

# Passing: A Haunting Memoir of Love and Death

Passing is a haunting memoir by Nella Larsen that explores the complexities of race, identity, and love. First published in 1929, the novel tells the story of two light-skinned Black women, Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield, who choose to pass for white in order to escape the limitations of their race. The novel follows the women as they navigate the complexities of their new lives, struggling with issues of identity, belonging, and love. Passing is a powerful and moving novel that sheds light on the complexities of race and identity in America.

## Plot Summary

The novel opens with Clare Kendry, a light-skinned Black woman who has been passing for white for several years. She is married to a white man, Jack Bellew, and they have two children. Clare is living a comfortable life, but she is haunted by the secret of her true identity. She is also deeply unhappy in her marriage, and she longs for something more.



## Passing: A Memoir of Love and Death by Michael Korda

★★★★☆ 4.8 out of 5  
Language : English  
File size : 4485 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Print length : 242 pages



One day, Clare encounters Irene Redfield, a childhood friend who also passes for white. Irene is a successful artist, and she is living a glamorous life. Clare is immediately drawn to Irene, and she begins to spend more and more time with her. As they spend more time together, Clare begins to question her own choices. She starts to wonder if she has made the right decision to pass for white, and she begins to long for a connection with her Black heritage.

Irene, on the other hand, is more comfortable with her decision to pass for white. She believes that it is the only way to achieve success and happiness in America. She is also more accepting of Clare's decision to pass, even though she does not fully understand it.

As the novel progresses, Clare and Irene's friendship becomes more and more strained. They begin to disagree on important issues, such as race and identity. Clare also becomes increasingly jealous of Irene's success and happiness.

The novel reaches its climax when Clare reveals her true identity to Irene. Irene is shocked and betrayed, and she ends their friendship. Clare is heartbroken, and she begins to spiral out of control. She starts drinking heavily, and she becomes increasingly isolated.

In the end, Clare's secret destroys her. She dies from an accidental overdose of drugs, and her death is a tragic reminder of the dangers of passing for white.

## **Themes**

Passing is a complex and multi-layered novel that explores a variety of themes, including:

\* **Race and identity:** The novel explores the complex and fluid nature of race and identity. Clare and Irene are both light-skinned Black women, but they choose to pass for white for different reasons. Clare is motivated by a desire to escape the limitations of her race, while Irene is motivated by a desire for success and happiness. The novel shows how race and identity are not always clear-cut, and that people can often have multiple identities.

\* **Love and death:** The novel also explores the themes of love and death. Clare and Irene are both searching for love, but they find it in different ways. Clare finds love with a white man, but she is unable to fully embrace her love for him because of her secret. Irene finds love with a Black man, but her love for him is complicated by her desire to pass for white. The novel shows how love can be both a source of joy and pain, and how it can sometimes lead to death. \* **The dangers of passing:** The novel also shows the dangers of passing for white. Clare's secret ultimately destroys her, and it also has a negative impact on Irene's life. The novel shows how passing for white can lead to isolation, loneliness, and even death.

## **Characters**

The novel's two main characters are Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield. Clare is a light-skinned Black woman who has been passing for white for several years. She is married to a white man, and they have two children. Clare is living a comfortable life, but she is haunted by the secret of her true identity. She is also deeply unhappy in her marriage, and she longs for something more.

Irene is also a light-skinned Black woman who passes for white. She is a successful artist, and she is living a glamorous life. Irene is more comfortable with her decision to pass for white than Clare is. She believes that it is the only way to achieve success and happiness in America.

The novel also features a number of other characters, including Clare's husband, Jack Bellew; Irene's lover, Brian Redfield; and Clare's childhood friend, Felise.

## **Setting**

The novel is set in New York City in the 1920s. The novel's setting is important because it reflects the social and racial tensions of the time. The novel shows how Black people were often forced to live in the shadows, and how they were often denied opportunities for success and happiness.

## **Style**

Larsen's writing style is spare and elegant. She uses simple language to create complex and nuanced characters. The novel's prose is often lyrical, and it evokes a strong sense of atmosphere and place.

## **Critical Reception**

Passing was a critical and commercial success when it was first published in 1929. The novel was praised for its realism, its psychological depth, and its exploration of important social issues. Passing has since been recognized as one of the great American novels of the 20th century.

The novel has been adapted for film and television several times. The most recent adaptation was a 2021 film starring Tessa Thompson and Ruth Negga.

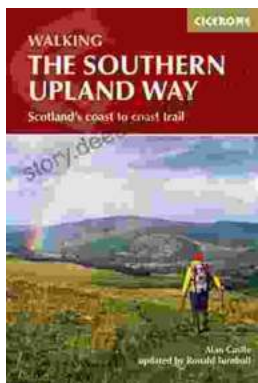
Passing is a powerful and moving novel that explores the complexities of race, identity, and love. The novel is a classic of American literature, and it continues to be relevant and important today. Passing is a must-read for anyone who is interested in race, identity, or American history.



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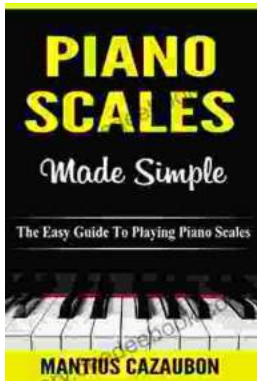
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