

AUTHOR'S NOTE



Author's Note from [The Rodeo Queen](#) by Marcella Bell

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Between writing the first draft of [The Wildest Ride](#) and the first draft of [The Rodeo Queen](#), the world completely and utterly changed. Not only had I just welcomed my second child, but far more drastically, COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd swept through the globe, undermining the foundations of what most of us understood to be immutable and redefining our lives into the future.

Among other things, I am Black. I grew up deeply and thoroughly immersed in the “nice racism” of the Pacific Northwest. From there, I navigated a pathway through life as a bubbly, friendly, agreeable, Black Girl. It was a path that was relatively free from aggressive encounters with racism and optimistically dedicated to being a Black Ambassador—living and breathing proof of the ignorance of racist concepts and beliefs.

Of course, there were obvious flaws and cracks in my rose colored view of what I was doing, could do, and who I was. Those cracks had been growing and multiplying in the years leading up to the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the summer of 2020. But it was truly the one-two punch of witnessing my community’s refusal to make public safety a top priority paired with its expressed commitment to maintaining the racial status quo that drove me to confront my full experience.

What was seen could not be unseen, and what was worse, it demanded a reconsideration of everything that I had ever believed or thought I knew. After that reckoning, I was left with shame, anger and loneliness.

I felt shame at all of the anti-Black ideology that I had absorbed, and how I had participated in my own denigration. In serving as an ambassador, I was furthering the harmful idea that it is the actions and behaviors of Black people that drive discrimination and oppression. It is not. It has never been about Black people and has always been about racist people. We do not need ambassadors. We need justice and reparations. We need to make things right.

My anger, while justified, was a mask for the fact that through this I realized how powerless and afraid I had always felt. From the moment I first learned about the enslavement of Black Americans from a white elementary school teacher as the only Black child in a classroom of white students, to the moment I painted and put up the Black Lives Matter display at [Rebel Heart Books](#), I have been petrified by the prospect of white violence. I have lived a life driven by the need and desire to protect myself from it. I will never know how much of my success is a result of my personal desire or the result of the intricate defense system I developed to navigate this world as safely as I could, because they are forever intertwined. Fear drives many of us to strive and succeed—fear of hunger, of being without shelter, of death. In a moment long overdue, I learned the shape of the fear that drove me.

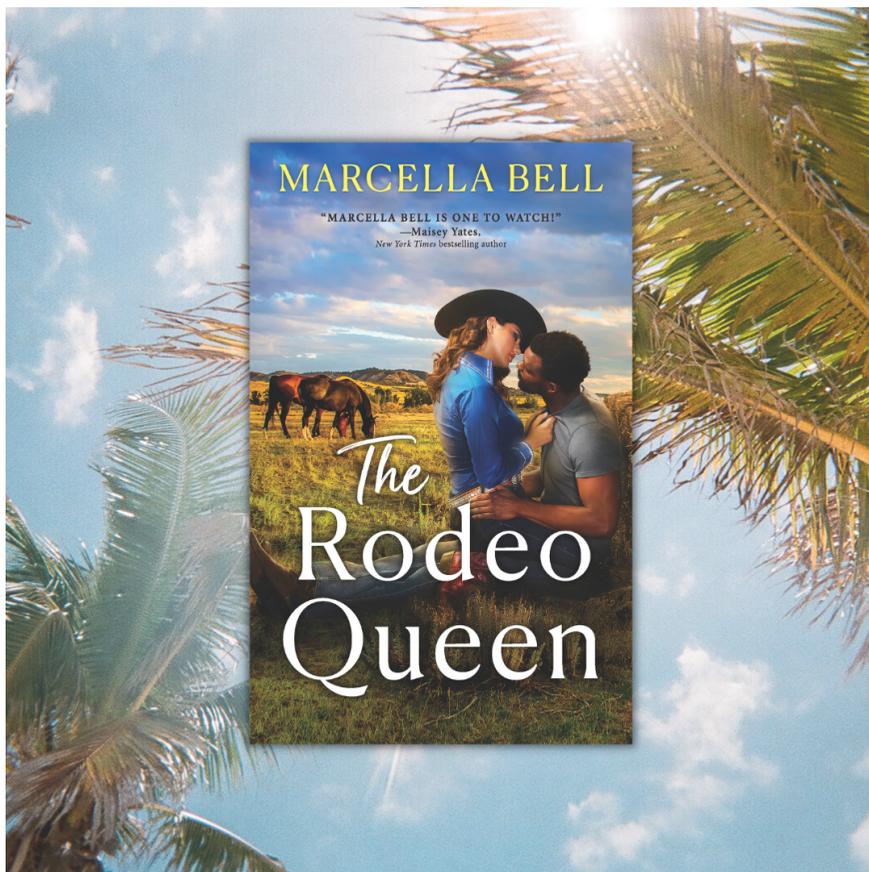
As a result, everything changed. We made the difficult decision to leave Oregon, where my husband and father and I were born and raised, and where we had chosen to continue to grow our family. Feeling like I was a part of progress and my deep sense of home were no longer good enough reasons to tolerate the psychological onslaught of living as a person of color in the Northwest. Realizing that so many of the people I knew and loved were unwilling or unable to acknowledge and sit with such a major portion of my experience showed me that it was time to leave.

I have never felt lonelier than I did when I recognized how much of my experience was invisible and unbelievable to so many of the people I loved and who loved me deeply in return. Racism is its most insidious and cruel when it weaves its way into love.

All of this came out in *The Rodeo Queen*. *The Wildest Ride* was an adventure written in stolen hours late at night, full of hopes and dreams and brightness. *The Rodeo Queen* was written while preparing to leave the home that had never made space for me.

Like everything I can no longer unsee, Diablo existed before the summer of 2020—his anger and frustration a slight hint of what lay on the other side of all of my hope and belief in the capacity for progress that was reflected in *The Wildest Ride*. Like all of the other revelations the past two years have brought, it was only a matter of time until Diablo boiled over into my consciousness.

This book reflects an important, if painful, point in my personal evolution. Like Diablo, I am tired of injustice and frustrated by how little power I have in the face of it. I hope, though, that also like Diablo, someday in the future there will be an opportunity to dust off the old equipment and show up stronger and wiser on the front lines of change.



About the Author

Marcella was born and raised in Salmon Nation but now lives where kalo grows. In addition to being an author, she is a book person, a honeybee enthusiast, and a fan of anime, travel, corvids, karaoke, and the Portland Timbers soccer team. Whether working on romance like the [Closed Circuit](#) series and [Harlequin Presents](#), or youth fiction, Marcella is interested in reflecting and centering the people, places, and experiences she's known

