

THE ESCAPIST

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TITLE CARD:

1852 - South Carolina

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - MORNING

CLOSE ON the lowered face of LLOYD BECKWITH (24, handsome, extremely fair-skinned African American, **'passing' as white**).

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Try again. And then again until you  
get it right.

FRAME WIDENS to reveal Lloyd chained between two trees -- METAL CUFFS are attached to each hand -- their respective CHAINS fixed to an oak.

LLOYD

What if I don't get it right?

Lloyd looks over to JOHN MCCLAIN (60, white, morose), who sits high on his horse. John clenches a small METAL BALL in his hand.

JOHN

Then I'll leave you out here until  
the cock starts to crow.

LLOYD

Very well then, on the count of  
three.

John throws the ball at the feet of Lloyd -- a CLOUD OF SMOKE quickly covers Lloyd --

JOHN

One --

The dense white envelopes LLOYD --

JOHN (V.O.)

Two --

Lloyd narrows his eyes at the dissipating smoke.

JOHN

Three.

INT. THEATER - DAY

A MAN stands on a stage -- showing only his profile to a LARGE AUDIENCE. He slumps back a little and slowly turns to face the crowd. The crowds GASP in unison as the man reveals his SIAMESE VERSION. Unlike a Siamese, his "twin" doesn't have a full face. Like the other, they only half a face (though they are a love and fully functioning) - an anomaly. The right Siamese speak.

SIAMESE 1

I was born like this. Split  
straight down the middle. When the  
doctors tried to sew me up...

FACES in the audiences look terrified; SOME partly disgust. A MOTHER covers her young SON's eyes.

SIAMESE 2

They realized that I was two parts  
in one.

The Siamese twins regain full posture, almost perfectly gelling back into the same "MAN."

EXT. SLAVE PLANTATION - SAME - COTTON FIELDS

The sun shines bright. Rows of COTTON PLANTS -- a thick COTTON BOLL bulging out a pod.

CAMERA MOVES to find a BLACK SLAVE COTTON PICKER (25, male) pulling bolls of plants and pushing them in a burlap SACK until... SOUND OF a MAN SCREAMING.

The Slave stops, a look of concern on his face. A beat. He then continues to pick. The SOUND of a GUNSHOT startles him.

He rises to survey the fields. Soon a COUNTLESS NUMBER of PICKERS (of all ages and sizes) begin to rise up. He exchanges a look with a FEMALE PICKER (16).

INT. THEATER - SAME

CAMERA PANS the face of CHEERING WHITE MEN and WOMEN. They look to a stage where Lloyd stands unfettered. TWO YOUNG WHITE BOYS approach him, holding a PILE OF CHAINS in hand.

LLOYD

(shouting over the voices)  
Now, I need quiet if I'm going to  
do this.

A MAN in the crowd shouts to audience members:

MAN IN CROWD

Shut up... shut up!

FULL FRAME on stage. There's a single person METAL BAR CELL a few feet behind John -- The noise dies down to allow the SOUND OF CLANKING CHAINS -- the boys on stage approach Lloyd - - A few SMILING WOMEN watch as the boys begin to place the chains on the escape artist.

LLOYD

I want you all to know that I don't have any keys, any saws, no magic tricks that could help me escape. I'll prove it.

MAN IN CROWD

Prove it!

Lloyd begins to take off his SHIRT as the crowd stirs in commotion --

CROWD

Prove it! Prove it!

Lloyd then pulls out his pockets, proving only empty linens -- the noise dies down -- John stands to the side, watching silently.

LLOYD

Now, I want you all to watch closely.

The crowd CHEERS -- two boys attach the fetters, first to the ankles -- then to the wrists -- Lloyd stands chained at the wrists and ankles. There's also a heavy leather belt fully enclosed around his neck -- Lloyd looks in the corner over at John, who nods --

LLOYD (CONT'D)

I need a volunteer!

CUT TO:

Lloyd stands in the cell. FRAME WIDENS to show John closing the single cell bars. The Man from the audience holds a LOCK in his hand.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

Tell your audience about the lock.

The Man swallows as he inspects the standard LOCK.

MAN IN CROWD

It's a lock. It seems to be in working condition.

LLOYD

And tell them about the bars.

The Man in Crown frees a hand to touch the sturdy BARS.

MAN IN CROWD

Bar's are sturdy.

LLOYD

Then proceed.

(shouting to the crowd)

And place me in a prison of chains!

The CROWD quietly watch as John closes the cell door -- the Man locks the pad on it --SOUND of a FAINT BLAST -- SMOKE on STAGE. Most of the CROWD GASPS; some SQUINTING, trying to see through the smoke. The Man in the crowd watches, waiting -- as SMOKE DISSIPATES -- to reveal Lloyd standing next to the cell, lighting up a SMOKING PIPE he soon places to his lips --

The amazed crowd begin to CLAP - soon RESOUNDINGLY --

EXT. JOHNSON TOWN - LATER AFTERNOON

A HORSE 'n CARRIAGE rolls through the town -- passing Lloyd's CARRIAGE -- John and Lloyd SHOVE the single cell (from the escapist show) onto the bed of the carriage --

John jumps in the driver's seat of the carriage while Lloyd looks over at an AUCTION HOUSE, watching two WHITE MEN guide a LINE of chained BLACK MALE SLAVES, -- ONE of the slaves has a fresh LACERATIONS on his MUSCULAR BACK -- the slaves shuffle inside the building. CLOSE ON Lloyd's face --

MANAGER (V.O.)

Mr. Beckwith?

The last escorted SLAVE, bloodied and bruised all over, shakes his head back and forth in nervous shock (from the pain). Frame widens to reveal the building MANAGER standing on the wooden sidewalk.

MANAGER

Don't mind the sight of those Niggers.

Lloyd's eyes are fixed on the shaking man.

JOHN

Lloyd?

Lloyd turns to face John and then the manager, who pulls a few BANK NOTES out of his coat.

MANAGER

(handing to it Lloyd)  
Your cut. Ten continentals as agreed.

LLOYD

(taking the notes)  
We agreed to five.

MANAGER

The extra is a down payment for your next return. You're getting famous down here.

Lloyd smiling, shakes the Manager's hand.

LLOYD

Of course. In fact, the best escape artist you'll ever come to know.

Camera on John who gives a wry smile.

Lloyd exchanges a look with John.

MAN IN CROWD (O.C.)

That was some show you put on there!

John watches as the Man in the Crowd approaches Lloyd.

MAN IN CROWD (CONT'D)

I'm Chip. Chip Rutter.  
(holding out his hand)  
Nice to meet you.

LLOYD

(shaking his hand)  
Nice to meet you, Chip. But uh, me and my partner better get going here.

MAN IN CROWD

You know you really need to think about doing your own act. Not having to share the stage with them other freaks and making five times what you made here.

LLOYD  
You sure about that?

The Man in the Crowd stands close to the carriage, looking at the BLANKETED CAGE.

MAN IN CROWD  
Most assuredly --

JOHN  
We ought to get going, Lloyd.

LLOYD  
(to Man in the Crowd)  
I'll think about that one for sure.

Lloyd tips his hat to the Man in the Crowd as John CRACKS the horse reigns. A note below his debonair demeanor:

LLOYD (CONT'D)  
(smiling)  
The main act, john. You hear that?  
Oh boy!

The carriage starts rolling. PAN down to carriage wheels rolling --

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

SOUND OF HUFFING. CLOSE ON BLACK RACING LEGS rapidly streaming through the trees --

EXT. OPEN PRARIE - SAME

SOUND of HUFFING. CLOSE ON rotating carriage WHEELS --

EXT. FOREST - SAME

HUFFING SOUND increases. CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal a BLACK FIGURE desperately racing --

INT. CARRIAGE - MORNING

CLOSE ON Lloyd's face, eyes opening --

LLOYD  
Ahhh --

Lloyd quickly pitches up from a nightmare, BREATHING HARD as he takes in his surroundings while John drives the carriage ahead.

JOHN  
What's wrong?

Lloyd can't talk.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Another bad dream?

A beat.

LLOYD  
A thousand of them and more.

Lloyd looks straightway at the quiet TOWN ahead.

LLOYD (CONT'D)  
Where we now?

JOHN  
Collard's Town.  
(a beat)  
I don't want you making a scene  
here, you understand?

LLOYD  
What's that suppose to mean? A  
scene is exactly what I'm supposed  
to make.

JOHN  
Lloyd?

LLOYD  
Goddamnit. Stop worrying, John.  
Just let me be me. Damn scene and  
all.

EXT. BANK - DAY

Lloyd fills a SMOKING PIPE with tobacco -- mouth on pipe, he pulls in SMOKE -- he blows out as the smoke clouding his view of a pretty WHITE WOMAN (25). She smiles at Lloyd who smiles back. TWO OTHER WOMEN follow behind her. They wear heavy make-up and thick ruffled dresses.

Tipping his hat at the ladies:

LLOYD  
It sure is a beautiful day, ladies.



EXT. MOTEL - SAME

John talks to the MOTEL MANAGER as Lloyd walks in.

JOHN  
Three days is fine.

John extends a bank note to the Manager who moves to an ADJOINING ROOM.

LLOYD  
John, we might as well stay a little longer.

Looking around at the FANCY LIGHTS and FURNITURE:

JOHN  
I kind of like the town.

John turns to face Lloyd, who moves towards the open door.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
What happened to your show in Roxville?

LLOYD  
They can wait on their main act, can't they?

JOHN  
Is that what you're trying to prove now?

LLOYD  
(looking out the windows)  
I don't have anything to prove, especially to you.

The Manager returns with a set of keys.

MOTEL MANAGER  
(to John)  
Your room keys, Sir.

John takes the keys. With a sigh;

JOHN  
Thank you.

## MOTEL MANAGER

You know the town's not that bad.  
In fact, it's one of the only town  
that limits the amount of niggers  
that pass through. We rarely see a  
black face in these parts.

## INT. BEDROOM - DAY - MOTEL

Lloyd looks at his face in a swinging MIRROR -- inspects the  
furrows in his forehead -- pivots side to side to look at his  
profile -- inspects his teeth -- then his contemplative eyes -  
John's reflection as he walks in the room --

## JOHN(O.S.)

Maybe you ought to start thinking  
about doing something else.

Lloyd puts on a coat, still posing in the mirror.

## LLOYD

Like what?

(a beat)

Like what?! This is all I know....  
so what are you afraid of?

## JOHN

I'm afraid that the more fame you  
get, the more hated you'll  
become... Afraid that someone, the  
wrong one, will discover that your  
tricks aren't as magical as you  
lead them to believe.

Lloyd turns to face John.

## LLOYD

I've fooled them this far, haven't  
I?

## JOHN

Lloyd?

Lloyd moves for the door.

## INT. SALOON - LATE AFTERNOON

Lloyd leans against the bar counter, holding a shot of whisky  
in his hand -- he tips it back, drinking -- He gently places  
the glass on the counter as the BARTENDER approaches.

BARTENDER  
You want another?

Lloyd nods.

LLOYD  
Please.

Two drunk MEN walk in the saloon. A flirtatious woman, SHEILA (25) hangs on one of their shoulders. Sheila glances Lloyd as the trio take a seat. She then gives each man a kiss on the cheek.

LLOYD (CONT'D)  
Where can I find a broad like her?

BARTENDER  
I don't think you can. That Sheila there is in a class all on her own.

Lloyd smiles as he lifts his glass, throwing it back--

The drunk men share a few LAUGHS as Sheila walks over to Lloyd.

SHEILA  
Hey there. I'm Sheila.

Lloyd confidently holds out his hand - they shake.

LLOYD  
I'm Lloyd.

Sheila pulls her hand back, looking down, surprised: it's a flower in her hand.

SHEILA  
How'd you do that?

LLOYD  
I'm a bit of a magician, having the ability to fool the imagination in all sorts of ways.  
(smiling)  
May I buy you a drink?

SHEILA  
(with a big smile)  
Only if you make it magically appear.

LLOYD  
(to the Bartender)  
You heard the lady, Sir.