

A SMALL TOWN MURDER
By Michael January

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EXT. STREET INTERSECTION - NEW HARRISBURG - DAWN

It's 1952. Early October. An intersection in a small town in southern Indiana. Morning dew fog rises off the lawns of wood-framed houses lining Temple street where it crosses Morris Avenue.

A POLICE CRUISER drives up Temple Street to the traffic light suspended over the intersection, just flashing red.

The Cruiser rolls past a '49 Buick stopped at the side of the street, underneath the flashing traffic light as if waiting for the light to change.

INT. FISH'S POLICE CRUISER - DRIVING - DAWN

DEPUTY HAL FISH, 25, looks at the car as he slowly rolls past. There seems to be someone asleep in the driver's seat.

But something else makes Deputy Fish stop.

EXT. STREET INTERSECTION - NEW HARRISBURG - DAWN

LOW ANGLE on the Buick reveals a POOL OF BLOOD puddled on the pavement, DRIPPING from the rear driver's side door.

Deputy Fish pulls in front of the Buick, stopped at a slightly cocked angle, as if it had just rolled to a stop. Fish gets out and approaches the driver's door.

It is a young man, maybe 17, in the front seat. He appears to be asleep, breathing shallowly, but out like a light.

Fish eases with curiosity to the rear door behind him where the blood drips. He leans close to peer in the window.

FISH
Bleedin' Jesus...

CAMERA PUSHES up to the glass. In the back seat is a man's body, sprawled akimbo with BLOOD running from a wicked gash in his head. He is wearing an open cotton shirt over an undershirt, but no pants. His underwear is pulled halfway down off his buttocks. He seems to have a hard-on in his shorts.

Fish steps back looking toward the young man, DENNY PENHURST, asleep in the front seat.

Fish reaches through the window of his cruiser to snatch the radio microphone.

TITLES OVER:

A MONTAGE of PHOTOS and NEWSPAPERS detailing a sensational case in this small Indiana town in 1939 of the sexual assault and murder of a young boy and the arrest, conviction and ultimate execution of ALBEY PENHURST, "The Singing Killer", ending with a photo of Albey purportedly dancing on his way to the electric chair...

FADE TO:

EXT. STREET INTERSECTION - NEW HARRISBURG - MORNING

Another POLICE CRUISER has joined Fish's, along with a couple of LOCAL NEIGHBORS watching from across the street, still in morning slippers.

Fish pulls Denny out of the driver's seat. Denny is a good-looking kid with a pleasant demeanor. Fish guides him to his cruiser and pushes him into the back seat.

FISH

You just sit quiet, Denny. We'll get your side soon enough.

He closes the door as Denny just looks blankly confused. Fish steps next to his boss, SHERIFF "BIG JIM" FOSTER, a robust and beefy man of commanding and assured presence.

Big Jim is staring through the opened rear door at the sprawled body.

FISH

It's Al Drucker, ain't it? Didn't see no murder weapon.

BIG JIM

Shoes are on the floor. Don't see his pants anywhere.

Jim glances toward Denny in the back of the police cruiser, then back to the body in the car.

BIG JIM

Looks pretty clear what happened...

Fish glances at his boss oddly, scratches his head. Seems the opposite to him.

BIG JIM

Check the body to see if there's any other wounds. And take a look in his shorts and see if there's any jism or what not.

FISH

What?! Me?

BIG JIM

Just do it.

Deputy Fish eases himself into the passenger door. He looks around the body. The victim stares at him with one eye, blood from the open gash in his head covering the other.

Fish slides back out of the car.

FISH

Just the one kibosh on his head. And can't see no...fluids. But he does have one helluva stiff in his Johnson. I heard about that. Never seen it before.

BIG JIM

(nods)

Says a lot right there don't it?

Jim looks toward the neighbors on the lawn, straining to see.

BIG JIM

Kids and folks don't need to see this. Get an ambulance out from the hospital and call over to Digby's Garage. Let's tow this thing on outta here.

Fish nods and walks back to his Cruiser. Denny's haunted eyes follow Fish as he grabs up the radio mike. Fish catches his eyes, and just shakes his head, looking away.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET INTERSECTION - NEW HARRISBURG - LATER

An AMBULANCE has arrived and the white-suited AMBULANCE CREW carry the body, covered by a blanket, from the back seat of the car.

Fish waves a TOW TRUCK toward the car. As it backs up, Big Jim gestures to one of the neighbors in the growing CROWD.

BIG JIM

Harly... Think you could get your hose out here to wash this off the street?

HARLY

Sure, Big Jim. I think it'll reach.

FISH

Should we get the camera and take some pictures first, Big Jim, before we wash it up?

BIG JIM

Pictures?! Who is gonna wanna see pictures of this? Ain't gonna be no vacation photos, if you see my meanin'.

FISH
For court and all.

BIG JIM
You seen it. And I seen it. All them...
(points to the crowd)
Seen it. You tell me, Deputy... You
gonna forget this?

FISH
No, sir. I think I'll recall it for
some time.

Big Jim nods and walks away toward his Cruiser. He glances to Denny in the back of Fish's Cruiser. Their eyes meet, cold. Big Jim climbs in his cruiser.

CUT TO:

INT. STATE PRISON - DEATH ROW - MEMORY FLASHBACK

DREAMLIKE QUALITY of an empty hallway in the old State Penitentiary. A long hallway of ceiling LAMPS as they FLICKER ON and OFF as the switch to the electric chair is thrown.

CAMERA WHIPS to a 9 year old YOUNG DENNY PENHURST standing in the middle of the hall, as the lights flicker in his emotionless eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - FRONT - DAY

Denny is escorted by another Deputy, BILL SEMPLE, in handcuffs past the CLERK and SECRETARY who stare as he passes.

SEMPLE
We'll put you in the interrogation room
until Big Jim comes back.
(to the Secretaries)
Don't think he'll bother you ladies in
there.

Semple opens the door to a smallish room with a table and three chairs below one shaded window. Through the open door we watch as he sets Denny, unresisting into a chair and locks the handcuff to it.

Semple comes out and closes the door behind.

SECRETARY
What is all goin' on Billy? It's Al
Drucker been killed?

Semple nods his head solemnly.

SEMPLE
Killed and man-raped, yup.

The girls look at each other in shock.

SEMPLE

Not much surprise. Everybody pretty well knew it would come to this. Sooner or later. Just the nature of things.

He saunters out the door as the TOW TRUCK rattles into the drive with the Buick hanging on the hook.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Big Jim stands with Fish and Semple as the tow truck backs the Buick up the drive next to the building, just below the window of the interrogation room.

A few others have gathered in curiosity as the TOW DRIVER lowers the Buick. Big Jim glances to Fish, then to Semple.

BIG JIM

Bill...

SEMPLE

Yes, sir.

BIG JIM

Get out the Brownie and take some pictures of the vehicle.

Semple heads for office.

BIG JIM

Get the blood on the seat and all. And dust around for some fingerprints.

SEMPLE

Sure thing.

Fish looks at Big Jim, a little confused.

FISH

Now, you want pictures?

Big Jim doesn't answer.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Denny sits silently on the wooden slat chair, while arrayed around him are Big Jim and his two Deputies, just staring back at him, hands resting casually on their gunbelts.

BIG JIM

Got anything to say, son, now's the time to tell it.