



BOOKS»

At 25 years old, Kenya Jackson was \$100,000 dollars in debt. She was unemployed despite her three degrees. Her girlfriend of three years had broken up with her, leaving her alone in a barren apartment. Lonely and depressed, Jackson lay on her floor and began journaling out her feelings. Over the next few years, those reflections would come together as her first book, *empty. SPACE: Where is My Stuff? Navigating the Quarterlife Crisis with Wisdom and Skill* a self-memoir based on an idea that Jackson created to overcome the anxieties that gripped her mid-twenties.

In her book Jackson writes that title is a play on words, representing both the physical empty space of not having something and the infinite prospects the world has to offer. She explains that we can turn our lowest moments of physical and spiritual emptiness into empowering opportunity. “When you don’t have anything, it’s really such a great opportunity for you to build what you want, versus fill your space with things [that] everybody else is telling you [to] do.”

Jackson’s book suggests that we lessen our reliance on the “Tools of the Ego”—attachment, judgment, fear and destruction—feelings that serve our logical thought processes but can impede our happiness. On the other hand, she suggests practicing the “Tools of the Spirit”—appreciation, compassion, enthusiasm and creation—to create positive mental balance.

Rather than being a step-by-step self-help manual, Jackson’s book reflects upon her own struggles with addiction, loss and failure. The title is also inspired by the fact that, during the time of her crisis,



Conquering the Quarterlife Crisis

New author Kenya Jackson turns failure into opportunity.

BY ELIZABETH NGUYEN

her apartment had been literally devoid of material belongings. “I was just sitting in this emptiness. Like, there was nothing around me,” Jackson describes. “...And I felt really empty on the inside.” But since her apartment was empty, Jackson realized that she had infinite prospects. She healed herself by unlearning her judgmental ways and practicing enthusiasm for the future.

“We’re a very encouraged generation, but not necessarily an empowered generation,” says the Atlanta-based author. She explains that even though youth are hitting the books, job prospects remain low;

when the expectation of success isn’t met, the blame gets directed inwards.

“The quarterlife crisis is something that has ceased to be a topic of conversation, but I think it’s because young people are just burying it. We’re not talking about it because of the shame, and because of the fact on some level we think it’s our fault.”

During her crisis, Jackson kept silent about her situation because she felt embarrassed by her perceived failures; her writing was the only place where she felt she could be honest. It was the journaling that helped her dig into her psyche and transform herself.

It took Jackson five years to write and publish *empty*. *S P A C E*. Now 31, she is a motivational speaker and is running a series of workshops based on her book's messages. She's also embracing her love for creative writing, preparing to publish a book of poems she'd never printed out of fear. And she's engaged to her partner, Michelle.

"I really want for young people to realize

that [the quarterlife crisis] is not unique to them," says Jackson. "We have a whole generation of young people who are dealing with these exact same things, and it's time for us to release the shame, release the blame and the embarrassment surrounding this topic, and start getting to the root of who we really are. None of us are what we have, who we date or how much money we make...We are so much

more than that, and the sooner we get to figuring out [our passions], the better our quality of life will be..."

"I want young people to start creating a space for themselves. If there's no space for you at corporate America... then create a space for yourself, because this is the perfect opportunity for you to do so. And don't feel bad about it." (kenyajackson.com) ■

EDITOR'S PICK»

BY TRIXY FLOWER

Small Town Trouble Jean Erhardt (Two Terriers Press)

As an avid lover of genre fiction, especially crime novels, I was so impressed with *Small Town Trouble* I just had to interview its author. Protagonist Kim Claypoole, successful lesbian business owner and wannabe detective, just can't keep her nose out of things and finds herself in the thick of a murder when she goes home to help her mother sort out her finances. The author Jean Erhardt kept me engaged by taking me through Claypoole's journey and her unexpected reunion with Amy—the girl with whom she used to practice French kissing! The novel is intriguing, funny and made me wonder if there was a bit of Kim Claypoole in Jean Erhardt.

What does Kim Claypoole have in common with Jean Erhardt?

Claypoole and I are alike in a lot of ways. We share the same sense of humor and we both have a penchant for damsels in distress. For years, I worked as a private investigator and personal protection specialist aka bodyguard. In one memorable case I was holed up for two weeks in a high-end, high security hotel situation with a loaded .38 and a female client from a country that started with I.



The client was in the process of divorcing her crazed, psychopathic husband who smoked opium and was richer than God. She chain-smoked long, rainbow colored cigarettes, drank gallons of Persian tea and carried on lengthy, melodramatic phone conversations in Farsi at all hours of the day and night. By the end of the two weeks I was almost hoping that her husband would show up and shoot me. But things turned out well for both of us. I got a big paycheck and she is now living happily ever after under an alias enjoying her multi-million dollar divorce settlement in an exotic, sunny locale.

Where did you get your inspiration?

I knew I wanted to write a mystery series set around the Smoky Mountains. I love it there and have spent a lot of time in the area, which is so rich with colorful characters, folklore, good food and beautiful scenery. As a teenager, I worked during the summers in Gatlinburg, Tenn. where my family spent summers and I graduated from Maryville College, which is in the area.

Is this your first novel featuring a lesbian as the main character?

Lesbians have regularly appeared in my books and short stories. One of my short stories that comes to mind is about a young woman named Taffy who conspires with her creepy twin brother to rob the convenience store where she works. But things don't go as planned. Her boss gets killed in the heist and Taffy finds herself becoming romantically involved with the female cop who is investigating the robbery homicide. I think this story would make a great movie. Any filmmakers out there?

Do you have a favorite type of book that you enjoy reading?

I used to read a lot of so-called literary fiction, which was smart, well written, emotionally loaded stuff. But these days, I find myself mostly picking up a good mystery, usually one written by a writer who tells a good story, but also makes me laugh. Kinky Friedman is probably my favorite but I also love the early Janet Evanovich mysteries.

The humor is so refreshing, especially for a mystery novel.

Who doesn't love a good laugh? Especially these days. I want to write a series that is not just mysterious, but fun. I want readers to have a good time along the way. (jeanerhardt.com)

