



INTRO

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

[Beep]

So, um, my homegirl from grad school wants to do a pool workout in the morning buuuuut, I can't swim. And I don't want to get my hair wet. #coloredgirlproblems

[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 One. Here we go...

SOLANA

"On 'Having It All'... Whatever That Means"

I toss my phone back on the bed after turning off the alarm and smell the pillow again. I inhale his scent, still lingering since I slathered his deodorant on my pillow a few days ago. This is how all my mornings have started since he left. For the first time, I'm truly torn between my two hearts: needing to get to up and finish my problem set before class but really wanting to stay in bed and wallow in the memories before they disappear like his last kiss.

I stare up at the ceiling again, recalling our last "what are we doing?" conversation. I'm not sure which one of us dreaded it more. To call me non-confrontational is the world's biggest understatement. If a situation looks like it's going to cause me discomfort I'm painting it sunshine yellow, tossing on my shades, and walking away.

But that whole walking away thing? I haven't been able to do it with him. In fact, sometimes it feels like he's the one who walked away from me, physically at least. He left Chicago suddenly, alerting me the night before.

I spent the 45 minutes it took him to get to my apartment on the floor telling myself not to "ugly" cry. Because let's face it, once the tears start, it's not long before I'm looking like a tanned tomato and I wasn't trying to leave that lasting memory. Our conversation the day he left wasn't fulfilling. I tossed around dishes in the sink pretending to wash them but really just avoiding his glances. I puttered around my words eventually settling on the ever-so-articulate: "Um, uh, we're still going to be together right?" Earning a somewhat committal "yeah" from him.

My friends' advice: Go with the flow. Which is all well and good, except...

I do not go with the flow. When I go to restaurants I look up the menu first. My outfit is always picked out the night before. I even schedule conversations with my parents. Letting my situation with him flow like the Nile goes against what I stand for.

I need to figure out us, so I can figure out where he belongs in this great life plan that I have. I need him to fit. I lay awake at night and pray for it.

Why? Because the truth is: I want it all. I want the boy. I want the Hollywood ending to our perfect first date. I want our kids raised on the South Side of Chicago and coming home to this perfect little family.

But first I want that corner office. That partner title. The name brand firm on my business card. To be THAT GIRL. But more and more, I'm realizing just how impossible that might be.

Last year I attended a banquet held by my law school that brought together fierce women alumni and rising young women law students to talk candidly about partnerships, power, and progeny. Not a single woman "had it all." If she was a firm partner, married, and with kids, she had 3 nannies to do things like pick up presents for birthday parties. (Whet?). One of my favorite mentors is in a loving marriage with no kids- "they get in the way," she told me over coffee one day. (Insert blank stare).

So the question ultimate begs then- what do I want more? Who am I now? Who do I want to become? I used to think these questions were so far in the future, they had no business invading my day to day life plans. But then I realized that life doesn't work that way.

When I first met him, I thought he would be in Chicago for at least two years, that I'd have time for me to finish my LLM, get a job, make him fall in love with Chicago, and watch the evolution as we fell for each other. But true to form, nothing has gone according to plan.

Now he's out of the state and I'm looking at my life and myself and wondering what my definition of "having it all" includes. If it includes him, what changes and sacrifices will I be making during interview season? Is it worth it? Am I suddenly becoming the girl who is family over career? Woah. This will be an interesting ride.

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CARMEN

"On Being and Becoming Metaphorical Chocolate Milk"

I am writing this in a hipster coffee shop in Minneapolis (you know, one of those all organic, all natural, all local, incredibly overpriced... yeah) listening to Pandora and sitting across from a girl I have a crush on. An innocent crush... mostly... I think.

I have been on tour with a puppet show for the last 3 and half weeks. Now I know what you're thinking: black chick, college educated, puppet show?

Here's the deal: I had just moved from New York City (the theater capital of the world) back to my home state of North Carolina (the pork capital of the world) and was trying to put my theater degree to use somewhere... ANYWHERE. I needed to know that this move back home wouldn't be the end of a theater career that hadn't even begun yet.

I saw a audition for a puppet show and even though I didn't have much experience with puppetry (ok, fine, I had NO experience with puppetry), but something told me I could do it. I auditioned and, surprisingly, got the part. One year, two puppetry classes, and one New York film festival later and here I am. A black girl on tour with a puppet show.

Anyway, I'll be home in 6 days, 10 hours and 16 minutes but who's counting. No really, I'm super grateful to be traveling and performing and getting paid (I mean, life is pretty hard for an unemployed puppeteer!) BUT I am also ready to wrap my arms around my momma's neck (and my daddy's, my nanny's, my brother's and my little dog too).

I have been obsessively giving exact change which is something my mother does. I think I'm subconsciously turning into her as a way to be close. But I think we are all turning into our mothers or actively trying not to.

Besides, the truth is: I miss Black people (Am I allowed to say that LOL)! I do! God! And I know you're like Carmen, you were just in Chicago! How could you miss Black folks!?

Well I'll tell you! We stayed in Wrigleyville – a suburb in Chicago as white as... Needless to say, the neighborhood was full of Brians, Daves and Chris' that all wore polos and got degrees in Business Management; not my cup of tea. And I could have found plenty of colored folks on the SouthSide but the hood is just as dangerous for an unknown black chick as it is for anyone else.

And if you didn't know, most theater scenes are predominately white and puppetry even more so. I knew what I was getting into when I entered this field but that doesn't make it any easier. In fact, even when it's great, it's never been easy.

For three and a half weeks, I've been doing what I love while living with my lovely (White) tour-mates, hanging in some cool (White) bars and staying in very (White) suburban Wrigleyville; the oh-so-conspicuous chocolate swirl in an otherwise all natural, completely organic glass of free trade soy milk.

6 days, 10 hours, and 11 more minutes until I step off the plane and into my mamma's arms. But hey, who's counting?

MAYA

“On Divorce, Dating, and Magical Matchmaking Aunties”

I don't know how to date.

This is evidenced by the fact that I'm going thorough not one but TWO breakups – my marriage and the relationship that I got into right after that (jury's still out on if that was a rebound or not – I still love the guy). Add in the whole, learning-new-boundaries/healing-the-past/serious-childhood-shit – and you have a recipe for dating disaster.

The problem is, as a 34-year old woman whose first marriage ended without producing some cute and cuddly Indian children to add to the billion that already inhabit the planet – somewhere the faint ticking of a biological clock is not letting me rest too long without beginning anew the search for my next great love.

Cinderella might have had a fairy Godmother but so far, my magical matchmaking auntie is nowhere to be found. And I'm not even looking for Prince Charming, just a nice guy who has a stable job and knows his passions. He could even be divorced like me with no “issues.” (That's Indian for kids.)

Plan B: find my own kindred spirit(s) through this wonderful/confusing/hilarious thing called dating, kind of a scary thing for a girl like me.

What kind of a girl is a girl like me, you ask? Let me give you the short version: As a late bloomer, I never really dated much. I was in one serious relationship with a plain vanilla (but nice) good ol' American boy before venturing to India and falling flat-on-my-face in love with my super-Indian husband. As my marriage was heading toward failure, I never had in mind to be with anyone else when bam! - my Ex 2.0 fell into my lap and swept me off my feet – and there was no turning back. It worked, until it didn't, which left me painfully right back at square one.

I never really played the field in my 20s, so at 34, I am learning the basics of what I like and what I don't, how to set healthy boundaries, and the art of writing an online dating profile (current strategy: energetically oozing “HEY! I'm single – if you like it put a ring on it!” and working my newfound confidence.)

I just came from a date with a guy before writing this post– we saw a god-awful movie. He's lifting the armrest and asking to share the warmth of my jacket. I am recoiling (inside) because my head is screaming that I am not into him and I don't want him to touch me. He walks me to my car and asks to kiss me and I say no – let's not do that just yet – all the while thinking I need to tell him I am not into him. He's already texting to say that he had a good time so on the way home I compose a civil speech to him when he seeks my time out again to tell him he's nice, but ...

The visual I have of myself is this little baby bird, just getting out of the nest. I don't think I have ever really flown, not in my relationships before, not the first tentative beats of the wing when you meet people and

refine what your heart desires. As my heart mends – I am out there trying to meet people that can help me believe in the magic of love – but in reality, I have no idea what I am doing.

I spend a lot of time consulting various internet gurus, tempting GOOGLE'S algorithm with queries like “two dates and I am not feeling it.” There is no resolution to this post – just know that I am trying my best.

My heart is mending and learning to feel. I compose speeches in my head when I miss the moments when I should have spoken them to whatever man is taking my arm that evening. And for now, that will have to do.

TAMAR

“On Family, Faith, and the Complications of Coming Out”

“This is not the life God has chosen for you.”

The sarcastic, snarky, witty, Scorpio in me wanted to respond with, “Oh and you know that how? Did you have God over for tea recently?” But I didn't, I held my tongue (for a moment). I then, politely as I could muster, proceeded to tell her that she has her beliefs and I have mine and we'd just have to agree to disagree; she didn't like that very much. That was almost 9 months ago; the day that it became public knowledge to the majority of my family that I am a lesbian.

If I were to tell you that I had not predicted my family's reaction to my coming out I would be lying. For the most part they reacted just as I thought they would. Some would say that my lack of positivity is what led to things turning out the way they did; that I had manifested a different outcome things could have been different. To that I give my best side eye and say, “You have never met my family.”

Now don't get me wrong, I am not knocking manifest destiny or speaking things into the Universe, in fact I believe in it. However, I also grew up with my family and have known their views on same sex relationships and the people who have them since I was old enough to understand words.

The one thing I could not predict, however, was how much it would hurt. I was devastated, I felt abandoned by the people who had been the most constant in my life, who just a month before had rejoiced over my acceptance into seminary and told me how proud they were of me. I felt my heart ripping into a million pieces and I was inconsolable. My beloved was with me through it all, comforting me and trying her best to fill the void that had been created with all the love she has in her heart. Yet the loss I felt was grave and I was not sure that it could or would be filled.

At this point you may be wondering if there is an upside to this traumatic ass situation, I promise there is; it's coming.

A couple weeks after the climax of coming out events the tears began to subside and my spirit began to perk up. I had a collective of folks around me lifting me up, checking on me, and supporting my partner as she supported me. I call these people my heart/chosen family. They are the people who have stepped up to the plate in my times of need and who love me unconditionally. They are a mix of friends, loved ones, biological relatives, elders and more.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that my biological family is replaceable (THEY'RE NOT). What I am saying (and it is not an easy thing to say) is that they may not be the family I need for this part of my journey through life. I will always value my biological family for what they have given and who they have been to me.

I will always love them, pray for them, support them in any way that I can BUT it will not be done at the expense of my own well being. Coming out helped me to gain my full sense of self and self-worth back. I was able to overcome the last hurdle that stood between me and full unadulterated love for myself: the approval of my biological family.

For the majority of my life many of the decisions that I made was focused around one central thing: MY FAMILY. "Would they approve? Would they be happy? Would they be hurt?"

The questions went on and on, most importantly when it came to coming out every time I thought about it, an indescribable fear would grip me and make me believe that there was no way I would be able to survive my family's rejection. But not only did I survive it I am thriving to the point that I am living more fully than I was before.

Do I hope for reconciliation with some of my family members? Of course. I just know that if that day ever comes it will not occur at the expense of me living my authentic life and defining me for me. And that? That is a very good thing.

ZORA

"On the Process of Remembering and Reinventing"

Now seems like a good time for some much needed self-reflection. Let's start with the basic question of: "who am I now?"

If I am to be honest, at a little past fifty, I am a bit too old to be called young but still too young to be considered done; mother of four amazing ones, grown enough to know better, but in truth still needing their mama; wife to a man who remembers me as the teenage dreamer who vowed to "take the world by storm," but now watches helplessly as the storms often overtake me.

Sometimes it seems like so much has faded. The upside? Faded ain't the same as gone.

But back to that self-reflection: A woman, a bit past fifty, living with a crippling chronic illness, but determined to restart my career and re-connect to the fierce and fabulous woman I once was; that miracle minded, way-making sister who knew a little something about making impossible dreams come true.

It's time to stop talking transition and actually start transitioning. It's time I put the tough years behind me and start living again. Start working again. Begin managing my chronic illness instead of it managing me.

Today I recognize that tired doesn't mean beaten and pain doesn't mean weakened.

I know now that my limitations are not the sum total of my existence. (Although some days, that's harder to remember than others.)

My hands may not always work but my brain still does. Well at least it does most of the time. There was that time I took some pretty strong pain meds and dreamed I was on a deserted island with nothing but an endless supply of Nora Roberts novels, strawberry shortcake, and fabulous shoes to keep me company. Hey don't judge. I don't choose my delusions. But I digress.

Once upon a time I was proud to do work that mattered, to have a job very few got to do. I travelled the back roads of this country collecting the words, wit and wisdoms of the elders as they told me how it used to be. I was able to share with the world amazing tales of make do mamas as they pieced together living from spit and grit.

But now I am the one making do. Oh, for me there may not be a lot of spittin' and grittin' but there is a whole lot of piecing it together to get the job done - manicure scissors to chop veggies in the salad when swollen fingers can't hold a knife. Fingers to style hair when my arm can't bear the weight of a comb. And if I choose colorful accessories, most don't notice my cane.

I am learning to negotiate life by being imaginative and accepting. It wasn't always this way but if I am going to live with chronic illness I know I'll have to grow myself big enough to rise to any occasion, and that I can do.

I remind myself that I am blessed to have breath and as such I need to earn my gift of life by continuing to live, love, learn and get back to doing that work which mattered so much just a dozen years ago.

To me, that means I need to go looking for myself and I won't stop until I find what I am looking for. Now I am smart enough to know that I won't discover the woman I used to be. She is just as gone as those years are and that's a good thing. What good is living if all you are doing is standing still?

No, I am looking for a new me. One who is prepared to let illness exist with opportunity and who has the courage to live with uncertainty.

I have seen glimmers of her recently so I know she is out there. I just have to help her break free.

Let the journey begin.