



"It's not a spoiler to say: love wins." —*PEOPLE*

MAYBE IN ANOTHER LIFE

A NOVEL

TAYLOR
JENKINS REID

AUTHOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

THE SEVEN HUSBANDS OF EVELYN HUGO

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“Taylor Jenkins Reid delivers a seductive twist on the timeless tale of a couple trying to rediscover love in a marriage brought low by the challenges of domestic togetherness. I fell in love with Ryan and Lauren from their passionate beginning, and I couldn’t stop reading as they followed their unlikely road to redemption. Touching, perceptive, funny, and achingly honest, *After I Do* will keep you hooked to the end, rooting for husbands and wives and the strength of true love.”

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“Taylor Jenkins Reid writes with ruthless honesty, displaying an innate understanding of human emotion and creating characters and relationships so real I’m finding it impossible to let them go. *After I Do* is a raw, unflinching exploration of the realities of marriage, the delicate nature of love, and the enduring strength of family. Simultaneously funny and sad, heartbreaking and hopeful, Reid has crafted a story of love lost and found that is as timely as it is timeless.”

—Katja Millay, author of *The Sea of Tranquility*

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MAYBE IN ANOTHER LIFE

~ A Novel ~

TAYLOR JENKINS REID



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*To Erin, Julia, Sara, Tamara, and all of the other women I feel destined to
have met.*

May we know each other in many universes.

It's a good thing I booked an aisle seat, because I'm the last one on the plane. I knew I'd be late for my flight. I'm late for almost everything. That's why I booked an aisle seat in the first place. I hate making people get up so that I can squeeze by. This is also why I never go to the bathroom during movies, even though I always have to go to the bathroom during movies.

I walk down the tight aisle, holding my carry-on close to my body, trying not to bump anyone. I hit a man's elbow and apologize even though he doesn't seem to notice. When I barely graze a woman's arm, she shoots daggers at me as if I stabbed her. I open my mouth to say I'm sorry and then think better of it.

I spot my seat easily; it is the only open one.

The air is stale. The music is Muzak. The conversations around me are punctuated by the clicks of the overhead compartments being slammed shut.

I get to my seat and sit down, smiling at the woman next to me. She's older and round, with short salt-and-pepper hair. I shove my bag in front of me and buckle my seat belt. My tray table's up. My electronics are off. My seat is in the upright position. When you're late a lot, you learn how to make up for lost time.

I look out the window. The baggage handlers are bundled up in extra layers and neon jackets. I'm happy to be headed to a warmer climate. I pick up the in-flight magazine.

Soon I hear the roar of the engine and feel the wheels beneath us start to roll. The woman next to me grips the armrests as we ascend. She looks petrified.

I'm not scared of flying. I'm scared of sharks, hurricanes, and false imprisonment. I'm scared that I will never do anything of value with my life. But I'm not scared of flying.

Her knuckles are white with tension.

I tuck the magazine back into the pouch. “Not much of a flier?” I ask her. When I’m anxious, talking helps. If talking helps her, it’s the least I can do.

The woman turns and looks at me as we glide into the air. “’Fraid not,” she says, smiling ruefully. “I don’t leave New York very often. This is my first time flying to Los Angeles.”

“Well, if it makes you feel any better, I fly a fair amount, and I can tell you, with any flight, it’s really only takeoff and landing that are hard. We’ve got about three more minutes of this part and then about five minutes at the end that can be tough. The rest of it . . . you might as well be on a bus. So just eight bad minutes total, and then you’re in California.”

We’re at an incline. It’s steep enough that an errant bottle of water rolls down the aisle.

“Eight minutes is all?” she asks.

I nod. “That’s it,” I tell her. “You’re from New York?”

She nods. “How about you?”

I shrug. “I was living in New York. Now I’m moving back to L.A.”

The plane drops abruptly and then rights itself as we make our way past the clouds. She breathes in deeply. I have to admit, even I feel a little queasy.

“But I was only in New York for about nine months,” I say. The longer I talk, the less attention she has to focus on the turbulence. “I’ve been moving around a bit lately. I went to school in Boston. Then I moved to D.C., then Portland, Oregon. Then Seattle. Then Austin, Texas. Then New York. The city where dreams come true. Although, you know, not for me. But I did grow up in Los Angeles. So you could say I’m going back to where I came from, but I don’t know that I’d call it home.”

“Where’s your family?” she asks. Her voice is tight. She’s looking forward.

“My family moved to London when I was sixteen. My younger sister, Sarah, got accepted to the Royal Ballet School, and they couldn’t pass that up. I stayed and finished school in L.A.”

“You lived on your own?” It’s working. The distraction.

“I lived with my best friend’s family until I finished high school. And then I left for college.”

The plane levels out. The captain tells us our altitude. She takes her hands off the armrest and breathes.

“See?” I say to her. “Just like a bus.”

“Thank you,” she says.

“Anytime.”

She looks out the window. I pick up the magazine again. She turns back to me. “Why do you move around so much?” she says. “Isn’t that difficult?” She immediately corrects herself. “Listen to me, the minute I stop hyperventilating, I’m acting like your mother.”

I laugh with her. “No, no, it’s fine,” I say. I don’t move from place to place on purpose. It’s not a conscious choice to be a nomad. Although I can see that each move is my own decision, predicated on nothing but my ever-growing sense that I don’t belong where I am, fueled by the hope that maybe there is, in fact, a place I do belong, a place just off in the future. “I guess . . . I don’t know,” I say. It’s hard to put into words, especially to someone I barely know. But then I open my mouth, and out it comes. “No place has felt like home.”

She looks at me and smiles. “I’m sorry,” she says. “That has to be hard.”

I shrug, because it’s an impulse. It’s always my impulse to ignore the bad, to run toward the good.

But I’m also not feeling great about my own impulses at the moment. I’m not sure they are getting me where I want to go.

I stop shrugging.

And then, because I won’t see her again after this flight, I take it one step further. I tell her something I’ve only recently told myself. “Sometimes I worry I’ll never find a place to call home.”

She puts her hand on mine, ever so briefly. “You will,” she says. “You’re young still. You have plenty of time.”

I wonder if she can tell that I’m twenty-nine and considers that young, or if she thinks I’m younger than I am.

“Thanks,” I say. I take my headphones out of my bag and put them on.

“At the end of the flight, during the five tricky minutes when we land, maybe we can talk about my lack of career choices,” I say, laughing. “That will definitely distract you.”

She smiles broadly and lets out a laugh. “I’d consider it a personal favor.”

When I come out of the gate, Gabby is holding up a sign that says “Hannah Marie Martin,” as if I wouldn’t recognize her, as if I wouldn’t know she was my ride.

I run toward her, and as I get closer, I can see that she has drawn a picture of me next to my name. It is a crude sketch but not altogether terrible. The Hannah of her drawing has big eyes and long lashes, a tiny nose, and a line for a mouth. On the top of my head is hair drawn dramatically in a high bun. The only thing of note drawn on my stick-figure body is an oversized pair of boobs.

It’s not necessarily how I see myself, but I admit, if you reduced me to a caricature, I’d be big boobs and a high bun. Sort of like how Mickey Mouse is round ears and gloved hands or how Michael Jackson is white socks and black loafers.

I’d much rather be depicted with my dark brown hair and my light green eyes, but I understand that you can’t really do much with color when you’re drawing with a Bic pen.

Even though I haven’t visited Gabby in person since her wedding day two years ago, I have seen her every Sunday morning of the recent past. We video-chat no matter what we have to do that day or how hungover one of us is feeling. It is, in some ways, the most reliable thing in my life.

Gabby is tiny and twiglike. Her hair is kept cropped close in a bob, and there’s no extra fat on her, not an inch to spare. When I hug her, I remember how odd it is to hug someone so much smaller than I am, how different the two of us seem at first glance. I am tall, curvy, and white. She is short, thin, and black.

She doesn’t have any makeup on, and yet she is one of the prettiest women here. I don’t tell her that, because I know what she’d say. She’d say that’s irrelevant. She’d say we shouldn’t be complimenting each other on our

looks or competing with each other over who is prettier. She's got a point, so I keep it to myself.

I have known Gabby since we were both fourteen years old. We sat next to each other in earth science class the first day of high school. The friendship was fast and everlasting. We were Gabby and Hannah, Hannah and Gabby, one name rarely mentioned without the other in tow.

I moved in with her and her parents, Carl and Tina, when my family left for London. Carl and Tina treated me as if I were their own. They coached me through applying for schools, made sure I did my homework, and kept me on a curfew. Carl routinely tried to persuade me to become a doctor, like him and his father. By then, he knew that Gabby wouldn't follow on his path. She already knew she wanted to work in public service. I think Carl figured I was his last shot. But Tina instead encouraged me to find my own way. Unfortunately, I'm still not sure what that way is. But back then, I just assumed it would all fall into place, that the big things in life would take care of themselves.

After we went off to college, Gabby in Chicago, myself in Boston, we still talked all the time but started to find new lives for ourselves. Freshman year, she became friends with another black student at her school named Vanessa. Gabby would tell me about their trips to the nearby mall and the parties they went to. I'd have been lying if I said I wasn't nervous back then, in some small way, that Vanessa would become closer to Gabby than I ever could, that Vanessa could share something with Gabby that I was not a part of.

I asked Gabby about it over the phone once. I was lying in my dorm room on my twin XL bed, the phone sweaty and hot on my ear from our already-hours-long conversation.

"Do you feel like Vanessa understands you better than I do?" I asked her. "Because you're both black?" The minute the question came out of my mouth, I was embarrassed. It had seemed reasonable in my head but sounded irrational coming out of my mouth. If words were things, I would have rushed to pluck them out of the air and put them back in my mouth.

Gabby laughed at me. “Do you think white people understand you more than I do just because they’re white?”

“No,” I said. “Of course not.”

“So be quiet,” Gabby said.

And I did. If there is one thing I love about Gabby, it is that she has always known when I should be quiet. She is, in fact, the only person who often proves to know me better than I know myself.

“Let me guess,” she says now, as she takes my carry-on bag out of my hand, a gentlemanly gesture. “We’re going to need to rent one of those baggage carts to get all of your stuff.”

I laugh. “In my defense, I am moving across the country,” I say.

I long ago stopped buying furniture or large items. I tend to sublet furnished apartments. You learn after one or two moves that buying an IKEA bed, putting it together, and then breaking it down and selling it for fifty bucks six months later is a waste of time and money. But I do still have *things*, some of which have survived multiple cross-country trips. It would feel callous to let go of them now.

“I’m going to guess there’s at least four bottles of Orange Ginger body lotion in here,” Gabby says as she grabs one of my bags off the carousel.

I shake my head. “Only the one. I’m running low.”

I started using body lotion somewhere around the time she and I met. We would go to the mall together and smell all the lotions in all the different stores. But every time, I kept buying the same one. Orange Ginger. At one point, I had seven bottles of the stuff stocked up.

We grab the rest of my bags from the carousel and pack them one after another onto the cart, the two of us pushing with all our might across the lanes of airport traffic and into the parking structure. We load them into her tiny car and then settle into our seats.

We make small talk as she makes her way out of the garage and navigates the streets leading us to the freeway. She asks about my flight and how it felt to leave New York. She apologizes that her guest room is small. I tell her not to be ridiculous, and I thank her again for letting me stay.

The repetition of history is not lost on me. It's more than a decade later, and I am once again staying in Gabby's guest room. It's been more than ten years, and yet I am still floating from place to place, relying on the kindness of Gabby and her family. This time, it's Gabby and her husband, Mark, instead of Gabby and her parents. But if anything, that just highlights the difference between the two of us, how much Gabby has changed since then and how much I have not. Gabby's the VP of Development at a nonprofit that works with at-risk teenagers. I'm a waitress. And not a particularly good one.

Once Gabby is flying down the freeway, once driving no longer takes her attention, or maybe once she is going so fast she knows I can't jump out of the car, she asks what she has been dying to ask since I hugged her hello. "So what happened? Did you tell him you were leaving?"

I sigh loudly and look out the window. "He knows not to contact me," I say. "He knows I don't want to see him ever again. So I suppose it doesn't really matter where he thinks I am."

Gabby looks straight ahead at the road, but I see her nod, pleased with me.

I need her approval right now. Her opinion of me is currently a better litmus test than my own. It's been a little rough going lately. And while I know Gabby will always love me, I also know that as of late, I have tested her unconditional support.

Mostly because I started sleeping with a married man.

I didn't know he was married at first. And for some reason, I thought that meant it was OK. He never admitted he was married. He never wore a wedding ring. He didn't even have a paler shade of skin around his ring finger, the way magazines tell you married men will. He was a liar. A good one, at that. And even though I suspected the truth, I thought that if he never said it, if he never admitted it to my face, then I wasn't accountable for the fact that it was true.

I suspected something was up when he once didn't answer my calls for six days and then finally called me back acting as if nothing was out of the ordinary. I suspected there was another woman when he refused to let me

use his phone. I suspected that *I* was, in fact, the other woman when we ran into a coworker of his at a restaurant in SoHo, and rather than introduce me to the man, Michael told me I had something in my teeth and that I should go to the bathroom to get it out. I did go to the bathroom. And I found nothing there. But if I'm being honest, I also found it hard to look at myself in the mirror for more than a few seconds before going back out there and pretending I didn't know what he was trying to do.

And Gabby, of course, knew all of this. I was admitting it to her at the same rate I was admitting it to myself.

"I think he's married," I finally said to her a month or so ago. I was sitting in bed, still in my pajamas, talking to her on my laptop, and fixing my bun.

I watched as Gabby's pixelated face frowned. "I told you he was married," she said, her patience wearing thin. "I told you this three weeks ago. I told you that you need to stop this. Because it's wrong. And because that is some woman's husband. And because you shouldn't allow a man to treat you like a mistress. I told you all of this."

"I know, but I really didn't think he was married. He would have told me if he was. You know? So I didn't think he was. And I'm not going to ask him, because that's so insulting, isn't it?" That was my rationale. I didn't want to insult him.

"You need to cut this crap out, Hannah. I'm serious. You are a wonderful person who has a lot to offer the world. But this is wrong. And you know it."

I listened to her. And then I let all of her advice fly right through my head and out into the wind. As if it was meant for someone else and wasn't mine to hold on to.

"No," I said, shaking my head. "I don't think you're right about this. Michael and I met at a bar in Bushwick on a Wednesday night. I never go to Bushwick. And I rarely go out on a Wednesday night. And neither does he! What are the odds of that? That two people would come together like that?"

"You're joking, right?"

"Why would I be joking? I'm talking about fate here. Honestly. Let's say he is married . . ."

“He is.”

“We don’t know that. But let’s say that he is.”

“He is.”

“Let’s *say* that he is. That doesn’t mean that we weren’t fated to meet. For all we know, I’m just playing out the natural course of destiny here. Maybe he’s married and that’s OK because it’s how things were meant to be.”

I could tell Gabby was disappointed in me. I could see it in her eyebrows and the turn of her lips.

“Look, I don’t even know that he’s married,” I said. But I did. I did know it. And because I knew it, I had to run as far away from it as I could. So I said, “You know, Gabby, even if he is married, that doesn’t mean I’m not better for him than this other person. All’s fair in love and war.”

Two weeks later, his wife found out about me and called me screaming.

He’d done this before.

She’d found two others.

And did I know they had two children?

I did not know that.

It’s very easy to rationalize what you’re doing when you don’t know the faces and the names of the people you might hurt. It’s very easy to choose yourself over someone else when it’s an abstract.

And I think that’s why I kept everything abstract.

I had been playing the “Well, But” game. The “We Don’t Know That for Sure” game. The “Even So” game. I had been viewing the truth through my own little lens, one that was narrow and rose-colored.

And then, suddenly, it was as if the lens fell from my face, and I could suddenly see, in staggering black-and-white, what I had been doing.

Does it matter that once I faced the truth I behaved honorably? Does it matter that once I heard his wife’s voice, once I knew the names of his children, I never spoke to him again?

Does it matter that I can see, clear as day, my own culpability and that I feel deep remorse? That a small part of me hates myself for relying on willful ignorance to justify what I suspected was wrong?

Gabby thinks it does. She thinks it redeems me. I'm not so sure.

Once Michael was out of my life, I realized I didn't have much else going for me in New York. The winter was harsh and cold and only seemed to emphasize further how alone I was in a city of millions. I called my parents and my sister, Sarah, a lot that first week after breaking up with Michael, not to talk about my problems but to hear friendly voices. I often got their voice mails. They always called me back. They always do. But I could never seem to accurately guess when they might be available. And very often, with the time difference, we had only a small sliver of time to catch one another.

Last week, everything just started to pile up. The girl whose apartment I was subletting gave me two weeks' notice that she needed the apartment back. My boss at work hit on me and implied that better shifts went to women who showed cleavage. I got stuck on the G train for an hour and forty-five minutes when a train broke down at Greenpoint Avenue. Michael kept calling me and leaving voice mails asking to explain himself, telling me that he wanted to leave his wife for me, and I was embarrassed to admit that it made me feel better even as it made me feel absolutely terrible.

So I called Gabby. And I cried. I admitted that things were harder in New York than I had ever let on. I admitted that this wasn't working, that my life was not shaping up the way I'd wanted it to. I told her I needed to change.

And she said, "Come home."

It took me a minute before I realized she meant that I should move back to Los Angeles. That's how long it's been since I thought of my hometown as home.

"To L.A.?" I asked.

"Yeah," she said. "Come home."

"You know, Ethan is there," I said. "He moved back a few years ago, I think."

"So you'll see him," Gabby said. "It wouldn't be the worst thing that happened to you. Getting back together with a good guy."

"It is warmer there," I said, looking out my tiny window at the dirty snow on the street below me.

“It was seventy-two the other day,” she said.

“But changing cities doesn’t solve the larger problem,” I said, for maybe the first time in my life. “I mean, *I* need to change.”

“I know,” she said. “Come home. Change here.”

It was the first time in a long time that something made sense.

Now Gabby grabs my hand for a moment and squeezes it, keeping her eye on the road. “I’m proud of you that you’re taking control of your life,” she says. “Just by getting on the plane this morning, you’re getting your life together.”

“You think so?” I ask.

She nods. “I think Los Angeles will be good for you. Don’t you? Returning to your roots. It’s a crime we’ve lived so far apart for so many years. You’re correcting an injustice.”

I laugh. I’m trying to see this move as a victory instead of a defeat.

Finally, we pull onto Gabby’s street, and she parks her car at the curb.

We are in front of a complex on a steep, hilly street. Gabby and Mark bought a townhouse last year. I look at the addresses on the row of houses and search for the number four, to see which one is theirs. I may not have been here before, but I’ve been sending cards, baked goods, and various gifts to Gabby for months. I know her address by heart. Just as I catch the number on the door in the glow of the streetlight, I see Mark come out and walk toward us.

Mark is a tall, conventionally handsome man. Very physically strong, very traditionally male. I’ve always had a penchant for guys with pretty eyes and five o’clock shadows, and I thought Gabby did, too. But she ended up with Mark, the poster boy for clean-cut and stable. He’s the kind of guy who goes to the gym for health reasons. I have never done that.

I open my car door and grab one of my bags. Gabby grabs another. Mark meets us at the car. “Hannah!” he says as he gives me a big hug. “It is so nice to see you.” He takes the rest of the bags out of the car, and we head into the house. I look around their living room. It’s a lot of neutrals and wood finishes. Safe but gorgeous.

“Your room is upstairs,” she says, and the three of us walk up the tight staircase to the second floor. There is a master bedroom and a bedroom across the hall.

Gabby and Mark lead me into the guest room, and we put all the bags down.

It’s a small room but big enough for just me. There’s a double bed with a billowy white comforter, a desk, and a dresser.

It’s late, and I am sure both Gabby and Mark are tired, so I do my best to be quick.

“You guys go ahead to bed. I can get myself settled,” I say.

“You sure?” Gabby asks.

I insist.

Mark gives me a hug and heads to their bedroom. Gabby tells him she’ll be there in a moment.

“I’m really happy you’re here,” she says to me. “In all of your city hopping, I always hoped you’d come back. At least for a little while. I like having you close by.”

“Well, you got me,” I tell her, smiling. “Perhaps even closer than you were thinking.”

“Don’t be silly,” she says. “Live in my guest room until we’re both ninety years old, as far as I’m concerned.” She gives me a hug and heads to her room. “If you wake up before we do, feel free to start the coffee.”

After I hear the bedroom door shut, I grab my toiletry bag and head into the bathroom.

The light in here is bright and unforgiving; some might even go so far as to describe it as harsh. There’s a magnifying mirror by the sink. I grab it and pull it toward my face. I can tell I need to get my eyebrows waxed, but overall, there isn’t too much to complain about. As I start to push the mirror back into place, the view grazes the outside of my left eye.

I pull on my skin, somewhat in denial of what I’m seeing. I let it bounce back into shape. I stare and inspect.

I have the beginnings of crow’s-feet.