THE GOOD WITNESS

by
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based on the novellas
"The Next Witness" and "Die Like a Dog"

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PRODUCTION WHITE DRAFT -
October 4, 2001
PINK DRAFT
October 8, 2001
BLUE DRAFT
October 15, 2001
GREEN DRAFT
October 22, 2001
THE GOOD WITNESS

FADE IN:

MONTAGE/CREDITS

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - DAY (DAY ONE)

Archie grabs his trenchcoat from the hallway tree and starts to put it on. He stops. It doesn't feel right. He looks at a button - it's dangling. He checks the pocket flaps - twisted. He's not happy. He thinks. Ah. Grimly, he puts it on, heads for the door. The DOORBELL RINGS.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
I was on my way out to right a wrong, when fate in the form of Inspector Cramer rang the doorbell.

He opens the door and INSPECTOR CRAMER comes in and barrels past him going towards the office.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Inspector Cramer. To what do we owe the pleasure?

CRAMER
I gotta present for your boss.

ARCHIE
Is he gonna like it?

CRAMER
He's gonna love it. Got one for you, too. Stick around.

He disappears into the office. Archie trails after.

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

Cramer serves Wolfe, chomps happily on his cigar. Wolfe regards him balefully. Archie waits at the door.

WOLFE
Mr. Cramer. What brings you into my home?

CRAMER
An opportunity that doesn't come often enough:

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

WOLFE
Pfui.

CRAMER
A situation you can't get out of.

WOLFE
Archie! Escort Mr. Cramer...

Cramer puts the subpoena down on the table.

CRAMER
Your subpoena for the Ashe trial next week. Do you need me to read it out loud?

WOLFE
You came all this way to serve me in person?

CRAMER
I came all this way to serve you in person. I wanna make sure you understand the fine print.

WOLFE
A sad commentary on the pusillanimous nature of your dreams.

CRAMER
If you don't show up, you'll be in contempt of court. A bench warrant will be issued for your arrest and I will send the newest recruit on the force down here to lead you away in cuffs.

Wolfe glowers, throws the subpoena down and picks his book back up. Cramer savors the moment and bows out. As he passes Archie in the door, he hands him his subpoena.

ARCHIE
Allow me.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - STOOP (STUDIO) - DAY

Cramer comes out and is surprised to find Archie accompanying him. On Cramer's look.

(CONTINUED)
ARCHIE
I have an errand. This morning a guy name Meegan tried to engage Mr. Wolfe to find his wife.

CRAMER
Fat chance of that.

ARCHIE
No chance at all. So he left in a huff and grabbed my raincoat instead of his on the way out. I'm going to right the wrong.

CRAMER
You should try working for a living.

They part ways.

EXT. 29 ARBOR STREET - ANGLE INCLUDING THE STREET - DAY

Archie comes down the street. The camera pulls back to see whole street and what lies ahead - a police scene. A FLASHING POLICE CRUISER is double parked in front of the entrance to 29 and a crowd. 29 Arbor Street has a stoop with stairs and a basement apartment.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
But when I got to Meegan's home at 29 Arbor Street, I didn't enter it. There was party going on in front.

ARCHIE maneuvers through a crowd to the front to see a POLICEMAN trying to shoo away a BLACK LAB (JET)

POLICEMAN
Whose dog is this?

No one in the crowd responds. Their attention is diverted by PURLEY STEBBINS, who emerges from a squad car and goes into the house without delay, bristling with authority.

Archie sees Stebbins and turns away so he won't be seen.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
The presence of Purley Stebbins made it a cinch that there was a corpse inside.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And my presence at the scene of
a homicide arouses all of
Purley's worst instincts. I
decided to get my raincoat back
some other time.

He stops and looks down. The Black Lab is nuzzling his knee.
The Cop looks at him.

POLICEMAN
Sure that's not your dog?

ARCHIE
Nah. The wife's allergic to
them.

Archie pats the dog, and moves on.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Archie goes along appreciating the day unaware that the dog
is tailing him. Archie stops, sensing something. He glances
back. Nothing. Only people. He is relieved. Then he feels
something nuzzle his knee. He looks down.

THE BLACK LAB (JET) grins up at him.

ARCHIE
I'm not your pal.
(The Lab begs to differ;
nuzzles him again. Voice-
over)
Apparently I was mistaken. We
were friends for life. I could
have ditched him by taking a
taxi but that would have been
pretty rude. So I took him
home, as any good pal should.

He begins walking, the dog at his side.

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - DAY

Archie comes in with the dog, hangs up his coat. He looks
at Jet and then heads towards the office with him.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
My idea was to call the ASPCA
for help, but there was no sense
in passing up an opportunity to
annoy Wolfe.
INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

Wolfe sits at his desk. As Archie comes in, he doesn't look up, he just starts talking.

WOLFE
Where the devil have you been? We were going to go over orchid lists...What's that?

ARCHIE
A dog. A hound to be precise.

WOLFE
I'm in no temper for buffoonery. Get it out of here.

ARCHIE
No, sir. You have your orchids, Fritz has his turtle and Theodore has his parakeets up in the potting room. Why shouldn't I have a dog? He is registered as Champion Nero of Bantyscoot so I'll have to change his name. I don't want us to confuse the two of you. Ebony, would do, or Jet, or Inky...

WOLFE
Stop babbling. It's not a hound. It's a Labrador Retriever.

ARCHIE
I said hound because it would be natural for a private detective to have a hound.

WOLFE
Labradors have a wider skull than any other dog, for brain room. A dog I had when I was a boy in Montenegro had a rather narrow skull, but I did not regard that as a defect. I do not recall thinking that dog had a defect. (on Archie's look) When you smuggled that creature in here did you take into account the disruption it would cause in this household?

(Continued)
Archie starts improvising a leash with a piece of cord.

ARCHIE
Don't worry. I'll get rid of him. I do feel the need for a pet, but what the hell, I can try a chameleon.

WOLFE
No.

ARCHIE
No?

WOLFE
I do not wish to interfere with the commitment you have made.

ARCHIE
I haven't made a commitment.

WOLFE
Then where did you get it?

ARCHIE
He followed me home. I'll just call the ASPCA and we can be rid of him.

WOLFE
No.

ARCHIE
No. Why not?

WOLFE
Call someone you know in the Police Department and use the license number to find out the owner's name. Then call him directly.

ARCHIE
If the owner is dead or in jail, you'll take the position that I committed myself by bringing the dog home.

WOLFE
It would be dishonorable to renege.

(CONTINUED)
He and Jet consider each other.

ARCHIE
You'd enjoy having a dog around provided you can blame it on me.

WOLFE
The name you suggested, Jet. That would be acceptable for this dog.

As Archie nods, Fritz comes in.

FRITZ
Dinner is served, sir.

Jet jumps up at this proposal. Fritz sees Jet.

FRITZ (CONT'D)
Is the animal dining with you?

WOLFE
Pfui. His manners appear to be adequate, but let us test them first in the kitchen.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Wolfe carries on as Archie eats.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
The squabs were absolutely edible, but other phenomena of that evening were not so pleasing.

WOLFE
...The Basinji is the oldest breed on earth, originating in Central Africa in 5000 BC, there is, of course, no trace of the Afghan hound until 4000 BC...

Fritz enters with the salad.

WOLFE (CONT'D)
Has Jet demonstrated a capacity for restraint vis a vis food?
FRITZ
For a dog, he has remarkable control.

WOLFE
You wouldn't find him an insufferable nuisance as a cohabitant?

FRITZ
No. Of course, they take time. They must be walked and fed. But for such a noble beast we could make the sacrifice.

WOLFE
Well, we must suffer him in any case, for Archie's sake.

FRITZ
Ah.

ARCHIE
Yeah. That's right. For my sake.

(V.O.)
Clearly they were prepared to become charter martyrs of the Canine Canonization League. Next thing you know, we'd have box seats at the Westminster Dog Show.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Archie and Wolfe are going through orchid lists. Archie reads the descriptions and Wolfe considers them. The DOORBELL RINGS. Archie checks his watch.

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The Doorbell RINGS again. Archie appears - and one look through the one way glass panel reveals INSPECTOR CRAMER. Archie shows his watch pointedly as he opens the door six inches.

ARCHIE
You never come after dinner.
CONTINUED:

CRAMER
Cut the crap, Goodwin and tell me where the dog is.

On Archie's reaction, we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Cramer is settled in the red leather chair.

CRAMER
(to Archie)
The owner of the dog was murdered this afternoon. The officer at the scene recognized you and said you enticed the dog to go off with you.

ARCHIE
I didn't entice.

CRAMER
The dog just followed you.

ARCHIE
Girls follow me; dogs follow me. Sometimes even your own dicks follow me. I can't help...

CRAMER
Skip the comedy. The dog belonged to a murder victim and you removed it from the scene of the murder.

WOLFE
I advise you to shift your ground if you expect us to listen.

CRAMER
(turning to Wolfe)
And to top it off, this morning, you refuse to do a job for one of the tenants of 29 Arbor Street, Richard Meegan. You know damn well the last thing I want near a homicide is you or Goodwin, but you're here and I want to know how and why and what and when and who.
(shaking his head, sighing))
You're wasting your time. In Mr. Meegan's first breath, he mentioned his wife...

CRAMER
Yeah, I heard.

WOLFE
...My vanity bristles at the offer of that sort of job...

CRAMER
Yeah, I know, Wolfe. I...

WOLFE
...and I stopped him. My bluntness enraged him and he dashed out, taking Mr. Goodwin's coat.

CRAMER
So that's how you got there; why'd you'd take the dog?

ARCHIE
I will admit, if pressed, that I should not have patted him, but if there's some kind of dodge about the dog, please tell me why I phoned the precinct to get the name of his owner?

CRAMER
I don't know. With you and Wolfe I never know. Look. I'm gonna open the bag.

ARCHIE
He's come for free advice.

CRAMER
Shut up. The man who was killed was named Philip Kampf. He lived on Perry Street, a few blocks from Arbor, all alone with the dog, no family.
12  EXT. 29 ARBOR STREET -- DAY

OLSEN, who has come out to sweep the walk, watches KAMPF and Jet go up the stairs of the house.

    CRAMER (V.O.)
    Olsen, the janitor, sees him arrive with the dog on a leash at five twenty this afternoon.

    WIPE TO:

    FLASHCUT TO

Jet being shooed down the stoop stairs by VICTOR TALENTO.

    CRAMER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
    Fifteen minutes later the dog comes out with a tenant named Victor Talento. He says he found the dog in the vestibule, thought it was a stray, and chased it out.

Victor goes, Jets stays around.

    FLASHCUT:

Olsen finishes his sweeping. Hears yelling. Runs inside.

    CRAMER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
    Then twenty minutes later, somebody starts yelling.

13  INT. 29 ARBOR STREET -- FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY

Olsen comes into the hallway outside Apartment 101 and sees ROSS CHAFFEE standing over the body of Kampf.

    CRAMER (V.O.)
    He finds two men in the foyer, one live, one dead. The live one was Ross Chaffee, an artist from the top floor studio. The dead one was Philip Kampf.

    WIPE TO:

14  INT. 29 ARBOR STREET - FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

It's now a police scene. Stebbins pulls a leash from Kampf's pocket.

(CONTINUED)
CRAMER (V.O.)
We got onto the dog because Stebbins found his leash in the pocket of Kampf's raincoat. The lab says it was used to strangle him.

The two other tenants of the house are brought to the bottom of the stairs by a POLICEMAN: RICHARD MEEGAN and skinny JEROME ALAND, sleepy and tying a satiny robe around him.

CRAMER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
All four tenants of the house were home when Kampf arrived: Victor Talento, a lawyer on the ground floor, had left, but the rest of them - Chaffee, Richard Meegan and Jerome Aland, a night club performer, were still there.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT
Cramer is expounding. Wolfe listens with his eyes closed.

CRAMER
Of course, none of them heard or saw a thing. But Kampf went there to see one of those four men and had his dog with him. My theory is that the dog is my witness.

WOLFE
The animal seems quite intelligent but I doubt if it's up to answering questions.

CRAMER
He saw and heard it all. It's possible he was actually present when Kampf was killed. That's why we want to take it there, to see which door it goes to. We're going to do that now. I gotta man out in my car who knows dogs.

Cramer stands up.

WOLFE
Archie.

(MORE)
CONTINUED:

WOLFE (CONT'D)
Go lock yourself in your room with the dog and stay there until I notify you. Even Inspector Cramer will think twice about breaking down a door.

CRAMER
What you talking about?

WOLFE
Go!

Before Cramer can say anything else, Archie skedaddles.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
I went. It was either that or quit my job on the spot and I resign only when we haven't got company. Jet was waiting patiently where I left him.

INT. BROWNSTONE - ARCHIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Archie comes in. Jet looks up but does not come to Archie until told to do so. Archie is impressed. The SOUND of RAISED VOICES and then the door slamming.

ARCHIE
All clear?

WOLFE (O.S.)
NO! Wait until I bolt it!

(beat)

All right!

ARCHIE
You stay here.

Jet doesn't want to but he does.

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Archie enters and Wolfe snaps.

WOLFE
A pretty mess. You sneak a dog in here to badger me and now this?

(CONTINUED)
ARCHIE
Forget it. You're the one who bollixed this up. And all because you felt sorry for an orphan.

WOLFE
I had thought that my disinclination to permit a policeman to storm in here and commandeer any person or object which struck his fancy was shared by you.

ARCHIE
It is. Within reason.

WOLFE
Don't be ambiguous. Clearly the simplest way to settle the matter is to find out who killed Mr. Kampf.

ARCHIE
Oh. Of course. That follows. And we have the prime witness sitting upstairs.

WOLFE
A witness who can't testify. We must do better than that. Luckily we have the pretext for an immediate exploration. You can go there to get your raincoat.

ARCHIE
You mean now?

WOLFE
Yes.

ARCHIE
I'll be damned. No client, no fee, no nothing except a dog with a wide skull for brain room. I will be damned.

He leaves.

{A&E - END ACT ONE}
Archie approaches. There are no lights on any floor but the ground floor. He goes up the stairs to the list of names and buzzes the name MEEGAN. No click from the door. He tries the door, it won't open. He tries four buzzes. Nada.

Archie comes back to the sidewalk. He finds a perch on a fire hydrant. The LIGHTS in the first floor apartment go out. Archie shifts his position for a better look.

Talento comes down the stoop and glances at Archie as he passes him. Archie considers the situation and then checks out the street. He sees a FIGURE emerge from the shadows across the street and starts strolling down the opposite side of the street after Victor.

**ARCHIE (V.O.)**
Sloppy. I would have waited ten more paces before I started.

Archie counts to ten and then starts tailing the tailer.

**EXT. STREET - FURTHER DOWN - NIGHT**

TALENTO comes down followed by the FIGURE on the other side of the street. ARCHIE follows behind them, on Talento's side. Talento stops, the Figure stops. But Archie keeps coming. When he gets abreast of the Figure, they exchange a look. Archie tips his hat. He then moves on to catch up with Talento.

Talento stiffens as Archie begins to gain on him. They reach a streetlight.

**ARCHIE**
Victor Talento?

**TALENTO**
No comment.

He keeps going. So does Archie.

**ARCHIE**
I'm not a reporter.

**TALENTO**
I'm not interested.

**ARCHIE**
Okay.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
ARCHIE (CONT'D)
And if you're out for a midnight stroll, forget it, sorry I interrupted. But if you're headed for something you'd like to keep private - you ought to know - you got a homicide dick on your tail.

(Talento stops)
Don't scream or look around or he'll know I'm telling you.

TALENTO
Is this your good deed for the day?

ARCHIE
No. I'm Archie Goodwin and I'm out dowsing for Nero Wolfe.

TALENTO
Who hired Wolfe to investigate?

ARCHIE
I don't know. He says he needs the practice. I'm helping out by looking for a seam.

TALENTO
I can't help you. A woman phoned me and I arranged to meet her, but she has nothing to do with this business and I have no right to expose her to embarrassment. Damnit. I can't be sure of shaking that man off.

ARCHIE
Or me.

TALENTO
You mean you would follow me?

ARCHIE
I need practice, too. Too bad you don't want to reciprocate.

TALENTO
I see you've earned your reputation as scum, Goodwin.

(Continued)
ARCHIE
You're the one who's going to expose your lady friend.

TALENTO
I'm meeting her three blocks from here. You might be willing to go tell her I'm not coming.

ARCHIE
Sure. Where's the appointment?

TALENTO
The woman's name is Jewel Jones, she's extremely pretty and she'll be at the southeast corner of Christopher and Grove at midnight. Tell her I'll get in touch with her tomorrow.

ARCHIE
Right.

Talento holds out his hand, but Archie shakes his head.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
See - the problem is: How do I know I'm not shaking hands with a murderer?

They walk off in opposite directions.

WIPE TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Archie is sitting on a stoop, waiting. He checks his watch. A COUPLE go by. Then a TAXI pulls up and JEWEL JONES gets out and pays the driver. She looks around.

ARCHIE
Miss Jones? Victor.

JEWEL
Who are you?

ARCHIE
Victor sent me with a message. I've ante'd half of your name and half of his. So it's your turn.
CONTINUED:

JEWEL
But who are you?

ARCHIE
I'll count to ten. One two three four..

JEWEL
My name is Jewel Jones. His is Victor Talento.

ARCHIE
That's the girl.

(V.O.)
I gave her the whole crop. (Archie talks. Jewel listens growing annoyed.) And by the time I finished she'd developed a healthy frown.

JEWEL
Damn it. Come and put me in a taxi.

ARCHIE
I'll be glad to. We're going to Nero Wolfe's place.

JEWEL
We? Are you crazy?

ARCHIE
It's either that or I take you to a Homicide sergeant named Stebbins and you two can discuss why you and Victor Talento didn't want to be seen together.

Jewel suddenly turns it on.

JEWEL
I'll discuss it with you. I wouldn't mind that. We'll go somewhere.

She takes Archie's arm with both hands.

JEWEL (CONT'D)
I want to talk to you. I know you're the kind of man I could talk to. You'd understand.

(CONTINUED)
They walk towards seventh avenue, arm in arm.

ARCHIE
You know, you could probably
thaw me in four or five hours;
your voice could thaw a
refrigerator, but we just don't
have time.

Archie sees a taxi and flags it. She pouts prettily as she
gets in.

ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Of course that didn't stop her
from trying.

WIPE TO:

EXT. BROWNSTONE - STOOP (STUDIO)- NIGHT

Archie and Jewel mount the steps and ring. Fritz undoes the
chain bolt and opens the door.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
And I was feeling quite brotherly
by the time we got to the
brownstone on 34th Street.

Fritz looks wonderingly at the very pretty Miss Jones as
Archie returns the raincoat to its place.

FRITZ
Good evening, Mr. Goodwin.

ARCHIE
Good evening, Mr. Brenner.
Would you conduct Miss Jones
into the front room? She's
come to marry Mr. Wolfe.

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Wolfe is at his desk reading. Archie sees Jet as he enters.
He looks at the prayer rug, looks at Jet.

ARCHIE
I see you've made some advances
with "my" dog.

(CONTINUED)
WOLFE

The creature was alone and whining in your room. And hungry.
ARCHIE
I've brought company. Before I introduce Miss Jewel Jones, I should...

WOLFE
The tenants of 29 Arbor Street are men.

ARCHIE
I can't deny it.

WOLFE
Yet you produce a female.

ARCHIE
I can chase her out if you want. I could have grilled her myself but it would have been risky.

WOLFE
Confound it.
   (he stares at his book, decides, dog-ears the book)
   Bring her.

Archie exits.

WIPE TO:

Archie opens the door from the front room to usher in Miss Jones. Her preparation for a wistful smile is interrupted as Jet jumps to his feet and makes for her, making sounds of doggy pleasure. He stops in front of her.

WOLFE (CONT'D)
I see. Can you tell us what the dog's name is, Miss Jones?

JEWEL
That's funny. You're asking me what your own dog's name is?

WOLFE
Pfui. Obviously he knows you well, and he belonged to Mr. Kampf. So you knew Mr. Kampf well. What is the dog's name?

JEWEL
Bootsy.

(CONTINUED)
She gives the dog an efficient pat, spots the red leather chair and goes to sit in it. The dog follows her, wagging his tail.

WOLFE
Good heavens. No other name?

JEWEL
Not that I know of.

WOLFE
And your name is Jewel Jones.

JEWEL
Yes, I sing at a night club. But I'm not working now. Believe me, Mr. Wolfe, if I knew anything that could help I'd be perfectly willing to tell you, because I'm sure you're the kind of man that understands.

Archie reacts to her repeating herself.

WOLFE
I try to understand. You knew Mr. Kampf intimately?

JEWEL
Not lately, not for the past two months. But for nearly a year, we were...as you say.

WOLFE
When did you see him last?

JEWEL
Intimately?

WOLFE
At all.

JEWEL
He came to the club last month and spoke to me there.

WOLFE
There was no quarrel.

JEWEL
What was there to quarrel about?
WOLFE
Do you know Mr. Talento intimately?

JEWEL
Well, I used to live there.

WOLFE
With Mr. Talento?

JEWEL
No. I never live with a man. I had the second floor apartment. But about two months ago, I got a little apartment on East Forty ninth Street.

WOLFE
Then you know the others, too - Mr. Meegan, Mr Chaffee and Mr. Aland?

JEWEL
I know Ross and Jerry, but who's Meegan?

WOLFE
A tenant at 29 Arbor Street. Second floor.

JEWEL
Oh, well sure, that's the floor I had. I hope they fixed that damn table for him. I hate furnished apartments, don't you?

WOLFE
In principle, yes. I take it you now have your own furniture? Supplied by Mr. Kampf?

JEWEL
(chuckling)
I see you didn't know Phil Kampf.

WOLFE
Not supplied by him, then?'

JEWEL
A great big no.

(CONTINUED)
WOLFE
By Mr. Chaffee? Mr Aland?

JEWEL
No and No. Look Mr. Wolfe. A friend of mine was mighty nice about that furniture and we'll just leave it at that.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
I could report the rest of it, but it wouldn't get you any further than it did Wolfe. Around 1:30, I took her to Tenth Avenue and put her in a taxi.

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - LATER

Archie comes in. Fritz is serving Wolfe beer.

ARCHIE
Where's Bootsy?

WOLFE
No.

ARCHIE
Where's Jet?

WOLFE
Down in Fritz's room. You don't like him.

ARCHIE
That's not true, but if it means you can't blame him on me, fine. Cramer's coming with a writ in the morning to take him anyway.

WOLFE
No.

ARCHIE
I offer twenty to one. Before noon.

WOLFE
That was roughly my own estimate of the probability, and it seemed (MORE)
WOLFE (CONT'D)

an unfair manner to settle the
obligation you brought upon us.
So I phoned Mr. Cramer and
arranged for you to be present
throughout the fatuous
performance the police have in
mind. While there, you may
flush someone more contributive
to a solution than that volatile
demirep.

ARCHIE
I'll have to look that up, but
I resent it on principal.

{A&E: END ACT TWO}

EXT. 29 ARBOR STREET - DAY

Archie and Jet approach the door, Jet stylishly attached to
Archie by a cord. Purley Stebbins waits with a roly poly
man with rimless glasses, LOFTUS, the dog expert.

LOFTUS
Well, well. Fine animal. What's
his name?

ARCHIE
Bootsy.

LOFTUS
No. A hell of a name. Who did
that to you boy?

As the dog and dog expert get acquainted, Stebbins gets close
to Archie.

STEBBINS
He should have bit you when you
kidnapped him.

ARCHIE
You got it twisted. It's women
that bite me. I've often
wondered what would bite you.

LOFTUS
Where was the body?

STEBBINS
At the bottom of the stairs.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
STEBBINS (CONT'D)
The tenant socked him in his apartment and used the leash to finish him. It took a lot of nerve to carry the body down the stairs to the lower hall. Of course the dog was already outside on the sidewalk. Talento had chased him out.

LOFTUS
So Talento's clean?

STEBBINS
No. Nobody's clean. If it was Talento, he just put the dog in the vestibule first, brought the body down and then let him out when he left. Anything wrong with that?

LOFTUS
It depends on the dog. There wasn't any blood.

STEBBINS
Then that's how I'm buying it. Come on, we've already prepped the tenants.

WIPE TO:

INT. 29 ARBOR STREET - HALLWAY - TALENTO'S DOOR (101) - DAY

As he swings it open the door. Loftus stands behind Jet. Talento is dressed to go out.

TALENTO
Hello, Bootsy.

The other men groan as he pats Bootsy. Stebbins comes up.

STEBBINS
Godammit! I told you not to speak!

TALENTO
Oh. So you did. I'm sorry, I forgot. Do you want to try it again?

(CONTINUED)
STEBBINS
No. That's all. Come on.

ARCHIE
You said in your statement you didn't know the dog.

TALENTO
What?

ARCHIE
You thought it was a stray; you chased it out.

TALENTO
I was in a hurry. I am in a hurry now. The District Attorney wants to see me downtown.

He comes out and pulls the door behind him.

WIPE TO:

INT. 29 ARBOR STREET - HALLWAY - MEEGAN 'S DOOR (201) - DAY

Meegan opens his door (identical to Talento's, but 201), scowling.

STEBBINS
Take a look at the dog. Pat it.

MEEGAN
Pat it yourself.

STEBBINS
Have you ever seen it before?

MEEGAN
No.

He slams the door. The men look at the dog, who is unaffected.

LOFTUS
You must realize that a Labrador can't be expected to go for a man's throat. They're not that kind of dog.

(CONTINUED)
STEBBINS
Thanks. I'll remember that.

INT. 29 ARBOR STREET - HALLWAY - ALAND'S DOOR (301)

Stebbins elbows his way past Loftus and pounds on Aland's door (301). (Identical to Talento's and Meegan's)

STEBBINS
Come on, Aland!

ALAND (O.S.)
The dog don't like me.

STEBBINS
The dog's on a leash.


ALAND
Once at a party at Phil Kampf's, I...I didn't mean to hurt it, but it thought I did. (Jet growls)
What are you trying to do?
Frame me?

STEBBINS
We're making the rounds, Mr. Aland. We didn't want to leave you out.

Aland slams the door. Jet barks indignantly.

INT. 29 ARBOR STREET - HALLWAY - ROSS CHAFFEE'S DOOR (401) - DAY

As he sweeps the door open. He's very handsome and wears an artist's smock covered in paint. Outside his door things are decorated with two of his paintings, extra furniture. He stares at Jet.

STEBBINS
Okay. Pat him then.

He bends to Jet gracefully. He scratches his ears.
27 CONTINUED:

CHAFFEE
Hey beautiful. Do you know
your master's gone? Gone for
good?
(he stands)
Anything else? I'm working and
I like the morning light.

STEBBINS
That's all thanks.

CUT TO:

28 EXT. 29 ARBOR STREET - DAY

The three men and the dog emerge to the daylight.

STEBBINS
Loftus. Give him the dog.

ARCHIE
I am willing to give you a
detailed analysis of the dog's
conduct. It will take about a
week.

STEBBINS
Go to hell, and take that dumb
dog with you.

Archie moseys off with Jet. He stops to let Jet sniff around
and checks behind him as he sees the police cruiser pull
out. Then he looks around and sees a cab and hails it.

THE CAB

pulls up to the curb and Archie leans in. He pulls out a
five and hands it to the CABBIE.

CABBIE
Gee, thanks. For what? Down
payment on my cab?

ARCHIE
You'll earn it, brother.

He opens the back door and invites Jet in.

CABBIE
Hey!

(CONTINUED)
ARCHIE

He's a nice dog. Take care of him and when I return, I'll be reasonable.

(to Jet)
I'll be back when you see me coming down the street.

EXT. 29 ARBOR STREET - DAY

Archie gets next to the list of names and pushes all the buttons and keeps his hand on the doorknob. There is a click and he opens the door.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

Getting information was going to be tricky. My plan was to let the tenants assume - after seeing me with the dog and Purley Stebbins - that I worked with the Homicide division, but that meant I couldn't bring up Jewel Jones because the cops might not have got around to her yet.

INT. 29 ARBOR STREET - HALLWAY ALAND'S DOOR - DAY

Archie knocks on the door. Aland opens it.

ALAND

Look, I need my sleep. I work nights.

ARCHIE

We just need to recheck some points, Mr. Aland. How long did you say Richard Meegan has occupied the apartment downstairs?

ALAND

Nine days. Nine days. I'll spell it for you. He took it a week ago Tuesday. I've told you a dozen times.

ARCHIE

Who was the previous tenant? Just before him.

ALAND

I've told you: a girl had it.

(MORE)
ALAND (CONT'D)
I've told you she's a fine artist
and I've told you she got me my
job at the night club where I
work.
(raking his hair)
Die like a dog. That's what
poor Phil did. He died like a
dog.

ARCHIE
Did she know Philip Kampf?

ALAND
she did. Poor Phil died like a
dog. Like a dog, I tell you.

He shuts the door. Archie starts to head upstairs.

WIPE TO:

INT. 29 ARBOR STREET - HALLWAY - MEEGAN'S DOOR - DAY
Meegan stares suspiciously out a half opened door at Archie.

ARCHIE
We just want to re-check...

MEEGAN
Haven't I seen you before?
Yeah. When I was in Nero Wolfe's
office. Yeah.

ARCHIE
That's right. I'm often there
on business. Now I'm here on
business.
(opens notebook)
How did you come to take this
apartment?

MEEGAN
Oh my god.

ARCHIE
You could have omitted something
important, Mr. Meegan.

(CONTINUED)
MEEGAN
(rattling it off)
I'm a commercial photographer. In Pittsburgh. Two years ago, I married a girl. Margaret Ryan. Seven months later she left me. She left Pittsburgh, too, anyway I couldn't find her and her family didn't hear from her.

ARCHIE
Did you go to the police?

MEEGAN
No. I didn't want to. You want a better reason, but that's mine.

ARCHIE
I'll skip that. Go ahead.

MEEGAN
Three weeks ago I go to a show at the Art Institute. There was an oil, a big one: "Three Mares in a Pasture". It was three women in it, eating apples. One of them was my wife. I knew the minute I saw her.

ARCHIE
What did you do?

MEEGAN
The artist's signature was Ross Chaffee. The catalogue said he lived in New York. And so I came here.

INT. 29 ARBOR STREET - HALLWAY - CHAFFEE'S DOOR - DAY

(FLASHBACK)

Chaffee greets Meegan. Meegan talks but Chaffee keeps shaking his head. Meegan gets aggressive.

MEEGAN (V.O.)
He fed me this line - he used so many different models for his pictures, that it was impossible to remember which

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
MEEGAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
was which. It was so phony I
got a little tactless with him.
INT. 29 ARBOR STREET - HALLWAY - MEEGAN'S DOOR - DAY

Archie is taking notes.

MEEGAN
I'm a photographer. I might forget a model I see for a day, but this dolly sat for him for a month at least. So he was a phony.

EXT. 29 ARBOR STREET - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Meegan talks with Olsen, holding a "TO LET" sign. Talento comes out and eyeballs him. Meegan looks truculent. TWO MODELS accompany MR. BRAUNSTEIN on their way up to Chaffee's.

MEEGAN (V.O.)
Coming in the house, I'd seen a sign that there was an apartment to let and so I rented it. I wanted to be as close as I could to Chaffee and the people who came to see him. There were models, of course, And Aland and Talento. And a man who Chaffee said buys his stuff. His name was Braunstein.

WIPE TO:

INT. 29 ARBOR STREET - HALLWAY - MEEGAN'S DOOR - DAY

ARCHIE
Uuhh. And what did you learn from Philip Kampf?

MEEGAN
Nothing. I told you I never saw him or heard of him. I told you twice.

ARCHIE
What would you say if I said you were seen with him.

MEEGAN
I'd say you were a dirty liar!

He slams the door. ON ARCHIE'S REACTION WIPE TO:
Chaffee lounges at the door. He holds two fat paint brushes which he idly uses to decorate the door of his apartment as he talks.

CHAFFEE
My dear sir. Do you mean to say you think I'm lying?

ARCHIE
There are those who find it hard to believe, Mr. Chaffee, that you couldn't remember who modeled for such an important painting.

CHAFFEE
To what end? What deep design am I cherishing?

ARCHIE
Look, Mr. Chaffee. I don't expect a man like you to pass out dirt just for the hell of it, but any dirt that's connected with this murder is coming out, and if you are keeping some to yourself you're a bigger fool than you look.

CHAFFEE
Quite a speech.

ARCHIE
Thanks. You make one.

CHAFFEE
You have my opinion of Kampf, whom I knew quite well; he was in some respects admirable but he had his full share of faults.

ARCHIE
I gather, despite his inheritance, he was not free with a buck.

CHAFFEE
Yes, that. And he had a peculiar, a cruel sense of humor.

* (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
CHAFEE (CONT'D)
But that's hardly a reason to be killed...Look, I'm losing the light.
Archie gestures: go on.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

Archie is finishing a phone call, Jet at his feet, when Wolfe parades in carrying his morning orchid. Jet immediately gets up and goes to sit at Wolfe's feet, on the prayer rug. Wolfe pats him before he sits. They exchange looks - Wolfe is defensive; Archie smug.

WOLFE
Well? Proceed.

He leans back, closes his eyes. Archie starts to report.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
I reported. When I came to the end, he asked no questions. Instead, he opened his eyes, and started giving orders.

WOLFE
Call the...

ARCHIE
I'm way ahead of you. I called the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. The show seen by Mr. Meegan ended a week yesterday. The picture was lent by a Mr. Herman Braunstein of New York, also seen by Meegan at 29 Arbor Street. It was shipped back to him by express four days ago.

WOLFE
Get him.

ARCHIE
No. I don't think so. He may be a poop. Why don't I go to the residence without phoning? It's probably there, and if I can't get in you can fire me. I'm thinking of resigning anyhow.

Archie gets up and goes out.
ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Since it was my idea, he had his doubts, but he bought it.

INT. BRAUNSTEIN APARTMENT - DAY

Archie cases the joint which would comfortably house airplanes. He is wearing two cameras and carries a portable light. MRS. BRAUNSTEIN, a tall, dignified dame, appears.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
I explained to Mrs. Braunstein that a client of mine wanted to photograph "Three Mares in a Pasture" for his collection. When I had invented all the identification she required, she led me through the arch into a room not quite as big as Madison Square Garden.

Mrs. Braunstein leads Archie to the living room and points. Archie raises his camera and starts photographing the painting. He focuses on one particular portion of the three women eating apples and starts taking close-ups.

MULTIPLE INSERTS OF THREE MARES IN A PASTURE:

And we get closer and closer to Jewel Jones's smiling face.

CUT TO:

{A&E: END ACT THREE}

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

The phone rings. Wolfe reluctantly puts down his book and picks up the phone.

WOLFE
Whom do you want?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BRAUNSTEIN APARTMENT - DAY

Archie has borrowed Mrs. B's phone.

ARCHIE
That's a hell of a way to answer the phone.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

WOLFE
Yes or no?

ARCHIE
I've seen the picture, and I wouldn't have thought the stallion had it in him. It glows with color and life and the blood seems to pulsate under the warm skin...

WOLFE
Shut up! Yes or No?

ARCHIE
Yes. You have met Mrs. Meegan. Would you like to meet her again?

WOLFE
I would.

WIPE TO:

INT. JONES APARTMENT - HALLWAY - DAY

The door opens to reveal Jewel Jones posing in a very nice blue negligee. Archie keeps his distance.

JEWEL
Oh, Archie. I wasn't sure I should see you, but I couldn't resist...

ARCHIE
Cut it, doll. I've just come from Harold Braunstein's apartment where I've seen the most interesting picture.

She's shocked, but she recovers nicely.

JEWEL
What? Come in and tell...

She steps forward and puts a hand on his arm. He removes it.

ARCHIE
Sorry. But I'm afraid of young mares. One kicked me once. So I'll wait here while you change.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Don't put on anything red. Mr. Wolfe dislikes red. He likes yellow. Go on.

JEWEL
But...

ARCHIE
Go on. Or I'll go get Richard Meegan.

She gasps and does not recover.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

JEWEL
Don't call me Mrs. Meegan!

WOLFE
I was only stressing the fact that your identity is not a matter for discussion. Legally, you are Mrs. Richard Meegan. Sit down please.

JEWEL
All right!

Jewel flounces to a chair, pull a handkerchief from her purse and dabs at her eye make up.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
Wolfe was in as bad a humor as she was. He had been compelled to tell Fritz to postpone lunch.

WOLFE
You are a competent liar, madam. Your offhand denial of knowing Mr. Meegan last night was better than competent. When did Mr. Chaffee tell you that your husband was in town looking for you?

JEWEL
I didn't say he had.
WOLFE
Don't be preposterous. When the police learn it was you...

JEWEL
They don't have to learn about me, do they?

WOLFE
Pfui.

JEWEL
Wait. Why I didn't think of it before? You're a detective, you help people in trouble and I'm in trouble. I'll pay you to help me.

WOLFE
Not now; not ever, Miss Jones. When did Mr. Chaffee tell you that your husband was here looking for you?

JEWEL
You won't even listen to me.

WOLFE
Talk sense and I will.

JEWEL
My husband was jealous about me before we got married and then after, he got worse. It got bad. Really bad. Finally, it got so bad I left. I came to New York, found a job and made friends. I modeled for Ross and Phil Kampf found me a job singing. I thought I was safe. Then all of a sudden Ross phoned me that my husband was here. I begged him not to tell.

WOLFE
An idiotic strategy.

JEWEL
The only reason he wants to find me is so he can kill me.
Has he ever killed anyone?

I didn't say anyone. I said me. I don't know what it is. Men just go for me.

Did Mr. Aland and Mr. Talento?

They're good friends of mine. They said they wouldn't tell and they didn't.

I can pay you forty dollars to start with. To start. I'm not just in trouble, I'm in danger of my life, really I am. You're not listening!

He's not. He's watching his forefinger make little circles on his desk blotter. Jewel and Jet look at him, concerned. Jewel looks at Archie, who closes his eyes and does the same thing. Then, Wolfe speaks to Archie.

Get Mr. Chaffee.

Archie gets Chaffee on the phone.

No! I don't want him to know...

Nonsense. Everyone will have to know everything.

She whimpers and remonstrates.

Mr. Chaffee? Nero Wolfe wants to speak with you.

Mr. Chaffee. I need to speak with you and the other tenants of 29 Arbor Street. Of course it's important.
WOLFE (CONT'D)
Well, if you want it to take
less time, then you should bring
the other tenants with you. Of
course, all of you. How should
I know how you will do it? I
could suggest that if Mr. Meegan
is balky, you might as well
tell him that his wife is
here....

Jewel leaps from her chair across the desk at Wolfe, who
backs away. Jet leaps at her as does Archie

JEWEL
No! Don't tell him, Ross!
Don't bring him. Don't...

At this point, Archie grabs her shoulders and yanks her back
so that he lands in the red leather chair with her on his
lap. She is by no means through, so he wraps his arms around
her, pinning her arms to her sides, whereupon she starts
kicking his shins. Finally she goes limp. Archie and Wolfe
exchange looks.

WOLFE
Truly, an affecting sight.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - DAY

Fritz lets the three men in - Chaffee, Aland and Talento.
Then Meegan comes in after. The others look at him like a
pariah. Archie comes down the hall.

ARCHIE
Greetings.
(on their reactions)
Before you ask, I will be happy
to discuss my split personality
as a homicide dick and a private
eye with you after you've talked
to Mr. Wolfe.

TALENTO
You double crosser! You used
me as an opportunity to drag
Jewel Jones into...

The others chime in with their complaints.
ARCHIE
Aah, go climb a rope.

Archie pulls out his gun from his shoulder holster. This stops all of them dead.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
What with Miss Jones's theory that her husband might kill her on sight and the fact that one of you did kill Poor Phil, I have taken a precaution.

He smiles. Shrugs. Puts it back.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
It's just a precaution. But it's loaded.

He pats them down from shoulders to ankles. Not unkindly. He shows them to the office. As he passes the door of the front room, he notices that it opens a crack.

ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I kept Miss Jones in the front room until I had them seated in the office.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - OFFICE - DAY

Archie finishes seating the men in chairs facing Wolfe. Jet lies on his carpet. Wolfe looks at the door to the front room. Archie goes to the door and opens it to reveal Jewel. Meegan jumps up and starts for them.

MEEGAN
You little whore...

Jewel ducks behind Archie with a shriek. Talento and Aland jump to their feet.

TALENTO
See what you've done, Goodwin!

ALAND
Don't you call her...you don't owe him anything, Jewel. Nothing.
Archie stiff arms Meegan and backs him towards his seat. Talento and Aland step to either side.
Archie puts Jewel in a chair next to his. Meegan stares straight at her. She can't pull her eyes off the ground.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
She had the damsel in distress bit down to a science. On the other hand, I had begun to believe that she had a reason.

WOLFE
When this hubbub is over, I'll proceed. I have not been hired to work on this case;
(The SOUND of the doorbell and Fritz answering it.)
The only client I have is a dog...and he came to my office by inadvertence.

He stops. He looks at Archie.

ARCHIE
I put the chain bolt on.

Fritz appears.

FRITZ
Inspector Cramer, sir.

WOLFE
I suppose it was to be expected.

Cramer and Stebbins appear in the office door.

WOLFE (CONT'D)
Luckily, Mr. Cramer, your usual chair is unoccupied.
(Cramer hovers, undecided as to whether he should submit)
You know the gentlemen, of course, but not the lady. Her current name is Miss Jewel Jones. Her legal name is Mrs. Richard Meegan.

CRAMER
Meegan. Meegan's wife? The one in the picture? Where did you get her?

(CONTINUED)
WOLFE
That can wait. No interruptions.
No demands for thirty minutes.

CRAMER
I don't have to...

WOLFE
If you interrupt again, by
heaven, you can take them all
down to your quarters and stew
it out yourself. You know
everything there is to know.
(Cramer sighs. Sits.
Wolfe turns to the three
men.)
But before I come to that, one
point: I offer no comment on
your guile with Mr. Meegan. I
will even concede that there
was a flavor of gallantry in
it, but what you could not know
was that Mr. Meegan had been to
see me that morning.

CHAFFEE
What? Meegan hired you?

TALENTO
I knew something wasn't right.

WOLFE
I refused the job and he stormed
out in a temper, taking Mr.
Goodwin's raincoat instead of
his own.

CRAMER
We know all that. What I wanna
know is...

WOLFE
Hackneyed and dull. Mr. Meegan.
Some two hours ago, I learned
that you maintain that you never
met Phil Kampf. I would like
to hear it straight from you.
Did you ever meet Philip Kampf
alive?

MEEGAN
No.

(Continued)
WOLFE
You don't wish to qualify that?

MEEGAN
No.

WOLFE
Then whose raincoat hangs on
the rack in the hallway?

MEEGAN
What are you talking about?

WOLFE
The raincoat you brought into
this house is in the hall now.
There on the rack.

MEEGAN
I heard of your tricks, Wolfe.
You planted something there.

WOLFE
I will now ask the question
that no one has had the wit to
ask in this whole investigation:
Why did the dog follow Mr.
Goodwin through the turmoil of
the city? Mr. Goodwin is willing
to believe, as many men are,
that he is irresistible both to
dogs and women and doubtless
his vanity impeded his intellect
or he would have reached the
same conclusion that I did.
The dog did not follow him; he
followed the coat.

CRAMER
That smells. How can you account
for Kampf's dog following
Meegan's coat?

WOLFE
I couldn't. I can't. However,
it was unquestionably Mr. Kampf's
dog, therefore it couldn't have
been Mr. Meegan's coat. It is
better than a conjecture that
it was Mr. Kampf's coat.

(CONTINUED)
MEEGAN
What are you talking about?
WOLFE
Where did you get it, Mr. Meegan?

MEEGAN
This is a dirty frame.

WOLFE
That it is Mr. Kampf's can be readily established by examining it.

MEEGAN
You can't prove that's the coat I left here.

WOLFE
I warn you. You are in deadly peril.

MEEGAN
She fixed you against me!

WOLFE
Have you any explanation of how Mr. Kampf's coat came into your possession?

MEEGAN
No. And I don't need any, you big blob!

WOLFE
Then you are done for, sir. For your own coat must be somewhere and I think I know where: in the police laboratory. If you won't explain how you got Mr. Kampf's coat, then explain how he came to wearing yours.

JEWEL
I knew it. I knew it! He wanted to kill me! So he killed Phil.

Meegan springs up, so does Jet, barking and keeping him in his chair. Stebbins grabs him and sits him back down. On a look from Wolfe, Jet subsides and reseats himself.

WOLFE
How do you know that, madam?

(CONTINUED)
JEWEL
Because Phil told me. He wanted me to come back to him. I wouldn't. So he told Dick he knew the girl who posed for that picture. Then he comes and tells me that if I don't come back and be with him, he'll Dick how to find me. So I promised I would. And he laughed. He said he had to go see Dick again anyway because Dick had gone off with his raincoat. Phil thought it was funny that Dick had his raincoat and he had Dick's wife.
(to Meegan)
And I'll bet that's just what he told you, huh? I bet he told you I was coming back to him and he thought that was a good trade - a raincoat for a wife!

She giggles. But the giggles becomes sobbing very quickly. Archie stands to go help but the three men are already there - Chaffee, Aland and Talento. Her sobs increase. Stebbins starts to cuff Meegan. Wolfe takes it for one second and then skedaddles.

CRAMER
All right. Everybody's going down to the station. Including you, Wolfe. Hey, where are you going?

Wolfe ignores him and goes out, slamming the door behind him.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
If there's one thing on earth Nero Wolfe will not be in the room with, it's a woman in eruption.

Cramer has to help Stebbins get Meegan into handcuffs and it isn't easy. He keeps up a stream of invective directed at Jewel, whose sobs get more lavish as Chaffee folds her into his arms. Cramer and Stebbins try to get everyone to shut up. Suddenly the door flies open again. Nero Wolfe fills the doorway. Everyone pauses, compelled by his presence.
WOLFE

Jet.

(CONTINUED)
He gestures. Jet taps obediently out the door to him. Wolfe closes the door. Stebbins looks at Cramer. Cramer looks at Stebbins. They both look at Archie, who shrugs. Then the noise ensues again.

{A&E: END HOUR }

INT. MANHATTAN COURTROOM - DAY THREE

The prosecuting attorney, MANDLEBAUM, struts before the jury making his opening statement in his patented style. The courtroom is packed, the press box is full. The Judge doesn't appear to be paying attention, but he is. He has patented a country style to win the affection of juries.

  MANDLEBAUM`
  The People will show that Leonard Ashe engaged Marie Willis to spy on his wife from her vantage point as an operator at the Bagby Answers Telephone Messaging service. And we will prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that when poor Marie told him that she could not go on and had decided to tell his wife of his espionage, he murdered her in cold blood.

He paces, getting more intense.

  MANDLEBAUM` (CONT'D)
  We will demonstrate that Leonard Ashe was mad with jealousy of his wife. Obsessed. It would be easy to portray this murder as an act of passion. But he did not kill Marie Willis when she told him, "No." He didn't raise his hand in anger. He waited until she was all alone at her job, her back to him at the switchboard, probably answering a call. He came up behind her. She never knew what was coming, poor kid. And now this rich sophisticated man sits before you, wealthy enough to buy a battery of lawyers, arrogantly confident that you won't convict him because he is

(MORE)
MANDLEBAUM` (CONT'D)
a respectable man, married to a famous woman. Don't let him get away with it.

WIPE TO:

DONOVAN
Ladies and Gentlemen. The State has brought you this case out of sheer laziness. Is it plausible that my client killed a woman because she refused to spy on his wife? No. Is it plausible that a grown man would kill to avoid embarrassment? No. Is it plausible that in a fit of rage, a respected theatrical producer killed an aspiring actress because she threatened to undermine his marriage? Possibly. My client's wife is a beautiful famous woman. Leonard Ashe would be a fool not to be madly in love with her. Even so, it's only a theory. A possible explanation. I can come up with a hundred of them. The fact is that the state has not one shred of physical evidence which indicates that my client ever touched Marie Willis, much less grabbed her and choked her to death. In fact on finding her body, he called the police. Is this the behavior of a cold blooded killer?

Mandlebaum interviews witness, THE CORONER. He shows him a glossy photo of the body of MARIE WILLIS

MANDLEBAUM
Is this a picture of the deceased?

CORONER
Yes.

(CONTINUED)
MANDLEBAUM
What was your analysis of the cause of death.

Mandlebaum shows a BLACK AND WHITE GLOSSY 8 x 10 to the jury.

INSERT: 8X10 GLOSSY - MARIE WILLIS STRANGLED AT HER SWITCHBOARD STILL SITTING IN HER CHAIR.

INT. BAGBY ANSWERS INC - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)
FLASHCUT: MARIE WILLIS reaches to plug in a call, from behind her, hands rip off her headset, wrap the cord around her neck twice and pull. Marie's tries to scream and can't.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY 

(CONTINUED)
CORONER (V.O.)
Strangulation. The victim's windpipe was crushed by an electrical wire which was yanked back and held taut around her neck, tight enough to slice into the flesh of her neck.

MANDELBAUM (V.O.)
How long did the murderer have to hold it.

CORONER (V.O.)
Three to five minutes.

MEMBERS OF THE JURY look at the picture and then at LEONARD ASHE. Behind him, ROBINA KEANE puts her hand on his shoulder.

MANDELBAUM
The killer had to hold her, dying, choking, for that long?

DONOVAN
Your honor...

CORONER
Yes.

MANDELBAUM
Your witness, Mr. Donovan.

JIMMIE DONOVAN stands. He looks at Ashe.

DONOVAN
Were there any fingerprints on the cord?

CORONER
Of course not.

DONOVAN
Or any bruise patterns, skin under her fingernails?

CORONER
No.

DONOVAN
Any physical evidence of any kind to connect my client to the body of the victim.

(CONTINUED)
CORONER
Not in my report.

DONOVAN
Thank you. Your honor, we would like to move for dismissal The State has not met the evidentiary burden of proof in a capital crime.

MANDELBAUM
(jumping up)
We can establish a clear motive, your honor. By his own admission, he was there - This man was insanely jealous of his wife and this girl threatened to...

The doors of the courtroom open and NERO WOLFE strides in. His floppy pirate hat, his coat, his gold-capped cane. ARCHIE GOODWIN is right behind him. The whole courtroom stops and stares at his magnificent figure. WHISPERS can be heard: "Wolfe. It's Nero Wolfe. Nero Wolfe." AN ENTERPRISING PHOTOGRAPHER takes his picture.

Wolfe looks around. There are only two spaces left: on a bench, between two women. One of them is gorgeous and one of them is THE SMELLY WOMAN. Wolfe considers his options - neither one pleases him. He goes to sit next to the Smelly Woman. She looks at him in moist surprise. Archie sits next to the Gorgeous Woman. The JUDGE raps for order.

JUDGE
Mr. Wolfe. I am so happy you could join us today for the trial.

WOLFE
I am here only because I was subpoenaed, sir.

JUDGE
Yes, and I believe the subpoena stated that you should arrive at 8 a.m. You are two hours late, but I suppose we should be grateful for small favors. In this day and age, even the highest court in the land must bow before the idiosyncrasies (MORE)
of the famous. And you, of
course, are very famous. I
trust our accommodations suit
you? Are you quite comfortable?
Would you care for us to repeat
the testimony which has been
given?

WOLFE
That is unnecessary, your honor.
I am sure we will be able to
follow the course of the trial.

JUDGE
Is it all right with you if we
go on, Mr. Wolfe.

WOLFE
I assure you, Judge, that I
wish these proceedings to be
concluded with as much dispatch
as justice will allow.

JUDGE
Well, that's reassuring, Mr.
Wolfe.

(to Donovan)
I'm denying your motion.
Continue Mr. Mandlebaum.

MANDELBAUM
The State calls Clyde Bagby.
Archie settles in, as CLYDE BAGBY waddles up to the stand.

WOLFE
Why must I submit to this?

ARCHIE
Because a summons to testify is an occupational hazard if you hope to collect fees from clients.

WOLFE
I had no client.

ARCHIE
Only because you turned Leonard Ashe down when he asked you for help.

WOLFE
Confound it.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
Nero Wolfe had been called to testify as a key witness in the murder trial of a girl he'd never met. Leonard Ashe had come to the office to try to hire him to get Marie Willie to spy on his wife. And Wolfe, who gets hives at the idea of being involved in marital difficulties, refused. So Leonard went and found Marie himself. Two days later, she'd been found dead at her post, and Ashe had been fingered for the job. Wolfe was the only one in the city, besides the victim and of course, me, who could testify to the extent of his jealousy.

MANDLEBAUM
Mr. Bagby, you are the owner of Bagby Answers, Ink.

BAGBY
I am. The Ink stands for incorporated.

(CONTINUED)
MANDELBAUM
Could you describe it, please.

BAGBY
Well, it's a telephone answering service. When you're a person or a firm and you have a phone, you're not only always there to answer it. So you get a phone answering service. I've got four different exchange districts - Gramercy, Plaza, Trafalgar, and Rhinelander. I specialize in private homes instead of firms. When somebody dials a client's number, his light goes on on the switchboard and a buzz synchronizes with the ringing of the client's phone. How many buzzes the girl counts before she plugs in depends on who the client is. We got some want her to plug in after three buzzes, some want her to wait longer. I got one client, he has the girl count fifteen buzzes. That's the kind of specialized service I give my clients. The big outfits, the ones with tens of thousands of clients, they won't do that.

MANDELBAUM
And the way the office on 69th street is set up is unusual, is it not?

BAGBY
Yes. It's an apartment. See on account of the labor law, you can't have women working in an office building after 2 am. And I have to give all night service. So on 69th Street I've got 4 girls working and living right there in the apartment.

WOLFE
tries to get comfortable on the bench. THE SMELLY WOMAN, wears a wide feathered hat and has a large purse at her side.
She smiles at him diffidently, but she does not make room for him or seem aware that her feathers are in Wolfe's air space.
ARCHIE (V.O.)
Wolfe's mood was to be expected. At this hour of the morning, he should have been sniffing his celebrated collection of orchids.

BAGBY
We give specialized services.

MANDLEBAUM
Now, Mr. Bagby, please look at the gentlemen in the dark blue suit sitting next to the officer. Do you know him?

He indicates Leonard Ashe.

BAGBY
Sure, that's Leonard Ashe. He arranged for 24 hour service on his home phone, paid a month in advance.

MANDLEBAUM
Then two days later he made contact with Marie Willis and offered her fifteen hundred dollars to do what?

DONOVAN
Your Honor, the Assistant District Attorney is testifying.

JUDGE
So he is. Let your witness do his own testimony, Mr. Mandelbaum.

MANDLEBAUM
Of course. We'll go the long way if that's what Mr. Donovan prefers. Was Leonard Ashe's number on Marie Willis's board?

BAGBY
Yes, sir.

MANDLEBAUM
Did he contact Miss Willis?

(CONTINUED)
BAGBY
Yes sir. He asked to meet with her. Well, he was a theatrical producer and she wanted to be an actress, so she asked my permission to meet with him. I said, sure. Ashe asked her...

DONOVAN
If your Honor pleases, the witness can't testify as to what Miss Willis and Mr. Ashe said to each other. He was not present.

MANDELBAUM
Of course not. He is reporting what Miss Willis told him had been said.

JUDGE
That should be kept clear. Do you understand that, Mr. Bagby. Only what she told you.

BAGBY
Yes sir. Ashe said...she told me Ashe asked her to listen in on any phone calls to his apartment during the day. And then every night, she was supposed to phone him and report. He gave her five hundred dollars and promised her a thousand more if she went along.

MANDELBAUM
Mr. Bagby, did Marie tell you what kind of information she was supposed to report.

BAGBY
She told me Ashe wanted her to report on any extramarital activity on the part of his wife.

MANDELBAUM
And did she.

(CONTINUED)
Bagby
She told him she wanted to sleep
on it and came to see me. She
said she knew she should have
turned him down but she didn't
want to make him sore.

Mandelbaum
Miss Willis initially agreed,
then?

Bagby
Oh yeah. Until she found out
his wife was her idol, Robina
Keane. Marie studied acting
very seriously.

Mandelbaum
In any case, can you confirm
that the night of her death,
Miss Willis had an appointment
to meet with Mr. Ashe?

Bagby
I tried to talk her out of it.
(MORE)
BAGBY (CONT'D)
I rode with her in the taxi to Ashe's office. I couldn't budge her. She had given her promise to Ashe and wanted to withdraw it. She wanted him to know that she was going to tell his wife.

The very beautiful ROBINA KEANE who sits on the front row exchanges a loving glance with her husband, who looks haggard.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
I had never worshipped Robina Keane as my idol, but I had liked her fine in a couple of shows and she was giving a good performance in her first and only courtroom appearance - either being steadfastly loyal to her husband, or putting on an act, but good in any case. How she and her husband stood with each other was anybody's guess and everybody was guessing. Some said her husband was her whole world and some that she had only quit the stage to have more time for certain promiscuous activities. I wasn't ready to vote.

In the meantime, Wolfe is having his war with the Smelly Lady. Unconscious of his discomfort, she rummages in her purse and comes up with a lace trimmed hanky and damps the perspiration on her face. It's almost too much for Wolfe.

MANDLEBAUM (O.S.)
So you didn't go up to Ashe's office with Miss Willis?

BAGBY (O.S.)
No sir.

MANDLEBAUM (O.S.)
What did you do that evening, after you saw Marie Willis enter that elevator to go up to Ashe's office.
BAGBY
I had to keep a dinner date
with a friend at a restaurant
on 52nd Street. Not long after
I got home, the police called
to say Miss Willis had been
found murdered at 69th street.

DISSOLVE TO:

The office is now a crime scene, as Bagby identifies Marie.
Leonard Ashe is there being questioned by PURLEY STEBBINS.

BAGBY (V.O.)
They wanted me to identify the
body. Leonard Ashe was already
there. He said a man phoned
him - a voice he didn't recognize -
and said if Ashe would meet him
at the office maybe they could
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
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CONTINUED:

BAGBY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
talk sense into Marie. Ashe said he found the door to the office just standing open.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

BAGBY
When he saw her, he leaned out a window and yelled for the police.

Wolfe processes this comment. He turns to Archie.

DONAVAN
Your honor, how does the witness know this?

MANDELBAUM
These facts are established by the police report. Mr. Bagby was there when it was taken.

JUDGE
Gentlemen. Come forward.

WOLFE
We're leaving.

Archie watches as Wolfe sidles past knees and heads for the door. He follows.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
I assumed some vital need was motivating him such as phoning Fritz to discuss the state of the shad roe we were to have for lunch.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - ALLEY - DAY

Wolfe opens a side door, checks down the alley. He comes out; Archie follows.

WOLFE
Which way is Centre Street? We want a taxi and then I want a word with you.

(CONTINUED)
ARCHIE
No, sir. First a word from me. You were told you would follow Bagby to the stand. If you want a taxi, of course, you're going home and that will put you in contempt of court.

WOLFE
I'm not going home.
ARCHIE
Right. Where are you going?

WOLFE
To six-eighteen 69th Street. I'll explain it on the way.

ARCHIE
I'm going back to the courtroom.

WOLFE
No. I'll need you.

ARCHIE
Very touching. This had better be very good.

WOLFE
It's preposterous.

ARCHIE
Yeah, it is. Let's go back inside.

WOLFE
I mean Mr. Mandelbaum's thesis. I concede Mr. Ashe might have murdered that girl. I concede his state of mind about his wife approached mania. But his solution was to hire someone to spy on his wife. A man reluctant to undertake such a chore for himself, would be unlikely to strangle a woman and then open a window and yell for the police.

ARCHIE
Maybe Ashe didn't go there to kill her. But then he got mad.

WOLFE
Pfui. My testimony will support the thesis Mr. Mandelbaum is presenting. If Ashe is convicted, it will be a judicial transgression, and I will not be a party to it.
ARCHIE
You doubt Ashe's guilt and you think your testimony will help tag him, so you're scooting.

WOLFE
That's close enough.

ARCHIE
Not for me. And don't try to guff me that your finely honed sense of justice is putting you to work.

WOLFE
I can't go home. If I go home they will come and drag me back to the witness box.

ARCHIE
So why make the sacrifice? For who? For Ashe? Go back inside.

WOLFE
No. It's not what I like, it's what I don't like.

ARCHIE
What?

WOLFE
Being called as a witness is one thing, being used to corroborate a theory I can't support is another, but being forced to sit there on that confounded bench with a smelly woman pressed up against me...

ARCHIE
Oh. So that's how it stands. Well, it's a fine day, the bank account could use a shot in the arm and there's always a chance that Ashe will be grateful.

Wolfe starts up the alley.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
I admit that woman was smelly.
(MORE)
ARCHIE (CONT'D)
But I have a good nose and it was Tissot's Passion Flower, which costs eighty bucks an ounce.

WOLFE
It was smelly.

ARCHIE
What are you going to do at 69th Street?

WOLFE
I don't know.

ARCHIE
Good.

{A&E: END ACT ONE}

CUT TO:

EXT. BAGBY ANSWERS, INC - DAY

Archie pays the cabbie and then opens the door for Wolfe.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
The apartment building that was the home of Bagby Answers, Ink, had last been painted about the time I started working for Nero Wolfe.

Wolfe emerges and arranges himself, recovering from the horror of the cab ride. He looks about magisterially and then faces the steps. Archie looks with him. It's a dump. They look at each other and start in for the door.

ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Wolfe and I were in a peculiar position. Normally he thinks up a batch of errands for me and sends me out to do them using my intelligence guided by experience, while he sits home in his favorite chair reading whatever book strikes his fancy and drinking beer provided by Fritz.

(MORE)
ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But that arrangement was out because if he went home now, the court would surely come get him. Therefore, we had to do errands together. I decided to tackle the delicate question of who was in charge.
(out loud)
Since this is your first time running the kind of errands you usually send me on, why don't you take the lead? Are we going to be brush peddlers or plumbers?

WOLFE
Don't be ridiculous.

They go inside.

Wolfe enters the living room of the apartment, followed by Archie. He glares at PEARL who works a board and is a receptionist. The other two women, MISS HART and MISS VELARDI work their boards.

WOLFE
I am Mr. Wolfe and this is my assistant, Mr. Goodwin. We've just come from the courthouse where Leonard Ashe is being tried.

(MORE)

(Continued)
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CONTINUED:

WOLFE (CONT'D)
(on a look from Archie)
We've been sent to check on subpoenas that have been served on witnesses. Have you been served?

PEARL
Umm...I...no.

WOLFE
Where are Miss Hart, Miss Velardi and Miss Weltz? They were all present on July 15th.

On hearing her name, ALICE HART takes off her headphone and comes forward. MISS VELARDI does not turn around but sits staring at her board.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
It had been weeks since those names had appeared in the papers, but Wolfe's skull had a filing system even better than Saul Panzer's.

Hart gets into Wolfe's personal space.

ALICE
Aren't you Nero Wolfe, the detective?

WOLFE
Yes. You are Alice Hart?

ALICE
(stepping closer)
Yes. What do you want?

WOLFE
(stepping back)
I want information.

ALICE
(stepping closer)
We have no information. Who sent you here?

WOLFE
Autokinesis.
(MORE)
WOLFE (CONT'D)
There's a cardinal flaw in the assumption that Leonard Ashe killed Marie Willis. It has made me curious and when I'm curious there is only one cure – the whole truth, and I intend to find it.

Alice Hart starts to tell Wolfe off, then changes her mind.

ALICE
Take my board, will you, Pearl? Miss Weltz has the day off, but Miss Velardi and I can see you. We'll go to my room.

WOLFE
One moment, Miss Hart. A point not covered in the newspaper accounts.
(pointing at board) Marie Willis was found slumped over her switchboard. Presumably she was seated at the switchboard when the murderer arrived. But you live here, you and the others. If the murderer was Mr. Ashe, how did he know she was alone on the premises.

ALICE
I don't know. Perhaps she told him she would be. Is that the flaw?

WOLFE
No. But I would prefer someone with surer knowledge that she was alone. Since she was small and slight, even you are not excluded, or these others. Not that I am now prepared to charge you with murder.

ALICE
I hope not.

She leads them to a door at the end of the room, into a hallway. Wolfe and Archie exchange a look and follow.
CONTINUED: (3)

Archie glances back at the room. Bella and Pearl are not looking after them but sit hunched over their boards, staring straight ahead.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
As I followed Wolfe, I was thinking that the reaction we were getting was a little exaggerated. It would have been natural under the circumstances for Miss Velardi and the other girl to turn in their seats for a good look at us, but they didn't. They sat rigid, staring at their boards.

INT. BAGBY ANSWERS - ALICE'S BEDROOM - DAY

The room is a surprise. There's a chair almost big enough for Wolfe. The furniture is comfortable and over the mantle...

ARCHIE
I may not be an art critic, but isn't that a Van Gogh over your fireplace?

ALICE
What's the flaw?

WOLFE
I'm the inquisitor, Miss Hart, not you. Where did you get that piece?

ALICE
That's none of your business.

WOLFE
It certainly isn't. But there will be no limit to my impertinence with you. If you refuse to say where you got it, I'll put a man on it, a competent man and he'll find out.

(MORE)
WOLFE (CONT'D)
You can't escape being badgered, madam; the question is whether you will suffer it from me, or face a prolonged inquiry among your friends by meddlesome men.

ALICE
What does it matter where I got the picture?

WOLFE
Probably nothing about you matters. But the picture is a treasure and this is an odd address for it. Do you own it?

ALICE
Yes.

WOLFE
What is your salary?

ALICE
(tightly)
Eighty dollars a week.

WOLFE
Not enough for your extravagance. An inheritance? Alimony?

ALICE
I have never married. I had some savings, and I wanted it. I wanted it. If you save for fifteen years, you have a right to something.

WOLFE
You have indeed. Where were you the evening that Miss Willis was killed?

ALICE
Out in Jersey. In a car, with Bella Velardi. To get cooled off - it was a hot night. We got back after midnight.

WOLFE
In your car.

(CONTINUED)
ALICE
No, Helen Weltz let us take hers. She has a Jaguar.

Archie whistles. To Wolfe.

ARCHIE
A Jaguar is quite a pricey machine. Counting taxes and extras, four thousand bucks isn't enough. You couldn't squeeze into one.

WOLFE
Has any client ever asked you listen in on calls to his number.

ALICE
Certainly not.

WOLFE
Did you know of Miss Willis's regard for Robina Keane?

ALICE
We all knew. Marie did imitations of her.

WOLFE
When did she tell you of her decision to tell Robina Keane that her husband meant to spy on her.

ALICE
I didn't say she had.

WOLFE
Did you know the boyfriend?
(on her look)
Marie Willis's boyfriend, Guy Unger?

ALICE
Not very well.

They continue talking. Archie watches.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
Wolfe was playing a game I had often watched him at, tossing (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
balls at random to see how they bounced. It's a good way to find a lead if you haven't got one, but it may take all day and he didn't have it. If one of the females in the front room took a notion to call the cops or the DA's office, we might have visitors any minute. As for Guy Unger, Miss Hart gave the opinion that he and Marie Willis had enjoyed each other's company but that's all. She knew nothing of a crisis that might have made Unger want to end the friendship with a plug cord.

Wolfe abruptly rises.

WOLFE
That's all. For now. Send in Miss Velardi.
ALICE
Her room is next door. This way.

She's out the door eagerly, but she waits for them.

ARCHIE
Obviously she doesn't want to leave us alone with Van Gogh.

WIPE TO:

INT. BAGBY ANSWERS - MISS VELARDI'S ROOM - DAY

It's a mess. Dainties on the chair backs and an unmade bed. None of the drawers or doors are exactly closed. Alice shows them in and disappears. Wolfe hates the mess and sits himself down in a chair that is too small for him.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
Bella Velardi's closet door and drawers were open to cracks of various widths. One of the reasons I am still shy a wife, is the risk of getting a crack lover.

WOLFE
Look around.

Archie goes to work. He pulls the closet door open. A jungle of duds bulges out. He closes it. He moves on to a stack of paperbacks on a little table. He picks up the one on top:

ARCHIE
The library. One Mistake Too Many featuring a double breasted floozy shrinking from a muscle bound baboon. Ahah.

He picks up The Racing Form and Track Dope.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
She's philanthropist. She donates dough to the cause of equine genetics.

WOLFE
Meaning.
ARCHIE
She bets on horse races.

WOLFE
Does she lose much?

ARCHIE
She loses. Probably tidy sums since she takes two house journals.

WOLFE
Open drawers. Have one open when she comes in. I want to see how much impudence these creatures will tolerate.

Archie goes to the smaller chest. In the second drawer he opens, he finds photographs, and he flips through them. He shows Wolfe one. Wolfe holds it up.

INSERT: A SNAP SHOT
BELLA and HELEN WELTZ with GUY UNGER in bathing suits on a boat.

WOLFE (CONT'D)
Guy Unger.
(pockets it)
Find more of him.

At the SOUND of Bella approaching, Archie opens another drawer of the small chest and inspects its contents. As Bella enters, he shuts it in no hurry and turns. She sees it, and he lets her see it, but she doesn't react.

She starts tidying up in a half-hearted way.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
I was ready to meet a yelp of indignation, but didn't have to. With her sassy face and sassier eyes, Bella Velardi looked perfectly capable of indignation, but her nerves were too busy with something else. She decided to pretend she hadn't caught me with her drawer open and that was plain screwy. It was a cinch these phone operators had something on their minds.

(CONTINUED)
BELLA
Miss Hart says you want to ask me something.

WOLFE
Yes. If I put three investigators on the job of finding out how much you lost last year betting on horses, how long do you think it would take them?

BELLA
Why, I...I don't know.

(Continued)
WOLFE
With luck, five hours. Without it, five days. It would be simpler for you just to tell me. How much have you lost?

BELLA
How do you know I've lost anything?

WOLFE
Archie. Resume your search. There's fair chance that she keeps a record of gains and losses.

BELLA
Look, Mr. Wolfe. There's no secret about my liking to bet, but the amounts - that's different. I have friends who - well they don't want people to know, so they give me money to bet for them. So it's about a hundred dollars a week, sometimes two hundred. I mean, I only make $65 dollars a week.

Wolfe doesn't even dignify the lie with a comment.

WOLFE
In summer weather, when one of you is on duty there at night, are the windows open? The shades up?

BELLA
When it's hot, yes.

WOLFE
It was hot July fifteenth. Were the windows up that night?

BELLA
I don't know, I was out in Jersey. In a car with Alice Hart. To get cooled off. We got back after midnight.

ARCHIE
Well, that settles that.

(MORE)
ARCHIE (CONT'D)
One woman might conceivably
lie, but surely not two,
especially in the same words.

WOLFE
If the windows were open and
the shades up, would anyone in
her senses have killed Marie
Willis so exposed to view?
What do you think?

BELLA
Why, no. That would have
been...no, I don't think so.

WOLFE
Then she - or he - must have
drawn the shades before
proceeding. How could Leonard
Ashe have managed that without
startling Miss Willis?

BELLA
I don't know. He might have -
No. I don't know.

WOLFE
(producing snapshot)
When was this taken?

Bella jumps up, grabs it. Wolfe holds on. Finally she
explodes.

BELLA
You took that from my drawer!
What else did you take? Get
out of here and stay out!

Wolfe returns the snap to his pocket. Rises.

WOLFE
Come, Archie. There seems to
be a limit after all.

INT. BAGBY ANSWERS, INC. - FRONT ROOM - DAY

They go out. Alice Hart is waiting next to Pearl. Bella
grabs Wolfe's arm.

(CONTINUED)
BELLA
Wait. I didn't mean to flare up like that.

WOLFE
When was the picture taken.

BELLA
About two weeks ago. Two weeks ago Sunday. The other woman is Helen Weltz and the man is Guy Unger. We were having a day on his boat, that's all. Guy and Helen and Ralph and me. Ralph is my boyfriend. And Guy. Well, since Marie died, he's kinda taken an interest in Marie.

(on a look from Alice)
Look, I told Marie she was asking for trouble going to Mr. Ashe like that. I told her she was asking for it and she might get it. But she was so daddled on Robina Keane. Well, you couldn't talk to her.

WOLFE
Where is Miss Weltz?

ALICE
This is her day off.

WOLFE
I know. Where can I find her?

PEARL
She's probably at the place she rented up in Westchester, near Katonah. Do you want me to phone and find out?

WOLFE
Yes, if you would.

Pearl places the call.

ARCHIE
Are we going to Katonah in a taxi?
WOLFE
No. We are going to Pete's garage for the car.

WIPE TO:

EXT. PETE'S GARAGE - DAY

Wolfe and Archie stand waiting for PETE to bring the car down. A UNIFORM COP passes them and gives Wolfe the eye. Archie turns away; Wolfe, of course ignores it.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
For more years than I can remember, Inspector Cramer of Homicide has dreamed of locking Nero Wolfe up, at least over night. And now, with Wolfe in flight, his dream was close to coming true. I didn't think he'd be so excited he'd put out an all points bulletin in that regard, but seeing a cop give Wolfe a second glance made me pause. I told myself it was just nerves. Wolfe's size and carriage rated that much notice without any special stimulation.

WOLFE
We could walk home from here in four minutes.

ARCHIE
I was expecting this. Yes, sir. I knew it was coming - it's your genius working. To go to Katonah, we have to drive. To drive we have to get the car. To get the car we have to go to the garage.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
ARCHIE (CONT'D)
And the garage is so close to home that we might as well go and have lunch first. Once in the house, with the door bolted, we could reconsider this insanity of driving to Westchester.

Wolfe goes to a phonebooth.

WOLFE
I should call Fritz.

ARCHIE
Yeah. What's he cooking for lunch, I wonder.

WOLFE
Fritz? If there are any callers, tell them you have not heard from us. Ah. No. Not at all. I don't know about dinner. You cannot expect us until we arrive. (he hangs up, glaring)
There have been four phone calls. One from an officer of the court, one from the District Attorney's office, and two from Inspector Cramer.

ARCHIE
Ouch. Are you sure you don't want to go home?

WOLFE
Shut up.

ARCHIE
Yes, sir.

PETE drives up in the sedan and rolls up to a stop.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

The car bumps towards Helen's country cottage.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
In his own comfortable chair surrounded by his books, Wolfe can usually keep his genius under control, but faced with a perfumed

(MORE)
ARCHIE (V.O.)(CONT'D) woman, he ran away and now he was stuck. He couldn't go back to court. He couldn't go home. So he was headed into the wilds of Westchester County to talk to a woman who might be as smelly as the one he had run from.

WOLFE (V.O.)
Archie. Decrease the velocity of this deathtrap.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
If this deathtrap goes any slower, we won't get there until next Tuesday.

They hit a bump.

WOLFE (V.O.)
What was that? Was that the tire? Has it blown out? Stop the car immediately.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
No sir. That was called a bump and it is unavoidable in Westchester County. As a matter of fact, we are headed into a whole nest of them, so hold on.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

Archie pulls the car up next to a yellow Jaguar. Two people appear, drinks in hand, country clothes. Neither HELEN WELTZ or GUY UNGER are feeling any pain.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
The dash clock said 2:38 when I turned off a dirt road into a rutted driveway and stepped on the brake to avoid hitting into a bright yellow Jaguar. Two people immediately appeared. Helen Weltz looked bright and friendly and not like a murderer at all. I wish I could say Guy Unger did, but he just looked mean.
HELEN
You're Archie Goodwin? I'm Helen Weltz. Mr. Wolfe? It's really you. Such a pleasure. This is Guy Unger. Come come come this way. We're enjoying the last gasp of autumn color.

She leads them to the OLD TREE in the shade of which a full bar has been set up on a rustic table. Wolfe lowers himself into one of the little wooden slatted chairs which have been painted.

HELEN (CONT'D)
(gaily)
What will you have? We have martinis and martinis and...martinis. Or if you're cold, I can fix you a hot toddy.
(Wolfe gives a stiff silent shake of his head)
Ohhh. You might as well. Otherwise you came all this way for nothing. I don't know anything. I was out on the Sound on a boat with Mr. Unger that day.

She pours herself another highball.

WOLFE
When did Mr. Unger get here?

HELEN
Why, he just...
UNGER
I'm looking on, that's all.
I'm not an impartial observer,
because I'm partial to Miss
Weltz, but...

WOLFE
Let me explain more fully.
When I spoke to Miss Hart and
Miss Velardi I was insufferable,
and they should have flouted
me, but they were afraid to,
and I assume that you know why.
I also assume that, after I
called, you phoned Mr. Unger,
and he was concerned enough to
get here before I arrived.

UNGER
Forget it. Miss Weltz invited
me yesterday to come out this
afternoon.

HELEN
(laughing)
Behave yourself, Guy. You know
what he said when I told him
Nero Wolfe was coming? He says,
"Maybe he's famous for brains,
but I'm going to make him prove
it!", something like that. I
don't pretend to have brains.
I'm just scared.

WOLFE
Scared of what, Miss Weltz?

HELEN
Scared of you! Wouldn't anybody
be scared if they knew you were
coming to pump them?

WOLFE
You have the alternative of
snubbing me, yet you suffer me.
Why?

She pats Wolfe on the shoulder and then on top of the head.

(CONTINUED)
HELEN
I didn't want to miss a chance
to touch the great Nero Wolfe,
that's why!
She downs her bourbon and goes to pour some more.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Brrr.

WOLFE
Now you have touched me, yet you still suffer me. I can't expect to prove Mr. Ashe innocent; the best I can hope for is to establish a reasonable doubt. Can you give it to me?

HELEN
(giggling)
Sorry, but you're funny. The way they kept after us and after us in the District Attorney's office and you come and expect to drag it out of me in twenty minutes.

She drinks again, controls her shudder, and goes back for more, but Unger beats her to the bottle.

UNGER
You've had enough, Helen. Take it easy.

She stares at him, drops her glass into his lap and sits back down.

WOLFE
The most I expect, Miss Weltz, is support for my belief that you people share knowledge of something that you don't want revealed, and you have given me that.

HELEN
I didn't tell you anything.

WOLFE
Nonsense. You are on the edge of hysteria.

HELEN
I am not!

(CONTINUED)
UNGERTake it easy, Helen. Why do you doubt his guilt, Wolfe.

WOLFE Divination. Contrariety.

UNGER So you're shooting at it on spec. Do you regard me as a suspect?

WOLFE Yes.

UNGER Look. Me and Marie weren't engaged or anything like that. We had fun. The week before the murder, we went up the Hudson, in my boat. But there was nothing in it.

WOLFE What do you do, Mr. Unger?

UNGER Oh for God's sake.

WOLFE The papers were vague. Broker, I believe. Have you handled any transactions for Bagby Answers, Incorporated?

UNGER Why do you ask that? Just curious?

WOLFE Mr. Unger. Since apparently you've heard of me, you may know that I dislike riding in cars. Do you suppose I would have made this excursion to a place called Katonah completely at random?

UNGER Let's take a little walk. I want to speak with you privately.

(CONTINUED)
I don't like conversing on my feet. Archie?

Archie stands up.

Let's go rake some leaves, Miss Weltz.

Helen Weltz looks back and forth between Unger and him. Unger doesn't give her a clue. Archie takes her to the stairs.

When they are gone, Wolfe and Unger contemplate each other.

Well, sir. You wished to speak with me.

Yeah. Why'd you ask me if I did work for Bagby.

Idle curiosity.

You're lying. Why'd you come here, why'd you go to the office if you haven't concocted some crazy idea about Bagby?

The most I expected out of my journey was support for my belief that you people have common knowledge of something you don't want revealed. And you have given me that. I will now go to work, although I am not too sanguine. It's quite possible that when I've squandered my time and the time of my assistants, I will find that what you people are nervous about has nothing at all to do with the death of Marie Willis. But I can't know that until I know what it is. And I will know, sir.
UNGER
Yeah, yeah. Well, guess what - I was playing dumb before. I do know something about you. You've come all this way in a car, and you hate cars. You're also shooting at this on spec and you never investigate anything for free. So suppose I offered you some cash? What if I offered you five thousand dollars.

WOLFE
I like money and require a lot of it to live as I see fit. And five thousand dollars is a handsome sum. What would you expect in exchange.

UNGER
I have to spell it out for you?

WOLFE
I never undertake a job unless the client can specify an objective.

UNGER
And they said you were smart.

WOLFE
I will repeat to you what I have said to others. I have seen a flaw in the case against Leonard Ashe, and it has made me curious. When I become curious there is only one cure. The truth. If I undertake an investigation on your behalf, I will still look for the truth whether it is to your benefit or not.

UNGER
All I want you to do is to go back to the court and give your testimony. Stop stalling. That crumb deserves to get the chair after what he did to Marie.

(Continued)
Then you had more feelings for her than you earlier referred to?

You didn't know her. She...it doesn't matter, she's gone.

I am surprised that no one seems to think your relationship was more than casual.

You are stupid someways. You think I'm gonna tell the police that we were in love, that we were making plans? I'd be sitting in that dock. But I want her killer caught.

You want revenge?

Yes.

I am luckier man than you then. I only want the truth.

What if I raise the price. What about 10,000 dollars.

Pfui.

For 10,000 dollars a man should be able to do his duty.

You interest me. What is your concept of duty? What theory of justice could compel me to help convict a man I am convinced is innocent?
I don't know anything about theory. I only know I want you to go back to that courtroom. And I'll pay you 10,000 dollars to go.

They pick their way across the meadow. Helen is ahead of Archie, rushing.

You know, this is far enough unless he uses a megaphone.
(no answer)
Me, I've gotta stay in sight.
I admit he'd be a maniac to jump Mr. Wolfe, but being involved in a murder makes people do strange things.

He's not involved in a murder!

He will be when Mr. Wolfe gets through with him.

She drops down in the grass, buries her face in her hands and starts to shake. But she doesn't cry, she just shakes. Archie squats and takes a firm grip on her.

That's no way to do it. Open a valve and let it out. If Unger thinks it's me and flies to the rescue that will give me an excuse to plug him.

That's enough.

Archie loosens his grip; she looks up at him.
HELEN (CONT'D)

My God. It'd be wonderful if you put your arms around me and told me, 'It's all right my darling, I'll take care of everything, leave it to me.'

Archie does so.

ARCHIE

It's all right. My darling, I'll take care of you. Leave it to me. Now what?

HELEN

Why didn't I get me a man? I could have had a dozen, but no, I had to do it all by myself. And now here I am, with a Jaguar and no man. How do you set fire to a car?

ARCHIE

Pour gasoline all over it, toss a match and jump back fast. Be careful what you tell the insurance company or you'll end up in the can.

HELEN

Is it a bluff? Is he just trying to scare something out of us?

ARCHIE

No, not just. If he scares something out of you, fine. If not, he'll get it the hard way. But he will get it. You may get hurt.

HELEN

I'm already hurt.

ARCHIE

Hurt worse.

HELEN

I guess I can be.

She picks a flower - Queen Anne's lace - she twirls it.

(CONTINUED)
HELEN (CONT'D)
I used to feel delicate, just like one of these.
(she crushes it)
Where can I see Nero Wolfe around nine o'clock in town?

ARCHIE
Come on and tell him now.

HELEN
I can't. I don't dare.

ARCHIE
On account of Unger.

HELEN
Yes.

ARCHIE
We'll go and come back when he leaves.

HELEN
He's not going to leave; he came to take me back to the city.

ARCHIE
Then tell me. I'm trained to be a tape recorder. Better than one. You can trust my memory, and I guarantee to repeat it to Wolfe word for word.

HELEN
I don't dare. You don't understand. I'm not a hero.

ARCHIE
Are you afraid for your life?

UNGER
Helen! Helen!

She scrambles up and Archie gives her a hand. They go towards Wolfe and Unger.
ARCHIE
(softly)
Call Wolfe's house when you're ready. Past midnight, 3 AM. It doesn't matter.

HELEN
Are you going to tell him?

ARCHIE
A man named Fritz will answer. Tell him you're the Queen of Hearts. He'll know what to do.

HELEN
If you tell him, I'll deny it.

ARCHIE
You got that? The Queen of Hearts?

(she nods)
Now laugh.

She does. So does he. Merrily they approach the others. But Wolfe and Unger are in no laughing mood.
WOLFE
We're through here, Archie.

(A&E: END ACT TWO)

WIPE TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The Sedan comes down the road. The car pulls over to the side, under a tree. Archie gets out of the car and leans against the car. Wolfe rolls down the window.

ARCHIE
We got a nibble from Helen Weltz.

WOLFE
You are the connoisseur of comely women. Is she a murderess in a funk, trying to wiggle out?

ARCHIE
She's trying to wriggle all right, but out from what I would need six guesses. Is Unger wriggling too?

WOLFE
Yes. He's offered me money. First five thousand dollars, and then ten.

ARCHIE
I'll be damned. I've often thought that you ought to get out more. What did you tell him?

WOLFE
That I resented and scorned his attempt to suborn me.

ARCHIE
He was in a panic and it'll wear off. Why not string him along?

WOLFE
Not enough time. I intend to appear in court tomorrow morning.

(CONTINUED)
ARCHIE
Tomorrow. With what, for God's sake?
WOLFE
We can't go home. Mr. Cramer will have a man posted there. Is Saul Panzer's apartment conveniently located?

Archie gets back in.

ARCHIE
Yes, but he's only got one bed. Lily Rowan has plenty of room in her penthouse, and we'd be welcome, especially you.

WOLFE
We'll manage at Saul's. Let's stop at Dixie's on the way into town.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
He gripped the strap. I started the ignition.

INT. DIXIE'S JOINT - 170TH STREET - NIGHT
Wolfe devours chili on a stool and converses with DIXIE. In the background Archie makes phone calls at the phone at the bar.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
By eight o'clock, Wolfe had put away three orders of chili con carne at a little dump in Harlem where a guy named Dixie knew how to make it. I spent the time phoning Saul and Fritz, and invested an extra dime in Lon Cohen. When he heard my voice he said...

INTERCUT WITH LON COHEN AT GAZETTE

LON
Are you calling from the slammer?

ARCHIE
No. Has our absence been noticed?

LON
The whole town's in an uproar.

(MORE)
LON (CONT'D)
A raging mob has torn the
courthouse down.
(MORE)
LON (CONT'D)
We're running a fairly good picture of Wolfe, but we need a new one of you. Could you drop in at the studio, say in five minutes?

ARCHIE
Sure, glad to. But I'm calling to settle a bet. Is there a warrant out for us?

LON
You're damn right there is. Judge Corbett signed it, first thing after lunch. Look, Archie, let me send a man...

ARCHIE
Much obliged, but if I told you where I am, you'd be an accomplice and have to take your own picture.

He hangs up and comes back to Wolfe, who is starting on another bowl.

WOLFE
Chili is one of the great peasant foods, one of the few America has contributed to world cuisine. Eaten with cornbread, sweet onion and sour cream, it contains all five of the elements deemed essential by the sages of the Orient: sweet, sour, salty, pungent and bitter. Like the best of French cuisine, it begins with good meat, chopped not ground, but key to Dixie's success are the onions and tomatoes he owes to his grandmother, who grows them on the south side of the vacant lot behind his house in full sun. He begins his batch on Sundays. By Tuesday it is edible. By Thursday, it is unforgettable.
ARCHIE
Well, there is a warrant in case you're interested. And I didn't try to get Jimmy Donovan, Leonard Ashe's attorney.

WOLFE
Why not?

ARCHIE
What could I say? That Nero Wolfe had something urgent for him and leave a telephone number? He's a sworn officer of the court, and he'd have to serve the warrant on you. Not to mention the one on me.

WOLFE
You're enjoying this.

ARCHIE
I am like hell. I'm a fugitive from justice.

WOLFE
Phone Saul. Ask him if he's heard from Miss Weltz. Then call and arrange for us to see Mrs. Leonard Ashe.

ARCHIE
Oh yeah. I get the easy ones. She's probably sitting there right now hoping a couple of strange detectives will drop in. Are we pretending to be from the court again? Shall I say we are Judge Wolfe and Judge Goodwin?

WOLFE
No. We are ourselves.
64 OMITTED
AND
65

64
AND
65
INT. ASHE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Wolfe and Archie wait with a disapproving MAID while Robina makes her entrance.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
I hadn't managed to speak directly to Mrs. Ashe. A female voice told me she was resting and absolutely could not come to the phone. I asked the voice if it had ever heard of Nero Wolfe. It said it had. I told it to tell Mrs. Ashe that if she didn't see Nero Wolfe that she'd never stop regretting it. Not very clever, I admit, but I was pressed for time.

ROBINA
I'm dead tired. I'm empty. Completely empty. Sit, won't you. Your man said on the phone that I would regret it the rest of my life if I didn't see you. Will I?

WOLFE
I'll be as brief as I can. I have information that may not exculpate your husband, but it should at least raise a reasonable doubt in the mind of the jury. However, it would take a prolonged investigation to get it in the form of admissible evidence.

ROBINA
I hate to inform you of this but the trial's already started, Mr. Wolfe.
WOLFE
I have in mind a short cut. To take it I must have a talk with your husband.

ROBINA
Ah. And how, pray tell, will you manage to do that?

WOLFE
You, Madam. You have a wide acquaintance and great personal charm. It would not be too difficult for you to get permission to talk with your husband tomorrow morning; and you can take me with you.

ROBINA
But what do you wish to say? Is it about me?

(CONTINUED)
I can tell you nothing without compromising my plan.

Well, I suppose I have nothing to lose. Nothing more to lose. But if I do this, should I not tell Mr. Donovan?

You must not. Not only would he forbid it, he would prevent it. This is for you alone.

For me, alone. My God, it would be such a relief to do something.

Of course, I have made the assumption that you don't want your husband convicted of murder.

You didn't have to say that. My husband's not a fool, but he has acted like one. I love him very dearly. Where can I reach you?

I gave her Saul's number. She went with us to the foyer but she wasn't there. Her mind was so glad to have a job that it had left us entirely.

After circling Saul's block three times, we decided that Cramer had not had enough genius to post a man there and went inside.

Saul opens the door cautiously and then greets Wolfe and Archie and brings them into his apartment. It is a good big room, with windows, one wall of books and another one taken up with a grand piano. There are interesting objects and pictures, such as elephant tusks and large chunks of minerals.
The chairs are big enough for Wolfe and he takes one with pleasure.
WOLFE
A good room. Satisfactory. I congratulate you. Has Fritz phoned you with news of that woman?

SAUL
The Queen of Hearts? No, sir. Will you have some beer?

Wolfe's pleasure shows. He needs this.

WOLFE
I will indeed. If you please.

MONTAGE:
Saul serves Wolfe beer and then a bewildering array of liver pate, herring, sturgeon, pickled mushrooms, melon and three different kinds of cheese and seven bottles of imported beer. Wolfe is delighted and Archie's nose is out of joint.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
In the next three hours, Saul served Wolfe seven bottles of beer, sturgeon, pate, pickled mushrooms, Tunisian melon, and three different kinds of cheese.

Wolfe tries the cheese. There's cheddar, gorgonzola and very runny brie-like cheese.

WOLFE
Vermont cheddar, Piedmont gorgonzola and...Columierre?

SAUL
Vacherin Mont D'or.

WOLFE
Impossible. It is made from the milk of cows who have been fed the last cutting of grass before the first snow. It is available for weeks only in September.

SAUL
Summer in the Alps stayed late this year. I have a friend who keeps an eye out for me.

(CONTINUED)
WOLFE
Satisfactory. Next year have him keep an eye for me.

ARCHIE (V.O.)
Naturally, the first time Wolfe ate under his roof, Saul wanted to give him good grub, okay, but the three kinds of cheese was piling it on.

WIPE TO:

The two men play checkers. Archie lounges and advises.

WOLFE
I notice that you have the new translation of Aristotle's Analytics.

SAUL
It's more colloquial. It provides a voice.

He jumps a man of Wolfe's.

WOLFE
What is your estimation of it's value?

SAUL
No one sets out the problem of deducing a conclusion from a set of disparate facts so clearly.

WOLFE
But is it of use? He never condescended to actual practice. King me.

SAUL
Well...he's Aristotle.

WOLFE
Indeed. He defined the terms for all of us.

ARCHIE
Yeah, yeah. That's certainly true.

(MORE)
ARCHIE (CONT'D)
I will always remember his
fashion advice. Never mix togas
and sandals on a windy day.
It's ruled my life.

Saul and Wolfe react. Saul jumps three of Wolfe's men.
Wolfe jumps two of his. They are each left with two kinged
pieces.

ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Time didn't drag too heavily,
what with three hot games of
checkers between Wolfe and Saul,
all draws. Just after midnight
Robina Keane phoned and told
Wolfe to meet her at 100 Centre
Street at half past eight. But
no word came from the Queen of
Hearts. At quarter to one,
Wolfe left his chair and
announced.
WOLFE
Her panic wore off. I'm going to bed.

SAUL
I'm afraid I have no pajamas that you could get into, but I do have a robe from the Sudan...

The phone RINGS. Archie grabs it.

ARCHIE
This is Jackson 4-3-1-0-9.

HELEN (V.O.)
I want...This is the Queen of Hearts.

ARCHIE
I recognize the voice. Where are you?

HELEN (V.O.)
In a booth at Grand Central. I couldn't get rid of him.

ARCHIE
I'll meet you at the information booth, upper level, in five minutes. Will you be there?

HELEN (V.O.)
Of course, I will. Hurry.

He hangs up.

ARCHIE
If her panic wore off, it wore on again. Make some coffee, Saul. She'll need either that or bourbon. And maybe she likes cheese.

{A&E: END ACT THREE}

WIPE TO:

It's dark. 3 am. Archie sleeps restlessly on Saul's couch. * Saul is arrayed in a chair. Wolfe pads in from the bedroom, draped in a sheet like a Roman emperor. He stands above Archie.

(CONTINUED)
WOLFE

Archie.

Archie reacts defensively and then sees who it is.

ARCHIE

Has it been eight hours already?

WOLFE

Are you awake?

ARCHIE

No. You wouldn't be either if you'd had to deliver Helen Weltz to her apartment after you interviewed her.

WOLFE

Have you finished yet?

ARCHIE

No. One more. I need my sleep in order to be alert enough to keep you from harm. When I don't get sleep you don't get your money's worth. Which, of course, is moot because you don't pay me enough. Okay. Now.

He sits up.

WOLFE

I ask you again. Is she a murderess trying to wriggle out?

ARCHIE

And I answer again. No.

WOLFE

Did she understand the implications of what she told us?

ARCHIE

Not completely. In her state, I don't think she was capable of deducing a conclusion from the assembly of facts.
WOLFE
And you have?

ARCHIE
Once you adjust the point of view, there aren't too many other conclusions to reach.

WOLFE
Indeed. What do you suppose Saul has planned for breakfast?

ARCHIE
Ask Aristotle.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTHOUSE - ALLEY - DAY

Archie appears at the end of the alley. He cautiously looks down and then signals Wolfe. Wolfe emerges from the street and they make their way to the door of the courthouse. It's locked. Archie starts to work the lock.

ARCHIE
Tell me again why I am not going with you.

WOLFE
If you are present, the guard will surely alert the authorities. I will manage on my own. Will you make sure that you are ready with an efficacious route to the courtroom?

ARCHIE
I'll look that up later when I have time, but if you mean quick, yes.

WOLFE
Good. Why is it taking so long?

ARCHIE
Picking a lock is one of my skills, but I seldom get to practice it on the doors of our penal institutions. They are better made than most.
CONTINUED:

He gets it. He holds the door and they slip inside.

INT. COURTHOUSE - VISITING ROOM - DAY (DAY FOUR)

Leonard Ashe waits miserably. A GUARD is near him. The door opens and Robina Keane comes in. They embrace. Robina turns and nods at the door.
ROBINA
I’ve brought a visitor, darling.

ASHE
I don’t want to see anyone but you...

Nero Wolfe comes in the door.

ASHE (CONT’D)
Mr. Wolfe!

WOLFE
Mr. Ashe. I need your attention.

ASHE
But isn’t this irregular...

WOLFE
Please just pay attention. While listening to the proceedings yesterday, it occurred to me that a telephone answering service provides a singular opportunity for scoundrelism. Like doctors, servants and lawyers, they have access to privileged information.

ASHE
Well, of course. That’s exactly why I thought of using them.

WOLFE
It occurred to me further, that the opportunities to practice blackmail on their clients would be limitless.

ROBINA
Blackmail? You mean an actual criminal operation?

WOLFE
Yes. And at the risk of incurring the penalty of contempt, I left the courtroom specifically to view the offices at 69th Street and concluded that it would be impossible for one operator to eavesdrop on

(MORE)
WOLFE (CONT'D)

her lines without the others
becoming aware of it.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
Therefore, if Bagby Answers, Ink were to engage in a blackmailing operation, it must be done collusively or not at all.

ASHE
My Lord, that would explain why she didn't turn me down outright. But how does it affect my case?

ROBINA
I still don't understand how you mean to get it before the jury.

LEONARD
Get it to the jury? Have you been consulting with Mr. Wolfe?

ROBINA
No. Of course not, darling. He came to me.

LEONARD
When? How long has this been going on?

ROBINA
Last night. I was alone and he called, or his man called and said...

LEONARD
You were alone with... God. You still don't know how this kills me! You...

WOLFE
Madam! Sir!

ROBINA
He's trying to help, Leonard.

WOLFE
Don't interrupt again. I have much to say and must say it all before court convenes.
INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The courtroom is packed to the rafters. The BAILIFF is calling Wolfe's name to no avail.

BAILIFF
Nero Wolfe. Is Nero Wolfe present?

No answer. The Judge looks to Mr. Mandlebaum who shrugs.

JUDGE
Can you proceed?

Then the doors to the courtroom open and Wolfe makes an entrance, his cane clearing way for him. Archie follows. All eyes go to him as he makes his way to the bench.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
Why, Mr. Wolfe. How kind of you join us. Do you intend to stay this time?

WOLFE
I will stay until I have completed my testimony.

JUDGE
You knew you were to testify yesterday. Why did you leave then?
WOLFE
I was impelled by a motive which I thought imperative. I can expound it now if you so order, but I would rather plead on the contempt charges later if the court will permit. I will still be here.

JUDGE
Indeed you will. You're under arrest.

WOLFE
No sir, I am not.

JUDGE
You're not under arrest.

WOLFE
No, sir. I came here voluntarily.

JUDGE
Well, you are now. Officer, this man is under arrest. But I will allow you to answer the contempt charges later. Bailiff?

The Bailiff holds out a Bible as Wolfe is seated. Wolfe raises his right hand.

BAILIFF
Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

WOLFE
I do so affirm.

JUDGE
Proceed, Mr. Mandelbaum.

MANDELBAUM
Well, Mr. Wolfe, now that I've finally got you on the stand, I may have to keep you until tomorrow.

WOLFE
You have always been doggedly thorough, Mr. Mandelbaum.
MANDELBAUM
And you are very famous, Mr. Wolfe. Perhaps even deservedly so. But we observe formalities in the courtroom in order that the rule of law can be preserved. So, for the record, please state your name, address and occupation.

WOLFE
Gladly. I am Nero Wolfe, a licensed private detective. My office and my home are at the same address: 914 34th Street, Manhattan, New York City, New York State.

MANDELBAUM
Have you ever met the defendant in this case?

WOLFE
Mr. Leonard Ashe? Yes.

MANDELBAUM
Under what circumstances did you meet Mr. Ashe?

WOLFE
He said he wished to hire me to learn the identity of the phone operator who was assigned to his phone and to propose to her that she spy on his wife.

MANDELBAUM
Did he say why he wished to make this arrangement?

WOLFE
No. But I surmised...

DONOVAN
Objection your honor. Conclusion of the witness as to the intention of the defendant.
MANDELBAUM
Just answer the question, Mr. Wolfe. Yes or no. Did Mr. Ashe suggest any inducement to Marie Willis to participate in his scheme?

WOLFE
No, he did not name an actual sum but he indicated...

DONOVAN
Your honor...

MANDELBAUM
Not what he indicated. What he said. Strike all of his answer except the word, "No"; your answer is "No" Mr. Wolfe. Yes or No.

WOLFE
No.

MANDELBAUM
What else did Mr. Ashe say to you?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
MANELBAUM (CONT'D)
(no answer)
Mr. Wolfe?

WOLFE
I would like to be sure I understand the question. Do you mean what I said that day, or on a later occasion?

MANDELBAUM
That day, of course. What later occasion?

WOLFE
Are you asking me...?

MANDELBAUM
(attacking)
In your deposition, you swore you hadn't seen Leonard Ashe before or after July 13th.

WOLFE
That was true then. We met again.

MANDELBAUM
When?

WOLFE
In this building at half past eight this morning.

MANDELBAUM
You met and spoke with the defendant in this building at nine o'clock this morning, today?

WOLFE
His wife arranged to see him and she allowed me to accompany her.

MANDELBAUM
And was Mr. Donovan, the defense counsel, present?

WOLFE
No, sir.

(CONTINUED)
Donovan is on his feet speaking. Mandlebaum doesn't hear him.
I would like state for the record, that I knew nothing of this.

Don't you know that it is a misdemeanor for a witness for the State to talk with the defendant charged with a felony?

We didn't discuss my testimony.

What did you discuss?

Matters which I thought would be of interest to him.

What exactly did you say, Wolfe?

Wolfe suddenly looks almost pleased with Mandelbaum, who hesitates, unsure. Wolfe glances at Donovan. Mandelbaum whips around and looks at Donovan, who shakes his head.

The fat son of a gun had put it over. Having asked him directly, Mandelbaum couldn't possibly keep Wolfe's theories from the jury, unless Jimmy Donovan was a sap.

Do you wish to withdraw the question, Mr. Mandlebaum?

Oh no, no. I'm absolutely fascinated. You didn't discuss your testimony. What did you discuss?

I told him that yesterday, as I sat in this courtroom, I became aware that significant questions concerning the murder were unanswered and that made my

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
WOLFE (CONT'D)
position as a witness for the prosecution an uncomfortable one.

MANDELBAUM
On behalf of the State of New York, I apologize.

WOLFE
I told him further that I left this courtroom to make the investigation which the police should have undertaken had they not been so enamored of the idea that Ashe was guilty.

MANDELBAUM
You are not now answering the question of your contempt charges. Did you say anything relevant to this case?

WOLFE
I detailed to him my suspicion that Bagby Answers had been used as a blackmailing operation.

MANDELBAUM
Surely, this is just surmise, Mr. Wolfe.

WOLFE
Not at all. I told Mr. Ashe that when I left the court and visited there, the operators at Bagby Answers tolerated my rudeness beyond reason; I learned their personal expenditures far exceeded their salaries. An associate of Bagby's offered me five thousand dollars for services which he would not specify. When I declined his bribe, he offered me ten. And most significant, I told Mr. Ashe that last night Helen Weltz phoned me.

MANDELBAUM
How long were you with Mr. Ashe?

(CONTINUED)
WOLFE
A half an hour.

MANELBAUM
Half an hour?

WOLFE
I can say a lot in half an hour.

MANDELBAUM
No doubt. But the court's and the jury's time cannot be spent on irrelevancies. Did you make any suggestions to Mr. Ashe regarding his defense?

WOLFE
No.

MANDELBAUM
Then why did you seek the interview, Mr. Wolfe? Were you seeking employment?

DONOVAN
One moment. Your Honor, surely this is cross-examination and I object to it.

JUDGE
The objection is sustained. Mr. Mandelbaum, you know the rules of evidence. Examine him upon the merits.

MANDELBAUM
Your honor, I...
(takes a moment)
...have no more questions.

The Judge looks long and hard at Wolfe.

JUDGE
Mr. Wolfe. Your reputation precedes you to this witness stand. I must say that as a reader of newspapers, it is an entertaining one. However, as jurist, I read of your exploits with an unquiet heart.
(MORE)
From the judicial point of view, you have often taken it upon yourself to be the judge of matters best left to officials who are bound by the rules of evidence and who have sworn to uphold the Constitution. You have on occasion acted as judge, jury and executioner. I would not find it at all entertaining if you tried one of your shenanigans in my courtroom in order to cause a mistrial - intending to get your client released.

WOLFE
He is not my client, sir, and I have only one interest - that justice be served.

JUDGE
That is my point. Your idea of justice and that of the law's may be different.

WOLFE
I accept that analysis.

JUDGE
I am so pleased. But I want you to know that if there is a mistrial as a consequence of your shenanigan in the name of justice, both you and your client will see the inside of a jail.

WOLFE
You appear to be an intelligent man. From my reading of the law, I believe that what I am about to say falls within the rules of evidence.

JUDGE
Unfortunately for you, Mr. Mandelbaum, I cannot at this time see any flaw in Mr. Wolfe's reasoning. However, I reserve the right to do so. Your witness, Mr. Donovan.

(Continued)
Mandelbaum sits and Donovan takes the floor.

DONOVAN
Mr. Wolfe, why did you seek an interview this morning with Mr. Ashe?

WOLFE
Because I wanted to tell him that I had acquired information which cast a reasonable doubt on

(MORE)
WOLFE (CONT'D)
his guilt and I wanted to get it to the jury without delay. I had concluded...

MANDELBAUM
Objection. Your Honor. Conclusions of the witness are not admissible.

DONOVAN
But he is merely relating what he said to Mr. Ashe as the Assistant District Attorney asked him to.

JUDGE
The objection is overruled, Mr. Mandlebaum. Continue, Mr. Wolfe.

DONOVAN
You were answering the question: why did you seek an interview with Mr. Ashe.

WOLFE
It occurred to me that if I saw Mr. Ashe the fact would probably be disclosed in the course of my examination by Mr. Mandelbaum; and if so, he would almost certainly ask me what had been said. If he did not, then you would, Mr. Donovan, and I would be able to make my case to the jury. Therefore, I sought an interview with Mr. Ashe.

A bubble of sound bursts as the courtroom absorbs this. The judge frowns at Wolfe. The lawyers approach and whisper furiously. One of the jurors makes a noise and the other jurors look at him. Someone titters. Then Judge shrugs - and waves Mr. Donovan on.

DONOVAN
Please tell the jury what you said to him.

WOLFE
I told him that Helen Weltz came to see me last night and confessed

(MORE)
WOLFE (CONT'D)
that Bagby Answers, Inc. had been used as a blackmailing operation for years. All of the switchboard operators had been party to it, including Marie Willis. Their dean, Alice Hart, collected the information, she gave it to Bagby and Unger who used the personal secrets she had culled to blackmail...

GUY UNGER, ALICE HART AND BELLA VELARDI
suddenly jump to their feet and start heading for the door. All eyes go to them.

ARCHIE
Guard. That's Alice Hart in front!

Judge Corbett slams down his gavel.

JUDGE
No one is to leave the room!
Officer, detain these people as material witnesses.

The GUARD detains Miss Hart, Guy Unger and Miss Velardi and guides them back to their seats.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
Continue, Mr. Wolfe.

WOLFE
Is it necessary for me to go on repeating the phrase, "I said."

JUDGE
Not if you confine yourself strictly to what you said to Mr. Ashe this morning.

WOLFE
I shall do so. As I was saying. Guy Unger and Clyde Bagby gave the girls cash. In three years, Miss Weltz received over 15,000 dollars.

(CONTINUED)
JUDGE
This is fascinating, but earlier you alleged that you could establish a reasonable doubt of Mr. Ashe's guilt.

WOLFE
Yes, your Honor. According to Miss Weltz, Marie Willis had been ordered by both Unger and Bagby to accept Ashe's proposal to spy on his wife and she had refused. She announced that she would quit, and tell Mrs. Ashe everything - making her an intolerable peril to the whole operation. I believe this establishes a clear motive for all of them and provides reasonable doubt of Mr. Ashe's guilt.

JUDGE
Did you go on to speculate as to a probable replacement for Mr. Ashe?

WOLFE
Yes. The conditions of the murder - the closed windows, the position of the victim made it likely that the perpetrator was a co-worker. I considered the most promising candidate to be Mr. Bagby. He has the most to lose. And all the others had established alibis, on boats, in cars. By his own testimony, Mr. Bagby dined not six blocks from the office.

BAGBY
He's lying. I went home!

WOLFE
And from there he called Mr. Ashe and enticed him to the office to find the body. I leave the timetable to the police, they are extremely efficient with timetables.

(MORE)
CONTINUED: (14)

WOLFE (CONT'D)
Now I would now like to plead
to the charge of contempt, if I
* * may...

* *

JUDGE
You may not. You know quite
* well you have made that charge
frivolous. It is dismissed.  
(to Donovan)
Are you through with this
witness, Mr. Donovan?

WOLFE
Yes, your Honor. No more
questions.

JUDGE
Mr. Mandelbaum?

MANDELBAUM
Your Honor will appreciate it
if I confess I find myself in
an extraordinary predicament.
I feel I am entitled to consider
the situation. I would like to
retire and consult with my
colleagues. Therefore I ask
for a recess and would like the
material witnesses made available
for questioning.

JUDGE
You may step down, Mr. Wolfe.
Alice Hart, Bella Velardi, Guy
Unger, and Clyde Bagby will
come forward. The rest of you
will keep your seats and preserve
order.

The courtroom immediately dissolves into an uproar. Robina
Keane springs up from her seat on the front bench and throws
her arms around Wolfe's neck as he leaves the witness stand
and presses her cheek to his. An army of photographers leap
to their feet and start taking pictures.

A NEWSPAPER PHOTO OF WOLFE AND ROBINA
embracing, frozen in time.
ARCHIE (V.O.)
Actresses always act, but I admit that was probably unrehearsed. And I thoroughly approved since it indicated that the Ashe family would prove to be properly grateful.

RETURN TO ACTION:

WOLFE DISENTANGLES HIMSELF

and then passes the SMELLY WOMAN on his way out. She is enraptured with him and grabs his arm. Emboldened, she plants a kiss on him.

ARCHIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The thought may have occurred to you, that's nice, but the real reason Wolfe walked out was because he hated to sit against a perfumed woman on a wooden bench. You may be right.

THE END