

TONIGHT AT THE MARIGOLD: THE BLACKFOOTS!

OPENING ACT: THE NASHVILLE NIGGERS!

The choir gasps facing the MARIGOLD THEATER marquee. A long line snakes down the block.

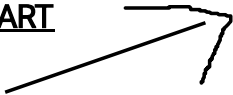
GEORGIA
Sweet Jesus.

CUT INSIDE TO:

INT. MARIGOLD THEATER, BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The choir and the cigar-chomping female OWNER face off. They're all freaked out.

START



OWNER

Damn me! You cabled that you're a Negro troupe. Coons dance and do coon tunes!

MINNIE

You've got to change that marquee!

OWNER

You didn't give me a name! What's your act?

MINNIE

We're doing *Esther*.

She chokes on her cigar.

OWNER

As in Old Testament *Esther*?! *Mordecai slays the Agagites* and all that?! What the hell kind of niggers are you, pardon my French?! I got three hundred soon-to-be drunks out there, and I'm fairly certain they're fairly certain they didn't pay to get a Bible lesson by a bunch of opera-singing spades, pardon my French! I am damned! Do you dance?

ALL

No!

OWNER

Shimmy?

IKE

We're out of here!

"Steal Away"

OWNER

All right, all right - you got me by the sack. Gotta distract those hicks with *something*. I'm going to pay for this, but you're on in twenty.

Ella hands her a thick folder.

ELLA

Spotlight cues and gel changes. And the piano was tuned *late* today, per my cable?

The Owner looks at her diabolically then exits freaking out.

OWNER

Damn me to dust!

CUT TO:

End

INT. MARIGOLD THEATER, AUDITORIUM - LATER

A sleazy, rowdy dive. As White eggs Bennie on, he nervously faces the drunken crowd.

BENNIE

HELLOOOOOOOO C-CINCINNATI!!

(*crickets*)

W-we've g-got a gripping s-saga for you t-tonight, right from the p-pages of scripture! O-one request: O-out of r-reverence, p-please refrain from drinking, s-smoking, and curs--

SMASH! A hurled beer bottle EXPLODES beside him, drenching the choir in suds. That settles that.

FLASH FORWARD TO:

A FULL-SCALE RIOT

The performance: Deckerd out in gaudy thrift-store costumes, the choir slogs through the dreadful *Esther*. White directs with his usual flair. Ella flogs the toothless cadaver impersonating a piano. Maggie and Loudin sing out with their stunning voices --

MAGGIE (as Esther)

Alas, thou knowest to go unto the King unbidden is death! Death! Deaaaaaath!

LOUDIN (as Mordecai)

Go unto the king and make supplication for our people. Go! Go! Go!