

## From Laughter to Tears



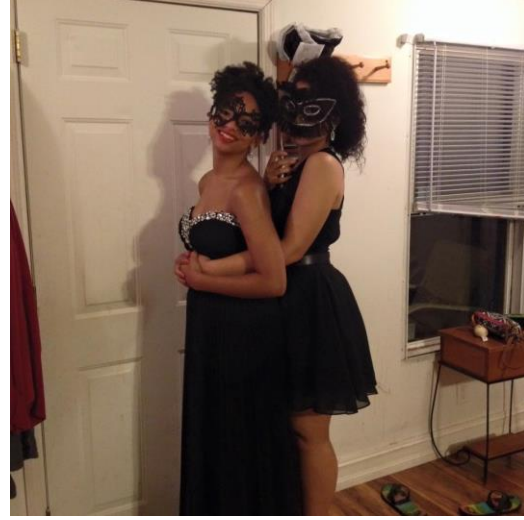
All my life, I have been known for the way my laughter fills a room and forces others to follow suit. I grew up a happy child despite all the hardships my family faced. My mother was a widowed single mother of four, relying solely on my late father's life insurance. She thought we could not see the sadness in her eyes at times. I was young, but I was not stupid. My childlike naivety had been stripped away the day I walked in on my mother lying on the floor crying, desperately clinging to a handful of bills. I was seven. On that day, I vowed to never let my mother know that I was sorrowful too. I knew I had to be happy enough for the both of us.



I grew up having a childhood as normal as my mother could provide for me. Even when she was despondent or frustrated, I never doubted her love for my siblings and myself. We never went hungry even if she had to make sacrifices to feed us. I made sure to repay her in the only way I knew possible, making her proud. I excelled in school and joined numerous clubs. She was proud of every achievement, even if it was as small as a school art show. She always made me feel like I could achieve anything I wanted to, and I made her feel like she already had.



I had the life of a normal teenager, including a small group of friends that I would not trade for the world. I got my driver's license at sixteen. I attended prom with my sister as my date. I graduated a scholar. Despite everything I was lacking compared to my peers, I never felt inferior to them. I was just happy and grateful for all that I had.



Although my mother gave me everything she could, there was one thing she could never provide, which was a male figure in my life. My father had died when I was an infant, leaving my brother as the only man in my family, but even he stopped loving us when he became a teenager. This left a gap in me that I became desperate to fill as I grew older. I was too trusting of men, and they often took advantage of that. A few short months ago, I had just arrived at college and was in search of friends. While at orientation, I had met someone, so I asked him to hang out soon after the start of the semester. I had just finished decorating my room, and I was excited for him to see. Unfortunately, he was excited for something else.

He raped me in my dorm room, and I slept in that same bed for months. A little over a month after the incident, I discovered that I was pregnant. I did not find out through a pregnancy test like most women; I found out through a life changing miscarriage. These events changed my life in ways I could never have imagined. My laughter changed to tears. My trust changed to loathing. I no longer felt happiness. I have been made to feel as if this occurrence was my fault by people who were supposed to be my support group. I lost friends because they believed I had become obsessed with playing the victim. This is a battle I have had to fight alone, and I have never faced a more difficult challenge. Every day, I make progress towards being happy again, but some days are harder than others. The events of those few

months occupy my mind and often make me forget how to breathe. Most days my body weighs a thousand pounds as I drag myself out of bed. However, today is not one of those days. Today, I feel beautiful.

