

**M**orris Chestnut wasn't the man he used to be — at least not physically. He was bigger. It was the middle of winter in New York, and the actor was in town temporarily shooting a series. You know how it goes: The weather gets cold, work gets hectic, and comfort food always seems to taste better in the month of December. "I wasn't going to the gym as often as I like," he says, "and I was 'eating well,' as they say."

The pounds just sort of crept up on him. It happens. Chestnut, at 6 feet tall and just shy of his 44th birthday, was about 220 pounds, his heaviest bodyweight ever, and sporting a potbelly. It wasn't a huge potbelly, but a potbelly no less.

And then he got a phone call: *The Best Man Holiday* had just been greenlit. Like in the first installment of the series *The Best Man* (1999), he would play Lance Sullivan, a professional football player, alongside Taye Diggs and Nia Long. He would have two shirtless scenes — scenes in which female moviegoers would be expecting to see the same handsome, chiseled Morris Chestnut they'd been ogling since his 1991 breakout role as Ricky in *Boyz n the Hood*. Filming would start in about four months.

Panic? Nah. "I've done shirtless scenes before," Chestnut says, "so it didn't really scare me. I just knew it was going to take some work. I needed to get down and get into shape. But I love challenges."

