

## Chapter 24: Shanty's Birthday

Earlier that day, Shantelle was lazily preparing for school. She wasn't feeling well, but school was school. Every day is vital for medical school.

After showering and changing into a pair of faded jeans and a white top, she made her way to the dining area to have breakfast. "Surprise! Happy birthday, Shanty!" Both her parents greeted. Shantelle smiled from ear to ear, seeing her mother, Eleanor, had prepared balloons and a bouquet for her special day. Her father held up her favorite cake, saying, "Happy birthday to my beautiful daughter, Shanty."

Recently, her breakfast usually involved toast and fruit, but she supposed that day could be an excuse to indulge, since her mother had her favorite dishes on the table. The new maids they hired also cheered her on. "Good morning, Shanty! Happy Birthday!"

"Maybe I should." Looking at the mouthwatering food, she suggested, skip school today!"

"Hahaha!" Her father laughed. He said, "No skipping school. One of your professors is my subordinate at the hospital. I don't want him asking about your whereabouts, and he shouldn't be giving you any special treatment, either."

Shantelle laughed and said, "Fine." After her father put the cake on the table, she embraced him and her mother. "Thank you. To the best parents in the world that love me so. Thank you."

After having breakfast, Doctor Scott informed her they would have dinner at the best restaurant in town to celebrate her birthday formally. He said, "I invited Eana's family and Keith."

Her father referred to his secretary. Eana and her family relocated with them. Her father entrusted Eana with all of his patient's personal information.

Shantelle's mother, Eleanor, was her father's constant aide. She was a surgical nurse at St. Dominique Hospital in Rose Hills, and that was how they met. She acted as his sole assistant in the past, not just in surgeries, but also during clinic hours and meetings.

However, over time, Doctor William's patients grew in number. Now, Eana was the one who made patient appointments and managed her father's clinic. On the other hand, Eleanor screened and scheduled her father's surgeries. Sometimes, she took part in helping the surgery itself.

"We don't have many friends yet here in town to share your special day," Eleanor said. "But we have each other."

"Thank you, mom. And, of course, I'd love Eana's family to be there, and I don't mind Keith's presence. He already promised not to talk about Evan," Shantelle replied.

She checked the time and, realizing it was getting late, stood up and said, "I better go. "Sorry, dear. The driver I hired will start next week. Bear with taking a taxi in the meantime," her father said before walking her out to the driveway.

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At four in the afternoon, Shantelle was exhausted. She walked out of the school with an upset stomach. She groaned, "I should not have eaten so much at breakfast."

"Shanty, over here!" She turned to find Keith, leaning on the side of his car, his hand waving at her. He was holding a bouquet in his hand. He said, "We can go together for your special dinner."

Since Shantelle moved to Warlington, this was the third time Keith fetched her from medical school. In between, he did not bother her nor call her, despite knowing her number. She met him on two other occasions at the hospital. They talked, and he flirted, but then again, it was Keith. It wasn't a secret to Shantelle how Keith was a ladies' man in Rose Hills. After a short chat, he would always rush to whatever he was doing, building his network of doctors within Warlington. @

"Happy birthday, Shanty," he said with a smile. "Thank you for the flowers," Shantelle said, accepting the bouquet.

As she entered Keith's car, she could feel the jealous eyes of the ladies outside the school. She could not blame them. Keith was gorgeous. He knew how to dress well. He was rich and had a well-toned body.

Shantelle buckled her seatbelts just

before Keith turned on the engine. Then she shifted to him and said, "You should stop at this. You are going to give the girls at school the wrong ideas.. You will miss out on all the potential prospects here in Warlington."

Keith laughed. He shook his head and replied, "I'm not interested in them, and... they are not at all wrong."

Shantelle simply shook her head at his remark, not wanting to dwell on it. Keith was handsome and charismatic, but he was also Evan's friend. She did not want to go there with him. Moreover, Shantelle did not know if she could ever like someone again.

Ten minutes on the road, Shantelle was feeling extremely uncomfortable. She was taking deep breaths and kept gulping down whatever was threatening to come out of her throat!

Eventually, she knew she could no longer hold it in. She instructed, "Park at the side of the road. Park at the side of the road. Now!"

Keith's car stopped by the entrance of a park. Shantelle rushed outside and found a tree, where she threw the entire contents of her stomach. When Keith made his way to her, he soothed her back, asking, "Are you okay? Are you fine?"

It took a few minutes for Shantelle to feel better. Keith had to buy warm water from the coffee shop across the street since Shantelle did not feel like drinking beverages.

Keith observed how Shantelle was drinking the water slowly, too slowly. She sometimes acted to heave even with drinking only water. He suddenly felt uneasy. He hated the possibility, but he saw the signs and had to ask, Shanty... are you... pregnant?"

At his probing, Shantelle froze and looked distantly. Soon fear washed over her, and she stood up, looking at her surroundings. When her eyes landed on a pharmacy, she excused herself. "I need to buy something."

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An hour passed, Keith and Shantelle were sitting on a park bench, their faces white as a ghost. Shantelle had taken a pregnancy test, and it came back positive. She used not only one, but five pregnancy test kits.

Tears flowed down Shantelle's face as she hugged herself with her arms. Then, out of nowhere, Keith walked to the nearest tree and punched it with his fist.

"Fuck! Fuck!" He kicked the truck with his feet and did so again and again. Most of the time, he said no words, but he grunted and groaned. He was so angry that he did not care how he had cut his knuckles. He only stopped being frantic when he noticed the stares of people passing by. When Keith returned to the park bench with Shantelle, he rested his elbows against his knees; his hands held his face. He said, "I don't mean to scare you." He wanted to explain himself, but no words came out of his mouth. "It's just that... this wasn't what I wanted for you, Shanty."

His words took Shantelle aback. It was awfully caring for someone who wasn't really that close to her. Sure, she had known Keith since they were young, but they were never that tight. Silence fell upon them, but soon, Shantelle asked, "What – what do I do now, Keith?"

It took some time, but eventually, Keith answered, "Do the right thing, Shanty." Keith was taking deep breaths. He avoided her gaze for some time, but when he peered back at her, he reminded, "My mother left my father and me for another man when I was eight years old. I've always thought it was unfair to me."

"Do what's right, Shanty," he faintly said. "I will be here to support you and your family, no matter what."

Shantelle silently understood what he meant. She remained in her seat, just thinking and crying.

After ten minutes, she asked, "Please... please don't tell Evan."

The last time Shantelle saw Evan, she perfectly remembered how he asked her about taking contraceptives. He did not want a child with her. So, he did not have to know.