

OPENING NIGHT

Written by

Zach Sullivan

Zach Sullivan
ZacharySullivan@gmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

JOHN, riding a horse, trots along in the darkness under a full moon. He cautiously turns his gaze from side to side into the dark woods around him. His horse rears, and he nearly falls off. Ahead, two silhouettes lay in the road.

A MOTIONLESS MAN lays underneath a PANICKED FIGURE, who appears to be frantically listening for a heartbeat in the former. Reluctantly, John dismounts.

JOHN

Is that man in need of a physician?

The PANICKED FIGURE SNAPS his head up to look at John.

JOHN (CONT'D)

If you can lift him, we can use my horse to take him into town.

The PANICKED FIGURE stands, and takes it's first slowed steps towards John. The awkward gait is unnerving.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Are you injured yourself?

The figure says nothing, but continues on it's course, gaining speed as he approaches John. Suddenly the figure is in full sprint, just feet away from John. The horse rears again, and John steadies the beast. When he turns his attention back towards the runner, we are close enough to see it's face; it whips it's demonic head towards John, blood covering it's mouth, crooked teeth stab into John's jugular as we

CUT TO:

INT. CARRIAGE - EVENING

JOHN snaps awake, his DRIVER's arms around his shoulders.

DRIVER

John!

JOHN

Get the devil off me!

DRIVER

John, we're here. You were having a nightmare.

JOHN

Right.

John looks around the carriage, taking in his surroundings. A playbill is in his hand. The cover reads "MY AMERICAN COUSIN".

JOHN (CONT'D)

A nightmare.

His DRIVER takes a step back and holds the carriage door open.

DRIVER

Probably just nerves.

JOHN

Nonsense. He's just a man, no different than you or I.

John grabs his hat and exits the carriage.

EXT. THEATER

John pauses outside the carriage to take in his surroundings. He breathes a sigh of relief; John is at home here. A YOUNG WOMAN approaches him.

YOUNG WOMAN

Excuse me, are you John?

JOHN

Yes ma'am. And you are?

She stands awestruck a moment. John stifles a laugh.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Ma'am?

YOUNG WOMAN

Sorry. Miriam.

JOHN

Nice to meet you, Miriam. Will you be attending the play this evening?

MIRIAM

Oh my, yes! I've come ten miles to see it! I've attended all your previous work.

JOHN
You understand that I'm not
performing this evening?

MIRIAM
Yes, sir, but when I heard who else
was to be in attendance tonight, I
could resist.

JOHN
I know the feeling. Good day,
Miriam.

MIRIAM
Nice meeting you, John!

John walks to the rear of the building. It's getting darker
now.

EXT. REAR ENTRANCE - DUSK

A dimly lit alley with a heavy black door. John stands
outside and knocks impatiently.

GUARDSMAN
Who is it?

JOHN
It's John! Do hurry, it's freezing
out here!

The door swings open.

GUARDSMAN
Sorry, John. Can't be too careful,
what with the cannibals running
about.

JOHN
Surely you don't believe that
nonsense. Is Edward back here?

GUARDSMAN
He's running late.

John pushes past into

INT. REAR ENTRANCE

John and the Guardsman make their way towards the make-up
room as John sheds his jacket and hat.

GUARDSMAN

Well, I haven't seen it with my own eyes. But I've heard stories, and this is from trustworthy folks.

JOHN

Stories about what? About cannibals from Baton Rouge roaming the country-side, eating people?

GUARDSMAN

You've heard it too!

INT. MAKE UP ROOM

The Guardsman and John enter. A couple of vanities sit in the center of the room.

ACTRESS (O.S.)

Edward is that you?

JOHN

It's John.

ACTRESS (O.S.)

I'm in the dressing room, I'll be out in a moment!

JOHN

(back to the Guardsman)

It's farce. There are no cannibals. At best it's all made up. At worst, it's a band of particularly violent thieves.

GUARDSMAN

Thieves who eat people?

JOHN

Thieves that want to give the appearance that they eat people, yes. That imagination of yours; you should be a writer.

GUARDSMAN

Alright then, say it is a band of violent thieves, you aren't the least bit worried? There are a lot of well-off people in that audience, John. Well-known people too.

John stands and turns to the Guardsman. He opens his jacket slightly, revealing the butt of a pistol.

JOHN
I can defend myself fine, thanks.

GUARDSMAN
Are you sure that's wise to have in here? Especially with him in the audience tonight?

JOHN
So he is here then?

GUARDSMAN
Of course!

EDWARD enters.

EDWARD
Who is watching the door?

The Guardsman shoots a look at John, then quickly scampers off.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Some security.

The Actress approaches from behind.

ACTRESS
Are you boys nervous?

JOHN
Why should I be? I'm not performing.

ACTRESS
Well, it's kind of a big deal, don't you think? This could be a major step up for us!

EDWARD
Plus I heard he's a fan of yours, John. What if he wants to meet you?

JOHN
That's likely.

ACTRESS
Why are you being facetious?

EDWARD
John doesn't like the man.

ACTRESS

John! Is that true? I hear he's actually very nice.

JOHN

Well, I-

EDWARD

(interrupting)

It's not a matter of how nice he is, Dear. John simply detests the man on principle.

ACTRESS

Really?

JOHN

Well, Edward, if you are through interrupting me, I'm sure I could answer for myself.

EDWARD

By all means.

JOHN

I don't dislike the man, we just have a difference in political opinion.

The DIRECTOR appears.

DIRECTOR

Alright everyone. Five minutes! Finish up your make-up and get in your places!

Edward and the actress grab the finishing touches to their costumes. John stands back watching the chaos. For the first time, he does appear nervous.

INT. THEATER

John in his seat. He nervously looks up towards the balcony. No one in it is visible.

INT. THEATER STAGE

BLACKNESS. Suddenly we hear pulleys grinding rope and light illuminates the darkness. Curtains spread to reveal the Actress seated on a sofa. Edward enters.

EDWARD

I don't know how you may feel as a visitor, Mr. Buddicombe, but I think this is a most unfortunate family!

ACTRESS

Very uncomfortable. I have no curtain to my bed.

The audience chuckles.

INT. THEATER KITCHEN

A MANAGER is yelling at an USHER.

MANAGER

You listen to me, this platter is for our special guests, understand?

USHER

Yes, sir.

MANAGER

You take these champagne glasses to them, and don't dare spill a drop. This bottle costs more than what you make in a year!

USHER

Yes, sir.

MANAGER

And don't gawk at the man, either! I'm sure he gets that all the time!

USHER

It'll be fine, sir.

MANAGER

It had better be!

The Usher picks up the platter and begins his journey. We follow him through the kitchen doors into the

INT. CONCESSIONS

The Usher carefully makes his way out of the booth and carefully traverses up the stairs.

INT. BALCONY ENTRANCE

After a short walk, he's greeted by a large threatening man.

USHER
Mr. Parker?

PARKER
It's about time.

USHER
I was told to bring this to the
balcony.

Parker eyes the champagne.

PARKER
I don't get a glass?

USHER
I don't-

PARKER
Put the tray down.

The usher, intimidated, puts the tray down. Parker pushes the usher back by his forehead.

PARKER (CONT'D)
Go get me one.

The Usher runs his hands through his hair, and mumbles curses as he walks away. Parker picks up the tray and enters

INT. BALCONY

Parker places the champagne glasses on the table in between the two fancy seats.

PARKER
Compliments of the house, Mr.
President.

We PAN up from the drinks for the first time to see our two honored guests: MR. AND MRS. LINCOLN.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN
Thank you, Parker.

MRS. LINCOLN
I am quite disappointed we couldn't
see one of Mr. Booth's
performances.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN
Scheduling conflicts, dear. You
know how it is.

MRS. LINCOLN
I know.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN
I understand he's here though.
Would you like to meet him?

The President winces, and rubs his left shoulders.

MRS. LINCOLN
Oh, could we? I'd love to!
(beat)
Are you okay?

PRESIDENT LINCOLN
Yes, it's my chest again. It'll
pass.

MRS. LINCOLN
Probably the stress.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN
Probably.

INT. THEATER STAGE

Edward is killing.

EDWARD
"Don't know the manners of good
society, eh? Well, I guess I know
enough to turn you inside out, old
gal- you sockdologizing old man-
trap..."

The theater erupts in laughter.

INT. THEATER

John elbows his neighbor, grinning.

JOHN
That was my understudy!

INT. BALCONY

MRS. LINCOLN
Oh, Abe, can we meet him? Please?

PRESIDENT LINCOLN
Of course, Dear! Anything you'd
like! Parker!

Parker enters.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN (CONT'D)
Mrs. Lincoln would like to meet Mr.
Booth, if you don't mind.

PARKER
Of course, sir.

Parker exits. President Lincoln jolts in his chair and grabs his chest hard, wincing.

INT. MAKE UP ROOM

Everyone is standing around giddy, congratulating each other. Edward comes back and gives John a big bear hug.

EDWARD
Thank you, John.

JOHN
You did great, Edward.

DIRECTOR
Great show, everyone! Great show!

The cast begins to scatter to their make-up tables for clean up.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
John? May I speak with you a
moment?

JOHN
Yes sir?

DIRECTOR
He wants to see you?

JOHN
Him? Me? I didn't even perform
tonight!

DIRECTOR

They are big fans of yours, John.
Don't keep the man waiting.

The Director leaves to go chat with the others. John just stares at the ground for a beat, before looking up with a sincere grin.

INT. CONCESSIONS

John follows the path of the usher, up the stairs by the concessions area. He takes the short jaunt to Parker's post.

INT. BALCONY ENTRANCE

Parker, now sipping on his own champagne, is uninterested in John, and nods to him as he enters.

INT. BALCONY

John steps through the door and spots the silhouettes of the President and his Wife. It appears that they are making out. The President has his mouth on his wife's neck and is making soft groaning noises. John turns to leave, not wanting to interrupt their privacy, but the door is already closed. He turns back, and with renewed courage, clears his throat. No response. He sighs to himself and takes a deep breath. He clears his throat again, louder. They continue. Finally, wanting to get it over with, he steps forward quickly and approaches the couple, his hand extended, ready for shaking.

JOHN

Mr. President, I just wanted to say
that it's an honor to-

The President snaps his head towards John, tearing more flesh from his wife's garbled neck. Blood drips down his chin in torrents, his beard is matted with blood and skin. He bears his teeth and stares wildly from big yellow eyes.

John recoils and stumbles backwards on his hit butt. He scoots backwards as ZOMBIE LINCOLN scurries towards him, growling and frothing from the mouth. When Lincoln is almost on top of him, he pulls his pistol from his jacket and fires, sending a fine pink and spray into the air. Pushing Lincoln off of him, he glances at the door, sure that Parker will come through any moment. Screams of pandemonium erupt from below. They've probably heard the gun blast!

John makes a move towards the balcony and grabs on to a curtain intent on making his escape.

He stops with one leg over the banister, aghast at what he sees below: The patrons of the theater are attacking each other, ripping, tearing, biting, disemboweling. Blood, guts, and gore litter the floor. John turns back towards the door, deciding to take his chances with Parker. As he pushes it open, he steps over Parker's body and runs off screen. The thick, black door to the balcony bounces off Parker's body and squeaks itself shut, encompassing the screen as we

FADE TO BLACK

And then, inset over the blackness:

THIS SUMMER

THE SOUTH SHALL RISE AGAINf