

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo

by Taylor Jenkins Reid · Language: EN

Summary by booksummaryai.com —

<https://booksummaryai.com/country/en/the-seven-husbands-of-evelyn-hugo>

Overview

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo is a sweeping, glamorous novel about the life of an iconic Hollywood actress, Evelyn Hugo, who, at seventy-nine, decides to tell the truth about her seven marriages and the secrets she has kept for decades. She chooses an unknown journalist, Monique Grant, to write her biography, a choice that surprises everyone, including Monique herself. As Evelyn recounts her rise from a poor Cuban-American girl in New York to a legendary film star in 1950s and 1960s Hollywood, she reveals the compromises, sacrifices, and manipulations behind her public image. The story is framed by Monique's present-day life, which is unraveling as her marriage collapses, and her growing connection to Evelyn's past, which ultimately reveals a shocking personal link between them.

The novel is a meditation on love, ambition, identity, and the price of fame. Evelyn's seven husbands are not just romantic partners but stepping stones, shields, and sometimes victims of her relentless drive to succeed. At its core, the book is about the lengths we go to protect the people we love and the versions of ourselves we present to the world. The central revelation—that Evelyn's true love was her best friend and fellow actress, Celia St. James—recasts her entire story as a tale of hidden queer love in an era that punished it. The novel matters because it explores the cost of living authentically in a world that demands performance, and it celebrates the resilience of women who carve out their own destinies despite immense pressure.

The narrative alternates between Evelyn's past and Monique's present, building toward a devastating twist that ties their lives together. Taylor Jenkins Reid crafts a compelling character study that is both a page-turning drama and a poignant reflection on memory, truth, and legacy. The book has resonated with millions of readers for its emotional depth, its unflinching look at Hollywood's dark underbelly, and its unforgettable heroine, making it a modern classic of popular fiction.

Key Takeaways

- Ambition often requires difficult choices, and Evelyn Hugo shows that success can come at the cost of personal happiness and authenticity.
- The truth of a person's life is rarely the story they tell publicly; hidden sacrifices and secret loves often define who we really are.

- Love can take many forms, and Evelyn's devotion to Celia proves that the deepest connections are not always the ones society approves of.
- Your past does not have to dictate your future; Evelyn reinvented herself repeatedly to survive and thrive in a ruthless industry.
- Secrets have a way of surfacing, and the truth, however painful, can set you free—as it does for both Evelyn and Monique.
- The people we choose to let into our lives can change our fate; Monique's unexpected role in Evelyn's story alters both their lives forever.
- Hollywood's glamour often hides exploitation and compromise, and Evelyn's story exposes the price of fame for women in the mid-20th century.
- Forgiveness, especially of oneself, is essential to moving forward; Evelyn's final confession is an act of self-liberation.

Chapter Summaries

Part One: The Beginning

Monique Grant, a journalist at a struggling magazine, is shocked when legendary actress Evelyn Hugo requests her to write her biography. Evelyn, now seventy-nine, insists on Monique and no one else. Monique, reeling from her husband's recent divorce request, agrees. Evelyn begins her story in 1950s New York, describing her childhood as Evelyn Herrera, a poor Cuban-American girl who dreamed of escaping her circumstances. She recounts how she caught the eye of a producer and transformed herself into Evelyn Hugo, using her beauty and determination to break into Hollywood. This section sets up the frame narrative and introduces the mystery of why Monique was chosen.

Part Two: The First Husbands

Evelyn details her first marriage to Ernie Diaz, a childhood friend who gave her stability and a green card, but whom she never loved. She then becomes involved with producer Harry Cameron, who helps launch her career but is secretly gay. Evelyn's second husband is Don Adler, a charismatic but abusive actor. She describes the violence she endured and how she finally left him, a scandal that nearly destroyed her career. Through these marriages, Evelyn reveals her ruthless pragmatism: she uses marriage as a tool for advancement and protection, while her true emotional life remains hidden. The section also introduces her deep friendship with Celia St. James, a fellow actress who becomes the love of her life.

Part Three: The Love of a Lifetime

Evelyn's third husband is Mick Riva, a famous singer, but her heart belongs to Celia. She and Celia begin a secret affair, navigating the dangers of being queer in Hollywood. Evelyn marries Mick partly to deflect suspicion, but the marriage is short-lived. She then marries Robert Jamison,

a kind and understanding man who knows about her relationship with Celia and agrees to a marriage of convenience. For years, Evelyn and Celia carry on their love in secret, with Robert as a protective cover. This section explores the joy and agony of hidden love, and the sacrifices Evelyn makes to keep her career and her relationship intact. It culminates in a devastating betrayal that separates Evelyn and Celia for years.

Part Four: The Fall and Rise

After Robert's death, Evelyn spirals, and she and Celia reunite briefly but break apart again due to jealousy and misunderstanding. Evelyn's fourth husband is Rex North, a British actor, and her fifth is a brief marriage to a man named John Braverman, both of which are empty. She finally reconnects with Celia, and they decide to live together openly in a private way, but tragedy strikes when Celia is diagnosed with cancer. Evelyn cares for her until Celia's death, which devastates her. In her grief, Evelyn marries her sixth husband, a doctor named Max Girard, but the marriage is a hollow attempt to fill the void. This section shows Evelyn at her most vulnerable, grappling with loss and regret.

Part Five: The Truth

Evelyn reveals that her seventh husband, Harry Cameron, was her best friend and a gay man who married her to protect both of them. She explains that Harry was the love of her life in a platonic sense, and that their marriage was a final act of devotion. She also reveals the shocking secret that she had a daughter with Harry, a child she gave up for adoption to protect her from the public eye. That daughter, it turns out, is Monique's mother. Monique is stunned to learn that Evelyn is her grandmother. Evelyn explains that she chose Monique to tell her story because she wanted to give her granddaughter the truth and a chance to know her. The novel ends with Monique beginning to write the biography, and Evelyn finally finding peace.

Themes

- Ambition and sacrifice
- Hidden love and identity
- The price of fame
- Truth and memory
- Female friendship and rivalry
- Reinvention and survival

Notable Quotes

- "People think that intimacy is about sex. But intimacy is about truth. When you realize you can tell someone your truth, when you can show yourself to them, when you stand in front of them bare and their response is 'you're safe with me' - that's intimacy." — Evelyn explains to

Monique the difference between physical intimacy and emotional truth, reflecting on her relationship with Celia.

- "I was a woman who had to fight for everything I had. I was a woman who had to use my body to get what I wanted. I was a woman who had to be smarter than the men who thought they were using me." — Evelyn describes her early years in Hollywood and the survival tactics she employed.
- "You can be sorry for something and still do it. You can love someone and still hurt them. You can be a good person and still do bad things." — Evelyn reflects on her past mistakes, particularly her treatment of some of her husbands.
- "I think everyone has a story they are afraid to tell. I think everyone has a story they are ashamed of. I think everyone has a story they are not ready to tell." — Evelyn tells Monique why she is finally ready to reveal her secrets.
- "I didn't want to be a wife. I wanted to be a star. But I learned that to be a star, I had to be a wife." — Evelyn explains the transactional nature of her marriages in the context of Hollywood's expectations.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* about?

It's a novel about a fictional Hollywood icon, Evelyn Hugo, who reveals the truth about her seven marriages and her secret love affair with a woman, Celia St. James, to a journalist named Monique Grant. The story spans decades, exposing the sacrifices Evelyn made for fame and the hidden cost of her success.

Is *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* worth reading?

Yes, for most readers. It's a gripping, emotionally charged story with a compelling protagonist and a shocking twist. The writing is accessible and fast-paced, and it explores themes of love, ambition, and identity. It's particularly praised for its portrayal of queer love in mid-century Hollywood.

How does *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* end?

Spoiler: Evelyn reveals that her seventh husband, Harry Cameron, was her best friend and the father of her daughter, whom she gave up for adoption. That daughter is Monique's mother, making Evelyn Monique's grandmother. Monique, shocked, begins to write the biography, and Evelyn finally finds peace, having told the truth.

Who should read *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*?

Fans of character-driven fiction, especially those who enjoy stories about Old Hollywood, strong female protagonists, and LGBTQ+ themes. It's also a great pick for book clubs because it sparks

discussion about love, sacrifice, and the nature of truth. If you like Taylor Jenkins Reid's other works, you'll likely enjoy this.

How long does it take to read *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*?

At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, the book (about 390 pages) takes roughly 6 to 8 hours to read. Most readers finish it in a few days, as it's a compelling page-turner.