

TITLE CARD:

1852 - South Carolina

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - MORNING

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

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

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

FRAME WIDENS to show Lloyd's arms chained and suspended in the air -- the metal wrist cuffs are attached to chains, which fixed to two respective oak trees.

LLOYD

What if I don't get it right?

Lloyd looks over to **JOHN MCCLAIN (60, white, modestly stately)**, who sits high on his horse while clenching a small, METAL BALL in his hand.

A dense, green forest surrounds the two men.

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 Lloyd's feet -- a stream of smoke STREAMS from the ball covers Lloyd with a WHITE CLOUD --

JOHN

One --

The thick smoke envelopes LLOYD --

JOHN (V.O.)

Two --

John narrows his eyes at the dissipating smoke.

JOHN

Three.

INT. THEATER - DAY

SOUNDS of a MURMURING CROWD. CLOSE ON a pile of chains being carried by TWO YOUNG WHITE BOYS. The pair approach Lloyd who stands on a stage, unfettered. They drop the chains at his feet.

A large group of MURMURING WHITE MEN and WOMEN look at Lloyd with anticipation.

LLOYD

Now, I need your absolute attention if
I'm going to do this.

The MURMURS die down as Lloyd increasingly dramatizes his act, taking off his shirt and pulling down his pants to reveal short white pants.

LLOYD (O.C.) (CONT'D)

These two young boys will put me in
chains and bind my hands and feet like
a good old slave...

The two boys attach the fetters, first to the ankles -- then wrists -- they enclose a thick leather belt around Lloyd's neck.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

...then take away my freedom when they
lock me in that cage over there.

On stage a few feet from Lloyd is a RECTANGULAR PRISON CELL, suitable in size for a single person. In the crowd, a burly white man, **CHIP (45)** smirks at an AUDIENCE MEMBER.

CHIP

You believe this guy?

Chip turns to the stage, smirk still on his face as he watches Lloyd's CHAINS dragging on the ground.

Lloyd turns, rotating in a circle, facing the audience and lifting up his shackled hands.

LLOYD

I want you all to know that I don't
have any keys, pins, saws, or magic
tricks to help me escape.

John stands in the far corner of the stage, looking at Chip. He also notices a pair of WHITE WOMEN fawning over Lloyd's ripped body, but he's unmoved by this.

LLOYD (O.C.) (CONT'D)
 This act of freedom will be based
 on sheer strength of will. And I'll
 prove it.

CHIP
 Then shut up and prove it!

CROWD
 (shouting)
 Prove it! Prove it! Prove it! Prove
 it!

Lloyd smiles at the CHEERING CROWD.

LLOYD
 I need a volunteer!

CUT TO:

FRAME WIDENS to show John closing the cell door on Lloyd who
 stands in the cell.

Chip holds a LOCK in his hand. Lloyd and the volunteer speak
 with loud intonations for all to hear:

LLOYD (CONT'D)
 Tell your audience about the lock.

Chip inspects a PADLOCK, tinkering with it and pulling on its
 metal.

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

Chip hands John the lock.

LLOYD
 Tell them about the bars.

Chip pulls on the METAL BARS, soon banging on them with his
 FISTS.

CHIP
 The bars are sturdy, fit for a
 prisoner.

LLOYD
 And the fetters and chains on my body?

Chip looks at Lloyd, proceeding to tug on his fetters.

CHIP
They are real.

LLOYD
Then proceed.

The CROWD watch as Chip closes the cell door -- John then places the lock on the cell door, slowly moving away, his hand reaching in his pocket, pulling out a METAL BALL --

SOUND of a FAINT BLAST as SMOKE begins to cover Lloyd, locked in his cell. Most of the CROWD GASPS, some straining to see through the smoke, which slowly dissipates --

Lloyd stands next to the cell, lighting up a SMOKING PIPE he places to his lips -- The amazed crowd begin to CLAP.

Lloyd takes a bow as John, his quiet accomplice, grimaces at the CROWD and their burgeoning APPLAUSE.

EXT. JOHNSON TOWN - LATE AFTERNOON

A HORSE 'n CARRIAGE rolls along a dirt road, passing Lloyd's CARRIAGE where John and Lloyd SHOVE the single cell (from the escapist show) onto the carriage bed --

John climbs into the driver's seat of the carriage while Lloyd sits on the carriage bed, looking over at an AUCTION HOUSE where three WHITE MEN guide a LINE of chained BLACK MALE SLAVES into the door.

The last escorted SLAVE, bloodied and bruised with a fresh laceration on his back, shakes his head back and forth in a nervous shock (from the pain). He shuffles inside the building.

MANAGER (V.O.)
Mr. Beckwith?

Frame widens to reveal the building MANAGER standing on the wooden sidewalk.

MANAGER
I can't stand the sight of those
Niggers.

Lloyd's eyes are fixed on the shaking man.

JOHN
Lloyd?

Lloyd turns to face John and the Manager. Lloyd jumps out the carriage bed, approaching the Manager, who then pulls a few BANK NOTES out of his coat.

MANAGER
 (handing to it Lloyd)
 Eight continentals as agreed.

LLOYD
 (taking the notes)
 We agreed to five.

MANAGER
 The extra is a down payment for your next show. I reckon you'll be famous soon with all your chain and prison stunts.

Lloyd shakes the Manager's hand.

LLOYD
 (smiling)
 That's right. I'm the best escape artist there is. Ain't that right, Mr. John?

MANAGER
 Sure is.
 (tipping his hat)
 All the best to you until we meet up again.

The Manager walks toward a nearby Saloon.

CHIP (O.C.)
 That was some show you put on there!

Chip from the audience approaches Lloyd, holding his hand out for a shake.

BURLY WHITE MAN
 I'm Chip. Chip Rutter. Nice to meet you.

LLOYD
 (shaking Chip's hand)
 Nice to meet you, Chip.

CHIP
 You know, you really need to think about doing something big... maybe joining the Luge Circuit or something.

Lloyd takes his smoking pipe out of his pants pocket and places it in his mouth. He lights his pipe.

LLOYD
I ain't no Luge freak.

CHIP
(awkwardly laughing;
glancing at John)
No, that's not what I meant.
(serious tone)
That's not what I meant. The Luge
Circuit is good business. Has ten
times the crowd and a lot more buzz,
you know what I mean?

Lloyd sucks his pipe, soon blowing some in the man's face.

LLOYD
You sure about that?

Chips looks at the case in the carriage.

CHIP
I'm sure.

John pulls on the double horse reins.

JOHN
We ought to get going.

LLOYD
(to Chip)
I'll think about that one.

Lloyd tips his hat and jumps in the passenger side of the carriage. Like an excited child:

LLOYD (CONT'D)
The Luge Circuit, John. You hear that?
Oh boy!

John CRACKS the horse reins and off they go, the concealed cage rattling in the back.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

SOUND OF HUFFING. CLOSE ON FEMININE BLACK LEGS staggering toward the trees --

EXT. OPEN PRARIE - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON rotating carriage WHEELS moving at lightning speed --

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

PANTING SOUND increases. CAMERA REVEALS a BLACK FIGURE desperately shuffling ahead --

INT. CARRIAGE - MORNING - FOREST

CLOSE ON Lloyd's face, his eyes opening wide as he pitches up from a nightmare --

LLOYD

Ahhh!

His BREATHE is ragged as he takes in the forest surroundings while John drives the carriage forward.

JOHN

What's wrong?

(a beat)

Another nightmare?

LLOYD

A thousand nightmares all rolled into one.

Lloyd looks straightway at a quiet TOWN ahead.

EXT. CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS - COLLARD'S TOWN

Lloyd sits up, taking in the town characterized by two-story, wooden row houses.

LLOYD

Where we now?

JOHN

Collard's Town.

(a beat)

I don't want you making a scene here, you understand?

LLOYD

What's that supposed to mean?

JOHN

You know exactly what I mean. You can't be calling attention to yourself more than you need to.

LLOYD

I can do what I want. If I want to make a scene, then a scene is exactly what I'm supposed to *make*.

JOHN

Lloyd Beckwith?

LLOYD

God damnit, John! Stop worrying, and just let me be me. My whole show is about me bringing attention to myself -

John slows the carriage to a stop, calmly looking at Lloyd.

JOHN

You're good at it. Lloyd. You're real good, but you can't do what you're doing forever and not get caught.

Lloyd starts to laugh.

LLOYD

You worry too much.

John looks away.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

No one's going to catch me. Look at me.

John looks at Lloyd, who sniggers in juxtaposition to John's serious face.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

No one.

EXT. COLLARD'S TOWN - DAY

A booming town with various buildings: a SALOON, a HARDWARE STORE, a BANK, and a MOTEL.

WHITE TOWNSPEOPLE carry out their daily business: entering and exiting nearby stores; riding carriages through the streets; building a new structure; lugging carts with food and supplies.

EXT. MOTEL - SAME

Lloyd fills a SMOKING PIPE with tobacco -- mouth on pipe, he pulls in SMOKE, soon blowing out as the smoke clouds his view of a pretty WHITE WOMAN (25). She smiles at Lloyd who smiles back.

TWO OTHER WHITE WOMEN follow behind her, wearing heavy make-up and thick ruffled dresses.

Tipping his hat at the ladies:

LLOYD

It sure is a beautiful day, ladies.

INT. MOTEL - SAME

A modest place with a high counter, a saloon-style door, and fancy lights and furniture. John extends a bank note to the MOTEL MANAGER, who takes a moment to inspect the bill.

JOHN

Three days is fine.

LLOYD (O.C.)

John, we might as well stay a little longer.

Lloyd stands inside inspecting the unique décor as the Manager slips into an adjoining room. Lloyd stares at a taxidermy deer head:

LLOYD (CONT'D)

I kind of like this town.

The Manager returns with a set of keys, handing them to John.

MOTEL MANAGER

The pace isn't that bad. In fact, it's one of the only town that restricts the passage of niggers. In fact, I haven't seen a black face for over twenty years.

LLOYD

You hear that, John? No niggers in sight. Wow, well, ain't that something.

MOTEL MANAGER

(pointing to a room)

You two will be in room 3, through the doors and up the stairs.

JOHN

Thank you.

John hands the keys to Lloyd, who exchanges a look with the Motel Manager while spitting some of his tobacco on the ground.

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING - MOTEL

Lloyd looks at his face in a swinging mirror, examining the furrows in his forehead while putting on a coat.

He pivots his face from side to side, looking at his profile -- inspecting his teeth --

JOHN(O.S.)

Where you dressing to go?

John approaches as Lloyd poses in the mirror.

LLOYD

I'm going to find me a girl, John. You didn't expect me to get all pretty for you did ya?

John SIGHS as Lloyd moves toward the door.

EXT. FOREST - SAME - COLLARD'S TOWN

From behind, we see a Black Figure, the same from earlier, lean against a tree while facing Collard's Town. The face is yet to be revealed.

INT. SALOON - SAME

Lloyd leans against the bar counter, drinking a shot of whisky. He then slams the glass on the counter as the BARTENDER approaches.

BARTENDER

You want another?

Lloyd nods.

LLOYD

Please.

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

The Bartender slides Lloyd another whisky. Looking at Sheila:

LLOYD (CONT'D)

(to the Bartender)

Where can I find a broad like her?