

## Let the Good Times...

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Characters:

Lizzie: Black woman, Mid-40s to Early 50s. She's dressed like she just came from work, nice dress slacks, up-to-date pumps, and a long sleeved, dress blouse.

Setting: Easy Chair with an end table beside it which has a bottle of gin, whiskey glass, a book with reading glasses on top of it and photo album on the second shelf. Directly across from it to suggest two separate spaces is a low stool with a large enough seat for comfort. In the middle and upstage Center is an old-fashioned record player with a single 45 on it.

*(Lizzie enters taking her time. She gets to the edge of the stage and addresses the audience)*

Lizzie:

You ever cry without tears...realize in the middle of damn near every night that everybody you know answers their "How are you?" with 'Fine,' before you can open your mouth?

*(She moves upstage to her stool, takes off her heels, then moves towards easy chair as she calls offstage in a child's voice)*

Lizzie:

Mama? Mama? Can I—

*(She feels her mother's slap, freezes for a moment—starts to skip briefly. Stops)*

Lizzie:

But no matter how many times mama smacked me for beginning to ask for something, kept her foot on my neck (*Beat*) most people thought we were close...I'd always be best dressed, good grades, no problem, big smile—wearing the mask. Only times she'd tell me she loved me is after she was drinking. Talking to herself, 45s spinning on our portable record players, mama dancing with me—laughing.

*(Lizzie walks over to the easy chair, sits back into it, puts on the reading glasses. She pours herself a double-double, drinks it down in one long swallow, and becomes her mother)*

Lizzie as Mama:

*(‘Mama’ calls for Lizzie offstage)*

Lizzie, come here girl. I know you hear me, get out that bed and come here for a minute baby.

*(‘Mama’ sees Lizzie as a young girl)*

Lizzie as Mama:

How was you sleepin' daughter? You okay? *(Listens)* Nothin' but good dreams? That's good. Come put your head on mama's lap. You know mama loves you don't you? Love you always and forever. *(Listens)* Aww, that's sweet, I know you do Lizzie. Come on now, give mama a hug and go on back to bed...Mama's gon' listen to her favorite song for a minute.

*( 'Mama' watches briefly as Lizzie goes back to bed, then heads for the record player to play Sam Cooke's version of "Let the Good Times Roll." (Sound Cue) As it plays mama starts to dance, acknowledges daughter's returning to dance with her)*

Lizzie as Mama:

Of course, you can join me, baby come on.

*(She changes position to make it obvious she dancing with her daughter. Song ends and she's grown Lizzie again. Lost in thought she approaches the stool, takes a seat)*

Lizzie:

Remember that book Dickens wrote that starts *It was the best of times, it was the worst of times?* That's how it was with me and mama. She was like two different people in the same body. When she wasn't drinking, she stayed on my ass like white on rice. I had to come home right after school even when I was in high school, except then I could work my part time job at the library. She let me keep all my money too, but no friends could visit, no spending the night over anybody else's house, and of course no grade lower than a B and she'd didn't like more than one of those. *(Beat)* When she drank, honey wouldn't melt in her mouth. Exact opposite of the mean drunk grandpa used to be before he quit. I unconsciously started connecting being drunk with love. Didn't realize it till years later, when I was married to Mark, an alcoholic. Only time he really turned me on is when he'd had too much to drink. One time when we'd just started dating, we caught mama sober at her house, and she thought she'd play a joke on me.

*(Lizzie walks over to the front of the easy chair and becomes 'Mama')*

Lizzie as Mama:

Hmmph! You sure wearin' them jeans young man, good thing you datin' my daughter, I might give you a run for your money. *(She laughs)* Here, look at this—

*(She stands up, becomes Lizzie, who quickly raises her skirt in the back, then starts walking dsc)*

Lizzie:

Mama knew I didn't wear any panties...she came up behind me, lifted my skirt high up, while Mark stood there, quiet. I was so embarrassed, I couldn't look him in the eye.

*(She stands there remembering for a few moments, turns to walk back to the easy chair, where she drops like a sack, becomes mama.)*

Lizzie as Mama:

*(She puts on her reading glasses, pours herself a drink, drinks it down, picks up her book from and settles back to read. Suddenly she gets upset, drops the book on the ground, gets the photo album off the end table. She starts looking through a few pages until she stops on one page, holds it up to her face briefly before she returns the album to her lap.)*

Lizzie as Mama:

Only have one picture a-that mothafucka...Shit, shit, shit. Only man I ever loved. Didn't know it...Never forget...met him on that playground...few months older, tall, dark and so fine-as-wine, his jump shot stopped me in my tracks...I'm standin' there lookin' what had to be stupid and here he come...with that smile I still see in my dreams...that tight sweaty behind...long legs...boxer's chest...oooo wheee...Too young...didn't care. We did it everywhere we could, even at the movies after popcorn...was so happy, had to keep Vaseline on my mouth to keep my constant smile from cracking.

*(Starts to sing)*

Come on baby let me thrill your soul.  
Come on baby let the good times roll.

*(She thinks she hears Lizzie offstage)*

Lizzie as Mama:

Lizzie? Daughter, is that you? *(Silence)*

*(She stops, rubs her hand over the face of her first love, closes the photo album and puts it back as lights go out briefly)*

*(Lights up and Lizzie is seated on her stool)*

Lizzie:

Mama had me just before she turned seventeen...my father's parents wanted her to have an abortion—he agreed. Mama was so mad, she refused to put his name on my birth certificate. Only reason I know what he looks like is I eased up on her looking at his picture in our family photo album, talking to herself...Water running down her face...Never saw her cry like that...Shocked me too, because mama had a big problem with crying. Always said it showed weakness...when she used to whoop my ass with that extension cord, no matter how hard it landed on my arms, legs, feet, face, neck whatever she could get to, one thing she kept repeating is *(voice change)* “And you bet not cry either, not one drop.” I was scared of her when she was sober and mad, all I wanted was for her to stop...learned to make my eyes dry up like God turned off my tear ducts. Till this day, I can't remember the last time I cried and felt water.

*(Lizzie gets up and walks quickly to the front of the record player, angry, pointing her finger as if in Lizzie's face)*

Lizzie as Mama:

I don't give a fuck what you think, with yo dumb ass. You ain't but thirteen years old. You don't know shit from Shinola! I don't care what the teacher said, you not joinin' the chess club or no other kinda club that stops you from being in this house after school when you're not workin'...period. Don't you think I useta be thirteen? That I know young girls and boys lie to their parents all the time, to go do somethin' they ain't got no business doin'?

*('Mama' reaches out to slap Lizzie)*

Lizzie as Mama:

Now, get yo Black ass out my face and go finish writin' that paper for English class.

*('Mama' watches her leave the room, returns to her chair, takes another drink)*

*(She reaches down picks up the photo album, turns to the page with Lizzie's father's photo. She carefully removes it, starts to tear it up, changes her mind. She stands up, looks at his image as she speaks)*

Lizzie as Mama:

You don't know what you missed, not being a father to your only child... You coulda at least been a man about it and said goodbye before you left... Whole time I was pregnant, you had me believin' it was your parents who wanted me to have an abortion, that you wanted our child but didn't know what you could do about it since we were so young, you kept tellin' me you loved me... I was so shocked and hurt when I found out you'd been fuckin' around with that high yella girl a year younger than me... that you got her pregnant too... and her mama let her marry you, after she took her out of town for an illegal abortion *(Beat)* Bet she was surprised when she found out you'd gone behind her back and enlisted in the army... I didn't find out you were gone until I overheard one of your friends talking to somebody I didn't know at the bus stop. *(Beat)* Wonder if you used to sing to her too, promise her that if she stuck with you, she'd have a lifetime of lettin' the good times roll.

*(She slowly puts his picture in her bosom and exits the stage)*

*(Lizzie re-enters singing and dancing to "Let the Good Times Roll." She walks to the edge of the stage and takes her father's picture out of her pocket)*

Lizzie:

I met my father today. *(Beat)* Last June, the day before my birthday, I went over mama's house for my usual birthday surprise and dinner. A tradition mama's mother started with her and kept up until we lost granny a few years ago... Usually, as soon as I rang the doorbell, I could hear her singing "Happy birthday to you, Happy birthday to you, Happy Birthday dear..." before she opened the door. This time the door was cracked slightly when I walked up on the porch, and when I walked in calling "Mama?" She entered from the kitchen without a sound carrying a single cupcake with a lit candle in it, finishing the Birthday song, "Happy Birthday, Dear Lizzie, Happy Birthday to youuuu." She put the cupcake in my hand and after I blew it out, she smiled and put an envelope in my other hand. I was so excited I dropped the cupcake and tore the

envelope open. In it, was this picture. The same one she's kept in our photo album all these years. I reached out to try to give her a hug, but she took the picture from my hand and flipped it on the back and there...was my father's full name "Isaiah Emanuel Johnson." I spent the rest of the evening hugging on her, kissing her cheeks, forehead, hand...thanking her...Finally we sat down at the kitchen table for the best birthday dinner I don't remember, because I was too busy asking her all kinds of questions about my dad, she had no interest in answering. *(Beat)* I immediately went on Facebook with the photo, his name and my story asking anybody who might know him to please contact me asap. *(Beat)* Three weeks ago, my father sent me a Friend Request and last week, I met him at Starbuck's for coffee...I hugged him, he hugged me and to my surprise—we cried together. *(Beat)* Found out we like our coffee the same way, black...Stayed and talked until the store closed...Got a chance to hear his side of a story mama never told me.

*(Lights out)*

*(Lights up on Lizzie as Mama. She's standing center stage, looking up with her arms wide open)*

Lizzie as Mama:

Where you been Manny? *(Listens)* Course I still love you. Been missing you baby. *(Listens)* All I want from you right now is a dance.

*(She closes her arms as if being held by Lizzie's father and begins a slow dance in silence, turning slowly in a circle.)*

*(Lights out)*

*Lights up on Lizzie, who's standing in front of her stoop holding her mama's reading glasses up to her eyes briefly)*

Lizzie:

She hasn't needed these for a while. Used to read all the time, starting with the morning paper, moving on to the book she was reading that week...About six months ago, we were riding together just a few blocks from where mama lives and she couldn't figure out how to get home. Kept telling me to shut up when I tried to help, insisted nothing was wrong...even after the fifth time she drove around the block to make the same wrong turn...couldn't get her to go to the doctor...wound up having to take her keys and move the car to keep her from getting in it...By the time I could get her to a doctor, she was repeating herself all the time, forgetting to change her clothes...would wear the same blouse and skirt everywhere, only took showers when I was there to help...Moved her in with me last week. Made sure I brought her favorite chair, record player, photo album and the only 45 she had left—Let the Good Times roll.

*(Stage to Black as "Let the Good Times Roll" starts to play. Spotlight up on easy chair)*

The End

Come on baby let the good times roll  
Come on baby let me thrill your soul..  
Come on baby let the good times roll..  
Roll all night long..  
Come on baby yes this is this..  
This is the something I just can't miss..  
Come on baby let the good times roll..  
Roll all night long..  
Come on baby while the thrill is on..  
Come on baby lets have some fun..  
Come on baby let the good times roll..  
Roll all night long..  
Come on baby just close the door..  
Come on baby lets rock some more..  
Come on baby let the good times roll..  
Roll all night long..  
Feels so good..  
When your home..  
Come on baby..  
Rock me all night long..  
Come on baby let the good times roll  
Come on baby let me thrill your soul..  
Come on baby let the good times roll..  
Roll all night long..  
Feels so good..  
When your home..  
Come on baby..  
Rock me all night long..  
Come on baby let the good times roll  
Come on baby let me thrill your soul..  
Come on baby let the good times roll..  
Roll all night long...





1. 

2. S

3. [Stand By Me](#)

4. Let the Good Times Roll Lyrics