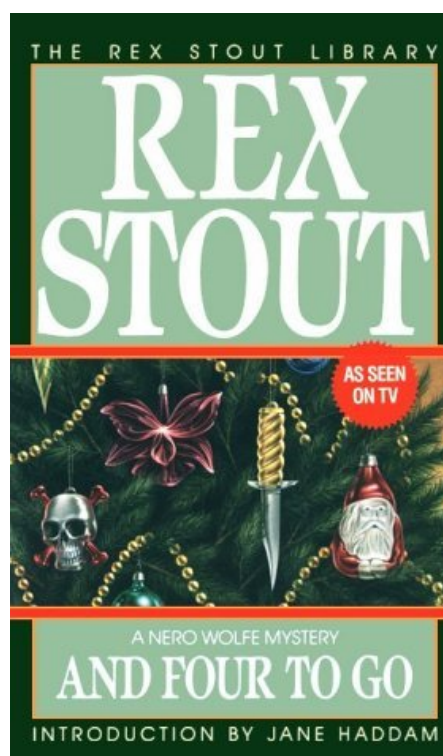




And Four to Go

Rex Stout , Jane Haddam (Introduction)

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And Four to Go Details

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From Reader Review And Four to Go for online ebook

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

Four short stories, three with a holiday theme (Christmas, Easter, Fourth of July), all from the 1950s.

I think I liked "Christmas Party" best.

Michelle Cox says

As always Rex Stout delivers the goods and short stories are an extra bonus when you are short of reading time. I thought I had read all of the Nero Wolfe books so very pleased to find one I had missed

Evgeny says

The anthology consists of four novellas:

Christmas Party.

This probably is the most unusual beginning of all stories from the series. Nero Wolfe wants Archie Goodwin to drive him to meet an orchid expert. Archie wants to go to a Christmas party his female friend invited him to. Nero Wolfe persists in his wants. Archie produces *his own* marriage license and says he needs to go to the party and does so. A dead body promptly made an appearance and both detectives became personally involved in the case. At least their Christmas is neither lonely nor boring.

This story has one much unexpected twist which caught both Archie and me - during my first read - completely off guard; very nicely done.

Easter Parade.

Nero Wolfe heard a rumor another orchid enthusiast managed to grow an orchid with ideal "flamingo pink" color. The enthusiast denies rumors, but Wolfe is convinced it is true. He is also convinced the orchid would make an appearance at Easter parade and he will stop at nothing, including petty theft, to see it for himself. He did not expect to get a dead body attached to the said orchid as an additional bonus, but this is exactly what he received. Two detectives became personally involved in the case yet again.

Wolfe's obsession with seeing the rare orchid specimen makes this story. If you have any doubts about the outcome, I will spoil for you: fear not, he ends up with a live plant.

Fourth of July Picnic.

A restaurant union leader made a deal with Nero Wolfe: if the latter makes a speech at Fourth of July picnic the former stops bugging Wolfe's cook Fritz into joining the union. Wolfe arrives at the gathering only to

find a dead body waiting for him to investigate and a very limited number of suspects.

This is probably the first and the last time when Wolfe himself has the honor of finding a corpse; usually it is Archie who finds them in droves due to his activities.

Murder is No Joke.

The picture above shows exactly what I imagine first when the subject of high fashion comes up. Back to the story: a sister of high fashion designer came to Nero Wolfe asking him to help rid her brother off a woman who seems to have way too much influence over him suspecting blackmail is involved. No sooner Wolfe agrees to act - in his case it always means he sends Archie to act - a dead body drops by to say hi. Wolfe gets very suspicious about the circumstances.

One of the times when Wolfe could not leave seemingly obvious case along because he feels somebody was trying to make a fool of him. His self-esteem cannot allow it, so Archie gets to go and stir the hornet's nest.

The common theme of these stories (other than the obvious fact that the first three take place during big holidays) is that the Manhattan detective received exactly zero dollars total for all his troubles, speaking of which most of the times they were of his own doing - or Archie's acting on his behalf.

Due to the short length of all novellas there were no long and involved investigations by the detectives, but the character interactions really shined, as it is usually the case. This is an entertaining read rated with 4 stars.

Jeanne says

I remember reading Nero Wolfe in a Detective Fiction class many years ago and I didn't care for it then. Not surprisingly, I don't care for this series now either. The book is a group of 4 short stories which seem to follow the same pattern. Somebody dies in the first few pages and the rest if Wolfe directing his flunky, Archie Goodwin, to perform various tasks, then he calls all the suspects together and tells them who-dun-it. Boring.

Christopher Rush says

When you get to the end of summer and realize you haven't read any Nero Wolfe all year yet, it's way past time to get on that. This is another trim, clean, crisp group of Nero Wolfe adventures mostly though ancillary pertaining to holidays. "Christmas Party" is a surprising revelation to what lengths Nero Wolfe will go to keep Archie Goodwin in his employ (and single). "Easter Parade" is a very clever mystery about ancient machines known as photographometers (I believe), fantastical boxes of antiquity that were used to visually capture a moment of time without also letting you order pizza. This, too, has a surprising revelation concerning to what lengths Wolfe will go to acquiring rare orchids, including asking Archie to steal them!

"Fourth of July Picnic" is also bizarre, but not in a bad way - whenever Wolfe is out of the house the story feels unsettled. Wolfe is on deck to give a speech about the restaurant world and, of course, a murder is discovered during his speech. The problem is an eyewitness can testify no one went into the room of the murder except Archie and Wolfe! Another unique aspect of this mystery (though a bit of a theme for this

collection) is motive for murder is almost a nonfactor in the crimesolving. Archie and Wolfe spend almost no time on "why" the murder, just "who." "Murder is no Joke" is another very clever mystery with an obvious set-up: a painfully obvious ruse to befuddle Wolfe at the very beginning, but soon that ruse takes on new twists and nothing is quite so obvious anymore.

Top notch collection. Strangely, as readers, we are torn between wanting to spend time with Archie and Wolfe and the rest but wanting short, concise stories that we can inhale and enjoy quickly. This collection with four very short yet rich stories balances that tension perfectly: short, quick stories, but four instead of the usual three. "Satisfactory."

Sean O says

Classic Wolfe, this time in four short stories with a holiday theme.

I'm not a fan of these because they devolve into puzzles because of the length constraint.

Otoh, I read Nero Wolfe for the lead characters and there's plenty of Nero and Archie. Just nothing earth shaking.

Recommended to Wolfe fans and "fair mystery" fans.

Tony says

AND FOUR TO GO. (1958). Rex Stout. ****.

Stout brings together four novellas in this collection. Three of them are set around holidays. They are clever and witty exercises in the mystery genre. The edition I read had a preface by Jane Haddam. "Murder is No Joke" is the only one not set around a holiday. This story was also included in another book by Stout titled "Death by Three," but with some differences in the female lead character. These are short reads, but you won't be disappointed. You will also get a chance to learn about Nero Wolfe's early life.

Jim says

Four novellas, three centered around holidays. It always fun and enjoyable coming back to the brownstone on West 35th Street in New York City to visit Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin. The stories are a bit dated. Pay phones? Automats? But the characters are so wonderful and trying to match wits with Wolfe to figure out whodunit is a treat.

"Those stories have ignored time for thirty-nine years," Stout told his authorized biographer John McAleer. "Any reader who can't or won't do the same should skip them."

Christmas Party(1957)

As often seems to be the situation, Wolfe has no case and he and Archie are at odds. Here Wolfe wants Archie to drive him to Long Island to see someone who will only be available one day and Archie has plans. Things are tense in the brownstone. Wolfe hires a limousine to take him to Long Island. Archie goes to a

Christmas party where the bartender is dressed as Santa Clause and the host drops dead after drinking a drink poured by St. Nick. While the others are attending to the stricken host Santa Claus was gone in a flash.

Easter Parade(1957)

Fans of Nero Wolfe know that one of his loves is orchids. It seems that someone claims to have grown a pink orchid. A shade that Wolfe has had no success with. The wife of the orchid grower plans to wear it in the Easter parade and Wolfe wants it. He asks Archie to hire someone to grab it during the parade. Things turn sticky for Wolfe and Goodwin when the woman drops dead during the parade.

Fourth of July Picnic(1957)

Nero Wolfe rarely leaves his brownstone where he is content to read, tend his orchids, and eat gourmet meals prepared by his chef, Fritz Brenner. But in this story he agrees to give a speech at a picnic for a restaurant union's Fourth of July Picnic, in exchange for the the union's promise that they will stop pressuring Fritz to join. The fireworks begin when one of the union leaders is murdered.

Murder is No Joke" (1958)

The only story that does not center around a holiday. A potential client is visiting Wolfe and presenting her case. As part of her presentation she makes a phone call and hands the phone to Archie. Wolfe is listening on his extension. They overhear what appears to be a murder. The timing is suspicious and Wolfe believes someone is making a fool of him. His ego will not allow that.

None of these are great stories. Each story is about sixty pages in length so there is no room for a lot of confusion or involvement. Wolfe sits back in his custom built chair, puffs his lips in and out for a while, has Archie call all the suspects together where he identifies the murderer. One of the common themes, besides the holidays, is that it does not appear that Wolfe has a client who will pay his large fees. Other than satisfying his ego the only compensation may be a pink orchid. What we have here is a small collection of mystery stories for fans of the genre.

Elizabeth Du says

Classic Nero Wolfe Tales

These stories are from the golden age of mysteries when Nero and Archie were as fine a team as ever quaffed cold ale while discussing the cultivation of orchids and solving a murder or three under the noses of Inspector Cramer and Sgt Stubbins.

C.J. says

Four short novellas or long stories, each fun in a different way. Rex Stout was at his (long-lived) peak in the late 1950s, so these are vintage Nero Wolfe capers. Oddly, the first three are holiday-centered, whereas the fourth opens on a random Tuesday in the fashion business. In "Christmas Party," Archie Goodwin strikes fear into his boss's heart by announcing he's getting married. "Easter Parade" features (you guessed it) orchids. "Fourth of July Picnic"--in which Wolfe leaves home to make a speech--and "Murder Is No Joke" both involve women named Flora. My favorite moment comes in "Fourth of July Picnic," when Wolfe and Goodwin give us brief impromptu autobiographies. A treasure for Stout fans; a good intro for newcomers.

Gilbert Stack says

This collection of four short stories featuring Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin is great if you're looking for a quick mystery. Because of the length there are fewer loose ends to keep track of, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you will figure out the villain because Stout doesn't always play fair. It's not uncommon for Nero Wolfe to have a piece of information that isn't shared with the reader, such as the contents of the photograph Archie takes in *Easter Parade*. It's also not uncommon for him to trap people into exposing themselves instead of using old fashioned detective work. That didn't really dampen my enjoyment of the stories, however, because the heart of every Nero Wolfe mystery is the at times tense relationship between Wolfe and Archie. Stout's created an archetypal detective pairing here that has recurred in many other stories. Wolfe never leaves his mansion and sends Archie out to do all of his footwork. Archie's more than competent in his own right, but Wolfe is a genius and watching him pull the strings of the various players in the mystery is always a delight. While Glen Cook, in his *Garrett Files*, and now Dan Wickline, in his *Lucius Fogg* series, do it well, no one surpasses the master, Rex Stout.

Bill Kerwin says

An entertaining group of four Nero Wolfe short stories, three with holiday themes.

In the first, Archie attends a *Christmas Party* at a design studio, a party equipped with a professional Santa. Soon someone is poisoned from drinking Pernod, and Santa is nowhere to be seen. In the second, Wolfe, takes up orchid-napping by proxy at New York's fashionable *Easter Parade*, where Mrs. Bynoe, the wearer of the aforementioned orchid, is murdered. In the next, murder occurs at the restaurant union's *Fourth of July Picnic*, where Wolfe has promised to speak (in return for the the union's promise that they will stop pressuring his chef Fritz to join). The last story, *Murder is No Joke* (sans holiday theme) involves an esteemed *couturier*, ghosts of the French resistance, and a murder overheard--by both Archie and Wolfe--on the telephone.

All in all, a good collection of tales, perfect for any festive--or non-festive--occasion.

Marie says

Several clever Nero Wolfe stories. My only complaint was that there were so many characters, I had to keep going back and reading who was who. Other than that, I liked the mysteries and I love the interactions between Archie and Nero.

Jim Mann says

Rex Stout wrote a number of Nero Wolfe novellas, usually collected in sets of three (or in this case four) to a volume. This volume features three novellas centered around holidays -- "Christmas Party," "Easter Parade," and "Fourth of July Picnic" -- plus "Murder Is No Joke."

All follow the typical formula: a murder occurs, often with Wolfe or Archie somehow already involved with

the characters, Archie talks to a number of people, gathering evidence, Wolfe gathers everyone together, and finally Wolfe identifies the murderer. All feature Archie's wonderful first-person narrative, the usual banter between Wolfe and Archie, the usual meals by Fritz: everything that makes the series not only memorable, not only one of the great all time mystery series, but also one of my favorite comfort reads.

Three of the four novellas are very good. Only "Fourth of July Picnic" falls a little short, mostly because the ending ties things up too quickly, involving a key reason that we had no clue about earlier. But even it is fun along the way.

If you haven't read a Nero Wolfe mystery before, this isn't the top of the list to start at, but it's not a bad place. There are no bad places, really.

Adam Graham says

What could be better than the numerous Nero Wolfe books including three Novellas? How about one featuring four? Well, it doesn't quite work out that way, but there are still some worthwhile stories in the lot:

"The Christmas Party"

Archie connives to get a fake wedding license for a dancing partner who wants her to boss to marry her. The boss is being stubborn so Archie gets a fake marriage license blank with both their names on it to force the issue.

When Wolfe starts to get bossy and unreasonable in demanding Archie drive him to meet an orchid expert, Archie springs the marriage license on Wolfe and tells him that he's getting married. Wolfe is displeased but Archie gets out of the errand.

Archie ends up attending the Christmas Party where the boss is murdered and Santa mysteriously disappears after the crime is committed. Archie also can't find the fake wedding license which has him at risk of a forgery charge. When Archie gets home he finds out that Santa was none other than Nero Wolfe, spying on him and his supposed fiancée. To make matters worse, a jealous young woman who believes the woman Archie helped was the murderess demands that Wolfe connive to help frame the woman. Otherwise, Wolfe will have to endure the embarrassment of being exposed as Santa. Wolfe and Archie are in a pickle and it'll take all of Wolfe's wits to get them out.

The story's plot is priceless and along with some memorable characters, I'll give it a:

Rating: Very Satisfactory

"Easter Parade"

A wealthy philanthropist, who is also an orchid grower has developed a new species of orchid that he's keeping under wraps. Wolfe has to see it, and the only chance he has is that the philanthropist's wife is wearing one of the orchids. So he has Archie hire a two bit hood to snatch the orchid as the lady is exiting the church and entering the Easter Parade. The orchid snatch is done right as the woman dies and Wolfe finds himself in a pickle, as police want to find the orchid snatcher.

The best part of this story is the look back at the Easter Parade, an event that was much more widely practiced both in New York and across the country in years past. In essence, Stout gives us a portrait of the

Easter Parade in its heyday.

The plot itself has problems. While Wolfe can tend to childish behavior in pursuit of his goals, this one takes the cake. The action has several accomplishments. Wolfe's reputation and his license are both put at risk. More than that though, the stunt is itself quite mean and both the lady and her husband are sympathetic characters who have dedicated themselves to the betterment of others and have done nothing to agrieve Wolfe aside from refusing to let him look at a flower. The idea of hiring a criminal to assault two saintly people coming out of church on the holiest day of the Christian year does little to make one sympathetic as Wolfe and Archie try to avoid embarrassment.

Of course, Stout could have turned this around a little bit with a clever solution, a dramatic stunt to find the real killer, some clever interaction between Wolfe and Archie. Unfortunately, the story is wrapped all too easily on the spur of the moment. with Wolfe barely moving a brain cell. The story was first published in the April 1957 issue of Look and has all the earmarks of being written to satisfy the commercial requests of a magazine wanting a story for its April issue rather than the cleverness of a typical Wolfe story. If another writer wrote it, I'd say it was flummery. However, as Stout wrote it, I must give it a:

Rating: Pfui

Fourth of July Picnic:

After the death of Marco Vukcic, Wolfe assumed a key role in ensuring the quality of Rusterman's restaurant with Wolfe's cook Fritz providing some consulting assistance. A restaurant union leader seized on this to try and force Fritz into the union and this became an annoyance to Wolfe. In order to rid himself of the annoyance, Wolfe agrees to speak at the Union's 4th of July Picnic.

However, before Wolfe's speech, the man who'd been annoying him is murdered after having taken ill. Every speaker went in to the tent he was resting in for one reason or another including Wolfe, but police suspect someone came through the back of the tent because they'd rather not suspect prominent citizens of the crime (other than Wolfe and Archie). However, Archie knows that a woman was watching that back entrance and no one had gone in but withholds the fact because he's annoyed by the police and didn't want He and Wolfe to be held as material witnesses in rural New York. When Wolfe finds out about the witness, he has to solve the crime quickly or risk going back as a material witness to be held by a very unhappy and unfriendly district attorney.

While not up to the best standards of Wolfe Stories, it features a good amount of atmosphere and a clever enough solution to make it:

Rating: Satisfactory.

"Murder is No Joke"

If Murder is No Joke had been set at the fall, this would have been a four seasons collection. As it was, Stout appears to have abandoned the seasonal stories after two middling efforts. Murder is No Joke is a much more solid story.

A woman comes to Wolfe's office concerned that her brother's business is being destroyed by a woman who has some hold over her. She wants Wolfe to investigate her but doesn't have the money to pay him. However, she offers to pay Wolfe to call the woman. Wolfe dials the number and is promptly insulted by the woman and then hears sounds that indicates violence has occurred. Archie calls the woman's office and finds she has indeed been murdered with Wolfe and Archie as likely ear witnesses.

However, Wolfe has a sense that someone is trying to make a fool of him and sets out to uncover the truth of what really happened and how the suicide of a formerly promising actress plays into what happened. He sends Archie down to the office where the murdered woman worked to ask about correspondence from the actress who committed suicide.

The highlight of this story is when Archie wants to know why Wolfe is an investigating and Wolfe and Archie share a moment of detective zen when Wolfe opens Archie's eyes to a key clue. All in all, the story has a good cast of characters and a solution that really shocked me.

Rating: Very Satisfactory

Overall, Four to Go features two middling stories in between two solid ones that make up for their lack.

Overall Collection Rating: Satisfactory

Jacque says

I always enjoy a Nero Wolfe story and these were no exception. I think they age better than those of some of the others of their time. Perhaps that's because although Wolfe wants nothing to do with women (and Archie is quite fond of them) Stout is less chauvinistic than most of his contemporaries.

Carolyn says

This is one of my favorite collections of short works. For one thing, I was able to figure out one of the mysteries--not a usual experience with Rex Stout. Unlike Agatha Christie, he did not typically plant clues for the audience to pick up. Usually Nero Wolfe deduces the existence of various clues that must exist. There is also a story here in which Archie Goodwin plays an integral role in solving--also an unusual occurrence. As engaging as Archie is, he is usually pretty much an observer. He does a lot of legwork, but he doesn't all that often bring home the deciding fact.

Ronnie Justice says

If you haven't read Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe you should. If you have there is no need to keep reading this review.

Stout's work spans decades and reviewing each Nero Wolfe story is a little unnecessary and I intend to publish this same review as I finish the volume it appears with.

First, they all hinge on the amiable narration of Archie Goodwin, Wolfe's assistant. Second, Wolfe rarely leaves his house. Third, the mysteries are usually solved not by chance or obscure knowledge of some hideous poison, but by thinking the facts through. The stories are well written and far from being timeless are laced with changes in American life that span the twentieth century.

Usfromdk says

The Christmas Party story was in my opinion worth five stars and I found it simply hilarious, but the other stories in the book were not really anything special (they were enjoyable, as are most Nero Wolfe stories, but nothing special).

John R. Goyer says

Everything about this was a bad idea. Four short and very straight-forward "mysteries" where after some decent but not great writing and adventure, everyone gets gathered together and suddenly new information is added which points to one person. He or she is the guilty one and more or less incriminates themselves. Weak and not at all in the class expected from a major writer like Rex Stout - poor first drafts that got loose?
