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The Threesome

I was fifteen minutes late for my dinner outing with Julian. It really wasn't my fault though. My hair was a mess and one of my shoes chose that specific day to learn how to play hide and go seek. Let's not even talk about the fight I had with my closet to deliver the perfect little cocktail dress. The price a girl must pay for perfection—or at least as close to perfection as money can buy.

Julian was already seated when the hostess escorted me to the table. He looked nice in his long sleeve, blue Ralph Lauren shirt—I can spot a designer label from miles away. The top two buttons were undone which meant he was in casual mode despite how formal the restaurant was. A single white candle was lit in the center of the table. He looked up just as the hostess and I approached the table. We smiled at each other.

“Hey there Shells.” My name is Shelley, but he had always calls me Shells for short.

“Hi, Julian. This is a lovely restaurant. I've never been here before.”

“You're in for a treat. The food is really good here.”

A tall female with a long, blonde ponytail approached our table and said, “Welcome to La Larenz. My name is Meagan and I'll be your waitress for the night.” She gave both of us menu's.

“Umm, we will need one more,” Julian said to the waitress.

“What?” I questioned without thinking. “Someone else is joining us?”

“Nicole is on her way. She should be here by now,” he said as he looked at his watch.

“Oh, this is a party of three. I’ll be right back with that menu and another chair?”
said the waitress.

“You invited Nicole? Since when is she a part of our little thing?”

“Well, she’s special to me and I’m hoping that she can be just as special to you too. That’s why I asked you to come meet us here tonight. I have something to tell you.”

“Oh, no. What do you—”

“Julian, Shelley, I’m so sorry that I’m late. The traffic on the 706 was just horrible,” Nicole said as she approached the table with the waitress right behind her holding a chair and a menu.

“No problem, sweetheart. You are just in time,” Julian said. At this point I was praying that my face wasn’t all twisted up in disgust and confusion.

“Julian and I are so glad you could make it, Shelley. I bet you’re surprised.”

There were many emotions that I was feeling at the time—surprise wasn’t one of them. So, I answered, “Oh, yeah. I’m surprised alright.” They both laughed—I didn’t.

“Honey,” Nicole said, “did you tell her yet?”

“No, sweetheart. I was waiting for you.”

“Let’s tell her now.” My head was moving back and forth between the two of them and I was fighting the urge to lose my lunch. It’s just something about those happy, giddy couples and all the ‘honeys’ and ‘sugar pies’ and ‘sweeties’ that always make me want to hurl. For as long as I live, I hope that I am never like that.

“Wait, I need a drink first,” I said. I was happy that Julian had the foresight to order the wine before I got there. I took a long sip then said, “Ok, what is it?”

“We’re getting married,” they said in unison before breaking into excited laughter. Nicole showed me the huge diamond ring on her left hand.

“When?” This time I guzzled my drink.

“In two months,” said Nicole. My drink spewed out of my mouth and onto the happy couple.

“Oh, my gosh! I’m so sorry!” I said.

“Waitress, we need some towels or napkins over here,” Julian said loudly enough to gain the attention of everyone that hadn’t witnessed the spewing incident. Of course, all eyes were on us now.

“This is an imported, Persian silk blouse that my mother gave me. You just ruined it,” Nicole said.

“I am so sorry,” I repeated. And really, I was. But I was in shock. Two months? Why the rush?

“Let me get the tab so we can go. I think I have something that may help if we can catch the stain before it sets,” Julian said to Nicole as they both stood up. Julian placed a one hundred dollar bill on the table and said, “I’ll call you,” as he put his arm around Nicole and headed for the door.

I called after them, “I’m sorry.”

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The day the invitation came made it official. Somehow, it just wasn’t real until I saw it in writing. Gina’s phone call came right on time. She had gotten her invitation too. “So, how do you feel?” she said.

“Honestly, I’m kind of numb. It’s only been six months. How can he be so sure that he wants to marry her?” I said.

“I don’t know. Maybe she’s the one.”

“We were together for two years, Gina. Did it not dawn on him at any point that maybe I was the one? Not this Nicole chick.” I threw a shoe across the room, and then made a note to myself to remember where it went.

“But you were the one who broke it off with him.”

“We were on a break—a small break that was just supposed to be long enough for both of us to get ourselves together, then get back together and make things work. He wasn’t supposed to fall in love while we were on a break.”

“But you knew he was dating Nicole,” Gina said.

“Yes, I knew. That was why I didn’t feel so bad about dating Jonas and Ted and Bill.”

“Don’t forget about Ryan.”

“Oh, and Ryan. But that wasn’t serious. Those were just guys to get my mind off Julian and whoever he was dating.”

“Well, what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know. What can I do?”

“You could just tell him how you feel.”

“I can’t just tell him how I feel, Gina,” I said as I threw another shoe across the room. “That would make me look desperate.”

“But you are—”

“But he doesn’t have to know that. I just need to hatch a plan or something. This can’t happen. This wedding can’t happen! That is going to be my Julian up there exchanging vows with some other woman! That just can’t happen!”

“Ok, you know what? I’m going to be totally, brutally honest with you. But I want you to remember that I’m doing this out of love and concern because this could be disastrous for all parties involved.”

“Something tells me this conversation is about to take a turn that should require a four drink minimum,” I said as I placed my head in my hands.

“Maybe so, but you need to hear this. The Julian that is going to marry Nicole is the same Julian that left the toilet seat up and spent long nights at the office. This is the same Julian that forgot your birthday—twice. Hell, it’s the same Julian that after a year of dating was still introducing you as his friend.”

“But aren’t those qualities slightly endearing?” I said. Even I didn’t believe it, but desperation is good for clouding a girl’s judgment.

“The only thing that has changed is that he is involved with someone else. He is still the same old Julian.”

“Maybe I need the same old Julian.” At this point I was exasperated.

“You just want what you can’t have. That’s all it is. Just like that time when you waited all summer to decide to buy the new Minolo Blahniks strappy sandals until after they had been taken out the window. Remember the fuss you made when they refused to sell them to you and how you wrote the president of the company? Then when he sent them to you, you returned them.

“You can’t be seriously comparing this situation to shoes,” I said.

“I had to go for a topic you would understand.”

“My life’s happiness is at stake here. Julian can’t marry her. It’s a mistake.”

“When is the next time you’ll see him?”

“On Friday.”

“Well, think on it. If you truly feel that strongly about this, then tell him how you feel, Shelley. That’s the only way you’ll know how things will play out.”

“Yeah,” I said before hanging up the phone. I cried all that night.

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The following day found me in the same funk. The good thing about having a decent paying job as a staff accountant for Brooks, Meld, and Smithowitz is that I always have a few extra dollars to play with whenever I need a little pick me up. Since I had just had my hair, nails, and feet done, the only thing left to do was shop. I headed to the only place that I knew could handle me in my sensitive condition—Bergdorf Goodman.

As soon as I arrived, my problems seemed to just melt away. I was surrounded by Vera Wang, Dolce & Gabbana, and Giorgio Armani—all best friends in my head. My brand new platinum credit card and I were both ready for a workout. I had just bent over to get a better look at the fabric of a forest green dress I had spotted from the Marc Jacobs fall collection when I was tapped on the shoulder.

“Shelley?” the female voice said. I turned around to find Nicole looking down at me. I smiled—she didn’t.

“Oh, hi, Nicole. What are you doing here?”

“I was across the street volunteering at the Salvation Army booth when I saw you come in. I can’t believe you shop here. Everything is so expensive,” she said as she took a glance around.

“Well, you know...a woman’s wardrobe is never really complete...and there is nothing wrong with treating yourself every now and then.

“Look at this! They are charging \$100.00 for this belt. Are they crazy?”

Just the week before, I had purchased that exact same belt in three different colors. I went with the safe answer, “You’re right. That is ridiculous.”

“Too expensive for my blood. But anyway, I came over here because I really need to talk to you. Kind of get a few things off my chest.”

I braced myself for impact. “What’s wrong?”

“As you know, I am very excited about the wedding. I just can’t seem to stop smiling,” she said. The funny thing was that she wasn’t smiling.

“I can understand that,” I said.

“No, I don’t think you can. See, I love Julian and he loves me. We have that certain something that...I just can’t put into words. It’s like we’re always on the same page. I always know that no matter what, he’ll always be there and I’ll always be there for him. We just know it.”

“I’m not sure I’m following you.”

“Well, I wanted to let you know that I appreciate what you have done for Julian. You have been a very good friend—a great friend even, let him tell it.”

“We’ve known each other for a long time.”

“I know, and I respect that. However, once we’re married, there are going to have to be some changes.”

“What kind of changes?” I said.

“The whole time we have been dating, I’ve been feeling like we are this one big happy threesome. Me, you and Julian have this triangle going on that I just know I won’t be comfortable with once we are husband and wife.”

“What are you saying?”

“I need to be the only woman in Julian’s life. Not the main woman, not the number one woman, but the only woman in his life—aside from family.”

“So, you want me out of his life?”

“Not necessarily out of his life, but I do need you to back off. You two are talking on a regular basis, hanging out every week, and although I have been very patient, I will not tolerate that once we’re married. If he needs female companionship, I should be the one giving him that.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“Don’t say anything. Just try to understand where I’m coming from. One day when you are in my shoes, you will understand. But look, I have to get back to my stand. We probably have a line around the block by now. You have fun shopping, though.”

“Um, yeah.” I was in shock.

“I’ll see you at the wedding, right?” she said as she turned and walked towards the front of the store. She didn’t wait for a response, which was good because I didn’t have one.

That Friday night, Julian surprised me by taking me to an opera. I can't tell you the name of it—or what it was about. Some woman singing about something. I guess that could sum it up. I wasn't complaining though. Despite my little run in with Nicole, I was excited just to be spending time with him. After it was over, we went for a walk to wind down the evening.

“Well, that was interesting,” I said sarcastically.

“Don't tell me you didn't enjoy that.”

“OK, I won't. But I will say that I loved the ending. You know, when the curtains closed and everyone stood up and clapped. I have never been so happy in my life. I almost shed a tear.”

“It wasn't that bad,” he said.

“A few times I wanted to launch myself off the balcony. But I was scared that I wouldn't die and would have to stay for the next showing.” We both laughed.

“That's the last time I try to expose you to some culture.”

“Since when have you been so open to culture anyway?” I said.

“Nicole took me to my first opera a few months ago and I've been in love ever since.”

“You never told me that.”

“There are a lot of things I haven't told you about me and Nicole. It's weird talking to your old girlfriend about your new one.”

“So, now I'm old.”

“You know what I mean,” he said. We both laughed.

“Did she tell you that I ran into her while shopping the other day?”

“I don’t think she did. What did ya’ll talk about?”

“A real lady never tells.”

“Then why aren’t you telling?”

“Shut up. I can be a lady when I want to. Look at me in this dress and these heels. I just came from an opera for gosh sakes. It doesn’t get more lady-like than that. Give me some credit,” I said as I tried to punch him in the arm. He caught my wrist and spun me around so that we were face-to-face.

“By the way, you look good tonight.”

“Why thank you kind sir,” I said in my best southern accent.

“You never dressed like this back when we were together.”

I looked up into his eyes and said, “You never gave me a reason to.” I rested my hand on his chest. We stared into each other eyes for what seemed like an eternity, but it was probably only a few seconds. I was about to reach up for a kiss when a car horn beeped loud enough to scare us both. Fortunately, it wasn’t anyone we knew.

“Let’s head over to the park,” he said as he grabbed my hand and pulled me along.

The moonlight was just enough for us to see the path that took us to the bridge over the brook. We stood there for a moment taking in the view. It was beautiful. We’d had many nights of extended lip-locking sessions at that exact spot.

As he stood beside me, I began to notice little things about him that I hadn’t noticed before. He appeared more muscular. Somehow, he even appeared more attractive. I could barely see his goatee. Seeing it made me smile. We’d had several arguments because I was trying to get him to cut it off. He never listened though. It’s

funny how stuff like that used to bother me, but at that moment I would have given anything to be in the position to let him have his way.

“Shelley, do you remember that time when—”

“Of course I remember. I told you not to bring that up again—ever!” I said before he could get the question out. He was about to go into a story of the time when we were feeding the ducks and they attacked. Apparently, we hadn’t been feeding them fast enough. I have never been that scared before in my life. We dropped the loaf of bread and ran for our lives. At that point, we had already been beaked and pecked a few good times.

“And here we are again,” he said.

“Yep, here we are.”

“What’s on your mind? What are you thinking about?”

“Just how different things are now. You’re getting married,” I said.

“I know. It almost doesn’t seem real. It forces you to think long and hard about a lot of things.”

“Like what?”

“Like am I ready? Is Nicole the right woman? How will I measure up as a husband and eventually a father?” he said. There was a few moments of silence where neither one of us said a word. “It almost doesn’t seem real,” he added. Little did he know I was thinking that exact same thing.

I opened my mouth a few times to say to tell him what I felt, but the words just wouldn’t come out.

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“So, what are you going to do?” Gina asked.

“I don’t know,” I said.

“The wedding is next week. If you are going to do something, you need to do it now while there is still time.”

“I know. It’s just that...I don’t know. What do I say? Hey Julian, I know you are about to get married and all, but I love you and I want to make you happy for the rest of your life. Choose me, not Nicole. How pathetic is that?” I said as I placed my head in my hands. We were sitting on the couch in my living room. Gina started rubbing my back as I began to cry.

“You just have to tell him how you feel, Shelley.” She brushed my hair back out of my face with her hands and wiped my tears. “You can do this. In fact, you have to do this, or you’ll never know.”

“You’re right. I have to do this. I need to do this. I’m going to do this!” I said as I knocked my knuckles together.

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The wedding day came and I still hadn’t done it. I had tried to connect with Julian several times during that week but he had been busy with last minute wedding arrangements. I’d left him several messages—all of which he returned. The problem was that Nicole was with him each time he called back. That made me lose my nerve. I couldn’t pour out my heart to him with her in the background wondering what I was saying. It was bad enough that Julian would have to witness my plea for him to rethink his decision. The last thing I needed was her to also be able to give a play-by-play.

Gina and I were rushing around her apartment trying to get ourselves together. Our goal was to get to the chapel early so that I could talk to Julian before the ceremony. Although we both thought it was in bad taste, we both knew it had to be done. At that point I didn't care about taste or class. I just wanted what I felt was rightfully mine. And how could he not choose me? My long black hair was swept into an up-do that was so tight my head throbbed each time my heart beat. My makeup was flawless. I almost didn't recognize myself in the mirror. My lavender dress was tight in all the right places but loose enough that I could move around comfortably. My five-inch heels, which matched my dress perfectly—courtesy of Nine West, were killing me. The three extra strength Tylenols that I had taken with a glass of champagne were helping with that though.

The car service was over forty minutes late, which really pissed me off. I kept trying Julian's cell phone, but each time I got his voice mail. Gina and I were yelling at the driver the whole time as he sped down the street and onto the ramp for highway 785. It wasn't until we got on the highway that we noticed the backup. We yelled for the driver to do something, but of course we knew he couldn't.

“We're going to miss the wedding!” I yelled.

“Maybe it's fate,” Gina said as the car crept forward an inch.

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The wedding had already started by the time we got there. For some reason, seats had been saved for us on the third row from the front on the groom's side. I had expected us to be seated in the back with the rest of the latecomers. Once we were seated, I noticed how handsome Julian looked in his white tuxedo. Everything about him was perfect

from head to toe. Nicole's dress was fit for a queen. It was white, with beads and lace all over. It had a train that seemed to be a mile long. She looked amazing, though I think I would have looked better in the dress.

I couldn't pay attention to a word the preacher was saying because I was so caught up in my thoughts. It was too late. Maybe Gina was right. Maybe it was fate. I was fighting back tears when Gina nudged me. Julian had turned towards the side and appeared to be slyly scanning the crowd. He did that two or three times before the murmuring started. Before I knew it, he was whispering to Nicole and then the preacher. The whole audience, including Gina and I, gasped as he left the alter.

"What's he doing?" I said.

"I have no idea," Gina replied as the audience broke into a sea of chatter. He stopped at the row I was on and whispered something into his cousin, Edward's ear, who then passed the message on to Julian's aunt, Laurel. Gina was the first to get the message and she looked me in the eye and said, "Julian needs to talk to you."

"Now?" I said dumb-founded.

"Just go see what he wants before this scene gets any worse," Gina said.

I scooted past everyone and followed Julian up the aisle. I made sure that I didn't make eye contact with anyone by keeping my eyes on the backs of his shoes. The people were chattering loudly now and I could hear my name being said repeatedly. Once we made it out into the hallway, he led me into the preacher's study. The room was dimly lit and there were books everywhere. He shut the door behind us.

"What's going on, Julian?" I said.

"You were late," he replied.

“Yeah, but I got here as soon as I could. What’s wrong?”

“I know the timing is off and I should have done this months ago, but I had to talk to you.”

“Actually, I need to talk to you too.”

“Ok, Shelley, what you have done for me these past few months is nothing short of amazing,” he said. We were face-to face at this point. “I couldn’t have asked for a better support system. I never would have expected my feelings to grow for you the way they have. When I look at you, I can’t describe the joy that I feel for having you in my life.”

“Julian, there are hundreds of people out there wondering what’s going on. You are right, the timing couldn’t be worse.”

“Let them wait. I have to do this. I need you in my life. I’m glad to have you in my life,” he said as he caressed the sides of my face with his hands. I hoped that he didn’t wipe any of my makeup off.

“I need you too, Julian.”

“I can’t express in words the way I feel about you. You are truly a blessing.” He kissed my forehead before giving me a big hug.

“I can’t believe this is happening. I have dreamed about this moment where we could express our true feelings. I love you, Julian. I really do,” I said as I stared up into his eyes. I laid my head on his chest and palmed his back.

“I love you too, Shelley. In ways that no one else will ever probably be able to comprehend. That is why I need you to be up there with me.”

“Up where?”

“Up at the alter with me during the ceremony.”

“Julian, I can’t marry you today.” I said as I stared into his eyes again. He frowned at me for a moment and then broke into a laugh.

“You are so silly.”

“I’m serious. I can’t marry you like this.”

“Shelley, who’s talking about marriage?” he said. I was just quiet. I had no idea what was going on. Someone started banging on the door and asked if everything was all right. Julian asked for five more minutes.

“I’m confused. You need me at the alter, but—”

“You are my closest companion. If anybody belongs up there, it’s you.”

“I don’t know what you are asking me, Julian.”

“I need you to be standing there beside me when Nicole and I exchange vows.”

“What?”

“Please say you’ll do it. I don’t feel right having Rupert up there when there is someone who means a lot more to me sitting out there in the audience.”

“I don’t know what to say.” I was getting a little choked up.

“With Nicole on my left and you on my right, everything will be perfect. Make me the happiest man in the world and say yes.”

“Yes,” I said as I wiped my eyes and tried to act enthused.

“Now what did you want to tell me?”

“Oh, it’s not important...just that I’m happy for you.” The tears were rolling nonstop.

“Thank you,” he said as he kissed my forehead and led me out of the office. Before heading back into the chapel, he sent an usher to announce to the pastor who in turn informed the audience that the ceremony would continue, but with a slight change.

Our arms were interlocked as we headed down the aisle. It was the hardest thing I had ever had to do in my life. For me, it was as if I was just handing him over to Nicole—which was why I walked as slowly as I could. When he tried to pick up the pace, I stopped completely and pointed to my shoes. The audience laughed at my antics, which forced me to smile. It made the tears that were streaming down my face seem like tears of joy instead of tears of pain.

I spotted Gina as we got closer to the front. She smiled at me. I nodded my head from side to side in response. When we finally made it to the base of the alter, Nicole and I locked eyes. I could tell she was pissed, but she had no choice but to get over it. Julian walked me to my place, which was two steps below and to the right of his and the ceremony continued.

Not only had I lost the battle, I also had a spectacular view to witness my losing the war.

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