

NATHANIEL

Written by

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BLACK SCREEN:

There is a faint CHUGGING of a steam engine. THE CHUGGING grows louder.

FADE IN:

INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

The train WHISTLES.

A train car sign reads:

WHITE ONLY

There are few people occupying the train car. NATHANIEL (20s) sits in a window seat in the middle of car. His wavy hair parted to the side and slicked back. His skin is light enough to pass.

He stares out the window at the passing trees, fingers absently fiddling with his hat on his lap. His mind is elsewhere.

The car door opens and the CONDUCTOR appears. He is collecting tickets from people. Nathaniel doesn't notice when the conductor reaches him.

CONDUCTOR

Ticket?

Nathaniel starts, nearly dropping his hat on the floor. He fumbles clumsily into his coat pocket and pulls out his ticket. He hands it to the conductor, looking cautious.

NATHANIEL

(quietly)

Sorry.

CONDUCTOR

No worries, sir.

He smiles as he takes the ticket from Nathaniel.

Nathaniel watches him leave and adjusts himself in his seat. When the conductor disappears, he turns back to the window.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Nathaniel looks around at the mass of people moving around him on the street corner.

He hears the loud CHATTER of various conversations. Traffic guards direct congested streets.

EXT. VIRGINIA/ELLIS FRONT YARD - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Nathaniel's booted feet step through the tall grass. He brushes his hands against it. Birds CHIRP in the distance.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY (BACK TO SCENE)

He is nearly knocked over when a person bumps into him. Gathering himself, he continues walking.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING/LANGLADY'S OFFICE - DAY

The office is cramped and cluttered. Nathaniel sits patiently across from ALICE (60s) who is looking over a few papers on her desk. She looks up at Nathaniel.

ALICE

Mr. Ellis, good on you for arriving when you did. Almost gave the apartment to someone else.

NATHANIEL

Yeah uh...I needed to sort out a few things first.

His fist clenches underneath the desk. Alice opens a draw and sorts through it. She pulls out a pair of keys.

ALICE

All right then. Let me show you to your apartment.

INT. NATHANIEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

The apartment is small, a studio. A ratty mattress rests in the corner. Nathaniel could see the various dust particles from where the sunlight entered the room through the window.

ALICE

(pointing to the mattress)
Previous owners left that there. Might wanna get some furniture of your own sometime soon.

NATHANIEL

I've got enough saved up. I'll go out shopping tomorrow.

ALICE

Ok then. The water never gets hot enough. Same goes for the bathroom out here in the hall. There's four other people on this floor you'll be sharing with. Oh, and I hoped to packed a blanket because it gets pretty cold at night.

NATHANIEL

Thank you, Alice.

She nods and goes to leave, but she stops and turns around.

ALICE

Oh, if you like to play your records, don't play 'em too loud. And not too much of that bebop stuff or else Mr. Allen, right across the hall there might mistake you for a negro.

She laughs.

ALICE (CONT'D)

I tell the man he's crazy. There are no negroes in this building. Not since it opened back in '32.

NATHANIEL

Thank you, Alice. Again.

She smiles and leaves.

Nathaniel drops his briefcase onto the floor. He surveys the tiny apartment. He moves to the ratty mattress and lays down on it. He closes his eyes.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. ELLIS HOUSE/BEDROOM - DAY

Nathaniel is packing clothes into his suitcase on the bed furiously. BOBBY (50s), skin a darker contrast to Nathaniel own pale complexion, stands in the doorway looking angry.

BOBBY

So you gonna leave then? Run away?

NATHANIEL

I'm not having this talk with you anymore, Pop.

BOBBY
You're being stupid, boy.

Nathaniel continues packing. Bobby gets closer so that they are now mere inches apart.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
You think your gonna just go out there, make it big time.

Nathaniel stops packing and turns to face Bobby.

NATHANIEL
I think I'm old enough to figure that out.

BOBBY
Where you gonna go!

NATHANIEL
Away from here!

Nathaniel closes his suitcase and picks it up. He picks up his coat and hat nearby and rushes out of the room. Bobby follows after him.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Bobby grabs onto Nathaniel's arm. Nathaniel jerks away.

Nathaniel opens the door.

NATHANIEL
Bye, Pop.

He steps out. The door SLAMS shut.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

Nathaniel plops down onto a musty looking chair. He watches the hustle and bustle of the tiny office.

The ceiling fan hums above them.

Next to him, an office door that reads:

EDITOR

MR. GREENE (50s), steps out of the office. He looks over at Nathaniel.

MR. GREENE

Mr. Ellis.

He reaches out a hand.

Nathaniel stands and shakes hands with the man.

NATHANIEL

Thanks for meeting with me, sir.

MR. GREENE

Come on.

(he waves a hand to
Nathaniel)

Step into my office.

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The office is cramped. Nathaniel sits in small chair across from Mr. Greene. A desk separates the two men.

Mr. Greene stares at Nathaniel.

Nathaniel stares back, growing uncomfortable under the older man's gaze.

MR. GREENE

So.

(beat)

You want a job at The New York Sun?

Mr. Greene leans back in his chair.

NATHANIEL

Yes, sir. I saw your add in the
paper. You need people don't you?

Mr. Greene purses his lips.

MR. GREENE

What do you like, son?

NATHANIEL

I'm sorry?

MR. GREENE

What interests you?

NATHANIEL

Well...I like going to see
pictures.

MR. GREENE
Pictures. What kind?

He takes out a cigarette and a lighter from a drawer.

NATHANIEL
I don't have much of a preference
sir. There was a theater just down
the road in my town. I would go
there every other week.

MR. GREENE
Where are you from?

NATHANIEL
Virginia. A small town you'd have a
hard time finding on a map.

MR. GREENE
(laughing)
A country boy who likes the picture
shows.

Nathaniel smiles nervously.

MR. GREENE (CONT'D)
(lighting his cigarette)
So why do you want a job here?

NATHANIEL
Well...I like to write sir. About
pictures, anything really. I just
enjoy writing.

MR. GREENE
You ever written for a paper
before?

NATHANIEL
No...Sir.

Mr. Greene nods.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)
But I'm confident I could do the
job. I used to write all the time
back in high school.

Mr. Greene lets out a puff of smoke.

MR. GREENE
We may have an opening for you.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Nathaniel is pushing a cart filled with mail down an aisle.

Mr. Greene enters the office carrying a briefcase. He is holding his hat and coat in the other hand. He pats Nathaniel on the shoulder.

MR. GREENE
Morning, Ellis.

NATHANIEL
Morning, sir.

Nathaniel continues on into...

INT. MAILROOM - DAY

He drops a stack of mail onto a table. It lands with a THUD.

INT. NATHANIEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment door SLAMS shut.

Nathaniel plops down onto his mattress on the floor. He rolls over and closes his eyes.

He sighs.

Sounds of FOOTSTEPS and SLAMMING doors can be heard from the hallway.

The sounds grow quiet. Nathaniel begins to relax.

He falls asleep.

Whispering is heard O.S. The whispering grows louder. It is the voice of Bobby.

BOBBY (V.O.)
What do you think is gonna happen,
Nate?

Nathaniel stirs, looking distressed.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
You're a fool, you know that!

The sounds of CRASHING pots and pans are heard.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
You're making a mistake!

He wakes up with a start. He gets up from the mattress.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Nathaniel walks down the street. He looks unsettled as he eyes each person he passes. They eye him back with mild fascination.

He reaches a club in the middle of the street. JAZZ MUSIC can be heard through the large double doors.

Nathaniel reached into his trouser pockets. He pulls out a few dollars and inspects them. He puts the money back into his pocket.

He opens the door...

INT. JERRY'S JAZZ LOUNGE - NIGHT

The club is big. Nathaniel looks around at the patrons, all white. They don't spare a glance at him.

The music is loud. Nathaniel looks over at the stage where a black jazz band is playing. People sit at candlelit tables by the stage talking among themselves.

Nathaniel makes his way to the bar on the side. He gestures to the bartender.

NATHANIEL

Brandy please.

The bartender nods and walks away. He comes back carrying a bottle of brandy and a glass. He sets the glass down in front of Nathaniel and pours the brown liquid into the glass.

Nathaniel thanks him and the bartender walks away.

INT. JERRY'S JAZZ LOUNGE (AN HOUR LATER)

Nathaniel holds the half empty glass of brandy.

People LAUGH and TALK around him.

He stares into the glass, tilting it a bit.

The brandy swishes in the glass.

He grips the glass.

Nathaniel continues staring. His eyes are distant.

The LAUGHING and TALKING become muffled, white noise in the background.

Someone taps his shoulder.

Nathaniel breaks out of his trance. He looks over to see Frances (20s), a sharp-looking brunette with raised eyebrows and a hand on her hip. She sits on the stool beside him. Behind her sits Henry (20s) with his arm around Rita (20s). Both look amused.

FRANCES

You mind moving out of the way? My friends and I are trying to get a view from the bar.

She gestures to the band on the stage. Nathaniel regards them with confusion. He sits up straighter.

NATHANIEL

Can't you get a seat up there?

FRANCES

There isn't any room. Besides, my friends and I always sit by the bar. We like it here.

NATHANIEL

(indignantly)

Wasn't aware that you all owned the bar area.

FRANCES

I never said we did, but your big head is blocking half the stage.

Rita pulls away from Henry and leans closer to Frances.

RITA

Oh, Fran! Leave the poor man alone. He looks like he's had a day.

FRANCES

(scowling at Rita)

Weren't you the one complaining about how you couldn't see?

RITA

Yeah, but it's all right.

She leans into Henry.

RITA (CONT'D)

I'm fine with listening.

Henry locks his arms around Rita.

HENRY
I agree with Rita.

FRANCIS
Of course you do.

HENRY
Leave the fella alone. Let it rest
will ya.

Frances sighs and pulls out a cigarette from her purse.

RITA
Hand me one, will ya.

Frances hands her one and takes out a lighter. She lights both their cigarettes. Rita blows out a puff of smoke.

RITA (CONT'D)
Thanks.

FRANCES
You're welcome.

There's silence.

RITA
Did you hear about Vivian Connors?

HENRY
(sighing)
Rita, not again.

RITA
What? She didn't here about it.

HENRY
It's tired.

RITA
But Fran doesn't know about it.

FRANCIS
And why should I care?

Nathaniel watches them talk. He drinks his brandy and turns away from them. They continue talking, completely forgetting his existence.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

Nathaniel pushes a cart down an aisle. Around him, CLICK-CLACKING of the keys on the typewriter.

Mr. Green enters the office. He passes Nathaniel and the two men nod to each other.

MR. GREENE

Ellis.

NATHANIEL

Mr. Green.

Mr. Green passes him, heading towards his office. Nathaniel pauses, turning back to look at the other man.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Mr. Green...I um.

Mr. Green turns and looks over at Nathaniel a little annoyed. Nathaniel abandons his cart of mail and jogs over to the other man.

MR. GREENE

Make it quick, Ellis. I've got a headline to make for last night's bank fire over on thirty-second.

NATHANIEL

I won't take up too much time...I was just wondering when you were gonna let me have a desk. I think I'm ready to...

MR. GREENE

(sighing)

We talked about this, son. You just don't have the experience.

NATHANIEL

But Mr. Green I...

MR. GREENE

Look, you wanna be useful? Do me a favor and do your job.

(looking past Nathaniel)

Miller, have that story on my desk by four!

Mr. Green steps into his office. The door SLAMS behind him.

Nathaniel is left standing there. He exhales deeply and goes back to his cart pushing it towards the mailroom. No one spares him a glance.

INT. JERRY'S JAZZ LOUNGE

Nathaniel gulps down a glass of dark liquor. The band plays jazz in the background.

FRANCES

Mind saving some of that for the
rest of us here?

Nathaniel turns to see Frances approach him. He looks skeptical as he watches her take a seat on the stool beside him.

NATHANIEL

You again?

FRANCES

(mimicking him)
Me again?
(she laughs)
Is that any way to greet a lady.

Nathaniel scoffs, going back to his drink.

NATHANIEL

I suppose your here to banish me
from the bar section.
(holding up his glass)
Don't worry. I'll move right after
I finish my drink.

Frances glances down at the floor, embarrassed.

FRANCES

Look, I'm...I'm sorry about the way
I acted last night. It was a really
trying day for me, and I shouldn't
have taken it out on you.

Nathaniel raises an eyebrow, not looking at her.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

You've been sitting over here by
yourself for a while I thought you
could use the company.

Silence. Nathaniel sips his drink slowly.

Frances takes out a cigarette and a lighter from her purse. She holds out the cigarette to Nathaniel.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Want one?

NATHANIEL

No.

She shrugs, putting the cigarette in her mouth and lighting it. She puts the lighter back into her bag.

A large puff of smoke escapes her lips. She crossed her arms.

FRANCES

I'm Frances, by the way. Friends call me Fran.

Nathaniel sighs.

NATHANIEL

Where are they?

FRANCES

Hm?

NATHANIEL

Your friends. Shouldn't you be with them right now.

She smirks.

FRANCES

They couldn't make it tonight. Rita's got dinner with her parents and Henry's stuck doing research. Doesn't mean I couldn't enjoy a night out by myself.

NATHANIEL

And yet you choose to waste it talking to an miserable guy like me.

She leans closer to him.

FRANCES

Bet I could cheer you up.

She takes another drag of the cigarette. Nathaniel watches to smoke waft through the air as she exhales. He is transfixed by it.

He turns away, closing his eyes. He opens them after a few seconds.

NATHANIEL

What is it that you want from me exactly?

Frances's smile is more innocent this time.

FRANCES

I just want us to be friends.
Honest.

(beat)

I think smoothing out the rough patches is the first step. Besides, how else would I get you to buy me a drink.

Nathaniel smiles.

NATHANIEL

You're a funny girl.

FRANCES

So I've been told.

He turns away from the bar, fully facing her this time.

He puts his hand out.

NATHANIEL

I'm Nate. Nathaniel.

She takes his hand gingerly and shakes it.

FRANCES

Nice to meet you Nate. So what has you firmly rooted to the bar this fine evening?

NATHANIEL

(frowning)

I'd prefer not to talk about at the moment.

FRANCES

I'm so sorry! You'll forgive me for prying won't you? Besides we hardly know each other.

NATHANIEL

It's all right.

Frances straightens herself on her stool.

FRANCES
Where are you from?

NATHANIEL
Virginia. A small town. I only just
arrived in the city a few weeks
ago.

Frances smirks.

FRANCES
Oh. So you're a farm boy.

NATHANIEL
No. Not really. It's just a house
on a plot of land.

FRANCES
Sounds quaint.

NATHANIEL
It was all right.

Frances takes a drag from the cigarette.

FRANCES
I hope the city's been treating you
well.

NATHANIEL
I like it. It's very...loud.
(beat)
What about you? Where are you from?

FRANCES
New York City, born and raised.
I'll probably die here.

She chuckles. Nathaniel chuckles along with her.

She puts out her cigarette in a nearby ashtray.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
Why don't we talk more once you buy
me that drink? I'm a little
parched.

Nathaniel smirks and gestures to the bartender.

INT. JERRY'S JAZZ LOUNGE (AN HOUR LATER)

Nathaniel and Frances are seated at the bar. Frances is
holding a half empty glass of alcohol.

NATHANIEL

A woman lawyer.

FRANCES

And what's the matter with that?
Last time I checked it wasn't
illegal.

Nathaniel puts his hands up in surrender.

NATHANIEL

I don't have anything against it.
It's just...not really common in
Virginia.

FRANCES

Why? They don't have lawyers in
Virginia?

NATHANIEL

No. That not what I...

Frances laughs and takes a sip of her drink.

FRANCES

I'm only teasing. Although, I am
serious about getting my law
degree.

NATHANIEL

I'm sure you'll make a fine lawyer.

FRANCES

What do you do?

NATHANIEL

Oh, I'm...I work at a paper. The
New York Sun.

Frances raises an eyebrow.

FRANCES

So, you're a vulture.

NATHANIEL

A what?

FRANCES

Vultures. It's what my father calls
you lot over at the papers. You
pick away at people until there's
nothing left but a sorry
reputation.

NATHANIEL

Well, I...

FRANCES

But never mind that. You seem like
a nice guy.

She pats his shoulder. Nathaniel swallows thickly.

Frances peers down at her tiny gold wristwatch.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Oh my! It's getting quite late
isn't it.

Nathaniel looks around the club. It is less crowded than
before.

NATHANIEL

I suppose it is. I think I should
be heading home.

They get up from their stools and walk towards the door...

EXT. STREET

They stand outside the club. Nathaniel puts his hands in his
pockets looking at Frances with a nervous expression.

NATHANIEL

So...can I walk you home.

FRANCES

I would really...

Frances cuts herself off when she sees a sleek black town car
pull up beside them on the curb.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Unfortunately, I'll have to
decline. It appears that my ride is
already here.

She points at the car. Nathaniel regards the car with a
confused expression.

Frances steps away from Nathaniel and opens the car door. She
turns back to him before getting in.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

I'd like to do this again sometime.
I had a wonderful evening with you.

NATHANIEL

Me too.

FRANCES

Well, goodbye now.

She gets into the car.

NATHANIEL

Goodbye.

She closes the door. He sees his reflection in the window.

The car drives away. He watches it with longing.

INT. ARLINGTON PENTHOUSE/MR. ARLINGTON'S STUDY - NIGHT

Frances enters the study without knocking, heels CLACKING on the hard wood floor. MR. ARLINGTON (50s) sits at a large desk. He stands, moving around the desk to approach her.

MR. ARLINGTON

Glad you're home, darling.

FRANCES

You didn't need to do that, Daddy.

Mr. Arlington sighs.

MR. ARLINGTON

What have I done this time, dear.

FRANCES

Don't act like you don't know!
Sending a town car for me!

MR. ARLINGTON

It was getting late and you hadn't gotten home yet. Besides, I don't really enjoy the time you spend at that club with your friends going on until the early hours of the morning.

FRANCES

I can take care of myself!

Mr. Arlington goes to sit back down.

MR. ARLINGTON

I'm not arguing with you. It's late.

FRANCES
We're not finished here!

MR. ARLINGTON
(sternly)
I think we are, Frances. Remember
whose roof you're under.

Frances stares at him. She opens her mouth as though to speak but closes it again. She turns and leaves the room.

Mr. Arlington watches her leave. We hear her heels ascending the staircase. A door is heard SLAMMING shut from upstairs.

He leans back into his chair, sighing.

INT. NATHANIEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nathaniel sits at a table eating a sandwich. The light flickers above him. He glances up at it. It stops flickering and he goes back to his food.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Nathaniel is wiping his face with a wet washcloth. He stares at his damp face in the mirror.

He stops wiping. The towel is set down on the edge of the sink. He leans into the mirror, really looking at his reflection this time.

Frances's face flashes through his mind. She is smiling. A sly smile.

Nathaniel shuts his eyes. Frances is gone.

He opens his eyes again. They search his reflection.

NATHANIEL
(quietly)
You don't know her.

His reflection stares back.

He pushes away from the sink and exits the bathroom, turning out the light.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. ELLIS HOUSE - NIGHT

Nathaniel steps out of the front door, closing it quietly behind him.

He walks over to a tan Ford parked next to the house. He steps into the car and the engine ROARS to life.

The car pulls out of the drive way and down the dirt road.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Ford pulls into an empty space in the parking lot.

Nathaniel heads over to the ticket booth and purchases a ticket for himself. He heads into the...

INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

He stops walking. A sea of people move around him. They are all white, and he blends right in.

He continues walking towards the theater, but stops when he sees the USHER (18), a young black man at the door.

Nathaniel avoids the other man's eyes as he enters the theater. The usher gives him a quizzical look as though he were trying to remember Nathaniel's face.

Nathaniel finds his seat in the theater.

The movie plays. His eyes never waver from the screen.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Nathaniel is washing his hands in the sink. He is the only one in the bathroom.

The usher enters. Nathaniel doesn't notice.

The usher approaches him slowly. He taps him on the shoulder and Nathaniel looks up, startled.

USHER

I didn't mean to scare you, but
what are you doing here?

Nathaniel ignores him and goes to grab a paper towel.

USHER (CONT'D)

Hey! I'm talking to you!

Nathaniel looks up at him.

NATHANIEL

I think you're mistaking me for
someone else.

USHER

No...

(laughing bitterly)

No, I'm not. You live over on that
dirt road by the railroad tracks.
You're Bobby Ellis's son.

Nathaniel stops drying his hands and throws the paper towel
into a nearby trashcan.

NATHANIEL

I don't know what you're talking
about. Now, why don't you just
leave me alone.

Nathaniel walks towards the exit, but the usher blocks him.
Their faces are inches apart.

USHER

Who do you think you're fooling,
huh. You walk around here like
you're one of them.

NATHANIEL

(angrily)

I told you...you've got the wrong
guy.

There is silence as the two men glare at each other. The
tension is thick.

A MAN walks into the bathroom. He stops when he sees the
usher in close proximity to Nathaniel.

MAN

Everything all right.
(looking to Nathaniel)
Is this boy bothering you?

Nathaniel looks at the man and then at the usher.

NATHANIEL

Everything's fine.

The usher doesn't look the man in the eye. He spares one
glance at Nathaniel before exiting the bathroom.

Nathaniel gives the man a thin smile before leaving as well.

INT/EXT. NATHANIEL'S CAR - NIGHT

Nathaniel drives down the dirt path. His knuckles gripping the steering wheel rather tightly.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. ARLINGTON PENTHOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

Frances sits alone at the kitchen table eating a piece of toast and reading a book.

Mr. Arlington strolls in.

MR. ARLINGTON
Morning, dear.

Frances raises an eyebrow but doesn't look up from her book.

He walks up to her chair. Her face is still buried in her book.

MR. ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
You know, frowning doesn't really suit you.

FRANCES
I'm merely minding my own business, Father. Can't I eat my breakfast in peace.

MR. ARLINGTON
(sighing)
Don't start this again, Frances.

She puts her book down on the table and looks up at him. She is angry now.

FRANCES
What? What am I doing?

MR. ARLINGTON
You're being difficult.

Frances says nothing as she watches him leave the kitchen. She looks at the doorway. Then down at her unfinished toast. She takes a bite out of it. She chews it slowly.

Just then, MRS. ARLINGTON (40s) wanders in. She sits in the chair next to Frances and greets her with a kiss on the cheek.

MRS. ARLINGTON
Good morning, darling.

FRANCES
Morning.

Frances goes back to reading her book.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
Are you eating breakfast with me?

MRS. ARLINGTON
No. No food for me this morning. I don't think I can stomach it. I'll just have Daniel prepare hot water and lemon for me.

FRANCES
Wild night?

MRS. ARLINGTON
Oh, it was sensational! I actually came down to tell you and your father all about it, but I'm afraid I've just missed him.

Frances sighs and places her book on the table.

FRANCES
Even if he were here, I'm not so sure he'd be interested in hearing it. He's in one of his moods again.

MRS. ARLINGTON
You have to try not to upset him, dear.

FRANCES
It isn't even my fault! He just won't except the fact that I'm no longer a child! I should be able to spend my time however and I want and as long as I want to!

MRS. ARLINGTON
Frances!

Mrs. Arlington crosses her arms.

FRANCES
What?

MRS. ARLINGTON
 Staying out late at night...It Just
 isn't safe.

FRANCES
 I'm fine. And I'm not always alone.
 My friends tag along sometimes.
 (beat)
 And why should that matter. Your
 always out late.

MRS. ARLINGTON
 This isn't about me, Frances.
 You're a young unmarried woman
 hanging out in low-grade bars.
 There are much better things you
 could be doing with your time.

Frances closes her eyes and places the back of her hand on
 her forehead in a dramatic fashion.

FRANCES
 I can already feel myself wasting
 away.

Mrs. Arlington looks unamused.

MRS. ARLINGTON
 I'm being serious, dear.
 (Beat)
 Look, why don't you spend a night
 out with me. The Gilmores are
 having a dinner party next
 Thursday, and I would love it if
 you would accompany me. You know,
 the eldest son, Perry is quite
 handsome, and I think the two of
 you would get on.

Frances traces her finger along her plate and sighs.

FRANCES
 Mother...

MRS. ARLINGTON
 Yes?

FRANCES
 You already know that answer to
 that.

MRS. ARLINGTON
Frances, please.
(reaches over and takes
Frances's hands in hers)
For me?

Frances pulls away and get up from the table. She leans over and gives her mother a kiss on the cheek.

FRANCES
Maybe.

She leaves.

INT. NATHANIEL APARTMENT - DAY

Nathaniel is holding a glass under the faucet. He twists the knobs. The faucet SPUTTERS and CREAKS. No water comes out.

Nathaniel curses under his breath.

He sighs, defeated and puts the glass back in the cupboard. He heads towards the door and...

INT. STAIRWELL

Jogs down to the first floor. He knocks on the first door closest to the stairs. After a few moments, Alice answers the door looking tired in her robe.

ALICE
Yeah? What do you want Mr. Ellis?

NATHANIEL
Hi Alice. I don't mean to be a bother, but my kitchen sink isn't working.

Alice frowns.

ALICE
I'll call a plumber.

INT. NATHANIEL'S APARTMENT - DAY (LATER)

Alice and Nathaniel wave to the PLUMBER exiting the apartment. The door SLAMS shut behind him.

Alice looks back at Nathaniel.

ALICE
You owe me fifty dollars for that.

NATHANIEL
Fifty dollars? I don't have that on
me right now.

ALICE
Well, you'd better figure something
out.

She exits the apartment.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Frances, book in hand, walks towards a large wooden table.
She sits next to Rita who is flipping through a magazine.
Rita turns to her.

RITA
(pointing to a page in her
magazine)
Green or blue?

Frances glances over.

FRANCES
Green.

Rita looks up at Frances and wrinkles her nose.

RITA
Really?

FRANCES
Pick the blue one then.

Frances opens her book and begins reading.

RITA
I don't know, Franny. I'm not in
love with the collar on the blue
dress.

FRANCES
It looks fine.

RITA
You're not even looking.

Frances looks up at her.

FRANCES

You showed me the picture. I looked. I gave you my opinion.

RITA

You could at least act like you care.

FRANCES

I said I like the green one.

Rita rolls her eyes.

RITA

Oh, but doesn't that one make the model look a little more plump? I can see it now. Just think of me in this dress looking at least twenty pounds heavier. Henry would surely dump me!

FRANCES

Henry's just smitten with you, and you know that.

(beat)

Didn't we come to the library to work. Put the magazine down and bury your face in a book.

Rita sighs rather dramatically.

RITA

All right, Fran.

She sets her magazine aside her and grabs a book from the pile in front of her.

FRANCES

You'll thank me later.

Rita looks over at Frances and smiles.

RITA

I will, won't I.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Nathaniel enters the library passing the front desk and goes straight to the stacks of books.

He wanders around going form section to section.

He stops.

From behind a bookshelf, he's sees Frances and Rita sitting at a wooden table.

He watches them for a moment then turns away.

Rita looks up.

Nathaniel looks back at the table and sees Rita noticing him.

She squints her eyes at him. She recognizes him.

He sighs, moving from behind the bookcase and walking over to them.

Rita nudges Frances. Frances looks up and sees Nathaniel walking towards them.

NATHANIEL

Didn't think I'd see you again so soon.

FRANCES

By the looks of it, it seems as though you were following me.

NATHANIEL

I did no such thing.

FRANCES

Really?

NATHANIEL

Honest.

Rita looks between the two.

RITA

(Turning to Nathaniel)

I'm really sorry about my friend, she can be real hostile sometimes.

NATHANIEL

It's all right, we talked some last night.

RITA

Did you?

NATHANIEL

Yes. If you'd like me to go, I can. I didn't mean to intrude.

Frances smiles, amused.

FRANCES

No. Stay.

(beat)

You know what, why don't you take me out to lunch. I think I've done enough reading for one day.

RITA

But, Frances!

Frances stands. She puts on her coat and grabs her purse from the table.

FRANCES

You'll live, Rita. Besides I've already done the reading.

Rita frowns but says nothing.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

I'll see you later, all right.

RITA

All right.

NATHANIEL

It was nice meeting you, Rita.

Frances and Nathaniel leave Rita at the table.

INT. DINER - DAY

Frances and Nathaniel sit at a booth by the window. They each have a plate of food in front of them. Around them, waitresses move from table to table and patrons sit eating their food.

NATHANIEL

I hope you don't mind this place.

FRANCES

I don't mind. It's quaint.

Silence. Nathaniel is sheepish as he looks around, avoiding Frances's gaze.

NATHANIEL

So...

FRANCES

So.

NATHANIEL

This is all very spontaneous.

FRANCES

Oh! I'm all for spontaneity.
Routine does get a bit boring from
time to time. And luckily, I ran
into you to take me out. Think of
this as a date.

Nathaniel is surprised.

NATHANIEL

You're pretty brazen.

FRANCES

I find that that's the best way to
live a life.

Frances takes a sip of her water.

NATHANIEL

We don't really know each other.

FRANCES

I know.

NATHANIEL

For all you know, I haven't got my
head on right! I could be a
murderer.

FRANCES

You look quite fine to me. Besides,
you seemed like a guy who could use
a bit a company.

Nathaniel is silent.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

(raising an eyebrow)

I'm not overstepping, am I?

NATHANIEL

No, no! I needed to get out more
anyway.

(beat)

Weren't you busy back at the
library. I hope I didn't distract
you and your friend.

FRANCES

You didn't. I thought we had this established already that this was my decision. Besides, Rita and I had been cooped up in that place all morning.

NATHANIEL

It's such a big place.

FRANCES

What, the library? I suppose, yes.

Frances smirks.

NATHANIEL

Do you go there a lot?

FRANCES

Well, I'm a student. It's practically my home away from home especially when home can oftentimes be distracting.

Nathaniel nods.

NATHANIEL

I understand.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Nathaniel (12) sits cross legged on the floor, hidden in a tiny corner of the library. His face is buried in a book. Around him are stacks of books.

INT. DINER

Nathaniel looks out of the window.

NATHANIEL

I used to go a lot when I was a kid.

FRANCES

You were a smart kid.

Nathaniel looks down at his half eaten food.

NATHANIEL

Growing up, I never really got on with the neighborhood kids, so I spent most of my time in the library when I wasn't in school.

FRANCES

Not one friend?

NATHANIEL

Not really. I was a bit different from the other children, so we never played together.

FRANCES

I'm so sorry.

NATHANIEL

You have nothing to be sorry about. It was my childhood, and It's not like I'm in Virginia anymore.

Frances reaches across the table and takes hold of Nathaniel's hand. He is surprised.

FRANCES

But that's just awful. No one deserves to be treated that way.

Nathaniel pulls his hand away.

NATHANIEL

It's in the past now.

FRANCES

If only we'd grown up in the same area. Maybe we would have met as children and became friends.

NATHANIEL

Maybe.

Nathaniel takes a sip of his water.

Silence. A waitress comes and refills their cups of water.

FRANCES

You know what? Why don't you tell me about your time in the city. How are you adjusting.

NATHANIEL

I'd...say that I'm doing all right.
Although I've had to get used to
the constant sound of cars right
outside of my window.

Frances laughs.

FRANCES

It's the charm of the city. Gives
it character.

(beat)

But I get it. Sometimes a girl
needs a nice escape to the
countryside once in a while. But I
don't think that I could ever truly
leave New York. It's my home.

Nathaniel nods.

NATHANIEL

Hopefully I'll come to feel the
same way that you feel.

FRANCES

I won't mind helping you out with
that.

She reaches over the table and places her hand on his.

EXT. STREET

Frances and Nathaniel stroll down the street. Her arm is
looped though his.

They reach the steps of the library and climb the stairs to
the entrance.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

They approach Rita reading a magazine at a table.

FRANCES

Right where I left you.

Rita puts her magazine down and looks up.

RITA

Yes, well it's about time. I was
beginning to think you forgotten
about me.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)
 (glancing at Nathaniel)
 Is this gentleman that enthralling.

Frances goes to sit down next to her and places her bag on the table.

FRANCES
 Hush, you!
 (to Nathaniel)
 Thank you for lunch. It was nice getting to know you a lot better.

NATHANIEL
 I'm glad that you enjoyed yourself.
 I'd like to see you again.

FRANCES
 I would like that very much.

Nathaniel places his hands in his pockets looking sheepish.

NATHANIEL
 Well, I'll let you ladies get back to work. Goodbye.

FRANCES
 Goodbye.

RITA
 Bye.

He strolls away. Frances stares after him.

RITA (CONT'D)
 Oh, Fran! You're smitten!

Frances breaks from her trance.

FRANCES
 Hardly.

RITA
 And grass isn't green! Don't try to deny it. It's written all over your face. Clear as day. You've got a thing for him.

FRANCES
 He's friendly.

RITA
 And handsome.

She stares at Frances.

FRANCES

All right. I do like him.

RITA

So, what's the issue? It's quite obvious that he's taken interest in you as well.

FRANCES

Why are you pushing this, Rita?

RITA

Because my dear friend refuses to admit that she's been absolutely taken by a handsome stranger. Romance looks good on you, Frances.

FRANCES

I'm glad you think so.

Rita laughs.

RITA

I can't wait to use this as leverage for whenever you have something to say about Henry and I.

Frances smiles.

INT. UNIVERSITY/DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

A SECRETARY sits at a desk outside of the Dean's office typing away at a typewriter.

The usher from Nathaniel's past, who's name is actually, MORRIS (21), enters. His simple sweater-vest and trousers takes the place of his usual usher uniform. He carries a small stack of books by his side.

The secretary looks at him, wide-eyed as he approaches the Dean's door.

SECRETARY

Is there something you needed.

MORRIS

I just wanted to have a word with Dean Peeters.

SECRETARY

I'm afraid that won't be possible. Peeters is just about done for today.

Morris sighs.

MORRIS
Can I leave him a note then?

SECRETARY
(looking uncomfortable)
Well...

The door opens, and out steps DEAN PEETERS (50), coat and hat on with his suitcase in hand.

DEAN PEETERS
What's going on here?

SECRETARY
I tried to tell him that you were on your way out.

Dean Peeters looks over at Morris and grunts.

DEAN PEETERS
What is it?

MORRIS
Do you remember? We spoke last week about giving the negro students access to the one of the empty rooms in the recreational building.

DEAN PEETERS
Yes, I remember.

He walks out of the office and into...

INT. HALLWAY

Morris follows behind him.

MORRIS
I was hoping that you'd consider it.

DEAN PEETERS
I thought about it.

They reach large double doors. Dean Peeters opens them and they both step out into...

EXT. ACADEMIC MALL

The mall is filled with students and faculty passing every which way. Dean Peeters keeps walking, taking long strides.

DEAN PEETERS
And I discussed it with my
colleagues.

MORRIS
Yeah?

He sprints so that he can catch up with Dean Peeters.

DEAN PEETERS
We don't think that it's a good
idea.

MORRIS
I don't understand. I thought that
you would consider it?

DEAN PEETERS
I said that I would discuss it with
faculty. I never made any promises
to you and the rest of the colored
students on campus.

Morris clutches his books tighter against his sides.

MORRIS
But Sir, it's only one room out of
the entire building. It's the only
one available.

DEAN PEETERS
A room that used for homecoming
committee.

MORRIS
Homecoming isn't for another few
months.

Dean Peeters stops and sighs. He turns to face Morris.

DEAN PEETERS
We just feel that it wouldn't be
appropriate for there to be a
colored collective to take place on
campus.

MORRIS
It's just a newsletter.

DEAN PEETERS

I believe the school already has
one of those, don't we.

MORRIS

For the white students.

Dean Peeters shakes his head. He moves closer to Morris.

DEAN PEETERS

Why can't you understand that this
is for the school's best interest
as well as yours.

MORRIS

Well, you'll forgive me if I don't
see it that way.

DEAN PEETERS

I don't care how you see it.
(beat)
Frankly, I don't see why this is so
important. You and your peers
should be grateful to be the few of
your kind to even get past those
school gates. Why can't you just be
satisfied with what you have?

Dean Peeters walks away.

Morris stands among the sea of people. They engulf him.

INT. DORMITORY/COMMON AREA - NIGHT

STEVEN (20), adjusting his glasses, sits next to Morris
shaking his head.

STEVEN

Why am I not surprised?

Morris sighs.

MORRIS

I honestly thought that they would
consider...

STEVEN

It doesn't matter now.

MORRIS

Yeah, but don't you remember we
talked about this for months.

STEVEN

I'm not saying we're giving up. I'm just saying we're going to have to take a different course of action.

MORRIS

Without the school?

Steven nods.

STEVEN

It's risky, but I'm just tired. We go here too! This is just as much our school as its theres'.

(beat)

You'd think that earning a place in the white man's world would give you a leg up. Instead, they've got there bats ready to sweep your legs right from under you.

Morris leans back into the couch, silent.

INT. NATHANIEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nathaniel leans out of his window, hanging his clothes out to dry on the fire escape. There is a KNOCK at his door. He moves from the window and goes to the door, opening it.

Alice stands there, staring back at him with an uninterested expression.

ALICE

Ellis, telephone for you.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Nathaniel picks up the phone. He stands alone in the dim hallway.

NATHANIEL

Hello?

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Frances is sprawled along the couch, telephone in hand.

FRANCES

Hey, Stranger?

INTERUT NATHANIEL/FRANCES

NATHANIEL
Frances, how did you...

FRANCES
Why, the telephone book of course.

NATHANIEL
Right.

Silence.

FRANCES
Well, what's wrong? Have I called
at the wrong time? You don't seem
like you want to talk.

Nathaniel raises his eyebrows, panicked.

NATHANIEL
No! I just wasn't expecting your
call.

FRANCES
You should start getting used to me
calling. Did you know that I enjoy
listening to the sound of your
voice?

Nathaniel swallows.

NATHANIEL
I hadn't.

FRANCES
I hope you believe me when I say
these things. I'm not one to lie.

NATHANIEL
(chuckling)
I hold you to that.

FRANCES
It's true!
(beat)
But anyway, I didn't call you just
to talk about the sound of your
voice.

NATHANIEL
(dubiously)
Oh?

FRANCES

Yes. I'm calling because I'd like to invite you out. To a party.

Nathanial grips the telephone tightly.

NATHANIEL

A party?

FRANCES

Yes. That's what I just said.

NATHANIEL

What type of party.

Frances shrugs.

FRANCES

Just a small gathering. It's just my family...and maybe a few other families.

NATHANIEL

Your family?

FRANCES

Relax. It's not too grand. Besides, I could really use a companion.

NATHANIEL

When is it?

FRANCES

This Thursday at seven. Does that work for you?

NATHANIEL

I can manage that.

FRANCES

That's fantastic! Let me give you the address.

We stay on Nathanial's side, alone in the hallway as he listens to Frances.

INT. PENTHOUSE/DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT

The place is grand. Nathanial stares at the walls adorned with intricate wallpaper, then up at the high ceiling.

FRANCES

See anything interesting up there?

Nathaniel looks at her. She stares back at him holding a flute a champagne, hint of a smile on her lips.

NATHANIEL

Who's house did you say this was again?

FRANCES

The Gilmore's. Family Friend.

Nathaniel nods. He looks around at the people surrounding them. They LAUGH and CHATTER among themselves as black servants shuffle around them with trays of hors d'oeuvres and alcohol.

NATHANIEL

I remember you saying that this was going to be a small gathering.

FRANCES

It is small. I'm a bit surprised with the them this evening. They're not really the type to be modest with their parties.

NATHANIEL

You're disappointed?

Frances is amused. She raises an eyebrow and takes a sip of her champagne.

FRANCES

Oh, no! These things are usually long and terribly drawn out. I'm always stuck milling around and being forced to listen to my mother talk everyones' ear off.

She points to Mrs. Arlington in a corner surrounded by a group of socialite women LAUGHING loudly.

NATHANIEL

So you've decided to drag me along.

Frances nods.

FRANCES

I have. Isn't suffering more bearable with someone you enjoy?

Mrs. Arlington has stopped talking to the group of women. She approaches Nathaniel and Frances.

MRS. ARLINGTON
 Frances, I'm just having the most
 wonderful time!

FRANCES
 I can see that, mother.

MRS. ARLINGTON
 A shame your father couldn't make
 it.

FRANCES
 You know he isn't one for these
 pointless dinners.

Mrs. Arlington purses her lips.

MRS. ARLINGTON
 (turning to Nathaniel)
 I hope your friend here is enjoying
 himself.
 (beat)
 Forgive me, but I don't believe
 that we've been properly
 introduced. Vivian Arlington,
 mother of this impudent young lady.

She puts out her hand. Nathaniel shakes it.

FRANCES
 Nathaniel Ellis.

MRS. ARLINGTON
 Nice to meet you, Nathaniel.

NATHANIEL
 Same to you.

Frances sips her champagne.

PERRY GILMORE (21), comes up behind Mrs. Arlington and places
 his hands on both of her shoulders. She is startled at first
 but then she smiles when she turns to see who it is.

MRS. ARLINGTON
 Perry!

PERRY GILMORE
 Vivian Arlington! Just the woman I
 was looking for!

MRS. ARLINGTON
 How are you?

PERRY GILMORE

I'm well, and I see the same can be said for you. I saw you cruising about the room, and just had to come say hello.

MRS. ARLINGTON

I'm flattered that you took the time to stop and talk to this old woman.

PERRY GILMORE

I must need to re-examine my eyes because I can't seem to find this old woman you speak of.

Mrs. Arlington laughs. Frances rolls her eyes.

Nathaniel, uncomfortable, looks away.

Perry looks and Frances and smiles.

PERRY GILMORE (CONT'D)

And how are you doing, Frances?

FRANCES

I'm doing fine, Perry.

PERRY GILMORE

I'm glad. Looking as beautiful and refined as your mother, that should be a given.

Frances gives him a small smile.

FRANCES

Is there something you needed, Perry?

MRS. ARLINGTON

Frances, don't be rude! The boy just came to say hello!

FRANCES

I only asked him a question, mother.

Perry turn to Nathaniel.

PERRY GILMORE

I hope you'll forgive me for being so rude I haven't introduced myself to you. I'm Perry Gilmore.

(MORE)

PERRY GILMORE (CONT'D)

My parents are the hosts of this party.

NATHANIEL

Nathaniel Ellis. Frances told me. It's very nice.

PERRY GILMORE

Thank you. I haven't seen you around before.

NATHANIEL

Well, I just moved here from Virginia a few months ago.

MRS. ARLINGTON

I hear Virginia's quite nice. Barbara Finley told me that her husband just bought a property down in Falls Church not too long ago. Great area. Lovely people.

NATHANIEL

I'm sure.

PERRY GILMORE

So why New York?

NATHANIEL

It seemed like a good place for change.

QUICK FLASHES - NATHANIEL'S CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

- A WOMAN'S hand, matching Nathaniel's complexion, strokes Nathaniel's hair as his head is pressed against her chest.

- Inaudible as Nathaniel is beat up by a group of black children in a field.

- Inaudible as Nathaniel sobs when the woman's hands apply antiseptic to the cuts on his face.

- Inaudible as Nathaniel watches the front door slam in front of him.

BACK TO SCENE

PERRY GILMORE

Change?

NATHANIEL

Yep. I hear the pizza is to die for. Virginia could never compare.

PERRY GILMORE

That is the truth. So how did you meet Frances?

Frances steps between the two men.

FRANCES

I don't appreciate you interrogating my companion.

Perry puts his hands up in surrender.

PERRY GILMORE

It was a simple question. Am I not allowed to ask questions?

FRANCES

Not when it comes to my personal life.

PERRY GILMORE

But I wasn't asking you, Frances. I was asking Nathaniel.

Frances glares at him. He smiles back at her.

NATHANIEL

It's fine, Frances.

(beat)

We met at a jazz bar.

MRS. ARLINGTON

(leaning into Perry)

This girl just insists on staying out late every other weekend! Her father and I have had just about enough of it!

FRANCES

I'm hardly in any danger.

MRS. ARLINGTON

Yes, but you never know what you might bring home.

Frances stares at her mother. Nathaniel hands tremble. He places them in his pocket and turns to leave.

NATHANIEL

I just need to step out for a...

FRANCES

Nathaniel!

Nathaniel collides with JOHN (30), a black servant holding a tray of champagne flutes.

The glasses spill from the tray and onto Nathaniel's sweater.

The glasses SHATTER.

The tray CLATTERS to the floor.

Some of the talking in the room subsides. People turn to see what is happening.

John scrambles to clean up the mess. Nathaniel stands frozen in place.

JOHN
I'm sorry, Sir!

Perry steps closer to inspect the mess. He looks down at John.

PERRY GILMORE
Look what you've done! Go get this man a cloth so that he can dry himself off.

Nathaniel looks at Perry.

NATHANIEL
You don't need to do that.

PERRY GILMORE
It's his job.

NATHANIEL
It's fine. Really.

PERRY GILMORE
But...

NATHANIEL
I said it's fine. I can do it myself.

INT. BATHROOM

Nathaniel dabs at the giant stain on his sweater with a wet cloth.

He sighs and looks at himself in the mirror. He stares for a long moment.

INT. HALLWAY

Nathaniel opens the door to see Frances waiting for him on the other side. She looks at his stained sweater.

FRANCES
That's unfortunate.

NATHANIEL
I think I'll live.

She smiles.

FRANCES
That's good to know.

Silence.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
Do you want to go back?

Nathaniel looks down the hallway towards the door of the drawing room where the party can be heard.

NATHANIEL
You don't need to leave because of me.

FRANCES
Who says it's because of you?

NATHANIEL
Well, I...

FRANCES
Haven't I told you already how much I loathe these parties.

Nathaniel smiles.

NATHANIEL
Where would you like to go?

FRANCES
Anywhere. You lead, I'll follow.

They turn to leave. Mrs. Arlington appears from the drawing room and walks down the hallway towards them.

MRS. ARLINGTON
Frances, I've been looking all over for you! I wanted you to meet...

FRANCES

Well that's very unfortunate
because Nathaniel and I were just
on our way out.

Mrs. Arlington looks at Nathaniel, then back at Frances/

MRS. ARLINGTON

Leave? The party ins't even close
to finished yet. You can't leave
now.

FRANCES

We thought it would be better if we
went out and go some air.

Mrs. Arlington moves closer to Frances.

MRS. ARLINGTON

I expected that you would stay the
entirety of it.

FRANCES

I never made that promise to you.

MRS. ARLINGTON

Frances, do not embarrasses me in
front of the Gilmores.

FRANCES

I'm doing no such thing.

NATHANIEL

Frances, if you have to stay...

FRANCES

I don't, and I'm not going to.

Frances turns to leave. Nathaniel hesitates, then follows
behind her.

Mrs. Arlington watches them go.

EXT. PIER - NIGHT (LATER)

Nathaniel and Frances stand against the pier railing looking
out into the river.

Frances sighs. She looks over at Nathaniel.

FRANCES

I apologize for earlier.

NATHANIEL

Why? You haven't done anything wrong.

FRANCES

Inviting you to the party was probably a mistake.

NATHANIEL

I wasn't suffering too much.

FRANCES

I apologize for my mother.

NATHANIEL

You don't need to...

FRANCES

And I apologize for Perry.

NATHANIEL

I'm not bothered by it.

Frances turns around so that she is leaning against the railing with her back to the river.

FRANCES

He never knows when to back off.

NATHANIEL

You and Perry have a history?

FRANCES

I wouldn't call it that. We were never together.

NATHANIEL

He seemed nice enough.

FRANCES

That's the thing. He seems nice, but I know him. He saw that I was with someone. That's the only reason he came to speak with you.

NATHANIEL

You must have had quite the effect on him to garner that sort of attention.

Frances smirks.

FRANCES

Stop it!

NATHANIEL

It's true! If I saw the pretty girl that I've been pinning for show up to the party with a new man, I'd want to scope him out as well!

Frances laughs.

FRANCES

I'm pretty?

NATHANIEL

(quietly)

Yes.

He looks away.

FRANCES

What? What's the matter?

NATHANIEL

I shouldn't like you, Frances. I shouldn't have let myself get tied into all of this.

Frances frowns.

FRANCES

I'm not understanding what you're saying.

Nathaniel shakes his head and grips the railing.

NATHANIEL

Were different people, Frances.

FRANCES

I still don't follow.

NATHANIEL

I'm not rich. I don't have any sort of status.

FRANCES

You honestly think I care about those that. If I did, I'd be off somewhere with Perry Gilmore, which is just what my mother would have wanted.

NATHANIEL

So is this some sort of rebellion?

FRANCES

No. I could really care less about what she expects of me.

A BOAT HORN is heard in the distance.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

I want you to believe me when I say that.

Nathaniel nods.

NATHANIEL

I'm sorry. I just...get too far into my head sometimes.

FRANCES

I like you, Nathaniel. I really do.

She places her hand over his.

NATHANIEL

I know.

FRANCES

And I know that you like me too.

NATHANIEL

I do.

FRANCES

I think that that's incentive for us to be together.

She moves closer to Nathaniel. Their faces are an inch apart.

NATHANIEL

Frances.

FRANCES

Yes.

NATHANIEL

You make you lose my senses.

They stare intensely into each other's eyes. Nathaniel swallows.

FRANCES

I'm delighted.

NATHANIEL

Can I ask you a question?

FRANCES

Yes?

NATHANIEL

Can I kiss you?

FRANCES

Of course.

They kiss. It's long and passionate.

They part. Nathaniel holds Frances in his arms.

NATHANIEL

You know, I think you're quite beautiful.

FRANCES

Thank you! It's quite a leg up from pretty.

Nathaniel smiles.

In the distance. Morris is seen walking along the pier behind Frances.

Nathaniel sees him. His smile falters.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

What's the matter?

Morris reaches them and sees Nathaniel as he comes closer. He averts his gaze when he passes them. Frances doesn't notice him.

NATHANIEL

Nothing. Why don't we get out of here?

FRANCES

Ok.

He leads her away in the opposite direction of Morris.

INT. NATHANIEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nathaniel sits at his small kitchen table reading a manuscript. There is a KNOCK at the door.

Nathaniel opens the door and sees a large box on the floor. He picks it up and brings it inside. He closes the door behind him.

He places the box on the table and opens it. Inside is a maroon colored typewriter. Beside it is a note. Nathaniel picks it up, bring it up to his face. It reads:

WRITE ME SOMETHING GOOD—FRANCES

Nathaniel sets the note down on the table. He looks around his tiny apartment, then out the window.

INT. DINER - DAY

Nathaniel and Frances sit in a booth in the back of the diner. They both have steaming cups of coffee in front of them.

FRANCES
Thank you for lunch.

Nathaniel smiles.

NATHANIEL
You're welcome.

FRANCES
Did you get the gift that I sent you?

NATHANIEL
Yes.

FRANCES
So. What did you think?

NATHANIEL
It's nice.

Frances raises an eyebrow.

FRANCES
Nice?

NATHANIEL
I like it.

FRANCES
Have you tried it out.

NATHANIEL
I will.

FRANCES
So, you haven't tried it out yet.

NATHANIEL
I never said that.

FRANCES
But it's implied that you didn't.

NATHANIEL
Are you upset?

Frances grips the handle of her coffee mug. She takes a sip.

FRANCES
I'm not.

Nathaniel attention drifts to the window, becoming preoccupied with the people walking by.

NATHANIEL
I'm going to use it. I just wasn't expecting it.

FRANCES
It's a gift. It's not something to be expected.

His eyes turn back to her.

NATHANIEL
Thank you for the typewriter. I promise to use it.

FRANCES
Good. I wanted to get you something nice, assuming that you don't already have one.

NATHANIEL
I didn't.

FRANCES
Now you've got something to write all your great stories on.

Frances glances at her wristwatch and gasps.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
I've got to get going if I want to be on time for class.

She gathers her coat and her purse in her hands scoots out of the booth. She stands, smiling down at Nathaniel.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
See you later?

NATHANIEL

Yeah.

She saunters off.

Nathaniel continues to sit and drink the rest of his coffee. Frances's forgotten mug remains across from him.

Nathaniel is startled when Morris slides into the booth opposite him. He goes to grab his jacket, but Morris puts a hand out to him.

MORRIS

Calm down. This place isn't like back home.

Nathaniel pauses. He scans the mostly vacant diner, carefully. He sits back down.

NATHANIEL

Why are you here?

MORRIS

I was in the neighborhood.

Nathaniel narrows his eyes.

NATHANIEL

You're following me.

MORRIS

Actually I wasn't. You're very easy to spot in a crowd even with the whole facade.

NATHANIEL

So, you seeking me out was intentional.

MORRIS

It wasn't. Can't a man have his lunch just like everyone else?

NATHANIEL

There are plenty of other restaurants around here.

MORRIS

But I chose this one. And you just so happened to be here.

NATHANIEL

I did.

Silence.

MORRIS
Frances Arlington.

NATHANIEL
You know her?

MORRIS
Who doesn't. We go to the same
university.

NATHANIEL
You're in school?

Morris nods.

MORRIS
I am. One of a handful of negro
students enrolled.

NATHANIEL
Congratulations.

MORRIS
Thank you.

The silence is long and uncomfortable.

MORRIS (CONT'D)
(leaning in closer to
Nathaniel)
Does she know that you're...

NATHANIEL
No.

MORRIS
Right. Right.

NATHANIEL
Look, I don't want any trouble with
you.

Morris shakes his head.

MORRIS
I don't intend to start anything.

NATHANIEL
You follow me, threaten me...

MORRIS

When have I made a threat in the time that I've been here. And I already told you before, I wasn't following you.

NATHANIEL

I don't believe you.

MORRIS

Believe what you want, but my goal and life is not to be constantly seeking you out.

Nathaniel takes a sip of his coffee.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

You know, I never bothered you after that time I saw you at the theater.

NATHANIEL

I didn't think anyone in town would be there.

MORRIS

Well, I was there working. Took a while, but it got me my ticket here.

(beat)

I didn't bother you then, even though I knew what you were doing was risky.

NATHANIEL

And here you are now.

MORRIS

I'm here to tell you to be careful. Friend to friend.

NATHANIEL

I never had any friends. I was always tormented by the other kids in town.

MORRIS

It's because you would go around telling everyone that were white. You understand why they didn't respond positively to that.

NATHANIEL

I stopped saying that.

MORRIS

But your actions said otherwise.
That day I saw you on the job
confirmed it. You don't know when
to stop.

Nathaniel shrugs.

NATHANIEL

I can't help it if that's the way
people see me.

MORRIS

No, they don't really see you
because the 'you' that's presented
isn't really you.

NATHANIEL

You said you didn't come here to
start anything. Well, you starting
something now.

MORRIS

I haven't said anything that wasn't
true. Isn't it true that you lack
your own identity, you just let
people mold around you to see what
sticks.

Nathaniel hides his hands under the table. They tremble with
anger. He inhales, exhales. His hands are under control now.

NATHANIEL

You just want to make me angry.

MORRIS

You should be careful with that
girl, Frances.

NATHANIEL

Why should I listen to you?

MORRIS

Because her family can destroy you
if they ever find out who you are.
You know their one of the most
influential white folks in New York
City.

NATHANIEL

I can't just walk away from her.

MORRIS

You love her?

NATHANIEL

I don't know yet, but I enjoy spending time with her. Every time we're together, I just want to take in her warmth and her smile...and hold onto that forever. I never really meant to get involved with her. It just happened, and I didn't do anything to stop it.

MORRIS

It's dangerous. What's gonna happen when she finds out the truth about you?

NATHANIEL

She won't.

MORRIS

Won't she?

NATHANIEL

No. I'll handle it.

MORRIS

You know this thing can only go so far.

Nathaniel sighs deeply.

NATHANIEL

Why should it matter to you.

MORRIS

Because some part of me feels sorry for you. All those years I spent watching you be the outlier.

NATHANIEL

I need to go.

Nathaniel puts on his jacket. He gets up from the booth and walks away. Morris is still sitting as he watches Nathaniel leave the diner.

INT. NATHANIEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nathaniel sits at a table with in front of the typewriter. The paper is blank. His hands hesitate over the keys. He pulls them away.

He stands, chair SCRAPING against the wood floor and moves to the window. Bracing his hand against the wall, he stares out into the darkness.

INT. NATHANIEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nathaniel sits at the table eating a piece of toast. He chews slowly. The typewriter is on the other side of the table.

INT. NAEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

Nathaniel pushes the mail-cart, nearly full, down the aisle. A pile of mail begins to fall over, but he catches it before it does.

He passes Mr. Greene's office. The door is open. Mr. Greene is surrounded by a group of men. They TALK and LAUGH as smoke from their cigars cloud the room.

Nathaniel looks into the room. Mr. Greene catches his eye.

MR. GREENE

You need something, Ellis.

Nathaniel pauses. The men stop their conversation and stare at him.

NATHANIEL

No, Sir.

Mr. Greene nods. He resumes his conversation with the men.

Nathaniel continues on his way.

INT. JERRY'S JAZZ LOUNGE - NIGHT

Nathaniel and Frances sit at the bar, each holding a drink.

FRANCES

I've had quite the week. School has been keeping me busy on top of managing my parents while at home.

NATHANIEL

Mhm.

Frances watches as his gaze flickers to the people around him, then down at his drink.

FRANCES

Nathaniel!

His eyes land on her.

NATHANIEL

Yes?

FRANCES

Did you hear anything I just said?

NATHANIEL

I was listening.

FRANCES

Really. Then you wouldn't mind repeating it back to me.

Nathaniel takes a sip of his drink. Frances nods slowly.

NATHANIEL

I don't mean to be so distant. I just...got preoccupied.

FRANCES

Did something happen?

NATHANIEL

No.

(beat)

Do you mind if we get out of here?
I need some air.

FRANCES

Of course not. Let me just go and let Rita and Henry know we're stepping out.

Frances leaves. Nathaniel swallows the rest of his drink.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Nathaniel and Frances walk down the street.

NATHANIEL

Frances, I...

FRANCES

Yes?

Nathaniel places his hands in jacket pockets.

NATHANIEL

I didn't mean to pull you away from your friends.

FRANCES

It's all right. I'm sure they'll manage.

(beat)

You seem tense. Is everything ok with you?

NATHANIEL

Yes...No. I don't really know.

FRANCES

Look, if something's going on, you should tell me.

He moves over to a building leaning against the brick, Frances follows.

NATHANIEL

I just want to ask you one thing.

FRANCES

Yes? Ask me anything.

NATHANIEL

Frances, do you love me?

She takes a step back, stunned.

FRANCES

Well, I...

Nathaniel shakes his head. He moves away from her, but stops when she places a hand on his shoulder.

NATHANIEL

I didn't mean startle you. I shouldn't have asked that.

FRANCES

Forgive me for reacting that way. I just wasn't expecting it.

NATHANIEL

I was being to forward.

FRANCES

You weren't.

Frances removes her hands and he turns to face her again.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Something happened, didn't it. Don't lie to me, your face is giving you away.

NATHANIEL
I was just thinking about us, and
my feelings for you.

FRANCES
And?

NATHANIEL
You make me lose all my senses.

Frances smiles, leaning in closer to him.

FRANCES
It's 'cause I've got this charm.

NATHANIEL
(quietly)
Yeah.

He leans into her as though he is in a trance. He pauses,
suddenly pulling away from her.

FRANCES
What's the matter?

NATHANIEL
I want to be with you.

FRANCES
So what's stopping you?

Nathaniel takes both of her hands, bringing them up to his
chest.

NATHANIEL
I need you to say it.

FRANCES
Say what?

NATHANIEL
I asked you if you loved me. I need
you to answer the question.

FRANCES
I figured that it would be obvious
that I want to be with you.

Nathaniel shakes his head.

NATHANIEL
It's not the same if you don't say
the words. I need to hear that you
love me.

FRANCES

Fine. I love you, Nathaniel. Even though it's only been a few months, I just seem to be so drawn to you.

She places her hands on his face, staring into his eyes. They kiss. Nathaniel wraps his arms around her, holding her tightly.

QUICK FLASH

Young Nathaniel lays in bed. A woman's hand brushed against his hair.

BACK TO SCENE

Nathaniel pulls away from Frances, breaking the kiss. He staggers.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Nathaniel?

NATHANIEL

Frances, I...

FRANCES

Are you ok?

NATHANIEL

Why don't you head back to the club.

FRANCES

What?

NATHANIEL

I need to head home.

FRANCES

I should come with you.

NATHANIEL

No. I'll be fine.

He walks away, taking quick strides. Frances is left standing there.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING/HALLWAY - NIGHT

Nathaniel closes the front door. He stands in front of it, his back facing the hallway. He braces his hands against the door, breathing in heavily.

He turns and walks up the stairs to his apartment. The door SLAMS shut behind him.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Nathaniel stands at the wall phone with the receiver to his ear. We here a DIAL TONE.

He dials a number. The phone RINGS.

The RINGING stops. A CLICK is heard.

NATHANIEL

Hello, I'd like to speak with Frances?

(beat)

This is Nathaniel, a friend of hers.

(beat)

Nathaniel Ellis.

(beat)

All right. I'll wait.

INT. ARLINGTON PENTHOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Frances stands at a large window overlooking the city. She picks up receiver from the phone on the table beside her.

FRANCES

Hello, Nathaniel.

INTERCUT NATHANIEL/FRANCES

NATHANIEL

Frances, I was calling to tell you I'm sorry about last night.

FRANCES

You should be sorry.

NATHANIEL

I didn't mean to upset you.

FRANCES

You left me standing there on the street.

NATHANIEL

I told you to go back to your friends.

FRANCES

Well, I was too unsettled to spend anymore time at the bar, so I decided to go home.

NATHANIEL

I want to be honest with you, Frances.

FRANCES

Unlike last night when you refused to tell me what was bothering you?

NATHANIEL

I'm being serious?

FRANCES

And I'm not? What am I suppose to think about a man who's just told me that he's in love with me, then abruptly decides to leave me in the street?

NATHANIEL

Let's talk again. In person.

Silence.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Frances?

FRANCES

Where would you like to meet?

NATHANIEL

How about the pier? Is six a good time for you?

FRANCES

I usually have dinner with my family around that time.

NATHANIEL

Seven-thirty?

FRANCES

I can do that.

Nathaniel smiles.

NATHANIEL

That's good.

Frances twirls the phone cord with her finger.

FRANCES
Do you promise to tell what's going
on?

NATHANIEL
I promise.

FRANCES
I'll see you tonight.

NATHANIEL
Ok.

Nathaniel shuts his eyes, brows furrowed.

He opens his eyes.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)
Frances?

FRANCES
Yes.

NATHANIEL
I love you.

FRANCES
I love you, too.

Frances hangs up the phone.

Nathaniel places the receiver onto the phone gingerly. He
presses his back to the wall, places his hands in pockets.

EXT. PIER - NIGHT

Nathaniel leans on the railing under the yellow glow of a
streetlight.

Frances approaches him. Nathaniel straightens and walks over
to meet her, closing the distance between them.

Frances clutches her purse tightly against her chest, hugging
herself.

FRANCES
It's cold.

NATHANIEL
I hadn't realized. I'm sorry.

FRANCES

Well, I'm already out here, aren't I? Tell me what's got you in such a rut.

Nathaniel places his hands on her shoulders.

NATHANIEL

I've made a mistake, Frances.

FRANCES

What are you talking about? What kind of mistake?

NATHANIEL

Sometimes I forget myself. Sometimes I just go too far into the deep end that I let everything consume me.

FRANCES

What are you saying, Nathaniel?

He pulls away from her, turns and walks over to the railing. He looks out into the river.

NATHANIEL

Do you know something? A part of me secretly liked my ambiguity.

Frances stares at his back.

FRANCES

You're not making any sense.

NATHANIEL

I thought that it gave me more control over the type of man that I was.

FRANCES

Nathaniel...

NATHANIEL

I didn't understand that I was really losing myself.

Frances walks to the railing and grabs onto Nathaniel. She spins him around so that he is now facing her.

FRANCES

You need to stop speaking all of this nonsense.

NATHANIEL

I can't be this man anymore.

Frances releases him.

FRANCES

Tell me what's going on. Please.

Nathaniel sighs.

NATHANIEL

Do you remember that I told you about being alone as a child, not having any friends.

FRANCES

Yes.

NATHANIEL

It's because I was different.

FRANCES

Different how?

Nathaniel looks out into the water, then back at Frances.

NATHANIEL

I didn't look like them.

FRANCES

Them?

NATHANIEL

Everyone else in town.

He takes a takes a step back.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

I haven't been truthful, Frances.
Truthful about who I am.

Frances stares at him as the wind picks up, blowing some of her hair into her face.

FRANCES

Who are you then?

NATHANIEL

My name is Nathaniel Ellis. I didn't lie about that.

(beat)

I really like you, Frances. I've fallen in love with you, and I shouldn't have, but I was selfish.

FRANCES
It's not selfish to fall in love.

NATHANIEL
It is for me because I haven't been
honest with you.

Frances throws her hands up in frustration.

FRANCES
You keep pulling me around in
circles! Whatever you're trying to
say, just say it! I can't stand it
anymore!

Nathaniel balls his hands into fists at his side.

NATHANIEL
I'm colored!

The waves CRASH against the pier.

The street lamp flickers.

The wind blows trash against the ground.

FRANCES
(quietly)
What?

NATHANIEL
I said I was...

FRANCES
I heard what you said!

She turns away. Nathaniel watches her.

She turns back to him.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
Why did you say that?

NATHANIEL
Because it's true.

FRANCES
Well, I don't believe you.

NATHANIEL
I'm not lying to you.

Frances hugs her purse to her chest. Her lip trembles. She
looks like she is going to cry.

FRANCES

Why would you tell me that? I
didn't want to hear that!

NATHANIEL

It had to be done. It hurt too much
to go on like this.

FRANCES

You're hurting? What about me?
Don't you think this hurts me as
well?

NATHANIEL

You don't think I'm aware of that?

Frances shakes her head.

FRANCES

Then why did you lie?

NATHANIEL

Because I was drawn to you! I
didn't do anything to stop it!

He reaches for her. She steps back.

FRANCES

That's a dirty trick to play on a
girl!

Silence.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

You don't look colored.

NATHANIEL

I am. I take after my mother.

Frances drops her hands to her sides.

FRANCES

Just my luck to get wrapped up into
something like this. Frances
Arlington romanced by a colored
boy!

NATHANIEL

I wish things could've been
different.

FRANCES

How?

NATHANIEL

I would've still told you about myself, if not now, eventually.

FRANCES

When would eventually have been? If we'd gotten married? After we had children? Were you hoping that things would be dandy between us and that I'd be none the wiser?

NATHANIEL

No matter what you think about me now, you can't deny what you felt for me, Frances.

FRANCES

It doesn't matter how I felt then.

NATHANIEL

Doesn't it? You enjoyed our time together.

FRANCES

It makes no difference now. I can't be with you! I won't be with you! Do you know what this would do to me? The kind of scandal it would cause? I could lose everything!

Nathaniel nods.

NATHANIEL

I know, but I don't regret revealing myself to you.

FRANCES

I have to go!

Frances rushes away into the night. Nathaniel watches her go.

NATHANIEL

I'm sorry, Frances.

INT. NATHANIEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nathaniel shuts the door to his apartment. The sound of TRAFFIC is heard through the window.

He walks over to the small table in the kitchen area. He shrugs off his jacket and places it onto a chair.

Nathaniel sits, looking around his apartment.

At his small bed in the corner.

At the water stains on the wall.

At the chipped paint on the front door.

At the typewriter at the end of the table with the note tucked under it.

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Nathaniel stands in front of Mr. Greene's desk. Mr. Greene is leaning back in his chair, reading what appears to be a letter. A cigar hangs from his mouth, smoke wafting throughout the small office.

Mr. Greene lowers the letter from his face, gaze now on Nathaniel.

Mr. Greene raises an eyebrow, cigar dipping slightly in his mouth.

INT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

A PAWNBROKER stands behind a counter. Nathaniel is across from him watching him count money.

The typewriter rests on the counter between them.

The pawnbroker places a hand on the typewriter. The other hands the cash over to Nathaniel.

Nathaniel nods to the man and pockets the money. He leaves the shop.

INT. FRANCES'S BEDROOM - DAY

Frances lays in her bed under the covers. Her curtains are closed, allowing little light to enter the room.

There is a KNOCK at the door. Frances doesn't stir.

MRS. ARLINGTON

Frances? Frances, darling you must come out! You been cooped up in that room all day!

FRANCES

I'm fine.

MRS. ARLINGTON

Well, why don't we go out? Maybe
for a walk? A little fresh air...

Frances sits up in bed. She glares at the door.

FRANCES

I said I'm all right, mother!

Silence.

MRS. ARLINGTON

I'll check in with you later.

We hear Mrs. Arlington's FOOTSTEPS walk away.

Frances pulls the covers back and swings her legs to the floor. She reaches over to the edge of the bed where her robe lays haphazardly. Throwing it on over her nightgown, she stands and walks over to the window.

She pulls the curtains open, wincing at the sunlight in her face.

Glancing over at her nightstand, a telephone rests on top if it.

Frances paces, hand coming up to touch her face.

She moves to the nightstand and reaches for the receiver, putting it to her ear. She dials a number.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

The hall phone RINGS. A few moments later, Alice appears to answer it.

ALICE

Hello?

INTERCUT ALICE/FRANCES

FRANCES

Hello?

(beat)

I was just wondering if Nathaniel
is available.

Alice is annoyed.

ALICE

Sorry, hon. You just missed him. He
moved out a few days ago.

Frances bites her lip, twisting the sleeve of her robe with her hand.

FRANCES

Do you know where he moved to?

ALICE

No.

FRANCES

Did he leave a message?

ALICE

No.

FRANCES

Ok. Thank you.

Alice hangs up.

Frances is still holding the receiver to her ear, listening to the sound of the DIAL TONE. She puts it back slowly.

She stares out the window.

INT. VIRGINIA/TRAIN STATION - DAY

Nathaniel, holding a suitcase, stands on the platform watching the train pull away from the station.

People mill around him.

Nathaniel leaves.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

A bus pulls away from a bus stop revealing Nathaniel. A cloud of dirt pulls around him. He pats down his trousers, picks up his suitcase, and walks down the road.

In the distance, his house is visible.

INT. ELLIS HOUSE - DAY

Nathaniel closes the front door behind him. He looks at his surroundings.

He takes off his jacket and places it on the coat hanger by the doorway.

INT. BEDROOM

Nathaniel puts his suitcase on his bed. He sits, running his hands over the quilt.

He reaches over to his and opens a drawer. Inside is a stack of papers. He pulls some out and reads them.

The FRONT DOOR opens.

Nathaniel looks up from the papers. He sets them down and leaves the room.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Bobby is cooking at the stove.

Nathaniel enters. He moves to kitchen table, pulls out a chair and sits down.

A long silence between the two.

BOBBY

I'm making chicken and mashed potatoes. Your favorite.

Nathaniel looks over at Bobby, still leaning over the stove.

NATHANIEL

Thanks, Pop.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

The two men sit across from each other, eating their meal silently.

BOBBY

Ronnie said he saw you at the station this morning.

NATHANIEL

I wanted to catch the early train.

Silverware SCRAPES against plates.

BOBBY

Less of a crowd.

NATHANIEL

Yeah.

He takes a bite of his food.

BOBBY
How long are you staying?

NATHANIEL
How long do you want me here?

Bobby puts his fork down.

BOBBY
I never forced you to leave.

Nathaniel looks down at his half eaten food.

NATHANIEL
I know.

Bobby sighs.

BOBBY
(pointing to his potatoes)
I tried to make them like your
mother. Do you remember? I never
really get the consistency right.

NATHANIEL
I remember. Yours are fine.

Bobby eats the rest of his mash potatoes.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nathaniel lays under the covers wide awake. He turn so that he is facing the window. The moonlight shines outside.

INT. YARD - DAY

Bobby stands in front of a Ford.Hood up, he inspects the inside of the car.

Nathaniel sits on a stool a few feet away, watching him.

NATHANIEL
I met a, girl.

Bobby turns to him.

BOBBY
Band me the wrench.

NATHANIEL
Did you here what I said?

BOBBY

Yes. Now, hand me the wrench.

Nathaniel grabs the wrench from the ground and hands it to Bobby.

NATHANIEL

Pop, I...

BOBBY

I heard. You meet a girl, and now you're here.

NATHANIEL

I couldn't stay in the city anymore.

BOBBY

You break her heart?

NATHANIEL

Yeah. Badly. There's no way I can make it right.

Bobby continues to work on the car.

BOBBY

That's always the difficult part of a relationship, getting through a rut.

NATHANIEL

It's not really like that.

BOBBY

No?

NATHANIEL

I can't make things right with her.

BOBBY

Why not?

NATHANIEL

Because I hid things from her.

Bobby pauses, looking up from the hood of the car and over at the hood of the car.

BOBBY

Was she...

Nathaniel nod.

Bobby brings his attention back to the car.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

You know nothing good could've come out of that.

NATHANIEL

I didn't mean for it to happen.

BOBBY

But it did.

Nathaniel rubs his hands together.

NATHANIEL

Yeah. It did.

Bobby closes the hood.

BOBBY

Why did you do it?

NATHANIEL

I don't really know, Pop. I guess I really liked the attention.

BOBBY

Not all attention is good attention, Nathaniel. Especially the kind that can lead to serious consequences.

Nathaniel rises from his stool.

NATHANIEL

It always has to be something with you!

BOBBY

Well, I apologize for being concerned about your wellbeing! Need I remind you that you're colored, son! You have to be smart about these things!

NATHANIEL

I was careful!

BOBBY

Something must've happened. You left so suddenly all those months ago and now your back! Is someone after you...Is it the Klan?

Bobby walks over to Nathaniel and places his hands on his shoulder.

NATHANIEL

No.

BOBBY

Are you sure?

NATHANIEL

Yes!

Bobby nods.

BOBBY

All right.

INT. KITCHEN

Bobby and Nathaniel sit at the table and eat dinner.

NATHANIEL

I suppose you want to know about my time away.

BOBBY

If you're up to talking.

NATHANIEL

New York was...so different from here.

BOBBY

I can imagine.

NATHANIEL

It was strange at first, being in a city constantly in motion.

BOBBY

Where did you stay.

NATHANIEL

I found a small apartment. Got a job at a paper. That's how I paid my rent.

BOBBY

That's good.

NATHANIEL

I was doing all right.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Bobby has his head in the fridge, looking through its contents.

Nathaniel sits at the table watching him and sipping a cup of coffee.

BOBBY

Looks like I'm gonna have to make a run to the store.

He closes the fridge and sighs.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

It should only take a few minutes.

NATHANIEL

I can go.

Bobby turns to him.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

I haven't really gone out since I've gotten back. I think it would be good for me.

BOBBY

All right.

EXT. ROAD

Nathaniel strolls down the road between the myriad of houses, hands tucked into his pockets.

MS. JOHNSON (60) spots him from where she sits on her porch.

MS. JOHNSON

Oh! Hello!

Nathaniel doesn't hear her.

MS. JOHNSON (CONT'D)

Hello! Nathaniel!

Nathaniel stops walking. He turns around to face her.

Ms. Johnson waves, smiling at him. Nathaniel waves back, cautiously.

NATHANIEL

Hello, Ms. Johnson.

MS. JOHNSON

I haven't seen you in such a long time, Nathaniel. How have you been?

NATHANIEL

I'm doing fine.

MS. JOHNSON

That's good, that's good.

NATHANIEL

I should be going.

He starts to leave.

MS. JOHNSON

Oh! Where to?

Nathaniel stops, turns again.

NATHANIEL

Heading to the store to pick up some groceries.

MS. JOHNSON

I was just about to ask if you'd like to step inside. You know Freddie just got back from...

NATHANIEL

I really should be going, Ms. Johnson.

Ms. Johnson's smile falters.

MS. JOHNSON

Oh, well, have a nice day!

NATHANIEL

You too. Nice seeing you.

Nathaniel continues down the road.

INT. STORE - DAY

A BELL chimes from the top of the doorway at Nathaniel enters. A few people stop to look at him briefly before going back to their business.

Nathaniel walks over to the produce section, inspecting the apples in the crate.

Next to him, the SHOPKEEPER is sweeping down an aisle. She Shopkeeper looks over at him, a gleam of recognition in his eyes. He goes back to sweeping.

Nathaniel picks up a few apples.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Nathaniel plops a paper bag of groceries onto the kitchen table.

NATHANIEL
Pop, I'm back.

Silence.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)
Pop?

He leaves the kitchen and enters...

INT. HALLWAY

Nathaniel walks down the hallway. He stops when he sees his bedroom door cracked open.

He peers in. On the bed sit Bobby, reading over a stack of papers.

Nathaniel enters his bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM

Booby looks up, putting the papers aside.

NATHANIEL
Pop?

BOBBY
Sorry, I didn't realized you'd be back so soon.

NATHANIEL
What are you doing?

BOBBY
I was just...

NATHANIEL
Looking through my stuff.

BOBBY

I'm sorry.

Nathaniel sits next to him on the bed.

NATHANIEL

It's fine.

He picks up some of the papers, skimming through them.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Some of this I wrote years ago.

BOBBY

It's good.

Nathaniel shakes his head.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

No, I'm serious.

NATHANIEL

You really think so?

Bobby looks down at his hands.

BOBBY

While you were gone, I would come
in here from time to time.

NATHANIEL

How much did you read?

BOBBY

Just about most of it.

NATHANIEL

I didn't think you'd ever bothered
to read any of my stuff.

BOBBY

Some things have changed since you
left. I've changed, or at least
I've tried to.

NATHANIEL

Right.

BOBBY

Believe me when I say this,
Nathaniel. All those months with
you away gave me some time to
think.

NATHANIEL

I didn't expect you to become so enlightened.

Bobby clasps his hands together.

BOBBY

I know I wasn't fair to you. I should have been a better father to you, but I was just so angry all the time.

(beat)

Your mother left and...and that just felt like the end for me. And every time I looked at you, it reminded me of her. You look so much like her.

NATHANIEL

I always knew that there was some part of you that hated me.

Nathaniel turns away, hurt. Bobby grabs his face in both his hands forcing Nathaniel to look at him.

BOBBY

I could never hate you, son! Don't ever say that! I hated myself for not being a better father, for not always being there when you needed me!

Nathaniel stares at him.

NATHANIEL

You don't know how long I've waited to hear you admit that.

BOBBY

I'm just sorry that it took me so long to say it.

Bobby lets go of his face.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Your my son, Nathaniel, and I care about you.

Nathaniel is quiet.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

And I want to try to be the father that I never was. Will you let me?

Nathaniel nods.

NATHANIEL
Ok, Pop. Ok.

Bobby reaches over and hugs him. They hold onto each other tightly. They let go.

BOBBY
Thank you, son.

He get up and goes to Nathaniel's desk. He opens the top draw and digs out a small stack of papers.

He sits back on the bed with Nathaniel.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
I spent so much time in your that I found these.

NATHANIEL
What?

Bobby shows him the papers. They are revealed to be college application papers.

BOBBY
I saw here that you started them, but you never finished.

NATHANIEL
Pop...

BOBBY
Why not?

NATHANIEL
It doesn't matter.

BOBBY
It does.

He puts the papers in Nathaniel's lap.

NATHANIEL
I haven't looked at this is such a long time.

BOBBY
You can still apply. It's not too late.

Nathaniel shakes his head.

NATHANIEL

Forget it.

BOBBY

No. I'm not going to forget it. I think that this would be a good thing for you.

NATHANIEL

Why because you didn't go to college.

BOBBY

Because I want to see you succeed. I know you have the potential. I've seen your work. You actually have a chance.

NATHANIEL

No I don't, Pop.

BOBBY

Yes. You do. What do you think is stopping you, Nathaniel!

NATHANIEL

Do you really have to ask that?

Bobby sighs.

BOBBY

You're an intelligent colored boy. Any school should be lucky enough to even have you.

NATHANIEL

I don't know.

BOBBY

Don't do it for me, Nathaniel. Do it for yourself.

Nathaniel looks out the window.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Nathaniel and Bobby sit on the front steps under the porch light. Both men have beer in their hands.

NATHANIEL

I don't think I've ever done this.

BOBBY

Hm?

NATHANIEL

This is the first time a sat out here with you. When I was younger, I used to watch you from the window.

Bobby sips his beer.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

This is nice.

BOBBY

Yeah.

Cicadas SING in the night.

NATHANIEL

I still don't like how I left things in New York. It wasn't fair to Frances.

BOBBY

You did right by that girl, leaving her when you did.

NATHANIEL

It would be ridiculous of me to think that somehow things could have been better between us.

BOBBY

There will be someone out there for you. But you're young, you've got plenty of time to find a girl. One that you can be completely honest with.

NATHANIEL

Yeah. You're right.

Nathaniel takes a sip of his beer.

INT. PORCH - DAY (A FEW MONTHS LATER)

Nathaniel and Bobby stand on the porch. Bobby watches Nathaniel pick up a suitcase sitting beside him.

Bobby places both hands on his shoulder, squeezing them.

BOBBY
You have everything.

NATHANIEL
Yes, Pop. I do.

BOBBY
You sure.

Nathaniel nods.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
I didn't think time would go this quickly.

NATHANIEL
I'm not leaving forever. Remember that I'll be home during breaks.

BOBBY
You promise.

NATHANIEL
Promise.

Bobby digs into his pocket and pulls out a wad of cash.

BOBBY
I almost forget to give this to you.

He puts the cash in Nathaniel's coat pocket.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
I pulled some extra hours.

NATHANIEL
Pop, you didn't have to. I told you that I already had some money saved up.

BOBBY
No. I wanted to.

Nathaniel feels the bulge in his pocket.

He nods and heads down the steps and out onto the lawn. Suddenly he stops, turning back around to face Bobby.

NATHANIEL
I love you, Pop.

BOBBY
I love you too, son.

Nathaniel turns. He walks down the dirt road. Bobby stands on the porch watching him go until his figure becomes too small in the distance.

FADE OUT.

THE END.