

The ending of Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* is irrefutably ambiguous, and although this may be, I am wholly convinced that it is Irene Redfield who is responsible for the murder of Clare Kendry. Even before interpreting contextual evidence, we are clued into this possibility simply through analysis of Irene's name. The name Irene derives from the Greek word for peace, as well as alludes to Saint Irene, who, historically, was martyred. These things would certainly be misleading if not for the development of Irene's character, and because Irene is developed, her namesake serves as Larsen's employment of irony. It is clear that Irene is not peaceful and is neither at peace with herself nor with those surrounding her; in multiple instances, we see Irene's turmoil in her jealous attraction to Clare, in her marriage with Brian which is characterized mainly in their fights, and in her expressing that the only thing worse than Clare dying is Clare *not* dying. If we assume that the complex in which the final scene takes place is an apartment building surrounded by grass and shrubbery, then Clare quite literally ends up in a "red field"—the field being the grass, and the red, her blood.

Early on in the novel, we get from Irene a mixture of jealousy and attraction towards Clare. Clare is physically beautiful, yes, but her seductive and charming qualities also allow her to be well-received and easily likeable in every scenario presented within the novel. Although Irene has a sense of pride in her race, she is obviously jealous of the life Clare has made for herself by rejecting her black identity and claiming a white one, and this jealousy is further complicated by Irene's attraction to Clare. Although the novel never explicitly states this, Irene's fixation on Clare's physical beauty is suggestive enough, and it is also necessary to point out that the only kissing that happens within the novel is not shared by any couple, but by Irene and Clare. There are many instances in which Irene and Clare touch, and because we are tuned into Irene's perspective through the third person omniscient narration, we see Irene's inner thoughts and feelings about Clare.

In a similar vein, and most relevant to my argument, is the idea of Irene's paranoia. In part three of *Passing*, Irene convinces herself that her husband and Clare are having an affair, despite her having no evidence to bolster this notion. This, then, leads to a dilemma central to the novel: Irene wants to tell Bellew that Clare is passing because she is jealous of her seemingly better life while simultaneously not wanting Bellew to discover Clare's secret out of fear that they will divorce and Clare will steal Brian from Irene. Irene expresses her want "to rid [herself] forever of Clare Kendry" and even goes so far as to say that "she could not get rid of the thought" of Clare Kendry dying (112-116). This, combined with the aforementioned points as well as Irene "[running] across the room, her terror tinged with ferocity, and [laying] a hand on Clare's bare arm" right before the incident makes me believe that it was, in fact, Irene who killed Clare.