

# The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TAYLOR JENKINS REID

Taylor Jenkins Reid was born in Maryland in 1983. She graduated from Emerson College with a degree in media studies before moving to Los Angeles to work as a casting assistant. It was then that she realized her passion for writing, signed with a literary agent, and subsequently published her first novel, *Forever, Interrupted* in 2013. Since then, Reid has published eight novels, four of which make up what readers refer to as the “famous women quartet”—novels which focus on prominent fictional women and share a handful of recurring characters. Reid lives in Los Angeles with her husband and daughter.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reid’s creation of the character of Evelyn Hugo draws inspiration from a few different Old Hollywood figures, in particular Elizabeth Taylor, one of the biggest stars of the 1950s. Taylor was married eight times to seven different men. Another is Rita Hayworth, a 1940s star who, like the fictional Evelyn Hugo, changed her name and her hair color to conceal her Spanish heritage and appear whiter. Reid’s novel also focuses on the complexities of living as a famous LGBTQ+ person in the mid-20th century, a time during which being openly gay could jeopardize a person’s safety and career. The book also references the Stonewall riots of 1969 and the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, events of which Reid’s characters are at the periphery but eminently aware. The Stonewall riots were a series of protests led by the gay community following a police raid of the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in the Greenwich Village in Lower Manhattan. At the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, LGBTQ+ communities, whom the disease disproportionately affected, suffered stigmatization and became the subject of national hysteria.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Reid cites several biographies of Old Hollywood stars as inspiration for the character of Evelyn Hugo. *Scandals of Classic Hollywood* by Anne Helen Petersen discusses Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift’s friendship (Clift was gay, and the victim of a car accident, much like the novel’s Harry Cameron). *Ava Gardner: The Secret Conversations* is an exclusive set of tell-all interviews between Gardner and a ghostwriter; *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* echoes the book both in content and structure. Many of Reid’s other novels, including *Daisy Jones & The Six* and *Carrie Soto is Back*, focus on similar subjects of

famous women with towering reputations and unwieldy ambition. Several bestselling contemporary novels by other authors also share a Hollywood setting, including *The Work Wife* by Alison B. Hart, which focuses on contemporary Hollywood and the impact of #MeToo allegations, while others share Reid’s historical interest such as *City of Girls* by Elizabeth Gilbert follows one woman’s romantic exploits, set against backdrop of the theater scene of 1940s New York.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo
- **When Written:** Mid-2010s
- **Where Written:** Los Angeles
- **When Published:** 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel, Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Los Angeles, New York City, and the southern coast of Spain between the 1940s and 2010s
- **Climax:** Evelyn reveals to Monique that Harry’s deceased lover was Monique’s father
- **Antagonist:** Though several of Evelyn’s husbands treat her cruelly, both physically and emotionally, the novel’s most consistent antagonist is the voracious print media, which inflames and misconstrues details of Evelyn’s life to stoke public opinion.
- **Point of View:** First Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**The Small Screen.** In 2022, Netflix announced its plans to create a film adaptation of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*.

**Going Viral.** Though *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* was published in 2017, it hit a new stride of popularity in 2021. When Reid and her publicity team looked for the reason, they found it was because of BookTok—the subsection of the social media app TikTok devoted to books—where many influencers were sharing their excitement for the book’s LGBTQ+ themes.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Evelyn Hugo, a movie star of the 1960s and 1970s, is now 79 years old. As she prepares to sell 12 of her most famous dresses at auction, she reaches out to *Vivant*, a prominent magazine, to request an interview with one of its reporters, Monique Grant. Neither Monique nor her editor, Frankie, can work out why Evelyn requested to speak to Monique, a lower-

ranked reporter. Monique leaps at the opportunity to distract herself from her separation from David, her husband. She throws herself into researching Evelyn's life, most notably her seven husbands, and ends up with one burning question: "Who was the love of Evelyn's life?"

When Monique arrives at Evelyn's apartment for the interview, Evelyn soon tells her that, instead of an interview for *Vivant*, she wants Monique to write her biography and sell it after Evelyn's death. Though Monique presses her for more details, Evelyn only tells her that she'll understand everything once the interview is over. Monique begins interviewing Evelyn daily, starting with the subject of Evelyn's first husband. From there, the novel jumps back and forth between Evelyn's past and Monique's present.

When Evelyn is just 15 years old, she marries Ernie Diaz, a man in her Hell's Kitchen apartment building, because she knows he's moving to Hollywood, and she can escape with him. She has no intention to be Ernie's housewife, however, and instead spends every day at a diner where she attempts to attract the attention of producers. Eventually, a young producer, Harry Cameron, notices her and signs her to Sunset Studios. After struggling to land roles that offer her more than one line of dialogue, Evelyn eventually exerts enough influence at Sunset Studios to convince Harry and Ari Sullivan, another producer, to cast her as Jo in an adaptation of [Little Women](#). To appeal to the widest possible American audience (Evelyn is Latina), Evelyn transforms her appearance by dyeing her hair **blond**, changing her name, and divorcing Ernie. Evelyn stars in a few generic romantic comedies and falls in love with and marries Don Adler. But a few weeks after their wedding, Don begins to physically abuse Evelyn.

Meanwhile, in the present, Monique receives a package from Monique's mother: a box of Monique's father's photographs from his days working on movie sets (Monique's father died when she was a young girl). Monique reflects on the challenges of her parents' biracial marriage and her father's advice to find a job she loves.

Evelyn's history picks up on the set of [Little Women](#), which has finally started shooting. Evelyn and her co-star Celia St. James strike up a mutually beneficial relationship: Evelyn will help Celia get noticed around town, and in return, Celia will give Evelyn acting lessons. A tabloid article spreads the rumor that Evelyn would rather spend time with celebrities like Celia than start a family with Don. When Evelyn realizes the story came from her maid, Paula, she fires Paula and plants a false story about having a miscarriage to restore her image through public sympathy.

At the premiere of [Little Women](#), Evelyn realizes Celia's performance has overshadowed everyone else's, but she's happy, not jealous. At the afterparty, Evelyn's friend Ruby tells her that Celia is a lesbian and that Don is cheating on Evelyn.

When Evelyn sees Celia, she kisses her. After she finds Don with another woman in a bedroom at the party, she asks Harry to take her home. Harry takes Evelyn to his house, and the next day, she returns home to see that Don has already left.

Evelyn stays with Celia, where Harry delivers her the divorce papers from Don. The papers stipulate that, though Evelyn will keep the house and half of her and Don's money, she's not allowed to discuss their marriage with the media. In addition, Sunset Studios will drop Evelyn and blackball her from an Oscar nod. Later, Evelyn and Celia have sex for the first time.

Celia attends the Academy Awards while Evelyn watches on the TV. When Celia wins the Oscar for best supporting actress, Evelyn kisses the TV and chips her tooth. After the Hollywood studios lose interest in Evelyn, she meets French director Max Girard, who casts her in a movie called *Boute-en-Train*; the film features a topless shot of her. The movie's release turns Evelyn into an international sensation. Meanwhile, to quash rumors about her close relationship with Celia, Evelyn elopes with popstar Mick Riva. Evelyn has sex with Riva to seduce him, but the couple annuls their marriage the next morning. Later, Evelyn discovers she's pregnant. Celia, who didn't realize Evelyn was willing to go as far as sex to ensure a successful elopement, breaks up with her.

Evelyn marries Rex North to generate interest in [Anna Karenina](#), the adaptation they are starring in together. After a few years of marriage, Rex tells Evelyn he's in love with someone else and needs to divorce Evelyn. Evelyn stages a false affair with Harry, who is gay. When both Evelyn and Celia lose in the same category of the Oscars that year, they find each other in the bathroom and forgive each other. Evelyn marries Harry and moves to Manhattan with him, allowing her and Celia, as well as Harry and Celia's husband John (who is also gay, and seeing Harry), to live out their secret relationships under the cover of heterosexual marriages.

When Evelyn turns 36, she realizes her marriage with Harry is the longest of all her marriages. She and Harry agree to have a baby together, and Evelyn gets Celia's consent. A year later, Evelyn and Harry have a daughter, Connor. Celia encourages Evelyn to film another movie with Max. Evelyn will have to act alongside Don in the movie, so she meets with him to make peace. Max convinces Evelyn to film an explicit sex scene, which Evelyn agrees to and shoots without asking Celia. When she tells Celia about the scene, Celia leaves her and files for divorce from John. A few years later, John dies of a heart attack. To distract Harry from his grief, she convinces him to produce Max's next film, which she'll also star in. After she, Harry, and Max all win Oscars for the film, Max asks Evelyn to marry him.

Meanwhile, in present-day New York, Monique arrives at her apartment after a day of writing to find David waiting there for her. He asks her to keep working at their marriage, but she tells him the relationship is over.

Evelyn's history picks back up the day after her Oscar win. She and Harry agree to get a divorce. Evelyn marries Max, who she soon realizes is more interested in her beauty and celebrity status than her real personality. Evelyn begins to exchange letters with Celia. Eventually, Celia agrees to meet Evelyn and tells her she's dying of a pulmonary disease. The two rekindle their relationship. Evelyn divorces Max and tries to convince Harry to move to Spain with her and Celia, but Harry suggests they move to LA instead, where he's found someone he wants to have a future with. Later that evening, Evelyn finds Harry unconscious in a crashed car with a dead passenger beside him. Harry dies after Evelyn takes him to the hospital.

Six months after Harry's death, Connor's unruly behavior gains press attention, and Evelyn knows she has to get Connor out of town. Evelyn and Connor move to Spain with Celia and Celia's brother, Robert, who becomes Evelyn's seventh husband. In Spain, Connor refocuses on her schoolwork while bonding with Robert. Meanwhile, Celia's health deteriorates, and she dies a few years later.

Evelyn and Robert move back to New York City where Evelyn spends her time fundraising. Robert dies 11 years later. Connor is diagnosed with breast cancer and dies at age 41. Evelyn realizes that people will only understand the whole truth of her story, particularly her romantic relationship with Celia, if she tells the story herself, in the form of this biography. She asks Monique to emphasize that she no longer cares about wealth or celebrity—she just wants to be with the people she loves.

Finally, Evelyn reveals to Monique that the passenger who died in the car crash with Harry was James Grant, Monique's father. She gives Monique the letter that Monique's father wrote to Harry, explaining that he could never leave Monique or Monique's mother, even though he loved Harry. Monique, enraged, asks Evelyn when she can publish the book—in other words, when Evelyn will die. Evelyn reveals she has late-stage breast cancer.

Monique returns to Evelyn's apartment the next morning for a cover shoot for *Vivant's* article about Evelyn. After the photographers leave, Evelyn says goodbye to Monique, and Monique understands that Evelyn has chosen to die on her own terms, and that she's saying goodbye forever. Evelyn dies soon after, and *Vivant* publishes an article by Monique which reveals Evelyn's bisexuality and includes an excerpt from her upcoming biography.

the low-level reporter specifically. This manipulative, opaque behavior is characteristic of Evelyn, who has sacrificed her name, identity, and morals to achieve fame and success. For instance, Evelyn got married seven times—not for love, but for a greater chance at fame and success. Evelyn's husbands and daughter, Connor, have all died by the time she gives her interview, however, and being all alone has forced her duality as a loving, caring woman whose ambition leads her to act cruelly and pragmatically. Evelyn's care for the women who help in her home—first Luisa, then Grace—suggests she holds deep respect for working-class people due to her own childhood of financial insecurity. The challenges of having a same-sex partner in the mid- and late-1900s, building genuine relationships despite the predatory nature of the media, and grieving many deep losses in secret all contribute to Evelyn's character development. At 79, Evelyn is now vulnerable enough not only to tell the world her whole life story, but to inform Monique of the reality of Monique's father's death (Evelyn's best friend, producer Harry Cameron, killed him in a drunk driving accident). Evelyn's transformation can also be seen in her eventual decision to stop acting and move to Spain with Celia, her true love, which is only possible after Evelyn realizes that love and honesty make her happier than wealth and fame.

**Monique Grant** – Monique Grant is a low-level reporter who jumps at the chance to interview Evelyn Hugo, though at first, she doesn't understand why Evelyn has specifically requested her. Monique gains Evelyn's trust by reassuring Evelyn that she'll make every effort to interpret her story with care. Over the many days of interviews, Monique realizes that she has much in common with Evelyn, particularly her ambition, which Monique's father encouraged in her before his early death, and her attitude toward her divorce, which she learns is less about heartbreak and more about the disappointment of having failed at her marriage. As the interviews progress, Monique reveals her capacity to demand what she wants, both from Evelyn and from her boss, Frankie, and she begins to admire Evelyn for demonstrating this same capacity throughout her life. Eventually, Evelyn reveals to Monique why she chose Monique to interview her: Evelyn was instrumental in covering up the circumstances of Monique's father's death. Learning this allows Monique to come to terms with the complicated duality that she and Evelyn share: though she's angry with Evelyn, she knows she might've done something just as morally dubious to ensure the safety of her loved ones.

**Celia St. James** – Celia St. James is an actor and the love of Evelyn's life. Celia intimidates Evelyn with her superior acting talent in rehearsals for *Little Women*, but eventually the two form a mutually beneficial relationship when Celia offers Evelyn acting coaching in return for Evelyn making public appearances with her. Though Celia is less cunning than Evelyn, her appetite for fame and success is almost as keen. Eventually,



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Evelyn Hugo** – Evelyn Hugo is the novel's protagonist and the subject of reporter Monique Grant's interviews. At 79, Evelyn, one of the biggest stars of Old Hollywood, convinces Monique to write her biography—but without disclosing why she chose

Celia and Evelyn begin a romantic relationship which reveals Celia to be naïve and idealistic in the face of Evelyn's pragmatic realism (Celia was born rich and has never had to struggle financially, whereas Evelyn came from nothing). The couple breaks up twice, both decisions stemming from Celia's disapproval of Evelyn prioritizing public admiration and success over their relationship. Though the couple endures hardship due to Evelyn's obsession with her public image and the dangers of being openly gay, Celia never relinquishes her desire for happiness. Toward the end of her life, Celia asks Evelyn to move to a small town in Spain with her, where they can live anonymously and be together romantically in their later years. Not long after retiring to Spain, Celia dies of a pulmonary disease.

**Harry Cameron** – Harry Cameron is a film producer who is Evelyn's first and best friend when she arrives in Hollywood; they eventually marry and have a child (Connor) together. Though Harry tries to stay somewhat detached from Evelyn, not wanting his secret identity as a gay man to jeopardize her hopes of success, he eventually builds up the courage to tell her about his relationship with Celia's husband John Braverman. Being married to Evelyn allows Harry to secretly continue his relationship with John (while Evelyn and Celia continue their own secret relationship). But John's early death leaves Harry heartbroken, and his alcohol addiction worsens. Still, Harry is a devoted father, caring for Connor even as he grieves, and he remains committed to Evelyn's success. He takes Evelyn's side at almost every juncture, admiring her pragmatism and ambition—qualities he shares with her. Harry dies after driving drunk, and his lover (who turns out to be Monique's father) also dies. At the end of the novel, it's revealed that Evelyn removed Harry from the car and claimed he died of an aneurysm to protect Harry's image.

**Don Adler** – Don Adler is Evelyn's second husband. The son of actors, Don feels a huge pressure to also become a huge film star, so he's really sensitive when he receives poor reviews. Though Evelyn loves him and considers their relationship genuine, Don begins to physically abuse her soon after they marry. His tendency to hit and push Evelyn surfaces in moments of stress, particularly when Evelyn threatens (knowingly or accidentally) to endanger his reputation or make him seem less powerful in front of influential people. Evelyn's growing stardom also intimidates Don, and so he tries (unsuccessfully) to force her to take his last name, quit acting, and start a family with him. He continues to exert his influence over Evelyn's life when the terms of their divorce include a stipulation forbidding her to discuss their relationship with the press. Don eventually apologizes to Evelyn for the way he treated her during their marriage, though it takes him a few decades for him to do so.

**Connor Cameron** – Connor Cameron is the daughter of Evelyn and Harry. She grows up between their apartments in New

York City. In her early teenage years, she begins to withdraw from her parents, particularly Evelyn, and when Harry dies, Connor's behavior spins out of control: when she's 14, Evelyn finds her having a threesome with two friends, and an article in a tabloid notes her tendency to frequent clubs around the city and take drugs. After moving to Spain to live with Evelyn, Celia, and Robert, Connor warms to her mother again, focuses on academic work, and gains admission to an Ivy League school. Though she begins a career in finance, she realizes she's happier as a teacher. Connor's illness and death due to breast cancer, along with Evelyn's matching diagnosis, motivate Evelyn to donate to breast cancer research.

**John Braverman** – John Braverman is Celia's husband and Harry's lover. He marries Celia around the same time Evelyn marries Rex North, but Harry eventually tells Evelyn that John is his lover and that John's marriage to Celia is merely a marriage of convenience. John lives in New York with Celia, Evelyn, and Harry for a long time, and though he has a reputation as a tough football player, he's the most softhearted one of the four. When he dies at the age of 50, he leaves Harry and Celia heartbroken, suggesting that though his romantic relationship was with Harry, he was nevertheless a devoted husband and friend to Celia.

**Max Girard** – Max Girard is a French New Wave film director and Evelyn's sixth husband. After meeting Evelyn, who immediately captivates him, he casts her in his films *Boute-en-Train* and *Three A.M.* on the condition that she agrees to film nude scenes. Max and Evelyn's relationship becomes sexual and romantic after their film, *All for Us*, wins them each an Oscar. But though Evelyn feels genuine affection for Max, she soon realizes he is more interested in her as a celebrity than as a person, and he'd rather use her to boost his public image. This becomes even clearer when Max finds the letters Celia wrote to Evelyn and threatens Evelyn that he'll reveal her sexuality to the media. When he eventually does so, after Evelyn files for divorce, it's apparent from the media reaction labelling him "bitter" that he's less respected in Hollywood than she is.

**Robert Jamison** – Robert Jamison is Celia's brother and Evelyn's seventh, and final, husband. He agrees to move to Spain with Celia, Evelyn, and Connor. Though Evelyn allows him to have as many romantic entanglements as he wants, he bonds with Connor and becomes a father figure and mentor to her. He's wracked with grief when Celia dies, lying down to weep beside Evelyn instead of attempting to comfort her. Evelyn's marriage to Robert allows her to inherit Celia's money and belongings after he dies.

**Mick Riva** – Mick Riva is a pop star and Evelyn's third husband. Mick makes his attraction to Evelyn public by expressing his desire to marry her during interviews, suggesting he's an extremely confident man who can imagine Evelyn reciprocating his interest. When Evelyn decides to elope with Mick to grab media attention, she understands that he's an ego-driven man



who wants to always have the upper hand. Mick's preoccupation with glamour and physical beauty becomes even clearer the night after his elopement with Evelyn when, after a night of deliberately lackluster sex on her part, he immediately tires of her and suggests an annulment.

**Rex North** – Rex North is Evelyn's fourth husband. The similarities he shares with Evelyn—namely his pragmatism, which includes changing his name to succeed as a film star just as Evelyn did—endear him to her and lay the grounds for a mutually beneficial (though almost completely loveless) marriage. His opportunistic nature is evident in his decision to marry Evelyn in order to help their film succeed at the box office. Ultimately, though, Rex reveals his romantic side when he informs Evelyn of his romance with Joy Nathan.

**Monique's Father/The Passenger** – Monique's father is also Harry's lover and the man Evelyn finds dead in the passenger seat of the car Harry crashes while driving drunk. Monique has grown up believing that her father was the driver, but at the end of the novel, Evelyn reveals that she manipulated the crash site to protect Harry's image. Monique's father is a persistent influence in Monique's life even after his early death; he constantly encouraged Monique to find a joyful career, advice she follows perhaps even more closely due to his absence. Monique's father hid his sexuality from Monique and Monique's mother, and though he loved Harry, the letter Evelyn found in Harry's pocket on the night of his death reveals that Monique's father loved and treasured his wife and daughter too much to leave them for Harry.

**Ruby Reilly** – Ruby Reilly is one of the first actors Evelyn forms a relationship with in Hollywood. She stars alongside Evelyn and Celia in [Little Women](#) and seems more threatened by Celia than Evelyn does, suggesting both that Evelyn's relationship with Celia is particularly close, and that Ruby is hungry for fame and success. Evelyn refers to Ruby as a "fair-weather friend," meaning that Ruby will help and support Evelyn only when it suits Ruby to do so. Nevertheless, Ruby's help is integral to Evelyn's plan to have paparazzi photograph her and Harry passionately kissing. Ruby marries Don after he and Evelyn divorce, and when she tells Evelyn that Don abused her just as he abused Evelyn, Evelyn realizes that by not telling Ruby about Don's behavior, she unintentionally put Ruby in harm's way.

**Ernie Diaz** – Ernie Diaz is Evelyn's first husband. Though his marriage to Evelyn allows her to get to Hollywood and begin her acting career, he pays little attention to her interests and expects her to behave like a typical housewife of the 1950s. When Evelyn leaves him at the advice of Sunset Studio's producers, Ernie is heartbroken, revealing that he was completely oblivious to Evelyn taking advantage of him.

**David** – David is Monique's husband. At the beginning of the book, the couple is separated, and David is living in San

Francisco. The separation allows Monique to reassess her relationship with him, and she ultimately realizes that she's not all that sad about the marriage ending—in fact, David was a safe option for a partner, and he never truly fulfilled her.

**Evelyn's Mother** – Evelyn's mother emigrates to the United States from Cuba with Evelyn's father when she's 17 years old. She performs in off-Broadway productions and attempts to save enough money to leave Evelyn's father and go to Hollywood with Evelyn—a dream that she passes on to Evelyn after her early death. Evelyn's mother is a motivational figure in Evelyn's life, which Evelyn demonstrates when she expresses her desire for her new name to bear a resemblance to the name Evelyn's mother chose for her.

**Luisa** – Luisa is the maid Evelyn hires to replace Paula. Evelyn respects Luisa and takes good care of her financially, which demonstrates Evelyn's empathy for working-class people. When she begins working for Evelyn, she insults Evelyn in Spanish while speaking to mother on the telephone, not realizing Evelyn can understand what she's saying. Lucia's surprise at Evelyn's ability to speak Spanish reminds Evelyn how much of her Latin American identity she sacrificed to achieve fame.

**Ari Sullivan** – Ari Sullivan is a film producer. Evelyn quickly understands that Ari is a powerful figure at Sunset Studios, and he proves himself to be corrupt and lecherous when he agrees to give Evelyn roles in films only after she allows him to orally pleasure her. He further demonstrates his corrupt nature when he agrees to Don's request to blackball Evelyn from an Oscar nomination after her divorce from Don.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Frankie** – Frankie is Monique's boss at *Vivant*. Monique admires her, and finds her intimidating, partly because Frankie is a biracial woman in a high-powered position—something Monique, who is also biracial, aspires to be.

**Monique's Mother** – Monique's mother is a devoted and caring presence in Monique's life. Though she didn't entirely approve of David as a husband for Monique, she supported their marriage, demonstrating her trust in her daughter. After David leaves, Monique's mother flies to visit Monique in New York City and comforts her.

**Grace** – Grace is Evelyn's assistant. She repeatedly expresses her gratitude to Evelyn for treating her so well as an employee, which demonstrates Evelyn's desire both to respect working-class people and to spend her money on the few people close to her who are still alive.

**Evelyn's Father** – Evelyn's father is her sole caregiver after Evelyn's mother dies. He does little to support Evelyn and, when her body begins to mature, he acts predatorily toward her. He dies shortly after Evelyn moves to Hollywood.

**Nick** – Nick is Evelyn’s driver on the night she finds Harry in a fatal car crash. He agrees to keep quiet about the details of that evening on the condition that Evelyn helps him land film roles, reminding Evelyn of the opportunism and greed that Hollywood is built on.

**Robert Logan** – Robert Logan is Celia’s date to the premiere of *Little Women*. Celia’s reluctance to go with Robert suggests that their relationship, which has featured in the tabloids, is nothing more than a photo opportunity.

**Paula** – Paula is Evelyn and Don’s maid. She speaks to the press about Evelyn and Don’s relationship twice, which suggests that she has no qualms about taking advantage of her employers for personal gain.

**Brick Thomas** – Brick Thomas is a former child star who goes on a date with Evelyn early on in her time at Sunset Studios. Evelyn finds Brick’s egotistical self-esteem distasteful.

**Joy Nathan** – Joy Nathan begins a relationship with Rex North while Rex is married to Evelyn. Joy’s pregnancy leads to Rex and Evelyn filing for divorce.

**Joan Marker** – Joan Marker is Celia’s friend. Their friendship features in the tabloids; it’s implied that Joan and Celia have a romantic relationship after Celia leaves Evelyn for the second time.

**Dr. Lopani** – Dr. Lopani is Evelyn’s doctor. He agrees to make a call to Evelyn and Don’s house to give Evelyn the false message that she’s had a miscarriage in order to plant a rumor with Paula.

**Greg** – Greg is Connor’s boyfriend.

Indeed, early in the novel, it’s hard to tell whether Evelyn has any morals at all, given that she’s able to justify even the most extreme situations and decisions by assessing how they’ll contribute to her personal success.

Soon, though, Evelyn’s pragmatic actions begin to jeopardize her relationships with the people she holds most dear. Her decision to film an explicit sex scene for the film *Three A.M.* without first asking Celia, her partner, how it’d make her feel leads to her relationship with Celia crumbling, demonstrating that when Evelyn prioritizes her soaring career over her respect for her friends and loved ones, she’ll lose what truly makes her happy. Because Evelyn started out in Hollywood with nothing, feeling no strong connection to anyone—not even her husband—it’s difficult for her to realize that a successful career is no substitute for happiness. Once she does realize this, however, she’s able to bow out of her career in order to care for her daughter, Connor, and Celia in a remote part of Spain, and finally to share her story with Monique, a reporter, despite the repercussions that telling her story may have on her legacy when specific details come to light. In the end, it’s through Evelyn’s deepest relationships that she learns what her true morals are: love, respect, and honesty—and that honoring these morals gives her far more satisfaction than wealth or success.



## FEMININITY, SEXUALITY, AND POWER

Throughout the novel, Evelyn constantly uses her feminine beauty and sexuality to secure success in a world run by men. Though at first, she’s frustrated that what many people admire about her—her appearance—is something she did nothing to earn, she quickly learns to use her sexuality to her advantage. Many of Evelyn’s early-career successes arise from situations where she uses her body to convince men to give her what she wants, whether that’s through marrying Ernie Diaz in order to move to Hollywood with him or allowing producer Ari Sullivan to pleasure her so that he’ll agree to give her lead roles in films. Evelyn understands what men want from her and decides to take something from them in return, effectively using her femininity as a weapon. Throughout her career, she continues to marry—and divorce—tactically, based on what each man can offer her, whether it’s a job or media approval.

However, the power Evelyn wields by using her sexuality and exploiting her femininity has its limits. For example, although she succeeds in eloping, marrying, and annulling her marriage with popstar Mick Riva, she finds herself carrying an unwanted pregnancy from their single sexual encounter. Though her plan succeeds, she’s still unable to control every element of it, and even though she uses her body to tempt Mick, she’s essentially powerless to control what he does with it. Ultimately, this means her plan—which was to draw media attention to her failed marriages so that they’d ignore her relationship with



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### AMBITION VS. MORALITY

Evelyn Hugo, the novel’s titular protagonist, must frequently choose between furthering her career and honoring her values. In her early teens, she realizes one of the only sources of power she has is her body, so she very quickly becomes accustomed to using it in order to get what she wants, justifying her actions based on their outcomes. When Evelyn divorces Ernie Diaz, her first husband, she does so because she knows she’ll gain more attention as a single woman, dating film stars, than as a married one. When she allows producer Ari Sullivan to orally pleasure her, she’s able to soothe her own physical discomfort with the idea that this situation will lead to the vital beginnings of a career on screen.

Celia—fails. When Evelyn tells Celia about the pregnancy (Celia didn't know Evelyn planned to have sex with Mick to entice him to marry her), she loses the relationship with Celia she was working so hard to preserve. Similarly, though Evelyn and her second husband, Don, both deliver admirable performances in Max Girard's movie *Three A.M.*, Don is awarded an Oscar while Evelyn is refused a nomination because the sex scene between them was too explicit, proving that though Evelyn's success depends on her willingness to share her body with individuals and audiences, she's also punished for her sexuality. Ultimately, though Evelyn consistently finds ways to subvert the power that men have over her by using the very thing they desire the most—her body—she can never truly overcome the limits a male-dominated industry imposes on her due to her gender.



### TRUTH AND IDENTITY

Throughout her life, Evelyn's desire to uphold a favorable public image with the media and her fans causes her to lie about herself and her

relationships. For instance, her fear of public backlash motivates her to keep her romantic relationship with Celia St. James a secret; Evelyn's secrecy causes lasting damage to her relationship with Celia, and it also prevents her from fully embracing her identity as a bisexual woman. The novel drives home the media's role in Evelyn's life by punctuating several of its chapters with clippings from tabloids that have spread rumors about Evelyn, her friends, and her loved ones. Whether these articles misconstrue or accurately depict Evelyn's public appearances and lifestyle changes, the one thing they have in common is their tendency to report the story that's most likely to get people talking. Evelyn capitalizes on the fickleness of the media in many instances, like when she asks her friend Ruby to alert a photographer to her tryst with Harry in order to deliberately start rumors about their relationship and take the focus off her romance with Celia, using rumor as a shield.

Eventually, though, Evelyn's constant obsession with the media and public opinion causes her to concoct ridiculously complex plans to distract people from seeing her real life. For example, her elopement with Mick Riva—a highly public stunt she created to deter rumors about her and Celia's relationship—backfires when Celia realizes the lengths Evelyn went to in order to make the situation seem authentic (Evelyn had sex with Mick), ultimately viewing the sex as a betrayal and breaking up with Evelyn. Evelyn eventually begins to resent the power the media has over her life, which contributes to her almost immediate distaste for Max Girard, whose obsession with Evelyn as a star rather than a person comes to light as soon as she marries him. Ultimately, Evelyn realizes that in her obsessive quest for public admiration and approval, she has sacrificed her personal relationships—and lost a lot of herself in the process, too. As Evelyn nears death, her decision to share her true story to the world in the biography she tasks Monique

with writing shows that her priorities have shifted. Ultimately, Evelyn realizes that in order to live a happy life and cultivate genuine relationships, she must prioritize her true desires and the needs of her loved ones above public approval.



### FAMILY

*The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* illustrates that a strong family bond does not come from marriage or blood relation, but from the depth of connection two or more people share. Though Evelyn is raised by Evelyn's father, she realizes as a young adult that she needs to put as much distance as possible between herself and him if she wants to succeed in life, suggesting that, despite his blood relation to her, Evelyn's father is not a vital part of her family. However, Evelyn's connection with Harry, a Hollywood producer with no blood relation to her, is built on a foundation of honesty and trust, and Evelyn understands that when she's with him, she feels as if she's with family. Evelyn's family structure becomes further complicated when it involves four people—Celia, John, Harry, and herself (the four characters act as a pair of straight couples in public but are involved in gay relationships with each other in private). Things become even more complicated when Evelyn's daughter, Connor, comes along. Despite these complications, the love the characters share for one another creates a familial bond unlike the one Evelyn had with her father. When all of these people have died, the loss crushes Evelyn: this found family meant more to her than any wealth or admiration she acquired throughout her life. With this illustration of a radically non-traditional family unit, in which each member commits to protecting the others from media attention and out of which arises many celebrations and acts of care, the book suggests that kindness, love, and self-sacrifice are more important elements of a family than any amount of shared DNA.



### SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### EVELYN'S BLOND HAIR

Evelyn's hair, which she dyes blond very early in her career, symbolizes the personal sacrifices she makes to achieve success and stardom. When Evelyn meets with Harry in her early days at Sunset Studios, they discuss the changes the production team thinks will transform Evelyn into a star. Her hair, which is natural dark brown, is only one of these changes. In addition, Evelyn changes her name from "Herrera" to "Hugo" to conceal her Cuban heritage and pass as white, and she's also not allowed to speak Spanish. Evelyn's blond hair, however, becomes one of the signature elements of her

physical appearance, made even more striking by its contrast with her dark eyebrows. Throughout the book, Evelyn repeatedly sacrifices her personal morals and her loyalty to her loved ones to achieve fame and success, and her blond hair is a constant outward reminder of these sacrifices—and all the pain and suffering Evelyn has inflicted on herself and her loved ones in the process. But Evelyn's dark eyebrows, which alert people that her blond hair isn't natural, is a small but vital sign that, though she's willing to change on the surface, she'll never completely lose her true self.



## THE COFFEE TABLE

The coffee table that furnishes Monique's apartment, which is missing until the end of the novel, is a symbol of Monique's separation from her husband, David, and her complex attitude towards his presence in her life. Early in the novel, Monique returns to her apartment and notices the absence of the coffee table, which was a wedding present from David's mom (David took the table following the couple's separation). Monique considers David petty for taking the table with him, especially because his new apartment is fully furnished. After a while, though, Monique forgets that the table is gone; at one point, she tries to put her feet up on it before remembering that David took it away—a sign that David's absence is no longer Monique's most pressing issue, especially now that she's become passionate about her job and is learning to exert her authority as a writer. Listening to Evelyn's reflections on her own divorces allows Monique to understand that she's been preoccupied with the idea of her marriage and her identity as a married woman rather than the truth of the relationship itself, which is perhaps another reason why the coffee table, not David's absence, is more upsetting to Monique. After Monique and David decide to get a divorce, David returns the coffee table to Monique. The physical presence of the coffee table signifies the finality of Monique's decision to move on from David without mulling over his absence or nursing the doubt and frustration that once plagued her.





## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Washington Square Press edition of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* published in 2018.

## Chapter 1 Quotes

☞☞ My mother raised me to be polite, to be demure. I have long operated under the idea that civility is subservience. But it hasn't gotten me very far, that type of kindness. The world respects people who think they should be running it. I've never understood that, but I'm done fighting it. I'm here to be Frankie one day, maybe bigger than Frankie. To do big, important work that I am proud of. To leave a mark. And I'm nowhere near doing that yet.

**Related Characters:** Monique Grant (speaker), Frankie, Monique's Mother

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 7-8

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Monique reflects on the values with which she was raised and considers that they might not be the best way to get what she wants out of her career. Though she was trained to be polite and submissive, it's becoming clear that she'll only gain the respect and success she desires if she changes her attitude.

This passage shows that Monique struggles with the implicit expectations society places on women. The word "demure," which describes shyness and modesty, is rarely used for men. The fact that Monique uses it to describe one of her core values reveals that, even though her superior at work is a woman, there are patriarchal standards embedded both in her workplace and in her mindset that prompt her to defer to her superiors without standing up for herself. But the passage as a whole, which appears very early in the novel, suggests that learning to fight for her chance to succeed will be one of Monique's main areas of growth over the course of the story.

The passage also suggests that Monique struggles to balance her two, opposing identities: the Monique that longs to be polite and kind, and the ambitious Monique that wants to be successful—a balancing act that she'll scrutinize even more in light of Evelyn's story, in which ambition often overshadows morality, often at great cost.





## Chapter 2 Quotes

☝ There are two men seated next to her, names lost to history, who are staring at her as she looks ahead at the stage. The man next to her is staring at her chest. The one next to him is staring at her thigh. Both of them seem enraptured and hoping to see the tiniest bit farther.

Maybe I'm overthinking that photo, but I'm starting to notice a pattern: Evelyn always leaves you hoping you'll get just a little bit more. And she always denies you.

**Related Characters:** Monique Grant (speaker), Evelyn Hugo, Celia St. James, Max Girard, Mick Riva

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 16

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Monique scrutinizes her favorite photo of Evelyn—a shot of the audience at the 1967 Golden Globes. Her description of the photo reveals just how objectified Evelyn was and is—not only by the men beside her who can't take their eyes off her body, but by anyone witnessing Evelyn from afar. That includes Monique, who can't help but fixate on the same thing that enthalls those two men. Both the photo and Monique's description of it suggest that Evelyn used her body as a tool to hold people's interest in her.

Much like Evelyn's suggestion to Max to cut to black in *Boute-en-Train* just before the shot reveals her nipples, this photograph demonstrates Evelyn's understanding that people are more captivated by what they don't yet know than by what they have full access to. Evelyn's clothing choice in this picture demonstrates her strategy of showing or telling just enough to allow onlookers and the media to construct their own story of her. It draws parallels to many different media stunts throughout Evelyn's life, including her elopement with Mick Riva, which she orchestrated to draw attention away from the intimacy of her relationship with Celia. Evelyn's clothing choice also emphasizes the perpetual balance she strikes between maintaining a persona that pleases the public and using that public persona in order to keep her true self secret.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ “I was gorgeous, even at fourteen. Oh, I know the whole world prefers a woman who doesn't know her power, but I'm sick of all that. I turned heads. Now, I take no pride in this. I didn't make my own face. I didn't give myself this body. But I'm also not going to sit here and say, 'Aw, shucks. People really thought I was pretty?' like some kind of prig.”

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Monique Grant

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 35

**Explanation and Analysis**

Evelyn explains to Monique that she realized her beauty early in her teenage years. This passage reveals that Evelyn's attitude about her appearance is pragmatic and bluntly truthful. Though Evelyn knows her comments could sound arrogant, she finds it more distasteful to obscure the truth to seem humble.



This passage shows that Evelyn knows she doesn't act the way women are expected to act. She's aware of her own beauty and of the power that beauty holds, though others (particularly men) would prefer that she feign ignorance. Evelyn knows that men would prefer to lavish compliments on her body as if they're telling her something new, Nevertheless, pretending she's unaware of the effect she has on other people is frustrating for Evelyn, and now that she's able to tell her story to Monique without needing to remain attractive to men, she relishes the chance to show that she understands herself even when other people aren't complimenting her.


It's also clear in this passage that Evelyn knows she had nothing to do with her good looks. They're unearned, and so she has no pride in them, which suggests she might have complex feelings when looking back on her career.

☝ I sit on my couch, open my laptop, and answer some e-mails. I start to order something for dinner. And it is only when I go to put my feet up that I remember there is no coffee table. For the first time since he left, I have not come into this apartment immediately thinking of David.

Instead, what plays in the back of my mind all weekend—from my Friday night in to my Saturday night out and my Sunday morning at the park—isn't *How did my marriage fail?* but rather *Who the hell was Evelyn Hugo in love with?*

**Related Characters:** Monique Grant (speaker), Evelyn Hugo, David

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 37

### Explanation and Analysis

After a day of interviewing Evelyn, Monique returns to her apartment. Instead of immediately focusing on her husband David's absence, which has until now been at the top of her mind, she's so focused on her work that she only remembers her failing marriage when she tries to put her feet up on the coffee table that isn't there.

In this passage, Monique doesn't recall David's absence until she realizes the coffee table is gone. Neither the coffee table nor David have been in this apartment for weeks, but tonight, instead of thinking primarily of her broken relationship with David as she enters the apartment, it's a thought that only springs back into Monique's mind when she remembers she can no longer put her feet up on the coffee table. In other words, her failing marriage is more a logistical snag, represented by the absence of the furniture that David took with him, than a heartbreaking, emotional truth. It's a sign that Monique has unconsciously moved on from her relationship, which suggests that her romantic connection with David wasn't a particularly strong one—perhaps she only married David because she was used to being with him, and their relationship was convenient.

The passage also demonstrates that Monique has become deeply focused on the Evelyn Hugo assignment. Her identity has changed: instead of seeing herself as a low-level writer with dull reporting assignments and a failing marriage, her high-profile writing project is now almost all-consuming, and her marriage is barely a priority.

### Chapter 6 Quotes

☛ And then, of course, there was the three-page questionnaire I had to fill out about my life until then. What did my father do for a living? What did I like to do in my spare time? Did I have any pets?

When I turned in my honest answers, the researcher read it in one sitting and said, "Oh, no, no, no. This won't do at all. From now on, your mother died in an accident, leaving your father to raise you. He worked as a builder in Manhattan, and on weekends during the summer, he'd take you to Coney Island. If anyone asks, you love tennis and swimming and you have a Saint Bernard named Roger."

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Evelyn's Father, Evelyn's Mother

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 50

### Explanation and Analysis

When Evelyn's career begins to take shape, alongside undergoing physical and lifestyle changes, she fills out a questionnaire for the publicity team at Sunset Studios. Even before Evelyn answers them, the questions suggest what the studio finds marketable about a young woman: someone with a happy, carefree, and relatable lifestyle.

The fact that Evelyn provides honest answers at first suggests that she's still a little naïve this early in her career, not yet understanding the necessity of constructing a false identity in order to win people over. It's possible that this moment, when the researcher tells her to change her answers, sparks that realization and teaches Evelyn the power of controlling her own story by telling the press and public what they want to hear.

The details the researcher replaces Evelyn's true answers with emphasize the gap between Evelyn's true identity and the double life that she, from this point on, must pretend to lead in order to reach stardom. Because the dismal facts of Evelyn's childhood are difficult for audiences to stomach, she must sacrifice that truth and the complex feelings that come along with it. Furthermore, the other details the researcher suggests—tennis, swimming, and a Saint Bernard—are all details picked straight out of a financially secure, white, American lifestyle, which implies that in order to achieve the kind of wealth and comfort she desires, Evelyn must pretend she already has it.

### Chapter 8 Quotes

☛ I blame pheromones, ultimately.

That and the fact that, at least at first, Don Adler treated me like a person. There are people who see a beautiful flower and rush over to pick it. They want to hold it in their hands, they want to own it. They want the flower's beauty to be theirs, to be within their possession, their control. Don wasn't like that. At least, not at first. Don was happy to be near the flower, to look at the flower, to appreciate the flower simply *being*.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Don Adler, Ernie Diaz

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 62-63

### Explanation and Analysis

Evelyn describes her attraction to Don, which doesn't spring from her admiration of his good looks or her desire to share in his fame, but from the pleasure of being treated like a person rather than a possession. It's clear from this passage that, even early on in her career, Evelyn has already grown accustomed to men objectifying her and wanting to possess her. The metaphor of the flower implies not only that Evelyn felt other men wanted her just for her looks, but also that they saw Evelyn as something delicate and innocent. Though Evelyn resists this, she came up with the flower metaphor herself, which is a sign of her ability to hold contrasting ideas in balance: she knows she is beautiful, but she's frustrated by how her beauty allows men to treat her.

The flower metaphor also extends to underline how Evelyn felt around Don, versus by other men. When someone picks a flower, they cut off that flower's access to nutrients, essentially ending its life. For Evelyn, the threat of a man possessing her makes her fear for her life, or at least the life she desires. This is perhaps because, when she was with Ernie, her first husband, she knew he'd eventually expect her to give up her career in order to start a family. In contrast, the idea of a life with Don doesn't present this threat—at least not when Evelyn first falls in love with him—which suggests that she can envision being with Don while remaining connected to the other things that fuel her, like her growing career.

ask Don what he'd like for breakfast, he's so frustrated he can't even formulate a verbal response.

This passage highlights Evelyn's refusal to act as a typical housewife. Though she loves Don, his breakfast order isn't her top priority. It's clear she doesn't see her role in their marriage as a domestic one, nor does she see herself as subservient to Don: their maid knows exactly how Don likes breakfast, and that's not a role that Evelyn assumes she needs to fulfil. Though this is a small, domestic moment, the scene underpins Evelyn's dismissive attitude toward gender norms.

This passage also foreshadows Don's increasingly violent behavior. In the face of such a slight inconvenience, he can't find the words to express his rage, which suggests that if—and when—he finds himself in situations he finds more offensive than this one, he'll react more violently.

☝ I had made my way three thousand miles from where I was born. I had found a way to be in the right place at the right time. I'd changed my name. Changed my hair. Changed my teeth and my body. I'd learned how to act. I'd made the right friends. I'd married into a famous family. Most of America knew my name.

And yet...


And yet.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ Our maid back in Los Angeles, Paula, made his breakfast every morning. She knew just how he liked it. I realized in that moment that I'd never paid attention.

Frustrated, Don grabbed the pillow from under his head and smashed it over his face, screaming into it.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Don Adler, Paula

**Related Themes:** 


**Page Number:** 75

### Explanation and Analysis

Evelyn describes one of the early moments in her relationship with Don when she begins to witness his anger in response to even the smallest stresses. When she has to

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Don Adler

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 78

### Explanation and Analysis

The first time Don hits Evelyn, she realizes that no matter how far removed she is from her life in Hell's Kitchen, and no matter how much fame or success she achieves, she'll never be able to avoid abuse or disrespect.

This passage shows that Evelyn knows the different factors involved in her rise to celebrity status. It's not a rank she achieved simply through talent or because she deserved it; rather, it's a mix of incisive choices, luck, and the willingness to sacrifice one identity and live under the façade of another. This list of simple and fragmented sentences emphasizes Evelyn's relentless pursuit of stardom. It's a list that demonstrates Evelyn will keep striving for more—and that she'll revise every element of her life if it'll help her

career.

But after this prolonged list of actions, there's a sudden shift in the pace of the passage. The two extremely short paragraphs, which repeat each other with only the words "And yet," suggest that in this moment, Evelyn realizes that no matter her efforts, she'll never be totally protected from pain or abuse.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

●● He opens the parked car's door and pushes you out.

When he comes crawling to you in tears the next morning, you don't actually believe him anymore. But now this is just *what you do*.

The same way you fix the hole in your dress with a safety pin or tape up the crack in a window.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Don Adler

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 82

### Explanation and Analysis

Evelyn describes Don's increasing violence toward her in moments of stress. Though she knows he'll continue to hurt her, she continues to forgive him and move on every time he apologizes. In this passage, Evelyn describes her experience in the second person, using "you" pronouns instead of the first-person "I." The distance that comes from this pronoun usage implies Evelyn's desire, looking back on her younger self, to forget and forgive herself for the way she prolonged her abusive relationship with Don. In essence, Evelyn isn't proud of herself for putting up with Don's abuse. It's perhaps something she does just to keep up appearances for the public—or perhaps she feels she has no other choice.

Evelyn describes her actions using two different images, both of which describe a flimsy, temporary fix to a problem. If you fix a hole in a dress with a safety pin, you can expect the hole to get bigger until you have it properly mended; if you tape the crack in a window, it's likely you're waiting for a professional to repair the glass. These images of shoddy repair demonstrate that Evelyn knows her forgiveness, much like a safety pin, is simply a stand-in for the permanent, inevitable solution to her abusive marriage: a divorce.

## Chapter 17 Quotes

●● It was expensive wine. I liked drinking it as if it was water, as if it meant nothing to me. *Poor girls from Hell's Kitchen can't drink this kind of wine and treat it like it's nothing.*

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Celia St. James

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 110

### Explanation and Analysis

When Celia visits Evelyn at her house, she brings a bottle of wine. Evelyn and Celia split the bottle, first drinking out of glasses, but eventually drinking straight from the bottle. Evelyn savors this moment not because of the taste of the wine, but also because of its value—and because she is able to pretend its value is of no consequence to her. Her attitude in this passage suggests that the material goods she's able to afford with her relatively newfound wealth don't delight Evelyn on an aesthetic level. Instead, she's happy simply because she can afford them—they signify her change in status and her financial freedom.

The passage also suggests that Evelyn is constantly criticizing herself. The italicized portion of the passage is a kind of challenge to Evelyn from herself, a claim about her identity that she's desperate to prove wrong. It's a sign that Evelyn is perhaps not striving toward some level of fame or success but is in fact running away from her unhappy childhood.

## Chapter 20 Quotes

●● "Evelyn!" he yelled.

I liked how the glass between us took the edge off his voice, how it muffled it enough to make him sound far away. I liked the control of being able to decide whether I listened to him at full volume.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo, Don Adler (speaker), Harry Cameron

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 128

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Don has run after Evelyn as she leaves the Oscars afterparty and gets into a car with Harry. When Don




demands her not to leave, she ignores him, refusing even to roll down the car's glass window. The barrier between Evelyn and Don is "glass," literally and metaphorically: it's solid, but transparent. It allows Evelyn to dull Don's presence and gives her enough distance from him that she feels safer, but it doesn't entirely block out his image or his voice. Evelyn's dramatic transformation into a wealthy celebrity allows her to feel a little protected and to live the life she desires, but she can never totally cut her ties to things she'd rather forget, like when she moves to Manhattan and must wrestle with the memories of her Hell's Kitchen childhood, or when, while drinking expensive wine from the bottle, she still battles against her inner fear that she's not the kind of person who can enjoy such luxury. Evelyn's wealth and social connections mean that she's often able to separate herself from immediate danger, just as she does here in the car with Harry—but she'll always be aware of the uncertainty from which she's constantly escaping.

## Chapter 30 Quotes

☛☛ "And now that I don't have her, and I have more money than I could ever use in this lifetime, and my name is cemented in Hollywood history, and I know how hollow it is, I am kicking myself for every single second I chose it over loving her proudly. But that's a luxury. You can do that when you're rich and famous. You can decide that wealth and renown are worthless when you have them. Back then, I still thought I had all the time I needed to do everything I wanted. That if I just played my cards right, I could have it all."

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Monique Grant, Celia St. James

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 192

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Evelyn explains to Monique that she wishes she'd gone after Celia wholeheartedly rather than keeping her distance after their first breakup. Though Evelyn is used to balancing simultaneous, often contradictory ideas of herself, in this passage, she accepts that sometimes it's impossible to be (and have) everything at once. In fact, this passage suggests that trying too hard to have everything was Evelyn's downfall: the reason she lost Celia, not only in this instance but again, years later, was because she couldn't prioritize Celia over her career and fame.

Evelyn uses the metaphor of "playing [her] cards right" to

describe her old attitude regarding success. It's a metaphor that emphasizes her reliance on strategy and luck to get what she wanted: if she chose the right "card" at the right time, she'd eventually win the whole game. But her change in perspective here suggests she's realized that her relentless strategizing—her pursuit of the game—cost her what she loved most.

## Chapter 31 Quotes

☛☛ Rex put out his hand, and I shook it.

"Well, I should be going," he said, checking his watch. "I have a date with a particularly eager young lady, and I'd hate to keep her waiting." He buttoned his coat as I stood up. "When should we tie the knot?" he asked.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo, Rex North (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 199

### Explanation and Analysis



Rex and Evelyn agree to marry in order to boost box office numbers for *Anna Karenina*, a film they're starring in together. To confirm their agreement, Rex and Evelyn shake hands. While a handshake is a physical gesture of confirmation, it's distinctly unromantic—more suitable for closing a business deal than a marriage proposal. It's a gesture that emphasizes the complete lack of romance involved in the relationship between Rex and Evelyn. Their marriage is essentially a business deal, an arrangement intended to boost the income of each involved party.

This passage highlights how pragmatic Evelyn and Rex both are. Though they've begun their relationship in such a sterile, bureaucratic way, the fact that both of them are on the same page about it lays the groundwork for an emotional bond in itself. While Evelyn and Rex have no intention of falling in love with each other or pretending their marriage is anything but a façade, they're able to respect each other's strategic thinking, and their transparency with each other is perhaps what allows the marriage to succeed, albeit lovelessly, for the few years in which it benefits both of them.

## Chapter 39 Quotes

☛☛ Harry laughed and put out his hand. I shook it. "Once again, Evelyn, you've got yourself a deal."

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo, Harry Cameron (speaker), Celia St. James, Rex North

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 243

### Explanation and Analysis



When Harry and Evelyn agree to have a baby together, they shake hands. This gesture echoes the handshake Evelyn shared with Rex when the two of them agreed to get married to promote a film they both starred in. It's clear, therefore, that Evelyn has become accustomed to making decisions about her life as if they're business deals—it's almost as though she sees herself and the people around her as strategic assets rather than human beings. Even though Evelyn's excited to have a child, her complex platonic relationship with Harry and her simultaneous romantic relationship with Celia force her to approach the most sensitive moments in her life coolly rather than emotionally.

This passage also highlights the multifaceted relationship Evelyn and Harry share. They were colleagues first, and though they soon became friends and eventually a married couple, their lack of romantic attachment to each other and their shared career ambitions mean that the professional side of their relationship is ever present. When Harry describes his and Evelyn's plan to have a baby together as a "deal," it highlights the fact that they're so accustomed to seeing each other as actor and producer rather than husband and wife that even having a baby together is a strategic decision.

### Chapter 45 Quotes

☝☝ What Max was talking about was a graphic portrayal of female desire. And my gut instinct was that I loved the idea. I mean, the thought of filming a graphic sex scene with Don was about as arousing to me as a bowl of bran flakes. But I wanted to push the envelope. I wanted to show a woman getting off. I liked the idea of showing a woman having sex because she wanted to be pleased instead of being desperate to please. So in a moment of excitement, I grabbed my coat, put out my hand, and said, "I'm in."

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Celia St. James, Harry Cameron, Don Adler, Max Girard, Rex North

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 262

### Explanation and Analysis

During an early-morning shoot, Max proposes the idea of a graphic sex scene between Evelyn and Don's characters. Evelyn immediately agrees to film the scene without discussing it with Celia.

This passage also echoes the other moments in the novel that involved handshakes to confirm momentous decisions. When Evelyn agreed to marry Rex North, she shook his hand. Then, when she agreed to have a baby with Harry, she shook his hand. Now, agreeing to film a groundbreaking sex scene that will demand courage and vulnerability—and that eventually will lead to the demise of Evelyn's relationship and generate widespread criticism and disdain—she shakes Max's hand. It's a gesture that demonstrates Evelyn's pragmatic attitude: instead of approaching this decision emotionally, she acts with businesslike confidence and decisiveness.

It's a moment that also underscores Evelyn's tendency to take her relationship with Celia for granted. Celia doesn't seem to cross Evelyn's mind before she shakes Max's hand—she's more of an afterthought. This demonstrates Evelyn's habit of treating her own body as a business asset rather than something that is treasured by her sexual partner. It also reveals Evelyn's priorities: though she loves Celia, her career comes first.

### Chapter 46 Quotes

☝☝ "People were shocked by the representation of a woman wanting to get fucked. And while I'm aware of the crassness of my language, it's really the only way to describe it. Patricia was not a woman who wanted to make love. She wanted to get fucked. And we showed that. And people hated how much they loved it."

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Don Adler

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 270

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Evelyn describes the repercussions of the graphic sex scene she and Don filmed for the film *Three A.M.* When the film came out, Don was lauded for his performance while Evelyn received scorn and derision from the industry, even in the wake of soaring box office numbers. This passage is one of the few moments in the novel in which Evelyn discusses a character she played, which emphasizes her deep connection to this particular

role. It's clear that the role of Patricia is so important to Evelyn because it allowed her to explore the idea that women can desire and enjoy sex for its own sake—and to share that idea with a wider audience. Having been defined by her body and all its sexual connotations for her whole career, Evelyn relished this role, perhaps because it allowed her to explore her sexuality on her own terms.

This passage also emphasizes Evelyn's desire to tell the truth in plain words rather than obscuring her language for the sake of politeness. Just like when she acknowledges her own beauty rather than performing false modesty, here, she used the phrase "get fucked" instead of "make love" to highlight a clear difference: "making love" is a tender, sweet expression that highlights the intimacy of a sexual act, while "getting fucked" hones in on the physical act without tying it to emotional connection—an honest and explicit phrase that, in its shocking nature, mirrors the sex scene itself.



## Chapter 54 Quotes

💬 "Did you ever love me?"

"Yes, I did. When you made love to me and you made me feel desire and you took good care of my daughter and I believed that you saw something in me that no one else saw. When I believed you had an insight and a talent that no one else had. I loved you very much."

"So you are not a lesbian," he said.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo, Max Girard (speaker), Celia St. James, Connor Cameron

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 308

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Max confronts Evelyn about the letters from Celia he found in the closet. He demands that Evelyn explain her sexual identity to him. Evelyn's response is her attempt to show Max that she's sexually attracted to men, but more than that, it's her opportunity to show him why she feels her relationship with Max is failing. The details Evelyn includes in her response go far beyond a simple confirmation of her attraction to Max, and her repeated use of the past tense emphasizes that, since she first fell in love with Max, she's come to feel very differently about him. One of the significant details of this passage is Max's dismissive response to Evelyn. Instead of attempting to digest what Evelyn's mourning about their relationship, Max skips over those important details to serve his own basic purpose,


which is to decide whether or not he married a lesbian—something that he clearly feels would hurt his pride.


Furthermore, the things Evelyn claims she treasured in Max—his care for Connor and his singular devotion to Evelyn, as if he did in fact see her as a complete human being—are completely overturned by Max's behavior in this scene. Though Evelyn has already decided to leave Max, his response here further confirms everything she doubted about him. He may have once cared for her, but his focus is now squarely on how he appears to outsiders, and that's completely incompatible with what Evelyn desires in a partner.

## Chapter 57 Quotes

💬 With her blond hair and her face thinning out, I was starting to fear that she looked more like me than Harry. Sure, conventionally speaking, she would be more attractive if she looked like me. But she *should* look like Harry. The world should give us that.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Harry Cameron, Connor Cameron

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 337

### Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Evelyn takes stock of teenage Connor's appearance. Now that Harry has died, Evelyn wishes she could see more of him in Connor's face. One detail that stands out in this description is Connor's blond hair. Though Evelyn is known for her own blond hair, it's a striking feature of her appearance partly because it's so dramatically mismatched to her dark eyebrows—a clear sign it's bleached, not natural. But strangely, she sees her own traits, rather than Harry's, in Connor's blond hair, even though it's obviously not something she passed down genetically.

The passage hints at the image-obsessed, superficial side of Evelyn. When she sees herself in Connor's blond hair, it shows that she's unable to distinguish her true self from the celebrity image she shares with the world. More simply, though, it demonstrates that, to Evelyn's despair, memories of Harry are slipping away, and she can't hold onto them even through the daughter she had with him.

## Chapter 59 Quotes

☝ Robert always claimed that he married me because he would do anything for Celia. But I think he did it, in at least some small part, because it gave him a chance to have a family. He was never going to settle down with one woman. And Spanish women proved to be just as enchanted by him as American ones had been. But this system, this family, was one he could be a part of, and I think he knew that when he signed up.

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo (speaker), Celia St. James, Connor Cameron, Robert Jamison, Robert Jamison

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 344

### Explanation and Analysis

When Evelyn and Connor move to Spain to live with Celia, Evelyn marries Celia's brother, Robert. Though Robert has no desire of being a typical, monogamous husband, he quickly warms to Connor, and the two form a strong bond. It becomes clear to Evelyn that the unconventional family structure she, Robert, Celia, and Connor share over their years in Spain appeals to Robert. More than that, the happiness these four share as a family is a sign that their family bond is strong because of—not despite—its nontraditional elements. Robert would be unhappy if he settled down with one woman, but this arrangement allows him to have a family without needing to remain monogamous, and he's able to experience the joy of close relationships without feeling bound by them.

At the same time, this unusual family structure allows Evelyn and Celia to finally have the life together that they've always wanted, but with the added presence of Robert, who affords them support and security and provides Connor with a father figure. It's clear that that this family arrangement, which is nontraditional in more than one sense, provides more freedom, love, and happiness to all involved than any conventional structure could.

☝ “I think being yourself—your true, entire self—is always going to feel like you're swimming upstream.”

“Yeah,” she said. “But if the last few years with you have been any indication, I think it also feels like taking your bra off at the end of the day.”

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo, Celia St. James (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 346

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Evelyn and Celia, who are living together as a couple in Spain for the final years of Celia's life, discuss how it feels to embrace their true identities without needing to cover up the truth to appease the public. Evelyn and Celia both use similes to describe the experience of “being yourself.” Evelyn imagines it as “swimming upstream”—hard, exhausting work that involves battling against the elements in order to get where you want to go. This turn of phrase emphasizes that Evelyn has had a difficult time figuring out exactly who she is—and an even more difficult time finding the courage to be that person. Throughout her whole career, she's had to hide parts of herself from the public, and she's struggled to be completely honest with romantic partners—especially Celia. Because some of her most important traits—particularly being an ambitious woman and being bisexual—aren't always something that society approves or admires, she feels that the world is standing in the way of her ability to be herself.

On the other hand, Celia uses the image of taking her bra off to describe the relief she feels at being able to live her true self. It's an image that depicts physical release after a period of restriction and discomfort, which describes how she feels living in Spain, out of the media spotlight, with the woman she loves. It also suggests that Celia feels like she's escaped from a world governed by gender restrictions and expectations.

## Chapter 66 Quotes

☝ No one is all good or all bad. I know this, of course. I had to learn it at a young age. But sometimes it's easy to forget just how true it is. That it applies to everyone.

Until you're sitting in front of the woman who put your father's dead body in the driver's seat of a car to save the reputation of her best friend—and you realize she held on to a letter for almost three decades because she wanted to know how much you were loved.

**Related Characters:** Monique Grant (speaker), Evelyn Hugo, Harry Cameron, Monique's Father/The Passenger, Monique's Mother

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 366-67



**Explanation and Analysis**


In this passage, Monique has just learned from Evelyn that her father was the passenger in the crashed car in which Evelyn found Harry. Monique reflects on her changing perspective of Evelyn, who she now knows framed her father as the car's driver, effectively hiding the truth about Monique's father's death from Monique and Monique's mother for decades.

Monique can't decide how to judge Evelyn. Though she knows everyone has a mix of flaws and strengths, this moment demonstrates the difficulty of understanding that about someone when they've deeply hurt you. Evelyn's actions show a balance of self-serving cruelty and good intentions. Monique is able to distill Evelyn's actions into one sentence, a sign that she's processing their complex implications on an intellectual level—but that single sentence, which describes Evelyn's simultaneous selfishness and generosity, proves that even though Monique can understand Evelyn's dual intentions, she's unable to untangle them from each other. When faced with the full picture of Evelyn—a calculating, ambitious woman who also cares deeply for others—Monique can't decide how to react to the revelation.

**Chapter 68 Quotes**

☝ She smiles for the camera, her brown eyes sparkling in a different way from anything I've ever seen in person. She seems at peace somehow, in full display, and I wonder if the real Evelyn *isn't* the woman I've been talking to for the past two weeks but, instead, the one I see before me right now. Even at almost eighty, she commands a room in a way I've never seen before. A star is always and forever a star.

**Related Characters:** Monique Grant (speaker), Evelyn Hugo

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 372

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Monique sees Evelyn in the middle of her photo shoot for *Vivant's* cover story. Even though Monique spent two weeks learning Evelyn's most precious secrets—and even after Evelyn told her the truth about her father's death—in this moment, Monique wonders if Evelyn's true self is not the person from those stories but rather this camera-ready star. It's significant that Monique

makes a distinction between this image of Evelyn and the Evelyn she's come to know: clearly, after all that Evelyn's revealed, she doesn't seem like much of a star to Monique.

The way Monique describes Evelyn in this scene is similar to the way she described her when they first met, but now it seems like the Evelyn Monique first admired in person is only one version of Evelyn—one that obscures the tragedies and messy details that make up her life. It's a moment that emphasizes Evelyn's ability to juggle contrasting personas and perform each one convincingly—a skill that was vital not only to her acting, but also to her stardom.

☝ Evelyn was never going to let the thing that made her be the thing to destroy her. She was never going to let anything, even a part of her body, have that sort of power. Evelyn is going to die when she wants to.

**Related Characters:** Monique Grant (speaker), Evelyn Hugo, Harry Cameron, Mick Riva

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 375

**Explanation and Analysis**

Evelyn has been diagnosed with late-stage breast cancer, and in this passage, Monique realizes that Evelyn has decided to die on her own terms rather than wait to die from the cancer. This passage highlights, firstly, one of Evelyn's core attributes: the need for control. Even in Evelyn's most harrowing moments, like when she eloped with Mick Riva or rescued Harry from a car wreck, she coped with the chaos of the situation by exerting control. Now, when the only way to control her life is to end it, that's the choice she makes. The passage also emphasizes Evelyn's preference for power over weakness. Rather than accept a fate of pain and illness, she chooses to end her life while she can still make decisions—and while she can still look good for the camera.

In this moment, it's also clear that Monique has learned enough about Evelyn to predict her actions. Obviously, their conversations have been thorough enough to capture not only the superficial details of Evelyn's life, but also the very deepest parts of her personality, like her desires and fears. Because Monique knows Evelyn so well now, it's evident that her biography will portray Evelyn in an accurate and honest way—exactly how Evelyn wanted.

## Chapter 69 Quotes

☝ “It was almost as if when I met him, I met this other side of myself. Someone who understood me and made me feel safe. It wasn’t passionate, really. It was never about ripping each other’s clothes off. We just knew we could be happy together. We knew we could raise a child.”

**Related Characters:** Monique’s Mother (speaker), Evelyn Hugo, Monique Grant, Harry Cameron, Monique’s Father/The Passenger

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 379



**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Monique’s mother describes her relationship with Monique’s father. What’s significant about this passage is the similarity between this description and the relationship between Evelyn and Harry. Like Evelyn and Harry, Monique’s mother and father were connected by their shared happiness—and their shared child—even in the absence of romantic or sexual passion. The passage suggests that a close bond can exist between two people without sex or romance.

There’s a hint of dramatic irony here: Monique’s mother doesn’t know that Monique’s father had been in love with a man for at least a few months of his relationship with her. The reader knows this, which means the passage is an opportunity to consider how Monique and Evelyn’s stories are inextricably linked. Not only are Evelyn and Monique connected through Harry’s relationship with Monique’s father, but they’re also connected by the happiness that existed in both Evelyn’s family and Monique’s family, even in the absence of a traditional, monogamous, heterosexual pair of parents.

☝ Maybe I’ll leave that part out completely. I think I’d be willing to lie about Evelyn’s life to protect my mother. I think I’d be willing to omit the truth from public knowledge in the interest of the happiness and sanity of a person I love dearly.

**Related Characters:** Monique Grant (speaker), Evelyn Hugo, Monique’s Mother

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 380

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Monique considers how much of the truth she should reveal about the car crash when she writes Evelyn’s biography. It’s clear from Monique’s phrasing—“I think I’d be” rather than “I am”—that she’s unsure how to approach the truth in this instance. The uncertain phrasing also shows that Monique can’t quite see herself as a biographer yet: the idea of writing the book exists somewhere in the imagined future, not here in this moment. Though she’s grown in confidence and ambition over the past few weeks, she still has more growing to do.

More importantly, this passage emphasizes that, like Evelyn, it’s more important for Monique to protect herself and the ones she loves than to follow an absolute moral truth. Though she said she’d do her best to tell Evelyn’s story in the most accurate and honest way possible, in this moment, she finds herself deciding between her promise to Evelyn and her devotion to her mother. It’s a decision that demonstrates what she’s learned from Evelyn’s life: at the crossroads of doing the honest thing and doing what’s best for yourself and your family, there’s hardly ever a simple choice. It’s a moment that helps the reader to understand Monique’s attitude toward Evelyn, too—she can neither condemn Evelyn nor praise her, partly because she understands that the decisions Evelyn had to make throughout her life were just as tricky as this one is for Monique.

## Evelyn and Me Quotes

☝ I said, “Doesn’t it bother you? That your husbands have become such a headline story, so often mentioned, that they have nearly eclipsed your work and yourself? That all anyone talks about when they talk about you are the seven husbands of Evelyn Hugo?”

And her answer was quintessential Evelyn.

“No,” she told me. “Because they are just husbands. I am Evelyn Hugo. And anyway, I think once people know the truth, they will be much more interested in my wife.”

**Related Characters:** Evelyn Hugo, Monique Grant (speaker), Celia St. James

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 385

**Explanation and Analysis**

This passage is a section of the article Monique writes about

Evelyn for *Vivant* after Evelyn's passing. Monique's decision to include a direct quote from Evelyn in her article illustrates Monique's desire to represent Evelyn as a complex, enigmatic, and dynamic person. She wants her reader to get a sense of the real Evelyn. Because this article includes an excerpt from Monique's upcoming biography on Evelyn, the way Monique writes this article is a sign that her biography will depict Evelyn in a similarly raw, truthful way, honoring Evelyn's voice and sticking as closely as possible to the facts.

The passage is also one of the only moments in the novel and, presumably, the only moment during Evelyn's life (apart from what Monique will presumably include in the biography) when Evelyn publicly refers to Celia as her wife. Not only does this emphasize how groundbreaking both the

article and the biography will be, but it also shows how seriously Evelyn took her unofficial wedding vows to Celia. Even though the ceremony Evelyn performed for herself and Celia took place in bed, without witnesses, rings, or paperwork, and even though it was never made official, Evelyn regards that marriage to Celia as just as legitimate—and much more important—than any of her marriages to men. It's another reminder that though Evelyn's life was the subject of media scrutiny and endless rumor, her most precious truths were the ones she kept secret. While outsiders attempted to piece Evelyn's story together through official documentation and public sightings, what was most important to Evelyn was a relationship that evaded speculation.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## EVELYN HUGO TO AUCTION OFF GOWNS

An article for the *New York Tribune* announces that movie star Evelyn Hugo, now 79 years old, will auction off 12 of her most iconic gowns. The proceeds from the gowns, many of which Hugo wore to events like the Academy Awards, will go to breast cancer research, presumably because her daughter, Connor, died of breast cancer last year at the age of 41. Hugo, as the article notes, is not only famous for her career, but for her seven different husbands and her transformation from Evelyn Herrera, the daughter of Cuban immigrants in Hell's Kitchen, to **blond**, Hollywood-dwelling Evelyn Hugo.

*The fact that the novel begins with a news clipping—the first of many that punctuate the novel's chapters—emphasizes Evelyn's celebrity status and suggests that the novel will focus on the public and private perceptions of Evelyn Hugo. The focus on Evelyn's dresses and appearance implies that much of her fame depends on her outward appearance.*



## CHAPTER 1

Frankie calls Monique into her office. Frankie's the editor of *Vivant*, the magazine Monique writes for. She tells Monique that Evelyn Hugo's people have contacted *Vivant* to offer them a rare exclusive interview, but Evelyn has specifically requested that Monique write the piece. Monique is confused, as is Frankie: she's been writing for the magazine for less than a year and hasn't produced anything substantial. Frankie tells Monique that, while she respects her, she'd rather send a more experienced writer to run the interview. But Evelyn insisted that she'd either do the interview with Monique, or not at all.

*The reluctance and shock that Monique and Frankie share about Monique being assigned to this story emphasizes not only Monique's low status as a beginning reporter at *Vivant*, but also Evelyn's towering reputation. It's clear that getting a story on Evelyn is a big deal—a precious opportunity that could be taken away at a reporter's first mistake.*



Frankie asks Monique if she knows Evelyn personally. Monique doesn't think so, but on Frankie's urging, she texts her mother to ask whether Monique's father might've worked on one of Evelyn's sets when he was a still photographer. Frankie peeks at Monique's phone while she waits for a reply, but her mom says there's no chance her dad made any friends on the sets he photographed.

*Monique's father's involvement in the film industry, and the possibility that he worked on one of Evelyn's sets, foreshadows an overlap between Monique and Evelyn's lives. Meanwhile, Frankie's urge to peek at Monique's phone suggests she's someone who desires to have control over others—a control that might cross personal boundaries.*



Frankie suggests that Evelyn has requested Monique because of her lack of experience—it might be easier to get her to write the story Evelyn wants. But Frankie doesn't think Monique can be bullied. Monique knows that taking this story could fast-track her career. She convinces Frankie that she's capable by suggesting that, given both Frankie and Evelyn want her to do the interview, *she's* the one who needs to be convinced. She immediately regrets her bold statement, but after a moment of silence, Frankie relents, telling her to ace the story.

*Monique surprises herself by speaking so frankly to Frankie, which suggests that she's not used to standing up for herself or exerting authority in the workplace. On the other hand, her outspoken behavior here shows her ambition to grow as a reporter and strengthen her reputation. In this moment, it's also clear that Frankie respects Monique for her strength and resolve.*





As Monique leaves the office, Frankie tells her that Evelyn might've requested her because of the story on physician-assisted suicide she wrote for the *Discourse*, the previous magazine she worked at. Monique is proud of that story, having pitched the idea herself and researched it thoroughly. She and Frankie agree, though, that Evelyn probably didn't choose her for her talent. Still, Frankie tells Monique that if she does well on this story, she might be a sought-after journalist in the future.

*To evidence Monique's writing talent, Frankie refers to a story Monique wrote for a previous publication, which is a clear sign that Monique hasn't written anything substantial during her time at Vivant. Monique and Frankie betray their cynicism about celebrities when they agree that Evelyn probably doesn't care about Monique's writing and must instead have an ulterior motive.*



## EVELYN HUGO'S COMING CLEAN

An article on *TheSpill.com* claims that Evelyn Hugo has agreed to an interview, something she hasn't done for decades. The author hopes Hugo will reveal the stories of her seven marriages, and she fawns over old pictures of the actor's eyes, skin, and body. She goes on to express her frustration that Hugo chose an unknown writer to conduct the interview, rather than a more seasoned journalist like herself.

*By name alone, *The Spill* seems to be a publication driven more by rumor and gossip than by fact—it's clearly set up as a contrasting publication to the more reputable New York Tribune. This reporter's unrestrained tone reinforces the idea that this publication, like the tabloids in later chapters, is willing to run with an assumed story rather than wait for the facts.*



In the comments, readers argue about Hugo's relevance and beauty, with some believing that her donations to charities are more worthy of discussion than the author's preoccupation with her appearance. One commenter calls one of Hugo's films "a disgrace to women" for its overt sexuality, while another calls her "the most beautiful woman of all time," referencing a shot in one of her movies that cut to black just before her nipples were revealed.

*The readers' comments emphasize the double-edged sword of femininity that society constantly wields against Evelyn. No matter what she does, she'll receive praise and criticism in equal measure. Even artistic decisions Evelyn made decades ago are still the subject of heated debate, which suggests that the way society critiques and objectifies women has been slow to change.*



## CHAPTER 2

Monique researches Evelyn's life and films. She stays late at work before heading home to a tiny apartment which her husband, David, half-emptied when he left five weeks ago. She thinks David was petty for taking the **coffee table**, since his new apartment in San Francisco is fully furnished. She orders dinner and takes a hot shower; she feels happiest in the shower, where she's free of her responsibilities and failures. The prospect of interviewing Evelyn intimidates Monique, so she immerses herself in research and spends the next few evenings watching Evelyn's old movies. She watches one clip so many times it appears in her dreams.

*It's clear that Monique is taking her assignment seriously, partly because it has the potential to skyrocket her career, and partly because, as it now becomes clear, she finds it hard to go home to her empty apartment. Her love for the anonymity she finds while showering suggests that at this moment in her life, she's feeling overwhelmed and uncertain, not just about her work or her relationship, but her identity as a whole—it's easier to forget about it for a while.*



Through her research, Monique understands that Evelyn is incredibly beautiful. Her favorite picture of Evelyn is from the 1967 Golden Globes. In the picture, Evelyn wears a low-cut dress with a high slit; two men stare at her body while she looks straight ahead. Monique concludes that Evelyn is someone who leaves people wanting more—like in the sex scene in *Three A.M.*, in which her breasts were only visible for three seconds, attracting huge box-office numbers, allegedly because couples kept returning to see it.

*All Monique's research either focuses on, or eventually leads to, the subject of Evelyn's beauty and appearance. It seems like Monique will have to work hard in her interviews to dive beneath the surface; at the same time, it's clear from her obsessive research that Monique is just as transfixed by Evelyn's façade as everyone else is.*



## CHAPTER 3

Monique wakes up before her alarm. She has an email from Frankie that reads “KEEP ME UPDATED.” While she’s getting ready, she realizes she’s lost the weight she gained while living with David. She admires her slimmer appearance before heading out the door. She takes the subway to Evelyn’s apartment, which is on Fifth Avenue and overlooks Central Park. It’s one of Evelyn’s two residences, the other being a seaside house in Spain, and as Monique approaches, she notices its outstanding beauty.

*Monique's early wake time betrays her nervousness. Frankie might be almost as nervous as Monique is, given her early, emphatic email. Monique's self-assessment shows that she's focused on her appearance—one thing that connects her to Evelyn even before the two meet. In addition, the fact that her weight gain pleases her shows that she conforms to the societal expectation of slimness as a positive female trait.*



A kindly doorman lets Monique up to Evelyn’s apartment, which is on the top floor. Monique rings the doorbell at 11 a.m. exactly. A woman who looks around 50 greets her; she knows Monique’s name and introduces herself as Grace. When she offers Monique coffee, Monique has a hard time expressing her preference for cream, but Grace, picking up on Monique’s nerves, tells her not to worry: Evelyn’s very kind, and she’s better than the other people Grace has worked for.

*Evelyn's apartment is a penthouse, which emphasizes her wealth and the comfort it provides her. Grace's kindness and patience, and her obvious respect for Evelyn, suggest that Evelyn is a gracious employer and a kinder person than most people would assume a celebrity to be. Monique, meanwhile, is clearly unused to expressing her preferences and desires, especially when she feels intimidated.*



As Monique struggles to reply to Monique’s mother’s good luck text, Evelyn walks down the stairs towards her. She looks as beautiful as any of the pictures Monique has seen of her. Though she’s certainly had cosmetic surgery done and has had her **hair** treated, she gives off the impression of someone aging gracefully. Instead of shoes, she’s wearing thick socks. Evelyn greets Monique by name and, carrying her coffee for her, leads her to the living room. The two images on the wall are in black and white: one is of Harry Cameron, and the other is the poster for the [Little Women](#) adaptation that Evelyn and Celia St. James starred in.

*The photos Monique has been poring over are mostly decades old, which means that even though Evelyn has grown significantly older, she's still beautiful. This suggests that Evelyn's beauty is partially intangible—it's more a feeling or an aura, which contributes to her mysterious star power. At the same time, Evelyn's choice to wear thick socks shows that she prioritizes comfort over glamor, and by carrying Monique's coffee for her, she demonstrates she's not interested in maintaining a sense of superiority—she doesn't need to act like a star in order to appear as one.*



Just as Monique settles in with her pen and notepad, Evelyn says she's called her there under false pretenses. Instead of discussing the auction of her gowns, Evelyn wants to give Monique her life story. She doesn't want to give the story to Vivant, but to Monique directly. Monique takes a while to process the information: Evelyn must have an underlying motive, but Monique can't work out what. When she suggests that Evelyn will be confessing her "sins," Evelyn loses her composure but continues to explain that she wants to give her story to Monique: not to ghostwrite, but to use for a biography which will be published after her death.

Monique is so shocked by Evelyn's proposition that she chokes on her coffee and stains the white carpet. Grace comes in to clean it up, at which Evelyn suggests she and Monique go down the street to a restaurant. There's a chill in the air, and Monique notices the signs of Evelyn's age more clearly, particularly in the papery skin on her hands. As they walk to the restaurant, Monique asks Evelyn whether her request for the book means she's dying. Evelyn retorts that everyone is dying.

At the restaurant, Evelyn orders the chopped salad and Monique follows suit. She continues to question Evelyn about the proposed book, but Evelyn is unforthcoming. She takes issue with the idea that she'd be confessing any sins or regrets: she forgives herself for the things she did in the past, and she knows she had reasons for even her most questionable actions. Monique reassures her that she'll try her best to faithfully interpret what she says. She knows that Evelyn is giving her a lot of power by offering her whole story, and she intends to treat that story with the utmost respect.

Convinced by her sincerity, Evelyn allows Monique to ask specific questions about her intentions for the book. But when Monique asks what the book's timeline will be—in other words, when Evelyn will die—Evelyn refuses to answer. Instead, she tells Monique that they will meet for several days, she'll tell her story, and after that, Monique will be free to turn the story into a book and sell it for the highest price she can get. All money made from the book will be hers. Monique is perplexed: why would Evelyn give her this gift? But Evelyn refuses to offer an explanation. She tells Monique that she's giving her the chance of huge financial and career prospects, so she doesn't owe her an explanation.

*Evelyn is quick to reveal her true intentions for the interview with Monique, which suggests that she's confident her plan will succeed without the need to play the long game or trick Monique somehow. Even when Monique offends her with the word "sins," Evelyn continues with her plan—so it's clear that she needs Monique specifically and not just because she's a pliable junior reporter.*



*Monique's behavior in this moment reinforces her feeling that she doesn't belong in Evelyn's apartment or on this assignment—she's already damaged something, and it's only the first hour of her first day on the job. Evelyn's suggestion to leave the apartment shows two things. First, the book project is so precious to her, and so secret, that she can't even share it with Grace, whom she clearly trusts. Second, Evelyn seems to have an awareness of how intimidating her apartment is for Monique and is thoughtful enough to move to a more neutral location for Monique's benefit.*



*It's important to Evelyn that the proposed biography is as accurate as possible, and she needs Monique to take it seriously, which is why she's unwilling to provide any further details until she feels Monique is on the same page. Monique's commitment to telling Evelyn's story, despite Evelyn's unwillingness to provide even basic details at this stage, shows that Monique is an ambitious writer and also that she trusts Evelyn, though it's unclear why.*



*Evelyn's attitude in this scenario shows she's accustomed to making deals that revolve around money and ambition, which suggests that stardom and her time in Hollywood have jaded her. She's offering Monique her big break and a huge amount of money—terms she believes will more than make up for the frustrating vagueness of the assignment. It's also clear that despite—or perhaps because of—decades of media exposure, Evelyn is a guarded person: she won't reveal the details of her life very easily.*



Monique knows this opportunity would change her life, but she could also lose her job if it seemed like she were stealing a story from *Vivant*. Evelyn tells her to “grab life by the balls”: she should think of herself as a business just like *Vivant* does. Though Evelyn still won’t explain why she chose Monique, she says that by the time she’s finished telling her story, Monique will understand everything. Monique knows she wants to climb the career ladder to the top, so she agrees to Evelyn’s proposition.

## CHAPTER 4

Back at Evelyn’s apartment, Monique decides that her only option is to lie to Frankie and tell her that everything is going according to plan. She remembers going to the beach when she was small. When she felt the cold water on her feet, she cried, but Monique’s father told her to breathe in and out five times, and afterward the water didn’t feel so cold. In the hard moments of her childhood—when she was teased or hurt—her father would breathe with her like this. Now, in Evelyn’s foyer, she breathes the same way. Monique calls Frankie and says that “things are progressing,” but that Evelyn is reluctant to talk about anything other than the dresses and the auction.

Grace takes Monique upstairs to Evelyn’s study. Evelyn tells Monique to sit at the desk and seats herself on the sofa opposite. Monique says she’s never written a biography, at which Evelyn launches into a story. At the age of 14, after Evelyn’s mother died, she knew Evelyn’s father would eventually marry her off for his own advantage. They were broke and couldn’t even afford electricity. But Evelyn knew she held men’s attention, and she’d heard that one of her neighbors, Ernie Diaz, was about to take a job in Hollywood, so she knocked on his door and lied about her age in order to be with him. She tells Monique that the one thing she should learn from her is to take things, rather than wait for them to be given to her—and that rule applies to this biography, too.

Evelyn asks Monique where she should begin. Monique refers to her notebook, where she’s gone over and over one question with her pen: “Who was the love of Evelyn’s life???” She asks Evelyn whether Harry Cameron was the love of her life. Evelyn says that, while he was her best friend, he wasn’t the love of her life in the way Monique means. When Monique presses her, she stands up and sees her out, telling her to come back on Monday to recommence the interview. Monique senses tension. As Monique puts her coat on, Evelyn tells her that in that moment in her study, she had a hard time telling the truth, but she’ll be ready on Monday.

*This is the first of many moments in which Monique wrestles with the question of honesty versus ambition, but it’s clear that Evelyn has become so used to that question that it doesn’t bother her anymore. Evelyn’s use of the phrase “by the balls” suggests she’s not one to avoid a crass expression if it’ll help her to get her point across.*



*Monique complicates the memory of her father by using an innocent skill he taught her in her childhood to calm herself down in order to tell a convincing lie. At the same time, the memory emphasizes Monique’s impression of her father as a kind, gentle person. Monique’s language in the phone call to Frankie is especially vague, which highlights her discomfort: she’s not used to lying, and she’s not great at it.*



*By giving Monique the spot at the desk—seemingly the position of authority in the office—Evelyn appears to acknowledge her status as the subject, rather than the conductor, of the interviews that are about to begin. It’s a position that Monique needs to grow into, however: her admission to Evelyn that she’s never written a biography is a sign that she’s intimidated by the task ahead. It also emphasizes Evelyn’s ability to coax information out of Monique, perhaps because she’s an intimidating presence no matter where she sits.*



*Monique’s guess that Harry Cameron was the love of Evelyn’s life hints that Harry played a large role in Evelyn’s life—large enough to be perceived as particularly significant even from an outsider’s perspective. Evelyn’s reaction to Monique’s question is a sign that the truth about her romantic life is something she hasn’t yet been able to discuss with many people—implying it’s a secret she’s kept for many years.*





Monique takes the subway home. She sits on her couch, answers some emails, and thinks about ordering dinner. It's only when she goes to put her feet up that she remembers the **coffee table** and David are no longer there. It's the first time she's returned to her apartment without immediately thinking about David, and for the next few days, instead of thinking about her marriage, she ponders Evelyn's love life instead.

*Monique remembers David's absence only when she remembers the coffee table is gone—which suggests that she's getting used to her empty apartment and that her failing relationship is no longer her top priority. In addition, when Monique shifts her focus from her marriage to Evelyn's interview, her ambitious, career-driven side starts to reveal itself.*



## CHAPTER 5

Monique is back in Evelyn's study, committed to staying as long as Evelyn wants to talk. Instead of sitting at the desk, Monique sits in the chair next to the sofa to make Evelyn feel like they're on the same team. She opens her notepad and hits record on her phone. Evelyn says she's ready to begin: everyone she loved is dead, and she has nobody she needs to protect by lying. Monique tells her to start at the beginning, with her first husband, Ernie Diaz.

*Moving from the desk to the chair is a small way that Monique exerts her own authority in Evelyn's domain, and it shows she can express her own preferences once she feels comfortable enough to do so. Evelyn's statement implies that, while her loved ones were still alive, she was accustomed to lying in order to protect them—and suggests that what she's about to tell Monique will change not only her own reputation, but the reputations of those close to her.*



## CHAPTER 6

Evelyn's mother and Evelyn's father emigrated to the U.S. from Cuba and settled in Hell's Kitchen, a neighborhood in Manhattan, when Evelyn's mother was 17. Evelyn's mother, who dreamed of becoming a movie star and getting herself and Evelyn away from Evelyn's father, died when Evelyn was 11. Soon after, Evelyn's body begins to mature. By the time Evelyn is 13, she's tall and beautiful with a full chest, and she realizes grown men look at her as she walks past. One day, a 16-year-old boy, the cashier at the corner store, kisses her and forces her to show him her chest. She knows she'll have to do it, so in exchange, she takes whatever she wants from the store without paying. The boy tells her she has power over him, and she believes him. When he dumps her, she feels relieved, but also that she's failed.

*In the mid-1900s, when Evelyn and her parents lived in Hell's Kitchen, the neighborhood was a particularly tough area in Manhattan. Even the name "Hell's Kitchen" suggests a trial by fire, emphasizing that Evelyn had to learn how to fend for herself early in life—she wasn't born into the luxury she now enjoys. Evelyn's loss of a parent when she was young is something she shares with Monique. Evelyn seems to have inherited her mother's dream of stardom. This passage also suggests that Evelyn's mother's death strengthened Evelyn's own resolve and propelled her to grow up faster.*



Eventually, Evelyn realizes she can choose whom she shows her body to. She doesn't feel attracted to anyone sexually, but what she *does* want is to escape Hell's Kitchen and get to Hollywood. In her mind, Hollywood is the promise of sun and palm trees. She also thinks that life there is just like life in the movies: in Hollywood, good people win, and bad people get punished. Evelyn puts on her favorite green dress and knocks on Ernie Diaz's door. They marry—Evelyn is only just 15—and move to Hollywood, where they save up to move into their own place.

*From a young age, Evelyn is used to juggling often contradictory mindsets: her idea of Hollywood is naïve and idealistic, but her strategy of getting there is pragmatic and crude. She knows what men want—sex, and to possess a woman's beauty—and she knows that if she gives those things to them, she can get something in return.*



Instead of finishing high school, Evelyn visits the same restaurant every day, hoping to be discovered as an actress. Eventually, the bartender gets sick of her and tells her she has to work if she's going to keep hanging around, so she begins to wait tables. After four months, young producer Harry Cameron has a meeting at the restaurant and is startled by Evelyn's beauty; he secures her a deal at Sunset Studios within two weeks.

Evelyn tells Ernie, dishonestly, that acting will be something fun for her to do until she becomes a mother. At this point, she's 17. She heads to Sunset Studios every morning to play as an extra, occasionally getting one or two lines. She asks Ernie if she can pay for acting classes, though it angers her to have to ask him how she can spend her own money. Though he doesn't know her real motive for marrying him, she becomes frustrated that he underestimates her, telling her she "might" star in a movie one day when she knows she *will*.

After six months of acting lessons, Evelyn can deliver lines convincingly. She visits Harry Cameron's office and asks him for a lead role in an upcoming romantic comedy. Harry is one of the few men at the studio who doesn't seem preoccupied with Evelyn's body, which bothers her—she feels like she's doing something wrong. He tells her that Ari Sullivan, a producer on the movie, won't approve her for the part because of her race: he needs "a nice **blond** girl." Though Evelyn pushes Harry, suggesting she get a part in a different film, he doesn't budge on the subject.

The next time Evelyn sees Ari Sullivan, she drops her purse in front of him and makes eye contact with him as she bends to pick it up. A week later, she runs into him in the hallway. He greets her by name, and after his secretary leaves for the night, Evelyn allows him to orally pleasure her on his desk. She fakes an orgasm after a few minutes. Though she doesn't enjoy the act, she's happy enough being there because she knows she's going to get what she wants from a career standpoint.

*It's clear that Evelyn's ambition can cause her to have tunnel vision: school won't get her where she wants to go, so she doesn't spend her time pursuing it. But she's also patient—four months is a long time to wait for someone's attention—which suggests that she's also capable of playing the long game.*



*Evelyn knows she can only continue to get what she wants as long as Ernie is happy, which means she has to cultivate two sides of herself—the ambitious, career-driven side, and the housewife persona that appeases Ernie. Even though Evelyn deliberately keeps up this façade for Ernie, her frustration with him is a sign that keeping up a false persona will never truly satisfy her.*



*Harry's comment about Evelyn's appearance and race is a sign that, no matter her talent or ambition, Evelyn is still one step behind white actresses. Meanwhile, Evelyn's candid conversation with Harry suggests that the two of them, despite disagreeing, have a close relationship—possibly because Harry is the one man Evelyn can't manipulate with her appearance.*



*Evelyn's strategic nature is clear here: instead of trying to get what she wants all at once, she breaks her plan down into smaller steps. Allowing Ari to perform a sexual act on her shows she's able to separate the act of sex from any feelings of intimacy: sex is a tool for her, and so it's not emotionally loaded. In fact, treating sex like a performance means it becomes just another element of her workday and an integral part of her career.*



When the two films Evelyn wanted parts in come out, they receive dismal reviews, which Evelyn uses as leverage with Harry. He and Ari offer her the option of either playing an Italian heiress or playing Jo in *Little Women*. Evelyn chooses Jo: though it's a white role, which means she'll have to transform physically, it will put her on a more ambitious career path. Evelyn meets with a stylist who bleaches her **hair** and shapes her eyebrows, a nutritionist who prescribes cabbage soup and smoking for weight loss, and an elocutionist who forbids her from speaking Spanish. Evelyn also fills out a questionnaire about her life, but the researcher who reads it tells her she needs to change her answers, especially making sure to paint her father as a caring, hardworking man.

Evelyn sits for dozens of publicity photos, some of which involve her playing golf and getting on an airplane. The wardrobe people ensure she's always wearing what Harry demands, including a tight sweater. She realizes she's being marketed as "both naïve and erotic," and she feels comfortable acting out that persona. Harry asks for another meeting to discuss Evelyn's name. She wants one with the initials EH, her maiden name, and suggests Evelyn Hugo—a name she came up with the night before. Finally, Harry asks Evelyn to go on dates with a few movie stars, implying that she needs to divorce Ernie. She writes him a letter expressing false love and heartbreak. Looking back, Evelyn doesn't feel sorry for her opportunistic behavior, especially considering that Ernie remarried and had eight children.

## CHAPTER 7

Back in the present, Grace enters the study to tell Evelyn she has a meeting soon, prompting Monique to wrap up for the day. As soon as Monique gets home, she picks up a call from Monique's mother, who asks her how things are going. Monique knows she's really asking how life is without David. Monique's mother was never fully on board with their relationship. She tells Monique that she's been thinking of visiting. Monique considers this: her mother will be critical and concerned, but at least she'll provide some company. Monique agrees, at which her mom tells her she's already booked the ticket.

Monique isn't excited about her mom's visit, but she knows it'll be good for her. Her mom asks if she received the package of the photographs her dad took during his work on movie sets—she didn't. She tells her mom that Evelyn wants her to write her autobiography, and when her mom says it's probably because she's a talented writer, she insists that there must be something else going on. Her mom tells her to share the "juicy stuff" with her.

*It's clear from Evelyn's choice of role that she's willing to sacrifice her identity if it'll help her career. The changes she makes to her weight, hair, and accent are all signs that success in Hollywood depends on how well an actor can please and entertain a white audience. Evelyn's advised diet is unappealing, which suggests that the goal isn't to enjoy the process, but to work toward the end result—an attitude Evelyn has already taken up when it comes to other parts of her life, like sex and relationships.*



*The publicity photos feature Evelyn participating in activities that proclaim wealth and whiteness, which suggests that in order to appeal to audiences and secure financial stability, she already has to appear well-off and aspirational. Evelyn must embrace the contradictory elements of naivete and eroticism to pull off this public persona—something she's already proved she can do by marrying Ernie and winning over Ari. Her strategic attitude comes through in her comment about Ernie: he ended up happy, so she has no reason to feel remorse for hurting him.*



*Monique and her mother clearly talk to each other often, which shows that though her mother might be a little overbearing, their relationship is strong. Monique's mother is clearly eager to see Monique—she booked her ticket before even asking her, which also demonstrates her assumption that Monique will be happy to see her, too.*



*Monique's mother's excitement about the project is slightly foreboding—a sign that there might be some parts of Evelyn's life that could intersect with Monique and her family in surprising ways. At the same time, Monique's mother's suggestion that Evelyn chose Monique for her talent emphasizes her naivete and establishes her as an outsider—someone who doesn't understand everything that happens in the interviews.*



## CHAPTER 8

Evelyn's biography picks back up as she continues to transform her identity. Right after Evelyn dyes her **hair**, the studio places her in several inconsequential comedy films, the first of which is *Father and Daughter*. She goes along with it, firstly because she has no choice, and secondly because she knows she's gaining momentum. Harry pushes her to go on a date with Brick Thomas, a former child star with a huge ego. One night, Evelyn and Brick go on a date, fully styled and driving Harry's Cadillac. Before they even sit down at the restaurant, photographers begin to take their picture. At the end of the date, Brick tells Evelyn that people will start rumors about them tomorrow and offers to "make 'em true." Evelyn replies, "Don't hold your breath."

Harry drives Evelyn home from the date and tells her that, while she doesn't have to like every man she dates, it'd be good if she could take some of them seriously. When Don Adler shows up at her house for their first date, he tells her he's been begging Harry to meet her. Evelyn knows he's equally as handsome as her other dates, but for some reason—perhaps because, at least early on, he treats her like a person and not a possession—she genuinely likes him. Their first date lasts the whole night. Don and Evelyn dance for hours at a club filled with celebrities. When Don drops Evelyn home, he asks to see her again—not arranged by Harry, and not a photo op, but a real date. She agrees, and he cancels his prior arrangement to go out with her then instead.

## CHAPTER 9

*Father and Daughter* is a big hit. On opening night, Evelyn imagines telling Evelyn's mother, "We're both out of there." She expects Sunset Studios to move ahead with [Little Women](#) immediately, but they put her in another film with essentially the same plot as *Father and Daughter*. During the film's shoot, Don visits the set during his lunch breaks. Evelyn finds she's fallen in love with him, and Harry, who's become Evelyn's closest friend, gets sick of hearing her talk about him. Evelyn values Harry's friendship because she knows he wants her to succeed as much as she does.

Evelyn asks Harry why Ari is moving so slowly with [Little Women](#). He tells her it'd be better if they start filming in a few months' time. After she's done a few similar, romantic roles, people will begin to think she can only do one thing—and then, when they see her as Jo, they'll be delighted by her unpredictability. Evelyn knows she can't argue: Sunset Studios essentially owns her. Harry tells her she needs to focus on making her relationship with Don official.

*At this juncture, Evelyn relies on the patience she's cultivated, riding out the process of filming less important movies because she knows she'll reap the rewards eventually. Her distaste for Brick shows that, no matter how much effort she puts into cultivating her hyper-feminine, people-pleasing persona, she finds it hard to pander to men with oversized egos. Her date with Brick is fully styled and choreographed, highlighting the fact that romance is simply another part of her job as an actor.*



*Don's immediately humbler and more vulnerable than Brick, and it's clear that Evelyn finds these qualities attractive. She's less excited by handsomeness—which, she's discovered, is everywhere in Hollywood—and more delighted by what she perceives to be a genuine connection. It's also important to her to be prioritized, a desire that Don fulfills by choosing to cancel a prior arrangement to go out with her. Evelyn's inflexibility in the date she sets for Don is a way she exerts power in a male-driven society.*



*Despite all her internal and external transformations, Evelyn remains anchored to her past by the dream she inherited from her mother. Harry's response to Evelyn's infatuation suggests that he isn't as won over by Don as Evelyn is. But even when Harry and Evelyn irritate each other, their friendship stays strong, and it's clear that they have each other's best interests at heart.*



*Even though Evelyn can't do anything to move her career forward faster, Harry's suggestion about her relationship with Don emphasizes that Evelyn's love life is its own kind of professional obligation. Taking steps in her relationship with a famous actor will be just as helpful for her career as securing a big role.*



The night of the premiere of Don's new movie, he picks Evelyn up and shows her a huge diamond ring. She expected that he'd propose soon, mostly because he wants to have sex with her so badly—a feeling she reciprocates. But he shuts the ring box before she can touch it. Just as Evelyn begins to feel bitter, he tells her he's going to propose tonight, in front of everyone at the premiere, but he wanted to make sure she'd say yes. She confirms that she will, feeling the furthest from Hell's Kitchen she could imagine, and he kisses her passionately. When Don proposes on the red carpet, Evelyn sees Harry clapping and he gives her a wink.

An article in *Sub Rosa* titled "Don and Ev, Forev!" announces Don and Evelyn's engagement and spreads the rumor that Don's parents are delighted to welcome Evelyn to the family. The article suggests that the wedding will be "the event of the season."

## CHAPTER 10

Don and Evelyn's wedding is grand and luxurious, planned mostly by Don's parents and Sunset Studios. Though they're surrounded by celebrities, Evelyn feels that when she and Don exchange their vows, it's just the two of them alone. Near the end of the evening, Harry asks Evelyn if Don will take good care of her. She says she doesn't doubt it: she feels like Don is her fairytale happy ending.

Evelyn asks Harry why he never tried to make a move on her. She didn't have feelings for him, but she feels a little offended that he never showed interest. He tells her that she's not his type, and from the tone of his voice, she knows he means that he's not interested in girls. She tells him he's her best friend, and he says she's his. Don comes over and asks Evelyn for a dance; he tells her he loves everything about her. In that moment, Evelyn feels completely removed from her old life. Don tells her that they'll rule Hollywood together. Two months after the wedding, he begins to hit her.

## CHAPTER 11

Evelyn loves the first few weeks of marriage: they're full of parties and champagne, and she feels that Don has changed her mind about sex. Rather than seeing it as a tool, she's begun to truly enjoy it. But as soon as they start shooting a movie together, the cracks begin to appear. Don's receiving poor reviews for his performance in his latest movie which call him "no John Wayne." Meanwhile, Evelyn just won an award for Best Rising Star.

*Sex before marriage is the subject of severe societal disapproval in the 1950s, so for Evelyn and Don, marriage is bound up with the idea of sex. Don's behavior here emphasizes the fact that, no matter how genuine the relationship is, he and Evelyn are perpetually aware of how their fans and the media see them, so they need to capitalize on every moment that could give them positive press coverage. Harry's wink suggests he knows the proposal was planned to be a spectacle, and it also serves as a reminder that, in many ways, Harry is as close to Evelyn as Don is, if not closer.*



*It's clear from the playful headline and gossipy tone of the article that Sub Rosa is a publication whose purpose is to entertain and entice the reader rather than to offer well-researched facts.*



*Even on one of the most important days of her life, Evelyn is under the control of those wealthier and more powerful than her—even her celebrity status is a kind of restriction, because it requires such a high standard of perfection. While Harry's question emphasizes his care for Evelyn, it's also a hint that Don might pose a threat to her.*



*Even when Evelyn doesn't want something—or someone—she wants to know it's available to her, which is why Harry's lack of interest is so perplexing. Her ability to gauge his meaning from a subtle comment is a sign that she's becoming less naïve and more aware of the spectrum of sexuality. Don's quick shift in behavior emphasizes how fickle happiness can be; it also shows how quickly Evelyn's circumstances, however comfortable, can change completely.*



*Don can be affectionate with Evelyn as long as he feels secure as the masculine figure in the marriage—security he feels he maintains through his reputation and career success. As soon as it seems like Evelyn is rising above him professionally, however, she becomes more a threat than a lover to him, which proves that he treasures his celebrity status more than his marriage.*





On the day they're due to shoot an emotional scene on *One More Day*, Don orders Evelyn to make him breakfast. She asks the maid at the bungalow they're renting to cook it, then she asks Don what he would like, realizing he's used to his own maid knowing what he wants. He screams into a pillow and tells Evelyn that if she's not going to make him breakfast, she should at least know how he likes it. By now, Evelyn knows that Don is only happy when things are going well for him. Later, as they're driving to set, Don asks Evelyn why she hasn't taken his name as her stage name. He's stopped the car in the middle of the road, and she knows that people will begin to notice them soon.

Don drives the rest of the way to set. He and Evelyn are 45 minutes late. He tells her they can afford it because of their status, and when they get to his trailer, she tells him not to say things like that around other people. He retorts that he and Evelyn are not equals, and she should stop making movies and start having children. When she refuses, he slaps her face. Evelyn is humiliated but stares straight ahead the way she did when her father hit her. The assistant director knocks on the door, asking for Evelyn. She tells Don to have her wardrobe team come to his trailer, and to have his go to hers. As soon as he leaves, she slumps to the floor and cries. Even though she's gone through a huge transformation and changed her whole life, trouble is still following her.

Evelyn's hairstylist comes in and remarks on her appearance. She asks Evelyn if she fell, and Evelyn says she did, though they both know what really happened. Evelyn knows she's not the only woman being hit, and the protocol is to keep quiet about it. Evelyn prepares to shoot and heads to set, where Don apologizes for hitting her. She's surprised, never having received an apology for violence before, and forgives him. Though she and Don both receive Oscar nominations for the film, it's the only one she can never bear to watch.

## CHAPTER 12

Don continues to hit Evelyn when he's stressed out. When they both lose at the Oscars, Evelyn tries to console Don by telling him she lost too, but he tells her it's different for her because her parents are "trash" and nobody expects her to succeed. When she tries to argue with him, he pushes her out of the parked car they're in. Evelyn continues to forgive Don, even though she's stopped believing he'll change.

*Don's attitude to Evelyn suggests that he expects her to fulfill the role of a maid when necessary and to treat him like a superior rather than an equal. Evelyn's rejection of this expectation shows she has no desire to respect rigid gender norms. Don and Evelyn fundamentally disagree on the function of their marriage: for Evelyn, it's a close bond to a person she loves, while Don sees it as Evelyn's agreement to be subservient to him.*



*Though both Don and Evelyn know their celebrity status means they'll be forgiven for lateness, it's something Evelyn feels they should acknowledge privately while Don flaunts it. Don's unwillingness to take advice from Evelyn emphasizes his desire to be the person in charge, and his violence shows that he's so profoundly insecure about his authority that language doesn't seem like an option. Evelyn is used to violence—she remains poised and cool-headed—but she realizes in this moment that it's not something she escaped from when she left her father behind.*



*The hairstylist offers Evelyn a chance to lie when she asks if Evelyn fell. On the one hand, this is a kind thing to do—she doesn't demand that Evelyn tell a delicate truth. But it's also a small act that perpetuates the expectation that women keep quiet about domestic violence—and it's a silent warning to Evelyn that she could jeopardize her career if she threatens the preexisting power structure that reveres and protects men.*



*Don's reply confirms that he doesn't see Evelyn as his equal—her career is merely something for her to do until she starts having children. Don consistently uses bodily force instead of attempting to remedy a situation verbally—it's possible he relies on being physically stronger than Evelyn because he knows he might not match her intellectually.*



One day, Harry visits Evelyn's dressing room to tell her that [Little Women](#) is going ahead. But when he says that Celia St. James will be playing Beth, Evelyn worries that Celia will overshadow her and Ruby Reilly, another of her co-stars. She tells Harry she's ready to do the film. He agrees. As she hugs him, he notices the bruise on her face and becomes angry. She tells him there's nothing he can do to help: she still loves Don, and he ensures her fame and success. Ruby comes in to discuss Celia with Evelyn, reiterating Evelyn's worry that Celia's going to steal their thunder.

*Professional success is never an easy road for Evelyn: even when she secures her breakout role, she needs to compete with a better actor if she wants to stand out. Though Harry is on Evelyn's side when it comes to her relationship with Don, he, like Evelyn, is still beholden to the unwritten rules of the movie industry, in which ambition and fame are paramount. The scene introduces a conflict that'll continue throughout Evelyn's life: she'll continue to put herself in physical and emotional danger if it'll help advance her career.*



## CHAPTER 13

The first morning of rehearsals for [Little Women](#), Don brings Evelyn half a grapefruit and a cigarette: breakfast in bed. She's charmed by the gesture. Her maid, Paula, is cleaning the bedroom, and Evelyn notices her picking the cigarette butt off the duvet. Her room's a mess. She asks Paula to continue cleaning later. She doesn't want to get dressed in front of her, because then she'll see the bruise on her ribs that she got when Don pushed her down the stairs a week ago. A moment later, Paula comes back in, and Evelyn snaps at her.

*Evelyn's diet hasn't changed much since she was encouraged to eat mainly cabbage soup and smoke cigarettes—a sign that even now she's established a strong career, she has to stay slim. The fact that Evelyn hides her bruises from Paula suggests that she's ashamed of being a victim of Don's violence—and that Don only hurts her when nobody, not even Paula, is around.*



On set, Evelyn realizes that Celia has no idea how much the other actors hate her. She looks youthful and perfect in a girl-next-door way—a beauty that people can relate to. Evelyn and Ruby know the kind of power that accessibility gives Celia. Celia tells them she's scared, and Evelyn tells her she can see right through her modesty. Celia acts hurt, but Evelyn continues, saying that Celia's Oscar nomination is virtually guaranteed. When she realizes that Celia is only acting naïve, she begins to like her more.

*Celia has a different kind of beauty than Evelyn, so she's more of an outright threat to Evelyn than an equal competitor. Evelyn likes Celia once she knows Celia's only pretending to be innocent, which shows that Evelyn has no time for sweetness—she respects ambition and cunning, perhaps because those qualities are the foundations of her own success.*



## CHAPTER 14

Back in the present, it's been dark for hours. Evelyn tells Monique to pick back up tomorrow. She mentions that Frankie has emailed about a photoshoot, and Monique says she hasn't told *Vivant* the plan for the story. Monique knows she has to tell Frankie something.

*Now that Evelyn knows Frankie wants a photoshoot, time is running out for Monique to decide what to tell Frankie. Monique's caught between pleasing both of them and securing her own interests.*



Monique arrives home to the package from Monique's mother. It's too heavy to carry. She opens it to find Monique's father's albums full of photos from movie sets. She remembers the job he took in Vancouver a year before he died. When she and her mom visited him, she asked him why he had to take this job so far away, and he told her that when she grew up, she'd need to find a job that she cared about, too. During her freshman year, she realized she loved telling stories. That led to journalism school, freelancing, and finally working at *Vivant*. She realizes that that conversation with her father led her to this point in her life, and she questions whether she'd have taken it so seriously if he hadn't died.

At the end of the final album, Monique finds a photo of herself with her parents at a barbecue when she was four. At that point, people still called her by her first name, Elizabeth—Monique is her middle name. After Monique's father died, Monique and Monique's mother realized that she should go by Monique, the name her father chose. Monique notices how beautiful her parents look in the picture and considers how hard it must have been for them, a white woman and a Black man, to build a happy life in the 1980s.

Monique didn't meet anyone who looked like her until she started school, when she became friends with another mixed-race kid. She grew up feeling like two halves, and after her father died, she felt "one-half [her] mother and one-half lost." But now, looking at the photo, she realizes that she isn't two halves, but one whole, loved person. She wishes she could send her dad a letter. Back in Evelyn's study, Monique tells Evelyn to pick up from where she left off. Evelyn laughs and comments on Monique's confidence.

## CHAPTER 15

Evelyn's story picks up as she's rehearsing for [Little Women](#). Evelyn tells Don that Celia is proving as big a threat as she expected. He tells her that his latest film is doing well, and he has the power to get Celia removed from the film, but she says she's not too worried; in fact, she even slightly likes Celia. The next day, Celia asks Evelyn out for a milkshake at Schwab's, a celebrity hotspot. While they're driving there, Evelyn says Celia only wants to take her to Schwab's to be photographed together. Celia's insulted by Evelyn's underestimation of her, but when Evelyn tells her to drive to a different ice cream shop, she complies.

*Monique's father's influence on her life is similar to the influence Evelyn's mother had on Evelyn's life—a coincidence that hints there might be more linking the two characters together. Further suggesting their link is the fact that Monique's father worked in the movie industry and, as his many photo albums prove, was deeply invested in the work he did. Monique's question about her father's role in her life adds to the fateful undertone of this moment—it prompts the reader to wonder once again why Evelyn chose Monique to write her story.*



*Monique's late father has shaped her identity in addition to her ambition. The arrival of the photo albums presents an opportunity for Monique to look into the past, and by looking at the photos, she makes an indirect, subconscious link between her own history and the history she's immersed in during her interviews with Evelyn.*



*It's the image of family that confirms Monique's identity as a complex, complete, and loved person, which emphasizes the influence that having a caring family has on one's self-worth. When Monique remembers how deeply her family cares about her, the burden of her complex mixed-race identity becomes lighter. It seems like this cathartic moment also instils a sense of professional confidence in Monique.*



*Evelyn is up for a challenge, and she has enough confidence to believe that she'll shine in the film even while sharing scenes with Celia. Though Celia is beginning to learn a few Hollywood tricks, Evelyn has been playing the game longer, and it's important to her to exert power over Celia in this game of strategy—perhaps especially because she knows Celia has the upper hand as an actor. Celia, despite her skill and reputation, is intimidated by Evelyn.*



The server at the ice cream shop is transfixed by Evelyn and Celia. When he asks Evelyn if she's really who he thinks she is, she says no. Celia apologizes for trying to use Evelyn for clout, but Evelyn replies that Celia shouldn't feel bad for trying. She says she's not using Celia because Celia has nothing to offer her yet, which Celia disagrees with: she's the better actor of the two, and she'll help Evelyn with her scenes after hours if Evelyn agrees to be seen around town with her. She tells Evelyn she likes her, even her "calculating and awful" qualities, and that Evelyn will end up as Hollywood's biggest star. Evelyn agrees that Celia will be her second-best friend (after Harry Cameron).

An article in *Sub Rosa* titled "Cold, Cold Evelyn" reports that, despite Don wanting a family, Evelyn refuses to have children and is only focused on her career, preferring to go out with celebrities like Celia rather than spend time with her husband. The author adds that Evelyn is unkind to the help and keeps an untidy home.

*Evelyn is secure enough in her celebrity status that she has no need to cause a scene for clout. She clearly holds no contempt for Celia's strategic thinking: it's not offensive to her that other people are playing the same networking game she is, though she'll keep the upper hand as long as she can. Evelyn understands, however, that she won't go far as an actor without pulling off a good performance. Celia becomes important to Evelyn because Celia can help her professionally, which means their relationship begins on the same grounds as Evelyn and Harry's friendship—a sign Evelyn might come to trust Celia just as she trusts Harry.*



*The article makes allegations against Evelyn that paint her as a woman who's failed to act within the acceptable social boundaries of womanhood. Instead of being a mother and homemaker, Evelyn is focused on her career—and this publication knows that the disapproval for such a woman is so widespread it's sure to sell copies.*



## CHAPTER 16

Evelyn throws a copy of *Sub Rosa* on Harry's desk and asks why nobody at Sunset Studios paid the magazine not to print the story. He tells her that the magazine will make more money by printing rumors than the studio can afford to pay them, especially because they're making less money than they used to. Celia enters the office and fails to offer a positive spin on the situation.

A week earlier, filming wrapped on [Little Women](#) and Harry told Evelyn and Celia that they were likely to be nominated for Oscars for the film. During the shoot, Evelyn and Celia stayed late every night to rehearse together, and under Celia's influence, Evelyn started paying attention to the newer, grittier work happening in Hollywood—Method actors and messy plots. As she sits in Harry's office now, she knows she's in the company of two people who bring out the best in her.

*Sunset's diminishing authority and finances show that Hollywood is changing—and that Evelyn's career, tied up as it is with Sunset Studios, is far from secure. Celia's realism in this moment is a sign that she's stopped acting naïve, especially around Evelyn.*



*Evelyn's idea of close interpersonal connections is underpinned by the deep, serious conversations she has with the people with whom she's close, especially when they're discussing her career. These aren't conversations she has with her husband, Don, but she has them regularly with Celia and Harry—a hint that Evelyn and Don's relationship is fundamentally unsatisfying for Evelyn.*



Harry encourages Evelyn to leave the studio lot with Celia so that Don can't find her when he's in a bad mood about the article. She says that'll only encourage the rumors, and she realizes her maid, Paula, is the one who sold the story. Harry offers to fire Paula, but Evelyn knows she has to spin the story in a way that will win back the sympathy of moviegoers. She asks Harry to have Dr. Lopani ring the house in the evening sounding concerned; she writes out a note for him to read on the phone call. Don comes into the office holding the magazine. Evelyn tells him the plan for the evening: she'll fake a miscarriage and gain pity for both herself and Don.

When Evelyn picks up the phone that evening, she starts crying as loud as possible to make sure Paula knows something is wrong. Don fires Paula, making sure to be rude enough to make her angry so she'll go to the tabloids. Soon after, *Sub Rosa* publishes another article titled "Bless Don and Evelyn! They Need It!" which details the miscarriage and encourages readers to send their best wishes to the couple.

## CHAPTER 17

The night after *Sub Rosa* publishes the new article, Evelyn wants to celebrate, so Celia comes to the house with a bottle of wine. With no maid, Evelyn needs Celia to tell her which glasses to use. Celia says she likes that Evelyn doesn't come from old money; her own family thinks the fact that she works is undignified. Evelyn says she doesn't really have any family. Celia admires the fact that Evelyn found success for herself.

Evelyn puts on a Billie Holiday record that Don hates. She tells Celia that Billie Holiday changed her name, which prompts Celia to ask what Evelyn's real name is, and Evelyn tells her. Celia says her name is beautiful, without commenting on the fact that she's not white. Celia says she changed her name from "Cecilia Jamison" because it sounded like the name of someone who might live next door, and she wanted to have the effect Evelyn has on the people around her instead. When Celia remarks on Evelyn's lips and chest, Evelyn flushes—a woman has never talked about her this way before.

Evelyn refills their wine glasses, while Celia tells her that when she saw her film *Father and Daughter* for the first time, she thought Evelyn was the most beautiful woman who had ever lived. Evelyn says that Celia is just as beautiful. They move to the living room and Evelyn starts a fire. When Celia suggests they need newspaper, Evelyn finds the copy of *Sub Rosa* with the article that called her "cold" and adds it to the flames. Celia brings her the bottle of wine, and Evelyn drinks straight from it, enjoying the feeling of consuming something so expensive so quickly.

*For Evelyn, securing her status as a beloved star is more important than protecting her privacy. She deals with problems by choreographing her life as if it's a movie, and she expects the people around her to play along. It's clear here that she's willing to fabricate and publicize even highly personal details if it'll help her career. She knows, too, that she'll get more sympathy from the public if they think she can't have a baby than if it appears she's chosen not to. In other words, it's socially acceptable for a woman to be helpless, while a woman with power and agency is condemned.*



*Here, Don and Evelyn bring their acting skills into their personal lives, and it seems natural for them to ignore the boundaries between their daily lives and their professional obligations.*



*Evelyn celebrates with Celia instead of Don, which suggests that she enjoys Celia's company more than Don's. Though Evelyn is in many ways more independent than other women, she relies on her maid for many things—a sign that she's become accustomed to financial comfort.*



*When Don is away, Evelyn feels free to indulge in her own tastes and pleasures, and this highlights the authority that Don has around the house and in their relationship when he's there. Evelyn's reaction to Celia's compliments is a sign of her growing intimacy with Celia: she's been complimented countless times, but this time, the words really mean something.*



*Celia's comments here don't seem to be strategic or cunning. Instead, she's driven to impress her admiration and attraction upon Evelyn. Though neither of them is particularly skilled at starting a fire, their willingness to work together suggests that they enjoy navigating situations together without the presence of men.*





Celia tries to take the bottle from Evelyn, which ends in wine spilling onto Celia's white shirt. Evelyn takes her upstairs to change into one of her own shirts. In the bedroom, Celia asks Evelyn whether she loves Don. Evelyn says she doesn't know. She didn't just marry Don for publicity—she enjoyed his company and still does sometimes. Don has taught her that you can still desire someone even, or especially, when you hate them. Celia tells her to drop the subject.

Celia tells Evelyn that her secrets are safe with her, and Evelyn believes her, realizing that the honesty between them feels more intimate than any relationship she's had before and wondering if this is what it means to be in love. She hands Celia a shirt and watches as she takes the stained one off, mesmerized by her bare skin and the freckles on her hip. At that moment, Don comes into the bedroom, surprising them both.

An article in *Photomoment* reports that Celia St. James has been making high-profile friends, most notably Evelyn Hugo. The two have been seen all around town, and the news that Celia is dating Don Adler's friend Robert Logan presumably means that Celia and Evelyn will be going on double dates in the future.

## CHAPTER 18

Celia, wearing a low-cut black dress and a diamond necklace that Evelyn asked Don to procure for her, tells Evelyn she doesn't want to go to the [Little Women](#) premiere with Robert Logan. Evelyn is dressed in emerald green, which is becoming her signature color. She tells Celia she has to go with Robert, even though she hates him: she can't go without a date. She asks Celia why she's here if she's unwilling to take the necessary steps to become famous. Celia storms out of the room, but when she reaches Robert in the living room, she's smiling widely.

Evelyn walks up to Don, who she's beginning to tire of. As the two couples get ready to leave, Don says, "Let's see our little women in [Little Women](#), shall we?" Evelyn resists the urge to smack him. When they get out of the car at the theater, Evelyn waits a little longer than the others before emerging onto the red carpet. Don tells her she's the most beautiful woman there, and Evelyn feels frustrated that he loves her for something she didn't earn.

*By spilling red wine onto Celia's white shirt, Evelyn leaves a permanent mark—a symbol emphasizing the real, tangible nature of their relationship. Celia seems uncomfortable when Evelyn talks about loving Don, possibly because she's jealous, or because she doesn't particularly respect Don.*



*In this moment, Evelyn becomes aware of the depth of her connection to Celia. However, it's a connection that, for the reader, has been obvious for the past two chapters, which shows how focused Evelyn has been on her relationships with men: feelings for a woman are unfamiliar territory for her.*



*It's clear Evelyn's feelings for Celia go further than a professional connection, but instead of focusing on the two women, the article manages to pivot to the subject of their male partners. It's a reminder that in this society, women's value is based on what they offer men.*



*Here, Evelyn's realistic attitude—shown by her awareness that Celia will have a better chance at fame and success if she's seen with a male date—clashes with Celia's idealism. However, once she accepts the necessity of going with Robert, Celia (like Evelyn) finds it easy to lean on her acting skills in order to construct an image of her personal life that will appeal to the public.*



*Don's comment belittles Evelyn and Celia, and Evelyn's patience with him has clearly run out. Evelyn loved Don for seeing her whole self, not just her appearance, so Don's admiration of her beauty in this moment is a sign that his attitude toward her has changed dramatically—and as a result, Evelyn's love for him fades.*



When a reporter on the red carpet asks Evelyn whether Celia and Robert are getting serious, she evades the question. Then, when he asks Don when he and Evelyn will start a family, Don steers her into the theater. Just as they're about to go through the doors, Evelyn takes Celia's hand, and they wave to the crowd together. Don tells Evelyn that, in a few months, they'll both win Oscars. Evelyn reminds him that Celia will also be nominated, which irritates Don, who asks her to stop talking about Celia.

When the film starts, Evelyn quickly realizes that Celia has stolen the show and will be the only one people talk about. Instead of feeling jealous, she feels happy, and when Celia's character dies in the film, Evelyn reaches over to hold Celia's hand, at which Don rolls his eyes. Evelyn knows Don will make up an excuse when he hits her later—but that it'll really be because she held Celia's hand.

After the premiere, Evelyn stands alone in Ari Sullivan's mansion. Don disappeared as soon as they arrived at the party, and Evelyn looks for Celia instead. She runs into Ruby, who pulls her into the laundry room and asks her what they're going to do about Celia overshadowing them. Evelyn tells Ruby to move on and accept that Celia was better than her in the film. Ruby tells Evelyn that people have been spreading rumors about her and Celia. When Evelyn is confused, Ruby tells her that Celia is a lesbian. Evelyn is shocked and doesn't register much of what Ruby says after that, only refocusing when she tells her that Don is in Ari's bedroom cheating on her. But instead of wanting to address the situation with Don, she wants to find Celia.

## CHAPTER 19

Back in the present, Evelyn asks Grace to order dinner. Instead of continuing with her story, she simply looks at Monique. Monique can tell Evelyn is nervous to continue, so she asks the question she asked at the beginning of the interview: "Who was the love of your life?" After more prompting, Evelyn tells her it was Celia. Monique asks her if she's ready to come out as a gay woman, to which Evelyn replies that while she loved Celia, she also loved Don, and Monique shouldn't ignore her bisexual identity. Monique realizes that in overlooking half of Evelyn's identity, she's done what so many people have done to her regarding her race. She apologizes sincerely. Evelyn says she's ready to come out in this book as bisexual.

*Evelyn's relationship with the media is built on evasion—though she's not prone to lying outright, she'd rather skip a question than tell the truth. Don's certainty that they'll both win Oscars highlights his self-involved attitude, which he further emphasizes by his lack of interest in anything to do with Celia, despite—or perhaps because of—Evelyn's obvious affection for her.*



*This film is Evelyn's chance to break out as an actor—meaning that her career is at stake; despite this, Evelyn chooses to celebrate Celia rather than nurse her own jealous feelings, which demonstrates her deep affection for Celia. Conversely, Don's jealous anger is an immediate reaction and a clear sign that his relationship with Evelyn is falling apart.*



*Despite her fame and success, Evelyn actually has very few friends; this suggests that she only gets along with people she trusts—and in a place like Hollywood, there aren't many of those people. Meanwhile, Evelyn's affection for Celia seems to have interfered with her tendency to control the rumors people spread about her. Though she understood what Harry meant when he implied he was gay, she takes a long time to realize that Celia experiences same-sex attraction, too, and this suggests two things: first, female sexuality is less acknowledged in the 1950s, and second, Evelyn understands homosexuality as a distant concept rather than a part of her own life.*



*Though it's been decades since she realized she was attracted to Celia, Evelyn is hesitant to come out to Monique, which suggests that it's the first time she's discussed this part of her life with anyone outside her inner circle. In this moment, Monique begins to understand that Evelyn is just as complex as she is. Evelyn needs Monique to be as precise as possible with her language: this is Evelyn's chance to tell the world who she is, and this story isn't about Celia—it's about her.*



Monique asks Evelyn how she worked out her sexuality. Evelyn says that in that moment at the party, she realized she was jealous that both Don and Celia had been with other people. But she didn't immediately understand that she was in love with Celia, because she had never thought about herself that way before, and that kind of relationship wasn't accepted back then.

*Because Evelyn had no bisexual role models and hadn't witnessed any same-sex female relationships, her own identity was a kind of puzzle to work out. Perhaps this biography allows her to give future generations the role model she didn't have, which explains Evelyn's desire for Monique to record her life as accurately as possible.*



## CHAPTER 20

Evelyn's history picks back up at the Academy Awards afterparty. Ruby leaves Evelyn alone in the laundry room at the party, and soon after, Celia walks in. Evelyn asks her if she has sex with women, and Celia asks her if she'll stop being friends with her. She says no. Celia starts to leave, but Evelyn grabs her wrist and kisses her. Evelyn doesn't understand the full weight of her actions. She's focused on the sensory experience. Though Celia's body is different from Don's, the sensation is similar to being with him. Celia leaves the room.

*Despite Celia's idealism, she knows that outing herself as a lesbian would be dangerous. In fact, in this moment, Evelyn is the one who's immune to reality, subconsciously sacrificing her reputation in order to enjoy a romantic moment with Celia.*



Evelyn goes upstairs to find Don in one of the bedrooms getting dressed beside a woman. When Evelyn runs out, Don follows her, but she continues looking for Celia. When she sees Harry, she asks him to take her home. As Harry and Evelyn start to drive away, Don runs to Evelyn's window, which she doesn't roll down. He orders Harry not to take Evelyn away, but Harry tells him they'll discuss it later and drives away.

*Even when Evelyn walks in on a scene that proves Don is having an affair, she continues to pursue Celia, which is a clear sign that Celia, not Don, is her priority now. Don seems to assume that Harry will do as he says, which highlights his attitude that Evelyn is more his property than an equal partner. But Harry's response shows he is, as always, on Evelyn's side, even though refusing to do what Don wants could hurt his career.*



In the car, Evelyn tells Harry she found Don with a woman. Harry isn't surprised—he knows Don does this kind of thing often. Evelyn realizes Harry hasn't been telling her the whole truth, and she proposes that they tell each other everything from now on. Harry says he doesn't want to burden her with that. Evelyn suggests she's ready to be a real friend in that way, and that she and Celia may be more similar to Harry than he thinks. He replies that he's suspected Celia had feelings for Evelyn.

*In this moment, Evelyn realizes that Harry knows more about Don and Celia than she does, which suggests that she's less in control of her own life than she seems to be. Keeping his sexuality secret means Harry doesn't often form close friendships, which explains his reluctance to tell Evelyn the outright truth about himself.*

When Harry and Evelyn arrive at Harry's house, Evelyn tells him she's going to leave Don, and while Harry's happy to hear that, he warns her that Don will fight back. Evelyn observes Harry's décor: while his house is nice, there's nothing fancy about the way he's decorated it, and she realizes that, like her, he cares more about the hunt for success than the money he gets from it.

*Harry is a pragmatist, and his intimate knowledge of the way Hollywood works means he understands the kinds of repercussions Evelyn will face if the press uncovers the truth about her relationship with Celia. He shows his care for her not by reassuring or coddling her, but by warning her about these repercussions, which suggests that, though he can't guarantee she'll have an easy time, he'll be there for her anyway.*



Harry sets Evelyn up in his guest room and unzips her dress for her. As he leaves the room, he warns her that his job is to keep the studio happy, which involves keeping Don happy. The next morning, Harry takes Evelyn home to find that Don has already left. Instead, Celia is there. Harry leaves Evelyn at the doorstep, and she goes inside with Celia. She tells Celia that, though she used to love Don, she now only thinks about Celia. She goes to pack her bags.

*Don forgoes an opportunity to talk to Evelyn, again preferring not to communicate verbally but instead demonstrating his decision through physical absence. Celia's presence in the house is a sign that she's replaced Don as Evelyn's partner.*



## CHAPTER 21

Evelyn stays at Celia's apartment for a week. They sleep side by side in Celia's bed, and during the day, Evelyn stays inside reading. Though Evelyn wants to kiss Celia again, she doesn't know how to proceed and wonders whether her feelings are merely platonic. She isn't ready to identify as homosexual, so she tries to convince herself that her feelings for Celia are just a "quirk."

*Evelyn retreats from public life: she can barely understand her own changing feelings and circumstances, let alone work out which persona to present to the world. It's hard for her to untangle her feelings for Celia from the celebrity identity she must perform in public.*



One morning, Harry visits the apartment to deliver Evelyn her divorce papers. The main highlight is that Evelyn will keep the house, her own money, and half of Don's, as long as she agrees never to talk about the marriage. The same rules do not apply to Don. Harry continues by saying that Sunset Studios will drop Evelyn. She proposes to go freelance, which Harry encourages, but he adds that, on Don's request, Ari will blackball Evelyn from an Oscar nomination. Sunset is staying afloat because of stars like Don, so they can't afford not to keep him happy.

*Don is clearly still threatened by Evelyn even outside of his marriage to her, and he knows he's at fault for the dissolution of their marriage. His offer to Evelyn proves that his reputation and career are more important to him than money. Don's connections in the industry give him more power than Evelyn, and it's clear in this moment that no matter how much wealth or success she has, she'll always be at the whim of a more powerful man.*



Evelyn tells Harry she can rebuild her career from scratch—she's done it before. Harry doesn't doubt her, and when he says he wants to stay friends, Evelyn says that will never change. When he leaves, she realizes she's going to lose everything she worked toward—everything but the money—but then she remembers Celia. She goes into the bedroom where Celia's getting dressed after a shower and tells her she loves her. She pulls Celia's robe open, and the two have sex for the first time.

*Though Harry and Evelyn's friendship began as a professional relationship, it's clear now that their friendship transcends work. This passage also shows that money is an afterthought to Evelyn: while it's nice to have, it doesn't make up for the loss of the career she's been patiently building. The divorce papers seem to set Evelyn free from qualms about her identity, as evidenced by her first sexual encounter with Celia, which takes place immediately after Harry delivers the divorce papers.*



An article in *Sub Rosa* announces Don and Evelyn's divorce, pinning it on Evelyn's jealous behavior. The article goes on to suggest that Don is set to see more success, while it looks like Sunset Studios will be getting rid of Evelyn.

*The editors of Sub Rosa know how to pander to the status quo, so they spin the divorce to pin as much blame on the woman as possible: the story of the jealous lover is an easy sell.*



## CHAPTER 22

Back in the present, Monique asks Evelyn how she remained so confident when Don left her and her career began to collapse, mentioning that because Evelyn had Celia, it was “a little different.” When Evelyn asks Monique what she means by “different,” Monique admits she’s been thinking about her own divorce. Evelyn asks whether Monique has already signed the papers. Monique accuses her of being cynical in the way she treats divorce, but Evelyn replies that divorce doesn’t signify loss—heartbreak does. Monique wonders why she’s never distinguished between the two.

On her way home, Monique sees that Frankie has called her twice today. She texts her to ask whether she should call tomorrow, but Frankie tells her to call tonight. Monique sees two options: to tell Frankie that everything’s going to plan, or to tell the truth and put her job in jeopardy. Monique decides that she should focus on getting what she wants. She tells Frankie that Evelyn isn’t interested in doing a piece for *Vivant*—she wants to give her biography to Monique. Though Frankie is offended, Monique assures her she’ll try to convince Evelyn to give *Vivant* a groundbreaking cover story, as long as Frankie gives her a promotion. Frankie agrees, as long as Monique gets the story.

## CHAPTER 23

The next morning, Monique arrives at Evelyn’s study feeling nervous. She tells Evelyn that if she can’t tell her when the autobiography can be published, she needs to allow *Vivant* to publish a piece of it. Evelyn agrees. Monique pushes on, asking Evelyn to sit for a photo shoot. When Evelyn refuses, Monique tells her that if she doesn’t agree to the shoot, she’ll stop writing the book: she’s not going to lose her job over this.

Evelyn’s pleased to see Monique bargaining. Monique says she’s “learning from the best.” Evelyn agrees to the shoot, asking in return for Monique to be available at every moment starting next week. They agree on their terms, and Monique begins the interview from where they left off, realizing as Evelyn begins to tell her story again that she must have agreed to the cover shoot because she wants Monique for something important. At this moment, Monique begins to suspect she should worry about what that is.

*Monique allows her personal life to seep into her professional assignment, almost without noticing—a sign that her failing marriage is still preoccupying her. It’s clear from Evelyn’s response to Monique’s question about Don leaving her that the official bounds of marriage, like the paperwork and the divorce, mean less to her than the love that is or isn’t at the heart of a relationship. In other words, she doesn’t measure the strength of her relationships based on whether they developed into lasting marriages.*



*Frankie is deeply committed to her work and has little respect for Monique’s personal time, suggesting that she can’t imagine Monique wanting or needing a break. Monique’s choice to tell Frankie the truth suggests that she thinks she (Monique) has the upper hand, which appears to be true: Frankie would rather have a small story on Evelyn than no story at all. Monique’s ambition grows the longer she spends with Evelyn.*



*Monique can tell Evelyn wants her to be her biographer, which gives her some leverage in this argument. Additionally, she’s become comfortable enough around Evelyn to make demands of Evelyn. For Monique, who couldn’t even ask for cream in her coffee a few days ago, this is a huge sign of growth.*



*Evelyn admires in others what she considers strengths in herself—in this case, strategic thinking. Instead of feeling victorious, though, Monique feels a sense of foreboding, which turns this moment into an ominous one. The reader shares Monique’s trepidation about why Evelyn wants so badly to hold onto her.*





## EVELYN, GREEN'S NOT YOUR COLOR

An article in a 1960 issue of *Photomoment* describes Evelyn's appearance at the Audience Appreciation Awards in a green dress as lackluster, while Celia "dazzled." It reports that at the awards evening, the two of them didn't talk to each other at all, possibly because Evelyn's jealous of Celia's Oscar nomination while she didn't receive one herself. The article ends by calling Evelyn "green with envy."

*The previous article from the same publication focused on Evelyn and Celia's friendship, so this change in tone emphasizes the fickleness—and inaccuracy—of the media. Instead of allowing two high-profile women to coexist, it's more lucrative to print an article that pits them against each other.*



## CHAPTER 24

Evelyn's biography picks back up in the wake of her divorce from Don. Ari drops Evelyn from films at Sunset Studios and loans her to Columbia, where she stars in two bad romantic comedies, causing the other studios to lose interest in her. Meanwhile, Don gets his picture on the cover of *Life* magazine. The night of the Oscars, Harry calls Evelyn while she's at Celia's apartment to offer to take her with him, but she refuses, saying that'll hurt his reputation. When Evelyn gets off the phone, Celia asks if Evelyn will still love her if she doesn't win, and Evelyn tells her she'd love her even if she lived in a cardboard box.

*Evelyn's quick slide into mediocrity is a sign of significantly men control her career; meanwhile, those same men—no matter how poorly they've acted—will continue to enjoy social and professional stability. Harry's offer to take Evelyn to the Oscars shows the lengths he'll go to support her: he's willing to sacrifice his reputation to make her feel better.*



Back at home, Evelyn makes herself a drink and turns the TV on to watch the Oscars. She notices the ceremony seems more glamorous on screen than it feels in person, and she feels markedly distanced from the social circles she was once at the heart of. By the time they announce Celia's category, Evelyn is "drowning in self-pity," but when Celia wins, Evelyn jumps out of her seat and kisses the TV, chipping her tooth.

*When Evelyn sees people like her from the perspective of an outsider, they look more glamorous than Evelyn knows they are, which highlights the mismatch between appearances and reality. Still, she feels left out—it's easy to get sucked in by those appearances, however false they may be. When Evelyn chips her tooth, she temporarily sacrifices her appearance for Celia, and it's a rare moment in which she expresses her love without worrying how it'll look to others.*



Evelyn goes to bed alone but before she falls asleep, she hears a car pull into the driveway. Celia gets out and heads to Evelyn's bedroom with her Oscar. Evelyn asks her why she's not out celebrating, and Celia tells her, "Nothing means anything without you." When Evelyn tells her what happened to her tooth, she laughs before undressing and getting into bed.

*Celia would rather be at home with Evelyn than out celebrating: she obviously values her relationship with Evelyn more than the opportunity to network or show off.*



Both of Evelyn's romantic comedies flop at the box office, while Celia's newest film sells out, Don stars in a blockbuster, and Ruby receives rave reviews for a role Ari took away from Evelyn. Eventually, after seeing the French film *Breathless*, Evelyn decides to go to Paris.

*It seems like Evelyn is falling behind her peers. France is a place of possibility for her: she can envision opportunities there while doors are closing for her in Hollywood.*



## CHAPTER 25

Celia goes away for a film shoot and Evelyn considers it too risky to visit her on set or to have her come home on the weekends, so she takes the opportunity to go to Paris. Harry organizes meetings for her with his connections, most of which lead nowhere. But then Evelyn meets with a New Wave director, Max Girard, who knows nothing about her but is stunned by her beauty. He asks if she's willing to test for a part. She tries to keep her excitement secret as she agrees. She goes back to the hotel and writes a letter to Celia, signing off as "Edward."

In the middle of the night, Max calls Evelyn to ask if she's free to shoot a movie with him in France in two weeks. The movie is called *Boute-en-Train*, which Max translates for her as "the life of the party." Evelyn's role has already been cast, but Max says he'll fire the original actor if Evelyn will agree to do it. She says she'll sleep on it. Max asks if Evelyn has done nudity before—he thinks the movie should include a topless scene—and presses her to decide by the morning, because the original actress is sure to agree to nudity.

Two weeks later, Evelyn is on the set of *Boute-en-Train*. During the shoot, it's obvious that Max is attracted to her. On the penultimate day of filming, he tells her it's time to shoot the topless scene. She proposes that instead of showing the full shot of her breasts, the movie cuts to black a millisecond before they're revealed. She knows that people will enjoy being teased, whether they're attracted to women or not. Six months after the shoot ends, Evelyn is an international sensation.

An article in *Photomoment* reports that Mick Riva, a famous singer, is interested in Evelyn Hugo. Evelyn has become a sensation thanks to *Boute-en-Train*, which has sold out all over Europe and is now showing in the U.S. The article quotes Mick saying he'd like to marry her.

An article in *Hollywood Digest* reports that Evelyn has signed on to play the title role in [Anna Karenina](#), which Harry Cameron will produce. According to the article, Harry left Sunset Studios due to a disagreement with Ari Sullivan. The article concludes by saying that if Evelyn shows any bare skin in this movie, audiences will flock to see it.

*Evelyn is perpetually aware of the risks of publicizing her same-sex relationship. Here, she shifts her focus back to her career for the first time since moving in with Celia. When she meets Max, it's almost as though she's starting her career from the beginning again, with nothing to lose and much to prove. Meanwhile, her letter sign-off disguises her as a man, which shows she worries about being outed even by her mail correspondence.*



*Evelyn loves to be prioritized over others, so it's likely that Max wins her over when he mentions he'll fire the other actor. But his flattery is also manipulative, and he puts Evelyn under a lot of pressure to decide to film nude within a matter of hours. While he admires her, he still holds the cards—and once again, Evelyn's body is, to some degree, under the control of a man.*



*Even though it's implied that Evelyn won this role because of her physical appearance, her suggestion proves her artistic talent and her knowledge of what audiences want. She's knowledgeable about the male gaze, and she knows temptation is a more powerful tool than satisfaction.*



*From Mick's statement, it's clear he has a lot of confidence and assumes he'd have a chance at a relationship with Evelyn. The article is an abrupt piece of foreshadowing, leading the reader to wonder why the novel has introduced this new character.*



*Evelyn's success has clearly won her enough favor with American audiences for a title role like this to be a viable financial investment for Harry. Evelyn's career continues to rely on her physical appearance, which confirms her suggestion that audiences thrive on temptation.*



An article in *Sub Rosa* reports that Don Adler and Ruby Reilly are engaged, two years after Evelyn and Don's divorce. The article ponders how Don must feel about Evelyn's recent return to public favor.

*The tabloids were quick to pin Evelyn and Don's divorce on Evelyn's jealousy, but this article suggests that Don might now be the jealous one—another reminder of how fickle media representation can be.*



## CHAPTER 26

Evelyn accepts an invitation to see Mick Riva perform at the Hollywood Bowl, and though she wants to go with just Celia, she takes Harry along as a buffer. When Mick takes the stage, Celia wonders what everyone sees in him. Evelyn says he's handsome, and Harry agrees. At one point in the concert, Evelyn forgets she's in public and grabs Celia's hand. She sees a woman along the row looking and pulls away, but the woman whispers something in her husband's ear and Evelyn knows she and Celia are in danger. She stands up and cheers wildly for Mick, who takes notice of her.

*The friendship between Evelyn, Celia, and Harry is partially one of necessity—bound by the secrets of one another's sexuality, the three must also work to keep one another safe. When Evelyn pulls her hand away from Celia's and refocuses on Mick, she sacrifices a brief moment of happiness for her and Celia's long-term safety—a sign that public perception will continue to threaten their relationship.*



An article in *Sub Rosa* rumors that Evelyn and Celia are “quite a pair of... thespians.” The author questions why Celia's car is parked outside Evelyn's home every night, saying that whatever's happening doesn't seem to be “on the straight and narrow.”

*The clumsily suggestive wordplay in this article (“thespians” as a substitute for “lesbians,” and “on the straight and narrow” as an additional allusion to Celia and Evelyn's romance) suggest that the women's romance is too scandalous even to print.*



## CHAPTER 27

Evelyn tells Celia she's going on a date with Mick. Celia becomes angry, but Evelyn says they don't have a choice if they want to keep their jobs and friends. Celia says she'd give up her career to live a normal life with Evelyn. Evelyn accuses Celia of being a “dilettante” who can rely on her family's money if acting doesn't work out for her. She doesn't want Celia to throw her career away for her; she knows how it feels to have to work back up from nothing, and if she and Celia let their relationship go public, they'll lose everything, even Harry, who's endangered by his proximity to them.

*Evelyn becomes stressed when the two things she holds most dear—her relationship for Celia, and her career—begin to oppose each other. While Celia wants Evelyn to love her without worrying what others think, Evelyn strategizes a lifestyle in which she can have everything she wants if she keeps some of them secret, which becomes a major source of tension in their relationship.*



Celia says it'd be enough just to have Evelyn, even if she loses everything else, but Evelyn tells her she loves her too much to let her live a life centered around her. She plans to let Mick elope with her, and then to have the marriage annulled. People will stop focusing on her relationship with Celia and will start rumors that Evelyn's a bad wife with poor taste in men; Celia will no longer be part of the narrative. Celia agrees to the plan, as long as she doesn't have to hear any more about it, and Evelyn agrees that afterward, she'll think about moving in with her.

*Though Evelyn's idea of a happy, full life involves Celia, it isn't based solely on her, and that's the kind of life she wants for Celia, too. If they gave up their careers and friends for each other, they'd be left with nothing else. For Evelyn, the elopement with Mick is just a brief sojourn to deflect media attention, but it's clear that it's a more emotional commitment for Celia, who doesn't want to share Evelyn with anyone.*



## CHAPTER 28

Evelyn goes out to an LA club wearing a cream-colored dress and diamond earrings. She and Mick would both benefit from this arrangement: she wants to get people's attention, and Mick wants everyone to know he's had sex with her. At the club, she asks Mick if he's ever been to Vegas, prompting him to boast that his people can call a private plane and get them there right now. Soon, Evelyn and Mick are on a plane to Las Vegas together. Evelyn sits in Mick's lap but doesn't allow him to touch her where he wants to: she needs to tease him enough to want to marry her.

At the casino, Evelyn drinks champagne to bring a celebratory air to the evening and catches Mick's attention when she celebrates a roulette win. When he asks to leave with her, she tells him she can't trust herself with him. Evelyn knows she can't be the first one to mention marriage. She starts to get tired around two a.m. and pushes through by reminding herself of the normal life she can have with Celia once this is over. Mick finally tells her he wants to marry her, and after some performative resistance, Evelyn agrees. Forty minutes later, they exchange vows.

Because Evelyn doesn't want to have sex with Mick more than once, she needs to disappoint him the first time. She allows him to see her body for as long as he wants to, removing all mystery, and then lies unmoving beneath him. The part that most disturbs her is the fact that he won't wear a condom and she's not on any birth control. Mick doesn't say anything afterward, and when they wake up, she tells him she doesn't like to have sex in the morning. He tells her she's not what he envisioned and says the same thing he told *Photomoment* about his previous wife: Evelyn deserves a better man. He tells her they should get an annulment. Evelyn starts to cry but stops as soon as Mick leaves the room.

An article in *Photomoment* reports Evelyn and Mick's elopement and asks whether one more failed marriage for the both of them is a big deal. Meanwhile, an article in *Sub Rosa* a week later suggests that, while Mick saw the elopement as just one night of fun, Evelyn desperately wanted to get married to Mick and has been inconsolable since the annulment.

*Evelyn dresses casually enough to fit in at a club, but her outfit hints at wedding attire: she hopes she can plant the idea of marriage in Mick's head without actually having to suggest it. Her strategy relies on Mick's ego. She knows he'll want to prove his wealth and readiness for adventure—she just has to keep tempting him with her body.*



*Evelyn acts the night out as if it's a scene in a movie she's filming, using her skills as an actor to make her feelings for Mick seem genuine. She needs Mick to bring up marriage before she does, because that'll make him feel like he's in control of the situation. Even when Mick suggests they wed, Evelyn knows she has to keep tempting him—Mick, like most men Evelyn knows, is more driven by anticipation than satisfaction.*



*Evelyn's calm, strategic attitude in the moment shows she's accustomed to using her body as a tool when it suits her; she can separate sex from love easily. When Mick recycles a phrase that's already been printed as part of an interview, it's clear that the elopement was nothing more than a novel experience for him—there were no genuine feelings between him and Evelyn. Evelyn cries not because she's at all upset, but because she knows it'll please him to think he was the one with the power in the situation—he'll think she wanted it more than he did.*



*Sub Rosa's follow-up article shows that tabloids such as these will do anything to conjure up a story, even when the first article about the elopement essentially referred to itself as a non-story.*



## CHAPTER 29

For two months after the elopement, Evelyn enjoys blissful freedom with Celia in the knowledge that rumors about her failed marriage are worth more to the media than rumors about her sexuality. Everything is working in her favor until she finds out she's pregnant. After she suspects it for two weeks, she visits a doctor for confirmation before telling Celia while they're beside the pool together. It surprises Evelyn when Celia throws her glass of iced tea to the ground, dives into the pool and screams underwater. She realizes that Celia didn't fully understand that she had planned to have sex with Mick.

Celia gets out of the pool and goes inside without drying off. Evelyn can tell that she's started to pack her bags. She begs Celia to talk to her. Celia says she doesn't want to live this way anymore, hiding her behavior while Evelyn has sex with other people. She calls Evelyn a coward. Evelyn says she did it for Celia, but Celia disagrees—she thinks Evelyn acted to protect herself and retain her fans.

Evelyn tells Celia she'll lose everything if people find out what she is. Celia tells Evelyn they're no different from each other, but Evelyn says they are: she can love a man, but Celia can't. Celia tells Evelyn she's leaving her because she's a "whore" who agrees to sex in order to build her fame. As Celia goes to her car, she tells Evelyn she thought their relationship was fated, but she doesn't want to believe that anymore; Evelyn replies that they were never meant to be together, because Celia can't accept that she needs Evelyn to take these actions to protect her. Finally, Evelyn realizes that this fight signifies the end of her relationship with Celia.

Celia drives away. Evelyn goes back inside and cleans up the water Celia dripped everywhere, then requests cleaners to drain the pool and remove the glass Celia smashed. Three days later, she drives to Tijuana with Harry to get an abortion—something that, looking back, she hasn't ever regretted. Still, she cries the whole way home because of all she lost in her efforts to stay with Celia. She asks Harry if he thinks she's a "whore." He replies that people use that word when they have nothing else to say, and it's unfair that women are judged for demanding something in return for the pleasure they bring to men.

Harry tells Evelyn that Celia is used to acting righteous and pure, but he likes Evelyn for her scrappiness. When they arrive back at her house, he tucks her in, makes her dinner, and sleeps next to her in bed. Evelyn doesn't speak to Celia for five years, but she feels that, with Harry beside her, she has family.

*Evelyn's body is seemingly never under her own control. Mick's refusal to use a condom meant he put his own enjoyment over Evelyn's future, and Evelyn's the one who has to bear the brunt of that selfishness. Though Celia reacts dramatically, she also mutes her scream underwater, which suggests that she feels completely enraged but also aware, and possibly ashamed, that she might be overreacting.*



*Evelyn sees her reputation and Celia's safety as inextricably linked, but Celia doesn't share that perspective. Her idea of a relationship is simple and pure, and she occupies a moral high ground that Evelyn can't understand, let alone reach.*



*This won't be the last time Evelyn and Celia weaponize their difference in sexual preferences during an argument, and doing so reveals a shared anxiety that neither one of them truly understands the other. Their different perspectives on Evelyn's behavior seem irreconcilable: Evelyn refuses to acknowledge her own selfishness, while Celia can't see how Evelyn's actions were, primarily, signs of her love for Celia.*



*Evelyn's response to heartbreak is to focus on small, practical tasks—they allow her to feel a sense of control even as her relationship crumbles. She's not upset about the loss of a potential baby, but about the real loss of Celia—she's able to compartmentalize her emotions in order to determine what she really feels. Harry's understanding of the power dynamics attached to the word "whore" emphasizes his tendency to observe these kinds of power dynamics from an objective, removed perspective, given his lack of sexual interest in women.*



*The friendship between Harry and Evelyn is, in a way, more intimate because of its sexlessness. Harry's companionship is a sure thing, not based on what Evelyn offers him sexually, and that makes Evelyn feel safe around him—a safety she equates to familial love.*





## CHAPTER 30

Back in the present, Evelyn goes to the window and opens it. She tells Monique that, at that point in her life, she didn't know it was okay to grovel for what she wanted, even though she was miserable. She pored over *Sub Rosa* for pictures of Celia. Though she regrets wasting that time not being with Celia, she and Celia both knew that they'd find each other again.

Monique's phone beeps with the ringtone she set especially for David. She sees he's written her a message saying that he wants to talk. She ignores it and asks Evelyn about her next marriage to Rex North. Evelyn explains that the film she was working on, *Anna Karenina*, was over budget and behind schedule and they needed to save it, so she married Rex, who was playing her character's love interest.

*One of Evelyn's biggest regrets is her preoccupation with appearing strong and independent—an unnecessary performance that caused her to waste time not being with Celia. Still, they both shared an attitude that their relationship was fated and inevitable.*



*David's ringtone is different from the others in Monique's phone, which emphasizes his role as her husband—a rigid, compartmentalized role. Meanwhile, Evelyn's ability to quickly explain her marriage to Rex without pausing or derailing the conversation is a sign that she didn't have a strong emotional connection to him.*



## CHAPTER 31

Evelyn's biography picks back up as she proposes the idea of marriage to Rex, an extremely handsome Icelandic man who, like Evelyn, changed his name and had sex with several people in order to make it in Hollywood, he asks whether they'll ever have sex with each other. She says she can't guarantee she won't because he's so handsome. They agree that she'll move into his house as long as she can bring her maid Luisa, whom she hired after firing Paula.

Shortly after Evelyn hired Luisa, she heard her on the phone to her mother, calling Evelyn "crazy" in Spanish. She told Luisa in Spanish that she could understand her, and Luisa apologized and explained that Evelyn didn't look Cuban. Though Evelyn's offended at first, she realizes that there are no clues in her appearance or the house where she lives that she's Latin American: she made the choice to distance herself from her heritage. She could tell Luisa felt uncomfortable after the phone call, so she made sure to tell her she was excited to see her the next day.

*It's possible that Evelyn finds the prospect of marrying Rex so appealing because they share so many qualities—particularly their ambitious streaks. Rex, having sacrificed his original identity in order to succeed in Hollywood, is likely to understand the decisions Evelyn makes in her own life in order to do the same.*



*Evelyn uses Spanish with Luisa to mark her territory, but she soon realizes that Luisa had no reason to think she could speak Spanish—Luisa could easily perceive Evelyn's behavior, her identity, and her belongings as those of a white woman. Her surprise demonstrates how much distance Evelyn has put between herself and her heritage—a distance Evelyn doesn't always feel within herself.*



Evelyn is too insecure to speak Spanish to Luisa, but she admires how comfortable she is as a Latin American woman. She's the first employee Evelyn cares about. Rex agrees that Luisa will move with Evelyn, and they decide they don't need to sleep in the same bed as long as they make it seem like they do when they host parties. Evelyn tells Rex he can have sex with whomever he wants, as long as he doesn't get caught; he reassures her he wouldn't do anything to embarrass her. They shake hands on their agreement. Before Rex leaves to go on a date, they agree that Rex will propose two weeks before the film is released. Evelyn says the latest edit is looking great, but if they want people to pay to see the three-hour-long film, they have to cause a stir.

An article in *Photomoment* announces Evelyn and Rex's engagement, reporting they fell in love "instantly" during rehearsals for [Anna Karenina](#). The author goes on to mention that Don is separating from Ruby. Two weeks later, an article in *Photomoment* announces that Celia St. James is engaged to John Braverman, a New York Giants quarterback, amidst a streak of successful film releases. A week after that, a *Hollywood Digest* article reports that [Anna Karenina](#) has opened to excellent reviews, and there are rumors that both Evelyn and Rex will win Oscars.

## CHAPTER 32

Evelyn and Rex attend the Oscars together. Neither of them wins: Evelyn suspects people think "beautiful movie stars" like them should "stay in [their] lane[s]." After the awards, they drink and dance for the whole night, though Evelyn searches for Celia wherever she goes. At one party, she finds Harry to chat about their success. She realizes that no matter how wealthy she gets, she'll keep wanting more.

Evelyn and Rex go home together, both very drunk. Evelyn goes to her room alone, realizing the loneliness of her marriage and missing Celia. After she undresses, she sees Rex standing in her doorway with his shirt half buttoned. She tells him to go to bed, but he moves toward her and suggests they have sex with each other. Though Evelyn's tempted to, she realizes that Rex is behaving the way he behaves with many other women. Refusing to feel like just another woman, she convinces Rex to leave her alone.

*Luisa becomes Evelyn's connection to her ethnic heritage, and through this, she seems to win Evelyn's trust. Evelyn and Rex are on the same page about their marriage: they'll do what they need to do to keep up appearances, but otherwise, they're free to live their separate lives. Their handshake emphasizes the pragmatic nature of their marriage—there's no romance here at all, just a shared desire to succeed professionally.*



*The brief mention of Don in the Photomoment article shows that Evelyn can't escape her connection to him, despite them having divorced many years ago. The baggage of her relationships travels with her everywhere. Though Evelyn's career is flourishing, she'll also never be allowed to ignore what Celia's up to: fame means they'll be aware of each other's whereabouts and life events no matter how emotionally distant they are from each other.*



*Even though Evelyn has achieved great success in Hollywood, she's becoming aware of the limits of that success—she'll never please everybody. Harry's the person Evelyn talks to at the important junctures in her career: she trusts his advice and knows that he understands her ambition.*



*Even though her marriage is working the way she wanted it to, ensuring financial stability and appeasing the press, Evelyn is unsatisfied by it—a sign that her career is insufficient grounds for happiness. It's also clear that Evelyn can only have sex without emotional attachment as long as it brings her something in return: if it's for her own pleasure, she wants to be desired even more than she desires her sexual partner.*



The next morning, Evelyn wakes to a phone call from Harry. He tells her that after Evelyn left the party last night, an executive suggested that she and Rex sign a three-picture deal with Paramount. She can name her price and choose the films she and Rex want to play in. Just before Evelyn hangs up, Harry tells her she's about to become the highest-paid actress in Hollywood.

*Harry's the person people talk to when they want to talk to Evelyn, which highlights his role as her perpetual supporter and colleague. This is a landmark moment for Evelyn: she's climbed to the very top of the Hollywood ladder.*



## CHAPTER 33

Over the next two and a half years, Evelyn and Rex work on films for Paramount. They sleep and prepare for work separately, spend the day together, then split apart again in the evening, when Evelyn goes out with Harry or one of the Paramount actors. She doesn't meet anyone she wants to have a serious relationship with, and she assumes Rex is having a similar experience—until he tells her he's in love with Joy Nathan, whom he's been seeing discreetly.

*Evelyn and Rex's marriage is bound to the work day, just like any other job. Evelyn falls into this routine without really noticing, so it's a shock to her that Rex has had other priorities outside the work they share—a shock that emphasizes Evelyn's tendency to focus on her own life and goals without looking around her.*



Rex says he and Joy would like to get married. Evelyn immediately brainstorms a strategy for divorcing Rex that will gain favor with their fans. She tells Rex to wait a while before he marries Joy. But Rex can't wait: Joy is pregnant. While Evelyn is rethinking the plan, Harry walks into the kitchen where she and Rex are talking. She proposes that they tell people they've both been having affairs—Rex with Joy, and Evelyn with Harry. Though it makes both of them look bad, it'll also guarantee ticket sales for their upcoming movie. Rex agrees and shakes Evelyn's hand.

*Rex's commitment to marrying Joy before she has their baby shows his respect and concern for her, given that having a baby outside of marriage would be socially damning for a woman in the 1960s. Evelyn thinks quickly to rearrange the situation: she's done this kind of thing before, and she's used to reducing herself and others to strategic objects in order to keep the press and public at bay.*



Harry tells Evelyn no one will believe the story: too many people in Hollywood know that he doesn't like women. She suggests they have candid photographs taken that prove the sincerity of their relationship. Harry asks Evelyn whether she'd rather choose to be with someone else, but she says she truly cares about him and doesn't want to start another relationship. He tells her he's been seeing John Braverman, confirming that Celia's marriage to John is "fake": they sleep in separate beds.

*Though Harry keeps his sexuality a secret, Hollywood is small enough (and rife enough with gossip) that even the closest-held secrets are barely confidential. Evelyn is getting tired of meeting and winning over men. She pays attention when Harry mentions John because knowing that Celia doesn't really love John brings her a new spark of hope that she and Celia might have a future together.*



Evelyn asks Harry if he's seen Celia, and whether she's asked about her. He tells her she hasn't, but probably because she's too proud to ask. Evelyn imagines running to Celia and telling her that life is hollow without her. Instead, she continues to plan the candid picture: they'll do it tomorrow night in a secluded but accessible spot. Evelyn calls Ruby, asking her to clue in photographers. During the phone call, Ruby asks Evelyn why she didn't warn her that Don was prone to violence. She and Don are now divorced, and Don is quickly losing respect in Hollywood.

*Rather than really playing out her romantic fantasy of winning Celia back, Evelyn pursues a more cunning and careful strategy, which suggests that the prospect of securing romantic happiness with Celia still isn't worth the risk of losing her career. Meanwhile, the fact that Don's erratic violence is losing him respect is a small sign that the times are changing: perhaps men are no longer getting away with everything just because of their gender and influence.*



Ruby asks Evelyn whether she wants any particular photographers for the following night. Evelyn tells her to get anyone who wants to make money off her misfortune, and Ruby says that's everybody. As Evelyn hangs up, she realizes that if she'd been keeping track of the people she hurt through her decisions, Ruby would be on the list.

*Evelyn didn't consider that Don would abuse Ruby when she read about Ruby's marriage to Don. This perhaps suggests that Evelyn saw herself as a unique victim, while the truth is that she simply crossed paths with a violent man who would—and did—act the same way with other women, too.*



## CHAPTER 34

The next night, Evelyn puts on a revealing dress and drives up the road with Harry. When they pull over, Evelyn asks Harry if he's ever kissed or had sex with a woman; though he has, he didn't really enjoy it. She begins to direct his movements. When a car approaches, Harry panics and kisses Evelyn, but the car keeps going—it was just a passing neighbor. Harry proposes that he and Evelyn really get married: he loves her, even if not romantically, and perhaps they could raise a family together. He knows he can't give her everything she'd want from a relationship, but they know each other well enough to work well together.

*Harry's less accustomed to choreographing convincing, false scenes like this than Evelyn is, which is why he panics while she stays calm. His suggestion of marriage shows he's able to envision the idea of a family separate from sexual fulfillment: like Evelyn, he has a realistic attitude and knows that he'll probably never gain true fulfillment all in the same place.*



Evelyn envisions her marriage to Harry allowing her and Celia to have a real relationship the way he and John do, and even if she can't be with Celia, a life with Harry is all she wants. When another car approaches, Harry kisses Evelyn and slips his hand down her dress: the photo printed the next day is appropriately scandalous. When Evelyn and Rex's film comes out, it sets a record for the longest run in theaters.

*Again, marriage is just another strategic tool for Evelyn, but this time she uses it to succeed romantically, not professionally. Celia is the only one she can imagine loving in a romantic way: she'd rather be with Harry than pursue love elsewhere. The success of Evelyn and Rex's film is another reminder that scandal makes money in Hollywood.*



## CHAPTER 35

Back in the present, Monique arrives home at three in the morning. She knows she could've left earlier, but interviewing Evelyn allows her to escape from her own life. She wakes up in the morning to a phone call from Monique's mother, who asks how it's going with Evelyn. When Monique tells her she convinced Frankie to promote her and persuaded Evelyn into doing a cover story, her mom says that her dad would be proud. Monique hangs up feeling smug, not knowing that by the time the next interview is over, Evelyn will have revealed something that makes Monique want to kill her.

*Monique's late work hours mean that Evelyn's willing to stay up past midnight talking about her life—a sign that Evelyn's story is approaching a moment of great excitement and emotional investment. Monique doesn't know what potentially damaging information Evelyn will reveal, so the suggestion that she'll want to kill Evelyn is heavy foreshadowing: whatever control Monique thinks she has, she's likely about to lose it.*



## CHAPTER 36

Evelyn's biography picks up a couple of years into her marriage to Rex. Evelyn is nominated for Best Actress for her latest film with Rex; Celia is nominated in the same category. Evelyn attends the ceremony with Harry in a dress with a slit up to each thigh—a dress that will end up in every career retrospective. She admires Celia and John until Harry tells her to stop staring. He asks her if, in the event that she wins, she'll talk to Celia; she agrees begrudgingly. The Oscar goes to Ruby. Evelyn goes to the bathroom and cries in a stall. Soon, she hears Celia calling her name. When she opens the stall door, she can tell that Celia still loves her.

Celia says they shouldn't stay in the bathroom together for long, suggesting that Evelyn would hate for people to become suspicious. Evelyn rises to the challenge, asking Celia whether she'd rather not be seen with a "whore." Celia admits she was wrong to call Evelyn that, but she said it to hurt Evelyn as much as Evelyn hurt her by trying to conceal their relationship. Though neither of their marriages were genuine, both admit to having had sex with other people since breaking up with each other. Finally, they agree they shouldn't have left each other. Evelyn and Celia kiss passionately until two other women enter the bathroom. They break apart, but after the women leave, they begin to kiss again. If someone walked in and saw them, they'd lose their careers, and the risk they take in this moment allows them to forgive each other.

An article in *Photomoment* announces Harry and Evelyn's wedding after a long engagement—it will be Evelyn's fifth marriage. It goes on to report that Celia was the maid of honor and John was the best man.

## CHAPTER 37

Celia gets drunk at the wedding, struggling not to feel jealous even though she, Evelyn, Harry, and John all know that the marriage is only going ahead so that they can live out their true relationships. After their honeymoon, Evelyn and Harry buy an apartment in Manhattan down the road from Celia and John's. Before they move, Evelyn has Harry investigate whether her father was still alive, but they find out that he died eight years ago, which clarifies to Evelyn why he never came after her for her money. Feeling freed by this news, Evelyn agreed to relocate and persuades Luisa to come too.

*Evelyn's dress confirms that she knows how to attract attention by tempting onlookers with her body. Harry knows Evelyn would be happier if she talked to Celia—he knows her well enough to understand when she's holding a grudge. Evelyn and Celia's response to losing brings them together—they're used to weathering storms together.*



*Celia and Evelyn have clearly kept their final argument fresh in their minds. Neither of them has found peace in their separation, and there are still things they want to work out. Here, Celia comes down from her moral high ground, and Evelyn accepts her mistakes. It's this shared vulnerability—emphasized further by their willingness to kiss each other in a rather public place—that allows them to reconcile.*



*Because Harry and Evelyn treat their marriage like an administrative task, they can approach their wedding without urgency.*



*The stress of living a double life—loving Evelyn, but acting as John's wife—is clearly harder on Celia than it is on Evelyn. Rather than mourning the loss of her father, his death sets Evelyn free, emphasizing the fact that she feels closer familial connections to people like Harry, who care about her deeply, than to people like her father, who neglected and abused her.*





A month after moving to Manhattan, Evelyn takes Celia to Hell's Kitchen and points up at her old apartment from the sidewalk. Celia takes her hand, and Evelyn worries what people will think until she realizes they're not paying any attention. She and Celia spend their nights in Evelyn's apartment; Harry and John spend their nights in John's. The four of them go out together appearing like two straight couples.

The morning after the Stonewall riots, Evelyn realizes for the first time that the four of them aren't alone: there are others like them. But unlike her, the Stonewall protestors have hope for a future in which people like them can live freely, without fear. Celia suggests that they join the second night of rioting, but the other three disagree. Harry says that by joining in, they'd take media attention away from the cause and direct it toward themselves. Instead, they should contribute what the protestors lack: money. They begin to privately filter money toward the cause, and Evelyn continues to do so for the rest of her life.

The next year, Celia wins her second Oscar. She calls Evelyn after the ceremony and says she wishes she could be there with her. Evelyn gets annoyed: why does it always have to be about Celia's feelings, and not her own? Celia drunkenly accuses Evelyn of not wanting to be with her in public because she doesn't want people to call her a lesbian. Evelyn's frustrated that Celia constantly ignores part of her identity—while she loves Celia, she also loves men. She calls Celia a “brat,” to which Celia replies that Evelyn is only “a nice pair of tits” before crying and apologizing.

## CHAPTER 38

Back in the present, Monique asks Evelyn if she ever confronted Celia about that phone call. Meanwhile, Monique's phone rings with David's ringtone—she turns the ringer off. Evelyn says she preferred to make up with Celia than to fight, but it hurt that Celia had said what every other man had made Evelyn feel—that her beauty was the only worthwhile thing about her. Meanwhile, she'd begun to doubt how long she would last as a movie star now that she was beginning to age.

*Evelyn wants Celia to understand her entirely—not just as a beautiful and successful woman, but someone who had to work hard to get there. She's able to be vulnerable with Celia, which is a sign that they've learned to trust each other again.*



*Evelyn has come a long way in accepting her sexuality, but she still lives a restricted life and is bound by fear. Her comparison of herself to the rioters demonstrates how her fame and success have trapped her, not only socially but also mentally: she's unable to have the same hope they do. Here, Celia once again shows herself to be the most naïve of the four, while Harry and Evelyn are especially pragmatic and can easily see themselves as financial assets rather than human beings.*



*Evelyn's irritation reveals a deep-seated anxiety about her role as Celia's partner. Even though she knows she couldn't celebrate with Celia, Celia still wants her to have the reckless courage that'd allow her to go to the party, and Evelyn knows she lacks that. Again, when the couple is under stress, Evelyn attacks Celia's dreamy idealism while Celia attacks Evelyn's sexual history.*



*Monique finds it easier to invest her attention in Evelyn's story than to face her own problems. Evelyn treasured her relationship with Celia more than she wanted to win any argument, but that made her particularly vulnerable to Celia's attacks—standing up for herself could've destroyed their relationship, so Evelyn had to allow Celia to hurt her.*



## CHAPTER 39

Evelyn's biography picks up on her 36th birthday. She, Harry, Celia, and John go out to the Palace, allegedly the most expensive restaurant in the world. They drink champagne and eat caviar. Celia toasts to Evelyn. Later that night, Harry asks if Evelyn's realized her marriage to him is the longest one she's had. She tells him it's also the best one. He asks if she's ready to have a baby, and despite her qualms, she says yes. They agree to talk to John and Celia. Harry tells Evelyn that a small part of him has wanted to have sex with her since they met. They shake hands on their plan.

*Evelyn and Harry's marriage has been so easy, probably because of their distance from each other, that Harry knows Evelyn might not have noticed how long they've been together. Despite the unconventional arrangement, Evelyn treasures her connection to Harry more than any of her more traditional marriages. Their handshake makes their plan to have a baby seem more of a business venture than a momentous personal decision, which fits naturally into their strategic marriage.*



## CHAPTER 40

Celia asks Evelyn whether she and Harry will raise the baby together. Evelyn says they will, and she reassures Celia that they'll work out Celia and John's place in the arrangement as they go. Celia asks whether it's an issue for Evelyn that she doesn't want, and can't provide, children. Evelyn tells Celia she provides more than she could've hoped for, and that she and Harry will only be having sex for the sole purpose of procreating. Celia agrees to the arrangement, suggesting she'll be called "Aunt Celia."

*Evelyn and Celia's relationship is sometimes so obscured by their marriages to different people—and now, by Evelyn needing to have sex with Harry—that it's necessary for them to reassure each other of their love. Celia puts a safe distance between herself and the potential baby, which suggests that she's unsure about how life will change when Evelyn has a child. Celia's detached attitude also hints at the distance that future child may put between Evelyn and Celia.*



A year later, an article in *Photomoment* announces Harry and Evelyn have had a baby girl, Connor Cameron—"Their most exciting co-production yet."

*This is a rare instance in which the language of the tabloids matches Evelyn's attitude: having a baby with Harry was, indeed, like a "co-production"—an agreement formed in the same kind of professional manner in which they'd make a movie deal.*



## CHAPTER 41

Evelyn loves baby Connor, who mostly loves to eat and sleep on her. In the first few months of Connor's life, Celia and John go out of town to shoot films, leaving Harry and Evelyn to live essentially like a traditional married couple, with Luisa's help. During this time, Evelyn feels closely bonded to Harry through Connor. When Celia and John return, life returns to the same structure as before Connor was born, with Celia living with Evelyn and Harry living with John. The first morning she's back, Celia makes oatmeal for everyone, taking over Harry's job of making breakfast and staking her claim as Evelyn's partner.

*Though Harry and Evelyn agreed to have a baby in a nontraditional setting, their first months of parenthood together are surprisingly conventional. Meanwhile, Celia's departure, particularly at a time when one could assume Evelyn needs her support, emphasizes her desire to distance herself from Connor and from Evelyn's motherhood. Once she's back, it's clear she's decided to cope with the situation by ensuring her own territory—hinting that she might feel some anxiety about losing Evelyn because she's not co-parenting with her.*



Celia tells Evelyn she thinks she should star in Max Girard's next film, *Three A.M.* Evelyn's surprised by her suggestion: Celia hates Max and thinks he's too interested in Evelyn. She says that Evelyn's perfect for the "bombshell" part, and that she should do it especially because she's just become a mother: she needs to prove she can still play a sexual role. Evelyn knows Celia wants her to do the film for her own good—Evelyn values being able to play roles of all kinds—but knows that Celia also wants her to do it because she doesn't want motherhood to change her.

Evelyn reads the script and eventually rings Max to tell him she wants the part. When he hesitates, she reassures him her body is still up to it, but he says what he's worried about is that Don Adler will be playing opposite her for the whole film.

*Celia's love for Evelyn has a firm foundation in sexual desire; her suggestion of Max's film means she wants Evelyn to prove to her, as much as to audiences, that she's still a sexual figure. This also demonstrates that Celia's attraction to Evelyn is at least partially founded in her appreciation of Evelyn's celebrity persona and screen presence. These things are inextricably linked to the Evelyn she knows and loves.*



*Presumably, Evelyn and Max—who at this point don't have a particularly personal relationship—haven't discussed Don in depth, so Max's awareness of Evelyn's relationship with Don demonstrates the scale of the media attention Evelyn and Don received as a married (and eventually divorced) couple.*



## CHAPTER 42

Back in the present, Monique asks Evelyn why she agreed to the film without asking Max to cut Don. Evelyn says she wasn't sure Max would fire him if she asked, and she also felt bad for Don, who hadn't made a good film in years and, according to rumors, had lost control of his drinking. She tells Monique that it was a complicated decision for which Monique should have some compassion. Monique apologizes for making assumptions. Evelyn forgives her, saying that Don was no longer a threat to her despite having abused her in the past. She arranged to meet with him before filming began.

*The dynamic between Evelyn and Don has shifted since their divorce. At first, Don was the one with power and influence, but now Evelyn feels buoyed by her status and her family, so she's not scared to face the man who once abused and intimidated her. Still, her plan to meet with him before filming shows that she still anticipates their relationship might cause difficulties on set, and that's something she wants to have a degree of control over.*



## CHAPTER 43

Evelyn's history recommences in the restaurant where she's chosen to meet Don before shooting Max's film together. Don apologizes to Evelyn as he sits down across from her. She says it's fine—he was only five minutes late—but he's really apologizing for his behavior as a husband. He tells her he's been sober for 256 days. Evelyn doesn't immediately accept his apology—she hadn't prepared for this conversation—and orders a Reuben sandwich to fuel up for it. Don reiterates his apology and tells Evelyn that he regrets treating her so badly and that he loved her very much.

*Don has been sober for less than a year, and his specific day count is a sign that sobriety still demands constant vigilance and careful attention. Evelyn didn't expect Don to apologize—he's clearly lost some of the arrogance she came to expect from him. Still, she knows she's worth more than a single apology.*



Evelyn realizes that in the years since her marriage to Don, she's never wanted to go back and get it right with him. Now that she has a good husband, a daughter, and her relationship with Celia, Don doesn't pose any threat to her. She doesn't verbally forgive him, but she shows him a picture of Connor, and after the meal, she tells him she'll do the movie with him.

*Evelyn's lack of regret about her divorce from Don emphasizes the fact that she perceives her relationship with Celia to be fated, or at least inevitable in some way—every failed marriage has led her to Celia, and so Celia must be the one she's meant to be with.*



## CHAPTER 44

Just before shooting starts on *Three A.M.*, Harry turns 45. Evelyn, Celia, and John plan a picnic in the park. When Harry arrives, he says it's the perfect celebration. They all put on wigs and sunglasses John bought for them to conceal themselves from strangers. Harry asks what Evelyn did to help with the picnic plan. She starts to make up an excuse before saying she didn't do anything, and the four all laugh together. It's one of the final moments of happiness between them before Evelyn does something to ruin it.

*Though their constant efforts to conceal their true selves from the public are often tiring, here, the two couples have fun with disguising themselves—a sign that though their relationships can be fraught and stressful, there are still lighthearted moments. Still, Evelyn's happiness is never guaranteed or permanent.*



## CHAPTER 45

While Evelyn shoots *Three A.M.* with Don, Luisa, Celia, and Harry take turns watching Connor. Evelyn observes Don putting real effort into his role, and she can tell that the movie is going to be a meaningful one for audiences. She begins to give up time with Connor and Celia in order to fit in with Max's changing schedule. She can tell Celia regrets encouraging her to do *Three A.M.*, but she remains supportive, even when Evelyn keeps cancelling plans with her.

*Once again, Evelyn prioritizes her career over her personal life; her ability to give up time with her family demonstrates how easily she can be distracted by the opportunity to nurture her artistic side. Much like on the set of his previous film with her, Max exerts control over Evelyn: he influences her in a way other people rarely do. Celia's patience is generous, but it's being tested.*



One day toward the end of the shoot, Max knocks on Evelyn's dressing room door to convince her that the love scene, which she and Don are shooting next week, needs something extra. She tells him that she's agreed to show her breasts, something she's never done before, but he says the scene needs to demonstrate her character's truly passionate desire. His idea is to show the character reaching orgasm. It feels scandalous to Evelyn, who's used to the socially acceptable idea that women have sex for intimacy, not pleasure. She loves the idea of portraying a woman's sexual desire, and her excitement drives her to agree on the spot, though she knows she should discuss it with Celia first. Instead of telling Celia about the plan that evening, she avoids the subject.

*Max uses his authority to control what Evelyn does with her body. It's a complex situation: she's disempowered by his insistence that she use her body in an explicit way, but she also sees the proposed scene as an opportunity to represent female sexuality as empowering. Evelyn makes a decision on her own behalf without considering that her life is now firmly attached to Celia's—she's not used to considering others' feelings when contemplating her own ambitions.*



Evelyn shoots the sex scene with Don after downing two shots of bourbon. During the scene, she recalls the sensation of feeling sexual desire for the first time and tries to focus on depicting that freedom for the women in the audience. It's the most passionate performance she ever gives, but afterward, she rushes to her dressing room and cries about her dishonesty to Celia.

*Evelyn needs to drink to take the edge off the discomfort she feels about filming something so sexual with Don, which emphasizes that her performance isn't fueled by her chemistry with him, but rather her conviction that women should be allowed to see themselves as sexually empowered figures.*



Evelyn walks the 50 blocks home to give herself time to think. She buys flowers on her way, and calls Harry to ask him to take Connor for the night. When she gets home, she gives Celia the flowers and asks to talk to her. She tells her that she and Max have discussed the sex scene being more graphic than expected. Celia says she understands the character's need to be pleased and wants Evelyn to play the role as she wants to. Still, though she tries to accept the necessity of Evelyn making the scene look real, she isn't comfortable with it. She tells Evelyn she'll do whatever she can to make it up to her.

*Celia gives a measured, thoughtful response to Evelyn's explanation of the scene because she truly believes Evelyn will take her decision seriously. She considers their relationship to be one of equality and honesty, and she doesn't suspect that Evelyn would go behind her back, so even though she knows how tempting this scene is for Evelyn, she expects Evelyn to prioritize her feelings.*



Evelyn tells Celia she already filmed the scene. She begs Celia to forgive her, but Celia interrupts her groveling by saying that she can't tolerate getting half of Evelyn while the world gets the other half. Celia moves back to LA within a week. She doesn't answer the phone when Evelyn calls, and a few weeks later, she files for divorce from John. Evelyn feels that Celia is divorcing her by divorcing John. She gets John to track Celia down at a hotel and flies to see her, pounding at her hotel door while the other hotel guests notice her. When Celia opens the door, Evelyn begs for her forgiveness, but Celia says Evelyn will never be able to put love ahead of fame or her career. Evelyn flies back to New York and cries as if Celia has died.

*Celia isn't only upset by the scene itself but by Evelyn treating her as an afterthought—once again, just like with Mick Riva, Evelyn didn't let Celia in on the whole plan before it happened. Evelyn finally understands that Celia needs her full, unashamed commitment, but it's too late; Celia's divorce from John makes the split official, highlighting how convoluted and secretive their relationship was.*



## CHAPTER 46

Back in the present, Monique asks Evelyn if that was truly the end of her relationship with Celia. Evelyn says it was, and even though *Three A.M.* was a huge hit, it wasn't worth it. Don won an Oscar for it, but Evelyn wasn't nominated, even though she deserved it—her part was too explicit for the Academy to reward it. She's still angry that she spent years being shamed for playing that role, despite it making money for so many people and enlightening the public about female pleasure.

*This is a painful moment for Evelyn, mostly because of her own actions, but also partly for misogynistic attitudes beyond her control. It's a moment that emphasizes her inability to hold onto happiness—not only due to her ambitious tendencies, but also because she's never truly in charge of her own life.*



Monique asks Evelyn whether her bisexuality affected her relationship with Celia, suggesting that she lost her due to her relationships with men. Evelyn rejects that idea: she lost Celia because she cared more about fame than her relationship. Being bisexual had nothing to do with her loyalty; she just couldn't stop using her body to get what she wanted. Though Celia could be cruel, she tried hard to outweigh that cruelty with goodness, but Evelyn couldn't give Celia more than 50 percent of herself. She trusts Monique to clearly communicate that it was her many failings, not her bisexuality, that ruined her relationship. She assures Monique that she's not a good person. When Monique protests, Evelyn tells her she'll change her mind very soon.

*Evelyn blames herself for her failed relationship with Celia. Even though Celia never fully acknowledged or understood Evelyn's bisexuality, that wasn't the reason they broke up—they broke up because in choosing to film the sex scene, Evelyn showed that she couldn't prioritize Celia over her career. Monique deems herself capable of appreciating a person's good traits along with their bad ones, but it's clear Evelyn will soon reveal something much harder for Monique to come to terms with.*





## CHAPTER 47

Evelyn's history picks back up a few years after Celia leaves her. John dies of a heart attack just before he turns 50. Connor is five, and Evelyn doesn't know how to explain to her why Harry is so sad and only gets out of bed to drink. Evelyn wants to comfort Celia, but she knows she can't, so she tries to help Harry by staying at his apartment with Connor and making sure he eats and bathes. Harry is visibly distraught at the funeral, and though Evelyn knows this seems suspicious to those who believe that Harry and John were just friends, she doesn't tell Harry to hide his feelings. Celia barely looks at Evelyn during the service. Connor recognizes Celia as "the nice one" from [Little Women](#), which confirms to Evelyn that her family has fallen apart.

An article in *Now This* reports that Celia and newcomer actor Joan Marker have been seen shopping and dining together around Hollywood. The reporter suggests that the two are planning to shoot a movie together.

*Evelyn funnels her desire to comfort Celia into other tasks, emphasizing her tendency to accept the reality of difficult situations. Harry, usually the one to shepherd Evelyn through heartbreak and instability, now relies on her, and during this period Evelyn proves she's just as much of a stabilizing force for Harry as he is for her. When Connor recognizes Celia from a film, not from her own life, it's a moment that emphasizes not just Evelyn's distance from Celia, but also how difficult it is for Evelyn and Celia to separate their true identities from their celebrity personas.*



*This brief article is markedly similar to the one that commented on Evelyn and Celia's friendship when they filmed [Little Women](#)—a similarity that implies Joan and Celia's relationship is deeper than friendship, just like Celia and Evelyn's was.*



## CHAPTER 48

Evelyn knows she needs to keep Harry busy with work and Connor if she wants him to return to his normal life. Though he cares about being a good father to Connor, whenever he's not with her, he resumes drinking and doesn't leave his bed. Evelyn reads hundreds of scripts to find one that Harry would want to produce. Finally, Max sends her one called *All for Us*, a gritty, hopeful story about a single mother which Evelyn can see herself playing in and knows Harry will like. To persuade him, she tells him she could finally get her Oscar with this movie. She loves shooting *All for Us* not because of the Oscar but because it gets Harry out of bed.

Four months after *All for Us* comes out, Evelyn and Harry go to the Oscars together, though because Max has made so many comments about wanting Evelyn as his date, she feels like she's attending with him, too. When Evelyn wins Best Actress, she can barely believe it. She ends her speech by addressing an anonymous person, saying "I just hope she knows how important she is to me." Max wins Best Director and Harry wins Best Picture for the same film.

*The family environment that Evelyn and Connor provide and the responsibility of fatherhood are grounding for Harry. Still, they can't take the place of his love for John, which emphasizes both the extent of his grief and his need for an intimate partner. Meanwhile, though Celia has left Evelyn's life, Max is now an integral part of it, which hints that he might start to replace Celia's role as Evelyn's partner.*



*Max's attraction to Evelyn hasn't faded since he first met her, and he's not too shy to make it obvious. Evelyn has described her attendance at several different Academy Awards, so when she wins this time, it's a long-awaited and much-deserved moment. When Harry and Max win, too, it seems as though a new era of success is beginning for Evelyn after a period of heartbreak.*



## CHAPTER 49

Later that night, Harry has already returned to the hotel to check on Connor. Max's limo pulls up to where Max and Evelyn are sitting outside a mansion. Max asks if Evelyn wants a ride to her hotel; his date disappeared after the awards show, but he feels happy to have spent his evening with Evelyn, "the most beautiful woman in the world." He tells her to get in the limo with him: they'll go get hamburgers. Evelyn wants to go back to the hotel to see Connor, but she agrees to go with Max.

Max and Evelyn end up standing in line at a fast-food restaurant. When the cashier recognizes Evelyn, Evelyn tells her she has no idea what she's talking about. Soon, Evelyn is mobbed by people asking for her autograph. Max wades through the crowd, puts Evelyn over his shoulder, and carries her to the limo. Once they're in the car, he tells her he loves her and kisses her. Evelyn experiences desire for the first time since Celia left. Max tells her to do what she likes with his confession. In the morning, two-dozen red roses arrive at her hotel room with a note from Max asking her to marry him.

*Harry focuses on his role as a father while Evelyn seems to be open to romance again. Her decision to go with Max—who has been openly flirting with her—is spontaneous, and their location of choice, a casual burger joint, is a public and uncontrolled location, which suggests that Evelyn feels a sense of freedom and power after winning and Oscar.*



*Evelyn doesn't want to cause a scene, but she can't help it—her appearance has become iconic, and she's now, evidently, a household name. Meanwhile, it's clear that Max sees himself becoming Evelyn's lover, and in any case, he's pleased to be seen doing something so classically masculine and romantic.*



## CHAPTER 50

Back in the present, Evelyn tells Monique they should pause the interview. Monique agrees, checking her phone to see two missed calls from David, one from Frankie, and one from Monique's mother. On her way home, she listens to her mom's voice mail first, in which her mom reminds her that her flight will get in on Friday evening and tells her not to meet her at the airport (Monique texts back to say she'll meet her at the airport anyway). Next, she learns from David's voice mail that he's at her apartment right now, waiting to talk.

Monique hurries home. When she sees David in her kitchen, she remembers the things that drew her to him in the first place. He was white, so he'd never tell her she wasn't Black enough; he didn't read much, so he wouldn't criticize her writing; he was less attractive than her, which meant he wouldn't leave. She realizes that she chose David to avoid being challenged. David says he came back to set their relationship right. He thinks that they should keep trying to make it work. But Evelyn knows she doesn't feel heartbroken that they broke up: she feels defeated because her marriage failed—because it was the wrong marriage to begin with.

*It's clear from the state of Monique's inbox that she's been ignoring her relationships and obligations to focus on Evelyn's story, which has become particularly complex and engrossing. But Monique can't avoid these things by avoiding her phone: the physical presences of David and her mother bring her back to reality.*



*Monique's attraction to David is in fact more of an attraction to the kind of relationship she can have with him, one in which she feels she has the upper hand and won't be intimidated or hurt. She's quicker to realize this than David is, possibly because her interviews are helping to see herself as someone like Evelyn—ambitious, but with a desire to retain control that could hurt herself and others. She now sees her relationship through a pragmatic lens: it's not a romantic failure, just a bad fit.*



Monique tells David he should go back to San Francisco, adding that he never felt like her “other half.” He leaves without saying much. The next morning, Frankie calls Monique to arrange the details of the photo shoot. Monique and Evelyn agree that they’ll shoot at the apartment. Evelyn suggests Friday, which shocks Monique: it’s only three days away. Evelyn tells Monique she should be pleased by the fast pace, because by then, she’ll have all the answers she wants.

*Monique acknowledges her relationship with David wasn’t built on a level foundation. The inequality that once made her feel secure no longer satisfies her. Meanwhile, the fact that the interviews will end in three days hints that Evelyn’s working to a strict timeline; in light of this, the anticipation about Evelyn’s revelation grows stronger.*



## CHAPTER 51

Evelyn’s biography picks back up the day after the Oscars. When Harry reads the note from Max, he’s silent for a while before suggesting that nothing would change between himself and Evelyn if they got a divorce. He would still visit every day, and Connor would sleep at his house whenever she wanted. In fact, a divorce would make more sense of why they live in separate houses. Harry tells Evelyn to do what she wants, and says it’d be good for her to fall in love with someone. Evelyn doesn’t like the idea of divorcing Harry, but he suggests she showed him the note because she’s tempted to marry Max.

*Evelyn is completely transparent with Harry, and her trust in him is evident from the fact that she shares Max’s note with him before deciding how she feels. It’s also proof that their relationship is built on stronger, more honest foundations than Evelyn’s relationship with Celia was. Harry wants what’s best for Evelyn; it seems his role in her life as friend and coparent rather than a lover allows him to help her find happiness without wanting to exert any control over her.*



Three weeks later, Evelyn visits Max’s apartment to ask whether his proposal is serious. He confirms it is: it’s been 20 years since they first met, and he’s directed three of the most important films in Evelyn’s career. She inspires him just as he inspires her. They undress each other and have sex, bringing Evelyn pleasure she hasn’t felt in years. Afterwards, she asks Max whether he’d accept being a stepfather and whether it’d bother him that Harry would always be around. Max says he’s fine with those things, and he also doesn’t mind moving into Evelyn’s apartment. Evelyn agrees to marry him.

*Evelyn and Max’s relationship is built on the foundation of a shared artistic vision—but that’s a vision that has always involved Evelyn’s (mostly nude) body, which is a sign that Max’s attraction to Evelyn is inherently sexual. While she sees him as an artistic equal, his attitude toward her seems more like that of an artist to his muse, hinting at a potential mismatch in their goals for marriage.*



## EVELYN HUGO DIVORCES HARRY CAMERON...

An article in *Now This* reports that Evelyn and Harry are getting a divorce after 15 years of marriage. According to the article, Evelyn and Harry have been living separately for a few years while Evelyn has been kindling a relationship with Max Girard, who may be her “lucky ticket to happiness” now that the two have announced their engagement.

*The language in this article, much like in the novel’s previous tabloid pieces, reveals the popular attitude toward marriage as a “ticket to happiness”—a kind of simple transaction that’s either effective or not—even though Evelyn’s several previous marriages have all been much more complex than this idealistic language would suggest.*



## CHAPTER 52

Evelyn and Max marry in Joshua Tree in the company of Harry, Connor, and Max's brother. Evelyn wears a blue dress and Max wears white linen. That night, everyone else flies home while Evelyn and Max stay together in a cabin in the desert. They have sex, play cards, and talk about potential movies. When Max suggests Evelyn play an action hero, she reminds him she's in her forties, but he tells her she can do whatever she wants: she's "Evelyn Hugo." She tells him he doesn't need to call her by her full name, but he replies, "That is who you are."

When Evelyn wakes up the next morning, Max tells her that this isn't how he imagined life with her—it lacks the glory he envisioned. He explains that he hates the desert and thinks they should go back to the city. At the airport, Max buys a copy of *People* magazine and shows Evelyn the article about their wedding, excited to be featured. He fixates on the picture of him, worrying about his weight. Evelyn realizes he's preoccupied by the idea of being seen with her. Her heart breaks as she realizes Max is obsessed with the idea of her as a famous actor, not the reality of life with her.

After four months of marriage, Evelyn realizes that Max has no intention of loving the real her: the idea of her is more attractive to him. After she realizes that, she's still reluctant to leave him because she doesn't want to get a divorce. Max shows her off around town like a trophy, never understanding that she's not the woman from his movies.

## CHAPTER 53

In 1988, six years after Evelyn and Max's wedding, Celia plays Lady Macbeth in a film adaptation and submits herself for Best Supporting Actress—a category more likely to bring her a win than Best Actress, which she's also viable for. Evelyn votes for her. When Celia wins, Evelyn is at home with Harry and Connor, having refused to go to the Awards with Max, both because she wanted to be with her family, and because she didn't want to be compared to the new generation of actors. Evelyn is getting fewer offers of roles, and the ones she does get are mother figures. She feels like the industry is "putting [her] out to pasture."

*The casual, secluded nature of this wedding shows that Evelyn understands that the official, outward signs of a relationship are less important than the genuine connection between herself and her spouse. Max still sees Evelyn as a perpetually recognizable icon, though. Even though they're married, he can't see past her existence as "Evelyn Hugo"—or if he can, whatever's beneath that persona doesn't interest him.*



*Max's quick change in attitude—from infatuation to restlessness—is a sign of his appetite for media and public appearances. Max doesn't care if Evelyn's happy in the desert; he's more interested in appearing to enjoy himself than in experiencing pleasure for its own sake. Tabloid gossip is a novel excitement to him, while to Evelyn, it's more of a nuisance.*



*Evelyn would rather continue an unfulfilling relationship than go through a public divorce. This illustrates that romance isn't her priority—instead, she's willing to sacrifice interpersonal fulfillment for a stable career.*



*Even though Evelyn has no contact with Celia, she reads into her actions from afar to find the cunning streak she's always admired. Unlike Max, Evelyn has no desire to be seen publicly, and her family has become her top priority and her main source of happiness. Max isn't an integral part of that family. In fact, he's more of a nuisance at the edge of her life. On top of that, she dislikes being somewhere she's not valued and prioritized—and the movie industry is becoming that kind of environment for her.*



Evelyn, Connor, and Harry watch Celia accept her award. In Celia's speech, she warns "anyone tempted to kiss the TV" not to chip their tooth, and Connor asks Evelyn why she's crying. Harry tells Evelyn to call Celia; instead, Evelyn writes her a letter congratulating her. She signs it "Edward," then crosses that out and writes her own name. She doesn't expect a response, but a week later, she receives a letter from Celia. The two begin to correspond frequently. Evelyn apologizes for her errors in their relationship, but Celia admits that each time Evelyn made a decision that kept the outside world at bay, she felt relieved. She adds that she watched *Three A.M.* recently and feels it would've been wrong for her to stand in the way of such an important film.

Evelyn writes a letter to Celia asking if lovers can ever be friends. Celia writes back, asking if Max is like Harry and Rex; Evelyn replies saying no, but asking to meet. Celia writes that she doesn't know if she could bear seeing Evelyn under those circumstances. Evelyn writes to Celia asking her to return her calls, which she's avoided for the past week.

## CHAPTER 54

Evelyn calls Celia, and Celia picks up. Evelyn tells her that she used to love Max but doesn't anymore; she'd like to see Celia. Celia refuses. Evelyn insists, telling Celia she still loves her, and that things are different now—Elton John is out of the closet. Celia tells her it's different for them and they'll lose their jobs. Evelyn tells Celia she's ready to give up her career to be with her. They both say they still love each other, and they agree to meet for dinner in LA in two weeks' time.

The morning Evelyn leaves for LA, she can't decide whether to take the letters from Celia with her. She's been rereading them every day, but she decides she doesn't need them since she's flying to see Celia in person. She leaves while Max is still asleep, saying goodbye to Connor, who rolls her eyes at Evelyn's farewell. But when Evelyn gets downstairs, she realizes she wants to take the letters with her, so she goes back up to the apartment to get them. She finds Max in the closet looking through the letters. He accuses her of having an affair, and when she protests, he says it's worse that she's a "dyke." If the letters are merely referring to Celia's past feelings, he'll forgive Evelyn, but if they influenced Evelyn's decision to go to LA, he'll be angry.

*When Evelyn and Celia's love for each other is brought into the public sphere, it's heavily coded. Here, Evelyn begins to reject that code for the truth by crossing out her male pen name. It's possibly this small editing decision that convinces Celia to write back—she can tell that Evelyn is ready to prioritize their love over her public image. Celia has also come to appreciate the safety Evelyn tried to ensure for her, which implies it wasn't simply Evelyn she was angry with, but the social circumstances that made it impossible for them to have an uncomplicated relationship.*



*Celia needs to be entirely convinced that she's Evelyn's priority. The desire to be placed above all else is one that they share, which makes it difficult for either of them to move past stubbornness toward reconciliation.*



*Celia has become more of a realist, aware of the dangers of coming out that she previously told Evelyn were cynical worries. Evelyn, conversely, is willing to risk everything to be with Celia. It seems they appreciate each other's ability to see from different perspectives.*



*The letters are physical proof of Celia's love for Evelyn, and they presumably make Evelyn feel more confident in her decision to fly to LA to meet Celia—a decision that might not lead anywhere concrete. Max's response to the letters isn't one of love and understanding, but defensiveness and presumptions. It's an attitude he has in common with most of the tabloid pieces that have reported on Evelyn's life, which proves Max's inability to understand Evelyn in any kind of depth. And in the end, his anger isn't even about Evelyn: it's about his need to possess her.*





Evelyn's instinct is to lie to Max and tell him that she's not planning to see Celia. But when she opens her mouth, she tells him the truth: she was going to leave him, for herself if not for Celia. Evelyn tells Max she loves Celia, and he calls her a "dyke" again. She argues with him, saying she also loved him once, too, but he didn't show her any love—he just wanted to own her. Max blocks the door, trying to get Evelyn to explain herself to him. He threatens to tell people about her relationship with Celia, but Evelyn pushes him out of the way and goes down to the car.

*When Max feels as though he's losing control of Evelyn, he physically intimidates her, which does nothing to disprove her claim that he wants only to possess her. Instead of trying to understand Evelyn's anger and frustration, Max doubles down and threatens her: he clearly only wants to stay connected to her for his own gain; whether she loves him is irrelevant.*



## CHAPTER 55

Evelyn arrives at the restaurant in LA to find Celia at the table already. Evelyn can see that Celia's skin and hair are aging just as hers are. Evelyn orders wine, but Celia orders soda, saying wine no longer agrees with her. When Evelyn offers to pour her wine out, Celia says her low tolerance doesn't need to be Evelyn's problem, and when Evelyn says she wants everything about Celia to be her problem, Celia tells Evelyn it took her years to get over her, both times they broke up. She still hates Evelyn a bit, and Evelyn says she feels the same way, but she still wants to be with her.

*Evelyn is willing to enter a relationship with Celia again, no matter how difficult or unglamorous that relationship might be—and this isn't a decision Celia takes lightly. The women's attitudes toward their relationship are similarly realistic: nothing will be perfect or perfectly happy, but their love for each other means these considerations are secondary to their desire to be together.*



Celia says she's surprised that Evelyn didn't call her to gloat when she won her Oscar. Evelyn tells her she was referring to her in the acceptance speech, and Celia says she thought there might've been another "she" that Evelyn was talking about. Evelyn tells Celia she's the only one she's loved, despite the men she's been with since they broke up. She says she's getting a divorce from Max, no matter what he says about her: she has her fame and Harry's support, and she no longer cares what anyone thinks. She's signed on for one last movie and then she'll stop making them.

*Evelyn's refusal to let Max control her and her decision to stop making movies are signs that she's beginning to care less about maintaining her celebrity status. As long as her family is safe, she doesn't need to worry.*



Celia doubts Evelyn's sincerity, but Evelyn reassures her she means everything she's just said. Celia hesitates before telling Evelyn she has a pulmonary disease and probably won't live past 60. Evelyn doesn't believe her at first. Celia tells her to do her final movie before moving to the coast of Spain with her, bringing Harry, Connor, and Celia's brother Robert with them. Evelyn asks about the disease, and Celia explains that it's from smoking; she can live a normal life for a while, but eventually it'll become difficult to breathe. Evelyn starts to cry, and when she can't calm down, Celia takes her home and sits her on the sofa.

*Celia's decision to tell Evelyn about her condition is her way of allowing Evelyn back into her life: she trusts Evelyn enough to tell her the hard truths. Though Celia has clearly known about her condition long enough to come to terms with it, Evelyn's shock highlights this moment as one in which she realizes she can't have everything she wants—there's simply not enough time.*



Celia tells Evelyn that if she can handle losing her again, they can spend the rest of their lives together. Evelyn says that she can't handle it, but she'd rather go through the pain of losing Celia than never feel it. Celia and Evelyn cry together, then have sex. In the morning, Celia describes her plan. Evelyn will leave Max and appear in public with Celia's friend, a politician. People will be shocked to see Evelyn dating someone so young, so when Max tries to spread information about Evelyn's relationship with Celia, it'll seem like he's spreading bitter rumors. Eventually, Evelyn will marry Celia's brother, Robert, so that when Celia dies, she can inherit everything.

Evelyn asks Celia whether they need to do all this just to hide the truth. Celia reminds her of the people afflicted with AIDS who were attacked by the media, and Evelyn thinks of Harry crying over the loss of so many of his friends. Celia says that while things have changed since the 1960s, they haven't changed dramatically, and they need to protect each other. Evelyn says she'll talk to Harry, but she tells Celia she's made a good plan.

An article in *Now This* reports that Evelyn, who has been seen out with a young Democrat, is filing for divorce from Max, who has been spreading rumors that Evelyn's a lesbian and a cheater. The author writes that, while Evelyn doesn't have a "great track record" with marriage, Max's comments "sound like sour grapes."

## CHAPTER 56

Harry resists Celia's plan: he doesn't want to retire yet, and he envisions himself quickly getting bored by the life Evelyn proposes. He and Evelyn are arguing in her dressing room on the set of her current film. She asks him whether he wants to stop living a lie, but he tells her he's not living a lie—since John died, he hasn't been with anyone he really cares about. He doesn't think it's fair to uproot his and Connor's life because Evelyn loves Celia.

During the shoot, Harry and Evelyn fly back to New York each weekend to see Connor. During the weeks, Evelyn spends her time with Celia and suspects that Harry, who goes elsewhere, has found someone he's interested in. The day after the shoot wraps, Evelyn and Harry call Connor to discuss their plans for the next day, taking a while to agree on where to go for breakfast. When they hang up, Harry says he has an idea related to Evelyn and Celia's plan. Instead of moving to Spain, he suggests they move back to LA. He's found someone he can imagine being with for a long time, and he suggests that Celia marry him.

*For Celia and Evelyn, intimacy means sharing pain as well as pleasure, sometimes in quick succession. Celia's complex interpersonal arrangement is the kind of plan Evelyn is used to drawing up, which shows that Celia has learned from Evelyn's strategic behavior even while she was criticizing it. Now, she understands the value of manipulating the media to protect the people she loves. Celia's acceptance of strategic behavior suggests that her serious medical condition has forced her to adopt a more realistic attitude.*



*Evelyn is still adjusting to Celia's new attitude, and she's still processing her medical news, so she's not as quick to immerse herself in strategy as she usually is. Evelyn knows that Harry needs to be involved and consulted, which shows that although her relationship with Harry is unconventional, it's still of vital importance to her.*



*Even though Max's rumors are partially true, in Hollywood, clout and fame are more important than the facts—and those are things Evelyn has more of than he does, so this time, the media is on her side.*



*Harry isn't yet tired of Hollywood like Evelyn is, which is perhaps partially because his role as a producer is much less public than Evelyn's role as an actress. Evelyn's love for Celia leads her to assume that Harry's missing something by not having a romantic partner, but she seems to overlook the times in her own life when she found more joy in work than in romance.*



*Now that Evelyn is devoted to Celia and Harry seems to be spending time with his own romantic partner, Evelyn and Harry's role as Connor's parents unite them more than their own friendship. While Connor brings them together, their different love lives pull them in different directions, and it seems like their bond isn't as close as it was before. Perhaps that's because, having finally reunited with Celia, whom Evelyn feels bound to by fate, Evelyn no longer needs Harry's emotional support.*



Evelyn tells Harry she wants to stop acting, so she can't see the point of living in LA—she wants to live an anonymous life with Celia. But Harry doesn't like that idea. They grow frustrated and agree to discuss the plan later, organizing for Evelyn to pick Harry up on the way to the airport. Harry says he's falling in love with the man he met, and Evelyn assures him she won't do anything without him—they'll figure this out.

That evening, a driver called Nick picks Evelyn up. During the drive to Harry's address, Nick tells Evelyn he's an actor and would appreciate any tips she has for him. Evelyn doesn't reply, but she considers telling him it's mostly luck—and that you have to be ready to sacrifice your identity and lie about yourself until you can't remember who you are. When they round the corner onto Harry's street, they see a car has collided with a tree. They jump out and run to the car to find Harry slumped on the driver's side with a passenger beside him.

In the stress of the situation, Evelyn finds herself acting on autopilot. Later, she remembers helping Nick to pull Harry out of the car, holding Harry in her arms, and telling him to stay with her. Nick tells her the passenger is dead. Harry opens one eye and Evelyn knows she has to get him to the hospital, and that she has to make sure nobody knew he was driving the car—if they found out, he could go to jail.

Evelyn and Nick move the passenger to the driver's seat. She wipes Harry's blood from the crashed car and gets Nick to drive them to the hospital, where she rings the police from a pay phone to report the car crash. She gives Nick money for a cab and tells him not to speak to anyone until he rings her at the hotel tomorrow: in the meantime, he should think about what he wants from her in exchange for his help.

Evelyn finds a pair of scrubs to change into and waits in a private room. Just after midnight, a doctor tells her that Harry lost too much blood and won't survive. He tells Evelyn she can say goodbye, and when she gets to Harry's room, she climbs into bed with him and tells him he can go if he needs to, and that he was her best friend. Harry dies an hour later, when Evelyn switches from her calm survival mode to a state of panic.

*For Evelyn, LA is synonymous with her career and her celebrity persona. She doesn't feel an emotional connection to the place, or if she does, it isn't as important as the idea of anonymity and a life with Celia. Harry's comment about love is one of the few times he indulges in sentimentality throughout the novel—a sign that this new man is truly important to him.*



*Evelyn's reply to Nick is laden with cynicism. She's clearly disillusioned with the acting life, a feeling made more intense by the promise of a life with Celia away from Hollywood. Meanwhile, the fact that the passenger beside Harry is unnamed introduces a mystery to the story—will his identity ever be revealed?*



*Evelyn's immediate response is a balance of finding medical care for Harry and ensuring that the scene of the crash doesn't incriminate him. It's clear that she's used to protecting the people around her, not only physically, but also by obscuring the truth and being constantly vigilant about possible media coverage.*



*Evelyn doesn't think twice about getting dirty to help Harry: he's her chief priority. She's considered every detail of the situation; her ability to perceive humans as assets and liabilities rather than people means that she knows Nick is a vital part of this situation—and that she needs to control him.*



*Evelyn's final moment with Harry highlights the simultaneously intimate and innocent bond they shared. Harry was Evelyn's best friend, and it seems she can remain in control as long as he's alive, but once he dies, she's lost her anchor.*



The next morning, Evelyn wakes in her hotel room after barely an hour of sleep to a phone call from Nick. He tells her he knows what he wants from her: to make him famous. Evelyn tells him that if he becomes a celebrity, he too could face the repercussions of last night's events. He says it's not a problem, and she reluctantly agrees to get him parts in films. After she makes the calls to get Nick what he wants, she howls in grief for Harry. A few days later, an article in *Now This* announces Harry Cameron's death from an aneurysm, adding that his loss has left Hollywood heartbroken.

*Nick capitalizes on the situation in a way that Evelyn might once have done, had she still been hungry for fame and success. Her response shows that she's not concerned with whether Nick's request is reasonable or ethical—she's resigned to do whatever it takes to get him out of her life. Though the book doesn't make it explicit, it's clear to the reader that Evelyn manipulated the hospital and news media to report the death as an aneurysm—an event much less dramatic, and much less likely to lead to questions, than a car crash.*



Six months later, *Now This* reports an unnamed child of an extremely high-profile actor has been seen around New York's clubs drunk and under the influence of drugs, adding that she's been caught "in bed" with two "fellow students."

*The reader can easily work out that this article refers to Connor. Her behavior is a sign that Harry's death affected her profoundly and that Evelyn hasn't yet found an effective way to console or support her.*



## CHAPTER 57

Six months after Harry's death, Evelyn's only option is to get Connor out of town. Connor is one of the only people who knows Harry's true cause of death, and Evelyn knows that adds to her stress. Having tried talking to Connor and putting her in therapy, Evelyn knows the only thing left to do is to go far away from the spotlight. Evelyn talks to Celia on the phone every night, usually discussing the pain Connor is going through. Celia suggests they move to Aldiz, on the southern coast of Spain, where nobody will care who they are. Evelyn knows that she'll have to leave Luisa behind, but because Luisa has been working for her for decades, it seems like a good time to say goodbye. Celia asks Evelyn if she'll be able to handle feeling insignificant, and Evelyn replies that she's ready.

*Evelyn knows that keeping secrets and constructing lies for the media is exhausting and stressful, and witnessing her daughter bearing that stress highlights just how damaging it can be. Ultimately, it's not just her love for Celia, but also her care and concern for Connor that pushes her to move to Spain. She's realizing just how tiring and damaging it's been for her and her loved ones to be at the center of media attention, which means that though she once loved this attention, she's willing to give it all up for her family's wellbeing.*



Once the relocation plans have been finalized, Evelyn goes into Connor's bedroom. She tells her she's retiring from acting and that they're going to move to Spain. She carefully explains that she's in love with Celia, and that she'll marry Robert. When she says she'll answer any of Connor's questions, Connor tells her she doesn't care—she'll do whatever Evelyn tells her to do, but all she wants is to be left alone. Evelyn relents, giving Connor the space she asked for. Two days before the move, she tells Connor she'll give her as much freedom as she wants, as long as Connor agrees to have dinner with her every night and to see a psychologist. Connor agrees, and when Evelyn hugs her, she hugs her back.

*Connor's lackluster response not only emphasizes how emotionally withdrawn from Evelyn she's become, but it also suggests that the idea of same-sex relationships no longer elicits shock or disgust, at least from young people; times have changed since the 1960s. Even though Connor is barely communicative, it's clear that the idea of escaping the spotlight feels freeing to her, too, given the increasing affection she shows Evelyn after she learns of the plan to move to Spain.*



## CHAPTER 58

Back in the present, Monique notices that Evelyn's eyes are wet. Though she tries to maintain her integrity as a journalist, she can't help but feel for Evelyn. When she tells Evelyn she admires her, Evelyn tells her not to say that—by tomorrow, Monique will understand how flawed she is.

*This brief chapter increases the reader's anticipation; there's now a strongly foreboding mood as the final chapters unfold.*



## EVELYN HUGO MARRIES FOR THE SEVENTH TIME

An article in *Now This* announces Evelyn's marriage to Robert Jamison—Evelyn's seventh marriage and Robert's first. The article describes the wedding, which took place in the courthouse, and reports that Evelyn, Robert, and Connor took off on a trip to Spain soon afterward, making the assumption that they went to visit Celia.

*The dramatic contrast between the number of times Evelyn and Robert have been married doesn't just emphasize how complex Evelyn's relationship history has been. It also suggests that society doesn't put as much pressure on men as on women to get married—a man can be respected and successful without a wife, but a woman can't be successful or respected unless she has a husband.*



## CHAPTER 59

Evelyn's history picks up a few months after the move to Spain. In Aldiz, Connor transforms "like a seed sprouting." She plays Scrabble with Celia and helps Evelyn prepare dinner, but she connects most strongly with Robert, who teaches her how to play poker and paints her bedroom for her. Connor stops partying, starts to get good grades in school, and gets into Stanford. The night before Evelyn and Connor leave to move Connor into Stanford, they and Celia and Robert go out to a small restaurant; Robert gives Connor a gift of a poker set. Evelyn suspects that part of Robert's reason for marrying her was so that he could have a family, despite never wanting to settle down with one woman.

*The natural imagery with which the novel describes Connor emphasizes the simple, more rural lifestyle that Evelyn and her family have now that they've left Manhattan. Robert begins to act as a father figure for Connor, which seems to be the grounding she needs to reset her priorities, and this highlights the importance of family support—however unconventional—in one's ability to feel safe and important.*



Once Connor leaves for school, Evelyn and Celia spend more time together than ever, not having to worry about gossip columns or being recognized in public. Evelyn feels like she's living the life she truly wants. She even starts to speak Spanish again, first because she needs to when she's out and about, but after a while she even speaks it at home.

*Now that Evelyn has no secondary identity to uphold and only Celia to care for, Evelyn's life becomes simpler than it ever has been, and elements of her core identity, including her cultural heritage, find their way back to her. This suggests that the price Evelyn paid for fame wasn't an irrevocable sacrifice: she still has the time and freedom to be the person she wants to be, despite the pragmatic decisions she made during her career.*





Celia's health begins to deteriorate. She tells Evelyn that she sometimes regrets the time they wasted not being together. Evelyn reminds her that they're both stubborn, and Celia adds that the world didn't make their relationship easy. Evelyn can't bear the thought of losing Celia. She asks Celia to marry her—a "spiritual promise" that they can make at that moment in bed without religious approval. Celia agrees. She and Evelyn face each other and hold hands, and Evelyn performs a kind of wedding ceremony. They exchange vows and wrap hair ties around each other's fingers in place of rings. Evelyn ends the ceremony by kissing Celia, whom she now considers to be her wife.

## CHAPTER 60

Six years after Evelyn performs the informal wedding ceremony, Celia dies in her arms in their bed. Evelyn's mind goes blank, and later she remembers saying, "We didn't have enough time." When the paramedics take Celia away, Evelyn feels like they're ripping out her soul. Once they've gone, she falls to the floor and weeps; Robert does the same.

An article in *Now This* announces Celia's death, detailing her "girl-next-door allure" and saying that after her marriage to John Braverman, she never remarried.

## CHAPTER 61

Evelyn and Robert hold Celia's funeral and burial at the same place that Harry is buried. Though the ceremony is private, people know they're there. After Celia's coffin is lowered, Evelyn walks away to find Harry's grave, where she sits and cries for as long as she can. When she stands up, she notices two paparazzi photographing her, but she doesn't care—she walks away.

Two weeks later, back in Aldiz, Evelyn receives mail from Connor: a magazine with the image of her weeping at Harry's grave, with a note from Connor that says "I love you." The headline for the image reads "Evelyn Hugo Weeps at Harry Cameron's Grave Years Later," confirming to Evelyn that the media will only pick up on the narrative they're focused on telling, even when the truth is in plain sight. She realizes that the only way people will understand her story is if she tells them directly, in her own book.

*Just as they consider their bond to be fated, Evelyn and Celia seem to acknowledge that their lengthy periods of separation were also inevitable. There was nothing they could have done to be together longer or to have had an easier relationship. Evelyn has been married seven times, but this time—in a way, the eighth time—she's finally in control. Her relationship with Celia is one in which she has total agency and no obligation to the law, the media, or a possessive or aggressive man.*



*Robert and Evelyn weep next to each other. Neither one of them holds the other, which emphasizes that they're connected through their shared love of Celia (and not their love for each other). This is the third time Evelyn loses Celia.*



*The article focuses on Celia's attachment to men, a sign that society is still dominated by men, and also that the media's version of the truth is never accurate. Celia's symbolic marriage to Evelyn is especially precious to Evelyn because the media can't report on it.*



*Even after his death, Harry is still a comfort and an anchor to Evelyn. The presence of the paparazzi emphasizes the insatiable appetite of the media: even in her grief, tabloids continue to attack Evelyn. Yet, instead of trying to frame the scene to tell a certain story, Evelyn has no energy left to control what people think about her.*



*Connor is one of the only people in Evelyn's life who understands everything the media coverage overlooks—in effect, she's one of the only people in the world who loves Evelyn for who she truly is. The magazine's instinct to understand Evelyn's emotion as being for her husband rather than for Celia shows that even if attitudes same-sex relationships are changing, the public will overlook and erase those relationships instead of acknowledging them. The only way Evelyn can validate her love for Celia is by telling her story plainly, leaving no room for misunderstanding.*



## CHAPTER 62

After Celia's death, Evelyn lives a scandal-free life. She continues a happy marriage with Robert for 11 years, moving back to New York with him and raising money for charity. Evelyn's focus is squarely on Connor, who takes a job teaching at Wharton after realizing a life in finance isn't right for her. When Robert dies at age 81, Connor gives the eulogy. After the funeral, she and her boyfriend, Greg, come to stay with Evelyn until she tells them to live their own lives. But when they leave, she realizes that the apartment feels huge and quiet, so she hires Grace, spoiling her with the money she inherited from Harry, Celia, and Robert.

Evelyn is happy with her life of charity and art collecting until Connor is diagnosed with breast cancer and given months to live. Evelyn looks after Connor through chemotherapy and sits with her in hospital. 18 months later, Connor dies, and Evelyn, completely heartbroken, buries her next to Harry.

*Moving back to New York means that Evelyn is once again a subject of media attention, but it's easier for her to cope with now that she has no secrets to protect. By all accounts, she has a traditional, married life. Connor's bond to Robert is evident by the fact that she gives his eulogy. It's possible that Connor is well adjusted thanks to the family structure in which Robert played a vital part.*



*Connor is the last in a quick succession of heartbreaking losses for Evelyn, which emphasizes that no matter how much fame and wealth she accrues and how hard she tries to hold on to her loved ones, the odds seem stacked against her.*



## CHAPTER 63

Back in the present, Evelyn tells Monique her story ends with her, alone in an Upper East Side apartment, without the people she cared about the most. She asks Monique to make it clear that she doesn't love her wealth, the apartment, or the adoration of fans; in fact, she made the wrong choices most of the time. All she really wanted was family, and now, she wants to go home to them. She says goodbye to her readers.

*Though Evelyn and her life of luxury initially dazzled Monique, it's clear now that most of the apparent comfort and happiness in Evelyn's life is just a façade. Evelyn's farewell is a foreboding moment—it seems clear to readers that she's about to reveal a few important details to Monique.*



## CHAPTER 64

Monique tells Evelyn not to say goodbye, but Evelyn ignores her. She instructs Monique to emphasize that she would make all the decisions she made to protect her family again—and would do worse, if she thought she could save them. When Monique says most people would do the same, Evelyn pulls out an old, crinkled piece of paper. She tells Monique that Harry's lover, the passenger, was a Black man: James Grant.

*Evelyn stands by the decisions she made that prioritized her loved ones over other people. She doesn't have a hero mentality, and she's aware of her limited capacity to care only for the people closest to her. She understands that telling Monique the truth about her father means she's revealing the cruelest, most selfish side of herself.*



## CHAPTER 65

Monique feels a sensation in her chest, a feeling of fury. Until this moment, she blamed Monique's father for his own death, believing that he had been driving under the influence even though it seemed totally out of character. Now that she knows her father was not responsible, she has someone else to blame. She can tell from Evelyn's body language that she's ready to take the blame. She pushes Evelyn against the sofa and tells her she's glad there's nobody left alive to love her. She asks her whether she thinks giving Monique her story makes up for her actions. Evelyn says she doesn't want absolution: she wants to give Monique the chance of knowing her father properly. While Monique says she knows who her father was, she realizes she's not telling the truth.

Monique takes the piece of paper from Evelyn—something she found in Harry's pocket the night of his death. She opens it to see bloodstains. Before reading it, she asks Evelyn to leave. The paper holds a letter from her father, James Grant, to Harry. In it, he writes that he loves Harry in a way he never thought he could love, but he can't go to Europe with him or marry Celia in order to create the life Harry wants in LA. Though he doesn't love his wife the way he loves Harry, he won't leave her—he refuses to break his family apart, because his daughter is the most important thing in his life and his wife is his best friend. After reading the letter, Monique realizes at last that her father was in love with a man.

## CHAPTER 66

Monique sits on the couch for a long time, revising memories of her father in the light of what she just learned. After a while, she can't sit still, so she goes to find Evelyn. When she does, she asks her if the letter is the reason she's here. Evelyn says that Monique's job at *Vivant* provided the pretense for meeting her, but once she looked into her, she realized she was a talented writer, and she was especially impressed with Monique's right-to-die piece. She wanted both to give Monique the letter and to have her write her life story.

Monique accuses Evelyn of being self-interested: even when seeking redemption, her actions are self-centered. Evelyn reminds Monique that she's benefitting from this, too, and she challenges her to burn her notes and recordings if she feels so cheated by the situation. Monique says the story is the least she deserves, but Evelyn tells her nobody deserves anything—you get what you're willing to take. Monique says she hates Evelyn, and Evelyn tells her that everything is more complicated than that, including Monique's father.

*This is presumably the first time Monique makes physical contact with Evelyn—an act that emphasizes her uncontrollable rage. At first, Monique is satisfied by blaming Evelyn, but she soon realizes that what she really needs is to accept these new truths about her father—a much more complex undertaking. While Monique is angry at Evelyn, Evelyn has also given her an opportunity to learn an important truth about her father, whom she deeply loved and who's still a guiding force in her life.*



*The bloodstains on the letter are a tangible connection between Harry and Monique's father, and they also connect Monique and Evelyn in a concrete, irreversible way. Monique's father's letter highlights that the manipulation and secrecy that underpin Harry and Evelyn's relationships isn't a reasonable price for other people. The letter also suggests that the love and security of a family unit can be more important than the pursuit of romantic love.*



*Evelyn's story is important to her. Though she wanted to give Monique the letter, ultimately, she only chose Monique because she was also a fine writer. This emphasizes that Evelyn sees Monique as not just a small part of her own life story, but also as an ambitious and admirable woman in her own right.*



*Evelyn feels somewhat protected by what she's offered Monique. It's not as though her generosity can reverse what she did to Monique's father, but giving her life story to Monique is a way of making up for her own secretive selfishness. She trusts that Monique will understand the complicated decision she had to make on the night of the car crash, and this shows that she respects Monique's intelligence and her ability to understand human nature.*



Evelyn says she wanted Monique to know how much her father loved her—that he was willing to turn down romantic love so that he could stay with her. Monique feels confused by Evelyn; she hates her for moving her father’s body to the driver’s seat, but she appreciates that she held onto the letter for decades so that she could show Monique that her father loved her. She decides that Evelyn is neither good nor bad but “somewhere in the middle.”

Monique asks Evelyn to tell her specifically when she can release the book. Evelyn reveals that she has late-stage breast cancer and has been putting her affairs in order, including the gown auction and the book. Monique tells her she has to leave—she can’t work anymore today—and when Evelyn says she’ll see her tomorrow for the photo shoot, Monique says she’s not sure if she’ll come.

## CHAPTER 67

Monique arrives back at her apartment, sits down on the couch, and puts her feet up on the **coffee table**, only then realizing that David brought the coffee table back for her. He left a note with it, including his lawyer’s business card and a message ending with, “Thank you for doing what I could not.” Monique doubts she would have ended her marriage, stood up to her boss, written a guaranteed bestseller, or understood her father’s love without Evelyn.

## CHAPTER 68

Monique returns to Evelyn’s apartment in the morning without realizing that she decided to come back—but knowing that she couldn’t give up her career. Grace opens the door looking frazzled: the photo shoot team showed up earlier than expected, and she’s been rushing to get the apartment ready for the shoot. Frankie scolds Monique for being late—which she hardly is—and Monique knows the situation intimidates Frankie.

*In this moment, Monique fully understands Evelyn as a complex human being—unlike the tabloids that have made Evelyn into a superficial, simple person her entire life.*



*Monique and Evelyn are now able to be brutally honest with each other; the walls of politeness have completely crumbled. Evelyn’s final affairs involve arranging a charity auction and ensuring that the public will understand her life story. It’s clear that at the end of her life, Evelyn’s priorities are honesty and generosity.*



*This is the second time Monique hasn’t paid much attention to her apartment when she returns to it, but this time, it’s not because she’s too busy with work—it’s because her reality has completely shifted around her. She knows she owes a lot to Evelyn, a fact that further complicates her anger toward Evelyn. This knowledge also seems to lead Monique back to Evelyn’s apartment the next day, if only subconsciously*



*Monique’s feeling of being on autopilot suggests she’s still in shock from Evelyn’s revelation. The feeling of chaos and anticipation in the apartment gives this chapter an air of finality, as if this is Evelyn’s final dramatic performance. Now, Frankie is the one who feels out of place, while Monique, who was once intimidated by Frankie, has grown accustomed to this environment—it’s a moment that shows Monique’s professional growth.*



Evelyn is sitting on the terrace amidst an array of lights, wires, and cameras. There's a wind machine blowing her graying **blond** hair, and the sun is shining behind her: she looks completely relaxed. Monique wonders if this, not the woman she interviewed, is the true Evelyn. Though Evelyn's looks certainly helped her find fame, Monique realizes that she has a star quality that would've seen her succeed anyway. Evelyn asks for some photos of herself and Monique. Monique is reluctant, but Evelyn insists. While she's standing next to her, Evelyn smiles sincerely, and Monique understands that Evelyn really cares how she's doing and whether she'll be okay.

After the shoot, everyone but Monique leaves the apartment. Monique says goodbye to Grace, who's leaving for a vacation in Costa Rica later today, fully paid by Evelyn, who enters the room at that moment to reassure Grace she'll be fine without company. As Grace leaves, Evelyn tells her she couldn't have been without her these past few years.

Monique understands what Evelyn is doing: she's put a plan in place to die at the time of her own choosing. Monique starts to confront Evelyn about the plan, but she realizes that whether she's interpreted the situation correctly or not, she wouldn't have anything to say. As Monique leaves, Evelyn tells her she has a bright future ahead of her. Monique knows from Evelyn's expression that she's saying goodbye.

## CHAPTER 69

Monique enters the subway station, wondering whether she should try to stop Evelyn or call 911. But she remembers that Evelyn chose her because she read her right-to-die piece and knows she understands the importance of a dignified death. Monique feels that Evelyn trusts her. A train arrives, opens its doors, then closes its doors and leaves; Monique doesn't get on the train—she's frozen by the decision she needs to make. At last, she decides that it would be a betrayal to interfere in the death that Evelyn chose. Monique realizes she stepped into the train carriage unconsciously.

*The combination of the artificial wind machine and the natural sunshine subtly emphasize that Evelyn's fame has its foundations in Evelyn's natural beauty and talent. They also symbolize Evelyn's ability to manipulate situations to put herself in the best light. Evelyn knows she's both hurt and helped Monique over the past few weeks, and she doesn't shy away from this complicated relationship: instead, she wants to memorialize it. It seems that Evelyn's at peace, having revealed the most secret parts of her life, and this allows her to embrace the camera like she once did before the complications and stresses of a public life made media attention unbearable.*



*Even at the very end of her life, Evelyn is still choreographing the lives of those around her in order to serve her own purposes, but in this situation, Grace isn't in danger—Evelyn simply wants her as far away as possible.*



*Monique knows Evelyn well enough now to understand that it'll be impossible to get Evelyn to back down from a plan she's made. For Evelyn, control is everything, which means that losing control over her own body would be worse than death.*



*Monique's still reeling from Evelyn's revelation about her father, but in this moment, her personal feelings take a back seat to her desire to help Evelyn. Against her first instinct, she understands that Evelyn would appreciate being left alone more than she'd like anyone's help, a sign that her time with Evelyn has taught her to second-guess her immediate assumptions about people.*





Monique changes to the AirTrain, arrives at the airport, and finds Monique's mother at the arrivals gate. When she reaches her mother, she holds her and cries. Her mother asks her what's wrong; Monique doesn't know how to begin to explain. They hail a cab and Monique calms down enough to tell her mother that she and David are getting divorced, and she misses her Monique's father. She asks about her parents' relationship; her mother tells her that her father was very romantic and made up a special holiday just to celebrate her. It wasn't a passionate marriage, but they enjoyed each other's company and worked well as a team.

*Monique's mother is a comfort to her, but her arrival means Monique can't escape thinking about what she's learned about her father. Her father's identity is no longer the theoretical question it was when Monique sat in Evelyn's study—it's something that directly affects her mother, which means Monique has to wrestle with how much of the truth to share. For now, she skirts around that subject. Her mother's description of the relationship she had with Monique's father echoes what Monique learned about Evelyn's relationship with Harry, and it's possible that this similarity allows Monique to see the value in her own parents' relationship more clearly, even if Evelyn's revelation has changed what she knows about that relationship.*



Monique doesn't know whether she'll tell Monique's mother the truth she learned from Evelyn, or whether she'll even include it in Evelyn's biography. She knows that whatever she decides will be based on what she thinks is best for her mother. She doesn't know how Monique's father identified—straight, gay, bisexual—but what matters is that he loved her and her mother, and those are two things that won't ever change. The driver stops outside Monique's apartment. Monique and her mother go inside and order pizza. Monique's mother suggests they watch *All for Us*. A few minutes in, Monique feels the urge to knock down Evelyn's door and talk her out of her chosen death, but she represses the urge and falls asleep to Evelyn's voice from the movie. When she wakes up in the morning, she realizes that one day, she'll forgive Evelyn.

*Monique is willing to lie to protect her mother, which is the same decision Evelyn made when she lied about Monique's father's death to protect Harry. The fact that Monique is stuck with the same decision Evelyn had to make emphasizes their unbreakable bond. Monique's mother's ignorance about Monique's father results in a moment of dramatic irony when she suggests watching one of Evelyn's films, but it also lightens the mood, suggesting that Monique might be able to enjoy a pleasant evening with her mother and leave the difficult decisions until later.*



## EVELYN HUGO, LEGENDARY FILM SIREN, HAS DIED

An article in the *New York Tribune* announces Evelyn Hugo's death at the age of 79 of what's rumored to be an accidental overdose. The article details Evelyn's contributions to cancer research, battered women shelters, and LGBTQ+ communities, and predicts that the auction of her gowns will now see skyrocketing bids. It reports that Evelyn left some of her money to the people who worked for her, and the rest to charity.

*Instead of focusing solely on Evelyn's husbands, this obituary highlights the parts of Evelyn's life that had nothing to do with men. This sets it apart from the relationship-focused tabloid pieces throughout the novel, suggesting that, at least outside of Hollywood, Evelyn was respected and known for more than her relationships.*



## EVELYN AND ME

Monique Grant, in an article published in *Vivant*, describes the few weeks she spent with Evelyn. Sometimes, Monique writes, she thinks she admires Evelyn, and other days she despises her. She reckons Evelyn would be proud of that dichotomy, because by the time she gave her interview, she was focused on telling the truth. Monique reveals that Evelyn was bisexual and in love with Celia St. James, something Evelyn wanted the world to know because her love for Celia was "perhaps her greatest political act."

*Evelyn didn't tell her story to be admired or revered but to be seen as a complicated human being—an opportunity the fickle media deprived her of throughout her career. Monique's announcement in this article isn't a moment of condemnation but of celebration—it's a sign that times truly have changed since tabloids made furtive, disdainful reports of Evelyn's intimacy with Celia.*



Monique introduces an excerpt of the biography which will be published next year. She chose the title because when she asked Evelyn if she was embarrassed by the fact that her seven husbands are such a huge part of her identity, Evelyn said that once people knew the truth, she expected they'd be more interested in her wife.

*The final word of the novel—"wife"—echoes the actual shape of Evelyn's life, which ended with her transparent revelation of her love for Celia. It's also a sign that the symbolic wedding ceremony she performed with Celia meant just as much (or perhaps more) to her than any of her seven official marriages.*





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