POISONVILLE

Screenplay by

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Based on the novel "Red Harvest" by Dashiell Hammett

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FADE IN:

EXT. PERSONVILLE - TRAIN STATION - DAY (1920S)

The operative from the Continental Detective Agency -- THE OP -- steps off the train. About 40, medium height, extra weight. Plain suit, plain hat, plain overcoat.

Not a guy you'd look at twice, and that's jake by him.

EXT. PERSONVILLE - DOWNTOWN - DAY

Toting his valise, the Op passes POLICEMAN #1 -- missing two buttons from his uniform.

POLICEMAN #2 could stand a shave.

POLICEMAN #3 dangles a cigar as he directs traffic.

Maybe not the Keystone Kops, but not Scotland Yard's finest.

EXT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - DAY

The nicest building in town, besides the bank.

THE OP (PRE-LAP)
Operator -- connect me to Donald Wilson. Morning Herald.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

The Op occupies a phone booth.

THE OP
Hello, Mr. Wilson. I just got in.

DONALD WILSON (V.O.)
Will you come out to my house this evening? Say, ten?

EXT. LAUREL AVENUE - DONALD WILSON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The Op rings the bell.

DONALD WILSON (V.O.)
Take a Broadway car to Laurel Avenue and walk two blocks west.

The MAID answers.

THE OP
I have an appointment with Mr. Wilson.

MAID
Mr. Wilson isn't home, sir.

Behind the maid, MRS. WILSON looms into view: slender, blonde, a bit under 30, with a trace of an accent.

MRS. WILSON
If he's expecting you, he'll probably be home shortly.

INT. DONALD WILSON'S HOUSE - LIBRARY - NIGHT

The Op and Mrs. Wilson occupy leather chairs by the fire.

MRS. WILSON
Do you live in Personville?

THE OP
San Francisco.

MRS. WILSON
But this isn't your first visit?

THE OP
It is.

MRS. WILSON
I'm afraid you'll find it dreary. I suppose all mining towns are.... Are you engaged in mining?

THE OP
Not just now.

MRS. WILSON
It's inconsiderate of Donald to keep you waiting. Especially at this time of night.

THE OP
It's alright.

MRS. WILSON
Though perhaps it isn't a business matter.

He doesn't take the bait.

The telephone rings in the next room. She ignores it.

MRS. WILSON (CONT'D)
I'm ordinarily not so curious, really. But you're so excessively secretive. You aren't a bootlegger, are you? Donald changes them so often.

MAID
Ma'am, you're wanted at the phone.

MRS. WILSON
Excuse me.

She follows the maid into the next room.

MRS. WILSON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(on the phone)
Yes?... I beg your pardon?... What?... Yes.... Hello? Hello!

Rapid footsteps down the stairs.

The Op goes to a window and peers around the blinds.

A car pulls out of the garage.

LATER

The Op smokes. Five past eleven by the mantel clock.

Outside -- brakes screech.

Rapid footsteps up the stairs.

Mrs. Wilson's face is ashen.

MRS. WILSON
I'm sorry you had all this wait for nothing. My husband won't be home tonight.

THE OP
I'll try him tomorrow at the Herald.

He notices her left shoe. The green leather clashes with the crimson stain on the toe.

EXT. CITY HALL - NIGHT

The Op hops off a streetcar. By the side entrance to the Hall -- marked "Police Department" -- a crowd has gathered:

YOUNG MEN who look at home in a pool room. MINERS coming off their shift. A few MINERS' WIVES. A few WOMEN who know the wives' husbands better than they should.

THE OP
What's the rumpus?

BILL QUINT -- a miner, about 30 -- sizes up the Op, as if ensuring the news will go into safe hands.

QUINT
Don Wilson's gone to sit on the right hand of God -- if God don't mind the bullet holes.

THE OP
Who put them there?

Quint hesitates.

THE OP (CONT'D)
I'm a stranger here.

QUINT
(shakes hands)
Bill Quint. Drink? This town's dry and so's my throat.

INT. SPEAKEASY - NIGHT

In a booth, the Op and Quint nurse mugs of beer.

QUINT
Heard of old Elihu Wilson?

THE OP
Donald's father?

QUINT
Old Elihu owned Personville -- skin, bones, and guts. The mine. The papers. The First National. Plus some other choice properties.

THE OP
Such as?

QUINT
Such as the mayor, the governor, a Congressman, a senator, and most of the legislature. Elihu <u>was</u> Personville.

THE OP
He’s dead?

QUINT
Might as well be. During the Wobblies’ strike, both sides bled plenty, but Old Elihu hired strike breakers to do his bleeding. He won the strike but lost the town. Personville looked good to his goons and, brother, they took it. Why it’s called Poisonville.
(hoists his mug)
Pete the Finn does most of the bootlegging. Lew Yard handles most of the fencing, plus a lot of bail bonding. Lew’s pretty thick with the chief of police. And there’s this kid Whisper -- Max Thaler. Slick little gambler with something wrong with his throat.

THE OP
What about Elihu's son?

QUINT
Old Elihu brought Don and his wife home from Paris. Well, Don starts a reform campaign in the papers. Clean up the burg. Which means prying loose Pete and Lew and Whisper. I guess they got tired of being pried.
(shoves his mug away)
Had enough of this paint?

EXT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - NIGHT

The Op and Quint stroll up.

Beside a touring car, JERRY -- about 30, thin face, no chin -- chats with the slim young man at the wheel: Max Thaler, aka WHISPER. He could pass for an Arrow Collar model.

QUINT
That's Whisper.

THE OP
He's pretty.

QUINT
Uh-huh. So's dynamite.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - THE OP'S ROOM - DAY

The Op reads the Morning Herald. The lead story is Donald Wilson's murder on Hurricane Street.

EXT. LAUREL AVENUE - DAY

The Op jumps off a streetcar.

Down the block, Whisper crosses the street.

The Op hurries up in time to see him enter Donald's house.

INT. DRUGSTORE - PHONE BOOTH - DAY

The Op on the phone -- the phone directory open to the W's.

STANLEY (V.O.)
Elihu Wilson residence. Mr. Wilson's secretary.

THE OP
I'm with the Continental Agency. It's about Mr. Wilson's son.

EXT. WILSON MANSION - DAY

The mansion is what you'd expect of the town tycoon.

In the driveway, a muscular CHAUFFEUR polishes a Studebaker.

ELIHU (PRE-LAP)
What's this about Donald?

INT. WILSON MANSION - BEDROOM - DAY

ELIHU WILSON, near 70, sits in bed. Crisp white pajamas. Cropped white hair. Lined face but meaty shoulders.

The Op displays his credentials. With a jerk of his head, Elihu chases off his secretary -- STANLEY LEWIS: about 40, slim, and proper.

THE OP
Two days ago your son asked the Agency to send a man. Last night he asked me to come to his house but he wasn't there.

ELIHU
Well -- what of it?

THE OP
While I was waiting, your daughter-in-law got a phone call. Went out and came back with what looked like blood on her shoe, and said her husband wouldn't be home.

ELIHU
Is she in jail?

THE OP
Why should she kill him?

ELIHU
Because she's a French hussy!

THE OP
She’s as French as chop suey. And if you don't yell, maybe I'll hear you anyway.

ELIHU
Stanley!

THE OP
Was she jealous?

ELIHU
I hope so! I'd hate to think a son of mine was faithful -- though likely he was. Donald was that way.

Stanley glides in.

ELIHU (CONT'D)
Throw this bastard out!

THE OP
Better get help.

Stanley blushes, and glides back out.

THE OP (CONT'D)
I intended to see her this morning. Max Thaler got there first.

ELIHU
So that's the way it is.

THE OP
Mean anything?

ELIHU
Yes. She killed Donald.

THE OP
You used him to get dirt on Thaler and Lew Yard and Pete the Finn.

ELIHU
You don’t hear me unless I yell. I gave Donald the newspapers. He did what he liked with them.

THE OP
What of it? He won't come back because he was killed by mistake.
(leaving)
I'm at the Great Western. Don't bother me unless you want to talk sense for a change.

FOYER

Stanley smiles apologetically as he sees the Op out.

THE OP
A fine old rowdy, your boss.

STANLEY
A remarkably vital personality.

INT. THE MORNING HERALD - DAY

Donald Wilson’s secretary -- LELA, about 20, pale, pretty -- runs a finger along the dead man's desk. Almost lovingly.

LELA
Mr. Elihu told Mr. Donald to stop stirring things up. Mr. Elihu wasn't -- he wasn't in sympathy with what Mr. Donald was doing. Mr. Elihu owned the papers really.

THE OP
Elihu puts him in charge but kicks about the muckraking?

LELA
Mr. Elihu’s doctor said he'd have to give up some of his affairs, so he gave Mr. Donald the newspapers. Mr. Donald didn't know about ... he was away since he was a boy.

THE OP
He didn't know his father was in as deep as anyone.

She stares at the desk and chews her lip.

LELA
My father is Mr. Elihu's secretary.

THE OP
Stanley?

LELA
But you mustn't think we discuss--

THE OP
It's nothing to me. Why was Wilson on Hurricane Street last night?

LELA
I don't know.

THE OP
Did you hear him ask me to come to his house?

LELA
Yes.

THE OP
What did he do after that?

LELA
He dictated a few letters.

THE OP
Try to remember the least thing.

LELA
(thinks)
Oh, yes. He went out for about twenty minutes. With a check.

THE OP
To whom?

LELA
I don't know.

THE OP
Was his checkbook on him?

LELA
No, it's here.

She tries the top drawer. Locked.

The Op straightens a paper clip and fiddles the drawer open.

Lela takes out a First National Bank checkbook.

The last stub is for $5,000. No details.

THE OP
Anything else happen before he wrote the check? Calls? Messages?

LELA
He took a call, yes. He said he could be somewhere at ten but he'd have to hurry. That was all.

THE OP
A man or a woman?

LELA
I don't know.

THE OP
Think. There'd be a difference in his voice.

LELA
Then it was a woman.

EXT. FIRST NATIONAL BANK - DAY

The Op enters.

ALBURY (PRE-LAP)
Dinah Brand.

INT. FIRST NATIONAL BANK - DAY

The Op interviews ALBURY, mid 20s -- assistant cashier, and not bad looking as cashiers go.

ALBURY
I certified the check. It was drawn to Miss Brand for $5,000.

THE OP
She has an account here?

ALBURY
Yes. She deposited it this morning.

THE OP
Yeah? And where does she live?

ALBURY
1232 Hurricane Street.

Hurricane Street again -- but the Op doesn't react.

THE OP
You know her?

ALBURY
Yes -- or did. Dinah's favorite color is green, if you follow me. Somehow you don't mind. She's so frank about it.

THE OP
She gave you the brush off?

ALBURY
Thank God, or you'd be after me for dipping in the till. But she has her good side. Take Dan Rolff. TB case. She's not in love with him or anything. Just found him somewhere and took him in like a stray cat.

THE OP
What about Donald Wilson?

ALBURY
No -- that was the first check he wrote to her. I've seen her with this guy who runs a few gambling houses. His friends call him Whisper.

THE OP
You still have the check?

ALBURY
Chief Noonan does.

INT. CITY HALL - NOONAN'S OFFICE - DAY

The Op's Agency credentials are clutched in the pudgy fingers of CHIEF NOONAN. His face is perpetually jovial.

CHIEF NOONAN
So who do you think killed Wilson?

THE OP
Tell me what you know and I'll tell you what I guess.

CHIEF NOONAN
Fair enough.

He offers a stogie and lights his own.

CHIEF NOONAN (CONT'D)
Just before the First National closed yesterday, Wilson certified a five-grand check in Dinah Brand's name. Last night he was killed by a .32 a block from her house. People saw a man and a woman bending over the body. First thing this morning, the said Dinah Brand deposits said check in said bank.

THE OP
Who's this Dinah Brand?

CHIEF NOONAN
A soiled dove, as the fellow says. A big-league gold-digger.

THE OP
Gone up against her yet?

CHIEF NOONAN
There's a few angles to look into. This I've told you is under the hat. Now -- I'm all ears.

LATER

The cigars are smoked halfway down. The chief whistles.

CHIEF NOONAN
Blood on her slipper.

THE OP
Unless it was ketchup.

CHIEF NOONAN
Talked to her since?

THE OP
A fellow went in ahead of me this morning. Name of Thaler.

CHIEF NOONAN
Whisper! Grease us twice! Dinah Brand is Whisper's girl.

He plants his fat hands on the desk, oozing delight.

CHIEF NOONAN (CONT'D)
Let's you and me console the grieving widow.

EXT. DONALD WILSON'S HOUSE - DAY

Black crêpe over the door. Noonan presses the doorbell.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

The chief and the Op sit across from Mrs. Wilson: black mourning and frosty eyes.

CHIEF NOONAN
We just want to ask a few questions, ma'am. For instance, about your excursion last night.

She glares at the Op and turns back to the chief.

MRS. WILSON
May I ask why I am being questioned in this manner?

CHIEF NOONAN
And something about a shoe stain. The left one, or maybe the right. Anyway, it was one or the other.
(to the Op)
Was that all? Oh -- and how you knew your husband wouldn't be home.

MRS. WILSON
(stands)
I'm sure you'll excuse me if--

Noonan waves a beefy paw.

CHIEF NOONAN
We don't want to bother you. Just about last night. And come to think of it, what your visitor today wanted. Oh, and the shoe.

She sits back down and studies the Op.

THE OP
(sympathetic)
You'll have to tell us.

MRS. WILSON
The caller wouldn't give his name. He said Donald had gone to see a woman with a check for five thousand dollars. He gave me her address, and I waited until Donald came out. That's when I heard the shots. I ran to him. Then Thaler came over.

THE OP
You know him?

MRS. WILSON
I know him by sight.

CHIEF NOONAN
What did he say this morning?

MRS. WILSON
That he or I would be suspected if anyone knew we were there.

CHIEF NOONAN
Did Thaler fire the shots?

MRS. WILSON
No. That is, he said he didn't. I don't know why I thought he didn't.

The chief winks at the Op.

CHIEF NOONAN
No idea who called last night?

MRS. WILSON
No.

THE OP
What kind of voice was it?

MRS. WILSON
He spoke in an undertone -- as if afraid of being overheard. I had trouble understanding him.

CHIEF NOONAN
He whispered?

MRS. WILSON
Yes. Yes -- a hoarse whisper.

CHIEF NOONAN
Well, that’s fine.

EXT. DINAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The doorbell is answered by a thin man with a tired face: DAN ROLFF, the tuberculosis case. The Op flashes his ID.

THE OP
I'd like to see Miss Brand. It’s about the Wilson murder.

ROLFF
(an educated voice)
That's kind of you.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The coffee table is cluttered with stock market bulletins and racing forms.

Hair sloppily parted, DINAH BRAND lolls on the sofa. About 25 but getting a head start on 30. Yet with her round hips and full breasts, she’s still the It Girl of Personville.

She kicks newspapers off the sofa to make room for the Op.

Rolff takes a chair -- bored face in his thin hands.

DINAH
His father sent for you, of course.

THE OP
No, the son sent for me. I was waiting to see him while he was out getting killed.

DINAH
Did he say someone meant to?

THE OP
He didn't say why he asked for us.

DINAH
But you think he was in--

THE OP
It's no fun being a sleuth if someone else asks the questions.

DINAH
I like to know what's going on.

THE OP
I'm that way too. For instance, why you made him certify that check.

Rolff lifts his head -- no longer bored.

Dinah crosses her legs and notices a run in a stocking.

DINAH
Oh, damn! I swear I'm going to stop wearing them! I just bought these yesterday and look at them.

THE OP
Noonan has the check.

DINAH
It may be I can help you -- if you talk my language.

THE OP
May be, if I understood it.

She rubs her fingers together. Moolah.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Money saved is money earned. I can save you trouble and dough both.

DINAH
I can save my own dough. What I need is more.

THE OP
Noonan knows Whisper knew about the check. Noonan knows Whisper was around when Wilson was shot. Noonan knows Whisper and a woman were seen bending over the body.

ROLFF
Those things don’t concern Miss Brand.

DINAH
My God, if I was going to kill him, I'd have done it in here where nobody could see. What kind of a dumb onion do you take me for?

THE OP
I’m just saying Noonan plans to hang it on you and Whisper.

DINAH
What’s it to you?

THE OP
I want to learn who killed him. Not who could have or might have.

DINAH
(rubs fingers together)
Like I said.

THE OP
Forget the bankroll for once. I hear you have a charitable side.

Rolff gets up. Dinah waves him back down and laughs.

DINAH
Why so tight? You've got an expense account. Haven’t you?

No reply.

DINAH (CONT'D)
Dan -- maybe he'd loosen up with a drink.

Rolff shuffles toward the kitchen.

LATER

Cracked ice melts in a bowl. A bottle of gin is half empty. Dinah chews a lemon peel and prods the Op with a toe.

DINAH
It's not so much the money. It's the principle. If a girl's got something that's worth something, she's a boob if she doesn't collect.

THE OP
I hear you’re a good collector.

DINAH
A girl could have a worse reputation. Come on -- it won't come out of your pocket.

THE OP
It's not so much the money. It's the principle.

She puts her glass where she thinks the side table is and misses by a foot.

DINAH
Oh, hell! Who moved it!

THE OP
Besides, I'm not sure I need what you can tell me.

DINAH
Don't forget I'm the last one who saw him alive. Besides whoever killed him.

THE OP
His wife saw him.

DINAH
His wife?

THE OP
She was in a coupe across the street.

DINAH
How’d she know he was here?

THE OP
She says Whisper told her.

DINAH
You're trying to kid me. Max couldn't have known.

THE OP
I'm telling you what she told Noonan and me.

She wipes her mouth with the back of her hand.

DINAH
Alright, mister. You think it's not going to cost you but I'll get mine before we're through. Now listen. I’m just drunk enough to tell you anything you want to know. That's the kind of girl I am.

THE OP
Why did Wilson give you five grand?

DINAH
Simple. He was hunting for dirt on the local talent, and I had some tucked away for a rainy day. I gave him a peek then we talked jack. He was almost as tight as you. I told him I had another customer and he'd have to show with five thousand. That was hooey about the other party but then he hadn't been around much.

THE OP
Why the certified check? You really thought he'd stop payment?

DINAH
You bet he would. Oh, the stuff was good alright but he couldn't have printed it. It would have nailed papa tighter than anyone.

THE OP
Anyone who?

DINAH
Lew, Pete, Noonan. All of them.

THE OP
If Noonan found the stuff on Wilson, he'll think you and Whisper are out to get him. That's why he wants to hang the murder on you.

DINAH
I'm as clean as a Chinese laundry. So's Max.

THE OP
How do you know?

DINAH
Lots of reasons. First place, if Max was gonna do it, he'd have someone else do it. Second place, he'd be someplace else, with an alibi tighter than your wallet. And C, Max packs a .38. Anyone he sent would have that much gun or more.

The Op springs up, as if inspired.

DINAH (CONT'D)
(grabs his lapels)
Tell me who!

THE OP
There's a few things to cover yet.

She lets go and laughs.

DINAH
Alright. Try to figure out which part I told you is true.

THE OP
Thanks for the part that is. And the gin.
(puts on his hat)
If Whisper is more than a drinking buddy, pass along the tip.

EXT. DINAH BRAND'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

The Op walks toward downtown.

A bullet whizzes by his head, followed by a twin.

He dives into a darkened vestibule.

His foot upsets a milk bottle.... That's the ticket.

He hurls the bottle across the street and smashes a window.

He presses the vestibule doorbell.

THE OP
Fire! Fire!

Up and down the street, lights go on, windows go up, heads poke out. Too many witnesses for whoever's taking potshots.

The Op waves at his audience and hurries away.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Two-thirty by the clock. The NIGHT CLERK hands the Op his key and a message.

THE OP
When did you get this?

NIGHT CLERK
A little after one.

EXT. WILSON MANSION - NIGHT

The house is lit up. Before the Op can press the bell, Stanley opens the door in his bathrobe.

STANLEY
Mr. Wilson is waiting.

INT. WILSON MANSION - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A THICK-SET MAN lies on his back between the door and the bed. One hand grips a blackjack as big as a milk bottle.

He stares at the ceiling with unblinking eyes and thoughtlessly leaks blood on the Persian rug.

Elihu sits in bed holding a black automatic.

THE OP
How’d it happen?

ELIHU
I heard the door open, I switched on the light, there he was, and there he is.
(beat)
Have you got as much guts as gall?

The Op just grunts.

ELIHU (CONT'D)
I built Personville with these hands. Now it’s a pig sty. I want it cleaned it up.

THE OP
You didn't last week.

ELIHU
I wasn’t threatened last week! I’ll show ’em there’s still a sting in the old boy.

THE OP
I’ll need a ten-thousand-dollar retainer for the Agency and a free hand. No favors to anyone. I’m not starting a job and having it blow up on me. Take it or leave it.

ELIHU
I'll damned well leave it.

STAIRCASE

The Op is halfway down.

ELIHU (O.S.)
If I were ten years younger!

The Op smiles, and turns back.

BEDROOM

Stanley hands the Op a check for ten thousand dollars.

Elihu sulks.

THE OP
And you might phone the police about the retired burglar here.

LATER

FOUR COPS loiter. Chief Noonan grins at the corpse.

CHIEF NOONAN
Well, well. Yakima Shorty. And will you look at that sap. Big enough to sink a battleship. You drop him?

THE OP
Mr. Wilson did.

CHIEF NOONAN
Well, that certainly is fine.
(to Elihu)
You saved a lot of people a lot of trouble. Pack him out, boys.

Noonan gives a cigar to Elihu, sticks another in his mouth, hands a third to the Op, and strikes a match for him.

CHIEF NOONAN (CONT'D)
(softly)
I got a job maybe you'd like to be in on. Going to pick up Whisper.

A plump DOCTOR enters.

CHIEF NOONAN (CONT'D)
Hello, Doc.

HALL

The Op huddles with Stanley.

THE OP
Any men in the house besides you?

STANLEY
The chauffeur, the gardener. And the cook.

THE OP
Have one stay in his room. I doubt you'll have more excitement tonight but don't leave him alone. Especially with Noonan’s men.

Stanley gapes in utter naivete.

INT. POLICE CAR (DRIVING) - NIGHT

CAPTAIN O’DOOLE -- about 50, burly, Noonan’s flunkey -- sits by the driver. The Op and Noonan in back.

CHIEF NOONAN
Whisper's got a joint over on King Street. We could crash it but that'd mean gun play. He generally leaves about daylight.

THE OP
Got enough to make the rap stick?

CHIEF NOONAN
If what the Wilson dame gave us can’t swing him, I'm an organ grinder’s monkey.

EXT. KING STREET - NIGHT

The Op, Noonan, and O’Doole case a two-story brick building across the street. Windows dark, blinds down.

They’re joined by NICK -- a craggy lieutenant with a fedora pulled low.

NICK
Whisper's wise. He phoned the station to say he's staying put. Says if you can pull him out, try.

NOONAN
(chuckles)
How many would you say’s in there?

NICK
Fifty anyhow.

NOONAN
Go on. Not this hour.

NICK
The hell you say. They’ve been drifting in since midnight.

NOONAN
Is that so? A leak somewhere.
(thinks)
Well, I don't reckon Whisper wants trouble any more than we do. Still, there's no use me talking to him. You run over, Nick, and see if you can't argue him into being peaceable.

NICK
The hell I will.

NOONAN
Phone him then.

Nick wanders off.

COPS hunker in doorways. In an alley. On rooftops.

LATER

Nick returns.

NICK
Whisper says go to hell.

NOONAN
(cheerful)
I’ve been to Lubbock. Alright -- get the rest of the boys down here.

EXT. KING STREET - DAWN

The Op and Noonan shelter in a doorway with Nick and O’Doole.

NOONAN
I hate to start this without giving him a chance.

Noonan looks at Nick. Nick scowls.

Noonan turns to the Op. The Op nods.

CHIEF NOONAN
That’s fine.

The Op crosses the street. Hands swinging empty at his side.

Knocks on a frosted glass door. No answer.

Rattles the knob.

SLATS (O.S.)
Scram while you're able.

THE OP
I want to talk to Whisper.

SLATS (O.S.)
Talk to that fat-ass who sent you.

THE OP
(softly)
I'm not speaking for Noonan. Is Whisper where he can hear me?

SLATS (O.S.)
(after a moment)
Yeah.

THE OP
I tipped Dinah that Noonan was framing you. I've got nothing to do with him except to queer his game if I can. I want five minutes.

SLATS (O.S.)
(finally)
When we open, come in quick.

The latch clicks.

The Op plunges inside.

INT. WHISPER’S JOINT - GROUND FLOOR - DAY

Bullets shatter the glass door. The Op hits the floor.

He sees Nick step out of a doorway, firing with both hands.

The Op pulls out his automatic, lines up Nick, and squeezes.

Nick crumples to the sidewalk.

SLATS grabs the Op’s ankles and drags him out of the doorway.

SLATS
People don't like you.

Whisper looms from the shadows.

WHISPER
Slats -- you and Hank keep an eye on things. We’ll be upstairs.

UPSTAIRS

The Op and Whisper sit at a craps table in the center of a windowless room.

An angular BLOND KID, no more than 20, sprawls on a couch and blows smoke rings.

A DARK-HAIRED KID about the same age primps at a mirror.

JERRY -- Whisper’s chinless sidekick -- paces.

WHISPER
Noonan can’t hang a one-legged rap like that on me.

THE OP
He won't need to. You'll be shot resisting arrest.

WHISPER
Any time he can rub me out, I deserve rubbing. What's he got against you?

THE OP
I'm getting to be a nuisance.

WHISPER
Too bad. Dinah says you’re an alright guy -- except kinda Scotch with the bankroll.

THE OP
We had a nice visit. I still want to clear up the late Mr. Wilson.

WHISPER
I know about as much as the three monkeys.

THE OP
You called Mrs. Wilson that night?

WHISPER
She said I did?

THE OP
After Noonan persuaded her.

WHISPER
(thinks)
You dropped Big Nick. That squares us.... I didn’t phone her. Some guy phoned me.

EXT. DINAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Donald Wilson leaves.

WHISPER (V.O.)
The guy said Wilson went to Dinah's with a five-grand check. Funny he thought I’d care.

Whisper watches from a doorway as Wilson walks away.

Four gunshots. Wilson collapses.

Mrs. Wilson jumps out of her car and runs over.

WHISPER (V.O.)
I knew she didn’t do it.

He hurries across as she leans over the body.

WHISPER (V.O.)
But I had to make an out for myself, in case a certain party wanted to frame me. So I strung her along. That's it, on the level.

INT. WHISPER’S JOINT - UPSTAIRS - DAY

The Op looks around.

THE OP
The trick now is getting out.

WHISPER
No trick to it. Any time you want.

THE OP
Now is good. If I were you I'd go too. Hide out till about one and Noonan's frameup will be a washout.

WHISPER
Yeah?

Whisper takes a fat roll from a pocket and peels off fifties, twenties, and tens.

WHISPER (CONT'D)
Buy us a getaway, Jerry. And you don't have to give anybody any more than he's used to.

Jerry takes the money and goes downstairs.

THE OP
Nick said there were fifty of you.

WHISPER
Fifty? My mother could stand those bums off with a rolling pin.

EXT. WHISPER'S JOINT - BACKYARD - DAY

The back door opens. The Op, Whisper, and his men step out.

BRIBED COP #1 holds open the back gate.

BRIBED COP #1
Hurry it up, boys. Please.

No one hurries.

MONTAGE

They cross an alley.

BRIBED COP #2 beckons them through another gate.

Through a house.

Out to the street.

Into a black car and away.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY

The Op gets out of the black car.

WHISPER
See you later.

The car roars off. It has a police license plate.

EXT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - DAY

The Op walks out -- freshly shaved and dressed.

INT. FIRST NATIONAL BANK - DAY

Albury certifies Elihu's check to the Agency.

The Op sponges an envelope addressed to the Agency, inserts the check with a letter, and seals it.

THE OP
Now -- tell me why you killed him.

ALBURY
(smiles)
Cock Robin or President Lincoln?

THE OP
You won’t admit you killed Wilson?

ALBURY
I'd rather not, since I didn’t.

THE OP
You're the only one who knew about Wilson’s check in time to phone his wife -- and Thaler. Wilson was shot with a .32. Banks like that caliber. I’m betting you put it back. I can ask your manager for a look, and an expert with a micrometer can verify it.

Albury’s smile vanishes.

THE OP (CONT'D)
You were nuts about Dinah and she showed you the gate. You were so nuts about her, you--

ALBURY
Stop.... I <u>was</u> nuts.

EXT. DINAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Donald Wilson leaves.

ALBURY (V.O.)
I lost her cause I was broke -- and here he was giving her five grand.

Albury watches from the shadows.

ALBURY (V.O.)
Everyone knew his wife was jealous. I thought if I told her ... but nothing happened.

Albury takes a .32 from his pocket.

INT. FIRST NATIONAL BANK - DAY

The Op gets up.

THE OP
Still nuts about her?

ALBURY
I don’t know why I ever was.

INT. CITY HALL - NOONAN’S OFFICE - DAY

A STENOGRAPHER records Albury’s confession to a young PROSECUTOR as Noonan returns with O’Doole.

O’Doole gapes at the sight of the Op. If Noonan’s surprised, he doesn’t show it. Just pumps the Op’s hand and smiles.

CHIEF NOONAN
Well, it certainly is fine to see you. I was sure those rats got you. How’d they get out of there?

THE OP
One of your men strewed bread crumbs. They took me along so I couldn't tip you off.

CHIEF NOONAN
One of my men? Well, well. If I line ’em up, will you pick him out?

THE OP
Sure.

CHIEF NOONAN
That’s fine.
(listens to Albury for a moment)
Well, I did Whisper an injustice. I'll have to hunt him up and square myself. You'll not be leaving our fair city now, will you?

THE OP
Not yet.

CHIEF NOONAN
Well, that's fine.

INT. TELEGRAPH OFFICE - DAY

The Op hands the CLERK a telegram to the Agency.

INT. WILSON MANSION - BEDROOM - DAY

Elihu basks in a chair by a window.

ELIHU
My check is only fair pay for your work.

THE OP
Your son’s check covered it.

ELIHU
Then call mine a bonus.

THE OP
The Agency has a rule against it.

ELIHU
Well, dammit, then--

THE OP
You haven’t already forgotten what your check is for?

ELIHU
Oh -- I was excited. That’s off.

THE OP
Not with me.

ELIHU
Then give it back! It’s my money, damn you, and I won’t--

THE OP
It <u>was</u> your money. I had it certified.

For once Elihu is speechless.

THE OP (CONT'D)
You and your pals thought you were double-crossing each other. Now that they know Albury killed your son, it’s peace in the valley.

ELIHU
You impudent--

THE OP
Your police chief gunned for me twice. Now I'll have my fun. Your cash will buy a lot of it.
(as he leaves)
I'll send you regular reports, of course. You’re my client.

STAIRS

Elihu’s curses follow the Op down.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - THE OP’S ROOM - DAY

The phone rings.

THE OP
Hello.

DINAH (V.O.)
Max wants to see you. Can you run up tonight?

THE OP
Sure.

HOTEL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Op digs into steak with mushrooms.

THE OP (V.O.)
After dinner.

THE OP'S ROOM

The key turns. The Op steps in and snaps on the light.

A bullet slams into the door jamb.

He dives behind the bed.

More bullets hit the door and the wall.

He takes off a shoe and chucks it at the bare bulb in the ceiling fixture.

The bulb shatters, the room goes dark, the shooting stops.

LATER

A new bulb lights the room. Noonan's men count bullet holes. O'Doole, on the phone, offers the receiver to the Op.

THE OP
Hello.

CHIEF NOONAN (V.O.)
Now who do you reckon would be after you like that?

THE OP
I couldn't guess.

CHIEF NOONAN (V.O.)
Well, we'll nail that baby, whoever he is. Would you like me to leave a couple of the boys with you?

THE OP
No, thanks. I'll get another room.

CHIEF NOONAN (V.O.)
Well, that's fine.

EXT. DINAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dinah answers the door. Hair still haphazardly parted. Food stains on her dress.

DINAH
Still alive? Well, I suppose nothing can be done about it.

THE OP
News travels.

DINAH
Like a salesman.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rolff and Whisper play pinochle.

WHISPER
I hear you declared war on Poisonville.

THE OP
Elihu wants it cleaned up.

WHISPER
Wanted, not wants. He says keep the ten grand and go back to Frisco.

THE OP
I'd be there if they'd let me alone on the Wilson murder. Being shot at makes me irritable. My turn now.

WHISPER
That'll get you nothing but a box.

DINAH
(to Whisper)
I told you he was pig-headed.

WHISPER
Look -- I'm for you. You kept Noonan from framing me.

THE OP
And I'm for you. That gang tried double-crossing you once. They'll do it again. Give them the split.

WHISPER
I'm sitting too pretty. And I can look out for myself.
(a few beats)
Going to the fights tomorrow?

THE OP
I thought I might.

WHISPER
Do yourself a favor and bet on Kid Cooper.

THE OP
Yeah? I hear the smart money's on Ike Bush. Seven to four odds.

WHISPER
Ike won't make it past the sixth round.

THE OP
Thanks for the tip.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

Eyes closed, the Op relaxes as the BARBER shaves him.

He opens his eyes. Inspired.

INT. POOL ROOM - DAY

The Op fishes out a cigarette and wanders over to a young POOL ROOM BYSTANDER.

THE OP
Got a match?... Thanks.... Going to the fights tonight?

POOL ROOM BYSTANDER
Who isn't?

THE OP
(leans in)
Ike Bush takes a dive in the sixth.

POOL ROOM BYSTANDER
Yeah?

THE OP
I got it straight from Whisper.

POOL ROOM BYSTANDER
Okay. Thanks, mister.

MONTAGE

The Op confides in a SPEAKEASY PATRON.

A street corner LOAFER.

A HOTEL GUEST in the lobby.

INT. LUNCH COUNTER - DAY

Sandwiched between CUSTOMERS, the Op eats a burger.

THE OP
Anyone know the odds on Kid Cooper tonight?

COUNTER MAN
He’s the favorite. Two-to-one.

THE OP
That figures. Word is Ike Bush will take a dive.

LUNCH COUNTER CUSTOMER
Where’d you get that?

THE OP
Straight from Whisper.

A few stools down, BOB MACSWAIN chews a toothpick.

EXT. LUNCH COUNTER - DAY

The Op exits. MacSwain falls in with him. He’s half a dozen years younger, thirty pounds lighter, and mostly muscle.

MACSWAIN
I know for a fact that ain't so.

THE OP
What?

MACSWAIN
About Ike Bush flopping. I know for a fact it ain't so.

THE OP
Then it oughtn't bother you any. But Cooper’s not that good unless Bush lets him be good.

MacSwain spits out the toothpick.

MACSWAIN
Ike wouldn't do nothing like that. Not to me.

THE OP
Friend of yours?

MACSWAIN
Not exactly, but ... hey, on the level -- Whisper told you?

THE OP
On the level.

MACSWAIN
Christ! And me that could send Ike--

He catches himself.

THE OP
Could send Ike over for what?

MACSWAIN
Plenty.... Nothing.

THE OP
If what you've got is any good, what's the matter with putting it up to Bush?

MACSWAIN
Who are you?

THE OP
The name’s Hunt. I’m in sales.

MACSWAIN
MacSwain. Bob MacSwain. Ask anybody in town if it isn't.

THE OP
I believe you. What do you say? Do we put the squeeze to Bush?

MACSWAIN
(thinks)
I wouldn’t stand a chance here if it got out.

THE OP
Give me the dope and I'll make the play -- if it's any good.

MACSWAIN
And you won't turn him up? You'll just use it to make him fight?

THE OP
Right.

MACSWAIN
His real moniker is Al Kennedy. Remember the Keystone Trust knock-over in Philly? Al didn't do any of the killing but he was in on the caper. The bulls got everyone but him. That's why he's out here in the sticks. That's why he won't let them put his mug on a card. That's why he's a pork-and-beaner when he's as good as any of them. See? This Ike Bush is Al Kenn--

THE OP
I see. Where does he flop?

INT. MAXWELL HOTEL - OFFICE - DAY

The office needs paint, like everything else. No one’s behind the counter. The Op flips back through the register until he finds “Ike Bush, Salt Lake City, Room 214.”

MACSWAIN
The Maxwell. Ike’s kinda slim, black hair, and eyebrows straight across.

UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR

The Op knocks on 214. No answer.

Heads for the stairs.

Someone’s coming up. The Op waits at the top.

A fit young man in a blue suit and gray cap reaches the landing. Black brows form a line above his eyes. IKE BUSH.

THE OP
Win tonight?

IKE BUSH
(keeps walking)
Hope so.

THE OP
So do I. I'd hate to have to ship you back to Philly ... Al.

Ike turns.

IKE BUSH
Huh?

THE OP
If you were smacked down in the sixth by a palooka like Kid Cooper, it'd make me peevish, Al.

Ike steps toward him.

The Op shifts his gun in his pocket, just enough to notice.

IKE BUSH
I ought to bust your jaw.

THE OP
Bust the Kid's. If you win, you won't see me again. You will if you lose, but you'll be in cuffs.
(heads for the stairs)
Knock him out, champ.

EXT. FIGHT CLUB - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

The Op scans the FANS streaming in. There's Dinah with Rolff. Her hair trimmed and marcelled. Body swathed in a gray fur.

DINAH
Get down on Cooper?

THE OP
No. You playing him heavy?

DINAH
Not as heavy as I might have. The odds went all to hell today.

THE OP
Yeah. Everybody seems to know Bush is gonna dive.
(whispers)
The dive is off. Better copper your bets while there's time.

DINAH
You mean it?

THE OP
Yeah.

Her mouth moves, as if silently counting money.

She pulls out a wad of bills and shoves half of it at Rolff.

DINAH
Slap it on Bush at the best odds.

Rolff shuffles off. The Op starts across the street.

DINAH (CONT'D)
You’re not gonna watch?

THE OP
I’m hungry.

DINAH
Wait for us when it's over.

THE OP
Okay.

DINAH
God help you if you cost me that dough.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

The Op’s plate is picked clean. He reads the Evening Herald over a slice of pie.

An ambulance races by.

Across the street, fans stream outside.

EXT. FIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

The Op approaches Dinah and Whisper. Whisper sulks.

THE OP
Who’s the meat wagon for?

DINAH
Ike Bush.

THE OP
He lost?

DINAH
He won. Some sore loser shot him. He ought to have known better than to double-cross them.

WHISPER
Last night I advised you to leave town. Now I'm telling you.

THE OP
Thanks just the same.

Whisper glares at him, and disappears into the crowd.

DINAH
I’m thirsty.

INT. DINAH’S MARMON (DRIVING) - NIGHT

Dinah floors the convertible. Winning makes her happy.

THE OP
Where’s Rolff?

DINAH
He got tired in the third round. Geez, I'm almost eleven hundred ahead! And if the boyfriend doesn't like it, it's just too bad. How'd you come out?

THE OP
Didn't bet.

DINAH
Didn't bet? When the thing was sewed up?

THE OP
I wasn't sure it was sewed up.

DINAH
Brother, you take the cake....
Geez, I’m thirsty.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dinah pours gin and seltzer over ice and lemons.

DINAH
Max thinks I crossed him just cause I got in on the win. Now he thinks his gang will think he was in on it. Well, that's his red wagon.

At the dining table, Rolff trickles liquid from a brown bottle into a highball glass. The Op sniffs the air.

DINAH (CONT'D)
Laudanum. He lives on it.

She hands the Op a glass, drains hers, bangs it on the table, and fixes another.

DINAH (CONT'D)
Is that on the level about you having ten grand to clean up Personville?

THE OP
Yeah.

DINAH
Is that why you uncooked the fight?

THE OP
That was just an experiment -- to see what would happen.

DINAH
Geez, Louise! For a pig-headed guy, you've got the vaguest way of doing things.

THE OP
Plans are alright. Sometimes you have to just stir things up and see what comes to the top.

DINAH
(rubs fingers together)
And if I help stir?

Rolff slowly stands, laudanumed to the gills. His voice is thick but gentle, as if addressing a child.

ROLFF
You can't do that, Dinah. That would be utterly filthy.

She strides over and gets in his face.

DINAH
It's just too bad that a gentleman of your purity has to associate with the likes of me.

She grabs a thin wrist and twists it until he sinks to his knees. With her free hand she slaps him.

She lets go and returns to her drink.

Rolff looks at the Op with glazed eyes.

From his coat, Rolff brings out a black automatic.

The Op hurls his glass and hits Rolff’s shoulder.

The bullet goes wild.

The Op leaps at him, bats the gun away, and socks his jaw. Out cold.

DINAH (CONT'D)
Ungrateful bastard.

THE OP
He wasn’t going for you.

DINAH
What’s his beef with you?

THE OP
You humiliated him and I saw it.

DINAH
Men.

She polishes off her drink.

DINAH (CONT'D)
So -- how much?

THE OP
Whatever I think it’s worth.

DINAH
That's kind of vague.

THE OP
So's your help.

DINAH
Oh, I can give you the stuff, brother. If you want to stir things up, I've got a swell spoon.
(spots a run on her knee)
Did you see anything to beat it? Honest to God, I'm going barefoot.

THE OP
Your legs are too big.

DINAH
That'll do out of you!... Listen. Last year Noonan's brother committed suicide, only he didn’t. Max killed him. How's that?

THE OP
I like details.

DINAH
This talking is thirsty work.

The Op mixes her a drink.

DINAH (CONT'D)
Mock Lake is our summer resort. It's a dump but it's cool when it’s hot so it gets a good play. I was out there last August with a fellow named Holly. Max was with this Myrtle Jennison. She was a classy looker then. Tim Noonan was crazy about her too, only Myrtle didn’t tell Max, what with Tim’s brother being the chief and all.

Dinah accepts the glass and takes a gulp.

EXT. MOCK LAKE - FOOTPATH - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A full moon lights the path to the lake.

DINAH (V.O.)
So Tim shows up this one Saturday.

MYRTLE JENNISON -- cute, mid 20s, flapper chic -- reads a note: “If you won’t see me I’ll kill myself. Tim.”

She laughs.

A gunshot.

She runs down the path.

TIM NOONAN, about 30, lies in the grass with a hole in his temple and his gun beside him.

Myrtle leans over him.

TIM NOONAN
He didn't have to.

MYRTLE
Who, Tim?

TIM NOONAN
Max....

THE OP (V.O.)
Could it have been suicide -- with Tim sticking it on Max?

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dinah scoffs.

DINAH
That four-flusher shoot himself? Not a chance.

THE OP
Anyone else hear him say it?

EXT. MOCK LAKE - FOOTPATH - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Bob MacSwain joins Myrtle beside Tim’s body.

DINAH (V.O.)
Myrtle said a dick named MacSwain. I knew his wife before she left him. Decent guy, till he got on the force. Anyway, Myrtle didn't want Max to find out she heard what Tim said.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dinah drains her glass.

DINAH
I told Myrtle a little jack would ruin MacSwain's memory. Plus she had Tim's note. MacSwain shot square with her and sold the suicide.

THE OP
No fuss?

DINAH
Max had an alibi. He was in the bar at the time and three guys said so. As I recall, they said so before anyone asked. Peak Murray was one of them. Noonan couldn’t prove anything but he still broke MacSwain. Kicked him off the force.

She hands her glass to the Op for a refill.

DINAH (CONT'D)
Max and Myrtle slid apart after that. She's in City Hospital now with Bright's disease or something. I think she'd tell the truth if she was asked. And MacSwain would probably spill if there was something in it. Those two have the stuff on Max, and wouldn't Noonan eat it up. And get this.
(leans in)
Peak Murray and Max are on the outs. Peak might tell it straight now. He's got a pool room on Broadway.

THE OP
This MacSwain happen to be named Bob?

DINAH
You know him?

THE OP
By sight. What’s he do now?

DINAH
Small-time grifter. So, talk scratch.

THE OP
Not just yet, sister. Let’s see how it works out before we scatter pennies around.

DINAH
You damned nickel nurser.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - THE OP'S ROOM - DAY

Bathed and dressed, the Op drafts an affidavit ...

INT. CITY HOSPITAL - TERMINAL WARD - DAY

... now held in a feeble hand by the ward’s only patient: Myrtle Jennison. Lifeless hair frames a bloated face.

MYRTLE
Who told you?

THE OP
Dinah Brand.

MYRTLE
(eager)
Has she broken off with Max?

THE OP
Not that I know of, Miss Jennison. I imagine she wants this in case she does.

MYRTLE
And get her fool throat slit. Well, it’s nothing to me anymore. Only it's hell to die as ugly as this.
(sighs)
Give me a pen.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

As the Op walks to the elevators, MacSwain stops hiding behind a newspaper.

MACSWAIN
You got a minute?

THE OP
Yeah.

MACSWAIN
Let's get out of sight.

THE OP'S ROOM

The Op sits on the bed. MacSwain straddles a chair and chews a match.

MACSWAIN
I'll come clean with you, brother. I'm busted flat but I'm close to a lot that goes on in this burg.

THE OP
Why did Noonan put the skids under you?

MACSWAIN
What skids? I come into a piece of change when my wife died. I quit the force. Ask anyone if I didn't.

THE OP
It's not that much to me.

MACSWAIN
Well, knowing the ropes both ways, there's things I could do for you.

THE OP
You want to stool for me?

MACSWAIN
There's no sense picking out the worst name for everything.

The Op hands him Myrtle's affidavit. MacSwain scans it.

MACSWAIN (CONT'D)
There's something I'll have to find out first. I'll be back in a bit and give you the whole story.

THE OP
Don't be silly. We're going to the Hall.

MACSWAIN
Uh-uh.

THE OP
Why not? You're only a witness.

MACSWAIN
Sure. I'm only a witness that Noonan can hang a bribery rap on. And wouldn't he be tickled.

THE OP
You'll see him just the same.

For a moment neither man moves.

The Op slides his right hand to his hip.

MacSwain grabs for him. The Op throws his body back and swings his feet at MacSwain.

MacSwain lunges, bumps the bed, and spills the Op to the floor. The Op lands on his back and claws at his gun.

MacSwain's lunge carries him over the bed and onto the floor.

The Op puts the muzzle in MacSwain's eye.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Up.

MacSwain gets up. The Op frisks him.

MACSWAIN
Maybe it'd be smoother for me if they thought I came along without being dragged.

THE OP
Sure.

MACSWAIN
Thanks, brother.

INT. CITY HALL - NOONAN'S OFFICE - DAY

The Op and MacSwain wait for Noonan to return.

O'Doole tries to do paperwork but the visitors distract him.

Noonan walks in, spots the Op first, and grins.

CHIEF NOONAN
Well, how are you!

THE OP
Tired.

Noonan sees MacSwain and loses the grin.

The Op hands him the affidavit. Noonan reads for a moment.

He slams a fist into MacSwain, knocking him against a wall. A photo of Noonan with local bigwigs drops beside him.

Noonan waddles over, picks it up, and beats it to splinters on MacSwain.

CHIEF NOONAN
Come through or I'll kill you!

MACSWAIN
It was like she says, Chief!

Noonan presses a button. A BURLY COP enters.

CHIEF NOONAN
Let the wrecking crew work on this scum before you lock him up.

MACSWAIN
Aww, Chief!

The burly cop hauls MacSwain out.

Noonan hands the Op a cigar and taps the affidavit.

CHIEF NOONAN
Where's this broad?

THE OP
Dying in City Hospital. Another thing -- I hear Peak Murray and Whisper aren't playmates any more. Wasn't Murray one of his alibis?

CHIEF NOONAN
O'Doole -- get hold of Peak.

Noonan sighs like a Catholic who missed a year of confession.

CHIEF NOONAN (CONT'D)
I haven't been on the up-and-up with you. Just because a man's chief of police doesn't mean he's chief. Know what I mean?

The Op exudes sympathy.

CHIEF NOONAN (CONT'D)
When the old woman kicked off, Tim was just a lad. “Take care of him,” she said, and I swore I would.
(taps the affidavit)
This -- this is a new deal. I'm telling you, there's no man in Personville with a voice big enough to talk you down. Not after today.

THE OP
Well, that’s fine.

LATER

The Op smokes as Noonan cheerfully interviews PEAK MURRAY -- lanky, unflappable, and puffing one of the chief’s cigars.

CHIEF NOONAN
We were just wondering, Peak, where Whisper was the night Tim died. You were out to the Lake?

PEAK
Yep.

CHIEF NOONAN
With Whisper?

PEAK
Not all the time.

CHIEF NOONAN
At the time of the shooting?

PEAK
Nope.

CHIEF NOONAN
Know where he was?

PEAK
Nope.

CHIEF NOONAN
Hang it, Peak -- you don't mind standing a perjury rap?

PEAK
Don’t kid me. I didn't say nothing in no courtroom, and didn’t do nothing except help out a friend. But I don't know any reason to cover him nowadays.

CHIEF NOONAN
How about Jerry and Tony? Were they helping out a friend too?

PEAK
Yeah.

INT. MOCK LAKE BAR - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Peak joins Whisper, Jerry, and TONY -- an Italian in his 20s.

TONY
You hear Tim was knocked off?

WHISPER
It never hurts to have an alibi, Peak. We were here all the time.

INT. CITY HALL - POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Noonan leans in.

CHIEF NOONAN
Tony said Tim was knocked off? Didn't say he was found dead?

PEAK
"Knocked off” was the words.

CHIEF NOONAN
Thanks, Peak. You oughtn't have said what you said, but what's done is done. How are the kids?

PEAK
Good, thanks.

CHIEF NOONAN
That’s fine.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - THE OP'S ROOM - DAY

The Op pulls back the bedspread and unbuttons his vest for a nap. The phone rings.

THE OP
Hello?

DINAH (V.O.)
I’ve been trying to get you since ten. Have you done anything with what I told you?

THE OP
I've been looking the ground over. I think I'll crack it this afternoon.

DINAH (V.O.)
No! Hold off. Can you come up now?

He covets the vacant bed.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

Rolff lets in the Op as if nothing happened last night. Or maybe he forgot.

LIVING ROOM

Dinah plops on the sofa beside the Op.

DINAH
You like me enough, don't you?

THE OP
Sure.

DINAH
Then forget what I told you. Now, wait. Dan was right. Selling out Max would be filthy. Besides, it's Noonan you want. If you'll be nice and lay off Max, I'll give you enough on Noonan to swing him.

THE OP
What's the dirt?

DINAH
(kneads his biceps)
Promise?

THE OP
No.

She yanks her hand back -- afraid.

DINAH
You went to Noonan?

THE OP
Yeah.

The Op gets up.

WHISPER (O.S.)
Sit down.

Whisper emerges from the kitchen, wielding a .38 automatic and trailed by the primping kid with the nice hair.

In the hall doorway, Jerry clutches his own gat. The blond kid from Whisper's joint looks over his shoulder.

DINAH
It's none of my doing! Max said he was sorry for what he said last night, and how we could make a mint turning up Noonan for you. Max came alone. I didn't know the others--

JERRY
If I shoot a pin from under her, she'll maybe shut up.

WHISPER
Not now. Where's Dan?

BLOND KID
On the bathroom floor. I had to sap him.

DINAH
Max, you're a lousy little--

WHISPER
Shut up.
(to the Op)
So you and Noonan want to paste his brother's death on me?

THE OP
It doesn't need pasting. It's a natural.

WHISPER
You're as crooked as he is.

THE OP
You know better. I played your side when he tried to frame you. This time he's got you copped to rights.

DINAH
Get out, the whole lot of you! Why should I give a damn? Get out!

The blond kid edges past Jerry, grabs her arm, and bends it back. She twists around and socks the kid hard in the belly -- breaking his grip and leaving him gulping air.

Jerry laughs.

The blond kid whisks a blackjack from his hip.

WHISPER
Lay off!

The kid feints with his left hand and starts the blackjack at her face with his right.

Whisper’s bullet hits the kid under an eye, spins him around, and drops him into Dinah’s arms.

The Op yanks out his gun and fires at Whisper just as Jerry’s bullet singes the Op’s wrist, throwing off his aim.

The Op’s bullet misses Whisper but crumples the primper.

The Op switches his gun to his other hand.

Dinah heaves the blond kid at Jerry, spoiling his next shot.

The Op jumps for Jerry -- out of the path of Whisper's next bullet -- and they roll into the hall.

HALL

The Op socks Jerry twice, butts him once, and feels him go limp. He smashes a fist into his chin to be sure.

He scrambles out of Whisper’s line of fire but there’s only silence in the other room.

A quick glance -- and he steps back in.

LIVING ROOM

Rolff, his face bleeding, has his gun in Whisper’s kidney. His other hand holds Whisper’s .38.

ROLFF
(to the Op)
Put down your pistol.

Dinah makes a slow half circle toward Rolff.

DINAH
It seems to be Dan's party now.

THE OP
Yeah? Tell him I don’t like to play this way.

ROLFF
I'm not interested in whatever is between you. And I have no intention of giving either of you--

THE OP
(to Dinah)
If you upset him now, you're sure to make two friends: Noonan and me. You can't trust Whisper any more.

DINAH
Talk scratch, darling.

ROLFF
Dinah.

THE OP
A hundred.

DINAH
My God. A cash offer at last. But louder, please.

THE OP
Two hundred.

DINAH
You're getting positively reckless.
But I still can't hear you.

THE OP
Try. It's worth that to me not to
shoot Rolff, but no more.

She’s behind Rolff now. He keeps his eyes on the Op.

DINAH
One more bid.

THE OP
Two hundred dollars and ten cents.

DINAH
You bum!

THE OP
Fair enough. When what happens,
happens, Whisper, be damned sure
you keep still.

DINAH
Wait! Two hundred?

THE OP
Don’t forget the dime.

She yanks down Rolff’s anemic arms.

The Op shoves Whisper aside, keeps his gun on him, and disarms Rolff. Dinah turns him loose.

Rolff takes two dizzy steps and collapses.

The Op pushes Whisper toward the telephone and dials.

THE OP (CONT'D)
I’m at Dinah Brand’s. I’ve got
Whisper.

CHIEF NOONAN (V.O.)
Grease us twice! Don't kill him
till I get there!

INT. CITY HALL - NOONAN’S OFFICE - DAY

Alone with Noonan, the Op smokes one of his cigars.

THE OP
The Brand girl gave me the tip-off. I'd like you to keep her out of it.

CHIEF NOONAN
If she had a hand in turning up Whisper, she can name her price. How about you?

THE OP
I just need dinner and sleep.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Op makes headway on a sirloin.

Distant gunshots.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

A car careens around the corner.

The Op ducks into a doorway.

The car whizzes by, leaking gunfire. A streetlight illuminates Whisper in the passenger seat.

A squad car follows. Its headlights catch movement in an alley across the street.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

The Op darts in and hunkers behind a stack of crates.

A shadow breaks away.

THE OP
Stop or I'll plug you, MacSwain!

MacSwain turns.

THE OP (CONT'D)
What gives?

MACSWAIN
I don't know. Somebody dynamited the floor out of the jail. I dropped down with the rest of them. There was some mugs holding off the bulls, so we split.

THE OP
Whisper was pinched today.

MACSWAIN
Then that's it. Noonan ought to know he'd never keep that guy screwed up in this burg.

THE OP
Know why he was pinched?

MACSWAIN
Sure. He killed Tim.

THE OP
Uh-uh.

EXT. MOCK LAKE - FOOTPATH - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Myrtle leans over Tim as he gasps his last breath.

TIM NOONAN
Max....

THE OP (V.O.)
Women call Thaler “Max” but I never heard men call him anything but “Whisper.” Tim didn't say “Max.”

MacSwain joins Myrtle beside the body.

THE OP (V.O.)
He died before he could finish saying “MacSwain.”

EXT. PERSONVILLE - ALLEY - NIGHT

MacSwain sweats.

MACSWAIN
Why would I? Tim was the--

THE OP
What started me thinking was how you never tried to get more dough out of Myrtle. You had sense enough not to overplay your hand.

MACSWAIN
Cut it out. Why would I have hung around?

THE OP
You were a bull then. Close by was just the spot to see the job was handled right.

MACSWAIN
You know it don't hang together.

THE OP
It's something to put to Noonan.

MACSWAIN
Oh, God, no!

THE OP
Then give it to me straight.

MACSWAIN
He'd croak me with his hands!

THE OP
It's my play to keep Noonan and Whisper split. Letting Noonan think Whisper croaked Tim will keep them split.

MACSWAIN
(finally)
My wife fell for Tim. I let her put in divorce papers. Pretty soon I hear he's chasing this Myrtle.

EXT. MOCK LAKE - FOOTPATH - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

MacSwain and Tim face off. Both angry. Both drunk.

MACSWAIN (V.O.)
I wasn't going to stand for that.

Tim pulls a gun. MacSwain grabs it and wrestles it around.

It goes off and Tim falls.

MacSwain hides in the bushes as Myrtle rushes up.

INT. CITY HALL - NOONAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Noonan is cursing out half a dozen cops when the Op enters with MacSwain.

THE OP
Found this walking around loose.

Noonan decks MacSwain.

CHIEF NOONAN
Downstairs!

The cops haul MacSwain away.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - THE OP'S ROOM - NIGHT

The Op collapses in bed.

Distant gunfire. His handiwork.

He smiles and closes his eyes.

INT. THE OP'S ROOM - DAY

The phone wakes him.

MICKEY (V.O.)
We're here.

LATER

Shaved and dressed, the Op briefs two Agency detectives: MICKEY LINEHAN, mid 30s -- a big, cheerful slob -- and DICK FOLEY, late 20s -- boyish, slim, neat. A hoarder of words.

THE OP
What did the Old Man tell you?

MICKEY
Not much except you wired for help. And he hasn't got any reports for a few days.

THE OP
He won't for a few more.
(lights a cigarette)
Boys -- this could be the biggest blaze since Mrs. O'Leary's cow.

LATER

The Op stubs out his second cigarette. Mickey whistles.

MICKEY
If the Old Man knew, he'd skin you.

THE OP
We need to burn this job up before he tumbles. I need results to hide all the details under.

The phone rings, the Op picks up.

DINAH (V.O.)
How's the wrist?

THE OP
Just a scratch.

DINAH (V.O.)
I'm coming downtown to buy a hat. Thought I'd drop in.

THE OP
When?

DINAH (V.O.)
Oh, around three.

THE OP
I'll have your hat money for you.
(hangs up)
The break between Whisper and Noonan is a start, but it could sag if we don't help it along. Mickey -- you watch Pete the Finn. Dick will take Lew Yard. You'll both have to play it as I have. Do what you can, when you can. If we smash things up enough, they'll have their knives in each other and do our work for us.

Mickey and Dick head for the door.

THE OP (CONT'D)
And don't kid yourselves there's any law in Poisonville except what you make for yourself.

MICKEY
You'd be surprised how many laws I can get along without.

INT. CITY HALL - NOONAN'S OFFICE - DAY

The Op enters as Noonan confers with O'Doole.

THE OP
Any line on Whisper?

CHIEF NOONAN
Any minute. We picked up the rest, except Jerry Hooper and Tony Agosti. Jerry is Whisper's Man Friday. The wop bumped Ike Bush.

The phone rings.

CHIEF NOONAN (CONT'D)
Noonan.... Yes.... Yes.... Right.
(hangs up)
Whisper’s holed up at Cedar Hill Inn. O'Doole -- hold the fort but send everybody you can get hold of after us. We’ll need ’em.
(to the Op)
Come on. This is the kill.

INT. POLICE CAR (DRIVING) - DAY

The car zips along a rural road. Noonan sits beside the driver, PAT. The Op crowds in back with cops and riot guns.

NOONAN
Give her a bit more, Pat.

PAT
Okay, but the brakes ain’t so good.

NOONAN
That’s alright -- we won’t be needing them.

Pat guns the engine.

EXT. CEDAR HILL INN - DAY

The yard is strewn with trash. The inn is dead quiet.

Noonan and the Op crouch behind the car with a TALL DETECTIVE and half a dozen cops. Other cops scurry left and right around the inn.

TALL DETECTIVE
He’s not here.

Spitting in disgust, he strides up to the porch.

From a window sill, a muzzle flashes three times.

The tall detective drops dead, or close enough.

The Op, Noonan, and the cops bolt for a ditch.

Noonan taps a cop with a machine gun.

CHIEF NOONAN
Set up your mill and start cranking. We'll sieve the dump.

The cop fires a few experimental shots then gets down to business. Noonan lights a cigar.

Somewhere, another cop with a machine gun opens up.

Rifles, shotguns, and pistols join in.

Wood splinters. Windows shatter. No guns reply from the inn.

Noonan blows a whistle.

The fusillade dies down.

CHIEF NOONAN (CONT'D)
What do you think?

THE OP
If there's a cellar, there might be a mouse alive.

INT. CEDAR HILL INN - LOBBY - DAY

The Op and Noonan wade ankle deep in booze. Hooch gurgles from scores of bullet-riddled barrels and cases.

On the floor, four fresh bodies marinate.

A MOTORCYLE COP roars up.

MOTORCYLE COP
The First National was hit!

CHIEF NOONAN
Foxed us, damn him! Back to town!

INT. FIRST NATIONAL BANK - DAY

O'Doole briefs Noonan and the Op.

O'DOOLE
Was six of them, masked. Five got away with the jack.
(MORE)

O'DOOLE (CONT'D)
We wired around and blocked the roads, if it ain't too late.

O'Doole lifts a coat draped over a body: Jerry.

O'DOOLE (CONT'D)
It's a cinch it’s Whisper's caper.

A gray-haired BANK GUARD -- he should be on a pension -- puffs out his chest and mistakes himself for Wyatt Earp.

BANK GUARD
They was in before anyone knew it. Right down the line, scooping it up! “Alright, young fellows, you’ve got it all your way now, but wait till you try to leave.” And I was as good as my word! I got that fellow just as he was getting in the car. I bet--

Noonan pats his back hard enough to empty his lungs.

CHIEF NOONAN
That certainly was fine of you.
(to the Op)
Want to poke around here or go back to the Hall with me?

THE OP
I want to get into dry shoes.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - THE OP'S ROOM - DAY

The Op reads a telegram from the Agency: “Send by return mail full explanation of present operation with daily reports to date.” The Old Man’s pissed.

The Op answers the knock.

DINAH
God, you keep a boozy room.

She opens the window and sits on the sill.

THE OP
Noonan thought he’d find Whisper at Cedar Hill Inn.

DINAH
I thought that joint was closed up.

THE OP
It is. Was. Is.

DINAH
Max wasn’t there?

THE OP
Seems he was knocking over Elihu's bank.

DINAH
I saw that! I just came out of Bengren's with my hat.

THE OP
Was Whisper with them?

DINAH
He'd send Jerry and the boys.
(extends her palm)
How about it?

He counts out her money. She stows it in her purse.

DINAH (CONT'D)
That's for pulling Dan off you. How much for showing where to get the dope on Max killing Tim Noonan?

THE OP
How do I know it's any good?

DINAH
What do you do with all the money you don't spend?
(brightens)
Know where Max is?

THE OP
No.

DINAH
What's it worth to know?

THE OP
I don't care.

DINAH
Do you only perfume yourself with booze or is there any for drinking purposes?

THE OP
I need to change.

He disappears into the bathroom but leaves the door ajar.

DINAH
Listen. What's it worth to learn how the boys didn't lose anything building City Hall?

THE OP (O.S.)
No sale. I need dynamite.

DINAH
(pouts)
Are you married?

THE OP (O.S.)
No.

DINAH
I'll bet your wife's glad.
(beat)
Take me out tonight? I've got a new outfit that'll knock them cockeyed.

THE OP (O.S.)
Yeah.

DINAH
Come for me around eight.

She leaves. The phone rings.

THE OP
Yeah.

MICKEY (V.O.)
Lew Yard and the Finn were at Elihu's this afternoon. The Finn's been busy as hell but I don't know what it’s all about yet.

THE OP
Thanks. When you get back to your room, call the morgue. Ask what kind of slug they pulled out of the stiff at the bank.

He hangs up, lies back, and thinks.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dinah twirls in her new dress.

DINAH
You think I look good in it?

THE OP
You always look good. Lew Yard and Pete the Finn called on Elihu.

DINAH
You don't give a damn about my dress.

THE OP
What’s the occasion?

DINAH
Reno’s having a celebration out at the Silver Arrow.

THE OP
Who's Reno?

DINAH
Reno Starkey. One of Lew Yard’s boys. You'll like him.

INT. DINAH’S MARMON (DRIVING) - NIGHT

Dinah has the car clipping along.

DINAH
Reno blew a safe six or seven months ago -- Reno, Put Collings, Blackie Whalen, Hank O'Marra. Lew Yard’s boys. Well, last week the jewelers' association tied them to the job. Noonan went through the motions but they got out on bail today -- and that's the last anyone’ll hear about it.

THE OP
How’s the Silver Arrow?

DINAH
Not a bad dump. Anything Polly De Voto sells is good, except maybe the bourbon. You'll like her. Whatever you do at her place is jake so long as you don't get loud. She won't stand for noise.

She pulls up to the roadhouse -- lit up top to bottom.

Pistol shots disturb the peace.

THE OP
Won't stand for noise, huh?

CUSTOMERS flee out the front and side doors.

RENO STARKEY -- mid 30s, tall, solid -- climbs out a second-story window, hangs from the sill, drops to the ground, and pulls an automatic.

DINAH
Reno!

She guns the Marmon.

Reno makes the running board in three strides.

She races off with the Op hanging onto Reno as he fires at the muzzle flashes in their wake.

LATER

Reno’s in the back seat.

RENO
Thanks, kid. We had party crashers.

DINAH
Yeah? Who wasn’t invited?

RENO
Let it alone. Better get as much out of the heap as it's got.

She hits the accelerator. After a moment:

RENO (CONT'D)
You split with Whisper?

DINAH
Um-hmm.

RENO
Ditching him was okay. But throwing in with a dick is kind of sour, if you ask me.

DINAH
If that's how you feel, why--

RENO
Watch out!

A long black car blocks the road between high shoulders.

Dinah shoves the Marmon up onto the left shoulder. Reno and the Op lean in to keep the wheels down.

She swerves back onto the pavement.

A bullet slams into the trunk. Reno and the Op return fire.

She floors it around a bend as Reno slides in a fresh clip.

RENO (CONT'D)
Nice work, kid. You handle the heap like you meant it.

DINAH
Where now?

RENO
You know the Tanner Road?

DINAH
Uh-huh.

RENO
It'll take us back to town. You can drop me at a flop on Ronney Street.

DINAH
(to the Op)
There's a flask in my bag. I hope to God there's some Scotch left.

INT./EXT. BUICK RENTAL - DAY

The Buick is parked across the street from a row of nice houses. The Op climbs in. Dick Foley's at the wheel.

THE OP
Which one is Lew Yard's?

DICK
Red brick. Garage.

THE OP
What's he been doing?

DICK
Spotted at four yesterday. Then to Wilson's. Home at five. Busy in and out. Off at three, back at seven. Visitor eight-thirty. Still there.

THE OP
Okay. I'll wait for a look at him. Then you'll have to drop Yard and take a plant on Elihu. Whisper's likely holed up there.

DICK
Nice burg.

THE OP
(lights a cigarette)
Yeah. Good place to raise a family.

LATER

Several cigarette stubs litter the grass by the Op's door.

From the house emerge two men in hats and overcoats.

THE OP
That's Stanley -- Elihu's secretary. The other's Yard?

DICK
Yep.

LEW YARD -- tall, gaunt, white-haired -- and Stanley enter the garage.

THE OP
Might as well see where they go.

The garage explodes.

The Op jumps out.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Beat it! Keep an eye on Elihu.

INT. CITY HALL - NOONAN'S OFFICE - DAY

The Op enters. Noonan is a changed man. All the cheer is sucked out of him. And all the fight.

CHIEF NOONAN
These damn mining towns. A baby could lay his hands on dynamite.

THE OP
Who were the stiffs at the Silver Arrow?

CHIEF NOONAN
Pete’s boys. None of Whisper’s.

THE OP
Whisper is at Elihu's now.

Light flickers in Noonan’s eyes, then the gloom returns.

CHIEF NOONAN
Tell the truth, I'm getting sick of all this killing.

THE OP
Sick enough to give up evening the score for Tim, if it'll make peace?

The Op has his attention.

THE OP (CONT'D)
The others ought to be as sick of it as you are. Call a powwow.

CHIEF NOONAN
They'd think it was a trick.

THE OP
Meet at Elihu's place.

CHIEF NOONAN
(thinks)
Will you go with me?

INT. WILSON MANSION - LIBRARY - NIGHT

Elihu sits at the head of the table. On his right, PETE THE FINN: about 50, big-boned, bald. Reno beside Pete. Whisper on Elihu's left. The Op beside him. Noonan at the other end.

PETE THE FINN
This busting the town open is no good for business.

ELIHU
Pete is right.
(thumps the table)
Compromise. To get what he wants, each man has to give up something another man wants.

Noonan finally clears his throat.

CHIEF NOONAN
Whisper -- I'll forget you killed Tim. Here's my hand on it.

WHISPER
That sonuvabitch needed killing. But I didn't do it.

THE OP
We won't get anywhere unless everyone comes clean. Noonan -- you know MacSwain killed Tim.

Noonan gapes. Blindsided.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Whisper. After Mr. Wilson found out the bank teller killed his boy, he told Noonan to let you be. Noonan and Lew Yard still wanted to nail you. So they framed you for looting the bank.

WHISPER
Yeah?

THE OP
Noonan faked a tip you were at Cedar Hill. While his cops were blasting the joint, O'Doole sprang Reno’s boys from jail to pull the bank job. I don’t know Jerry was roped in, but him being killed at the bank helped pin the caper you.

RENO
The way I heard it, Jerry was shot by the bank guard.

THE OP
The guard couldn’t hit an elephant at five paces. And it wasn’t his slug they pulled out of Jerry.

Whisper stares daggers at Reno.

WHISPER
Deal me out.

He gets up and leaves. After a moment:

PETE THE FINN
So long as everyone’s coming clean, I didn’t have nothing to do with Lew’s garage.

THE OP
No. That was Reno.

ELIHU
Hogwash! Reno worked for Yard.

THE OP
Reno got tired of working for Yard.

He looks at Reno for confirmation.

RENO
You're telling it.

THE OP
Lew Yard sent a few of his boys to the Silver Arrow to teach Reno not to get too big for his britches. Reno got away, which is why Lew is fertilizing his own lawn now.

Pete the Finn glares at Reno.

PETE THE FINN
So’s you know, my garage has two Packards and three German Shepherds.

RENO
(addressing Elihu)
I never went in for compromise.

He leaves.

Pete the Finn gets up.

PETE THE FINN
I’m too big to compromise.

LATER

Elihu and the Op have the library to themselves. The Op’s on the phone.

THE OP
Pick me up at Wilson’s.

Hangs up.

ELIHU
How would you like to be chief of police?

THE OP
I'm a rotten errand boy.

ELIHU
I don't mean with this bunch.

THE OP
You're the damnedest client. When I look like a winner, you climb off the fence.

ELIHU
Son, I was had where the hair was short. There were things I didn't like, but I had to bide my time.

THE OP
Are you behind me now?

Elihu hesitates.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Go to hell.

EXT. WILSON MANSION - NIGHT

The Op climbs into Mickey’s rental car.

MICKEY
What’s up?

THE OP
Dinah Brand’s.

MICKEY
You and Dick. You guys’ll get laryngitis yakking so much.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Op sinks into the sofa.

DINAH
You look tired. Been working?

THE OP
We’ll see.

She answers the phone and hands him the receiver. He listens for a moment.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Thanks.

Hangs up.

DINAH
What’d Reno say?

THE OP
He thought I'd like to know Poisonville is fresh out of police chiefs. Noonan was plugged in front of his house. Any gin left?

KITCHEN

The Op savages a chunk of ice with a pick.

THE OP
Pete’s gunning for Whisper. Whisper’s gunning for Reno. Reno’s gunning for him.

DINAH
They deserve all they get.
(takes the ice pick)
Here. You’re making me creepy.

As she mixes their drinks:

THE OP
When I saw Noonan today, I saw a corpse -- and I felt warm inside.... “Poisonville” is right. If I don't get away soon, I'll go blood-simple.

She hands him his glass.

DINAH
Let's go out to the Lake. It'll do you good.

THE OP
Someone's got to stay here and count the bodies.

DINAH
I've got nothing to do with it.

THE OP
Since when?

DINAH
Now what are you getting at?

THE OP
You have a gift for enraging your boyfriends. There's Albury waiting trial for killing Wilson. There's Whisper thinking you crossed him. And Dan's going to have a try at you some day.

DINAH
You just want to argue.

THE OP
(studies his glass)
There’s not much authority to this gin.

DINAH
You want an honest-to-God rear?

THE OP
I'd drink nitro tonight.

She rummages in a cabinet, takes out Rolff’s brown bottle, and splashes laudanum in his glass.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Is he still in the hospital?

DINAH
Fractured skull. There's your nitro, mister.

He downs the drink.

MONTAGE

Dinah and the Op drink and laugh.

She mixes another gin and laudanum.

His eyes glaze over.

She helps him lie down.

Something glows yellow like the sun: the bulb of a table lamp, gleaming from beneath the shade as he stares up from the floor.

Everything goes dark.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Op slowly wakes.

The lights are off, yet a yellow glow warms his face: sunlight filtering through the blinds.

Dinah lies beside him. Eyes closed.

Her right cheek and wrist are bruised.

The ice pick is buried in her heart.

The Op’s hand rests beside the pick.

KITCHEN

He gulps a glass of water. The clock says 7:41.

He checks the back door. Locked. No sign it was jimmied.

MONTAGE

He surveys the living room. Undisturbed.

He roams the house, checking windows and doors. No sign of a break-in.

Dinah’s jewelry is arrayed on her dressing table. More than four hundred dollars in her purse. No robbery.

With his handkerchief, the Op wipes the ice pick handle. And glasses, bottles, furniture. Anything he touched.

He wipes the front door knob, opens the door, looks around, wipes the outer knob, steps out, and shuts it.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - THE OP'S ROOM - DAY

Dick Foley listens with growing curiosity.

THE OP
Last night or early this morning. The cops don't know about it yet. Look up Whisper and Rolff and see if you can learn where they were. Rolff’s supposed to be in a hospital. Try City first.
(MORE)

THE OP (CONT'D)
Tell Mickey to drop the Finn and give you a hand. And time means something.

Dick starts to say something but changes his mind.

LATER

Alone now, the Op's on the phone.

THE OP
Mind if I come over?

EXT. RONNEY STREET - ROOMING HOUSE - DAY

A dingy two-story. Two of RENO'S MEN answer the doorbell. Heavy builds and stony looks.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE - RENO'S ROOM - DAY

Feet on the window sill, Reno whittles a stick with a stiletto. The Op pulls up a chair.

THE OP
Dinah Brand was killed last night after I left her. I don't know how I'm hitched up with the department, what with Noonan dead. I want an alibi.

RENO
(studies the Op)
Why me?

THE OP
You phoned me at her place. You're the only one who knows I was there. I'd have to fix it with you even if I got the alibi elsewhere.

RENO
You didn't croak her, did you?

THE OP
No.

Reno stares out the window.

RENO
You were at the Tanner House -- a little burg up the hill.
(MORE)

RENO (CONT'D)
You went there after the meeting broke up and stayed till morning. A guy named Ricker drove you up and back. Give me your sig and I'll have it put on the register.

THE OP
Thanks.

RENO
I need all the friends I can get. When the time comes that you sit between me and Whisper and Pete, I don't expect the sour end of it.

THE OP
You won't get it.

He signs his name on a slip of paper.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Who gets to be chief of police?

RENO
O'Doole, likely.

THE OP
How will he play?

RENO
With Pete. He won’t like any rough stuff, but I'd be a swell palooka to sit still with Whisper on the loose. Think he croaked the broad?

THE OP
He had reason enough. She double-crossed him.

HANK O’MARRA enters: late 20s, tall, thin.

RENO
Where do you want Hank to drop you?

THE OP
Anyplace downtown. Where can I get word to you on the QT?

RENO
Know Peak Murray?

THE OP
We met.

RENO
Anything you give him will get to me.
(thinks)
The broad. I guess you and her were kind of ...

THE OP
Kind of.

INT. CITY HALL - CORRIDOR - DAY

The Op negotiates a gauntlet of rough-looking YOUNG MEN.

NOONAN'S OFFICE

The Op ambles in like he’s out for a stroll.

O'Doole fidgets in Noonan’s chair -- an awkward fit for a born second fiddle like O'Doole. The Op takes a seat.

O'DOOLE
When'd you see Dinah Brand last?

THE OP
About ten-thirty last night. Why?

O'DOOLE
Where?

THE OP
Her place.

O'DOOLE
How long were you there?

THE OP
Ten minutes, maybe fifteen.

O'DOOLE
Why?

THE OP
What makes it your business?

O'DOOLE
Murder.

THE OP
You don't think <u>she</u> had anything to do with Noonan getting whacked?

The Op offers him a cigarette and lights one himself.

O'DOOLE
Why not?

THE OP
My guess is Whisper killed him.

O'DOOLE
Was he at Brand's?

THE OP
How could he have been at her place if he was off killing Noonan?

O'DOOLE
Damn Noonan! Dinah Brand was murdered last night.

THE OP
Yeah? Well, I was at Wilson's with Noonan and the rest. I dropped in on her long enough for a drink and to say I had to go up to Tanner.

EXT. DINAH'S HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Detectives SHEPP and VANAMAN find the front door ajar.

O'DOOLE (V.O.)
Shepp and Vanaman went over this morning about nine-thirty. See if she could help cop Whisper for Noonan's murder.

INT. DINAH’S HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The detectives inspect the kitchen.

O'DOOLE (V.O.)
The kitchen looked like she’d been drinking with someone. No prints we could use though.

They survey Dinah’s bedroom. Her jewelry is gone.

O'DOOLE (V.O.)
No money anywhere -- and her jewel case was empty.

They view Dinah’s body.

O'DOOLE (V.O.)
The doctor says she was killed about three o'clock. Says it was a round, pointed blade about half a foot long.

The ice pick is missing.

INT. CITY HALL - NOONAN'S OFFICE - DAY

The Op digests the news.

THE OP
Round. Pointed. Half a foot.... Sounds like her ice pick.

O'DOOLE
Was it there last night?

THE OP
She made our drinks with it.

O'DOOLE
What's your slant?

THE OP
It’s too new for me to have one. Give me a few hours to chew it over.... What do you think?

He waves a hand in dismissal. As the Op leaves:

THE OP (CONT'D)
What's with the mob outside? Emptying the can to make room for more?

O’DOOLE
Augmenting the force. Them's our new specials.

THE OP
Congratulations.

INT. POOL HALL - DAY

Peak Murray chats with several POOL PLAYERS. He notices the Op and walks over.

THE OP
If you see Reno, you might let him know Pete the Finn's handing out badges to his mob.

PEAK
I might. Thanks.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - THE OP'S ROOM - DAY

Mickey briefs the Op.

MICKEY
Rolff sneaked out of the hospital sometime after midnight. Nothing on Whisper yet but Dick is--

The phone rings.

THE OP
Hello.

CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN (V.O.)
(a mannered voice)
Mr. Charles Proctor Dawn speaking. I think you will find it well worth your while to appear at my office.

THE OP
Yeah? Who are you?

CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN (V.O.)
Mr. Charles Proctor Dawn -- attorney-at-law. My suite is in the Rutledge Block -- 310 Green Street. I think you will--

THE OP
Mind telling me what it's about?

CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN (V.O.)
These are affairs best not discussed over the telephone.

THE OP
I'll be around this afternoon if I’m not too busy.

CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN (V.O.)
I think you will find--

THE OP
(hangs up)
Oughtn’t be hard to trace Rolff with a head full of bandages. I’d try Dinah Brand’s first.

MICKEY
Don't tell me anything. I'm only working with you.

He picks up his hat, grins, and leaves.

The Op stretches out and lights a cigarette.

LATER

Several cigarettes are stubbed out in the ashtray.

Someone knocks.

The Op opens the door to a thin young man with a faint mustache and a nervous face. TED WRIGHT holds out a hand as if the Op is glad to meet him.

TED WRIGHT
I'm Ted Wright. I guess you've heard Whisper talk about me.

The Op lets him in and shuts the door.

THE OP
You're a friend of his?

TED WRIGHT
You bet.
(two fingers together)
Just like that.

Wright looks around. Peeps into the bathroom. Satisfied they’re alone.

TED WRIGHT (CONT'D)
I'll knock him off for half a grand.

THE OP
Whisper?

TED WRIGHT
Uh-huh. Dirt cheap.

THE OP
Why do I want him killed?

TED WRIGHT
He carved you fresh out of girls.

THE OP
Yeah?

TED WRIGHT
You ain't as dumb as that.

THE OP
Sit down. This needs talking over.

TED WRIGHT
It don't need nothing. You want him knocked off or you don't.

THE OP
Then I don't.

Wright turns to the door. The Op cuts him off.

THE OP (CONT'D)
So Whisper's dead.

Wright reaches behind him. The Op pokes his jaw. Wright sags but the Op pulls him up by the wrists with one hand.

THE OP (CONT'D)
What's the racket?

TED WRIGHT
I ain't done nothing to you.

The Op slaps him -- hard.

THE OP
Who got Whisper?

TED WRIGHT
Dan Rolff! He walked up and stuck him with the same skewer Whisper used on the twist.

THE OP
How do you know Whisper killed her?

TED WRIGHT
Dan said so.

THE OP
What did Whisper say?

TED WRIGHT
Nothing. He looked funny as all hell with the sticker in his side. Then he puts two slugs in Dan, and the both of them go down together.

THE OP
Then what?

TED WRIGHT
Then they’re a pair of stiffs. Every word I'm telling you is right.

THE OP
Who else was there?

TED WRIGHT
Nobody. Whisper was hiding out, with only me to run between him and his boys. He killed Noonan hisself and didn't trust nobody except me.

THE OP
So you thought to pick up some jack for killing him after he was dead.

TED WRIGHT
This won't be no place for Whisper's pals after news gets out. I need a getaway stake.

THE OP
How'd you make out?

TED WRIGHT
I got a century from Pete the Finn and a century and a half from Reno through Peak Murray -- with more after I turned the trick. I thought you'd kick in with something.

THE OP
Nobody else knows where Whisper is?

TED WRIGHT
Except Dan that's as dead as he is.

THE OP
Where are they?

TED WRIGHT
The Redman warehouse on Porter Street.
(MORE)

TED WRIGHT (CONT'D)
Whisper had a room fixed up in back, upstairs. Just give me time to grab a rattler out.

THE OP
I'll lay off for a few hours.

TED WRIGHT
Thanks, brother.

Whisper's best friend scurries out.

EXT. GREEN STREET - RUTLEDGE BUILDING - DAY

The building is long past any prime it ever had.

INT. RUTLEDGE BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY

The Op climbs a dimly lit staircase.

INT. CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN'S OFFICE - DAY

The Op waits in a dingy anteroom. Hardly a bustling practice.

DAWN'S CLERK, a milquetoast, emerges from the other room.

DAWN'S CLERK
Mr. Charles Proctor Dawn will see you now.

Behind a battered desk squats CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN: short, fat, 50s, with a graying Van Dyke as unkempt as his suit. He rests a hand on a drawer that's slightly open.

CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN
My dear sir. I'm gratified you had the good judgment to follow my counsel.

The Op takes a seat.

CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN (CONT'D)
As one who occupies a place of prominence in his community, I may say your interests will be best served by retaining me as your legal representative.

THE OP
What'll it cost?

CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN
That is of secondary importance. However, we shall say a thousand dollars now. Later, I--

THE OP
Why do I need a lawyer?

CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN
My dear sir, this is no matter for jest, I assure you.

THE OP
No joke. I'm stumped.

The shyster frowns. Clears his throat.

CHARLES PROCTOR DAWN
I shall be glad to elaborate upon your situation. However, I have a pressing appointment with Judge Leffner. Shall we say--
(checks a blank calendar)
--tomorrow at ten.

THE OP
See you then.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - THE OP'S ROOM - NIGHT

The Op smokes in bed. Thinking.

INT. THE OP'S ROOM - DAY

Dick Foley briefs the Op as he finishes dressing.

DICK
Hijacking last night. Four trucks of hooch burned.

THE OP
I guess Reno doesn't think much of O'Doole's specials.

Mickey Linehan lumbers in.

MICKEY
Rolff was at the girl's house alright. The Greek grocer on the corner saw him come out around nine yesterday morning.

THE OP
Did the Greek tell the cops?

MICKEY
He wasn't asked. A swell force this burg's got.

THE OP
Yeah. Dick and I just had a long conversation on the subject. Plus there's not one Mexican restaurant. I'm sick of steak and potatoes.

MICKEY
Well -- do we find Rolff for them?

THE OP
Rolff didn't do it. She was killed around three. And at eight-thirty the ice pick was still in her.

DICK
How do you know?

THE OP
I know because I'm telling you.

Dick just stares. Mickey grins awkwardly.

THE OP (CONT'D)
I have to see someone at ten. Hang around the lobby till I get back.

MICKEY
What about Whisper and Rolff?

THE OP
Likely they're dead.
(grins at Dick)
Yeah, I killed Cock Robin too.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

As the Op heads toward Dawn's office, Hank O'Marra pulls up.

O'MARRA
Reno wants to see you.

THE OP
Where will I find him?

O'MARRA
Jump in.

THE OP
Can’t now. Probably this afternoon.

O’MARRA
See Peak when you're ready.

O’Marra pulls away.

INT. RUTLEDGE BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY

The Op heads for the dim stairs -- and stops cold.

From the space under the stairs protrudes a shoe. And the ankle attached to the shoe.

Amid mops and brooms lies Mr. Charles Proctor Dawn -- graying Van Dyke stained red from a gash across his forehead.

The Op lifts Dawn’s coat. Pulls out a sheaf of papers and a small memoranda book.

Pats the other pockets. Nothing.

EXT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - SIDE DOOR - DAY

The Op slips in, avoiding Mickey and Dick.

INT. THE OP'S ROOM - DAY

The Op flips through Dawn’s memo book. Fragmentary notes. Meaningless addresses -- until he gets to “Helen Albury, 1229-A Hurricane Street.”

He shuffles the papers.... Nothing. Nothing.

Jackpot: four envelopes addressed to Dinah Brand.

He pulls out the letters.

Shaky writing, like an old man’s.

Love letters.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

The Op huddles in a corner with Mickey and Dick.

THE OP
Mickey, see what you can raise on Charles Proctor Dawn.
(MORE)

THE OP (CONT'D)
Lawyer on Green Street. Avoid his office, and don't put in a lot of time. I just want a rough line, quick. Dick and I are going to Hurricane Street.

EXT. 1229-A HURRICANE STREET - DAY

The doorbell is answered by a thin girl about 19. HELEN ALBURY chokes back a scream.

THE OP
Miss Helen Albury?

INT. 1229-A HURRICANE STREET - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Helen backs into the room. It’s barely furnished, but the windows give a swell view of Dinah Brand's house.

THE OP
(gently)
You’re Robert Albury's sister. When he killed Donald Wilson, you blamed Dinah Brand. You took this place to watch her house. The lawyer helped you out.

No response. The Op waves the love letters.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Who did the lawyer send to get these? Who did the killing?

She might as well be a pillar of salt.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Okay. I gave you your chance.

EXT. HURRICANE STREET - DAY

The Op leans into Dick’s car.

THE OP
Tail her. She’s Helen Albury. If she cuts up on you, haul her in. And watch out -- she's crazy as a cuckoo.

INT. GREAT WESTERN HOTEL - THE OP’S ROOM - DAY

Mickey briefs the Op.

MICKEY
Your three-named shyster is the guy in the joke. “Is he a criminal lawyer? Yes, very.” That fellow Albury -- his family hired Dawn to defend him, but Albury wouldn't have anything to do with him. Dawn nearly went over himself last year on a blackmail rap. Want me to keep digging?

THE OP
That's enough. We'll stick around till we hear from Dick.

MICKEY
I ran into Tommy Robbins. Consolidated sent him to cover all the doings. He says the other associations are sending reporters too. Wouldn’t it be swell--

The Op answers the phone.

DICK (V.O.)
She left pronto for Three-Ten Green Street. Full of cops. Mouthpiece named Dawn killed. Cops ran her in.

THE OP
Stay with O'Doole. Anything you learn, get it to me quick.

He hangs up and gives Mickey his room key.

THE OP (CONT'D)
Camp here. Take anything that comes for me and pass it on. I'll be at the Shannon around the corner, registered as J. W. Clark. Tell Dick and nobody else.

Mickey shrugs and smiles.

INT. SHANNON HOTEL - THE OP’S ROOM - DAY

The Op smokes. A knock.

THE OP
It’s open.

Dick Foley tosses him the Herald. The murders of Dinah Brand and Charles Proctor Dawn hog the front page.

DICK
Warrants out for you. Two counts murder. Cops are grilling Mickey.

THE OP
Yeah, I expected that.

DICK
(sharp)
So did I.

THE OP
You think I killed them, Dick?

DICK
Good time to say you didn’t.

THE OP
Go back to Frisco. I've got enough without keeping an eye on you too.

Slowly, Dick puts on his hat and shuts the door behind him.

The Op scans the article: “Detectives Shepp and Vanaman, who discovered Brand's body, have mysteriously vanished. Foul play on the part of the plotters is feared.”

He tears out the page, folds it, and puts it in a pocket.

INT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

The Op edges in, hat low, collar up. No cops around.

Peak comes over.

THE OP
Hank says Reno wants to see me.

PEAK
Know Kid McLeod's place?

EXT. MCLEOD’S PLACE - NIGHT

A MCLEOD CRONY answers the door.

THE OP
Looking for Kid McLeod.

INT. MCLEOD'S PLACE - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

An old man with a dirty collar plays solitaire: KID MCLEOD.

THE OP
Reno sent for me.

McLeod motions to a boy in his early teens: SONNY.

MONTAGE

The Op follows Sonny out the back door.

Down an alley.

Across a vacant lot.

Through a gate and up to a door.

The boy knocks.

SONNY
It's Sonny with a guy the Kid sent.

A stocky man -- FAT -- opens the door.

INT. RENO'S HIDEOUT - PARLOR - NIGHT

A LOOKOUT keeps an eye to the crack under the blinds. The Op and Reno share a tatty sofa.

RENO
When I fixed up that Tanner alibi,
I told you I needed friends.

THE OP
You got one.

RENO
The Finn threw in with O'Doole.

THE OP
I noticed.

RENO
That lines up the bulls and the
beer mob.
(MORE)

RENO (CONT'D)
While me and Whisper are trying to shiv each other, those bums will chew us up.

THE OP
I was thinking the same thing.

RENO
If Whisper calls a truce for a few days, we can put our mobs together and take care of the Finn. Then we'll have plenty of time to gun among ourselves. Put it to him cold. He'll listen to you.

THE OP
Whisper's dead.

RENO
That so?

THE OP
Dan Rolff killed him yesterday in the Redman warehouse. Stuck him with the ice pick Whisper used on the girl.

RENO
You know this? You're not just running off at the head?

THE OP
I know it.

RENO
None of his mob act like he's gone.

THE OP
They don't know, except Ted Wright.

RENO
That sap. I'd have given him twice as much for the straight dope.

THE OP
Suppose Whisper's mob thinks he's alive and back in the can. They blasted him out when Noonan copped him. Think they'd try again?

RENO
Keep talking.

THE OP
If his mob tries to crack the jail, they'll keep the specials busy -- while you go after Pete.

The Op gets up. His work here is done.

RENO
This is as good a spot for you as any, with the bulls out. And we'll need a guy like you on this party.

The Op would rather skip the party but doesn't show it.

LATER

Men and smoke fill the room. Reno hangs up the phone.

RENO
Let's take a ride.

EXT. RENO'S HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Reno, the Op, and five other men climb into a curtained touring car -- Hank O'Marra at the wheel.

Reno hands the Op a heavy black valise.

RENO
Don't rassle that around too much.

INT. RENO'S CAR (DRIVING) - NIGHT

At a cross street, another car pulls in front of them. A third falls in behind.

The Op studies the valise.

EXT. PETE THE FINN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The lead car disappears around a corner. Reno's car stops at a brick three-story with no lights showing.

RENO
Get it open. We got to work fast.

The Op unfastens the valise: pipe bombs packed in sawdust.

Reno grabs a bomb, hops out, and heaves it at the front door.

Debris pelts the lawn.

O’Marra tosses a bomb through the open doorway.

The blast blows out the downstairs windows.

Gunshots behind the house: the first car joining the action.

O'Marra clutches his throat. The shots that drop him come from the house next door.

RENO (CONT'D)
Burn ‘em out, Fat.

Fat hurls a bomb at the neighboring house.

Flames erupt.

In Finn’s house, smoke billows from the windows.

PETE THE FINN (O.S.)
Reno!

RENO
Yeah!

PETE THE FINN (O.S.)
It’s Pete! We're done! Don't shoot!

RENO
You come first! Mitts on your head!

The blaze next door illuminates Pete as he emerges -- hands on his head, face bleeding.

RENO (CONT'D)
You lousy fish-eater!

Reno shoots him dead, and hurls the last bomb inside.

Everyone scrambles back in the car.

A stray bullet must have hit the engine. It’s dead.

Reno leans on the horn to summon the lead car.

In a moment it roars up.

Reno and the Op cram inside.

The overflow hang on the running boards as the driver heads back, followed by the tail car.

EXT. PERSONVILLE - OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

Ahead, a car swings across the road and belches gunfire.

RENO
Hired cops, the bastards! Pile out!

The tail car pulls up and returns fire.

As Reno’s car empties, the Op darts into a blind alley.

Climbs onto a garbage can and vaults the wall.

Drops into a yard with an angry terrier.

Over a gate.

Down a clothes line gauntlet.

Across two more yards.

And emerges in a back street. The gunfire is faint now.

EXT. ELIHU WILSON’S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

The Op walks toward Elihu’s mansion.

Up the street, a black coupe starts up and rolls toward him.

The Op darts behind a tree -- his hand near his gun.

The coupe comes abreast.

MICKEY
Thought you might come up here.

INT. MICKEY'S CAR (PARKED) - NIGHT

The Op settles into the passenger seat.

THE OP
How'd you make out with O'Doole?

MICKEY
Played dumb. I happened to hit town and run into you. Old friends. Then all hell broke loose, so I back-windowed them.

THE OP
That was Whisper’s boys. How did they do?

MICKEY
The cops got a tip. Shot the hell out of them. What's Reno up to?

THE OP
Performing surgery without a license. He just removed Pete's guts with a .38.

MICKEY
Brother, when you stir, you stir.... Seen Dick?

THE OP
I sent him home. He seems to think I killed Dinah Brand.

He stares at Mickey, as if asking if he thinks so too.

MICKEY
Well, you didn't lift her dough and her pretties.

THE OP
Neither did the killer. They were still there when I left. Dan Rolff wouldn't have taken them either.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The ice pick protrudes from Dinah's breast. The Op studies her bruised cheek and wrist.

THE OP (V.O.)
Rolff wasn't strong enough to rough up a mouse. I figure he showed up after I left, took the sticker, and went hunting for Whisper. Then the cops got there--

INT. MICKEY'S CAR (PARKED) - NIGHT

The Op fishes out the Herald clipping. Mickey shines a flashlight.

THE OP
The cops.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Detective Vanaman scoops up the cash and jewels.

Shepp rifles a drawer. He finds the love letters.

THE OP (V.O.)
The letters looked like a nice payday. But Shepp and Vanaman needed cover, so they took them to the lawyer. He was killed before he could sell them.

INT. MICKEY'S CAR (PARKED) - NIGHT

The Op tucks the clipping back in his pocket.

THE OP
Shepp and Vanaman were afraid the letters would be traced back to them. So they lit out.

MICKEY
Fair enough. But it doesn't finger the killers.

THE OP
It clears the way some. Let’s go.

MICKEY
Old Elihu?

THE OP
Not yet.

EXT. REDMAN WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Mickey’s headlights hit a street sign: Porter Street.

He stops near a long warehouse.

EXT. REDMAN WAREHOUSE - REAR ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Mickey shines his flashlight on the back door. The lock is freshly scratched and dented, as if by a jimmy.

THE OP
(whispers)
Not cops.

The Op eases it open enough for them to squeeze in.

INT. REDMAN WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

They pause, guns drawn. Mickey plays his light around.

Across the vast space is an open doorway to another room.

They cover the distance noiselessly.

Beyond the doorway, Mickey’s light finds a set of stairs.

They creep up -- straining not to make a sound.

At the top: a small landing and a closed door.

The four gunshots beyond the door sound like a cannon.

The Op and Mickey barge in.

Mickey’s flashlight finds Reno’s stiletto -- buried to the hilt in the man lying on a cot: Whisper.

The Op and Mickey pull Reno off as Whisper dies.

The body on the floor by the cot is Dan Rolff.

Reno sways. The Op eases him into a chair.

THE OP
How bad?

RENO
He put all four in me.

MICKEY
I’ll call a doctor.

RENO
No good. I got no more belly than Jack Sprat.... Did you know he wasn't croaked?

THE OP
No. I gave it to you the way I got it from Ted Wright.

RENO
Yeah. I came to make sure.

INT. REDMAN WAREHOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Moonlight through the windows falls across Whisper’s ghostly face. Eyes closed. A bloody bandage around his waist.

Stiletto in hand, Reno creeps toward the cot.

Whisper brings up his .38.

RENO (V.O.)
Ted left too soon.

INT. REDMAN WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A crimson puddle forms under Reno’s chair.

RENO
How’d you figure you didn't croak her?

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The Op lies on the floor in a laudanum haze, staring up at the yellow orb of the table lamp.

Night morphs to day ... and the lamp is out.

THE OP (V.O.)
The lights were on when I passed out. They were off when I woke up.

INT. REDMAN WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The pool under Reno’s chair widens.

THE OP
There were reasons for counting out Whisper and Rolff. That left you -- especially after the lawyer wound up dead. But damned if I know why.

RENO
It was her own fault.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Dinah on the phone.

DINAH
Whisper's coming. Now’s your chance to lay for him.

EXT. DINAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Reno watches from the shadows. Checks his watch.

RENO (V.O.)
Except Whisper don't show.

INT. DINAH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Reno confronts Dinah. The Op is passed out on the floor.

RENO (V.O.)
She don’t say Whisper came and went before I got there. You were hopped, and she was afraid to let him in. Now I think it's me being set up.

Reno slaps Dinah. She falls on the couch.

She grabs the ice pick off the coffee table.

Reno grabs her wrist.

In the struggle -- the briefest of struggles -- the pick plunges into her heart.

Dinah gasps and collapses.

Reno thinks.

He drags her body beside the Op.

RENO (V.O.)
There you were to take the fall.

Reno wipes the ice pick handle.

He wraps the Op’s fingers around it. Leaving prints.

One by one the lights go off. The room goes dark.

INT. REDMAN WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Reno’s as dead as Whisper. The Op and Mickey are gone.

INT. MICKEY'S CAR (PARKED) - NIGHT

Near Elihu’s mansion, the Op gets out.

THE OP
Keep the meter running.

EXT. WILSON MANSION - NIGHT

The foyer light goes on. The door is opened by the chauffeur in his undershirt, clutching a pool cue.

CHAUFFEUR
He doesn't want to see you again.

The Op hands him one of the love letters.

THE OP
Tell him in five minutes I'll take the rest to Tommy Robbins of the Consolidated Press.

INT. WILSON MANSION - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The letter is crushed in Elihu's fist.

THE OP
Send the flunkey away. I'm not going to hurt you.

ELIHU
(to the chauffeur)
Get out!

With a parting glare at the Op, the chauffeur leaves.

THE OP
And maybe lower your voice so Texas won't hear what a sap you are.

ELIHU
Where did you get them?

THE OP
From the shyster you hired.

ELIHU
Blackmail.

THE OP
Hah! You came crying that naughty men took your town away. I just gave it back. That's some strange blackmail. Now listen for once.
(MORE)

THE OP (CONT'D)
You own the mayor and the governor, so you'll tell them you need the National Guard because your cops are more crooked than the crooks. Then you can hire a nice new force and have a nice clean town. Unless you spoil it again.

He drops the letters on the bed.

ELIHU
(sneers)
What kind of detective are you?

THE OP
What kind of father are you?

Elihu’s sneer vanishes.

EXT. MICKEY'S CAR - DAWN

Mickey gets out, the Op takes the wheel.

THE OP
The job's yours now. I should be in the clear but you know Poisonville. I'll drive the coupe to some way station and catch a train for Ogden. I’ll be at the Roosevelt as P.F. King -- fixing up my reports for the Old Man. Let me know when I should take my own name again -- or buy a ticket for Mexico.

INT. CANTINA MARGARITA - DAY (DAYS LATER)

In a corner booth, the Op makes a dent in a big plate of beans and rice. A MEXICAN WAITRESS passes.

MEXICAN WAITRESS
Mas, senor?

THE OP
Gracias, no.

After a moment, two figures slide into the booth.

Mickey and Dick.

MICKEY
You’re off the beaten path.

THE OP
I said I was tired of steak and potatoes. *Que pasa?*

MICKEY
Thought you'd like to know -- Personville is quiet as a grave.

THE OP
So Dick tells me.

Mickey does a double take. Dick is mute.

The Op swallows a forkful of beans and rice.

MICKEY
So -- what now?

THE OP
You mean where now.

MICKEY
Huh?

THE OP
Buena Vista Hills. Seems there's shenanigans in the oil fields.
(pats his mouth)
I need a hand or two. The Old Man says I can have my pick.

The light dawns. Mickey grins.

You could swear Dick is on the brink of a smile.

The Op looks out the window.

Lammed it to Mexico? What a laugh. How could the Old Man fire his best operative?

Beyond the window, the Golden Gate Bridge gleams.

FADE OUT.

THE END