

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

# KATE WHITE

WHAT YOU DON'T SAY MIGHT KILL YOU....



# HUSH

A NOVEL

**Kate White**

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A Novel

 HarperCollins e-books

*To John Searles.*

*Thank you for all the wisdom, fun, and joy you've brought to my life as a  
writer*

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PAIN WOKE HER forced open her eyes. She was lying in pitch-black darkness, and her head was throbbing, as if someone had smashed the back of it with a chair. There was a weird taste in her mouth—metallic. I've cut the inside of my mouth, she thought. She tried to find the spot with her tongue, but it was too swollen to move.

Where am I? she wondered, panic-stricken. Her heart began to pound in time with the throbbing in her head. She tried to shift her body, but she felt paralyzed.

She forced herself to take a breath. I'm in a nightmare, she told herself, one of those nightmares you can dream and see yourself in at the same time. And I'm going to wake up. As she breathed, she smelled something musty, like mildewed clothes. No, this was real. She tried again to shift her body. Her arms didn't move but she was able to twist her head a little.

A sound slid through the blackness—a long, low groan that she didn't recognize. Her heart pounded harder. It's a motor, she thought finally.

She realized at last where she was. But why? Had she fallen? Or had someone *hit* her? Her mind was so confused, her thoughts choked like a tangle of weeds in a lake. She found the beginning and tried to go step by step from there. The last thing she recalled was trying to reach the flashlight. It must have gone out, though. How long had she been here, and why was she alone? And then suddenly she knew. She remembered everything. She let out an anguished sob at the truth.

She realized that the hum of the motor must be from the freezer she'd seen earlier, which meant the power was back on. She had to get out. She twisted her head back and forth and commanded the rest of her body to move. Her legs still felt leaden, like metal drums filled to the brim, but she was able to shift one of her arms—the right one. She flexed her right hand slowly open and closed.

Then there was another noise—from far above this time. Footsteps. And next a door opening. Terror engulfed her body, squeezing air from her lungs.

The killer was coming to get her.

# 1

“YOU’VE GOT A secret, don’t you?”

“What do you mean?” Lake asked. Caught off guard by the comment, she set her wineglass down on the café table and pulled her head back slightly.

“There’s a cat-that-ate-the-canary look on your face.”

She knew Molly was picking up on something she herself had only realized in the past few days: the grief and guilt that had stalked her so unmercifully for four months had finally begun to retreat. She felt lighter, less oppressed, suddenly even hungry for life again. Earlier, as she’d hurried down Ninth Avenue to meet Molly for lunch in Chelsea, she’d actually felt a brief surge of joy—because of the brilliant summer sky and the work she was doing and the fact that somewhere something new and good might be waiting for her.

“Don’t tell me you’re seeing someone?” Molly added.

“God, no,” Lake said. “I just feel like the gloom has finally lifted.” She smiled. “I may even surprise you and be less than a total sad sack today.”

“Just remember, it can be a real emotional roller coaster right now,” Molly said, shaking out her long red hair. “What I learned the first year after my divorce was that you feel great one second and then *bam*, the blues are back—and you’re in bed for the next four days with the covers pulled over your head.”

“I’m not expecting any miracles,” Lake said. “I’m just sick of moping around like some character in a Lifetime movie. I’m a forty-four-year-old single mother, and it won’t be a breeze, but I’m ready to see it as an adventure rather than a curse. And it helps that I love working with my new client. The clinic does good stuff.”

“So what’s happening with the divorce? Are things moving along?”

“My lawyer has been playing telephone tag with Jack’s. But he thinks the agreement should be ready to sign before the kids are back from camp.

Once that's done, I'll really be able to move on."

"Then why *not* date?" Molly asked. "It would be so good for you."

"Well, I'm hardly beating men off with a stick."

"The reason no one's in hot pursuit is that you make it so hard for guys to talk to you," Molly said. "When are you going to let your guard down? You're a knockout, Lake."

That's helpful, Lake thought. Molly made her sound like a feral cat that ran and hid under the nearest porch whenever anyone approached. Sometimes she rued the day she confided in Molly about what she'd gone through when she was younger.

"I don't think I'm ready for any kind of romance, anyway."

"What about the doctor?" Molly asked, her green eyes flashing.

"Who?"

"That guy at the fertility clinic—the one you said was kind of flirty with you."

"Oh, Keaton," Lake said. As she said his name she pictured his face: the slate-blue eyes, the brown hair spiked a little in front, so un-doctor-y. And that soft, full mouth. "He's the type who would flirt with a coatrack," she added. "A real player, I'm sure."

"Playing has its place, you know. Why not try a little eye sex and see where it takes you?"

"Do you make these expressions up yourself, Molly?" Lake asked, smiling.

"When there's nothing suitable in the vernacular, yes."

"He lives in L.A., anyway. He's just consulting with the clinic for a few weeks. Should we check out the menu?"

Over lunch Lake did her best to steer the conversation off herself and toward her friend's latest exploits as a fashion stylist. It wasn't that she failed to appreciate Molly's concern for her. When Lake had gradually withdrawn from her two closest friends after the separation, too sick with shame to face them, Molly had persisted with her, offering herself as combination confidante and coach. Lake had eventually relented and had come to like the attention. But at times it could feel overwhelming. Maybe because Molly had always been just a casual friend, someone Lake had known professionally, and it was weird to have her in this new role. Or maybe because at heart, Lake had always been a bit of a loner.

"I'm supposed to hear about another job today," Molly said later, as

their coffee arrived. “Do you mind if I check my email?”

Lake used the moment to look at her own BlackBerry. There was a missed call from her lawyer, Robert Hotchkiss. *Finally*, she thought. But as she played back the message, she felt a rush of fear, like water gushing through a garden hose. He wanted to see her right away. And his voice sounded grim.

“Look, I’d better jump in a cab and get up there,” Lake said after filling Molly in. “Something’s clearly come up.”

She called Hotchkiss as soon as she hugged Molly goodbye and stepped onto the sidewalk. Though she didn’t reach him directly, the receptionist told her he was anxious to talk—no, she didn’t know why—and it was fine for Lake to drop by as soon as she could. *Now what*, she thought, as she threw her head against the backseat of the cab. Was Jack going to renege on his promise to let her and the kids keep the apartment? She’d spent a year being humiliated and hurt by him, and it made her furious to think he might have something else up his sleeve.

She was fuming by the time she arrived at Hotchkiss’s midtown Manhattan suite. The receptionist, an older woman whose champagne-colored hair was curled as tight as a poodle’s, didn’t even announce her but simply led her down the hall.

As Lake entered Hotchkiss’s office, he rose from his boat-size desk to greet her. He was about sixty, with a ruddy face and a stomach that draped over his expensive belt like a sandbag.

“Excuse the chaos, Lake,” he said, gesturing toward stacks of bulging brown legal files. “I’m in the middle of a messy case.”

“Well, with two kids in grade school, I know all about chaos.”

Her comment sounded stupid to her own ears. What she wanted to do was skip the chitchat and shout, “What the hell is Jack up to *now*?”

“I can tell you never let it get the best of you,” Hotchkiss said. “Please sit down. I appreciate your coming on such short notice.”

“Is there some new development?” she asked, working to keep her voice calm.

“Yes—and I’m afraid it’s not good.”

“What *is* it?” she blurted out.

“Jack has filed a custody complaint,” Hotchkiss said. “He’s now asking for full custody rather than joint.”

“*What?*” Lake exclaimed, shocked. As shabbily as her ex-husband had