

# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE



JAE HENDERSON & MARIO D. KING

# **Where Do We Go From Here?**

**Jae Henderson & Mario D. King**

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Put It In Writing

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This is a work of fiction. Any references or similarities to actual events, real people, living or dead, or to real locales are intended to give the story a sense of reality. Any similarity in names, characters, places, and incidents is entirely coincidental.

## Foreword

This book grew out of a desire for two people to work together to better our black community. To do this, we have to look at many things one of which is our black families and relationships. What better way to show how we are weakening the structure of our homes and our communities than to illustrate it in a story.

In 2014, a startling statistic was released that 72% of African American babies are born to unwed mothers. Some of those were unplanned pregnancies that occurred because two individuals merely found one another physically attractive. There was no relationship, no commitment and no foundation.

Nothing that lasts is built without a strong foundation and that includes our black families. According to a 2014 article released in the *Washington Post* children from two-parent households tend to be more successful at school, work and in their marriages. There are several factors that contribute to this but the one that most resonated with Marcus and myself is that children with married parents have more engaged parents, which means they have more time to spend with them to teach them, monitor them, encourage them, nurture them, love them, etc.

It would be foolish to think that we could stop unmarried people from having sex but perhaps we could encourage people to use protection and realize the importance of marriage and family before creating life. Sex is more than recreation. It's a responsibility

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that could end up impacting more than just the two people engaging in it.

This is only beginning, Jae Henderson and Mario D. King hope to hold events that uplift, encourage and enlighten but what better place for two authors to begin than in a book. We hope you enjoy the story of Natalie and Marcus. Yet, more importantly we hope you receive the message imparted within it.

Jae & Mario

## **Chapter 1**

### **Where Do We Go from Here?**

Natalie and Marcus stared silently at the white plastic stick on the vanity. It seemed like the longest few minutes of their lives, and when the plus sign appeared in the small results window, they both were in a state of disbelief. Neither one knew what to say. This wasn't supposed to happen. They weren't a couple. They could best be described as "friends with benefits." This wasn't the way Natalie wanted to usher in motherhood. She planned on being married to a man she loved, financially secure and prepared mentally and emotionally to take on the challenge of being responsible for another person's well-being. Marcus was a great guy, but he wasn't her boyfriend. If he wanted a relationship with her, she would have no problem with it, but he had made it clear that although he thought she was cool, he wasn't interested in having a girlfriend right now. She didn't see the need to force the issue. He came to see her regularly. He was kind to her, and they had AMAZING sex! It was almost like he was her boyfriend. However, this put their arrangement in a different light.

They both continued to stand there silently for a few more minutes. Natalie was the first to break the silence, but what she said was far from profound. "Wow!"

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Marcus countered with, “Damn!”

“I know we didn’t plan this, but please don’t ask me to have an abortion. I can’t kill my baby,” said Natalie in a soft and somber voice.

Marcus continued to stare intently at the pregnancy test as if the results would change if he looked at it long enough or hard enough. “OK,” he said.

Natalie finally broke her gaze from the vanity and directed it at her lover. “That’s all you have to say?”

Marcus looked into Natalie’s pleading eyes. He knew she needed him to say something positive. To tell her everything was going to be fine, but he wasn’t sure that was true. She was a nice enough person, but he didn’t want a kid with her. He planned to have all of his children with his wife, and she certainly wasn’t someone he would marry. She had a bangin’ body and a magical mouth, and that’s what kept him coming to see her. Not to mention the fact that she made him feel like a king, waiting on him hand and foot. She seemed to get enjoyment from pleasing him, and who was he to deny her happiness? Beyond that, he didn’t really have a reason for spending time with her. She stimulated him sexually but not intellectually. All she seemed to care about was celebrity gossip and her dog, Pepper. How did this happen? They had been careful. He always used a condom . . . except for that one time when they were in the park and then climbed in the back of his Explorer a few weeks ago and that time

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when they were in a restaurant and went to the bathroom for a quickie and that time last week. Well maybe they weren't that careful.

"I don't know what to say. This is serious," said Marcus.

Natalie looked at him in disgust. "Thanks, Einstein. I never would have figured that out. How do you feel about this?"

Marcus suddenly felt like there was a morbidly obese man standing on his chest while eating a turkey leg. Natalie's bathroom had always been small, but at that moment, it felt miniscule. Why was she asking him all these questions? Did she really expect him to answer?

"Marcus, I need to know what we're going to do about this. Where do we go from here?"

*We? We? As in the TWO of us? There is NO two of us. There is only me, Marcus. The guy that could come over here and have my sexual needs attended to at any time, and then there's you, the good girl closet freak who was willing to give it to me. I never took you around my friends. You only met my mother because she dropped by without an invitation. The most we've done is go to the movies and get something to eat. There is NO we.*

Those words ran through Marcus's mind, but what escaped his lips was, "Are you sure it's mine?"

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Natalie sat down on the toilet. Marcus had no idea how she felt about him. She always knew if she shared it she would lose him. Some women would be happy to be able to have a child to keep a guy like him around, but she wasn't. She felt like she hit the jackpot when he asked for her number. She had never been with a guy that fine before. She wanted him to be in her life because he loved her, and then their child could be a by-product of that love. He was the only man she wanted and the only man she had slept with in the last year. She figured because he was always coming over he must like her too. He even took her out from time to time, but it was always back to her place or his for some extracurricular activities, but she didn't mind because in that department, he was the MVP.

“Of course, it's yours. I haven't been with anyone but you. We agreed to be monogamous, remember?”

Marcus could tell that he hurt her feelings, but he had to ask. He was being a jerk. He felt the overwhelming need to leave. “I have to go, Natalie.”

She looked at him with pleading eyes once again. “Do you have to? I feel like we should talk this out or something.” What she wanted to say was I need you to hold me because I'm scared. She wrapped her arms around herself and began to rock back and forth. She wanted to cry, but she didn't. Not in front of Marcus. She would not use tears to make him stay.

Marcus wasn't a bad guy. He wanted to soothe Natalie's fears, but he also didn't want to lie to her. He

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had done his best not to do that for the past three months. She said she understood their arrangement, and she was fine with them having sex with no commitment. Her only requirement was that he didn't sleep with other people. He didn't mind because he really wasn't that kind of guy and she knew how to hold his attention. But this changed everything. It was no longer just fun and sex. Marcus didn't have to be at work for a few hours, but he wanted to be anywhere but there in that bathroom looking at that stupid test. "I'll call you later," he said.

"Sure," responded Natalie. She ended their conversation with her usual, "Be safe."

"Thanks. You too."

Marcus reached out his hand and touched her shoulder. It was the only reassuring gesture he could muster at the moment. It was cold and hard. She usually felt warm and receiving of him. Natalie continued to rock herself back and forth. She didn't even look at him. His hand felt as cold as his response to this life-altering news. She watched his back as he walked out of the bathroom. They were about to bring a life into this world. Shouldn't there be a little joy somewhere? She listened to his footsteps as Marcus made his way down the steps and out her front door. Only then did she release the tears she was holding hostage. The last thing she wanted was a baby with a man who didn't want her. Pepper, her Yorkshire terrier, came in the bathroom, leapt into her lap, and licked her cheek. At least someone cared about her.

## Chapter 2

### Marcus

I guess you can say I had a severe case of the *Mondays*. I spent the entire weekend preparing for an important client meeting. This meeting was going to make or break our third-quarter performance. I had to get my head back in the game so I spent the last 45 minutes to an hour sitting in my car with a cluster of thoughts. I was better but not good. Kristine, one of my colleagues, recognized that I was not my usual self as I entered the building where I worked. As soon as I entered my office, my coffee was awaiting me—the usual, no sugar nor cream. I shuffled through my portfolio to be sure I had everything I needed. As I began to look over my notes, I heard two subtle knocks at the door. Before I could say “come in,” Kristine sashayed across the room and took a seat. I’ve never dated outside of my race, but I always told myself and a few friends, if I ever did—Kristine would be a great place to start. I caught a whiff of her usual perfume of choice, Chanel No. 5. Classic and captivating. I’ve always been somewhat of a sucker for the beautiful scent of a woman. To be honest, that is what initially attracted me to Natalie.

As Kristine removed a manila folder from her leather satchel, she asked me, “Is everything okay this morning?”

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I nodded slightly and replied, “I’ll admit, I’m a little flustered, but it’s nothing that will distract me from the meeting. We need to close this deal, and trust me, I know neither of us wants those sticks in the home office breathing down our necks for the next quarter.”

As I began to gather my thoughts, I saw Stephanie, our receptionist, walk past my window. Normally, I wouldn’t have paid too much attention, but this day was different. Stephanie was seven months pregnant, and I immediately began to think about Natalie and our current situation. Kristine must have noticed the sudden change in my demeanor.

“Are you sure everything is all right? If you need me to run—”

I cut her off immediately and replied, “I *can* and *will* run the meeting. You just be sure to highlight the fluctuating market and how our product will minimize seasonal declines.” She didn’t put up a fight, she just replied, “Well, consider this deal closed, Mr. Colbert.”

I smiled and replied, “That’s Mr. Marcus J. Colbert.” We shared a laugh from the inside joke. However, similar to the tears of a clown . . . my facial expression was insinuating one thing, but my inner soul was torn.

Later that evening, I decided to indulge in some major me-time. No friends, no family, no Natalie, and most importantly—no work. I just wanted it to be me

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and my thoughts. The only company I needed was my good ol' friend, Jack. I ended up at one of Nashville's premiere spots, Red Carpet Bar & Lounge. It was a typical Monday night there. There were plenty of distractions that normally would have caught my attention. However, my mind was, all of a sudden, looking past distractions and narrowing toward the future. You see, I've always been a minute-by-minute-type of guy. I always considered predicting or thinking about the future as being too typical. I thought to myself, *How the hell did I end up here?* My somewhat careless behavior has finally caught up to me. I never had any intentions of hurting Natalie. She was fun to hang and be intimate with, but I've never thought about her being long term. Now *Lisa*—she was most definitely the long-term type, but her career ambitions were greater than mine. Our careers didn't allow us to reap the full benefits of our union. We decided to mutually separate. Well, it was more like *she* decided to take a position in Seattle, and I refused to leave the comfort and security of my work situation here in Tennessee. I can admit I was bitter for a while, but in the midst of my bitterness, I met Natalie. I can remember it like it was yesterday. Lisa had just picked up her last bit of belongings from my two-bedroom apartment. I peered through the blinds and watched the rain tap on my windowpane.

In addition to Lisa leaving, I was irked by the loss of another black body at the hands of a systemic culture. The news was on in the background and the reporter was giving the sordid details. The number of

killings at the hands of police continued to grow, and I wanted to do something about it, but didn't know what.

I turned it off and left. I had scheduled a meeting with my insurance agent, Jackson. I had some questions about my insurance policy. Jackson was also one of my best friends. When I entered the office, I noticed a new face on the premises. I gave Jackson *the* look, and he introduced me. "Natalie, I want you to meet my client and good friend Marcus Colbert." Her sun-kissed skin was smooth with no blemishes. She wasn't as attractive as Lisa, but her body was the engine that would eventually move this vehicle.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Colbert," she replied.

"No need to be formal. Call me Marcus." When I reached out to shake her hand, her scent reached out to me. Now that Lisa was in my rearview, I needed a distraction, and what a distraction she would turn out to be.

It was now 11:35 in the evening, and I was three Jack and Cokes deep. I sat at the bar with my all-black T-shirt with bold white letters that expressed that Black Lives Matter. The crowd was steadily dispersing. I signaled for the bartender to close out my tab. As I reached for my wallet, my phone began to vibrate. A part of me was hoping it was Natalie. I mean, I really didn't want to hurt her. I know she must have thought that I had intentions of running away from our newfound responsibility, but that was not the case. I didn't fear the responsibility; I just didn't want that responsibility with her. In my mind, it was as

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simple as that. My phone vibrated again. As the bartender passed me the check and my credit card, I picked up the phone and noticed two new messages . . . one text and one voice mail. I began to read the text:

GREAT PRESENTATION 2DAY. WE ARE INDEED A DYNAMIC DUO. REST EASY AND WHATEVER BURDEN YOU WERE CARRYING TODAY SHALL PASS.

Kristine always knew the right things to say. The other message wasn't from Natalie, but rather my mother. I immediately remembered that I was supposed to call her to discuss my baby sister, Mia's, graduation party. "I'll call her tomorrow," I whispered to myself as I placed the phone in my back pocket. I had a nice little buzz going on. I wasn't drunk, but I was feeling good. A nightcap from Natalie would have been the next move for the night, but *now* was definitely not the time. I gathered my keys and left a nice tip for the bartender. I was hoping I was able to do what Kristine had suggested in her text . . . rest easy. However, I knew this was going to be a Sleepless in Seattle-type of night.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Natalie**

I called in sick today and went to the doctor. A home pregnancy test had given me the preliminary answers I needed. Now, I wanted it confirmed by a physician. I didn't want to go to my primary care physician. She was a friend of my mother's, and I didn't need that drama. Since my mother passed away three years ago, Dr. Adina Frank had appointed herself my surrogate. I guess it was only natural since she was there the day I was born. She and my mother were best friends in college, and when my mother went into labor right after finishing her senior year, her best friend was there instead of my father. I never met my father. My mom said he just wasn't ready for a family, and when she told him she was pregnant, he suddenly wanted no part of her or me. She never even tried to find him after he left town. She said she was too busy raising me to go try to force a man to be a father. I tried, after I turned 18, and discovered he died at the age of 25 from a drug overdose. I pray to God Marcus will man up and be a father.

I chose a local clinic that catered to low-income families. That way, I could pay out of pocket and the visit wouldn't be recorded by my insurance. I wanted to keep this quiet for now. I had already peed in a cup, and now I was waiting for the results. A young lady who looked no older than 21 called my name, and I

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followed her to a private room. There was a bench and a chair inside. I sat on the bench and she sat on the chair.

“My name is Charlotte, and I’ll be going over your test results with you. Your test did reveal that you are medically pregnant.”

*Medically?* I thought. *What the hell does that mean?*

“Do you wanna keep it?” she said in a voice that held no emotion.

Was she serious? Was it that easy to ask a woman if she wanted to have an abortion?

I nodded my head yes. Then, I nodded no.

“I don’t know,” I blurted out, and then tears began to roll down my face.

She reached over to a box in the corner and handed me a couple of tissues. Neither her face nor her voice had developed any warmth. It was obvious she had done this hundreds of times.

“I understand. This isn’t a decision to be taken lightly. You are very early in your pregnancy, so you still have time. However, if you decide to have the abortion, we need to run some tests to make sure you are fit for the procedure. If you don’t do it today, you will need to come back. We offer two kinds of abortions here. The surgical one is the most common

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and least expensive. During it, we gently suction the fetus out of your uterus.”

That didn't sound comfortable at all. I could just imagine them taking a vacuum tube, shoving it up my twat, and then turning it on. She continued with her emotionless talk. “The other is a medicinal, or chemical, abortion. We will give you medication that forces your body to expel the fetus. It costs more, but it is less invasive. You pop a few pills, and by the next day, you will no longer be pregnant.”

I hoped this chick wasn't planning to be a doctor. Her bedside manner sucked. I decided I needed more time to think about it. I thanked her for her time and walked out into the lobby where my best friend Manny was waiting for me.

I'd had male best friends since kindergarten. I always got along with the boys better than the girls. They just understood me better. When I told Manny what happened in the bathroom with me and Marcus, he insisted that he come with me to the clinic. He felt I should have someone there to support me. I nodded to let him know that I was definitely pregnant. He hugged me and kissed me on the forehead.

“It's going to be all right, Nat. Let's get out of here. I'll take you to lunch.”

I suggested we go to the Panera Bread located close by. Now that I was eating for two it was imperative that I implement more than hot fries, chicken, and soda into my diet. It was only 11 a.m., so

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the restaurant wasn't crowded yet, but it would be shortly. We ordered our food and waited for the buzzer the young lady who took our order gave us to vibrate, indicating that it was ready.

"I think I'm going to have an abortion," I said.

Manny gave me a puzzled look. "Okay. Why?"

I shrugged. "I don't want a baby by a man who doesn't want me."

Manny was 34 years old with two children by two different women, and he wasn't with either one of them. So I didn't expect him to be on my side.

"You know it *is* possible to have a good co-parenting situation with someone you are not married to. I'm cool with both my baby mommas, and I see my kids regularly," he said.

"I know, but when I was a little girl playing house, I was always a wife and mother. Never a baby momma, and I don't think I need to be one now."

Manny looked at me and shook his head. "First, you aren't a little girl. Nat, you are a grown woman, and if you didn't want kids, you and lover boy should have taken the necessary precautions. I would have strangled Felecia and Tara if they had even thought about killing my kids."

"Manny, can you try to see this from my side? This isn't about you. I don't know what Marcus is going to do. I could very well end up raising this baby

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alone. I don't *want* to be a single parent. I saw how my mother struggled to take care of me and my brother."

"You right, Nat. My fault. And since you brought up your mother, you know Ms. Sylvia wouldn't approve. As religious as she was, if she were here and you said that, she'd probably rub you down with holy oil and then force you to sit there while she read the Bible to you. I think you should take the time to really think about this, *and* you should tell Marcus what you're considering. As the father, he has a right to know."

"This isn't about what my mother would do. She's not here to help me raise or provide for this child. I am. I'm just a secretary. I'm barely making \$30,000 a year. As for Marcus, I already know what he's going to say. You should have seen the look of dread on his face when the pregnancy test came out positive. He would be relieved if I ended this pregnancy. He'd probably even offer to pay for it."

"Every young man panics when he finds out he's about to be a father. Now that he's had a day to think about it, he might feel differently. I've only talked to him a couple of times, but he seemed like a stand-up guy. He may surprise you," said Manny.

"Maybe. Can we change the subject?" This was too much too soon. I had some decisions to make for myself, and as far as I was concerned, neither Marcus nor Manny had the final say.

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“Sure,” said Manny. “But one more thing. You seem to just be focusing on the negative aspects of having this child. Consider the positives. Children can bring a lot of joy into your life. I’m a better man because of Manuel Jr. and Rachel. I can’t imagine my life without them. And you know how much they love their godmother, Nat Nat. You could have all that love they give you in your home every day from someone with your DNA.” Just then, our red buzzer vibrated and lit up to indicate our food was ready. Good thing because I was starving.

Later that night, I stared at my phone. I wanted to call Marcus, but for some reason I couldn’t. I knew in my heart he needed some space. He needed time to digest the news. He was probably at the bar having a few drinks to help him unwind. It must be nice to be a guy. If they don’t want a kid, all they have to do is throw the mother the deuces and never look back. I have nowhere to run. Everywhere I go this little one is going to be right with me.

I went to the bathroom and wrapped my hair with a silk scarf. I got a retouch over the weekend, and I was determined to keep my hair looking like I just left the salon. While looking in the mirror, I raised up my pajama shirt and looked at my stomach. I don’t know why I did that. It was way too early for me to be showing. I tried to imagine me with a big stomach. I rubbed my stomach. It would have been nice if Marcus was there to rub it. He often rubbed my abs as we lay in bed after having sex. It was Monday. Mondays were usually rough for him, and he would come over that

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evening to de-stress. Sometimes, we'd lay on the couch and watch a movie. Some nights I cooked. Other nights we ate out. A couple of times, I ran him a hot bath and climbed in with him. If he seemed really tense, I gave him a massage. I have some special oil that heats up when you touch it that he loves. One thing was for sure . . . No matter what we did, the night was going to end with sex unless it was my time of the month. Unbridled, passionate, carnal SEX that was what had brought us to this point.

I remember the day we met at the insurance office. I knew I wanted to get to know him better the moment we locked eyes. He looked so sexy in his Polo V-neck sweater that hugged his muscular chest and abs just enough to let you know they were there. I could tell by the way he looked at me, he liked what he saw too. As Marcus was leaving Jackson's office, he asked me for my number. I knew we weren't supposed to fraternize with fellow employees or clients. It was clearly outlined in the employee handbook, but I couldn't help myself. Marcus had waves in his head that were beckoning for me to rub them. I'd loved a man with waves since seventh grade when all the boys seemed to discover Duke Pomade and doo-rags. I wasn't surprised when Marcus called me a couple of days later and asked me to dinner. I don't remember much about dinner. I think we went to Red Lobster, but I do remember rubbing those waves later that night as Marcus used his God-given gifts to make me scream his name. I've been screaming it ever since. I normally don't have sex on the first date, but there was just something about him that told me he was one of the

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good ones. Somehow, I knew he wasn't going to have sex with me and never call me again.

It's hard to believe that I, Natalie Erin Tellis, could possibly be a mother . . . a baby momma, to be exact. I knew Marcus didn't want to be with me, so there was no reason for me to believe he would marry me. I knew better. The problem was, I would marry him with no hesitation. Some kind of way while he was entering my body he entered my heart. There was no way to fix that, but there was a way to fix this pregnancy. I picked my phone up off the nightstand and sent a very simple text.

I THINK I'M GOING TO TERMINATE THIS PREGNANCY. DON'T DRINK TOO MUCH. GOOD NIGHT.

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