leave me. I love you so much."

"BUT! I DON'T. LOVE YOU! I never did!" Evan forced his frame away from her. He then slammed the papers against the living room table.

With how strongly he struck the table, Shantelle shuddered, feeling chills down her spine. For seconds, she remained silent, gawking at the document. 'This is it. It has come to this. Despite everything I had done to earn his love,' Shantelle said to herself. Her breathing became labored as tears finally rolled down her face.

Shantelle felt utterly defeated.

Her mouth parted, yet no words left her lips. Before she could respond, Evan groaned, saying, "You are unbelievable! What happened to the Shantelle I used to know?"

'What does he mean? I am still the same Shantelle, except I tried to fight for what I thought was right for me - him - his love!' She pondered deeply.

"Fuck!" He clenched his jaws before saying, "I'm leaving. I have better things to do than deal with you."

Pointing to the divorce agreement, he said, "I'll give you one week. One week to sign that document."

He stood up and put on his coat. As he did, Shantelle asked, "Where?" She gulped. "Where are you going?"

"None of your business." He took a few steps forward and then purposely said, "Maybe I'll stay at Nicole's apartment - anywhere but here."

The next thing Shantelle heard was the loud banging of their double doors.

Chapter 2: The Letter

Selfish? Yes, that was true. It was because she loved Evan so much.

Insecure? How could she not be? Knowing that Nicole Lively was at arm's length, Shantelle's insecurity grew.

Shantelle and Evan had a relatively tranquil marriage for more than a year. It wasn't fruitful or romantic – the dream marriage she wished for, but at least they were civil. Occasionally, they spent quality time as a married couple. Occasionally, they had made love. Shantelle could tell that Evan had tried.

However, six months ago, she received an anonymous message, tipping her of Nicole Lively's return. She became paranoid. She kept prying, infuriating Evan with her constant interrogating and snooping. He started bringing up a divorce since. Eventually, whoever gave her clues sent her photos of Evan and Nicole together, having lunch or taking her to a luxury apartment building.

That was when Shantelle pursued to know where Nicole lived. So when she found out that Evan was paying for the apartment, she stormed into the apartment building and gave Nicole a piece of her mind. Shantelle made sure everyone in the building knew that Nicole was a mistress!

Naturally, Evan found out about it. That was how they wound up in their most noteworthy argument, within the living room of their villa.

So yes, she was selfish and insecure, but that was all because of her love for Evan.

What hurt Shantelle the most, however, were Evan's words. 'I DON'T. LOVE YOU! I never did!'

She thought, if there was no ounce of affection for her, then why? Why would he touch her? She ridiculed herself, still sitting on the floor. She muttered, "I guess I'm just the convenient partner."

"Of course, Shantelle. You already know this," she added. Evan had never told her he loved her. He never even said he liked her. She was just someone his father forced him to marry.

Shantelle got up from the floor when she realized the maids were staring at her. 'They must have overheard. How shameful. How pathetic.'

She picked up the divorce papers and went to the master's bedroom. It was then that she read the terms of the contract. To set Evan free, she would get ten million dollars as alimony.

Shantelle set the document aside and stood in front of a full-length mirror. Watching the stain on her face, the bags around her eyes, and her skinny frame, she murmured, "How pitiful."

Before she became Misses Thompson, she was once the most sought-after young girl in college. She could not count the number of men who confessed their love for her, yet she chose to be with a man who did not love her.

"How pathetic." She told herself. "Shantelle, you are so pathetic!"

It's fair to say that love can turn one into someone foolish.

Shantelle was only twenty-two years old. She graduated at the top of her class in biochemistry, finishing her degree in seven semesters. She wasn't supposed to be someone who felt unloved and unwanted. She was meant to be greater!

After finishing college, she was so hung up, knowing that Nicole was just around the corner, that she did not even think about herself or her career. She had always wanted to become a doctor – a surgeon, but that would mean leaving the city to pursue medicine – allowing Nicole to see her husband freely! Thus, she gave up on that idea.

After studying herself in the mirror, Shantelle looked around the room. Her eyes landed on the portrait of her and Evan. It was a picture of them on their wedding day.

She noted how she was so happy. Her eyes were gleaming in the photo, but as she glanced at Evan's face, her heart sank. In that photo, there was only hurt in Evan's expression.

Guilt washed over her. Then, after some time, she laughed. The kind of laughter that was mixed with misery. Indeed, she was pathetic. She was at fault for marrying Evan against his will. If she had said no back then, he would have been free to choose, and she would not be in such a wretched state.

Shantelle did not know for how long she reflected on her decisions in life, but before dozing off to sleep that night, she admitted, "You are right, Evan. You are right. I am to blame for this."

"Mrs. Thompson, have dinner. You barely ate for two days," Mrs. Shaw, their house caretaker, walked in the door, forcing Shantelle to get up from the bed.

Shantelle did not know how, but she managed with only water and bread for two days. That was how depressed she had become after Evan gave her the divorce papers.

"I brought your dinner instead, so you don't have to go out," Mrs. Shaw said.

Mrs. Shaw urged Shantelle to eat. She did not leave, making sure Shantelle filled her stomach.

After Shantelle finished half her plate, she smiled and said, "Mrs. Shaw, thank you for taking care of me. Thank you for being my constant companion here at home, but -"

The words were stuck in her throat, and she cried, saying, "I'm afraid I must leave. I'm afraid I have pushed myself too hard on Evan's life that he hates me -"

"Shhh. Mrs. Thompson. You are a good person. You just need to learn that love cannot be forced," Mrs. Shaw said. "If you love something, set it free. If it comes back, it's yours. If it doesn't, then it never was."

Shantelle smiled at Mrs. Shaw. She acknowledged, "Thank you, Mrs. Shaw. I guess I know that already. I was... really hoping he would love me one day."

Mrs. Shaw nodded. She had been working with Evan's family for years. When Evan moved to his marital home, the Thompsons asked her to take care of the newlywed couple.

She had known Shantelle since she was in high school. The Scotts were constant visitors to the Thompson's home. Thus, Mrs. Shaw was aware of her kind nature, but Shantelle slowly changed since she married Evan.

Mrs. Shaw tried to mind her own business, but this time, she could not help but give Shantelle her advice. If they were both unhappy with the marriage, why stay?

"Have you decided?" Mrs. Shaw asked.

Shantelle nodded and faintly replied, "Yes, I have."

After Mrs. Shaw left, Shantelle first took out a paper and pen. Evan has been bringing up the divorce since four months ago, but it was only in the past twenty-four hours that Shantelle gave it enough thought.

She sucked in a breath and wrote a letter to Evan:

[My Dearest Evan,

You first helped me with my math homework when I was ten. Your technique for mastering mathematics was excellent. I thought you were so brilliant.

Remember when my parents were so busy because of a doctor's conference my father had to attend? Mom and Dad had to leave me in your house, and we made a mess of the kitchen, making pancakes. I enjoyed those happy times with you.

When I was twelve, our families went camping by the lake, and you saved me after falling into the water. That was the first time I felt I truly liked you. Even if I was just a kid, I was crazy about you.

I only told you about how I felt when I was thirteen because I knew you were leaving for college.

Evan, my love for you is not shallow. It goes deeper than you can imagine, but I was wrong about how I showed my love. You are right. I should not have agreed to the marriage and trapped you into such a commitment.

I've heard this line many times, but I have always denied it. Loving someone means setting them free. So, here it is. I have already signed the divorce papers.

I hope you and Nicole will find happiness. I'm sorry to have come between the two of you. Forgive me for being selfish. Forgive my childish ways.

Goodbye, Evan.

Take care.

Love,

Shantelle.]

Chapter 3: The Anonymous Number

Dark circles formed around her eyes as Shantelle packed her bags at five in the morning. She kept returning to the closet and deciding on what to bring. Evan bought her a few dresses. Even if they were in a loveless marriage, somehow, he had thought about her.

"I think it's better not to bring anything that would remind me of Evan," she mumbled and resumed packing only those she bought with her father's money.

When she was done, she called for her father's driver and asked him to pick her up. Only then did she read the terms of their divorce. She read it once and twice until it all sunk into her head.

"You are getting a divorce, Shanty. You are getting a divorce," she repeated. "No more crying. Cry later when you are at home."

"Ten million dollars." She reread. Evan would give her ten million dollars as alimony for accepting the divorce terms.

Shantelle marked out the alimony. She affixed her signature on the correction. Afterward, she cautiously signed her name on every page and at the last part.

She felt a knife stab her heart as she affixed her signature next to Evan's. For a moment, she wondered when he had signed this contract.

When Shantelle was done, her shaking hands placed the same document beside the table, and she sadly removed her wedding ring. Tears threatened to fall again, but she held back.

Shantelle allowed herself a few minutes to take it all in. Just as she was sitting on the bed, her phone buzzed. Immediately, she assumed it was her father's driver.

To her surprise, it was the same anonymous number that had been telling her about Evan and Nicole. However, the message was bolder this time, declaring herself.

Her eyes widened at what she saw, and her heart galloped!

On her screen was a picture of Evan having coffee at an unfamiliar dining area. From the photo, Shantelle could tell that Evan had just woken up. His hair was messy, and he wore his usual office attire, except it was all wrinkled.

The message on her phone read: [No matter what you do, he will come back to me. He never loved you. Give up.]

Shantelle's face turned ghostly white. She could not believe her eyes! Apparently, her mysterious tipper was none other than Nicole Lively herself! How brazen!

Her mouth fell open as she threw her head back on the sheets. She laughed and laughed while tears streamed down her face.

After what felt like ten minutes of laughing and crying, her heart out, she replied to the message, saying: [So it was you all along, Nicole. I would never have thought. Well, you can have him. I accept my defeat.]

Either way, Shantelle had already signed the divorce papers and earnestly accepted that Evan did not love her.

For seconds, she contemplated what to do. Still, she thought it was necessary to let Evan know what Nicole had done. She took a screenshot of Nicole's message. Then she sent it to Evan.

Shantelle typed her message: [I agree to the divorce. You can have your ten million dollars. I don't need the money, Evan. I am Shantelle Scott, daughter of the world-famous cardio surgeon, Doctor William Scott. Thank you for everything, Evan, and I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything.]

Before leaving, Shantelle made sure that Evan would get her message clearly. She wrote added instructions in her letter:

[By the way, I marked out the alimony and countersigned it. As I said in my text, you don't need to give me any money. And, I'm sorry about the picture message I sent you. I just thought you should know.]

The next call she received was that of her father's driver. She gave her room one last look before finally leaving her marital home.

Last night, in a private room in an exclusive club, Evan was spending time with his friends. His brown-colored eyes narrowed at his drink. His perfectly sculpted and slightly bearded jaws clenched before gulping down a full glass of hard liquor.

After settling the glass on the table, he ran his fingers through his dark brown hair and announced, "I'm divorcing Shantelle."

Dead air fell upon the room, but soon, one of his friends, Sean, asked, "I can't believe this. Are you serious, Evan?"

"He is dead serious, man. We all knew he was always envious of our single-blessed life," Wendell remarked before gulping down a full glass of wine.

"What's going on?" Keith arrived, curious about the purpose of their gathering.

Sean Ross, Keith Henderson, and Wendell Franco have been good friends with Evan since high school. They parted ways when they studied at different colleges, but they had always communicated with each other.

Sean and Wendell first glanced at Evan. Seeing he was seriously drinking his liquor, Wendell revealed, "Evan is divorcing our beautiful Shanty."

"What?" Keith asked with a frown. He sat next to Evan and poured himself a glass of wine.
"Why?"

"Why not?" Evan said back. "I never wanted to get married two years ago. I was twenty-five then, at the prime of my life. I had many plans. It was all my father's doing, and she rode in on it. She is not that innocent!"

"But I thought you both were fine last year?" Sean asked. "Weren't you going out on occasional dates?"

"A few. A few dinner dates were just a front to appease my father." Evan scoffed. His response was his way of justifying his decision. "I just endured it. But now that father no longer has the stamina to run the corporation, and he has no choice but to hand me the full authority, I am free to make my own choices."

"Besides, I have had enough of her being constantly jealous and insecure!" Evan added.

There was silence between the four friends, but eventually, Keith sought, "Is this because of Nicole Lively?"

"I don't know, man. I mean, you have been spending time with Nicole lately. Plus, you kept that a secret from Shanty. It's natural for Shanty to be jealous," Wendell suggested.

"Who I make friends with is none of her business," Evan curtly pointed out and then indulged himself in another glass of alcohol. "Whose side are you on?"

The temperature in their room dropped instantly. It took minutes and a few more drinks for Sean to break the ice. He asked, "So you are only interested in becoming friends with Nicole? Or are you planning to make her your girlfriend after the divorce?"

Evan thought deeply about it. That was the plan before he was forced into marriage. Now, many things had changed, but of course, he still felt responsible for Nicole's well-being. Nevertheless, he wasn't sure how he felt about it.

Despite his uncertainties, he retorted, "Why not? I brought Nicole to Rose Hills two years ago with that intention."

Evan immediately noticed the varied expressions of his friends. Keith scoffed. Sean sneered. Wendell bit his lip. All the more irritation filled his heart.

"What the hell is wrong with all of you?" Evan cast them an intimidating glare as he questioned.

"Nothing, Evan. It's just that." Sean cautiously looked at Wendell and Keith. When he confirmed their minds were synched, he said, "We don't get you, Evan."

Keith nodded. He, for one, had known Shantelle and Evan since they were young. Evan used to cherish Shantelle, and their families always knew they would end up together. Everything changed when he came home one day and brought Nicole Lively.

"What do you mean you don't get me?" Evan, in his stern voice, sought.

"Sure, they have similarities, but if you look closely, they are so far apart. And it's not just the look; it's everything else; Shantelle's background, her character." Shaking his head, Keith said, "Let me show you, Evan." With his left hand raised above his head, he said, "This is Shantelle." Then, he lowered his right hand below his waist and suggested, "This is Nicole Lively."

"That's the difference between the two of them. Any man would want Shantelle over Nicole. We don't get how you like Nicole over your wife," Keith said in a sarcastic tone.

"Then!" Evan yelled, "Why don't you marry her?!"

Angered by his friend's idea, Evan pushed the liquor bottles off the table, spilling the contents on the tiles. He got up and fixed his coat and acted to leave.

Just when he had heard enough from his friends, Keith said back, "Are you sure about that, Evan? Because if you are not interested in Shanty, I'd be more than happy to pursue her!"

The thought of Keith wooing his wife filled his heart with fury. Keith was a known playboy. He dated women left and right! He did not deserve someone like Shantelle. He said back, "Don't even think about it!"

Chapter 4: Nicole Lively

For an hour, Evan drove around town aimlessly, thinking about the divorce. Thanks to his so-called friends, he was second-guessing his decision.

It was past midnight when he still had no specific direction where to go.

He thought about going to a hotel or his office, but suddenly, he remembered one person who could understand him, Nicole. Thus, he drove to Nicole's apartment.

When Evan arrived at the apartment, he rang the doorbell several times. Finally, when the door opened, he saw Nicole's smiling face.

She was surprised to see him, and he could tell by how her eyes widened and gleamed. Faintly, she said, "Evan, you are here!"

"I need someone to talk to," Evan revealed. "I hope you don't mind."

Nicole quickly let him in and guided him to the living room. She said, "What's bothering you, Evan?"

Then she frowned, and with a sad expression, she asked, "Did you fight with Shantelle? I'm sorry. I don't know how she learned that I had returned. I was surprised when she came barging into my door last Tuesday."

Nicole quickly cried and said, "I should have never come back here and make trouble for you and Shantelle -"

"I've asked for a divorce," Evan revealed.

"What?" She asked in shock.

"I told Shantelle I want a divorce. Since my father stepped down at the company, he can no longer force me to stay married to Shantelle," Evan revealed, looking past Nicole.

"Are -are you sure?" Nicole inquired.

Evan groaned. He lowered his head and rested his face against his palms, saying, "It has to be done. I want to out. This wasn't how I wanted my life to be."

Nicole stretched her hands to rub Evan's shoulder. She said, "I know how you feel, Evan. It's hard when everything is taken from you – like how your father deprived me of getting an

opportunity here in Rose Hills. You and I both know what it feels like to be stuck in a situation you can't escape."

In a caring tone, she added, "I wholeheartedly support your decision. You deserve to make your own choices."

To Evan, Nicole was a good listener, and that always gave him a sense of comfort. It reminded him of how he became friends with Nicole in the first place.

When Evan was still taking his master's degree at Lockwood University, he met Nicole while borrowing a book from the library. She was working as a librarian there. At first, she quickly caught his attention because her back looked like Shantelle's. Besides that, Nicole was very efficient in giving Evan the books required for his research. Then, every time he visited the library, they would chat briefly.

Evan and Nicole seemed to like the same things. Outside the library, they often bumped into each other, especially in the places where Evan spent his free time. It was as if fate was bringing them together that Evan casually dated her. So when it was time for Evan to take on a more prominent role at the company, he offered to bring Nicole to Rose Hills. He wasn't sure yet of how he felt about her back then.

Nicole did not have friends or family, and Evan felt sorry for her. Evan thought, with his connections in Rose Hills, Nicole would have a better life in the city of his birth.

Unfortunately for Evan, he forgot about one thing.

Shantelle Scott.

He failed to factor in Shantelle in his decision to bring a woman to Rose Hills. How could he forget that his parents had always wanted him to marry Shantelle?

Evan could only blame the distance. He was technically gone for seven years, returning only a few days every year and forgetting about that verbal arrangement between their families.

However, before Evan could consider things thoroughly, his father acted harshly against Nicole. He looked down at her and tried to pay her off. When it did not work, and Nicole remained in the city, his father forced him to marry Shantelle.

Evan let out all his frustrations with Nicole. Feeling relieved, he said, "Thank you for hearing me out, Nicole. I'm glad I came here. Is it okay if I sleep in the guest room?"

"Of course, Evan. Technically, this is your house," Nicole replied.

Evan guided himself into the guest room. He smiled at Nicole, who was standing outside the door. He said, "Goodnight, Nicole."

"Goodnight, Evan," Nicole answered with an amiable smile.

When the door slammed shut, Nicole frowned. She was very disappointed that Evan did not let her in. She walked closer and even tried to open the door. However, it was locked from the inside.

She cursed but reminded herself of how Evan was divorcing Shantelle! She made her way to her room and mumbled, "Be patient, Nicole. In due time. The wait is all worth it."

In the morning, Nicole prepared breakfast for Evan. Then, recalling how Evan complained about Shantelle's paranoia, she took a picture of him while drinking his coffee.

Over the past few months, she had secretly sent clues to Shantelle that Evan had been seeing her. The photos did not have to suggest that they were in a relationship. Nicole knew Shantelle had always been insecure when it came to her.

Since Evan was divorcing Shantelle, she no longer hid her identity. 'Soon, Evan will be mine, like it should have been two years ago, bitch!'

Nicole smirked as she sent the photo to Shantelle. She gave Evan her back and awaited Shantelle's reaction.

After a few minutes, she received a response, and oh, how it was favorable to her. A sinister grin became painted on her face with the realization that Shantelle had given up!

She imagined herself living with Evan, sleeping beside him in the bed, and finally making love. Her relationship with Evan had always been ambiguous. When they were casually dating back in Lockwood City, they had kissed, but they had never gone beyond that. Evan never gave her a title, whether a girlfriend or a fling.

When Evan married Shantelle, everything changed. Evan held back with her and put a distance between them. It was worse when Evan's father banned her from the city. She could not get a job, and Erick's men constantly threatened her away.

Nicole had no choice but to stay away for over a year. Once in a while, she would reach out to Evan, but their communication was minimal.

Finally, with her back in Rose Hills and with Evan holding the CEO position of the Thompson Group of Companies, Nicole was more determined to be with Evan. She smirked as she thought, 'Soon, with Shantelle gone, Evan will remember who he truly likes, and that's me. I did not sacrifice so many years to fail!'

"Thanks for breakfast, Nicole. I better head back and remember, you have an interview at the public library. Don't worry. Father would not interfere from now on. He has become tired of fighting me."

"Really?" Nicole asked. "That's good news. That means I can finally pay you back for all the help you gave me."

"No, don't pay me back. I owe you for what my father did." Evan suggested. He then turned in the direction of the common restroom and asked, "Can I use the toilet?"

"Sure, Evan," Nicole said with a smile.

She watched as Evan first attended to some of his messages. He left his phone on the table before going to the restroom.

Nicole was cleaning the table when she saw Shantelle's message. Her hands itched to see what Shantelle had to say, especially since she had revealed herself to her. Thus, she opened the text. Thankfully, Evan's mobile was still open from his earlier use. She did not need his password at that point.

When she saw that Shantelle had sent a screenshot of her picture message, Nicole panicked. Even if she had used an alternate number, it was obvious that the picture came from her. The angle of where the photo was taken gave it away.

'Evan can't know!' She quickly deleted the screenshot Shantelle sent, including the message where she had agreed to the divorce. "Bitch! Do you think that will work?"

She laughed. She rolled her eyes and said, "Sorry, Evan will never know about it. You are such a loser, Shantelle Scott."

Chapter 5: She Left

"Sweetheart, if he can't appreciate you, then he doesn't deserve you," Doctor William Scott said. "I'm glad you have come to that decision."

William and Eleanor Scott embraced their weeping daughter inside the Scotts family mansion.

"I loved him, dad, mom. How I wish it did not have to end this way -" Shantelle expressed, but her mother cut her off.

"But more importantly, you have to love yourself," Eleanor suggested.

As Shantelle pulled away from her parents, her father suggested, "It's time to put yourself first, my dearest Shanty."

"When you married Evan, you lost yourself – your dreams and aspirations. I know you loved Evan, but there's more to life than that boy." William lifted Shantelle's chin and suggested, "You deserve better."

If it were two years ago, William would have wanted Evan as a son-in-law, but since Shantelle married him, he saw through her sadness. In the first few months of their marriage, his daughter was still elated at being with Evan. However, as the months passed, he could see Shantelle's longing to be loved.

Recently, she has been crying more often. She lost so much weight and was never interested in anything else but following Evan around. It pained William to see his daughter this way.

Shantelle was never lacking in love. Everyone around her loved her! For his daughter to feel so unwanted – to become doubtful of herself hurt William the most. He had long been asking Shantelle to get a divorce, but she always insisted that their marriage was getting better, day by day. Of course, that was not what he saw.

Finally, they were going to be separated. He did not care who initiated it. What mattered most was how his daughter would be free to live her life. He urged, "Let's leave this town. Let's relocate to where you can pursue medicine."

William smiled and suggested, "Become a surgeon like me."

In William's view, taking Shantelle away was the best solution. His daughter may appear strong right now, decided on the separation, but he knew well that Evan was her weakness. She could easily crawl back into his arms, and it wasn't because his daughter had no brain. She was too in love with Evan, and it clouded her judgment.

Shantelle sighed and contemplated. After some time, she weakly replied, "Okay, father. I agree with your plans."

"I'm glad you approve," William answered. "Then your mother and I will prepare for everything. I'll have the house for sale. I don't want us coming back here, even if it means cutting my friendship with the Thompsons."

"But, dad. That would mean – your work?" Shantelle asked.

"I will resign from St. Dominique's Hospital as their director. I will sell my shares at the university. I can easily find work elsewhere, being the best cardio surgeon in the world," William suggested. "Don't worry, sweetheart. I'll take care of you."

"I have a city in mind. Warlington. They have the best training facility for Surgeons," he revealed. "As soon as I can find a home, I'll move you out of Rose Hills."

Days passed.

"Mr. Thompson, sir. I'm very sorry, but my mother was admitted to the hospital because of pneumonia the other day. May I please be allowed to review the documents at the hospital?" James, Evan's assistant, asked. "I will bring my laptop with me."

"You will bring your laptop to the hospital?" Evan leaned back and sighed. He finally understood why his assistant had been so exhausted recently. He shook his head and suggested, "Take two days off and attend to your mother. I'll ask Sherly to cover your work. Get some proper sleep while you are at it."

James' eyes lit up. He quickly bowed and said, "Thank you, sir Thompson. Thank you so much. I will give Sherly my endorsements."

Evan brushed off his assistant with a hand, saying, "Go. Take care of your mother."

"Sir, since you allowed me to take a leave," James said. "May I recommend that you also get a good sleep yourself?"

Evan froze. Was it that obvious how he had been struggling to rest for many nights? He glanced at his private room next to the office and gasped. Maybe he needed a good sleep – at home, the same home he shared with Shantelle.

Again, he sucked in a breath, knowing it was finally time to deal with the divorce. Evan had yet to return home for more than a week. It was beyond the time that he gave Shantelle. 'Could she have already signed the divorce papers?'

There was only one way to find out. He turned to James and said, "You are right. Thank you, James."

"You are welcome, sir. Goodnight," James said before leaving the CEO's office.

"Mrs. Shaw? I have several clothes from the office needing laundry. Kindly take care of them," Evan said as soon as he entered the villa.

"Oh, my. Mister Thompson, you have been staying too much in the office. You used up all your spare clothes!" Mrs. Shaw said. "Have you eaten dinner? I can make one very quickly."

When Mrs. Shaw suggested she prepare his dinner, he frowned and asked, "Shanty did not make my dinner?"

Sure, he gave Shantelle divorce papers, but she had always attended to his needs, even when they were arguing. The fact that she did not cook dinner was surprising to him.

Mrs. Shaw was taken aback by Evan's probing. She knotted her brows and asked, "But, Sir, aren't you getting a divorce? She left three days after you and the Misses quarreled in the living room last week."

Immediately, Mrs. Shaw lowered her head, saying, "I'm sorry to pry. Your voices were so loud it was hard not to listen."

"I see." Evan frowned. He could not believe it. "She left?"

"Yes, Sir. She has left some papers on your bedside table," Mrs. Shaw revealed.

Evan skipped dinner altogether. He went straight to the bedroom and saw the papers, exactly as Mrs. Shaw had disclosed. When he moved closer, he understood it was the divorce agreement.

He was surprised that Shantelle signed it, even without making a drama. She did not go to his office. She did not call or send him any messages these past few days. Evan did not also get a call from his father, which meant his family had not learned about his decision to divorce Shantelle.

Evan picked up the two-toned wedding ring that was meant for Shantelle. He unwittingly studied the ring on his finger and muttered, "She signed it. She really signed it."

His brows met. Evan thought he would be relieved, but why did it feel like his chest was heavy? He was about to remove his wedding ring when he discovered another paper underneath the divorce agreement.

He picked it up and recognized it was a letter addressed to him. Lazily, he flipped the paper open and read it.

[My Dearest Evan...]

The weight on Evan's chest felt heavier in each line of the letter. Shantelle recounted the years when they were young. Somehow, it also reminded Evan of how close they were back then. Eventually, his eyes landed on the last words, which appeared to have been written as a follow-up. It read:

[By the way, I marked out the alimony and countersigned it. As I said in my text, you don't need to give me any money. And, I'm sorry about the picture message I sent you. I just thought you should know.]

He raised a brow and wondered, "A message? She sent a message?"

Evan found it strange because he had never received a single message from her.

Chapter 6: Divorce Celebration

"Good morning, Evan. I love you."

Evan smiled in his dream, hearing Shantelle repeat those words. She never got tired of expressing how she felt. In his dream, he did not respond, but he sensed the warmth in his heart.

Suddenly, he heard his phone buzz. It was his wake-up call.

"Shanty, can you turn off the alarm, please? I want to sleep longer. It's Saturday," Evan groaned in his sleep. "Shants. Shanty?"

His eyes opened, realizing he was calling out his wife's name. He sat up and turned to the empty side of the bed. Then his gaze landed on the bedside table. When he saw the divorce papers and the letter she wrote, it dawned on him how Shantelle was already gone.

"Right. She left," Evan said under his breath. Again, this was supposed to be his happiest moment. He was free! All he needed to do was to formalize the divorce, and he would be officially a single man, but why was his chest still feeling heavy? It had not felt any better since he learned about Shantelle's leaving.

He noticed his phone was ringing. He checked it and saw it was Nicole calling. He ignored it at first and just lay on the bed. When his phone continued to ring, he groaned in irritation and answered it, "Nicole."

"I got the job from the public library! It's like what you said. Your father did not interfere!" There was a smile in her tone when Nicole added, "Evan, I can't thank you enough. How about we have dinner to celebrate? I can cook for you?"

"I." Evan glanced at the bedside table. Then he replied, "I can't. I have to hand to my lawyers the divorce papers – "

"Oh, did Shantelle sign it?" Nicole probe.

"Yes. Yes, she did," Evan blandly answered. There was not a hint of happiness in his voice.

"That's even more reason to celebrate. Come on, Evan. Let's have lunch together," Nicole kept insisting.

Evan sighed and responded, "I'm sorry, Nicole, but I have things to do. Next time."

He ended the call without letting Nicole finish, and then he started staring at his phone, going through his messages. Recalling Shantelle's letter, he wondered, "Which message was she referring to?"

From one app to another, Evan checked all his messengers, but he did not find any recent texts or messages from Shantelle. He frowned and pondered what she meant.

Soon, he attempted to call Shantelle's phone. "The person you are calling is out of reach."

Again and again, he called. Since he could not get through, he sent her a message: [Shanty, I got your letter. Thank you for signing the divorce papers. I know you said you did not want the alimony, but I will still transfer the funds to you. By the way, I did not get any message from you, despite what you have written in your letter.]

Evan spent an hour waiting in bed, but Shantelle did not reply. He went down to have his late breakfast. When Shantelle still did not respond, he sent another message: [Shanty, we could still be friends. We have known each other since we were young. We don't need to be strangers.]

He bathed and changed into a new set of clothes. Evan left to meet his lawyers and, after handing in the divorce papers, he decided to pay his father and mother a visit.

When he entered the gates to the old Thompsons' mansion, Evan felt tensed. It was about time for him to tell his parents of his decision to divorce Shantelle. He did not know how they would take it.

His parents, Erick and Clara Thompsons, genuinely loved Shantelle as their daughter-in-law.

"Are my parents here?" Evan asked.

"Yes, Sir. They are in the garden with Misses – I mean, Miss Scott," the maid said.

Instantly, Evan knew what was going on. He looked outside and realized that the Scotts' car was parked next to his father's. Shantelle was here to report their divorce!

Many possibilities played in his head. Yet again, he was angered. He was prepared to defend himself should his father retort by threatening him again. Evan marched with heavy steps until he found himself in the gardens. What he saw broke his heart. He could make out how the news saddened his parents.

Erick and Clara were embracing Shantelle with tears in their eyes. His wife was doing the same, weeping.

"Evan," Clara, his mother, called. "You are here."

The embrace between the three broke off, and Evan could finally see Shantelle. It was obvious that she had been crying, observing the bags around her eyes.

"Shantelle tells me you have finally divorced?" Clara said in a soft tone.

Then, to Evan's surprise, his father said, "I guess it's better. I'm tired of forcing this onto you both."

"Don't worry, Evan. Shantelle had told me it was her decision. So I respect it," Erick said.

'What?' That came as an amazement to Evan. If his father knew it was his decision, a debate would happen again! He secretly thanked Shantelle for that.

"Aunt, Uncle. I have to go," Shantelle sniffed her tears away and said, "Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Shanty. We love you, dear. Good luck with everything," Clara said, waving goodbye.

Shantelle walked past Evan, not minding him for a second. It wasn't like her at all. Evan asked silently, 'Did she just ignore me?'

A big part of Evan was dumbfounded. She never ignored him. Noticing how she kept walking without glancing at him, he said, "I tried calling you."

"Hmmm?" Shantelle raised a brow and softly replied, "I changed my number."

And just like that, Shantelle walked away. She did not even say goodbye or give Evan her new number.

A month passed.

"Miss Shanty said to thank you for the divorce certificate," Howard, the Thompsons family driver, said in front of Evan.

With his money and connection, Evan quickly got the divorce certificates done. Officially, he was already a free man.

Clearing his throat, Evan asked, "Is that it? Did she say... anything else?"

"Nothing, sir. She just accepted it and returned to whatever it was she was doing. The Scotts appeared to be busy." Howard shrugged. "Their maids were walking in and out of the house, carrying boxes. Maybe they were cleaning the house."

"I see," Evan replied, inwardly disappointed. "Thank you, Howard – oh, and –"

Evan reached for a gift box inside his drawers and gave it to Howard, "This is for your son." He smiled and added, "I remember he liked baseball. Wendell sold some of his card collections."

"I figured Clark would love this," Evan added.

Howard had a huge smile on his face. He answered, "Thank you, sir. You are very thoughtful."

"Don't mention it. I just remembered," Evan replied, and Howard left his office.

Half bothered by Shantelle's pure silence, Evan went about his work. As he did, he kept reminding himself how this was his decision and that it was best for both of them; him and Shantelle.

In the evening, he received an invitation from his friend, Sean. They wanted to have drinks at the club.

At the same time, he received a text from Nicole. She said, "Evan, let's celebrate. I got my first salary from the library, but I don't have any friends to celebrate it with. Please, Evan."

Evan felt responsible altogether. He had been busy with work and had not also visited Nicole. Thus, he wound up inviting her to the club.

Instead of a private room, like they usually had, Sean booked a secluded booth at the club. Keith and Wendell were already there.

"Hey, Eva -" Sean's mouth fell open when he saw Nicole. He said, "Oh, hey, Nicole."

"Hi guys, I hope you don't mind that I join you?" Nicole said, giving off that amiable smile.

"Suuurre. It's fine," Sean responded awkwardly. "You remember Wendell and Keith, right?"

"Hi everyone, nice to see you again," Nicole replied.

The music was on at the club. The DJ played the most upbeat tune, and a few guests started dancing. On the other hand, Evan's group enjoyed their drinks, discussing businesses, and whatnot.

"You know, Nicole, I honestly thought you were so familiar, even during the first time Evan brought you to our circle," Wendell suggested. "Have we met before?"

"I see. Maybe it's just me, but I thought your eyes were familiar," Wendell added.

Nicole smiled and said, "No, it can't be. It was my first time to be here in Rose Hills two years ago."

"Woah, isn't that Shanty?" Sean asked, seeing a girl in a sexy white dress that hugged her body, her blonde hair bouncing as she danced with three other girls.

"Woah!" Wendell hissed.

Keith, on the other hand, whistled. "Damn, I knew she had a sexy body beneath those jeans and long dresses!"

"Announcement, everyone!" Another girl with short black hair took the microphone from the DJ. She said, "Meet my girl, Shantelle Scott! We are celebrating her divorce! She is a hot sexy ass who is single and ready to mingle!"

Evan's nose flared. His eyes widened in shock.

chapter 7

Take Me

Home "Shanty! Are you excited about your going away party!" Karise said with glee. Her short black hair bounced as she jumped at the idea.

Shantelle had just arrived at her best friend's home. She had called her days before, informing her that her family was leaving Rose Hills permanently. They cried over the phone, but soon, they covered the bright future ahead of Shantelle.

It was more than enough to lighten up their mood.

"Shants!" Celeste, another girl with red hair, exclaimed. "I can't believe I'm taking my prima and proper girl out to a club!"

Felice, Shantelle's other friend, flew all the way from another city to see her that day. She said, "I am going to teach you how to dance, bitch!"

Karise, Celeste, and Felice were Shantelle's college friends, which she had neglected since her marriage with Evan. Her world revolved around Evan, and she missed out on all the good fun during her last year in college. The four friends changed into dresses and put on their makeup at Karise's house. After which, they left for the most exclusive club in town, LEX.

Immediately, when they found a table, they all ordered their drinks. Shantelle wasn't much of a drinker, but her friends were, especially Felice and Karise.

"Here's some mojito!" Felice handed her another glass. "Get some courage, girl. We will find you a fine young man – yes, that's right, a younger man. Evan is old. You deserve someone hotter!"

"Yeah, he may be the richest man in town, but he ain't the hottest!" Karise remarked, encouraging laughter in their group.

"I'm so happy you are finally going to take medicine, Shanty. Come back when you become a famous surgeon and show Evan what he lost!" Celeste suggested.

"Uhuh!" The three girls said in unison.

"I don't know, guys. Maybe, when that time comes, I won't even care," Shantelle faintly said. Then she smiled, "But to make him drool over me would be great!"

"That's my girl!" Karise encouraged. "Cheers!" They all drank up while the music in the club roared.

It did not take long for the girls to hit the dance floor. All of them had the boost of confidence they needed. Karise, who made it her ultimate goal to get Shantelle a good overnight fling, went to the DJ and took his microphone. She said, "Announcement, everyone!"

Karise pointed at Shantelle and said, "Meet my girl, Shantelle Scott! We are celebrating her divorce! She is a hot sexy ass who is single and ready to mingle!" "Wohooo!" Shantelle's friends hooted, making her flush thoroughly. Soon, a tall man with dirty blond hair came up to Shantelle. He had striking features; inviting grey-colored eyes and chiseled jaws. The same man asked, "May I have this dance?"

When Shantelle turned, she gasped. Her eyes widened, "Keith! What – what are you doing here?"

Keith laughed. He replied, "Same as you, enjoying my single life." He winked at her and said, "Congratulations. You are free again. May I say you married too young? Don't ever think this divorce was such a waste." "Oooh, hottie. Nice pick, Shanty. Still, he looks old," Felice remarked.

Shantelle laughed. She snorted as she replied, "He is Evan's friend. So, yeah, he is a bit old." She danced along with Keith. The man shook his head as he said, "I don't look that old. I look so much more handsome than your... ex-husband. We should date now that you are free."

Another laugh escaped her lips. Shantelle replied, "That would be scandalous – dating your friend's ex-wife. Besides, we just divorced. It would be inappropriate to be dating right away –

"Evan has moved on." Keith purposely tilted his head in the direction of his friends, and so when Shantelle saw Nicole sitting next to Evan, her face paled.

"Eyes, here pretty," Keith instructed. "Don't give him a bit of your attention. It will only boost his confidence. He is that way because he knows you will always be there for him, but that's going to change, right?" "You should get used to seeing me more often instead," Keith added with a sly grin.

Shantelle narrowed her eyes at him. She asked, "Why?"

"Because I'll be seeing you in Warlington," Keith said with a smirk. "Who do you think recommended Doctor Scott to Warlington Hospital?"

Shantelle's eyes widened. Then, she realized the Henderson's were in the health insurance business. Keith or his father could easily connect her father to any hospital in the country. She sucked in a breath and shook her head, unable to grasp what she heard. 'Why was Evan's friend helping us to relocate?'

Keith warned her against gazing at Evan, but she could not help it. She was leaving the next day. She glanced at Evan, maintaining her gaze for seconds longer. When she noticed Nicole move closer to Evan, she turned her attention back to Keith. she asked, "You won't tell him, will you?" "Never! I won't tell him," Keith said. "Then again, it might be unnecessary. He might not look for you at all... He already has Nicole." Shantelle fell silent. 'That's right. Evan already dared to take Nicole out in public.' "What's that long face, girl?" Felice jumped in, handing Shantelle another glass of liquor. "Drink up your sorrow, and you will feel much better!" Recognizing Keith's

words, Shantelle wound up drinking three more glasses of cocktails that, at the end of her dance with Evan's friend, she was ready to retire for the night! She turned to her friends and said, "I think I am drunk! I want to go home!" "I'll take you home," Keith offered. "Nice try, lover boy," Karise said. "But, we will take her home."

"No, I'll take her home. You guys have fun!" Keith urged. Shantelle found it entertaining how her friends and Keith were arguing about who will drive her home. In her drunken self, she yelled, "Haha! Who else wants to take me home – Ahhh!"

To everyone's shock, Evan had carried Shantelle over his shoulder. He turned to Shantelle's friends and Keith, saying, "I'll take her home. She is my wife." "Excuse me, but you are already divorced! I thought Mister Thompson was a smart man. Let me spell it out for you," Karise said. "D.I.V.O.R.C.E.D! As in past tense –" "She is a long-time family friend. She is still my responsibility. I'll take her home!" Evan insisted.

"Evan, you seem to be forgetting about your date," Keith suggested, his head tilting toward Nicole. "I'll take Shantelle home."

"I feel dizzy," Shantelle complained while being swung from side to side. "I want to go home! Keith, take me home –"

" "I'll take you home!" Evan turned to Shantelle's friends, saying, "I'll take her home. I'd never harm her!" Then, he ordered Keith, "You take Nicole home!"

Keith let out a sarcastic laugh. He said, "I'm sorry, man." He looked over at Nicole, who was standing there, listening. He described, "I don't settle for second best. You take Nicole home –

Without warning, Evan marched into the exit, leaving Nicole, Keith, and Shantelle's friends behind.

"Evan!"

"Evan, let her go!"

While Shantelle's friends chased after Evan, Keith hissed. He fished for his wallet and turned to Nicole. He gave her a hundred-dollar bill and said, "Find your way home."

chapter 8

Ignored Evan could not believe his eyes. Shantelle had always been conservative. Evan liked to think of it that she preserved herself for him. He was her first, and oddly, he had never been intimate with anyone, other than his now ex-wife.

Shantelle was never the kind to go out in a club, nor did she enjoy dancing in the middle of a crowd, wearing a skirt above her knees.

She was fashionable, but she rarely showed off her skin in public. To Evan, Shantelle did not have to wear sexy clothes to know she had a gorgeous body.

Seeing Shantelle wear a laced dress that hugged her frame, Evan 'sucked in a breath. His eyes studied how her golden hair bounced from side to side, her hips swaying as she danced with her friends.

Evan was familiar with Shantelle's companions, especially Karise. One thing he was relieved about was the fact that she did not come into the club with a man. He already guessed this might have been something Karise had decided upon.

"Our Shanty is really beautiful," Wendell remarked. "That, she is," Keith said. Then he stood up and announced, "Well, I better dance with the most beautiful girl in the club."

"What are you doing, Keith?" Evan asked in irritation.

"What? Can't I dance with a friend?" Keith suggested with a sly grin. Then he gave Evan his back and walked to the dance floor, finding Shantelle.

Evan eyed as Keith and Shantelle spoke to each other. He saw her smile. Instantly, he felt his heart being squeezed by a hand. How long has it been since Shantelle smiled that way? She used to have that glowing face, a smile that could launch a thousand ships. Yet, that all faded through the latter part of their marriage.

"They look good together," Nicole remarked, her eyes fixed on Shantelle and Keith. She turned to Evan and tried to get his opinion. "Don't you think so, Evan?"

As Evan frowned, Sean spat out his drink. He laughed at the idea of Keith and Shantelle being together. Sean said, "That would be... a dream come true for Keith."

'What? What did Sean fucking say?' He sought in his head. 'Does – does Keith like Shantelle?'

Suddenly, Evan noticed Shantelle staring at them. Immediately, guilt washed over him, like he was caught cheating. Evan knew how Shantelle had always been hurt by his closeness with Nicole. He saw that again when their eyes briefly met.

'No,' he thought. He did not want Shantelle to misunderstand why he was out with Nicole.

"Evan, I want to dance. Can we dance?" Nicole asked. "Please." 1

Turning to Nicole, Evan said, "I don't want to dance. You go and dance."

He kept drinking while observing Keith and Shantelle. He had no idea what they were talking about, but it was making him uneasy. 'What if Keith really liked Shantelle? Why am I so upset about it?'

'Furi. Why do I even feel this way?' He asked himself as his eyes narrowed on the dance floor. The next thing he knew, Shantelle was enjoying herself in Keith's company, dancing, and ch

ating. Her friends kept giving her drinks, which also concerned him. While Evan was studying Shantelle, Nicole was enraged inside. She tried her best to act calm. to pretend that Evan's attention towards Shantelle did not affect her, but how could she not? Evan was practically ignoring her! "That bitch! This is all her fault!" She screamed in her head. Oh, how she wanted to walk to the dance floor and scratch Shantelle's face! Nicole hated Shantelle so much, especially her godly looking face!

Once in a while, Nicole studied Evan. How he looked at Shantelle made her wonder if he had fallen in love with her. At the possibility, she frowned. 'No, that cannot be. Otherwise, he would not ask for a divorce.'

After an hour of just sitting next to Evan, drinking while being ignored, Nicole tried again, "Evan, I want to da --"

Before she could finish her words, Evan marched into the center of the dance floor and suddenly carried Shantelle over his shoulder!

Her mouth hung open in shock. She turned to Sean and Wendell, who were both smirking at Evan's actions. Then they turned to her, giving her a pitiful look.

She was angered! Nicole could not believe how Evan had left her just like that. Trying to prove she carried greater weight in Evan's heart, she paced to where he was.

"I'll take Shantelle home," Nicole heard Keith say.

With her head down and legs over Evan's shoulder, Shantelle tried to reason, "I want to go home. Keith, take me home --"

"I'll take you home!" Evan suggested.

So, apparently, they were arguing about who should take Shantelle home. Nicole quickly made herself visible in Evan's view, just in case he forgot how she was there all along.

However, she heard Evan instruct Keith, "You take Nicole home!"

Nicole's face paled, but the dimmed lights at the club hid the pained expression on her face. "Evan. Evan, let Keith take her." Her voice could not even be heard against the calling of Shantelle's friends.

"Evan!"

"Evan, let her go!"

What made her situation worse was how Evan's friend, Keith, treated her. Keith fucking Henderson gave her a hundred-dollar bill and said, "Find your way home." She was infuriated! All the more, she hated Shantelle! 'Bitch!'

"Evan? Evan? Why did you leave me here?" Nicole kept calling Evan, but it only got routed to his voicemail. All she could do was leave him a bunch of messages. "Evan, please come back"

Chapter 8: Ignored

after you send

Shantelle home. I'm scared. I don't know anyone here. Keith refused to send me back."

What bothered Nicole further was how Evan was spending time with Shantelle. Anything could happen between them, and she could not allow it. Again and again, she called Evan. Much to her dismay, Evan never called back. In the alley where the club was located, Nicole waited and waited until her patience grew thin. She saw a bunch of horny teenagers looking at her maliciously. Seeing the boys continue leering at her, she knew exactly what to do. A smirk formed on her face very quickly. She eyed the surroundings, and after making sure none of Evan's friends were present, she called on to the group of teens, "Hey, boys. Do you want to make good money?" 'After this,' Nicole thought. 'Evan would feel obligated to keep me by his side. Then Evan will be in love with me.'

A luxury sports car was speeding on the road. Evan narrowed his eyes, recounting how Keith wanted to take Shantelle home. He said, "Shanty –" "Window – window!" Shantelle was jumping in her seat. Her hand covered her mouth. "Luaahh!"

chapter 9

One Last Time Evan managed to flee from Shantell's friends. Unfortunately, his beloved sports car did not escape Shantelle's vomit.

"Urggh. This is awful!" Shantelle said in disgust after throwing up on the side of Evan's car. Her dress got partly stained, and she absolutely reeked of alcohol. "I'm never going to drink

again."

'Damn, my favorite car.' Evan was behind the wheel. His other hand stretched to Shantelle's back. He stroked her back, saying, "You are never drinking again, Shanty. You got that?! You can't hold your liquor."

"Ha! It's your fault I'm drinking, you asshole!" She unwittingly said before heaving. She rolled back the car windows and emptied the contents of her stomach. Yes, she puked on the empty streets as Evan drove through the night.

"I'm not taking you to your parents like that," Evan announced before taking another turn. After thirty minutes, they arrived at their villa.

Evan carried Shantelle, princess style. As he paced into the house, Shantelle kept spouting nonsense. "Oh, home sweet home. I'll never see you again. Will you miss me?"

"Oh, it's the Misses!" Mrs. Shaw walked up to Evan.

"Can you make chicken soup for Shanty, Mrs. Shaw? Bring it up to the room when it's ready," Evan requested. After seeing a nod, he hurriedly took Shantelle to their room.

Evan settled her in the chair while he prepared the bath. After achieving the proper water temperature, he returned to Shantelle and carried her into the tub.

"You need to take a bath, Shanty," he suggested. "I'll ask Mrs. Shaw to help you –."

Before he could do as he thought, Shantelle had already removed her clothes.

"I stink. I stink – ah, my bath! I miss my bath! My favorite bathtub. I will never see you again," Shantelle said as she carelessly lay on the tub. Evan had no choice but to aid her. He figure

d, since they had already been intimate a few times, there was no harm in seeing her fully naked.

"You are okay continuing by yourself?" Evan asked.

"Hmmm." Shantelle lifted her face, and with narrowed eyes, she said, "I can take a bath, hubby."

Reluctantly, Evan stepped back. He said, "Okay, I'll check on you once in a while." It took half an hour for Shantelle to finish. By that time, Mrs. Shaw had already brought the chicken broth and placed it on the room's coffee table. Evan instructed her, "Can you help the Misses out of the bath?" "Certainly, Mr. Thompson," Mrs. Shaw confirmed. After some time, Shantelle came out with a robe over her body. Mrs. Shaw guided her to the coffee table and encouraged, "Have some soup, Misses. It will help you feel better." Since Evan carried Shantelle, he also had puke on his clothes. He decided to bathe while Mrs.

Shaw was feeding Shantelle. When he came out of the bathroom, Shantelle was already sleeping on the bed. Mrs. Shaw had also left their room.

Evan changed into his pajamas. He sat in front of Shantelle with a chair and studied her sleeping features. Her face was red from all the drinking she had done. Her eyes, without makeup, were back to being puffed.

Immediately, it reminded Evan of how she had probably cried so much. It made Evan feel tightness in his chest, knowing he was the root of her cries. He caressed her face and pushed back her hair, saying, "Shanty, what am I going to do with

you?"

Evan gazed at Shantelle for almost an hour, just contemplating. When he felt his eyes helplessly falling, he climbed onto the other side of the bed. He covered Shantelle and himself with a blanket and pulled her into his arms. He shut his eyes and easily wandered off to sleep.

"Evan, don't leave me!" In the middle of the night, Shantelle said in her sleep.

"Shanty, Shanty, I'm here." Evan woke up, hushing her cries. "Evan, please," Shantelle cried again. "Eva –

"Shanty, wake up," Evan pulled her up, pressed her against his chest, and soothed her back, saying, "I'm here." He clenched his jaws, saying, "I'm sorry, Shanty. I'm sorry." Soon Shantelle awoke and realized she was in Evan's arms. She cried for real. She said, "I'm going to miss you, Evan. I'm going to miss you." "Shanty, we live in the same city. We are still going to see each other," he said, but Shantelle kept weeping until she was out of breath. In the next few minutes, Shantelle was silent. Then she looked up at Evan and faintly asked, "Evan, make love to me one last time."

Evan gulped. "Shanty, I –

"Please, one last time. One last time," she begged. Looking into Shantelle's blue orbs, Evan blinked. How could he say no to this beautiful woman? He nodded, saying, "Okay."

In the next half an hour, two naked bodies were on top of each other, moaning and wailing their desires. Their lips were hungry for each other, not wanting to let go. To Evan, there was something special about the way they were in bed that night. He seemed to have poured more emotions into their kiss and how he entered her. It was probably the best sex they have ever had, to think they had already parted ways. When Evan came, he threw his head back, relishing the moment. When his eyes returned to Shantelle, he saw a tear down her face, which

made him speculate there was something wrong. Evan rolled on his back and sought, "Is there something you need to tell me, Shanty?" Shaking her head, she replied, "Nothing, Evan. Nothing." Evan struggled to sleep that night. The girl resting on his arm shed tears; he knew it was for

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him. Besides the guilt consuming him, he was surprised by how intimate they were. They had sex in the past, but it was nothing like this. The closeness between them was far different.

He meticulously studied Shantelle's face and acknowledged her elegance. Shantelle had long lashes, a long pointed nose, and very fair and youthful skin. Indeed, she would have been a wife any man would want. 'Do I truly want this?'

One thing was for sure; Evan wanted his freedom. Maybe if he was not forced into the marriage, he could have seen her in that way—that way, exactly how he looked at her with admiration.

He moved closer and pecked Shantelle's forehead. He noticed her do the same. He assumed she was still awake. Thus, he whispered, "Shanty, nothing is going on between Nicole and I. I promise you that. I might have considered it before, but everything has changed now." Why was he even telling her this? Evan was unwilling to admit anything. He simply wanted her to know the truth about where Nicole stood in his life.

After some time, he realized that Shantelle was indeed asleep. 'Did she hear me?' With a sigh, he said, "Shanty, goodnight."

chapter 10

Goodbye Evan When morning came, Evan woke up to find Shantelle dressed in one of her clothes. She had not brought home all of her dresses. Those that he had given her in the past remained in their closet.

For a second, he studied her slender frame. He admitted she had a beautiful body.

"Do you want me to have Howard send all of your clothes?" Evan asked, referring to the Thompson's family driver. He sat up, showing off his well-defined chest. Shantelle had just zipped up her dress. She did not turn to Evan when she answered, "I won't need them."

Shaking his head, he said, "Shanty. Don't be like this –" "I won't need them," she repeated firmly, finally looking at him. "I better go, Evan. My parents are waiting for me." "I'll take you," Evan offered.

"No." Shantelle pursed her lips and suggested. "It's not a good idea. I can take a cab."

Evan furrowed his brows. He suggested, "If you don't want me, then I can have Howard –"

"No, I can take a cab," she repeated.

"Okay. If you insist," Evan responded with a pained expression. He observed as Shantelle was about to leave, then he

recalled something important. He cleared his throat and reminded, "Shanty, you are still taking contraceptives, right? Last night, I –"

He raked his fingers through his hair, saying, "Given our situation, it would be best that you do not get pregnant. We are no longer... husband and wife."

"Right," she answered promptly. "I know that. Don't worry. I took my pills." 1

She lied. Shantelle had been so occupied these days that she forgot to take her pills. It wasn't a problem, though. She meant to take the emergency pill.

Unlike last night, Evan noticed her indifference. It made him uncomfortable that he brought up her special day. He said, "Shanty, it's your birthday in two months. Do you want to go somewhere? I remember you always wanted to go to Paris. I can take you there."

Instantly, Shantelle stiffened in her stance. Evan quickly noticed how her breathing became labored. Eventually, she answered, "Wow. that would be nice, Evan, but I don't know yet of my plans."

Shantelle turned to Evan. She forced a smile and said, "Thanks anyway, Evan."

"Of course," Evan said. "I'll visit you when I can. Thank you again, Shant, for signing the divorce agreement. I'll send you the alimony –"

"I don't need the alimony. I marked it out, remember?" She said. "I sent you that text, remember?"

"About that message. I never received any. What else did you say in your message?" He asked with a brow raised.

Chapter 10 Goodbye Evan

Shaking her head, Shantelle dismissed it. She replied, "It's not important. Don't send me any money." "Take care of yourself. I hope you'll be happy with Nicole. Goodbye, Evan," She added, forcing a smile.

Evan did not trouble correcting her understanding of his relationship with Nicole. He was more bothered by how Shantelle's goodbye gave him a sense of emptiness. "Shanty." "Goodbye," She said again before dashing to the stairs, her feet heavy against the floor. "Shant?!" Evan could not fathom the uneasiness of his chest. It

was with the way Shantelle said it and the way she looked into his eyes that he felt there was more to her words.

He quickly changed into his pajamas and chased after Shantelle. "Shanty! Shant!"

When he made out of the villa's gate, Shantelle had already taken a taxi.

Evan groaned and ran his fingers through his hair. He rushed back inside and grabbed his phone, hoping to call Shantelle. Then, he realized he did not have her new number.

He was about to call Doctor William Scott when his phone rang. It was an unknown number.

With a frown, Evan answered the call. He heard someone say, "Mister Thompson, this is from St. Benedict Hospital. A patient by the name of Nicole Lively was admitted last night. She was violated by thugs downtown. She named you as a contact person? I hope you can come to see her soon. She said you are the only family she has?"

"What?" Evan groaned. He was conflicted about whether to follow Shantelle or go to the hospital. In the end, he felt obligated to attend to Nicole, given her circumstance. He left for the hospital with a heavy heart.

"Shanty, given by the dress you are wearing, I think I know where you came from," Shantelle's mother asked, seeing her daughter arrive later in the morning, wearing a dress her ex-husband gave her. "I thought you were supposed to be with Karise, but she called me to check if you were already home."

"Sorry, mom. I made another stupid mistake," Shantelle admitted. While allowing Shantelle into the house, Eleanor said, "I hate it when you say that because you only make such mistakes with Evan!"

Eleanor let out a heavy sigh, saying,

"I'm glad we are leaving Rose Hills. As much as I love this city, we should keep you away from Evan." "I know, mom. I know," Shantelle admitted. Earlier, when Evan asked her about her birthday, she was this close to giving in – to giving up on their plans of moving. 'Why would Evan offer to treat me on my birthday?

Was he trying to lead me on?' The idea just irked her. Thank goodness she found the courage to leave the villa. "Go, call back your friends. They were worried sick about you. The maids have already brought down your luggage. We will leave in two hours," Eleanor instructed. Shantelle quickly called her friends and instructed them to meet her at the airport.

Two hours came and went. Shantelle and her parents arrived at the airport. A private jet was

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meant to take her and her parents to Warlington.

She was happy her friends met her one last time, knowing it would be long before she would see them again. "I'm going to miss you, guys," Shantelle said to her friends. She hugged them one by one and added, "Visit me sometime, okay?" "We will try," Felice said. "Either way, there is always the internet."

"I love you, my girl," Karise said. "I will miss you."

"Bye, Shant. Live your dreams," Celeste said. "Call us anytime."

"Don't ever think of Evan," Felice suggested. "Don't look back. Just keep moving forward." "You can do this, girl. You are not Shantelle Scott for no reason. Remember, one day, you'll be called Doctor Shantelle Scott," Karise reminded.

The group of friends formed a circle as they hugged each other. Soon, however, it was finally time for Shantelle and her parents to leave. She smiled at them and said, "I have to go. I'll miss you guys like crazy. Goodbye." "Bye Shanty!" "We love you, Shants! Bye!" "Bye Mrs. Scott!" "Bye Doctor Scott!"

After Shantelle's friends gave their last goodbyes, she and her parents rode on the jet. When the aircraft took off, Shantelle stared at Rose Hills City, the place of her birth. She had many memories of her home, happy ones and sad ones. Shantelle knew she would never forget Rose Hills, but she had to say goodbye. A tear fell down her cheek as she said, "Goodbye, Evan. Goodbye."