



The Chinaberry Tree: A Novel of American Life

Jessie Redmon Fauset

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Adultery, incest, and questions of racial identity simmer beneath the tranquil surface of suburban life in this novel, set in a small New Jersey town of the early 1900s. Lovely young Laurentine is obsessed with her "bad blood," inherited from a common-law interracial union. Proud and independent, she longs for the respectability of a conventional marriage. Laurentine's vivacious and self-confident cousin, Melissa, also aspires to "marry up." But a family secret shadows Melissa's dreams and ambitions as she approaches an explosive revelation.

African-American editor, poet, essayist, and novelist Jessie Redmon Fauset (1882–1961) was a prominent figure of the Harlem Renaissance. An editor of the NAACP magazine *The Crisis*, she was also an editor and co-author of the African-American children's magazine, *The Brownies' Book*. Her third novel, *The Chinaberry Tree*, draws upon elements of Greek tragedy in its powerful depiction of interracial love and marriage. The tale also offers a modern perspective on the struggle of its African-American heroines toward self-knowledge.

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