MY BABY FATHER’S A THOROUGHBRED

by

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**CHAPTER 3**

“Oh, God! Sharday, wake up! Wake up!” my friend Ellen frantically warned. “There’s a man on our porch. He keep banging on the door and calling your name. But something’s not right about him,” she exclaimed, scared and seeking protection. After seeing how pale she was and comprehending the sheer fear in her widened eyes, I was sure that we were about to be killed. Usually, Ellen was the cool white girl struggling to be popular and accepted in the face of hip-hop culture. Not on this night, though.

“Who is he?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” she responded, now starting to cry. “But we should leave. Let’s go while we still can.”

I wasted no time getting dressed and hopped out of bed as is. I squeezed Ellen’s hand as we eased down the steps to get through the living room and out the back door.

“Shar . . . day.” I heard his voice: a faint plea, followed by the door knob twisting as he tried to get in. Then Ellen’s stupid ass started screaming like we were in some dumb-ass horror movie.

“Shut up! Shhh . . . Hold on,” I said, listening closer. Then I tiptoed toward the window and peeked through the blinds. I saw my vehicle outside, Ellen’s jeep, and a beat-up two-door car that I didn’t recognize. Then I saw the man on my porch. He was hunched over with his hands on his knees and a duffle bag strapped over his back.

“Oh my God. That’s JT!” I explained, looking back at Ellen. Then I opened the door. I saw the relief on his face when he looked at me, though I knew something was wrong when he extended his arm for me to help him inside. “C’mon,” I said, as I grabbed his hand and assisted him in standing straight up.

With my teeth gridded, I then scolded my friend, “Ellen! Would you fuckin’ help me instead of just standing there looking stupid?”

I couldn’t blame her, though. After all, it was four in the morning, and she didn’t know who JT was, and to make matters worse he was mysteriously dressed in all black.

After we got him inside, we learned that JT had been shot, twice. He had one hole in his chest and another in his stomach. Instantly, me and Ellen begin to panic and tried calling for help.

“Hold up, hold up! Don’t call anybody,” JT insisted, sitting on the couch with one hand clenching his stomach as he pleaded with the other. “I just need you to get me to a hospital. I need y’all to help me. No cops!” he exclaimed, fighting to breathe. “I’m on parole,” he lied. “And if the cops get involved . . . I go back to jail.”

At this point, Ellen’s fear was transformed more into a form of excitement. She just wanted to be down more than anything else. Me, on the other hand, all I could think of was what if something went wrong while we were assisting him. Like what if he died as we were helping him avoid the police? Or what if the cops caught up to us and thought me and Ellen were responsible for shooting him? All kinds of thoughts were crossing my mind, and I could tell that it was apparent to JT.

“Don’t let it go down like this, Sharday. Don’t let me die.”

“Alright, alright,” I replied, with my hands on my head while trying to focus. “Okay. What should I do? I mean, what do you want us to do?”

“Get dressed.”

“Huh?” I responded, dumbfounded. Then I looked down at myself and saw that all I had on was a pair of my comfortable granny-panties and a bra that didn’t even match. I was so embarrassed! And the fact that I had a scarf wrapped around my head, looking like the lady from the syrup bottle, did nothing to make it better.

Ellen was already on her way upstairs to put on some clothes by the time I walked off.

“Wait,” JT let out, as he grabbed me by the wrist. I could sense his strength was fading because his tone was weak as he stressed, “Put this somewhere safe. I’ll be back for it.”

I took the duffle bag upstairs with me, and then stuffed it in my closet and covered it with a bunch of clothes and old coats. After I made my way back downstairs, we helped JT off the couch and out to Ellen’s jeep. From there, thank God everything worked out okay. JT instructed us to drive him twenty minutes across the state line into Springfield, Massachusetts, where, against my better judgment, he forced us to leave him for dead about a block away from the Springfield Medical Center. But he took my cellphone with him, I guess to call for help on his own after we were gone. So that made me feel a little more at ease. Yet, he stressed for me not to call or ask the hospital anything about him until after he contacted me first.

That same morning, I went to school tired as hell, but I still went. I followed through with my day as if everything was normal. Though I must admit, I couldn’t get JT off of my mind to save my life. I was dying to hear from him. I wanted to see him again, so bad that it was killing me. I was not exactly happy that his first time putting his arm around me was because he could barely hold himself up. Yet, as sad and desperate as this may sound, I was glad that fate had brought him by.

When I left school to go home between classes and make lunch, I was anticipating an indication of some kind that JT was alright. I hoped that he tried to contact me, but the caller ID was blank. I should’ve known better, because it was way too early, anyway.

After making my food, I grabbed a can of soda from the fridge, and then sat on the couch and clicked the television on.

There were at least three men involved in last night’s incident here at the credit union of Hartford Capital. One police officer and a security guard were injured during the well-planned, but not so smoothly executed, break-in. Throughout the gun battle which ensued, four bullets struck the officer in his upper torso, all being stopped by his bulletproof vest. However, the security guard wasn’t so lucky. A single bullet pierced his chest cavity, collapsing a lung and leaving him in critical condition. As for the thieves, we’re told that they made off with nearly $200,000 in cash.

*Damn, that’s a lot of money,* I thought to myself as I watched how the female reporter added emphasis on the amount of stolen cash.

According to police the thieves didn’t exactly make a clean getaway. Starting from inside of the credit union to the roof where the robbers both entered and exited a makeshift hole, was a trail of blood. That trail continued all the way down to this parking space, certainly indicating that one or more of the culprits had been shot as well. Witnesses say they saw a dark-colored custom van and an old two-door Ford Escort flee the area around the time of the shooting!

*Oh my God! Oh my God!* I thought with fear, using my hand to cover my mouth as an overpowering feeling of terror hit me. That’s why JT was so specific about me parking his car in the back last night. Then for the first time, something told me to check that big bag in my closet. But for what? More than likely it was full of drugs and guns. And I didn’t want nothing to do with that. There was no way JT had anything to do with that robbery. Selling drugs was his thing. At least that was what I remembered him for back in the day.

Regardless of what I expected to be in the duffle bag, when I made my way upstairs, I couldn’t help but be nosey. As slow as I peeled the zipper back, the more twenties, fifties, hundreds, and all types of bills were revealed. I almost passed out!

For three days straight, I was nervous as hell, scared, and didn’t have a clue as to what to do. I couldn’t tell Ellen, I didn’t have anyone else to talk to about it, and I definitely wasn’t gonna turn JT into the cops. I now yearned for him to call more than any time before. I knew he was guilty, but it still would’ve helped to hear from him. At least then I would have had someone to talk to, who I knew for sure wouldn’t say anything. Keeping this kind of secret wasn’t easy on a normal person, especially with no kind of direction or guidance at all.

By the time the fourth day rolled around, my whole world fell apart as, for the first time, the truth had become painfully obvious. JT didn’t make it. He had died at the Springfield Medical Center, and his blood was on my hands. I no longer worried about the trouble I’d suffer if caught with the stolen money that was stashed in my closet. Or even getting nabbed with the getaway car to an armed robbery hidden in my backyard. All I could think of was, instead of trying to aid JT, why hadn’t I actually helped him? I could’ve saved his life and avoided this.

That day I didn’t go to school. I didn’t get up to eat, dress, shower, or none of the above. All I did was stay in bed and cry. All day long.

At 3:00 a.m., the phone woke me out of my sleep. I figured it was Ellen calling me from one of those California nightclubs, where she was at, spending time with her sisters.

“Hello,” I answered, while clearing the sleep from my eyes.

“Whaddup?”

“Who is this?” I rudely replied, with a flat tone.

“Damn. That’s not how my guardian angel is supposed to talk to me after saving my life. Is it?”

“*JT?*”

“Yeah. But why do you sound so surprised?”

“Thank God! Oh my God. Thank you, thank you, thank you.” I started crying, gripping the phone with two hands. “JT, why didn’t you call me? You should’ve called me. I thought you had . . . And I didn’t have anybody to talk to about it . . . and I was going out of my mind because I saw the news and—”

“Yeah, yeah,” he purposely interrupted. “Calm down and relax. Just chill for a second.”

I was sure his health was better, though I could tell he was still healing through the sound of his voice.

“Yo, I’m not mad, but tell the truth—you looked in that bag, huh?”

“No . . . Yeah . . . But I don’t care about that. Or none of the other stuff either. I’m just glad that you’re alright. Can I come and see you?”

“Yeah, but don’t ask for Jerome Tilton when you come. I’m under the name Keith Gardner.”

Keith Gardner it is! By 9:00 a.m., not only was I dressed impressively sharp with my shoe-game and wig tight, but I was at Springfield Medical Center’s front desk asking for Mr. Keith Gardner; 305 was the room I was directed to. And when I arrived, JT was knocked out. For a few minutes I sat quietly at his bedside. But shortly after, he was waking up.

“Hi, sleepy head,” I expelled with a grin.

“What’s good?” he replied, smiling back at me as he stretched.

“Definitely not those dry lips of yours,” I chuckled. “Here, let me fix ’em,” I said while reaching in my bag for some lip gloss.

“Nah, man, chill.” He laughed, holding my hands at bay while turning his head the opposite way.

“Alright, well, give me a kiss so I can moisturize them myself.” JT then faced me while still holding my hands, and without opening my mouth I gave him a kiss. Then I playfully dragged my lips back and forth across his. From there it was a wrap. Everyday I came to visit, definitely expecting my kiss, but also bringing him food, fresh underwear, T-shirts, and anything else he needed