

AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES

KEKE PALMER

with JASMINE GUILLORY

★ My Dear Friend Janet

Southern Belle Insults

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

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Published by Amazon Original Stories, Seattle
www.apub.com

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eISBN: 9781542034333

Cover illustration by Jade Purple Brown

Cover design by Kimberly Glyder

Cover photo by Quil Lemons

Interior illustrations by Kim Salt



Gather round, my adoring admirers, as I, the famous Lady Miss Jacqueline, spin you a tale of MAGIC! MYSTERY! Annnnd HAIR CARE! But wait! First, let me get my fan. That's better. Sit, sit. Once upon a time, in a faraway land, by which I mean last year over on Thirteenth Street, there lived a sad, dull, dried-out husk of a woman named JANET. I've known Janet her whole life, and you're probably wondering, *Why would the fabulous Lady Miss even concern herself with someone so terribly ordinary?* Because this is the story of how a mystical event changed Janet's life. And also because I love a good train wreck.



It all began on a typically boring, awful, aesthetically hideous day for Janet.

There she was, getting ready for work in her dreadful abode, a travesty of cracked tile, '70s wallpaper (*not* a fashionable era), and curtains that hadn't been changed since my good friend Madonna was like a virgin. And as for her personal style, that girl had not met a shade of brown or beige that she didn't love. Occasionally, she'd mix it up with varying shades of lilac—which, PS to Janet, just because THAT worked once on a mannequin at Dillard's when CARTER was president does not mean it will work on you.

Such a lifeless look—I wouldn't blame you if your eyes just passed right over her. I know Janet better than anyone, and I regularly have to fan myself just to stay awake watching her so-called existence. Have I mentioned that Janet volunteers teaching orphaned children to read? Even the rowdiest naptime resisters fall straight to sleep when she opens a book. No one's hooked on phonics when Janet's around.

So there she was: our poor Janet, staring at herself in the mirror. Her natural curls were screaming for moisture and a trim. And Lord, her makeup! I can't! She slipped one of her shapeless, two-sizes-too-big dresses over her head. It was like watching someone be swallowed by a polyester boa constrictor. She'd been blessed with a figure that could fit most anything in the store, and instead she chose these garments that looked like they came from the clearance section of Bob's Discount Tents. She wrestled with that sad sack of a dress, and for a moment I thought we'd lost our dear Janet to death by fabric. But she emerged and shoved her feet into the kind of orthopedic clogs they sell in the "comfort" section of TJ Maxx.

"This outfit is so boring," said dear Janet. Finally, we agreed on something! "Why don't you wear something more interesting?"

She looked at herself a moment longer.

"Oh, because the last time you took a chance on an outfit, you wound up on the worst-dressed list in high school across print, digital, and mixed media, and you were the only one on it! Better play it safe and not take any chances."

Not that it would have mattered if she had put on something flashier, considering that time at her CEO's crab-cake lunch fest, when more often than not, guests thought her dowdy, burgundy-napkin-shaded choice of an outfit was in fact A NAPKIN and wiped their hands on her. No, let's not go down that road again!

"I'll see you for dinner," Janet said to her sad reflection as she left for work. Janet knew she talked to herself way too much, but since she had run

off several husbands as well as friends and family, who else was there to listen?

She was just so awkward.

Janet lived smack-dab in the middle of a high-rise city where anything you wanted was about two blocks away. Office headquarters, galleries, and a pristine riverside park were all along her path as she walked to work. But the poor child couldn't enjoy any of the sights without getting ping-ponged down the sidewalk by preoccupied pedestrians. With each bump, she flinched like a timid little mouse.

"I'm sorry!" Janet said. "So sorry!"

Oh Lord, she even apologized when men bumped into her! Hell, she would apologize twice for fear she was on some "gotcha" 20/20 segment. Janet had been shamed enough in life to cover all bases.

Why, even Janet's daily coffee order was a prison of utter boredom for her taste buds! Our girl stopped at the exact same coffee shop every single day on her way to work and ordered the exact same thing each time, never even venturing something as thrilling as a scone. And did she ever say a word to the semi-attractive barista with that DAZZLING smile, the one who always remembered her order and sometimes sneaked free cake pops to toddlers? Did she even manage to stammer an awkward hello? Of course not. Janet had all the charm of a two-day-old fish.

But on our day in question, in the sea of monotony that was Janet's life, something slightly different happened. That day as she stood in line, oh, she actually smiled at the barista when he glanced in her direction! Granted, she looked down right after she smiled, and she didn't make actual eye contact with him. This is Janet we're talking about.

If my memory serves me, his name was Paul, no, Patrick, oh wait, PETER! Yes. Well, if he was anything like the biblical Peter, she'd better watch out! You know what I mean. And if you don't, read between the lines of the Bible, my dear. Before he was a saint, he was a SINNER!

"Just say hi to him," Janet said under her breath. "Say, 'Hi, I'm Janet!' Or say, 'Good morning,' or ask him how his morning has been, or ask him if he had a good weekend, or just smile at him, or something!"

Oh now, isn't that adorable. Janet was giving herself a little pep talk. I love that for her.

"Double no-foam latte?" said Peter when it was her turn to order. His kind eyes twinkled.

“Double no-foam latte.” Alas, poor Janet couldn’t even veer off her script. That was all she said, with a ridiculous grin on her face. How spooky.

As she handed him the money for her coffee, her fingers brushed his. Electricity shot through her. Poor Janet flushed as hot as a leather car seat in August, which she wouldn’t know about because she’d never owned a luxury automobile. (My fourth husband was a collector before he discovered me in the back of his Rolls-Royce with his studly chauffeur.)

“Oh! Uh, sorry!” Janet stammered. She looked away quickly.

“What’s your—” Peter started, but Janet had already stepped into the corner.

She stared at the floor as she waited for her latte, all dejected, like she was ashamed of herself for not saying more to him. So many times she’d walked in boots not made for walking, but for sadness, into this little café just to ogle the poor man. It certainly wasn’t for the coffee, which was as tasteless and listless as she! And every time, instead of saying anything to him, she just ordered that damn double latte. Without even any foam, for God’s sake!

Once ready, Janet took her latte from Peter and rushed away, like she was scared to stay a moment longer. Oh, Janet, while I expected this from you, I’m still, dare I say, disappointed in you. *Again!* Unbeknownst to Janet, the coffee man watched as she walked out of the shop. He stared after her with an actual smile on his face. If she hadn’t gotten as spooked as a goose, she maybe would’ve noticed.

Was it possible that Peter’s type was dull and uninspired? Perhaps he might become *her* coffee man? I guess you’ll just have to wait and see.

Janet took a sip of her foamless latte and moved along wearily toward her office building to go to her dull-ass dishwater job. When she got into the elevator, everyone around her chatted away, and Janet’s face got sadder and sadder. I know, I didn’t think it was possible either!

“Hey, girl. This weekend was crazy, right?”

“It sure was. That birthday party was so fun; thanks for inviting me!”

“Oooh, wait until I tell you what happened after you left!”

Three guesses for whether Janet went to the party, had even been invited to the party, or even knew the name of the birthday person? No, no, and NO!



Janet got off at her floor and walked down the hall to her appalling generic beige cubicle. Janet drifted past her coworkers without a word. *Seen and Ignored* would be a great title for a book for Janet to write, if anybody cared to read it. You would assume she'd made friends with the women in the cubicles beside hers, like a normal person. But she wasn't normal; she was Janet. Maybe there was a time when Janet showed her true self, but something happened. Somewhere, at some point, Janet decided to internalize every unpleasant moment, and now she cowered at every little thing.

"Candace probably doesn't even know who you are," Janet said to herself as she sneaked a peek at Candace in the neighboring cube before sitting down and turning on her computer. Candace and Janet had both started working at the Rogers and Finch marketing agency at the same time. For their entire initial training week, Janet never said a word. Poor Candace must have thought she was mute! If Janet said good morning to her now and tried to strike up a friendship, it most likely would end up like all her past relationships: **BROKE DOWN!**

"Good morning!" Candace said as she walked by Janet's cubicle. But Janet was too far into her sad little world to hear her.

Janet spent the next few hours intent on her work. Can you imagine anything more depressing? Spreadsheets and notes and emails and meeting

preparation—how dreadful. Perfect for Janet.

“Okay,” our girl said to herself. “The Edgy Wardrobe ad campaign is in fifteen minutes. Remember, you’re excited about this, you have a lot of great ideas, you’ve worked hard for them and their brand, you understand them better than anyone else here. You’ve prepared really well for this meeting, you have so many notes. You HAVE to speak up!”

Janet got up and walked toward the conference room. I could actually feel her shrink and slink like an unlovable, undesired cat does along a dark alley! See, this is where those dreadful pleather clogs were yet another liability. If she’d been in heels, she would have at least had that extra height. Didn’t her grandmother teach her a lady always wears heels? Ugh, every time I look at her, my mind is full of Southern Belle insults.

She sat way off to the side even though there were still seats at the table, and watched her coworkers shuffle in. A woman in a floral suit—*What is her name?* Janet thought. *Something like Glenn?*—finished a phone call on her earbuds while walking directly toward her. Before Janet could stop her, she plopped her tush right onto Janet’s lap.

“Oh, I’m sorry, so sorry!” Janet said as the woman sprang back to her feet.

“I didn’t even see you there,” the woman huffed, as though it were all Janet’s fault. “Your dress is the same color as the chairs.”

Finally, this dreadfully boring meeting started. Janet’s boss, Gary, droned on about what he thought the client wanted and how best to give that to him. Oh, how sad, Janet made little notes on her notepad as he talked. She didn’t even notice Brad, the new guy, in his awful khaki pants, looking over her shoulder while she wrote.

She muttered, “Oh, he’s going about this all wrong; we might even lose the client!”

If she cared so much, why wouldn’t she say something?

She looked at that dismal stack of notes she’d printed out and underlined one sentence angrily.

This client’s brand is all about culture, so shouldn’t the theme of this ad campaign be about giving back to the community that created that culture?

Then, suddenly, Brad spoke up.

“You know,” he said, “this client’s brand is all about culture. Shouldn’t the theme of this ad campaign be about giving back to the communities that define it?”

Wow, now what? Janet turned and stared at him, just in time to see him look up from her note. The look of horror on her face was comical. What did she think was going to happen, with all of that dramatic underlining as if she were CHARLES DICKENS with a good idea!

“Great idea!” Gary said. “That is what their brand is all about. Way to tie it back, Brad. I bet they’ll love your idea.”

And so our poor pathetic girl was betrayed.

Khaki Pants Brad shrugged at Janet with a smug little smile. If you ask me, no one should ever look smug when they’re wearing BEIGE.

If Brad had done that there little trick to me, he’d already be flying through the window, much like my second husband when he had the absolute gall to give me a TOASTER as a birthday gift! Needless to say, he paid me back and then some . . . with alimony!

“Well, it’s like Abraham Lincoln said,” Brad muttered under his breath to Janet. “All’s fair in love and marketing.”

Janet sat there, stewing. On top of everything else, Abraham Lincoln hadn’t said that! But did Janet talk back to him? Did Janet advocate for herself to her boss? Did Janet tell Brad she was glad he seemed to want a Civil War, because she sure as hell was going to war with him for this?

Ha! No, of course not. She just shrank back into her chair as they all talked about Brad’s great idea.

At least she turned her stack of notes over so Brad couldn’t see the rest of them. He actually looked again, too! The man didn’t have a single idea of his own, did he? Or a conscience.

I can’t even believe that I’m saying this, but I wish Janet had done something! Stood her ground, thrown a fit, told the world she was the one with ideas, something!

Oh dear, me defending Janet? Hell has frozen over. Global warming be damned, Al Gore!

After the meeting, Janet went back to her desk, grabbed her sad little handbag that wouldn’t be sold at the DOLLAR store it was so ugly, and rushed out of the office. She was barely out the door before tears started streaming down her miserable little face.

Of course, leave it to Janet to cry in the most depressing way possible. Instead of sobbing loudly in the office, making a scene and grabbing a little attention for herself, she silently walked down the street with a tear-streaked face! As my friend JANET RENO once said, “Tears are only good if they are

seen and heard!”

The girl wandered aimlessly around for what felt like hours. She wept and blubbered, not even looking where she was going.



“I have to change the way I’ve been living my life.”

I could have told her that.

“I just don’t know what’s happened to me. I’ve become too timid, too scared, too ashamed to do all of the things I dream of doing. I’ve gotten so comfortable with letting people push me around, and now I don’t know how to change it. How am I supposed to get what’s inside me OUT? I don’t think I’m ever going to be able to be happy until I do. I’m afraid to believe that this is just who I am and all I’m ever going to be.”

Haven’t I been telling you all of this about her? Poor, sad Janet.

Eventually, she stopped walking and talking to herself and looked around. From the look on her face, it was clear the girl had no idea where she was! Of course not—Janet never went anywhere new. Every day she walked from home to that silly little coffee shop to her boring job and then back home. Every day of her life was as exciting as watching a muted color of paint dry! Finally, and purely accidentally, she was on a street where people were actually having fun. And she looked terrified and confused. There were murals! Music! Life! If she had the sense the Lord gave a goat she would have danced. But not our little two-left-feet Janet!

She looked around frantically, trying to figure out how to get home. And then she saw something that made her stop right where she stood.

Pay attention. This is when it gets good.

Janet took a step or two closer.

There it was. A big sparkly marquee saying, WELCOME, JANET. Her name shimmered like a mirage.

Were her eyes deceiving her? Yes, they were! Completely befuddled, she closed her eyes, and when she reopened them, the sign simply read, WELCOME, A WIG FOR ONE IS A WIG FOR ALL.

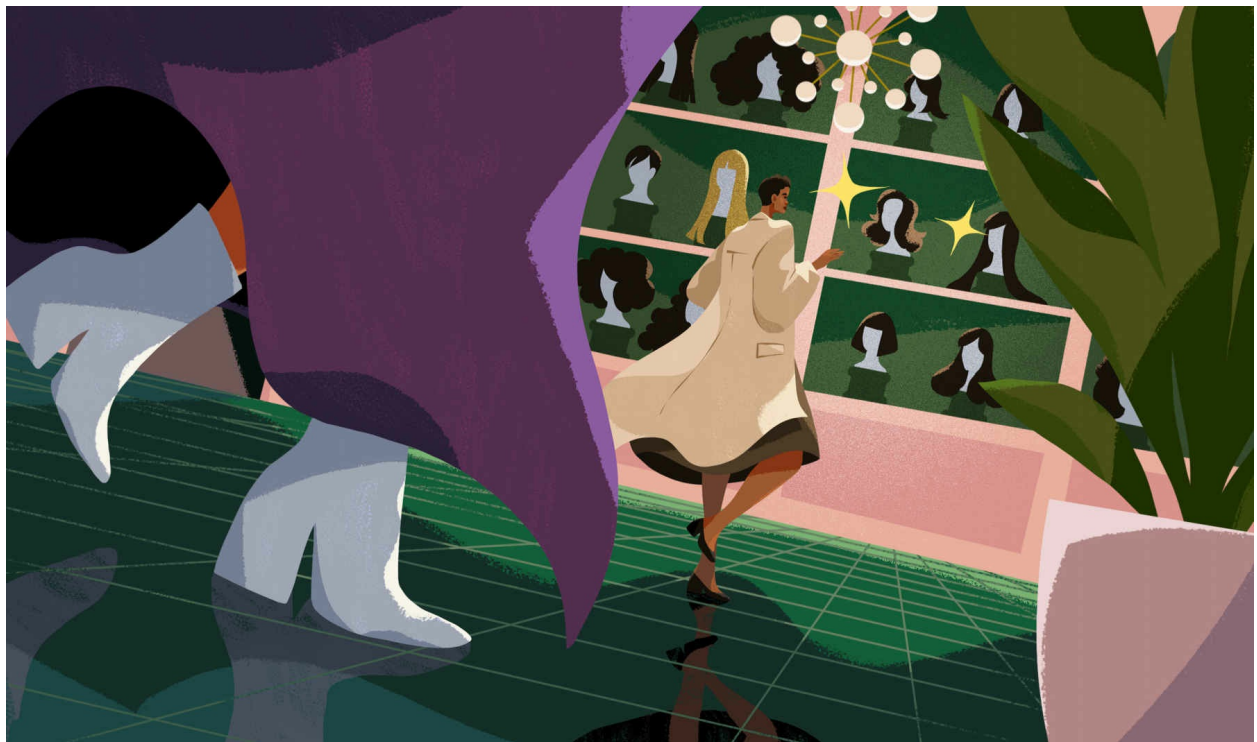
How melodramatic. They say diamonds are a girl’s best friend and it’s

TRUE; I have the divorces to prove it. But a wig is a girl's mask. It's the one thing that can turn her into someone new almost instantly, or bring something out of her that she had no idea she had.

Janet walked toward the sign, almost involuntarily, like a magnet was pulling her in.

Inside the wig shop, she was overcome with an intense feeling of being at ease. Our girl was mesmerized by the shop's elaborate décor. The ceiling was high, with floral designs etched in glimmering gold. The air smelled like roses and lavender. The furniture seemed to whisper old yet glamorous tales of all the lives that had passed through. With every step, Janet walked past huge mirrors that shimmered like galaxies and wallpaper with swirled vines that blossomed into roses right before her eyes. Did I mention the lighting in there was so lovely it even made Janet look average, which was a step above her usual.

And honey, the wigs! Almost infinite shelves of wigs, tresses fluttering as though invisible fairies were brushing them. There was a soft murmuring, almost like they were speaking. The whole shop looked like an ethereal wig library—how gorgeous!



“What is this place?” she whispered with hushed awe, like she had

discovered a lost palace.

Of course, she just walked around and looked, making no attempt to try on a single wig. The place was completely empty, and even with newfound pep she couldn't step outside of herself for just a moment and touch a finely designed hair crown.

Had she never heard of SASHA FIERCE? A wig can do wonders.

"No," she said to herself. "None of these wigs feel quite right."

"Hello."

The rich, melodious greeting startled Janet, and she almost jumped to the ceiling. She'd thought she was alone in this place, but I knew better.

This person was tall, much taller than Janet. They had long, shining black hair and wore only three colors: green and black and silver—quite fabulously, if you ask me. A green lace dress with a black tie that had silver stripes, complemented by silver boots and a silver hat. You almost had no idea how to define a person like this, and I believe that was their point. Janet wasn't sure what to make of them, especially after they startled her, until she looked up at their genuinely kind face. This was some years back before all their Botox and lip fillers, but I digress. They had a beaming smile, accented by a mustache and bold green eyeshadow. Janet gaped at them, all scared and silly because she was just so damn awkward. And then she smiled back.

Janet? With a smile on her face? How . . . unsettling.

"Can I help you?" they asked her, their voice an alluring woodwind.

Janet seemed to consider the question seriously. How unfortunate was this poor girl, didn't she know anyone who says "Can I help you?" in a store does it because they work there? Well, generally speaking.

"Oh, I'm just looking," she said with a shrug.

I waited for my dear close personal friend Rahdswee Tomal to tell her to leave, as that's what I would do. Rahdswee was much kinder. Fool!

Still, I hoped Rahdswee would lead Janet to a change.

"You need a change," Rahdswee said. Perfect!

"Oh, I don't know," she said to them. "I don't think . . . I don't know if any of these wigs are really me, you know? I'm not sure if I'm really a wig kind of person. I'm probably not going to buy anything, I was just looking around. Actually, I really only came in here because I'm lost, and I was wondering how to get back to—"

Rahdswee held up a hand, and she stopped talking. Clearly, Rahdswee had been touched by some sort of angel if simply raising a hand could get

Janet to stop droning on like a pastor at a wake for a true and pure SINNER!

“Yes,” they said to her. “You’re at a crossroads. I can see that. You need a change. A new look, but really, a new . . . perspective, maybe?”

Obviously she needed a new perspective, but would she surrender to it like she did to all those potato chips under her bed?

“I don’t know what you mean,” she said. Of course she wasn’t going to admit it.

“I think you do know what I mean,” they said. Rahdswee had an unnerving way of sensing people’s thoughts.

“Maybe I do, but I’m nervous.”

I couldn’t believe it. Janet actually said out loud and in a firm tone what was on her mind! Had she found her voice? Was it *the end*? I never thought I’d see the day!

“I know you’re nervous, but trust me, if you will,” they said. “Don’t worry; I’m on your side here. I’m here to help you. Come with me.”

Rahdswee led her through the rows of wigs. The wigs were still and quiet—hadn’t they been swaying softly before, as though in a breeze? Hadn’t she heard their soft rustling? Janet must have imagined it.

Rahdswee stopped suddenly. Their face lit up.

“This one.”

The wig Rahdswee pointed out to Janet was glorious. Dark brown, wavy, feminine, sexy—altogether perfect, much like ME.

No finer wig was to be found in that store! Its locks seemed to wave to Janet, to beckon her closer.



“Oh, no,” Janet said. “That’s not me. I couldn’t. I mean, the kind of woman who wears that wig, she’s . . . so much more than me.”

Without missing a beat, Rahdswee ignored what Janet said and reiterated, “This is the one for you.”

Janet stared at the wig and bit her lip. She looked at Rahdswee, then at the wig, then at Rahdswee again, and it was a very boring and horribly wasted five minutes of rubbernecking.

“It’s okay,” Rahdswee said in such a calm and illuminating tone, almost

like my dear friend Oprah Winfrey. “Just try it on. No harm in just trying her on.”

Rahdswee took the wig down from the shelf and handed it to her.

“Here you go. And don’t worry about the price. This one is on me.”

Janet stared at the wig in her hands.

“If it’s on you . . .” she said slowly. There was something so hypnotizing about Rahdswee’s voice.

Janet turned around, looked in the mirror, lifted up the wig, and set it on her head. She tugged it this way and that to adjust it, and smiled at herself in the mirror.

Suddenly, Janet’s head started bouncing like a bobblehead! She swung around and kept spinning, her body moving like a tornado around the room. The lights flickered, not just from light to dark, but from green to silver to black. Janet fell behind the chair, and, just as the lights returned to normal, I stood in her place.

“Well, hello, Lady Miss Jacqueline,” Rahdswee said. “Yes, indeed. You are exactly who Janet needs to help her out.”

I turned and fluttered my lashes.

“Rahdswee, you tall drink of sweet tea,” I said.

They opened a drawer beneath the wig shelf, took out a bag, and placed a package of wig caps and a wig stand inside. With a knowing smile, Rahdswee handed it to me. “Indeed, you are just in time. Oh, and there’s one more thing you’ll need.”

They handed me a folded item of velvet and lace. Of course, my fan! I snapped it open with a flick of my wrist—Janet could never have such grace—and flitted it in front of my face.

With Rahdswee’s help, I had arrived, ready to do my good deeds. “Thank you for your generosity.” I placed the bag strap on my shoulder and gave Rahdswee a *ta-ta* and went on my merry way.

Who knew I’d have to take Janet over to get her to fix her life, but if anyone could do it, I could. I had my work cut out for me, and I was more than up to the task. Wait until you hear what happened on my first day at Janet’s job!

XO, Lady Miss

The story continues . . .



Read and listen for free with Prime and Kindle Unlimited.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I can't believe this has happened! That the world of Lady Miss Jacqueline is finally getting to be explored!

I first off want to thank God for using me and giving me the gift of storytelling to hopefully inspire hope and faith, love, and acceptance in the way many stories have inspired me. I want to thank my mother, Sharon, and father, Larry, for their amazing support and unconditional love that has encouraged me to be the fearless person I am today. I want to thank my older sister, Loreal, for showing me it's okay to talk to the people in your head, and my younger siblings, Lawrence and Lawrencina, for giving me hope when the future felt bleak.

I want to give a huge thank-you to Lacy Lynch, my literary agent, for always sticking by me and supporting my best interests. And to Dabney Rice for all of her hard work behind the scenes.

Thank you to my amazing illustrators, Jade Purple Brown and Kim Salt, as well as Dave and Luke at (3 Arts) management for continuously providing me with the resources to spread my art and my voice.

Jasmine Guillory, I thank you so much for creating this story with me!! I couldn't have done it without you. Your partnership throughout this has been tremendous.

And MAX! My Maxie! Who saw in me what I hadn't yet seen in myself. When we discovered Lady Miss together, it was a true act of divinity. I can't wait to see what we continue to do together!!!

Thank you to my amazing publicist, Lauren Auslander, at LUNA and Cari Davine, Jon Polk, Ken Hertz, and all of HLY Media Law.

And saving the best for last 😊, I want to thank Amazon Publishing for being believers. The way this team supported me throughout this entire project is a testament to why I get my Amazon packages on time, haha! No, seriously, the work ethic and the actual care and dedication is seen and felt,

but most importantly, appreciated. So thank you to publisher Julia Sommerfeld; editors Selena James and Barry Harbaugh; art director Tyler Freidenrich; the publicity and marketing teams' Sarah Elison, Dennelle Catlett, Kyla Pigoni, and Kirsten Blair; and the rest of the Amazon Publishing team.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR




Photo © David J. Crewe

Lady Miss Jacqueline's dear friend Keke Palmer is a multifaceted content creator, actress, singer-songwriter, host, producer, author, and passionate voice of the millennial generation. She won an Emmy Award for her one-woman comedy series *Turnt Up with the Taylors* and received a nomination for her work as a host of ABC's *GMA3: Strahan, Sara and Keke*. Palmer rose to prominence through her breakout role in *Akeelah and the Bee* at age twelve and has gone on to star in over twenty-five films and thirty TV shows. Palmer starred in the blockbuster hit *Hustlers* opposite Jennifer Lopez and can be seen in the upcoming features *Alice* and Jordan Peele's *Nope*. She hosted the 2020 MTV Video Music Awards and will next host Disney+'s upcoming over-the-top food competition show *Foodtastic*. Currently, she is lending her voice to the new character Maya in the Disney+ revival *The Proud Family*:

Louder and Prouder and also to the character Brynn opposite Pete Davidson in Broadway Video's scripted Audible podcast *Hit Job*.

NOW AVAILABLE WHERE
BOOKS ARE SOLD!

A portrait of Keke Palmer, a young woman with dark hair and bangs, wearing a black turtleneck and a black skirt with a large white pocket. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a gradient of yellow and orange.

"I want to share the importance of this book for young women trying to find their voice. I'm having my own daughters read it and you should also."

—MEHMET OZ, MD,

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author
and Emmy Award-winning host of *The Dr. Oz Show*

I DON'T BELONG TO YOU

*Quiet the Noise and
Find Your Voice*

KEKE
PALMER