



EPISODE FIVE //

Dear Body, Why Can't I Love You?

INTRO

This is Janie's Daughters! Leave a message at the beep!

[Beep]

Sometimes I hesitate to bring fried chicken for lunch. But the fact is, I love chicken. I love fried chicken. And there's just not that much I'm willing to do about it.

[Theme Music Plays]

Welcome to Janie's Daughters, a podcast documentary that follows five kick ass women of colors and their adventures and antics in the real world of marriages, careers, sex, family, and faith. From one colored girl to another, this is life as WE know it.

Janie's Daughters is a project of Colored Girl Confidential. You're listening to Season One, Episode Four. Here we go...

SOLANA

"Dear Body, Oh How I Wish I Could Love You"

I once thought pole dancing was unique. That it wasn't so much about your skill but about your mind. If you thought about the trick, figured out the technique and got your mind over the mental hurdles you could accomplish it.

Then, I started running and realized what true mind over body meant. At first I started to run to lose those ten pounds before spring break. Then it became that quick 5k to loosen up the stress from finals and the bar.

Then came what I began to call the N5. 5 miles to distract myself from N. To lose the five pounds I gained dating him. To lose the other five pounds I gained when we ended. Soon those five miles turned to eight when I began to love running. Me. I love running.

I love the feeling of reaching the goal marker, when my Nike app cheers me on. I love that for one hour of the day I'm doing something that's not adding to the feeling of being somehow unsatisfactory.

Part of it comes from the unsteady rocking of life right now- my love life, my job life, my educational life. The other part comes surprisingly from twitter. Daily I log in during class or while waiting for the train and watch as the guys I follow for their witty insight and commentary, simultaneously post photos from accounts such as "PostBadBitches" where women with perfectly symmetrical faces, tiny waists and large butts stare back at me.

I can't help but look at myself in the mirror and see my muffin top, and my stomach, where my thighs touch, the stretch marks that invade my body like conquerers of foreign lands.

This isn't my first dip into the pool of the body issues. As a young brown teenager I grew into my body quickly. Breasts, hips, and thighs that directly contradicted with the ballet career that I was spending years to cultivate.

A teacher, Kristin looked at me one day when I was practicing splits and took it upon herself to sit on my shoulders to encourage me to go deeper into the split. Unsatisfied with my progress she remarked, "it's not your fault- bodies like yours aren't made for dance." From that day on I ate celery and ice, dropping over 25 pounds that summer and forcing my parents to put me into a clinic for anorexia.

Eventually I got over that stage, progressively getting larger but getting more confident in who I was. My first year in college I discovered that the combination of a large chest, smiling face, and inability to wear any shoe under 4 inches tall gave me what I wanted. The boys were around and paying attention- and when you're young and in the transitioning phase of college that's all you need.

Once I reached my peak weight of 250, I realized that I needed to make changes. I had boys in my life sure, but once again I wasn't happy with me. So 60 pounds had to go. And go, it did.

I wrestle now with how much more I want to lose and more importantly, who I'd be losing the rest of the weight for. Is it myself so that I can feel good and confident when I face the rest of the world? Or is it the rest of the world so that I'm not cringing every time I Instagram a picture and wonder how fat or ugly everyone will perceive me as.

I don't know if struggling with my self-image will ever reach a happy point. I don't take my cues from celebrities because we all know that they've been painted, contoured, and airbrushed to Mars.

But when your friends are the epitome of gorgeous, when they have their boyfriends, and are planning their weddings, and going into interviews and coming out with jobs- you can't help but think is it me? Is the way I look? Is it my body? If my waist was smaller and my stomach flatter would I be arguing with my husband right now over the dishes? Leading a board meeting?

I try to remind myself that my body is for me, but it often feels like my ticket to the good life, or a public display of art, waiting for the critics to make commentary. Of course, they'll have to get in line because, like pretty much every other girl out there, I am my own biggest critic.

CARMEN

"And Now He's Back... Well Kinda"

So there's this guy... I know I know but hear me out. The truth is I love him. But we have... History. It's been messy and complicated and wonderful and Lifetime movie worthy.

Well now he's back (from out of space, sorry I couldn't resist myself) Anyway, he's back... Again. We do this all the time. But last night he opened up and told me how important I am to him. I mean he REALLY had me going and I just knew that he was gonna ask me to be his girl. And he didn't! It was like he told me how much he loved me, got on one knee and started tying his shoe!

So here I am wanting to be the strong independent woman while being hopelessly in love with the same man since 2005. I want to do what's right for me and my future but when I think of my future I see him in it.

And apparently he sees our future (or at least our near future) in New York. Or did I forget to mention that he keeps hinting at me moving back to the city? As in the place I just moved *from*. Hi, Life. This is Carmen. Could you please be a little more complicated? *sigh*

MAYA

“Oh hello, Stephan”

So I should probably tell you that there is somebody in my life right now that has me singing from the rooftops and laughing for hours on end. We'll call him Stephan. Stephan is a younger by more than 8 years buck who picked me up in a bar and proceeded to rock my world when he challenged my friend Brian by staking his claim to me when we were all hanging out? Yeah, that's Stephan.

I have been busy travelling, gallivanting, and most of all, planning this huge community event that is happening this week – Yikes! So I haven't really kept up too well with the whole dating thing because life got busy and I don't really like anyone enough to go out of my way to communicate. (In other words, I'm busy “doing me” and feeling perfectly fine about that.)

During this down time a few of the men in my orbit checked in on me – thankfully most were very respectful of my grind and that I had a lot going on, including young Stephan.

Last week he reached out to me asking when can I see you again? And I was fondly remembering our first date and how much fun I had, despite all the drama. I had a packed weekend ahead of me but asked him if I could make plans on the fly with him should my load lighten, and that is exactly what I did Saturday night.

We met at the local wine bar, the same place where he picked me up – and lo and behold he walks in right when another man is hitting on me at the bar. I am like a friggin' magnet these days! Anyway, he comes in, dapper, big diamonds in his ear. This is a cute brown brother – Howard undergrad, Tulane for Law, living his dream in the sports broadcasting arena getting ready to go for the real goal – to manage an NBA franchise.

He walks in and I see that smile that got me the first time I met him – he quickly surmises the situation with the other dude hitting on me and once again stakes his claim by sitting next to me, putting an arm around me, and leaning in. I like this territorialness.

It doesn't feel jealous or threatening. He laughs and I can't help but to smile. We spend a lot of time talking about what is on and how I don't understand why men take my niceness an indication I am into them. He helps me practice being more flippant when being hit on. It's funny and we are laughing so loud the bar crew is looking at us strangely.

I test myself in that moment – how do I feel? Holy shit, I feel amazing. This man lights up the room and makes me

smile and laugh so hard. We are steady joking with each other for the rest of the night over glasses of wine for me and beer for him.

The big college football game is on and he watches while talking to me, all the while showing he's into me – hand on thigh, telling me I look beautiful, he missed me ...

Is anything going to come of Stephan long term? Probably not – but in those moments when we are clowning on each other- laughing so hard, having real conversations about politics and human dynamics and Indians and Black people and the whole nine yards – my soul is so happy. He keeps it light. He tells me he appreciates my time. He's charismatic, enigmatic, and he draws me out of my shell. I can be real.

No Stephan, I won't keep you but you are teaching me a valuable lesson. Love and like can be fun. It's not all heartache and pain. It can be energizing and breezy and it doesn't matter how old you are – laughter is for all ages.

Yes, he's a kid and he readily admits that he is immature – in fact- he calls himself out on it. But after two relationships with people that didn't know what was going on inside of them – the fact that someone can be so open to say "I like you, I want to kick it with you, you're really dope, I appreciate you spending time with me, I want to kiss you, your lips are soft ... " without throwing in promises to be with me for a lifetime and loving me forever...

Let's just say that is a refreshing change. No, I don't want or need to love him, but I ain't nothing wrong with an old school crush. In fact, I'd argue that it can do a girl a world of good.

TAMAR

"An Ode to Insecurity"

"Have you realized that your insecurities have spiked in the last few weeks and it's part of what is contributing to our arguments?"

My partner was frustrated with me. Here she was trying to get me to understand her viewpoint, trying to be vulnerable with me about something that had been bothering her and all I could focus on were my own feelings. Had I been in tune with my spirit at that moment, in tune with the parts of me that had evolved and not with my ego, I would have been able to hear her and remove myself from the equation.

In hindsight I can hear my humility appealing to my ego: "DE-CENTER YOURSELF FROM THE CONVERSATION. THIS ISN'T ABOUT YOU." Unfortunately, I was not in a place to be able to receive that plea.

Instead, I physically recoiled at her suggestion, immediately went into defensive mode, I felt attacked and hurt and so many other negative emotions all at once. "No, I don't think they've been any more than usual, and I've been working really hard on them," I snapped back.

How dare she bring up my insecurities right now, I thought to myself. Doesn't she know how hard I work on them and how much of a sore topic it is for me? I was beside myself.

This is what insecurity does. It gives you distorted views of an otherwise “normal” reality. Insecurity breeds fear and doubt and leads to irrational accusations hurled at your Beloved. Worst of all for me, insecurity breeds: JEALOUSY.

I have battled with insecurity for the majority of my life. In the wake of my mother dying when I was four, I fell into the pattern that had been developed in my family long before my existence. The pattern of using food to self medicate.

As I ate to suppress feelings that I had been shamed to believe were wrong for me to express, my small and slender frame morphed into something unrecognizable and equally as shameful in the eyes of my family and society.

I grew up being fat-shamed, called names and made to feel less than because of my physical appearance. This was where the seed of insecurity around my body image took root, coupled with the images that society plied me with, I was convinced that my body was not one I should take pride in.

As puberty set in and parts of me became fuller, rounder in a more womanly way, my insecurities grew and transformed, where I had been previously teased I now got unsolicited attention for the rise in my chest and the roundness of my ass. I felt defeated and like I could never win; more importantly I felt that I had gone from one undesirable image to another.

As unfortunate as it is, our society seems to breed insecurities in little black and brown girls. From day one the masses let it be known that we are not the ideal: we don't have the ideal complexion, body type, or hair texture. We fall outside of the socially accepted ideal of the white woman and because of this we are less than. Add in factors like sexual orientation, country of origin, etc. and you have the perfect recipe for insecurity's breeding ground. You have me.

I have spent years making unnecessary comparisons of myself with other women. And have found myself getting jealous in relationships when compliments were paid elsewhere because I was not secure enough in myself to recognize that my partner paying a compliment to someone else did not take away from me.

I have done a lot of work on myself over the years and realized beautiful and amazing truths about my authentic self.

However, there are times when those former insecurities rear their ugly heads and send me into an old comfort zone. During these times, jealousy has the tendency to also join the party. These times can be harmful to a partnership that bases its foundation on communication, honesty, and transparency.

In my fits of insecurity I become consumed by me and cannot see beyond the feelings that the insecurities cause me.

Thankfully because of the work I have done and continue to do I am able to have reflective moments after the fact, which hopefully eventually will lead to reflective moments during. I am a work in progress but then again, who isn't?

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ZORA

“On Taking Time to Play”

It's been a stressful week. Not a bad one necessarily, but a trying one. Sometimes the art of moving through life just

wears you down more than it should. But living is a practical thing and all you can do at the end of the day is tally up the score card and hope you have more wins than losses.

Still it's been a hard few days and they have left me drained and empty. I know it's time to take a step back. To catch my breath. To give myself a break.

And just like that, just cause I need her she's there. Like a fairy pushed magically out of pixie dust, she emerged out of nowhere with a smirk on her lips and mischief in her eyes. She is perfect. One of the better parts of me. Now some folks with a whole lot more education than I will ever have would call her my "inner child".

And although I do admit she is every bit as chaotic, rebellious, fearless, and determined as any six year old, she has matured over the years as I have and as such is a little too grown ass womanish to be called anybody's child. Still she loves a good time. Unfortunately she doesn't come around nearly often enough. But she's here now. So hopefully now the good times will roll.

Already I feel myself relaxing. I feel myself stepping away from properly set up places that cage my oh-so-responsible adult self and am feeling myself being set free. Free to go where it's okay for a fifty year old to giggle for no reason at all. Where even though my childhood days are long gone, my children are all grown, and the grand babies aren't close to being born, it's still okay to go to go to the park and swing on the swing just because I feel like soaring beneath the bright shining sun.

She is the one who reminds that while a black suit may be appropriate, a fustian blouse might kick things up a bit. "And what about a movie?" she asks. "One with a colorful cartoon prince and princess and a happily ever after?" I am smiling just thinking about it. I mean who doesn't love happily ever after and a box of popcorn?

So I am off to play. There is no pain or stress on the agenda today. I may even get a little silly. But what's the harm?

And so I am warning you. If you see a fifty year old woman, somewhere where happy little ones are supposed to be, sitting alone, looking a little too pleased to be sane and smiling for no reason at all, don't be alarmed. She is just a woman who decided to push the world aside and play for a while.