

EXCERPT CHAPTER

# *The* BEST MAN

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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*Unfinished Business* is an utterly propulsive, stylish read with so much heart."

—TIA WILLIAMS, bestselling author of *A Love Song for Ricki Wilde*

**MALCOLM D. LEE** *with* Jayne Allen

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Jordan

Jordan Armstrong turned to glance briefly through her own reflection and out the window of the forty-second floor of the Manhattan high-rise that she used to call her office. A very different woman was looking down now at the nine-to-five bustle on the streets below, and yet it was still invigorating. She missed the energy of the city, but the constant grind she did not miss at all. At least now that she'd developed as much of an affinity for her feet touching sand as she used to feel for a pair of killer stilettos. Two nights ago, she'd been in her spacious Malibu home, breathing the salt air of the ocean. Yesterday afternoon, she'd touched down in New York expecting the mildness of spring and the turn of seasons, but outside it still looked very much like winter. Thirty-six hours in Manhattan was passing quickly, especially with a schedule crammed with meetings.

The frenetic motion of the city below reminded her of her past life as the executive vice chairman of MSNBC, a position she'd left almost three years ago. The constant stimulation, the on-the-go energy, for the first part of her career at least, had been the fuel that she thrived on. Now this view wasn't as satisfying, even perched on the top of the world. She loved the life

she'd created in Malibu, doing things at her leisure—self-care for sure, plus her unbeatable view of the Pacific. This trip was just a quick detour, a necessary one to set the wheels of her next chapter in motion.

"Ms. Armstrong, we have the podium and microphone all set for you." A soft voice behind her brought her back into the room. Jordan turned and smiled, instinctually smoothing her already immaculate beach waves into proper place along the shoulders of her power suit.

"Great, let's go." She stood and followed her wrangler down the hall as the young woman continued to contort herself trying to walk and talk at Jordan's pace.

"Thank you again for agreeing to speak to the ladies," she said effusively. "We couldn't waste an opportunity knowing you'd be in town. I mean, when we sent the email to the junior staff, that you'd be coming, we had a flood of responses. I hope you don't mind, but there were a few ladies who agreed to stand in the back just to be in the room."

"It's not a problem," Jordan said. She wanted as many junior staff to attend as possible. She meant to bring her best here, her full attention. As hard as she had to work for where she'd gotten, it was important to give back, especially in rooms like the one she was entering, filled with the eager faces of young women of color just starting their careers, full of energy and ambition like she was.

Jordan pushed back a single tendril of hair from her immaculately set face, flawlessly finished, with red lips for both power and presence. Now reset into a perfect middle part, the cascading waves of ebony satin showcased her face like open draperies. It was important to look good and feel better. Her power suit fit perfectly, her blazer opened just so. *Yes*, she thought, *these girls should see and hear from me*.

The door opened to a completely full meeting room, and Jordan let herself be guided to a podium that seemed far too formal to be just “stopping by for a quick lunch with the interns and juniors” between the pitch meetings she’d set for her new show concept. When she stepped to the podium and looked out at the dozens of sets of blinking eyes staring back at her from mostly brown faces, she felt overwhelmed with everything she wanted to say. How she wished to tell these women, so young still, that success goes hand in hand with regret. Already they were so willing to give so much of themselves to a corporation and an industry that would never so much as thank them and would happily let them give their all until there was nothing left. She wanted to tell them to take care of themselves. To tell them to say no instead of just thinking it. To set boundaries and take weekends, to make self-care actually mean something, and to never lose sight of their friendships and relationships that matter (especially that part). But that last bit would be slightly ironic, because Jordan was in town for work, and not a single one of her friends knew. Not even Shelby, not Harper, not even her godchildren.

Hands in front of her, placing one on each side of the lectern, Jordan cleared her throat before leaning forward into the microphone. All the talking in the room had stopped. It wasn’t even clear she needed a mic. The way these girls leaned forward, Jordan could have whispered and they still would have picked up her every word. This is how her afternoon meetings needed to go. All eyes on her, listening and nodding around the conference room table to her pitch of her own show. Especially Evelyn, who she’d met in a room just like this, ten years ago. Evelyn, who she’d helped climb the ladder into the positions that made up the executive levels of her own career. It was Evelyn now who had the power to listen, to decide, to green-light. And it was Jordan who finally had something of her own.

“Ladies,” she began. “I started my career in positions like those that many of you hold now. I answered calls, set schedules, hoped that maybe just a few of my suggestions would make it to air. And then I earned my boss’s job, and then my boss’s boss, and finally when I was *the* boss, when I’d made it to the top of everything I dreamed of, you know what was waiting for me there?” Jordan paused, catching the eye of some of the girls so eager, they sat suspended at the edge of their seats with bated breath, waiting. She wanted to make sure they heard her, especially the young Black women present. “What was waiting for me was even more . . . more hours, more pressure, more expectations. And the life I’d set up to meet those demands wasn’t serving me. So, I took a new position. I become the CEO of my own life, a role I should have held from the start. One that you should hold for your own life. Maybe this is your dream job, but it should be part of a much bigger picture. Ask yourself, how is it serving you? In this room today, you are the greatest natural resource that this country will ever produce. And you need to act like it. To treat yourself like it. That’s how I see you and that’s how you need to see yourselves.”

Jordan had more to say, but as she took a breath to continue, the room broke out into applause. And she looked out again at those brown faces, young women in whom she could see herself. She hoped they heard her and that some of them would wake up and take the advice she wished she’d been given. But anyway, that’s what her next meeting was for. She’d make them hear her, just next time with a much bigger microphone.



“Success doesn’t mean just being successful.” An hour after the lunch with interns, Jordan sat in the conference room four floors

higher, presenting the well-considered opening lines of her show pitch. She was seated across from Evelyn Castro, EVP of programming and three less senior executives. Beyond her role at the network, Evelyn had been Jordan's friend for years. Just a few years behind her, Evelyn had followed Jordan up the corporate ladder, and Jordan had certainly reached back to help her climb, making it nice to see her in the decision-maker's seat. This was supposed to be a low-pressure, familiar setting, but as confident as she felt, she loved this idea enough to still harbor a bit of nerves. She wanted the best for it, and for herself. Jordan had been on the buyer side for many years, wielding power, cultivating relationships, smiling, power hugging, and giving firm handshakes. Her hard work had taken her to the mountaintop, a huge accomplishment that she was proud of herself for. But still, she didn't miss this room one bit. In front of yet another audience, her sixth of the day.

Jordan let the words of her show pitch float through the room and settle upon the executives seated around the conference room table. She was ready to place her concept—wellness for Black women. She wanted to get specific, relevant, and meaningful because by now, she realized that if you're talking to everyone, you're speaking to no one. She would center Black women with intention and address all aspects of wellness that were too often overlooked while they (and she) "got the job done." Her own exit from MSNBC was well-chronicled. And she'd set the record straight for those young women earlier today, just as she had for those who'd known her professionally in the years prior—Jordan Armstrong was no quitter. Why the exit? That type of grind wasn't her anymore. She'd needed a change, made one, and it had worked for her.

Now she was on a mission to help other Black women begin their own wellness journey. Her pitch deck was flawless and her



sizzle reel looked like a movie trailer. The scene had been set, and she was in the presenter's seat now, all business. Evelyn, her contemporary, was at the head of the table, in the decider's seat. This would be her ace in the hole. Everyone in the room knew that they were friends, that Jordan had even mentored Evelyn through the ranks, but they had no idea of the strength of the relationship, one that Jordan was counting on to make this last meeting her best.

*Success doesn't mean just being successful.* . . . She surveyed each person's face in a split second, gauging if they were following along and nodding. She'd said something profound, the payoff of what she'd learned after a very costly sacrifice and perhaps equally expensive therapy sessions. Now it was time to take what she had learned and do with it what she did best. Turn it into a smash hit, Emmy Award-winning broadcast show.

"I see," Evelyn said, uncrossing her arms and settling into the cushions of her executive swivel chair. "Very intriguing. Can you expound, Jordan?"

Jordan looked to the other faces, seeing some nods to her left and to her right. She understood Evelyn's directive; make *them* understand.

"Of course." Jordan made it a point to make and keep eye contact as she slowly turned to look around the table, bringing everyone along with her, fully in control. Satisfied that she'd taken all the air in the room, she continued. "We are at an inflection point in corporate and career culture. People are unplugging, adjusting, taking inventory. COVID was a wake-up call. We've had years of political instability and an insurrection. And now the reelection of a divisive and polarizing figure in our nation's highest office. Who bears the brunt of that divisiveness? You know who. After generations of striving for a corner office, it's become absolutely clear there is something to pay attention

to outside of boardrooms like these. And *urgently*, with more at stake now than ever, that *something* is the rest of our lives. Women, and in particular *Black women*, are no longer willing to show up just to pay the price of success and expect nothing in return. They want . . . no . . . they *expect* more." *I do too*, Jordan thought, and took a breath to reset herself. She felt this so deeply it was easy to get worked up about it, to have her passion bleed through and have it mistaken for anger. There was always such a thin line between a Black woman's enthusiasm and some kind of misinterpretation. So she was being professional, deliberate with each syllable, each pause, each turn of her head, each set of eyes that she met. This was her sixth meeting of the day, and intentionally so, making her pitch well-rehearsed by now. It had been repeated all day long in rooms just like these, full of suits and cynicism. But this one was different. She'd saved the best for last. She had good connections with all the executives in the room and her reputation was still stellar. But having Evelyn in this room, with real power now, was worthy of her best performance and she was happy for the questions. Evelyn for sure would get it.

Jordan wound up for the big reveal. "It's time now, for wellness to go mainstream. Black women are ready for a show that centers all aspects of wellness—physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental. The host for this show will bring in guests each week for a panel-style discussion to center the latest developments and discoveries of interest on the topic of health." In her career, Jordan had already heard more pitches than she'd ever be able to remember. Today, she was ready for anything. Each question that even *might* be asked as a follow-up she already held in her mind. *Who's this show for?* She didn't even need to think about that answer.

"This show is for Black women, particularly now—feeling



betrayed and let down, tired of shouldering the burden of everyone else's work, who are thinking about the changes they need to make," she added. Jordan knew this woman, these women, well. This woman was her. She'd walked away at the pinnacle of her career. She'd made a choice and the choice was for a change, a different life, one with herself at the center, where she could enjoy the fruits of her work.

Fully in her flow, she concluded. "This network's core business is to sell access to consumer buying power. In order to do that, you do need forward-leaning programming that addresses the needs and interests of key viewer demographics. And the wellness economy is the largest sector in the world, led by the United States. That's a \$1.8 trillion market. So people are getting the message—success can't be enjoyed if you've compromised your health. Yet Black women are still dying to succeed. Yes, we're killing it. And it's killing us. We're the growth sector within the growth sector."

Jordan winced slightly at her use of the personal words "we" and "us." She hadn't meant to bring it so close to home. This pitch wasn't personal. It was about the right thing to do right now, a business opportunity for an audience of millions, not a vanity project.

She surveyed the faces around the room. They looked interested, intrigued perhaps, but not as excited as she expected. They were processing. Evelyn was the big boss in the room, so the junior execs wouldn't say anything until she'd said her piece. But for an extended while, she was quiet.

After a moment, just before Jordan started to ask for questions, Evelyn started to speak.

"Thanks so much for this, Jordan," she said. "As I'm sure you know, we're focused more so on news and covering measurable developments relevant to our viewer. This seems like we'd be

doing something outside of our core competence. A new format, a new approach, and a topic that's interesting, but still niche, as it would target just a portion of our audience. Who do you envision as the host?" Evelyn asked her follow-up, leaning forward toward Jordan against the table, an indication of the importance of the question.

*The host?* They'd just hire a host, of course, like they'd hired so many hosts of so many shows before. It wasn't about the host; it was about the concept. One five-hour flight, three hours of sleep, and six meetings in, six times that she'd done this pitch, this was the first moment that it occurred to Jordan that things wouldn't be as easy as she thought they'd be.

"The host?" Jordan repeated. There were so many other much more important questions they should be asking, like who would be prime advertisers, and how would they penetrate their core audience demographic targets. Questions they'd ask, if they were interested. Was Evelyn just throwing her a line? Was she drowning? Was this a prelude to no? But, unfazed, she listed a litany of well-known camera-facing personalities. Anyone would be glad to helm a Jordan Armstrong show. She'd generated hundreds of millions of dollars over the course of her career in advertising revenue, maybe even hit a billion.

"Hmmm . . ." Strangely, Evelyn seemed far less than satisfied with the answer. While "hmmm" wasn't a proper word, it was as much of a response as any, and Jordan knew it. Something about her pitch was unconvincing and Evelyn was trying to convey that to Jordan—she hadn't sold the room. They were humoring her, according her the respect her long career and experience had earned her. This wasn't what she'd come for. She wanted them to recognize the value in the concept she'd brought forth, and more important, the value in addressing the audience this concept was for.

Jordan leaned down and placed her fingertips on the table in front of her. She had no hesitation to meet each one of the executives straight in the eye, Evelyn too. Nobody was going to bullshit her in a meeting. Not like this. She'd been here too many times, charged with the same kind of decision-making. She'd brought them a great idea, but if they didn't get it, then they didn't get it.

"How about you tell me what you're thinking," Jordan said, looking straight at Evelyn now.

Evelyn shifted, looking much less comfortable than she had earlier. She cleared her throat and then seemed to find her grounding. "Well, Jordan, what I think we need to do is circle up on this on our end to discuss and—"

"Ev, let's not do this." Jordan cut Evelyn off quickly. She knew where it was headed. She'd been in five meetings prior and the responses had been similar. Tepid. Perfunctory. Any warmth in the room was for Jordan herself, but not for her pitch. It was already obvious that was the case here too. "Listen, if you like the pitch," Jordan continued, "then say so. And if you don't like it, then say that too. If you're going to pass on this, then I'd like to hear that now, in the room. Let's not waste each other's time. You can be straightforward with me."

Tension thickened the air in the room. Jordan could feel it herself but made no sign to show it. She wanted them to know that she meant business and didn't need to be babied. She'd been on the other side of that table. Even held the position of each person who sat across from her. Hell, she'd even been the executive that these executives would need to seek approval from if they *did* decide they were interested. Evelyn looked unsure, and the others shifted uncomfortably. Surely they hadn't expected confrontation, and maybe thought that she, like everyone else they saw daily, would simply accept their soft-balled rejection

and slink out of the room just glad to have had an audience. But she was Jordan *Motherfucking* Armstrong, and that wasn't what time it was. So, she decided to turn up the heat.

"I've given you all the reasons for why this show and why now. You know me and you know my reputation. So I can't imagine what your hesitation could be. Or, actually, I can. You're probably thinking, *Is there a market for this?* And let me answer that question for you *again*, in numbers. Black women are the rocket fuel driving the growth of a \$1.8 trillion power base of Black consumer spending. Our hair alone makes billionaires. We aren't just an economy, we are the economy, the fastest growing segment of entrepreneurs, degree holders, and the biggest opportunity this country has to increase its GDP, and that's according to Goldman Sachs."

Jordan was getting her wind now, but Evelyn cleared her throat and spoke up. Haltingly, she said, "Um . . . Jordan, it's not about the numbers. To be frank, and I think I can speak for all of us on the network side . . ." Evelyn turned to her left and to her right, indicating her own power in the room, and then continued, "What you haven't told us is why should we *care*? Why will our viewer care?"

Jordan's voice caught in her throat. On the one hand, it was the most substantive feedback she'd received all day. On the other, it was a swift jab to the gut that she hadn't expected. A weakness in her armor for sure. *Care? Why should they care?* If this had come from the white male executive, she would have gone off twenty ways from Sunday. They would be peeling him off the conference room paneling for weeks to come. *What? You don't care about Black women? The saviors of democracy? The keepers of culture? The purveyors of style, the titans of industry, the champions of education? The hardest-working, baddest bitches to have ever had to hold a country up by their carefully manicured fingertips? You*

*ought to give ALL the FUCKS*, she thought. But across from her, the person speaking wasn't a white person; it was *Evelyn*, someone she'd mentored and helped put in position, a sistah who was smart as fuck. *Okay, Ev, I see you, you're speaking for them.* Jordan took a sharp breath in through her nose. She straightened her shoulders and made sure the waves of her hair were cascading as they should across the shoulders of her tailored blazer. And then she chose her response.

"You know what? Since the answer to that question isn't already crystal clear, I understand that this is not the right home for this project. But thank you for the time today."

Jordan stood and began to gather her personal items. She slid her tablet into her Hermès bag and her phone next to it. By the time the others stood up, she was already across the room, ready to shake their hands. Jordan held Evelyn's gaze for just one beat longer than she usually would before continuing. "It was *fantastic* to see you all again."

She delivered her cordial goodbyes, with special effort, and with that, Jordan *Motherfucking* Armstrong left the building.

At least, she'd intended to, as quickly as possible. But as she pressed the elevator button down once again, she heard her name being called. She turned to see Evelyn walking as quickly as her stilettos would allow, scuttling down the carpeted hallway.

"Jordan," she called out, waving. "I'm so glad I caught you," Evelyn said, pulling her to the side. Jordan allowed herself to be led, even as the elevator door opened for the trip she would have taken down for the quickest escape. "Jordan, I didn't want you to leave thinking I'm not on your side here. I am," she said, touching her arm.

"Then what was that?" Jordan asked.

Evelyn shifted and met her eyes. "Look, I know I don't need to tell you what it's like. But it's gotten so much worse since you

left. I go in to get a budget and I'm asked about social media numbers, platforms, existing audience, all kinds of things we never had to think about. But now it's all the higher-ups care about. I was just asking you to give me some ammo, Jordan, something to take up a level and make this undeniable on their terms. Give me a host, a story, something that I can tie this to. That makes it clear that if we miss this, we're missing a moment. I miss you, J. I'd love to be working with you on something like this. But just give me something I can work with?" She looked like she was pleading, sincere for sure. At least they'd gotten down to real talk and not that empty humoring that had been a waste of her afternoon.

"I got you, Ev," Jordan replied. "Let me think on it and I'll get back to you."

"It's a great idea, Jordan. If anyone can make this happen, you can."

As the two women hugged, Jordan wondered just how true that was.

Just minutes later, stuck in afternoon city traffic, Jordan sat in the back of a black Surbarban thinking back over the day. The last meeting hadn't gone as expected, which was only a minimal perturbation relative to now, however. Horns were already blaring, and she could feel the tension of her driver radiating throughout the vehicle, reaching her all the way in the back seat. A sprinkling of light rain started, creating tiny halos of fog around each drop that hit the window. Reminding herself of better weather at home, she whispered a tiny prayer of quiet thanks to be heading back to Los Angeles on the next flight out that same day.

"Don't worry, Ms. Armstrong," the driver said, turning slightly toward her while stopped on Second Avenue. "We should be in good timing for your flight." And then without

waiting for her response, he went back to quietly cursing to himself at the other drivers.

Jordan eased back into the crinkling polished leather of her seat and let her eyes close, thinking back to the day's events. She'd arrived with so much excitement and a perfected pitch, ready to deliver her idea into the hands of the ideal broadcast partner. She'd come armed with the research, the stats, the well-rehearsed responses to anticipated questions. But it hadn't landed. She sighed. *This was a stupid idea, right?* What was she thinking trying to pitch a new show idea with a new format, a new concept for a decidedly Black female audience, to a mainstream network? She knew better.

Evelyn felt it would be too tough of a sell and was trying to make Jordan focus on things that were low concept but tended to create confidence for the higher-ups. A social media influencer host with five million followers. A disgraced celebrity who needed a comeback opportunity. Or another Oprah. That was how they thought: just point me in the direction of what's already working, what's been done but give me different wrapping. That wasn't this idea. *I just need to stay in my lane . . .* Jordan thought. It had been Harper who'd convinced her in the first place to try something new.

"You started leaning into your creativity with *From the Culture*," he'd said, referencing the show centering four Black women chopping it up about the news. It had been her brainchild and her idea to feature Shelby. The memory brought a smile to her face and Harper's voice floating back to her. "This is your lane," he'd said. "Lean into your creativity." That was how the idea for this show started. Yes, the original purity of it. Jordan believed in this new idea the same way she'd believed in *From the Culture*. Wellness was a long time coming. Over many conversations, Harper encouraged her, feeding into her creativ-



ity. They were bouncing ideas off each other, dreaming like the college kids they were when they met at Westmore. That's how she knew it was real—the ease, free flowing, no pressure. Maybe it was just the comfort of having Harper back in her life, even from three thousand miles away.

When she did share her dreams with him, it always seemed like they landed in fertile ground for the seeds to grow. She had the urge to call him. Being back in the Apple, it seemed like there were memories of him hidden around every corner. Like that day he was being honored at Lincoln Center for *Pieces Of Us*—one of many accolades. He looked like a man who had arrived then. Confident, wise, gracious, and . . . sexy. That had been October 2024. Just six months ago. Countless FaceTimes, texts, email, and phone conversations through the end of the year made it feel as if they had no lag time between their reconnections—despite her move to Malibu and his hermitting to write his masterwork for two years. She was proud of him. The memories made her smile. She picked up her phone. But— *But I'm not fucking with Harper like that right now*, she reminded herself, and motioned to put the phone away. But then it started ringing.

Shelby Taylor-Spivey's fabulous profile picture in all its blond splendor appeared on Jordan's screen, a video call request. Briefly, a spike of apprehension hit as she realized she'd told no one, not even Shelby, that she was doing this day of meetings in New York. Her plan was to slip into the city and slip back out before anyone knew the difference. Of course Shelby would hunt her down, her intuition on overdrive. Jordan considered not accepting the call, letting it go to voicemail, but then Shelby would call back, and again, especially if she wanted something. *Might as well pick up*. But she selected the option of voice only and left the camera off.

"Hey, Shelby," Jordan said breezily into the receiver.

"You're in town, aren't you?" Shelby levied her good-natured accusation.

*How did she know that?* Jordan wondered, swiveling her head to look out of the tinted windows and into neighboring cars.

"And before you answer that," Shelby continued, "I can hear the horns in the background. The sounds of New York traffic are like my lullaby. So, you might as well come clean and turn on the camera." Reluctantly, Jordan hit the button to activate her camera, revealing a well-coiffed Shelby in the backdrop of her airy Manhattan penthouse living room. "Um hum, I knew it," Shelby said, barely cracking a smile.

"It was just a quick trip," Jordan protested half-heartedly. "Just for a few meetings. I'm already headed back to the airport now."

Shelby's face crinkled. "You're *leaving*?! Why would you do that? Candace's fiftieth birthday dinner is tomorrow." And then, as if for emphasis, she added, "Everyone's going."

"Since when are you hyped to go to Candace's birthday?"

"First, it's not just any birthday. It's her fiftieth. And . . . we're close now. Of course we're going. And you're in town? So, you should be there too. I'm going to tell them to add one more . . ."

"Shelby, no, I have to get back." Jordan knew that this wasn't nearly enough to stop the tide.

"For what? Don't act like you have to go to work. And if you did, you can move any meeting. You're Jordan *Motherfucking* Armstrong. Tell them to turn the car around and head back uptown."

Jordan sighed. "Shelby, we're stuck in traffic, my flight is in less than two hours. I'm going back to Los Angeles."

"Nonsense. Change your flight. The city isn't the same with-

out you. Come on, Jordan. We want to see you. Stay here at the townhouse. We just got back from Amagansett, but we still have plenty of room here.” Jordan laughed a bit. *Still have plenty of room?* Shelby and Quentin’s return to the city from their Hamptons palace probably did feel like downsizing. And yet, their city home had more bedrooms than Shelby could enter in a week. With just one child—who was in college—*why did they need all that space?* Jordan wondered.

Shelby continued her pitch. “We’re good for excellent wine and top-tier gummies. You can’t tell me you won’t have a good time.”

“Fine,” Jordan said. Shelby was unrelenting anyway. “Let me see if I can move some things around.”

“Really?” On the screen, Shelby’s face looked genuinely surprised.

“Yes, I will *think* about it.”

Shelby narrowed her eyes. “Hmm . . . you’re lying. But *I love you* for humoring me.” She trailed off with a small giggle to herself. Jordan could only smile. Shelby was a trip, always. “Seriously though, I’d really like to see you. I miss you all the way out there on the left coast. I want you here.” Jordan was touched by Shelby’s rare showing of vulnerability. She started to feel swayed. “And Harrrperrrr’s going to be there.”

Jordan snapped back to attention. “Since when do I set my schedule around Harper?” she quipped.

“Oh, you are so full of shit.” Jordan could only laugh. Shelby knew her.

“Just think about it, okay? Ugh, I’m done being mushy and soft. It’s making my skin sag.”

“Okay, Shelby, I’m hanging up now.”

“Just do think about it, though, okay? Love you! K! Bye!”

Jordan managed to hang up with only a thin commitment.

And she was thinking, just as she said she would. But she was thinking about Harper and how long it had been since they'd actually talked. *January? No, before the new year. Sooo, was that two, three months ago?* The last real conversation had been about some rando he was talking about taking to Lance's New Year's Eve party. After that, their texting had slowed to one-to-two-word responses: Hit you back, TTYL, Happy New Year, check out this article . . . Regardless, a real conversation had been a while ago. Too long. Too long to know what to expect tomorrow evening. *What if he brings another rando date?* Terrible. And then being forced to sit next to him all night, or worse, across from him with . . . whomever . . . That was something she was going to have to unpack, again, in therapy. She looked at her calendar; her next appointment with Dr. Clark was scheduled for tomorrow.

"Still headed to JFK, Ms. Armstrong?" The driver turned back slightly, awaiting her response while the traffic light overhead burned red.

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**MALCOLM D. LEE** is a writer, director, and producer whose directorial work includes his critically acclaimed feature film debut, *The Best Man*, as well as *Girls Trip*, *Night School*, and *The Best Man: The Final Chapters*.

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**JAYNE ALLEN** is the author of the bestselling *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* novel series and *The Most Wonderful Time*.



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