

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JACQUELINE WOODSON is the bestselling author of more than two dozen award-winning books for young adults, middle graders and children, including the *New York Times* bestselling memoir *Brown Girl Dreaming*, which won the 2014 National Book Award, the Coretta Scott King Award, a Newbery Honor Award, an NAACP Image Award, and the Sibert Honor Award. Woodson was recently named the Young People's Poet Laureate by the Poetry Foundation. She lives with her family in Brooklyn, New York.

## PRAISE FOR ANOTHER BROOKLYN

"Woodson's unsparing story of a girl becoming a woman recalls some of the genre's all-time greats: *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, *The Bluest Eye* and especially, with its darkly poetic language, *The House on Mango Street*." —*Time*

"Woodson does for young black girls what short story master Alice Munroe does for poor rural ones: She imbues their everyday lives with significance." —*Elle*

"In Jacqueline Woodson's soaring choral poem of a novel...four young friends...navigate the perils of adolescence, mean streets, and haunted memory in 1970s Brooklyn, all while dreaming of escape." —*Vanity Fair*

“Woodson writes lyrically about what it means to be a girl in America, and what it means to be black in America. Each sentence is taut with potential energy, but the story never bursts into tragic flames; it stays strong and subtle throughout.”

—*Huffington Post*

“*Another Brooklyn* joins the tradition of studying female friendships and the families we create when our own isn’t enough, like that of Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, Tayari Jones’ *Silver Sparrow* and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* by Audre Lorde. Woodson uses her expertise at portraying the lives of children to explore the power of memory, death and friendship.”

—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

“It is the personal encounters that form the gorgeous center of this intense, moving novel...Structured as short vignettes, each reading more like prose poetry than traditional narrative, the novel unfolds as memory does, in burning flashes, thick with detail.”

—*New York Times Book Review*

“With *Another Brooklyn*, Jacqueline Woodson has delivered a love letter to loss, girlhood, and home. It is a lyrical, haunting exploration of family, memory, and other ties that bind us to one another and the world.”

—*Boston Globe*

“Woodson manages to remember what cannot be documented, to suggest what cannot be said. *Another Brooklyn* is another name for poetry.”

—*Washington Post*

“In this elegant and moving novel, Jacqueline Woodson explores the beauty and burden of growing up *Girl* in 1970s Brooklyn through the lens of one unforgettable narrator. The guarded hopes and whispered fears that August and her girlfriends share left me thinking about the limits and rewards of friendship well after the novel’s end. Full of moments of grief, grace, and wonder, *Another Brooklyn* proves that Jacqueline Woodson is a master storyteller.”

—Angela Flournoy, author of the  
National Book Award finalist *The Turner House*

“*Another Brooklyn* is a sort of fever dream, containing both the hard truths of life and the gentle beauty of memory. The story of a young girl trying to find herself in the midst of so many conflicting influences and desires swallowed me whole. Jacqueline Woodson has such an original vision, such a singular voice. I loved this book.”

—Ann Patchett,  
*New York Times* bestselling author of *Commonwealth*  
and *This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage*

“And Sister Jacqueline Woodson sings memory. Her words like summer lightning get caught in my throat, and I draw August up from Southern roots to a Brooklyn of a thousand names, where she and her three ‘sisters’ learn to navigate a new season. A new herstory. Everywhere I turn, my dear Sister Jacqueline, I hear your words, a wild sea pausing in the wind. And I sing.”

—Sister Sonia Sanchez

“Jacqueline Woodson’s *Another Brooklyn* is another kind of book, another kind of beautiful, a lyrical, hallucinatory, heartbreaking, and powerful novel. Every gorgeous page leads to another revelation, another poignant event or memory. This is an incredible and memorable book.”

—Edwidge Danticat, author of *Claire of the Sea Light*

“Jacqueline Woodson’s spare, emphatic novel about young women growing up in 1970s Bushwick brings some of our deepest silences—about danger, loss, and black girls’ coming-of-age—into powerful lyric speech. *Another Brooklyn* is heartbreaking and restorative, a gorgeous and generous paean to all we must leave behind on the path to becoming ourselves.”

—Tracy K. Smith, Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *Life on Mars* and *Ordinary Light*

“Jacqueline Woodson’s *Another Brooklyn* is a wonder. With a poet’s soul and a poet’s eye for image and an ear for lyrical language, Woodson delivers a moving meditation on girlhood, love, loss, hurt, friendship, family, faith, longing, and desire. This novel is a love letter to a place, an era, and a group of young women whom we’ve never seen depicted quite this way or this tenderly. Woodson has created an unforgettable, entrancing narrator in August. I’ll go anywhere she leads me.”

—Naomi Jackson,  
author of *The Star Side of Bird Hill*

“Grief and friendship are the hallmarks of this story that leaps from the pages in a musical prose that is exacting and breathtaking. Woodson illustrates the damning invisibility and unrelenting objectification of girls in this tender tale that effuses a spirit of unrelenting hopefulness. *Another Brooklyn* is a tableau of the personal and the collective that is at once graceful, restrained, and potent. It is an exquisite telling.”

—Lauren Francis-Sharma,  
author of *'Til the Well Runs Dry*

ALSO BY JACQUELINE WOODSON

MEMOIR

*Brown Girl Dreaming*

YOUNG ADULT & MIDDLE GRADE FICTION

*Last Summer with Maizon*

*The Dear One*

*Maizon at Blue Hill*

*Between Madison and Palmetto*

*I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*

*From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*

*The House You Pass on the Way*

*If You Come Softly*

*Lena*

*Miracle's Boys*

*Hush*

*Locomotion*

*Behind You*

*Feathers*

*After Tupac and D Foster*

*Peace, Locomotion*

*Beneath a Meth Moon*

# **ANOTHER BROOKLYN**

**JACQUELINE  
WOODSON**



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This is a work of fiction. While, as in all fiction, the literary  
perceptions and insights are based on experience, all names,  
characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's  
imagination or are used fictitiously.

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For Bushwick (1970–1990)  
In Memory



Keep straight down this block,  
Then turn right where you will find  
A peach tree blooming.

—RICHARD WRIGHT



# **ANOTHER BROOKLYN**



# 1

For a long time, my mother wasn't dead yet. Mine could have been a more tragic story. My father could have given in to the bottle or the needle or a woman and left my brother and me to care for ourselves—or worse, in the care of New York City Children's Services, where, my father said, there was seldom a happy ending. But this didn't happen. I know now that what is tragic isn't the moment. It is the memory.



If we had had jazz, would we have survived differently? If we had known our story was a blues

with a refrain running through it, would we have lifted our heads, said to each other, *This is memory* again and again until the living made sense? Where would we be now if we had known there was a melody to our madness? Because even though Sylvia, Angela, Gigi, and I came together like a jazz improv—half notes tentatively moving toward one another until the ensemble found its footing and the music felt like it had always been playing—we didn't have jazz to know this was who we were. We had the Top 40 music of the 1970s trying to tell our story. It never quite figured us out.



The summer I turned fifteen, my father sent me to a woman he had found through his fellow Nation of Islam brothers. An educated sister, he said, who I could talk to. By then, I was barely speaking. Where words had once flowed easily, I was sud-



denly silent, breath snatched from me, replaced by a melancholy my family couldn't understand.

Sister Sonja was a thin woman, her brown face all angles beneath a black hijab. So this is who the therapist became to me—the woman with the hijab, fingers tapered, dark eyes questioning. By then, maybe it was too late.

*Who hasn't walked through a life of small tragedies?* Sister Sonja often asked me, as though to understand the depth and breadth of human suffering would be enough to pull me outside of my own.



Somehow, my brother and I grew up motherless yet halfway whole. My brother had the faith my father brought him to, and for a long time, I had Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi, the four of us sharing the weight of growing up *Girl* in Brooklyn, as though

it was a bag of stones we passed among ourselves saying, *Here. Help me carry this.*



Twenty years have passed since my childhood. This morning, we buried my father. My brother and I stood shoulder to shoulder at the gravesite, willows weeping down around us, nearly bare-branched against the snow. The brothers and sisters from mosque surrounding us. In the silver light of the morning, my brother reached for and found my gloved hand.

Afterward, at a diner in Linden, New Jersey, my brother pulled off his black coat. Beneath it, he wore a black turtleneck and black wool pants. The black kufi his wife had knitted for him stopped just above his brow.

The diner smelled of coffee and bread and bleach. A neon sign flickered EAT HERE NOW in bright

green, dusty silver tinsel draping below it. I had spent Christmas Day at the hospital, my father moaning for pain medication, the nurses too slow in responding.

A waitress brought my brother more hot water for his mint tea. I picked at my eggs and lukewarm home fries, having eaten the bacon slowly to tease my brother.

*You hanging in, Big Sis?* he asked, his deep voice breaking up a bit.

*I'm good.*

*Still whole?*

*Still whole.*

*Still eating pork and all the other Devil's food, I see.*

*Everything but the grunt.*

We laughed, the joke an old one from the afternoons I had snuck off with my girls to the bodega around the corner for the foods I was forbidden to eat at home and the bits of bacon still on my plate.

*You still could come stay with me and Alafia you know. Bedrest isn't contagious.*

*I'm good at the apartment, I said. Lots to be done there. All his stuff to go through . . . Alafia doing okay?*

*She'll be all right. Doctors talk like if she stands up, the baby's gonna just drop right out of her. It's all good. Baby'll be fine.*

I started my way into the world two days before July ended but didn't arrive until August. When my mother, crazed from her long labor, asked what day it was, my father said, *It's August. It's August now. Shhh, Honey Baby*, he whispered. *August is here.*

*You scared?* I asked my brother, reaching across the table to touch his hand, remembering suddenly

a photo we had back in SweetGrove, him a new baby on my lap, me a small girl, smiling proudly into the camera.

*A little. But I know with Allah all things are possible.*



We were quiet. Old white couples surrounded us, sipping coffee and staring off. In the back somewhere, I could hear men speaking Spanish and laughing.

*I'm too young to be someone's auntie.*

*You're gonna be too old to be somebody's mama if you don't get busy. My brother grinned. No judgment.*

*No judgment is a lie.*

*Just saying it's time to stop studying the dead and hook up with a living brother. I know a guy.*

*Don't even.*

I tried not to think about the return to my father's apartment alone, the deep relief and fear that came with death. There were clothes to be donated, old food to throw out, pictures to pack away. For what? For whom?

In India, the Hindu people burn the dead and spread the ashes on the Ganges. The Caviteño people near Bali bury their dead in tree trunks. Our father had asked to be buried. Beside his lowered casket, a hill of dark and light brown dirt waited. We had not stayed to watch it get shoveled on top of him. It was hard not to think of him suddenly waking against the soft, invisible satin like the hundreds of people who had been buried in deep comas only to wake beneath the earth in terror.



*You gonna stay in the States for a minute?*

*A minute, I said. I'll be back for the baby though. You know I wouldn't miss that.*

As a child, I had not known the word *anthropology* or that there was a thing called Ivy League. I had not known that you could spend your days on planes, moving through the world, studying death, your whole life before this life an unanswered question . . . finally answered. I had seen death in Indonesia and Korea. Death in Mauritania and Mongolia. I had watched the people of Madagascar exhume the muslin-wrapped bones of their ancestors, spray them with perfume, and ask those who had already passed to the next place for their stories, prayers, blessings. I had been home a month watching my father die. Death didn't frighten me. Not now. Not anymore. But Brooklyn felt like a stone in my throat.

*You should come out to Astoria for a meal soon, a clean meal. Alafia can sit at the table, just not allowed to stand at the stove and cook. But I got us. It's all good.*

A minute passed. *I miss him*, he said. *I miss you*.

In my father's long, bitter last days of liver cancer, we had taken turns at his bedside, my brother coming into the hospital room so I could leave, then me waking him so he could go home for a quick shower and prayer before work.

Now my brother looked as though he was seven again, not thirty-one, his thick brow dipping down, his skin too clear and smooth for a man.

I wanted to comfort him. *It's good that he . . .* but the words wouldn't come.

*Allah is good*, my brother said. *All praise to Allah for calling him home*.

*All praise to Allah*, I said.





My brother drove me to the subway, kissed my forehead, and hugged me hard. When had he become a man? For so long, he had been my little brother, sweet and solemn, his eyes open wide to the world. Now, behind small wire-rimmed glasses, he looked like a figure out of history. Malcolm maybe. Or Stokely.

*I'll be by day after tomorrow to help you out, cool?*

*I'm good!*

*What—you got a man over there you don't want me to meet?*

I laughed.

*Still doing the Devil, I bet.*

I slapped at him and got out of the car. *Love you.*

*Love you, too, August.*



On the subway heading back to the old apartment, I looked up, startled to see Sylvia sitting across the aisle reading the *New York Times*. She had aged beautifully in the twenty years since I'd last seen her. Her reddish brown hair was cut short now, curly and streaked with gray. Her skin, still eerily bronze against those light eyes, was now etched through with fine wrinkles. Maybe she felt me watching her because she glanced up suddenly, recognized me, and smiled. For several slow seconds, the years fell away and she was Sylvia again, nearly fifteen in her St. Thomas Aquinas school uniform—green and blue plaid skirt, white blouse, and plaid cross bow tie, her belly just beginning to round. As my body seized up with silence again, I remembered Sister Sonja, her hijabbed head bent over her notebook, her fingers going still the first time I cried in her office.

*Sylvia.*

*Oh my God! August!* she said. *When did you get back to Brooklyn?*

The child would be a young woman now. I remember hearing she had Sylvia's reddish hair, and that as a newborn, her eyes had been gray.

Somehow I knew the train was pulling into Atlantic Avenue. But the station and everything around me felt far away. Somehow, I rose from my seat. Voice gone again. Body turning to ash.

Maybe Sylvia thought I was coming toward her, ready to hug away the years and forget. Maybe she had already forgotten, the way years allow us to.

*You look good, girl,* she said.

The train doors opened. It wasn't yet my stop.

But I got off anyway.



Years erase us. Sylvia sinking back into the dust of the world before I knew her, her baby gone, then her belly, then breasts, and finally only the deep gap in my life where she had once been.

Angela fading next, across the years, just a faint voice on the answering machine when I was home on college break. *I only just heard about Gigi. So awful. Were you there?* Promises to reconnect when both of us were next in New York. Promises she'd find me again. So much air around the lies distance allowed us to tell as she sank back into the world she had become a part of, a world of dancers and actors—redrawn into royalty without a past.

*Gigi.*

Each week, Sister Sonja said, *Start at the beginning*, her dark fingers bending around a small black notebook, pen poised. Many moments passed be-

fore I opened my mouth to speak. Each week, I began with the words *I was waiting for my mother . . .*

The office was small, ivy cascading down from a tiny pot on an otherwise stark windowsill. Maybe it was the ivy that kept me coming back. Every week, I spent forty minutes, my eyes moving from the ivy to Sister Sonja's hijab to her fingers closed around the notebook and pen. Maybe I spoke only because each week I was allowed to look into the brown, angled face of a woman and believe again that my mother was coming soon.

*I know when I get there, my brother and I used to sing. The first thing I'll see is the sun shining golden. Shining right down on me . . .*

How did I get there, to that moment of being asked to start at the beginning? Who had I become?

*She's coming, I'd say. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.*