

“Stupid, stupid, stupid! How could I have been so daft, so stupid?”

Seeing Chandler after a week was like the first drops of water on dry terrain. She soaked in the sight of him like a sponge, the vise around her heart releasing a little, and her eyes devoured him like a meal. His blue eyes had widened, taking in the sight of her too, and for that one moment, everything was alright with the world.

Then, she saw the woman clinging to his arm and the way she looked up at him, confusion shining in her big hazel eyes. There was familiarity there that came easy to both of them, and she knew immediately that she was his newest girlfriend. And barely a week after they had walked away from each other.

Shauna shook with rage, but also with sorrow as tears streamed down her face in the privacy of her office. The vise around her heart tightened further, and she reached up a hand to rub at her chest, but it was scarcely enough to make a difference. Her tears flowed freely as she replayed their interaction over and over again in the back of her closed eyelids.

She saw the carefree manner in which he related with her, and pain stabbed in her heart when she remembered that he had never been that free with her before. They had not even went out for long to build that kind of familiarity, and he broke it off by being unwilling to go further.

And to think she had been holding on, day after day, expecting him anywhere – just to talk. At the office, at her apartment, in the parking lot – anywhere. She had been waiting for him to come for her, but he had already gotten over her and found himself a new woman while at it.

Shauna sat up straight as she made up her mind. She wiped her tears off with the back of her hand and sniffed once. Chandler McKinley was not worth wasting tears over. He was a playboy as he had demonstrated time and time again.

He moved on, and it was time for her to move on too. It didn't matter that he was the first man to give her an orgasm, or rock her world with just a kiss, or the way his intense blue eyes focused on her and made her – *No!*

She interrupted that train of thought immediately. So what if he did all that and more? He wasn't ready to give her what really mattered – his heart, and neither was he ready to take the gift of her heart. There were other men willing to do all those things, as well as give her their hearts without her even asking. And Shauna was going to do her damned best to meet one of those guys.

“Just you wait, Chandler McKinley,” she said into the empty office. I'll get over you and get my happily-ever-after as well,” she said into the office, her voice firm with a steely determination.

For the rest of the day, Shauna threw herself into work completely, even staying past her closing time. Hours later, she raised her head and pulled herself out of focus work mode to see the sky dark outside. She stood up and stretched, wincing in pain when her muscles and joints protested.

Then, she gathered up her things and wondered what to have for dinner as she went down to her car. Then, she dismissed the thought almost immediately, opting for takeout instead.

She reached the parking lot and instinctively started looking for Chandler's metallic blue Audi. She let out a sigh of disappointment when she didn't find it, then caught herself as the disappointment washed through her to be replaced by anger.

Why do I care if he's still around or not? It's not like I want to see him any more than he wants to see me. He can work himself to the bone for all I care, she thought, gritting her teeth. She entered her own car, a black Chevrolet, and drove, edging on the speed limit all the way home.

When Shauna got home, she was positively livid. She kicked off her shoes and went to her fridge to retrieve a bottle of red wine. She didn't bother with a glass. She planned on getting rip-roaring drunk. She uncorked the bottle and took a deep swallow before she slammed it down on the coffee table and took out her phone. She stared at it for several moments, wondering what to do.

Borrow a page from the playboy handbook, her subconscious said, *what did he do?*

"He got himself a new girlfriend," she said aloud.

Then that's exactly what you should do, her subconscious replied.

On that note, she unlocked her phone and opened the Meet app. Instinct took over, and she clicked *Current Match*, before she realized that she didn't have any current match. She cursed, then clicked the *Find New Match* button and relaxed as the page started to load. She took another swallow of her wine and perked up as the page finished its loading.

She had a range of diverse matches, from 26-year-old Thomas, who lived in her city and was a graduate student, to 40-year-old Harris, who was a woodworker and a father of two. Nobody caught her attention, and she sighed in frustration, tears springing to her eyes.

Why was it so *hard* for her to get over him? Why couldn't she find someone new as easily as he did? Why did she have to remain alone while he moved on? She rocked herself on the sofa as she cried, each sob echoing in the silence of her apartment that had suddenly become too loud to bear. She cried until the tears didn't flow anymore, and she felt like a piece of cloth that was wrung out.

Immediately, she felt ashamed of herself. Where did those thoughts come from? She had never been one to use anyone as a rebound. It was unfair to both parties, and she believed that it was necessary to heal from a breakup before entering into another relationship.

It was a lesson she learnt from one of her most painful breakups yet, a relationship she had in college. He had broken up with his girlfriend the previous month, but she didn't know that when he asked her out.

They had been going out for almost 3 months, and she had fallen in love with him, when he suddenly broke up with her, unprovoked. When she asked him why, he told her that his ex-girlfriend was back in the picture and he wanted to go back to her.

Apparently, he never stopped loving her and had only asked Shauna out because he thought she was cute and wanted to make his ex-girlfriend jealous. She teetered on the edge of depression for several months after that, and her grades suffered for it that semester.

Since then, she swore that she would never use anyone as a rebound and put anyone through such agony. And here she was, years later, contemplating it. Shame bloomed in her chest and sobered her up.

Abruptly, she stood up and picked up her shoes. After a brief moment of hesitation, she picked up the bottle of wine and went into her room. She was going to indulge, just for tonight, just to dull the edge of the pain a little. Then, she'd wake up tomorrow and keep living, day by day, until she got over Chandler McKinley.

It didn't make her heart wrench in pain any less, or the tears pour out like waterfalls any less.

"Now, tell me what has happened in the past week, and why you were drinking on the floor of your office, and don't you dare omit anything."

Chandler took in a deep breath and sighed. His friend had demanded an explanation, and he was going to give him one. He owed him that much. He raised his head to look his friend in the eyes, and more than the anger and irritation he saw there, he also saw genuine concern and weariness.

"A little over a week ago," he began, "Shauna came into my office and came to submit a letter for transfer to another department. That was two days after our date, and she cited it as a reason for the transfer. She couldn't live with herself, that she had become like my previous girlfriends. I...we had sex, and then I panicked and said it was a mistake, and I'll approve her transfer to another department." The words left a bitter taste in his mouth, but he forced them out.

"I've been miserable since then. I miss her, so much," he whispered, his voice breaking on the last word.

"So what happened today?" asked Lordell patiently.

Chandler collected himself and sighed. "Gabiella de Lucci came to my office today. She needed a favor...and a quick fuck." His lips twisted with disgust. He had almost succumbed. "I granted her the favor, but I couldn't bring myself to...do it."

"She didn't do it for me anymore. No one did. She sat on my laps and kissed me, but all I could think about was Shauna, and how it was with her...magical. And then I went ahead to call it a mistake." *I am an asshole*, he thought to himself.

"Then?" Lordell pressed gently. His brown eyes filled with compassion were trained on him, and he drew strength from him. He took in another deep breath.

"She wanted to leave, and she asked me to see her off, so I did. I offered my elbow and she took it. That was how we always walked and I thought nothing of it. But Shauna was outside, and she saw us and...I guess she thought that we were dating, and so soon. She left and I just stood there and watched her leave, like a coward." He stayed silent for a moment, trying to collect his thoughts.

“After Gabriella left, I went back into the office and took the alcohol. I just wanted to stop the pain so I drank and drank. It still hurt. It still hurts,” he whispered. He could feel tears welling in his eyes, but he could not stop them as they rolled down his cheeks.

He ducked his head, embarrassed, and he was glad that Lordell afforded him a few moments of privacy. He heard his friend exhale loudly, and he raised his head. He wiped the tears from his cheeks and waited.

“So, what do you want to do?” Lordell asked.

Chandler shrugged. “I don’t know.” His lips curled in a bitter smile. “I guess she would never want to see me after this. I don’t blame her. I am such a c –”

“I asked what you wanted to do, Chandler,” Lordell cut in.

“I don’t know,” he whispered brokenly. He didn’t know how to move on, how to continue living. He didn’t know how to deal with the pain.

“How do you feel about Shauna?” Lordell asked after several moments.

Chandler thought about it before he said, “She makes me want to become a better person. All I care about is her opinion. She’s like a beam of sunshine and her smile can uplift my mood. And she’s just...I just...even if we’re not talking, her just being there is everything.”

“You know what that is called, right? It’s the same way I feel about Yasmine, and I’m not denying it like you are. Chandler, you are in love with Shauna.”

Chandler didn’t reply. His emotions were just thrown into turmoil, and he had no way to put them into words. He didn’t try.

Lordell sighed and tried another approach. “Why don’t you talk to her?”