

LAST OF THE NOVELLAS

MURDER IS CORNY is the second from the last of the 38* novellas that Stout wrote. It is the only one not published in a magazine prior to publication in a hardbound anthology. Below are copies of a correspondence exchange between Rex Stout and Marshall Best, who handled Rex' manuscripts at Viking for a number of years. These specific four letters shed light on the fate of this category of fiction. Stout was one of the major authors writing novelettes or novellas which are distinctly different lengths than either novels or short stories. Mr. Stout referred to them as novelettes, but in recent times they are almost always referred to as novellas. There are number of varying guidelines for the word count for various categories of fiction. One guideline is:

Classification	Word
Novel	over 40,000 words
Novella	17,500 to 40,000 words
Novelette	7,500 to 17,500 words
Short story	under 7,500 words

The four letters below were copied from the Rex Stout Archives and are reference the last two novella collections: *Trio for Blunt Instruments* and *Homicide Trinity*.

Rex Stout, not only a top-notch writer, but a financial genius, started writing novellas as war-support activities took more and more of his time: he could write them more quickly than a novel and sell them twice: once to a magazine and again as a hardbound anthology of 2-4 stories. In fact, he also did this with his novels written between 1934 and 1940. After the war, he resumed writing one novel per year, but in addition wrote 1-2 novellas per year until 1962, when he wrote "Blood Will Tell."

By 1962 a number of changes had occurred:

- there was a decided softening of the market for short stories and novellas in the 1960s as magazines' demand for the category faded
- he was 75 years old in 1962, with some health problems, as well as a surfeit of hobbies

Approximate Date of Story Events	Novella Title	Anthology Book Title
January 1958	"Eeny Meeny Murder Mo"	<i>Homicide Trinity (1962)</i>
April 1958	"Poison à la Carte"	<i>Three at Wolfe's Door (1960)</i>
January 1959	"Counterfeit for Murder"	<i>Homicide Trinity (1962)</i>
January 1960	"Death of a Demon"	<i>Homicide Trinity (1962)</i>
September 1959	"Method Three for Murder"	<i>Three at Wolfe's Door (1960)</i>
October 1959	"The Rodeo Murder"	<i>Three at Wolfe's Door (1960)</i>
December 1960	"Kill Now, Pay Later"	<i>Trio for Blunt Instruments</i>
September 1961	"Murder Is Corny"	<i>Trio for Blunt Instruments</i>
August 1962	"Blood Will Tell"	<i>Trio for Blunt Instruments</i>

The letter of November 22, 1960 from Viking (below) probably refers to those novellas that eventually comprised *Homicide Trinity* (1962). No novella collection was published by Viking in 1961. The next and final novella collection published was *Trio for Blunt Instruments* (1964). Rex Stout did not submit them for publication to Viking until October, 1963. His cover letter of 1963 (below) states, "I doubt if I'll write any more novelettes." Viking indicates in their letter of November 22, 1960 that they are not happy with the novellas that would eventually comprise *Homicide Trinity*. The Saturday Evening Post's decision to not print "Murder is Corny," for which they had already paid, showed a distinct softening of the market for short stories and for the unusual "novelette" or "novella" format popularized by Rex Stout.

*(This number excludes "Bitter End," "Frame Up For Murder," and "Assault on a Brownstone" which are alternate plots to stories published much earlier and which were only published posthumously in book format in 1977 and 1985.)

THE LAST OF THE NOVELLAS
Data Gathered During The Wolfe Pack Expedition
to the Rex Stout Archives at Boston College
July 6, 7, 8, 9, 2011



THE VIKING PRESS INC · PUBLISHERS
625 MADISON AVENUE · NEW YORK 22 · NY

Cable: Vikpress Telephone: PL 5-4330

November 22, 1960

Mr. Rex Stout
High Meadow
Brewster, New York

Dear Rex:

I never wrote you about those two novelettes because at the time they came in we were waiting to see whether the plan for a new omnibus volume would go through. Now that it is definite, I think we should hold off another short story collection until next year. The general view of our panel of experts was that one of the stories was top-flight Stout and the other somewhat under par. Do you want to guess which was which, and what did you think yourself? In any case, with these two we now have three that we are holding on to for future use, and maybe by the time we are ready for another collection there will be more to choose from.

What do you say?

Yours,

HKG/pg

October 24 1963

Dear Marshall:

I am sending you under separate cover a couple of pounds of educational materials - manuscripts (carbons) of three novelets. Videlicet:

KILL NOW - PAY LATER. Appeared in the Saturday Evening Post, issues of December 9, 16 & 23, 1961.

MURDER IS CORNY. In the fall of 1961 the SEP paid me \$15,000 for the serial rights. Nearly two years later they hadn't used it, and I wrote them, got a reply, and wrote them again. Their two letters are enclosed. I don't want to offer it to another magazine.

BLOOD WILL TELL. Written in the summer of 1962, offered to the SEP, rejected. Fred Dannay asked for it and I let him have it, and it is in the current number of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine (December). Enclosed is a letter I got last week from Anthony Boucher. (EQMM has no anthology option.) If you think the three stories are publishable by Viking, what shall I tell Boucher? I've had a wire from him; he would like to know soon.

Yours.....

By the way, I doubt if I'll write any more novelettes.



PUBLISHERS · THE VIKING PRESS INC · NEW YORK 22 NY

Cable address · Vikpress

625 MADISON AVENUE

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November 11, 1963

Mr. Rex Stout
High Meadow
Brewster, N. Y.

Dear Rex:

Everything's hunky-dory about the new threesome. Alan and I both enjoyed it as much as ever. The Mystery Guild likewise, and they are taking it for June. We will publish in April or May. I enclose the usual contract, made out with the title TRIO FOR BLUNT INSTRUMENTS. If you don't like it, give us a better one -- but do it quick because the manuscript has already gone to Bill English for his usual ministrations.

To uphold the editorial honor, I must raise a couple of quibbles. Alan and I both thought Murder Is Corny might be a little too easy. It's fair enough to give the customers an easy one now and then and let them think they have outsmarted you. You signpost it pretty unmistakably, however, when you make such a fuss about the badly-picked corn. If that were planted (pardon the expression) a little less noisily, it might not be so easy. Alan also tells me that one of the "ten top models" would certainly get more than \$50 an hour for being photographed. If she were just modeling in a dress shop or salon, that figure might be enough, but you seem to mean for photographing. Will you look at this again in the proofs?

If you have a duplicate manuscript we could use it here. If not, we can get along without it. Thanks, and congratulations.

Sincerely yours,

Marshall

MAB:nbm
encs.

November 12 1963

Dear Marshall:

I'm not sure this contract is legally binding on me because my signature is witnessed by my nine-year-old granddaughter. She wanted to.

The creator of that title, TRIO FOR BLUNT INSTRUMENTS, should get half of the royalties. It's wonderful.

I'm sending you duplicate scripts.

All right, if Alan says so, when I go over the proofs I'll give the gal a raise - say \$80 an hour. As for your other suggestion, I would much prefer to let it stand. Of course the fuss about the badly-picked corn is a giveaway, but it would be wholly out of character if NW didn't make the fuss, and I don't think toning it down would make it a better story. Anyway, not many readers are as smart as you and Alan.

Since you will publish in April or May, Tony Boucher probably won't use Blood Will Tell in his anthology, which will appear in July.

Yours.....