

NERO WOLFE

"In Bad Taste Parts 1 & 2"

FADE IN:

MONTAGE

Underneath Archie's voice-over, we see a montage of sensual delights, alternating between...

FRITZ BRENNER AND FELIX CAREFULLY PREPARING ONE ELEGANT, VISUALLY DELICIOUS ENTREE AFTER ANOTHER...PHEASANT, SUCKLING PIG, BLINIS SPRINKLED WITH CHOPPED CHIVES AND PILES OF CAVIAR...

NERO WOLFE DELICATELY AND LOVINGLY SELECTING ORCHIDS (PHALAENOPSIS APHRODITE, TO BE EXACT), CUTTING THEM, AND ARRANGING THEM WITH EXQUISITE CARE...

VARIOUS TANTALIZING SHOTS OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN FITTING THEIR PERFECT, YOUNG BODIES INTO PERIOD ANCIENT GREEK STOLAS.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

Lewis Hewitt, millionaire and orchid fancier, asked Nero Wolfe if he could borrow Fritz Brenner to cook the annual dinner for The Ten for Aristology, a group of men pursuing perfection in food and drink. Since it's a pursuit Nero Wolfe shares, he agreed.

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nearly a dozen beautiful women, wearing loose-fitting, ANCIENT GREEK STOLAS, are gathered in around the elaborate and upscale kitchen, watching FRITZ, FELIX and ZOLTAN prepare the various dishes.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

Wolfe might have balked, though, if he knew one detail Fritz and I kept from him...

Archie stands in front of one of the women, notebook out, pen poised.

ARCHIE

No, I'm neither a producer nor an agent. My name's Archie Goodwin, and I'm here because I'm a friend of the cook. My reason for wanting your number is purely personal.

NORA

I know, it's my dimples. Men often swoon.

ARCHIE

It's your earrings. They remind me of a girl I once loved in vain.

NORA

The name is Nora Jaret, without an H, and the number is Stanhope five, six, six, two, one. The earrings were a present from Sir Laurence Olivier. I was sitting on his knee.

Archie writes the number down.

NORA (CONT'D)

Now please let me alone. I'm nervous, and I don't want to spill the soup.

Archie smiles and obediently moves to another woman.

ARCHIE

Good evening, Miss--?

CAROL

Carol Annis.

ARCHIE

I was standing, watching you, when all of a sudden I had an impulse to ask you for your phone number, and I'm not good at fighting impulses. Now that you're close up, it's even stronger, so I guess we'll have to humor it.

CAROL

I have no sense of humor.

ARCHIE

Maybe I can guess it. Socrates, one, oh-oh-oh-oh?

She turns to look at Zoltan stir something.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Apparently not. Plato two, three, four, five, six?

Another woman, a beautiful RED HEAD, speaks up, clearly amused:

PEGGY

You like yourself, don't you?

Archie turns to her and flashes her his most winsome grin.

ARCHIE

Certainly.

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I string along with the majority.

We'll take a vote.

(to all the ladies:)

How many of you like yourself, raise your hands?

A hand goes up, then another, then two more, then all the rest.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Okay, that's settled. My problem is I decided to look you over and ask the most absolutely, irresistably beautiful and fascinating one of the bunch for her phone number, but--

PEGGY

Archie, have your eyes examined. We admit we're all beautiful, but were not in the same class as Helen Iacono. Look at her.

Archie does. HELEN has deep, dark eyes, dark velvet skin, and wavy, silky hair darker than either eyes or skin. She's making a point of ignoring him. Archie is about to try and change that when a WELL-DRESSED MAN enters and tugs on Archie's sleeve. This is BENJAMIN SHRIVER, a grin on his ruddy face.

SHRIVER

I hate to interrupt but we're ready to sit. Will you join us?

ARCHIE

Ladies...

Archie smiles, gives the women a half-bow, and exits to:

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A richly paneled room decorated with pictures of geese, pheasants, fruits, and other assorted edible objects. The tablecloth is white as snow. The polished silver and the wineglasses, seven at each place, glisten in the soft light. In the center of the table is a low gilt bowl, two feet long, filled with clusters of orchids we saw cut by Nero Wolfe, who sits uncomfortably in a chair, his fundament lapping over both sides. Archie and Shriver take their seats among the EIGHT OTHER ARISTOLOGISTS at the table. LEWIS HEWITT, the host, motions to the orchids.

HEWITT

My compliments, Mr. Wolfe. I have never seen Phalaenopsis Aphrodite better grown.

Wolfe acknowledges the compliment with a barely perceptible nod. The others around the table add their compliments, too...except for one man, VINCENT PYLE, a theatrical producer who wears a dinner jacket with a dark green tie to match. He eyes the orchids with his head cocked and his mouth puckered.

PYLE

I don't care for flowers with spots
and streaks. They're messy.

That's when the women file in wearing their Greek stolas, each girl carrying a plate -- with the food already on it -- to her assigned aristologist. Zoltan goes around pouring Montrachet. Wolfe, reacting to the girls, glares at Archie, who tries his best to look innocent.

WOLFE

What is this flummery?

HEWITT

We went to ancient Greece not only
for our name but for other precedents.
The goddess of youth was cupbearer
to the Gods, so it's the custom of
the Ten of Aristology to be waited
on by maidens in appropriate dress.

WOLFE

"Aristology" means the science of
dining, therefore you gentlemen are
witlings. Dining is not a science,
it is an art.

ADRIAN DART, a good-looking stage actor, laughs good-naturedly.

DART

Then as an actor, a man who lives to
embody art, I agree. We must change
our name. We'll appoint a committee
right after dessert -- but until
then, let us indulge ourselves!

His fellow Aristologists join in a chorus of agreement.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

Even Wolfe couldn't argue with that...
at least not with a plate of Fritz's
blinis in front of him.

TIGHT ON THE PLATE

And the *blinis*, sprinkled with chopped chives, piled with
caviar, and topped with sour cream. It's looks amazing.
And so begins our montage, no, our *symphony*, of fine dining...

WIPE TO:

THE SAME PLATE

Now empty, being taken away and replaced by a soup plate.

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The girls are now taking the empty blinis plates, replacing them with soup bowls, and gracefully ladling green turtle soup into them. As Pyle takes his last bite of blinis, and his plate is taken away, he complains loudly.

PYLE

A new idea, putting sand in. Clever.
Good for chickens, since they need
grit.

EMIL KREIS, who is sitting beside Archie, speaks up:

KREIS

Ignore him. What does he know? He
backed three flops on Broadway this
season.

And as they all begin to eat the soup, we WIPE TO:

TIGHT ON A SPECIAL DISH

It's flounder poached in a dry white wine, with a mussel-
and-mushrooms sauce. It also looks wonderful.

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

We pan around the room, as each aristologist enjoys the
culinary pleasure of each bite, savoring every morsel of
fish.

DART

Superb!

HEWITT

I must have the recipe!

Archie turns to Pyle, who is devouring his meal with obvious
delight.

ARCHIE

Any sand?

Almost in response, Pyle suddenly drops his fork on his plate
with a clatter, his head droops, and he clutches a hand to
his mouth.

PYLE

You must excuse me. I'm sorry.

And with that, he rushes out. Archie and Wolfe share a look.
Hewitt rises and follows him. There's a moment of awkward
silence, then:

DART

A damn shame, but I'm going to finish this.

Dart continues eating, and soon so do the others, including Wolfe, who nonetheless glowers.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

The aristologists all resumed with the flounder, and the conversation, but the spirit wasn't the same.

And we

WIPE TO:

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Zoltan enters bearing an enormous silver platter. Felix lifts the cover off with a flourish, revealing a beautiful pheasant. Hewitt enters.

HEWITT

Vincent is in considerable pain, and a doctor has come. There is nothing we can do, so let us proceed.

Hewitt sits, but the life is definitely out of the party. Wolfe's glower deepens.

WIPE TO:

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Vincent Pyle still hasn't returned. Hewitt gets up and again just as chestnut croquettes and cheese are being served.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

Hewitt left the room three times and when he rose from his chair for the fourth, Wolfe went too. By the glower that had been deepening on Wolfe's face for the past hour, I knew he was boiling, and when he's like that, especially away from home, there's no telling about him.

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Wolfe lumbers down the corridor to an open doorway and peers inside.

WOLFE'S POV

Vincent Pyle lies on a bed, clearly near death, Hewitt and a DOCTOR at his side. The doctor looks VERY GRIM.

WIPE TO:

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Coffee and brandy are being poured by Felix, but only for one: Archie, who sits lighting a cigar. Wolfe comes in, still glowering, and snaps:

WOLFE

Come with me.

Archie puts the cigar on a tray and follows Wolfe, who marches into:

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The twelve maidens are scattered around on chairs and stools at tables and counters, eating. A woman is busy at the sink. Zoltan is busy at the refrigeration, Fritz is pouring a glass of wine for himself as Wolfe enters.

WOLFE

Fritz, I offer my apologies. I permitted Mr. Hewitt to cajole you. I should have known better. I beg your pardon.

FRITZ

But it is not to pardon, only to regret. The man got sick, that's a pity, only not from my cooking, I assure you.

WOLFE

I repeat that I am culpable, but I won't dwell on that now, it can wait. There is an aspect that is exigent. Archie, are those women all here?

Archie does a quick head count.

ARCHIE

Yes sir, all present. Twelve.

WOLFE

Collect them. They can stand over there.

(motions to a corner:)

And bring Felix.

Archie turns and calls out:

ARCHIE

I'm sorry, ladies, but if Mr. Wolfe say it's urgent, that settles it. Over there, please? All of you.

Archie motions to a corner, then sticks his head out the door to the dining room.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Felix.

Archie wiggles a beckoning finger, and Felix enters. Wolfe stands, tight-lipped, surveying the women.

WOLFE

I remind you that the first course brought to the table was caviar on *blinis* topped with sour cream. The portion served to Mr. Vincent Pyle, and eaten by him, contained arsenic. Mr. Pyle is in bed upstairs, attended by doctors, and will probably die within the hour.

There are GASPS and EXCLAMATIONS of surprise. Wolfe glares at them.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

I am speaking. You will please keep quiet and listen.

NORA

How do you know it as arsenic?

WOLFE

From the symptoms. My conclusion the poison was in the first course is based on the amount of time it takes arsenic to act; second, on the fact that it is highly unlikely it could have been put in the soup or the fish; and third, that Mr. Pyle complained of sand in the cream or caviar.

Fritz is nervously biting his lips, first the lower, then the upper.

FRITZ

I must assure you--

WOLFE

I need no assurances from you, Fritz. Who put it on the plates?

FRITZ

Zoltan and I--
(points across the
room:)
At that table.

WOLFE

And left them there? They were taken from that table by the women?

ZOLTAN

I watched them Mr. Wolfe. They each took one plate. And believe me, nobody put any arsenic--

WOLFE

Please, Zoltan. I add another conclusion: that no one put arsenic in one of the portions and then left to chance which one of the guests would get it.

(then, to the women:)

Which one of you took that plate to Mr. Pyle?

No reply. No sound. No movement.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Pfui. If you didn't know his name, you do now. The man who left during the fish course and who is now dying. Who served him?

No reply. Archie fixes his eyes on the RED HEAD, PEGGY CHOATE.

ARCHIE

Speak up.

PEGGY

I didn't!

ARCHIE

That's silly. Of course you did. Twenty people can swear to it. I looked right at you while you were dishing his soup.

PEGGY

But I didn't take him that first thing! He already had some! I didn't!

WOLFE

You deny that you served the plate of caviar, the first course, to Mr. Pyle?

PEGGY

I certainly do.

WOLFE

But you were supposed to? You were assigned to him?

PEGGY

Yes. I took the plate from the table there...

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

And we watch Peggy start to go to Pyle, see that he has a plate already, and serve Wolfe instead, who is at Pyle's right.

PEGGY'S VOICE

I started to serve him, saw that he already had some, and I thought I'd made a mistake. So I gave the plate to you.

BACK TO SCENE

WOLFE

Indeed. Who was assigned to me?

Helen Iacono -- the woman Archie didn't get the chance to chat up earlier -- speaks up:

HELEN

I was.

WOLFE

Your name, please?

HELEN

Helen Iacono.

WOLFE

Did you bring me the first course?

HELEN

No.

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Helen sees Peggy serving Wolfe, so she gives her plate to someone else, MR. KREIS.

HELEN

Since Peggy was serving you, I gave mine to man on the left next to the end who didn't have any.

BACK TO SCENE

WOLFE

Who was assigned to him?

NORA

Mr. Kreis was mine. He had his plate when I got there. I was going to take mine back to the kitchen, but then I gave it to the man at the end, Mr. Shriver.

CAROL

That's right, and I was assigned to him.

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Carol gives her plate to Mr. Dart.

CAROL

I was going to stop her, but she had already put the plate down, so I went around to the other side of the table and served Mr. Dart, who didn't have his.

BACK TO SCENE

Another woman speaks up, and her name is:

LUCY

My name is Lucy Morgan. I had Mr. Dart, and Carol got to him before I did. There was only one place that didn't have one, and that was Mr. Hewitt.

Archie looks at a FERN FABER, a tall self-made blonde with a wide lazy mouth.

ARCHIE

It's your turn, Miss Faber. You had Mr. Hewitt, right?

FERN

I sure did.

WOLFE

But you didn't take him his caviar.

FERN

I sure didn't.

WOLFE

Then who did you take it to?

FERN

Nobody.

WOLFE

What did you do with it, Miss Faber?

FERN

I didn't do anything with it, there wasn't any.

WOLFE

Nonsense.

(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

There were twelve of you, and there were twelve at the table, and each got a portion. How can you say there wasn't any?

FERN

Because there wasn't. I was in the john fixing my hair, and when I came back in Lucy was taking the last one from the table, and when I asked Zoltan where mine was he said he didn't know and I went to the dining room and they all had some.

WOLFE

Where is that room where you were fixing your hair?

She points toward the pantry.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

How long were you in there?

FERN

My God, I don't know, do you think I timed it? When Archie was talking to us, and Mr. Shriver came and said they were going to start, I went pretty soon after that.

WOLFE

(to Archie:)

So that's where you were. I might have known there were young women around. Supposing that Miss Faber went to fix her hair shortly after you left -- say three minutes -- how long was she at it, if the last plate had been taken from the table when she returned to the kitchen?

ARCHIE

Fifteen to twenty minutes.

Wolfe snaps at Fern Faber:

WOLFE

What was wrong with your hair?

FERN

I didn't say there was anything wrong with it. Look, mister, do you want all the details?

WOLFE

No.

Wolfe surveys them all for a moment, not amiably, takes in enough air to fill his middle, then turns his back to them. He picks up Fritz's glass of wine, smells it, gazes at it for a moment. The girls start to make noises and, hearing them, Wolfe puts the glass down and faces the girls again.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

You -- I speak now to that one, still to be identified -- you must have extraordinary faith in your attendant godling, even allowing for your craft. For you took great risks.

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - KITCHEN/ DINING ROOM - NIGHT

As Wolfe lays out his SCENARIO, we SEE IT ENACTED... though only from about WAIST-HIGH...we DO NOT SEE THE WOMAN'S FACE, just her actions as described:

WOLFE'S VOICE

You took a plate from the table and on your way to the dining room you put arsenic in the cream using a paper spill. You took the plate to Mr. Pyle, came back here immediately, got another plate, and gave it to one who had not been served.

BACK TO SCENE

The women are clearly unsettled by his chilling scenario.

WOLFE

It was a remarkably adroit stratagem, but you can't possibly be impregnable.
(then, to the men:)
Gentlemen, please.

Wolfe motions to Fritz, Felix, Zoltan and Archie, then walks out, the men following him.

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Wolfe leads the men to the dining room.

WOLFE

Miss Faber is the only one who is eliminated.

FELIX

Just because she says she wasn't in the kitchen when the plates were taken? She could be lying.

WOLFE

She wouldn't dare say that if she had in fact taken a plate and carried
(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

it to Mr. Pyle. She would certainly have been seen by some of you.

(to Zoltan:)

You say you watched as the plates were taken and each of them took only one. Did one of them come back and take another?

ZOLTAN

I'm thinking, Mr. Wolfe, but I'm afraid it won't help. I didn't look at their faces, and they're all dressed alike. I guess I didn't watch very close.

WOLFE

Fritz?

FRITZ

No sir, I was at the range.

WOLFE

Felix. I have neglected you purposely, to give you time to reflect. You were in the dining room. I must look to you for the fact itself. I must ask you to point her out.

FELIX

I can't.

WOLFE

Pfui! I have always found you worthy of trust, but it's possible that in your exalted position, maitre d'hotel at Rusterman's, you would rather dodge than get involved in a poisoning. Are you dodging, Felix?

FELIX

Good God, Mr. Wolfe. I *am* involved. I didn't see anything.

Wolfe turns to Archie.

WOLFE

Archie. You are commonly my first resort, but now you are my last. You sat next to Mr. Pyle, who put that plate before him?

ARCHIE

I don't know. There was an argument going on about flowers with spots and streaks, and I was listening to it and so were you.

Wolfe breathes. He shuts his eyes and opens them again.

WOLFE

Incredible. The wretch has incredible luck.

Wolfe marches out, Archie follows him.

INT. HEWITT HOUSE - PARLOR ROOM - NIGHT

The men -- all but Hewitt, Shriver, and Pyle -- relax with brandy and cigars as Wolfe and Archie enter.

KREIS

Oh, there you are. Our custom is to ask the chef to join us with champagne, which is barbarous but gay, but of course, under the circumstances...

WOLFE

Mr. Pyle is still alive?

KREIS

We hope so, we sincerely hope so. There's been no word since I came down nearly an hour ago. I suppose I should go up. It's so damned unpleasant.

Wolfe takes a seat, sinking into it heavily.

DART

(to Wolfe:)

Didn't you ask Pyle who brought him the caviar?

WOLFE

I've asked everybody. I have discovered the artifice the culprit used, but not her identity. By a remarkable combination of cunning and luck she has so far eluded identification, so I am appealing to you again. All of you. I ask you to close your eyes and recall the scene. Which one was it?

Everyone closes their eyes. Adrian Dart, the actor, stands with his eyes closed, his chin up, his arms folded, posing for concentration. His eyes flash open dramatically.

DART

It's gone. I must have seen it, but it's gone. Utterly.

KREIS

I didn't see it. I simply didn't.

All the men now voice their "I don't know" and "I didn't see anything." Wolfe puts his hands on the table and says grimly:

WOLFE

Then I'm in for it. I am your guest, gentlemen, and would not be offensive, but I am to blame that Fritz Brenner was enticed to this deplorable fiasco. If Mr. Pyle dies, as he surely will--

That's when Hewitt and Shriver enter, followed by the familiar burly frame of SGT. PURLY STEBBINS.

SHRIVER

Vincent is dead. Half an hour ago. Dr. Jameson called the police. He thinks that it is practically certain--

STEBBINS

(interrupts:)

Hold it, I'll handle it if you don't mind.

And on Wolfe's glower, and Archie's realization that it's going to be a very long night, we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. POLICE PRECINCT - NIGHT

We are TIGHT ON INSPECTOR CRAMER, who is standing in front of Wolfe, furious and roaring:

CRAMER

I did not! Quit twisting my words around! I didn't charge you with complicity! I merely said you're concealing something, and what the hell is that to scrape your neck? You always do!

We now turn to see Wolfe, who looks exhausted. Even so, he seems to be enjoying Cramer's discomfort. Purly and Archie watch the their bosses go at it.

WOLFE

Everyone conceals something, or at least omits something, if only because to include everything is impossible. May we go home now or do you wish to show us the sunrise?

CRAMER

You witnessed the commission of a murder and you didn't notify--

WOLFE

(interrupts:)

It wasn't a murder until he died.

CRAMER

All right, a felony. You not only failed to report it, you--

WOLFE

(interrupts:)

That a felony had been committed was my conclusion, not a fact.

CRAMER

You should have reported it. You're a licensed detective. Also you started an investigation, questioning suspects--

WOLFE

(interrupts:)

Only to test my conclusion. I would have been a ninny to report it before learning--

CRAMER

(interrupts:)

Damn it, will you let me finish a sentence? Just one?

WOLFE

Very well, finish a sentence.

Wolfe leans back in his chair.

CRAMER

You knew Pyle was dying. You said so.

WOLFE

Also my own conclusion. The doctors were still trying to save him.

Cramer turns to look at Archie, sees nothing inspiring, turns back to Wolfe.

CRAMER

Those three men -- Fritz Brenner, Felix Courbet and Zoltan Mahany -- it's hard to believe they don't know who served Pyle.

WOLFE

It is indeed. They are highly trained men. But they have been questioned.

CRAMER

They sure have. It's also hard to believe that Goodwin didn't see who served Pyle. He sees everything.

WOLFE

Mr. Goodwin is present. Discuss it with him.

CRAMER

I have.

(then:)

Now I want to ask your opinion of a theory. In the trash container in the kitchen we found a roll of ordinary white paper that had been rolled into a tube, held with tape, smaller at one end. The laboratory has found particles of arsenic inside.

WOLFE

As I surmised, a paper spill.

CRAMER

The only two fingerprints on it are Zoltan's. He says he saw it on the floor some time after the meal was started, picked it up, and threw it out.

STEBBINS

The lab checked out the ladies' clothes and didn't find any traces of arsenic on them.

CRAMER

What's wrong with the theory that Zoltan poisoned one of the portions and Felix told him who was getting the plate?

WOLFE

Tommyrot, and you know it. They may have a dozen murders on their souls, but they had nothing to do with the death of Mr. Pyle and I shall prove it by unmasking the conniving wretch who is responsible.

Wolfe rises with difficulty from his chair.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

This pointless exercise in nincompoopery and sleep deprivation is over. Archie!

Archie opens the door for Wolfe and shoots a look at Cramer.

ARCHIE

Always a pleasure.

And on Cramer's scowl, we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

As Wolfe and Archie enter, exhausted.

WOLFE

Have all of them here at six o'clock tonight. Dealing with them singly would be interminable.

Wolfe heads straight for the elevator, his back to Archie.

ARCHIE

All of whom?

WOLFE

You know quite well. The women.

ARCHIE

I have a suggestion. I suggest that you postpone operations until your wires are connected again. Counting up to five hundred might help. Do you want some aspirin?

WOLFE

I want *them*.

That's when Archie spots HELEN IACONO dozing in a chair in the front room.

ARCHIE

Would you settle for one right now? I've got one on tap in the front room.

WOLFE

Pfui!

Wolfe turns around to face Archie.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

It is dawn, a time of day I aspire never to experience with my eyes open. This is no time for flummery!

Archie jerks his head towards the front room.

ARCHIE

She's right there.

Wolfe makes a face.

WOLFE

Which one?

ARCHIE

Helen Iacono.

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Shall I keep her here and let her
sleep while I get the rest of them?

Wolfe takes a look into the front room for himself.

WOLFE

Confound it! Wake her up and bring
her in.

He marches to his office, unaware that his bellow has already
shaken Helen from her slumber. And we

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - LATER

Helen Iacono is seated in the red leather chair. From the
look on Wolfe's's face, she's been talking for a long time,
and doesn't seem inclined to stop soon.

HELEN

...after I left the district
attorney's office I was going to go
home, but my mother would be at me
again, because she never wanted me
to be an actress.

WOLFE

I don't suppose, Miss Iacono, you
came to consult me at this ungodly
hour about your career.

HELEN

I came because you're a detective
and you're very clever and I'm afraid
they'll find out something I did and
if they do I won't have a career.
So I decided to tell you about it
and then if you'll help me I'll help
you. If you promise to keep my
secret.

WOLFE

I can't promise to keep a secret if
it's a guilty one -- if it is a
confession of a crime or knowledge
of one.

HELEN

It isn't.

WOLFE

Then you have my promise and Mr.
Goodwin's.

HELEN

I stabbed Vincent Pyle and got blood on me.

Archie stares. Wolfe waits for her to continue. And waits. Then, when it's apparent she's not going on:

WOLFE

Ordinarily, Miss Iacono, stabbing a man is considered a crime. When and where did this happen?

HELEN

About three months ago in his apartment. I went out with him a few times, then he asked me to his apartment, and I went...

INT. PYLE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

They are barely in the door when Pyle makes a pass at her... and aggressive one. She tries to get away, but he pins her against his desk.

HELEN'S VOICE

He became a beast...he wouldn't let me go. So I grabbed a knife from the table and stabbed him with it.

She stabs him in the shoulder. He staggers back, shocked, blood on his shirt and on her dress.

BACK TO SCENE

HELEN

When I got home I tried to get the blood out of my dress but it left a stain. It cost 46 dollars.

WOLFE

But Mr. Pyle recovered.

HELEN

Oh, yes. I don't know if he backs shows just so he can get girls, but it might as well be. I don't mean just taking them out, I mean the last ditch. We say that on Broadway. You know what I mean?

WOLFE

I can surmise.

HELEN

He ruins girls. There's a lot of talk about the girls he gets.

(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)

I don't think he ever told anyone about us, but what if he did? What if the police find out about it?

WOLFE

The police are not simpletons. You wouldn't be arrested for murdering Mr. Pyle last night, let alone convicted, merely because you stabbed him in self-defense last January.

HELEN

But if they find out right away who did it, that would end it and I'd be all right. Only I'm afraid they won't find out right away, but I think you could if I helped you. I can't offer to help the police because they'd wonder why.

WOLFE

I see. How do you propose to help me?

HELEN

Well, I figure it like this. The girl who poisoned him was one of the first to take a plate in, then she came back and got another one, so she must have been one of the last five: Peggy Choate or Nora Jaret or Carol Annis or Lucy Morgan.

WOLFE

Or you.

HELEN

No, it wasn't me. I can talk to those four girls and find out which one had a reason, and then I can tell the police I saw her going back to the kitchen for another plate.

(off their looks)

You didn't think a 20 year-old girl could help, did you?

WOLFE

I may have been a little skeptical. And it's possibly you're over simplifying the problem. We have to consider all the factors. Mr. Pyle was in agony, but he was conscious and could speak. Why didn't he identify and denounce his poisoner?

HELEN

I guess you're not as clever as you're supposed to be. She came up behind him and gave him that plate. He didn't know who it was. I thought you wanted to get her. All you do is make objections.

WOLFE

I do want to get her, Miss Iacono. But our quarry is a malign and crafty harpy, and I will not be a party to your peril. I propose an alternative. Arrange for Mr. Goodwin to see them, together with you. If they are not available at the moment, arrange for it this evening -- but not here.

HELEN

A man can't understand what a girl feels. Look at me. Pyle thought I would give up my honor and my virtue just to get a part in that play he was backing, and anyway, it was a flop.

WOLFE

I have full faith in Mr. Goodwin's comprehension of the young woman's mental processes.

Helen's going to raise another objection, but the look on Wolfe's face stops her.

HELEN

Fine.

And as she gets up to go:

INT. BROWNSTONE - ENTRY HALL - DAY

Archie leads her out the front door, locking it behind her.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

I was congratulating myself that I hadn't got her phone number. I don't say a girl must have true nobility of character before I'll buy her a lunch, but you have to draw the line somewhere.

He goes back to:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

To find Wolfe sitting with his eyes closed and his fists planted on the chair arms. Question is... is he dozing or thinking?

ARCHIE

Even money.

WOLFE

On what?

ARCHIE

On her against the field. It was getting too hot for comfort and she decided that the best way to duck it was to wish it on some dear friend.

Wolfe's eyes open.

WOLFE

She would, certainly. A woman whose conscience has no sting will stop at nothing. But why come to me? Why didn't she cook her own stew and serve it to the police?

ARCHIE

For a guess, she was afraid the cops would get too curious and find out how she had saved her honor and virtue and tell her mother. Shall I also guess why you proposed your alternative instead of having her bring them here for you?

WOLFE

She wouldn't.

ARCHIE

That's your guess. Mine is that you're not desperate enough to take on five females in a bunch. When you told me to bring in the whole dozen, you knew darn well it couldn't be done. Okay, I want instructions.

WOLFE

Later.

Wolfe rises and heads for the door, passing Archie.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

I'm going to bed.

Archie checks his watch.

ARCHIE

Shouldn't you be going to the plant room?

Wolfe waves him off and keeps on going.

INT. CAB - NIGHT

Archie, in fresh clothes but not quite refreshed himself, opens the door and lets Helen in.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

After several long phone conversations in which Miss Iacono interrupted my attempts to nap and let me know how she was getting on with the arrangements, I was now calling her Helen. Not that I felt like it, but in the detective business, you have to be sociable, of course preserving your honor and virtue.

HELEN

I've been thinking it over. It's not going to be possible to find out which one of these girls had a motive to kill Pyle.

ARCHIE

It isn't?

HELEN

The only way is to get one of them to open up, and since that will practically be confessing to murder, I doubt I can get her to do it.

ARCHIE

Maybe I can.

HELEN

No, I'm sure you can't. But I have another idea.

ARCHIE

I can't wait.

HELEN

We'll spend the evening with them, then you and I can decide which one is the most likely, and I'll tell Wolfe I saw her going back the kitchen and bringing another plate and Wolfe will call the police, and that will do it.

ARCHIE

Oh, yeah, that'll do it, all right.

Helen beams. Archie leans back against the seat.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

No, I didn't feel like calling her Helen. I would just as soon have been too far away from her to call her at all.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's a medium-sized apartment, and the couch and chairs and rugs have the kind of homeyness that furniture gets by being used by a lot of different people for fifty or sixty years. Nora Jaret, Carol Annis, and Helen Iacono are scattered on the couches around the room. Lucy Morgan is sprawled on the floor. Archie perches precariously on a wobbly-legged chair, a glass of milk on an even-more wobbly table next to him. Peggy Choate comes up to him.

PEGGY

As long as you came all the way down here to tell us what the police are doing, we thought we'd try to make it a little festive.

She thrusts a bottle at him. Archie studies the label.

ARCHIE

Bubble-Pagne. Registered Trademark.

PEGGY

Ten cents a bottle.

ARCHIE

Thanks, I'll stick with the milk.

Peggy shrugs and goes to refill the other glasses. Carol Annis waves her off.

CAROL

So what do the police think?

ARCHIE

They think one of you here killed Pyle because you were the last five to serve a plate.

NORA

How do you know what they think?

ARCHIE

I'm not at liberty to say. But I do.

CAROL

I know what I think. I think it was Zoltan.

(MORE)

CAROL (CONT'D)

He's a chef at Rusterman's and Nero Wolfe is the trustee there and so he's the boss there, and I think Zoltan hated him and tried to poison him but he gave the poisoned plate to the wrong girl.

ARCHIE

Nobody can stop you thinking. But I doubt very much if the police would buy that.

PEGGY

What would they buy?

ARCHIE

Anything that would fit. They think one of you served two plates and poisoned Pyle.

LUCY

They're a bunch of dopes. They get an idea and then they haven't got room for another one.

PEGGY

There's no proof any of us went back for another plate.

NORA

Or even if she did, there's no proof it wasn't just a mistake.

ARCHIE

There is, but it's tricky. Take 24 pieces of paper, on twelve of them write the names of the guests and arrange them as they sat on the table. Then on the other twelve --

HELEN

Write the names of the girls?

ARCHIE

Then try to manipulate the girl pieces so that one of them either took in two plates at once and did not give either of them to Pyle, or went back for a second plate and did not give either one to Pyle. It can't be done. So the idea that a girl *innocently* brought in two plates is out.

NORA

I don't believe it.

ARCHIE

It's not a question of believing.
I'll show you.

Nora glares at him for a moment, then gets up and slams some paper and a pen on the table next to him -- nearly sending the milk cascading to the floor. And as Archie starts to write:

MONTAGE

As the five girls try to work out the puzzle. Archie has arranged the 24 pieces of paper in a rectangle as he described. Nora kneels facing him, Lucy props herself on her elbows, Carol squats on side of Archie, Peggy on the other, while Helen stands behind them. It almost looks like a game of Twister. The girls try every possible combination, their faces registering excitement, confusion, irritation, and finally defeat as none on their combinations proves their point.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

My memory has had a long stiff training under the strains and pressures Wolfe has put on it, but I wouldn't undertake to report all the combinations they tried, even if I thought you cared.

Finally, one by one, the girls give up, until only Peggy Choate is left, frowning and biting her lip, propped first on one hand then the other. Then:

PEGGY

Nuts.

And she sweeps all the papers into a pile with her arm and we END MONTAGE.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

As the girls go back to their seats, unsettled by the demonstration.

CAROL

It's just a trick.

NORA

I still don't believe that one of us deliberately poisoned a man. Point her out, I dare you to.

ARCHIE

If I could, I wouldn't be bothering the rest of you. So the cops will have to get to it from the other end: motive.

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

(to Carol)

Did you know Pyle?

CAROL

Of course I met him. Everybody in show business has. But that's all.

ARCHIE

Miss Morgan?

LUCY

Once I danced with him at the Flamingo. That was the closest I had ever been to him... though not as close as he wanted to be to me.

ARCHIE

Miss Choate?

PEGGY

I never had the honor.

ARCHIE

Miss Jaret?

NORA

The only time I ever saw the great Pyle was at Sardi's. From a distance. A welcome distance.

ARCHIE

You all clearly knew what kind of man Pyle was, maybe more than you're letting on. I hate to say it, but one of you is lying.

LUCY

Archie Goodwin, a girl's best friend.

ARCHIE

Actually, I have a friendly feeling for all pretty girls, and I admire and respect you for being willing to make an honest fifty bucks by coming there yesterday to carry plates of grub to a bunch of finickers. I *am* your friend, Lucy, if you're not the murderer, and if you are, no one is.

The girls exchange glances, suddenly suspicious of each other.

CAROL

You *are* a help. Now you've got us hating each other. Now everybody suspects everybody.

ARCHIE

It's about time. If I've made you all realize that this is no Broadway production, and the longer the payoff is postponed the tougher it will be for everybody, I *have* helped.

Archie gets up.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Let's go down to Nero Wolfe's office. I don't say Mr. Wolfe can sort this out just by snapping his fingers, but he might surprise you. He has often surprised me.

NORA

All right. This is getting too damn painful. Come on.

She gets up, followed by the other girls. But before he can get them out, a door in the back of the room swings open, revealing Purlly Stebbins.

STEBBINS

I'm surprised at you, Goodwin. These ladies need their sleep.

If Archie is surprised -- and he is -- he won't show it.

ARCHIE

Greetings. And welcome. I've been wondering why you didn't join us instead of skulking there in the dark.

STEBBINS

I'll bet you have.
 (to the girls)
 You can relax, ladies.
 (to Archie)
 You're under arrest for obstructing justice.

Archie knows better than to fight. He heads for the door.

INT. CAB - NIGHT

As Archie settles comfortably in the seat next to Stebbins.

ARCHIE

Why not cuffs?

STEBBINS

Clown if you want to.

ARCHIE

I've been thinking about laws and liberties and so on. If a man is arrested for obstructing justice, and it turns out he didn't obstruct any justice, does that make the arrest false? I guess I'll have to ask a lawyer. Nathaniel Parker would know.

Stebbins knows that name -- and doesn't like it.

STEBBINS

You tried to get them to tell you things instead of telling the police, and you were going to take them to Nero Wolfe so he could pry it out of them. And you haven't even got the excuse that Wolfe is representing a client. He hasn't got a client.

ARCHIE

Wrong. He has. Fritz Brenner is seeing red because food cooked by him was poisoned and killed a man. It's convenient to have a client living right in the house. You admit that a licensed detective has a right to investigate on behalf of a client.

STEBBINS

I admit nothing.

ARCHIE

That's sensible. When you're on the stand, being sued for false arrest, it would be bad to have it thrown up to you, and it would be two against one, because the hackie could testify.
(to the driver)
Can you hear us, driver?

DRIVER

Sure I can hear you. It's very interesting.

ARCHIE

(to Stebbins:)
So watch your tongue. You could get hooked for a year's pay. Am I still under arrest?

STEBBINS

You're damn right you are!
(then, easing up:)
No, you're not. But I have to bring you in, one way or another. Lt. Rowcliffe is expecting you. He sent me.

Archie nods, understanding Purely's awkward situation.

ARCHIE

One will get you five that I can make him start stuttering in ten minutes.

Stebbins stifles a smile and we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

Archie stifles yawns as he relates last night's occurrences to Wolfe.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

It had taken me only eight minutes to get Rowcliffe stuttering, a personal best for me, but it was hardly worth losing another night's sleep for. When Wolfe came down after his morning session with the orchids, he wanted to hear my conversation with the girls verbatim, and also my impressions and conclusions.

ARCHIE

My basic conclusion is that I came up with nothing. That's my impression, too.

WOLFE

You are saying in effect it must be left to the police. I can expose her only by a stroke of luck.

ARCHIE

Right. Or genius. That's your department. I make no conclusions about genius.

WOLFE

Then why the devil were you going to bring them to me at midnight? Don't answer. I know. To badger me.

That's when Fritz comes in, a grave look on his face.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

What is it?

FRITZ

I'm sorry to disturb you, sir, but it's something of a crisis. It seems that we've been delivered watercress that's at least a day old.

WOLFE
Again?

FRITZ
Yes, sir.

Wolfe's eyes narrow in anger.

WOLFE
Bring it to me. I must see this
abomination for myself.

FRITZ
Right away, sir. There's another
matter, sir. Felix and Zoltan would
like an appointment with you after
lunch, and I would like to be present.

WOLFE
What is it? Something wrong with
the restaurant?

FRITZ
No, sir. Concerning the misfortune
of Tuesday evening.

WOLFE
What about it?

FRITZ
It would be better for them to tell
you. It is their concern.

Archie swivels for a view of Fritz's face. Wolfe studies
Fritz for a long moment.

WOLFE
Would half-past two be convenient?

Fritz nods and leaves. The moment he's gone, Archie swivels
back to look at Wolfe.

ARCHIE
You didn't press him.

WOLFE
No, I did not.

ARCHIE
You think Felix and Zoltan have been
holding out on us?

WOLFE
I assume we will learn that at half-
past two.

Archie starts to get up.

ARCHIE

I can go to the kitchen and pry it out of him.

WOLFE

No. There is no one more obliging than Fritz, but also there is no one more immovable when he has taken a stand. We shall not press him.

Archie settles back into his seat with a sigh and we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - LATER

Felix is in the red chair, Zoltan in one of the yellow ones, and Fritz, now in a jacket instead of his apron, stands. Archie and Wolfe are at their desks.

FELIX

For the maitre d'hotel and one of our chefs to assist at a dinner where a guest is served poison, that is not pleasant. A few of our most desirable patrons make jokes, but most do not, and some of them do not come.

WOLFE

Confound it, Felix. I have avowed my responsibility. I have apologized. Are you here for the gloomy pleasure of reproaching me?

FELIX

No, sir. Of course not. We wish to engage your professional services. We know it wouldn't be proper to pay you from restaurant funds, since you are the trustee, so we'll pay you with our own money. We appeal to you.

Zoltan stretches out a hand, arm's length.

ZOLTAN

We appeal to you.

WOLFE

Pfui.

ZOLTAN

He said pfui.

FELIX

I heard him. I have ears.

FRITZ

I wished to be present so I could add my appeal to theirs. I offered to contribute, but they said no.

WOLFE

This is preposterous. I said pfui not in disgust but astonishment. I am solely to blame for this mess, but you offer to pay me to clean it up. Preposterous! You should know that I have already bestirred myself. Archie?

ARCHIE

Yes, sir. At least you have bestirred me.

WOLFE

Your coming is opportune. Before lunch I was sitting here considering the situation, and I concluded that the only way to manage the affair with dispatch is to get the wretch to betray herself, and I conceived a plan. For it I need your cooperation. Yours, Zoltan. Will you give it? I appeal to you.

ZOLTAN

But yes! But how?

WOLFE

The plan requires that you telephone five of those women this afternoon. You will first call Miss Iacono and ask her to meet you at Rusterman's. You will say that you saw her return for a second plate, but that --

ZOLTAN

But I didn't. I told --

FELIX

Tais-tois!

WOLFE

-- but that before you tell the police, you wish to discuss it with her. You will say...

And we SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - LATER

Zoltan is on the phone at Archie's desk.

ZOLTAN

(into phone:)

--I have stayed silent until now because I couldn't believe anyone as beautiful and charming as you could be guilty of such a crime. But now that the notoriety is hurting the restaurant, I may have to reveal what I saw. Of course, if we were to become friends, that would change everything.

We PULL BACK to REVEAL Wolfe on the extension at his desk. He hangs up.

WOLFE

Exemplary.

ZOLTAN

Is that good?

Archie enters from outside.

ARCHIE

Good? I've never rated above satisfactory. But you were only talking to me on the front room extension. Do you think you can pull it off again with a woman on the line?

Zoltan hesitates.

ZOLTAN

Can we rehearse it one more time?

And on Archie, pivoting on his heels to return to the front room, we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - LATER

As Zoltan speaks nervously into the phone. Archie listens at Wolfe's desk and takes notes.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

Wolfe went up to the plant rooms and Zoltan called each girl while I listened in on the extension.

ZOLTAN

(into phone:)

--of course, if we were to become friends, that would change everything. I could never betray an intimate --

(then:)

She hung up.

Archie scratches a name off a list.

ARCHIE

Next up -- Peggy Choate.

And as a flustered Zoltan starts to dial, and OVER A MONTAGE of Zoltan making calls:

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

We'd given the girls different appointment times, just in case one of the innocent ones agreed to meet Zoltan for some unimaginable reason. We also told Cramer about the scheme, which was a good thing, since Helen Iacono hung up on us and immediately called the district attorney.

INT. RUSTERMAN'S RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Archie sits with Cramer at a small table in the corner. There's a metal case between them, with cords extending to the earphones both men wear, and down into the wall. Wolfe, Stebbins, Fritz and Felix are also there. Cramer glances at the clock on the wall. It's nearly eight.

CRAMER

Peggy Choate isn't coming.

ARCHIE

We have to hang on. You never can tell with a redhead.

Cramer glares at him, then draws a line in his notebook. Archie slides the book away from him and glances at it. A list of names and times: Helen Iacono 6:00 pm. Peggy Choate 7:30 pm. Carol Annis 9:00 pm. Lucy Morgan 10:30 pm. Nora Jaret 12:00 am. Helen and Peggy have been crossed out. Archie slides the notebook back to Cramer.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

If I had to write it down, I would certainly have made do with one "pm," but policemen are trained to do things right.

WOLFE

Preposterous!

CRAMER

Who? Me or Goodwin?

Archie looks over to see Wolfe standing over a cutting board, staring down angrily.

WOLFE

They have the temerity to sell this horse fodder as *watercress*? Felix!

And as Fritz and Felix go over to him, we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RUSTERMAN'S RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - LATER

The clock on the wall reads 8:30.

CRAMER

Like I said. She's not coming.

ARCHIE

I never thought she would. I said
you never can tell with a redhead
merely to make conversation.

Cramer glares at Archie, then signals Felix to bring them
more coffee. DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RUSTERMAN'S RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - LATER

Now the clock reads 8:56.

ARCHIE

Shall I do a countdown?

STEBBINS

You'd clown in the hot seat.

That's when a SOUND comes from the EARPHONES. Wolfe sees
Archie and Cramer react.

CRAMER

She's here.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. RUSTERMAN'S RESTAURANT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Zoltan stands up as Carol Annis walks over to his table.
She's wearing a veil.

ZOLTAN

Good evening.

She sits, ignoring the LARGE FLOWER ARRANGEMENT on the table.

ZOLTAN (CONT'D)

Will you have a drink?

CAROL

I don't want anything.

ZOLTAN

It is more friendly if we eat. The
spaghetti with anchovy sauce is
excellent. I had some.

CAROL

You had some?

Archie bites his lip, waiting to see if Zoltan can recover.

ZOLTAN

I've been here half an hour, I wanted so much to see you. I might even eat another portion.

CAROL

You should know your own restaurant's food. All right.

Zoltan snaps his fingers and a WAITER scurries over.

ZOLTAN

Hans, two spaghettis with anchovy sauce.

The waiter rushes into the kitchen, where Felix places two orders of SPAGHETTI on a tray, then adds a dish of FRESHLY-GRATED PARMESAN.

CRAMER

How is he going to trap her into admitting she's a killer?

ARCHIE

He'll find a way.

Cramer is skeptical, to say the least.

CRAMER

He's a cook. He's not you, Goodwin.

Hans heads back to the dining room, but before he reaches the door, Wolfe grabs the Parmesan off the tray. Felix shrugs and motions to the waiter to go.

ZOLTAN

If any of the others had come and taken another plate, I would have stopped her, but before you I was dumb.

CAROL

I see. So you're sure.

ZOLTAN

I am, my dear. Very sure.

CAROL

But you haven't told the police? Or Nero Wolfe or Archie Goodwin?

ZOLTAN

Could I tell anyone that I know you killed a man? If you weren't wearing that veil, I could look into your beautiful eyes and I would see suffering and sorrow.

(MORE)

ZOLTAN (CONT'D)

I know he made you suffer. I know that's why you killed him.

CRAMER

He's overdoing it.

ARCHIE

No, he's perfect.

Carol doesn't even look up as the waiter puts the food on the table.

CAROL

That's why I'm wearing the veil, Mr. Zoltan, because I know it's in my eyes. He did make me suffer. He ruined my life.

ZOLTAN

No, my dear, your life is not ruined. No matter what he did.

CAROL

He promised to marry me. I'm only 22 years old, Zoltan. I'm glad you know I killed him because it will be better now that somebody knows. I had to kill him, *had to*, or I would have had to kill myself.

Archie nods. They've got her. But:

ZOLTAN

Wait! Don't eat that!

(then:)

The spaghetti with anchovy sauce is not complete without cheese. Wait until I return, and we can talk about our future.

Zoltan gets up and goes into the kitchen. Carol looks around to make sure no one's watching, then slips a CONE OF PAPER out of her dress and sprinkles the contents on Zoltan's plate. She's about to put it away when she looks up to find Zoltan has returned... with Wolfe, Archie, Cramer, Fritz, Felix and Stebbins in tow. Stebbins takes the paper spill out of her hand.

STEBBINS

I'll take that.

Archie opens the flowers to reveal to Carol the HIDDEN MICROPHONE.

CAROL

You tricked me.

WOLFE

You had injured and humiliated one of my most valued friends, Fritz Brenner, and two other men whom I esteem, and I wished them to witness your own humiliation, contrived by me, in my presence.

CAROL

Then you're no better than Pyle.

WOLFE

A better reason was that I wished to ask you a few questions. You took such prodigious risks that it is hard to believe in your sanity, and it would give me no satisfaction to work vengeance on a madwoman. Are you a lunatic?

She doesn't answer. Wolfe turns to Archie.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Is she deranged, Archie?

ARCHIE

No comment.

WOLFE

If you are mad, you are also ruthless and malevolent. You may have been intolerably provoked by Mr. Pyle, but--

CRAMER

(interrupts:)

That's enough. I didn't agree to let you preach at her all night. Bring her along, Sergeant.

Stebbins starts to lead her out, but Fritz goes up to her.

FRITZ

Mr. Wolfe said you injured me, and that is true. It is also true I wanted him to find you. I can't speak for Felix and you tried to kill Zoltan and I can't speak for him, but I can speak for myself. I forgive you.

CAROL

You lie.

So much for pathos. Stebbins leads her out. And on Wolfe and Archie sharing a look, we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Archie is doing the book-keeping. Wolfe paces anxiously, staring up at the clock, then looking away, scowling.

WOLFE

Time?

ARCHIE

I'm good at my job, but I'm not afraid to say when another's more qualified. In this case, I take second position to the clock you just glared at.

WOLFE

What is the time?

Archie sighs, glances at his watch.

ARCHIE

Six twenty-nine.

WOLFE

One minute.

He resumes his pacing. The clock lets out a small CHIME, indicating it's half past the hour.

ARCHIE

Of course, I could be a couple seconds slow.

Wolfe stops pacing. He sinks into his chair, stricken.

WOLFE

Too late.

ARCHIE

Or maybe the clock is fast.

Somehow, Archie doesn't seem to share Wolfe's gloom. But Fritz does, as he comes in looking like everyone he cares about has just died.

FRITZ

Mr. Wolfe, I'm so sorry.

Wolfe waves him away, his despair beyond words. Fritz proffers two EGGPLANTS.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

I could... I could stuff them.

Wolfe gazes at him dolefully, then nods. Fritz goes. And the doorbell RINGS. As Archie gets up:

WOLFE

Send it away.

INT. BROWNSTONE - ENTRY HALL - NIGHT

Archie opens the door and is surprised to see Inspector Cramer on the stoop, holding a carton marked NERO WOLFE.

ARCHIE

Thanks for the corn, but we're going with the eggplants.

Cramer hands Archie his hat and tramps down the hall to the office.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Cramer drops the box on Wolfe's desk, takes out his knife, and cuts the cord as Wolfe and Archie come to the desk. Cramer opens the flap, takes out an ear of corn, and holds it up.

CRAMER

If you were going to have this for dinner, I guess it's too late.

WOLFE

Where did you get it?

CRAMER

If you don't know, maybe Goodwin does. Four hours ago, the dead body of a man was found in the alley back of Rusterman's restaurant.

Cramer shoots a glance at Archie, goes to the red leather chair, and sits down.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A DEAD BODY lies on the ground, an IRON PIPE next to the victim's head.

CRAMER'S VOICE

He had been hit in the back of the head with a piece of iron pipe.

A POLICE PHOTOGRAPHER FLASHES the body, then turns to an open STATION WAGON, the back filled with CARTONS.

CRAMER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

The station wagon he had come in was alongside the receiving platform of the restaurant, and in the station wagon were nine cartons of corn. That's one of them, with your name on it.

BACK TO SCENE

WOLFE

Has the body been identified?

CRAMER

Kenneth Barker, 28-years-old. His driver's license and eighty-some dollars in cash were in his wallet. He had been delivering corn at the restaurant the past five weeks and then he had been coming here with yours, right?

WOLFE

I don't know.

CRAMER

The hell you don't.

Cramer drops the ear of corn on the desk.

CRAMER (CONT'D)

If you're going to start that kind--

ARCHIE

(cutting in:)

Hold it, stay in the buggy. As you know, Mr. Wolfe is up in the plant rooms from four to six every day except Sunday. The corn usually comes before six, and either Fritz or I receive it, so Mr. Wolfe doesn't know, but I do. Kenneth Barker has been bringing it the past five weeks, if you want--

Archie stops because he sees Wolfe moving. Wolfe picks up the ear of corn, feels it, grips it from the middle, and then starts shucking it. Wolfe frowns at it.

WOLFE

I thought so.

Wolfe puts it down, reaches for the carton, and grabs another ear.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

You will help, Archie.

Archie takes an ear and starts shucking it. And as Cramer watches, clearly wondering what is going on, we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

There are now THREE PILES of corn on Wolfe's desk. Two ears are too young, six are too old, and eight are just right. Wolfe sits in his chair and looks at Cramer.

WOLFE

This is preposterous.

CRAMER

You're stalling.

WOLFE

No. Shall I expound it?

CRAMER

Yeah. Go ahead.

WOLFE

Since you have questioned men at the restaurant, you know that the corn comes from a man named Duncan McLeod, who grows it on a farm some sixty miles north of here. He has been supplying it for four years, and he knows precisely what I require. It must be nearly mature--

ARCHIE

But not quite.

WOLFE

And it must be picked not more than three hours before it reaches me. Do you eat sweet corn?

CRAMER

Yes. You're stalling.

WOLFE

No. Who cooks it?

CRAMER

My wife. I haven't got a Fritz.

WOLFE

Does she cook it in water?

CRAMER

Sure. Is yours cooked in beer?

WOLFE

No. Millions of American women, and some men, commit that outrage every summer day. They are turning a superb treat into mere provender.

CRAMER

Is that so.

WOLFE

Shucked and boiled in water, sweet corn is edible and nutritious; roasted
(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

in the husk in the hottest possible oven for forty minutes, shucked at the table, and buttered and salted, nothing else, it is ambrosia. No chef's ingenuity and imagination ever created a finer dish. American women should themselves be boiled in water--

CRAMER

How much longer are you going to stall?

WOLFE

This is preposterous. Mr. McLeod knows what I require and he knows how to choose it without opening the husk. He is supposed to be equally meticulous with the supply for the restaurant, but I doubt if he is.

CRAMER

(to Archie)

Where were you at 5:15 this afternoon?

ARCHIE

In the Heron sedan which Mr. Wolfe owns and I drive. 5:15? Grand Concourse, headed for the east river drive.

CRAMER

Where had you been?

ARCHIE

Ball game. Yankee Stadium.

CRAMER

What happened in the ninth inning?

(waves him off:)

To hell with it. You'd know all right, you'd see to that. How well do you know Max Maslow?

ARCHIE

Connect it, please.

CRAMER

One item in Kenneth Barker's pockets was a notebook. One page had the names of four men written in pencil. Three of the names had checkmarks in front of them. The last one, no check mark, was Archie Goodwin. The first one was Max Maslow. Will that do?

ARCHIE

I don't know him.

CRAMER

How about Peter Jay and Carl Heydt?

ARCHIE

Don't know Jay, Heydt makes clothes for women, including a friend of mine, Lily Rowan. I have gone with her a few times to his place to help her decide.

CRAMER

Do you want me to connect Susan McLeod before I ask you about her?

ARCHIE

No thanks, I'll do the connecting. The first time Barker came with the corn, he told me Susan got her father to give him the job on the farm.

CRAMER

How long have you been intimate with her?

ARCHIE

Well. There are several definitions for intimate. Which one?

CRAMER

You know damn well which one.

ARCHIE

If you won't say, I'll have to guess. If you mean the worst, or the very best, depending on how you look at it, nothing doing. I have known her for three years, having met her when she brought the corn one day. I helped her get her first modelling job.

CRAMER

And?

ARCHIE

And she's a model and she has points. But she's a lousy dancer and after a show or prize fight or ball game I want an hour or two with a band and a partner.

CRAMER

When and how did you find out that Kenneth Barker had shoved you out and taken Sue over?

ARCHIE

Nuts.

(turns to Wolfe:)

Your honor, I object to the question on the grounds that it is insulting, impertinent and digusticulous. It assumes not only that I am shovable, but also that I can be shoved out of a place I have never been.

WOLFE

Objection sustained. You will rephrase the question, Mr. Cramer.

CRAMER

The hell I will. You might as well open up, Goodwin. We have a signed statement from her. What passed between you and Barker when he was here a week ago today?

ARCHIE

The corn. It passed from him to me.

CRAMER

Okay. You don't wear a hat. You have one minute to get a toothbrush.

Cramer gets up. So does Archie.

ARCHIE

Now listen, I can throw sliders in a pinch and do, but this is no pinch. It's close to bedtime.

CRAMER

The minute's up. You're under arrest as a material witness. Move!

Cramer leads him out to:

INT. BROWNSTONE - ENTRY HALL - NIGHT

Cramer lets Archie get his jacket. Wolfe follows them into the hall.

ARCHIE

If you want me back in the morning, you might give Mr. Parker a ring.

WOLFE

I shall. Mr. Cramer. Knowing your considerable talents as I do, I am sometimes dumbfounded by your fatuity. You were so bent on baiting Mr. Goodwin that you completely ignored the point I was at pains to make.

Wolfe holds up an ear of corn and waves it at him.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Who picked the corn?

CRAMER

That's *your* point. Mine is who killed
Kenneth Barker. Move, Goodwin.

And out the door they go.

WOLFE

Pfui!

And on Wolfe's frustration, we:

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Archie stares down at a thoroughly unappetizing plate of
bacon and eggs -- essentially congealed grease in a variety
of decorator colors. Frankly, after a night of interrogation,
it's hard to say which looks worse, the eggs or Archie.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

Cramer took me to his place, and
after spending half an hour with me,
turned me over to Lieutenant Rowcliff
for nearly an hour. I had him
stuttering in 14 minutes -- far from
my record -- and he turned me over
to the DA's office, where they made
a night of it.

Archie looks up at NATHANIEL PARKER.

PARKER

This is serious, Archie. They
actually think you may have killed
that man. Bail is set at twenty
thousand dollars.

ARCHIE

In a way that's a compliment. Last
time it was a measly five hundred.

PARKER

I told the judge this amount could
only be justified only if they had
enough evidence to charge you with
murder.

ARCHIE

I guess the judge didn't buy that.

PARKER

Unfortunately, he did.

(MORE)

PARKER (CONT'D)

As your counsel, I must advise you to be prepared for such a charge at any moment.

ARCHIE

Consider me prepared.

Parker opens the door and leads Archie into:

INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY - DAY

There's one more thing. This is the hard part.

PARKER

By the way, Wolfe said this is your affair, not his. He told me to send my bill to you, not him. I'll make it moderate.

ARCHIE

Thanks.

That's when Archie spots DUNCAN MACLEOD, dressed for town, with a necktie, coming down the hall.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Good morning, Mr. McLeod.

MCLEOD

It's not a good morning, it's a bad one, a day lost and no one to leave to see to things.

And he's gone down the hall.

INT. BROWNSTONE - ENTRY HALL - DAY

Archie opens the door...but the chain bolt is on. Archie pushes the buzzer. Fritz opens the door for him.

ARCHIE

Good morning, what's up?

FRITZ

Archie, you look terrible.

ARCHIE

I feel worse. Now what?

FRITZ

A woman to see you. Miss Susan McLeod. She's in the office.

ARCHIE

Has he talked with her?

FRITZ

No.

Archie heads for the kitchen.

INT. BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - DAY

Wolfe is at the center table with a glass of beer in his hand, as Archie enters.

WOLFE

So, have you slept?

ARCHIE

No.

WOLFE

Have you eaten?

Archie gets a glass from the cupboard, goes to the refrigerator, gets some milk, and takes a sip as:

ARCHIE

If you could see the bacon and eggs they brought in for me and I paid two bucks for, let alone taste it, you'd never be the same. They think maybe I killed Barker. For your information, I didn't.

He sets the glass down.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

This will hold me until lunch. I understand I have a caller. As you told Parker, this is my affair and you are not concerned, even though this all started with *your* corn. May I take her to the front room? I'm not intimate enough with her to take her up to my room.

WOLFE

Confound it. How much of what you told Mr. Cramer is flummery?

ARCHIE

None. All straight. But he's on me and so is the DA and I've got to find out why.

WOLFE

You will see Miss McLeod in the office.

ARCHIE

The front room will do. It may be an hour. Two hours.

WOLFE

You may need the telephone. The office.

Archie takes another sip and we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

As Archie enters, still holding his half-empty glass of milk, Susan McLeod goes to him, tilting her head up to him. Archie kisses her... a nice long kiss.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

If it hadn't been for the milk I would have used my arms for one of their basic functions, since that's a sensible way to start a good, frank talk with a girl. That being impractical, I kissed her. Not just a peck. She not only took it, she helped. It wouldn't have been polite for me to quit, so I left it to her.

She steps back.

SUSAN

(sits down:)

Archie, I don't know what you're going to do to me.

Archie crosses to his desk, sips his milk, and sits down.

ARCHIE

Neither do I. Why, have you done something to me?

SUSAN

It came out. You remember you explained it for me one night.

ARCHIE

I said with ordinary people like me, when words start on their way out they have to go through a checking station for an okay. You may have a perfectly good checking station, but for some reason, maybe a loose connection, it often gets bypassed.

SUSAN

But the trouble is, if I haven't got a checking station, I'm just plain dumb. If I do have one, it certainly got bypassed when the words came out about my going to meet you there yesterday.

ARCHIE

Meet me where?

SUSAN

At the entrance to the alley where I used to deliver corn to Rusterman's.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

As Susan, checking her watch, enters the mouth of the alley, out of breath from running.

SUSAN'S VOICE

I said I was going to meet you there at five o'clock and we were going to wait there until Ken came because we wanted to have a talk with him.

BACK TO SCENE

SUSAN

But I was late, I didn't get there until a quarter past five, and you weren't there, so I left.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Susan doesn't leave. She stops cold, staring at something in the alley.

BACK TO SCENE

ARCHIE

You said that to whom?

SUSAN

To several people. And it was in the statement they had me sign.

ARCHIE

It's just possible that you *are* dumb. Didn't you realize they would come to me?

SUSAN

Why, of course. And you would deny it, and you could probably prove you were some where else, so it wouldn't matter.

ARCHIE

Okay, you're not dumb. If you went there to see Ken and got there at a quarter past five, you *did* see him. Didn't you?

EXT. ALLEY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Susan sees Barker's dead body lying on the ground.

SUSAN'S VOICE

I was scared, because I told him just two days ago that I would like to kill him. So I left. I didn't stop to think until I was several blocks away how dumb *that* was.

BACK TO SCENE

ARCHIE

Why was it dumb?

SUSAN

Because Felix and the doorman had seen me when I arrived, so I couldn't say I hadn't been there. When I got to the apartment, I thought it over, decided what to say about going there to meet you, and when a man came and started asking questions, I told him about it before he asked.

ARCHIE

I'm sure they asked what we wanted to talk with Ken about. Had you thought about that?

SUSAN

Oh, I didn't have to. It was about what he had told you, that I thought I was pregnant and he was responsible.

Archie goggles at her.

ARCHIE

He had told *me* that? When?

SUSAN

You know when. Last Tuesday when he brought the corn. He told me about it Saturday -- no, Sunday. At the farm.

ARCHIE

Ken Barker told you on Sunday that he had told me on Tuesday that you thought you were pregnant and he was responsible. Was that it?

SUSAN

Yes. He told Carl, too -- you know, Carl Heydt.

(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I think he told two other men too -- Peter Jay and Max Maslow. That was when I told him I would like to kill him.

ARCHIE

And that's what you told the cops we wanted to talk with him about?

SUSAN

Yes.

ARCHIE

For a frame, it's close to perfect, but I'm willing to doubt if you meant it. But whether you meant it or not, what are you here for? Why bother to come and tell me about it?

SUSAN

Don't you see? It's my word against yours. They told me last night that you denied that we had arranged to meet there.

ARCHIE

Because we hadn't.

SUSAN

I thought you might change that. The way it is now, they think either I'm lying or you're lying, but if you tell them--

ARCHIE

(interrupts:)

Shut up!

She gawks at him, then all of a sudden she breaks into tears, dropping her head and covering her face with her hands. Archie gets up, goes over to Wolfe's desk, gets the vase of orchids, removes the flowers, and goes back to her... gently lifts her head up by the chin, and... DUMPS THE WATER OVER HER HEAD. And on her SQUEAL, we

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - LATER

Susan is drying her face with a towel. Archie is sitting at his desk, watching her.

SUSAN

You didn't have to do that.

ARCHIE

The hell I didn't. It might help if someone did it to me. Now listen. Whether you meant it or not, I am out on a very rickety limb.

SUSAN

But Archie, you--

Archie stands up and goes to her.

ARCHIE

Look at me.

Archie extends his hands at waist level, open, palms up.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Put yours hands on mine, palm down.
(she does, and:)
No, don't press, relax, just let them rest there. Damn it, relax! Look at me. Did you kill Ken?

SUSAN

No, Archie!

Archie turns and goes back to his chair. She sits down in hers.

ARCHIE

That's my private lie detector. Not patented. Either I wriggle off by selling them on you, which is not my style, or I do a job that is my style. First I see Mr. Wolfe and tell him I'm taking a leave of absence, I hope a short --

That's when the door opens and Nero Wolfe enters. Wolfe looks at Susan, indicates the red chair with a nod, and goes to his seat behind the desk.

WOLFE

Will you please move to this chair, Miss McLeod?
(to Archie:)
"A job that is your style?"

Archie shrugs.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Miss McLeod, I eavesdropped, without Mr. Goodwin's knowledge, through a hidden panel. I heard all that was said and I saw. Do you wish to complain?

SUSAN

Why?

WOLFE

Why did I listen? To learn how much of a pickle Mr Goodwin was in. And I learned. I have intruded because the situation is intolerable. You are either a cockatrice or a witling. Whether by design or stupidity, you have brought Mr. Goodwin to a desperate pass. That is--

ARCHIE

(breaking in:)

It's my affair. You said so.

WOLFE

(ignoring him:)

That is his affair, but now it threatens me. I depend on him. I can't function properly, let alone comfortably, without him. I won't have it. Thanks to you, he is in grave jeopardy.

(to Archie:)

Archie. This is now our joint affair. By your leave.

ARCHIE

Retroactive? Parker and my bail?

Wolfe makes a face.

WOLFE

Very well. Intimate or not, you have known Miss McLeod for three years. Did she kill that man?

ARCHIE

No and yes.

WOLFE

That doesn't help.

ARCHIE

I know it doesn't. The 'no' because of a lot of assorted items, including the lie detector test I just gave her, which of course you would hoot at if you hooted. The 'yes,' chiefly because she came here to ask me to change my story and back hers up.

SUSAN

I didn't kill him.

ARCHIE

One item for 'no,' when a man gets a girl pregnant, her normal reaction is to make him marry her, and quick. What she wants most and has got to have is a father for the baby, not a dead father.

SUSAN

That's silly. I'm not pregnant. There's only one way a girl can get pregnant and it couldn't have been that with me because it's never happened.

Wolfe looks at Archie.

WOLFE

Get your notebook.

And on Wolfe, turning his gaze on Susan again, we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - MONTAGE

Various shots, alternating between:

ARCHIE FILLING PAGE AFTER PAGE OF HIS NOTEBOOK...

WOLFE POURING, AND FINISHING, SEVERAL GLASSES OF BEER...

AND OF SUSAN TALKING... AND TALKING... AND TALKING.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

Four men had asked to marry her at one time or another -- Carl Heydt, Max Maslow, Peter Jay and Ken Barker. She didn't exactly say no to any of them. She told Ken she might marry him, say in two or three years, when she was ready to give up modeling and he could support a family. He asked her to get him a job on her father's farm, knowing that she went out there every weekend in the summer...

SUSAN

...on the very first weekend it was easy to see what his idea was.

INT. BARN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

As Barker puts his hands on Susan. All over Susan.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

And when you wouldn't do what he wanted?

She shoves Barker away.

BACK TO SCENE

SUSAN

He accused me of letting other men do what I wouldn't let him do. Then he told me he told you I was pregnant and he was responsible, and that of course, you'd pass it on and if I denied it, no one would believe me, and the only thing to do was get married right away.

ARCHIE

Then he told you about telling Peter Jay, Carl Heydt and Max Maslow the same thing.

She nods.

WOLFE

(to Susan:)

You know these men quite well. If one of them, enraged beyond endurance by Mr. Barker's conduct, went there and killed him, which one?

SUSAN

They didn't.

WOLFE

Not 'they,' one of them. Which?

SUSAN

None of them.

Wolfe wriggles a finger at her.

WOLFE

That's twaddle, Miss McLeod. By your foolish subterfuge, you have made it impossible to satisfy the police that neither you nor Mr. Goodwin killed that man except by one procedure: demonstrate that someone else killed him, and identify him. I must see those three men, and since I never leave my house on business, they must come to me. Will you get them here? At nine o'clock this evening?

And on her look:

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

She didn't want to, but she had to admit we had to get some information from somebody, and who else was there to start with?

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - DAY

Archie is reading the paper and finishing a breakfast of corn fritters.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

For breakfast the next morning, Fritz made corn fritters. There had been eight perfectly good ears and Fritz hates to throw good food away. I had finished the eighth fritter and was deciding whether to take on another one when:

We HEAR the doorbell ring, Archie rises and we CUT TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Wolfe glares up as Archie sticks his head in the door.

ARCHIE

Duncan McLeod is here.

Wolfe GROWLS. Archie steps aside to let in McLeod, who marches in to the room.

WOLFE

Good afternoon, sir.

Wolfe motions to the red leather chair.

MCLEOD

No need to sit. I've been told about the corn, and I've come to apologize. I didn't pick it; Kenneth Barker did.

WOLFE

(grunts)

Wasn't that heedless? You know what I require.

MCLEOD

A man was coming with a bulldozer to work on a lot I'm clearing, and I had to dynamite a lot of stumps and rocks before he came. I had to leave the corn to that young man. I thought he knew. Of course I'm not expecting you to pay for it.

WOLFE

I'll pay for the eight ears we used.

MCLEOD

(to Archie)

What did that young man tell you about my daughter?

ARCHIE

Where did you get the idea he told me anything about her?

MCLEOD

From her. This morning. What he told her he told you. So I'm asking you, to get it straight.

WOLFE

She has told you what he said he said. She has also told Mr. Goodwin and me. She came shortly after eleven this morning and stayed for two hours.

Now McLeod sits in the red chair.

MCLEOD

My daughter Susan? Came here? What did she come for?

WOLFE

You have it wrong side up. That tone is for us, not you. We may or may not oblige you later, that will depend.

MCLEOD

My daughter --

WOLFE

The young man you permitted to pick my corn has been murdered, and because of false statements made by your daughter to the police Mr. Goodwin may be charged with murder. The danger is great and imminent.

MCLEOD

You can't say my daughter made false statements and --

Wolfe slaps the desk.

WOLFE

Confound it, after sending me inedible corn you presume to come and make demands on me? Go!

McLeod gets up.

MCLEOD

I don't think it's fair. I don't think it's right.

McLeod turns to go, then turns back.

MCLEOD (CONT'D)

Of course, you won't be wanting any more corn.

WOLFE

Why not? It's only the middle of September.

MCLEOD

I mean not from me.

WOLFE

Then from whom? Mr. Goodwin can't go scouring the countryside with this imbroglia on our hands. I want corn this week. Tomorrow?

MCLEOD

I might. Yes, I guess so. The restaurant, too?

WOLFE

I'll tell them to expect it.

INT. BROWNSTONE - ENTRY HALL - DAY

Archie ushers McLeod out the door, then goes into:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

To find Wolfe leaning back, frowning at the ceiling.

ARCHIE

That was a big help. Now we know about the corn. What's more important to you -- the corn or me ending up in the jug with no way out?

Wolfe straightens up.

WOLFE

Pfui. Call Felix and tell him to expect a delivery on Friday.

ARCHIE

Yes, sir. Good. Then everything's jake.

WOLFE

There is good slang and bad slang. That's bad slang.

(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

How long will it take you to type a full report of our conversation with Miss McLeod, yours and mine, from the beginning?

ARCHIE

Altogether, say four hours. Do you want it to remember me by?

WOLFE

No. Two carbons.

ARCHIE

Your memory is as good as mine -- nearly. Are you actually telling me to type all that crap just to keep me off your neck until nine o'clock?

WOLFE

No. It may be useful.

ARCHIE

Useful how? As your employee I'm supposed to do what I'm told, and I often do, but this is different. This is our joint affair, you said so, trying to save you from the calamity of losing me. Useful how?

WOLFE

I don't know! I say it *may* be useful, if I decide to use it. Can you suggest something that may be more useful?

ARCHIE

Offhand, no.

WOLFE

Then *if* you type it, two carbons.

And as Wolfe returns his gaze to the ceiling:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Archie's at his desk. CARL HEYDT, medium and round with quick eyes that keep on the move, is in the red chair. PETER JAY, the something big in advertising who looks like he has the regulation ulcer, and MAX MASLOW, with a trick haircut and dangling string tie, sit in the yellow chairs.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

At five past nine that evening the three men whose names had checkmarks in Kenneth Barker's little notebook were in the office, waiting for Wolfe to show.

Archie buzzes on the house phone, and after a moment, the door slides open and Wolfe comes in.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

When there is to be a gathering,
Wolfe doesn't enter, he makes an
entrance.

A straight line from the door to Wolfe's desk would require him to circle around Heydt's feet and pass between Heydt and the other two. Instead, Wolfe detours to the right between the chair and the wall to his side of the desk, then shoots Archie a glance.

ARCHIE

(indicating which is
which)

Carl Heydt. Peter Jay. Max Maslow.

Wolfe gives them a nod, sits, then moves his eyes from left to right and back again before speaking.

WOLFE

This can be fairly brief or it can
go on for hours. I think, gentlemen,
you would prefer brevity, and so
would I.

The three men nod. Max Maslow gives Wolfe his twisted smile.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Since you came here to oblige Miss
McLeod, you should know our position
regarding her. She is not our client;
we are acting solely in our own
interest. But as it stands right
now, we are satisfied that she didn't
kill Kenneth Barker.

MASLOW

That's damn nice of you. So am I.

JAY

Your own interest? What's your
interest?

WOLFE

Because of statements made by Miss
McLeod, Mr. Goodwin is under heavy
suspicion, and because she knew the
suspicion was unfounded she agreed
to ask you gentlemen to come see me.

MASLOW

Goodwin rescued Miss McLeod from the
sticks and started her on the path
of glory. He's her hero. Now you
say she's set the police on him.

JAY

That's your interest. To get Goodwin out from under.

WOLFE

Certainly. To lift the suspicion from Mr. Goodwin, we must find out where it belongs.

HEYDT

My God, *I* don't know where it belongs.

The three men regard each other suspiciously.

WOLFE

All of you had an adequate motive -- adequate, at least, for the one it moved: Mr. Barker had either debased or grossly slandered the woman you wanted to marry.

MASLOW

Who fed you that? I admit I want to marry Miss McLeod, and as far as I know Carl Heydt does, but not my pal Pete. He's the pay-as-you-go type. I couldn't exactly call him a Casanova --

Peter Jay jumps out of his chair, fists raised, glaring down at Maslow.

JAY

Stand up.

MASLOW

I wouldn't, Pete. I was merely --

JAY

Stand up or I'll slap you out of the chair.

Archie could stop it if he wanted, but he's curious, and watches as Maslow gets up, sidestepping. Jay has to turn to aim a fist at Maslow's jaw, and Maslow ducks and lands a punch on Jay's kidneys, then another. Jay crumbles, as Archie rushes over to help steer him back to his chair. Maslow sits down and gives Wolfe his twisted smile.

MASLOW

I hope you didn't misunderstand me. I wasn't suggesting that I think he killed Barker. Even if he did I wouldn't want him to get it. On that point we're pals. You all right, Pete?

Jay nods and lets out a belch.

WOLFE

Will you have a brandy, Mr. Jay?
Whisky? Coffee?

Jay shakes his head.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Very well. I said that to lift the suspicion from Mr. Goodwin, we must find out where it belongs, but that isn't vital. We can merely shift the suspicion to Miss McLeod.

HEYDT

You don't mean it.

WOLFE

I doubt she'd be convicted; the police are not blockheads. It will be an ordeal for her, but it will also be a lesson; her implication of Mr. Goodwin may not have been willful, but it was inexcusable.

MASLOW

You're bluffing. I call.

He gets up and goes to the door. Archie follows him.

INT. BROWNSTONE - ENTRY HALL - NIGHT

Archie lets Maslow and Jay out the door. Heydt hovers behind as Archie gets his hat.

HEYDT

Look, Archie, you've got to do something.

ARCHIE

Check. What, for instance?

HEYDT

I don't know. But about Sue -- he doesn't mean it, does he?

ARCHIE

It isn't just a question of what he means, it's also what I mean. Damn it, I'm short on sleep, and I may soon be short on life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Pleasant dreams.

He ushers Heydt out and bolts the door.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Archie comes in and sits at his desk.

ARCHIE

So you thought it might be useful.

WOLFE

May I see it?

Archie opens a drawer and hands Wolfe a sheaf of pages. He leafs through it.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Your notebook, please.

Archie gets his notebook and pen ready.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

There will be two, one for you and one for me. First mine. Heading in caps, affidavit by Nero Wolfe. I hereby depose that the twelve foregoing pages are a full and accurate etcetera. Add a space for my signature and, below, the conventional formula for notarizing and--

ARCHIE

All right, it wasn't just to keep me off your neck. But before I sign that affidavit I would need to know that you won't chuck the joint affair as soon as the heat is off me.

Wolfe growls.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I agree. It's a goddamn nuisance. If a girl pushes a man in a hole he has a right to wiggle out, but you must remember I am now her hero. Heroes don't wiggle. Will you say it will be our joint affair to make sure that she doesn't go to trial?

WOLFE

I wouldn't say that I will make sure of anything whatever.

ARCHIE

Correction. That you will be concerned?

Wolfe takes in air through his nose and lets it out through his mouth.

WOLFE

Very well. I'll be concerned.
(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Will you bring the notary, Miss Pinelli, to my room at five minutes to nine in the morning?

ARCHIE

No. She doesn't get to her office until nine-thirty.

WOLFE

Then bring her to the plant rooms at nine-forty with the affidavit. You can type it in the morning.

Archie is stunned. He studies Wolfe.

ARCHIE

You want me to bring her to the plant rooms.

WOLFE

Do you have a problem with that?

ARCHIE

I don't, but you usually do.

WOLFE

Archie, you've had no sleep for forty hours. Go to bed.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - ENTRY HALL - DAY

Archie opens the door to let Cramer in.

ARCHIE

Good morning.

Cramer comes in and hands Archie a folded paper. Archie unfolds it.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

At least my name's spelled right.

CRAMER

You'd clown in the chair. I want to see Wolfe.

He marches down the hall into the office.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie comes in as Cramer is lowering himself onto the red chair.

CRAMER

I have just handed Goodwin a warrant for his arrest, and this time he'll stay.

ARCHIE

It's an honor. Anyone can be banged by a bull or a dick. It takes me to be pinched by an inspector, and twice in one week.

Cramer doesn't take his eyes off Wolfe.

CRAMER

I came myself because I want to tell you how it stands. I know damn well what Goodwin will do, he'll clam up and a crowbar wouldn't pry him open. Give me that warrant, Goodwin.

ARCHIE

It's mine. You served it.

CRAMER

I have not. I just showed it to you.

He stretches an arm and takes the warrant, then turns back to Wolfe.

CRAMER (CONT'D)

When I was here Tuesday night, you were dumfounded by my fatuity. All you cared about was who picked your corn. I came myself to see how you feel now. Goodwin will talk if you tell him to.

Wolfe pushes his chair back and rises, going straight for the safe.

CRAMER (CONT'D)

Do you want me to wait in the front room while you discuss it? Not all day, say ten minutes.

Archie reaches the safe before Wolfe can open it.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

I never did actually make up my mind about passing the buck to Sue. If he'd told me to get the affidavits, I could have stalled while I thought about it.

Wolfe pays no attention to Archie's presence; Archie would have to physically stop him from taking the affidavit.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

She made the soup herself, and I
wouldn't be much help in the joint
if affair if I was salted down. I
owed Susan McLeod nothing.

Archie goes back to his desk and sits. Wolfe gets the papers
and hands them to Cramer.

WOLFE

I suggest that you look at the
affidavits first. The last two
sheets.

Cramer does, then turns to the rest of the document.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

Lieutenant Rowcliff or Sergeant Purley
Stebbins would have kept at us for
an hour. Cramer didn't ask a
question, or even look up.

Cramer folds the document and sticks it in his inside breast
pocket, then picks up the phone on Archie's desk.

CRAMER

(into phone)

Purley? Get Susan McLeod. Don't
call her, get her. Go yourself,
take a man along. If she balks,
wrap her up and carry her.

Cramer gives Wolfe and Archie a long straight hard look,
then grabs his hat off the stand and marches out.

INT. BROWNSTONE - ENTRY HALL - NIGHT

The DOORBELL RINGS. Archie opens the door. Carl Heydt, Max
Maslow, and Peter Jay stand in the doorway.

ARCHIE

I'll tell him you're here.

He closes the door and heads to the office.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

In the nine and a half hours that
had passed since Cramer used my phone,
I had let it lie. I couldn't expect
Wolfe to start any fur flying until
there was a reaction, or there wasn't,
say by tomorrow noon, to what had
happened to Sue.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Wolfe glares up from his book at Archie.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

But when the reaction came, Wolfe told me not to let it in.

ARCHIE

You said you'd be concerned.

WOLFE

I am concerned.

ARCHIE

Then here they are. You tossed her to the wolves to open her up, and here --

WOLFE

No. I did that to keep you out of jail. I am considering how to deal with the problem, and until I decide there is no point in seeing them.

ARCHIE

Then I'll see them. In the front room.

WOLFE

No. Not in my house.

Wolfe goes back to his book.

ARCHIE

In my room, then. Technically it's part of your house, but --

WOLFE

Confound it!

Archie glares at him, but Wolfe turns back to his book.

\S1EXT. BROWNSTONE - STOOP - NIGHT

As Archie opens the door enough for him to slip through and does so, bumping into Carl Heydt, then pulls the door shut behind him.

ARCHIE

Mr. Wolfe is busy on an important matter and can't be disturbed. Do you want to disturb me instead?

MASLOW

You let us in, we'll handle the disturbing.

ARCHIE

You don't seem to realize that you're up against a genius.

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

So am I, only I'm used to it. You were damn fools to think he was bluffing.

HEYDT

I can't believe you'd do a thing like this -- to Sue -- when you said she didn't --

ARCHIE

This is Mr. Wolfe's house, and he doesn't want you in it, but I'm a licensed detective too and I could spare a couple of hours. We can sit here on the steps or we can go somewhere.

The three men cast suspicious looks at each other.

JAY

We can go to my place.

And as Archie goes to hail a cab, we WIPE TO:

INT. PETER JAY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

On the 15th floor, the bachelor pad is high, wide, and handsome, with chairs and carpet of matching green. Heydt and Jay glare at Archie. Maslow just gives him that twisted smile.

MASLOW

All right, ask your questions.

ARCHIE

I think Sue's lie about me was part truth. I think she *had* arranged with someone to meet her outside the restaurant at five o'clock. If Sue decided to jump on Barker for the lies he was spreading around and ask one of you to help, which one would she pick?

(to Heydt)

What about it, Carl? Just a plain answer to a plain question. Which one would it be? Jay?

HEYDT

My God, no. She must know that nobody can depend on him for anything.

Jay jumps up and heads for Heydt. Archie blocks him, and Jay swings at him. Archie grabs his arm, whirls him, and shoves. Jay stumbles, but stays on his feet.

MASLOW

Hold it, Pete. There's no love lost among us three, but we all feel the same about this Goodwin.

(gets up)

Let's bounce him. Care to help, Carl?

HEYDT

No, thanks, I'll watch.

MASLOW

Okay. It'll be simpler if you just relax, Goodwin.

ARCHIE

I hope you won't tickle.

MASLOW

Come in behind, Pete.

Archie doubles over and whirls, coming up bumping Jay, then slamming the edge of his hand on the side of Jay's neck. Jay crumples, but Maslow grabs Archie's left wrist and is getting his shoulder in for the lock. Archie ducks down, sliding off his shoulder and bending his elbow into Maslow's belly. Maslow reaches for Archie's right wrist, but that opens him up and Archie rolls into him, brings his right arm around, and ends with his knee in Maslow's back.

ARCHIE

Do you want to hear it crack? Or is it bad manners to ask, since you can't answer?

He glances over at Jay, who's on a chair rubbing his neck.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

If you want to play games you ought to take lessons. Maslow would be a good teacher.

Archie unwinds his arm and stands up.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Don't bother to see me out.

No one stops him as he heads for the door.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

As Archie enters the dark office, switches the light on, and spots a note on his desk under a paperweight.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

It was after one when I got back to the old brownstone on West 35th Street, and found a note on my desk in Wolfe's handwriting, saying that Saul would be using the car for the day.

Archie goes to the safe, opens it and spots another note.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

He'd also give him a hundred dollars in expense money. If Wolfe saw fit to keep Saul's errand strictly private, he could eat wormy old corn boiled in water before I'd ask him.

Archie slams the safe shut, turns off the light and walks out.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Archie comes in as Fritz dishes shrimp from a casserole.

WOLFE

Good afternoon. That forty dollars on your desk can be returned to the safe. Saul had no expenses and I gave him sixty dollars for his six hours.

ARCHIE

His daily minimum is eighty.

WOLFE

He wouldn't take eighty. He didn't want to take anything, since this is our personal affair, but I insisted. This shrimp Bordelaise is without onions but has some garlic. I think an improvement, but Fritz and I invite your opinion.

Archie takes his place. And as Fritz serves him:

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

I was supposed to demand to know where and how Saul spent the six hours. So I wouldn't explode, I would eat shrimp Bordelaise without onions but garlic and like it.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Archie is at his desk, reading the paper, when he hears something unusual.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

I was at my desk reading the evening edition of the Gazette when I heard something I couldn't believe.

He drops the paper and looks at his watch. Then he gets up and goes into:

INT. BROWNSTONE - ENTRY HALL -DAY

Where he sees the elevator descending.

ARCHIE'S VOICE-OVER

The elevator. At half-past-five. That was unprecedented. He never did that. Once in the plant rooms he stuck there for two hours, no matter what.

Wolfe emerges.

WOLFE

The corn. Has it come?

ARCHIE

Being finicky about grub is all right, up to a point, but there's a limit.

WOLFE

A possibility occurred to me. When it comes -- if it comes -- no. I'll see for myself. The possibility is remote, but it would be--

That's when the doorbell RINGS.

ARCHIE

Here it is, good timing.

When Archie opens the door, Wolfe is beside him. A SKINNY MAN, DELBERT PALMER, with pants too big for him and wearing a bright green shirt, stands at the door holding the carton.

DELBERT

Nero Wolfe? Got your corn.

WOLFE

Did you pick this?

DELBERT

Hell no, McLeod did.

WOLFE

Did you pack it in the carton?

DELBERT

No, he did.

(MORE)

DELBERT (CONT'D)

Look here, I know you're a detective.
You just ask questions from habit,
huh?

Wolfe ignores that. He bends down, lifts the carton by the cord, and heads for his office. Archie follows.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE -DAY

Wolfe sets the carton on his desk then turns to Archie as he enters.

WOLFE

Get Mr. Cramer.

Archie goes to the phone and dials.

ARCHIE

Inspector Cramer please... this is
Archie Goodwin, calling for Nero
Wolfe... Hold on, Inspector.

Wolfe picks up the extension.

WOLFE

Mr. Cramer, I must ask a favor. I
have here in my office a carton which
has just been delivered to me. It
is supposed to contain corn. Perhaps
it does. But it is conceivable that
it contains dynamite and a contraption
will detonate it when the cord is
cut and the flaps raised... will you
please notify the proper person
without delay?

Wolfe hangs up, then hands Archie a SHEET OF PAPER.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

You might want to glance at this
while we're waiting.

(then, glaring at
carton:)

Confound it! We'll get some corn
somewhere before this season ends.

And we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Where Wolfe is ignoring the package that now sits on the red chair. Archie follows Cramer in.

ARCHIE

If you touch it and it goes off we
can sue you for damages.

CRAMER

You couldn't pay me to touch it,
I'm here to make sure nobody else
does. The bomb squad is right behind
me.

(to Wolfe)

What is this, a gag?

WOLFE

It may be a bugaboo, but I'm not
crying wolf. I can tell you nothing
until we know what's in the carton.

CRAMER

The hell you can't. Why do you think
it's dynamite?

That's when the DOORBELL RINGS. Archie goes to get it.

INT. BROWNSTONE - ENTRY HALL - DAY

Archie opens the door. It's the BOMB SQUAD guy, in uniform.

ARCHIE

Bomb squad?

The guy nods and Archie leads them in to:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

The bomb squad guy enters, Cramer gestures at the box, and
the bomb guy kneels by the chair, putting his ear against
the box. Then he checks the string, then cracks open the
lid of the box as much as he can without disturbing the string
and peers in. He signals to Cramer -- bad news -- then eases
his fingers under the box and gently lifts it up.

ARCHIE

The guy who brought it in here carried
it by the cord.

The bomb squad member, moving as quickly and gently as he
can, ignores Archie as he leaves. Cramer turns to Wolfe.

CRAMER

If you had opened that carton, they
wouldn't have found all the pieces.
You didn't think it was dynamite,
you knew it was. Talk.

Wolfe, his lips tight, is breathing hard.

WOLFE

Not me. It would have been Archie
or Fritz, or both of them. And of
course my house.

(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

The possibility occurred to me and I came down, barely in time. Three minutes later... Pfui. That man is a blackguard.

Wolfe shakes his head, as if getting rid of a fly.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Well. Shortly after ten o'clock last evening I sent for Saul Panzer. When he came --

CRAMER

Who put that dynamite in that carton?

WOLFE

I'm telling you. When he came I had him type something on a sheet of paper and told him to drive it to Duncan McLeod's farm this morning and give it to Mr. McLeod. Archie. You have the copy.

Archie takes the paper from his pocket and hands it to Cramer.

ARCHIE

Memorandum from Nero Wolfe to Duncan McLeod.

CRAMER

(reading:)

"I suggest you should have in readiness acceptable answers to the following questions if and when they are asked:

INT. BARN - DAY

As a grim-faced McLeod reads the letter...

CRAMER'S VOICE

"When did Kenneth Barker tell you that your daughter was pregnant and he was responsible?"

..tosses the letter aside, opens a crate with a crowbar and takes out STICKS OF DYNAMITE.

BACK TO SCENE

Cramer scans the rest of the document, then looks at Wolfe.

CRAMER

When did you figure this out?

WOLFE

It's a question of interpretation,
not of knowledge.

CRAMER

So you decided to share your
interpretation with him, instead of
me.

WOLFE

I prefer to put it that I decided
not to decide.

Cramer snatches up the phone.

CRAMER

(into phone)

Purley? Get the sheriff's office.
Ask him to pick up Duncan McLeod and
hold him for murder. And tell him
to watch it -- McLeod may be rough.

He hangs up and turns back to Wolfe and reads from the paper
again.

CRAMER (CONT'D)

"Question two:"

INT. BARN - DAY

AS McLeod arranges a LARGE PILE of dynamite and wires it all
together.

CRAMER'S VOICE

"Where did you get the piece of pipe?
Was it on your premises?"

BACK TO SCENE

WOLFE

Any man, sufficiently provoked, might
plan to kill, but very few men would
choose a massive iron bludgeon for a
weapon to carry through the streets.
Seeing Mr. Heydt, Mr. Maslow, and
Mr. Jay I thought it highly improbable
that any of them would. But a
countryman might.

CRAMER

"Question three:"

INT. BARN - DAY

As McLeod attaches a DETONATOR to the dynamite.

CRAMER'S VOICE

"Did you know that your daughter saw you leaving the alley Tuesday afternoon? Did you see her?"

BACK TO SCENE

WOLFE

You read the affidavit. When I asked Miss McLeod which of the three men might have killed Mr. Barker, how did she answer me?

CRAMER

She said 'they didn't.'

WOLFE

Didn't you think that significant? She stated as a fact that none of them had. And there was only one way she could know they hadn't, with such certainty in her words and voice and manner. She knew who had.

Cramer crumples the paper in disgust. That's when the phone rings. Archie answers it, then hands it to Cramer.

ARCHIE

Stebbins.

Cramer listens, growls, and hangs up.

CRAMER

About an hour ago, Duncan McLeod sat or stood or lay on a pile of dynamite.

INT. BARN - DAY

As McLeod PRESSES the detonator.

CRAMER'S VOICE

They've got his head and some other pieces.

BACK TO SCENE

Cramer waits for the news to sink in, then:

CRAMER

You knew all along it was McLeod, didn't you?

WOLFE

Not certain knowledge. A reasoned conclusion.

CRAMER

How?

WOLFE

The corn.

CRAMER

The corn?

WOLFE

McLeod knows how extremely particular I am. I pay him well, more than well. He told me that he had Barker pick my corn because he had to dynamite some rocks and stumps. But he knew that young man couldn't possibly do that job. It must have been something more urgent than stumps and rocks that led him to risk losing such a valuable customer.

Cramer stares, once again astonished by Wolfe's brilliance... and his ego.

CRAMER

And the only thing that could possibly be more important than your corn is murder.

WOLFE

Precisely.

Cramer just shakes his head and walks out. Wolfe looks at Archie, who is grinning back at him. Wolfe scowls.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Pfui.

And we FADE OUT.

THE END