

## Chapter 18: Nicole's Past

"You only had one thing to do: make Evan Thompson marry you." An older man spoke coldly to his daughter in a private home. "Now, we could not even get out of the city. If Evan ever finds out, we will lose everything. Have you forgotten what the Thompsons did to us back then? This was your chance to redeem yourself!"

Glancing at her father, Nicole replied, "I – I'm sorry, dad. I – I was careless. I failed."

The man shook his head, saying, "You waited many years for nothing." Her father was not screaming, but his tone was glacial enough to send shivers down her spine. "We are done with Evan. It's getting too dangerous – "

"But, dad" Nicole tried to retort, but his father seethingly approached her, thrusting his hand back. He was this close to hitting her, but he halted mid-way. He said, "I went along with your plan, thinking you could do it, but in the end... you are still no match for Shantelle Scott!"

Her father turned around and marched to another room. He came back quickly and threw an envelope containing old documents, saying, "I'll go out and buy hair color. For now, we will have to make use of that old ID. Let's hope the police won't suspect us with you, holding on to a mere high school ID and an old birth certificate!"

"Forget Nicole Lively! You are back to being Melody Campbell!" Her father said before pacing out of her room and down the stairs of their old home.

Alone in her room, Nicole wept, thinking about her situation. After many years of planning, stalking, and studying Evan from afar, she still failed. After changing herself completely, to become someone Evan would appreciate, she still could not win his love.

Everything was going according to plan when Evan brought her back to Rose Hills, but alas, his father forced him to marry Shantelle! Then, even after she successfully made Evan divorce Shantelle, she was still no match for her!?

Evan did not have to say it, but Nicole saw how he left her at the club to be with Shantelle. He defended their marital home and kept her clothes in their closet. He did not even realize it, but until now, Evan still wore his wedding ring!

"This is all Shantelle's fault! Shantelle! I hate you! You ruined everything – everything! Nine years have passed, and you are still the same person who ruined my life!" She barked, thinking about the past. "I really hate you, Shantelle! I hate you so much!" \* FLASHBACK: 9 YEARS AGO \*

A girl with amber-colored eyes saw Evan and his friends coming her way. A smirk formed on her face as she held her books tightly against her chest.

When Evan walked past her, she purposely let all her books fall to the floor. Evan was the first one to pick up the pieces. His friends soon followed.

"Here, be careful next time, Melody," Evan said. "You are always very careless with your things. "Thank you, Evan," said the girl. Her name was Melody Campbell, a junior at the same school as Evan and a neighbor of Wendell Franco.

"You are welcome," Evan plainly replied before walking away with his friends. That day, Melody wore the latest fashion trend. She had her hair done at the salon. They were silky smooth and smelled of

lavender. Like always, when she created opportunities for Evan to aid her, he helped, but she got nothing more than what was required. 2

“Um. Evan. Evan?” She called and chased after the group of friends.” There is a small gathering at my house tonight. Just a few girlfriends of mine and maybe.” She smiled brightly and suggested, “Maybe, your friends? There is free beer?”

“You are not eighteen yet,” Evan said. “Oh, but it’s my house. So, it should be okay,” the girl said. Evan frowned. He answered, “I don’t know -”

“Sounds like fun,” Keith said. “We could go for an hour or two.” “Yeah. I don’t have to drive myself back home,” Wendell remarked, and Sean laughed.

Before Evan could answer, Shantelle rushed in their direction. The girl already knew Shantelle Scott. She was the daughter of a cardio surgeon, Doctor William Scott, and her rival in Evan’s attention.

“Evan! Evan! Dad has a meeting at the hospital. As usual, mom will be with him to help. Dad asked if you could take me home, but I want to go to the beach. It’s plankton season!” Shantelle squeaked in excitement.

“Wait. Wait. Shanty, didn’t uncle William say you should go home?” Evan asked. It was as if no one was around them. His full attention was on Shantelle. A laugh escaped Shantelle’s lips before she revealed, “But it’s plankton season!”

“I don’t know.” Evan frowned at the idea. “Come on, Evan! Don’t you want to see the ocean wonder of bioluminescence? The sea sparkling in neon blue?” Shantelle encouraged, her eyes gleaming as she described.

Evan laughed, and his eyes sparkled altogether. It made him look handsome, but that smile was only meant for Shantelle. He shook his head and said, “Shanty, what am I going to do with you?”

“Say yes, and let’s see nature’s wonders!” Shantelle beamed as she insisted on her plan. “You and your biology,” Evan complained. He sighed and said, “Fine. Planktons, here we come.

“But, what about the party?” Melody sought. Her earlier smile faded after Shantelle came into the picture. Shantelle easily convinced Evan to take her to whatever it was she was talking about.

‘Planton? Phantom? Plakons? Whatever!’

“Um, the boys can go,” Evan said, referring to his friends. “Well, if you are not going, then we aren’t,” Sean revealed. Even Melody’s next-door neighbor declined.

As Evan walked away with Shanty, Melody’s blood boiled. A mere thirteen- year-old defeated her! For a year, she had been trying to catch Evan’s attention. She observed how Evan was always helpful, so she faked many encounters with him.

One time, Melody tripped on purpose, knowing Evan was behind her. He aided her up, but then, he just left. Shanty came rushing to him, and Melody was ignored.

On another occasion, she saw Evan in the library. She pretended to be interested in books and was about to approach him when she realized the same young girl was with him. They were studying together.

Last month, she pretended to faint from sickness in front of Evan. He helped her to the clinic. However, after that, Evan was yet again rushing to where this little Shanty was!

Melody brewed hate for Shantelle, that on their subsequent encounter, she made sure her message was clear.

One afternoon, Melody saw Shantelle talking with her friends outside the school gates. She rolled her eyes as she moved closer to Shantelle. She smirked at the thought of Shantelle sprawled on the ground. Thus, with her right hand, she pushed Shanty onto the road. Melody laughed and said, "Oops! sorry.

The screeching of the school bus stopping in front of Shantelle shocked Melody and everyone around her. She did not realize it then as her back faced the arriving vehicle. Melody had just pushed Shantelle to the road where a bus was moving in the same direction!

The worst part was how Evan was apparently nearby. He carried Shantelle in his arms and held a murderous look in his eyes. "Melody! How dare you? You are going to get punished for what you did to Shanty!"

Melody was expelled the next day. Evan's parents, who held the most power in the city, ensured it. Not only that, Erick Thompson announced a business ban against her family, and they were forced out of Rose Hills. Her family lost many business opportunities while she struggled to enter a new school.

To Melody, her life turned into shambles, all because of Shantelle Scott. She hated Shantelle so much that she made it a mission to take what was hers, especially Evan Thompson.

After a series of plastic surgery, trying to look like Shantelle, she became Nicole Lively. She used part of her family's wealth to get her a new name instead of going by Melody Campbell. \* END OF FLASHBACK \*