

BEFORE I DIE

teleplay by
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based on the novella
"BEFORE I DIE"
by
REX STOUT

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INT. BROWNSTONE - DINING ROOM - DAY

FRITZ BRENNER, with imperturbable calm, stands above Wolfe with a decanters of oil and vinegar as Wolfe prepares the salad dressing. He has mashed a clove of garlic with fresh rosemary. He pours in the oil and beats it, adding vinegar and beats it. Then he dips a lettuce leaf in it, tastes it and scowls. Fritz sighs. Wolfe shoves the dressing away from him and starts on another bowl, this time with a different decanter of oil.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

That afternoon, I had had all of Nero Wolfe that I could stand for a while. Despite careful hoarding, his supply of olive oil from a certain grove in Montenegro was finally gone. And now the grove was behind the Iron Curtain and unavailable to loyal citizens of our great democracy.

WOLFE

Take it away. I won't eat salad again.

ARCHIE

Bring some here, Fritz. And a jar of good old American mayonnaise.

Wolfe glares at him and speaks, but we don't hear it.

ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It would be best to skip his retort. As soon as lunch was over, I decided to avoid the office and go out.

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - DAY

Archie steams out and goes to get his hat. The DOORBELL RINGS. Archie stops, goes to the door and opens it. Before him stands the quintessential MOBSTER HENCHMAN (ARCHIE2) - his hat too small and his face very cold and motionless.

ARCHIE2

Your name's Goodwin.

ARCHIE

Thanks. How much do I weigh?

(CONTINUED)

ARCHIE2
My boss is out here in a car
and wants to see you.

Archie looks over his shoulder, does a double take.

ARCHIE
Hold it a minute.

He shuts the door and heads for the office.

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

He goes to his desk. Wolfe glares at him. He pulls out his gun.

WOLFE
What is it? A mouse?

Archie checks to see that it's loaded and puts it in his side coat pocket and leaves his hand there.

ARCHIE
No, sir. I was asked to descend
to the sidewalk and see a man
in a car. I recognized the man
as Dazy Perrit. Since he is one
of our most famous citizens I
suppose you have heard of him.
His latest title is King of the
Black Market.

Without giving Wolfe a chance to react he disappears.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Archie2 guides Archie to a big black SEDAN. Archie still holds his hand at his pocket to show what he has. The man inside cranks the window down.

ARCHIE2
He's got his hand on a gun in
his pocket.

DAZY
Then he's damn silly to let you
walk behind him.

ARCHIE
Mr. Wolfe knows you're here.
What do you want?

(CONTINUED)

DAZY
I wanna see Wolfe.

ARCHIE
Nope.

Archie leans in the window.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Lookit, mister. Don't think I'm
laughing you off. People who
laugh you off are apt to show
up soon at a funeral, playing
the lead. Whatever you have in
mind, Mr. Wolfe wants no part
of it.

WOLFE (O.S.)
Archie!

Archie straightens and wheels.

SHOT OF WOLFE

Standing at an open window.

WOLFE (CONT'D)
Bring Mr. Perrit in here!

Then he disappears and slams the window.

Archie turns back and tries to regain his cool Archie2 gives what could be interpreted as a smile, looks searchingly up and down and across the street, then opens the door of the car, and Dazy Perrit climbs out. He turns to the henchman.

DAZY
Wait here, Archie.

ARCHIE
Archie?
(neither of the men deny
it)
Archie. I have a namesake.
Great. Just great.

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

Archie stalks in and flops at his desk, too sore at Wolfe to speak. Dazy Perrit surveys the premises like a general. Archie doesn't make introductions.

(CONTINUED)

WOLFE
Be seated, Sir.

DAZY
I don't like it in here. Come
out and sit in my car.

Archie starts getting nervous, hoping Wolfe won't get obnoxious. To his amazement Wolfe chuckles in a friendly manner.

WOLFE
My dear sir, I do like it here.
I rarely leave my house. I
would be an idiot to leave this
chair, made to fit me--

DAZY
You might make exceptions. I
might be a good exception to
start with.

WOLFE
(soothingly)
Sit down, Mr. Perrit. There's a
little matter I'd like to discuss
with you.

Dazy glances at him, steps to the chair and sits.

DAZY
Whaddyou wannu discuss?

WOLFE
I understand that you are an
expert...uh, in a certain field.
Presumably you know where certain
things are and how they may be
got. I am on the whole a
respectable and virtuous citizen,
but like everyone else I have
my smudges.

DAZY
You want a slice of the rackets?

WOLFE
No. I want to be able to dress
my salads. It's a kind of olive
oil, grown only at one place,
behind the Iron Curtain.

(CONTINUED)

DAZY
Oh, you're just hungry.

WOLFE
Yes, I am.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
He had lost all sense of proportion. In a wild grab for a bottle of olive oil, he had invited the most deadly specimen between the Battery and Yonkers into his house.

DAZY
That's too bad. I'm not an importer, but I'll see--
(to Archie)
Ring Lincoln six three two three two, before ten in the morning, ask for Tom and use my name.

WOLFE
Thank you, sir. This is appreciated. Now for your own business. The occupational hazards are relatively high in the detective business and in any activity connected with you - they are substantially higher. A combination of the two would be inadvisable.

DAZY
I need help.

WOLFE
It would be foolish to entrust me with secrets when...

As if he hadn't spoken

DAZY
I don't often need help. When I do I get the best there is.

He gets out a neat packet of bills and tosses it onto Wolfe's desk.

DAZY (CONT'D)
Fifty C's. Five grand. That will do for a start.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DAZY (CONT'D)
I'm being blackmailed and your
job is to stop it.

Archie goggles at him. He can't help himself.

 ARCHIE
What?

 DAZY
You gotta problem?

 ARCHIE
The idea of you being pestered
by a blackmailer is about as
likely as Billy Sunday being
pestered by an evangelist trying
to convert him.

Dazy doesn't smile. He turns back to wolfe.

 DAZY
I'm being blackmailed by my
daughter.

 WOLFE
Sir, you must not speak...

 DAZY
That's one thing nobody in the
world knows except me, and now
you and this man of yours.
Here's another thing, I wouldn't
tell it to my mother even if I
still had one, but my daughter
is...

 ARCHIE
Hold it!

Archie is out of his chair and standing in from of him.

 ARCHIE (CONT'D)
I want to warn you that Mr.
Wolfe is fully as stubborn as
you are. This is damn dangerous
for all concerned. He's told
you he doesn't want to hear it,
and neither do I!
 (to Wolfe)
Good God, what's wrong with
Hellmans?

(CONTINUED)

He picks up the stack of bills and shoves them at Perrit. Dazy ignores him, his eyes are still on Wolfe. As if Archie had not spoken.

DAZY

The particular thing is that my daughter isn't really my daughter-- the one that's blackmailing me, I mean. Now you know that too, you and this man. I have got a daughter, born twenty-one years ago. There's a job for you to do with her too.

(Wolfe gets up)

What's up?

Wolfe heads for the office door.

WOLFE

You'll have to excuse me, Mr. Perrit. I always spend from four to six upstairs with my plants.

He stops because Perrit is suddenly standing square in his path

DAZY

Sit back down.

Archie is now standing, with his gun drawn.

ARCHIE

If you so much as poke a finger in his stomach, I'll drop you.

DAZY

What?

ARCHIE

My reaction may strike you as corny, but as far as I know no serious argument with you has ever been settled with any tool but a gun.

WOLFE

If you insist on confiding your troubles to me, tell Mr. Goodwin about it. I'll phone you this evening or in the morning.

Wolfe goes out and to the elevator.

(CONTINUED)

DAZY

You're crazy. Both of you.
Crazy as bedbugs. What's that
thing in your hand for?

Archie sinks into his chair, and puts the gun on the desk.

ARCHIE

(miserably)

Okay. Tell me about it.

(voice over)

It wasn't really very
complicated. In his early days
in St. Louis, Perrit had got
married and produced a daughter.

DAZY

Then three things happened in
the same week: my daughter had
her second birthday, my wife
died, and I got three years in
the hoosegow. But I got out and
when I started getting
prosperous, I went to look for
my daughter.

ARCHIE

Does she know who she is?

DAZY

Nah. She thinks I'm just her
father's friend, and her father
is very wealthy and can't
disclose himself.

ARCHIE

Sure. Maybe he's planning to
get elected President of the
United States or something.

DAZY

It was okay. It was working
fine. I saw her about every
three months and gave her money.
Plenty. It was a break for me
when she picked a school right
here in town. Then Thumbs Meeker
bitched it up.

INT. CAFE - DAY

Dazy and Archie² are having a nice meal with FABIAN. THUMBS
MEEKER makes an appearance with his HENCHMAN. They all

(CONTINUED)

posture. Fabian is out of his chair with his hand in pocket quicker than anyone. Then Meeker, laughs, leans down and grins at Dazy.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

Mr. Meeker was the cave man on the other side of the mountain. He got the name Thumbs on account of his favorite method of getting information from reluctant persons.

THUMBS

So you tell me if there's any little favor I can do for your daughter. Huh? You just let me know. I never took you for a family man.

He and his cohort find that hysterical and they go off laughing.

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

ARCHIE

Had Meeker tagged your daughter or just heard that you got one?

DAZY

He'd just heard. But that was enough. Suppose he found her and told her who her father was? It's ruined me, having a daughter. It's put water in my guts. You've heard I'm tough? You've heard that?

ARCHIE

Yeah, I've heard it said.

DAZY

Okay, I'm tough. But there's plenty of tough ones. The point is I've got brains. I've got better brains than any man I've ever met. If I had got started on another track I could have been anything you care to name.

(His voice wavers emotionally. Archie is horrified.)

My little girl.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DAZY (CONT'D)

Did I tell you she's at Columbia? Wants to be a doctor? Wants to change the whole public health system. She's at the top of her class. They're all panting to keep up with her. And she's leaving them in a cloud of dust.

(catching Archie's look,
he shrugs)

But where she's concerned my brains don't work. Look at my coming here and spilling this. Worse yet, look at what I did a year ago April.

ARCHIE

Are we coming to the blackmail now?

DAZY

Almost. I rented a penthouse off Fifth Avenue and brought a girl there as my daughter. Her name was Angelina Murphy. She was on the jump in Salt Lake from a rolling and cleaning charge under the name of Sally Smith. I figured I had enough on her to keep her mouth shut. Her name as my daughter was Violet Perrit.

INT. PENTHOUSE - DAY

Dazy introduces 2-3 people to his "daughter" Violet. They smile and nod and she hangs on him affectionately. But the look she gives him when she doesn't have to perform is anything but affectionate.

DAZY (V.O.)

I figured with if Thumbs saw my daughter living there, he wouldn't go looking for her in other places, like colleges. Then the little bitch used the pliers on me.

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

Dazy reaches into his pocket and pulls out a list of blackmail dates.

(CONTINUED)

DAZY

A week before Christmas she asks for a thousand bucks over and above her allowance. And then...well, look.

INSERT: A LIST: Jan: \$1500 Feb \$1000 April: \$5000 June: \$3000 July: 5000. September: \$8000.

ARCHIE

She has nicked you for nearly twenty-five grand. Why didn't she happen to have an accident, like getting in the way of flying pieces of metal?

DAZY

My daughter? My own daughter?

ARCHIE

She wasn't. She isn't.

DAZY

As far as anyone knows she is. How would Thumbs Meeker and others dope it if she disappeared? They'd be looking for trails again. I've looked at it from every angle and it's no go.

ARCHIE

Then you're stuck with an expensive daughter.

DAZY

I'm stuck with a glutton and a damn fool. Last night she hit me for fifty grand.

ARCHIE

Why don't you try something short of curtains?

DAZY

Do you think I've shelled out with a smile?

ARCHIE

No. I don't.

(CONTINUED)

DAZY

Right. I haven't. But there are limits to that too, since I've got her there as my daughter. It didn't take her long to realize that I couldn't unload her.

(points to the bills)

That's just for a start. I'll pay what it's worth, and it's worth plenty.

ARCHIE

He won't touch it.

All of a sudden, Dazy Perrit gets very cold. Dangerous.

DAZY

You talk too much.

He starts talking and Archie starts writing.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

By the time Dazy Perrit was ready to go, he had spent nearly an hour giving me information about Angelina Violet and Beulah Page, the name of his real daughter, that he thought might be helpful. And he made arrangements for Violet Angelina Sally to be in Wolfe's office at 11:30 that night.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - DAY

Archie closes the door on Dazy Perrit. FRITZ BRENNER comes down the hall carrying flowers for the front room. He smiles at Archie innocently.

FRITZ

Ca va?

ARCHIE

Boy, does it va. The only question left to answer is what color shrouds to we like.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

Wolfe listens, eyes closed, while Archie finishes up.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

When Wolfe came down from the plants rooms, I made a full and honest report, only because it no longer mattered.

(out loud)

Originally, I wanted you to lay off. But now, with me crammed to the gills with Dazy Perrit's secrets, any kind of a brush-off you can think of wouldn't be worth a damn. I am, if you want the facts, scared stiff. And of course it will be useless to ring this number to get your olive oil in the morning if we're not still in good with Dazy.

WOLFE

Get the daughter.

ARCHIE

Violet? Or Beulah?

WOLFE

Miss Page. We don't even know there is a daughter. I want to see her. At the very least, I want you to see her.

ARCHIE

You going to introduce me to her?

WOLFE

Pfui. She is twenty-one years old. Flummox her.

Archie checks his notes, looks at the list of numbers he has gotten from Perrit and dials. He opens his mouth but Beulah gets there first.

BEULAH (O.S.)

Hello? Hello Hello Hello!

ARCHIE

May I speak to Miss Beulah Page?

(CONTINUED)

INTERCUT WITH BEULAH ON THE PHONE

BEULAH

Sure. Talking. Are you a preacher?

ARCHIE

No, Miss Page, I'm not. My name is Stevens, Harold Stevens, from Dayton, Ohio. May I have a minute?

BEULAH

Sure. Only it's too bad you're not a preacher. We're going to get married. We just decided.

MORTON SHANE joins the frame and puts his arms around Beulah.

ARCHIE

I see. Well, I'll be in the city only a short while, and I wanted to tell you about the wonderful work we're doing at Dayton Community Health Center.

BEULAH

How did you know I was interested in health work.

ARCHIE

You've been a generous donor to other...

BEAULAH

That's all right. Come ahead. Come on and come ahead.

Archie covers the phone with his hand.

ARCHIE

Lit. Not plastered, but lit.
(into phone)

I've got a better idea. Why not let me help you celebrate, in a mild sort of way? How about a betrothal dinner? I'm putting up with a friend down on Thirty-fifth Street, and he happens to be a famous man, with a famous chef.

Wolfe glares at him, but Archie turns his back.

(CONTINUED)

BEULAH
 What's he famous for? Who is he?

ARCHIE
 Nero Wolfe, the detective. He saved my life once, uh, on a murder charge.

BEULAH
 Morton! We're going to eat dinner with Nero Wolfe!

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Fritz opens the door to reveal Beulah and Morton, her fiancée. Archie emerges from the front room.

ARCHIE
 Thank you, Mr. Brenner. I can take it from here.

FRITZ
 My pleasure, Mr. Stevens.

They make introductions.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
 I had suspected that Dazy was just one more male parent with wool over his eyes, but everything about Beulah Page was in its proper place, with a face totally different from dad's. But her man was, in my opinion, a pain in the neck.

BEULAH
 He didn't want to come!

SCHANE
 I have to study for an exam.

BEULAH
 On the night we get engaged! He says I was maudlin on the phone. Maybe I was, but he shouldn't have got me drunk.

(CONTINUED)

MORTON

Now wait a minute. Who made the cocktails?

And somehow they are next to each other, attached like amoebas.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Introductions are made in the dining room and people are assigned to their seats. Wolfe is positively jovial.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

To my surprise, Wolfe was downright hospitable. Keeping up with Beulah and trying to draw Schane out. He even called him Morton in paternal tone.

WOLFE

I hope, Morton, that you are prepared to face the fact that very few people like lawyers. I don't. They think everything has two sides, which is nonsense.

MORTON

We only have to be able to argue both sides, there's a difference.

WOLFE

No there is not. Lawyers are inveterate hedgers. I had a lawyer draw up a tort for me once, a simple conveyance, and he made it eleven pages! Two would have done it. Have they taught you to draft torts?

MORTON

Naturally, sir, that's in the course. I try not to put in more words than necessary.

WOLFE

Well, for heaven's sake, keep it brief.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - NIGHT

As Fritz pours coffee, Beulah and Wolfe are singing a Middle European folk song. Well, Beulah is and Wolfe is nodding his head very slightly and humming. Archie stares.

ARCHIE

Wolfe was evidently humming. For him that was drunken revelry, and I would have liked to have spent an hour observing this phenomena, but it was past ten o'clock, and the plan called for me to drive them home. I didn't want to miss Violet Angelina Sally.

She finishes and he gets up and gathers them to go.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Well, I suppose you're anxious to get home and study.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Archie escorts them to the door. Suddenly Morton claps him on the shoulder.

SCHANE

You know, you're a swell guy, Stevens. What do you think of this? Drive us down to Maryland, it will only take four hours, and we'll get married! How's that for an idea?

BEULAH

It stinks.

SCHANE

What? Why?

BEULAH

Because it does. I may not have a father or mother, or aunts or uncles or cousins, but I don't have to sneak off to Maryland in the dead of night to get a husband. I'm going to have flowers and white things, and sunshine if I get a break.

(CONTINUED)

MORTON

Very well then. If you don't want to get married, I'll go study for my test.

BEULAH

Fine. And in case it might compromise your future as a Justice of the Supreme Court to be seen riding with an orphan, take the subway home to your work, and Mr. Stevens and I will go somewhere and talk. Or go somewhere and dance.

Morton is not having that. He remonstrates.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

For a minute it looked sticky, but the law student filed objections, motions, demurrers, and protestations, and it ended with us all piling in the convertible and heading uptown.

They all exit.

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Wolfe is involved with germination records when Archie re-enters.

ARCHIE

Did our client call?

WOLFE

No.

ARCHIE

It'd be nice to give him something. His daughter being engaged is nothing colossal but it's fresh. Of course now that she has met me she doesn't want Shane at all. I'll have to get out of it somehow. I can't very well explain to her that I don't want Dazy Perrit for a father-in-law.

WOLFE

We have something for him better than that.

(CONTINUED)

ARCHIE
Oh? We have?

WOLFE
Yes indeed.

ARCHIE
Something happened while I was out?

WOLFE
No. While you were here. In your presence. Evidently you missed it.

ARCHIE
(nonchalantly)
Oh.

He opens his typewriter, and rifles the papers on his desk.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
I'll just get started on these then.

He starts typing. Wolfe smirks and goes back to his germination records. THE DOORBELL RINGS

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Ah. Violet Angelina Sally. Dazy said we should call her Angelina. It'll upset her.

WIPE TO:

VIOLET ANGELINA SALLY sits in the red chair. She is a piece of work. She crosses her legs to give a better view and laughs. Wolfe stares at her, unblinking.

VIOLET
Like it?

WOLFE
I am trying to decide whether to let you keep the twenty-four thousand five hundred dollars you have gotten from Mr. Perrit or get that from you, too. At least most of it.

VIOLET
Balls.

(CONTINUED)

Wolfe scowls. Profanity from a woman offends him.

WOLFE

I do not intend to prolong this. Here's the situation. You are getting money from Mr. Perrit by threatening to disclose the existence of his real daughter. That, of course, is blackmail--

VIOLET

What? I simply can't believe my ears! My father told you those lies? Holy Jesus, Dazy Perrit telling anyone I'm not his daughter! You think I believe that?

WOLFE

I think you find it difficult to believe, Miss Murphy because you misjudged his character. His strongest feeling, stronger even than his feeling for his daughter, is his vanity. He can't stand to have you diddle him.

VIOLET

So where do you come butting in?

WOLFE

He has made the same mistake and misjudged my character. Henceforth, Miss Murphy, whenever you get money from Mr. Perrit, above your hundred dollars a week allowance, you will give me ninety percent from it, that's ninety dollars out of every hundred or the Salt Lake City authorities will come and get you

Violet stares at him.

VIOLET

Aw, for the love of Christ, you think I'm that dumb? Dazy thinks I'm that dumb?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

VIOLET (CONT'D)

I give it to you and you hand it to him and he gets off cheap, wouldn't that be sweet. You thought I would fall for that? It takes guts to face up to Dazy perrit and make him fork it over.

She starts unfastening her dress.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

I was at the theater tonight, but you notice I'm wearing sleeves and I'll show you why.

She wriggles her dress down from her shoulders, revealing her underthings. Her arms above the elbow are covered in bruises. She shows them off like a prize.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

What do you think of that?

Archie gets up and stepped over for a close-up, and she obligingly holds her arm for him.

ARCHIE

I can't tell; it might have been fingers or fists, or he might have used something.

VIOLET

There's other places, but you'd have to pay to see them.

She gets the dress back over her shoulders and starts to fasten it.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

And I took it. I told him, listen, I said, if you hurt me enough, I'll spill it plenty where it will do the most good and then I'll clear out, and try and find me, you or anyone else. So you can let up, see? And now he thinks he can get away with this lousy runaround! Balls.

Wolfe makes another face. Very politely.

(CONTINUED)

WOLFE

But Miss Murphy. What if I'm acting on my own hook? You would discover it too late. To me you're no asset at all unless you get money from Mr. Perrit and give most of it to me.

VIOLET

He told you to say that.

WOLFE

No. He didn't.

Wolfe rise and walks past her to the door. Then he turns.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

A word of caution, Miss Murphy. Your natural impulse will be to get all you can and disappear. Mr. Perrit might decide not to find you for obvious reasons. But I wouldn't. I would find you. I am fully as vain as Mr. Perrit. I will not be diddled.

He goes. Violet sits with her eyes on his chair as if he were still in it. Finally she turns her eyes to Archie, suddenly very friendly.

VIOLET

My God, he's fat.

ARCHIE

You're a brave little woman and I admire you. Shall I take you home and tuck you in?

(She smiles at him and he at her.)

I don't offer to drive you home because you've got your own car. But I can go along just for the air.

VIOLET

Air. Baby, do I need air!

ARCHIE

We'll share it. Ninety percent for you and ten for me, Miss Murphy.

(CONTINUED)

She goes to him and puts put four fingers carefully and precisely at the top of his forehead, and runs them back over and down his scalp giving him a comb.

VIOLET
Cut out the Murphy. Call me
Angel Food.

WIPE TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A small convertible streaks up the empty streets.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
What I was actually after was
not air, but insurance against
bodily injury. I don't condemn
Wolfe for not informing Dazy
Perrit before he pulled that
stunt, because he probably
thought it up after she came,
but if she bounced into the
penthouse and blurted it out,
there was no way of telling how
Perrit might react.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

The sports car zooms to a curb and Archie beats the doorman
to Violet's door.

ARCHIE
Miss Murphy.

VIOLET
Cut out the Murphy.
(she gets tangled up in
his arms)
I'm Angel Food.

ARCHIE
I don't like Angel Food, though.
How about Maple Delight? It
doesn't matter cause you're
sunk. Wolfe is a hyena, a
vulture, and a jackal.

VIOLET
Your voice goes right through
me. I won't even want a drink
first.

(CONTINUED)

Archie's in a wrestling match now.

ARCHIE

How about not being greedy.
Tell him that the gyp is out.
You are merely his loving and
obedient daughter but it would
be nice if the century he hands
you once a week got upped to
three.

VIOLET

We'll leave the car here and
then later I'll come down and
drive you home.

Suddenly, the SOUND OF A CAR ACCELERATING towards them.
They look. The car slows down, screeching. Violet hides
behind Archie as Archie spins around to see, and she spins
out and is exposed. A RAIN OF BULLETS in the headlights and
VIOLET'S SPINNING BODY getting hit. SHE SPINS AND SETTLES
SOFTLY on the sidewalk. Archie drops, rolls and comes up
firing as the car screeches away. He fires after it until
the gun is empty. Then there is silence.

He turns to see Violet trying to get up. She collapses under
the weight of her hands. He comes up and gingerly cradles
her.

ARCHIE

Easy, Angel Food. Quiet.

VIOLET

Uh-uh-it's...it's...uh uh shame.
Uh uh Shame!

ARCHIE

It sure is.

Then she gives up and flops. Gradually we become aware that
a hub-bub is surrounding Archie. A UNIFORM COP is running
towards him. People are leaning out of windows. THE DOORMAN
is coming out. Archie stands and dives at him.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

We've gotta get a doctor.

And he dashes inside.

(A&E: END HALF HOUR}

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING FOYER - NIGHT

Archie gets himself behind the old-fashioned switchboard and puts in plugs until he gets a dial tone. Then he dials his favorite number.

WOLFE (V.O.)

Nero Wolfe. What is it?

ARCHIE

Archie. I took her home. A guy came along in a car and started shooting, and then got away. She is dead. Tell Fritz--

WOLFE

Are you hurt?

ARCHIE

That bastard Perrit decided to get her and to use us for proof of something, and you can figure out what while I spend the night as a quiz kid. Tell Fritz--

A voice from behind.

ROWCLIFFE (O.S.)

Get offa that phone! Now!

Archie turns to see Lt. ROWCLIFFE. Of all the dumb luck. They glare at each other. Rowcliffe tries to steer Archie towards the street, Archie shrugs him off with more vehemence than is strictly necessary.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

Lieutenant Rowcliff is one of the reasons I doubt the world will ever reach universal brotherhood. It just doesn't seem feasible, as long as opinions like mine about Rowcliff are still loose.

WIPE TO:

INT. 19TH PRECINCT POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Rowcliffe leans into Archie.

ROWCLIFFE

Very well. We'll lock you up.

(CONTINUED)

Archie yawns a wide yawn. He turns it so Rowcliffe can participate.

ARCHIE

I don't like the idea, and neither will Mr. Wolfe, but I prefer it to more of this. Proceed.

Rowcliffe just scowls. Looking at Archie's statement.

ROWCLIFFE

You said the shooter wore a white handkerchief. How do you know it was a handkerchief?

ARCHIE

Oh, my God, we're off again. Something white then, possibly torn from his shirt tail, which is why I wouldn't know him from Adam. There was a license plate on the car but I couldn't make it out, which is unimportant since you tell me it was hot, having been liberated less than a mile away. I would like to know if any of my bullets-

ROWCLIFFE

Where's Dazy Perrit?

ARCHIE

I have no idea.

ROWCLIFFE

Is he holed up in Wolfe's house?

ARCHIE

Good lord, no. It makes my teeth chatter *just* to think of it.

ROWCLIFFE

Did your teeth chatter yesterday, when he was there arranging things with Wolfe?

ARCHIE

Look, Lieutenant. It will soon be dawn and I am now going to clam up.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I knew a man once who insisted on hunting ducks with a shotgun with a recoil that knocked him flat on his prat every time he pulled the trigger. He seemed to love it. In a way you remind me of him.

Rowcliffe snorts, presses a button on the phone.

ROWCLIFFE

Goodwin's good to go.

Archie gets his things.

WIPE TO:

EXT. 19TH PRECINCT POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Archie comes out onto the street and starts walking.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

It was too late for a taxi and I voted against walking alone on the streets, so I headed for the subway and did some useless wondering.

INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT

Archie rides, watching the lights flash by.

ARCHIE

It was a cinch that Dazy Perrit had decided to erase Violet without delay. But then what was the big idea of dragging Wolfe in, not to mention me? I am no one-man pestilence; the only times I have shot people has been purely ad lib, but I decided I would have to shoot Dazy Perrit the next time I saw him.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Archie comes out the subway.

(CONTINUED)

ARCHIE (V.O.)

Four minutes later, I decided the guy I really wanted to shoot was Wolfe, for having opened that window and yelled to me to bring Perrit in, in a frantic snatch at a proper vinaigrette.

He passes the corner of 34th and 9th and turns. He passes a car and slows, recognizing it. Then two men emerge from the shadows of a stoop. It's Dazy Perrit and Archie2.

Archie2 has a gun showing, in his hand. Perrit's hands were in his coat pockets.

PERRIT

I want to ask you about tonight. My car's right there.

ARCHIE

We can talk here. I often talk to people here.

DAZY

Get going.

ARCHIE

I like it here.

The SOUND OF A CAR coming up the block. Archie turns and looks at it. It's a cab.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Even if I had ideas, which I haven't, my gun's empty, so relax. I emptied it--

Then all of a sudden he looks back. In the cab...

A WHITE FACE

with no features - because it's covered with a handkerchief.

Archie drops, flat on the sidewalk and starts rolling as GUN SHOTS ring out. MORE GUNS REPLY

He looks up as Archie2 and Dazy fall, their guns still shooting. Then the noise stops and there is only the sound of the cab speeding away. Silence. Archie gets up and goes to the two forms. One of them twitches. He kicks its gun away and kneels for a brief inspection. Dazy Perrit and Archie2 will not be dangerous to turn your back on ever again.

(CONTINUED)

Archie starts walking.

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The doorbell is ringing. Fritz comes to the door and opens it a crack.

FRITZ

Archie?

ARCHIE

Me, Fritz. Open...

Fritz finishes with the bolt and Archie comes in. Fritz looks at Archie's face.

FRITZ

Did you kill somebody?

From upstairs comes Wolfe's bellow.

WOLFE

Archie! What the devil is it now?

ARCHIE

I suppose you expect me to apologize for interfering with your sleep. But there are corpses on the sidewalk on the corner and it might have been me. I'm calling the 19th Precinct Station House.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S BEDROOM - (DAY TWO) - DAY

It's 4:30 AM as Fritz ushers Rowcliffe and a sergeant. Wolfe sits up in his bed. Rowcliffe works hard at staying composed.

ROWCLIFFE

This is a hell of a thing. Why can't we meet downstairs?

WOLFE

Because a relentless committee of your men are already interviewing Mr. Goodwin there. Why you wish to see me at all an exercise in faulty logic. If hoodlums are gunned down a block from where I am sleeping, does that mean I am associated with the event?

(CONTINUED)

ROWCLIFFE

Wolfe, don't try any of your tricks.

WOLFE

I don't need to. Get your notebook.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

Wolfe proceeded to tell him everything about Violet Perrit and the blackmail and nothing about Beulah Page. And Rowcliffe just took notes. I got the same thing from the boys downstairs. From the way they acted it wasn't hard to tell why. They were sorry for me. As soon as they were all gone, I mounted one flight to Wolfe's bedroom.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Wolfe, in yellow silk pajamas and yellow slippers with turned-up toes, is coming out of the bathroom.

ARCHIE

Well, I suppose you want it all.

WOLFE

Not particularly.

The yellow phone rings. Archie goes to answer it.

ARCHIE

Nero Wolfe's office.

SAUL (V.O.)

Archie? Saul. I want the boss.

ARCHIE

Saul Panzer.

WOLFE

Good. Go up to your room and look at your face. It needs washing.

(CONTINUED)

ARCHIE

So would yours if you had spent the night rolling around on sidewalks.

(he gets it)

You mean you have private business with Saul? Have you got him working on this?

WOLFE

I phoned him last evening while you were taking Miss Page home. Go and wash your face.

ARCHIE

Am I out of it.

WOLFE

At the moment there is nothing to discuss. If you want something to do....I suppose it would be futile to call that number, Lincoln six-three two three two, now that Mr. Perrit is dead?

Archie is furious.

ARCHIE

Don't ask me. I'm out of it.

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

Archie dusts, rearranges, and answers the phone.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

My breakfast was interrupted four times by phone calls. Only one of which was interesting. A man said his name is L. A. Schwartz and he was Dazy Perrit's lawyer. I told him to come right over and he was waiting when Wolfe came down.

WIPE TO:

L.A. SCHWARTZ, wearing an old fashioned pince-nez, is sixtyish, and skinny. He sits nervously in the red leather chair. Wolfe eyes him with half-closed eyes.

(CONTINUED)

WOLFE

Well, sir?

SCHWARTZ

I uhm...I gathered from Mr. Perrit last evening that you had not explicitly given your assent, and therefore—

WOLFE

My assent? My assent to what?

SCHWARTZ

To your appointment as executor of his estate and in effect the guardian of his daughter. Did you?

WOLFE

Utterly preposterous.

SCHWARTZ

I was afraid of that. It will complicate matters. There is a question whether the fifty thousand dollars provided for that purpose will go to the executor if the executor is not you.

Ah. Wolfe eyes open and then half close again.

WOLFE

Tell me about it.

SCHWARTZ

Last evening he asked me to draw up a will and related papers at once, for which I was to be paid when he died, through the executor of his estate, fifty thousand dollars. It took a long while, it's extremely difficult to convey property to a daughter without naming her.

WOLFE

Let me see the documents.

Schwartz hands over the documents and Wolfe starts to go through. Archie comes and looks over his shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

ARCHIE (V.O.)

There was a will, a birth certificate, a marriage license and letter from Dazy expounding on his personal philosophy. All it amounted to was that for fifty thousand bucks, Wolfe was to see that Beulah got one million dollars of Daddy's stocks and bonds. It was also up to him how much Beulah should ever be told about her father, and, if so, when.

WOLFE

Put them in the safe.

SCHWARTZ

I understand there might be some reluctance about handling money accumulated by the methods used by Mr. Perrit, but...

WOLFE

Bah. If a Wall Street steel bandit gets respect for his wishes regarding the disposal of his loot, why shouldn't Mr. Perrit?

SCHWARTZ

Then you accept the--ah--office?

WOLFE

I do.

SCHWARTZ

In that case, there is a detail which concerns me. With the daughter dead, how do you propose to perform the functions of your office?

WOLFE

That, sir, is my affair.

SCHWARTZ

I see. I hope you'll forgive me if I mention another detail. I have a personal interest.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SCHWARTZ (CONT'D)

If I don't get my fifty thousand through you, I will not get it at all. Your assistant was present both when Miss Perrit and Mr. Perrit were killed, and was not injured. When it becomes public knowledge that over a million dollars has been entrusted to your hands, Mr. Perrit's former associates...

The phone rings. Archie picks up.

ARCHIE

Nero Wolfe's office.

An incredibly hoarse voice speaks.

FABIAN (O.S.)

I wanna talk to Wolfe.

Archie nods to Wolfe, who picks up. Archie showily hangs up.

WOLFE

Nero Wolfe speaking...Your name, please?...I'm sorry, sir, I never speak to people without a name.

(to Schwartz)

Have you ever heard of a man named Fabian? F-A-B-I-A-N.

Schwartz and Archie look at each other, startled.

SCHWARTZ

Oh my. Yes.

ARCHIE

So have I.

WOLFE

Yes, Mr. Fabian? I never make appointments outside my house...No, no indeed, I assure you I'm not frightened at all. Why don't you come to my office, say at two o'clock today?...Good.

He hangs up.

(CONTINUED)

SCHWARTZ

I was about to say when the phone rang that Mr. Perrit's associates will draw inevitable conclusions. To put it baldly, they will kill both you and your assistant the first chance they get. They are men of action and Mr. Fabian is one of the most deadly of them.

WOLFE

Mr. Fabian says he wants to ask me something.

SCHWARTZ

But great heavens! He's the most notorious--to invite him--to let him in--

WOLFE

He is a friend of Dazy Perrit's?

SCHWARTZ

He would say so.

Wolfe sits back, thinking.

WOLFE

If he is really dangerous, and if he has drawn the sort of inferences you fear, my own office is the only safe place to meet him. This business has to be settled sooner--

The phone rings again.

ARCHIE

Nero Wolfe's office, Archie Goodwin speaking.

The reply is a screech that could be heard in the kitchen.

BEULAH (O.S.)

You said your name was Harold Stevens! I saw you in the paper and that man who was killed I know him, I...

ARCHIE

Hold it a second. Stay on.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
 (to Wolfe)
 It's the friend of that law student.

WOLFE
 Yes. We might as well get it over with. She can come any time. Arrange it properly.

Archie talks to Beulah and Wolfe talks to Schwartz.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
 Apparently I was back in. I arranged for Beulah to come in the back way and avoid the police, the reporters and any gangsters lurking at the front. While I talked with her, Wolfe convinced Mr. Schwartz that the only way to get his money was to return at 2 pm to meet with Mr. Fabian. You'll have to ask him how he did that.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - DAY

Archie opens the door to reveal Morton and behind him Beulah.

BEULAH
 It's all right that Morton came along, isn't it? He wouldn't let me come alone.

ARCHIE
 (not pleased)
 Well, he's here. Hello. For reasons of state, we're meeting in the plant rooms, a distinct honor since Wolfe never does business up there. But not you Mr. Schane. You will wait in the front room. There are some magazines and...

MORTON
 I'm afraid I must insist...

ARCHIE
 Don't even try. Fritz, there be two luncheon guests.

(CONTINUED)

FRITZ

Of course. And more singing?

ARCHIE

If the occasion calls for it.

INT. BROWNSTONE - PLANT ROOMS - DAY

Archie and Wolfe show an amazed Beulah around. She pauses by a particularly splendid array and her mouth just drops open. Wolfe is excessively nonchalant. He takes a stool.

WOLFE

Someday, you must spend an hour up here. Or two hours. Now I'm afraid we haven't time. You're not an infant, Miss Page. You're nineteen years old.

BEULAH

In Georgia I could vote.

WOLFE

So you could. Then I won't have to use a nipple for this. We'll ignore non-essentials; such as Mr. Goodwin's real name. Do you know what a hypothetical question is?

BEULAH

Certainly.

WOLFE

Then I'll put one to you. Suppose these things: that with me as intermediary, your father has made available to you a considerable sum of money; that he cannot ever disclose himself to you; and that he has put it wholly within my discretion whether you shall be told his name. Supposing all that, here's something for you to think over.

(Wolfe points a finger at her.)

Do you want me to tell you his name or not?

BEULAH

I don't need to think that over. I want you to tell me.

(CONTINUED)

WOLFE

That's an impulse.

BEULAH

It is not an impulse. Good Lord, an impulse? If you only knew what I--for years--I want to know.

WOLFE

What if your father is--say, a convicted pickpocket?

BEULAH

I don't care what he is! I want to know!

WOLFE

Then you should. Mr. Dazy Perrit, your father, died last night.

BEULAH

I knew it.

WOLFE

The devil you did!

BEULAH

I knew it!

Beulah sits down, trying to hold on. But she's going to blow soon, because she's started a swallowing marathon. Her shoulders start going up and down. Then she covers her face with her hands and a sob comes.

WOLFE

Good god.

He makes a speedy exit. Archie goes to stand close. He waits a second and then touches her shoulder.

BEULAH

Why don't you have the sense to leave like he did?

ARCHIE

I have but I was waiting to tell you that the room at the front on the second floor is mine, is unlocked, and has a bathroom with a mirror.

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - DAY

Wolfe is at his desk, INSPECTOR CRAMER is just sitting down opposite. Archie enters.

ARCHIE

Why Inspector. We've been expecting to hear from you all day.

CRAMER

Yeah, well this is just a friendly call.

(to Wolfe)

How are you?

WOLFE

The way I always am just before lunch. Hungry.

CRAMER

Well, enjoy it.

(Archie registers this)

I wanted to let you know you were right as usual when you decided to tell Rowcliff only one thing that was worth a damn, about Perrit's daughter being wanted in Salt Lake. I don't think she was his daughter at all. She had about ten years coming. I just wanted to tell you that, but I suppose I might as well ask if you have anything to add.

WOLFE

No--no. I think not.

CRAMER

Nothing at all? About the job you took on for Perrit?

WOLFE

Nothing.

CRAMER

Okay. I didn't expect it. Enjoy your lunch. Don't bother, Goodwin. I know the way.

He exits. Archie looks at Wolfe.

(CONTINUED)

ARCHIE

At least I heard that before I died. Cramer knowing you've got things he could use and merely telling you to enjoy your lunch! And you know why? He thinks the only guy that you should talk to is a priest for the last rites!

WOLFE

Quite right. It was in effect an obituary. He thinks I haven't long to live.

ARCHIE

Including me.

WOLFE

Yes, you too, of course. If I were a sentimentalist I would be touched.

ARCHIE

And what do you think?

WOLFE

I haven't given it--

ARCHIE

Baloney. No one who likes eating as much as you do would want to see it stop. I don't want you to think I mind dying. It's all part of my line of work. But dying for the sake of salad dressing...

The phone rings again. Archie picks it up, listens. To Wolfe

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Saul Panzer.

He waits for Wolfe to pick up and then hangs up.

WOLFE

Saul? I need you earlier than expected. Come and join us at luncheon.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DINING ROOM - DAY

It is a glum lunch. Morton glowers into his food, Beulah's mind is elsewhere, Archie doesn't feel like eating.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

Whether Wolfe enjoyed his lunch or not, I didn't. I had to grit my teeth to stay in my chair and you can't chew very well with your teeth gritted.

Fritz comes to clear the dessert, Wolfe pushes back his chair.

WOLFE

We are expecting visitors at two. You two may either leave...

BEULAH

No. I'm not leaving yet. I have too many questions.

WOLFE

Perhaps you would like to visit the plant rooms again and wait.

MORTON

Beulah can. But I don't like the way things look here. Her interests are soon to be my interests and after last night, I want to know who these callers are.

WOLFE

One of them is a man named Fabian. The other is a lawyer, L.A. Schwartz.

MORTON

I want to be there.

BEULAH

No! I don't want you...

WOLFE

Your name will not appear in the conversation, Miss Page, so there is no reason why Morton shouldn't be there if he feels compelled to.

(CONTINUED)

Archie blinks; he has no idea what Wolfe is up to. The DOORBELL RINGS.

ARCHIE
It's show time.

They all get up to go to their various posts.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - DAY

Archie pulls open the door to reveal Mr. Schwartz, a couple of sheets to the wind.

ARCHIE
Well, I see you've been
fortifying your courage.

Just as Archie starts to close the door, Fabian appears. He is a square scary man, whose nose seems to disappear into his face. He constantly sounds like he needs to clear his throat.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Mr. Fabian. Do you two know
each other.

FABIAN
Yeah, yeah. You're Perrit's
shyster. Which way?

To Archie's immense surprise, Wolfe emerges from the office.

WOLFE
Good afternoon, Mr. Fabian.
I'm Nero Wolfe. How do you do?
(he holds out his hand.
Fabian takes it)
Mr. Schwartz, if you'll go to
the office and make yourself
comfortable, we'll join you
shortly.

Schwartz takes his cue, scuttles up the hallway. The big bad Wolfe looks at the big bad Fabian.

WOLFE (CONT'D)
It is part of your legend, sir,
that you go nowhere unarmed.
Are you armed now?

(CONTINUED)

FABIAN
Yeah? Any objections?

WOLFE
None at all. Let's go in the
office and sit down. This way,
sir.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

Wolfe, Archie, Saul and Morton are seated. Fabian cases the joint and picks a chair backed up against the bookshelves. Saul also sits with his back to the wall, across the room.

WOLFE
I must apologize, sir, for first
appropriating a few moments of
your time.

The DOORBELL RINGS. Wolfe continues, darting a glance at Archie, who shrugs. The SOUNDS of FRITZ answering.

WOLFE (CONT'D)
You should have first say. But
this will only take me...

Unwelcome noises came from the hall, including raised voices.

FRITZ (O.S.)
Archie! ARCHIE!

Archie jumps to his feet and goes, but as he gets to the door it blows open and there is THUMBS MEEKER, who is over six feet and weighs two twenty or so. Archie screeches to a halt and whirls around. Fabian has jumped to his feet, his gun in his hand. Schwartz slides behind the red leather chair and kneels behind it.

MEEKER AND FABIAN are only aware of each other.

FABIAN
You'd better lift 'em.

MEEKER
Not here and now.

FABIAN
Who gave you the steer?

MEEKER
Nobody. I came on business.

(CONTINUED)

FABIAN

Lift 'em up.

WOLFE

Tommyrot!

(but nobody looks at him
but Archie)

This is preposterous! Besides
you two, there are five people
here. If you shoot him, Mr.
Fabian, what do you expect to
do, shoot all of us? Nonsense.

(to Meeker)

Who the devil are you, sir?
What do you mean, bounding into
my house like this?

Archie sniggers and then hides it.

ARCHIE

That's Mr. Thumbs Meeker, Mr.
Wolfe. Mr. Meeker, this is
Nero Wolfe.

The men nod at each other. At a look from Wolfe, Fabian
doesn't say anything but somehow both hand and gun slide
into his side coat-pocket and stay there.

ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That relaxed me. I thought to
myself, okay, before I die at
least I get to hear Wolfe bawling
hell out of Thumbs Meeker for
dashing in without being
announced.

WOLFE

Confound it. What do you want?

MEEKER

I want to know if it's true
that you told the cops that
your punk put a finger on Perrit
and his daughter for me.

WOLFE

It isn't true.

MEEKER

Oh, so I'm a liar?

(CONTINUED)

WOLFE

I don't know whether you're a liar or not. But I would have expected you to be sufficiently familiar with police methods not to come running to me with anything as silly as that.

MEEKER

(to Archie)

Did you tell them that?

ARCHIE

Am I a half-wit?

WOLFE

Mr. Meeker. Now that you're here, I suggest that you stay. You will find it interesting. When you entered I was about to tell these people who killed Mr. Perrit and his daughter. It will be doubly interesting because the man who did it is present.

Total silence.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

You could have heard a cockroach stomping.

Schwartz slinks back into the leather chair. Morton sits forward. Thumbs Meeker grabs a chair from the middle and drags it to the wall and plops down opposite Fabian. With that settled, Fabian sits down, too. Wolfe leans back and his fingertips meet at the summit of his magnificent middle.

WOLFE

First, about Mr. Perrit's daughter. The police know that the young woman who was killed last night was not his daughter, but they do not know that he actually has a daughter. I do, and I know who and where she is.

FABIAN

Go slow.

(CONTINUED)

WOLFE

If you please, sir. No power on earth will keep me from telling this properly. Dazy Perrit's daughter is at this moment in this house. She--

MORTON

That's a lie!

WOLFE

She doesn't think so.

MORTON

You've got your hands on a pile of money and want to eliminate anyone who understands the law well enough to...

WOLFE

Shut up. Dazy Perrit came to me for help. He told me many things but he did not tell me that a young man who had been attached to the woman he'd hired to play his daughter had come to New York. It may be surmised that he came about the time Miss Murphy began demanding money from Mr. Perrit.

FABIAN

Go slow.

WOLFE

Don't be absurd, Mr. Fabian. I assume it was from Miss Murphy, the young man learned the identity of Mr. Perrit's daughter and calculated that the highest expectations, in the long run, would be realized through the real daughter and not the counterfeit one. So he masqueraded as a law student named Morton Schane and got himself engaged to her.

MORTON

That's a lie. An utter lie. I'll sue you for slander, as soon as I've passed the bar, I'll file...

(CONTINUED)

WOLFE

Really? And when you do so, will you write a tort to go along with it?

MORTON

What?

FABIAN

What have you got on him?

WOLFE

Last evening this young man dined with us. One or two remarks he made stirred a faint breath of suspicion in me and I asked him if he had learned to draft torts, and he said he had. A tort is an act, not a document, as any law student would know. You can't draft a tort any more than you can draft a burglary.

MORTON

This is ridiculous. How can you sit there and say...

WOLFE

The real question is why? Why did you shoot and kill Miss Murphy and Mr. Perrit? Merely to get them out of the way, since the daughter was now betrothed to you? Possibly, but more probably, you had become aware that Dazy Perrit was on to you. That he was planning to take care of you...

MORTON

You'll eat all this, you fat, lying, son-of-a-bitch! I'm going!

Morton jumps to his feet. Fabian stands up. Meeker stands up. Morton freezes.

FABIAN

You got anything else?

WOLFE

Yes.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Because he clearly was not who he said he was, I had my chef save his wineglass, and I confirmed, through the FBI, Mr. Schane's criminal association with Angelina Murphy in Salt Lake.

Morton goes for his gun. He gets it out and pulls the trigger, but that's all. Fabian's first bullet hits plaster, but Saul's gets Morton. Fabian's second bullet and Meeker's bullets hit him and he slams back into the couch. Fabian and Thumbs Meeker step forward together, side by side, blazing away at the same target. Morton slithers off of the couch onto the floor. Silence.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY (DAY THREE - SIX DAYS LATER)

Archie is reading the paper as Wolfe takes his beer from the tray.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

Six days later, Wolfe came down from the plant rooms at six o'clock and rang for beer.

(out loud)

The evening paper says that the District Attorney has decided not to charge Meeker or Fabian because all the witnesses agree that Schane shot first.

WOLFE

Perfectly sound.

ARCHIE

I like it, but so far you have refused to loosen up. So I would like to make it clear that I think you made Schwartz come at two o'clock because you wanted a witness to what you said to Fabian. You intended to tell Fabian about Schane, but do it in such away that you couldn't be charged with incitement to crime.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

You knew Fabian would get Schane, and so your ward wouldn't marry him, which you didn't approve of. Very noble. Most fathers wouldn't go that far.

WOLFE

Shut up. I want to read.

ARCHIE

Yes, sir. In an hour or so. When Schane came here with her right away you began to ad lib. You figured that with Fabian and Saul and me all here, one of us was bound to plug him before he plugged you.

WOLFE

I suppose you have to get it out of your system.

ARCHIE

I do, but I want to be fair. I got one on me, too. You remember I told you that just before Violet quit for good, she said, 'It's a shame. Shame!'

(on Wolfe's look)

Of course what she said was, 'It's Schane. Schane!' I fumbled that one, and hereafter I'll wash my ears better. Now I suppose you'll tell me...

The phone rings.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Nero Wolfe's office.

BEULAH

May I speak to Mr. Harold Stevens?

ARCHIE

He's not in. Gone to Central Park for his health. Will anyone else do?

BEULAH

You might.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BEULAH (CONT'D)

I started to decide where to go for dinner, and I'm sick of all the restaurants around here, and--

ARCHIE

Not another word. I was just wishing I didn't have to eat with the person I was going to eat with. Meet me at seven o'clock at Riberio's on Fifty-second Street.

BEULAH

Sure.

Archie hangs up and looks at Wolfe.

ARCHIE

I'm dining with your new ward, but don't jump to the conclusion that I'm thinking of marrying her. I don't want you dragging Fabian and Thumbs Meeker down here again on my account.

And he leaves. Wolfe heaves a sigh of relief and opens his book.