

PASSING

Written by

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Based on the Novella by Nella Larsen

EXT. NEW YORK, UPPER EAST SIDE. AUGUST 1927.

Unnatural quiet given that we find ourselves in a busy shopping street in a well-to-do part of town. It is unreasonably hot, and too bright to see anything clearly.

Dissolve to Light flaring in a static frame. As the focus sharpens we see feet walking. As many feet as we can get flare in and out of focus, fading away to a white then reforming as the honking of car horns and footsteps on the pavement builds to a realistic volume.

Eventually we focus on two pairs of female feet marching purposefully.

WOMAN 1

It's like the whole city is out today.

WOMAN 2

Summer sales!

WOMAN 1

That's right.

WOMAN 2

You can't keep a New Yorker away from a bargain.

WOMAN 1

Ain't that the truth.

We follow them for a while eventually panning up to their well hatted heads...

WOMAN 1 (CONT'D)

Let's get to the toy store and out of this heat. I'll never hear the end of it if I don't get my niece a doll for her birthday.

WOMAN 2

Is she asking for a special sort? You know they have those ones with the darling hair that you can braid?

WOMAN 1

Oh, maybe she'll like that. I don't know.

As they...

INT/EXT. TOYSHOP

...Enter a Toyshop. The toyshop is packed with merchandise, spilling into all corners, leaving little space for the customers of which there are already too many to accommodate.

WOMAN 2

There now, that's better.

An ATTENDANT holding a large pile of wooden airplanes fights his way through the crowd as the women browse the doll section. We stay on their backs.

WOMAN 2 (CONT'D)

Look at that precious little pickaninny one. That she'll love.

WOMAN 1

No...

WOMAN 2

Mm. Of course she never even met a colored that didn't work for us. Thank Heavens.

WOMAN 1 ruffles through a bucket of dolls and picks out a 'Golliwog' as the ATTENDANT comes towards them still carrying the planes for the window display.

ATTENDANT (O.S.)

Excuse me.

The shop ATTENDANT teeters causing a calamity as everything falls to the floor.

WOMAN 1 drops the 'Golliwog' in order to help the ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Never you mind ladies! Accidents will happen.

He heads towards the register to deal with the line of impatient shoppers.

In the general commotion an UNKNOWN WOMAN picks up the doll.

WOMAN 1

Oh dear.

The UNKNOWN WOMAN holds the doll out to the women.

UNKNOWN WOMAN

Here.

We see the women's faces looking closely at the unknown woman, IRENE REDFIELD (30s). She turns away nervous, as they take the doll from her.

WOMAN 1

Thank you.

IRENE walks away.

WOMAN 1 (CONT'D)

What a nice lady.

INT. TOYSHOP. MOMENTS LATER.

IRENE stands in line behind a TALL BLONDE MAN.

For the first time we see her face underneath her cloche hat - dark and furtive. IRENE is not necessarily extraordinary looking, but definitely different to those in line with her. Her eyes. Her mouth. Her hair. She's difficult to place, and therefore people rarely do.

The TALL BLONDE MAN finishes paying and leaves.

IRENE sets down two toy cars on the counter. Her hand is shaking a little, and throughout this exchange she tries to avoid eye contact with the ATTENDANT.

IRENE

Do you have the 'Mother Goose
Tracing and Drawing Book'?

ATTENDANT

All Sold Out.

IRENE

Figures. I've tried all over town.
My son won't settle for anything
but...

ATTENDANT

Try again in a couple weeks? Might
get lucky.

IRENE

His birthday's tomorrow.

He shrugs and finishes tying the string around her box, before passing it to her.

ATTENDANT

Well, better luck next time.

EXT. TOYSHOP. THE SAME.

IRENE scrambles out into the glaring sun. Her bundles are awkward to carry and she's starting to fade under the heat.

She looks towards a store on the other side of the street, fanning her perspiring face with a handkerchief.

She takes two steps away from the curb and sees a MAN on the other side of the street from her.

HE LOOKS DEAD INTO HER EYES, CLOSE, IMPLORING, THEN CLUTCHES HIS CHEST AND STUMBLES.

A couple passing by moves toward him and catches him.

The glare is strong in IRENE'S eyes as she tries to focus on THE MAN.

THE MAN is lying in the street and a gaggle of people are forming around him.

IRENE, also faint, hails a cab.

INT. TAXI.

IRENE settles into her seat.

In the rear view mirror the also perspiring CABBIE's eyes look concerned.

CABBIE

This heat. Feel like I'm about to pass out myself.

IRENE

Yes. I guess, it's tea I need. I'm a little faint.

CABBIE

The Drayton ma'am? They do say as how there's always a breeze up there.

IRENE

The Drayton'll be lovely.

Through the back window driving away, she watches THE MAN's motionless body lying on the ground. His grey anonymous face, obviously dead from a sudden heart attack.

EXT. HOTEL.

IRENE gets out of the cab and looks at the hotel. It is an impressive period building. Well to do white people drift in through the revolving doors. Suddenly everything looks crisper and cleaner.

INT. HOTEL.

IRENE walks a quiet hall towards the tea room.

Everything here looks crisp and in focus. A cool, eerily quiet and strangely remote oasis.

INT. HOTEL. TEA ROOM.

IRENE stands in the doorway of the empty tea room. A SERVER bobs into IRENE's view signaling 'one?' - she follows him to a table and sits.

SERVER

The waiter will be right with you.

INT. HOTEL. TEA ROOM. LATER.

IRENE powders her forehead and checks her face in a compact mirror.

She looks around the room. It is unusually silent. A PAIR OF ELDERLY WOMEN and A YOUNG MAN AND WOMAN IN LOVE. The ice cubes tinkle and the breeze carries the muffled conversations past her.

One such conversation drifts into Irene's earshot.

She hears the mumbles of a baritone voiced MAN and a light HUSKY VOICED WOMAN behind her.

Their conversation escalates in volume as they walk past her table and sit at a table a little ways in front.

The HUSKY VOICED WOMAN is obscured from view by the MAN standing with his back to us.

IRENE catches a glimpse of her legs crossing under the table, the extravagant chiffon of her dress as it blows around them.

MAN

(barely audible)

See you later then?

HUSKY VOICED WOMAN
 (barely audible)
 I should hope so.

IRENE sees fragments of golden hair as the MAN leans down to kiss the HUSKY VOICED WOMAN's cheek, before turning around, adjusting his tie, and walking back the way he came, briefly making eye contact with IRENE on his way.

IRENE looks away, nervous to be caught staring. She looks up in the other direction.

POV of the LOVED UP COUPLE clasping hands.

POV ELDERLY WOMEN sipping tea in silence.

HUSKY VOICED WOMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Tea. Thank you.

The waiter brushes past IRENE, again she looks down. Then up again careful not to look in the direction of the HUSKY VOICED WOMAN.

THE LOVED UP COUPLE.

THE ELDERLY WOMEN

AND THEN SUDDENLY...

A PAIR OF DARK EYES ARE STARING DIRECTLY BACK AT HER.

They are those of the HUSKY VOICED WOMAN.

We see her properly as she stares unapologetically at Irene. She is extraordinary looking - Fine golden hair, strong features, beautifully shaped mouth precisely painted a bright geranium red, and big, dark, almost black eyes.

IRENE LOOKS AWAY. CAUGHT.

IRENE DARES TO LOOK AGAIN, aping confidence. So what if she looks? She can't possibly know.

THE HUSKY VOICED WOMAN keeps staring. She is neither hostile nor smug - but something close to both. She stands up and starts to walk towards her.

Time to leave. IRENE turns to ask the waiter for the check. She turns back around to get money out of her purse only to be greeted by the woman now standing by her table.

HUSKY VOICED WOMAN (CONT'D)
 Pardon me. I don't mean to stare,
 but I think I know you!

IRENE returns her smile, and makes to leave.

IRENE
I'm afraid you are mistaken.

HUSKY VOICED WOMAN
No no why of course I know you
'Rene!

IRENE is taken aback.

HUSKY VOICED WOMAN (CONT'D)
You look just the same! Tell me, do
they still call you 'Rene?

IRENE
Yes, though nobody's called me that
for a long time.

HUSKY VOICED WOMAN
Don't you know me? Not really
'Rene?

IRENE
I'm afraid I can't seem to place...

A spark of recognition. THE HUSKY VOICED WOMAN nods excitedly
and breaks into a laugh - crisp like a bell.

IRENE, hand to mouth, sits down in shock.

IRENE (CONT'D)
(covertly)
Clare!

CLARE
That's right.

IRENE
Not really Clare Kendry?!

CLARE sits.

CLARE
Now don't run away. You simply must
stay and talk. Fancy meeting you
here! It's simply too lucky.

IRENE
It's awfully surprising yes.

Pause. They look at one another knowingly.

CLARE laughs again.

IRENE (CONT'D)

I'd never in this world have known you if you hadn't laughed. You've changed so.

CLARE

Well it's been twelve years at least.

She stares at IRENE.

CLARE (CONT'D)

You know I almost dropped by your father's house not so long ago- I've thought of you so often.

IRENE

You have?

CLARE

Of course.

CLARE smiles.

CLARE (CONT'D)

You know since I've been here I've hoped I might run into someone. Preferably you though. And now you're here.

She goes to grasp IRENE's hand on the table, stops, as IRENE withdraws her hand slightly. Just slightly. CLARE lights a cigarette.

CLARE (CONT'D)

I'll wager you've never given me a thought. So tell me. I want to know everything. Married? Children?

IRENE

Yes. Two boys. You?

CLARE

Mmm, one girl. Margery - she's my angel. My husband John is here on business. Banking business - in this heat! Can you imagine?

IRENE

That was your husband?

Clare almost nods. Pause.

CLARE

We've been here a whole week from Chicago. That's home... Although I come here and remember what home really is.

She smokes.

CLARE (CONT'D)

Well - we can see lots of one another these days that I am here, can't we?

IRENE

I don't know, I mean - I'm just - I live in Harlem still. I don't come to this part of town a whole lot...

CLARE

Oh! That's sad -

PAUSE.

CLARE (CONT'D)

- Perhaps I can come visit with you another time in Harlem? Meet your boys? We're often here - and if things go well with this trip, John's quite sure we'll move. It's my dream to come back 'Rene.

There is something desperate in CLARE's expression that touches IRENE despite herself.

IRENE

I'm sure.

CLARE snaps out of the brief melancholy with a wide smile.

IRENE (CONT'D)

(cautious)
Clare, does he...?

CLARE

Know? -

She coyly shakes her head.

CLARE (CONT'D)

Let's go up to my suite where we can talk properly.

With complete authority -

CLARE (CONT'D)

Waiter!

INT. CLARE'S HOTEL SUITE. LATER.

The women enter an elegant if somewhat immodest room. CLARE heads to the back where the bed is behind a screen.

CLARE

I can't bear this heat. I have to change.

IRENE hovers at the door still holding her bags, and observes the flurry of fine things scattered around the suite.

CLARE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

John'll be back soon and here I am sweating up a storm!

IRENE

(bluntly)
That's nice.

CLARE (O.S.)

You know, I found Gert Johnson in the phone book - well Gertrude Martin now. She married Fred. Remember?

IRENE

Yes - I haven't seen Fred for an unmentionable time.

CLARE changes her dress partially obscured by the screen.

CLARE

They have twins! Isn't that wonderful? Boys. I'd love to have boys.

CLARE emerges trying to do up a button in back.

CLARE (CONT'D)

I'd never risk it again though - never. I went through hell those nine months for fear Margery might come out dark.

IRENE looks behind her at the exit, unable to move - but desperate to...

IRENE

Mine are "dark"

CLARE
And your husband... He..?

IRENE
He couldn't exactly 'pass' if
that's what you mean.

CLARE
Oh! I thought you -

CLARE laughs loudly.

CLARE (CONT'D)
- Well then! Would you?

She stands in front of IRENE with open button.

CLARE (CONT'D)
Would you?

IRENE puts down her bags and does up the button on the back
of her dress.

CLARE grabs a nail polish and sits down to fix a chip.

CLARE (CONT'D)
Anyway - she goes as white.

She faces IRENE.

CLARE (CONT'D)
So you haven't ever thought to?

IRENE
What?

CLARE
I'm asking if you've ever thought
of passing?

IRENE
No! Why should I?

CLARE shoots her a disdainful look.

IRENE (CONT'D)
I mean for convenience -
occasionally, I suppose. But no.

CLARE continues to stare.

IRENE (CONT'D)

I just mean, why would I? I have everything I ever wanted. Except perhaps a little more money.

CLARE

Of course. That's all everybody wants - a little more money. Money is an awfully nice thing to have! In fact all things considered I think it's entirely worth the price!

Pause.

IRENE

I should go, Clare. I am not sure it's such a good idea if John comes back...

CLARE stands, desperate to keep IRENE from leaving.

CLARE

No 'Rene - please. It is. You must stay a little while longer. Please say you'll stay.

IRENE is touched, but reticent.

CLARE (CONT'D)

(noticing her nails)

Oh hang it! I made a mess. Give me a second and I'll order some food up here, huh?

IRENE sits as if hypnotized by the nail business.

IRENE

Alright.

CLARE blows the nail polish dry.

CLARE

What you thinking, 'Rene? You're curious is that it...?

IRENE

Yes.

CLARE

I don't mind... you can ask me anything. Anything you want.

Sternly,

IRENE

What have you told him... about your family?

CLARE

You know, I haven't had to worry about it as much as you'd think. There were my Aunts you see, who took me in after father died and gave me a home of sorts. Very white. Very respectable. Very religious. I met John not long after and as soon as I turned eighteen and legal we got married and well... went off and left for good.

Incredulous,

IRENE

And - you're happy?

CLARE

Of course 'Rene. As you say, I have everything I ever wanted.

Shamed.

IRENE

Sorry Clare - That was rude of me. Of course you're happy. Look at you! And your daughter - ?

CLARE

Margery. She's divine. John wants to put her in one of those Swiss boarding schools this fall. I dare say it'll give her quite the education. Not anything like we had -!

CLARE picks up the phone, still blowing her nail polish dry.

CLARE (CONT'D)

Hello - room service? We want cakes! The most beautiful cakes you have, and... tell me, what kind of tea you got passes for French champagne?

(beat)

Oh I'm messing!

She pulls a hip flask from a drawer and shakes it provocatively.

CLARE (CONT'D)

We'll take a pitcher of iced tea -
in champagne flutes - we're
celebrating!

IRENE smiles. CLARE's joy is infectious.

INT. CLARE'S HOTEL SUITE. LATER.

A tray of beautiful cakes are on the table. CLARE pours more liquor from the flask into IRENE's glass and passes it to her. She has finally removed her coat but her hat stays on.

IRENE

That's enough, thank you.

CLARE

Oh, have a drop more, you've hardly
had any.

The door opens with a BANG and from behind IRENE, JOHN BELLEW enters. Confident, entitled, charismatic. His manner is relentlessly jovial and easy - even in moments of extreme cruelty.

JOHN

Nig? Come here and -

IRENE gulps, swallows, gasps or none of the above - but the effect is the same.

CLARE

- John dear!

CLARE knows the kind of mood JOHN is in and interrupts him quickly.

CLARE (CONT'D)

I ran into an old, old friend of
mine from school! Irene Westover.
Irene this is my husband John
Bellew.

IRENE and JOHN shake hands. Lucky for IRENE he's far more interested in his wife, who he expected to find alone.

JOHN

Oh. A pleasure to meet you Mrs.
Westover -

IRENE

Actually, it's Mrs. Redfield.

CLARE
Of course, I didn't even ask - !

JOHN grabs a cake.

JOHN
Well - I'm sorry if I've interrupted. Will you get me a drink, honey?

CLARE
Well here.

She passes him her glass.

JOHN
Thank you. What do you say then? To old friends?

They toast. 'To old friends' etc.

JOHN loosens his tie a little, examining IRENE properly for the first time. She looks away.

He clocks the champagne flutes.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Cute.

He grabs another cake. Displacing his desire for his wife with desire for cakes.

CLARE
You hear what John called me 'Rene'?

JOHN chuckles and waves it away, dismissive.

JOHN
Oh Clare, please?!

There is a knock at the door. CLARE runs to open it.

CLARE
Go on - tell her why.

JOHN
It's silly really... but when we were first married, this woman was white - white as a lily!

Behind IRENE a ROOM SERVICE MAN, A DARK SKINNED BLACK MAN IN HIS LATE TEENS talks inaudibly to CLARE - she tells him to clean the pitcher, empty the ashtray and bring up a fresh glass etc.

JOHN (CONT'D)

But as the years go by she seems to be getting darker and darker -
- So I told her if you don't look out, you'll wake up one morning and find you've turned into a nigger!

He roars with laughter. Another cake.

JOHN (CONT'D)

- She's been 'Nig' ever since.

CLARE joins the laughter affectionately batting him.

IRENE stares in shock, concentrating hard on THE ROOM SERVICE MAN going about his business in silence. She is not sure if she's going to scream or cry in fury.

THE ROOM SERVICE MAN shuts the door behind him and suddenly and unexpectedly, IRENE explodes into gales of hysterical laughter.

IRENE

That's good!

IRENE continues to laugh.

JOHN

Well it's silly.

CLARE and JOHN have stopped.

IRENE

No that's... that's... that's good.

IRENE catches CLARE glaring at her and manages to pull herself together.

CLARE

My goodness John! After all these years what would it matter if you found out that I was one or two percent colored?

He pulls her towards him kissing her throughout.

JOHN

You can turn as black as you please as far as I'm concerned! - I know you're not colored.

There is an awkward silence, awkward for so many reasons not least because of the lecherous show of affection towards his wife that follows this speech. Then,

IRENE
So you dislike Negroes, Mr. Bellew?

JOHN
Oh no nothing like that at all.

IRENE
Oh?

JOHN
I hate them. But not as much as Nig
does - for all she's trying to turn
into one. She won't have them near
her, not even as a maid! Isn't that
true?

The whites of IRENE's knuckles show. Her lips compress.

IRENE
Have you ever known any Negroes?

CLARE throws her a sharp look. JOHN turns serious,

JOHN
No, no, but I do know people who
know them. And I read about them in
the papers of course. Terrible
mess. Robbing, killing. It's sad
really.

Silence.

CLARE
John dear I'm sure 'Rene doesn't
need to hear your pet perversions.

JOHN
You're right, I'm sorry. Didn't
mean to bore you Mrs. Redfield.

Pause.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You live near Mrs. Redfield?

IRENE
Fairly.

JOHN
Great city, New York. City of the
future. What's your husband's line
of work?

IRENE
He's a Doctor.

JOHN
Interesting life a Doctor's.

IRENE
Yes. Hard. Nerve wracking too.

Flirtatious,

JOHN
Wife's nerves too eh? - All those
lady patients.

He laughs.

CLARE
John dear, don't start! More tea
'Rene?

IRENE
I've taken up too much of your time
already.

She stands. They stand.

CLARE
But we're just getting started!

IRENE
Thank you for the drink Clare.

JOHN
I'll see you out.

They walk to the door. JOHN opens it for her. IRENE stands in
the doorway looking at the two of them.

CLARE
'Rene... I do hope I'll see you
soon.

JOHN
Good-bye Mrs. Redfield. Glad to
have met you.

IRENE
Good-bye Clare.

He closes the door on her. IRENE stands in the corridor.
Finally, she takes a breath.

EXT. REDFIELD HOUSE. STREET. A SUMMER EVENING.

At peace at last in her environment, IRENE walks slowly up a beautiful tree lined residential block. A single shot tracking with her. The day is winding down. The street is becoming quiet. House lights start to turn on as she walks past.

A neighbor walks up the stoop to his house. He tips his hat.

IRENE
'Evening Lance.

A window opens and the sounds of someone practicing a trumpet floats out.

She reaches her house and walks up the stoop to the front door.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL / LIVING ROOM. THE SAME.

IRENE drops her bags on the floor and looks in the living room.

The house is simple. A staircase hits the entrance to the front door with a living room to the left and a dining room to the right. The kitchen is out back with a modest backyard and porch. The hallway has a hat stand, a mirror and a table with the one telephone in the house.

In the living room BRIAN REDFIELD is fast asleep in an armchair. He is dressed in a smart suit but his shoes are unlaced - as if he fell asleep in the act of untying them.

Upstairs can be heard the frenzied thuds of children playing.

IRENE kneels by BRIAN's feet and starts to take his shoes off. He stirs.

BRIAN
Where you been?

IRENE
Looking for that darn book. They eaten?

BRIAN
Think so. Yes. I was gonna put them to bed -

IRENE
But you fell asleep.

BRIAN
Apparently.

She kisses him deeply.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Am I still sleeping?

BRIAN pulls her into his lap.

FADE TO:

EXT. REDFIELD HOUSE. THE STREET. EARLY MORNING.

It is now Autumn. The calm before the day begins.

Eventually the front door bursts open and BRIAN and his two children JUNIOR and TED run out onto the sidewalk thick with autumn leaves.

JUNIOR (9) is in stature and coloring much like his father. TED (nearly 12) also dark like his father, his manner is far more internal and contemplative than his brother. JUNIOR tosses a football at TED.

JUNIOR
Catch it!

TED doesn't and instead halfheartedly kicks the ball back to his brother.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)
Pass! Pass!

Brian smiles at him. A trace of concern for his fragile offspring.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. THE SAME.

IRENE watches her children play out the window.

The bedroom is homey but a mess. Clothes are strewn everywhere, the bed is unmade, there are toys scattered. The signs of a busy family life.

As usual she is late for the day.

INT/EXT. REDFIELD HOUSE.

From the window she can hear and see them:

BRIAN
Ted. Come here.

TED
Pa -

BRIAN
(teasing)
I thought you nailed this already.

TED
(shyly, but teasing back)
I get confused.

He ties his son's laces.

BRIAN
Go on now go play with your
brother. We gotta leave in 5
minutes!

We glimpse / hear him disappearing into the house.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. THE SAME.

IRENE goes to the closet to fetch stockings. As she puts them
on she notices a ladder.

IRENE
Damn!

BRIAN creeps up on her from behind.

BRIAN
Caught!

IRENE
Damn it Brian, you scared me. Why
you gotta always be creepin' round
the place like that?

BRIAN
The profanity miss!

He kisses her neck. She shoos him away a little too quickly.

BRIAN fixes his tie in the mirror.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
They're gonna be late for school.

The sounds of the boys draw IRENE's attention, and she stares
out the window, thoughtful.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

And I won't make it downtown for my next call if I have to drop you.

She's not listening.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Irene?

IRENE

Sorry, honey.

She snaps into gear grabbing new stockings and putting them on.

IRENE (CONT'D)

I was just thinking how much Junior is getting like you.

BRIAN decides to change his tie.

IRENE (CONT'D)

I wonder if he isn't going too fast - in school. It's easy to forget he's younger -

BRIAN

I do wish you wouldn't be ever fretting about those boys. They are fine. Perfectly good, strong, healthy boys.

IRENE admires how handsome her husband is.

IRENE

I suppose. I'm just afraid he's picked up some queer ideas about things - from the older boys...

BRIAN

'Queer' - what about?

IRENE

You know 'things' young boys be thinking about.

BRIAN

You mean about sex?!

IRENE

Yes - jokes. Things like that.

BRIAN
 If sex isn't a joke, what is it?
 And what is a joke?

IRENE
 Don't be facetious.

BRIAN
 You ready?

She is still in her robe.

IRENE
 You go. I'll take the bus.

He's familiar with this routine.

BRIAN
 I'll pick you up then?

IRENE
 Please. From the printing office. I
 need to see about more handbills
 and tickets for the dance.

BRIAN
 They ought to be paying you.

She brushes down his jacket.

IRENE
 It's not charity work if they pay
 me for it.

He kisses her. She ends it a little fast.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL / MIDDLE ROOM. MOMENTS LATER.

Their maid ZULENA, a small dark skinned black woman helps
 JUNIOR and TED into their coats. BRIAN puts on his hat. IRENE
 sits on the stairs smiling at them.

BRIAN
 (to the boys)
 Are we ready?

IRENE
 Alright now - lickety split!

JUNIOR
 Can't catch me!

ZULENA

Come back.

BRIAN

(to Ted)

Are you ready?

TED

I don't wanna go!

BRIAN

You have to I'm afraid.

They dart out the door. BRIAN tips his hat at IRENE on the way out. ZULENA heads back to the kitchen.

JUNIOR (O.S.)

Bye, mama!

Quiet. IRENE goes to collect the mail off the hall table. She shuffles through the letters pausing on one with ORNATE FLOWERY HANDWRITING addressed from CLARE BELLEW.

She places that letter back on to the table absentmindedly and heads down the stairs.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. DINING ROOM. THE SAME.

IRENE settles into a seat. Around her is the wake of the family breakfast. She has no intention of cleaning it up.

ZULENA comes in with the pot and pours her some.

ZULENA

You want grapefruit, ma'am?

IRENE

(reading a letter)

Uh-huh. Thank you.

IRENE divides the post into organized piles. One for bills, another with envelopes marked 'Negro Welfare League'. The action is methodical and slow. So precise as to be obsessive.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL / MIDDLE ROOM. LATER.

IRENE, now ready to go out, puts on her coat in front of the hall mirror. ZULENA is dusting the hall. Irene realizes she has left her hat upstairs and goes to retrieve it.

As she goes, ZULENA spots the flowery letter on the table and hands it to IRENE.

ZULENA
Mrs. Redfield, you forgot one.

IRENE
Thank you.

IRENE takes the letter and continues up the stairs.

EXT. PRINTING OFFICE. STREET.

BRIAN waits in the car for IRENE, as IRENE walks towards the car counting the Tickets in her bundle.

IRENE
(getting in)
You want me to drive?

BRIAN
Sure.

We stay looking at the inside of the car as they swap seats.

INT. CAR. THE SAME.

They drive. We see them in the car and very little out the small back window behind them.

BRIAN
Everything set?

IRENE
Uh-huh - we're a month away and all
the bookings are gone - not
counting the door.

They stop behind a car. In front of the car is a dump truck with a guy collecting garbage cans from the street.

BRIAN rolls down a window.

BRIAN
I'm as busy as a cat with fleas
myself.

IRENE
Ain't you cold?

BRIAN rolls up the window.

IRENE (CONT'D)
No. Leave it. If you're not cold.

BRIAN stares at the garbage man hauling the trash.

BRIAN
This city!

IRENE
Bad today huh?

BRIAN
Bad. Yes, bad. All of it. Really
Irene I'm beginning to hate sick
people! Their stupid meddling
families, smelly, dirty rooms -- I
can't. I swear. This city -

IRENE
Come on now. It's just a bad day -
you don't mean that. You're helping
those sick people.

The car moves.

BRIAN
Let's not talk about it.

IRENE
You brought it up.

Pause.

IRENE (CONT'D)
Put the window down would you?

BRIAN
Thought you said you were cold?

IRENE
Well now I'm saying I can't
breathe. Put the window down.

He does. The car stops again.

IRENE (CONT'D)
I know you think trying somewhere
else would be easier for us - South
America or some such. And to a
point I agree. We should go -
abroad somewhere...

BRIAN looks up.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Not for a while of course but when
the boys leave - We could visit
Brazil?

BRIAN

Visit?

IRENE

Or maybe - I was thinking one of
them European schools for Junior?

The car moves.

BRIAN

You're going to make a mollycoddle
out of that boy. Ted is the one who
needs your attention not Junior.
You needn't think I'm going to let
you change Junior to some nice
kindergarten school coz he's
getting a little necessary
education.

IRENE

I wasn't -

BRIAN

- coz the sooner he learns about
sex the better. Certainly if he
learns it's a grand joke, the
greatest in the world.

IRENE feels the slight of this on her. She loves him, but
they haven't... Don't so much... anymore.

IRENE

What's that supposed to mean?

The car stops.

BRIAN

Nothing.

He gives up.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

I'm just getting a little tired of
playing second fiddle to your
precious Negro League that's all.

He playfully pushes her dress up over her leg.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

How 'bout a little charity for this
Negro?

IRENE

Come on now - there's people
looking.

She pushes his hand away. BRIAN looks out the window and happens to catch eyes with a lady waiting on the sidewalk.

The lady looks at them in the car as they move past - the idyllic picture of the respectable middle class couple in their automobile. He tips his hat.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

IRENE is sitting up in bed reading a magazine. BRIAN enters taking off his robe and slippers. He picks up a letter from the dresser.

BRIAN

What's this?

IRENE

I think it's from Clare Bellew.

BRIAN

Clare Bellew? That the woman from
Chicago you told me about running
into?

IRENE nods and turns out her lamp, settling down to sleep.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

You gonna see her again?

IRENE

I haven't opened the letter.

BRIAN

It's postmarked New York.

IRENE

I know.

BRIAN

Maybe they moved?

IRENE

Brian, I'm not going to see her.

BRIAN

Thought you said you two were good friends in school...

IRENE

Brian darling, I would have to be an idiot not to realize that if a man calls me a 'you know what', it's his fault the first time, but mine if I give him the opportunity to do it again.

BRIAN

Sure sure. May I?

She shrugs. Closes her eyes and rolls over. He opens the letter. Nonplussed.

IRENE rolls back over to face him, cross. He tries to contain himself.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

(reading)

"I am so lonely, so lonely... cannot help longing to be with you again".

IRENE

Don't mock her. That's not fair.

BRIAN

I'm just reading it.

IRENE

Fine.

BRIAN

"You can't know how in this pale life of mine I am all the time seeing the bright pictures of that other that I once thought I was glad to be free of..."

He giggles again. IRENE rolls back over trying to ignore him.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

C'mon it's funny! She's very dramatic. "It may be, 'Rene dear that your way may be the wiser and infinitely happier one. -

IRENE

- well I am flattered! "Wiser"? As if anything could rectify the humiliation -

BRIAN

Wait! There's more - "I wouldn't feel this wild desire if I hadn't seen you" -

BRIAN tosses the letter on the table and rolls towards IRENE.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

That's rich - blaming you. "Wild desire!" (whistles) Don't give her an inch...

He turns out his light. Snuggles down.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

What you so angry for anyhow. The husband didn't call *YOU* a -

IRENE

- No but he would have. It amounts to the same thing.

BRIAN

It has, you will admit, its humorous side.

She sits up abruptly turning back on her light.

IRENE

No - I won't! It's not funny at all! It's revolting!

BRIAN yawns.

BRIAN

Irene, leave it. It's normal. They always come back.

IRENE

Why?! They have to work so hard getting there. Why would they want to come back?

BRIAN

(falling asleep)
If I knew that, I'd know what race is.

Disdainfully,

IRENE
 You'd think they'd be satisfied
 'being white'.

BRIAN
 Rot! Who's satisfied being
 anything.

IRENE turns off her light. Settles down.

IRENE
 I am.

BRIAN
 Hmm?

IRENE
 Satisfied. I am.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL / MIDDLE ROOM. MORNING.

BRIAN hurries the kids out the door to school kissing IRENE who is watching them as usual on her spot on the stair.

BRIAN
 Let's go! Books, books.

TED
 Bye momma.

JUNIOR (O.S.)
 Bye!

IRENE
 (to all)
 Bye.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. DINING ROOM. LATER.

IRENE sits at the breakfast table with her grapefruit sorting the post.

She is pensive for a moment as she realizes there are no letters from CLARE. Relief.

EXT. REDFIELD HOUSE. STREET. THAT AFTERNOON.

IRENE walks the block and up her stoop with bags of groceries to the sound of the boy practicing his trumpet - now a little more accomplished.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL.

IRENE walks through the hall and down the stairs.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. KITCHEN. CONTINUED.

IRENE places the bag on the counter for ZULENA to unpack.

IRENE

I got yams for tonight. Save the
chicken for tomorrow.

ZULENA

Yes ma'am.

IRENE

Did you clean the boys' room
already?

ZULENA

Not yet.

IRENE

Well hurry - they'll be back soon
and then it'll be impossible.

IRENE stands there watching ZULENA unpack. She has an
instinct to help her but resists it in order to treat her
servant in the 'proper way'.

ZULENA

Can I get you something?

IRENE

No. I can get it.

She pours herself a drink. ZULENA carries on, acutely aware
of her presence.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. FRONT ROOM. LATER.

IRENE naps in an armchair, a book lying open in her lap.
THUMPING from the playroom above wakes her up.

IRENE looks at the clock: 4pm - It chimes.

The phone starts ringing over the clock.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL.

ZULENA picks up the phone.

ZULENA
 Redfield residence.
 (beat)
 Yes, hello.

IRENE takes the call from ZULENA.

ZULENA (CONT'D)
 It's Mr. Wentworth.

ZULENA walks back down to the kitchen.

IRENE
 Hello.... Yes Hugh... oh quite -
 and you? Every single one. Honest.
 I know... wait - I'll give mine to
 Bianca. I won't need it anyway

The doorbell rings. ZULENA walks back through to open it.

IRENE (CONT'D)
 No... I mean it. Was silly of me
 not to in the first place. I'll be
 so busy -

IRENE turns around to face the door.

Silhouetted in the door is CLARE.

IRENE waves to ZULENA to show her into the living room. Then
 turns back partially facing the wall.

IRENE (CONT'D)
 Mmm... well as long as Brian has a
 place to drop down now and then -
 uh-huh -

She traces her finger along the wood of the table, stiff and
 deliberate.

IRENE (CONT'D)
 - that's nice. My love to Bianca.
 Yes, I'll see to it right away. See
 you tomorrow Hugh. Bye.

IRENE hangs up the phone and checks herself in the mirror.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. CONT.

IRENE rounds the corner to the living room to see CLARE,
 resplendent in a fine day dress.

IRENE

Dear god, but aren't you lovely
Clare!

IRENE goes to greet her, genuinely moved to see her in spite of herself.

CLARE turns away. She seems hurt. She sits down curling her legs easily under her.

CLARE

Didn't you mean to answer my letter
'Rene?

IRENE stays silent.

CLARE (CONT'D)

Every day I went to that nasty
little post office -I'm sure they
all thought I'd had some love-
affair and that the man had thrown
me over!

IRENE

Oh Clare I -

She finally looks directly at IRENE.

CLARE

Well - eventually it sunk in. You
hadn't written and didn't intend
to.

IRENE taken aback by the heightened drama in the room takes a moment to put her feelings into perspective.

CLARE (CONT'D)

I tried very hard to forget about
it. But I couldn't. I had to know
why. So that's why I came here.

Pause.

CLARE (CONT'D)

Why didn't you write to me, 'Rene?

Irene takes a cigarette, now observing CLARE rather than running to put her out of her pain.

IRENE

You see -

She takes a drag being careful to word everything with great care and precision.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Well you see - I can't help thinking... that you ought not... ought not to come up here.

CLARE

What you mean is you don't want me here.

IRENE

No. Just what I said. You ought not to run the risk. It's terribly foolish - you must see that, and ...well - just not the right thing.

CLARE laughs. The air shifts.

CLARE

Oh 'Rene! You're priceless! 'The right thing'!

IRENE

I mean it isn't safe.

CLARE

Safe?

IRENE

To come up here - considering what I saw of Mr. Bellew's attitude.

CLARE

Of course. I understand. And I don't blame you for being angry. That said, you behaved beautifully that day. Really beautifully - thank you.

IRENE

I don't want thanks.

CLARE

I just mean it was very kind of you to be so delicate about it all.

Snapping,

IRENE

What other option did I have Clare?! I've been furious with you. Really furious - putting me in that position.

CLARE

Of course.

CLARE wells up again.

IRENE

And honestly, I don't see why you can't know that's why I wouldn't write -

CLARE

- How foolish of me.

IRENE

- Why I wouldn't want anything to do with you!

CLARE starts to cry.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Oh no, now don't cry.

IRENE goes and hugs her. The instinct to protect this woman always wins.

CLARE

I just feel so terrible about it all. I didn't even think - how could I? I'm just so sorry 'Rene.

IRENE

There there - don't be. I'm sorry too.

She hands CLARE a hankie. They smile at one another.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Darn it but truth is - I'm very glad to see you Clare. Very.

CLARE

And I you 'Rene! You can't imagine - without that day I might have gone to the end unable to really speak to anyone. You can't know - never anyone to really talk to.

IRENE

Of course. It was very insensitive of me not to think about that.

CLARE

Oh I don't expect you to understand.

She tries not to cry again.

CLARE (CONT'D)

You're happy. You have a true, good life - and you're free. Free - and safe. I don't even know what that is anymore.

IRENE is incapacitated. She stares at the ceiling towards the inconsistent thumping of the children above her.

IRENE

I'm beginning to believe that no one is ever completely happy, or free or safe.

CLARE collects herself. Another emotional U-turn.

CLARE

So then what does it matter if I come up here sometimes?

IRENE looks at her straight.

IRENE

You have a child Clare. It's not just a matter of your safety.

The phone rings. Eventually...

CLARE

I think - that being a mother is the cruelest thing in the world.

IRENE thinks about how this statement disgusts her. Her perspective is back,

IRENE

Yes - and the most responsible.

Silence. The thumping stops as abruptly as it started.

ZULENA enters.

ZULENA

Mr. Wentworth is on the telephone again ma'am.

CLARE smiles at ZULENA, to which she returns an unimpressed nod.

IRENE

'Scuse me.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL / LIVING ROOM. THE SAME.

IRENE watches CLARE move around the living room whilst talking to HUGH on the phone.

CLARE traces her finger gracefully around a photograph of BRIAN and the boys. The actions is invasive and a touch sinister.

IRENE

Hello? Oh honestly Hugh - tell her to stop being silly. I've told you it's fine. I'll see you tomorrow.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. MIDDLE ROOM / STAIRS. THE SAME.

IRENE re-enters as CLARE turns to face her.

CLARE

You sound busy?

IRENE

It's this Negro Welfare League Dance tomorrow. I'm on the organizational committee - am the committee pretty much!

CLARE

Hugh Wentworth the novelist?

IRENE

Yes. You know him?

CLARE

I've read a book or two of his.

IRENE

(surprised)
You have? Good aren't they?

CLARE

I suppose - sort of contemptuous.

IRENE

Yes. Well, he's a dear really.

She wishes CLARE would leave.

IRENE (CONT'D)

You don't mind if I do some things around the house. I wasn't expecting guests.

They start down the stairs.

CLARE
I don't mind. You can show me your
home.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. KITCHEN. CONTINUED.

The women enter the kitchen. ZULENA is preparing yams. A
stock is simmering on the stove.

CLARE
So Hugh Wentworth is coming up here
to your dance?

IRENE
Yes. Why not?

IRENE sniffs the stock and starts to exit, CLARE following.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. STAIRS / HALL / UPPER FLOOR LANDING
CONTINUED.

IRENE and CLARE climb the stairs up to the first floor.

CLARE
Seems rather curious. A man like
that, going to a Negro dance.

IRENE
Hundreds of white people like Hugh
come to affairs in Harlem now -

CLARE
Why?

IRENE
Same reason you're here: to see
Negroes.

They have reached the landing near the front door. Still
CLARE does not leave. IRENE shouts up the stairs.

IRENE (CONT'D)
What you doing boys?

No answer, just thumps. IRENE grabs a discarded sweater from
the bannister and a pair of shoes.

IRENE (CONT'D)
- To enjoy themselves, get
material...
(MORE)

IRENE (CONT'D)
gaze on the great and near great
while they gaze on the 'Negroes'!

CLARE
'Rene suppose I come too?!

IRENE
Because so many white people go?

IRENE starts up the next flight of stairs with CLARE in pursuit.

CLARE
No! Because it will be fun!

IRENE
I don't know. What if someone
recognizes you?

CLARE
I'll take my chances on getting by!

IRENE
You will be bored stiff.

CLARE
I won't, honestly I won't!

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. THE SAME.

IRENE moves into her bedroom to put her sweater and shoes away. She grabs some other stray items off of the bed. CLARE stays in the doorway. There is a wide open window with gauzy curtains blowing in the wind.

IRENE
(as to a child)
I won't be able to look after you.

CLARE
I'll be good as gold. Just sit and
gaze on the great and near great.

IRENE realizes that she really does not want her to come. That in fact the thought of it is already making her anxious.

IRENE
Look - I don't care what you do or
where you go. But I don't see why
you should put yourself in a place
that might bring you trouble.

She slams the dresser drawer shut with her hip.

CLARE

Damn John! He gets in the way of everything I want. I could kill him.

IRENE goes to close the window and notices a weed in one of the pots in the window box. She lifts the pot out in order to get better purchase.

IRENE

I wouldn't. There's still capital punishment - in this state at least.

CLARE walks into the room behind her settling against the wall next to IRENE.

CLARE

I want so much to be with Negroes again, to talk with them, to hear them laugh. I've almost forgotten it -

Something about the preposterousness of this sentiment and CLARE's proximity serves to unsettle IRENE enough to lose her grip on the plant pot.

WE HEAR A SMASH.

BOTH WOMEN CRANE OUT THE WINDOW TO LOOK.

WE SEE THE SMASHED POT ON THE GROUND BELOW.

IRENE

Oh damn!

CLARE

Shall I go down -?

IRENE

No. It's nothing. Zu will clean it.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE, UPPER FLOOR LANDING.

IRENE moves to the landing. CLARE follows.

She shouts over the bannister.

IRENE

Zu!

No answer. IRENE wipes her hands on her dress.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Oh look - come to the dance if you want to. I'm not going to stop you.

CLARE

Thank you 'Rene. You're so kind. Really, thank you.

IRENE moves to the boys room and knocks on the door.

IRENE

BOYS!

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. JUNIOR AND TED'S BEDROOM. THE SAME.

IRENE and CLARE stand in the doorway.

JUNIOR

We're busy! What do you want?

IRENE

Junior!

CLARE instantly crouches down to their level.

CLARE

Oh please don't be cross. I know I've gone and spoiled everything. If I promise not to get too much in the way will you let me in?

TED turns his attention to her and JUNIOR is enchanted. CLARE moves into the room to play. IRENE watches for a minute and then backs out to deal with the pot downstairs.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. KITCHEN. A LITTLE LATER.

IRENE talks to ZULENA who is cooking. IRENE has pieces of plant pot in her hand.

IRENE

It'll just be us for dinner.

ZULENA

Just as well. I don't have anymore for more.

She goes back to attacking some vegetables.

CLARE enters and goes to refill her water glass. She's already more comfortable in this kitchen than IRENE. ZU remains suspicious.

CLARE

Well! They were the cowboys and I was the Indian and they captured me in front of the fort. But I think I just made my escape.

JUNIOR (O.S.)

CLARE!!

IRENE

Pay no attention. Junior gets ahead of himself fast.

CLARE walks further into the kitchen.

CLARE

What's cooking? Yams? How you fixing them?

ZULENA

Butter, salt, sugar. Simple.

CLARE

Simple?! Why it's about the most perfect taste on God's earth!

CLARE rejoins IRENE at the doorway.

CLARE (CONT'D)

Where did you find her 'Rene? I long for a maid who knows real home cooking.

IRENE

It's not like that.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL. MOMENTS LATER.

IRENE and CLARE climb the stairs.

CLARE

Not like what?

IRENE

Everyone needs help. It's normal.

IRENE hands CLARE her coat.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Maybe next time you can stay for dinner. Hmm?

CLARE

Oh please yes! I can stop by here tomorrow and we can go to the dance together?

IRENE

'Alright.

CLARE

See you tomorrow then.

IRENE

Yes. Tomorrow.

CLARE

Bye 'Rene.

CLARE finally exits. IRENE shuts the door behind her with force and leans against it as if it might open again at any moment.

EXT. REDFIELD HOUSE. STREET. TWILIGHT.

TED and JUNIOR hopscotch on the sidewalk. ZULENA opens the door and beckons them in. The trumpet is playing.

ZULENA

Alright now boys, c'mon in.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. THE FOLLOWING LATE AFTERNOON.

IRENE in her robe picks out three un-fussy dresses from her closet and lays them on the bed. She is not convinced by any of them.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. EVENING.

IRENE now sits in front of her dressing room mirror finishing her make up in a negligee.

BRIAN enters.

BRIAN

Thought you might have fallen asleep or something.

IRENE

No. About on time. For once.

BRIAN

Good.

BRIAN sits on the bed.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

You nervous?

IRENE

Hey! Get off! You're sitting on my dress.

He shifts, smooths out the one dress left on the bed she has picked out. Surveys it. He knows it is not her nicest.

IRENE starts to do her eyebrows.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Clare's coming.

BRIAN

Huh?

IRENE

Clare Bellew.

BRIAN

The crazy woman, Clare?

IRENE

Her, yes her.

BRIAN

Crazy woman Clare Bellew?

IRENE

She's not crazy.

BRIAN

Since when?

IRENE

Just - different.

He raises more eyebrows if there were more eyebrows to raise. Starts to remove his tie.

IRENE (CONT'D)

She surprised me with a visit yesterday.

BRIAN

Yesterday? Why in the world didn't you tell me?

IRENE
Dunno. I've had a lot to think
about.

BRIAN
Irene -

IRENE
She made it sound not such a
problem if she came with us - so I
said fine -

He unbuttons his shirt thoughtfully.

BRIAN
She's coming here?

IRENE nods.

IRENE
Any minute I would think. Be nice,
huh?

BRIAN
I highly doubt it.

IRENE
I mean, you be nice to her.

BRIAN
I'll be polite.

He lets himself flop back on to the bed and lies there for a
moment staring at the ceiling.

THERE IS A SMALL CRACK IN THE PLASTER.

IRENE
You gonna dress or just lie there?

BRIAN gets up. He changes shirts quickly watching IRENE and
shaking his head. He grabs a different tie then goes to check
himself over IRENE's shoulder in the mirror.

IRENE (CONT'D)
You done?

BRIAN
Mmm...

IRENE
Quit hovering. Go wait for me
downstairs.

He grabs his jacket and heads to the door.

IRENE (CONT'D)
Wait. I'm sorry. I love you.

At the door.

BRIAN
Boy! You are nervous!

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. STAIRWAY LANDING. THE SAME.

BRIAN closes the door and bounds down the stairs putting on his jacket in the process.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. LATER.

IRENE stares at her hands as we see her reflection in the dressing room mirror. Her make up is simple and well applied. She is ready, still and serene.

The doorbell rings, breaking her out of her reverie. She looks at herself in the mirror listening to the voices drifting up from downstairs. CLARE can be heard. IRENE winces almost imperceptibly at her reflection. She stands up to check her outfit.

She smooths the creases in her gown and heads downstairs.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. MIDDLE ROOM / FRONT ROOM. THE SAME.

IRENE walks with mounting confidence down the stairs. As the voices from the living room become louder she stops for a moment to listen.

From the stair she can just make out the curve of a leg. A high heel - obscured by BRIAN - the play of shadow and light makes it appear that BRIAN and CLARE are much closer to one another.

CLARE (O.S.)
I thought I'd die. Truly I did. I had such a fever.

BRIAN (O.S.)
It was close to an epidemic. I can't recall how many cases I treated last year. Not all of them made it. You were lucky.

IRENE watches a corner of CLARE's arm as she reaches up to finish a drink.

She watches what looks like CLARE's hand brushing past BRIAN's chest.

Her neck arching back in laughter.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

More on my watch got through than others... but I'm bragging.

CLARE

So what if you are! It's worth bragging about if it's true.

BRIAN

You may be right.

IRENE moves forward.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. FRONT ROOM. CONT.

IRENE comes in with energy.

BRIAN and CLARE stand up to greet her. Not so close to one another after all.

Now we see CLARE in her full glory. She is exquisitely dressed in a shining gown of black taffeta with her hair pulled back into a small twist at the nape of her neck.

IRENE is suddenly self-conscious about her choice of dress especially now she sees how well CLARE compliments her husband. She does a good job of covering.

IRENE

Gosh I'm sorry! I had no idea you were here already!

CLARE

We made our own introductions.

BRIAN

We did.

CLARE

You look lovely 'Rene.

IRENE

I feel I may have chosen all wrong.

CLARE
Rot! It's perfect.

IRENE is flattered. Softens a little.

ZULENA comes in with the boys in their pajamas to say good night.

CLARE (CONT'D)
Here they are!
(to TED)
How'd I look?

TED
Like a princess.

BRIAN
Okay fella! Bedtime.

IRENE and BRIAN kiss the boys and hurry into the hall.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL. THE SAME.

ZULENA and the boys head upstairs as BRIAN, IRENE and CLARE get their coats on.

BRIAN helps CLARE into hers.

CLARE
You know I feel exactly as I used to the night before Christmas. I knew there was a surprise for me and couldn't quite guess what it was. I'm so excited! You can't possibly imagine.

BRIAN smirks at IRENE behind CLARE's back.

BRIAN
You can't possibly imagine...

IRENE
(laughs)
Stop now!

BRIAN puts on his hat.

EXT. TOWN HALL. NIGHT.

They walk alongside the long line of people waiting outside the hall to get in.

IRENE leads the gang to the front. Whilst the people stare at CLARE and she stares back.

INT. TOWN HALL. THE SAME.

The dance is in full swing. People from all walks of life for one night together. The frame fills with dancing bodies - Lindy Hopping frenetically. A band plays somewhere obscured by dancers. A bandstand made up of a Baby Grand Piano, double bass, Clarinet, Drum Kit, Two Trombones, Two Trumpeters, Baritone Sax and Banjo.

In one of the booths sits HUGH WENTWORTH, a distinguished white man in his 40s. He is watching his wife BIANCA dance with a handsome group of black men.

HUGH
(shouting)
Bianca, I'm outraged!

IRENE, BRIAN and CLARE make their way through the crowd to the booths on the edge of the dance floor.

IRENE
There's Hugh!

BRIAN
We got somewhere to sit?

IRENE
That booth with Hugh - if we can get there.

CLARE
What a hoot!

HUGH claps for his wife ostentatiously as the song finishes.

INT. TOWN HALL. LATER.

CLARE is pouring booze from her hip flask into soda bottles under the table. She passes them to HUGH and BRIAN.

IRENE is standing a little in front of the booth surveying the party.

FELISE FREELAND and her husband DAVE dance past her eye-line. She waves at them.

FELISE
It's a triumph! The band is peachy!

DAVE
It's a riot!

CLARE stands and drags BRIAN into the throng. HUGH stays seated behind IRENE.

CLARE
Come on Brian, we're going dancing.

BRIAN
Oh no, no, no.

CLARE
Oh yes, yes, yes.

IRENE waves on her husband and CLARE.

IRENE
Oh god, look out Clare the man has two left feet!

She laughs. BRIAN is 'being nice' and it's making her happy. At least...not so anxious.

CLARE
Is that true?

BRIAN
No.
(beat)
Yes it's very true.

IRENE looks at the people dancing 'young men, old men, white men, black men, youthful women, older women, pink women, golden women, fat men, stout women...'

She focuses a while on a particularly GOOD LOOKING AND ADEPT DANCING COUPLE.

Near them CLARE and BRIAN dance not nearly so well.

IRENE
Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief... How the rest of it go?

HUGH
Doctor, lawyer, Indian chief.
Everybody seems to be here and a few more.

He watches CLARE.

HUGH (CONT'D)

What I am trying to find out is the history, status and of the blonde beauty out of the fairy tale you brought along? The one currently seen dancing with your husband?

IRENE

She's a girl from Chicago I used to know. She's very excited I know you...

HUGH

Good of her I'm sure.

HUGH searches for something.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Can you spot my wayward wife in the throng?

IRENE points -

BIANCA is seen being taught a dance by an enthusiastic group of HARLEM LOCALS.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Ah yes. The usual problem - all these er gentlemen of color have driven a mere Nordic out of her mind.

IRENE

Stop!

He pats his forehead with an elaborate handkerchief. His dress is altogether elegant if not a tad flamboyant.

HUGH

Have I laid eyes on her tonight except in spots here and there being twirled about by some 'Ethiopian'? I have not.

HUGH often affects racist generalizations as 'irony' - IRENE tolerates it. It is a game they both play.

IRENE

Well sir, you've got to admit the average colored man is a better dancer than the average white. That is if the celebrities who find their way up here are fair specimens of your sort.

HUGH

Having not tripped the light
fantastic with any of the males I
am hardly in a position to argue
the point.

He rolls his eyes. The music changes to something slower.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Bianca and Co. are always raving on
about the good looks of some Negro -
especially an unusually dark one.

RALPH HAZELTON, very tall and impressive, cuts in and steals
CLARE for a dance. BRIAN, relieved, makes his escape.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Like Ralph Hazelton, there.

RALPH and CLARE dance. It's not silly. There is electricity
in their movements which become increasingly charged and
committed.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Dozens of women have declared him
fantastically handsome. What do you
think? Is he?

IRENE

No. And I don't think anyone else
would either. Just plain exoticism.
An interest in what's different. A
kind of emotional excitement - that
something you feel in the presence
of something strange and even,
perhaps, a bit repugnant to you.

She is watching CLARE.

HUGH

And there you have it.

HUGH CLOCKS A SMALL GROUP OF WHITE MEN OGLING SOME DANCING
GIRLS.

HUGH (CONT'D)

So you subscribe to the notion that
our motives for coming up here
are... predatory?

IRENE

No. More curious, I should say.

HUGH

Like your princess from Chicago -

IRENE laughs knowingly. Or maybe it's an eyebrow raised. Either way HUGH notices.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Now what's that supposed to mean?

IRENE

Things aren't always what they seem, Hugh.

HUGH

What is she then if not a princess from Chicago?

The penny drops.

HUGH (CONT'D)

I'll be damned.

IRENE

Nobody could tell from looking at her.

HUGH

No! Most surprising!

He watches her.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Tell me something - can you always tell the difference?

IRENE

Now you really are sounding ignorant.

HUGH

No, I mean it. Feelings of kinship or something like that?

IRENE

Stop talking to me like you're writing a piece for the National Geographic. I can tell the same as you. But I suppose sometimes - it is a thing, a thing that can't be registered.

HUGH

Yes I understand what you mean. Yet
- lots of people pass all the time.

IRENE

It's easy for a Negro to pass for
white but I don't think it would be
so simple for a white person to
pass for colored.

HUGH

Never thought of that.

IRENE

No Hugh. Why would you?

This lands on him.

HUGH

Sometimes I think you could.

IRENE

Yes.

HUGH

And in a way, if you can, why
wouldn't you?

She's offended.

HUGH (CONT'D)

I'm asking. Why wouldn't you?

IRENE spots BRIAN making his way through the crowd with fresh
sodas.

IRENE

(under her breath)

Who says I'm not?

HUGH

You're being unusually cryptic this
evening.

IRENE

And you are being an ass. I just
mean we're all of us passing for
something or other, aren't we?

He knows what she means.

HUGH

An ass am I?

CLARE approaches exhilarated from dancing.

CLARE
Oh my feet hurt like a marathon
runner!

CLARE flops into the booth.

IRENE
I am in awe of your energy.

HUGH
I suppose I ought to retrieve my
wife before some man or other
steals her away from me
indefinitely.

CLARE
Won't you dance with me Mr.
Wentworth?

Loaded,

HUGH
It's not my strong suit Mrs.
Bellew.

BRIAN crosses HUGH on the way out. He sits down handing IRENE
a drink.

CLARE
Your husband has ruined me 'Rene -
I simply must have another dance
with him. He's the best here!

Everyone knows this is a lie for BRIAN's benefit.

BRIAN
I suppose my wife hasn't told you
that I don't respond well to
flattery.

BRIAN stands and kisses his wife on the cheek.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
However, I would be more than happy
to find you a suitable replacement.

He goes to root out a friend.

CLARE stands, one knee resting on the edge of the seat. She
sways gently watching the dancers. Behind her IRENE sits
observing her.

Something about her innocence or fragility in this moment hits IRENE.

IRENE reaches forward and grabs CLARE's hand. Surprised, CLARE spins round.

They hold one another's gaze - a well of empathy, affection and history between them.

BRIAN RETURNS WITH A SHORT JOLLY LOOKING MAN WHO HE PRESENTS TO THE TABLE LIKE A PRIZE.

The two women break apart.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Now - This is your man!

CLARE looks at him benignly. She's nothing if not game.

CLARE

Well, you'll do. Come along.

CLARE pulls the man to the dance floor.

IRENE

He doesn't stand a chance.

BRIAN

(laughs)

None whatsoever.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

IRENE and BRIAN get into bed.

IRENE

You know I'm rather glad she came tonight.

BRIAN shrugs.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Isn't she extraordinarily beautiful though?

BRIAN

No not particularly.

IRENE

You're fooling!

BRIAN
No. She'd be an unusually good
looking white woman I suppose.

He starts to kiss her.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Personally I like my women darker.

IRENE
Yeah?

She breaks away.

IRENE (CONT'D)
Maybe it was just because she was
so happy

BRIAN
Shh.

They kiss some more. It is cautious. It has been a long time
and both are a little wary of rejection.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Irene - watch yourself.

IRENE
Hmm?

BRIAN
Don't find yourself responsible for
that kind of happiness.

IRENE
Nonsense.

She kisses him. No one is going to be rejected tonight.

EXT. REDFIELD HOUSE. THE SAME.

A light goes out in their window.

The boy in the window opposite plays the trumpet. He is
considerably more accomplished than the last time we heard
him.

Across the way, a voice screams -

VOICE
Hey, can it!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE REDFIELD HOUSE. GARDEN. DAY.

Sunlight.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. KITCHEN. DAY.

ZULENA in her apron preparing vegetables.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. FRONT ROOM. LATER.

The afternoon light streaming in the window wakes IRENE from a nap in her reading chair.

She squints and rubs her head. The beginnings of a migraine. The clock chimes.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. MIDDLE ROOM / HALL, THE SAME.

IRENE heads upstairs rubbing her head and feeling woozy.

BRIAN, TED and JUNIOR enter through the front door.

JUNIOR

Clare?

JUNIOR runs into the living room, then the kitchen, the dining room and back into the hall.

TED

You going back to bed mama?

IRENE starts back down the stairs putting a brave face on.

IRENE

No! Of course not sweetie.

JUNIOR finishes his lap back in the hall. Grumpy.

JUNIOR

Where's Clare?

IRENE

She's coming later. When you'll be in bed. She sends you special kisses.

JUNIOR

But Pa said she'd play with me after school!

IRENE
Ted, take your brother in the
kitchen and get something to eat.

JUNIOR
I don't want something to eat.

He starts to get tearful.

IRENE
Ted - take -

TED heads upstairs annoyed not to have his mother's
attention.

TED
Excuse me.

Before she can question it JUNIOR runs up after him.

BRIAN
I'm sorry. I told Junior Clare
would be here.

TED slams the door shut. IRENE stands and turns to the noise.

IRENE
What's that about?

BRIAN weighs up how to tell her so she will hear.

BRIAN
Someone called him a dirty you know
what today.

He finishes removing his coat and walks towards the kitchen.

IRENE
Oh.

IRENE sits back down, paralyzed.

EXT. THE REDFIELD HOUSE. STREET. DAY.

An unusually warm day in early winter. The trumpet plays.
IRENE carries groceries down the block and up the front
steps.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL. THE SAME.

IRENE moves through the hall and down the stairs towards the
kitchen.

IRENE

Zulena?

INT/EXT. REDFIELD HOUSE BACK PORCH.

CLARE and ZULENA sit together in the sun. They are both in winter clothes with the exception of CLARE who is barefoot, feet on the railings.

CLARE

We're out back, 'Rene!

IRENE comes out still holding the groceries.

IRENE

What in the world?! Clare - aren't you freezing?

CLARE

When the lord brings you a magical day like today - I say lap it up.

ZULENA chuckles.

IRENE

You're crazy. I'm getting you a blanket. Zu can you help me with these groceries?

ZULENA

They call this an Indian Summer.

CLARE

An Indian summer. That's right. It's perfect.

IRENE

Zu?

ZULENA finally gets up and takes the groceries. Did she make a face at CLARE on her way? Difficult to say but it looked like something.

IRENE watches her move into the kitchen. She takes off her coat and covers CLARE's feet with it, then sits down beside her.

CLARE

Zu and I were just talking about the Charlestons next door. That eldest girl is getting so pretty.

IRENE

She is. Ted can barely look at her.

CLARE

Puberty makes such a mess of friendships.

ZULENA (O.S.)

Puberty is a mess!

CLARE

Amen to that!

IRENE

I don't know. You had a lot of friends as I recall.

CLARE

I suppose.

She observes IRENE,

CLARE (CONT'D)

Sometimes I wonder why we weren't better friends.

IRENE

Oh we did alright.

CLARE

I always admired you though. You were so calm and beautiful in the face of everything.

IRENE

Me?! Come on now you were always the beauty.

CLARE

Not how I see it.

CLARE looks at IRENE. Something hangs in the air that makes IRENE uncomfortable.

IRENE

You're staying for dinner?

CLARE

I can't. John is coming home.

IRENE

Oh. I thought next week?

CLARE
 He's come back early. Misses me.
 Can't say the same. I wish he'd
 stay away always.

IRENE
 You mustn't say that.

CLARE
 'Mustn't' I?

She shakes it off - takes the coat off her feet and stands up.

CLARE stretches catlike in the last of the sun. IRENE watches the ease in her body.

IRENE
 You're still coming to Bridge?

CLARE
 Heaven forfend I would miss the
 bridge 'Rene!

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. FRONT ROOM. LATER.

The clock chimes waking IRENE from another nap in her reading chair. She rubs her head again.

It is almost as if she's not sure what to do with herself when Clare isn't here.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

TED and JUNIOR are in PJ's as IRENE finishes reading them a bedtime story by the fire. BRIAN reads a newspaper.

IRENE
 (reading)
 It was dusky inside and smelled
 like wood and oil. She bumped her
 head on a bare light bulb that was
 dangling from the ceiling.
 (to Ted)
 Do you want to take the next part?

TED
 (reading)
 All that time, the rat studied the
 bulb and pulled the chain and light
 flickered.

BRIAN
There was a lynching in Little
Rock. Pretty bad. You hear about
it?

IRENE
(mouthing)
Not now.

TED
What happened?

BRIAN
A black man was accused of
assaulting two white women.

TED
What did he do to them?

BRIAN
The question is less 'what' than
'if' Ted.

TED
But they lynched the man anyway.

BRIAN
Exactly.

IRENE
Junior go brush your teeth.

BRIAN
They chased him down -

JUNIOR stands but doesn't leave.

IRENE
Brian!

BRIAN
- and when they found him they hung
him from a telephone poll and shot
him.

JUNIOR stares, shocked. TED looks at IRENE then back to
BRIAN.

JUNIOR
Why papa?

BRIAN
Because they hate us, son.

IRENE

I said Brian - not now!

BRIAN picks up JUNIOR and squeezes him.

BRIAN

It seems son, that we can't discuss these things without distressing the ladies of our family.

He tickles JUNIOR who giggles. IRENE remains upset.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Go and brush those teeth.

BRIAN is rocked.

EXT. REDFIELD HOUSE. THE STREET - LATER

The same shot as always. IRENE and CLARE walk the block home holding large bunches of white flowers.

IRENE

I know I take being a mother rather seriously. I know I'm wrapped up in my boys and the running of my house - but I don't think there's anything funny in that.

CLARE

Oh 'Rene, I know. You're so good. So perfect.

They walk past the house with the boy out of sight playing the trumpet.

IRENE

You say that like it's a bad thing.

CLARE pauses on the stoop while IRENE looks for her keys.

CLARE

Let's sit here a minute. I like hearing him play.

IRENE sits by her.

CLARE (CONT'D)

Don't think, whatever happens, that I'll ever forget how good you've been to me.

IRENE

What are you talking about?

CLARE

No - I mean it. You see I haven't any proper morals or sense of duty like you.

IRENE

You're talking nonsense.

CLARE

But it's true, 'Rene. Don't you realize I'm not like you a bit?

CLARE stands and drifts down the steps towards the music. She drifts into a sort of dreamlike state, a melancholic reverie of sorts...

CLARE (CONT'D)

Why to get the things I want badly enough - I'd do anything... hurt anybody.

IRENE watches her as she traces a finger delicately up the length of her arm in time with the music. It is a sad and sensual gesture. For IRENE it signals that deep and unidentifiable fear returning to her.

CLARE (CONT'D)

Throw anything away... anything. I'm not safe.

IRENE stands up, shaking and frightened.

IRENE

Clare. Stop it.

CLARE doesn't turn around to face her.

IRENE (CONT'D)

What you're saying is wrong. Utterly, wickedly wrong. You've always had so much, you haven't given up anything.

CLARE drifts further away. IRENE watches, compelled by the beauty of her movements.

Finally she turns around. Huge tears envelop her face.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Clare!

Again the fear gives way to a need to save her. IRENE embraces her tightly.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

IRENE hears the doorbell. She grabs her purse and heads downstairs.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. FRONT ROOM. THE SAME.

BRIAN is standing over CLARE. The silhouette is the same as before but this time they really are standing very close to one another.

IRENE enters almost embarrassed to have interrupted them - they look so perfect together.

IRENE
Oh I'm sorry, has Mae called?

BRIAN
No.

IRENE
I don't know where she can be. Damn Zu for taking the night off -

BRIAN
She does have to see her family from time to time.

CLARE
But we're late already and it's my last night before I leave for Europe!

IRENE is compelled by such a strong instinct to make her happy she doesn't even quite know what she is saying.

IRENE
Why don't I stay with the boys and you two go.

BRIAN
Really?

IRENE
I don't mind.

CLARE
No! We can't leave you!

IRENE
Oh yes you can.

Now that she has made this choice, her pride makes sure she will follow through to the end.

IRENE (CONT'D)
AND - it will make the numbers even.

BRIAN
So now I really have to play Bridge?

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL. THE SAME.

BRIAN moves towards the door. CLARE hovers looking a little guilty.

A quiet moment between the two women.

IRENE
Go on now.

IRENE shoos them out the door. Anything to make her happy...

CLARE
I'll miss you 'Rene.

IRENE
No you won't.

CLARE kisses IRENE warmly on the cheek.

IRENE (CONT'D)
Go on - get!

SLAM. Peace.

She sighs in relief. Being with the two of them in the same room fills her with a deep unidentifiable anxiety, so much so that it is a genuine release when they are gone.

What has she done?

INT. HARLEM SPEAKEASY. NIGHT.

BRIAN, HUGH and IRENE sit at a table watching a solo Trumpet supported by a Clarinet, a Banjo and a humble Upright Piano.

IRENE is transfixed by the music battle.

BRIAN is distracted and slightly distant.

The music ends. All clap.

IRENE
(to Hugh)
This is where all the talent is.

HUGH
Yup... and the hooch.

He downs his drink.

HUGH (CONT'D)
Where's princess tonight? It's a
rarity having the two of you all to
myself.

IRENE
In Europe. Her daughter is in
boarding school - Switzerland of
all places.

BRIAN downs his drink. IRENE notices.

IRENE (CONT'D)
What?

BRIAN
Nothing. Just. What do you know
about Switzerland?

HUGH senses some friction.

HUGH
Well I shouldn't miss her too much.

IRENE
Of course we miss her.

Actually she's not entirely sure that she does tonight.

HUGH
I find her hard work.

IRENE
Many would say the same about you!

HUGH
True. But I call it shameless what
she does. Always playing the
victim. 'Poor little tragic me'
etcetera... It's a low way to make
yourself popular -

BRIAN
- I don't think that's fair -

HUGH
(sternly)
I didn't quite finish - but she
does maintain a certain charm.

BRIAN
You hardly know the woman and since
she's not here to defend herself -

HUGH
- You will. Very chivalrous of you
I'm sure.

This stops BRIAN.

HUGH's look suggest his chivalry might have a less moralistic
motivation...

The musicians start up again. IRENE watches BRIAN, concerned.

He doesn't look at her. She may as well not exist.

EXT. REDFIELD HOUSE. STREET.

The same as ever. IRENE walks towards the house with
groceries. The neighbor, Lance passes her. She hardly notices
but still says hello.

IRENE
Good afternoon, Lance.

LANCE
Irene.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL. THE SAME.

IRENE enters.

The house is quiet. She is relieved.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. KITCHEN. THE SAME.

IRENE unpacks the groceries herself.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. DAY.

IRENE makes the bed.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. KITCHEN. AFTERNOON.

IRENE is cooking. It is Sunday and the absence of ZULENA is notable.

IRENE struggles to find her way around the cabinets.

IRENE hates it and is not a good cook but she's doing her very best to win back her family.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. DINING ROOM. THE SAME.

JUNIOR is playing on the floor while TED and BRIAN construct a model toy of some kind on the table.

BRIAN

You have to wait for this part to dry before you can attach it.

IRENE enters and starts to lay the table around them.

IRENE

This is nice, isn't it? Just us four.

BRIAN nods.

IRENE (CONT'D)

I'll make some hot chocolate. How bout that?

JUNIOR

Yes please!!

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. KITCHEN. MOMENTS LATER.

IRENE pours the milk in the pan. Her hand is trembling a little.

She stops and turns it around inspecting it, as if an alien thing.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. DINING ROOM. THE SAME.

IRENE comes back in with glasses for the table.

TED

No papa, I want to keep talking.

IRENE

You two look serious?

TED

We're talking about John Carter -
the one who got lynched in Little
Rock.

IRENE

That again?

TED

You gotta know about these things
ma.

IRENE

Do I?

BRIAN

We got any more nuts?

Is he trying to get rid of her? Or is she being paranoid...

IRENE

I'll go see.

TED

I want some too.

He follows her out.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. KITCHEN. THE SAME.

IRENE searches for nuts. TED follows her, fired up.

TED

You know they didn't just shoot him
- they attached his body to a
caravan and dragged it through the
city.

She finds them.

IRENE

You tell your father that?

TED

He told me!

IRENE

Did he?

TED

You know I'm old enough not to be
spoken to like a child anymore.

He grabs the nuts out of her hand and runs back out. She doesn't have the energy to put up a fight.

IRENE is floored by her son's brief confrontation, and struck that the world seems to be going on without her. Her Children are growing and she can't seem to focus her attention to notice.

THE MILK BOILS OVER.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. DINING ROOM. EVENING.

IRENE, BRIAN, TED and JUNIOR finish dinner.

JUNIOR

Thank you for dinner, mama.

The boys head out and upstairs to their room to play. Thump thump thump.

After a moment,

IRENE

I do wish you wouldn't keep talking about all that lynching stuff with them.

BRIAN

Why?

IRENE

There'll be time enough for them to learn about horrible things when they're older. Right now they're safe.

BRIAN

You are absolutely wrong. If you're so determined that they grow up in this damned country, the sooner they find out what they're up against the better.

This hits her hard. She takes a moment proceeding carefully.

IRENE

But they're happy. Why ruin that? I want them to stay happy.

He gets up to clear the dishes.

BRIAN

Irene -- what's the use of keeping things from them? We kept them from learning the word 'nigger' and what happened? They found out the hard way.

IRENE

Stop it. Don't use those words in my house. You're not to talk about the race problem. I won't have it.

He clangs a plate back down on the table.

BRIAN

It's my house too and I tell you they've got to know these things!

IRENE

THEY DON'T. They do not!

The effort to control it all becomes too much. She starts to cry.

He stays where he is and looks at her. Shocked by the outburst.

BRIAN

I don't understand how someone as intelligent as you can be so stupid.

She desperately wants him to hold her. But understanding that he's not going to she pulls a handkerchief from her pocket and composes herself. Steely.

BRIAN sits back down again closer to her.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

I wanted to get them out of this hellish place years ago -

IRENE

- I've been saying we should go away for a bit. But then you've seemed happier having Clare around -

BRIAN

What the hell has Clare got to do with any of this?

IRENE

Only we would have gone on a trip but for that.

BRIAN
No, no - I gave up the idea because
you objected.

IRENE
I never objected to having Clare
here.

BRIAN hits the table.

BRIAN
GOD DAMN IT IRENE I'M NOT TALKING
ABOUT CLARE -

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| IRENE - because it seems to me - | BRIAN (CONT'D) - and I am not talking about 'a trip' |
|-------------------------------------|--|

| | |
|--|--|
| IRENE (CONT'D) Because it seems to me - | BRIAN (CONT'D) I am talking about leaving this country for good! |
|--|--|

IRENE (CONT'D)
- You are a lot less content With
what you've got when she's not
here!

He takes his plate and leaves her.

IRENE breaks down - irretrievably this time.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Cold winter sun streams in through the window. IRENE sleeps
fully clothed, the light shimmering over her form. On her
bedside table is a bottle of migraine medication.

She stirs a little, tries to focus in on the abstract shapes
dancing in front of her eyes.

She stares at the CRACK IN THE CEILING.

With her eyes still closed she loosens one of the buttons on
her cardigan and drifts back to sleep.

FADE SLOWLY TO
BLACK.

The sound of wind in the trees.

FADE SLOWLY IN:

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. IRENE AND BRIAN'S BEDROOM. DAY.

A different outfit, the same scenario. Now there are two bottles of medication on the table. One lying open and empty.

IRENE's shut eyes begin to open.

Again she stares at the CRACK IN THE CEILING NOW LARGER THAN BEFORE.

She closes her eyes again.

She opens them.

She is vaguely aware of someone sitting on the end of the bed. Initially it's just a shape in silhouette - hazy through her sleepy eyes. Is it CLARE?

It focuses and we see it is BRIAN. He is staring right at her. Motionless. An unfathomable expression in his eyes.

He may have been there some time.

She closes her eyes again.

IRENE

I'm getting up. Don't worry. It was good of you to think to call me.

She sits up. He stays still.

BRIAN

Always the attentive husband.

She rubs her head.

IRENE

Bother those people coming to tea. Thank goodness everything is ready.

BRIAN

Clare's downstairs.

IRENE

Clare?! How? I didn't invite her. Purposely.

BRIAN

She's been back for a while. Zu's always taking messages and you never respond. Might a mere man ask why?

IRENE

This party is for Hugh and Hugh happens not to care a great deal for her - so I didn't ask her.

BRIAN

If you ask me his dislike happens to be less to do with her and more to do with the attention she happens not to give him much of...

IRENE

You love Hugh.

BRIAN

I do. But you'll admit he has a rather God-like opinion of himself.

IRENE

I disagree. He thinks far better of himself than that.

This doesn't get the laugh she would have hoped.

IRENE gets up and starts to get ready.

BRIAN goes to the door and stays staring curiously at the floor.

The sealant for the floor board has come up.

IRENE looks at him staring at the floor.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Brian?

BRIAN

I'm sorry Irene. It's my fault. She seemed so hurt at being left out. I told her I was sure you'd forgotten.

IRENE is hurt and enraged. Not because of what he's said but because the way he's said it suggests something more entirely.

IRENE

But, Brian I - !

He goes to leave and stops with his hand on the door handle. He stiffens imperceptibly like a man about to receive a blow then looks at her slowly with a look that is as good an admission of guilt as the hardest piece of evidence.

It hits her. The hazy, depressed out of focus quality of IRENE's life falls into sharp and painful relief.

IRENE (CONT'D)

You spoke to her then?

BRIAN

Yes.

She buries the torrent of emotion and goes to compose herself in her mirror.

IRENE

Of course you did. And in spite of what I said Clare does add to any party. She's so easy on the eye.

He looks at her again, sadly. This time he looks frail - like a man in love with his wife but unable to connect to her anymore. From his perspective she is a woman slipping out of his grasp into a depressive fog.

BRIAN

You won't be long?

IRENE shakes her head. Unable to speak or look at him. He leaves.

IRENE stares hard at the mirror.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. MIDDLE ROOM / FRONT ROOM. LATER.

The tea party in HUGH's honor is filled with HARLEM INTELLECTUALS and a spattering of white ones, all talking loudly.

IRENE pours tea for a group of ladies but her focus is very much on CLARE.

IRENE

Josephine Baker? No I've never seen her.

CLARE sits a little way off holding court with a charmed gaggle.

MAN (O.S.)

You're missing out.

IRENE

I think she might have been in *Shuffle Along* when I saw it but I don't remember.

LADY (O.S.)
I much prefer her to Ethel Waters.

IRENE
Ethel Waters is awfully good.

IRENE carries the tea pot over to FELISE.

IRENE (CONT'D)
Hello, Felise. So happy you made it.

She moves on with her tea pot. FELISE follows.

FELISE (O.S.)
Come back, Irene. You haven't sat down all afternoon. I want to talk to you!

IRENE spots BRIAN and CLARE sitting close to one another talking.

FELISE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Come out of it. Whatever it is, you look like the second grave digger.

From her perspective CLARE is the center of attention - the natural host. Any attempt towards kindness from CLARE now just feels like charity to IRENE and stokes her lack of self worth.

IRENE
I'm not quite feeling up to par.
The weather I guess.

FELISE
Buy yourself an expensive frock, child. It always helps.

IRENE clutches the tea pot hard as she watches CLARE.

FELISE (CONT'D)
I've been trying to get her alone all afternoon.

She moves towards CLARE.

DAVE joins his wife.

FELISE (CONT'D)
Clare! You look too divine sitting so quiet like a painting! Will you come to ours for a little gathering next month?

IRENE stares on isolated.

CLARE

Felise, I was just telling Dave
I've just finished his book!

FELISE

You've read his books?

CLARE

Of course I have, I've read all of
them!

IRENE notices him glance at CLARE.

HUGH has moved up behind IRENE during this. He observes her
with concern.

IRENE is suddenly very hot. She looks at the tea pot in her
hands - it doesn't belong to her, nothing does...

She looks back at CLARE so much more composed and capable
than she is in this moment.

Overwhelmed with panic and surprise at HUGH standing so close
to her she drops the tea pot.

CLARE, BRIAN etc look over at the accident.

Dark tea stains dot the bright rug.

HUGH grabs her elbow. Hidden support.

HUGH

Steady.

HUGH covers.

HUGH (CONT'D)

So sorry 'Rene! I must have pushed
you. Clumsy of me. Don't tell me -
it's priceless and irreplaceable?

She rises to the game however there is a mania bubbling
underneath it. They crouch down to pick up the pieces.

As she looks away BRIAN looks to IRENE with concern.

IRENE

No no you didn't push me! I'm quite
sure. That - That pot was THE
ugliest thing, that your ancestors
- the charming confederates, ever
owned.

(MORE)

IRENE (CONT'D)

I've forgotten how many thousands of years ago it was that Brian's great- great - great great something uncle owned it - what I'm coming to is the fact that I've never figured out a way of getting rid of it... that is until about just this minute. Inspiration! I had only to break it and I was rid of it forever. Simple.

HUGH

Well done.

She smiles. Thank you.

Across the room CLARE smiles at her too.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL. LATER.

IRENE stands by the door as THE GUESTS are leaving.

BRIAN stands in the living room doorway as guests pass.

HUGH walks up to IRENE.

HUGH

My lovely, well done.

HUGH moves to the doorway.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Brian, thank you so much.

BRIAN

Thank you.

CLARE (O.S.)

Bye, 'Rene.

CLARE kisses IRENE on the cheek.

Out of habit without even thinking,

IRENE

You're staying for dinner.

CLARE

Can't tonight.

She's fixated on what CLARE might be doing tonight.

IRENE

Oh? Right. Too bad. Brian has work
tonight anyway...

CLARE moves through to the door to say goodbye to BRIAN.

She looks at BRIAN and CLARE kiss cheeks. Could they be
meeting?

CLARE

So glad to see you.

BRIAN

So long.

More guests shuffle CLARE out the door.

BRIAN again looks at IRENE with concern.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. EVENING.

IRENE is putting up Christmas decorations. She opens some
Christmas cards and places them above the mantle

Out of sight THE BOYS and BRIAN come in the front door,
letting in the cold. The bang of the door snaps her back into
reality.

THE BOYS run upstairs past the living room doorway, trailing
snow. BRIAN stops.

BRIAN

Evening.

BRIAN's POV as she carries on decorating the tree.

He looks despairing but familiar with the sequence of events.
Sure of not getting an answer, he walks away.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET. DAY.

The street is busy with Christmas shoppers. IRENE and FELISE
come out of a store with some bags, and rush against the
blizzard,

FELISE

Heaven's my eyes are watering!

IRENE

I fear my fingers might fall off.
The wind is brutal!

The wind blows them round a corner and straight into JOHN BELLEW.

IRENE (CONT'D)
(looking down)
Pardon -

JOHN
Oh Mrs. Redfield! How do you do?

IRENE looks up and is stunned.

JOHN takes off his hat. Holds out his hand, smiling genially.

He looks from IRENE to FELISE, clocks FELISE's golden face, her frizzy black hair.

His smile fades, but his hand remains outstretched.

IRENE registers the disgust in his face. She decisively links FELISE's arm and walks on.

FELISE
(looking behind her)
Well... that was abrupt!

IRENE looks back, JOHN's hand still outstretched staring after them confused.

IRENE
Felise, you just passed the only person that I've ever met while disguised as a white woman.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET. MOMENTS LATER.

From a little distance we watch as IRENE leaves FELISE behind, and hurries towards the subway.

EXT. REDFIELD STREET.

IRENE walks the blocks towards her house eager to get to the phone and warn CLARE of what has happened.

As she walks a light snowfall starts.

It stops her.

Thoughtful - She walks the steps to her house and enters.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE. HALL. MOMENTS LATER.

IRENE enters and picks up the phone.

IRENE
Hello Central Quincy 5, 4, 7, 3.

The call takes a moment to connect.

IRENE (CONT'D)
Hello. Is Mrs. Bellew in? It's
urgent.... No?...

She makes a decision.

IRENE (CONT'D)
Never mind. It's not that urgent.
I'll try again later.

She hangs up the phone and removes her hat and coat in the mirror, trying to regain her calm.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE, KITCHEN - THE SAME.

IRENE enters the kitchen. In a routine fashion IRENE gets herself a glass of water.

ZULENA is preparing vegetables.

IRENE looks out the back window.

The snow is coming down harder now. Thick and fast and settling.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT.

IRENE lies in bed fully clothed and awake staring out the window.

She watches the snow stop falling.

INT. REDFIELD HOUSE, MIDDLE ROOM / HALL - CONTINUED.

She walks downstairs and out the front door.

EXT. REDFIELD HOUSE, STOOP - NIGHT.

IRENE sits on the stoop, breathes in the fresh air.

She's shaking. Only partly from the cold.

She can see BRIAN approaching. He seems happy, and content.

BRIAN
Irene? What you doing? It's
freezing.

IRENE doesn't respond.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Aren't we going to that party with
Clare?

She nods. BRIAN goes inside.

She sits there, quivering with the chain of events that she may have set in motion, and excited by them.

EXT. FELISE'S APARTMENT BUILDING. NIGHT.

There is a courtyard in front of the building covered in undisturbed freshly fallen snow.

We hear that familiar CLARE laugh. BRIAN and CLARE walk through the arch on to the snow with IRENE a little way behind. Their dialogue is almost out of range.

BRIAN
Ever go up to the sixth floor?

CLARE
Of course! My father was a janitor.
In the good ol' days before every
ramshackle apartment had its own
elevator.

BRIAN
Elevator?

CLARE
You can't mean we've got to walk
up?

BRIAN
All the way to the top!

CLARE
Oh lord!

He opens the door and lets them through.

INT. FELISE'S APARTMENT BUILDING, STAIRWELL - CONT'D.

IRENE, BRIAN, and CLARE climb the six floors. BRIAN runs ahead. CLARE tries to catch up with him but is struggling in her shoes.

CLARE
Why on earth would anyone live here?

BRIAN
She claims it discourages the casual visitor.

BRIAN runs ahead further, two steps at a time.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Says she'd rather be dead than bored!

CLARE and IRENE pause to take a breath.

CLARE
Damn these thin shoes.
(beat)
What is it 'Rene?

Pause.

IRENE
Clare - Have you ever thought what you'd do if John found out?

A brief, brief smile that leaves as fast as it came.

CLARE
Yes.

Brian leans over the bannister from above.

BRIAN
Don't fall by the wayside before the fourth floor. I absolutely refuse to carry anyone up more than the last two flights.

CLARE laughs.

IRENE
And... what would you?

CLARE
I'd do what I want to do more than anything else right now.
(MORE)

CLARE (CONT'D)

I'd come up here to live. In
Harlem, with you!

CLARE stands up and bounds up the stairs to link arms with
BRIAN on the floor above.

CLARE (CONT'D)

Oh lord!

IRENE watches the two of them above her through the fractured
lens of the stairwell as they reach the fourth floor.

They lean over the bannister to hurry IRENE.

BRIAN

Come on slowpoke!

IRENE looks up at them in all their exuberance, beauty and
happiness, wishing she were anywhere else.

INT. FELISE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A dozen or so guests, including RALPH HAZLETON dot the untidy
living room. FELISE changes a record on the phonograph while
DAVE holds court halfway through a story.

IRENE is sitting silently by herself on a sofa opposite them.

DAVE

Dinner at Eddie's, then Leroy's
then Smalls. The dancers seem
strange to anyone else there?

FELISE

No honey, just the liquor.

DAVE

And that is why I have given it up.

FELISE

Since this morning?

DAVE

Yes. And nothing in the least
exciting has happened to me.

FELISE passes him a drink.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

BRIAN

I wouldn't - I've heard the drinks
here aren't safe.

General laughter. DAVE moves, dispersing the circle.

DAVE perches on the arm of the sofa to talk to her.

DAVE

Irene? Have you taken a vow never
to laugh again?

IRENE

No - it's simply the rest of you
are so clever I'm speechless...

She watches CLARE talking with BRIAN and RALPH.

DAVE

You haven't a drink. What will you
take?

IRENE

Ginger-ale and three drops of
scotch. Scotch first, then the ice,
then the ginger ale.

FELISE hears this.

FELISE

Don't attempt to mix that yourself,
Dave darling - Have the butler in.

IRENE

- and the footman!

The laughter settles.

Smoking a cigarette IRENE moves to the adjoining room and
pushes open a large window.

Outside is the quiet that only comes with the aftermath of
heavy snow. Cool and serene, an extreme contrast to the
party. Silence.

CLARE notices IRENE standing in the window. She joins FELISE
standing in the arch between the two rooms.

CLARE keeps one eye on IRENE.

CLARE

It really is a perfect evening.

FELISE

Good.

IRENE throws her smoke out the window and watches it fall down. A moment of peace. She takes a deep breath out the window.

The song changes. The party noise breaks back in.

DAVE approaches behind her and takes IRENE's arm and leads her a little way away from the window.

DAVE

Don't stand there, aren't you freezing! Come along and talk to me, or at least listen to me gabble.

As she is turned around IRENE sees CLARE now standing in the arch with BRIAN and FELISE.

Almost in slow motion she scans the room starting with BRIAN and CLARE, then slowly as if against her will her eye is pulled towards the other arch through which she glimpses what looks like JOHN BELLEW, speaking to a guest at the front door.

GUEST (O.S.)

Evening. Can I help you?

JOHN (O.S.)

Let me in.

GUEST (O.S.)

Perhaps you've come to the wrong home.

JOHN (O.S.)

I know where I am. My wife is in there.

DAVE lets go of IRENE's arm and moves towards the door, leaving her looking on, panic stricken and isolated.

GUEST

Your wife?! No sir, she's not here. I guarantee it. I'm afraid you're wrong.

JOHN

I'm NOT wrong!

GUEST

Do not come in! Sir, calm down.

IRENE looks to CLARE. BRIAN has left her and is moving into the hall via the other entrance to the hall.

JOHN (O.S.)
I've been to the Redfield's and I
know she is with them.

CLARE stands beckoning to RALPH.

CLARE
Where's my drink Ralph?!

CLARE starts to move towards the window.

IRENE is now watching JOHN in one arch and CLARE in the other. Their view of one another separated by a wall.

DAVE blocks JOHN from going any further.

DAVE
Now, maybe you ought to calm down
and we -

JOHN
If you're finished, get out of my
way.

IRENE looks on, mesmerized and motionless.

BRIAN joins the commotion around JOHN.

BRIAN
I'm Redfield.

JOHN pushes past BRIAN and gets into the room.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
What the devil's the matter with
you?

JOHN
You don't get to tell me what to
do! Any of you people!

JOHN sees CLARE standing at the window, composed, ready and seemingly unaware of danger.

RALPH comes through from the other room holding two drinks for himself and CLARE.

IRENE looks at CLARE who is looking at JOHN.

JOHN furiously points his finger at CLARE.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You liar!

FELISE jumps in between them.

FELISE

Careful. You're the only white man here...

JOHN

A damned dirty liar - !

IRENE looks at CLARE. CLARE looks back to IRENE. There is the faintest of smiles on her lips, her eyes are shining. She looks down to the open window beside her.

IRENE turns to face JOHN, backing up slightly and reaching for CLARE's hand behind her just as...

JOHN breaks out from behind FELISE, pushes her out the way and lunges violently towards CLARE.

IRENE reflexively swipes her arm out behind her to protect or push CLARE away from one imminent danger and accidentally or purposefully towards another.

BRIAN runs in, gasps.

IRENE looks to her side where CLARE's body had just been and now where JOHN is.

She looks in front to the STUNNED faces looking beyond her and out the window.

The guests move to the window to see what has happened.

GUEST

Good Lord Jesus!

JOHN runs out of the apartment.

IRENE stays rigid in shock still looking into the room while everyone stands in front of her.

A sudden animated rush as everyone else scrambles to the door.

INT. FELISE'S APARTMENT BUILDING, STAIRWELL - NIGHT

The party guests run down the stairs in silent panic.

Fifth floor...

Fourth floor...

Third floor...

Second floor...

Ground floor...

INT. FELISE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Once IRENE is alone, and breathing steadily she slowly turns around to look.

Far below on the snow lies CLARE - fallen.

Her dress splayed over the snow like an angel.

IRENE walks slowly away from the window trying to regulate her breath.

INT. FELISE'S APARTMENT BUILDING, STAIRWELL - CONT'D.

IRENE descends the six floors slowly.

One at a time, alone and in silence.

As she gets to the first floor, she hears a voice in the atrium out of sight.

VOICE SOMEWHERE (O.S.)
The husband's just sitting there.

ANOTHER VOICE (O.S.)
Is she still breathing?

VOICE SOMEWHERE (O.S.)
I don't know.

ANOTHER VOICE (O.S.)
What do you mean you don't know?

VOICE SOMEWHERE (O.S.)
I'm not even sure she's dead!

She gasps and breaks into a cold sweat, moving quicker towards the door and opening it into the bright white of the snow, noise and activity.

EXT. FELISE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONT'D

IRENE moves into the courtyard towards a circle including TWO POLICE OFFICERS, BRIAN, FELISE and DAVE to her left.

POLICE OFFICER
(to the group)
Just trying to protect his wife.
Doesn't strike me as particularly
unusual.

DAVE
Here's Irene now.

BRIAN sees IRENE, they stare at each other in shock.

IRENE
Is she- is she -?

IRENE turns to see CLARE lying dead in the snow, JOHN sitting right beside her.

IRENE nearly wretches as BRIAN wraps his coat about her.

BRIAN holds IRENE tightly.

He loves her. She realizes it.

BRIAN
There, there, Irene. You mustn't.
You'll make yourself sick.

His voice breaks.

IRENE glances behind him, where RALPH HAZELTON is sitting. He is weeping uncontrollably. Is it possible that it was RALPH who was having an affair with CLARE all along?

IRENE looks to where DAVE is being questioned by one of the POLICE OFFICER.

DAVE
Irene was right there beside her,
weren't you Irene?

OFFICER (O.S.)
This lady here?

The officer turns his attention to IRENE.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

You're sure she fell? Her husband didn't give her a shove or anything like that as Dr Redfield here seems to think?

IRENE looks behind her to JOHN who is alone near the body, in shock.

IRENE

No. No. I'm quite certain that he didn't. She just fell before anyone could stop her - it was so quick - I

OFFICER

You're sure?

IRENE looks at the OFFICER looming above her, her knees giving up.

BRIAN

Careful! Careful.

IRENE falls to the ground, drowning. BRIAN supports her....

OFFICER (O.S.)

So none of you saw how she went out?

FELISE (O.S.)

He was upset, it's true.

OFFICER (O.S.)

So an accident?

FELISE (O.S.)

I guess an accident, yes.

OFFICER (O.S.)

That's what I thought.

The OFFICER and DAVE etc move towards JOHN.

BRIAN and IRENE stay outside the crowd huddled in the snow.

IRENE buries her face into her husband's neck and cries quietly. Almost inaudible,

BRIAN

I love you.

We crane up as the body is carried away into an ambulance, and the two OFFICERS move back towards the building while the rest of the group close in around JOHN.

OFFICER

Death by misadventure I'm inclined
to believe. Let's go up and have
another look at that window.

Slowly they become indistinguishable dots in the snow.

FADE TO BLACK.