

“Little girls who dress and act like little boys are considered to be tomboys and are said to be going through a phase. It is said she will grow out of it and will no longer want things to be that way. It too shall pass. Life is a series of phases, you are born a child and then you grow out of it. Everyone goes through the same phases, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, senior citizen, and then death. What if you took those same phases and made them relevant to your life, your experiences, what would they be called? Well for me, it’s Easy Street, Sex, Maturity, and Relaxation.”



Easy Street



I am a strong believer in the saying, "Everything in life happens for a reason." Even though I went through a lot as a child I like to think one of two things. One, I wasn't the only one going through it, or two, that someone out there had it worse than me. Compared to the things that are going on today, I had it pretty easy as a child. This is how I learned to rationalize all the bad things that happened. I have been asked, "If you could change what happened in your life, would you?" To be honest, all of the struggles that I had to endure made me a better person. I like to think it shaped my character and gave me more to live for...



Sean

So here I am, twenty-four, married with two kids, and nowhere to go but up. So why do I feel so down? In the past week I have had rejection come my way and the words, bipolar, manic depression, and lithium spoken in my direction. Am I depressed? Please, do black people really get depressed or are they just trippin? I think I'm just trippin....

Like most black children; you are either raised by your struggling black mama or your struggling black mama and alcoholic stepdad. Although I prayed for the first, I received the latter. There was a time when it was just mama and me. I was

truly happy then, but hell, what child wasn't happy then. No bills to pay and all the candy you could eat. Did I mention I was an only child, then? Hump, the good ole days! Anyways, my mama struggled with the thought of being a single mother fresh out of high school, pregnant by that sweet talking Bobby. I have often heard her say he sweet-talked her right out of her clothes and virginity all in the same sentence. Smooth.

To have a tongue that sweet you would think it was made out of pure sugar, I mean sweet like the sugar cane we would chew on in the summertime. When I look at his pictures, it had to be the conversation cause there truly wasn't much else. He was black as tar and skinny for no reason. I can honestly say I have only seen him a couple times as a child and now I force myself to spend time with him as an adult. In fairness to him, at least that is what I tell myself, if he did nothing else, his sperm helped to create a pretty decent individual.

I often wondered why things did not work out between the two of them, and then I found out about his drug addiction, and my personal favorite, his unemployment addiction. I even sat and wondered if he just got his act together, would it have been possible for me to grow up

without being sexually and emotionally abused. You can spend your whole life wondering and never really get any fulfillment out of it. You could play the “What if?” game a thousand times over and still end up in the same sad situation. It is the reason that I actually hate daydreaming, it’s just another way for your mind to play tricks on you, conjure up ways for you to be happy and goals that you would never achieve. When you finally snap back to reality you are depressed, oops, I mean trippin all over again.

At some point my mama must have given up on finding a husband of her own because she started settling for other women’s husbands. At five, you don’t think much of it, you just had someone to call daddy and buy you pretty things. To a child there are two types of men who date your mama. The first type, we’ll call him “Johnny Feelgood”, is looking for a good time, and so he will buy the distraction, mainly me, whatever it took to get the distraction out of the way, hence; good time achieved. The other, “Sweetie Pie” is really a nice guy (the nice ones are usually married) and you wished your mama would have found him first.

I got lucky and for a short period of time my mama brought home a “Sweetie Pie”, his name was Sean. What I remember about Sean was his big belly, his smile, and his

scent. Sean always smelled clean and to me it meant he had a nice job. Whatever he did for a living required him to wear a shirt and tie. The shirt was always nice and crisp like new money and the tie always matched. I loved how big he was, he reminded me of Santa Claus and his tone was always calm and soothing; his attitude always pleasant. It was the things that I remembered about Sean that I carried on when I started dating or so I thought. When Sean and my mama began to see each other on a more constant basis, I was six years old and we stayed in a small two-bedroom apartment on the southwest side of Houston.

Sean only came over on certain days; I guess when his wife wouldn't notice he was missing. Mama and I made the best of those times; it made us feel good to have a man in the house. Sean spoiled me, whatever I wanted, I got. Not because he wanted to spend time with my mama, but I think he felt sorry for me. He knew I would never really have a father who would love me and treat me the way a child should be treated. He was right, never, after he and Mama's relationship ended was there anyone like Sean. My time with Sean was filled with Showbiz, Sesame Street on Ice, horseback riding, and playtime at the beach.

I was so fascinated with him that half the time I didn't know Mama was even there. Every night after Sean went home to be a husband to his wife and a father to his daughter, I would lie in bed crying, wishing he were there with us. One Friday night, while Mama was in the house fixing me grits and eggs, I was sitting on the porch waiting for Sean when Bobby showed up. How did he find out where we stayed? Mama moved away from him and vowed he would never see me again after she returned from work one day and found me, four years old, and home alone.

Bobby fixed me a bowl of cereal which I ate while I watched Smurfs on the television. He said he was going across the street to the store, he promised to be right back. He said if I was a good girl and didn't tell mama, he would bring me some candy. What Bobby didn't know was that Mama got off work early that day. When my mama got home and realized I was there by myself, she was hotter than fish grease. She called Bobby everything but a child of God when he came home three hours later. "How in the hell can you leave Olivia in the house by herself, so yo dumb ass can go get a hit!" she yelled.

“Damn it girl, you act like I left her here for a long time, she fine,” he said with an attitude, “get the hell out of my face with that shit!” Even as a child, I knew those were fightin words, instinct told me to get out of the way. Mama didn’t back down from anybody and she step directly in his path and said, “You need to pack your things and leave, I don’t want you around my daughter any...”, before she could finish her sentence, his fist crashed into her face. It landed with the same precision you would want from a pilot landing a plane and her body hit the floor. As he stood over her ready to strike again, she kicked him between his legs grabbed me and ran out of the door. Our neighbor, Ms. Caroline let my mama use the phone so that she could call the police. My last image of him was being hauled off to jail.

Now, here he was, prancing up our stairs, smiling like someone actually wanted to see him. He walked past me and asked, “Hey baby girl, where yo mama at?” As he spoke you could smell the beer on his breath and from the looks of his

dirty clothes, I knew he didn't have a nice job, not like Sean. Just then mama appeared in the doorway, "Bobby get the hell off my porch, you know you ain't supposed to be here."

"You think that piece paper gone stop me from seein my kid, you should know me better than that Valerie. By the time the cops get here, I could have Olivia and be gone." When I heard those words fall off his lips, I got up and ran pass my mama into the apartment; I didn't even want him to touch me. That must have made him angry because he pushed mama out of the way and ran after me screamin for me to come and give him a hug. After I slammed my bedroom door, I locked it and cried for my mama to make him leave me alone.

I kept wondering where is Sean? Why wasn't he here yet? I pictured Sean running up the stairs, grabbing Bobby by his skinny little neck, and saying, "Stay away from my girls!" Bobby would be so scared that he would leave and never come back. As I sunk down on the floor and began to cry even harder, I heard a loud scream. A scream composed of sheer pain and agony, but I've never known my mother to scream like a man. I raced out of my bedroom to find Bobby rolling around on the floor with hot grits stuck to his face. My aunts always said my mama was "mean in the kitchen"; I just thought they were talking about how well she cooked.

“If you know what’s good for you, collect yourself and leave my house”, mama said standing over him with the remainder of the grits still in the pot. As black as he was, he had white spots all over his face and as he tried to wipe the gooey food away, it revealed serious burns that would definitely call for medical attention. He sat in the middle of our living room floor, contemplating if he really wanted to go up against this crazy woman, especially with the pot still in her hand. He sat there hurt, because his intentions were never for things to be this bad between he and Valerie. He never intended for her to see rough times or feel pain. He truly wanted to love her and treat her like a queen.

Valerie was a queen she was beautiful. Valerie was about 5’4 and full figured with smooth peanut butter skin. Her long shiny black hair always hung over her right shoulder with the slightest curl at the end. She was a mixture of ghetto and sophistication all rolled into one and to finalized the deal she was intelligent. Some people could be book smart and not have an ounce of common sense to their name, but Valerie took that one step further. Valerie had book sense, common sense, and street smarts. She was a survivor. She could make a meal out of one pack of ground beef, two potatoes, and a block of government cheese that would last us for three days.

Bobby was smart enough to leave without even saying a word. He looked back at me and paused as if he had something on his mind but just couldn't gather the words. He looked like a wounded animal, like he lost the battle and had to forfeit his territory. Poor baby. NOT! I was laughing inside, I found pleasure in the fact that my mama could make him feel the same pain he caused her to feel. By the time Sean finally showed up, Valerie was a nervous wreck. She was sitting on the couch holding me tight in her arms allowing the tears to cascade down her face. She held me so tight that I was afraid to tell her that I had to go to the bathroom.

"What's wrong Valerie? What happened?" Sean asked as he lifted me from my mama's arms.

"Bobby showed up drunk and claiming he would take Olivia from me."

"Did he hurt you?"

"No, he pushed his way through the door and headed towards Olivia's room. He started beating on her door, scaring her, making her cry. When he realized she wasn't gone open the door for him, he came towards me with his fist balled up tight. I panicked and ran in the kitchen to get a knife. He

grabbed my arm and before I knew it, I threw hot grits in his face." Mama had finally stopped crying and allowed Sean to cradle her in his arms. While they were distracted I broke free and ran to the bathroom.

Sean sat quietly making sure he had fully processed what she had just told him, and then he said, "I'll put the two of you up in a hotel for a couple of days, just to make sure you're safe. You both need some rest."

"No thanks Sean. I have a couple of friends that are sending their kids off to summer camp and I'm going to send Olivia. I need to get my life together and I don't want her around to witness it."

"Are you sure, can I do anything to help?"

"Yeah, come by on Sunday and see Olivia off. You might want to make it special for her, because when she returns she won't be seeing you again."

"Valerie, what are you saying? You're just upset; maybe you should lie down and think things over."

“I have thought things over, it’s called Karma. Everything that I do, including fooling around with a married man, has made things hard for Olivia and me. Ain’t no use in acting like we’re a family when all is said and done, you’re going home to your wife.” Valerie looked Sean in the eyes and told him as plainly as she could, “I can’t see you anymore, please leave.” Simply said, this phase of my mama’s life was over.