

TO DESTROY A TOWN

by Rod Serling

Logline:

A small town descends into chaos when the citizens learn that there is a foreign spy among them.

FADE IN:

EXT. SMALL TOWN MAIN STREET - DAY

A busy main street in the center of a Midwestern small town in the 1950s. Various citizens go about their daily routine.

A black car parks in front of the sheriff's office. A middle-aged man gets out of the car and enters the building.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Only two cells in this small town lockup. The SHERIFF sits at a desk near them. The mysterious man walks up to him. He speaks slowly and deliberately.

CIA MAN

Excuse me, are you the sheriff?

SHERIFF

Yeah, what do you need? Don't think I've seen you before.

The CIA MAN reaches into the pocket of his jacket and takes out a badge.

CIA MAN

I'm a representative of the Central Intelligence Agency. I have something important to tell you that you must pass along to the citizens of this town.

SHERIFF

Always glad to help the feds. What do you need?

EXT. PARK GAZEBO - DAY

The Sheriff stands at the entrance to the gazebo in a park elsewhere in the town, with his DEPUTY standing at his side. Eager townspeople are gathered around him. He shouts so that he can be heard by everyone.

SHERIFF

Folks, I know that this is an inconvenience for most of you, but believe me when I say that this information is vitally important to the welfare of this community.

CITIZEN #1

Well get on with it then, we're all missing the ballgame.

SHERIFF

Right, right. I was visited today by a CIA agent, who told me...

He really does not want to say what he says next, but he soldiers on.

SHERIFF

...who told me that there is a spy
working for a foreign government
residing somewhere in the town.

Collective gasps from many in the crowd.

CITIZEN #2

Who are they?

SHERIFF

That's just the thing. He said that
they don't know who it is. That's
where we all come in. We are tasked
with finding who it is and bringing
him or her to them. All roads in or
out of the town are blocked off to
prevent anyone from leaving. If we
don't find the spy within
twenty-four hours...

Again, he hesitates. He nearly struggles to get out the
following words:

SHERIFF

...the government will have no
choice but to destroy the entire
town.

Some women in the crowd scream. Panicked conversation from
others.

SHERIFF

Believe me, I'm just as shocked as
you are, but if we just --

As he says this, CITIZEN #3, a young man in his mid 20s,
muscles his way to the front of the crowd. Like the sheriff,
he shouts to be heard above the noise.

CITIZEN #3

I know who it is, it's Mr. Tenbaum!
That fellow that moved here not
more than a month ago. I'll bet
it's him!

A majority in the crowd nod in agreement. The sheriff
realizes the crowd is turning against him.

SHERIFF

Now wait folks, if could have a
minute --

But the crowd's attention is on the young man.

CITIZEN #3

C'mon, let's go!

The young man walks off with the crowd of townspeople following him. The Deputy watches them, wide-eyed.

DEPUTY

I don't like the look of this.

SHERIFF

Me neither. We gotta do something.

EXT. MR. TENBAUM'S HOUSE - DAY

A comfy bungalow on a tree-lined street. The crowd, now an angry mob, has gathered in front of it. Many of the citizens carry assorted weapons. Citizen #3 stands in front of them with a megaphone.

CITIZEN #3

(through megaphone)

Come on out you commie rat! You can't hide forever!

The front door opens and MR. TENBAUM, a middle-aged man still wearing his robe and slippers, sheepishly steps out. He is shocked to see so many people in front of his house.

MR. TENBAUM

What seems to be the trouble?

CITIZEN #3

I imagine you'd know.

Mr. Tenbaum is genuinely confused.

MR. TENBAUM

What?

CITIZEN #3

Sheriff told us there's a spy in town. It's only logical it'd be you.

MR. TENBAUM

Me? What are you talking about? If there is a spy here, it certainly isn't me. Now leave me alone.

CITIZEN #3

C'mon now, we all know you stay up until all hours of the night. You radioing your buddies at the Kremlin?

MR. TENBAUM

(forcefully)

I said, leave me alone. Good day everyone.

And with that, he opens the door and steps back into his house.

Citizen #3 turns to the crowd.

CITIZEN #3

Looks like we'll have to force him out.

He points to two burly men in the crowd.

CITIZEN #3

Dan. Hewey. Break in there and look for radio equipment.

SHERIFF (O.S.)

Not on my watch.

The crowd turns to see the Sheriff and the Deputy standing next to the house with their pistols aimed at them.

SHERIFF

As long as I represent the law in this community, I'll make sure that every citizen's Constitutional rights are respected. There will be no search of this house unless there's a warrant. I refuse to let this become an all-out witch hunt. Understood?

CITIZEN #3

(points at the house)

Don't you understand? He's a commie!

SHERIFF

Who told you that? I certainly didn't. I know for a fact that Mr. Tenbaum is a good man and he's the last person I'd expect to --

CITIZEN #3

Why are taking his side? You're no better than he is.

SHERIFF

I'm not taking anyone's side! The only side I'm on is the law. Now, you all have ten seconds to drop your weapons and go home before I and my deputy have no choice but to start shooting.

Meanwhile, two men holding baseball bats have snuck up behind the sheriff and deputy. Oblivious to this, the sheriff begins counting down.

SHERIFF

Ten... Nine... Eight...

Citizen #3 nods.

On cue, the men hit the sheriff and deputy on the head with the bats, knocking both out cold.

CITIZEN #3

(to the crowd)

You men, get in there. The rest of you, search the town. We have to find the spy.

The mob splits up into two parts as the two burly men walk up to Mr. Tenbaums front door and begin to kick it in.

INT. MR. TENBAUM'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Mr. Tenbaum hears the door being kicked in downstairs. He opens his drawer and pulls out a snubnose .38 revolver. Checks the cylinder. Fully loaded.

FRONT HALL

The door finally gives way with a loud smash. The two men run in and start looking around.

HEWEY

(crazed)

Come on out. You can't hide forever.

Mr. Tenbaum is waiting for them at the top of the stairs.

MR. TENBAUM

Hey fellas, I'm right here!

The two men notice him and start running up the stairs. He whips out his pistol and fires two shots, hitting both men in the arm. They both collapse into a pile at the bottom of the stairs.

MR. TENBAUM

You men are dispicable! What's got into you?

MOB MONTAGE - DAY

Elsewhere in the town, all hell has broken loose.

-- Two men furiously bang on the door of another house, yelling for the occupant to open up.

-- A women fires pot shots from her pistol into her neighbors' house, a look of pure hatred on her face.

-- Several mob members beat a man senseless in front of his house.

-- A few people set fire to a house with torches.

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS - ROAD BARRICADE - DAY

A barricade consisting of two saw-horses has been set up across a road outside of town. Parked behind it is the same black car from before. Gunfire is heard in the distance.

The CIA man and his PARTNER lean against the side of the car, smoking cigarettes.

PARTNER

The people in the other towns, do you think they'll find out?

CIA MAN

I wouldn't count on it. What happens in these hayseed towns usually stays there.

The CIA man takes a drag from his cigarette.

CIA MAN

There is no spy in that town. Turns out you don't need bombs or bullets to destroy a town. All you need are words. Shame really. It was such a peaceful town before I got there.

He throws down and extinguishes the cigarette.

CIA MAN

Tell the other men to take down the barricades. When we get back to base I'll inform the president that the experiment was a success. Let's go.

PARTNER

Yessir.

The partner takes down the barricade while the CIA man starts the car. After he does so, the partner gets in the passenger seat.

The car turns around and drives down the quiet country road into the distance.

FADE TO BLACK