

AN INTIMATION OF THINGS DISTANT



THE COLLECTED FICTION OF
NELLA LARSEN

FOREWORD BY MARITA GOLDEN

An
Intimation
of
Things
Distant



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The Collected Fiction of Nella Larsen

Edited and with an Introduction by Charles R. Larson

With a Foreword by Marita Golden

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Foreword

Nella Larsen's heroines are emotional nomads, women whose intelligence and genius for rebellion make them ill suited for the proscribed existence ordained by whites for blacks in 1920s and '30s segregated America. No tragic mulattoes here. These prim, proper colored ladies bristle with discontent and yearning. But, most important, they are driven by the impulse to shape their lives rather than suffer them, even when their grasp is unsure and they are careening full tilt towards disaster.

In Helga Crane and Clare Kendry, Nella Larsen has created two characters that are rich, complex, and contradictory. *Quicksand* and *Passing* launch each woman on a quest for self that predicts the themes

Introduction

The erroneous "facts" concerning the life and career of Nella Larsen are nothing less than legion. Her brief literary career is said to have come to an abrupt halt because of the charges of plagiarism concerning her only published short story. After that awkward incident in 1930, she is said to have ceased her creative efforts and disappeared not only from the Harlem artistic scene but from the consciousness of her many friends as well. Larsen's readers have speculated that she passed for white—in the manner of the heroine of her 1929 novel, *Passing*. At the time of her death, there were no published obituaries. Her childhood, her parentage, and the date of her birth have all been incorrectly recorded—as have virtually all of the other

A Note on the Texts

To make these texts from the 1920s more accessible to the contemporary reader, minor changes have been made with spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and spacing. British spellings (“colour” instead of “color”) have been altered throughout. Obvious typographical errors in the original texts have been corrected.

The Wrong
Man



Freedom



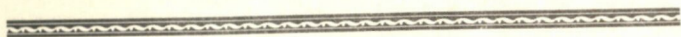
Sanctuary



Quicksand



Passing



*For Carl Van Vechten and
Fania Marinoff*

*One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?*

—COUNTEE CULLEN

Her quaking knees gave way under her. She moaned and sank down, moaned again. Through the great heaviness that submerged and drowned her she was dimly conscious of strong arms lifting her up. Then everything was dark.

Centuries after, she heard the strange man saying: "Death by misadventure, I'm inclined to believe. Let's go up and have another look at that window."

Nella Larsen—
A Chronology

- April 13, 1891 Born. New York (?)
- 1912-1915 Nursing Degree, Lincoln Hospital and Home
- 1915-1917 Works as nurse at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial
Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama
- 1918 New York City Department of Health
- May 3, 1919 Marries Elmer S. Imes
- 1920 "Three Scandinavian Games," *The Brownies' Book*
(June)
- "Danish Fun," *The Brownies' Book* (July) Pub-
lished under name Nella Larsen Imes

An Intimation of Things Distant

- 1921–1926 Works as a librarian for the New York City Public Library (Harlem Branch)
- 1926 “The Wrong Man,” *Young’s Magazine* (January);
“Freedom,” *Young’s Magazine* (April) Published under pseudonym: Allen Semi
- 1928 *Quicksand*
Awarded Bronze Award for Literature (Harmon Foundation)
- 1929 *Passing*
- 1930 “Sanctuary,” *Forum* (January)
Accused of plagiarism
- 1930–1931 Guggenheim Fellow in Europe
Working on *Mirage*
- 1932 Nashville, with Elmer
- August 30, 1933 Divorces Elmer Imes
- September 11, 1941 Elmer Imes dies
- February 14, 1944 Appointed Chief Nurse at Gouverneur Hospital, New York City
- September 1954 Night Supervisor at Gouverneur Hospital
- 1962 Supervisor of Nurses, Metropolitan Hospital, New York City
- September 12, 1963 Retires from nursing
- March 30, 1964 Discovered dead in her apartment

CHARLES R. LARSON is Professor of Literature at American University in Washington, D.C. He is the author of three critical works on Third World literature: *The Emergence of African Fiction* (1972), *The Novel in the Third World* (1976), and *American Indian Fiction* (1978). He has also published three novels: *Academia Nuts* (1977), *The Insect Colony* (1978), and *Arthur Dimmesdale* (1983). Previously, he was a general editor of Collier Books' African-American Library.

MARITA GOLDEN is the author of *Migrations of the Heart*, *A Woman's Place*, and *Long Distance Life*. Her writing has appeared in *Ms.*, *Essence*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and many other publications. She is a founding member of the African American Writers' Guild. Ms. Golden lives in Washington, D.C., where she teaches in the MFA Creative Writing Program at George Mason University.

"DISCOVERING AN INTIMATION OF THINGS DISTANT IS LIKE FINDING LOST MONEY WITH NO NAME ON IT. ONE CAN ENJOY IT WITH DELIGHT, AND SHARE IT WITHOUT GUILT."
— Maya Angelou

"To discover new fiction by Nella Larsen is to discover a gem, finely wrought."
— Paula Giddings

"The excavation of Nella Larsen's collected fiction is evidence that the terrain of African-American women writers, the archaeology of our existence and survival, is intersected by a cartography as poignant as Larsen's pen. No longer shall we relegate her creativity to an uncharted region, unexplored and ignored."
— Alexis de Veaux

Between 1926 and 1930 — during the golden era of the Harlem Renaissance — Nella Larsen published two novels and three short stories (two were pseudonymous) and enjoyed a brief period of fame and popularity equal to that of any of the literary stars of that period. In 1930, she became the first black woman to be awarded a Guggenheim fellowship. By 1933, she had disappeared from the literary scene, never to publish again.

In *An Intimation of Things Distant*, Charles R. Larson, a leading authority on Third World literature, has compiled a unique representation of Larsen's work. The stories have been unavailable for years, and their inclusion in this anthology makes this a definitive collection. Marita Golden's foreword was written specifically for this book.

Fifty years later, Nella Larsen's fiction still speaks to the black female experience. As Golden says in her foreword: "The angst, the tension that rivets the lives of Larsen's heroines makes their dilemmas completely contemporary and timeless. Inevitably, any writer whose female protagonists resist the expected, the traditional, the 'correct,' is dialoguing with the literary legacy of Nella Larsen."

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