



EPISODE EIGHT //

Building Our Wings On The Way Down

INTRO

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

[Beep]

Soooo... New Years is next week. We could either head out to that party happening downtown oooooor stay home, get drunk, and watch Oceans Eleven. I vote for Option Two.

[Theme Music Plays]

Welcome to Janie's Daughters, a podcastumentary 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 Six. Here we go...

SOLANA

"2014, I'm Coming for You."

One of my favorite recitations I say after every mass is the serenity prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr.

God, give me grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.

Like all of the other prayers I say every week I hope that this one sticks with me, but like all of the other prayers- I reflect on it for five minutes and then walk away, leaving the words under the steeple. Thoughts between God and I waiting to be picked up on the next Sunday at 11:30.

2013 has been the year though where I needed this more than anything. I became dependent on N and the comfort that he brought me this summer. Transitioning back to Chicago, taking the bar, starting a new school, it was a lot. He was there for me. He was there for me when I wasn't there for myself and I needed that. But he wasn't forever. It took me so long to realize that, and it took me even longer to accept that, to be at peace with that. To realize that his purpose wasn't what I originally thought and that's ok.

He taught little ole guarded me to be more open with my heart. I have a tendency to let my legs fly before I unlock my soul. For some reason it felt different with him. Although this openness hurt me more in the short term- I don't regret it. Currently, I've let Mal in a little bit more, and I'm actually happy with him. Not reading into it- just enjoying it.

And contrary to what it might seem like on this podcast, my ups and downs with N haven't even been my biggest challenge. That title goes to my paralyzing fear of mediocracy. I'm not scared to be great, but I am scared as hell to not be great. To shoot for the stars and land on the moon.

I wonder what people will think of me if I'm just ordinary. I'll never forget when one of classmates looked at me last year and said, "me and the boys were talking and we think you'll be the greatest black person in our class- probably the greatest person in our class." All eyes on me! Eeek.

I'm afraid of the moment when I'm shoveling boxes of Louboutins back into my mother's home and staring at the walls in defeat because I couldn't get the job I wanted. Or asking my parents to slide me a couple hundred on rent money once again for an apartment that I just can't afford (hint- it's happened a few times in 2013- oy).

I KNOW that snarky voice that says you miss 100% of the shots you don't take- but you also never have people yelling "airball." I'm always amused by my ability to be a perfectionist-self defeatist. It's like putting all of your ducks in a row and then shooting them with a .45. Sorry I'm a vegetarian. I'd never shoot ducks. Geese maybe- they're evil. I digress.

Finally- 2014. My year! I kid I kid. I hate when people say that. In 2014 I just want to be better. I think it means seeing what I can't change, and accepting it. Not wasting time thinking about it. Finding what I can change and being brave enough to change it. I want to take my life and my choices in my hands.

I want to see the job I want and look my interviewer in the eye and say I want to be a tax attorney and this is why you should hire me. And mean it. I want to be on a date with a guy and not feel like I have to explain why I'm a good catch. I want him to see why I'm worth a damn good taco, expensive bourbon, and oh 3 carats at Harry Winston.

Most importantly I want to stop explaining to myself why I'm worth everything I've ever wanted. I'm enough as I am at this very moment.

2014- I'm coming for you.

CARMEN

"On, Being Present"

Maybe I shouldn't be writing this right now... but then again, maybe I should. This year has been... LONG! Like one day felt like 2 months and a week felt like a whole year, long. But it also went by really fast.

I guess that's what happens when you spend a whole year looking forward to the next thing. I looked up and the next thing that I had been waiting for was over and I was half way done with the next item on my checklist. So today with only 22 days left in the year 2013, I realize that I didn't enjoy half of the things I did this year because I wasn't really there. I wasn't present. So, in 2014 I am challenging myself to stay in the moment... even the shitty, uncomfortable ones. I'm challenging myself to fully experience the right now before I bounce off into fantasies of tomorrow.

Trust, it's not gonna be easy but hey, a girl can try.

So here it is: I am in love with both a person and my passions. And I am ready (i.e. a little less scared than yesterday, which apparently is how I'm defining "ready" these days) to pursue them as hard as I can. They make me happy. I deserve to be happy.

I am grateful for the opportunities and friends that have found themselves in my life this year. Especially my sister friends. I have been blessed to be surrounded by some of the most awesome women and I am inspired and challenged and supported by them on a daily basis and I don't know what I would do without them.

I've said all that to say that I am ready for all the everything that will come my way. Reading my posts from week to week has been a reminder that even when I don't realize it, Future Carmen is taking shape right before my eyes. In some ways I can't believe that 2014 is right around the corner. But good, bad, and ugly, I will embrace it, learn from it and (hopefully) thrive through it all.

MAYA

"Saying Goodbye"

In the short time that I have been with you, I have shared my struggles with letting my ex-husband go. When we were courting, he told me that an astrologer told him that if we were to split up, I would be the one to leave him. I never thought that the time would come where I would have to make the decision to divorce him, or even to let him go from my life so that I could focus on a life that did not include him in it.

There were nights that we were together that I felt like my insides were screaming – "Let him go!" and every time I saw him my insides churned because I knew I would never move on. Saying goodbye to the love of your life is never easy – but when you have to "do you," you sometimes have to let go of the very things you love to grow in the way you need to.

After a trip to New York and a come to Jesus conversation from my friend, I realized that it is time to finally let him go from my heart and I composed the following email:

Aman,

We've been through many things together, including marriage and divorce, and now are trying a friendship. As much as being friends was important to me, I need to admit to myself that right now, seeing you and talking to you is not healthy for me. I want to meet someone and as long as you are in my life, I will not be able to move on because the feelings are still there. I will always hurt inside that you didn't want to have children with me, or fight to make our relationship work.

I also realize that there are things you have done, even post-divorce, that don't constitute good "friend" behavior. I have

always been there for you even as a friend- but I can't say you have shown me the same courtesy.

The time has come to cut the cord. Whatever we have is not healthy for me and I do not wish to have any contact with you from now on. It won't be easy, but I need to move on with my life. Please respect my wishes and do not contact me. I love you, but I need you to release me.

I wish you nothing but the very best.

Love,
Maya

As I prepared to send the email I had two friends on chat with me, talking me thorough the heart palpitations and absolute terror I felt. I was actually hyperventilating as I realized that I was going to say goodbye for real. This is the definitive step in getting on with my life, and I knew there was no turning back. I pressed send. I waited.

The world did not end. I did not die. Maybe this was the right decision after all. I finally said goodbye to my old life. I was alone. I was going to learn to be happy alone once and for all.

Throughout these weeks with you, you have acted as my girlfriends and supporters. Just knowing that my story is being shared with other women who have lived through pain, heartache, and rebirth just like me, has helped me in some strange way. As I sent that email into the ether, one of the thought that I had of how incredible a journey it has been documenting as a JD the incredible changes in my life, and also the journeys of my JD sisters.

With this final goodbye, to my ex, an also to you – I want you to know that I regret nothing. I am ready to take my place as a beautiful divine woman of the word, and one day, will feel new love for someone else blooming in my heart. Until then I will take on snarky aunties, young men, and anything that comes in my path. Thank you for listening to my story.

TAMAR

“Building My Wings on the Way Down.”

2013 has been a rough year. I can admit it. I can admit that two life events significantly altered and impacted my life, my partner’s life, and our collective life as a couple.

The one thing that I have not talked about with you all over these last couple of months is that my partner was let go from her job in April of this year. In the midst of everything going on with my family, and resigning from my job to start school, it was a case of epic bad timing.

However, after going through what we had with my family, we felt like it was something we could handle together, as long as we stayed strong. The problem with resolving to stay strong though is that you sometimes forget to grieve. My partner and I went from focusing on one traumatic ass situation to another; we were almost in a constant state of crisis intervention.

Even when it seemed like we could relax, we couldn't because of our financial situation, and of course things were still coming up with my family. Neither myself nor my partner have been here before: dealing with the aftermath of a not so stellar coming out and forced unemployment. So we did what any good millennial would do, we took Ray Bradbury's advice and decided that we would "jump off the cliff...and build [our] wings on the way down."

In dealing with our individual traumas, mistakes were definitely made. The way we handled those traumas as individuals spilled over into our partnership and directly impacted how we communicated and interacted with one another. I can only speak for my situation and what my individual trauma did to me, most of which you already know. As for my partner I have asked her to make a guest appearance for this final post to tell her story, what she has learned and how it is has impacted us. Here's what she had to say:

I was always the exceptional one, the standard. Thus, I did everything "early" and in a way that had never been done before. Graduating high school at 17, undergrad at 21, and grad school in a year and half—even gave a year of service in between degrees. I joined the right organizations and associated myself with the "right" people. Couple that with a decent pedigree and a formidable upbringing, hard work and determination had gotten me wherever I wanted to go and allowed me to do whatever I chose.

But here I was unemployed and broke, in a newish relationship attempting to support not only myself any my own dreams, but her dreams as well. I had finally failed for maybe the third time in life. This time there was no true rhyme or reason, honestly in hindsight there didn't need to be. I kept thinking that there must have been some kind of mistake, these types of things don't happen to me. Do you know who I am? (Turns out that was a question even I didn't have the answer to.)

I have learned to trust this process, its rewards have yet to show themselves but in the meantime I'm holding fast to the things I have and love. I wanted my partner to focus on school and maintain the life we had established for ourselves. In doing this, I created a false sense of reality and allowed her to become disillusioned to real hurt, pain, frustration, and my occasional breakdown.

I've always heard that finances were the biggest issue for couples. I now know this isn't exactly true. It's the things that come from it. Insecurities around failure, blame around mismanagement of funds, arguing over going out for date night when the phone bill is late. Having my job taken from me left me with what I thought was no identity, no purpose.

Being honest and remaining vulnerable while feeling helpless and at times unworthy is a lot to ask, but if your partnership has a foundation there is no one else you should ever want to go through such a hardship but them. Tamar loves me despite myself and sees a wonderfully successful me even after the countless form letters informing you "that while you possessed great qualities, we have decided to go with another candidate."

As you can see my partner has been dealing with her own inner turmoil this year while I dealt with the backlash from my family. However, neither one of us truly dealt with our situations alone, even though they were our "individual" situations our handling of them affected one another.

Over this past year I have not always stood up for my relationship or for my partner. Having to constantly battle my family over my sexuality because of their beliefs has been both exhausting and frustrating. At time that frustration has bred fear which bred disaster and caused me to revert to a younger more docile self. A self where, as the child, I succumbed to the will of my parents, leaving my partner feeling like an outsider; a pariah.

However, more and more, I am learning to choose being a woman over being "the child"; to stand on my own two feet and be proud of who I am, including who I love.

The biggest takeaways for us this year have been: not allowing fear to paralyze us in loving one another; standing in our own truth; defining ourselves for ourselves; having a savings account and budget is clutch; and communication is key.

No partnership is perfect, however, when you are dealing with trauma you sometimes have to work extra hard just to maintain. I think overall we did a pretty good job and taking the lessons we've learned we can go into the new year, if you ask me, stronger than ever before.

ZORA

"The Three Existences."

It's that time of year again. The holidays. And for me, this is a complicated time. There seems to be so much to think about. I want to remember first and foremost the religious reason for the season. I also want to remember to cherish the moments with family and friends because distance keeps us separated for so much of the year.

But being that it is the end of a year and soon to be the start of a new one, it will come as no surprise that for me this is also a reflective period. As a 51-year-old woman with so many health challenges I can't help but wonder how it will all shake out in the end.

The Christian soul in me prays regularly that there will one day be a place for me in God's heavenly skies but I must confess I would like a little something of me will live on here on earth as well. I want something to remain that will still speak for me long after my body has turned to ashes and dust.

I guess I am hoping that wherever I have lived, loved, laughed, cried and survived there will remain a piece of me like a lingering spirit or a restless soul. In truth, I want to one day be part of that beautiful African belief the motherland calls "the living dead."

When I worked in the field ten years ago I had the blessing of not only telling stories but collecting the words, wit and wisdoms from my sister kin. I try to remember as many of their truths as I can and I share their teachings whenever possible. So many amazing women but one in particular stands out for her uniquely soulful message.

"In many parts of Africa" she began " we believe there are three different human existences. There are the living, the living dead, and the dead and gone." Intrigued, I listened ever more closely. She continued, "the living are obvious things- we are here on this earth and still struggling just to make it from one day to the next. We don't have all the answers but we are doing the best we can."

"Now the living dead are the ones who have passed away but we can still remember their faces, we can call up their smile and we can still hear them talking in that special way only they can. They will never truly die as long as we tell their story and that means from generation to generation. The minute no one hear can call them up through our memory they done truly died and they become the dead and gone."

"Last but not least," she continued after taking a deep breath that ended in a sigh, "there is the dead and gone. They are the ones that made a way for us so we could have the right to be. They fought battles long, long ago. Sadly we don't know their names or can call up their faces. Those are the folks who the slave masters didn't even bother to acknowledge was human. We don't know them but we are never going to forget them."

"We are because they were and that alone connects us for all eternity. Stay strong my sister and know your power is as eternal and everlasting as anything that's ever been called human," and just like that she was gone.

I have never ever forgotten that truth. Maybe that is the reason I have felt so courageous and strong, because I knew I was never alone. I have always had my sisters who are everlasting, existing as long as this world has been a world. And now as one year is about to end and another year is due to begin, I can feel optimistic despite my pain and growing disability.

I am blessed- gifted with family and friends who remind me how powerful love is. I still have work to do and purpose is powerful. And I have my sisters – the living, the living dead, and the dead and gone – reaching out to me through the ages reminding me that all I can do is move through life with dignity and grace, so that one day even when I cease to be, a wonderful story will live on; and I honestly can't think of a better Xmas gift than that.