



# The Brownstone Of Nero Wolfe



Issue One—November, 2017

## From Archie's Desk



Back in 2006, I created *The Solar Pons Gazette*, a free, on-line newsletter dedicated to 'The Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street.' There have been seven issues so far and counting. The next year, in 2007, I produced the first issue of *Baker Street Essays*, another free, online newsletter: that one dedicated to Sherlock Holmes. It's at five.

But as much as I like Pons and Holmes, Nero Wolfe is number one for me. So, welcome to the first issue of *The Brownstone of Nero Wolfe*. Some of the essays are posts I made for 'The Public Life of Sherlock Holmes,' a column I

wrote weekly for three years over at the World Fantasy Award-winning website, BlackGate.com: I was working to bring Wolfe to a new audience.

I have had several Holmes stories published, but I much prefer writing about Wolfe and Archie and you'll find one pastiche here. I took one of the old Sidney Greenstreet radio shows and wrote it up as a short story. I plan on doing more of them, incorporating a bit more of my style and less of the radio show's. Give me some time....

I think that my love of the Wolfe stories comes through in this newsletter. I have re-read them many times and most weeks, I am listening to Michael Prichard's readings of the books on CD during my work commute. I NEVER tire of the Corpus. Hopefully, you'll finish the last page and mutter 'Satisfactory' (and not 'Flummery').

I have every intention of additional issues, each of which will include a new pastiche and a '3 Good Reasons' entry. And ideas for articles on the Corpus are always bouncing around in my head, such as a look at my favorite Wolfe-related book, **Stout Fellow**, and a review of a 1959 movie with Wolfean elements.

## *In this Issue*

2—Meet Nero Wolfe: A Sherlockian Perspective

14—Mets Lineup in 'Please Pass the Guilt'

7—Koufax or Mays? - Archie's Dilemma

17—The R-Rated Nero Wolfe

8—Talking About Nero Wolfe

19 - 3 Good Reasons—'Not Quite Dead Enough'

11—A Nero Wolfe Mystery

22—Stamped for Murder

## Meet Nero Wolfe: A Sherlockian Perspective

Readers (unknowingly) said goodbye to Sherlock Holmes in 1926's "The Adventure of the Retired Colourman." Only eight years later, a new detective who would not only evoke memories of the Holmes stories but also plough new ground arrived in the (oversized) form of Nero Wolfe. The seventy-four stories, written over forty-one years, would be collectively known as the Corpus, akin to the Sherlockian Canon.



For those unfamiliar with the stories, Nero Wolfe lives in a brownstone townhouse in New York City with Archie Goodwin, Fritz Brenner and Theodore Horstmann. This is a boy's club: no girls allowed (although Archie's romantic interest, Lily Rowan, holds a special status). Wolfe's attitude towards females makes Holmes appear to be a "whole-souled admirer of womankind." Quiz: Can you identify the Holmes tale that phrase is from? Answer at the article's end.

They are a self-contained unit, with Wolfe and Archie solving crimes, Fritz cooking and taking care of the household chores and Horstmann assisting Wolfe with his hobby, the cultivation of orchids in a rooftop greenhouse.

Archie often comments on the beauty of the orchids, which is a far cry from the thoughts of General Sternwood in Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*: "Nasty things. Their flesh is too much like the flesh of men, and their perfume has the rotten sweetness of corruption." Po-tay-toe, po-tah-toe, I guess.

Because the characters do not age, the stories all have a comfortable familiarity about them. Also, they are set contemporary to their writing, so while in a Holmes tale it is 'always 1895', the Wolfe stories feel much more like modern mysteries, even though some are over eighty years old.

The Wolfe adventures are great reads on their own merits, but the Sherlockian, using those famous powers of observation, can detect elements of the Canon throughout the Corpus.

### No, You Mean My Brother

Nero Wolfe bears a much stronger resemblance to Mycroft Holmes than to his more famous brother, Sherlock. Archie frequently tells us that Wolfe is lazy, and in fact his boss prefers to take cases only when financial necessity dictates. Archie tells us that one of his most important jobs is to browbeat Wolfe into working, which is certainly indicative of the latter's attitude towards accepting clients.

Sherlock Holmes says that his brother would rather be considered wrong than to exert the necessary energy to prove himself correct. Wolfe may not quite take things that far, but he will do his utmost to avoid taking on a case. He once said, "I am not interested, not involved and not curious." Unless forced by circumstances, that pretty much sums up Wolfe's attitude to work.

Physically, Mycroft is described by Watson as 'corpulent,' which means having a large, bulky body. Wolfe actually uses the word 'gargantuan' to describe himself, and while his weight varies over the years, under normal circumstances it is in the neighbor-



hood of 285 pounds. Both Wolfe and Mycroft are very large men, but with extremely agile minds. One thinks of Sidney Greenstreet's 'The Fat Man' in *The Maltese Falcon*. In fact, Greenstreet actually voiced Wolfe in a series of radio plays starting in 1950 (see page 9).

In *Fer de Lance*, the very first story, Wolfe is unfamiliar with the sport of golf. He has some clubs brought to his office and asks the delivery boy to demonstrate them for him. After watching a powerful swing, Wolfe mutters "Ungovernable fury." Only a man who detests unnecessary physical exertion would view a simple golf swing in that vein.



He lifted a stick and yelled, "Look out!" Wolfe grabbed a bottle by the neck.

Wolfe considered venturing outside the brownstone as something to be avoided in the extreme, with only three events regularly drawing him forth: voting, dining at Rusermans, (the restaurant owned by his boyhood friend Marko Vukcic), and pursuing his orchid obsession. Other sallies forth were dictated by circumstances and universally disliked. Wolfe viewed riding in a car akin to a suicide mission. One wonders how he managed to get to Montana in **Death of a Dude**. He was attitude was laughable while taking a train from New York City to West Virginia in **Too Many Cooks**.

Both Wolfe and Mycroft are men of habits. Six days a week, Wolfe takes breakfast in his room, dresses in exactly the same fashion, spends two hours in the morning and two more in the afternoon upstairs in the plant rooms, has lunch and dinner in the dining room at set times and only deals with business matters in the office if he absolutely must.

When Wolfe enters the office for the first time, he greets Archie with a "Good morning," even if they have already spoken. Fritz must not open the beer bottles he brings to Wolfe, who does it himself, using a specific bottle opener each time. Few detectives follow as rigid a daily pattern as Wolfe.

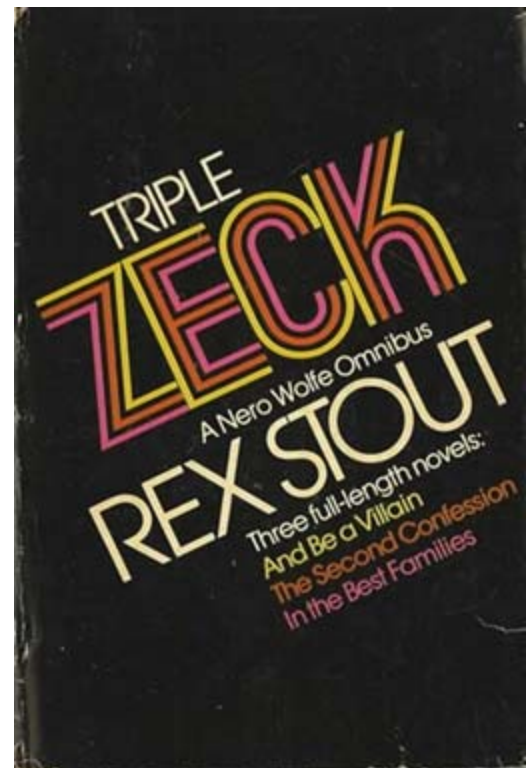
Mycroft 'has his rails' and only frequents three places: his lodgings, his government office and the Diogenes Club. Holmes wonders what upheaval could have unsettled Mycroft's habits so much to force a visit Baker Street. He compares it to a planet leaving its orbit.

"Give me your details, and from an armchair I will return you an excellent expert opinion. But to run here and run there... it is not my métier." Though this was Mycroft himself, talking to Sherlock, it could very well have been Wolfe talking to Archie. But similarities are not limited to only Mycroft.

### **Moriarty? No, Zeck.**

Professor James Moriarty was Sherlock Holmes' great nemesis. The detective got the better of Dr. Grimesby Roylott, Charles Augustus Milverton, John Clay and many others, but it is Moriarty who is THE villain in the Canon.

There is only one adversary who appears in multiple stories in the Corpus, and he is clearly the most dangerous man Wolfe faces. Three times Wolfe comes into contact with Arnold Zeck, who, like Moriarty, is the head of a criminal organization. Also like Moriarty, Zeck tries to warn the detective to stay out of his business. Failing, he has Wolfe's greenhouse destroyed with a barrage of machine gun fire. Later, he sends a tear gas bomb to Wolfe's office. Just as Holmes fled 221B





Baker Street, Wolfe simply abandons the brownstone and goes deep undercover: Archie doesn't even know where he is.

Holmes stayed in hiding until the opportunity arose to get Moriarty's chief lieutenant, Colonel Moran. Wolfe engaged in a similar ploy, slowly, anonymously, working his way into Zeck's organization. When the timing is right, Wolfe sets a trap for his foe, just as Holmes did for Moran.

## War Service

During World War I, Holmes came out of retirement to go undercover and break up a German spy ring. In World War II, Nero Wolfe essentially sets aside his private practice and works for the Army. In *Booby Trap* we watch Wolfe and Archie solve a wartime industrial espionage case fraught with murder.

Wolfe and the Holmes

brothers are both great patriots and serve their respective countries. Archie (pictured above) actually leaves Wolfe's employ to enlist in the army and quickly becomes a major.



## Archie!

It can be argued that Sherlock Holmes would have done just fine without Watson (I think so). While the good doctor was a more than capable chronicler, Holmes could probably have completed his investigations without Watson. Things might have been more difficult, but a successful conclusion would likely have been reached, nonetheless. This is partially because Holmes was a very energetic and physically capable detective.

Nero Wolfe most certainly is not. Archie does all of the legwork. Well, not quite all; he does have assistance sometimes. However, Wolfe, quite simply, does not investigate. He thinks and he issues orders. Archie is a far more capable sidekick than Watson. He is, in fact, a licensed private investigator in his own right. When Wolfe disappears as part of his campaign against Arnold Zeck, Archie sets up shop on his own and does quite well.

Archie is brave, wise-cracking, attractive to women, athletic and tough. He is a detective in the style of Sam Spade and gumshoes in the pages of *Black Mask Magazine*. In fact, Wolfe is an intellectual detective in the Sherlock/Mycroft era, while Archie is typical of the hard boiled genre. Thus, Rex Stout created a detective series that was characterized by the two periods of detective fiction which bookended the Golden Era of mystery stories (of which Agatha Christie is a prime example).



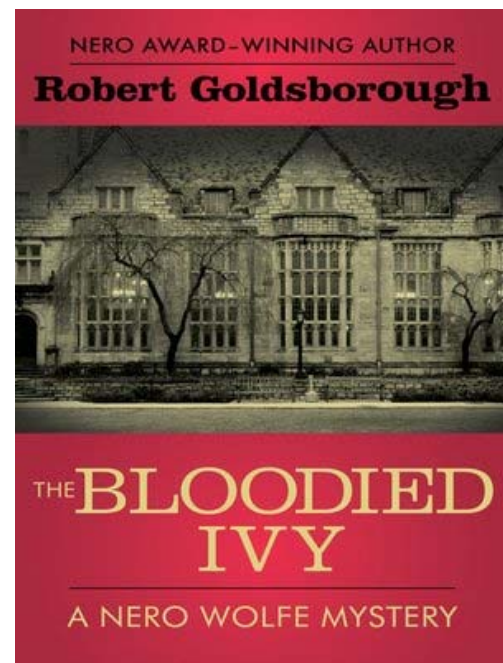
## Perhaps it's in the Blood?

Sherlockians have oft speculated that there was a romantic relationship between Sherlock Holmes and Irene Adler, with several films and pastiches utilizing the premise. John Lescroart wrote a pair of novels featuring Auguste Lupa (a name with linguistic connotations of Nero Wolfe), *Son of Holmes* and *Rasputin's Revenge*. The brilliant Lupa is the offspring of Holmes and Adler. Though it is never overtly stated, it's hard not to conclude that Lupa, who heads off to America with his Swiss chef, Fritz, at the end of the second novel, becomes Nero Wolfe. In fact, it's elementary. There will be an essay in the second issue of *The Brownstone* that identifies all the Wolfean and Sherlockian references in *Son of Holmes* (beyond the title!).

Now, don't get the impression that the Wolfe stories are just pale copies of the Holmes tales. Rex Stout excelled in both dialogue and characterization (his plots can fairly be criticized) and the Wolfe stories hold a unique and enduring place in the mystery pantheon. But Stout was a well known fan of Sherlock Holmes and traces of that admiration and respect for the world's first and greatest private consulting detective can be found in the Corpus.

## Beyond Stout

Unlike Sherlock Holmes, Nero Wolfe is still copyright protected, so you won't find a plethora of pastiches (There's a good name for a mystery story) for sale in bookstores and online. However, if you've worked through the Corpus a few times and want more, there are still some options out there.

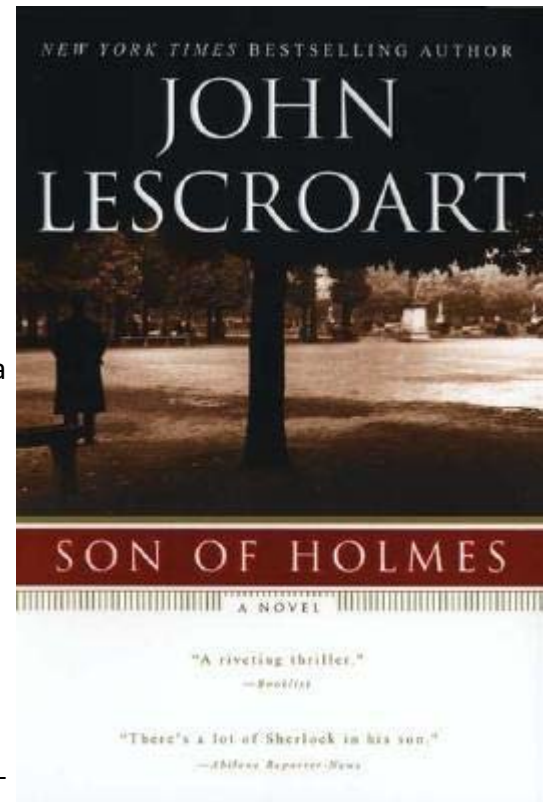


Robert Goldsborough, with permission from the Stout Estate, published seven novels featuring Wolfe and Archie between 1986 and 1994. Like Stout's originals, they are contemporary tales and the last book in this run, *The Missing Chapter*, pokes fun at pastiches of popular series'. Goldsborough returned to the Brownstone in 2012 with *Archie Meets Nero Wolfe* and has written a total of twelve Wolfe tales so far.

Lawrence Sanders created Leo Haig, star of two novels and several short stories. Haig has learned everything that he can about Nero Wolfe, who he believes to be a very real person: Rex Stout is merely a pseudonym. He lives as a shadow of Wolfe, keeping tropical fish instead of orchids, venturing out for business only when he has to and employing his own Archie, Chip Harrison, to do the legwork. Haig's dream is to be invited to dinner at Wolfe's brownstone, which is a clever bit.

'The R-Rated Wolfe' on page 17, is about Haig and Harrison.

H Paul Jeffers, who includes two Sherlock Holmes titles among his list of works, wrote three books featuring Sergeant John Bogdanovic. The policeman finds himself immersed in the world of a famous fictional detective in each novel. The third, entitled *Corpus Corpus*, centers around an annual Wolfe Pack Dinner. As expected, Wolfean details abound throughout the tale.





Finally, in 2008, Loren Estleman began a series of pastiches featuring amateur private detective Claudius Lyon, whose life mission is to emulate Nero Wolfe. Lyon's Archie is an ex-convict named Arnie Woodbine, who also serves as narrator. Estleman has long been known to Sherlock Holmes fans for two solid pastiches, one featuring Dracula and the other Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The stories were collected together in 2017 as **Nearly Nero: The Adventures of Claudius Lyon, the Man Who Would Be Wolfe.**

### **Very Satisfactory**

If you have only a passing acquaintance with Nero Wolfe, you would do well to read up on the Corpus. For the more visually-minded mystery lover, there is also a superb Nero Wolfe series available on DVD. It aired on the A&E network in 2001 and 2002 and features Maury Chaykin and Timothy Hutton. Hutton, in particular, excelled, also serving as director and executive producer on the series. It is a high-quality production with an excellent jazz soundtrack and happily, is quite faithful to the original stories. And you can read it about it on page 11. In 2017, an earlier Wolfe series, starring William Conrad, was released on DVD. It has some good points, but the A&E series is superior.

Quiz Answer: Holmes tells Watson that he is NOT such an admirer of women in the fourth and final novel, **The Valley of Fear.**



Austin Briggs for "Frame Up For Murder" in *The Saturday Evening Post*

## Koufax or Mays? - Archie's Dilemma

In **Death of a Doxy**, Archie is at Lily Rowan's penthouse, listening to a poet read a self-dubbed 'epithon:' so called because it was epic and took hours to read. Add in that the man wrote it himself and you've got the idea. Archie was rescued by a phone call from Wolfe, and when the call came, he had been leaning back with his eyes closed, debating on whether he would choose Sandy Koufax or Willie Mays. Which is a good question.



He continued pondering the dilemma and by the time he dropped the car off at the garage, he had decided on Mays because "Koufax's arm was too much of a gamble." The book was published in August of 1966. That was Koufax' amazing final year, in which he went 27-9 with a 1.73 ERA, 27 complete games and 317 strikeouts (he won the Pitcher's Triple Crown that year).

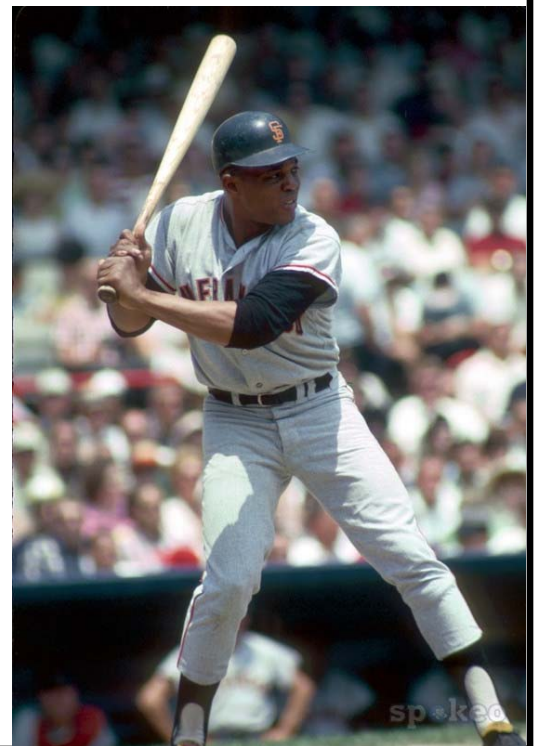
That same year, Mays made his last run at an MVP award (he finished third), batting .288 with 37 homers and 103 RBIs. Those were down numbers for Mays, and he wouldn't match them in the remaining seven years of his career.

Archie was right: Koufax, not wishing to risk permanent damage to his elbow, stunned the baseball world by retiring after the 1966 World Series: leaving as the best pitcher on the planet and nicknamed 'The Left Arm of God.'

Mays never managed to hit higher than .291 and only once smacked more than 23 homers before retiring. So, you could say that neither man contributed to his Hall of Fame resume after Archie made his call. However, both were in their prime from 1962 through 1966, so I prefer to think that the story actually took place during that period and it was a legitimate question. Especially since Mays was 5 years older than Koufax in 1966.

And while Koufax (pitcher) and Mays (player) remain two of the 'all-time greatest' candidates, Koufax' arm was certainly a worry and it ended his career just as Archie thought it might.

*"I can't believe that Babe Ruth was a better player than Willie Mays. Ruth is probably to baseball what Arnold Palmer is to golf. He got the game moving. But I can't believe he could run as well as Mays, and I can't believe he was any better as an outfielder." - Sandy Koufax*





# Talking About Nero Wolfe

In [“Who Needs a Hard Boiled Detective?”](#) which appeared at BlackGate.com in September of 2015, I looked at how, during the rise, rule and decline of the American hard-boiled school of fiction, August Derleth was writing Solar Pons stories that were pure throwbacks to the Victorian Era mysteries of Sherlock Holmes. I’d say more, but you already either know it or should go read my essay if you haven’t!

And the following excerpt is from the initial version of [“Hard Boiled Holmes,”](#) an essay I wrote tracing the roots of the American hard boiled school back to Victorian London and Holmes:

*Rex Stout created Nero Wolfe in 1934 and the last story was published in 1975, shortly before the author’s death. Fortunately, there were over seventy Wolfe tales in between. Stout created a synthesis of Holmes and the hard boiled school that has yet to be surpassed.*

*Nero Wolfe was a brilliant, disagreeable and incurably lazy detective. He seems very much to be a successor to Mycroft Holmes, with a bit of Sherlock thrown in. His chronicler and assistant was the smooth talking tough guy, Archie Goodwin.*

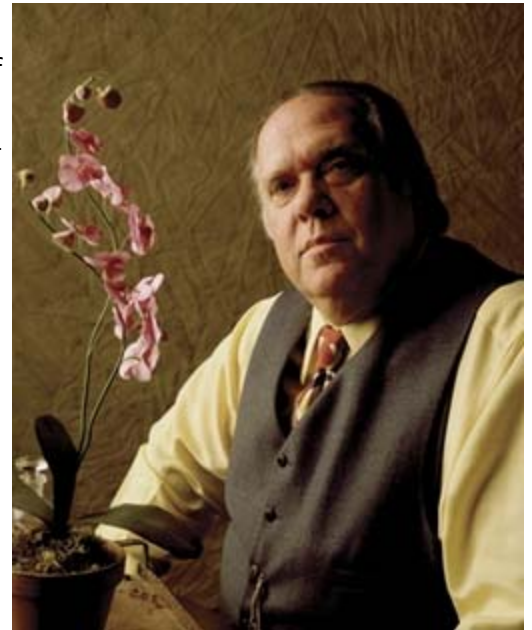
*Goodwin himself stacks up with the best of the hard-boiled private eyes. To over-simplify, Stout paired Mycroft/Sherlock Holmes with Sam Spade. Two characters, representing the Doylean and hard-boiled approaches, worked together in each story. This characteristic is probably one of the primary reasons that the Wolfe books have enjoyed so much success over three-quarters of a century.*

I’ve seen it asserted more than once that it’s not the plots that are at the root of the success of the Nero Wolfe stories. That’s a reasonable statement. We return to the tales time and again for the characters of Archie and Wolfe. Of course, we look forward to Fritz, Inspector Cramer, Inspector Rowcliff and the relationships between all the characters that come, go and live at the famous brownstone on 35<sup>th</sup> Street. But the Corpus is about Archie and Wolfe and what they do on the page.

And as I indicated above, the two represent a superb synthesis of the brilliant armchair reasoner and the tough, wisecracking private eye. If Wolfe went out and about on cases, his character would overlap with Archie’s, regardless of their differences. But Stout shrewdly split the necessities of a successful detective into two garments and draped them on two different private investigators.

## THE MEDIA WOLFE

I was a latecomer to Wolfe, actually discovering him through the A&E television series from 2000-2001. Far too short-lived, Maury Chaykin (Wolfe) and Timothy Hutton (Archie) starred in an excellent (and faithful) adaptation of the original stories. You can read my thoughts on that show on page 11, but to summarize: It is an excellent series and I am still re-watching episodes. I really wish it had held on for at least one more year and given us more episodes.







There had been a prior television series with William Conrad (*Cannon*) and Lee Horsely (*Matt Houston, PI*), set in the seventies and it was released this year on DVD. Thayer David actually starred as Wolfe in the pilot, but then passed away, putting the series on hiatus for four years, at which time Conrad and Horsely took center stage.

There had also been a pair of big screen movies in 1936 and 1937 that Rex Stout so disliked, he never let Hollywood touch Wolfe again during his lifetime!

An alternative I cannot recommend highly enough is Michael Prichard's audio book readings of the original stories. I have nearly two dozen and they are fantastic. They're a regular part of my work commute and I've listened to each at least three times. Great readings of great stories: how could you get tired of them?

But all of this media palaver from me is really just a lead-in to a look at Wolfe radio shows: primarily one of them.

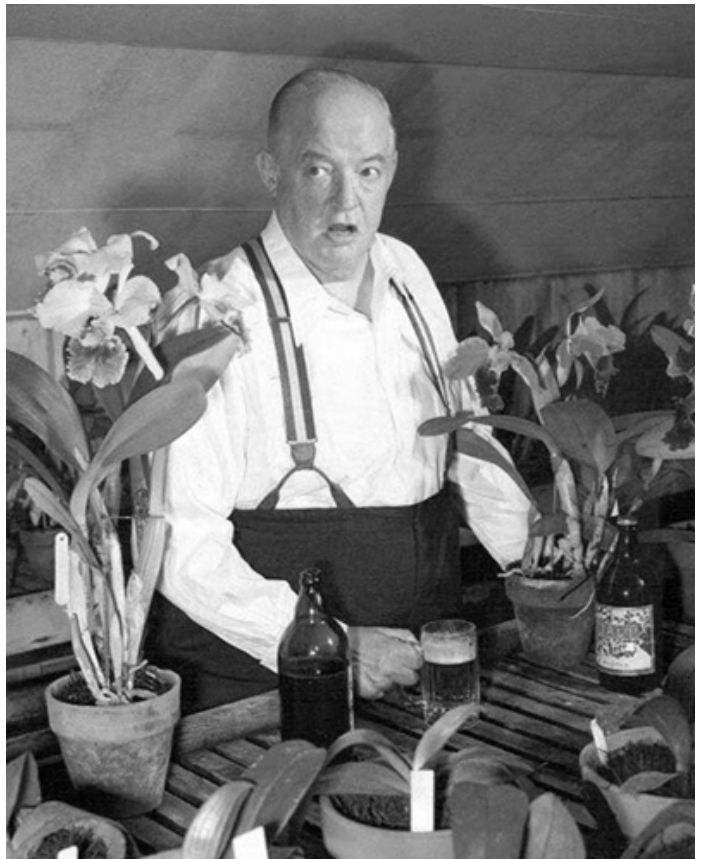
There were three radio series' in the forties and fifties. The first, *The Adventures of Nero Wolfe*, lasted 51 episodes in 1943 and 1944 and featured three different Wolfes: J.B. Williams, Santos Ortega and Luis Van Rooten. It didn't draw on Stout's stories at all (Louis Vittes scripted the show) and you can listen to the only known existing episode, [The Last Laugh Murder](#) (believed to feature Ortega).

The second, *The Amazing Nero Wolfe*, lasted only 21 episodes in 1945 and starred Francis X. Bushman. Again, the stories were originals and scripted by Vittes once more. [Click here](#) for *The Shakespeare Portfolio*.

The third, [The New Adventures of Nero Wolfe](#), is by far the best known. Lasting only six months and covering 26 episodes, it starred Sydney Greenstreet as Wolfe. Of course, *The Maltese Falcon's* 'The Fat Man' certainly looked the part. Quite a few folks like Greenstreet and almost every episode has survived and is available on the Internet. I'm slowly warming up to this series, but I'm not yet quite on totally sold.

Greenstreet sounds like Caspar Gutman pretending to be Nero Wolfe. Greenstreet's Wolfe doesn't at all sound like what I imagined. Unfortunately, they ran through six Archies. Regardless of who it is, this Goodwin is absolutely girl-crazy. In that regard, he actually comes across as a parody of Stout's creation. It's a variation on the 'Watson is a doofus' problem.

So, you've got a Wolfe who blusters far too much and a



libido-driven Goodwin who constantly annoys Wolfe about the bank balance. I don't find either character to be the embodiment of what Stout actually wrote.

This show marked the end of Wolfe on the radio for over three decades. Then, in 1982, The Canadian Broadcasting Corp produced 13 episodes with Maver Moore (Wolfe) and Don Francs (Archie), all based on Stout's stories. Moore plays Wolfe in the Greenstreet mode (see above), while Francs seems to be the most authentic Goodwin we've yet gotten on radio. The series had a soundtrack that veered between kind of neat jazz and eighties porn stylings. Its greatest strength is that the stories are directly from Stout, and that's worth quite a bit. The site I used to listen to it on is gone, but I know the episodes are still somewhere online. You'll have to look a bit.

Wolfe has also appeared in Italy, West Germany and Russia, but those are countries for another day. Also, Robert Goldsborough is writing authorized sequels; seven books between 1986 and 1994. I think overall, he did a nice job and I recommend them. After an eighteen-year hiatus, he returned to the brownstone in 2012, adding five more to the originals for a dozen and counting. So far, they newer books have not yet been up to the standards of his earlier novels.

I like Sherlock Holmes, I know my Solar Pons and I enjoy watching David Suchet's Hercule Poirot, but Nero Wolfe is the first and foremost detective for me.

*'In 1934, Rex Stout introduced Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin, a pair that blended the hard boiled private eye with the armchair genius best personified by Mycroft Holmes.*

*Stout was a well known Sherlockian and the Holmes stories exerted a great influence on the Wolfe books, which remain popular today. However, Stout was astute enough to know that pulp magazines set the style of American detective fiction and Wolfe and Goodwin very much read like contemporary mysteries, not throwbacks to gas lit London.'*

- from my essay, **August Derleth & Solar Pons—Who Needs a Hardboiled Detective?**

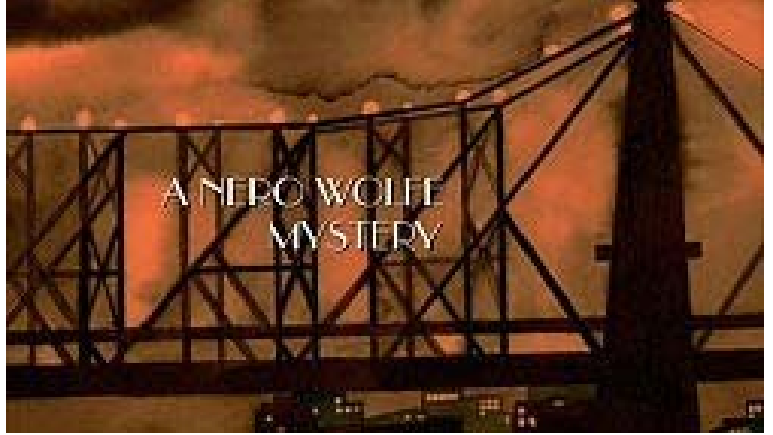


## A Nero Wolfe Mystery (A&E)

In early 2000, A&E aired a one-off movie, *The Golden Spiders*. It starred Canadian Maury Chaykin as Rex Stout's famous detective, Nero Wolfe, and Timothy Hutton as his man Friday, Archie Goodwin. Reviews were positive and a year later, the first of an eleven-episode series aired, *The Doorbell Rang*.

Sixteen more episodes came in 2002, of which four were two-parters (there had been three long-players the prior year). The show was independently produced and partially subsidized by A&E. But reportedly costs rose to a million dollars an episode and the show was, sadly, nay, tragically, cancelled after the second season.

I remember the late Maury Chaykin (he passed away in 2010) as the self-respecting southerner who didn't use instant grits in *My Cousin Vinny*. But he was a very good Wolfe. Large but not obese, he had Wolfe's command of words and inflection. He seemed to yell more than the Wolfe of the books, but that's not really a flaw in a television portrayal of the detective. I've seen interviews that indicate he didn't particularly enjoy playing the character, but that certainly didn't come through. I think he's easily the best Wolfe I've seen so far.



Timothy Hutton brought the star power to the show as the wise-cracking Archie Goodwin and he later directed and produced. His New York accent isn't quite right for the Ohio native, but he plays the part well. I think I actually prefer Lee Horsley in the seventies series starring William Conrad as Wolfe, but Hutton still delivers a fine performance. And a lot of fans I know think he was right on the money, so it's minor quibbling.

The relationship between Wolfe and Archie is, to me, the heart of the series. And Chaykin and Hutton do a superb job of pulling it off. When Archie tears up his paycheck after a snippy comment from Wolfe in **Prisoner's Base**, it's exactly how I read it.



The way the two actors play their characters and interact is one of the foundations of the show's success and it never falters.

Bill Smitrovich is THE Inspector Cramer. When I'm writing Wolfe stories, it's Smitrovich I see and hear as the words go down on the page. His scenes are usually among my favorites in an episode. Colin Fox is a solid Fritz, though his scenes are usually quite short. Saul Rubinek played Saul Panzer in *The Golden Spiders* but switched to Lon Cohen for the rest of the series, to good effect.

Conrad Dunn (Saul Panzer), Trent McMullen (Orrie Cather), Fulvio Cecere (Fred Durkin) and R.D. Reid (Purley Stebbins) all made frequent appearances. I mention them separately because this show featured an ensemble cast. A regular group of actors played different roles throughout the series. You might see George Plimpton (always fun to watch) as lawyer Nathaniel Parker one week and as the client the next. Kari Matchett, who played Lily Rowan (surprisingly, only twice), played eleven different characters: appearing as two different ones in a single episode. That's the only time I know of an actor with two roles in the same show.



But the rotating cast does a fine job and I don't mind the approach, though I have a few friends who didn't like these repeat performances. You'll see many faces that look familiar and send you scurrying to IMDB.com to see where you know them from, such as Debra Monk.

Visually, the show is a treat. Most of the episodes are set in the forties and they did a first-rate job in recreating the era. Archie's outfits are fun to see and both exteriors and interiors bring back the past. I would assume that the cost of designing and constructing these sets and filming the outdoor scenes played a significant part in the final decision to cancel the series.



Every episode was based on one of Stout's original stories and significant amounts of dialogue were left in, verbatim. I've watched several episodes immediately after reading the stories they were based on and while there are, of course, variations, it's hard to imagine a successful series being much truer to the source material than *A Nero Wolfe Mystery* is.

And the often-jazzy soundtrack, with music from Michael Small, is outstanding. I love the intro song, and they would often do a variation on it for other episodes – usually with neat graphics playing on screen. Throughout an episode, the music

strengthens the show and I wish somebody would put out an official soundtrack release. [Here's the intro to \*Murder Is Corny\*.](#)

Somewhere on the Internet (but unfindable by me: some mystery blogger I am) is a good essay about this show and how it got cancelled in part due to the cost, but also because A&E had new leadership and was making its transition from a good network to the trashy, reality show-based one that it is now. And *Nero Wolfe* went on the chopping block because quality, well-made dramas didn't have a place at A&E anymore. They still don't.

Jeremy Brett's Sherlock Holmes series for Granada TV is the standard for the great detective (*BBC Sherlock* newcomers – sorry). And David Suchet's brilliant performance in making almost every Hercule Poirot episode that Agatha Christie wrote is unlikely to be surpassed. I am convinced that if *A Nero Wolfe Mystery* had been



given two more seasons and about another two dozen episodes, it would have achieved the same level of recognition and praise. As it is, I have a hard time envisioning a better Wolfe adaptation coming. Heck – I don't see any Wolfe tv show on the horizon.

After the series was cancelled, a few principals, including Timothy Hutton, hoped to produce another television movie (presumably a two hour episode), but it never happened and with Maury Chaykin's passing and the years rolling by, it's highly unlikely this group will be the ones to continue the Wolfe saga.

I have the box set of the entire series and it's in my DVD player right now. Several, if not all, of the episodes can be found on YouTube. If you like the Wolfe stories and haven't seen this show, you are really missing out. In fact, I watched a couple episodes and liked them so much, that's what impelled me to go buy my first Wolfe book and read it (I'm late to the Corpus party).

And even if you've never read any Wolfe, it's a pretty good period detective series and you should give it a try.

## Writing Nero Wolfe

Lee Goldberg's list of accomplishments is almost too long to list here: successful screenwriter, best-selling novelist, co-founder of Brash Books, leading expert in the history of television pilots—you get the idea. Along with Bill Rabkin, Lee wrote the scripts for four Nero Wolfe stories: *Murder is Corny* and *Poison a la Carte*, and a pair of two parters: *Prisoner's Base* and *Champagne for One*. He wrote an excellent and insightful blog post about working on the A&E series. [I highly recommend clicking on over](#) and giving it a read!

And check out Brash Books' reissue of the fine hardboiled PI series by Michael Stone. [I wrote about the series](#) over at BlackGate.com and I think that the Streeter books are a treasure.

Lee also wrote over a dozen books starring another of my favorite detectives!



## The Mets in “Please Pass the Guilt”

Since the Nero Wolfe tales were all essentially set in the year that Rex Stout wrote them, we can answer the question I’m about to posit simply by looking at the publication date. Except, as I’ll show, it couldn’t have been 1973. So that approach is out.

Baseball references can be found throughout the Corpus. Archie was a Giants fan – at least he was until Horace Stoneham abandoned Coogan’s Bluff for sunny San Francisco, while Saul preferred his games at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn. There’s no indication of who Saul rooted for after Dem Bums relocated to Los Angeles, though it’s reasonable to assume that he, like Archie, followed the Mets, who played at the Polo Grounds until Shea Stadium was ready.



“This Won’t Kill You” took place at game seven of the World Series, with the Giants playing the Red Sox. All players were fictitious, however. In “Please Pass the Guilt” we get the real deal. Archie goes to visit a prospective client as the Mets are hosting the Pirates. Fortunately, she has the game on television, with Hall of Fame slugger Ralph Kiner calling the action.

Over the course of a couple innings, Archie mentions the actions of several Met players. From his comments, we’re going to reconstruct the two missing pieces of the lineup that day. Which of course first requires us to identify the year. Which poses a few questions but is no problem for a seasoned baseball investigator.

The following players, with the positions they played regularly and their years with the Mets, are identified by Archie:

SP - Jerry Koosman (1967-1978)

C – Jerry Grote (1966 – 1977)

1B/RF/LF - Ed Kranepool (1962-1979)

SS – Bud Harrelson (1965-1977)

3B – Ed Charles (1967-1969)



RF/CF/LF - Tommie Agee (1968-1972)

LF/CF – Cleon Jones (1963-1975)

Two additional players are mentioned by Archie during the case, though not as having played in the game in question:

SP - Tom Seaver (1967-1977)

RF/LF – Ron Swoboda (1965-1971)

A couple basic points that will help us nail down the year. Charles is our foundation point, since he was only in New York for parts of three seasons. He was acquired from the Kansas City (not Oakland) A's on May 10, 1967 and appeared in 101 games, starting in 86 of them. So, he started just over half the season at third. In 1969, he only started 45 games and appeared in 61 total.

Koosman was a rookie in 1967 and only pitched in 9 games, with 3 starts. The lefty was an All Star in each of the next two seasons.

Given those factors, 1968 is a reasonable conclusion for the year of the game. Given that year, here is all but one member of the squad that day, with the number of games they played at the position:

C – Jerry Grote (115) – From 1967 to 1976, Grote was primarily the starting catcher for the Mets, having been acquired from the Astros after spending 1966 in the minors.

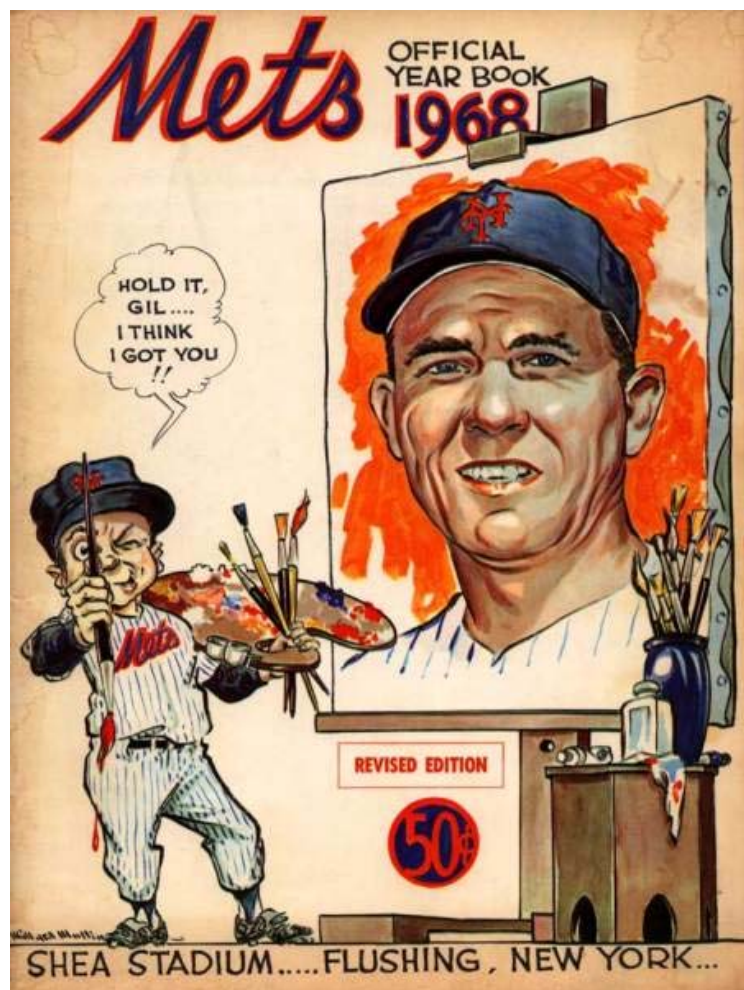
1B – Ed Kranepool (113) – Kranepool appeared in three games in 1962 and spent his entire career with the Mets retiring after the 1979 season. Playing both first and the outfield, he was really the team's first star in those awful early years. So much so that he was known as 'Mister Met.'

SS – Bud Harrelson (106) – The ten-year starter batted slightly more than his weight – and he was skinny. Best-known for his brawl with Pete Rose.

3B – Ed Charles (106) – Arguably the best player on the sad Kansas City A's teams of the sixties, the veteran Charles, a poet, batted poorly but helped steady the youthful Amazin' Mets of 1969.

CF – Tommie Agee (116) – A two-time all-star, the graceful Agee had power and speed and played a marvelous center field. He was the key White Sock in the trade that sent Tommy Davis from the Mets to Chicago.

LF – Cleon Jones (117) – The twelve-season Met exploded for a .340 average in 1969.



RF – Ron Swoboda (124) – Rocky hit 19 homers in his rookie season but never produced that kind of power again.

Each player led the team in games at their respective positions in 1968, further solidifying our choice of year.

That leaves us only one major question mark: second base. Left handed-hitting Ken Boswell and right handed-hitting Phil Linz both started 67 games at second that year. 1968 was Linz' final season in the majors, while Boswell was in his first full season. Linz played 573.1 innings in the field at second, while Boswell logged 623.2. A difference of only about five full games.

Now, we do have one more clue. The game took place on June 6<sup>th</sup>. It looks like Linz started 11 games in June, Boswell 14. Linz did start the real game on the 6<sup>th</sup>, but that was at the Cubs. In 1968, Linz started 6 games against the Pirates, while Boswell started 7.

It may well have simply come down to whether the Pirates started a righty or a lefty. Right handed pitchers made 128 starts for the Pirates in 1968: lefties made 33 (all by Bob Veale). So, the odds clearly favor Boswell if manager Gil Hodges was using a righty/lefty platoon.

We'll go ahead and plug Boswell in as Bud Harrelson's double play partner.

The Mets were trailing 2-4 going into the bottom of the fourth but ended up with a 7-5 win. Koosman completed exactly half of his starts in 1968 and 1969, and he was still in the game after giving up 4 runs, so he may have made it to the finish line. But since he gave up 4 or more runs 8 times and was pulled in every one of them, probably not.

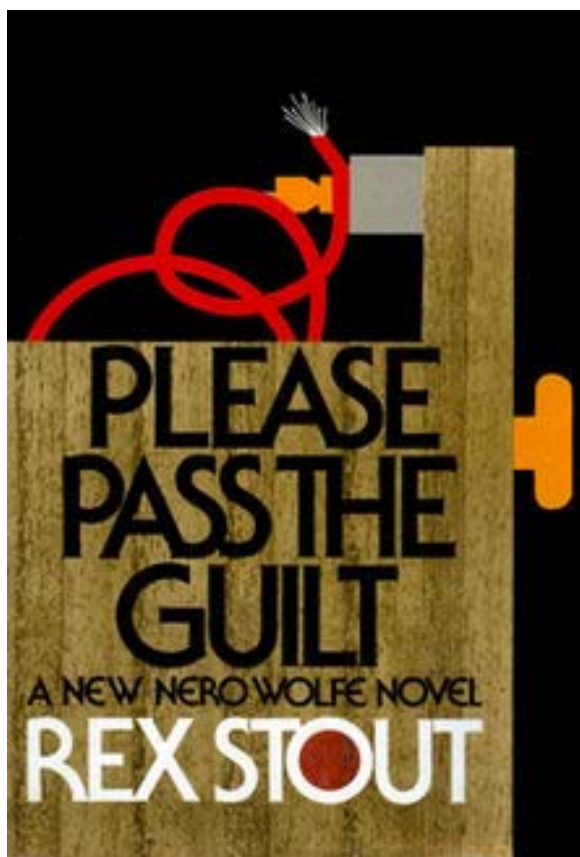
Ron Taylor and Carl Koonce combined to finish more than twice as many games as the rest of the staff together and they recorded 25 of the team's 33 saves, so one or both probably saw the mound in a two-run

win.

The Pirates probably used at least one righty out of the bullpen, so the Met's top pinch hitter, the left-handed Art Shamsky, likely got an at bat.

And that's the story of the game that Archie partly watched at Madeline O'Dell's house a few days after Ron Seaver came to the brownstone. Wolfe didn't recognize the fake name—no Met's fan was he.

The 1968 Mets were 73-89, avoiding last place by finishing 1 game ahead of the woeful Astros and only trailing the NL winning Cardinals by 24 games. Which made next year's Amazing Mets the most unlikely World Series champions ever. Archie surely attended several games at Shea Stadium that year.





## The R-Rated Nero Wolfe

Way back on page five, I mentioned that Mystery Grand Master Lawrence Block (Matthew Scudder, Keller, Bernie Rhodenbarr series' and more) tinkered with an R-rated version of Wolfe in two novels and two short stories featuring Leo Haig (Wolfe) and Chip Harrison (Archie Goodwin).

The stories don't just emulate Wolfe and Goodwin. They specifically talk about them! As Harrison tells us in **Make Out With Murder**:

'Something I have to explain to you if you are going to understand Leo Haig at all. He believes Nero Wolfe exists.

'He really believes this. He believes Wolfe exists in the brownstone, with the orchids and Theodore and Fritz and all the rest of it, and Archie Goodwin assists him and writes up the cases and publishes them under the pen name of Rex Stout.

"The most telling piece of evidence, Chip. Consider the nom de plume, if you will. And of course, it's just that; no one was ever born with so contrived a name as Rex Stout. But let us examine it. Rex is the Latin for king, of course. As in Oedipus Rex. And Stout means, well, fat. Then we have what. A fat king and could one ask for a more perfect appellation to hang upon such an extraordinary example of corpulence and majesty as Nero Wolfe?"

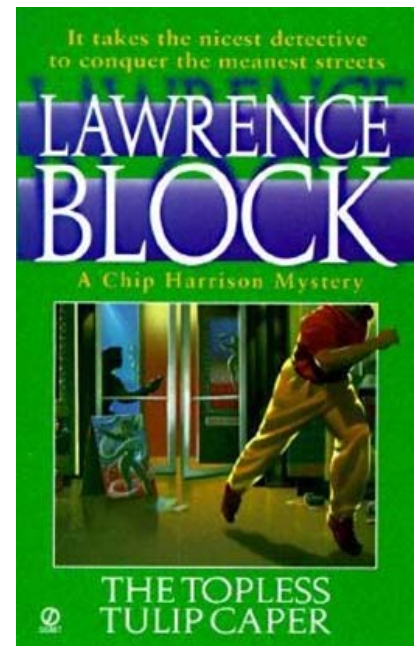
Elsewhere in the two novels and two short stories featuring Haig, Harrison explains that he writes up Haig's cases for publication because Haig doesn't just want to be the world's greatest detective: he wants everyone to know he is. Why? Because, as Harrison relates:

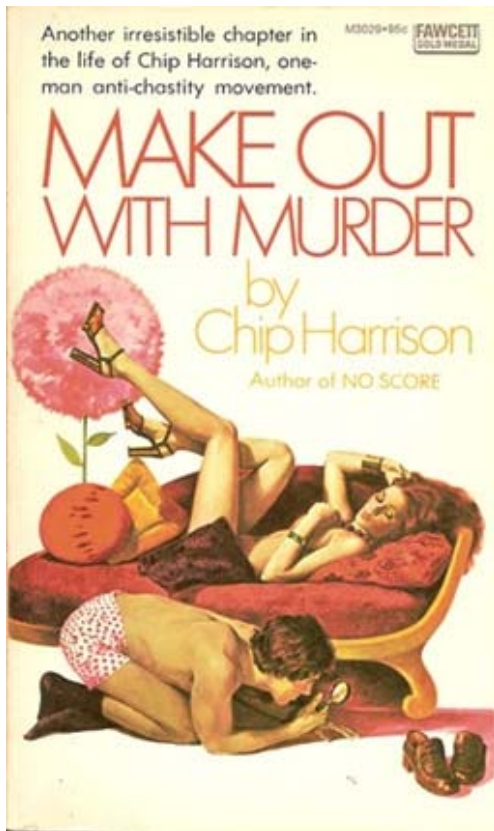
"I know his secret hope. Someday, if he makes enough of a name for himself, if he keeps his standards high, develops just the right sort of eccentricities and idiosyncrasies, possibly someday Nero Wolfe will invite him over to the house on 35th Street for dinner. That's what he really lives for."

This is a fun premise. Wolfe has his orchids. Haig raises fish. Wolfe has his Swiss chef, Fritz. Haig has his Chinese cook, Wong Fat. Harrison narrates the stories, just like Archie Goodwin did.

Harrison has no experience as a detective, and Haig's approach is to basically tell him to do as Archie does. Haig even tries to convince him to move into Haig's residence, which is the top two floors of a four-story building. The bottom two floors are occupied by a Puerto Rican whorehouse and Harrison thinks that might have a negative impression if he ever convinces a female to come back to his place, so he lives in a dumpy apartment nearby.

The first two Chip Harrison books (**No Score** and **Chip Harrison Scores Again**) are not mystery books. They're basically soft core, screwball comedies. With Harrison succeeding in the quest to lose his virginity, Block needed to find a new center for the series. So, he made the next two books into pastiche-parodies of Nero Wolfe. The first two books are pretty much irrelevant to the Haig stories.





But the two Haig/Harrison books could be called soft-core private eye books. Back when stand up comedians didn't commonly include profanity or crude jokes in their acts, it was known as "working blue" when they did so. Think of these two books as Rex Stout working blue. **The Topless Tulip Caper** starts out in a strip joint and is definitely R-rated from the go. **Make out With Murder** is of the same ilk: the picture on the next page gives you the idea. The two short stories don't have any of that stuff; presumably because they were written for magazines.

With that out of the way: they're fun. Haig has a world-class collection of mystery books and Block mentions other books and authors in the genre, like [John D. MacDonald's The Scarlet Ruse](#) and Bill Pronzini (author of the 'Nameless' series). Just as Sherlock Holmes believes crimes from history can provide similarities to a current one, Haig finds precedents to his current case in mystery books he's read.

And Block both acknowledges and pokes fun at some of the conventions of the mystery genre, as well as the Wolfe books specifically. Haig, who failed miserably at smoking a pipe, frequently takes pipes apart while deducing. Sometimes, he breaks them. Not exactly Holmes. In another scene, Harrison says he won't bother explaining how he got a group of suspects to come and how he arranged the seating: something Archie Goodwin does at least once in every story.

Robert Goldsborough has been authorized by the Stout Estate to continue the Wolfe series and has written twelve of them. He is even discussed in the short story, "As Dark as Christmas Gets," which is amusing.

There's not really an Inspector Cramer. Detectives Gregorio and Seidenwall despise Haig and Harrison and are pretty much totally incompetent. And unlikable. If anything, they're a pair of Rowcliffs. They represent New York's not-so-finest in both novels and they are pretty much useless.

I've asked Block a couple of times if there will be any more Haig stories, and he's indicated that it's unlikely. But he revisited Martin Ehrengraf when I thought that series was long done, so I hold out hope for a new story or two from Chip Harrison's pen. Maybe I'll write one myself where ol' Leo finally gets to dine at the brownstone...

# 3 Good Reasons: Not Quite Dead Enough

Welcome to the first installment of 3 Reasons. With a goal of eventually tackling every tale of the Corpus, I'll give three reasons why the particular story at hand is the best Nero Wolfe of them all. Since I'm writing over seventy 'Best Story' essays, the point isn't actually to pick one – just to point out some of what is good in every adventure featuring Wolfe and Archie. And I'll toss in one reason it's not the best story. Now - These essays will contain SPOILERS. **You have been warned!**

## 3 GOOD REASONS

### The First Three Chapters



*“You!” Lily said, in a tone to cut my throat. I was out of my chair in half a second flat*

Quite possibly my favorite sustained opening in all of the Corpus. Archie shows his brash side in chapter one. Major Goodwin is in the office of the head of US Army Intelligence. And though only promoted to major three days before, he pushes for the rank of colonel. He does not sway his commander, but it's classic Archie.

In the next chapter, Lily Rowan, who he has been avoiding since enlisting, snags the seat next to Archie on the plane, having chased him to DC. Archie is chilly, wanting nothing to do with her. His stated reason to her is because of her stance on Ireland giving up naval or air bases; which is patently ridiculous to her (and the reader). The best we get out of Archie is that he's in the Army now.

We get an inside glimpse of Lily, who realizes that she's chasing after a man – not the norm for her. And Archie's unflappable determination to ignore her. Archie later ruminates on the fact that he wouldn't be happy to see her get the electric chair, but he also wouldn't want to see her get away with murder. “Not Quite Dead

Enough” tells us more about their relationship than most other stories in the Corpus.

And as if that weren't enough, in chapter three Archie finds the Brownstone all but abandoned! The office is dusty and unused. And the only consumables in the kitchen are oranges, prunes, lettuce, applesauce and tomatoes. He's convinced that both Wolfe and Fritz are dead.

If that's not enough, we meet Wolfe, who “didn't exactly look smaller, he merely looked deflated.” Wearing one of Archie's sweaters, Wolfe and Fritz have been starving themselves and exercising (we're not talking about playing pool or darts: Wolfe is actually walking outside to lose weight!!) They plan on joining the army, going overseas and killing some Germans.

Archie, who has been ordered by the Army to get Wolfe to use his brain and work on a case, is almost distraught. He actually walks out of the Brownstone to keep from unloading on Wolfe, bringing these very entertaining first three chapters to a close.

### The Lengths Archie Will Go to Get Wolfe to Work

I mentioned there are spoilers, right? While I don't want to give everything away, Archie finds a corpse and immediately comes up with a way to get Wolfe back to work for the Army. He plants some of his own hair underneath the scarf that strangled the woman and plants some clear fingerprints. Later, he is waiting on the front stoop for the police to arrive. He refuses to answer any questions and is tossed in the clink. He uses his one call to phone the press (not Lon Cohen, but Bill Pratt of *The Courier*). The next day's



headline reads, 'Army Major Held in Murder Case. Nero Wolfe's Former Assistant Locked Up.'

Oh my. The scene in Cramer's office where Wolfe, Cramer and Archie unravel all of this is outstanding. Wolfe's anger at Archie is palpable. Wolfe is forced to clear Archie, with Archie demanding that Wolfe let Colonel Ryder come see him before he'll open the bag.

Archie intentionally frames himself for murder to force Wolfe into working on a case for Army Intelligence. Wow.

### The Motive & Method For the Crime

I've given away quite a bit, so I'll actually hold back in this area. But I'm fairly certain I've not run across this particular motive before. It's perfectly logical, but it probably wouldn't be enough for you and I. Well, for me, anyways (looks askance at the reader).

Prolific pulpster Lester Dent, in Master Plot Formula, right out of the gate, instructs, "A Different Murder Method for the Villain to Use."

While the actual method used in this case is not uncommon, it's essentially composed of two parts and it's definitely not an everyday thing. It's certainly not replicated anywhere else in the Corpus. And the way Wolfe breaks it apparently would never occur to Archie. When you put the two elements together, this one kinda sticks out.

## ONE BAD REASON

### Archie at his Worst?

Having heard that she is dead, Archie rushes to Ann Amory's apartment. Roy Douglas is standing in Ann's doorway, "his face pasty and twitching, trembling all over." Archie had come upon a man who has just killed his fiancé, looking way beyond discomfited. And Archie gives him some money and sends him out of town to keep an eye on the possible killer, who he also instructed to leave town!

Archie is very good at his job. He usually succeeds when Wolfe sends him on a mission and he's dedicated enough that it bothers him when he fails; even if the task was herculean. But this can't be considered one of his shining moments.

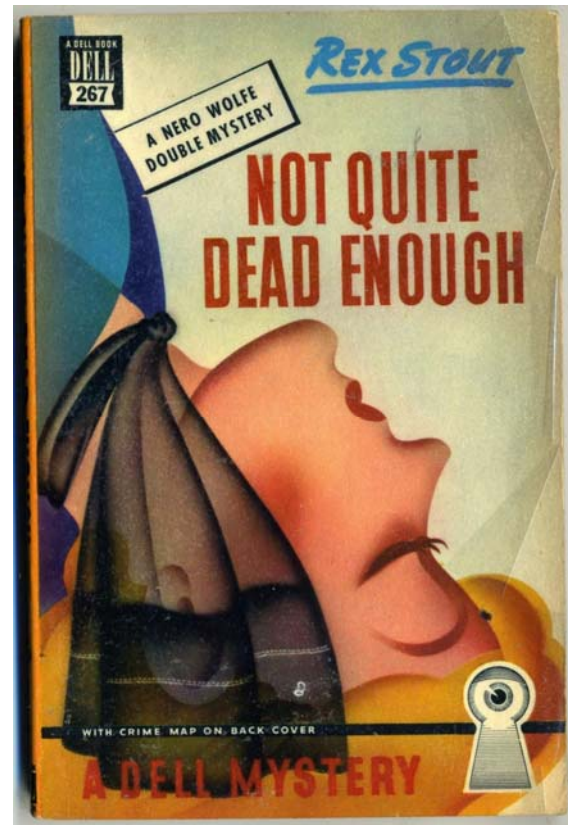
Now, he did put some thought into it. Having thought, After all, Roy Douglas was Ann's fiancé, and although it seemed incredible that he could have been coolheaded enough to sit and chin with me about pigeons just after strangling his sweetheart, I had to make sure if I didn't want to make a double-breasted boob of myself,' Archie does his due diligence. He reports, 'It was gratifying to know I hadn't slipped the murderer a hundred bucks to take a trip to the country.'

The gratification was short-lived, as Archie did exactly that. Roy didn't flee and he returned to town, going directly to the Brownstone, as instructed. But while the police were (cluelessly) looking for Ann Amory's killer, Archie had him stashed at a hotel in the country.

It's understandable, since Lily Rowan, his girlfriend, lied outrageously and he relied on what she said. But facts are facts: Archie isn't an admirable private investigator in this one.

## MISCELLANEA

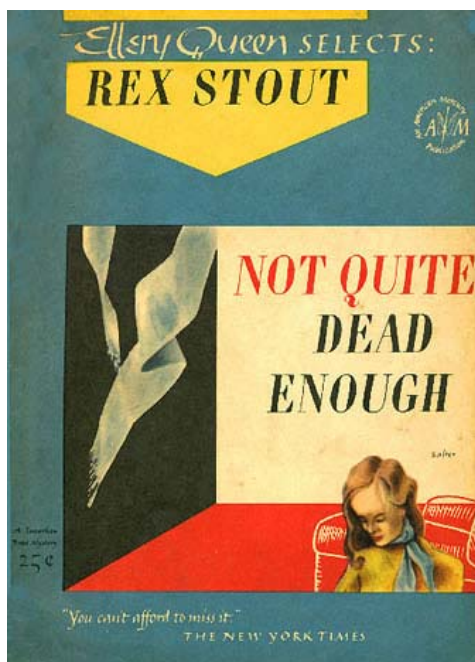
The head of Army Intelligence tells Archie that he did a good job with 'that mess down in Georgia.' Here we have an unrecorded adventure of Archie (sans Wolfe, while he was in the military).



This is one of two stories using World War II as a backdrop. It was paired with the other, "Booby Trap" and published as a double novella in 1944 as "Not Quite Dead Enough."

General Fife and Colonel Rider are mentioned in this story and play prominent roles in "Booby Trap." Colonel Cross is mentioned but not seen in both stories.

## YOU DON'T SAY



"That house seemed to be inhabited exclusively by conclusion-jumpers." – Archie

"I am going to kill some Germans. I didn't kill enough in 1918. Whatever your reason for coming here – I presume it is your furlough before going overseas – I am sorry you came. I am quite aware of the physical difficulties that confront me, and I will tolerate no remarks from you. I am more keenly aware of them than you are. I am sorry you came, because I am undertaking a complicated adjustment in my habits, and your presence will make it more burdensome. I congratulate you on your promotion. If you are staying for dinner –" Wolfe to Archie

Stebbins - "Well – for instance. When did you last see Ann Amory?"

Archie – "Aw, hell," I said regretfully. "You would do that. Ask me the one question I'm not answering tonight. This is my night for not answering any questions whatever about anybody named Ann."



# STAMPED FOR MURDER

## CHAPTER ONE

*As I mentioned on Page 9, Sidney Greenstreet starred in a radio series entitled 'The New Adventures of Nero Wolfe.' Stamped for Murder was one of the episodes in that show. While keeping as much of the original dialogue and story-line intact as I could, I have written that episode up as a full-blown pastiche. There is no doubt that there is much that is un-Corpus in this story—I believe that's attributable to the source material. And the style is a mix of my own and the original script. I intend to write up additional episodes and I will do my best to sound a bit more like Stout and a bit less like the radio show.*

Nero Wolfe had just settled his seventh of a ton into the only chair that really fit him. Made of Brazilian Mauro wood, it was in this room, the office: as opposed to the dining room, kitchen or the front room, because he spent about nine hours a day here. You read that right: nine hours. Not that he spent most of that time working.

Down from his two hours in the plant rooms on the roof, he had greeted me with the standard "Good morning" and placed a spray of *Miltonia Charlesworthi* in the vase on his desk. After going through the usual ritual, which includes drinking beer, brought by our chef, housekeeper and doorman, Fritz, going through the morning mail and checking his pen (which I've already done), he looked up at me.

"Your notebook please, Archie."

It was there on my desk, ready for use. I took a pen from the middle drawer and swiveled my chair, not made of Mauro wood but under much less pressure, to face him.

"Inform Mister Salzenbach that the recent Long Island pea fowl he provided was most unsatisfactory. Pea fowl's breast flesh is not sweet and tender unless it is well protected from all alarms. Especially from the air, to prevent nervousness. Long island is full of airplanes."

"About Salzenbach..." I interjected, but he continued.

"I shall want a dozen chickens fed on fresh blueberries. And a fresh killed lamb for tomorrow."

"Yeah. There's not going to be any lamb tomorrow."

He grunted at me. "Don't be ridiculous. Of course there will be. Please wait until after lunch to begin aggravating me."

I put down my notebook and pen. That got his attention. "Are you ready to listen?"

The silence he showered upon me was a good enough answer for me.

When Salzenbach's man delivered that last load of grub..."

"Archie!" I have told you that word is not to be used in this house. Nor will 'chow,' 'feed' and the like."

I should have known better than to give him a reason to interrupt when I had his attention.

"Okay. Delivery of provisions. Anyhow, he's not going to give us any more credit. We need to pay him what



we owe.”

He took in no more than one bushel full of air and let it back out. “So be it. You are responsible for preparing the checks, are you not? Or has there been a change in duties that I am unaware of.”

I nodded my assent, though what I really wanted to do was throw the phone at him. “I am, as you darn well know. And I’m also responsible for keeping an eye on the bank balance before writing those checks. And we’re running low.”

“Nonsense.”

“Saying it won’t make it so. You just had to have those Dendrobium bulbs last week. And they weren’t cheap.”

I eyed him sternly. “You’ve just pointed out my duties around here. And you were kind enough not to disparage my performance. Another duty is to remind you that it is your responsibility to solve cases and make the money that pays Fritz, Theodore and myself, and for the orchids, the food, the books, the...”

“You’ve made your point, Archie. I will consider the next case presented to me, if only so you will stop badgering me and I can do my crossword puzzle in peace.”

I looked at my watch, which read 11:15. At that moment, the doorbell rang and he stared at me with suspicion. I ignored him and before he could hurl an accusation, I rose and went to the front door, waving Fritz back into the kitchen. Looking through the one way glass, I saw an unfamiliar woman, along with a man, on the steps. I pulled the door open and she spoke before I could greet them.

“Mister Goodwin? I’m Gloria Kent. You said to be here at 11:15. So here I am.”

Under normal circumstances she might have been in the neighborhood of pretty, but you didn’t have to be a first rate detective like me to see that she was under a heavy load. Rodman was a mousey little guy with sloped shoulders, a wispy moustache and thin hair that would probably be all gone before too long.

“And so you are. Who’s the escort?”

His voice matched his looks. “I’m Gerald Rodman. I had some information that helped Miss Kent with her... difficulty.” She nodded in agreement, so I let them in. I took their coats and stepped ahead of them into the office.

Wolfe looked up as I ushered Miss Kent to the red leather chair. Rodman took a yellow one next to her. I moved around to my desk and introduced them to Wolfe.

“Miss Gloria Kent and Mister Rodman. Meet Nero Wolfe.” I looked at him meaningfully. “She has a pressing problem that needs your special talents. For a fee.”

Wolfe glared at each in turn, then shifted his gaze to me. I resisted the impulse to grin and looked back placidly.

Miss Kent was clearly uncomfortable and turned her attention to me, then back to Wolfe. “Is something wrong? Did I make a mistake about my appointment time? I thought that Mister Goodwin said...”

“You people are here by sufferance only. I shall speak to Mister Goodwin about your ‘appointment’ later. Yes

indeed, I shall." Oh boy.

"I don't like pressing problems. What are yours?"

She grasped the fingers of her left hand with her right hand, trying to compose herself.

"My father." She hesitated for a moment and Wolfe jumped into the breach.

"Indeed, I'm not a court of domestic relations Miss Kent. What does your father do? Beat you, hold your earnings, discourage your suitors? Mister Goodwin should have informed you that this office does not undertake cases involving marital or family problems.

"But that's not it," she said in a plaintive voice. I was afraid she wasn't going to be able to hold her ground in the face of Wolfe's personality onslaught. Braver folks than her have failed to do so.

"If Mister Goodwin had not been beguiled by your pretty face, you could have avoided this embarrassment to you and annoyance to me."

He was being more petty than normal and I tried to slow him down. "Now, now, take it easy. That's no way to handle a potential client."

"Yes. Handling young women is your specialty. Or rather, your Achilles heel. Would that Paris was here with his bow. Suppose you let Miss Kent handle me and be quiet?" He leaned back in his chair and gazed at her with eyes half closed.

I've got to give her credit. She squared her shoulders, took a deep breath and did her best. I wanted to give her a pat on the shoulder, but it wasn't the time or place for it.

"It's simply this Mister Wolfe. I had some money my mother left me and my father's just spent it. Without my permission. I want it back without a scandal."

"How much? How was it spent?" His immediate response was a good sign that she might be able to hang on a bit longer.

"\$10,000." She paused and looked down at her lap. "Father bought a treasure map."

Wolfe opened his eyes. "A map? Indeed. From whom?"

"A pair of despicable swindlers named Cross and Halleck." Her emotions were rising again.

"They've driven him crazy, Mister Wolfe. Talking about fortune that they've salvaged from the SS this and the SS that. Father's got a map and old letters he studies, as if he's going to find some treasure chest full of gold coins! He's childish."

"Many fortunes have been recovered while many more await on the sea bottom. How do you know your father's been duped, Miss Kent?"

"Well, I know."

It was the first peep from Rodman since he had joined us. I had to say, that having him as my backup wouldn't exactly inspire confidence in my situation.

Wolfe shifted his attention to the man without moving his head in the slightest. I've seen lizards basking on rocks that exerted more energy than he does. "You do, Mister Rodman?"

He cleared his throat weakly. Nothing about this guy indicated he had much substance.

"Yes. Cross and Halleck bought some old letters from me, written by my grandfather from Hawaii. They used them to manufacture the map and evidence. And that's what they sold to Miss Kent's father."

He had leaned forward in the chair but now slumped back.

"Father thought he was being so clever. He had the papers analyzed." Her voice wavered.

"Of course the document research laboratory said the letters were genuine. Because they were. But something new had been added." She gulped air.

"I'd have never have known if Mister Rodman hadn't told me." She took a cloth from her purse and wiped moisture away from her eyes.

"You are a party to the swindle, Mister Rodman." It was not delivered as a question.

"I was not." He actually squeaked. "I never knew what they were up to."

"Mister Wolfe you've got to help me. I can't do anything with father. I can't convince him it's all lies. Even Mister Rodman can't." There was no doubt that the floodgates were about to open. She had held off as long as she could.

"No Miss Kent, I'm sorry, this is not for me." Brusque doesn't even begin to cover his tone.

"But you must, you must." And that was all it took for the tears. If there is anything Wolfe cannot abide in his presence, it is a hysterical woman.

He was already up and moving to the door. "Not in my office madam. No tears. Archie, stop her!"

"Okay, okay." I moved out from behind my desk and proffered her my handkerchief, though she was sobbing into her hands.

"Archie, When Miss Kent has finished her disgraceful exhibition, show them out." His voice trailed off as he went to the kitchen.

The pint sized knight jumped out of his chair. "How dare you walk out on a.."

I held both hands up to him, palms outward. "Easy there tiger, easy. I know him and you don't. He gets into a panic when women cry. Or maybe he's curious about what Fritz is making for lunch. Now, wait a minute please. Let me handle this. You tend to Miss Kent."

With that, I left them in the office and went to find my cowardly employer.

Wolfe was standing at the counter in the kitchen, watching Fritz shredding carrots.

"Doesn't that beat all? Aren't you ashamed of yourself, walking out on her like that?"

He didn't even bother to look up at me. "That hysterical female? Pfui."

"She's lost all of her money. She needs help."



"I charge high fees, Archie. How do you propose she pay for our services?"

"So charge a small fee. Do you want her to starve?"

"Good heavens. Starve? How monstrous."

"I'm not kidding. While you'll be in here smelling your dinner, she and her father will be starving."

"I thought you were bringing me a paying client."

"Well, this is different. She's, uh..

"Beautiful. You're impossible."

I stood there silently while Fritz continued with the knife work.

"Oh, very well. Go back in there. Get names, addresses, facts. However, I am not committed to Miss Kent's case."

I turned and hurried out before he changed his mind, but I still heard his parting shot.

"I pay for your weakness for a pretty face. Pfui."

## CHAPTER TWO

They were gone when I returned to the office. All I had were the few facts she'd given me over the phone and which I had jotted down in my notebook. Wolfe came back in, closed his eyes, fat and content, and I glared at him.

"How much of you is awake?"

"Bah. What Archie?"

"Well, they left while we were in the kitchen. She'd probably had enough of you for one meeting. Did you tell me you'd help this girl just to get her out of the office or did you mean it?"

"You're a gadfly."

"No sir. You're stuck on this one. Start using your genius."

There's not another man on earth who can get such a wide range of emotions out of a sigh.

"Did something about Mister Rodman get your attention, Archie?"

"He could use some lessons from Charles Atlas, but other than that, not really."

"How did Rodman discover that the letters he sold were being altered by forgery and used for a swindle? How did he locate the duped Mister Kent?"

He stared at me from under half-closed lids. There could be any of a half-dozen explanations, but neither of our visitors had explained his entry into the situation. And happenstance was too much of a stretch since without him, Gloria wouldn't know the whole thing was definitely a fake. I hated it when he was right. Although he would pay for that Paris comment. I've read about the Trojan War.

"Yeah. I guess you're right. But what about now. Are you going to get Gloria's money back?"

"I assume you call Miss Kent Gloria solely in order to annoy me. It does. Stop it. Get Cross & Halleck here."

"Now you're on the job. Got it."

"You'll find them at the Hotel Bogaart."

Huh uh. Wrong. I looked up their address after I came back in here..."

"Never mind their address. The Hotel Bogaart is the headquarters of successful confidence tricksters. They celebrate their victories there. You will probably find Cross and Halleck drinking whiskey or lunching. Probably both. Now go get them and let me in peace."

I located Cross and Halleck in the hotel bar and lured them back to our place on 35<sup>th</sup> Street. Remind me some time to tell you about that little trip. When I described the place to Wolfe, he called it a 'den of reprobates.' Using my charm and intelligence, I convinced them I was a sucker looking to find someone to assist in spending a recently acquired windfall.

When I escorted them into the office, Wolfe was sitting behind his desk, with his hands crossed on his impressive middle, at peace with his lunch and the world. Seeing that I had delivered, he scorched me with a look. He hates to work before the 4:00 session with the orchids. Or after, for that matter.

"The tall one's name is Cross and the short one is Halleck. They, uh, want to help me invest my money."

I waved a hand expansively. "Gentlemen, Mister Nero Wolfe."

They had been celebrating at the hotel but weren't so far gone that they didn't recognize the name. They sputtered and protested upon finding themselves in what they must have considered the lion's den. It was really rather pitiful.

Wolfe was not amused. "Archie! How drunk are they?"

"Not too drunk for discussing business," I assured him.

Cross was the first one whose muddled brain found a handle on the situation. "Let's get out of here. C'mon."

I darted over and put my back to the door. "You want me to keep them here?" There were two of them, but in their present state I could handle them without too much strain.

"No. Not by force."

They were deciding whether or not to try and push their way past me and out into the hall when Wolfe made the decision for them.

"Come back here, gentlemen, unless you want seven years in the state penitentiary." His words and the tone of voice got their attention and they turned to face him. Cross spoke.

"You got nothin' on us Wolfe, nothin' at all."

"Oh, but I do, sir. I have the Kent Case."

Halleck peered at him. "The Kent Case?"

Wolfe had spent hours trading jabs with some of the coolest customers I'd ever seen. These two weren't going to be any trouble at all.

“Please sit down. I like eyes at a level.”

They looked at each other and then back to me, still blocking their exit. With a shrug, Cross took the big red chair and Halleck plopped down in a yellow one next to him. Halleck seemed to be in the worse shape of the pair and willing to follow his partner.

Wolfe nodded his head an eighth of an inch and I went back over to my desk and sat down.

“That’s a laugh. We’re sittin’ pretty.”

“You are not, Mister Cross. Not at all. You imagine that you possess legal immunity.”

A grin appeared on Cross’ face. “Yeah, we do.”

Wolfe had an amazing ability. Without raising his voice, his words could cut as if he were yelling. They sliced through the person he was talking to like a sharp sword, but his volume was suitable for the dinner table. I still hadn’t figured it out.

“You do not, sir. Mister Kent believes your grotesque balderdash and will not sue you for fraud. He is manifestly a dolt. Miss Kent cannot sue because she is reluctant to accuse her father of wrongfully obtaining her money. Ergo, you think you are invulnerable.”

Cross leaned forward. “Now listen, you overweight...”

Wolfe cut him off. “But you forget me, at your peril. I am a detective with a fee to earn.”

Halleck started to say something but didn’t get a word in.

“I am determined to get that fee. Therefore, as Miss Kent’s agent I can and will bring action against you. I am indifferent to her tears or her father’s disgrace. I am indifferent to anything outside of money. Your ill-gotten money. You will return the \$10,000 to me at once, sir, or you will be in jail by morning. As will your partner!”

“You mean that?” Cross’ voice didn’t quite shake, but he was losing his mental footing.

“I would not have said it had I not.”

That was a bit too complex for our somewhat inebriated guests. Wolfe stared at their confused expressions, looked at me and followed up.

“Yes, I do.”

Cross rose and moved over to the giant globe in the corner and looked back at his partner. “C’mere, Halleck did as instructed and they mumbled quietly. This went on for a minute or so before Wolfe prompted them. I was surprised he waited that long.

“I don’t have all day and you are in my office, gentlemen.”

They moved back to stand in front of his desk. “Ok. Here, Wolfe. We’ve decided we don’t want to get in any trouble with you. Here’s the ten grand.”

I got up and moved next to Halleck and reached out. “I’ll take that.”

“Give the dough to Kent, Wolfe, and get the letters and map back for us. You’ve got a reputation for being



tricky, but honest. We trust you.”

They turned and marched out. I didn’t follow them to the front door but let them go on their own. I smiled at Wolfe, sat at my desk and began counting the money.

I must have chuckled.

“Preposterous.”

“No sir.” I held up a wad. “Take a look. Genuine coin of the realm.”

“That man Cross is a nitwit. Does he imagine I am to be fooled so easily?”

“What do you mean? They left the money.” I’m sure the puzzlement showed on my face.

Wolfe leaned back in his chair. “He surrendered too quickly. Too easily. And that money in the envelope. He was carrying it, ready to refund. Why? They didn’t even know I would be here.”

He had me there. “Well, maybe he’s got a better sucker. I heard him mention a Ben Sandford while we were at the hotel.”

“Nonsense. Does they need Kent’s forged letters and map to cheat this Ben Sandford? Wouldn’t it be more likely that they would prepare another set, rather than give up \$10,000 already in hand?”

In my excitement at having filled Gloria’s order so quickly, I hadn’t looked too deep. “I guess you’re right. Something’s fishy.”

“In any event, it’s no concern of mine, thank heaven.”

Uh oh. “Why not?”

He sighed. “I’m not committed to Miss Kent in any way. As a favor to you, I undertook to regain her money. I have done that. You may take it back to her and obtain the forged papers in return.”

“But...”

“Silence, Archie. Go to your red-headed charmer and leave me in peace. I intend to spend the afternoon with my new world atlas.”

### **CHAPTER THREE**

He looked down into that large tome and I knew he was finished with me. I couldn’t really argue, as he’d done what she’d asked. And it wasn’t even clear we’d get paid a dime out of it. Sometimes, when you go against a genius, you’re going to come up short.

So, I left him three thousand miles up the Amazon with his magnifying glass, grabbed the Heron sedan that he owns and I drive, from the garage around the corner and drove up to East 69<sup>th</sup> Street. Sometimes, I missed having the roadster, but since Wolfe pays for the cars and he wouldn’t ride in a roadster, even under duress, he had sold it. Fritz has been pretending he doesn’t know how to drive for so long, he may really have forgotten how, so the Heron is all but mine anyways.

The Kent house was a broken down little brownstone. Not a lot of effort had been put into upkeep and chipped masonry and a rusted railing greeted me out front. As I went up the stoop, the door opened and Glo-

ria Kent burst out like a rocket. I grabbed her shoulders before she could bounce off of me.

“Hey, Miss Kent, easy, easy.”

She struggled to get loose, her eyes not even seeing me. “Let go of me. Let go!”

I got her to look at me. “It’s me, Archie Goodwin. What’s wrong?”

The eyes were anything but calm. “What’s wrong? Wrong? Nothing is wrong. Nothing at all!”

“I came to see your father. Is he here?” I wanted to calm her down enough to get her inside and sitting down. She looked on the brink of completely losing control.

“You want to see my father. Oh yes, let’s do that. Come inside.”

“For the love of heaven...”

She turned and went inside. I followed. Her voice remained pitched on the edge of hysteria.

“I’ll introduce you. He’s in a back room. Come back through the living room.”

I went into alarm mode. The room had been thoroughly tossed: It was a total mess. After a bad experience years ago, I had decided to never go on a murder case without a gun. But

"Where did you go after you left the office?"

"The laboratory."

She was in shock, but had moved away from the ledge. I let go of her face but kept a wary eye on her. "What lab?"

"Documents Research. The place that verified the map." She pushed some stray hairs away from her eyes. That was a good sign.

"How long were you there?"

"Until an hour ago. With Mister Rodman."

"Keep looking at me. And then?"

"I went to lunch."

"With Rodman?"

"No, alone. Then I came home."

"All right. All right, now listen to me. I want you to go to Mister Wolfe's house, right now. Have you got cab fare?"

"Yes."

"Take a cab. I've got to stay here, but I'll call Mister Wolfe and tell him you're on the way. Now get."

First thing, I called her a cab. While waiting for it to arrive, I called the number I knew best.

"What?"

What a way to answer the phone. "It's me. I'm at Gloria Kent's house."

"Congratulations. What of it?"

Someday I was really going to tell him what I thought of his comments. "Her father's dead. Somebody put a knife to his throat. I'm sending her to see you."

"Whatever for?"

I let out a growl. "Really? She's on the way. Have Fritz give her some soup or something and put her in the south room. She's in shock. I'll handle her when I get there. But if Cramer gets a hold of her first, he'll keep her until the case is over."

"Pfui. Anything else to report?"

"Do I call Cramer?"

"Yes. Goodbye." He hung up. I've had deeper telephone conversations with cemetery plot salesmen than I've had with Wolfe.

The cab arrived and I packed her inside, told her I'd meet her as soon as I could and gave the driver the address on West 35<sup>th</sup> Street. Then I went back inside, took a deep breath and called Homicide West and got Purley Stebbins. Once he decided I was on the level, he told me not to touch anything and clicked off in a hur-

ry. Hanging up on me seemed to be the day's leading activity.

I stood out front and a patrol car arrived in less than five minutes. Almost immediately after that, two plainclothes rolled up. Proving what kind of a day I was having, Inspector Rowcliff followed. Ty Cobb and Honus Wagner were boon companions compared to me and Rowcliff. If anyone ever conclusively proved to me that he was human, I'd have to find another race to join. Though it was unlikely to happen.

He couldn't decide whether he wanted to chew my face off or run the show inside. Finally, he ordered me into the doorway of the living room where he could do both. I told him that I was visiting on behalf of a client of Wolfe's and didn't know what had happened in the house.

He was still clearly unhappy with my ignorance when Stebbins and the head of Homicide, Inspector Fergus T. Cramer, arrived. Cramer brushed past me without even a hello and looked over the office. I followed to the doorway and he turned back to me. "Cheese and Rice, Goodwin, go stand in that room and stay out of the way. Purley, make sure he does."

I straightened up. "That is no way to treat a civic-minded citizen who happened to wander upon a dead body and immediately called the police."

Rowcliff started to open his mouth but didn't get a sound out. "Can it, Rowcliff." I admired Cramer a bit. He hadn't even taken his eyes off of me to shut down the lieutenant.

"I'll just bet you called it in immediately. You probably called that fat boss of yours and then tossed the joint yourself. Search him, Purley."

Rowcliff barked like a seal. I'm certainly not above disparaging the man, but that's what it sounded like.

Boy, am I glad I didn't have the ten thousand in my coat pocket. I let Purley do his job and frowned at Cramer.

More city officials arrived and after a while of watching disinterestedly, I sat on the edge of a sofa.

"Hey, Goodwin, this is a crime scene. Get up!"

I arose. "Well, I'm sorry about that, Purley. I mean, I'd hate to mess up the cushions or anything."

The various employees photographed, measured, printed and dusted with no input from me.

A little later, Cramer took me out front, Stebbins tagging along. I had to use all of my powers of persuasion to keep him from taking me downtown as a material witness. They might keep me until daybreak, and dinner would be no treat. I pointed out that I was the reason they even knew there had been a murder. Even though it placed me in imminent peril, what finally saved me was that I told him I'd put Gloria Kent in a cab and sent her to Wolfe's office.

I much preferred to be sitting behind my own desk when Cramer's face turned that shade of crimson. I had to step backwards to keep him from throwing me in the back of a black and white and sending me to the precinct for a long, lonely wait.

I finally got him calmed down enough to realize that his best play was to take me home and confront Wolfe. He did so, with Stebbins riding along.



## CHAPTER FOUR

The front door wasn't latched, so I opened up and took a step in. Cramer shouldered past me and marched down the hallway towards the office. I called out but he didn't slow. Stebbins smiled at me as he went by. I hung up my coat and hat in a hurry and hot stepped it to the office.

Wolfe had already bellowed at Cramer and slowed his assault. "Now take off your hat and coat like a civilized visitor, sit down and ask your questions, sir!" Cramer had charged into that room dozens of times under full steam and not once had he bulldozed Wolfe. He'd never learn.

I moved to his side and held out my hand. He glared at me, then at Wolfe, then back to me.

"You and your 'civilities.' Sure, why not?" He tossed his coat into my chest and handed me his hat. I laid them on the sofa, not wanting to go back out to the rack by the front door. Stebbins remained standing not far from the doorway, keeping his coat. With the situation under control, I took my normal position at my desk and waited.

Cramer got across his point that a man had been murdered. And that I had aided and abetted the woman who discovered the body, that man's very daughter, in fleeing the scene. I wanted to get her to Wolfe so he could ask her questions before the police did. As theories go, from his point of view, it wasn't a bad one at all.

It looked like things were going to explode again at that point, but Wolfe was more restrained than normal and I interjected myself into the proceedings to try and snuff out the fuse. Turns out my help wasn't needed.

"Inspector. The woman had just found her father murdered. Mister Goodwin has informed you that she was on the edge of breaking down. He knows the female sex better than I do. You know that I cannot abide a woman in that mood. Their moments of lucidity are merely short breaks from their natural state of hysteria."

Cramer had taken a cigar out of his pocket and was rolling it between his hands. I knew he wasn't going to light it up. Early in my acquaintance with the man, he had been known to smoke one. But I could count on one hand and have a finger and a thumb left over the number of times I had seen him light up the past several years. When dealing with Wolfe, instead of counting to ten, he clamped his teeth down on a cigar to try and get himself under control. It did help some, though certainly not enough. With what he spent on them, it was a good thing he didn't actually smoke them. The damage to his health might be beyond repair.

And in his mouth the cigar went.

"Yeah. You could stare down a charging rhino, but the second a dame starts to shed some tears." He stopped and chewed.

"I know your feelings towards my involvement in a murder case, inspector. I have not spoken a word with Miss Kent. I no more wished her here than I do you."

Ouch. That had to hurt a little.

"I have often told you that the burden of proof is on you to convince me that what I know is germane to your investigation. It is my decision on whether or not to share any or all information with you."

Cramer took the cigar out of his mouth. "Now wait just a minute damn minute."

Wolfe held a hand up. "Do not attempt to browbeat me. I assure you, it is useless. What I know is certainly relevant to your murder." And I'll be darned if Wolfe didn't open the bag and tell him everything, from Kent and Rodman's visit up to my phone call from the Kent house.

Leaving Cramer to think it over, he took a break, ringing for Fritz to bring beer. He didn't offer Cramer any, which was neither usual nor unusual. I don't think the inspector cared, as he was digesting Wolfe's account and figuring angles. Stebbins had moved forward and taken a yellow chair. He looked as if he suspected Wolfe of holding something back, which he did anytime Wolfe was talking.

Cramer wasn't angry anymore. He was trying to piece things together. His tone was almost conversational.

"It's quite a story, Wolfe. Kent buys a phony treasure map. Everybody knows it's a fake but Kent. Cross and Halleck try to buy it back and Kent gets himself murdered."

"Yes. Events do seem to have occurred in a rather linear matter."

Cramer just grunted.

"If you would perhaps share information with me. Did you find the map and letters in the house, inspector?"

"We weren't looking for them. If you had told us beforehand..."

"That is fatuous and you know it. I was hired by a client to investigate a simple case of fraud. If she chose not to consult the authorities, there was no reason for me to do so, either."

Cramer growled. "I suppose that's a point." A little more cigar chewing took place.

"We wouldn't find any map or letters if Goodwin did first."

The corners of Wolfe's mouth went up a full quarter of an inch. That was a broad smile for him. "Really, inspector. Do you expect me to believe that you didn't have him searched almost immediately?"

"Of course we did. And before you ask, he didn't have anything on him. He could have hidden...Oh, what's the damn use?" He looked at me. I grinned back.

"No. We didn't find what you described."

"The killer was after the map."

"The phony map?"

"Certainly."

"Why?"

Purley was watching intently but still hadn't spoken. When he tackles Wolfe on his own, he gets too nervous and botches it. When he follows Cramer here, he usually doesn't get involved in the discussion. I don't want to give the impression he's a bad cop. He and I have even shared a steak before. He just doesn't like private detectives and he knows he isn't a match for Wolfe.

"Yes. That is certainly the question, inspector. If we knew that, we would know why Cross and Halleck were so willing to pay back the money and why Mister Kent was murdered."

I tossed in, just for something to say, "Maybe it's not phony."

That made no impression on Wolfe or Cramer. Purley didn't even bother to look over at me. I clammed up.

"Okay Wolfe, tell me this. Suppose it was the daughter? She admitted to you her father took her money for a fairy tale map. What if she's at home and confronts him? Who knows what he says? But she can't take it and she kills him. How about that?"

Wolfe took in a bushel of air and let it out. "Come now, inspector. That's a simpleton's approach, and you are no simpleton. She cuts her father's throat, hours after hiring me to get her money back? That ignores the map entirely. You can do better than that, surely."

Cramer rose from the chair without using his arms, something he does because he knows that Wolfe can't.

"Maybe so. But I'm not ruling it out. I'd better see the girl now."

"You think that will pin her for the murder?"

"I'll know better after I ask a few questions."

"Tonight. She's had a shock, Mister Cramer. She needs rest."

The cheeks started to flush again. "Look, Wolfe. I want her. Don't start your tricks." Stebbins was standing now as well.

"Why bother with her when there is so much to be done?"

Cramer had started walking towards the doorway, intending to mount the stairs, but he stopped and turned.

"Yeah, such as?"

"Cross and Halleck. Find them. And the mystery man they spoke of, Ben Sandford. He's the man you want now, not this overwrought girl." He almost shuddered at the thought of Gloria breaking down again in his office.

Cramer eyed Wolfe, then me, and finally Stebbins. He wasn't sure what to do.

"Well...all right. The girl will be here for questioning tonight?"

"Tonight, Mister Cramer."

"Ok. You'll hear from me later."

He tossed his now well-chewed cigar at my trash can, surprisingly missing by less than a foot. He reclaimed his hat and coat from the sofa and left the office without saying anything else. Stebbins followed and I trailed behind. I locked the door behind them and went back into the office.

"Well, you certainly buffaloed him out of that."

"Bah. He only came out of pique. You disposed of Miss Kent and had the gall to send her here. He knows there are the usual avenues to explore beyond the girl."

"Why don't you want her questioned? Is she guilty?"

"I haven't the faintest."

"Well, what did she say when she got here?"

"She said nothing. She never arrived."

I goggled at him. "She never what?"

"She never arrived."

I was amazed. "Then why did you tell Cramer she was resting?"

"Would he have believed the truth? Bah. She must be found. But more importantly, we must learn why forged letters and a forged map have produced this turmoil. I wish to end this aggravation!"

"Find the killer and you find the map. You said so yourself."

He gazed at me without blinking. "I said the reverse, which is an altogether different statement. Words are important. It's why I am careful which ones I choose and how I use the ones I do."

"Yes, I'll try to remember that. Great tip. Thanks."

"I want a photograph of that map. Get it."

I slapped my palms down on the desk. "Oh, sure. Any particular camera you want me to use?"

"You'll find the photograph at 200 Vanderbilt Street."

Sometimes, talking with Wolfe, I felt like I was in some alternate world. "Are you kidding me?"

He looked forlornly at the empty beer bottles still on his desk. "A laboratory cannot check the authenticity of old papers without photographing them in ultraviolet light, infrared light and so on. If this document research lab has examined these papers, they will have photographs. Get them."

"And how do I do that?"

He got out of his chair and headed to the house elevator. It was 4:00 and time for his afternoon session with the orchids. I followed him out. Before the elevator door closed, he said, "Use your intelligence, guided by experience."

The doors closed. I said to them, "Of course. Thanks. I never would have thought of that myself. I wish you'd given me that advice before."

## CHAPTER FIVE

Putting on my hat and coat, I told Fritz I was going out and to lock up behind me, now that murder was in the mix. I hadn't gone half a block before I remembered that the Heron was still at Kent's house. I was legally parked, but who knew when I'd need it in a hurry? So, I walked over to 11<sup>th</sup> and got a cab. There were a couple cops out front of Kent's place to keep the curious at bay, but I didn't see any indoor activity. I ignored the scene and reclaimed the car. I'd spent enough time there for one day.

From there, I drove down to the document research laboratory on Vanderbilt. After a few minutes talking to the guy in charge, I dialed Wolfe, even though I knew he was with the orchids.

"What?"

"Archie here."



“What’s the matter? Are you lost?”

No sir. But I found something.”

“Photographs?”

“No. I don’t think you’ll ever see any photographs of the Kent map. I don’t think any were taken.”

“Indeed.”

“But guess who runs the document research laboratory?”

I didn’t let him answer.

“No, don’t guess, you probably know. A man named Ben Sandford and he’s sitting right here, looking at me.”

“Bring him here.”

“But you’re with the orchids.”

“Archie, bring him.”

Something really was bugging Wolfe if he was going to let me take a visitor – maybe a killer – up to the plant rooms to talk to Wolfe. I think it had something to do with having promised Gloria to Cramer with no idea where she actually was.

“Hey, how about this place. Must be a million flowers up here.”

We were walking through the cool room. I wouldn’t have taken Sandford for a flower fancier. But Wolfe has more than once referred to the ‘insidious charms’ of the orchids and I haven’t encountered too many people who fail to notice their beauty.

“No, not flowers. Orchids only. Mister Wolfe has 10,000 of them.”

His head swiveled back and forth, trying to take it all in as we moved into the tropical room. “Never seen anything like them.”

“And you never will again, brother.”

We had reached the potting room. “Say, what kind is that on the bench?”

“Oh that. That’s our pride and joy. *Odontoglossum harrayanum*. And above them the *Vanda petersiana*.”

I pointed to my left. “And the black ones are the *Coelogyne pandurata*. Common to Borneo and Malaysia.”

Wolfe was sitting at the bench. Theodore Horstmann, whose chief job was to baby him in all matters related to the plants, hovered over his shoulder, glaring at me for interrupting. He’s no Rowcliff, but some day I’d like to tie Horstmann up and kick him to the curb.

“The large object mulching flower pots is Nero Wolfe.”

Wolfe looked up.

“Mister Wolfe. Ben Sandford.”

Wolfe would have loved to unload on me for bringing Sandford up, but since he had told me to do that very thing, he had to swallow it. Instead, he got up, walked over to the sink and washed his hands, drying them on his smock.

“We will finish this later, Theodore. Go check the supplies of pots.”

Theodore nodded, gave me another dirty look and left the room. Wolfe sat in the only real chair in the room and turned his attention to Sandford. “Good afternoon, sir.”

“Yeah, hello. I came along to be obliging. I got nothing to say about anything.”

The initial attraction of the orchids had worn off. Apparently, he had realized where he was and who he was about to talk to.

“How much have you offered Cross and Halleck for their treasure map?”

“No comment.”

Wolfe stared silently at him through half-closed eyes, frowning. I waited for the show to really get started.

“Mister Sandford, I’m going to make some assumptions. I assume you are not in fact a document expert but an accessory to the fraud of Halleck and Cross.”

“No comment.”

“That you actually prepare fraudulent maps for those swindlers and then in the guise of an expert, guarantee their authenticity.”

“No comment.”

Sandford, who had struck me as being as much of a documents research expert as I was, had picked a line and was going to stick with it. That probably wasn’t a bad idea, but since we already knew the documents were fakes, there was nowhere for him to go with it.

“I see.” Wolfe adjusted himself. While the chair was big enough to fit him, it was not one of the most comfortable in the house. He didn’t come to the plant rooms to sit in that chair.

“This you must answer, sir. You did guarantee the authenticity of the map and letters Kent bought. It’s on record.”

He thought that one over. “All right, I did.” He seemed a little uncomfortable that he’d said something other than ‘No comment,’ though there hadn’t really been any choice.

“Then, will you admit, they were forged?”

That seemed to surprise him. “What, are you a comic? No. I don’t admit that.”

I thought I saw where Wolfe was going. Sandford was in for a surprise.

“You guarantee the value of the Kent map?”

“Yes.” The noose was just about in place.

“As an expert?”

“Yes.”

“Then you’ve convicted yourself of murder.”

Pow! His eyes shot open like they do in those Bugs Bunny cartoons. “What? Murder? What is this?”

Wolfe bored in. “Mister Kent was murdered, sir. Evidently for the map and letters he bought. And you alone believe in the value of the map. No one else does. Therefore, you alone would have murdered Kent for said map. Archie, take Mister Sandford down to the office and call Inspector Cramer to come get him.”

“Well for the love of. Wait a minute, wait a minute!”

I had grabbed his forearm, not tightly, and he shrugged loose.

“Chew it over, brother. He’s got you.”

Sandford took a handkerchief from his breast pocket and wiped his brow. “Okay. Okay. You want me to level. Here it is.”

Wolfe’s eyebrows rose. “Level, Archie?”

“Thief talk. It means ‘tell the truth.’”

Sandford looked curiously at Wolfe, finding it hard to believe he didn’t know the meaning of the word, but this wasn’t the time to discuss that type of thing.

“It’s like you say. The letters were bought from Rodman. Then I forge the map and evidence on them. I guarantee them to Kent. That’s the swindle.”

“And the letters are without value?”

“They’re old, that’s all. From 1851. Just tired family gossip and stuff. Nobody would pay much for them. I don’t know anything about murder.” More sweat was wiped away.

“Indeed. There we have the problem again, Archie. Mister Kent is swindled with a map and letters known to be worthless. He alone believes the fantasy of the treasure.”

“There isn’t any treasure. There never was.” Sandford would certainly know about that.

“Yet Cross and Halleck refunded their ill-gotten money so eagerly. It is obvious they want those worthless documents back. Someone else wants them so badly he murdered Mister Kent. Why?”

More work with the handkerchief. “I don’t know. Really, I can’t think of a reason.”

“Nor can I. You are free to go sir.”

Sandford must have thought his ears were out of order. “I can leave?”

“You can. But if I find the need to summon you back here, you will come, without demur. Am I clear?”

“Yeah, sure, whatever you say.”

“I want you to understand that it will not be a request. If you refuse to return upon summons, you shall find yourself in great peril.”

“Right, right. You just call me at the office and I’ll be on the way.”

“Archie, escort Mister Sandford out. Then return here.”

From the admiration of the orchids, to the initial defiance of Wolfe, to the murder accusation to being set free, Sandford’s emotions had gone up and down like a roller coaster at Coney Island. He didn’t say anything at all on the stairs and only muttered thanks as I started him walking down the street to flag a cab.

I got my instructions back up in the plant rooms. “Archie, we must find the girl. Clearly, she’s not at her home. There’s a chance that she turned to Mister Rodman for refuge. You must go there at once. If she’s not there, bring Rodman. And send Theodore back in when you go.”

## CHAPTER SIX

Back to the garage and the Heron. Al told me we should just park it up on the curb at the brownstone for the rest of the day when I thanked him again and rolled out. I was certainly getting in some legwork today.

Rodman lived on the first floor of a plain-looking walk in. Everything about this guy seemed to be plain. The hallway wasn’t dingy, but it wouldn’t be long before I could say that it was a bit worn. I rang the buzzer, gave it a second, rang it again and repeated one more time. I heard something from inside that might have been, “Yes, yes, I’m coming.”

The door opened. He didn’t look any more impressive in his home surroundings than he had at Wolfe’s office.

“Hello Mister Rodman, remember me? I’m Archie Goodwin from Nero Wolfe’s office.”

Recognition dawned. “Oh, yes, of course.”

“I came to get Gloria Kent. There’s been a change in plans. Tell her to come out, please.”

“Gloria? She’s not here. Why should she be?” If he was lying, he was far better at it than I would have credited him for. I pressed on.

“Haven’t you heard?”

“Heard what?”

“Well, I guess you’d better come down and see Wolfe.”

“I really can’t. I’m quite busy.” He looked harried, not guilty.

He hadn’t invited me in and I didn’t want to push through him. Yet. If he went skittish, he might be completely useless. It was time to shock him into line.

“Look Rodman, maybe you ought to know. Old Man Kent was murdered.”

“What?” His bones went loose. He probably wouldn’t have noticed if I walked in and sat down on the sofa. I stayed put but also stayed after him.

“Yes. Just after you and Gloria left us.”

“Kent. Murdered? Well...this is awful, Mister Goodwin.”

He was pale, no doubt about it. It was time to close up shop.

“You want to see Mister Wolfe now? Get your hat.”



“Believe me, I never wanted this. I’m going to tell Mister Wolfe the whole mess. Every word of it.”

He stepped back and looked around the room. He was trying to gather his wits but they were scampering around like a pack of poodles.

“Let me get my hat. Murdered. I never dreamed.”

I took a step in and looked around as he walked into the bedroom and closed the door. It was the type of place you expected a meek librarian to inhabit. I bet it really impressed the girls. If any ever actually came here.

There was a sound from the bedroom but I didn’t recognize it.

“What did you say?”

No reply, so I walked over and opened the door. Rodman was lying on the bed, his throat cut. The strangest details hit me at moments like this and I saw his hat on the floor. He wouldn’t be needing it any more.

There was a window, open, on the far wall. I stuck my head out and looked in every direction, including up, but there was nothing for me. The killer had gotten away before I had come into the room.

Feeling as if I were walking through molasses, I went out into the front room and picked up the phone, using a handkerchief to avoid leaving fingerprints.

The phone rang several times before anyone picked up. It was Wolfe.

“Who is this?”

I’m telling you. This guy could use a course in telephone manners. “Archie here. We got a tough break.”

“Yes?”

“While I was waiting for Rodman at the front door, he went to the bedroom to get his hat. The killer was there.”

“How do you know?”

“Because he cut Rodman’s throat. The back window was open. It’s a ground floor apartment. He was gone before I had a chance.”

“Archie, where were your wits?”

“Let me alone. I’ve had a man murdered twenty feet from me. You think I’m cheering?”

“No, I do not. Inspector Cramer is here. He has news for us. He could not locate Cross and Halleck at their apartment. They had not been home all day. The maid was there and informed him she was waiting for her weekly salary.”

“Well, so what? Did you understand what I’m telling you?”

“She was most angry. And peppery.”

Understanding slowly dawned. “Red pepper?”

“Just so.”

“Okay. I think I know what you mean. I’ll try to deliver the goods this time.”

“Yes. Don’t forget to report in on your present circumstance.”

“You mean, an anonymous call to the police?”

“Certainly. Goodbye.” He hung up. I’m sure that Cramer was giving him the fish eye across the desk.

In less than a minute, I had told the cops that there was a body and given them the address. I politely declined their request for additional information and got out of that place. I hoped I’d get to my destination this time before somebody got their throat cut. It was becoming an annoying habit and not one to enhance a private detective’s professional standing.

I drove down to the apartment house on Grammercy Square where Cross and Halleck lived. There was no operator for the elevator so I took it up to the tenth floor, found the right door and slipped in with a pass key I kept in the Heron for emergency situations. It took a little jiggling, but the key worked.

No one else was in the hall as I stepped in and closed the door behind me. The place wasn’t as much of a mess as Gloria Kent’s house, but it was closer than it should have been. Cross and Halleck weren’t investing their earnings in maid service.

“Come on out. Come out, wherever you are. I know you’re in here. You fooled Cramer pretending to be the maid, but you didn’t fool Wolfe. You’d better...”

I caught movement out of the corner of my left eye and turned. The retort of a gun came just after a bullet passed by me and thudded into the wall behind me. Gloria Kent had jumped out of a closet, gun in hand. The only thing that had saved me was the fact that her eyes were closed as she squeezed the trigger. They were still closed for the second shot.

I immediately realized that she was blasting wide right, so I moved towards her, sliding left. I got a hold of her gun arm as a third shot went off.

“You crazy fool. Stop it. Stop it!”

She struggled but I had that arm like my life depended on it. Which it did. I held on with my left and chopped her wrist, hard, with the right. The gun fell from her hands.

“It’s me, Archie. Archie Goodwin. Get a hold of yourself.”

She opened her eyes and stared glassily at me.

“Who did you think I was?”

“Halleck,” she mumbled.

“Oh, brilliant. You certainly are a brave girl. They killed your father so you came up here and you were going to kill them right back. Oh, that red headed temper.”

She didn’t say anything, but her eyes focused enough to take me in.

“And you bluffed Cramer into thinking you were the maid. He’s going to love that one.” I gave a chuckle.

Her voice was feeble. “I had to do something. The only thing I could think of was to kill them.”

“That was certainly one option. Not the best one. Well, you’re coming home with me.”

I picked up the gun and put it in my pocket. Then I thought about prints. But the murders in this case were all done with a knife, so I guessed I was okay in handling her gun.

She was a mess of nerves. I grabbed a coat from the closet she’d been hiding in and wrapped it around her. “And just remember one thing. Let Nero Wolfe do the thinking.”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

She didn’t say a word on the way to the brownstone. She just sat, leaning against the door and staring blankly out the windshield. I couldn’t think of anything to say that would improve the situation, so I drove, wondering how I was going to have her ready to talk to Cramer when we arrived.

I left the Heron at the curb, since she was in no condition to walk from the garage. I’d return it after she was settled and Wolfe had been briefed. An unmarked police car was out front, complete with driver, confirming that Cramer was there, ready to talk to Gloria. What a day.

The chain was on and Fritz let me in. I heard voices from the office. “We have several guests, Archie,” Fritz told me.

I parked Gloria in the front room and left Fritz to keep an eye on her. Then, ignoring the door leading directly into the office, I went back out into the hall and in from there.

Color me surprised. Sandford was there, sitting in the red chair. Cross and Halleck were in yellow chairs, one row behind Sandford. Cramer was sitting in my chair, with Purley Stebbins over on the sofa. Quite a party. And I hadn’t been invited.

Wolfe was behind his desk, listening to Halleck talking. He saw me and interrupted.

“Archie. The red pepper?”

“Yes, it was where you thought. I brought it home.”

All heads had turned to me.

“Bring her in.”

“Are you sure? Perhaps we could speak in the kitchen for a moment?”

Cramer stood up, suspicion crossing his face. “Now wait a minute...”

“That is not necessary. Bring her.”

I shrugged and opened the door to the front room and did as I was instructed. I thanked Fritz and he returned to the kitchen with a nod.

When Cramer saw Gloria, first he scowled at her, then he transferred it to Wolfe.

“So, it was a slick one after all, Wolfe. You didn’t have the girl. You had no intention of producing her.”

“Please Mister Cramer. That can wait. Other matters are more important. I dine at eight. That gives me one hour to solve your murders.”

“Murders? I’ve only got one murder. Miss Kent’s father.”

I spoke up. “Two. Elmer Rodman is dead. Throat slit. I found the body and called it in.”

“Cheese and rice, Goodwin. Can you go anyplace in this town without finding a dead body?”

“I don’t see any here, yet. Purley. Look behind the sofa for me.”

Wolfe cut that banter off. “Please, Inspector, not now. First, Miss Kent.”

“Good evening Miss Kent. I assume you have met these gentlemen: Misters Cross, Halleck and Sandford.”

“I, well...”

“I’ll take your purse, please.”

That got her attention. “Why do you...?”

His voice was sharp. “Don’t think me as naïve as Mister Goodwin. When you left your home after the murder of your father, you took the map and letters with you. They’re in your purse now.”

“That’s not true.”

“Archie, her purse.”

I gave her an apologetic look as I took her purse and handed it to Wolfe. She didn’t resist and I parked her in the yellow chair by my desk. Then I stood next to my chair and cleared my throat. Cramer glared at me but moved over to a yellow chair next to Halleck.

All eyes were now on Wolfe. One hand was on the purse.

“We have an interesting situation, gentlemen. There exist some old letters and a map. They are forged and fraudulent. That is agreed to by all in this room. Yet, they’re worth \$10,000 and more to Misters Cross and Halleck and worth two murders to a killer. Why? There must be something of great value in the letters.”

Nobody saw fit to respond, so Cramer said, “Yeah? Such as?”

“Something which Mister Sandford could not see though he worked on the document closely. Yet something that could be made manifest in order to validate their value. What is the answer Miss Kent? Do you know it?”

“I swear I don’t.” She was having quite a day, all right.

“Secret writing. Archie, bring the chafing dish from the dining room.”

This was certainly a new one. I went to carry out my duty. I could still hear their conversation.

“Secret writing?” Cross’ voice didn’t convey a vote of confidence.

“I saw nothing when I worked on those letters.”

“Naturally, Mister Sandford. The writing is invisible. Heat is an agent. It makes most forms of secret writing visible.”

I caught sight of Stebbins’ face as I reentered with the chafing dish. He wasn’t buying this at all. I’m not certain I was, either.



"The chafing dish," I said, placing it on Wolfe's desk with a flourish. What can I say? Sometimes I like an audience.

"Light it."

I did so. If this was the best he had come up with, I had my doubts Cramer would be leaving with anybody in handcuffs.

"Now I open Miss Kent's purse. As you see, I withdraw these aged letters which she took from her house after her father's murder."

"That's not true!"

Wolfe looked directly at me. "Archie."

He didn't want a denial every time he said something that involved her. I said gently, "Gloria, that's enough. It's time just to listen. Trust me."

"We remove the letters from the envelope and toast them gently. The secret ink, vintage 1851, will easily succumb to the agency of heat."

Cross and Halleck were not pleased. "Careful. Those envelopes will catch fire."

"Don't be upset Mister Cross, Mister Halleck. They'll burn safely in the dish. We can concentrate on the writing. Watch closely. I don't want to be accused of trickery."

Cross started to lunge towards the desk. "You fat fool. The envelopes are everything."

Halleck yelled urgently at Sandford. "Put them out Sandford. Don't just sit there, put them out."

Wolfe asked, "Why should he bother with these useless envelopes, Mister Halleck?"

"The stamps, the missionaries. They're worth a fortune!"

Wolfe smiled. "The missionaries. Of course. You know of them. Mister Cross knows. Mister Sandford knows."

He looked at the partners. "Yet Mister Sandford is not alarmed." He turned his gaze on the man "Why not, sir?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"A hundred thousand dollars is going up in flames before your eyes. Cross and Halleck are burning their fingers putting out trying to save the envelopes. And you sit there quite indifferently. Why?"

"Well. I..."

"You know the value of the missionary stamps on the letters you bought from Rodman. But you know these aren't the real letters."

"Not the real letters?" That was Cross.

Sandford could not have looked smugger. "I told you I'm tough to crack, Wolfe. You didn't fool me with those fakes."

"Indeed. Fakes. How do you know that? Mister Cross didn't know. Mister Halleck didn't know. How did you?"

Sandford realized his mistake and didn't answer immediately.

Cramer had moved next to the desk to see the show up close and finally interjected.

"What are you up to Wolfe?" He was ignored.

"I'll tell you, sir." He stared straight at Sandford. "Only one man could know that I was using Miss Kent as a decoy. Only one man could know that I prepared these dummy letters and pretended to take them from her purse via sleight of hand. And that is the killer. The man who murdered her father and stole the letters and map this morning. You sir!"

"Here is the killer, Inspector. You'll find the missing documents on his person or at his home or office."

Sandford just glared at Wolfe. Cross muttered, "Why, you dirty double crosser."

"Take him, Purley." Stebbins hoisted Sandford out of the chair and marched him out of the office.

Cramer stared at Cross and Halleck. "I'm Homicide. I don't give a damn about your fake maps. I'll tell the bunco squad about it tomorrow and you may be hearing from them. But for now, you're free to go."

Those two were almost out the door before Cramer stopped speaking. I didn't think they could move that fast.

Wolfe poured a glass of beer, watched the foam settle, then drained it in three gulps. Cramer, now sitting in the red chair, was having a glass as well. I'd gotten Gloria to swallow a bit of water and some color had returned to her cheeks. I was in my chair, nursing a glass of milk.

"Not a complicated case, Inspector. Rodman sold some old family letters to the swindlers for a small sum. They used the letters to perpetrate their fraud on Miss Kent's father."

"But the stamps on the letters were valuable, eh?"

"They were special Hawaiian issues, from 1851. Nicknamed missionaries because missionaries used them for writing home. They're extremely rare stamps, worth upwards of \$25,000 each."

Cramer whistled. "Say. That's why they were worth two murders. We found five of them on Sandford."

"Excellent. Somehow or other Rodman discovered the value of the stamps after he sold them. In his effort to get them back, he communicated his discovery to the swindlers. I imagine he hoped they'd share the profits with him."

"Fat chance," I said.

Cramer nodded to himself. "That's why they refunded the money so fast."

"Precisely, in an effort to have the sale rescinded. Compared to my getting the stamps back, the \$10,000 was negligible." Wolfe poured a second glass.

"Rodman sought out Kent and tried to convince him of the fraud. Alas, he would not listen to the truth."

"Father was so desperate to find the treasure on that map. He wouldn't have believed any silly story about old stamps."

Cramer said, "I get it. And while the others were running around Sandford tried to get it all for himself and resorted to murder."

Cramer got up and headed out the door. I helped him on with his coat and he said, "Thank you, Goodwin." That was about as friendly as he got after a case.

Back in the office, I stood behind our last remaining visitor.

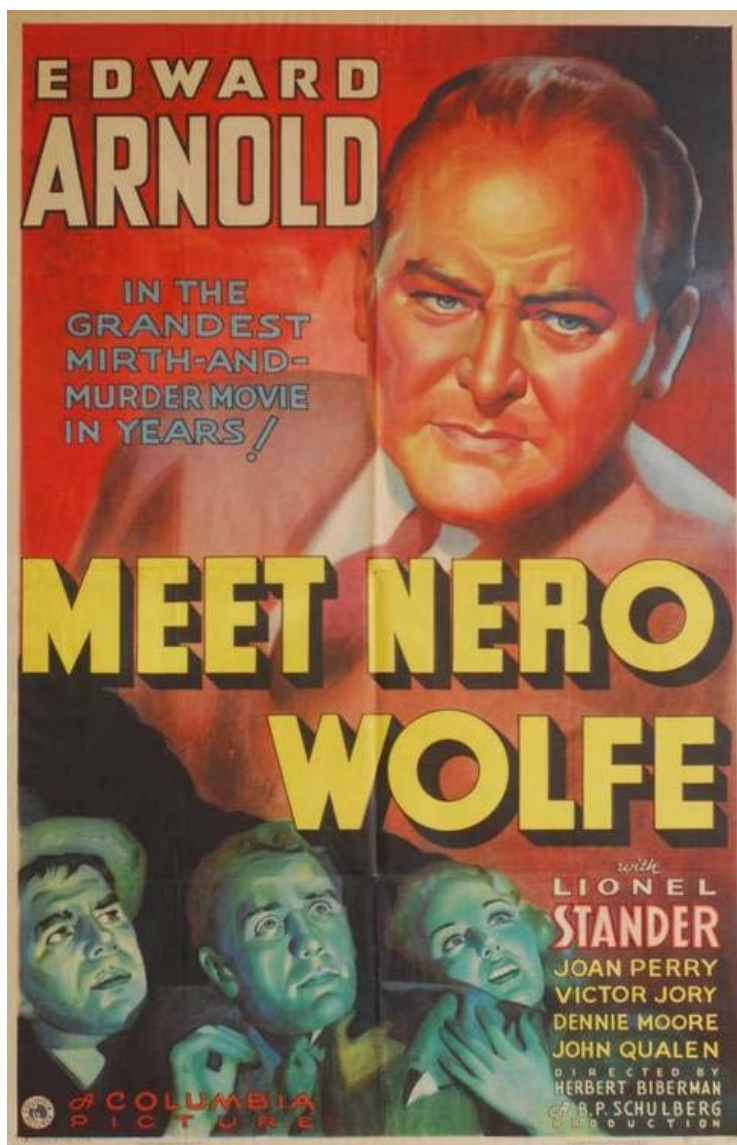
"So, Gloria not only gets her ten-grand back, but another hundred and twenty-five thousand. Great job, boss."

"Yes. Well. It is time for dinner."

"Well, you see, I'll be giving Miss Kent a ride home, sir. You can eat without me."

She took my arm and I took her towards the front door.

Wolfe sighed and I heard him rise from behind his desk. With the case over and everyone gone, I knew he would enjoy dinner. But I still didn't know how I was going to pay Salzenbach's bill and get that lamb.



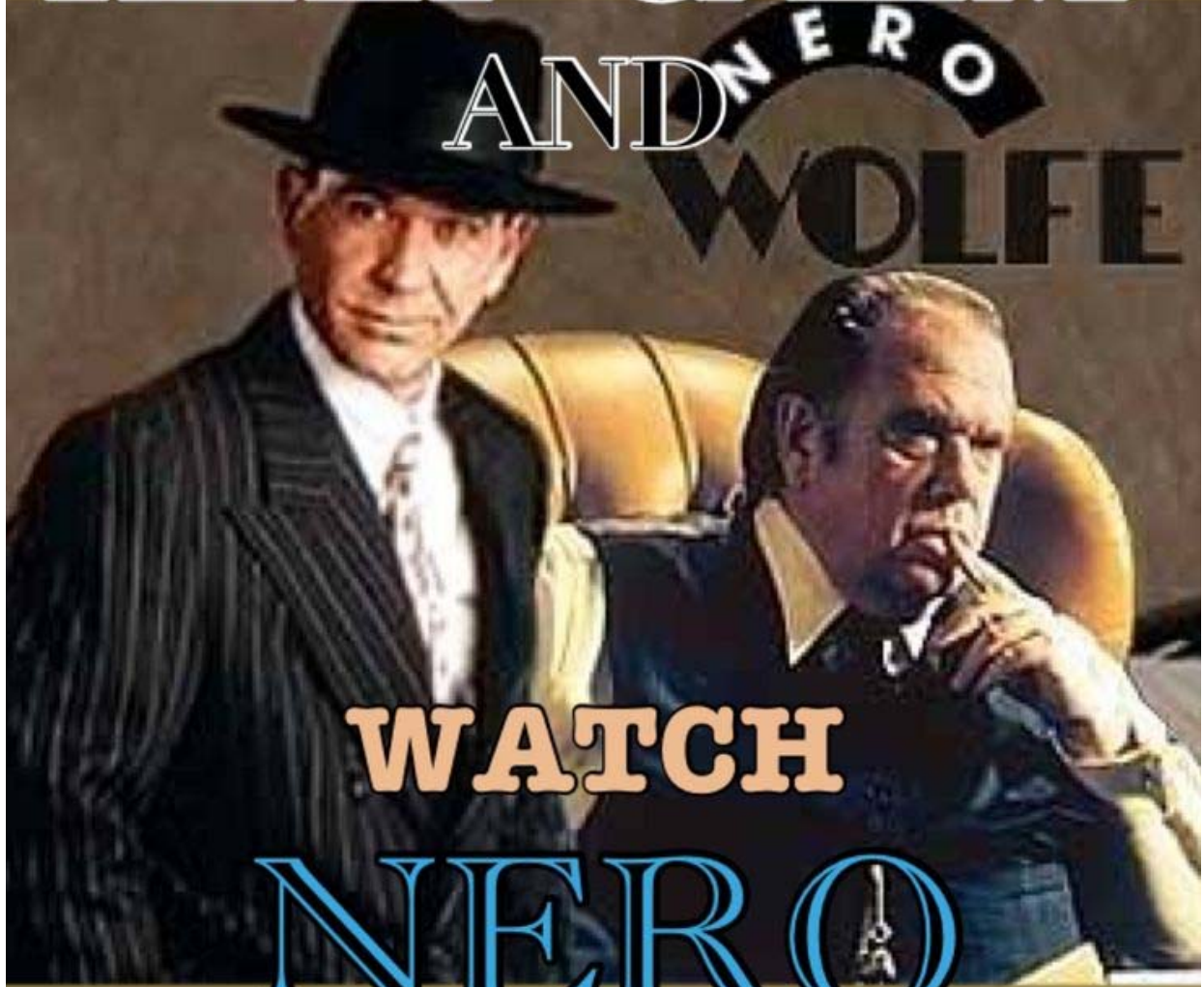
Edward Arnold looks a little Greenstreetish in the forehead there...



KEEP CALM

AND

NERO  
WOLFE



WATCH

NERO

WOLFE