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NIGHT GALLERY

"YEAR-END CLEARANCE"
(formerly #34358)

Teleplay by

Jack Laird

From the Story by

Mary Linn Roby

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Geer as an undertaker whose coffin
sale coincides with a strange rise
in the local death rate. Sheriff:
Slim Pickens. (60 min.)

TELEVISION

12/28/71

2

PROD. #C-33594 "YEAR-END CLEARANCE"
DIRECTOR: DAVID RAWLINS
REHEARSAL: -----
SHOOTING: JANUARY 3, 1972

Teleplay by JACK LAIRD
From the story by MARY LINN RO

SHERIFF HARLOW

SLIM PICKENS

WALT PECKINPAH

WILL GEER

gc

#C-33594

NIGHT GALLERY

"YEAR-END CLEARANCE"

CAST

SHERIFF HARLOW
WALT PECKINPAH

SETS

INTERIOR:

UNDERTAKING PARLOR

NIGHT GALLERY

"YEAR-END CLEARANCE"

FADE IN:

1 INT. UNDERTAKING PARLOR - CLOSEUP - SHERIFF - DAY 1

Sheriff Ned Harlow is a big man with a crest of black hair and shaggy eyebrows. He is hopping mad. As he speaks, his voice angrily upraised, he mops his crimson face with an already soggy handkerchief.

SHERIFF

I'm sure you have a hundred and one excuses, Walt, but what I'm telling you is that this sale has gotta come to an end -- pronto! If it don't, half the people in this town're gonna be dead!

(produces a newspaper,
snaps it open)

Whoever heard of such a thing?!
Look at this, just look!

2 INSERT - NEWSPAPER PAGE 2

Obviously, this is a small town publication, Rural America in origin. The full-page advertisement, however, despite its offbeat content, bears a surprising resemblance to a typical Big City used car sales announcement. Over this, we hear the Sheriff's intemperately roaring voice:

SHERIFF'S VOICE

"Giant January Clearance Sale!
Once in a Lifetime Bargains!"

3 SHERIFF 3

as he looks up from the newspaper, concluding vehemently:

SHERIFF

I never heard of anything so disgusting!

4 CLOSEUP - WALT PECKINPAH 4

who, like the fabled Jim Moran, could probably sell an Amana freezer to an Eskimo. There's something about him -- maybe we can't yet put our finger on it -- but there's something about him...

CONTINUED

4 CONTINUED

4

WALT

Everybody does it. Every other businessman in town gets rid of surplus merchandise that way. Why should I be any different?

5 SHERIFF

5

whose voice, incredibly, ascends still steeper heights.

SHERIFF

Because you're an undertaker!

With his all-encompassing gesture, camera zooms back to reveal, for the first time, their surroundings. Sheriff Harlow and Walt Peckinpah stand facing one another in what appears to be a showroom for the appurtenances, appliances, accoutrements and miscellaneous hardware involved with (if not fundamentally necessary to) the burial business. Everything bears its specific price tag; upon each, the standard going figure has been crossed out, the sales price handwritten in startling red beneath. Over this, the Sheriff heatedly adds:

SHERIFF

Undertakers don't have end-of-the-year sales!!

WALT

(pouting)

I don't see why not. I've got all these caskets I want to unload. I need new stock. And it's not just caskets, but visitor's books, crematory jars...

(warming to his subject, selling)

Y'oughta see some of those jars, Ned! For only one hundred and fifty, plus tax, I can sell you one of the most beautiful --

SHERIFF

Now don't get carried away! It isn't as simple as you make it seem...

6 FAVORING WALT

6

A beat. Walt looks at his friend questioningly.

CONTINUED

6 CONTINUED

6

WALT

All right, Ned. You just go ahead and explain. It ain't like you to come between a man and his business. Not unless you've changed in the last five years...

Turning slightly, he glances significantly o.s.

7 WALT'S POINT OF VIEW - CHECKERBOARD

7

In the corner by the fireplace, a checkerboard is set up, as if awaiting the imminent arrival of two players.

SHERIFF'S VOICE

Five years. It's been that long?

8 WALT AND THE SHERIFF

8

who stands gazing wistfully toward the checkerboard, lost in some nostalgic remembrance, his anger dissipated. Walt, his eyes on the Sheriff, responds with meaningful emphasis:

WALT

Since Etta...Since you'n she tied the knot...

Sheriff Harlow turns to him, sharply, instantly on the defensive: a touchy subject has been introduced. Walt, dissembling, shrugs, all innocence.

WALT

I don't play much anymore. Now and then, Jake Barker drops in, but I'm always so tensed up waiting for him to cheat that I can't concentrate on my game...

(beat; looks at Harlow,
eyes sparkling)

Say, couldn't this business of yours wait? We could sit down and have a beer and maybe play a game of checkers -- like in the old days?

SHERIFF

(shakes head regretfully)
The thing about this sale of yours is this, Walt...the death rate in Taunton has gone up sky high in the past week.

(cocks head)

Don't tell me you hadn't noticed?

CONTINUED

8 CONTINUED

8

Rubbing his chin reflectively, Walt, carefully avoiding his friend's eyes, begins to wander amongst the demonstration models on display, Sheriff Harlow dogging his heels.

WALT

Well, it's true I haven't had a free minute since I put that ad in the paper last Monday, but what's wrong with that?

(wheels on Harlow)

It's just darn lucky for all those people being able to take advantage of my January clearance!

9 PAST WALT TO SHERIFF HARLOW

9

who snaps:

SHERIFF

I wish you'd stop calling it that! Didn't it strike you as too much of a coincidence that everybody should start dying this week?

WALT

(stares at him blankly)

What're you getting at, Ned?

SHERIFF

(a deep breath)

I've got reason to think that these people who are lying in your half-price caskets didn't all die natural deaths. In fact, it's my bet that darn few of them did!

WALT

(contemplating him)

Your bet...or Etta's?

SHERIFF

(avoiding his eyes)

Folks talk...

WALT

(with emphasis)

Etta talks.

SHERIFF

(weakly protesting)

She's my wife, Walt. Can't we leave her out of it?

CONTINUED

9 CONTINUED

9

WALT
(quietly)
I can.
(pause)
Can you...?

10 REVERSE ANGLE

10

Silence, each man retreating to his own private thoughts.
Furtively, Sheriff Harlow sneaks a wistful look o.s.

11 CHECKERBOARD - SHERIFF'S POINT OF VIEW

11

It entices alluringly, like some inanimate Lorelei.

12 BACK TO SCENE

12

Walt taps out his pipe on the mantelpiece, sucks at it reflectively. His words are slow, measured:

WALT
You're trying to tell me that --
(gestures o.s.)
-- some of those folks in the next
room were murdered?

Rudely returned to immediate reality, the Sheriff whirls on Walt, exploding:

SHERIFF
I'm telling you just that! And
there's gonna be ructions round
here soon if these deaths don't
stop!!

13 BIG HEAD - WALT

13

earnest, supremely convincing, his words delivered with an almost evangelical fervor:

WALT
But they've been accidents mostly.
Sarah Hardesty fell off her back
porch and broke her neck, and Wes
Gammett -- well, everyone's known
for a coon's age that if he didn't
stop messing 'round with that
canned heat he was gonna get him-
self into trouble. And Tom Franklin --

14 SHERIFF

14

reeling, eyes glazed. There's an insistency in his voice, but it lacks his initial persuasion:

SHERIFF

It's more than a coincidence!

(pauses, collecting
his thoughts)

They're all a bit too clever for
me, I'll grant you. So far...

15 WALT

15

camera easing tightly in on his face during:

SHERIFF'S VOICE

There hasn't been a case of poison-
ing yet, or anything you could
prove was out of the way, but the
fact of the matter is, these people
who're dying are people that other
people have wanted to see dead for
a long time -- relatives and such,
who have to pay the funeral costs...

Walt, his back still turned to Sheriff Harlow, has tamped
fresh tobacco into his pipe. Lacking matches or convenient
tinder, he ignites the pipe with a flaming thumb - discreetly.

WALT

Well --

(puff, puff)

-- that might be true --

(puff, puff)

-- but I still don't see why I --

(puff, puff)

-- should stop my sale.

Whereupon, he turns toward his companion.

16 PAST WALT TO SHERIFF HARLOW

16

who responds patiently:

SHERIFF

Sarah Hardesty. Everyone knows she
left twenty-thousand to her nephew
Jake.

WALT

(beaming)

Good old Jake!

CONTINUED

16 CONTINUED

16

WALT (Cont'd)
(sighs, recollecting)
He was up for Christmas, wasn't he?

SHERIFF
(shouting again)
Darn right he was! Just in time
to push her off the back porch and
collect his inheritance!

17 WALT

17

as he ponders this, neither pro nor con.

SHERIFF'S VOICE
Now, you take Wes Gammett. He went
off that canned heat five years ago,
after he wound up in the hospital.
But lately he took up with Grayson
Brackett's wife, and there's some
who think they saw Grayson with
him down by the railway tracks the
night Wes died. And there was
Frank Lassiter....

18 SHERIFF

18

SHERIFF
He's been working in that box mill
for near on twenty-five years.
Strikes me odd that this week he
chose to lose his balance by the
saw. I don't s'pose I can prove
that Wilbur Parker was standing
right behind him when he fell has
anything to do with Frank ending up
like a sliced sausage, but ---

19 ACROSS SHERIFF TO WALT

19

who, digesting this information, muses aloud:

WALT
Frank was a hard one to fix proper...
(mulls this, nods)
I see your point, though. Frank was
telling all around that Wilbur doesn't
pay his bills, wasn't he?

SHERIFF
You've got it! Now my point is, if
you don't call off that sale ---

The phone rings, interrupting him. Walt moves to answer it.

20 FAVORING TELEPHONE

20

as Walt's hand enters frame, lifts the receiver. Angle widens to reveal Walt, the Sheriff visible in b.g. of shot.

WALT

Yes?...Well now, that is shocking,
isn't it? A real shame...

Since Walt's back is to the Sheriff, the latter is unable to observe the expression which comes over the undertaker's face. Although his tone of voice is one of sympathetic commiseration, his features mirror an almost satanic jubilation. A weird, unearthly light illumines his countenance; his eyes shine with a reddish glow. He continues into the phone:

WALT

Yes...Yes...Well, I'm sorry to
hear it, ma'am. I'll be right over.

He replaces the instrument in its cradle. The unearthly light slowly fades, his eyes return to normalcy, his face recomposes itself. Sheriff Harlow steps closer, demanding:

SHERIFF

Was that another one?

21 REVERSE ANGLE

21

as Walt turns, nods solemnly, his voice sepulchral:

WALT

Lucy Crockett's gone. Seems she
fell into the mill pond.

SHERIFF

(shakes his head)

Well, there's one that'll be im-
possible to prove. Everyone in
town hated Lucy.

(beat; eyes narrowed)

At least this should convince you,
if nothing else has. Even if
there's just the chance of a tie-in,
you can't go on with this sale, Walt.

WALT

(sighs regretfully)

I suppose you're right.

(gaze wandering over
their surroundings)

It's a pretty sad thing, Ned, that
folks around here would be taking
advantage of my sale this way.

CONTINUED

21 CONTINUED

21

WALT (cont'd)

Pity. I've got some lovely oak caskets. Pink satin lining, big fancy pillows. Over-bought them back in '58 -- forgot that folks around here want things simple if they have to pay for them. Now they're gonna lose out on a real buy. Shame...

Sheriff Harlow grunts agreement, his gaze again wandering wistfully toward the checkerboard. Walt follows his look.

22 CHECKERBOARD - THEIR POINT OF VIEW

22

over which Walt's voice ventures ultra-casually:

WALT'S VOICE

Never could understand what it was Etta had against me -- why she was so dead set on busting up our friendship.

23 BACK TO SCENE

23

Sheriff Harlow tears his gaze from the checkerboard, turns to meet Walt's questioning eyes. He shrugs sheepishly.

SHERIFF

Swore she'd leave me if I didn't.

WALT

Buy why? What'd I ever do to Etta?

Beat. Sheriff Harlow's gaze falters. He averts his eyes, digging at the carpet with the toe of his boot.

SHERIFF

You won't laugh?

WALT

Ned...how long have you known me?

SHERIFF

(choosing words carefully)
Etta's got kinfolk in Salem, y'know. According to her people, there was a Peckinpah got himself burned at the stake for witchcraft. Relative of yours, says Etta.

CONTINUED

23 CONTINUED

23

WALT

(nods)

My great-great-great-great grand-
father. But that was over two
hundred years ago!

SHERIFF

(shrugs helplessly,
grimacing)

Don't make no nevermind to Etta.
She says a thing like that just
naturally runs in the family, like
high hairlines.

24 REVERSE ANGLE

24

Walt contemplates the Sheriff with incredulous disbelief.

WALT

Etta believes -- actually believes
-- I'm a warlock?!

SHERIFF

(ruefully)

Never said she was long on in-
telligence. What she lacks in
logic, though, she makes up for
in ornery stubbornness!

WALT

(chuckling, bemused)

A warlock...well, well, well.

As he says this, a yellow-eyed jet black cat which has been
sleepily reclining atop one of the caskets, leaps gracefully
to the floor, pads over to Walt and rubs up against his leg.
Bending down, he picks the cat up, cradles her in his arms,
affectionately stroking her, during:

SHERIFF

That's howcome you gotta leave off
this sale, Walt. Otherwise, Etta's
gonna have it all over town that
it's you casting evil spells and
slipping the devil into folks'
breakfast cereal that's upping the
local death rate.

WALT

(muses thoughtfully)

Mmmm. I see. Yes, that would stir
up a fuss, wouldn't it...?

CONTINUED

24 CONTINUED

24

A faraway look comes into his eyes. He is concentrating upon something, concentrating with a tremendous effort of will. The Sheriff, oblivious to what's going on, contributes an addenda to Walt's previous observation:

WALT

Amen to that, brother!

Suddenly, Walt swings his gaze toward the telephone. Camera zooms in to hold the instrument in extreme closeup. It rings.

25 PAST TELEPHONE TO WALT AND SHERIFF HARLOW

25

as Walt, who has, of course, anticipated the ring, strides to the phone, plucking it almost buoyantly from its cradle:

WALT

Hello?...Oh, it's you, Etta...

(dripping honey)

Yes, he's here. Just a moment.

He turns, extending the phone to the Sheriff, who approaches timorously, with dour trepidation, muttering underbreath:

SHERIFF

I swear, that woman has built-in radar!

(takes the phone;

meekly, already

wincing)

Yes, dear?

26 CLOSEUP - WALT

26

watching, smiling benignly, continuing to stroke the cat. Again, briefly, that unearthly light plays upon his features. Over scene we hear the o.s. shrill-pitched voice of Etta Peckinpah as, from the other end of the line, her tumbling words unintelligible, she upraids her hapless spouse.

27 SHERIFF

27

holding the receiver away from his ear, cringing under the unmerciful tongue-lashing, shrinking in size. Occasionally he weakly manages to insert:

WALT

Yes, dear...Yes, dear...Yes, dear.

CONTINUED

27 CONTINUED

27

Finally, with a visibly shaking hand, he hangs up the receiver. Tugging his handkerchief from his pocket, he mops his streaming face, now the color of faded parchment. We hear the o.s. sound of liquid being poured from a bottle into a glass. The Sheriff turns. Walt's hand enters shot, extending a brimming glass.

28 THE SCENE

28

Beaming happily, Walt pours himself a glass from the same jug, observing:

WALT

Y'know, it wouldn't hurt all that much to let the sale go on one more day, would it? Might even help...

29 CLOSEUP - THE CAT

29

who evidently agrees, for she is now rubbing up against the Sheriff's leg. He reaches down into shot, picks up the cat, camera elevating to hold him as he begins stroking it. He grins back at Walt, nodding agreeably.

SHERIFF

Yeah, might at that.

FADE OUT

THE END