

# BLACK GIRLS MUST DIE EXHAUSTED **A**

## Letter to Book Clubs

Dear Reader,

*Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* started as a very limited-edition book that excited an exclusive community of beta readers so much that it inspired more than 1,000 reviews, 776 five-star ratings, and hundreds of written recommendations. When the series became part of a rare and exciting four-book relationship with my publisher, Harper Perennial, I had the dream experience of working with my amazing editor to compile all of the comments, conversations, and recommendations to put together a final edition of this very special story that is now available to anyone looking for a great read.

Set in Los Angeles, my debut novel, *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*—the first in a planned trilogy—has been called “Sex and the City meets Blackish.” The story centers on a Black female protagonist, Tabitha Walker, who is attempting to “have it all” when sudden complications of adulthood force her to deal with the weighty layers of womanhood in a novel way. In the process, she learns that her “checklist” life has made her exhausted and she’s spurred to reframe her dreams. In the midst of her challenges, a colorful and complex cast of characters comes to her aid, including her two best friends and her grandmother, a white woman who has had to come to her own understanding of how race affected the generations of the blended Walker family. The story is an entertaining vehicle to explore the issues of relationships, mixed-race families, fertility challenges, mental health, impostor syndrome, and the timely considerations of how race is experienced in our current racial reckoning.

This is a great, relatable read for book clubs, as the subject matter intersects with many of the contemporary issues that readers may confront in their own lives. As so much of *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* relates to friendship and the power of community, it is so fitting to be experienced that way.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* and recommend it to your friends and book clubs. I could not be more thankful for your support and help in furthering this work and the important conversations, community, and connections it has been fostering. I hope we get the opportunity to one day meet in person!

If you do decide on *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* as a selection, please feel free to send me a note. Schedule permitting, I would be more than happy to join your meeting!

All my very best,



Jayne Allen



# BLACK GIRLS MUST DIE EXHAUSTED Discussion Questions

**1.** I started writing *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* in early 2017, amid an environment when the discussion of race in America had been very much pushed to the forefront of our collective consciousness. One of the challenges that I presented to myself while writing was to tell a story that included the layer of a realistic depiction of the contemporary day-to-day experience of race in America from a Black female perspective. For Tabby, one aspect of her experience of race is embodied in the fear experienced when pulled over by Officer Mallory. What did you think of her reaction? What did you think of Officer Mallory's reaction? Marc tells Tabby that she should not feel threatened when approached by a police officer because she is a woman, rather than a man. Do you agree with Marc?

Were there any other experiences of race that you identified with or related to in the book? Which ones? Have you ever thought how you personally experience race? Are there examples that you can cite?

**2.** Early on in the story, Tabby learns that the word she's been living is "exhausted." It comes as a surprise, given that she thought, by living out her "checklist" life, she would be fulfilled. From the point of her realization, the story unfolds as she tries to change that word. What word would describe the life you're currently living? If that's not the word you imagine for yourself, what would you most want that word to be?

**3.** Part of the beauty of Tabby and Granny Tab's relationship is the closeness and strength of love that they share that allows them to talk about anything. Have you ever been asked what it feels like to experience life from your racial perspective? Have you ever asked anyone else? What do you imagine you'd say? What do you imagine someone of a different race would say? Would your response change based on the nature of the relationship you had with the person in discussion with you?

**4.** Tabby, Lexi, and Laila spend a bit of time over drinks discussing some of their experiences related to the intersectionality of race and gender. They seem to agree on the feeling that they have to choose one over the other, and protections and willingness to discuss different views fail most often when the topic of race comes up more than gender. What are your thoughts?

**5.** Initially, in her desperation to have a child, Tabby goes down a path of questionable decision-making. What if she had become pregnant with Marc's "NBA baby"? What do you think Marc would have done?

**6.** Does your employer's health care plan cover fertility treatments like IVF? Do you think that it should or should not?

**7.** What kind of similarities did you identify between Marc's and Tabby's fathers? Did you think that any aspect of Tabby's relationship with her father was reflected in her relationship with Marc? If so, how? Did you identify any similarities between Rob and Marc?

**8.** Which friend are you: Tabby, Lexi, or Laila? Are you a Granny Tab or a Ms. Gretchen?

**9.** In the course of their breakup, Marc attempted to explain himself to Tabby. What did you think about Tabby's reaction? Would you have reacted similarly or differently? If differently, how so?

**10.** The role of friendship/communion is a theme woven throughout the story. What do you rely on your friends for?

**11.** Tabby has some challenges relating authentically as herself to her work environment. Ultimately, she finds a way to make an advantage out of her unique perspective. Can you relate? How so? Are there similar opportunities for you in your own work environment?

**12.** Tabby, her mom, and her friends often found themselves with a drink in hand, both to celebrate and to commiserate or contemplate. What are some ways that you choose to celebrate?

**13.** By the end of the book, the title *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* has taken on several meanings. What has it meant for you throughout your experience? When you first came across the book? While reading? At the end? What is your takeaway from the novel?



# TABITHA'S LOS ANGELES: **Key Locations from the Book**

I've been a resident of Los Angeles for nearly twenty years. Second to my hometown of Detroit, Los Angeles is at the top of my list of cities I know and love. I imagined that Tabby would also have a love for her city, having returned to work there after graduate school with a coveted reporter position in a major market. I had a wonderful time building in the energy and essence of some of the landmark locations in LA that Tabby and her friends would be sure to visit. I hope you enjoyed the virtual experience.

Modern technology allows for you to visit almost any place from the comfort of your home or office via Google Maps, so perhaps you'd like to go on a virtual visual tour of Tabby's version of LA. I'll give you the locations from the book and as a group, you'll be able to see them on Google Maps (just search the name at [maps.google.com](https://maps.google.com)). Hope you enjoy!

## **View Park Neighborhood, Los Angeles**

View Park is a historic neighborhood in Los Angeles with scenic streets lined with palm trees up and down its rolling hills. Tabby and Alexis were both children in that neighborhood, and Alexis secured a home there for her own family. Lucky Alexis is a realtor; she must have gotten in on good timing before the prices skyrocketed! There are lovely homes of all sizes, as well as parks and walking paths. There are also famous former and current residents such as Tina Turner, Ray Charles, Issa Rae, Loretta Devine, and Bebe Moore Campbell.

## **University of Southern California**


USC is where Tabby met her bestie, Laila, when they were both students. The USC campus sits right in the center of the city and is just minutes from downtown LA. The campus is gorgeous, and you can take a virtual tour right from Google Maps.

## **Little Door Restaurant**

The Little Door is a fabulously quaint French restaurant located in West Hollywood. It's known for its gorgeous romantic décor and ambience, and if you're ever invited for a date there, prepare to be impressed. I can't wait for you to see the pictures for yourself and compare to what you imagined while reading!

## **NoMad Hotel**

The NoMad Hotel, located in downtown Los Angeles, is in a historic building, originally constructed in the 1920s. Along with many other buildings that were constructed around the same time—during the city's "golden age"—you'll still see the art deco influences in the architecture. It is just gorgeous to visit, and the dining options are simply fantastic. No wonder Tabby and Laila picked that spot for their "NBA baby" recap of bad decisions over bubbles!





### **Fig & Olive**

Fig & Olive at Melrose Place now lives only in our imaginations, within the pages of BGMDE, and in the incredible photos that preserve its memory. The restaurant itself has closed, but you can still virtually visit the site of Lexi's epic birthday party and imagine were Rob turned over the keys to her over-the-top gift.

### **71Above Restaurant**

Say what you want about Marc Brown as a boyfriend, but he sure did pick some spectacular venues for heartbreaking conversations! The restaurant that he takes Tabby to, I modeled after the real-life 71Above Restaurant located in downtown LA. It is perched seventy-one floors aboveground inside the US Bank tower and offers absolutely spectacular panoramic views of the glistening city lights below and as far as you can see beyond. Prepare to be dazzled, whether by the photographs or if you get a chance to visit in person!

### **Post & Beam**

It felt so special to be able to bring the wonderful energy that is Post & Beam restaurant into this story. It sits right next to View Park in the bordering shopping area, and serves as the local go-to restaurant for Tabby and Alexis. I've been to Pot & Beam countless times to celebrate everything from a friend visiting from out of town, to my own birthday, to just the end of the week, or a long day with Happy Hour. The warmth of the ambiance and staff in BGMDE is just as welcoming as it is in real life.



# THE BLACK GIRLS MUST DIE EXHAUSTED **Playlist**

Visit the BGMDE Spotify playlist: <https://bit.ly/BGMDEPlaylist>

BGMDE is a love letter: to women—especially black women and culture—as well as to the entire city of Los Angeles, where I’ve lived for nearly two decades. This playlist is its own love letter and an attempt to capture the emotion and spirit of the BGMDE story in an entirely different way with timeless hits that I’m sure you’ll enjoy.

- “To Live & Die in L.A.” — 2Pac
- “Party” — Beyoncé (featuring Andre 3000)
- “Best Life” — Cardi B (featuring Chance the Rapper)
- “I Am Not My Hair” — India.Arie
- “My Boo” — Hitman’s Club Mix – Ghost Town DJs
- “Classic Man” — Jidenna (featuring Roman GianArthur)
- “Weak” — SWV
- “Drunk in Love” — Beyoncé (featuring Jay-Z)
- “Black Mermaid” — Esthero
- “Yearning for Your Love” — The Gap Band
- “Let It Burn” — Jazmine Sullivan
- “Lies” — En Vogue (featuring Debbie T.)
- “I Bet” — Ciara
- “Daddy Lessons” — Beyoncé (featuring The Chicks)
- “Work” — Rihanna, Drake
- “Make it Happen” — Mariah Carey
- “Not Gon’ Cry” (from *Waiting to Exhale*) — Mary J. Blige
- “Who Can I Run To” — Xscape
- “Missing You” — Brandy, Tamia, Gladys Knight, Chaka Khan
- “Anytime You Need a Friend” — Mariah Carey
- “Count on Me” (from *Waiting to Exhale*) — Whitney Houston, CeCe Winans
- “Golden” — Jill Scott
- “To Be Young, Gifted, and Black” — Nina Simone
- “Before I Let Go” — Beyoncé





# JAYNE ALLEN'S **Book** **Recommendations**

As a busy person, I love a great book that can do it all! Whether it's fiction or nonfiction, I want something that transports me away to another place where I can enjoy, examine, interpret, experience, and come back with more than I started with in my own life. In the books listed below, I've gotten that experience: an enriching enjoyment that made reading feel less like a guilty pleasure and more like self-care and personal development, no matter the genre.

## ***Black Girls Must Be Magic, the follow up to Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* by Jayne Allen**

Of course, I recommend the next installment of Tabby's journey! I am really loving the opportunity to explore how she is growing and pushing herself past the limits of everyday courage. She has new reasons to live authentically, and I love seeing her find her way. I'm also secretly rooting for Marc—maybe he'll surprise us!

## ***Seven Days in June and The Perfect Find* by Tia Williams**

I adore how Tia Williams effortlessly weaves in the freshest pop culture references seamlessly into a riveting story filled with people I'd want to know. She brings a complexity to romance stories I need to make it feel like I'm reading so much more than just a fantasy.

## ***Beach Read and The People We Meet on Vacation* by Emily Henry**

Emily Henry is a great storyteller. She takes us on a trip with such a clear sense of destination and location, but also through the inner worlds of her characters. I really love that it's possible to get both depth and the "happily ever after" of romance in unexpected journeys with imperfect people.

## ***What Passes as Love and Nappily Ever After* by Trisha R. Thomas**

I've been a fan of Trisha R. Thomas since she gave us the classic book *Nappily Ever After*. That novel so beautifully represents the journey familiar to so many black women as we evolve our relationship with our hair outside the lines of what society has historically deemed "acceptable." *Nappily Ever After* is a contemporary fictional story that seamlessly weaves examination and exploration of societal issues, but keeps a clear focus on the characters and their heart-centered journeys. *What Passes as Love* is an incredible historical novel that kept me up turning pages late into the night. I had to know what happened to Lily in the story of a woman born a slave, but who escapes into another life of supposed freedom by passing as white.

## ***What Kind of Woman* by Kate Baer**

I always say that I view writing as a collaboration between me and the reader. I find it fascinating how words on a page in simple black and white representation can, once unleashed in a reader's mind, form the most



incredible worlds and elicit the deepest-felt emotions. Great poems are able to do this, even in compact form, and I'm in such awe of poets. Kate Baer is a contemporary poet whose work I greatly admire. She's managed to capture the entire essence of the current zeitgeist and distill it into powerful words that speak for so many.

### ***T.O.R.N.* by Ampora Yazdani**

I met Ampora and found the treasure that is her book *T.O.R.N.* in the wonderful bookstagram community. This story is a magical realism adventure of a woman whose life is suddenly turned upside down following a kidnapping that awakens her to special abilities she never knew she had. In my reading experience, I was transported into a parallel reality that mixed all of the popular modern concepts of mindfulness, meditation, self-actualization, and more into a high-stakes explosive quest that allowed me to see it all in action. It's so important to me to support independent and self-published authors who are often coming up with the next wave of fresh perspectives and ideas, but missing out on much-deserved exposure. You'd never believe this was a self-published novel, and I can't wait for it to come to life on a big screen.

### ***Crazy Rich Asians* by Kevin Kwan**

For sure, Kevin Kwan is my writing spirit animal. I love everything about his descriptive style, colorful characters, and showcasing of culture. I was deeply inspired by *Crazy Rich Asians* and really enjoyed the human story that was given such a strong cultural filter and perspective.

### ***In Every Mirror She's Black* by Lqlá Ákinmádé Åkerström**

I had the pleasure of moderating a launch event for *In Every Mirror She's Black* and I was so excited to meet the author of such an engaging read. Lqlá Ákinmádé Åkerström is an accomplished travel writer and photographer, and with this book, she let that skill shine through by taking readers to Stockholm through the story of three women of the African diaspora, all with various connections to a wealthy and mysterious native Swede. I felt like I not only experienced a trip to Sweden, complete with delightful food and cultural descriptions, but I was also deeply enveloped in the human stories told from the perspectives of these three women living the experience of blackness in very different ways.

### ***The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho**

I can't count the number of times I've read *The Alchemist*. The book was certainly an inspiration for me in my crafting of Tabby's story for *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*. In *The Alchemist*, we see an incredible journey of learning to follow one's heart. In *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*, I wanted to explore what that might look like in the context of contemporary everyday life.

### ***What I Know for Sure* by Oprah Winfrey**

I love all things Oprah, but when I read *What I Know for Sure*, I was so excited to see that some of her journey reflected that of Tabby's as a journalist and reporter. This book is one that I know I'll read over and over again, and will gain new wisdom each time.