

FILM NOIR ANTHOLOGY 2:

THE CRIME LORD

A new one-act comedy

by Greg Machlin

Greg Machlin

Ph: (207)-649-1714
gregmachlin@gmail.com

Cast of Characters:

BOBBY BLUES	An accomplished jazz musician who always carries his instrument with him
THE ACCOUNTANT	Good with numbers; carries ledgers & lots of pencils.
TONY THE TOOTH	Mentioned in “Film Noir Anthology 1” (FNA1). Has one prominent tooth, but he uses it well.
DEPUTY MAYOR GOODROCK	A heroic progressive in the mold of Corey Booker/Elizabeth Warren. May reappear in FNA3.
DETECTIVE BUKOWSKI	Bears <u>no</u> resemblance to novelist Charles Bukowski. Seriously. None whatsoever. Nope.
GAVIN GAVINI	Bitter over events in FNA1.
PHEM PHATAL	A dazzling dame straight out of <u>Out of the Past</u> .
LOLITA THE SEXY NARRATOR	Still sexy. A bit more involved in this play.
MARLOW PHILLIPS	Our hero. A classic Noir detective; smarter than he was in FNA1.
TRULY LOYELLE	Marlow’s secretary, probably with a strong nasal New York accent (Adelaide in <i>Guys & Dolls</i>). Pretty if she’d just lose those glasses.
HARD BOILED	A cynical, seen-it-all reporter. A Greg Palast type.
MYSTERIOUS MAN	The New Crime Lord! And one of the characters already listed.
NEWS ANNOUNCER	(voice only) The news.
ANNOYED RESIDENT	(voice only) It’s a late night, for God’s sake.

Possible Double Casting (5M, 3W)

BOBBY BLUES/MAYOR GOODROCK
 TONY THE TOOTH/DETECTIVE BUKOWSKI
 HARD BOILED/THE OPTOMETRIST.
 MYSTERIOUS MAN/GAVIN GAVINI

Set Notes

The following locations appear in this play: A criminal lair; the top of the Howard Hawks building (the tallest building in Noirtown); Marlow Phillips' office; a jail cell; a police officer's desk; a Ferris Wheel at a carnival; and a booth at a carnival.

Also, the Deputy Mayor speaks to an unseen crowd (which could be the audience).

When Rebecca Nyahay directed the first Film Noir play, she took a minimalist approach which works very well; suggesting locations with a few items should also work well for productions of this play.

SCENE

(BOBBY BLUES, THE ACCOUNTANT, and TONY THE TOOTH have gathered at a crime syndicate's meeting.)

BOBBY BLUES

I'm playin' the blues tonight.

THE ACCOUNTANT

Ever since Big Boss up & disappeared, we're *all* playin' the blues.

TONY THE TOOTH

Grrrr... arrrr... ahhhh, it's just not the same without the thugs.
(sniff)

I miss those guys.

BOBBY BLUES

The man didn't disappear. He just doesn't want to be a crime lord; he's a Sleep Demon.

TONY THE TOOTH

But we gotta have a crime lord.

THE ACCOUNTANT

Agreed. All great cities have crime lords. Chicago: Al Capone. New York: The heads of the Five Families. And Honolulu: The Legendary Shark Bait.

TONY THE TOOTH

Shark bait?

THE ACCOUNTANT

That's what his enemies said. They laughed, oh yes. They *underestimated* him. And they were completely caught off guard when he killed them. Thus Shark Bait remained the Crime Lord of Honolulu for 22 years. Until he died.

BOBBY BLUES

How did he die?

(pause)

THE ACCOUNTANT

(staring straight ahead)

He was eaten by a shark.

(TONY THE TOOTH and BOBBY BLUES burst out laughing. THE ACCOUNTANT glares.)

THE ACCOUNTANT

Go ahead and laugh! You wouldn't have been laughing if you messed with the wrong people out in Hawaii! No! You would have been killed!

BOBBY BLUES

How would he have killed us?

(pause)

THE ACCOUNTANT

Never mind.

TONY THE TOOTH

I guess he would have fed us to a shark.

(They both laugh.)

THE ACCOUNTANT

Enough! Let's get down to business. I have an invitation.

(A trenchcoated figure appears in silhouette.)

VOICE

Dear Bobby, Tony, and The Accountant:

Nature hates a vacuum. That's why it tends to clog their bags with pine needles. But seriously. Big Boss's transformation has opened up a power vacuum in this city of the damned. Meet me on top of Howard Hawks Towers at 11:45 PM sharp. And I'll explain how we can take over Noirtown.

Sincerely yours... Mysterious Stranger.

(pause.)

THE ACCOUNTANT

So, do you think we should go to the meeting?

TONY THE TOOTH

Arrrrrg!

THE ACCOUNTANT

One yes.

BOBBY BLUES

Jazz is a collaborative art form. I vote yes.

THE ACCOUNTANT

All right. We'll see what this mystery man has to offer.

BOBBY BLUES

Do we need to bring protection?

THE ACCOUNTANT

The usual. It wouldn't make sense for him to kill any of us, though. He *needs* us.

(Scene: Night. The rooftops of the Howard Haks Towers, tallest building in Noirtown. The Mysterious Man stays hidden in the shadows.)

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Welcome all.

I'm gonna be your new crime lord. You know why? 'Cause I know all the angles, that's why. I know how cops think, I know how detectives think—and I know how we think. So let me tell you what you're gonna do.

TONY THE TOOTH

Maybe we don't want you as our crime Lord. Maybe *I* could be a crime Lord.

(MYSTERIOUS MAN approaches TONY. TONY eyes him coolly.)

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Maybe—

(grabs Tony and throws him over the building.)

TONY

AAAAAAGGGGGHHHHHH— (bump) AAAAGHOOWW (bump)
AAAAAAGHHHOOWWWWWAAAAA

(Splat.)

(The hardened criminals look on in horror.)

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Or maybe not.

Anybody *else* have any objections??

(The others shake their heads.)

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Good. I'll lay it out for ya.

The only thing we have to worry about is...

(Lolita enters.)

LOLITA

Phillips. Marlow Phillips.

(Noir music possibly: “You’re Mine—So Fine.”
begins as the crooks slowly fade to backstage,
gets a red spotlight for her entrance. Lolita
She lights a match off the dead TONY THE TOOTH’S
shoe and lights her cigarette.)

Welcome to Noirtown. I’m Lolita the sexy narrator and your host for the evening. One detective is putting away the bad guys using his brains more than his brawn. But crimedoers never rest. So let’s set the scene: It’s a six days after Marlow Phillips and Gavin Gavini solved the case of the Sleep Demon & Big Boss left for good. Marlow enters his office.

(MARLOW enters his office. His loyal SECRETARY is already
there.)

SECRETARY LOYELLE

Good morning, Mr. Phillips.

MARLOW PHILLIPS

Let me tell ya something, dame. Everybody’s got an angle. And I don’t know what yours is yet, see? Just because you’ve got great gams that stretch from the floor to St. Louis, don’t think you’ll get away with anything!

LOYELLE

You say that every morning, Mr. Phillips.

MARLOW

I know. It’s the stress from all my new cases! I’m more tightly wound than an out-of-tune violin.

LOYELLE

Say, Mr. Phillips, speaking of stress, and possible ways to reduce it, I was wondering... they’re showing Double Indemnity and Out of the Past tonight on a double bill at the Roxie, and I—

MARLOW

Sure, sure, kid. Take the night off—I’ll even buy your ticket
(throws her some change.)

LOYELLE

Oh, but I—

MARLOW

Yeah, I know they raised their prices to ten bucks a pop. But just give ‘em my name. That’s Phillips. Marlow Phillips.

(A knock at the door.)

LOYELLE

Phillips Detective Enterprises, Incorporated. You may come in!

(Phem Phatal enters. Possibly music for her entrance. She is, of course, a femme fatale—ideally a brunette. Wearing a veil. Black dress. Not *too* risqué, but kinda slinky.)

PHATAL

Oh, Mr. Phillips, I’m so glad you’re in.

MARLOW

I’m always “in,” doll-face. In... style.

PHATAL

I just don’t know what to do. I... I don’t know where to begin... I
 (she removes her handkerchief and cries quietly into it.)
 They killed my husband last week.

MARLOW

Gee, I’m sorry to hear that, Ms....

PHATAL

Phatal. Phem Phatal.

(to secretary)

That’s P-h-e-m, P-h-a-t-a-l.

Oh, Mr. Phillips.

(She walks over to him, faints, and tries to collapse in his arms. He’s lost in thought and doesn’t see her or move to catch her. She hits the floor.)

MARLOW

This dame knew all the angles, but I was one step ahead –
 (he notices she’s fallen)

Holy Moley!

LOYELLE

Would you like a glass of water?

PHATAL

Oh no, I'm quite all right...

(She gets up.)

Oh, Mr. Phillips...

(this time, she grabs his arm, wraps it around her, and faints.)

MARLOW

Oh! Gosh! Uh... say, dame—uh... sheesh... kinda heavy for someone so slinky...

(she yanks on his arm)

Ow!

(looks at her)

I mean... you're beautiful.

PHATAL

Oh, Mr. Phillips!

MARLOW

And you know what? You're beautiful, so I'll take the case. I can't imagine how a woman as beautiful as you could ever lead a guy astray.

(Sings to himself)

“HATS OFF, HERE THEY COME, THOSE BEAUTIFUL GIRLS...
THAT'S WHAT YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR...”

PHATAL

“NATURE NEVER FASHIONED A FLOWER SO FAIR...”

(They begin to dance together. Secretary glares.)

PHATAL

NO ROSE CAN COMPARE

MARLOW

NOTHING RESPECTABLE

MARLOW AND PHATAL

HALF SO DELECTABLE¹

LOYELLE

Ahem!

Any further singing and we'll be sued by Mr. Sondheim for copyright violation.

(MARLOW & PHEM look vaguely ashamed, but don't break apart.)

¹ The song is the first verse of “Beautiful Girls,” from the musical Follies, by Stephen Sondheim (the opening number, track 2 on most CDs of Follies).

Ah.

MARLOW

Er.

PHATAL

Where were we?

MARLOW

The case. Her husband.

LOYELLE

MARLOW
(leaps back, papers flying)
You've got a husband?!

PHATAL

Well, he's dead.

MARLOW

Oh, thank God.

(pause.)

LOYELLE
Perhaps you would like to ask *Mrs.* Phatal who her husband was and what circumstances he *died* under.

MARLOW

Right. Uh... say, dollface--

LOYELLE
Oh forget it, I'll do it myself.
(she pulls out a clipboard)
Who was your husband?

PHATAL
Mr. Harry Roth, President and CEO of Roth enterprises, Incorporated.

(Silence. Marlow whistles.)

MARLOW

Oh, you're *that* Phem Phatal...

PHATAL

Indeed.

(We see the following re-enacted by an actor playing Harry. As LOYELLE and MARLOW watch the re-enactment, PHATAL slips papers into two of Marlow's desk drawers—if the desk doesn't have drawers, hide them somewhere.)

PHATAL

It was last Friday... Harry was enmeshed in some... tax problems or something. And I told him... I told him, he'd been spending so much time with his business that I...

(quiet sob)

I didn't love him anymore. And I ran out. I assume that he was *stricken* with grief and he stabbed himself in the stomach. But... he was still heartbroken, so he drank some cyanide. And when that didn't do the trick, he threw himself out of his window.

LOYELLE

I read it was thick plate glass.

PHATAL

I can't remember.

MARLOW

Do you think he was... *murdered*?

PHATAL

NO! No. No. Definitely suicide.

(pause)

MARLOW

So why are you here?

PHATAL

The police... they think I'm— tied up in his death somehow. Just because I inherited \$336.4 million dollars. But that's impossible. I *loved* Harry. Oh, Marlow, Marlow, will you take my case?

I can pay *very* handsomely...

MARLOW

Really. Can you pay... one hundred bucks a day... plus expenses?

PHATAL

I think I can manage that.

(She drops a cool grand on the table.)

MARLOW

Holy cow. You dropped a cool grand. You're rolling in dough!

PHATAL

I'll be seeing you, Mr. Phillips.

(She saunters to the door.)
(LOYELLE turns to MARLOW.)

LOYELLE

Just taking a water break, boss.

(She follows PHEM out.)

LOYELLE

I hope you had fun in there. Making eyes at Mr. Phillips. He's a good man, you know. He doesn't deserve that.

(PHATAL looks at the LOYELLE, rushes over, and grasps her hands.)

PHATAL

Oh, I know what you must think of me! But don't hate me! Just because we love the same man... we can still be friends.

LOYELLE

You really love him?

PHATAL

Oh... I've loved him since before I saw him. That trenchcoat... those cigarettes...

LOYELLE

Don't think I won't be keeping my eye on you.

PHATAL

I'd expect nothing less. Good day, Ms...

LOYELLE

Loyelle is the name. Truly Loyelle.

(PHATAL leaves. LOYELLE returns to the office.)

(Lights up on the Deputy Mayor, a Hubert Humphreyesque, Paul Wellstone-type progressive. He's addressing an unseen crowd—maybe the audience.)

DEPUTY MAYOR GOODROCK

And I'll tell you what. we're gonna shut down Roth Enterprises, and all the other polluters, and send its new CEO to prison! And I'm stating for the record that I'm a *little bit suspicious* of the circumstances under which the CEO, Harry Roth, *died!* Just before he was getting ready to testify before the U.S. Senate!

You know, we do some cracking down here, maybe we'll actually have people obeying the law. Oh, and here's a thought—the state legislature has the right to revoke Roth enterprises' charter. We'll shut 'em down! I don't care!

(Lights down on the Mayor.)

(Detective BUKOWSKI arrives at MARLOW' office. He saunters in without knocking, displaying his badge.)

BUKOWSKI

Afternoon, Phillips.

MARLOW

Detective Bukowski. What brings you here today?

BUKOWSKI

Checking out a tip on the Roth case. You didn't have anything to do with it, did it?

MARLOW

Me? No... no, I'm investigating it. Really.

BUKOWSKI

(sarcastic)

Wow, maybe you'll do as good as you did with the Sleep Demon.

MARLOW

The Sleep Demon case was one of my biggest triumphs!

BUKOWSKI

Come on, Phillips. Everyone knows Gavin Gavini did all the hard work on that case.

(Marlow is momentarily stunned. Bukowski goes to the desk and begins to open the drawers. As he finds items, he holds them up.)

Huh. A map of Roth Enterprises office, with Roth's office marked in red.

(opens another drawer)

A series of letters.

(opens one and reads)

“Dear Marlow... Tonight is the night! Kill Roth and I shall be yours forever. Signed, mysterious woman who is leading you astray.”

(finds one more sheet)

A diagram showing a stick figure getting stabbed, poisoned, and thrown out a window by another stick figure in a fedora and trenchcoat.

Phillips... this seems like an awful lot of circumstantial evidence.

MARLOW

This is crazy! I didn't even know the guy!

BUKOWSKI

One of our guys spotted his wife entering your office today... and said there was some hanky-panky.

MARLOW

Hanky-Panky? None of it!

BUKOWSKI

You embraced her!

MARLOW

She fainted! She wanted me to investigate her husband's death!

BUKOWSKI

Investigate the murder you committed? That is clever!

MARLOW

This is ridiculous.

BUKOWSKI

Yeah. I'm gonna have to take you in.

MARLOW

Whattaya gonna do after that, have a **Ham on Rye** down at the **Post Office**?

(The audience may miss this reference... sigh... so maybe Marlow has the two books & holds them up.)

BUKOWSKI

All right, that's enough of that! Look, Phillips, cops know your stupidity is legendary, but I never figured you for a murderer.

MARLOW

I'm not! You can't do this to me! I'm innocent!

BUKOWSKI

Marlow. That's what they all say. You're a detective. You oughta know that.

LOYELLE

But you can't arrest him! You just can't!

BUKOWSKI

Sorry, Miss. Better find yourself another boss.

(BUKOWSKI leads a stunned MARLOW offstage.
The news comes on.)

NEWS ANNOUNCER' S VOICE

Tonight: Shocking news in Noirtown: Ace Private Eye Marlow Phillips accused of killing Harry Roth! Yes, letters found by a mysterious woman in Marlow's office led Marlow astray down the path of sin.

(LOLITA listens.)

LOLITA

Oh, brother. Time for some narrative intervention. Watch and learn, ladies and gentlemen.

(LOLITA arrives at the station where Marlow is being held.)

LOLITA

Hi. I'm Lolita the Sexy Narrator. If he doesn't get out of prison, we don't have a play.

BUKOWSKI

Maybe I don't want a play, dame! Maybe I want a novel, or tough-guy poetry.

LOLITA

Oooh, tough-guy poetry. *So* impressive. Manly man.

BUKOWSKI

Hey, baby, I sing the cool hard jazz blues of the workin' man who hates his job but can't quit.

LOLITA

Enough of your white-man blues. How much is... bail?

BUKOWSKI

We set it at \$200,000.

LOLITA

(whistles)

That's not cheap.

BUKOWSKI

No it is not.

(LOLITA pulls out a roll of \$10,000 bills and counts off twenty of them.)

BUKOWSKI

Hey... where'd a dame like you get that kinda money?

LOLITA

I'm the Sexy Narrator. I can do things like that.

BUKOWSKI

Look, I gotta figure out if these are real or not.

LOLITA

(smiling)

Take your time.

(beat)

BUKOWSKI

The money. I *meant* the money. Not your... never mind.

(LOYELLE arrives.)

(BUKOWSKI exits. He reemerges with MARLOW.)

BUKOWSKI

Well, Phillips, looks like you got friends in high places. You posted bail. But you're still our prime suspect. And you better not leave Noirtown.

(LOYELLE embraces MARLOW.)

LOYELLE

Oh, Marlow! I'm so glad you're all right.

MARLOW

Yeah, yeah, dollface. Sheesh.

(They exit the Police Station.)

MARLOW

So now what. Who's trying to frame me for murder?

LOYELLE

It's probably Phem. I think she killed her husband.

MARLOW

Yeah... she's a looker, but she's trouble. But I think there's more to it than that—this ain't a one-man show we're dealing with here.

LOYELLE

She wants to meet you.

MARLOW

When and where?

LOYELLE

The Traveling Circus... sunset tonight.

MARLOW

All right.

(That evening. In a Ferris Wheel.)

PHATAL

Oh, Marlow, Marlow... I didn't think you'd come.

MARLOW

Stuff it dame. You framed me for murder & ya killed your husband. And not just for the money. He'd decided to go clean, hadn't he? But that would have brought the criminal enterprises—enterprises *you* were intimately involved with—smashing down. You were looking at a long

PHATAL

Yes. Yes, I did it and I'm glad, Marlow. In this world, you do whatever you need to do to survive. Harry didn't see that.

(she grabs his hand)

But maybe you do. You know there's no hope. The real criminals work in offices on the top floors of big buildings, they steal *billions* of dollars and make billions legally profiting off of war. And nobody can touch them. Nobody can bring them down.

Certainly not a small time detective who got a little lucky. And Marlow... if you can't beat them, *join them. Join me.*

Don't tell me you don't find my ennui seductive.

MARLOW

Doll-face, I...

PHATAL

Look down there, at all those little dots. Do you really mean to tell me that if someone offered you \$200,000 to squish just one, you'd turn them down?

(pause)

(The Ferris Wheel rotates around and lands.
Detective Bukowski is standing there.)

BUKOWSKI

You get it?

(MARLOW pulls out a tape recorder.)

MARLOW

Yeah. I got it.

PHATAL

You sold me up the river like a cheap bale of cotton, Marlow.
(pause)

I admire that.

LOLITA

Come on, sweets. It was fun while it lasted, but that's part of the price you pay for being a murderous temptress.
That's why I practice nonviolent temptressing. Much healthier.

(BUKOWSKI and LOLITA lead PHEM away as DEPUTY
MAYOR GOODROCK enters to read a statement to the
audience.)

DEPUTY MAYOR GOODROCK

I'd like to thank Detective Bukowski & Marlow Phillips for their efforts. This only goes to show that there's some *serious* corruption at Roth, Inc., and our investigation has to move forward full steam ahead. We're reviewing some important new evidence.

(Back to the carnival. GAVIN GAVINI's there.)

GAVINI

Phillips.

MARLOW

Gavini.

GAVINI

Guess you solved this one on your own. Nice work.

MARLOW

Not yet, Gavini. This thing goes deeper. Who's the new crime lord? Who was Phatal protecting when she killed her husband? What about the Senate investigations? There are more loose ends in this case than... than... there's a lot of loose ends. I dunno. What brings you to the carnival?

GAVINI

(pulls out a number, smiling)

Planning on having my vision checked. I'm number 537.

(hands him another number)

You can be 536 if you want.

(indicates a carnival OPTOMETRIST.)

Gag glasses. What'll they think of next?

MARLOW

Thanks, Gavini. Glad you're not sore over that Sleep Demon business.

GAVINI

Life goes on, right? Besides, those mushrooms are kinda fun.

OPTOMETRIST

536. Calling number 536.

GAVINI

Well, your number's up, Marlow.

MARLOW

Indeed. I'll see you in a few, Gavini.

GAVINI

Yeah. I think I've got something on the Crime Lord.

(THE OPTOMETRIST stands in front of his booth. There doesn't have to be a booth; a sign'll be fine. He has a suspicious and menacing air about him. During their conversation, GAVINI disappears unseen by MARLOW.)

THE OPTOMETRIST

You've been having vision problems.

MARLOW

(playing along)

Sure, sure. I'm as blind as an umpire making calls against the home team.

THE OPTOMETRIST

No wonder. You need new glasses.

(handing him a pair of glasses—Grouch Marx glasses, maybe?)

These should help.

MARLOW

Thanks, pal.

THE OPTOMETRIST

Don't mention it.

(he begins to take down his sign.)

MARLOW

Hey, but you've got another customer—

(looks around)

Where'd he go?

THE OPTOMETRIST

I don't see anyone.

(lights up on the Secretary in the office. The phone rings. She answers it.)

SECRETARY

Hello?

(pause)

Oh, yes, we're so glad his name was cleared.

(pause)

The who? The new Crime Lord? Tonight?

(pause)

I'll tell him.

(A phone rings at the OPTOMETRIST'S booth. He answers it.)

THE OPTOMETRIST

It's for you.

(MARLOW answers it.)

MARLOW

Marlow Phillips, Private Eye.

(pause)

The top of the Howard Hawks towers? I'll see you there.

(Scene: The top of the Howard Hawks.
MARLOW wears the Groucho Marx glasses.)

MARLOW

This is it, Phillips. This is your moment. You got nobody to help you out... nobody...

(GAVINI steps out of the shadows, wearing

whatever the MYSTERIOUS STRANGER was wearing.)

...except my pal Gavin Gavini!

GAVINI

Hello, Marlow. So now you see.

MARLOW

Yeah, I've got these new glasses...

Ya know, Gavini, it's a good thing you're here. I'm supposed to meet this new crime lord in a few minutes. He's the guy who's surging into the power vacuum left behind by Big Boss like a bunch of junk left on the beach after a tidal wave.

GAVINI

Uh, Marlow...

MARLOW

I mean this thing goes straight to the top, Gavini! To the Mayor's Office... and beyond!

GAVINI

Marlow! How *stupid* are you?! *I'm* the new Crime Lord.

MARLOW

What? Ah, I get it! Infiltrate the gang, then bring 'em down from the inside.

GAVINI

No. Just turn to a life of crime and accumulate massive amounts of money and power. You see, I realized crime *does* pay. Being a good detective doesn't. And now! We're gonna have it out!

You get Lolita the Sexy Narrator! I never did. You get the thanks of a powerful Sleep Demon! I never did. You get to be a lead in life. I'm just a supporting character! But it's over now, Phillips. You've climbed to the top, but it's a long way down.

MARLOW

You little double-crossing bastard. Bring. It. On.

(GAVINI swings at Marlow. Marlow dodges. He swings back, and tries to sweep Gavini's legs out from under him. Gavini is thrown off balance. They fight. Marlow accidentally stabs Gavini with his Groucho Marx glasses in the fight. Gavini gasps and falls to the ground.)

MARLOW

Ah, come on, Gavini, it's just a flesh wound.

GAVINI

Ahhh... ah... your glasses... were *poisoned*...

MARLOW

So it's true. You really were trying to kill me!

GAVINI

That's what I've been... ow... trying to tell you...

MARLOW

So how did you become a Crime Lord?

GAVINI

The mushrooms I got from the Sleep Demon. They gave me visions & showed me the way. That, and a little intimidation and instinct. I'm kind of a natural at this Crime Lord thing.

MARLOW

Gavini, I'm disappointed in you.

GAVINI

Yeah... I ordered Phem Phatal to do the frame-up. She's been working for us. And we were gonna do this thing with a goat... say you had relations with one... but, Marlow, come closer...

(MARLOW approaches, bends down low, puts his ear to GAVINI'S MOUTH. As GAVINI speaks, he slowly pulls his gun out.)

GAVINI

What I wanted to tell you... what I wanted to say...

(His gun is caught on part of his coat.)

GAVINI

The thing... the important thing... I have to tell you...

(GAVINI fires!)
(Click.)

GAVINI

Damnn. I forgot to reload.

MARLOW

Still trying to kill me. Gavini, your number's up.

GAVINI

537.

MARLOW

What?

GAVINI

My number. From the carnival. 537.

(He pulls out his number.)

MARLOW

The boys upstairs are callin' 537. Will it be Heaven or Hell for you, Gavini? Heaven or Hell?

GAVINI

Oh, probably a little of both, I expect.

(GAVINI dies.)

(HARD-BOILED, a reporter, arrives at the top of the Howard Hawks towers, out of breath.)

HARD BOILED

Well, well. That's former detective Gavin Gavini, who cracked the Sleep Demon case!

MARLOW PHILLIPS

Among many others. He was also...

(strikes a dramatic pose)

The Crime Lord.

HARD BOILED

Well, that wraps everything up neatly, doesn't it? We're done here.

MARLOW

No, we're not! This thing goes deeper. You've got to pursue it! Who else had ties to Gavini? What was Roth enterprises mixed up in? Write story after story about it! Follow the money! That's your job!

HARD BOILED

Yeah, with what budget? Nobody wants to read investigative reporting any more! The whole front page & top TV headlines are taken up with celebrity scandals. I can barely get my stuff two paragraphs on A17 as it is! Sorry, pal. You're on your own. Talk to the Deputy Mayor.

(HARD BOILED exits. We hear the sound of sirens. We hear shouted questions from REPORTERS. MARLOW walks across the stage. We don't have to see the REPORTERS.)

REPORTERS

Hey, Phillips, why'd ya kill Gavini?

Hey, Phillips, is it true you're in love with a goat?
Marlow! Marlow! What did Gavini have on you?
Was he blackmailing you?
Was he also in love with the goat?
Is your goat supporting you during this difficult time?
Mr. Phillips. A question for you. A known target of yours, Tony the Tooth, died under mysterious circumstances. Did you have any contact with him?
Phillips! Phillips!
Aw, come on, Marlow...
Come on, ya gotta say *something*...

(HARD BOILED breaks in.)

HARD BOILED

Hey, Phillips. Did Gavini have connections to Roth enterprises?

(MARLOW stares. A moment.)

MARLOW

Yes. Yes he did.

(MARLOW leaves the crowd and thinks.)

MARLOW

The Deputy Mayor...

(MARLOW arrives at the Deputy Mayor's office, but he's packing boxes.)

MARLOW

Came by to thank you for your statement and see if you needed help cleaning up the city, Mr. Deputy Mayor.

DEPUTY MAYOR GOODROCK

Make that Soon-to-be-former deputy Mayor. Just got word from on high. They're shutting down the investigations—the new CEO of Roth enterprises spread some campaign contributions around. And the Mayor is going to issue a “no confidence” statement in me. They're even revising the charter to eliminate my position. Clean up Noirtown? You're out of your mind. I mean, I admire ya, taking on one criminal at a time, but... this thing goes way deeper.

MARLOW

Well...

(pause)

Huh.

I'll see you 'round, I guess.

DEPUTY MAYOR GOODROCK

Yeah. See ya round.

(MARLOW returns to his office.)

LOYELLE

At least you got rid of the Crime Lord who was menacing the city.

MARLOW

Yeah, but Roth enterprises is still around. Corruption & rot everywhere. This is a bigger can of worms than... than... a fishing can full of worms--I'm even losing my power to make analogies!

LOYELLE

That's okay, Mr. Phillips. I still believe in you.

MARLOW

Yeah, yeah. But I'm a loner. Nobody helps me out.

LOYELLE

I helped you out. And I could use a thank-you, Mr. Phillips! *You* could have been the one in jail.

MARLOW

What?! What are you saying? That I'm not a hardened tough guy who can't take life... *inside?* In the "big house"?

(LOYELLE stares at him.)

MARLOW

I wouldn't last five minutes in there, would I?

LOYELLE

I give ya about three.

(Lights up on THE ACCOUNTANT, BOBBY BLUES,
and THE OPTOMETRIST in the criminals' lair.)

THE ACCOUNTANT

I embezzled another \$70,000 today. The gambling syndicate is doing well, and we added three new corrupt cops to the payroll. The only problem area is the bootleggers: they say they need more for police bribes.

BOBBY BLUES

Bootleggers? It's *legal* to drink. Prohibition ended years ago!

(Pause. THE ACCOUNTANT stares.)

BOBBY BLUES

1933? Repeal of the 18th Amendment? You can buy wine and beer and gin and banana daquiris *anywhere*?

(THE ACCOUNTANT stares.)

THE ACCOUNTANT

Huh. Remind me to talk to them about that.

THE OPTOMETRIST

But I *see* problems for us. Problems bigger than the E on my chart.

BOBBY BLUES

What's your worry, Eyeball Man?

THE OPTOMETRIST

Phillips. Marlow Phillips. He's still out there... and it's only a matter of time...

(Lights down on the criminals, Lights up on the office.
MARLOW is in his office with LOYELLE.)

LOYELLE

Oh, Marlow, they're showing The Thin Man tonight at the Roxie. It's about a married couple who solve crimes together, and I was wondering...

MARLOW

Yeah, you love those movies. Take some office cash. But a married couple who fights crime? Now *that's* ridiculous.

LOYELLE

(quickly, upset)

Well, I really ought to be going. I would hate to miss... those commercials they show before the previews! I hear there's a new one for... for... Mitsubishi!

(She storms out.)

MARLOW

Hey, she seems upset about something. Lolita, what is it with dames, anyway?

(LOLITA rolls her eyes.)

LOLITA

I couldn't tell you, Marlow.

So how does this thing end?

MARLOW

End? It ends with the corrupt in power and the down-and-out down and out. It ends with criminal billionaires secure in their mansions. And it ends with Noirtown without a good deputy mayor.

(turning to the skyline)

But by God, I'm not finished with you yet, Noirtown! I'm down, but I'm not out! I'll flush your streets of corruption with the pure Britta-filtered water of cleanliness! I'm gonna make this city mine!

(MARLOW strikes a defiant pose.)

ANNOYED NOIRTOWN RESIDENT (O.S.)

It's 10 PM, for Chrissake! *Some of us* have to work tomorrow! Go ta bed, ya drunken bum!

(A shoe is thrown out. It hits Marlow on the head.)

MARLOW

Ow. Whoa...

(he wobbles slightly, regains his balance, holds his defiant pose. Lolita walks forward and speaks to the audience.)

LOLITA

A dark night in Noirtown. Score one for the villains. But one tough guy is still alive and kicking... he found the Crime Lord & killed him. And he'll make the bastards pay, sooner or later.

So what if he's thrown Loyelle over like last week's stale popcorn? So what if he wouldn't know a good woman if she bit him in the neck? He's still... Marlow Phillips, Private Eye.

END OF PLAY