

A person wearing a grey beanie and dark clothing is riding a bicycle on a paved road that stretches into the distance. The road is lined with tall, thin trees with bare branches, suggesting an autumn or winter setting. The lighting is warm and golden, creating long shadows on the road. The person is seen from behind, riding away from the viewer.

WHERE IS SHE?

A 2ND STORY STUDY GUIDE
INSPIRED BY THE ORIGINAL STORY BY
JESS KADISH-HERNÁNDEZ



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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome to our study guide.

2nd Story is a collective of story-makers and story-lovers committed to building a more empathetic world by sharing one great story at a time. We believe in the unique power of sharing one's personal story.

This guide takes a closer look at a true story told by the person who lived the experience.

Jess Kadish-Hernández's *Where Is She?* captures the moment when a joyous honeymoon trip poses a potential risk, and the choice she must make between her safety and her identity.

Inside this study guide, you will find activities, an interview with Jess, and historical and contextual information that will add to your understanding of her story. On our website you can find additional resources and related learning standards.

To use this guide in any capacity, please start by listening to the story, available on the 2nd Story website at 2ndStory.com/studyguides.

Happy listening! Happy learning!

The 2nd Story Collective

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*We discussed at length the language to use for this study guide, and we settled on the phrase 'same-sex' because it is most frequently reflected in legislation and cited throughout history. However, we recognize that this is not a gender-inclusive phrase.



START TALKING.

2nd Story uses **true, first-person stories** as an entry-point for conversation. After listening to Jess Kadish-Hernández's *Where Is She?*, use the following questions for a guided discussion.

GROUP AGREEMENTS

When sharing personal narratives, stories, and sensitive information, we begin by establishing the following agreements with participants. Before beginning your discussion, we recommend going over the following group agreements. When finished, ask, "Do you agree?" and then have participants collectively and vocally respond with "I agree."

1. What is learned here leaves here. What is said here stays here.
2. Take care of yourself.
3. Practice equity by sharing the floor.
4. Replace judgment with curiosity.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Does this story feel familiar to you and your life? Why or why not?
- What is something new you learned from this story?
- What choices does Jess make in this story that turn out worse than expected?
 - How does she address the situation?
- How is this story affected by the community it takes place in?
 - How might it have gone differently had it taken place in a city?
- How do Jess and Erica communicate in this story that expresses their relationship?
- How do the heightened emotions of the story affect Jess's decision making?
 - How do you make decisions when afraid or stressed?
- Consider the different core types of relationships and how they are represented in the story:
 - Person & Person
 - Person & Self
 - Person & Society

MARRIAGE EQUALITY: A TIMELINE

The United States, as well as countries around the globe, has a dark history of criminalizing marriage. This timeline explores pivotal moments in the fight for marriage equality for both interracial and same-sex* couples. As with all battles for equality, this fight is far from over, and we must continue to push the needle towards justice and inclusion.

1776

Seven colonies legislate to re-criminalize interracial marriage.

1883 - PACE V. ALABAMA

The United States Supreme Court upholds anti-miscegenation laws, claiming racial equity by the fact that white and black folks were punished equally under these laws.

1948 - PEREZ V. SHARP

The California Supreme Court officially states that laws against interracial marriage are unconstitutional, making California the first state to do so.

1970

Jack Baker and Michael McConnell are denied a marriage license in Minnesota, leading them to sue the state.

1973-1987

Several states actively ban same-sex marriage. Similarly, many State Courts refuse to hear cases from same-sex couples attempting to marry or strike down cases officially.

2003 - GOODRIDGE VS. DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The Massachusetts Supreme Court legalizes same-sex marriage. Shortly after (in Feb. 2004), the Court officially states that limiting same-sex couples to terms akin to "civil union" is considered discrimination.

2008

The Democratic National Convention officially adopts an anti-DOMA policy in favor of same-sex marriage.

2012-2013 - WINDSOR VS. UNITED STATES

DOMA is ruled unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court.

2016

The Republican National Convention adopts a platform devoted to overturning Obergefell vs. Hodges and giving states the right to define marriage as between a man and a woman.

PRE 1776 - COLONIAL AMERICA

Starting with Maryland and Virginia, all thirteen colonies criminalize marriage between White and non-White people.

1865-1877 - RECONSTRUCTION ERA

Several Southern states legalize interracial marriage temporarily, before these bans are reinstated with the start of Jim Crow laws.

1913-1948

30 States enforce anti-miscegenation laws during this period.

1967 - LOVING V. VIRGINIA

The United States Supreme Court rules that laws banning interracial marriage are unconstitutional.

1971 - BAKER VS. NELSON

The Minnesota Supreme Court rules against Baker, upholding the legal definition of marriage as between a man and a woman.

1996

President Clinton signs the Defense Of Marriage Act (DOMA), officially defining marriage as between a man and a woman at the federal level.

2004 - 2008

Across the country, State Courts continue to strike down appeals to legalize same-sex marriage. Highlights include California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger twice vetoing legislation that would have legalized same-sex marriage.

2011

The Obama Administration states that DOMA is unconstitutional and will not defend it against court cases. Individual members of Congress are given permission to do so, however.

2015 - OBERGEFELL VS. HODGES

The United States Supreme Court hears this case and rules that marriage is a fundamental right for all, legalizing same-sex marriage across the United States.

AS OF THE WRITING OF THIS STUDY GUIDE:

- 29 (out of 195) countries in the world legally recognize and officiate same-sex marriages.
 - 12 additional countries offer legally distinct partnerships (similar to civil unions) to same-sex couples.
- No country explicitly outlaws interracial marriage.
 - However, some Middle Eastern countries do outlaw Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men.

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THE INS & OUTS OF 'I DO.'

- Marriage is defined as a legal or formal union between two partners.
- Historically, marriage has served to unite partners for many purposes, including, but not limited to:
 - Parenting
 - Official monogamy
 - Financial ties
 - Joint property ownership
 - Joining two families together for financial, legal, or political purposes
- Many ancient practices of marriage are now considered problematic.
 - Dowry/Bridewealth
 - For much of history, a groom would be expected to provide a degree of wealth to his bride's family in order to "buy" the right to marry her.
 - Conversely, the bride's family would also promise a dowry as a way of encouraging marriage.
 - This was especially important for cultures where women could not earn their own living and would become property of their husbands after marriage.
 - Both of these practices have been widely culturally abandoned, though some countries have had to actively outlaw them to stop the discriminatory effects they encourage.

#1

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2019, there were around 2.02 million marriages in the United States. That equals almost 6,030 weddings each day. The state of Nevada has the highest marriage rate, which is nearly four times the national average, while the state of Illinois has the lowest marriage rate.

#50

DISMANTLING OUR PRIVILEGE A CONVERSATION WITH JESS KADISH-HERNÁNDEZ

Jess Kadish-Hernández is an actor and writer who has been working with 2nd Story for the past ten years as a storyteller, director, curator, teaching artist, and CultureBuilds facilitator. She's also on the consulting team at Morten Group, where she works primarily with the firm's Equity and Inclusion Institute on organizational assessments and trainings, and she's a co-founder of the Chicago Artists Relief Fund. She holds an MFA in acting from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She and her wife Erica currently live in the cornfields of central Illinois, where they split their time between taking long walks and having Dua Lipa dance parties.



So, tell me a little about yourself. Where are you from? What do you do?

I grew up in Central Massachusetts and came to Chicago for college at the University of Chicago. About a year before I graduated, I met my now-wife, Erica, a born-and-raised Chicagoan, and Chicago became home. We've been together ever since and we now live down in Champaign-Urbana at the University of Illinois, where I received my MFA in acting and she's finishing hers now. We're both actors and writers. I'm also a communication skills coach with Pinnacle Performance, a member of the consulting team at Morten Group, and a co-founder of the Chicago Artists Relief Fund.

I'm also an actor, writer, and communication skills coach with Pinnacle Performance Company. I'm part of the consulting team at Morten Group, and I'm a co-founder of the Chicago Artists Relief Fund.

What role does storytelling play in your life?

In elementary school I learned about *Harriet the Spy* and I think that's where my love of personal narrative started. I started taking a notebook everywhere and observing everything I could about other people and myself. I got in trouble for this a lot; I would write during class all the time. It's how I first learned to document the beginnings of stories.

I am always looking for and absorbing and reflecting on stories. It's a lens I'm really grateful to see the world through.

Why did you want to tell this story?

This is a story of reckoning with my own privilege and my relationship with it, and that's something I know a lot of other folks are wrestling with, too. I wanted to offer my own mistakes and learning to others, and also to own them for myself by sharing them. I'm uncomfortable every time I tell this story, which is a good sign that I look for as an artist.

If you were to tell this story today, do you think it would change?

It changes every time I tell it. I have a folder of drafts with pencil marks from each telling. Sometimes it's a word or a sentence. Sometimes Amanda (2nd Story's Artistic Director) gives me an amazing directing note that becomes part of the text.

I always learn new things from folks' reactions to this story, and sometimes those leave a mark too. There's so much happening in this story. It's an entry point to so many conversations with so many layers based on how folks connect their own

experiences to the story. Every single time, without fail, someone says something that blows my mind.

You first told this story four years ago. What are some of the key differences between how you tell this story now from when you told it then?

One key change is that until this draft, I had identified Erica as Mexican-American, but I didn't include any phenotypical details beyond that. That's not a clear enough picture, actually, to understand what's happening. Race and phenotype are important to the story, and just saying she's Latina actually doesn't give you the information you need as a listener - she could be a dark-skinned Black woman, she could be blonde-haired and blue-eyed.

So for this draft, she & I have specified her racial background more clearly, about a month after my last public telling and nearly four years after the first performance. We actually sat down together and we co-wrote a new paragraph that felt right to her while also fitting into the scene.

This story takes place very soon after your marriage, and there is a moment in the story when you choose to "pass" as Erica's friend instead of as her wife. How has your relationship to passing changed in the time since?

It's an ongoing dance. The thing that we have been more acutely aware of since this story is how much of a privilege it is to pass. We are both very femme in our gender presentation and the fact that we can easily pass as straight impacts everything from the way we travel to how we're treated at the DMV. We've been mistaken for everything but spouses: roommates, coworkers, sisters - even mother and daughter once, which is still wild to me. Once in Mexico we decided to make it a riddle; I said "Her mother is my mother-in-law, but she's not my sister-in-law. What are we?" And the guy we were talking to truly could not figure it out.

Another kind of passing I'm doing in this story (which I don't write about because there's already so much going on) is that I'm Ashkenazi Jewish, too, but I can pass for non-Jewish white. I *definitely* do not advertise my Judaism in rural areas. Anti-semitism is pervasive and terrifying. But again, like my queerness, my Jewishness is something I can hide.

Your website references that, while you are fluent in Spanish, you are not Latina. What is the thought process behind this specification?

So now we're talking about yet another different kind of passing (but this time it's one which I refuse to do). I am often mistaken for Latina. In my early 20s, the more fluent I became in Spanish *and* the more fluent I became in talking about race, the more it happened. I've always

"THIS IS A STORY OF RECKONING WITH MY OWN PRIVILEGE AND MY RELATIONSHIP WITH IT, AND THAT'S SOMETHING I KNOW A LOT OF OTHER FOLKS ARE WRESTLING WITH, TOO. I WANTED TO OFFER MY OWN MISTAKES AND LEARNING TO OTHERS, AND ALSO TO OWN THEM FOR MYSELF BY SHARING THEM."

corrected people if they've openly assumed wrong, but the older I get the better I've gotten about being the one to bring it up. Folks will tell themselves a story about who you are if you don't tell them first. I've come to view it as part of my role in the conversation to be the one to name it, which then allows others to focus on more important things, like hiring actual Latinas if that's what they're trying to do. Since Latinas are underrepresented, it's really important to me that I not allow people to believe I'm someone I'm not. If I let that happen, I'm taking up space, resources, opportunities, etc. that aren't meant for me. That's stealing.

Do you feel the events in this story would have gone differently had they occurred in an urban setting?

I can't imagine the events of this story happening in an urban setting at all, honestly. The cornfields are their own character in this story. The story doesn't exist without them any more than it does without me or Erica.

Whenever we travel to a new city we're always visiting friends. When we're at home in our city we have our family and our friends and our people. We are fortunate to have great support networks - except on the rare occasion we're alone in a small town and truly don't know anyone, as we were here.

Calling the police in Chicago is not something we consider to be an option.

What did it mean to assess your interactions with the police, as well as other community residents? How did

those interactions either affirm or deny the need to hide your identity?

In this small town, I could call the police for help without fear that they would kill me. That's the first thing I have to say here. I knew subconsciously - and later was able to articulate consciously - that if I called and said my friend was missing and that was it, I'd be perceived as just some nice pretty straight white lady and they'd probably help me. At worst, they wouldn't help, but they wouldn't hurt me. That is an enormous privilege.

With other residents in the community, it wasn't a conscious decision to affirm or deny my identity with each interaction. I knew what the goal was: find Erica. I knew what I needed: help from strangers in a small town I didn't know. My need to be affirmed or seen for who I was, which is normally pretty important to me, took a distant backseat to desperately trying to make sure my wife wasn't hurt or worse. And the big aha moment in the story for me is understanding that the fact that I *can* hide my marginalized identity when I need to is, again, enormous privilege.

How often does that happen when you are in a new environment?

All the time. We are very out and very privileged in so many ways, but coming out as queer is a regular event. Sometimes it's dramatic, a big aha moment. Sometimes it's routine, like getting your oil changed. Often it's a safety calculation, especially in new environments.



RADIO CAÑA NEGRA

When we chatted with Jess, she credited a lot of her learning, from properly identifying Erica's race and phenotype to exploring the historical legacy of white supremacy in the construction of Latinidad to the hosts of the podcast **Radio Caña Negra**: Janvieve Williams, Dash Harris, and Evelyn Alvarez and their workshop "AntiBlackness in the Latine Community."

About Radio Caña Negra: Porque no somos morenas (Black Since Birth) - With the sharpness of a machete, we discuss and share, and with the sweetness of cane sugar we laugh and heal focusing on issues related to Black people from Latin America. Learn more at <https://anchor.fm/cana-negra>.

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF PASSING

WHAT IS PASSING?

“Passing” is defined as any act or ability of an individual to present themselves as a member of a social identity group they are not a part of. Historically, this has included race, such as light-skinned Black folks passing as white, and sexuality, with queer folks hiding their sexualities and passing as straight. It is important to name that passing is not always an active choice; it can also occur passively, when assumptions are made by individuals or society at large.

For example, in Jess's story, we see her and her wife hide their romantic relationship and pass as friends (and therefore implicitly straight) to avoid potential danger. The concept of “passing as straight” can also be placed upon an individual through no action of their own. When straightness is viewed as “the default sexuality,” a queer person may have their sexuality erased by the assumptions of those around them. This erasure can heighten societal ignorance of “invisible or lesser known” identities such as asexuality or bisexuality.

WHAT'S THE MOTIVATION?

While the act of passing looks different for different groups, the motivation is often the same – safety and opportunity. In a society that provides privilege to straight, white, cis people, passing as a part of any of those communities can instantly offer a degree of comfort for marginalized individuals.

IS IT HARMFUL?

Despite offering a sense of security, passing also requires a person to hide a core part of their identity. This can take a serious emotional toll, especially when done for a long period of time. It also brings with it an implicit danger if the passing is discovered. As author Allyson Hobbs articulates, “To write a history of passing is to write a history of loss.”

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF PASSING

FOR ALL AGES

• **PASSING**

- 2021 Film directed by Rebecca Hall, based on 1929 novel by Nella Larsen
- This story follows a pair of mixed-race friends who reunite in adulthood to discover that each has lived significantly different lives. One has lived her life as a Black woman, while the other passes as White and has married a racist White man. As they reunite, their differing worlds clash and expose the fragility of a life built on passing.

• **THE VANISHING HALF**

- 2020 Novel by Brit Bennett
- This novel follows a pair of twin sisters over the course of four decades, starting in the 1950s. As they grow, one of the twins leaves their hometown and passes as a white woman, while the other remains behind, choosing to live within the Black community in which they were raised. The novel explores the different lives these sisters lead and the long term effects of passing as someone you are not.

FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS+

• **DISCLOSURE: TRANS LIVES ON SCREEN**

- 2020 Documentary directed by Sam Feder
- This documentary explores the history of trans representation in film and television, with interviews from a wide group of trans and non-binary actors/writers/etc. They explore how the concept of disclosure (actively telling someone that you are trans) has specifically permeated society's understanding of trans folks. In that regard, this documentary exposes Hollywood's common transphobia and breaks down misunderstandings of the trans community.

• **BLACKKLANSMAN**

- 2018 Film directed by Spike Lee
- This film, based on a true story, follows the first Black detective in Colorado Springs as he investigates the local KKK. This story exposes the insidious nature of racism and shows how malleable race and identity can be. It also features a Jewish character who realizes that he, himself, has been passing as Christian – a historically common practice.

**I KNOW THAT “PASSING” FOR
SOMETHING YOU ARE NOT CAN BE
BOTH A BURDEN AND A PRIVILEGE.
I HAVE NEVER BEEN MORE IN-MY-
BONES AWARE OF THAT PRIVILEGE
THAN I AM IN THIS MOMENT.**

JESS KADISH-HERNÁNDEZ

