

Chapter 20: Evan Hoped

Days passed. With the help of Wendell's father, Evan had Melody, and her father locked up. Although Thomas Campbell's charges were less severe, and he was bound to be set free, he did not escape Evan's wrath.

Thomas' unpaid property taxes surfaced, and the local government issued a memo to seize his mansion in Rose Hills. His illicit transactions with politicians in Rose Hills and in Lockwood were spread through the internet, and the truth about his failing business came to light.

Like what his father did in the past, Evan also announced a business ban against the Campbells. No one wanted to be associated with Thomas Campbell, and no private lawyer represented him. He was left to choose a public defender, who wasn't that keen to support him as well.

Evan had never been angered in the same manner all his life that he made sure Thomas and Melody Campbell would learn to fear him. He used up all his influence, and he did not hold back.

However, despite receiving justice, despite going all out on Melody's punishment, Evan's heart was not at ease. He was angry at Melody, but he was more... mad at himself. 5

For days, he had been staying at his office, barely sleeping, and simply putting all his effort into his work and following up with the authorities. He hoped that by tiring himself, the heavens would forgive him for his oversight.

He had not spoken to his parents, and he avoided his friends. His Assistant, James, was also sensitive enough never to mention Nicole Lively or Melody Campbell in the office.

One afternoon, Wendell came to see Evan. Evan had dark circles around his eyes. He had not shaved his face for days and appeared troubled.

"What's wrong with you, Evan? Nicole slash Melody is already behind bars," Wendell asked. "Why are you killing yourself with work?"

Evan continued signing the contract in front of him. When he was done, he sucked in a breath. He shut his eyes and finally revealed what was bothering him. "Wendell, I don't know what else to do. I don't know what to say to my parents."

His mouth parted as he gawked in no particular direction. He felt a lump in his throat, which was very difficult to gulp down. Eventually, he resumed, "I

– I don't know how to apologize to Shanty. Her family should be back from vacation, but I don't have a face to show her. It was Nicole who provoked her the whole time.

"I brought that woman back to this town! I caused my parents and I to quarrel!" He groaned and added, "If Nicole Lively did not happen, my father would not have forced me into marrying Shantelle, and maybe things would have been different." 6

"Evan, please. Shanty loves you. She always has. Speak to her about it, and she'll forgive you. Besides, it wasn't directly your fault," Wendell suggested. "As for your parents, you have every reason to be upset after taking away your will to choose."

"Although." Wendell frowned and reluctantly described, "Uncle Erick did choose well for you. Shanty is great."

Evan repeatedly took deep breaths, doubtful. Thus, Wendell asked, "What I'd like to know is what you want from Shanty, Evan? Do you want her forgiveness because Nicole turned her into that insecure person you talked about? Or do you want more from her? Without Nicole – I mean, Melody, can you see distinctly now? How do feel you about Shanty?"

Observing how his friend had no definite answer. Wendell suggested, ' Don't you have to go to Russia? Use that time to think through and plan for what you want. When you return, and your head has cleared, speak to Shanty. She'll never turn you away. Shanty is Shanty.' 11

Evan gasped. The Scotts should have already returned from their vacation a few days ago, but he did not dare to see Shantelle.

To admit that he brought an insane woman into their lives was not something he could easily swallow. He was ashamed. Even if he never cheated on Shantelle during their marriage, Nicole Lively was the reason for her paranoia, hence their periodic fighting during the last few months of their marriage. While Evan had long desired his freedom, their constant arguing had pressed him to ask for a divorce once and for all.

'What do I want from Shanty?' Evan could not put a finger to it. He once told Shantelle how he wanted her out of his life. When it finally happened, however, it never made him contented. Shantelle's absence and utter silence left an uncomfortable feeling deep inside him, one that he had not deciphered. Evan shifted his gaze to his friend and confirmed, "You are right. I need time to think this through."

In the afternoon, Evan prepared to leave for Russia. He returned to the villa late at night and packed his bags. The next day, he was ready to go when Mrs. Shaw rushed to the driveway, giving him a gift box.

"Sir, this arrived yesterday for you," Mrs. Shaw said with a smile.

"What is it?" Evan asked. "It's a gift." Mrs. Shaw pursed her lips before showing the box with a blue ribbon. "It's from Shanty."

Evan froze. 'A gift from Shanty?' For seconds, he stilled. Suddenly, Evan saw hope. Perhaps, what was broken could still be fixed. The Scotts were a family friend. Their ties did not have to end due to their unfortunate divorce.

A smile became painted on Evan's face when he accepted the gift and hopped into the car. As Howard drove him to the airport, warmth filled his heart. He was constantly studying the gift box, his head full of Shantelle's smiling face. Under his breath, he muttered, " She gave me a gift."

Because his flight would leave in an hour, he could not see Shantelle that day, but he would see her upon his return – on Shantelle's birthday.

Minutes into the road, he opened the gift and breathed in at the sight of the jadeite prosperity ring. He saw a note that said: [Evan. This is my belated gift for your promotion. I wish you prosperity in life. Shanty.]

Evan was elated, but after reading Shantelle's note, he felt heaviness in his chest that he could not fathom. His eyes felt watery. Evan had to sniff it back, overwhelmed by what was happening to him.

Despite everything that had happened between them, Shantelle still thought of him. Guilt washed over him. He gripped the ring tightly in his fist before attempting to put it on.

As he did, his eyes widened when he realized he still wore his wedding ring! It had been part of his daily wear for two years, and he could not bear to remove it. For a second, he gawked at his wedding ring, thinking, 'Was it really that hard to remove? Why didn't I take this off?'

Evan laughed slightly. He doubted his reasons. Finally, after putting on the prosperity ring, he said under his breath, "Thank you, Shanty. I'll see you when I return."