



CHANDRA SPARKS SPLOND

# HE'S GOT GAME

## CHAPTER 1

THE INFECTIOUS BEAT of the music had some girls on the floor in groups dropping it like it was hot while a few couples were standing so close together in dark corners that it looked like it was one person instead of two.

Me, I just sat back and took it all in, trying real hard not to let a yawn escape, wondering why I had let my boy Monty Morgan talk me into coming to this last party of the summer.

“Man, the ladies are looking good tonight,” Monty said from his seat beside me. “I can’t believe school is almost about to start again. I was just getting used to the summer outfits.”

He raised an eyebrow and nodded toward three girls who looked to be sixteen like me in the face but had to be closer to twenty-one in the body. Between them they didn’t have enough clothes to cover one of them. I shook my head while Monty bit his index finger and stomped his foot, probably trying to keep from saying something crazy, which he had been known to do.

“You ready to go?” I asked, not bothering to wait for a response as I unfolded myself from a too-little lawn chair. I had grown a few inches over the summer, and I was still getting used to my six-two height—and apparently the extra length on my arms, too, I realized as a half-full red cup almost went tumbling when I accidentally hit it.

Monty’s eyes widened in surprise at my question. “Man, are you serious? The party hasn’t even really gotten started yet.” He glanced at his watch. “It’s not even nine o’clock. You don’t have to be home until eleven.”

Although that was true, really all I wanted to do was go home, maybe play a little Xbox or watch some ESPN SportsCenter, and chill. One of our church members, Deacon Forrest, had let me work for his lawn care business over the summer, and since it was my last day, he wasn’t playing. After I had done a few yards, including clipping the hedges and edging the grass, he had then insisted I organize everything in his truck. It was a dirty job, but someone had to do it, and I couldn’t complain because in addition to having a few thousand dollars to put away, I also was sporting muscles in places I never had been before.

“Noah Zachary Benjamin, are you even listening to me?” Monty said, interrupting my thoughts.

We had been boys since my second time in sixth grade, and I had learned the only time Monty used my whole name was when I did something that got on his nerves, even though he knew I hated that it sounded like I had three first names.

“Sorry, man,” I said. “What were you saying?”

“I’m trying to figure out why you’re trying to head home. You know after tonight Nana and Pops are going to have you on lock with your head stuck in those books. Live it up while you can, man.”

I sighed, knowing he was right—at least about the hitting the books part. Ever since my five-year-old sister, Natalie, and I had come to live with our grandparents four years ago, my life had changed a lot. Before then, I only went to school maybe two or three days a week, which was the reason I had to repeat sixth grade—not because I wasn’t smart, but because I missed too many days. Once my momma had Natalie though, sometimes I didn’t even make it that often because I was watching my sister who had been diagnosed with asthma when she was a baby. I figured that’s the way most kids lived—you know helping their parents care for their brothers and sisters and only going to school when they wanted—but I realized that wasn’t true after Momma split with her new man.

Nana and Pops didn't play when it came to education. I had to be at school every day, and my homework had to be done, and I better not even think of coming home with a bad grade. My behind still hurt thinking about the whipping Pops had given me when I had *C*'s and *D*'s on the first report card I got after we moved in with them when I was about twelve.

I thought Pops was never going to stop beating me, but he had when Nana had pulled him to the side. I overheard her telling him to give me some time to get myself together. He had muttered something I couldn't hear, and he had laid off.

I had walked around mad for a few days after that, wondering what the big deal was. Although my grades did improve, I still didn't get why school was so important—until my seventh-grade career day.

Darrell Spencer, one of the top players in the NBA and a native of Birmingham, Alabama, just like me, had visited my school for career day. He had talked about how important it was to have goals and dreams and to know that no matter who we were or where we came from, we could achieve them.

He had me and every other boy in my class thinking we wanted to become NBA stars too—until he explained basketball was a means to an end and that it wouldn't last always. He said his biggest accomplishment was being the first person in his family to graduate from college, which I thought was cool. By the time he was done talking, that was my dream too, and I had been working hard to make it happen ever since. More than anything I wanted to be the first person in my family to graduate from college and become a sportscaster.

"Man, what is up with you tonight?" Monty asked, looking really irritated that I had zoned out on him again.

"I'm sorry. It's been a long day, and I'm tired, man. Seriously, I'm going to head on home."

Monty shrugged, realizing my mind was made up. "A'ight. Cool. You want a ride?"

I shook my head, knowing he didn't want to leave the party. "I'll be fine. It's not that far."

"Okay. I'll get at you tomorrow," he said.

We slapped hands, and I headed toward the back gate.

"You out, man?" Tyrone Williams asked. He was hosting the party, and like me and Monty, he was a member of the Grover High School basketball team. We all spent most of our time riding the bench last season. I was determined this year that was going to change. When I wasn't mowing lawns, I had spent most of the summer working on my game because I really wanted to see some playing time this year. I figured I could follow my idol Darrell Spencer's lead and get a basketball scholarship if an academic one didn't come through. Monty and Tyrone were cool with staying on the bench. The fact that they were on the team made them really popular, and they didn't have to work as hard as the top players.

"I guess I'll see you Monday then," Tyrone said.

I nodded, slapped hands with him, and started walking toward home, which was only a few blocks away.

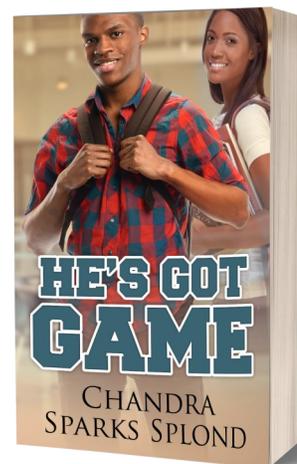
"Girl, who is that?" someone whispered. "He is fine." It took me about a second to realize they were all looking at me.

I never broke my stride, praying none of them would come up to me. Not that I minded the attention, but I still hadn't mastered the whole talking-to-a-girl thing, and I was too tired to try and figure out what to say.

"Excuse me," one of the girls said, and I inwardly groaned, especially when I realized it was one of the half-dressed ones Monty and I had seen earlier. Her hair was almost to her behind, and I willed myself not to keep looking at it, even though her wig was on a little crooked. Looking at her face wasn't much better since she had tons of makeup piled on it. She wasn't bad looking, but I guess I'm just more into the natural thing.

I thought about pretending I hadn't heard her, but my granddaddy had taught me better than that.

"Yes," I said, praying my voice would stay deep rather than cracking, which it often did, especially when I was nervous.



“I was just trying to figure out where I know you from. You look really familiar,” she said. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see her girls laughing at her game, which was sounding a little weak.

“Do you go to Grover?” I asked politely.

“I will be,” she said, getting excited. “I’ll be a sophomore there. I’m transferring from Carver.”

I nodded, not believing she was only a sophomore. She was dressed like she was a senior in college “I’m a junior. My name’s Noah Benjamin.” I extended my hand, and she ignored it, instead pinching my bicep.

“I’m Lola,” she said, throwing me a wink. “Lola McKenzie. Nice muscles.”

Her girls giggled some more, and I wondered if she was telling me the truth about her name. I gave a tight smile. “Nice to meet you, Lola.”

We stood there awkwardly for a few seconds as I tried to think of how to end the conversation without sounding rude.

“Can I get your number—you know, in case I have any questions about Grover before school starts?”

“I have a girlfriend,” I said. The last part of my lie came out high pitched, and I blushed when she and her friends who had inched a little closer giggled yet again.

Lola whipped a pen out of her purse and grabbed my hand. “Here’s my number, just in case y’all break up. I’ll see you Monday, Noah.” She scrawled her name in purple ink, using a heart where the “o” in Lola was supposed to be, then carefully printed her number, making sure it was easy to read. I tried snatching my hand away, but she held firm, blowing on my palm, I assumed to make sure the ink was dry. I cleared my throat, trying to ignore how her touch was affecting me and praying my reaction didn’t embarrass me.

I nodded when she released my hand and turned to make my getaway, only to trip over my own feet. I quickly untangled myself without looking back, especially when I heard one of the girls say, “Big hands, big feet. I wonder what else is big.”

I just shook my head, making a mental note to avoid Lola McKenzie starting Monday.

By the time I made it home, Pops was planted in his favorite spot in the den on the end of the sofa, and Nana was stretched out next to him. Our house wasn’t big. We did have a chair in addition to the sofa, but for some reason my grandparents always sat there together.

“How was the party?” Pops asked, not taking his eyes off a *CSI* rerun.

“It was alright,” I said. I thought about taking a seat, but as usual my grandparents had the heat turned up to about eighty degrees, even though it was at least ninety outside. I remember my momma telling me when I was little old people have thin skin so they get colder easier, so although it was always sweltering inside our house I never said anything, and I had told Nat she’d better not complain either. I didn’t want my grandparents to think we didn’t appreciate all they were doing for us. I knew if it weren’t for them, Nat and I would be in foster care. “Where’s Nat?”

“Your grandmother made her go to bed an hour or so ago. She’s probably still awake.” He glanced at the clock on the cable box. “I didn’t expect you to be home so early,” he said.

I shrugged. “I just felt like coming home.”

He nodded, and we fell silent. I glanced over at Nana who was dozing, and even though the heat in the room was stifling, I grabbed a light blanket off the back of the sofa and placed it over her, trying not to wake her.

“You ready for school?” Pops asked as I was headed out of the room.

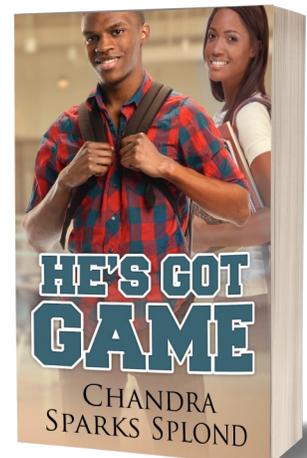
“As ready as I can be,” I said.

“The next few years are going to be very important,” he said. “You’ve got to make sure you stay focused.”

“I will,” I said.

He looked at me and smiled. “I’m proud of you, son. You worked really hard this summer and helped take care of your family, just like a man is supposed to do.”

I don’t know why Pops’ words affected me the way they did. Maybe it was because he didn’t say them that often, although I knew he was proud of me.



“Thanks, Pops.” I dropped a kiss on the bald spot on the top of his head. Monty had seen me do it once and had rode me for weeks that I was kissing my granddaddy, but I didn’t mind. Nana had taught me it was okay to show affection to the ones you loved. She always dropped a kiss on Pops’ head, so I had started doing the same thing.

I leaned over to kiss Nana, and she stirred.

“Hey, baby,” she said, yawning.

“I didn’t mean to wake you,” I said.

“I need to go get in the bed anyway,” she said, sitting up and yawning.

I nodded. “Good night.”

“Check on your sister,” she said, easing past me toward their bedroom.

“Okay.”

As Pops had said, Nat was still awake when I went to check on her, although she had her eyes closed pretending to be asleep until she realized it was me.

“Noah!” she said, standing on the bed and leaping into my arms when I got close enough to catch her.

I caught her and grinned. “Hey, Nat,” I said. “Why are you still up?”

She put her finger to her mouth, which meant I needed to be quiet, then tiptoed to the door and peeked out. Once she realized no one was coming, she climbed on her bed. “I wanted to finish reading this book,” she said, grabbing a *Doc McStuffins* book and a flashlight from under her pillow. “Can you help me?”

Although Nat’s only five, she’s really smart. Thanks to Nana who had always dreamed of being a school-teacher, Nat has been reading for almost a year, and she knew how to add too. I had heard about Providence, one of the top elementary schools in Birmingham, and I had convinced Nana to take Nat down and get her tested. She had been accepted and was really excited about starting kindergarten. I was excited for her. Since she stayed home with Nana all day, the only chance she got to hang with kids her own age was during church.

I helped her sound out a few words in the book, and just like I knew she would, she asked for another story before I finally insisted she go to sleep. When she asked if she could watch TV for a little while, I couldn’t resist. Nat has this way of looking at me, and I can’t say no, and she knows it too. That’s how she ended up with her own television and DVD player. It was one of the few things I had bought with money from my summer job after she told me the kids in her Sunday school class were talking about having their own TVs. I got one for her with my first paycheck, and Pops took her to the library every week to check out DVDs.

Although Pops and Nana never really said it, I know they appreciated it. They had their shows they watched every day, and since Nat was home with them, they rarely got to watch them because she was always watching Nick Jr. or Playhouse Disney. Now she could go in her room and play with her dolls and watch her own TV while our grandparents chilled in the den.

“Can I, Noah?” she asked.

“Huh?”

“You heard me,” she said, sounding like Nana, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

“No, I didn’t,” I insisted.

“Can I watch TV?” she repeated, and I realized I had heard her.

“Only for a few minutes—after you say your prayers.”

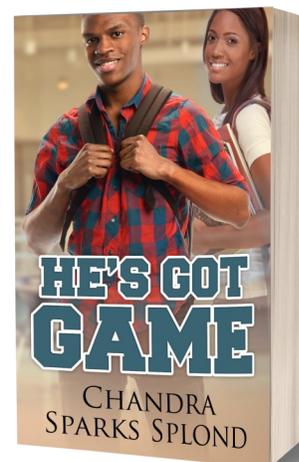
She scrambled out of bed and knelt beside it, then waited expectantly for me to kneel next to her. When I was in place, I opened my mouth to begin, but she stopped me.

“I want to say it tonight,” she said.

I widened my eyes in surprise, and she giggled, reminding me of the girls from earlier that night. “You do?” I said.

“Yes. Noah, you’re silly.”

I nodded then closed my eyes and bowed my head.



“Dear God, thank you for this day and for all our blessings. Thank you for Nana and Pops and for Noah who is the best big brother in the whole world. Please let us have a good day at church tomorrow, and bless us to have a good school year. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

I had to compose myself because Nat’s words had really touched me. My little sister meant everything to me, and her words showed me that I meant everything to her too.

It was my job to take care of and protect her, and I was determined to do just that.

## CHAPTER 2

NAT’S PRAYER stuck with me the whole night. Although it was short, I knew it was from her heart. It wasn’t until I had taken a shower and gone to bed that I realized she hadn’t included Momma in her prayers. Nat was only about a year old when Momma left us, so she really didn’t have any memories of her. I tried to talk about her sometimes, figuring one day Momma would come back. I didn’t want her to be a total stranger to Nat.

I heard Nana stirring at the crack of dawn, and I mentally prepared myself for the long day ahead. Sundays in our house were an all-day event. Not only did Nana and Pops insist we go to Sunday school, but we also had to go to church, and if there was a late service, we had to stay for that too. Sometimes Nana would invite church members over to eat, which meant I would get volunteered to do something, whether it was washing someone’s car or getting boxes out of their attic, or changing a lightbulb.

By the time service was over, my stomach was growling, and I was glad we didn’t have to stay late and no one was coming over. I just wanted to eat and get ready for the first day of school.

We sat down to Nana’s fried chicken, collard greens, black-eyed peas, macaroni and cheese, and corn bread, and after grace, it was on. I fixed Nat a plate then helped myself to two big pieces of chicken and huge spoonfuls of everything else. I was so busy wolfing down food that it wasn’t until I was gulping down my third glass of Nana’s iced tea that I realized she and Pops were just staring at me.

“What?” I asked, wondering if something was on my face.

Pops just shook his head. “Boy, where do you put all that food?” he said.

“In his feet,” Nat said, and Nana and Pops laughed.

I shrugged, reaching for another drumstick, mentally calculating whether there was going to be enough left over for an evening snack. There were at least five pieces left, so I was good.

I was just getting up to grab a napkin when the doorbell sounded. “I’ll get it,” I said, retracing my steps from the kitchen and heading to the front door. I glanced through the peephole and grinned at the face staring back at me.

“What’s up, Unc?” I said to my uncle, Marcus Benjamin. He was dressed in a white jogging suit, complete with a white ball cap and a brand-new pair of white Air Force Ones, so I assumed he hadn’t gone to church.

Uncle Marcus was thirty, and he was one of the coolest people I knew. I thought he was going to be the first person in our family to graduate from college, but he had dropped out, but I still wasn’t sure why, and he was working at Walmart and living with his future baby mama. Back in the day, he used to attend Grover, and he was a star basketball player. He had even gotten a full basketball scholarship to the University of North Carolina where basketball superstar Michael Jordan had played.

“What’s up, nephew?” he said, bumping my shoulder. “What’s for dinner?”

He didn’t wait for me to respond as he headed toward the dining room table then turned toward the kitchen when he realized there wasn’t a plate for him. He came back and grabbed three pieces of chicken, and I groaned, realizing that someone else had also taken another piece, so there was only one left for me to snack on later.

“Boy, I know you’re not going to sit down at my table without speaking,” Pops said.



“My bad, Pops,” Uncle Marcus said, stopping in mid-shake of the hot sauce, which he was sprinkling on his chicken. He licked his fingers, then got up to kiss Nana who beamed.

“Hey, Mama,” he said.

“Hey, baby,” she said. “Did you go to church today?”

“Naw, I didn’t make it today,” he said, not looking her in the eye. “I promise I’m going next week though.”

Nana nodded and went back to eating.

“What’s up, Pops?” Uncle Marcus said. He looked like he couldn’t decide whether to hug or kiss him, and finally he sat back down when Pops just kind of glared at him.

“Boy, take that hat off at my dinner table,” Pops snapped.

Uncle Marcus looked like he wanted to say something, but instead he picked up the piece of chicken.

“What about me, Uncle Marcus?” Nat said.

“I’m sorry, baby girl,” he said, licking his fingers again. He held out his hands, and Nat went flying to him, wrapping him in a big bear hug.

After Nat sat back down, things got quiet at the table. Nana and Pops never said anything to me, but I got the impression they were still upset with Uncle Marcus for not graduating college. Whenever he would come home from school to visit, they would both be excited to see him. Nana and Pops would drag him to church, proudly telling anyone who would listen that Marcus was going to get a good job after graduation. Uncle Marcus would always make it a point to mention he was going to the NBA, but my grandparents would ignore that. It seemed neither of their dreams were going to come true.

“So you ready for the basketball season, Noah?” Uncle Marcus asked.

I glanced at Pops who was rolling his eyes before I answered. One thing about Uncle Marcus hadn’t changed. He could not hold a conversation without bringing up basketball, especially back in the day when he played.

“That boy’s focus is on school, not basketball,” Pops said before I could respond.

“He can go to school and still play ball, Pops,” Uncle Marcus said. “I did it.”

“And look where that got you,” Pops muttered. I saw Nana throw him a look, but that didn’t stop him. “You still working at Walmart?”

“Yes, and I just got a raise too,” Uncle Marcus said. “I’m at ten dollars an hour now.” He puffed out his chest and grinned at Nana.

“Ooh, big money,” Pops said sarcastically. “It’s paying you so much you’ve got to come to my house and eat my food.”

Uncle Marcus opened his mouth then quickly closed it and focused on his plate.

“Don’t listen to your daddy, baby,” Nana said. “He’s happy to have you here.” She got up and heaped more black-eyed peas on Uncle Marcus’ plate then gave him the last piece of chicken. So much for my snack. “How’s Keisha and the baby?”

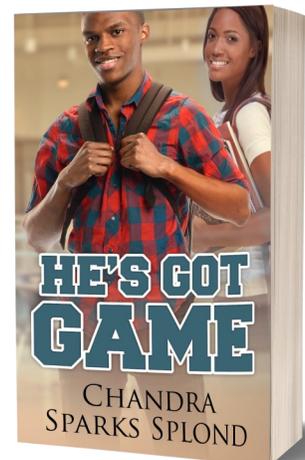
Uncle Marcus and Keisha had been high school sweethearts. They had broken up before he had gone off to college and had gotten back together last year. He swore Keisha was his first and only love, even though I know he was with a bunch of other girls. I didn’t think Keisha felt the same way since she had had two other kids even though she had never been married. Word on the street was they both had different fathers, and she didn’t have custody of either of them.

“Good,” Uncle Marcus said, his face lighting up. “They real good, Momma. Did I tell you I’m having a son?”

“You sure it’s yours?” Pops asked.

Uncle Marcus pushed back his chair and raised up like he was going to do something to Pops. I jumped up, knowing someone needed to take control before things got ugly.

“Hey, Unc, you want to play some one on one?” I asked.



Uncle Marcus jerked around like a dog on the scent of a bone. “A’ight, nephew. I’ll try not to hurt you too bad,” he said. “Momma, can you wrap my plate up?”

He didn’t wait for a response as he headed out to the driveway where a basketball goal was hanging over the garage. I scraped my plate and set it in the sink and hurried outside, glad I had changed into some chill clothes right after we got home from church. Uncle Marcus already had the basketball out, pimping around the driveway as he bounced it, talking a bunch of smack.

“You don’t know who you’re messing with, nephew,” he said.

“Alright, Unc,” I said. Last year, I had realized I could beat him, but I was still letting him win, mainly because I felt sorry for him.

“Back in the day, folks used to pay me to play one on one with them. You’re lucky I’m doing this for free.”

He dribbled and then went for a layup, and I couldn’t resist the urge to block him. He was a little stunned, but tried to play it off. “Oh, I see my lessons have been paying off,” he said. “You’ve come to play today, so let’s play.”

Nat came running outside dressed in a cheerleader outfit complete with pom-poms, a tiara, dangling earrings, and high-heeled dress-up shoes and stood on the side of the driveway cheering, “Go, Noah. You can do it.”

“Baby girl, you might want to cheer for the winner,” Uncle Marcus said.

She nodded, sending her pigtails flying. “Go, Noah,” she said, and I had to hold in a laugh. She started clapping and tried to do a move she had seen some of the cheerleaders do at our games, and when that didn’t work, she just settled for jumping around, pompoms bouncing.

Uncle Marcus managed to score while I was distracted, so I shifted my focus back to the game. When it was all said and done, I had beat Uncle Marcus by ten points. He stood there looking like he had lost his best friend, and I felt kinda bad since I hadn’t even given the game my all.

“Good game, Unc,” I said, reaching to shake his hand.

He didn’t even pretend to be happy for me, choosing instead to brush an imaginary spot from his warm-up, which had managed to stay white despite how hard he was playing. “I’ve got to get home,” he said.

Nat and I followed him into the house, and while Uncle Marcus headed to the kitchen, Nat and I went to the den where Nana and Pops were chilling despite how hot the room was.

“Noah won,” Nat announced, and I wondered if Uncle Marcus had heard her. I didn’t realize he was such a sore loser.

Pops just kind of grunted, but I saw in his eyes he was happy for me. Nana didn’t even stir from her nap.

“You need anything?” I asked Pops.

“Can you bring me a glass of iced tea?”

I headed into the kitchen where I found Uncle Marcus searching through cabinets. “What are you looking for?” I asked.

It looked like it pained him to answer me. “A grocery bag,” he said.

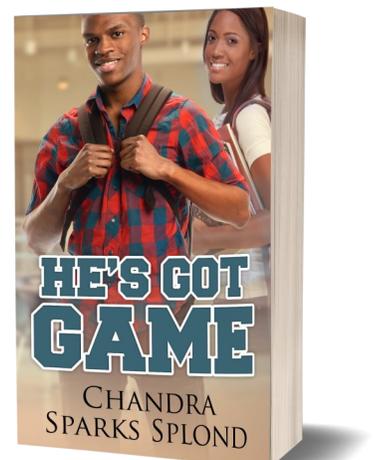
I silently went to the drawer right next to the stove and handed him a Walmart bag, wondering why he needed it since Nana had already packed his food. I watched as he went through the cabinets and placed a few items on the counter, like he was in the grocery checkout line.

“What are you doing?” I finally asked.

“What does it look like I’m doing?” he said.

Uncle Marcus knew as well as I did that Pops and Nana were on a fixed income. Pops had taken early retirement from his job at the post office after he had broken his hip a few years ago. He still walked with a cane and had to take medicine every day. Uncle Marcus was just bragging about his raise, so it didn’t make sense to me that he was taking their food.

“Uncle Marcus, if you need some money, I have some saved from my summer job,” I said.



He stopped searching the cabinets and looked at me. “Boy, don’t nobody need no food. Momma told me to get some stuff last time I talked to her. I figured she forgot to put the extra food in my bag, so I was just doing it for her.”

I nodded and cleared my throat. “I’m just saying, I know you got the baby on the way and everything, so I thought you might need some money. It can just be between us,” I said.

He hesitated. “How much you got?” he asked.

I thought about telling the truth, but I knew I needed to make sure I had money saved for college and set aside for me and Nat. “I have about a hundred dollars,” I said, knowing I had a few grand stashed away.

He laughed. “You’ve been working all summer, and all you have is a hundred dollars?”

I resisted the urge to say that he worked every day and didn’t have that much. “Yes,” I finally said.

“G’on give it to me. I guess it will have to do.”

I went to my room, and after checking to make sure he hadn’t followed me, I went to the shoebox I had in the back of my closet and pulled out five twenties, making a mental note to get Pops to take me to the bank so I could open a checking account, which I hadn’t gotten around to doing since I had been working all summer.

When I handed Uncle Marcus the money, he shoved it in his pocket without bothering to say thank you then took the food Nana had packed for him and the bag he had packed himself and placed them in his car before finally coming in to say good-bye to Nana and Pops.

When I saw Nana head into her room and return with a church envelope, I knew she was giving Uncle Marcus some money too, and he didn’t hesitate to take that either nor did he offer to give mine back.

After he left, I went back to the kitchen to wash the dishes. Nana was old school and didn’t believe in having a dishwasher, which according to Monty was what kept him from having to do them. I put away the leftovers as the sink filled with the hot, sudsy water, wondering why Uncle Marcus was so broke.

When I spotted Nana’s homemade banana pudding in the refrigerator, all my annoyance at Uncle Marcus faded, and I smiled, realizing I would still have a good snack that evening. I was just sweeping the floor when Nana came in.

“I’ve got your sister’s stuff out for tomorrow,” she said.

“Do you need me to do anything else for her?” I asked.

She shook her head. “It looks like she’s ready. Your granddaddy and I will drop her off in the morning, and he’ll pick her up,” she said. Nana had never learned to drive, so someone drove her wherever she needed to go. “You sure you don’t want him to take you?”

“No, ma’am,” I said. “I’ll ride with Monty.”

Monty had just turned sixteen, and his dad had surprised him with a brand-new Ford Escape. Since his parents were divorced, his mom and dad were always trying to outdo each other, so his mom had tricked it out with dubs and a radio system plus leather interior customized with his initials MM. When a girl asked why he had that on his seats, he had said because he’d melt in her mouth, not in her hands, which Uncle Marcus told me was the old slogan for M&Ms candy. I still cracked up every time I thought about it.

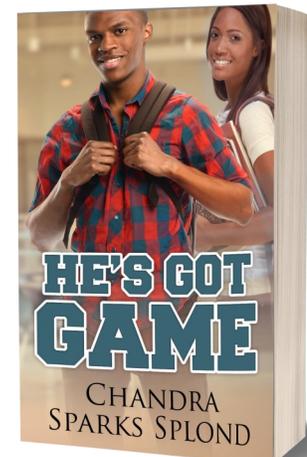
“Y’all be careful,” Nana said, sounding a little worried.

“Nana, we’ll be fine.” I ran a dishcloth over the counters then folded it and placed it on the edge of the sink so it could dry. “Do you need me to do anything else?” I asked.

“Could you check the oven? I think I might have left something in there earlier,” she said.

I frowned. Nana and Pops were both in their sixties, and it seemed more and more often Nana was getting a little forgetful. I glanced at the top of the stove and saw no lights were on, which would indicate it was actually on, but I still checked to be on the safe side.

When I saw a plate of fried chicken inside staring at me, I couldn’t help but smile.



“I had a feeling Marcus was coming over today,” she said, “so I put you some extra chicken in the oven. I know how much you like my chicken.”

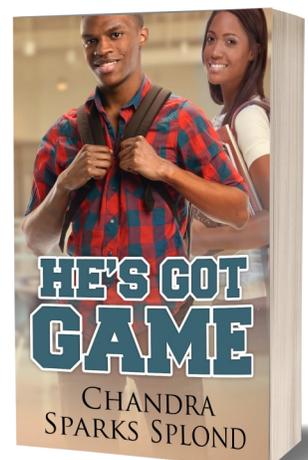
“Thanks, Nana,” I said, giving her a hug.

Since she had gone to so much trouble to save some chicken for me, I figured there was no time like the present to eat it and some banana pudding. I grabbed a couple of pieces then scooped some pudding in a bowl and headed to my room to catch ESPN SportsCenter. Life just couldn’t get any better.

**Excerpt from *He’s Got Game* (West End Publishing LLC, 2014)**

**by Chandra Sparks Splond**

**[www.chandrasparkssplond.com](http://www.chandrasparkssplond.com)**





CHANDRA SPARKS SPLOND

# HE'S GOT GAME

## ABOUT THE BOOK

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Sixteen-year-old Noah Benjamin has dreams of being the first in his family to graduate college. All that changes when he becomes the breakout star of his high school's basketball team. Despite his girlfriend Megan Agee trying to keep him on track, girls are showing interest, and people are in his ear telling him he should take his talents straight to the NBA. It doesn't sound like such a bad idea since it will give him the money to support his little sister, Natalie, and his grandparents. It would be so easy to forget about his game plan, but is that the way to go when the people around him have their own agendas?

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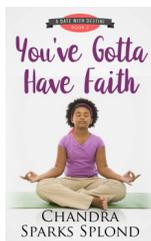
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Chandra Sparks Splond is an editor, speaker and award-winning author and blogger. She is the owner of West End Publishing, LLC., and was the consulting editor for *Arabesque* romance at Kensington Publishing. She has also edited for Random House, Moody Publishers, Kimani Press, and Hyperion, as well as several *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Essence* bestselling authors. She was a copy editor for *Good Housekeeping*, *Newsday* and *The Morning Call*, and has written for *Black and Married with Kids*, *Brides Noir*, *Weddingpages*, and *Romantic Times*.

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