

A SOUTHERN NIGHT

(Based on a true story)

By: David Lambertson

dlambertson@hotmail.com

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OVER BLACK SCREEN

YOUNG MAN (V.O.)
(hushed, in a whisper)
For God is my refuge and my
strength, a very present help in
time of trouble...

FADE IN:

INT. 1964 SHERIFF PATROL CAR - (PARKED) - NIGHT

The voice belongs to a frightened ANDREW GOODMAN (20), clean-cut, boyish looking. He sits on the far right of the patrol cars rear bench seat - pressed up against the door.

A red glow from the flashing light atop the car pulsates in the interior.

Andrew's cuffed hands rest in his lap. His head bowed, eyes closed. He trembles as he prays.

ANDREW
May hope abide beyond the moment's
loss. For you, God of hope, are our
sustaining power, even when we have
fallen --

A meaty, uniformed arm shoves another cuffed man in the car - pressing him up against Andrew. This is MICHAEL SCHWERNER, (24), tight curly hair - small goatee.

SOUTHERN MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
Here's your Jew friend.

A moment passes. Then JAMES CHANEY (21), African-American, wiry strong, bleeding from a cut above his brow is shoved in.

SOUTHERN MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
And yer nigger.

SLAM - the rear passenger door shuts.

SUPER: OUTSKIRTS OF PHILADELPHIA, MISSISSIPPI - 1964

A moment passes. The driver door opens.

Sheriff Deputy CECIL PRICE (26), pale and sweaty, rounded double chin, enters the car.

Cecil flips off the emergency light, inserts his key in the ignition.

INT. SHERIFF PATROL CAR - (TRAVELING) - NIGHT

The rhythmic HUM of tires. The car's headlights pierce the darkness of the isolated road - wooded on both sides.

Cecil has one hand on the wheel and one hand on his service revolver. His eyes dart back and forth between the road ahead and the rearview mirror. His focus lands on Andrew.

ANDREW

(softly)

Keep us from self-recrimination, oh
God.

CECIL

Keep yer Jew trap shut, boy.

ANDREW

(softer)

Give us peace of mind and
contentment of spirit --

Cecil extends his revolver towards the back seat - points it directly at Andrew.

CECIL

I'll fucking end you right here. I
swear to God I will.

The prayer stops. Andrew takes a deep breath - holds it as if merely breathing was cause enough to be shot.

MICHAEL

(loud and proud)

Help us to feel your help oh, God.
Let your presence be a light within
to dispel the darkness.

A CLICK as Cecil cocks the revolver.

A defiant, confident look consumes Michael's face. He knows blood won't be spilled in the back of a patrol car.

Andrew whimpers. Michael nudges him - reassurance.

MICHAEL

(at Cecil)

It's the Jewish prayer of courage.

Cecil brings his arm back towards him, lays the revolver to his right - refocuses on the road.

CECIL
 This is Mississippi, boy. You gonna
 pray in my car, it best be the
 Lord's prayer. Maybe yer nigger
 friend can help you out. Sure he
 can teach ya a proper Christian
 prayer.

Cecil catches James' eyes in the rearview, blood still oozing
 from his brow.

CECIL
 Cat got your tongue, boy?
 (with a chuckle)
 Thought as much.

INT. SHERIFF PATROL CAR (PARKED) - A BIT LATER

On the shoulder, almost hidden in the trees.

ANDREW
 Why are we stopped?

CECIL
 (as he studies the road)
 Quiet now.

ANDREW
 Why aren't you taking us back to
 the station?

MICHAEL
 You need to book us or release us.
 You know that.

CECIL
 How's that now?

MICHAEL
 We have rights.

Cecil removes his Deputy's hat - wipes sweat from his brow.

CECIL
 Must not teach you much in them
 fancy New York Jew colleges. Cause
 you two ain't got a lick of common
 sense tween ya.

Cecil extends his arm across the top of the front seat, turns
 and faces the back seat.

CECIL

Such a shame. I mean why in the world would you two risk everything for some niggers all the way out here in Mississippi anyway?

MICHAEL

You need to let us go.

Cecil turns back around - checks his watch.

CECIL

Uh-huh.

MICHAEL

Our people will be looking for us.

CECIL

Well, I bet they will. Don't mean they'd find y'all - now does it?

JAMES

Let them go. It's my fault. You know that. I asked them to come.

CECIL

Shut up, boy. Weren't talking to you.

JAMES

It ain't too late to make it right.

Cecil puts his Sheriff hat back on.

CECIL

Cept it is.
(checking his watch)
Time to go.

Cecil pulls the car away from the shoulder.

INT. SHERIFF PATROL CAR - (TRAVELING) - NIGHT

Dark and silent - just the hum of the road.

The car slows, Cecil turns the wheel. The car veers right.

MICHAEL

Where are you taking us?

The car bumps up and down - obviously now traveling on much rougher road.

CLINKS and RATTLES emanate from the back trunk.

CECIL
Y'all hear that clanging in the
back? You know what that noise is?

Michael nervously taps his cuffed hands on his lap. Andrew keeps his eyes closed. His lips quiver as he now prays to himself.

Cecil turns his head - looks at Michael and Andrew.

CECIL
Really? Thought you educated Jew
boys would least offer a guess. The
nigger knows.
(at James)
Go ahead, boy - tell em what the
noise is.

Cecil turns away, looks at James in his rearview mirror. James, locked jaw and defiant shakes his head.

CECIL
Fair enough. Anyway, that be the
sound of shovels and chains. Now
y'all know what we use shovels for
round here. Well, the nigger does
for sure. You Jew boys may not be
as familiar.

JAMES
Let them go. It ain't too late.

CECIL
That other clinging sound is the
chains. Ya see, first thing we're
going to do is beat that nigger to
death with those chains.

ANDREW
God is my refuge and my strength.
My help in time of trouble! My --

Cecil's revolver pointed at Andrew's head in a flash.

CECIL
Last time I'm warning you.

Andrew vomits on his shirt - starts to whimper.

MICHAEL
Leave him be.

An evil smile crosses Cecil's lips as he returns his focus to the road.

CECIL

Anyway - as I was saying, after we beat this nigger to death, I'm gonna take a hunting knife and cut off his balls. Actually, may do that fore he dies. Doesn't matter. The point being, the Klan always takes a memento.

James' chest starts to heave up and down.

CECIL

Then you two boys gonna go bout the business of digging some graves with them shovels.

Andrew's whimper grows louder.

CECIL

Three of em. Gonna come in handy after we put a bullet in your heads.

ANDREW

Please, just let us go. We won't tell anyone.

Cecil again catches Michael's eyes in the rearview mirror.

CECIL

Naw, I'm afraid that ain't so. Just so ya know, this ain't no picnic for me either. Shit, I'm supposed to be home having supper with the wife and kids.

MICHAEL

You wear your hood when you're with them?

CECIL

Don't get uppity on me now.

MICHAEL

Do you teach them your hatred? Or do you hide behind it?

Cecil pulls over - stops the car. He turns and looks Michael dead in the eyes.

CECIL

I'm proud of my hatred, boy. It serves a purpose.

MICHAEL
Purpose...?

CECIL
A white Mississippi. Thought ya
knew that.

JAMES
Let them go --

WHACK - Cecil clubs James with the butt of his revolver.
Blood oozes from the fresh wound. James' eyes flutter - his
head tilts as he loses consciousness.

CECIL
(at Michael)
Don't worry. I'll get em woke in
time.

Cecil turns back, shifts the car into gear, hits the road.
The shovel and chains rattle again.

MICHAEL
(bravado fading)
You won't get away with this.
You'll be caught. You'll spend the
rest of your life in jail.

CECIL
Naw, I won't. Some chance I get
caught, well I'd just eat a bullet
fore I ever saw the inside of a
jail cell. Ya see, I'm willing to
die for what I believe in.

MICHAEL
Any man that wears a hood doesn't
have the courage for that.

CECIL
That's where y'all underestimated
us. Ya see, we all got the courage
for that down here.

Cecil looks at Michael and Andrew in the rearview mirror.

CECIL
Same as you boys - right? Y'all got
the courage to die for what ya
believe in?

ANDREW
For God is my refuge and my
strength. A very present help in
time of trouble.

Michael looks to Andrew - gives him a nod.

MICHAEL	ANDREW
Help us to feel your help oh, God. Let your presence be a light within to dispel the darkness.	Help us to feel your help oh, God. Let your presence be a light within to dispel the darkness.

Cecil grimaces. His grip tightens on the wheel as he drives on. His face growing red with anger.

INT. SHERIFF PATROL CAR (PARKED) - MORNING

Cecil in the driver's seat. His service revolver in his lap.

SUPER: PHILADELPHIA, MISSISSIPPI - JANUARY, 1965

On the seat next to Cecil, a folded newspaper. He picks up his revolver, flips the newspaper open with the barrel.

INSERT NEWSPAPER:

A panel of black and white grainy photo of James, Michael and Andrew. Next to that, a black and white photo of Cecil.

Above the photo, the Headline reads: *"Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price - indicted for conspiracy in murder of three civil rights workers."*

BACK TO SCENE

As Cecil stares at the newspaper:

MICHAEL (V.O.)
Any man that wears a hood doesn't
have the courage for that.

CECIL
Wrong again, Jew boy.

Cecil places the revolver in his mouth. His teeth rattle against the barrel as his finger trembles at the trigger.

A gasp of relief as Cecil pulls the barrel from his mouth.

Cecil slams the steering wheel with his fists. Shakes his head in anger.

Cecil tosses the revolver on the seat on top of the newspaper. He removes his badge, tosses it next to it.

Cecil takes a deep breath - exits the car.

FADE OUT: