

Black Girls Must Die Exhausted by Jayne Allen, in conversation with Lissa Jones on Black Market Reads

Transcript (lightly edited)

Lissa Jones: Like the lead character featured in her new novel *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*, our guest today knows all about living life as a successful African-American woman and self-proclaimed serial entrepreneur. This Harvard law grad is a popular speaker, thought leader, seasoned business executive and noted author who writes fiction under her chosen nom de plume, Jayne Allen. The Detroit native and LA based writer began her career as an attorney in the music industry as an executive at Universal Music Group. She later served as a senior digital strategist and business development executive for Lady Gaga and as an attorney and strategist for Prince whom she credits for teaching her how to truly be an artist.

Join me for this exciting conversation.

Audio Bump: For Black writers and all their readers and audiences who are smart and free-thinking, Black Market Reads is a series of conversations highlighting the Black literary voices of today. Black Market Reads is produced by the Givens Foundation for African American Literature in partnership with iDream.tv

Lissa Jones: Jayne, welcome. I'm so excited to see you and to talk with you today. Thank you for your time.

Jayne Allen: Thank you so much for having me.

Lissa Jones: Absolutely. Let's get right into it. *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*. I thought I knew what that meant before I even began to read the book, but I learned so much more. So, let's start with a synopsis. Yeah, let's talk about the checklist, the checklist for a Black woman in her thirties.

[00:01:45] **Jayne Allen:** Well, we, I do believe live along the societal definitions of what success should equal. And so, for a lot of us, we want a formula. It's going to, we think result in fulfillment, happiness, success, all of those things and survival sometimes just at that base level.

And so, society tells us, okay, here are these things. If you do them, that is going to give you the promised land. And so, we internalize that. And I think especially as Black people and Black women, we do the most at that, that internalization. And we are trying to protect, survive. We don't even get to thriving, we're just in that place.

And that's where the checklist comes. I think so many of us internalize that. And in your thirties, in particular, I'm in my early forties, I believe we just, we were still stuck in that

thinking that the checklist is going to equate to fulfillment and the things that we really want. So, you haven't figured that out yet, but maybe it doesn't.

So that's where it comes from. It's this pressure that we put on ourselves to do the things that we believe externally are going to equate to fulfillment.

Lissa Jones: Hair was on the checklist.

Jayne Allen: Yeah.

Lissa Jones: Yeah. Having an appointment on a Saturday in a Black beauty shop. Okay. Reliable when the electricity is on, this is going to be there, right?

Jayne Allen: Cancellation texts like, oh no,

Lissa Jones: You are through, I mean, girl, you wrecked my whole week. If you can make a cancellation texts on Saturday, right. Yes. Let's talk about hair. You know, it's so central to a Black woman's life, and it's central to your book in talking about hair, both in the way, the character, the main character evolves with her hair.

And in the ways that she finds refuge and difficulty, the beauty shop. Yes. Talk about the incorporation of hair please in *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*.

Jayne Allen: Yes. Well, this book gave me an opportunity to examine my life myself, my culture as a Black woman. And I don't think that we really realize the depth and extent of the culture that we've created and that we live with.

And it's like, when you're a fish, you don't realize that you're swimming in water for what exactly it is. And so that was a beautiful experience for me. And one of the things that I noticed in a lot of contemporary fiction that has representation of Black people in it, you often do not. You see somebody, they have, maybe they have natural hair.

It's like, oh, they're textured hair. But if a Black woman shows up in a workplace with her textured hair, that is a whole book in and of itself, how she got to that place because it is not an automatic, "my natural appearance is acceptable". In fact, society teaches us different.

So, I wanted to unpack that journey. I don't like having to do all of this conforming. I don't want to wear this costume anymore and I want to just be myself. What does that even mean? Part of it is, well, this is how my hair actually grows.

I want to show up in spaces as my authentic self. And this is one of the big obstacles that I'm facing. So that's what Tabby's going through as a Black woman. I think so many of us do

without really thinking about that. It says it's a journey of authenticity and it's a really big element of authenticity.

If you have textured hair, and if you're Black, we are conditioned to believe that we have to alter the texture of our hair to conform and to be successful and to be professional. It's like the antithesis of the definition of what professional. Looks like, or is, and that's, if you really think about that and unpack that that's crazy.

You actually have to change the texture of your hair in very extreme ways, extreme heat, extreme chemical processes, or weaves or whatever it is. Hide it, I mean, what?!? You know, that the way your hair grows, you've been conditioned. We have been conditioned to believe that it is faulty, like faulty.

That's crazy. And so you just start to unpack that and think about that and the weight that, that puts on a, somebody that just from day one, you're told this by society and it's imposed upon you. So what does that journey look like of somebody unpacking that and unburdening themselves of that?

And I thought that was just an important story in and of itself, but the real underlying theme is authenticity, authenticity, and appreciation and celebration of self.

Lissa Jones: I am so excited to be talking to you because now this has just sparked so much thinking. So I dove right into the back of the book. We probably should go back a little bit to go forward.

Why don't you tell us a little bit about Tabby, a little bit about the book. What do you want listeners to know for context as you and I continue our conversation?

Jayne Allen: Well, Tabby is a, is a human being and she is living the experience of womanhood. She's a woman and she is a 33 year-old woman, she's a Black woman.

She's living the experience of blackness in society in her way, from her perspective. And she has been living this checklist. She's been doing the most, like all of the things that she thought she's supposed to be doing. And she has this enviable career as a local news reporter. She thinks she has it all figured out, you know, relationships, she's got a situationship that could lead to more.

And so, she's put the family thoughts in the back burner and is comfortable in that space. And then all of a sudden, we meet her on her basically worst day, she finds out she has a reproductive health issue and infertility issue. And it just sends her into a spiral because it just breaks down all of those things that she felt like she had sewn up so tightly.

And so, I had to push this character into getting past. What, you know, the strong Black woman and all of those things that checklists like to get to the human experience and how

she puts herself back together and how she comes to realize that maybe that checklist does not equate to fulfillment.

So that's what the story is. And she goes into this journey with the support of very colorful characters, her friends and family, including her grandmother and her grandmother's best friends. So there is an element of that cross multi-generational experience and perspective that contributes to her journey and her learning.

Lissa Jones: Wow. Thank you. Let's talk about Grammy, right? Gramma Tab. Let's talk about her. She's very complex.

Jayne Allen: Yes.

Lissa Jones: She's also white.

Jayne Allen: Yes. Yes, she is.

Lissa Jones: Let's talk about a Black girl with a white grandmother.

Jayne Allen: I thought that was really important. So, what I wanted to do with this book, it was kind of ambitious, but I wanted to unpack -what is race.

In contemporary times, we talk about it, we just throw these words around, right? We say black, we say Black experience all of this, but what is that? What does that really mean? And what is blackness? And it's, it's an invention, but it's a societal experience. And it's a real experience with real human impact to it.

Sometimes life and death sometimes fulfillment. It has health impacts. It has all these impacts this invention. So, I wanted to unpack what is this invention and from the perspective of human impact of it. And so, you have to take a look at it. And so, the invention of blackness goes hand in hand with the invention of whiteness.

And I wanted to have a character that could show this, but from a perspective, of real family and love where these characters have a space that they can really talk, but they can really examine this and unpack it. So, the most loving relationship I could think of is a grandparent grandchild because the grandparent doesn't have to do the parenting.

Sometimes in circumstances they do. But in this circumstance, they didn't exactly. But she did spend a considerable time living with her grandmother and she's her closest family member because of the complex nature of her family. If you read the book, you'll understand all of the things that happened in her family.

And so, I wanted to create this intimacy of relationship between the two of them. Just a space of love that I believe in the space of love any conversation can happen. Anything can

happen, any growth can happen. And so I wanted to support Tabitha in that way with this character, Granny Tab, and to be able to examine her experiences of Black woman, with someone who sees her and who has her own perspective and how the invention of race has, um, affected her and her experience because she married a Black man and her son is mixed race, but Black experience life as a Black man and then her granddaughter as well. So that affects her in her own way. So, I thought it was important to give her an opportunity to speak about her perspective.

Lissa Jones: The complexity of the characters, you have done something that so many people have failed to do when they're writing about us, but they're not for us and they're not us. And that is to present humanity. We are. Right. Layla. I don't even know if I'm pronouncing anyway, is that correct? Okay. Thank you. And Tabitha and I mean, all of them are unique in their own, right.

And each of the women, each of the three women in the relationship and the friendship are all unique, but they share this bond of this 9 11 kind of texting and the kind of sisterhood that you get when you're like, girl, I'm up against it and you don't even get to say anything else.

Jayne Allen: Right.

Lissa Jones: Talk to me, please, about the complexity of the characters and your thoughtfulness about making them so complex and about the sisterhood that you created between those three women.

Jayne Allen: Thank you. Well, I think a lot of times is artists and, and Black artists trying to reflect the Black experience. What we're often asserting is our humanity.

And that's what it boils down to. Off most times that we're just trying to say, I too, am human. I am having a human experience. This is what it looks like. We tried various vehicles of expressing that, and this was my go at it to say, these are human beings. This is a human story and society would condition us to believe otherwise and otherwise these people, but no, yes, this is a Black woman living this story, but she's living a journey of authenticity. That is a human drain. She's feeling pain. She's feeling elation. She's feeling support. She's feeling loved. Those are human emotions.

And so, what I really tried to do is get down to the core base level. Human experience unpacking all of this, getting past the labels, not using shorthand and not using labels, but going down and, and, and letting you feel and letting her feel, what this experience is like. So, so much of that I taught, I thought about and thinking about race, oftentimes the, the things that we go through that are, are difficult, the challenges. What are the things that counteract those challenges. It's relationships. It's laughter it's love, in spite of all these the celebration of this book. In spite of all of this we sparkle, we are funny. We are beautiful. We are sister girls. We are. Friends and lovers and partners and parents and all of these things so beautifully in spite of the weight of, of what experiences might be.

So, I wanted to celebrate that, and I thought the best way to show that is a real authentic sister girl kind of relationship. With her best friends. It's so imperfect. They are so imperfect. I mean, their friendships are in perfect. They're all hiding something, but they still come together, and they still ride for each other.

And I think that is just really a beautiful thing to see, especially in its imperfection. So that was important for me too.

Lissa Jones: I wish when people are listening to this podcast, I'm sure they're going to hear your smile, but you have such a loving aura thing and yes. When would you do us a favor?

Would you do a reading? You choose whatever you like for us to hear. And I will sit back and close my eyes and soak it up. And when we come back, I want to talk about authenticity. And I want to talk about the compassion with which you treat your characters. I would imagine you are a loving human in all of your relationships and you, you bring joy wherever you go, but you're certainly doing that for me today.

[00:14:37] **Jayne Allen:** Well, thank you so much. So, this section I'm going to read from is Tabby talking with her grandmother. And again, her grandmother was white. Tabbies black, but they are just so, um, their relationships just really beautiful and they have this, they can talk to each other about anything. And this was a great thing about using fiction to kind of push the boundaries of where people, most people would stop and fear. Hesitation would not allow us to go into these spaces, but they go past where fear would ordinarily stop a conversation. And so, they go to ask each other. What does it feel like to be the race that society has assigned them? So, in this part, I'm going to read, this is Tabby talking with her grandmother. I'll just read the whole section where she asked her grandmother, what does it feel like to be white and the brown there, then ask her, what does it feel like to be black?

Granny Tab. Can I ask you a silly question? I asked, even though I already knew I could ask my grandmother anything, but this time, what I wanted to know, felt foreign as a thought and strange coming from my lips, what does it feel like to be white? My grandmother absorbed my words, took a deep breath, took off her glasses and squinted just a bit, which told me she was thinking.

Hm. I've asked myself the same question on occasion when I was reminded of it. Most of the time by cruel people. When I was with my son, your father, she said quickly touching my knee. I look at him sometimes and look at me and wonder how we can live in a world that treated the two of us so differently.

When he came from my own body, my skin color changed in the sun too. Just like his, like yours. Just not as dark.. But believe me, I tried, she said with a smile running her pill fingers soothingly across my golden brown arm. I try to think was white, a hair texture, a state of mind. I can never put my finger on it.

Maybe it was just what we were told. It was supposed to be. Because I've never felt white. My grandmother shook her head softly before continuing. So the best I can tell you is that I, as I've experienced it, it's more of a what it's not than what it is. I mean, I get reminded of being a woman all the time, but being white, she brought her hand to her face and gently rubbed her cheek sometimes when there's no friction, no reminder of what she can't do. It feels like a hole. That needs to be filled with something so desperately filled so that there is a something. Your dad, then you, my grandchildren, you have been my greatest something. And I don't know that there is any more than that. We sat still for a moment after that. Both of us contemplating her words.

It was sometime before she spoke again. I never thought to ask it of anyone. Not even your dad whose whole life I watched yours too. I guess I thought I understood from observation and it never occurred to me how silly that might be not to ask and tell just now. I recognize should ask you too. What does it feel like to be Black?

Do you consider yourself Black. I laughed a bit in the answering. I don't think I have much of a choice granny tab. I said with a smile to consider myself Black or not Black. I mean, society just looks at me and sees a Blackwoman, no matter what I have to say. I suppose you're right to Granny Tab said, pensively, how does it feel?

I continue trying to think and still talk. And honestly never considered the question before, not while living it. I can tell you that your thought about it being exhausting. That sounds about right. Sometimes a lot of times it does feel exhausting because everything bad in society is about you, but when it comes to the good nothing is for you.

I feel like I'm not enough too much all at the same time. And then other times being Black feels exhilarating because every good thing that happens feels like a victory, even the small things, because you're constantly reminded that your other so whatever good happened in spite of, so there's celebration.

There's joy. I pause just to think it felt so complicated. I pushed myself to find more and the deeper parts hidden in the folds of my spirit, the secrets and emptiness is there too, a different kind from what you described the need for validation, maybe to be seen approved of, to matter as an individual, not just a monolith and a desire to know that if I do follow all of the rules, that I get the promise on the other side, just like anyone else. And by anyone else, I meet anyone else who was white.

Lissa Jones: If that does not draw people to you and your book, that was the author. Jayne Allen reading from her work *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*. That was so beautiful. Thank you.

Jayne Allen: Thank you.

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authors you love. Visit us at blackmarketreads.com. Your opinion counts. Let us know what you think. Share us with your friends rate and review us on apple podcast.

Lissa Jones: Let's talk about authenticity. You talk about authenticity a lot just today, but also the idea of authenticity and imposter syndrome sort of are held for me in the same place.

The idea that we have to change our hair in order to be professional, that we have to be the closer to white, the better we are aligned with white people. The more valuable we are in the crazy man. Yeah, that that creates that you have to almost take your wig off when you get home and then sort of imposter syndrome in all the secrets.

Everybody's carrying a secret, but everybody's trying to keep up an imposter kind of vibe. Like even among their friends. Did you intend for us to interrogate the idea of imposter syndrome alongside authenticity?

Jayne Allen: I did. And I, intended to have, the reader do it from a human perspective. So, whether you're living the experience of Blackness or living the experience of whiteness or somewhere in between, what you can understand is the concept of authenticity and feeling like you either have to be an imposter or are an imposter in the spaces that you're in. And that is the Black experience. I think a lot of times people will say, oh, I can't relate to the Black experience.

Yes, you can. It is the same thing. It's a human experience. So putting words to it from a general lexicon, When you, when you have a Black hair texture, for example, you have to straighten your hair to go to work, to be feel that it's presentable or to not have your professional opportunities diminished, that is an authenticity issue. That is an imposter syndrome issue. That is a self-esteem issue and a stressful experience, so we can use those general, less common words and you, and anyone can relate to that drawing upon their own life experiences. Maybe it's something a bit different in how it appeared, but the feeling is the same.

And so, what this boils down to is empathy. How do we develop empathy for one another? When it seems like on the surface, we're not the same, but the reality is in the inside. Yes, we are. And so, the women and, with Tabby, whether it's at work, I really try my best to break it down as far as I could go based on what I know about human nature and people and having observed people. I've talked to people and spent a lot of time asking a lot of questions, how does that break down past just the surface of things.

And I think we all do put on a mask because we want to be accepted, because we want to protect our vulnerable parts because, we may not think we have the strength to go into the space that Tabby and her grandmother showed us, but we do. So that was what I wanted to show that even imperfectly.

And I think as the book continues, you see all the imposter parts, they break down because they have to, they're just not sustainable. And what who's past that, like what, when the mask drops who's there. And I think that was the fun part to show and to write and to get into and explore in this book.

So that, that's why you see the complex relationships I just think it's, it's just a human experience. It's, it's what happens to all of us. And I thought what I could try to do with this book is break it down and get us past there so that we can see each other. And then maybe when you close the book and we'll, you'll still think there's someone there's a human being behind what I'm observing, um, even in strangers or people closer or close to you and you, and maybe push past where you would normally go to find that the treasures and the gifts that that person has for you.

Lissa Jones: Wow. I'm a little older than you. And I don't know if I've dropped all of my imposter syndrome, but I care a lot less about keeping up the masks.

Jayne Allen: Yes. I'm getting there. I'm getting there.

Lissa Jones: I'm hearing that it's a process and I'm not sure I haven't given up all my masks, so I won't be able to say that. Why did you think your book would never make it to hardcover?

Jayne Allen: Oh, my goodness. Well, when I first wrote this book, it was an experience.

So, it was my first time writing fiction. I wrote some nonfiction and I self-published and I just thought, okay, I thought when I went to the gatekeeper for a manuscript like this *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* and having a Black female protagonist that I was going to encounter bias.

And I did, so I'd written this novel, a lot of my friends, busy professionals, whose opinions are trusted and, and very expensive in the world they inhabit told me, honestly, that this was a book they really enjoyed reading. They read it quickly. They finished it. They told me all of the things that I was looking for and trying to make sure that I had written something really good and that was important to me if it's 'gonna have Black girls on it. And I wanted to make sure that it was a really solid representation. So, I felt confident when I took it out to try to find an agent the first time.

And the feedback I got was, this character's not likable. We don't like her, but we like her grandmother or, I can't connect to the story. Or it's not relatable and it wasn't that your writing's bad. Or this wasn't a good story or it's not well-written it was about my protagonist. That was the feedback I got. And so, what I realized is that that's a bias reaction and it's a projection on behalf of the market.

What these people believe about readers, that's not what I believed about readers. And I wrote a human story and that the human beings, not everybody, but look, it doesn't need to

be everybody, to make a book successful. So, I believe that there are enough people connected into their humanity that can relate to this story. That's a human story. Yes. It's starring a Black protagonist, but I thought it was really important to center a Black woman to teach us about authenticity, who better than a Black woman finding her way through all of this, into her own authenticity to teach us all about authenticity. So, I just stood by that. I was very sure about that. And so, I put out the book on my own. I decided to give the readers the last word on this. Cause I was like, no, I'm not shoving this into a drawer. I am going to give the readers the last word, because I believe differently from what was said to me. And I put the book out and it wound up attracting it's people and its community, and it's just been a worldwide community. Last year. I spent a lot of time, speaking with readers across five continents of all complexion shades, societal classifications, races, ethnicities, and what was so beautiful and encouraging, was that people saw Tabitha as a human being.

People learn lessons from Tabitha and I do mean people. And, it was just an incredible experience. It was a self-published version, but coming off of that, I wound up being introduced to the woman who would become my agent. She got it. She set up a call with me, I told her my story.

She's like, I get it. So, this is unconventional, like for a publisher to come in and pick up something that has been self-published or has already been in the market, but she's like, the communities there, she said the stories there, this should be. There. And so, I'm going to, I can't promise anything, but I'm going to try.

And that was all I needed for someone to just believe and try and she did more than try. She, she came back with a four-book deal with Harper Perennial HarperCollins. We have four books together. The trilogy of *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* in the two follow-on books. And a standalone book. So it was, it's really a testament to the power of community.

But up until that point, I just did not expect that there would be a hard cover of an audio book. But the readers were like, well, where's the audio book? I am at the end of my resources here. I could not produce all of this stuff. So, to have that and to be able to give that to readers, there's an audio book now, and there's a hard cover, it's beautiful. And it's everywhere. You can go to the airport and get it. I saw it in JFK yesterday. I saw it in LAX. It's in a local bookstores. It's in Target, it's in Barnes and Noble. And now it's in the library.

The second book will be everywhere. You know, that's just a beautiful thing. So I just wanted it to be able to connect with the readers who I believed could connect with this. And so, it's been a real dream.

Lissa Jones: I'm in conversation with author Jayne Allen, the first of her trilogy titled *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* is the focus of our conversation. You are a Black woman in the truest fashion, girl. You would have many styles at the same time. You remind me of Jill Scott. Right? You got so many things going right. You've been described as a serial entrepreneur. You've been described as a comedian. You can describe as all kinds of things.

Girl, how do you describe yourself?

Jayne Allen: I would like to say that I am an artist. And that is the word that I have run from a lot because I started out as a lawyer, and as a lawyer, I would do stand up on the weekends and I would dabble in writing and do all these things. And the one word that I would always hesitate to call myself is an artist and to really understand what that means and what that is. And so now I think in this phase of my life, no matter what I do, I realize that's my art. If I'm doing something in business, I'm creating a company and I'm building it and architecting it, that's art.

That's me being an artist. If I'm writing a novel, that's me being an artist. If I'm painting something or communicating in some way, Expressing a feeling to someone or, or even, trying to uplift somebody. That's me being an artist, that's channeling my gifts through my unique lens and perspective.

So I'm trying to become more fearless in that regard. And I'm working on that every day. So that's how I would describe myself.

Lissa Jones: Ah, just beautiful. You are an artist. Would you do one more reading?

Jayne Allen: Sure.

Lissa Jones: thank you. As you're looking for what you want to read. I just want to tell you that I'm always reminded of Sankofa looking backward to go forward.

Paul Laurence Dunbar, where We Wear the Mask that hides the lies, right? And now you're writing about the same thing, imposter syndrome and it's 2021. And it just strikes me that Black people have been speaking to our experience since we have been able to speak to our experience so that the experience has largely remained unchanged and that we've had to find a life and cultivate something out of this experience in spite of, is a huge, it has huge resonance with me in your book.

Jayne Allen: Thank you. I'm going to read the Note to Reader.

Lissa Jones: Thank you. That's a great idea.

[00:31:53] **Jayne Allen:** This is the very beginning of my book.

*Dear reader. It's not often that a book becomes as much about what happens outside of its pages. As inside of them. **Black Girls Must Die Exhausted** has been birthed by readers, into an ever evolving collaboration of culture, community, fellowship, healing, and important conversations that we're all just beginning to learn how to hold space for, and now you become part of the.*

I want to personally welcome you into this world. As the characters begin to take shape for you and fill out in your mind as to become friends, maybe even family, as you possibly even

*feel compelled to talk back to the pages, just know that you're becoming part of a much larger family, the community of **BGMDE** readers.*

*We are all right here with you. I originally wrote **Black Girls Must Die Exhausted** to show that when you strip away the divides barriers categories and all of the various ways we've learned to separate ourselves. One from another, at our foundation, love is the language that we all speak and the very lifeblood of our existence.*

Love comes in many forms. Self-love, love between friends, familial love, and romantic love among them. In a gorgeously complex life full of challenges. It is tempting to think that struggle somehow makes us unworthy in some way, rather than qualifying us for something greater. We tend to believe that the scars that come when we scrape against the pains of life are anything, but the beauty marks that fortify us.

If you understand that every day is a great triumph of victory over all of the forces that would try to tear you down, then you understand how very important it is to celebrate everything that gives us the courage to keep daring for our greatest selves. This book is my love letter to you, to Black women, to women, and to all those who understand the beauty that comes through struggle and the benefit of doing their own work to heal, to understand, to grow and most importantly, to love more fully.

Lissa Jones: That is the most beautiful letter. Thank you for writing to us. You remind me of the spirit of Lucille Clifton in one I'm a Black woman. I had no role model, right? Just me and somewhere between star shine, instill everything tried to kill me, but I'm still here. So I won. Two more things I'd like to talk about before we go.

Family that you're given by birth by blood, by marriage or breakup, but family that's chosen. It's also family and those things resonate and run through your book. Will you talk to us about that?

Jayne Allen: Well, I think that is so much a part of a call to the cultural experience and we make these ties and I don't think we really examine how sustaining they actually can be. And when I was thinking about this book and I was taking Tabby through all of the drama that a novel entails and requires. It was so wonderful to me to examine how things would tear us down, but yet these relationships and bonds that we create, keep us standing and sustain us and the amazing nature of specially female friendship and even, and those tight bonds, especially amongst Black women is I've experienced it too.

And I have sister girls of all ethnicities that are amazing, amazing people and definitely chosen family for me. And as I examine and think about how women we come to the rescue, no matter what else we're going through. That 911 is like, I need you. They're like, oh, what, where, what do I need to be?

And just show up. So, I wanted to, to really celebrate that because that's just, that's unusual. That's a, that's a miracle. That's amazing that people who have no obligation to you that are

there were strangers at some point in your life, they came into your life and somehow bond was established.

They're willing to put aside whatever, cause they're all carrying something and they're willing to put aside whatever that is and show up for you in your, whatever it is in that way. And so, I think there's just something to celebrate about that, that sister girl connection that, the way that we show up for each other and support each other.

So that was what I went to celebrate. That's part of the celebration. The book is supposed to be a celebration and acknowledgement and a call to adventure, ultimately. And so that was one of the pieces of the celebration. Absolutely.

Lissa Jones: It would be hard to resist celebration, looking at your face and watching your beautiful expressions.

Jayne Allen: It's just, it's marvelous. It is a celebration. And I remind people that play cousins are not a joke in the Black community. They're not a joke. We don't say that, we don't play about our play cousins.

Lissa Jones: We don't play about our play cousins. So people shouldn't talk about our mama or our play cousins.

Jayne Allen: Or play sister.

Lissa Jones: There you go. Don't play with our sister now. That's for true. *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*. Your heart just stops. I think about sometimes that Black women are overtaxed with heart disease because our hearts are broken so many times. And then I read your book and I'm like, maybe our hearts just give out. Will you talk to us about that, what made you decide that that would happen to you?

Jayne Allen: When I thought about this book and what I wanted to do, and I wanted to show and try to encapsulate a vantage point. Just one perspective of the contemporary experience of, of a Black woman authentically. So it really wasn't meant to be about race, but it was, but race is a societal construct that this person is living.

If you experience life as a Black person, as society is imposing all these things on you and there's a human impact. And I thought it was important to show that. And I had to start with myself and the way that I could describe it, especially in 2016 was exhausting. I'm exhausted. And that was when I first came up with the idea of this book.

It was the Hillary Clinton election time, all this stuff about womanhood was coming up. Plus, there was a lot with Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin. I can name far too many names, internalizing that. What is going on here, and you can't turn away from any of it as a Black woman, plus the issues of maternal health outcomes and, reproductive health and just all, disparate health outcomes.

It just, all of these things that are just so very real. And some of them again are life and death. Some of them are, are barriers to fulfillment, all of these things. So, I felt like it needs to be acknowledged. It needs to be. The human impact needs to be acknowledged, not just said as a soundbite or describe, but just what does this do to the spirit of a person and how do you sustain and more than sustain? Cause we're doing more than sustaining. We are sparkling. Where is that coming from? And that was something I really wanted to explore. So, what the title *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* I wanted to just lend perspective. It's not about death. And I think the title, it's a little bit tongue in cheek, it's meant to be.

Like *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted*, with all of this, it'd be end of life. Like when you've lived it all out, it must be, you must be, you're just done, that's where it starts from. And, it's a particular character who makes that observation and says the title of the book.

But what I decided to do was take the title on a journey and change the meaning. And that's a very cultural thing that we take things that aren't always great and make treasures and gems out of them. We change the meaning of words. We change the meaning of a lot.

So, I thought, okay, through story I'm going to change the meaning of this title. And by the time you get to the last page, it is going to be something inspirational. I think that word *exhausted* is something that kind of permeates through for Black women. It's like, woo!

The next time you are exhausted, it's going to mean something different to you. And it's going to be a call to something good. And it's going to be a celebration for you, and it's going to be something that is a reminder that you're going to do more than survive. We're going to thrive. It's a call to that.

So, through the book and through story, that was my intention with this. So, people who read the book and when you get to the end of it, you know what the title means. It's a different meaning.

Lissa Jones: You're absolutely right. It is an entirely different meaning. And the next time somebody says, girl, I'm through, I'm exhausted. I'm going to be able to say, you know what? I got something for you, Jayne Allen's got some for us.

Jayne, I just want to acknowledge one thing. You said Philando Castile's name. And I just want to say we live in the place where Philando Castillo was killed. Not very far from here, and I know his mother.

And so, every single time I'm reading a book and I see his name, I always feel it necessary to acknowledge. Thank you, Jayne. Thank you.

One question we ask of all of our authors because you are so brilliant and you're so beautiful. What are you reading?

Jayne Allen: Well, I just finished reading *Yinka, Where Is Your Husband?* And it's written by a British Nigerian author.

And, it's a cultural take on it's a little bit like kind of Bridget Jonesy a little bit. And, um, but it's done pretty creatively and it's, it's a very culturally authentic take on this woman's journey to get married because her family's freaking out because she's of age where she should be married. And so her family's imposing this on her, but it's really a girl gets herself story. So, I'm all about the girl gets herself story. And the other book I read recently, which I think was phenomenal. I don't normally read historical fiction, but Trisha Thomas who wrote *Nappily Ever After* has historical fiction novel out called, *What Passes as Love* and it is really good.

So, I just really liked that book and it didn't even read like historical fiction to me. It's about a woman who is born a slave, but she could pass for white. And then she ultimately does and winds up marrying into a white family and her secret is there.

But she's living this life and then she becomes a white woman and she has to really determine what is freedom and what's the price for freedom. So, it's such a good story. I just stayed up late at night reading it. I stayed up far later than I wanted to reading that book. So, make sure that's on people's radar too.

Lissa Jones: Well, those are excellent recommendations. We are writing them down. Jayne Allen. This is not the last time you're going to hear from her. She has just made her foray into fiction with *Black Girls Must Die Exhausted* and in a new way, I am happily exhausted. Thank you, Jayne Allen. Thank you for being our guest. And thank you for your marvelous book. I can't wait for book number two.

Jayne Allen: Yes. Book number two is, *Black Girls Must Be Magic*. This is the arc I have for it. So yes, *Black Girls Must Be Magic*. We were in a trilogy journey. So, Tabitha's story has a beginning, middle and end. So, this is February is the second book in the journey

Lissa Jones: Celebrating the month that they want to give Black people though, I celebrate Black History, 12 months a year, February. That's fine. I would tell you it would be delightful if we could welcome you back to Black Market Reads, we'll do our very best.

Jayne Allen: I would love to come back.

Lissa Jones: You're beautiful and you deserve every good thing. I'll be watching you. And I'll be following you on Twitter and whatever else you've got.

Jayne Allen: I appreciate that so much. Thank you for having me.

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The struggle continues.