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A NERO WOLFE MYSTERY

## SOME BURIED CAESAR

INTRODUCTION BY DIANE MOTT DAVIDSON

**Rex Stout**  
**Some Buried Caesar**

# 1

**THAT SUNNY** September day was full of surprises. The first one came when, after my swift realization that the sedan was still right side up and the windshield and windows intact, I switched off the ignition and turned to look at the back seat. I didn't suppose the shock of the collision would have hurled him to the floor, knowing as I did that when the car was in motion he always had his feet braced and kept a firm grip on the strap; what I expected was the ordeal of facing a glare of fury that would top all records; what I saw was him sitting there calmly on the seat with his massive round face wearing a look of relief-if I knew his face, and I certainly knew Nero White's face. I stared at him in astonishment.

I demanded, "What?"

"I said thank God." He let go of the strap and wiggled a finger at me. "It has happened, and here we are, I presume you know, since I've told you, that my distrust and hatred of vehicles in motion is partly based on my plerophory that their apparent submission to control is illusory and that they may at their pleasure, and sooner or later will, act on whim. Very well, this one has, and we are intact. Thank God the whim was not a deadlier one."

"Whim hell. Do you know what happened?"

"Certainly. I said, whim. Go ahead."

"What do you mean, go ahead?"

"I mean go on. Start the confounded thing going again."

I opened the door and got out and walked around to the front to take a look. It was a mess. After a careful examination I went back to the other side of the car and opened the rear door and looked in at him and made my report.

"It was quite a whim. I'd like to get it on record what happened, since I've been driving your cars nine years and this is the first time I've ever stopped before I was ready to. That was a good tire, so they must have run it over glass at the garage where I left it last night, or maybe I did myself, though I don't think so. Anyway, I was going 55 when the tire blew out. She left the road, but I didn't lose the wheel, and I was braking and had her headed up and would have made it if it hadn't been for that damn tree. Now the fender is smashed into the rubber and a knuckle is busted and the radiator's ripped open."

**"How long will it take you to fix it?"**

**"I can't fix it. If I had a nail I wouldn't even bother to bite it, I'd swallow it whole."**

**"Who can fix it?"**

**"Men with tools in a garage."**

**"It isn't in a garage."**

**"Right."**

**He closed his eyes and sat. Pretty soon he opened them again and sighed. "Where are we?"**

**"Two hundred and thirty-seven miles northeast of Times Square. Eighteen miles southwest of Crowfield, where the North Atlantic Exposition is held every year, beginning on the second Monday in September and lasting-**

**"Archie." His eyes were narrowed at me. "Please save the jocularity. What are we going to do?"**

**I admit I was touched. Nero Wolfe asking me what to do! "I don't know about you," I said, "but I'm going to kill myself. I was reading in the paper the other day how a Jap always commits suicide when he fails his emperor, and no Jap has anything on me. They call it seppuku. Maybe you think they call it hara-kiri, but they don't or at least rarely. They call it seppuku."**

**He merely repeated, "What are we going to do?"**

**"We're going to flag a car and get a lift. Preferably to Crowfield, where we have reservations at a hotel."**

**"Would you drive it?"**

**"Drive what?"**

**"The car we flag."**

**"I don't imagine he would let me after he sees what I've done to this one."**

**Wolfe compressed his lips. "I won't ride with a strange driver."**

**"I'll go to Crowfield alone and rent a car and come back for you."**

**"That would take two hours. No."**

**I shrugged, "We passed a house about a mile back. I'll bum a ride there or walk, and phone to Crowfield for a car."**

**"While I sit here, waiting, helplessly, in this disabled demon."**

**"Right."**

**He shook his head. "No."**

**"You won't do that?"**

**"No."**

**I stepped back around the rear of the car to survey the surroundings, near and far. It was a nice September day, and the hills and dales of upstate New York looked sleepy and satisfied in the sun. The road we were on was a secondary highway, not a main drag, and nothing had passed by since I had bumped the tree. A hundred yards ahead it curved to the right, dipping down behind some trees. I couldn't see the house we had passed a mile or so back, on account of another curve. Across the road was a gentle slope of meadow which got steeper further up where the meadow turned into woods. I turned. In that direction was a board fence painted white, a smooth green pasture, and a lot of trees; and beyond the trees were some bigger ones, and the top of a house. There was no drive leading that way, so I figured that there would be one further along the road, around the curve.**

**Wolfe yelled to ask what the devil I was doing, and I stepped back to the car door.**

**"Well," I said, "I don't see a garage anywhere. There's a house across there among those big trees. Going around by the road it would probably be a mile or more, but cutting across that pasture would be only maybe 400 yards. If you don't want to sit here helpless, I will, I'm armed, and you go hunt a phone. That house over there is closest."**

**Away off somewhere, a dog barked. Wolfe looked at me. "That was a dog barking."**

**"Yes, sir."**

**"Probably attached to that house. I'm in no humor to contend with a loose dog. We'll go together. But I won't climb that fence."**

**"You won't need to. There's a gate back a little way."**

**He sighed, and bent over to take a look at the crates, one on the floor and one on the seat beside him, which held the potted orchid plants. In view of the whim we had had, it was a good thing they had been secured so they couldn't slide around. Then he started to clamber out, and I stepped back to make room for him outdoors, room being a thing he required more than his share of. He took a good stretch, his applewood walking stick pointing like a sword at the sky as he did so, and turned all the way around, scowling at the hills' and dales, while I**

got the doors of the car locked, and then followed me along the edge of the ditch to the place where we could cross to the gate.

It was after we had passed through, just as I got the gate closed behind us, that I heard the guy yelling. I looked across the pasture in the direction of the house, and there he was, sitting on top of the fence on the other side. He must have just climbed up. He was yelling at us to go back where we came from. At that distance I couldn't tell for sure whether it was a rifle or a shotgun he had with the butt against his shoulder. He wasn't exactly aiming it at us, but intentions seemed to be along that line. Wolfe had gone on ahead while I was shutting the gate, and I trotted up to him and grabbed his arm.

"Hold on a minute. If that's a bughouse and that's one of the inmates, he may take us for woodchucks or wild turkeys-"

Wolfe snorted. "The man's a fool. It's only a cow pasture."

Being a good detective, he produced his evidence by pointing to a brown circular heap near our feet. Then he glared toward the menace on the fence, bellowed "Shut up!" and went on. I followed. The guy kept yelling and waving the gun, and we kept to our course, but I admit I wasn't liking it, because I could see now it was a shotgun and he might easily be the kind of a nut that would pepper us.

There was an enormous boulder, sloping up to maybe 3 feet above the ground, about exactly in the middle of the pasture; and we were a little to the right of that when the second surprise arrived in the series I spoke of. My attention was pretty thoroughly concentrated on the nut with the shotgun, still perched on the fence and yelling louder than ever, when I felt Wolfe's fingers gripping my elbow and heard his sudden sharp command:

"Stop! Don't move!"

I stopped dead, with him beside me. I thought he had discovered something psychological about the bird on the ^ fence, but he said without looking at me, "Stand perfectly still. Move your head slowly, very slowly, to the right."

For an instant I thought the nut with the gun had something contagious and Wolfe had caught it, but I did as I was told, and there was the second surprise. Off maybe 200 feet to the right, walking slowly toward us with his head up, was a bull bigger than I had supposed bulls came. He was dark red with white patches, with a big white triangle on

his face, and he was walking easy and slow, wiggling his head a little as if he was nervous, or as if he was trying to shake a fly off of his horns. Of a sudden he stopped and stood, looking at us with his neck curved.

I heard Wolfe's voice, not loud, at the back of my head, "It would be better if that fool would quit yelling. Do you know the technique of bulls? Did you ever see a bull fight?" I moved my lips enough to get it out: "No, sir." Wolfe grunted. "Stand still. You moved your finger then, and his neck muscles tightened. How fast can you run?"

"I can beat that bull to that fence. Don't think I can't. But you can't."

"I know very well I can't. Twenty years ago I was an athlete. This almost convinces me... but that can wait. Ah, he's pawing. His head's down. If he should start... it's that confounded yelling. Now... back off slowly, away from me. Keep facing him. When you are 10 feet from me, swerve toward the fence. He will begin to move when you do. As long as he follows slowly, keep backing and facing him. When he starts his rush, turn and run-"

I never got a chance to follow directions. I didn't move, and I'm sure Wolfe didn't, so it must have been our friend on the fence-maybe he jumped off into the pasture. Anyhow, the bull curved his neck and started on the jump; and if it was the other guy he was headed for, that didn't help any, because we were in line with him and we came first. He started the way an avalanche ends. Possibly if we had stood still he would have passed by, about 3 feet to my right, but either it was asking too much of human nature to expect me to stand there, or I'm not human. I have since maintained that it flashed through my mind that if I moved it would attract him to me and away from Nero Wolfe, but there's no use continuing that argument here. There's no question but what I moved, without any preliminary backing. And there's no question, whoever he started for originally, about his being attracted by my movement. I could hear him behind me. I could damn near feel him. Also I was dimly aware of shouts and a blotch of something red above the fence near the spot I was aimed at. There it was-the fence. I didn't do any braking for it, but took it at full speed, doing a vault with my hands reaching for its top, and one of my hands missed and I tumbled, landing flat on the other side, sprawling and rolling. I sat up and panted and heard a voice above me:

**"Beautiful! I wouldn't have missed that for anything." I looked up and saw two girls, one in a white dress and red jacket, the other in a yellow shirt and slacks. I snarled at them, "Shall I do it again?" The nut with the shotgun came loping up making loud demands, and I told him to shut up, and scrambled to my feet. The fence was 10 yards away. Limping to it, I took a look. The bull was slowly walking along, a hundred feet off, wiggling his head. In the middle of the pasture was an ornamental statue. It was Nero Wolfe, with his arms folded, his stick hanging from a wrist, standing motionless on the rounded peak of the boulder. It was the first time I had ever seen him in any such position as that, and I stood and stared because I had never fully realized what a remarkable looking object he really was. He didn't actually look undignified, but there was something pathetic about it, he stood so still, not moving at all.**

**I called to him, "Okay, boss?"**

**He called back, "Tell that man with the gun I want to speak to him when I get out of here! Tell him to get someone to pen that bull!"**

**I turned. The guy didn't look like a bull penner. He looked more scared than mad, and he looked small and skinny in his overalls and denim shirt. His face was weathered and his nose was cockeyed. He had followed me to the fence, and now demanded:**

**"Who air you fellows? Why didn't you go back when I hollered at you? Where the hell-"**

**"Hold it, mister. Introductions can wait. Can you put that bull in a pen?"**

**"No, I can't. And I want to tell you-"**

**"Is there someone here who can?"**

**"No, they ain't. They've gone off to the fair. They'll be back in an hour maybe. And I want to tell you-"**

**"Tell me later. Do you expect him to stand on that rock with his arms folded for an hour?"**

**"I don't expect nothin'. He can sit down, can't he? But anyhow, I want him out of there right now. I'm guarding that bull."**

**"Good for you. From what? From me?"**

**"From anybody. Looky, if you think you're kidding..."**

**I gave him up and turned to the pasture and called: "He's guarding the bull! He wants you out of there right now! He can't pen the bull and**

**no one else can! Somebody will be here in an hour!"**

**"Archiel" Wolfe bellowed like thunder. "When once I get-"**

**"No, honest to God, I'm telling you straight! I don't like the bull any better than you do!"**

**Silence. Then; "It will be an hour before anyone comes?"**

**"That's what he says."**

**"Then you'll have to do it! Can you hear me?"**

**"Yes."**

**"Good. Climb back into the pasture and get the bull's attention. When he moves, walk back in the other direction, keeping within a few feet of the fence. Was that a woman wearing that red thing?"**

**"Yes. Woman or girl." I looked around. "She seems to be gone."**

**"Find her and borrow the red thing, and have it with you. When the bull starts a rush go back over the fence. Proceed along it until you're away from him, then get back in the pasture and repeat. Take him to the other end of the pasture and keep him there until I am out. He won't leave you for me at such a distance if you keep him busy. Let him get the idea he really has a chance of getting you."**

**"Sure."**

**"What?"**

**"I said sure!"**

**"All right, go ahead. Be careful. Don't slip on the grass."**

**When I had asked the girl if I should do it again, I had thought it was pure sarcasm, but now... I looked around for her. The one in yellow slacks was there, sitting up on the fence, but not the other one. I opened my mouth to request information, but the answer came before I got it out, from another quarter. There was the sound of a car's engine humming in second, and I saw the car bouncing along a lane beyond some trees, headed toward the fence down a ways. It stopped with its nose almost touching the fence, and the girl in the red jacket leaned out and yelled at me:**

**"Come and open the gate!"**

**I trotted toward her, limping a little from my right knee which I had banged on the fence, but the other guy, using a sort of hop, skip and jump, beat me to it. When I got there he was standing beside the car, waving the gun around and reciting rules and statutes about gates and bulls.**

The girl told him impatiently, "Don't be silly, Dave. There's no sense leaving him perched on that rock." She switched to me. "Open the gate, and if you want to come along, get in. Dave'll shut it."

I moved. Dave moved too and squeaked, "Leave that gate alone! By gammer, I'll shoot! My orders from Mr. Pratt was if anybody opens a gate or climbs in that pasture, shoot!"

"Baloney," said the girl. "You've already disobeyed orders. Why didn't you shoot when they opened the other gate? You'll be court-martialed. Why don't you shoot now? Go ahead and blow him off that rock. Let's see you." She got impatient again, to me, and scornful: "Do you want your friend rescued or not?"

I unhooked the gate and swung it open. The bull, quite a distance away, turned to face us with his head cocked sidewise. Dave was sputtering and flourishing the gun, but it was obvious he could be ignored. As the car passed through – it was a big shiny yellow Wethersill convertible with the top down – I hopped in, and the girl called to Dave to get the gate shut in a hurry. The bull, still at a distance, tossed his head and then lowered it and began pawing. Chunks of sod flew back under his belly.

I said, "Stop a minute," and pulled the hand brake. "What makes you think this will work?"

"I don't know. We can try it, can't we? Are you scared?"

"Yes. Take off that red thing."

"Oh, that's just superstition."

"I'm superstitious. Take it off." I grabbed the collar of it and she wriggled out and I stuck it behind us. Then I reached under my coat to my holster and pulled out my automatic.

She looked at it. "What are you, a spy or something? Don't be silly. Do you think you could stop that bull with that thing?"

"I could try"

"You'd better not, unless you're prepared to cough up \$45,000"

"Cough what?"

"\$45,000. That's not just a bull, it's Hickory Caesar Grindon. Put that thing away and release the brake."

I looked at her a second and said, "Turn around and get out of here. I'll follow instructions and tease him down to the other end along the fence."