



Being White: A Memoir

Doug Power

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When Doug's father refuses to return to suburban New York from one of his lengthy business trips, his mother swallows a bottle of sleeping pills and Doug and sister Constance move in with their mother's mother in Rochester, who takes them in temporarily. At the end of the school year, Constance goes on to college and Grandma unloads Doug, putting him on a plane to Chicago to live with Carleton, the father he barely knows, and his father's young, beautiful, Native American wife. Doug finds himself living two blocks from the infamous Cabrini-Green housing projects, in an area where whites had mostly fled and black gangs are taking control. Carleton moved in with Mary a year earlier, marrying her two weeks after his wife died, and they remain in her apartment in the changing neighborhood because he'd lost another job due to his drinking and because Mary didn't like to be surrounded by white people anyway. Doug is immediately thrust into a world of petty crime, violence, and racial hatred, some of which emanates from Mary, who loves his father but despises herself for living with a white man. And yet, on her good days, she becomes more of a mother to Doug than he'd ever had, teaching him how to treat a lady and how to find his way in the inner-city. On her bad days, she locks him out of their apartment. So Doug comes of age in the streets, dates girls who live in the projects, and sees people beaten and killed. The people he comes to trust and learn from are people who are not white. They're Indian, they're Hispanic, and mostly they're Black. So who is he, he wonders, who thought of himself as White? This is the story of how it turns out.

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