

# **Hush Study Guide**

**Hush by Jacqueline Woodson**

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# Plot Summary

When Officer Jonathan Green witnesses two white cops shoot down an unarmed black boy, he changes his family's lives when he decides to testify against his colleagues. After the trial, his wife and two daughters are relocated to an East Coast city where they have to start making new lives. They also grieve the loss of the old lives they knew in Denver. Toswiah, his younger daughter, is the narrator. The story that she tells, follows her journey with her older sister and their parents from despair and loss through trials, new experiences, and discoveries, until they find the new things and the new futures that will make life make sense to them again. Each in their way, Toswiah and her family members all discover that they are still themselves—and also that they have become something new, at the same time.

"All that you have is your soul," Toswiah hears a pop song say. Her soul, it seems to her, is her life in Denver, where she loves the landscape and her best friend Lulu. She is a confident girl of 13, and she fits right into a society that makes perfect sense to her. Her father is a cop, friendly cops are everywhere in her and her sister's lives. When the family is pulled out of that life, with almost no warning, it makes a crisis for each of them. Toswiah has to give up the landscape she loves, and her friend and her grandmother, whom she loves. Her older sister Cameron has to give up her social life as well, and she also loses her boyfriend, who actually betrays her by spreading rumors about her father (it turns out that his father is one of the cops who shot the unarmed black boy). Toswiah and Cameron's mother seems to fare best, as she discovers religion on the day of the move, and becomes active with the Jehovah's Witnesses, spreading the good news of religion. Toswiah and Cameron's father fares worst, spending most of his days sitting in a chair in front of the window, depressed and brooding over the case that changed his life so drastically.

Things get better over time for each of the characters. Toswiah takes the new name of Evie, and finds friends among her new schoolmates. She joins the track team, and gets a new nickname, Spider woman, for her long legs and her ability to run as if her life depends on it. Cameron finds new friends as well, and focuses herself on studying so that she can get into Simon's Rock college in Massachusetts. Starting this new life all by herself gives her something to aim for, to make the unhappy life she is living in the present less unhappy. Their mother gets her teaching license and finds a job teaching, which is the thing she is best at. Their father suffers the most, but even he turns things around. His depression gets so deep that he slices his arm, trying to kill himself, but he survives, and in the hospital, he learns to look at things from a new perspective, and not to take things so seriously. He rediscovers his life and his old self, and the book ends with Toswiah/Evie asking him what it was that drew him to police work. This bond between father and daughter is strengthened by both the recent past they have endured, and by the search for a vocation.



# Introduction and Chapters 1-4

## Introduction and Chapters 1-4 Summary

The first and untitled chapter starts with a reminiscence of the narrator's mother making bread, kneading it with her brown fingers. The mother's two daughters love their mother, and they anticipate the good biscuits with fried chicken. They wait for their father to come home and ask them, 'what'd my two copper pennies do today?' (p. 3). The youngest daughter is afraid that something will happen to her father while he is working as a policeman. After a scrumptious dinner topped off with coconut cake, the youngest goes to the windows to relish the view of the Rocky Mountains. All of this is her, she says. But then the narrative says that it is all gone now.

In Chapter 1, Toswiah says that there is a song that says that "all that you have is your soul." (p. 9), and she says that she feels like she is missing her soul, she is not herself since her family moved from Denver to the East Coast. They live in an empty building where the Feds have relocated them. Toswiah says that she tries to preserve her identity as Toswiah - she has a new name now, since they moved, and she feels like two people. She says that the word 'sad' "is not big enough. What happened inside of me is much stronger than sad" (p. 11).

Toswiah says that her father sits by the window, depressed and inactive since they moved. Their new apartment is tiny, and no amount of wishing will take them back to their old lives. Toswiah tries to imagine the old floor and rug, but cannot make the memory last. She remembers her oldest friend Lulu, whom she has known since birth. They had promised each other that they would never be separated, but now Toswiah's name is Evie because her father testified and the family was relocated. Toswiah says that she is called Neckbone on the street because she is tall and thin. In Denver, Toswiah says that Cameron snowboarded and they skied, and she envied Cameron her confidence.

Toswiah says that she can never tell anyone her true story because her father might be killed if she did.

In a second flashback, Toswiah recalls her mother singing at Cameron's tenth birthday. Toswiah says that her mother sometimes says that she wishes she had never married a cop, but she seems proud in addition to sorry.

In Chapter 2, Toswiah says her family left Denver in the middle of the night, with hardly any possessions. On the morning of their departure, Jehovah's Witnesses had given Toswiah's mother a Watchtower and an Awake! In addition to a book called "Reasoning the Scriptures."

Toswiah says that her grandmother would not go with them. She considered herself too old, at seventy-five, to start from scratch in a new place. When they part, Toswiah's



grandmother starts to cry, but she does not want to be remembered that way, so she stops.

Toswiah says that she wishes her father would change his mind, and they could stay, because she feels like she has disappeared from herself. Now everything is different, and her mother talks about the end times the Jehovah's Witnesses talk about.

Toswiah opens her most recent journal to the last page, where she had written that her father witnessed two policemen, Mr. Dennis and Mr. Randall, shoot down an unarmed black boy. She says that he says that he wants to break the Blue Wall of Silence. She thinks back on all the things she gave up, all the possessions she will never see again.

Toswiah says that her name is Evie now, and she comes from San Francisco. She rehearses her story, but obviously lacks enthusiasm for the pretense.

In Chapter 3, Toswiah says that her father is still sitting by the window depressed. She says that she always thought of cops as her family, black and white alike. They were all the good guys in the struggle against the bad guys. "Who am I," Toswiah asks. "Who/Am/I" (p. 29).

In another flashback, Toswiah recalls her father's patrol car pulling up to her. She recalls the smell, and her early memories, when she knew who she was, and stated it for all her class to hear.

In Chapter 4, Toswiah recalls her father being awarded the medal for bravery, after saving a mother and son from a man who held them hostage. After the ceremony, Toswiah's father says that he saw his family looking up at him, and a little seed started to grow in my brain" (p. 33). It was a "seed of faith...that made him believe in the possibility of perfection, and trust, and loyalty." (p. 33).

Toswiah says that she thought her family was perfect until the night of the shooting, when she sat with her father, and her started to tell her what happened. A black boy had been killed who was an honor student and someone Toswiah might have known. Her father asks Toswiah what she would do. Will she say something to the authorities or will she cover it up and protect his colleagues?

One night Toswiah's father named the officers, and tells Toswiah that the officers had tried to believe that the boy had reached for something, but Toswiah's father insists that "he was just standing there with his hands up. (p. 39).

## Introduction and Chapters 1-4 Analysis

The first section introduces the reader to the younger daughter who will be the main character and narrator. The wealth she remembers in her childhood home is profound and her loss is presumably going to unfold in the chapters ahead.



In Chapter 1, this story is told from Toswiah's point of view, and she is obviously experiencing a crisis in regard to her family's relocation to the unnamed city. The facts of her relocation are fuzzy, although she says that her father's testimony was the cause of their relocation. The move is obviously new as Toswiah writes this, and she is full of memories and nostalgia, for the place itself and for her friend Lulu. Her flashback indicates that anxiety about her father's safety has been a perpetual aspect of the family, but this does not connect the flashback to the whole back story yet.

In Chapter 2, Toswiah's mother's religion enters the story, but only lightly, and her father's principled stand against the murder of the unarmed black boy is also introduced, although not in detail. There is still quite a bit of back story to be filled in, as well as a story to be taken forward, for the book has already raised the question for the reader: how will Evie and her sister adapt in their new environment. Their fake history is merely expedient, and the need for it is obviously a source of dismay for Toswiah/Evie.

In Chapter 3, Toswiah reveals more about the identity that was shaken by this move: her father had been part of the family of policemen, but now they are not family any more, and this betrayal is the source of all their problems.

In Chapter 4, the story of a perfect life interrupted is complicated by the fact that Toswiah's family's troubles began in a racially-motivated shooting. Her father, the only black cop on the squad, saw his colleagues gun down an unarmed boy. Toswiah's faith is shaken by the fact that two men she has always known could have done this, but it presents a grave danger for her father and the gm.



# Chapters 5-8

## Chapters 5-8 Summary

In Chapter 5, after the shooting, Toswiah took a call at the house where a raspy-voiced man made threats against her father's life if he talked about what happened. When Cameron comes home from school, she says that one of the cops' sons named Joseph had started telling people that Toswiah's father is a liar. Cameron had a relationship with Joseph, but now he has turned on her, and no one in Toswiah's family feels safe. Her father comes home from work without being spoken to by a single colleague.

Suddenly Toswiah realizes that there are politics surrounding race, and the friendly racist jokes the cops told were not innocent.

Inspector Oliver shows up at Toswiah's family's house after the shooting, to talk her father out of testifying. He says that police work is all those cops know, and Toswiah's father will be taking that away from them. But Toswiah's father stands on principle, and says that it was wrong to shoot an unarmed, unresisting boy. He says that he had answered the call for backup, but when he arrived, the boy was already standing still with his hands up. Inspector Oliver does not dispute this, but reminds Toswiah's father of the consequences of his testimony. Toswiah's father says that he has police work in his blood, and he believes in the law. Like blood, which is the same color in every body, it should apply to all men equally, even cops.

Toswiah says that she would like to pause the recording of her life at that moment, when her father was still a cop, and they could be most proud of his principles without paying the price for them.

In Chapter 6, there were riots and protests about Raymond Taylor's death, and Toswiah says that her father was suddenly isolated and endangered. Toswiah says that her sister Cameron is upset by her father's decision, because it will ruin her social life. When someone shoots through the family's windows, though, it is clear that it is time to go.

In Chapter 7, Toswiah imagines that her father sees Raymond Taylor as his own son, and when he looks at a picture of the cops in his department, he says that he no longer feels safe, and that it is time to go.

In Chapter 8, Toswiah says that her mother used to listen to blues records with sad voices that said "you know us, you know us" (p. 58). Toswiah says that she and Lulu have been saying good bye to each other every time they see each other, because Lulu knows that they will be going away. Toswiah says that she and Lulu were born at the same time, both a month early and both under five pounds. Cameron says that it is hard to leave the boy she loves, and when Toswiah says that she loves Lulu and Grandma and the cat, Cameron says that it is different.



The men who came to take the family to a safe house would not tell them where they were going. The family has to pick new names, and their house and possessions will be sold, and the money will be sent to them in their new location.

## Chapters 5-8 Analysis

In Chapter 5, there is official pressure to pretend that nothing happened, and cover up the shooting, but Toswiah's father is too principled to allow this. He has police work in his blood, and this is an idea that will return, that blood identity matters. It is one of the things Toswiah does NOT have, not until she starts running in the end.

In Chapter 6, Cameron's opposition to the move is moving, but insufficient. Her father's principles will require more from him—and the whole family—than anyone knows. But her unhappiness will just be the beginning. He cannot go back, so they will have to go forward, through a difficult time.

In Chapter 7, Toswiah's father is more concerned with safety than ever, and he wants to keep his kin safe now that it has become clear that his fellow cops were not family at all.

In Chapter 8, the business of moving is scary and disorienting for Toswiah and her family. They are not told where they are, or where they are going, but they have to pick new names. Toswiah's new name comes from a childhood song, and it seems like an arbitrary choice. She is still intent on returning to her old life, and she suffers because she cannot.





# Chapters 9-12

## Chapters 9-12 Summary

In Chapter 9, after leaving Denver, Toswiah says that she and her family stayed in a safe house for three months while her father testified. One day Toswiah sees her father's face on tv, but her mother makes her turn off the tv, and from that point, they watch only videos.

Toswiah says that her sister cried all the time, but Toswiah cried at night when no one could hear her. Neither one of them felt like they knew who they were. Toswiah says that it won't last forever, but Cameron says that they might move out of the safe house, but their lives are over. Toswiah is sad because she and Lulu had says that they would room together in college, but that's a long time.

In Chapter 10, one night, the girls are told to pick their new names. Toswiah thinks about a book she read where a girl could light things on fire by staring at things, but she fails to light her sister on fire by staring at her. Cameron chooses Anna for her new name, because it is a palindrome, and when Toswiah chooses Evie, Cameron asks her why she chose Evie. Toswiah says that she likes it because it is hers.

In Chapter 11, Toswiah says that she and her sister fight, but sometimes she takes her sister's sweater and wears it to school, because when she does, people say nice things to her. There is another girl named Toswiah in 'Evie's' new school, and Toswiah tells Evie not to think too much of herself just because she has a sweater.

In a flashback, Toswiah says that in fourth grade, a new girl came to her class who had scars where extra fingers had been cut off. She told the girl never to let anyone see her cry, and they became friends. "Always look for the beauty," Toswiah says. "It's in every single body you meet." (p. 78).

In Chapter 12, when Evie's teacher calls Toswiah's name, she answers along with Toswiah, which makes for some confusion. Toswiah asks Evie about it, and Evie says that she has a cousin with that name. Mama says that the girls shouldn't try to make friends yet, because they will tell them too much, so Evie and Anna keep to themselves and are lonely. When Toswiah says that the coldest winter she ever spent was the summer she spent in San Francisco, Evie recognizes the Mark Twain quote, and Toswiah half smiles in recognition, but another girl asks why Evie doesn't say the pledge, and Evie says that it is because her mother forbids it. The girls call Evie a Joho, short for a Jehovah's Witness. Evie resents how Toswiah and the others have this place in their blood, while she is far away from the place that's in her blood. When they leave her alone, she spins and spins till she falls down.



## Chapters 9-12 Analysis

In Chapter 9, Toswiah and Cameron are so saddened and distraught from what's going on that they don't know who they are any more, and they cannot see a future that looks bright enough to exert themselves toward it.

In Chapter 10, the choosing of names is an anti-climactic event, with no particular logic behind the girls' choices. The tension between the sisters is increasing, though, and the reader starts to be impatient for a break in the horribleness.

Chapter 11 begins Part 2 of "Hush," as the girls begin their new lives in an undisclosed location.

The appearance of another Toswiah adds a comic and also sinister tone to the book, since Toswiah has just given up her name, and now she is in a new school with no friends, and Toswiah shows up to tell her not to think too highly of herself. The flashback adds a human note to Toswiah's personality, but it also contrasts with the treatment she herself is receiving in her new school.

In Chapter 12, Evie's treatment at Toswiah's hands is rough and not entirely hostile, but there is not much welcome in Toswiah's behavior either. Evie's interview with Toswiah and the other girls makes her want to disappear.



# Chapters 13-16

## Chapters 13-16 Summary

In Chapter 13, in school, Evie watches three bugs crawl out of the hair of the girl in front of her, and now that girl is the cootie-girl, but Evie says that she is glad she is not the one everyone makes fun of.

When the sign-up sheet comes around, Evie signs up for track and field because the school does not have basketball or hockey. There is no cheerleading for Anna, either.

Evie tells Anna to think about the distant future and start planning for it. Anna is getting all As on her tests, and planning to go to a school in Massachusetts where she can start college without finishing high school.

Evie says that some days she can feel Lulu walking right beside her as if they were still together. She says that the missing makes her unsure about what will happen.

In Chapter 14, on Evie's 14th birthday, there is no celebration because her mother's new religion forbids it. Evie says that boys call to her with some desire in their voices, but it makes her walk past them even faster than before.

Evie says that the family get their money from the Feds, and will until her parents find jobs. A paperwork error has slowed down Evie's mother's teaching license.

Evie's father comes into her room to tell her 'happy birthday copper penny' but her hope that this is an indication that he is himself again is a false hope. During the day, he is as despondent as ever. Evie says that her mother took him to a therapist, but then stopped taking him, and he has gotten smelly and unkempt. Things have gotten strange and she and her sister have cereal for dinner one night.

Evie's mother tries to reassure her husband that he did the right thing, but he feels horrible about how it has affected everyone, and he cannot have confidence in a divine plan, the way his wife can, now that she has discovered religion. He says that his life ended when Randall and Dennis got sent to jail for manslaughter. No one is happy, and only Anna and her mother have any plans (college, and teaching, respectively).

Mama goes to the Kingdom Hall every other night, and Anna and Evie go with her on Sundays. The girls are both still upset about the big change, and Anna is angrier than Evie. Evie remembers her mother as a teacher, getting gifts from her students at the end of the school year.

In a flashback, Evie recalls visiting her mother's classroom, where the students are curious about her, and she can see that the students really value her mother's attention and regard.



In Chapter 15, Toswiah asks Evie about her 'cousin' named Toswiah, and Evie says that she hasn't seen her in a while because of a fight their mothers had. Toswiah agrees that adults are dumb. Toswiah says that her sister's 'retarded,' and Evie tells her thanks for just coming over to talk to her. It gives Evie the first warm feeling she has had in her new location.

In Chapter 16, on Thanksgiving, Evie's mother makes lasagna, and Evie misses the holiday and the tradition. She recalls Christmas, and Anna tells her to focus on the far, far future.

Mama's threats about suffering in Armageddon ring hollow to Anna and Evie, who feel like they are suffering plenty already. Evie says that what she knows about religion makes sense as a basic form of being nice to people.

As she prepares for church, Evie says that her house in Denver was enormous compared to this house. She wonders about her mother's religion, and wonders why God didn't give Hitler a disease, or the assassins who killed Kennedy or Martin Luther King Jr. Evie's mother admires her and her sister's strength, but Evie says that she wants to be herself, she doesn't want to have to be strong.

Evie says that she needs new running sneakers, but she cannot tell her mother that she has joined the track team, because her mother's religion disapproves of sports.

## Chapters 13-16 Analysis

In Chapter 13, starting over is a different challenge from missing the old life in Denver. It involves semi-hostile girls, but at least it is definite and present, as opposed to spectral and imaginary and absent.

In Chapter 14, Evie's 14th birthday is another disconcerting event, without celebration or gifts, without anything she knows as normal. Her dream that her father might be normal again is shattered, and memories are still the only place that provide good feelings for Evie and her family, and her father's discontent breaks into the narrative in Chapter 14. No one has an answer for his depression, though, although now there is some momentum toward teaching for Evie's mother and toward Simon's Rock for Anna.

Chapter 15 is a respite from the bleak nature of the previous chapter. Evie has a pleasant interchange with Toswiah, and it seems like the depression might lift a little.

Chapter 16 has some heavy religious concepts, as Evie wonders why God has allowed things to happen the way they have. Her mother does not have a good answer, but her sister tells her to "Hush. Make believe we never were. You and me, li'l sis, back to the dust." (p. 120). This introduces a metaphorical death that Anna and Evie must die, in order to be reborn in their new lives.



# Chapters 17-20

## Chapters 17-20 Summary

In Chapter 17, Evie's track coach is named Leigh, but she cannot tell her mother about joining the track team, now that her mother is so religious. When Evie shows up to practice, she sees runners practicing exchanging the baton in relay races: "Everyone seems to be connected to one another, in unison." (p. 127). Leigh tells her she'll need two kinds of track shoes, and he introduces her to the other girls, who say they are used to winning.

Evie says that her new shoes feel stiff and wrong, and they don't have the brand logos that the others' shoes have. Evie starts to run with the other, and after one lap of the eighth-mile track, she is struggling to keep up. When a fellow runner Mira tells her that her legs are long, she says that it is the "friendliest thing anyone has said" to her in a long time" (p. 129). Evie arrives home and Anna comments on her sweatiness, but Evie says that she's going to keep going to practice, three times a week.

In Chapter 18, Evie says that she gets letters from her grandmother—they are forwarded to Texas, and then she and her family write back to the Texas address, for the letters to be forwarded to Denver. She says that she cannot say anything that identifies where she is. "Under this new Evie skin," she says, "there is still Toswiah Green. Somewhere" (p. 133). After track practice, Evie says that Mira calls her Spider woman, and the nickname 'spider' sticks. Evie says that she likes that.

In Chapter 19, Evie says that her mother is ecstatic because she has finally got a job teaching. She is going to teach fifth grade. Evie and Anna want their parents dance to celebrate, but their father is too depressed, and their mother retreats to her room with her religious books.

In Chapter 20, Evie hears someone calling her name, it is Mira, who is trying to catch up with her. Mira challenges Evie to race to the corner, and Evie wins by a nose, but she says that when she hears Mira calling her name, it sounds like the most beautiful name in the world, now.

## Chapters 17-20 Analysis

In Chapter 17, finally something good has happened to Toswiah/Evie. Track practice is a quick ice-breaker and then a sense of being part of something, part of the unity the other runners share. Evie is even complimented by a fellow runner, and it seems like the book has turned toward something optimistic, a new life for Evie and Anna.

In Chapter 18, Evie's tendency to dwell upon missing Denver is balanced against making a new life on the track team. Evie is given yet another new name, but this time from a friend, based on her personal trait, her long legs.



In Chapter 19: There is more good news in this chapter, but it is still balanced against the girls' father's depression, which is now the low point of the book, as everyone else has something to look forward to.

Chapter 20 is another chapter of tenderness lightens the burden of Evie's nostalgia for her old life. Now that Mira is calling for her after school, life seems much more bearable for her.



# Chapters 21-23

## Chapters 21-23 Summary

In Chapter 21, Anna and Evie go out for a movie, and stop in a coffee shop, where they talk. Anna asks Evie what she wants most in the world, and Evie says that she distrusts Anna's tone: it seems like she wants something from her. Finally she says that she wants to belong somewhere, and Anna shows her an acceptance letter from Simon's Rock College in Massachusetts. She explains that she only needed two years of high school, and good grades. She tells Evie that she told her whole story in the application essay, and it got her in. Anna indicates that Evie has track to look forward to, but Evie gets nervous that Anna is going to ruin it for her.

Anna says that Evie's coach is her teacher, and she isn't going to ruin it for her. Anna says that she can leave because she knows that Evie will be okay.

Anna says that she thinks of the boy who died, whose death influenced the whole family, and she thinks that there is some bigger plan affecting them all. She tells Evie that Simon's Rock is only three hours away, and she can visit all the time. But she is delighted because the present is almost over, yielding to the future she had imagined.

Evie says that she'll have time to spend her for the rest of the year, but Anna says that she's going to start in January. Evie says that their mother will be angry that she's leaving, but Anna says that she will be glad because she'll know that she's getting an education.

In Chapter 22, after falling asleep in church, Evie goes for a run, and feels herself warm up in the cold air. In the part, she meets Toswiah and her sister Sheila, who are walking their dog, Sheba. Toswiah asks if Evie was a runner in San Francisco, and she says that she's going to go there, but Evie says that she can tell her all about it, before she runs off.

Chapter 23 begins with Evie's father slicing his wrist with a piece broken porcelain, and being taken to the hospital. Once again, Evie's soul is in one place (with her father) while her body is in another (at home).

## Chapters 21-23 Analysis

Chapter 21 brings a big change: Anna has been accepted at Simon's Rock, and will be leaving in January. She is moving on, and while this creates complex feelings for Evie, they are feelings that have a future, instead of nostalgia, which remains tied to an impossible past.



In Chapter 22, running into Toswiah and Sheila, Evie is starting to develop a friendship with Toswiah, and this feels satisfying—both because she has a new friend, and because she has contact with her old name, still.

In Chapter 23, Evie's father tries to kill himself. Evie is once again dispirited, and now the reader does not know what is going to happen to the family. This chapter is the end of part 4.





# Chapters 24-28

## Chapters 24-28 Summary

Chapter 24 begins Part 4, the last section of Hush. The chapter begins with Evie saying the pledge to the flag, and singing America the Beautiful—both things her mother's religion has forbidden. Evie says that she does not want life everlasting, "I wanted that moment—right there, right then." (p. 161). Mira asks her where she has been, since she has missed practice, and she says that she is not running any more. Mira walks away, and Evie is sad. She goes home, where her mother cries all the time. She tells Evie about how her father is doing. Evie says that her father is recovering. She says that you run the quarter mile in splits, or increments, and you have to focus on the little pieces to make the big pieces make sense.

As Anna prepares to leave for Massachusetts, she asks Evie why she doesn't return to track, and now Evie prepares to return to is. "It won't free me," she says. "But it's all I have" (p. 165).

In Chapter 25, Leigh tells the girls to run "all-out. like your life depends on it" (p. 166). When Evie says that she is going to stay on the team, Leigh gives her the running shoes he has ordered for her. When Evie runs the quarter mile with the others, she imagines all the events of the past year, and she runs so hard she beats Mira. Before she can celebrate, the coach tells her that she has to run four more quarters.

In Chapter 26, Evie says that she looks around and wonders what secret stories the other girls in her class could tell. She hears a song on the radio, and says that like the singer, "some days I like and love either or both of me." (p. 171). A boy in her class offers her a chocolate that he has kept in his pocket so that it is almost melting when he gives it to her.

In Chapter 27, Anna tells her mother that she is leaving for Simon's Rock. Her mother says "of course you are," and does not oppose her, to Evie's great relief (p. 173). Evie thinks of all the things she is, all the aspects of her personality, and she says that some of these things she will still be tomorrow. She sings the song the book is named for: "Hush little baby, don't say a word, Daddy's gonna buy you a mockingbird" (p. 174).

In Chapter 28, Evie sees her father's scars. He says that he is alright now, and she looks around at the other in-patients to see crazy people up close. He says that he will be home soon, and that he wants to be alive, now. When he tells Evie that she has a right to be mad, she says that he wanted to save their lives, that everything had to happen. She says that she used to shut herself off, instead of responding to what was happening, but now she has some ideas about what she would like to do. She says that her coach thinks she has things in common with some of the great sprinters, and he encourages her. Evie says that instead of everything feeling wrong, she feels like God changed his mind in the middle of her life. But now she thinks maybe he came up with a



better idea for her. "My life is a rewrite," she thinks (p. 180). The book ends with Evie and her father in the hospital sharing their stories like "two old buddies who knew each other when..." (p. 180).

## Chapters 24-28 Analysis

In Chapter 24, the reader does not find out immediately what happened to the father. There is a gap when the narration jumps forward, but the reader's anxiety is quickly dispelled: Evie's father is recovering. Evie has lost heart, but only temporarily, for Anna convinces her to go back to track, the one thing she likes.

In Chapter 25, there is a personal triumph for Evie, as her life has suddenly started to fuel her ambition to run. Her life might really depend on her running, as it focuses her and puts everything in perspective.

In Chapter 26, now that Evie has committed to her new life, it is treating her well, as she can see inside of other people's secrets, and she has been around long enough (seven months now) that a boy has begun to offer her chocolate and affection.

In Chapter 27, Evie's mother's enthusiasm for Anna's departure to Simon's Rock comes as a huge relief for Evie and Anna alike, and it resolves part of the tension that has been building in the background between the daughters and their mother. Evie's communication with the girl she sees with her doll is a touching symbol of her new integration into the community.

In Chapter 28, the book closes on a warm note as father and daughter stitch together the lives that have now officially survived the worst of the transition from Denver to East Coast. Evie has something to share with her father: her desire to find a path for herself, and he now has something to offer—a personal experience—that has not been ruined by this transition. With Anna going off to college early, the father healing up, the mother going back to teaching, and Evie passionate about running, it seems that the family has put itself back together even stronger after their trials.



# Characters

## Toswiah Green/Evie Thomas

Toswiah Green is the fourteen-year-old daughter of a policeman who has seen two white cops shoot down an unarmed black boy. When he testifies, the family enters the witness protection program, and is moved to the East Coast. Toswiah become Evie, and has to struggle to make a new life for herself in an unfamiliar place, and in the absence of the friends she has always known. She finds a passion and a talent for running, and befriends a girl named Toswiah, of all things. She starts to feel at home in her new location, and looks at life with promise.

## Cameron Green/Anna Thomas

Cameron is Toswiah's sister. She takes the name Anna when she relocates to the East Coast. She is older than Toswiah, and she loses her boyfriend when the family is relocated, but this is made a little clear-cut when it turns out that the boy she was dating is the son of one of the cops who shot the unarmed black boy, and the boyfriend becomes part of a smear campaign against Toswiah's father. So it is easy for Cameron to leave him, but her feelings are still hurt, and she still feels like her life has been ruined by their father's decision to testify. She gets through the transition by focusing on the future, and applying to Simon's Rock College in Western Massachusetts, where she can start before she graduates from high school.

## Lulu

Lulu is Toswiah's best friend in Denver. The two of them were born at the same time, both a month early and under five pounds, and they cannot imagine separating.

## Grandma

Like Lulu, Toswiah's grandmother is a symbol of the human world Toswiah has left behind in Denver. She does not entertain many specific memories of her, but her presence is a sore spot in Toswiah's sense of loss.

## Leigh Lacori

Leigh Lacori is the track coach who pushes Toswiah/Evie to run like she's running for her life. He encourages her, and gives her cleats when her parents cannot afford them.



## **Mira**

Mira is a friend of Evie's from the track team. She is faster than Evie in the beginning, but Evie beats her in one race.

## **Father/ Jonathan Green**

Toswiah's father is a black cop who sees two white cops shoot down an unarmed black boy. He agonizes over whether it is right to testify, or whether he should let it go, and keep silent, but he testifies because he realizes that one day someone might look at his daughters the way they looked at the black boy, and see a disposable life. This ruins things for his family, and he takes this out on himself, culminating in a suicide attempt, but he recovers and starts to look forward to getting back to his life.

## **Mama**

Toswiah's mother is a school teacher and supportive mother. When her husband puts the family through this terrible transition, she finds religion, and takes solace in the church with the Jehovah's Witnesses. Her family does not follow her into this new religion, and the book does not make the new religion a point of serious contention between mother and daughters, but it is responsible for the girls being isolated. Their mother has gone into church, and she no longer celebrates birthdays or holidays, so the family loses something. But at the same time, she is not so religious that she is opposed to Anna going off to Simon's Rock.

## **Raymond Taylor**

Raymond Taylor is the black honors student who was shot dead by the two policemen, in Toswiah's father's presence.

## **Inspector Oliver**

Inspector Oliver is a police inspector who visits Toswiah's father and tries to convince him not to testify about what he saw.



# Objects/Places

## Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses are a sect of Christianity that believes that the end of the world is near and that believers can be close to God in the afterlife. Toswiah's mother becomes a Jehovah's Witness when she gets literature from door-to-door preachers, and she hands tracts to strangers on the street, trying to tell them the good news about religion.

## Blue Wall of Silence

The Blue Wall of Silence is an unacknowledged law among police officers: never betray your fellow policeman. Toswiah's father breaks this wall when he testifies against his fellow cops.

## Track and field

This is the sport Toswiah takes up when she arrives in her new school. She does not tell her mother that she is going to run, because she thinks that her mother will oppose her. But her coach sees talent in her, and she enjoys running. When she puts her mind to it, and sees all the things she can be running from—and toward—she exerts herself and shows promise as a sprinter.

## Denver, Colorado

This is where the Green family lives when Jonathan, the father is a cop for fifteen years. The girls are raised there, and they have a grandmother there and their best friends. Toswiah spends a lot of time thinking back to Denver and the atmosphere around the city with the mountains beyond it.

## Toswiah's new home in the East Coast

This city is not named, because to name it would put the family in danger. But the city is much more urban and gritty than Denver, and it lacks the clean air and the mountains in the distance.

## Simon's Rock College in Massachusetts

This is where Anna applies for early decision admission, so that she can get out of the high school she does not like in the city. She uses her experience of being relocated in her admission essay, and gets accepted for January matriculation.

## San Francisco

San Francisco is where the Green family is supposedly from, and Evie tells her new friends all about the city's features, although she has never been there.



# Themes

## Being separated from your own soul

Toswiah tries out a number of ways of understanding herself and who she is, and she says that "all that you have is your soul," and she identifies her soul with the things she loves, but from the beginning of the novel, she has been denied those things, and as a result, she does not know who she is. This creates a strange sort of existence for her, and that form of existence is defined by anguish, as Toswiah tries to orient herself and find something that replaces the world she used to know and the identity it used to give her.

Memory is one of the things that she says constitutes the soul, but Toswiah's memory has been troubled by all the problems that came with the transition to a new life, and those memories are like her father's scars: they show where the strain of adjusting was too much. In many way, Toswiah's separation from Lulu stands in for her separation for her own soul. She misses Lulu so much that she says that sadness is too small a word for what she feels.

Toswiah repairs herself in two ways: by finding a new friend (also named Toswiah) and by finding something she loves (track and field), and following it.

## Having things and people and places in your blood

In the beginning, Toswiah defines herself by the Rocky mountains, and the flowers and the atmosphere in Denver. She says that her world was cops, and there was no black and white, there was only her family and the community, and she knew these things as the natural environment she lived in. When her father's experience shakes everything up for the family, though, she still has that life in her blood, but does not have those days themselves to live in. She is misplaced, and she lives in a world where other people have the landscape in their blood, but she does not feel any relationship with the landscape or the society, herself. Evie says that she envies Toswiah her identification with her city, but she cannot share it. It is only when Evie starts to run that she finds something that is in her blood as well, as running warms her up, and gives her a sense of her own freedom.

## Doing the right thing

Toswiah's father has to decide whether to do the right thing, and as much as he does not like his options, it is pretty much clear to him what the right thing is. This decision gets revisited from a number of directions, though, as Cameron and Toswiah and their mother are affected as well. They all say that they are glad that he testified, and did the right thing, but their depression and suffering are consequences that make that decision



again and again. Cameron, for instance, says that she is glad her father testified, but she also blames him for her unhappiness, she blames him for ruining her life.

And even though Toswiah's father knew that he was doing the right thing, he himself pays the greatest price for it, as his suicidal depression and guilt show that he cannot live with the 'right' thing—and that 'rightness' itself is not a consolation. It was just a natural force that destroyed the family's life in Denver. Living day to day and making a community and knowing who you are are different things to do, separate from 'doing the right thing,' but each of the family members finds that doing the right thing also involves learning how to live, and finding ways to overcome their despair.

## **People acting out a plan that is bigger than them**

Hush begins with all of the characters asking themselves who they are and how they got to where they are and what it all means. Toswiah does not know who she is, and her father has just thrown away the life that made sense to him, to follow a principle that is bigger than him. As they inquire into the consequences of these new lives, each of them feels a desire for a plan that will make things comprehensible. This plan is offered most plainly by Tara's mother, who picks up some Jehovah's Witness literature the day of the move, and starts to follow the Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of fate and God's plan.

Toswiah and Cameron do not follow their mother's ideas themselves, but they adapt them to their own purposes, and start to feel, by the end of the novel, that there may have been some plan for them after all. As their lives begin to make sense to them again, and as they start to recognize themselves, even in their new circumstances, they find that they themselves are still intact, and their lives have just changed around them. From the perspective of having survived the transition, they can look back and say that there might have been a plan that moved them from one good life to another.





# Style

## Point of View

Hush is recounted by Toswiah Green, who is also Evie Thomas. She changed her name because her father witnessed two cops killing an unarmed black boy, and when he testified, the family was relocated in the witness protection program. Toswiah's identity is in question throughout the early part of the book, as she does not know who she is, and she says that she cannot tell her honest story to anyone because it could get her or her family members killed. This unfamiliarity—even with themselves—is part of everyone's feelings in the family, as they are all waiting to see what will come for them in their new location.

## Setting

Hush is set partly in Denver and partly in an undisclosed East Coast city, which is three hours from Western Massachusetts (so it is probably either New York or Boston). For three months in between, Toswiah and her family live in a safe house in Denver, where they are guarded and kept inside while their father, Officer Green, testifies against his fellow policemen in the matter of the shooting death of Raymond Taylor.

The new city is colder than Denver, and more unforgiving socially. Toswiah and her sister Cameron (Evie, now, and Anna) have a hard time making friends there, and they are discouraged by their mother, who tells them not to tell anyone their real stories. Really, then, the story takes place inside of the Green/Thomas household, where the father sits depressed by the window all day, and the mother goes out to religious meetings all the time.

## Language and Meaning

The language in Hush is straightforward and easy to understand. Jacqueline Woodson tells a straightforward story that is only occasionally complicated by poetic meanings. When Toswiah says that she is not in her body, or that she lives in two places, or that she is still part of Lulu, she is making outwardly-nonsensical statements, but the reader understands that they are emotionally true.

Otherwise, the language is also lifted up by Toswiah's mother's religiousness, which raises questions about God and fate and a divine plan for human activities. In spite of a real difference between mother and daughters in regards to religion (the daughters do not believe) there is a thoughtfulness in all of the characters. They want to know where they come from, and how they should act, and these questions are answered in semi-religious language.

## Structure

Hush is told in linear chapters, starting in the beginning and working forward to a conclusion. The book proceeds on the strength of one question: how will Toswiah and Cameron adjust to their new life, and redeem the disintegration of their lives in Denver. Things get dark for them as they descend into anger and self-pity, but once they start to meet people in their new location, they start to head upward. Even though their father stabs himself in the arm, things get better as they make friends and find futures for themselves. Cameron/Anna's future is going to take her away to Massachusetts, and Mama's future is in the classroom; Evie's is in running, and there is even a future, at the end, for their father, who is healing up from his suicide attempt and depression.



## Quotes

"Cops were our family. Cops were our friends. Daddy was the only black on in his precinct. it was different there, though. Black. White. It didn't matter" (p. 28).

"My name is Toswiah Green. My favorite color is blue. I am tall for my age. My best friend is Lulu. These are the facts. The facts speak for themselves" (p. 30).

"What's the right thing, Daddy?  
Both choices seem wrong" (p. 36).

"I've got two daughters. Two. You think I brought them into this world to turn around and watch them get killed for no reason at all" (p. 48).

"I'm a man, I can testify" (p. 53).

Mama's religion says 'We are in the world but not of the world.' Maybe that's true...This place isn't my world. My soul isn't here" (p. 81).

"I spun until I collapsed from spinning...No one came to lift me up by my arms. How could they when I wasn't even there" (p. 84).

"Sometimes you dream. And sometimes you just cry. But when you stop crying and stop dreaming, it's all still here" (p. 87).

"So you just think about the far, far future and do everything you can to make it feel like it's coming quick" (p. 88).

"Sometimes it felt like me and Anna were in a world all by ourselves. And the world we're in doesn't make any kind of sense any more" (p. 94).

"That's what I wanted, the truth. Who were we really? And why? Why had this had to happen to us? Why couldn't someone else's daddy have witnessed the murder" (p. 116).

"At first I used to think it was so, so crazy—us, the innocent ones, having to leave because of some messed-up stuff the cops did. But now I think of it as a part of a plan—a bigger plan. I don't know if it's God's or the universe's or Raymond Taylor's or fate's but I feel like whatever it is, is way bigger than we are" (p. 148).

"If the soul is memory, mine has left me. There's tomorrow and the day after, and when I get there, there isn't a yesterday any more" (p. 163).



## Topics for Discussion

Evie says that she runs the quarter mile in splits, or little segments. How does this strategy apply to characters in the novel *Hush*? Does it work for them, or does it help them more to keep a high-level overview of the task they are working on?

Toswiah's family is black, but Toswiah says that she never thought that race was a big part of her life until Raymond Taylor was shot down. What role does Toswiah/Evie's blackness play in her identity, and in the meaning of the book?

The title of the book is invoked a few times. Once when Cameron tells Toswiah to hush, and make believe none of this exists, and again when Evie sings the Hush Little Darling song. What resonance does the title have with the book?

Toswiah's father agonizes over doing the right thing in regard to Raymond Taylor's death. How does he know that he has done the right thing, and how does his family come to agree with him? How are his decision and his family's decisions different, even though they come to the same conclusion?

Toswiah's father is a witness to a shooting, and her mother is a witness to God as a Jehovah's Witness. What is Toswiah herself a witness to, and what does it mean for her to see and testify? Who else sees and testifies in *Hush*?