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A NERO WOLFE MYSTERY

THREE FOR THE CHAIR

INTRODUCTION BY SHARYN McCRUMB

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Introduction

I wonder how an old mountain boy like Nero Wolfe ended up living in New York City.

He's originally from a central European country called *Montenegro*, you know. The word means "black mountain." It was once a republic and then part of greater Yugoslavia. Lord knows what it is now. It's about fifty miles south of Sarajevo, though. Wolfe was probably wise to leave early. Anyhow, encyclopedias describe Montenegro as wholly mountainous, with a population of less than half a million supporting themselves with sheep, goats, and forestry. Aside from wars and politics, it was probably a marvelous place to spend a childhood.

I have always felt some affinity for the reclusive Mr. Wolfe because I suspect that we have things in common: maybe some folk tales and fiddle tunes, but certainly a way of looking at the world. His mountains are part of the Carpathian chain, while mine are the southern Appalachians of east Tennessee and southwest Virginia, but there is a universal kinship among mountain people. They have the same ways of doing things: a love of nature and a dislike for authority; a fierce pride and a stubborn streak. And although they are loyal and hospitable, they tend to be wary of strangers. I'm pretty sure there's a word in Serbo-Croatian for *hillbilly*.

For years people have called Nero Wolfe eccentric and strange because he refuses to leave his Manhattan brownstone, because he grows orchids on the roof of his building, and because he's not a sociable, glad-handing fellow. This just goes to show that you can take a man out of the mountains but not vice-versa, because, given his situation, Nero Wolfe is behaving in a perfectly reasonable fashion—for a city-bound mountaineer.

A friend of mine who grew up in the coves of eastern Kentucky got an education and an important job late in life, and he made his first trip to New York City when he was well past forty. When Garry got back to Kentucky after two weeks in Manhattan, I called him up and asked how he liked the Big Apple. There was a pronounced pause at the end of the telephone line, and then he said, "Did you know there're people who go there *on purpose*?" I am certain that if my friend Garry or Spencer Arrowood, the Tennessee sheriff in my Ballad novels, were forced to stay in New York City longer than a few weeks, they, too, would be holed up in a brownstone, refusing to come out and confront that teeming mass of strangers.

And if Sheriff Arrowood had to stay in a concrete holler in midtown, he'd be growing anything that would take root up there on the roof, just out of homesickness for greenery. He would gather a family of sorts about him, just as Nero Wolfe has assembled a clan consisting of Archie, Fritz, Theodore, and Saul Panzer; and he would be as fiercely loyal to them as Wolfe is to his folks—though there might be some infighting when their egos rubbed together. Apologies would be rare.

When Nero Wolfe comes out of his brownstone lair, it's for one of two reasons: authority (which he doesn't like) has forced him out, or he's going to the country. In *Three for the Chair* we have examples of both. In the novella "Too Many Detectives" Wolfe and Archie are summoned to the state capital for a wiretapping investigation, and Wolfe is at his irascible and uncooperative best with the Albany version of "revenuers." In "Immune to Murder" Wolfe heads for the mountains—the Adirondacks—to cook brook trout for visiting diplomats.

Wolfe has all the good qualities of mountain people, as well as their solitary ways. He is whip-smart, honorable, and quite capable of adapting to the customs of the cultural elite. People underestimate Nero Wolfe—and the rest of us mountain folk—at their peril. We can jettison the accent, acquire a taste for opera and sushi, and stifle the glower of Wolfe under the sparkle of Archie's charm and self-deprecating humor. Most of us feel like Wolfe but have to act like Archie. We manage. But we tend to count trees

when nobody's looking, and we always, always hold something back. Inside each of us there's a brownstone fortress, and it takes some doing to get us out of it.

Nero Wolfe has outlived his creator, and even now he is practicing the art of detection from his Manhattan home; but if he *had* been allowed to retire, I think I'd see another mountain trait in him. I saw it in my great-uncles, who spent forty years between youth and retirement working in the car factories in Detroit. When their working lives came to an end, they went back to the mountains. The lucky ones never leave; the rest come home when they can. Wolfe settled in New York because you can't be an eminent and well-paid private detective in, say, Banner Elk, North Carolina; but for all Wolfe's success, I am not convinced that he felt at home in the city. I think his residence there would have ended when he quit the gumshoe business.

Maybe Nero Wolfe wouldn't have made it all the way back to the hills of Montenegro, but if he'd ever been allowed to stop crime solving, I think I'd know where to look for him. You'd be walking on the Appalachian Trail, in the green wilderness somewhere between Springer Mountain, Georgia and Mount Katahdin, Maine, and as you started to climb over a split-rail fence to reach a spring, a voice would yell, "Get away from my rhododendrons!" And you'd see a pear-shaped hulk glowering down at you from the deck of a glass and cedar chalet up on the ridge. Walk softly, dear reader. Archie's no doubt somewhere on the premises. He's probably armed. Now git.

—Sharyn McCrumb

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I

Nero Wolfe, behind his desk, sat glaring at the caller in the red leather chair. I was swiveled with my back to my desk, ready with my notebook, not glaring.

Wolfe's glare was partly on general principles, but more because David R. Fyfe had not phoned for an appointment. You might think it didn't matter. There was the office, on the ground floor of the old brownstone house on West 35th Street. There was Wolfe in the chair he loved, sharpening his penknife on the old oilstone he kept in a drawer. There was I, Archie Goodwin, eager to earn my pay by serving his slightest whim, within reason. There was Fritz Brenner in the kitchen, doing the luncheon dishes, set to bring beer if the buzzer went one short and one long. There was Theodore Horstmann up in the plant rooms on the roof, nursing the ten thousand orchids. And there in the red leather chair was a guy who wanted to hire a detective or he wouldn't have come. But for him and others like him Fritz and Theodore and I would have been out looking for jobs, and God only knows what Wolfe would have been doing. But Wolfe was glaring at him. He should have phoned for an appointment.

He sat forward in the red leather chair, not touching the back, his narrow shoulders sagging and his pale narrow face looking the worse for wear. I would have guessed his age at fifty, but most people look older than they are when forced by circumstances to go to a private detective. In a tired, careful voice, after giving his name and address and his occupation—head of the English Department at Audubon High School in the Bronx—he said he wanted Wolfe to investigate a confidential family matter.

"Marital?" Wolfe made a noise that went with the glare. "No."

He shook his head. “It isn’t marital. I am a widower, with two children in high school. It’s about my brother Bertram—his death. He died Saturday night of pneumonia. It will have to be—I’ll have to explain about it.”

Wolfe sent me a glance, and I met it. If he let Fyfe explain he might have to work, and he hated to work, especially when the bank balance was healthy. But I tightened my lips a little as I met his glance, and he sighed and went back to the customer. “Do so,” he muttered.

Fyfe did so, and I took it down. His brother Bertram had suddenly appeared in New York a month ago, unannounced, after an absence of twenty years, and taken an apartment in the Churchill Towers, and communicated with his family—his older brother, David, who was doing the explaining, his younger brother, Paul, and his sister, Louise, now Mrs. Vincent Tuttle. They had all been glad to see him again after so many years, including Tuttle, the brother-in-law, and had also been glad to learn that he had hit a jack pot—not David’s word, his was bonanza—by finding and hooking onto a four-mile lode of uranium ore near a place called Black Elbow somewhere in Canada. It is always nice to know that a member of the family has made out well.

So they had welcomed Bertram, their brother Bert, and along with him a young man named Johnny Arrow who had accompanied him from Canada and was living with him in the Churchill Towers apartment. Bert had been fairly fraternal and had shown an interest in old memories and associations; he had even asked Paul, who was a real-estate broker, to get a line on the purchase of the old house in Mount Kisco where they had all been born and spent their childhood. Obviously Bert was back as one of the family. Ten days ago he had invited them to dine with him on Saturday the sixth, and afterwards go to the theater, but on Thursday he had been put to bed with pneumonia. He refused to go to a hospital, and insisted that they should dine at the Churchill as planned and use the theater tickets, so they gathered at his apartment late Saturday afternoon and carried out the program, returning to the apartment after the show for a champagne snack.

That is, four of them did—sister Louise and her husband, Johnny Arrow from Canada, and brother David himself. Younger brother Paul had maintained that Bert shouldn't be left alone with the nurse, and had stayed at the apartment. When the four returned after the show they found a situation. Paul had gone and the nurse had a torn uniform and marks on her neck and cheeks and wrists. She had phoned the doctor to send another nurse and intended to leave as soon as her replacement came. Sister Louise resented some of her remarks and ordered her to leave at once, and she went. Louise phoned the doctor and told him she would stay until another nurse came. Johnny Arrow disappeared, leaving only David and Louise and her husband, Vincent Tuttle, on the scene; and after David had looked in at Bert on his sickbed, sound asleep under the morphine the nurse had given him by doctor's orders he departed for home.

Louise and Tuttle went to bed in a room that was presumably Johnny Arrow's, but were not yet asleep when a buzz took Tuttle to the door of the apartment, where he found Paul. Paul said he had been assaulted by Johnny Arrow down in the men's bar, and had an assortment of bruises to show as evidence. Arrow had been escorted away by two cops. Paul thought his jaw was broken and possibly a rib or two, and he didn't feel like driving home to Mount Kisco, so they put him on a couch in the living room, and in thirty seconds he was snoring, and after another glance in at the door of Bert's room Louise and Tuttle went back to bed. Around six in the morning they were aroused by Paul. He had aroused himself by tumbling off the couch, had gone to look at Bert, and had found him dead. They phoned down to the desk for a doctor because Bert had insisted on having the old family doctor he knew in his boyhood, and they didn't want to wait for him to get in from Mount Kisco. Of course they phoned him too, and he got there later.

Wolfe was fidgeting. He fidgets by making circles the size of a dime with a fingertip on his chair arm. "I trust," he grumbled, "that the doctors will now justify your calling on me and this long recital. Or at least one of them."

"No, sir." David Fyfe shook his head. "They found nothing wrong. My brother died of pneumonia. Doctor Buhl—that's the one from

Mount Kisco, Doctor Frederick Buhl—he signed the death certificate, and my brother was buried Monday, yesterday, in the family plot. Of course the nurse having gone made the—uh—the situation was a little embarrassing, but no serious question was raised."

"Then what the devil do you want of me?"

"I'm about to tell you." Fyfe cleared his throat, and when he went on his voice was more careful than ever. "After the funeral yesterday that man Arrow asked us to come to the apartment at eleven o'clock this morning to hear the will read, and of course we went. Louise brought her husband along. There was a lawyer there, a man named McNeil who had flown down from Montreal, and he had the will. It had all the usual legal rigmarole, but what it amounted to was that Bert left his whole estate to Paul and Louise and me, and made that man Arrow the executor. It put no value on the estate, but from things Bert had said I would have thought his uranium holdings were worth upwards of five million dollars, possibly twice that."

Wolfe stopped fidgeting.

"Then," Fyfe went on, "the lawyer took another document from his brief case. He said it was a copy of an agreement he had drawn up a year ago for Bertram Fyfe and Johnny Arrow. He read it. There was a preamble about their prospecting together for uranium for five years, and their joint discovery of the Black Elbow lode, and the gist of it was that if either of them died the whole thing would become the property of the survivor, including any assets that had been acquired by the deceased through income from the mining property. That wasn't the phraseology, it was all very legal, but that's what it meant. As soon as he read it Johnny Arrow spoke up. He said that Bert had possessed nothing that had not been acquired with income from the Black Elbow uranium, and that therefore it was now legally his property, including large sums on deposit in Canadian banks, but that when Bert came to New York he had had some thirty or forty thousand dollars transferred to a New York bank, and he, Arrow, didn't intend to claim what was left of it. That would be the estate and we could have it."

David made a mild little gesture. “He was being generous, I thought, since he could have claimed that too. We asked the lawyer a few questions and then left and went out to a restaurant for lunch. Paul was raging. My brother Paul is impulsive. He wanted to go to the police and tell them Bert had died in suspicious circumstances, and ask them to investigate. His theory was that when Arrow saw that Bert was getting reconciled with his family he was afraid he might make large gifts to us, possibly even a share of the mining properties, and Arrow couldn’t claim them under the agreement if Bert died, so he decided he had to die now. Vincent Tuttle, my sister’s husband, objected that even if the theory was sound Arrow hadn’t acted on it, since two competent doctors had agreed that Bert had died of pneumonia, and Louise and I agreed with him, but Paul was stubborn. He hinted that he knew something we didn’t know, but then he has always liked to be a little mysterious. He stuck to it that we should go to the police, and we argued about it, and finally I suggested a compromise. I suggested that I get Nero Wolfe to investigate, and if you decided there was sufficient reason to call in the police we would join with Paul in doing so, and if you decided there wasn’t, Paul would forget it. Paul said all right, he would accept your decision, so that’s what I want you to do. I know you charge high fees, but this shouldn’t require any great—uh—I mean it shouldn’t be too complicated. It’s a fairly simple problem, isn’t it?”

Wolfe grunted. “It could be. There was no autopsy?”

“No, no. Good heavens, no.”

“That should be the first step, but it’s too late now, without the police. Before burial an examination could have been made merely to satisfy medical curiosity, but exhumation needs authority. I take it that you want me to investigate, and reach a decision, without attracting the attention of the police.”

Fyfe nodded emphatically. “That’s right. That’s exactly right. We don’t want any scandal … any rumors going around …”

“People rarely do,” Wolfe said drily. “But you may be hiring me to start one. You understand, of course, that if I find evidence of skulduggery it will not be in your sole discretion whether to bury it

or disclose it. I will not engage to suppress grounds, if I find any, for a suspicion of homicide. If my investigation results in a reasonable assumption that you have yourself committed a crime, I am free to act as I see fit."

"Of course." Fyfe tried to smile, with fair success. "Only I know I have committed no crime, and I doubt if any one has. My brother Paul is a little impetuous. You'll need to see him, naturally, and he'll want to see you."

"I'll have to see all of them." Wolfe's tone was morose. Work. He grabbed at a straw: "But under the circumstances I must ask for a retainer as a token of good faith. Say a check for a thousand dollars?"

It wasn't a bad try, since a head of a high-school English department with two children might not have a grand lying around loose, and the deal would have been off, but Fyfe didn't even attempt to haggle. He did gulp, and gulped again after he got out a check folder and pen and wrote, and signed his name. I got up and accepted the check when he offered it, and passed it across to Wolfe.

"It's a little steep," Fyfe said—not a complaint, just a fact—"but it can't be helped. It's the only way to satisfy Paul. When will you see him?"

Wolfe gave the check a look and put it under a paperweight, a chunk of petrified wood that had once been used by a man named Duggan to crack his wife's skull. He glanced up at the wall clock; in twenty minutes it would be four o'clock, time for his afternoon session in the plant rooms.

"First," he told Fyfe, "I need to speak with Doctor Buhl. Can you have him here at six o'clock?"

David looked doubtful. "I could try. He would have to come in from Mount Kisco, and he's a busy man. Can't you leave him out of it? He certified the death, and he's thoroughly reputable."

"It's impossible to leave him out. I must see him before dealing with the others. If he can be here at six, arrange for the others to come at six-thirty. Your brother and sister, and Mr. Tuttle, and Mr. Arrow."

Fyfe stared. “Good heavens,” he protested, “not Arrow! Anyway, he wouldn’t come.” He shook his head emphatically. “No. I won’t ask him.”

Wolfe shrugged. “Then I will. And it might be better—yes. It may be protracted, and I dine at seven-thirty. If you can arrange for Doctor Buhl to be here at nine, bring the others at half past. That will give us the night if we need it. Of course, Mr. Fyfe, there are several points I could go into with you now—for instance, the situation you found when you returned to the apartment from the theater, and your brother Bertram’s reconciliation with his family—but I have an appointment; and besides, they can be explored more fully this evening. For the present, please give Mr. Goodwin the addresses and phone numbers of everyone involved.” He moved his vast bulk forward in his chair to pick up the penknife and start rubbing it gently on the oilstone. He had undertaken that job, and by gum he intended to finish it.

“I described the situation,” Fyfe said in a sharper tone. “I invited the inference that Paul had stayed at the apartment in order to approach the nurse. I wholly disapprove of his method of approaching women. I have said he is impetuous.”

Wolfe was feeling the knife’s edge tenderly with a thumb.

“What is the point,” Fyfe asked, “about the reconciliation?”

“Only that you used the word.” Wolfe was honing again. “What needed to be reconciled? It may be irrelevant, but so are most points raised in an investigation. It can wait till this evening.”

Fyfe was frowning. “It’s an old sore,” he said, the sharpness gone and his voice tired again. “It may not be irrelevant, because it may partly account for Paul’s attitude. Also I suppose we’re over-sensitive about any threat of scandal. Pneumonia is a touchy subject with us. My father died of pneumonia twenty years ago, but it was thought by the police he was murdered. Not only by the police. He was in a ground-floor bedroom in our house at Mount Kisco, and it was January, and on a stormy night, extremely cold, someone raised two windows and left them wide open. I found him dead at five o’clock in the morning. Snow was drifted a foot deep on the floor and there was snow on the bed. My sister Louise, who was caring

for him that night, was sound asleep on a couch in the next room. It was thought that some hot chocolate she drank at midnight had been drugged, but that wasn't proven. The windows weren't locked and could have been opened from the outside—in fact, they must have been. My father had been a little shrewd in some of his real-estate dealings, and there were people in the community who had been—uh—who were not fond of him."

Fyfe repeated the mild little gesture. "So you see, there is the coincidence. Unfortunately, my brother Bert—he was only twenty-two then—he had quarreled with my father and was not living at home. He was living in a rooming house about a mile away and had a job in a garage. The police thought they had enough evidence to arrest him for murder, and he was tried, but the evidence certainly wasn't conclusive, because he was acquitted. Anyhow he had an alibi. Up to two o'clock that night he had been playing cards with a friend—Vincent Tuttle, who later married my sister—in Tuttle's room in the rooming house, and it had stopped snowing shortly after two, and the windows must have been opened long before it stopped snowing. But Bert resented some of our testimony on the witness stand—Paul's and Louise's and mine—though all we did was tell the truth about things that were known anyway—for example, Bert's quarrel with my father. Everybody knew about it. The day after he was acquitted Bert left town, and we never heard from him, not a word for twenty years. So that's why I used the word 'reconciled.' "

Wolfe had returned the knife to his pocket and was putting the oilstone in the drawer.

"Actually," Fyfe said, "Arrow was wrong when he stated that Bert possessed nothing that had not been acquired with income from the uranium. Bert never claimed his share of our father's estate, and they couldn't find him, and we have never applied for its distribution. His one-quarter share was around sixty thousand dollars, and now it's more than double that. Of course Paul and Louise and I will get it now, but honestly it will give me no pleasure. I may say frankly, Mr. Wolfe, that I am sorry Bert came

back. It reopened an old sore, and now his death, and the way it happened, and Paul acting like this …”

It was one minute to four, and Wolfe was pushing his chair back and leaving it. “Yes indeed, Mr. Fyfe,” he concurred. “A nuisance alive and an affliction dead. Please give Mr. Goodwin the necessary information, and phone when you have made the arrangements for this evening.”

He headed for the door.

II

A little research into backgrounds is often a help, even in cases that apparently don't call for it, and after Fyfe left I made a few phone calls to various quarters, getting a skimpy crop of useless information. David had taught at Audubon High School for twelve years, and had been head of the English Department for four. Paul's real estate agency in Mount Kisco was no whirlwind but was seemingly solvent. Vincent Tuttle's drugstore, also in Mount Kisco, was his own, and was thought to be doing fine. David had had no address or phone number for the nurse, Anne Goren, but Wolfe wanted them all, and I found her in the Manhattan book, listed as an RN. The first two times I dialed her number I got a busy signal, and the next three times no answer. Nor could I get Johnny Arrow. Calls to the Churchill Towers go through the Churchill switchboard, and I left word for him to call, and made half a dozen tries. Finally, just before Fritz announced dinner, I got Tim Evarts, assistant house dick, security officer to you, and asked him a few discreet questions. The answers were both for and against. For, the rent was paid on the de luxe Towers apartment, and the bar and restaurant staff all liked Johnny Arrow, especially his tipping standards. Against, Arrow had plugged a guy in the bar Saturday night, repeatedly and persistently, and had been removed by cops. Tim said that technically it had been a fine performance, but the Churchill bar wasn't the place for it.

Fyfe had phoned that the arrangements had been made. At nine o'clock, when Doctor Frederick Buhl arrived, Wolfe and I were through in the dining room, having put away around four pounds of salmon mousse, Wolfe's own recipe, and a peck of summer salad, and were back in the office. The doorbell took me to the hall, and as

I switched on the stoop light what I saw through the one-way glass panel of the front door gave me a double surprise. Doctor Buhl, if it was he, was no doddering old worn-out hick doc; he was an erect, gray-haired, well-dressed man of distinction. And with him was a young female having her own personal points of distinction, discernible even by a swift glance at a distance.

I went and opened up. He moved aside for her to enter and then followed, saying that he was Doctor Buhl and had an appointment with Nero Wolfe. No hat covered his crown of distinguished gray hair, so there was nothing for the rack, and I led them down the hall and into the office. Inside, he halted to dart a glance around, then crossed to Wolfe's desk and said aggressively, "I'm Frederick Buhl. David Fyfe asked me to come. What is all this nonsense?"

"I don't know," Wolfe murmured. He keeps his voice down to a murmur after a meal, unless goaded. "I've been hired to find out. Sit down, sir. The young woman?"

"She's the nurse. Miss Anne Goren. Sit down, Anne."

She was already sitting, in a chair I had moved up for her. I was making revisions in my opinion of Paul Fyfe. Probably he had been too impetuous, but the temptation had been strong; and the marks on her neck and cheeks and wrists must have been superficial since no scars were visible. Also a nurse's uniform is much more provocative than the blue cotton print she was wearing, with a bolero jacket to match. Even in the cotton print, I could have—but skip it. She was there on business. She thanked me for the chair, coldly, no smile.

Doctor Buhl, in the red leather chair, demanded, "Well, what is it?"

Wolfe murmured, "Didn't Mr. Fyfe tell you?"

"He told me that Paul thought there was something suspicious about Bert's death and wanted to go to the police, and David and Louise and Vincent Tuttle couldn't talk him out of it, and they agreed to get you to investigate and accept your decision, and he had talked with you, and you insisted on seeing me. I think it quite unnecessary. I am a reputable physician, and I signed a death certificate."

“So I understand,” Wolfe murmured. “But if my decision is to be final it should be well fortified. I have no thought of challenging the propriety of your issuance of the death certificate. But there are a few questions. When did you last see Bertram Fyfe alive?”

“Saturday evening. I was there half an hour, and left at twenty minutes past seven. The others were there, having dinner in the living room. He had refused to go to a hospital. I had put him under an oxygen tent, but he kept jerking it off, he wouldn’t have it. I couldn’t get him to leave it on, and neither could Miss Goren. He was in considerable pain, or said he was, but his temperature was down to a hundred and two. He was a difficult patient. He couldn’t sleep, and I told the nurse to give him a quarter of a grain of morphine as soon as the guests had gone, and another quarter-grain an hour later if that didn’t work—he had had half a grain the night before.”

“Then you returned to Mount Kisco?”

“Yes.”

“Did you think he might die that night?”

“Of course not.”

“Then when you got word Sunday morning that he was dead, weren’t you surprised?”

“Of course I was.” Buhl flattened his palms on the chair arms. “Mr. Wolfe, I am tolerating this as a favor to David Fyfe. You are being inane. I’m sixty years old. I’ve been practising medicine for more than thirty years, and fully half of my patients have surprised me one way or another—by bleeding too much or too little, by getting a rash from taking aspirin, by refusing to show a temperature with a high blood count, by living when they should die, by dying when they should have lived. That is the universal experience of general practitioners. Yes, Bertram Fyfe’s death was a surprise, but it was by no means unprecedented. I examined the body with great care a few hours after he died, and found nothing whatever to make me question the cause of death. So I issued the certificate.”

“Why did you examine the body with great care?” Wolfe was still murmuring.

“Because the nurse had left him in the middle of the night—had been forced to leave—and I hadn’t been able to get a replacement. The best I could do was to arrange for one to report at seven in the morning. Under those circumstances I thought it well to make a thorough examination for the record.”

“And you are completely satisfied that pneumonia was the cause of death, with no contributing factors?”

“No, of course not. Complete satisfaction is a rarity in my profession, Mr. Wolfe. But I am satisfied that it was proper and correct to issue the certificate, that it was consistent with all the observable evidence, that—in layman’s language—Bertram Fyfe died of pneumonia. I am not quibbling. Long ago a patient of mine died of pneumonia, but it was a cold winter night and someone had opened the windows of his room and let the storm in. But in this case it was a hot summer night and the windows were closed. The apartment was air-conditioned, and I had instructed the nurse to keep the regulator at eighty in that room because a pneumonia patient needs warmth, and she had done so. In the case I mentioned, windows open to a winter storm were certainly a contributing factor, but in this case there was no evidence of any such factor.”

Wolfe nodded approvingly. “You have covered the point admirably, doctor, but you have also raised one. The air-conditioner. What if someone moved the regulator, after the nurse’s departure, to its lowest extreme? Could it have cooled the room sufficiently to cause your patient to die when you expected him to live?”

“I would say no. I considered that possibility. Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle have assured me that they did not touch the regulator and that the room’s temperature remained equable, and anyway on so hot a night the conditioner couldn’t have cooled the air to that extent. I wanted to be satisfied on that point, since no nurse had been there, and I arranged with the hotel to check it Saturday night, in that room. After the regulator had been at its extreme for six hours, the temperature was sixty-nine—too low for a pneumonia patient, even one well covered, but certainly not lethal.”

“I see,” Wolfe murmured. “You did not rely on the assurance of Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle.”

Buhl smiled. “Is that quite fair? I relied on them as wholly as you rely on me. I was being thorough. I am thorough.”

“An excellent habit. I have it too. Did you have any suspicion, with or without reason, that someone might have contrived to help the pneumonia kill your patient?”

“No. I was merely being thorough.”

Wolfe nodded. “Well.” He heaved a deep sigh, and when it had been disposed of turned his head to focus on the nurse. During the conversation she had sat with her back straight, her chin up, and her hands folded in her lap. I had her profile. There are not many female chins that rate high both from the front and from the side.

Wolfe spoke. “One question, Miss Goren—or two. Do you concur with all that Doctor Buhl has told me—all that you have knowledge of?”

“Yes, I do.” Her voice was a little husky, but she hadn’t been using it.

“I understand that while the others were at the theater Paul Fyfe made advances to you which you repulsed. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“Did that cause you to neglect your duties in any way? Did it interfere with your proper care of your patient?”

“No. The patient was sound asleep, under sedation.”

“Have you any comment or information to offer? I have been hired by David Fyfe to determine whether anything about his brother’s death warrants a police inquiry. Can you tell me anything whatever that might help me decide?”

Her eyes left him to go to Buhl, then came back again. “No, I can’t,” she said. She stood up. Of course nurses are expected to rise from a chair without commotion, but she just floated up. “Is that all?”

Wolfe didn’t reply, and she moved. Buhl got to his feet. But when she was half way to the door Wolfe called, considerably above a murmur, “Miss Goren! One moment!” She turned to look at him. “Sit down, please?” he invited her.

She hesitated, glanced at Buhl, and came back to the chair. “Yes?” she asked.

Wolfe regarded her briefly, and then turned to Buhl. “I could have asked you before,” he said, “why you brought Miss Goren. It seemed quite unnecessary, since you were fully prepared and qualified to deal with me, and surely it was inconsiderate to drag her into a matter so delicate. It was a reasonable inference that you expected me to ask some question that she could answer and you couldn’t, so you had to have her with you. Evidently I didn’t ask it, but I did provoke her. When I asked if she could tell me anything she looked at you. Manifestly she is withholding something, and you know what it is. I can’t pump it out of you, with no bribe to offer and no threat to brandish, but my curiosity has been aroused and must somehow be satisfied. You may prefer to satisfy it yourself.”

Buhl had sat and, his elbow on the chair arm, was pulling at his fine straight nose with a thumb and forefinger. He let his hand drop. “You’re not just a windbag,” he said. “You’re quite correct. I expected you to bring up something that would require Miss Goren’s presence, and I’m astonished that you didn’t. I wanted to consider it, but I’m perfectly willing to bring it up myself. Haven’t they mentioned the hot-water bags to you?”

“No, sir. I have been told nothing about hot-water bags.”

“Then I suppose Paul—but it doesn’t matter what I suppose. Tell him about it, Anne.”

“He already knows about it,” she said scornfully. “One of them hired him.”

“Tell me anyway,” Wolfe suggested, “for comparison.” His method with women is neither Paul’s nor mine.

“Very well.” Her lovely chin was up. “I was keeping two hot-water bags on the patient, one on each side of his chest, and changing the water every two hours. I changed it just before I left—before Mrs. Tuttle ordered me to leave. Sunday evening Paul Fyfe came to my apartment—I have a little apartment on Forty-eighth Street with a friend, another nurse. He said that when he found his brother was dead that morning he pulled the covers down, and the hot-water bags were there, but they were empty, and he took them

and put them in the bathroom. Later his sister, Mrs. Tuttle, saw them and called him to look at them and said the nurse had neglected to fill them, and she was going to report it to the doctor. He asked if she hadn't changed the water herself before she went to bed, and she said no, she hadn't thought is was necessary because the nurse had changed it just before she left."

Miss Goren's voice wasn't husky now. It was clear and firm and positive. "He said that he had told his sister that when he took the bags to the bathroom he had emptied the water out of them. He said he told her that on the spur of the moment, to keep her from reporting me to the doctor, but he had realized since that perhaps he shouldn't have told her that because the empty bags might have had something to do with his brother's death, and he asked me to go and have dinner with him so we could talk it over. We were standing at the door of the apartment, I hadn't let him in, and I slammed the door in his face. The next day, yesterday, he phoned three times, and last evening he came to the apartment again, but I didn't open the door. So he told his brother David and got him to come to you. How does it compare?"

Wolfe was frowning at her. "Pfui," he said, and gave her up and turned to Buhl. "So that's it," he growled.

Buhl nodded. "Miss Goren phoned to tell me about it Sunday evening, and again yesterday, and again last night. Naturally, since her professional competence was in question. Do you wonder that I expected you to bring it up?"

"No indeed. But I hadn't heard of it. How much chance is there that Miss Goren did in fact fail to put water in the bags?"

"None whatever, since she says she put it in. She trained at the Mount Kisco Hospital, and I know her well. I always use her, if she's available, when I have a patient in New York. That can be eliminated."

"Then either Paul Fyfe is lying, or someone took the bags from the bed, emptied them, and put them back. Which seems senseless. Certainly it could have had no appreciable effect on the patient. Could it?"

“No. Appreciable, no.” Buhl passed a palm over his distinguished gray hair. “But it could have an effect on Miss Goren’s professional reputation, and I feel some responsibility. I put her on the case. You haven’t asked me for an opinion, but I offer one. I think Bertram Fyfe died of pneumonia, with no contributing factors except those he contributed himself—his refusal to go to a hospital, his rejection of the oxygen tent, perhaps his capricious insistence on having them come to dinner despite his illness. He was a headstrong boy, and apparently he never changed. As for the hot-water bags, I think Paul Fyfe is lying. I don’t want to slander him, but the vagaries of his conduct with women are common knowledge in his home community. A woman who strikes his fancy doesn’t merely attract him; he is obsessed. It would be consonant with his former known behavior if, seeing the bags in the bed, he had formed the notion of acquiring a weapon to use on Miss Goren and took the bags to the bathroom and emptied them.”

“Then,” Wolfe objected, “he was an ass to tell his sister he had emptied them.”

Buhl shook his head. “Only to sidetrack her. He could tell Miss Goren he had done her that service, and at the same time could threaten, at least tacitly, to disclose her negligence. I don’t say he wasn’t an ass; obsessed people usually are. I merely say that I think he told his sister the truth and told Miss Goren a lie. I think he emptied the bags himself. I understand he will be here this evening, with the others, and I ask you to let them know that any attempt to charge Miss Goren with an act of negligence will be deeply resented by me and strongly opposed. I will advise her to bring an action for slander and will support it. If you prefer that I tell them myself—”

The doorbell rang. I got up and went to the hall for a look, and stepped back in.

“They’re here,” I told Wolfe. “David and two men and a woman.”

He looked up at the clock. “Ten minutes late. Bring them in.”

“No!” Anne Goren was on her feet. “I won’t! I won’t be in a room with them! Doctor Buhl! Please!”

I must say I agreed with her. I wasn’t obsessed, but I absolutely agreed. After a second’s hesitation Buhl did too, and told Wolfe so.

Wolfe looked at her, and decided to make it unanimous.

"All right," he conceded. "Archie, take Miss Goren and Doctor Buhl to the front room, and after the others are in here let them out."

"Yes, sir." As I went to open the door to the front room the bell rang again. Paul being impetuous. If he had known who was there he would probably have bounded through the glass panel.

III

The way it looked to me, as I sat at my desk and got out my notebook after ushering the newcomers in and letting Buhl and Anne Goren out, an investigation of a death that had surprised the doctor was about to deteriorate into an inquiry about a real-estate agent's methods of courtship—not the sort of job that Wolfe would ever consider worthy of his genius, fee or no fee, and I was looking forward to it.

In appearance Paul was not up to his billing. He was a good eight inches shorter than me, broad and a little pudgy, and probably thought he looked like Napoleon—and maybe he did a little, or would have without the shiner (left eye) and the bruises on both sides of his swollen jaw. Evidently Johnny Arrow used both fists. Paul and the Tuttles were on chairs lined up in front of Wolfe's desk, leaving the red leather chair to David.

Louise was taller than either of her brothers, and better-looking. For a middle-aged woman she wasn't a bad sight at all, though a little bony, and her hair was too short. As for her husband, Tuttle, he was simply short of hair. His shiny dome, rising to a peak, dominated the scene and made such details as eyes and nose and chin unimportant. You had to concentrate to take them in.

When I came back and sat after letting Buhl and Anne Goren out, Wolfe was speaking. "… and Doctor Buhl stated that in his opinion your brother died of pneumonia, with no suspicious circumstances. Since he had already certified the death, that leaves us where we were." He focused on Paul. "I understand that you maintain that the police should be asked to investigate. Is that correct?"

"Yes. You're damn right it is." He had a baritone and gave it plenty of breath.

“And the others disagree.” Wolfe’s head moved. “You disagree, sir?”

“As I told you.” David looked and sounded tireder than ever. “Yes, I disagree.”

“And you, Mrs. Tuttle?”

“I certainly do.” She was a word-clipper, with a high thin voice. “I don’t believe in asking for trouble. Neither does my husband.” Her head jerked sideways. “Vince?”

“That’s right, my dear,” Tuttle rumbled. “I always agree with you, even when I don’t. This time I do.”

Wolfe went back to Paul “Then it seems to be up to you. If you go to the police what do you tell them?”

“I tell them plenty.” The ceiling light made Paul’s shiner look worse than it really was. “I tell them that when Doctor Buhl left Saturday evening he told us that Bert’s condition was satisfactory and we could go and enjoy the play, and a few hours later Bert was dead. I tell them that that guy Arrow was making a play for the nurse, and she was giving him the eye, and he could have had an opportunity to get at her stuff and substitute something for the morphine she was going to shoot into Bert. Doctor Buhl told us he was giving morphine. I tell them that Arrow stands to rake in several million bucks that he never would have got a smell of as long as Bert was alive. I tell them that Arrow saw that Bert was getting on with us, one of the family again, and he didn’t like it and showed he didn’t.”

Paul stopped to press gently at his jaw with fingertips. “It hurts me to talk,” he said. “The goddam hoodlum. Look, I’m no prince. The way you’re looking at me, you might be asking am I my brother’s keeper, and hell no. I didn’t get along any too well with Bert when we were kids, and I hadn’t seen him for twenty years, so what. I might as well tell you what. A murderer can’t collect on his crime, and if Arrow killed him that agreement is out the window, and it will all be in Bert’s estate, and it will be ours. That’s obvious, so why not say it? I won’t have to tell the police that because they’ll know it.”

“That’s no way to talk, Paul,” David said sharply.

“That’s right,” Tuttle agreed. “It certainly isn’t.”

“Oh, can it,” Paul told his brother-in-law. “Who are you?”

“He’s my husband,” Louise snapped at him. “He could teach you a lot of things if you were teachable.”

All in the family. Wolfe took over. “I concede,” he told Paul, “that you might stir the police into curiosity, but surmise is not enough. Have you anything else to tell them?”

“No. I don’t need anything else.”

“For me you do.” Wolfe leaned back, pulled in a bushel of air, and let it out again. “Let’s see if we can find something. What time did you arrive at your brother’s apartment Saturday evening?”

“Saturday afternoon around five o’clock.” The bottom half of Paul’s face was suddenly contorted, and I thought he was having a spasm until I realized he was merely trying to grin, which is a problem with a sore jaw. “I get it,” he said, “where was I at nine minutes to six on August sixth? Okay. I left Mount Kisco at a quarter to four, alone in my car, and drove to New York. My first stop was at Schramm’s on Madison Avenue, to buy two quarts of their mango ice cream to take back to Mount Kisco for a Sunday party. Then I drove to Fifty-second Street and parked the car, which can be done on a Saturday afternoon, and walked to the Churchill, arriving at the apartment a little after five. I went early because I had spoken with the nurse on the phone and liked her voice, and I thought I might get acquainted with her before the others came. Not a chance. That guy Arrow had her in the living room, telling her about prospecting for uranium. Every ten minutes or so she would sneak in for a look at her patient and then come back for more about prospecting. Then Dave came, and then Louise and Vince, and we were just starting dinner around a quarter to seven when Doctor Buhl came. Want more?”

“You might as well finish.”

“Anything you say. Buhl was in with Bert about half an hour, and when he left—I told you what he told us. We not only ate, we drank, and maybe I overdid it a little. I thought it wouldn’t be right to leave the nurse alone with Bert, and when the others left to go to the show I stayed. I thought if the nurse liked to hear about

prospecting she might like to hear about other things too, but apparently not. After a little—oh, some remarks back and forth—she went in Bert's room and shut the door and locked it. She told my sister later that I banged on the door and yelled at her that if she didn't come out I'd break the door down, but I don't remember it that way. Anyhow, by that time Bert was dead to the world with morphine, if it was morphine. She did come out, and we talked, and I may have touched her, but the marks on her that she showed them when they got back from the theater—she must have done that herself. I wasn't that drunk, I was just a little high. Finally she got at the phone and said if I didn't leave she would call down to the desk and tell them to send someone up, and I beat it. Want more?"

"Go ahead."

"Righto. I went down to the bar and sat at a table and had a drink. Two or three drinks. Something made me remember the ice cream I had put in the refrigerator in the apartment, and I was deciding whether to go up and get it, when suddenly Arrow was there telling me to stand up. He grabbed my shoulder and yanked me up and told me to put up my hands and get set, and then he hauled off and socked me. I don't know how many times he hit me, but look at me. Finally they blocked him off and a cop came. I edged out, on out of the bar, and took an elevator up to the apartment, and Vince let me in. That part is a little hazy, but I know they put me on a couch because I woke up by falling off it, only I wasn't really awake. I had some kind of idea about being hurt and wanting to see the nurse, and I went to Bert's room and on in. The window curtains were drawn, and I turned on a light and went to the bed. He looked dead, with his mouth open, and I pulled the covers down and felt for his heart and he felt dead. There were two hot-water bags there, one on each side of him. They looked empty, and I picked one up and it *was* empty, and I thought to myself, she was careless because I made her sore and that won't do, and the other one was empty too, and I took them to the bathroom before I went—"

"Paul!" It was Louise, staring at him. "You told me you emptied them!"

“Sure I did.” He grinned at her, or tried to. “I didn’t want you to report her to the doctor. What the hell, can’t a man be gallant?” He returned to Wolfe. “You said I had to tell you something else. Okay, that’s something else. Like it?”

“So you lied to Louise,” Tuttle rumbled.

“Or you’re lying now,” David said, not tired at all.

“You have said nothing about this to me.”

“Of course not. Damn it, I was being gallant.”

They all pitched in, cawing at one another, all in the family. With Louise’s high soprano, Paul’s baritone, Tuttle’s rumble, and David’s falsetto, it made quite a quartette.

Wolfe shut his eyes and tightened his lips, took it up to a point, and then crashed the sound barrier. “Jabber! Stop it, please.” He picked on Paul. “You, sir, speak of gallantry. I didn’t mention that Miss Goren was here with Doctor Buhl. She was, and she told me of your visits to her apartment and your phone calls, so we’ll leave gallantry out, but there are two points at issue. First, the fact: did you find the bags empty, or did you empty them?”

“I found them empty. I told my sister—”

“I know what you told your sister, and the reason you give. Taking it that you found the bags empty, surely it is frivolous to offer that as an item for the police. Doctor Buhl told me that even if Miss Goren neglected to put hot water in them, which he doesn’t believe, it would have had no appreciable effect on the patient, so it has no appreciable effect on me. That is the second point. But your conjecture that something was substituted for the morphine—that might indeed have an effect if you can give it any support. Can you?”

“I don’t have to. Let the police see if they can.”

“No. That won’t do. A conjecture is well enough for private exploration, but using it to put a man under official suspicion of homicide is inadmissible. For example, it would not be a fatuous conjecture if I guessed that you, not knowing of the agreement between your brother and Mr. Arrow, and assuming that you would inherit a third of his fortune, killed him; but certainly I would not proceed—”

“You’d better not,” Paul cut in. His mug was contorted again, trying to grin. “I did know about the agreement.”

“Yes? Who told you?”

“I did,” David said. “Bert told me, and I told Paul and Louise.”

“You see?” Wolfe turned a hand over. “There goes my conjecture. If I were stubborn I could of course still cling to it, guessing that you had anticipated it and conspired to meet it, knowing that your dead brother can’t testify, but that would be witless if I had no single fact in support.” He shook his head at Paul. “I’m afraid you’re trying to open fire without ammunition. But I have been engaged to investigate, so I won’t scrimp it.” He went to David. “I know how you feel about this, Mr. Fyfe, so I don’t expect anything significant from you, but a few questions won’t hurt. What do you know about the morphine?”

“Nothing. Nothing at all, except that Doctor Buhl told us he had left some with the nurse to be given to Bert after we left.”

“Did you go in your brother’s room after Doctor Buhl left?”

“Yes, we all did—Paul and Louise and Vincent and I. We told him the dinner was excellent and we were sorry he couldn’t be with us at the theater.”

“Where was Mr. Arrow?”

“I don’t know. I believe he had said something about changing his shirt.”

“Did he go in your brother’s room after Doctor Buhl left?”

“I don’t know.” David shook his head. “I’m sure I don’t know.”

Wolfe grunted. “Not that that would indict him. How about later, when you returned from the theater? Did he go in your brother’s room then?”

“I don’t think so. If he did I didn’t see him.” David was frowning. “I told you about the situation. The nurse was very upset and said she had phoned Doctor Buhl to send a replacement. When she told us what had happened Arrow left—that is, he left the apartment. Then my sister and the nurse had some words, and my sister told the nurse to go, and after she went my sister phoned Doctor Buhl and told him she and her husband would stay until a replacement came. Shortly after that I went home. I live in Riverdale.”

“But before leaving you went to your brother’s room?”

“Yes.”

“How was he then?”

“He was sound asleep, making some noise breathing, but he seemed all right. When Louise phoned Doctor Buhl he told her that Bert had had half a grain of morphine and would probably not wake before morning.”

Wolfe’s head moved. “Mrs. Tuttle. You have heard what your brothers have said. Have you any corrections or additions?”

She was having a little trouble. Her mouth was working and her hands, in her lap, were clasped tight. She met Wolfe’s look but didn’t reply, until suddenly she cried, “It’s not my fault! No one is going to blame it on me!”

Wolfe made a face. “Why should they, madam?”

“Because they did about my father! Do you know about my father?”

“I know how he died. Your brother told me.”

“Well, they blamed me then—everybody did! Because I was taking care of him and I slept and didn’t go to his room and find the open windows! They even asked me if I put a drug in my chocolate so I would sleep! A twenty-four-year-old girl doesn’t have to take drugs to sleep!”

“Now, my dear.” Tuttle patted her shoulder. “That’s all in the past, it’s all forgotten. There were no open windows in Bert’s room Saturday night.”

“But I sent the nurse away.” She was talking to Wolfe. “And I told Doctor Buhl I would be responsible, and I went to bed and went to sleep without even looking at the hot-water bags, and they were empty.” She jerked her head around to her younger brother. “Tell the truth, Paul, the real truth. Were the bags empty?”

He patted her too. “Take it easy, Lou. Sure they were empty, on my word of honor as a Boy Scout, but that didn’t kill him and I never said it did.”

“No one’s blaming you,” Tuttle assured her. “As for your going to sleep, why shouldn’t you? It was after one o’clock, and Doctor Buhl

had said Bert would sleep all night. Believe me, my dear, you're making a mountain out of a molehill."

Her head went down and her hands came up to cover her face, and her shoulders began to tremble. To Wolfe a lady in distress is a female having a fit, and if she starts yowling he gets to his feet faster than seems practical for his bulk and makes for the door and the elevator. Louise wasn't yowling. He eyed her sharply and warily for a moment, decided she probably wouldn't go off, and went to her husband.

"About going to sleep, Mr. Tuttle, you said after one o'clock. That was after Paul had got you out of bed to let him in?"

"Yes." He had a soothing hand on his wife's arm. "It took a little time, hearing what Paul had to say and getting him settled on the couch. Then we took a look in Bert's room and found him asleep, and went to bed."

"Did you sleep right through until Paul woke you around six in the morning?"

"I think my wife did. She was tired out. She may have stirred a little, but I don't think she awoke. I went to the bathroom a couple of times, I usually do during the night, but except for that I slept until Paul called us. The second time I went and opened the door of Bert's room, and didn't hear anything, so I didn't go in. Why? Is this important?"

"Not especially." Wolfe darted a glance at Louise, alert to danger, and back at him. "I am thinking of Mr. Arrow and trying to cover all the possibilities. Of course he had a key to the apartment, and so might have entered during the night, performed an errand if he had one, and left again. Might he not?"

Tuttle considered. To watch him consider I had to make an effort to forget his shiny dome and concentrate on his features. It would have been simpler if his eyes and nose and mouth had been on top of his head. "Possibly," he conceded, "but I doubt it. I'm not a very sound sleeper and I think I would have heard him. And he would have had to go through the living room and Paul was there on the couch, but of course Paul was pretty well gone."

“I was *all* gone,” Paul asserted. “He would have had to slug me again if he wanted me to notice him.” He looked at Wolfe. “It’s an idea. What kind of an errand?”

“No special kind. I’m merely asking questions.—Mr.Tuttle, when did you next see Mr. Arrow?”

“That morning, Sunday morning, he came to the apartment around nine o’clock, just after Doctor Buhl arrived.”

“Where had he been?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t ask him and he didn’t say. It was—well, it was in the presence of death. He asked us a great many questions, some of them impertinent, I thought, but under those circumstances I made allowances.”

Wolfe leaned back, closed his eyes, and lowered his chin. The brothers sat and looked at him. Tuttle turned to his wife, smoothing her shoulder and murmuring to her, and before long she uncovered her face and lifted her head. He got a nice clean handkerchief from his breast pocket, and she took it and dabbed around with it. There was no sign of any tear gullies down her cheeks.

Wolfe opened his eyes and moved them from left to right and back again. “I see no likely advantage,” he pronounced, “in keeping you longer. I had hoped it would be possible to reach a decision this evening”—he leveled at Paul—“but your conjecture about the morphine merits a little inquiry—by me, that is, and of course discreet. It would be no service to expose you to an action for slander.” His eyes went to David and back across to Tuttle. “By the way, I haven’t mentioned that Doctor Buhl asked me to let you know that if Miss Goren is charged with negligence he will advise her to bring such an action, and he will support it. She maintains that before she left she put hot water in the bags, and he believes her. You will hear further from me, probably not later—”

The doorbell rang. When we have company in the office Fritz usually answers it, but I had a hunch, which I frequently do, and I got up and, passing behind the customers’ chairs, reached the hall in time to head Fritz off on his way to the front. The stoop light was on, and through the panel I saw a stranger—a square-shouldered specimen about my age and nearly my size. Telling Fritz I’d take it, I

went and opened the door to the extent allowed by the chain of the bolt and asked through the crack, “Can I help you?”

A soft drawly voice slipped through. “I guess so. My name’s Arrow. Johnny Arrow. I want to see Nero Wolfe. If you open the door that’ll help.”

“Yeah, but I’ll have to ask him. Hold it a minute.” I shut the door, got a piece of paper from my pocket and wrote “Arrow” on it, returned to the office and crossed to Wolfe’s desk, and handed him the paper. The visitors were out of their chairs, ready to leave.

Wolfe glanced at the paper. “Confound it,” he grumped. “I thought I was through for the day. But perhaps I can—very well.”

I will concede that I can be charged with negligence, since I knew what had happened Saturday night in the Churchill bar, but I deny that it was intentional. I have as much respect for the furniture in the office as Wolfe has, or Fritz. I just didn’t stop to consider, as I went to the front door and let the uranium prince in and ushered him to the office and stepped aside to observe expressions on faces. When, the instant he caught sight of Paul Fyfe, Arrow went for him, I was too far away and therefore one of the yellow chairs got busted. The consolation was that I saw a swell demonstration of how Paul had got his jaw bruised on both sides. Arrow jabbed with his left, hard enough to rock him off balance, and then swung his right and sent him some six feet crashing onto the chair. As he was reaching to yank him up, presumably to attend to the other eye, I got there and put my arm around his neck from behind, and my knee in his back. Tuttle was there, trying to grab Arrow’s sleeve. David was circling around, apparently with the notion of getting in between them, which is rotten tactics. Louise was making shrill noises.

“Okay,” I told them, “just back off. I’ve got him locked.” Arrow tried to wriggle, found that the only question was which would snap first, his neck or his back, and quit. Wolfe spoke, disgusted, saying they had better go. Paul had scrambled to his feet, and for a second I thought he was going to take a poke at Arrow while I held him, but David had his arm, pulling him away. Tuttle went to Louise and started her out, and David got Paul moving. At the door to the hall

David turned to protest to Wolfe, “You shouldn’t have let him in, you might have known.” When they were all in the hall I unlocked Arrow and went to see them out, and as they crossed the threshold I wished them good night, but only David wished me one in return.

Back in the office Johnny Arrow was sitting in the red leather chair, working his head gingerly forward and back to check on his neck. I may have been a little thorough, but with a complete stranger how can you tell?

IV

I sat with my back to my desk and took him in as an object with assorted points of interest. He was a uranium millionaire, the very newest kind. He was a chronic jaw-puncher, no matter where. He knew a good-looking nurse when he saw one, and acted accordingly. And he had been nominated as a candidate for the electric chair. Quite a character for one so young. He wasn't bad-looking himself, unless you insist on the kind they use for cigarette ads. His face and hands weren't as rough and weathered as I would have expected of a man who had spent five years in the wilderness pecking at rocks, but since finding Black Elbow he had had time to smooth up some.

He quit working his head and returned my regard with a stare of curiosity from brown eyes that had wrinkles at their corners from squinting for uranium. "That was quite a squeeze," he said in his soft drawl, no animosity. "I thought my neck was broken."

"It should have been," Wolfe told him severely. "Look at that chair."

"Oh, I'll pay for the chair." He got a big roll of lettuce from his pants pocket. "How much?"

"Mr. Goodwin will send you a bill." Wolfe was scowling. "My office is not an arena for gladiators. You came, I suppose, in response to the message we left for you?"

He shook his head. "I didn't get any message. If you sent it to the hotel, I haven't been there since morning. What did it say?"

"Just that I wanted to see you."

"I didn't get it." He lifted a hand to massage the side of his neck. "I came because *I* wanted to see *you*." He emphasized a word by stretching it. "I wanted to see that Paul Fyfe too, but I didn't know

he was here, that was just luck. I wanted to see him about a trick he tried to work on a friend of mine. You know about the hot-water bags."

Wolfe nodded. "And me?"

"I wanted to see you because I understand you're fixing it up that I killed my partner, Bert Fyfe." The brown eyes had narrowed a little. Evidently they squinted at other things besides uranium. "I wanted to ask if you needed any help."

Wolfe grunted. "Your information is faulty, Mr. Arrow. I have been hired to investigate and decide whether any of the circumstances of Mr. Fyfe's death warrant a police inquiry, and for that I do need help. There is no question of 'fixing it up,' as you put it. Of course your offer of help was ironic, but I do need it. Shall we proceed?"

Arrow laughed. No guffaws; just an easy little chuckle that went with the drawl. "That depends on how," he said. "Proceed how?"

"With an exchange of information. I need some, and you may want some. First, I assume that you got what you already have from Miss Goren. If I'm wrong, correct me. You must have talked with her since four o'clock this afternoon. No doubt she thought she was reporting events accurately, but if she gave you the impression that I'm after you with malign intent she was wrong. Do you care to tell me whether the information that brought you here came from Miss Goren?"

"Certainly it did. She had dinner with me. Doctor Buhl came to the restaurant for her to bring her here."

If I'm giving the impression that he was eager to co-operate with Wolfe I am wrong. He was merely bragging. He was jumping at the chance to tell somebody, anybody, that Miss Goren had let him buy her a dinner.

"Then," Wolfe said, "you should realize that her report was ex parte, though I don't say she deliberately colored it. I will say this, and will have it typed and sign it if you wish, that so far I have found no shred of evidence to inculpate you with regard to Bertram Fyfe's death. Let's get on to facts. What do you know about the hot-

water bags? Not what any one has told you, not even Miss Goren, but what do you know from your own observation?"

"Nothing whatever. I never saw them."

"Or touched them?"

"Of course not. Why would I touch them?" The drawl never accelerated. "And if you're asking because that Paul Fyfe says he found them empty, what has that got to do with facts?"

"Possibly nothing. I'm not a gull. When did you last see Bertram Fyfe alive?"

"Saturday evening, just before we left to go to the theater. I went in just for a minute."

"Miss Goren was there with him?"

"Yes, of course."

"You didn't go in to see him when you returned from the theater?"

"No. Do you want to know why?"

"I already know. You found what Mr. David Fyfe calls a situation, and you went out again, abruptly. I have inferred that you went to look for Paul Fyfe. Is that correct?"

"Sure, and I found him. After what Miss Goren told us I would have spent the night finding him, but I didn't have to. I found him down in the bar."

"And assaulted him."

"Sure I did. I wasn't looking for him to shine his shoes." The easy little chuckle rippled out, pleasant and peaceful. "I guess I ought to be glad a cop stepped in because I was pretty mad." He looked at me with friendly interest. "That was quite a squeeze you gave me."

"What then?" Wolfe asked. "I understand you didn't return to the apartment."

"I sure didn't. Another cop came, but I was still mad and I didn't want to be held, so they got mad. They put handcuffs on me and one of them took me to a station house and locked me up. I wouldn't tell them who it was I had hit or why I hit him, and I guess they were trying to find him to make a charge. Finally they let me use a phone, and I got someone to send a lawyer and he talked me out. I went to the apartment and found that Paul Fyfe there, and

that Tuttle and his wife, and Bert was dead. That doctor was there too."

"Of course it was a shock to find him dead."

"Yes, it was. It wouldn't have been if I had killed him, is that it?" Johnny Arrow chuckled. "If you're really straight on this, if you're not trying to fix me up, let me tell you something, mister. Bert and I had been knocking around together for five years, some pretty rough going. We never starved to death, but we came close to it. Nobody ever combed our hair for us. When we found Black Elbow it took a lot of hard fast work to sew up the claims, and neither of us could have swung it alone. That was when we had a lawyer put our agreement in writing, so if something happened to one of us there wouldn't be some outsiders mixing in and making trouble. It had got so we liked to be together, even when we rubbed. That was why I came to New York with him when he asked me to. There was nothing in New York I wanted. We could handle all our business matters in Black Elbow and Montreal. I sure didn't come here with him to kill him."

Wolfe was regarding him steadily. "Then he didn't come to New York on business?"

"No, sir. He said it was a personal matter. After we got here he got in touch with his sister and brothers, and I had the idea something was eating him from away back. He went to Mount Kisco a few times and took me along. We rode all around the place in a Cadillac. We went to the house where he was born, and went all through it—there's an Italian family living there now. We went and had ice cream sodas at Tuttle's drugstore. We went to see a woman that ran a rooming house he had lived in once, but she had gone years ago. Just last week he found out she was living in Poughkeepsie, and we drove up there."

It took him quite a while to get that much out because he never speeded up. There was the advantage that he didn't have to stop for breath. "I seem to be talking a lot," he said, "but I'm talking about Bert. For five years I didn't do much talking except to him, and now I guess I want to talk *about* him."

He cocked his head to consider a moment, and then went on. “I wouldn’t want to be fixed up, and I wouldn’t want to fix anyone else up, but I guess that was too vague what I said about something eating Bert from away back. He told me a little about it when we were sitting under a rock one day up in Canada. He said if we really hit it he might go back home and attend to some unfinished business. Do you know how his father died and how he was tried for murder?”

Wolfe said he did.

“Well, he told me about it. He said he had never claimed his share of the inheritance because he didn’t want any part of the mess he had run away from, and if you knew Bert that wouldn’t surprise you. He said he had always kidded himself that he had rubbed it out and forgotten it, but now that it looked as if we might hit big he was thinking he might go back and look around. And that’s what he did. If he had anyone in particular in mind he never told me, but I noticed a few things. When he told his family what he was doing he watched their faces. When he told them he was getting a complete transcript of the testimony at his trial for murder they didn’t like it. When he told them he had been to see the woman that ran the rooming house they didn’t like that either. It looked to me as if he was trying to give them an itch to scratch.”

His eyes narrowed a little, showing crinkles. “But don’t get the idea I’m trying to fix anybody up. The doctor says Bert died of pneumonia, and I guess he’s a good doctor. I just didn’t want to leave it vague about why Bert came to New York. Got any more questions?”

Wolfe shook his head. “Not at the moment. Later perhaps. But I suggested an exchange of information. Do you want any?”

“Now I call that polite.” Arrow sounded as if he really appreciated it. “I guess not.” He rose from the chair, and stood a moment. “Only you said you’ve found no evidence to—what was that word?”

“Inculpate.”

“That’s it. So why don’t you just move out? That’s what Bert and I did when we found a field was dead, we moved out.”

“I didn’t say it was dead.” Wolfe was glum. “It’s not, and that’s the devil of it. There is one mysterious circumstance that must somehow be explained before I can move out.”

“What is it?”

“I’ve already asked you about it, and you dispute it. If I broach it again with you I’ll be better armed. Mr. Goodwin will send you a bill for the chair when we know the amount. Good evening, sir.”

He wanted more about the mysterious circumstance, but didn’t get it. Nothing doing. When he found the field was dead he moved out, and I went to the hall to open the door for him. After he crossed the sill he turned to tell me, “That sure was a squeeze.”

In the office, Wolfe was leaning back with his eyes closed, frowning. I stowed the broken chair in a corner, put the others back in place, straightened up my desk for the night, locked the safe, and then approached him. “What’s the idea, trying to make him mad? If there’s a mysterious circumstance I must have been asleep. Name it.”

He muttered, without opening his eyes, “Hot-water bags.”

I stretched and yawned. “I see. You force yourself to go to work, find there is no problem, and make one up. Forget it. Settle for the grand, which isn’t too bad for eight hours’ work, and vote no. Case closed.”

“I can’t. There is a problem.” His eyes opened. “Who in the name of heaven emptied those bags, and why?”

“Paul did. Why not?”

“Because I don’t believe it. Disregarding his repeated declarations here this evening, though they were persuasive, consider the scene. He enters his brother’s room and finds him dead. He pulls the covers down and finds the hot-water bags empty. He turns to go and call his sister and brother-in-law, but it occurs to him that the empty bags are a weapon that may be used on Miss Goren. He doesn’t want them to come to his sister’s attention, so before he calls her he puts the bags in the bathroom. You accept that as credible?”

“Certainly I do, but—”

“If you please. I’ll use the ‘but.’ But try it this way. He enters his brother’s room and finds him dead. He pulls the covers down to feel

the heart. The bags are there, with water in them. Seeing them, he conceives a stratagem—and remember, he is under the shock of just having found a corpse where he expected, presumably, to find his living brother. He conceives, on the spot, before calling the others, the notion of taking the bags to the bathroom and emptying them, so he can go at some future time to Miss Goren and tell her he found them empty; and he proceeds to do so. Do you accept that as credible?"

"It's a little fancy," I admitted, "as you describe it."

"I describe it as it must have happened, *if* it happened. I say it didn't. He noticed the bags only because they *were* empty; if they had been full he probably wouldn't have been aware of them at all, there in a sickbed, now a deathbed. Doubtless there are men capable of so sly an artifice at such a moment, but he is not one of them. I am compelled to assume that he found the bags empty, and where does that leave me?"

"I'd have to look it over." I sat down.

"You won't like it." He was bitter. "I don't. If I am to preserve my self-esteem, a duty that cannot be delegated, I have got to explore it. Is Miss Goren at fault? Did she put the bags in the bed empty?"

"No, sir. I'm thinking of marrying her. Besides, I don't believe it. She's competent, and no competent trained nurse could possibly pull such a boner."

"I agree. Then here we are. Around midnight, just before she left, Miss Goren filled the bags with hot water and put them in the bed. Around six in the morning Paul Fyfe found the bags there in the bed, but they were empty. Someone had removed them, emptied them, and put them back. Justify it."

"Don't look at me, I didn't do it. Why should I justify it?"

"You can't. To suppose it was done with murderous design would be egregious. It's inexplicable; and anything inexplicable on a deathbed is sinister, especially the deathbed of a millionaire. Before I can even consider the question of who did it I must answer the question, why?"

"Not necessarily," I argued. "I'll switch. Settle for the grand, but don't vote no. Vote yes, and let Paul turn it over to the cops. That

will fill the order."

"Pfui. Do you mean that?"

I gave up. "No. You're stuck. The cops would only decide the nurse had left the bags empty and wouldn't admit it, and Johnny Arrow would start in slugging the whole damn Homicide Squad from Inspector Cramer right down the line." Struck with a sudden suspicion, I eyed him. "Is this just a build-up? Do you already know why the bags were emptied, or think you do, and you want me to realize how brilliant you were to get it?"

"No. I am lost. I can't even grope. It's more than mysterious, it's preposterous." He looked up at the clock. "It's bedtime, and now I must take this monstrosity to bed with me. First, though, some instructions for you for the morning. Your notebook, please?"

I got it from the drawer.

V

Wednesday morning, after having breakfast in the kitchen with Fritz, as usual, while Wolfe was having his up in his room, also as usual, I got started on the instructions. They were simple, but it proved to be not so simple to carry them out. The first and main item was to phone Doctor Buhl and arrange for him to be at the office at eleven o'clock, when Wolfe would come down from the plant rooms, and bring Anne Goren with him. To begin with, I didn't get hold of him until nearly noon. From nine o'clock until ten all I got was his answering service and the information that he was out making calls. I left word for him to ring me, but he didn't. From ten o'clock on I got his office nurse. She was courteous and sympathetic, in a subdued way, the first three times I phoned, but after that got a little brusque. The doctor, still out making the rounds, had been told of my request to be rung, and she couldn't help it if he had been too busy. When he finally called I couldn't very well ask him to arrive with Miss Goren at eleven, since it was already a quarter to twelve, so I suggested three o'clock, and got a flat no. Neither three nor any other hour. He had told Wolfe all he had to tell about the death of Bertram Fyfe, but if Wolfe wished to speak with him on the phone he could spare two minutes. Consulted, Wolfe said no, not on the phone. Deadlock.

The upshot was that after lunch I got the car from the garage and drove the forty miles, up the West Side Highway and out the Sawmill River Parkway, to Mount Kisco, and found that Buhl's office was in a big white house in a big green lawn. I had been told he would see me after his p.m. office hours, which were from two to four, but there were still five patients in the waiting room when I arrived, so I had a nice long visit with the usual crop of magazines

before the nurse, who had been with him at least sixty years, passed me through.

Buhl, seated at a desk, looking tired but still distinguished, told me abruptly, “I have calls to make and I’m late. What is it now?”

I can be abrupt too. “A question,” I said, “raised by a relative of the deceased. Did someone substitute something else for the morphine? Mr. Wolfe doesn’t want to pass it on to the cops without giving it a look himself, but if you would prefer—”

“Morphine? You mean the morphine administered to Bert Fyfe?”

“Yes, sir. Since the question has been—”

“That damn fool. Paul, of course. It’s absurd. Substituted when and by whom?”

“Not specified.” I sat down, uninvited. “But Mr. Wolfe can’t just skip it so he’d appreciate a little information. Did you give the morphine to the nurse yourself?”

From the look he gave me I expected to be told to go climb a tree, preferably one about ready to topple, but he changed his mind and decided to get it over with. “The morphine,” he said, “came from a bottle in my case. I took two quarter-grain tablets from the bottle and gave them to the nurse, and told her to give one to the patient as soon as the dinner guests had left, and the other one an hour later if necessary. She has told me that the tablets were administered as directed. To suppose that something was substituted for them is fantastic.”

“Yes, sir. Where did she keep them until the time came to administer them?”

“I don’t know. She is a competent nurse and completely reliable. Do you want me to ask her?”

“No, thanks, I will. Could there be any question about your bottle of morphine? Could it have been tampered with?”

“Not possible. No.”

“Had you got a fresh supply recently—I mean, put a fresh supply in that bottle?”

“No. Not for two weeks at least. Longer, probably.”

“Would you say there is any chance—say one in a million—that you took the tablets from the wrong bottle?”

“No. Not one in a billion.” His brows went up. “Isn’t this a little superfluous? From what David told me yesterday I gathered that Paul’s suspicions were directed at the man who came to New York with Bert—Mr. Arrow.”

“Maybe so, but Mr. Wolfe is being thorough. He’s a thorough man.” I stood up. “Many thanks, doctor. If you wonder why I drove clear up here just for this, Mr. Wolfe is also careful. He doesn’t like to ask questions about an unexpected death on the phone.”

I left him, went back out to the car, and rolled off. The route back to the parkway took me through the center of town, and on a red brick building on a corner, a very fine location, I saw the sign: TUTTLE’S PHARMACY. That was as good a place as any for a phone, so I parked down the block and walked back to it. Inside, it was quite an establishment—up-to-date, well-furnished, well-stocked, and busy, with half a dozen customers on stools at the fountain and three or four others scattered around. One of them, at a counter in the rear, was being waited on by the proprietor himself, Vincent Tuttle. I crossed to a phone booth, dialed the operator, asked for the number I knew best, and in a moment had Wolfe’s voice in my ear.

“From a booth,” I told him, “in Tuttle’s pharmacy in Mount Kisco. Quoting Doctor Buhl, the idea of a switch on the morphine is absurd and fantastic. As for its source, he gave two quarter-grain tablets to the nurse from his private stock. Do I proceed?”

“No.” It was a growl, as always when he was interrupted in the plant rooms. “Or rather, yes, but first some further inquiry in Mount Kisco. After you left I considered the question of the hot-water bags, and I may have hit on the answer—or I may not. At any rate, it’s worth trying. See Mr. Paul Fyfe and ask him what happened to the ice cream. You will remember—”

“Yeah, he bought it at Schramm’s, to take back to Mount Kisco for a Sunday party, and took it to Bert’s apartment and put it in the refrigerator. You say you want to know what happened to it?”

“I do. See him and ask him. If he accounts for it, check him thoroughly. If he doesn’t, see if Mr. or Mrs. Tuttle can, and check them. If they can’t, ask Miss Goren when you see her about the

morphine. If she can't, find Mr. Arrow and ask him. I want to know what happened to that ice cream."

"You certainly do. Tell me why so I'll have some idea what I'm after."

"No. You are not without discretion, but there's no point in subjecting it to an unnecessary strain."

"You're absolutely right, and I appreciate it deeply. Tuttle's right here, so shall I see him first?"

He said no, to see Paul first, and hung up. As I left the booth and the store and headed for the address of Paul's real-estate office, down the street a block, I was looking around inside my skull for a connection between Schramm's famous mango ice cream and the hot-water bags in Bert Fyfe's bed, but if it was there I couldn't find it. Which was just as well, if there really was one, because I hate to overwork my discretion.

I found Paul on the second floor of an old wooden building, above a grocery store. His office was one small room, with two desks and some scarred old chairs which had probably been allotted to him when the family split up the paternal estate. Seated at the smaller desk was a woman with a long thin neck and big ears, about twice Paul's age, who was perfectly safe even with him. Paul, at the other desk, didn't get up as I entered.

"You?" he said. "You got something?"

I looked at the woman, who was fiddling with some papers. He told her she could go, and she merely plunked a weight down on the papers, got up, and left. No amenities at all.

When the door had closed behind her I answered him. "I haven't got something, I'm just after something. Mr. Wolfe sent me up here to ask Doctor Buhl about the morphine and to ask you about the ice cream. The last we heard it was still in the refrigerator in your brother's apartment. What happened to it?"

"Well, for God's sake." He was staring at me, at least with his good eye. It was hard to tell what the one with the shiner was doing. "What the hell has that got to do with anything?"

"I don't know. With Mr. Wolfe, I often don't know, but it's his car and tires and gas, and he pays my salary, so I just humor him. It's

the simplest and quickest way for you too, unless there's something about the ice cream you'd rather keep to yourself."

"There's not a damn thing about the ice cream."

"Then I won't have to bother to sit down. Did you bring it to Mount Kisco for the Sunday party you mentioned?"

"No. I didn't come back to Mount Kisco until Sunday night."

"But you were in New York again the next day, Monday, for the funeral—and to call on Miss Goren again. Did you get the ice cream then?"

"Look," he said, "we'll leave Miss Goren out of this."

"That's the spirit," I said warmly. "I'm all for gallantry. But what happened to the ice cream?"

"I don't know and don't give a damn."

"Did you see it or touch it at any time after you put it in the refrigerator Saturday afternoon?"

"I did not. And if you ask me, this is a lot of crap. I don't know where that fat slob Wolfe got his reputation, but if this is the way he carries on an investi—What's the big rush?"

I had got as far as the door. Turning as I opened it, I said politely, "Nice to see you," and went.

Backtracking to Tuttle's pharmacy, I found there had been a turnover of customers, but business was still humming. Tuttle's shiny dome loomed behind a showcase of cosmetics. Catching his eye, I crossed over and told him I would like to have a couple of minutes when he was free, and then went to the fountain and ordered a glass of milk. It was nearly all down when he called to me, and beckoned, and I emptied the glass and followed him to the rear, behind the partition. He leaned against a counter and said it was a surprise, seeing me up there.

"A couple of little errands," I told him. "To ask Doctor Buhl about the morphine, and to ask you about the ice cream. I've already asked Paul Fyfe. You remember he bought some ice cream at Schramm's Saturday afternoon and took it to Bert's apartment and put it in the refrigerator, intending to take it home with him."

Tuttle corrected me. "I remember he said he did. What about it?"

“Mr. Wolfe wants to know what became of it. Paul says he doesn’t know. He says he never saw it again after he put it in the refrigerator. Did you?”

“I never saw it at all.”

“I thought you might have. You and your wife stayed there Saturday night. Sunday morning your brother-in-law was there dead, but even so you must have eaten something. I thought you might have gone to the refrigerator for something for breakfast, and you might have noticed the ice cream.”

“We had breakfast sent up.” Tuttle was frowning. “There was no equipment there for cooking. But now that I think of it, I believe Paul mentioned the ice cream Saturday evening at the dinner table. He said something about my ice cream here not comparing with Schramm’s and asked why I didn’t carry it, and I told him Schramm’s products were sold only at their own stores, and anyway it was too expensive. Then I believe my wife mentioned it on Sunday, when she went to the refrigerator for some ice for drinks.”

“Did you eat any of it Sunday? Or bring it home with you?”

“No. I said I never saw it. We stayed at the apartment until Monday and came home after the funeral.”

“You don’t know what became of it?”

“I do not. I suppose it’s still there. Unless that man Arrow—why don’t you ask him?”

“I will. But first, since I’m here, I guess I’ll ask your wife. Is she around?”

“She’s at home, up on Iron Hill Road. I can phone her and tell her you’re coming, or you can speak with her on the phone. But I fail to see what that ice cream has to do with the death of my brother-in-law. What’s the connection?”

It seemed to me that that reaction was rather late, but it could have been that since he was only an in-law he didn’t want to butt in. “Search me,” I told him. “I just run errands. Why don’t we get your wife on the phone, and I may not have to bother her by going there?”

He turned to a phone on the counter, dialed a number, got it, told his wife I wanted to ask her something, and handed me the

transmitter. Louise, not being an in-law, said at once that it was ridiculous to annoy them about something utterly irrelevant, but after a little give and take she told me what she knew, which was nothing. She had never seen the ice cream, though she had probably seen the package. Getting ice from the refrigerator Sunday afternoon, she had noticed a large paper bag on the bottom shelf, and, on returning to the living room, had mentioned it to her husband and her brother David, who was there, saying that she thought it was Paul's ice cream and asking if they wanted some. They had declined, and she had not looked into the paper bag. She had no idea what had happened to it. I thanked her, hung up, thanked her husband, and beat it.

Next stop, 48th Street, Manhattan.

VI

In view of the parking situation, or rather the non-parking situation, I have given up using the car for midtown errands, so I left the highway at 46th Street and drove to the garage. I could have phoned a progress report to Wolfe from there, but the house is just around the corner, and I went in person instead of phoning, and got a surprise. In response to my ring it wasn't Fritz who unbolted the door for me, but Saul Panzer. Saul, with his big nose taking half the available area of his narrow little face, looks at first glance as if he might need help to add two and two. Actually he needs help for nothing whatever. He is not only the best of the four or five operatives Wolfe calls on as required, he's the best anywhere.

"So," I greeted him, "you got my job at last, huh? Please show me to the office."

"Got an appointment?" he demanded, closing the door. Then he followed me down the hall and in.

Wolfe, behind his desk, grunted at me. "Back so soon?"

"No, sir," I told him. "This is just a stopover after leaving the car at the garage. Do you want a report on Paul and Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle before I go on?"

"Yes. Verbatim, please."

With him verbatim means not only all the words but also all the actions and expressions, and I sat down and gave them to him. He is the best listener I know, usually with his elbow on the chair arm, his chin resting on his fist, and his eyes half closed.

When I had finished he sat a moment and then nodded. "Satisfactory. Proceed with the others. Since you won't need the car may Saul use it?"

That wasn't as chummy as it sounds. It had long been understood that the car was his one piece of property on which I had the say.

"For how long?" I inquired.

"Today, tonight, and possibly part of tomorrow."

I looked at my wrist and saw 6:55. "There's not much left of today. Okay. Do I ask for what?"

"Not at the moment. It may be to chase a wild goose. What about your dinner?"

"I don't know." I arose. "If I find the ice cream I can eat that." I headed for the door, turned there to suggest, "Saul can eat the goose," and left.

Flagging a taxi at Tenth Avenue and riding uptown, and across 48th Street to the East Side, a part of the thousand-wheeled worm, I admitted that he must have a glimmer of something, since Saul's daily rate was now fifty bucks, quite a bite out of a measly grand, but I still couldn't tie up the ice cream and the hot-water bags. Of course he might be sending Saul on a different trail entirely, and as far as keeping it to himself was concerned, I had long ago stopped letting that get on my nerves, so I just tabled it.

The number, on 48th between Lexington and Third, belonged to an old brick four-story that had been painted yellow. In the vestibule two names were squeezed on the little slip by the button next to the top—"Goren" and "Poletti." I pushed the button, and, when the clicks came, opened the door and entered, and went up two flights of narrow stairs, which were carpeted and clean for a change. Turning to the front on the landing, I got a surprise. A door had opened, and standing on the sill was one named neither Goren nor Poletti. It was Johnny Arrow, squinting at me.

"Oh," he said. "I thought maybe it was that Paul Fyfe."

I advanced. "If it's convenient," I said, "I'd like to see Miss Goren."

"What about?"

He needed taking down a peg. "Really," I said. "Only yesterday you were bragging about taking her to dinner. Don't tell me you've already been promoted to watchdog. I want to ask her a question."

For a second I thought he was going to demand to know the question, and so did he, but he decided to chuckle instead. He invited me in, ushered me through an arch into a living room that was well cluttered with the feminine touch, disappeared, and in a minute was back.

"She's changing," he informed me. He sat. "I guess you called me about bragging." His drawl was friendly. "We just got back from the ball game a little while ago, and now we're going out for a feed. I was going to phone you this morning."

"You mean phone Nero Wolfe?"

"No, you. I was going to ask you where you bought that suit you had on last night. Now I'd like to ask you where you bought the one you've got on now, but I guess that's a little personal."

I was sympathetic. Realizing that a guy who had spent five years in the bush, and who, in New York, found himself suddenly faced with the problem of togging up for a ladylove, was in a tough spot, especially if he could scrape up only ten million bucks, I gave him the lowdown from socks to shirts. We were on ornamental vests, pro and con, when Anne Goren came floating in, and at sight of her I regretted the steer I had given him. I would have been perfectly willing to feed her myself if I hadn't been working.

"Sorry I made you wait," she told me politely. "What is it?" She didn't sit, and we were up.

"A couple of little points," I said. "I saw Doctor Buhl this afternoon, and expected he would phone you, but since you were out he couldn't. First about the morphine he gave you Saturday to be given to Bertram Fyfe. He says he took two quarter-grain tablets from a bottle he had, and gave them to you, with directions. Is that correct?"

"Wait a minute, Anne." Arrow was squinting at me. "What's the idea of this?"

"No special idea." I met the brown eyes through the squint. "Mr. Wolfe needs the information to clear this thing up, that's all.—Do you object to giving it, Miss Goren? I asked Doctor Buhl where you kept the tablets until the time came to administer them, and he told me to ask you."

“I put them in a saucer and put the saucer on top of the bureau in the patient’s room. That is standard procedure.”

“Sure. Would you mind going right through it? From the time Doctor Buhl gave you the tablets?”

“He handed them to me just before he left, and after he left I went to the bureau and put them in the saucer. The instructions were to give one as soon as the guests had gone, and one an hour later if it seemed desirable, and that’s what I did.” She was being cool and professional. “At ten minutes past eight I put one of the tablets in my hypo syringe with one c.c. of sterile water, and injected it in the patient’s arm. An hour later he was asleep but a little restless, and I did the same with the other tablet. That quieted him completely.”

“Have you any reason to suspect that the tablets in the saucer had been changed by someone? That the ones you gave the patient were not the ones Doctor Buhl gave you?”

“Certainly not.”

“Look here,” Johnny Arrow drawled, “that’s a kind of a nasty question. I guess that’s enough.”

I grinned at him. “You’re too touchy. If the cops ever got started on this they’d hammer away at her for hours. Five people have admitted they were in the patient’s room after Doctor Buhl left, including you, and the cops would go over that with her forward, backward, sideways, and up and down. I don’t want to spoil her appetite for dinner, so I merely ask her if she saw anything suspicious. Or heard anything. You didn’t, Miss Goren?”

“I did not.”

“Then that’s that. Now the other point. You may or may not know that Paul Fyfe brought some ice cream to the apartment and put it in the refrigerator. It was mentioned at the dinner table, but you weren’t there. Do you know what happened to the ice cream?”

“No.” Her voice sharpened. “This seems pretty silly. Ice cream?”

“I often seem silly. Just ignore it. Mr. Wolfe wants to know about the ice cream. You know nothing at all about it?”

“No. I never heard of it.”

“Okay.” I turned to Arrow. “This one is for you too. What do you know about the ice cream?”

“Nothing.” He chuckled. “You can get as nasty as you want to with me, after that squeeze you put on me last night, but don’t try getting behind me. I’m going to keep you right in front.”

“From the front I use something else. You remember Paul Fyfe mentioned the ice cream at the dinner table?”

“I guess I do. I had forgotten about it.”

“But you never saw it or touched it?”

“No.”

“Or heard anything about what happened to it?”

“No.”

“Then I’m going to ask you to do me a favor. You’ll be doing yourself one too, because it’s the quickest way to get rid of me. Where are you going for dinner?”

“I’ve got a table reserved at Rusterman’s.”

He was certainly learning his way around, possibly with Anne’s help. “That’s fine,” I said, “because it’s only a block out of the way. I want you to take me to the Churchill Towers apartment and let me look in the refrigerator.”

It was a good thing I had taken the trouble to brief him on tailors and haberdashers. But for that he would probably have refused, and I would have had to go and persuade Tim Evarts, the house dick, to oblige, and that would have cost both time and money. He did balk some, but Anne put in, saying it would take less time to humor me than to argue with me, and that settled it. It seemed likely that in the years to come Anne would do a lot of settling, and then and there I decided to let him have her. She permitted him to help her get a yellow embroidered stole across her bare shoulders, and he got a black Homburg from a table. On our way downstairs, and in the taxi we took to the Churchill. I could have coached him on black Homburgs, when and where and with what, but with Anne present I thought it advisable to skip it.

The Churchill Towers apartment, on the thirty-second floor, had a foyer about the size of my bedroom, and the living room would have accommodated three billiard tables with plenty of elbow space. There was an inside hall between the living room and the bedrooms, and at one end of the hall was a serving pantry, with an

outside service entrance. Besides a long built-in stainless-steel counter, the pantry had a large warmer cabinet, an even larger refrigerator, and a door to a refuse-disposal chute, but no cooking equipment. Arrow and Anne stood just inside the swinging door, touching elbows, as I went and opened the door of the refrigerator.

The freezing compartment at the top held six trays of ice cubes and nothing else. On the shelves below were a couple of dozen bottles—beer, club soda, tonic—five bottles of champagne lying on their sides, a bowl of oranges, and a plate of grapes. There was no paper bag, big or little, and absolutely no sign of ice cream. I closed the door and opened the door of the warmer cabinet. It contained nothing. I opened the door of the disposal chute and stuck my head in, and got a smell, but not of ice cream.

I turned to the hooker and the hooked. “All right,” I told them, “I give up. Many thanks. As I said, this was the quickest way to get rid of me. Enjoy your dinner.” They made gangway for me, and I pushed through the swinging door and on out.

When Wolfe had asked me what about dinner I had told him I didn’t know, but I knew now. I could be home by 8:30, and that afternoon, preparing for one of Wolfe’s favorite hot-weather meals, Fritz had been collecting eight baby lobsters, eight avocados, and a bushel of young leaf lettuce. When he had introduced to them the proper amounts of chives, onion, parsley, tomato paste, mayonnaise, salt, pepper, paprika, pimientos, and dry white wine, he would have Brazilian lobster salad as edited by Wolfe, and not even Wolfe could have it all stowed away by half past eight.

He hadn’t. I found him in the dining room, at table, starting on deep-dish blueberry pie smothered with whipped cream. There was no lobster salad in sight, but Fritz, who had let me in, soon entered with the big silver platter, and there was plenty left. Wolfe’s ban on business during meals is not only for his own protection but other people’s too, including me, so I could keep my mind where it belonged, on the proper ratio of the ingredients of a mouthful. Only after that had been attended to, and my share of the blueberry pie, and we had crossed the hall to the office, where Fritz brought coffee, did he ask for a report. I gave it to him. When I had

described the climax, the empty refrigerator—that is, empty of ice cream—I got up to refill our coffee cups.

"But," I said, "if you have simply got to know what happened to it, God knows why, there is still one slender hope. David wasn't on my list. I was going to phone from the Churchill to ask if you wanted me to try him, but I wanted some of that lobster. He was there in the apartment most of Sunday. Shall I see him?"

Wolfe grunted. "I phoned him this afternoon, and he was here at six o'clock. He says he knows nothing about it."

"Then that's the crop." I sat and took a sip of coffee. Fritz' coffee is the best on earth. I've done it exactly as he does, but it's not the same. I took another sip. "So the gag didn't work."

"It is not a gag."

"Then what is it?"

"It is a window for death. I think it is—or was. I'll leave it at that for tonight. We'll see tomorrow, Archie."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't like the slant of your eye. If you're thinking of badgering me, don't. Go somewhere."

"Glad to. I'll go have another piece of pie." I took my cup and saucer and headed for the kitchen.

I spent the rest of the evening there, chewing the rag with Fritz, until his bedtime came, eleven o'clock, and then went to the office to lock the safe and tell Wolfe good night, and mounted the two flights to my room. I have been known to feel fairly well satisfied with myself as I got ready for bed after a day's work, but not that night. I had failed to learn the fate of the ice cream. I hadn't the faintest notion where the ice cream came in. I didn't know what a window for death was, though I knew what it had been on a winter night twenty years ago. One of the noblest functions of a man is to keep millionaires from copping pretty girls, and I hadn't moved a finger to stop Arrow. And the case was no damn good anyhow, with a slim chance of getting any more out of it than the thousand bucks, and with the job limited to deciding whether to call the cops in or not. It was a bad setup all the way. Usually I'm asleep ten seconds

after I hit the pillow, but that night I tossed and turned for a full minute before I went off.

The trouble with mornings is that they come when you're not awake. It's all a blur until I am washed and dressed and have somehow made my way down to the kitchen, and got orange juice in me, and I'm not really awake until the fourth griddle cake and the second cup of coffee. But that Thursday morning it was accelerated. As I picked up the glass of orange juice I became aware through the blur that Fritz was putting stuff on a tray, and glanced at my wrist.

"My God," I said, "you're late. It's a quarter past eight."

"Oh," he said, "Mr. Wolfe already has his. This is for Saul. He's up with Mr. Wolfe. He said he already had breakfast, but you know how he likes my summer sausage."

"When did he come?"

"About eight o'clock. Mr. Wolfe wants you to go up when you're through breakfast." He picked up the tray and went.

That did it. I was awake. But that was no good either, because it kept me from enjoying my breakfast. I ate the sausage all right, but forgot to taste it, and I also forgot to put honey on the last cake until it was half gone. I had the *Times* propped on the rack in front of me, and pretended to read it, but didn't. It was only 8:32 when I took the last gulp of coffee, shoved my chair back, went to the hall and up one flight to Wolfe's room, found the door open, and entered.

Wolfe, in his yellow pajamas and barefooted, was seated at the table near a window, and Saul, chewing on griddle cake and sausage, was across from him. I approached.

"Good morning," I said coldly. "Shoe shine?"

"Archie," Wolfe said.

"Yes, sir. Suit pressed?"

"This is no time of day for you, I know, but I want to get on with this. Get all of them, including Doctor Buhl. Arrange for them to be here at eleven o'clock, or if that's impossible, at noon. Tell them I have made my decision and wish to communicate it. If Doctor Buhl is obstinate, tell him that the decision, and my reasons for it, will be of considerable professional interest to him, and that I feel strongly

he should be present. If you phone him immediately you may get him before he starts his day's work. Get him first."

"Is that all?"

"For the present, yes. I need a little more time with Saul."

I left them.

VII

It was twenty minutes to twelve when, after a buzz from me on the house phone to tell him they were all there, Wolfe entered, crossed to his desk, greeted them with a nod to the left and one to the right, and sat. On the phone Doctor Buhl and I, after a warm discussion, had settled for eleven-thirty, but he was ten minutes late.

I had given David, as the senior member of the family, the red leather chair. Doctor Buhl and Paul and the Tuttles were ranged in front of Wolfe's desk, with Paul next to me. I wanted him handy in case Johnny Arrow got a notion to try another one-two on him. Arrow and Anne were in the rear, side by side, behind Doctor Buhl. Saul Panzer was over by the big globe, in one of the yellow chairs, with his feet, on their toes, pulled back. He always sits like that, even when we're playing pinochle.

Wolfe focused on David. "I was hired," he said, "to inquire into your brother's death and decide whether the police should be asked to investigate. I have decided in the affirmative. It is indeed a case for the police."

They made noises and exchanged glances. Paul turned his head to glare at Johnny Arrow. Louise Tuttle reached for her husband's arm. Doctor Buhl said with authority, "I challenge that decision. As the attending physician, I demand your reasons for it."

Wolfe nodded. "Of course, doctor. You are right to make that demand. Naturally the police will want my reasons too, as will the others here, and the simplest way to handle it is for me to dictate my memorandum to Inspector Cramer of the Homicide Squad in your presence." His eyes moved. "It will go better if none of you interrupt. If there are questions after I finish I'll answer them. Archie, your notebook, please. First a letter to Mr. Cramer."

I swiveled to get the notebook and pen, swiveled back, crossed my legs, and rested the notebook on my knee. That way I was facing the audience. “Shoot,” I told him.

“Dear Mr. Cramer. I believe you should give your attention to the death of a man named Bertram Fyfe last Saturday night in his apartment at Churchill Towers. In support of that belief I enclose summaries of recent conversations with seven persons, with identifying data, and also a memorandum of the results of the inquiry I have made. Sincerely.”

He wiggled a finger at me. “You will prepare the summaries and data, and the memorandum will tell you what should be included and what may be omitted. Start the memorandum on my letterhead, in the usual form. Understood?”

“Right.”

He leaned back and took a breath. “The memorandum: Since three of the persons involved, including the deceased, are named Fyfe, I shall use first names. Paul’s conjecture regarding the morphine can, I think, be ignored. To suppose that one of those present brought with him lethal tablets of some sort, so similar in appearance to the morphine tablets that they could be substituted without arousing the suspicion of the nurse, would be extravagant indeed. One person, Tuttle, the pharmacist, might have had such tablets or been able to get them or make them, but even so it would have to be assumed that he anticipated an opportunity to substitute them unobserved, also an extravagant assumption.”

“It’s ridiculous,” Dr. Buhl declared. “Any lethal substance in the Pharmacopoeia would have left evidence that I would have detected.”

“I doubt that, doctor. It’s an overstatement, and I wouldn’t advise you to repeat it on the witness stand. I asked you not to interrupt. Archie?”

He wanted the last three words, and I obliged. “ ‘An extravagant assumption.’ ”

“Yes. Therefore, after routine inquiry by Mr. Goodwin, I dismissed jugglery with the morphine as a mere chimera of Paul’s spiteful

fancy; and indeed I would have dismissed the whole matter on that basis but for one pesky thorn, the hot-water bags. Paragraph.

"I felt compelled to assume, and I am confident you would have agreed in the circumstances, that Paul had found the hot-water bags empty in the bed. That stumped me. After the departure of the nurse, sometime during the night, someone had taken the bags from the bed, emptied them, and put them back. For what conceivable reason? That could not be simply dismissed. I worried it. I sent Mr. Goodwin to Mount Kisco to inquire about the morphine, but that was mere routine. The empty hot-water bags had somehow to be explained. I considered them in every possible light, in relation to everything I had been told by all those concerned, and it came to me from two directions at once. The first was as a possible answer to the question, what purpose could empty bags serve in a bed better than full bags? The second was the fact that the Fyfes' father had also died of pneumonia, after someone had opened a window and let the winter cold in to him. A window of death. The question and the fact together brought me an idea. Paragraph.

"I made three phone calls—no, four. I phoned the manager of Schramm's store on Madison Avenue, and asked him how he packs two quarts of ice cream on a hot summer afternoon for a customer who wishes to take it some distance in a car. He said the ice cream is put in a cardboard container, and the container is put in a carton on a bed of dry ice, and chunks of dry ice are packed on both sides of it and on top. He said that is their invariable custom. I phoned Doctor Vollmer, who lives on this street, and at his suggestion I phoned an official of a firm which makes dry ice, and learned (a) that several pounds of chunks of dry ice, placed under the covering of a pneumonia patient near his chest, would certainly lower his temperature materially and probably dangerously; (b) that only a controlled experiment could tell how dangerously, but it might be fatal; (c) that if the dry ice pressed against the body, even with fabric between, it would burn the skin seriously and leave vivid marks; and (d) that a rubber bag would be perfect, between the ice and the body, for prevention of the burning. My fourth—"

"This is fantastic," Doctor Buhl said. "Perfectly fantastic."

“I agree,” Wolfe told him. “I had something fantastic to account for. Paragraph. My fourth phone call was to David Fyfe, to ask him to come to see me. The next thing was to learn what had happened to the ice cream. The hypothesis I was forming was bootless if there was evidence that the package had been intact on Sunday, and when Mr. Goodwin phoned from Mount Kisco I asked him to inquire. He did so, of Paul, Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle, Miss Goren, and Mr. Arrow, and they all disclaimed any knowledge of it. He also—”

Louise Tuttle’s high thin voice cut in. “That’s not true! I told him I saw it in the refrigerator Sunday!”

Wolfe shook his head. “You told him you saw a large paper bag and supposed it contained the ice cream. You didn’t look inside the bag. You didn’t see the dry ice.” His eyes were holding hers. “Did you?”

“Don’t answer that,” Tuttle said abruptly.

“Indeed.” Wolfe’s brows went up. “Have we reached a point where questions can’t be answered? Did you look inside the bag, Mrs. Tuttle?”

“No! I didn’t!”

“Then I’ll proceed. Archie?”

I cued him. “ ‘it. He also.’ ”

“Yes. He also went to the apartment and looked in the refrigerator, and there was no sign of the ice cream. I had myself asked David, and he too had said he knew nothing about it. So my hypothesis now had some flesh and bone. Someone had done something with the ice cream and was lying about it. If the dry ice had been used in the manner suggested, to kill a pneumonia patient, it could never be proven, since dry ice leaves no trace whatever, and my assumption would have to remain an assumption. I had to tackle the problem from another direction, and in fact I had already prepared to do so by asking certain questions of David Fyfe and by sending for Saul Panzer. You know Saul Panzer. Paragraph.

“There had been a few intimations, as you will find in the enclosed summaries of conversations. Bert Fyfe had been tried for the murder of his father and acquitted. He had resented the testimony of his sister and brothers at the trial, and a major item in

his defense was an alibi supplied by his friend Vincent Tuttle, who testified that they had been playing cards at the rooming house where they both had rooms. According to Mr. Arrow, Bert had come to New York not on business but, in Arrow's words, because something was eating him from away back. Arrow himself was of course not a target for suspicion, since he spent Saturday night in a police station. And other points you will not miss—the most suggestive being, I think, that Bert not only went to see the landlady he had rented a room from twenty years ago, but when he found she had gone to Poughkeepsie he went there to see her. As you will find from the summary of my conversation with David yesterday afternoon—I'll have to give you that, Archie—Bert had lived in her rooming house only a short time, about two months, hardly a sufficient period to form a bond so strong that after an absence of twenty years he would seek her out so persistently. It was a fair inference that he had some special purpose in mind. Paragraph.

"Other suggestive bits came from David yesterday afternoon in response to questions. His father's relations with his progeny, after the mother's death, had not been cordial. He had ordered Bert to leave and not return. He had been difficult with David and Paul. He had refused permission for his daughter to marry the young man named Vincent Tuttle, then a clerk in the local drugstore, and had commanded her not to see him. After his death Louise had married Tuttle, and later they had bought the drugstore with her share of the inheritance. I had known, of course, from a previous conversation, that the estate had been divided equally among the children."

Wolfe turned his head. "Before I go on, Mr. Tuttle, you might like to answer a question or two. Is it true that in your hearing, the day before he was taken ill, Bert mentioned the fact that he had seen Mrs. Dobbs, his and your former landlady, and talked with her?"

Tuttle passed his tongue over his lips. "I don't think so," he rumbled. He cleared his throat. "Not that I remember."

"Of course he did, Vince," David declared. He looked at Wolfe. "I told you yesterday."

"I know. I'm testing his memory." He went to Paul. "Do you remember it?"

“Yes.” Paul’s eyes were on Tuttle. “You’re damn right I remember it. He said he was going to see her again as soon as he got well.”

Wolfe grunted. “I won’t ask you, Mrs. Tuttle.” He focused on her husband again. “The other question. Where were you yesterday evening from six to ten o’clock?”

It floored him completely. He hadn’t expected it and wasn’t prepared for it. “Yesterday evening?” he asked lamely.

“Yes. From six to ten. To refresh your memory, Mr. Goodwin came to your store to ask you and your wife about the ice cream, and left around five-thirty.”

“There’s nothing wrong with my memory,” Tuttle asserted. “But I don’t have to submit to this. I don’t have to account to you for my actions.”

“Then you decline to answer?”

“You have no right to ask. It’s none of your business.”

“Very well. I merely thought you had a right to tell me. Archie?”

Since it had been a long interruption I gave him more than three words. I looked at my notebook. “ ‘That the estate had been divided equally among the children.’ ”

Wolfe nodded. “Paragraph. As you will see in the summary of my conversation with Mr. Arrow, he had told me that Bert had told his relatives that he had gone to see his former landlady; and David verified that yesterday evening and gave me the landlady’s name—Mrs. Robert Dobbs. That has just been corroborated by Paul, as I dictate this. Clearly it was desirable to learn what Bert had wanted of Mrs. Dobbs, and since Mr. Goodwin might be needed for other errands I phoned Saul Panzer and had him come, and sent him to Poughkeepsie. David hadn’t known her address, and it took Mr. Panzer a while to locate her. It was nearly ten o’clock when he -got to the house where she lives with her married daughter. As he approached the door it opened and a man emerged, and as they met the man stopped him and asked whom he wanted to see. As you know, Mr. Panzer is highly sensitized and extremely discreet. He replied that he was calling on Jim Heaton, having learned the name of Mrs. Dobbs’ son-in-law during his inquiries, and the man went on his way. Reporting to me later, Mr. Panzer described him, and the

description fitted Vincent Tuttle. They are both in my office now, and Mr. Panzer identifies Mr. Tuttle as the man he saw emerging from that house last night."

Wolfe turned. "Saul?"

"Yes, sir. Positive."

"Mr. Tuttle, do you wish to comment?"

"No."

"That is wise, I think." He returned to me. "Paragraph. Before dictating the preceding paragraph I asked Mr. Tuttle where he was last evening, and he refused to tell me. I am also enclosing a summary of Mr. Panzer's conversation with Mrs. Dobbs. I must confess it is far from conclusive. She would not identify the man who had just left the house. She would not divulge the purpose of Bert Fyfe's visit to her. She would not discuss in any detail the events on that winter night twenty years ago. There are, of course, obvious conjectures. Was the alibi which Tuttle gave Bert a fraud, and Bert didn't dare to impeach it? Does Mrs. Dobbs know it was a fraud? Did Tuttle leave the rooming house that stormy night, but Bert didn't, and Mrs. Dobbs knows it? Did Tuttle go to the Fyfe home, and get admitted by Louise, and drug her chocolate drink, and later return and open the windows from the outside? I do not charge him with those acts, but the questions put themselves. I was not hired to find evidence to convict a murderer, but merely to decide whether a police investigation is called for, and I think it is, for the reasons given. I telephoned you this morning to suggest that you ask the Poughkeepsie police to put a guard on Mrs. Dobbs and the house she lives in, and said I would shortly tell you why. I have now told you. Paragraph.

"Many questions also put themselves regarding the death of Bert Fyfe. Merely as one example, if it is to be assumed that Vincent Tuttle, fearing exposure of a former crime, again undertook to help pneumonia kill a man, this time using dry ice instead of an open window, why did he leave the paper bag in the refrigerator that night, presumably with the ice cream still in it? Answer it as you will, failing an answer from him, but perhaps he did not know there was a disposal chute in the pantry; and when, on Sunday afternoon,

he found that there was one, he took the first opportunity to dump the thing. As for the dry ice, it leaves no trace, so there is no record for you, but experts can furnish you with presumptions, as they did me. The chunks of ice were of course not put inside the bags; the limp empty bags were merely used as insulation to keep the ice from contact with the body. Probably the experts can tell you how long it would take small chunks of dry ice to wholly vaporize, but that point is not vital, since Mr. Tuttle was there in the apartment and could easily have had opportunity to remove the residue, if any, before Paul discovered the body. That, and other pertinent questions, I leave to you. I have done the job I was hired for, and I trust you will not find it necessary to consult me at any length. All the information I have goes to you with this."

Wolfe flattened his palms on the chair arms and took in the audience. "There it is," he said. "I didn't want to tell you about it and go all over it again for Mr. Cramer. Any questions?"

David was slumped in the red leather chair, his head down, staring at the floor. At Wolfe's question he slowly lifted his head and slowly moved it, taking in the others, one by one, and then going to Wolfe. He squeezed words out.

"I suppose I ought to feel sorry, but I don't. I always thought Bert killed his father. I always thought Vince's alibi was false, that he lied to save Bert, but I see it now. Without it Bert would probably have been convicted, so it did save him, but it saved Vince too. Of course Bert knew it was false, he knew he and Vince hadn't been together all evening, but if he said so, if he said Vince had gone out for a while, that would have destroyed his own alibi, and he didn't dare—and he didn't know Vince had killed our father. He might have suspected, but he didn't know. I see it now. I even see the Mrs. Dobbs part" He frowned. "I'm trying to remember her testimony. She said she hadn't heard either of them go out, but probably she had, and she might have known which one, but if she said she heard either of them leave the house that would have ruined Bert's alibi, and she was crazy about Bert and she hadn't liked our father. Not many people liked our father."

He thought he was going to say more, decided not to, rose from the chair, and turned to his brother. “Was this what you were after, Paul? Did you suspect this?”

“Hell no,” Paul said harshly. “You know damn well what I suspected, and who, and if this fat slob is right about the dry ice”—he bounced out of his chair and wheeled to face Johnny Arrow—“why couldn’t it have been him? He had a key to the apartment! I never said I knew exactly how he did it! And if you—now lay off!”

David had stepped across and grabbed his arm, and for a second I thought Paul was going to sock his elder brother, but evidently David knew him better than I did. David said nothing, but he didn’t have to. He merely hung onto his arm, steered him around back of the other chairs, and headed him towards the hall. They disappeared, and Saul went to let them out.

“I have no questions,” Doctor Buhl said. He arose and looked down at the Tuttles, then at Wolfe. “My God, after twenty years. You used a phrase, ‘a window for death.’ You have certainly opened one.” He looked down again. “Louise, you have been my patient nearly all your life. Do you need me? Are you all right?”

“I’m all right.” Her high thin voice was trying not to be a wail. “I don’t believe it.”

Buhl opened his mouth to say more, decided not to, and turned and went. Wolfe spoke to the man and wife who owned a fine drugstore. “If you have no questions you might as well go.”

Louise, with her teeth bearing down on her lip, tugged at her husband’s sleeve. He took a deep breath, put a hand on her shoulder, and raised himself from the chair, and she came up with him. Side by side they headed for the door, and I left them to Saul too. When they were out of sight Wolfe sent his eyes in the direction of the pair in the rear and said sharply, “Well? Have I fixed it up for your?”

Damned if they weren’t holding hands, and they continued to hold as they got up and approached the desk. I am perfectly capable of holding hands, but not in public. Anne looked as if she wanted to cry but didn’t intend to. Luckily it was Johnny’s left hand she had,

for he wanted to use the other one. When they got to the desk he stretched his arm across it and said, “Shake.”

VIII

I should explain one thing. Since Johnny and Anne had no part in the performance, why did Wolfe tell me to invite them? I didn't have to ask him. I know him. One little grand is a pretty skimpy fee for a job like that, spotting a murderer, and if Johnny Arrow came and saw the neat process by which the guy who had killed his partner was dug out he might feel inclined to show his appreciation by contributing a small hunk of uranium. That was the idea, no question about it, and for some weeks, as I flipped through the morning mail, I had my eye out for an envelope with his return address. It never came, and I quit expecting it.

But last week, just four days after a jury had convicted Vincent Tuttle of the first-degree murder of Bertram Fyfe's father—it had been decided to try him for that one because it was a tighter case, especially after Mrs. Dobbs opened up—here came an envelope with Fyfe-Arrow Mining Corporation, Montreal, in the corner, and when I opened it and saw the amount of the check I raised my brows as high as they would go. A really nice hunk.

There was no letter, but that was understandable. He had no time for writing letters. He was much too busy showing his wife how to prospect.

The World of Rex Stout

Now, for the first time ever, enjoy a peek into the life of Nero Wolfe's creator, Rex Stout, courtesy of the Stout Estate. Pulled from Rex Stout's own archives, here are rarely seen, never-before-published memorabilia. Each title in "The Rex Stout Library" will offer an exclusive look into the life of the man who gave Nero Wolfe life.

Three for the Chair

Reviewers disagreed over the merits of Rex Stout's *Three for the Chair*. Anthony Boucher, in *The New York Times*, found it "one of the best of Stout's threesomes." But Julian Symons, in London's *Sunday Times*, made the suggestion—blasphemous to most devotees of Nero Wolfe—that it was time for Stout to kill off the great detective! Both reviews are reproduced here.

Extract from

THE SUNDAY TIMES

LONDON

CRIME STORIES

By JULIAN SYMONS

Like some vestigial limb, the Great Detective lingers on, although the social conditions that encouraged his omniscient amateurism have long since vanished.

Consider, for example, Mr. Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe, that Gilbert Harding of detection who entered the ring as heavyweight contestant for criminal honours some thirty years ago equipped with a fine set of prejudices, including a particular one against moving out of his old brownstone house on West 35th Street. In those days every new Nero Wolfe story was a delight. A fresh exercise of Mr. Stout's ingenuity in providing clues that would enable Nero to solve problems without moving further than the plant rooms on the roof.

That was long ago. The three longish short stories in "Three for the Chair" find Wolfe making a trip to the Adirondacks to cook trout for an ambassador, and tamely allowing himself to be taken the 160 miles from New York to Albany for an investigation into wire-tapping. "Three for the Chair" offers one murder method that is new to me, but is otherwise a sad comment on past glories. A peripapetic Nero Wolfe has really no reason for existence.

Could not Mr. Stout arrange for him to pass away after an excess of salmon mousse and blueberry pie?

Criminals At Large

By ANTHONY BOUCHER

THOSE who, like me, firmly believe that most mystery novels of 50 to 70,000 words could be more effective as novelettes of 20 to 30,000 can normally find the proper concise length (at least in book form) only once a year, in the annual "Nero Wolfe Threesome." But so far this year (the gods of terseness be praised) we've had an earlier novelette collection by Henry Kane, and this week volumes by Rex Stout and Richard S. Prather.

THREE FOR THE CHAIR (Viking, $2.95) is one of the best of Stout's threesomes, marred indeed by hardly anything save its inaccurate title (the whole point of one story is that its killer is *not* for the chair). The situations and solutions are unusually good ones; and the stories are rich in unexpected Wolfiana: Wolfe preparing brook trout Montbarry (his own invention), Wolfe under arrest for the first time, Wolfe calling once upon the Secretary of State and ones upon a band of four dozen operatives to pull out his chestnuts for him, Wolfe even going so far as to make a sort of professional sheep's eyes at private detective Dol Bonner.... As I've often said before, it's hard to find three novels as satisfying as these treble groups of novelettes.

The Rex Stout Library

Fer-de-Lance
The League of Frightened Men
The Rubber Band
The Red Box
Too Many Cooks
Some Buried Caesar
Over My Dead Body
Where There's a Will
Black Orchids
Not Quite Dead Enough
The Silent Speaker
Too Many Women
And Be a Villain
The Second Confession
Trouble in Triplicate
In the Best Families
Three Doors to Death
Murder by the Book
Curtains for Three
Prisoner's Base
Triple Jeopardy
The Golden Spiders
The Black Mountain
Three Men Out
Before Midnight
Might As Well Be Dead
Three Witnesses
If Death Ever Slept
Three for the Chair
Champagne for One

And Four to Go
Plot It Yourself
Too Many Clients
Three at Wolfe's Door
The Final Deduction
Gambit
Homicide Trinity
The Mother Hunt
A Right to Die
Trio for Blunt Instruments
The Doorbell Rang
Death of a Doxy
The Father Hunt
Death of a Dude
Please Pass the Guilt
A Family Affair
Death Times Three
The Hand in the Glove
Double for Death
Bad for Business
The Broken Vase
The Sound of Murder
Red Threads
The Mountain Cat Murders

Rex Stout

Rex Stout, the creator of Nero Wolfe, was born in Noblesville, Indiana, in 1886, the sixth of nine children of John and Lucetta Todhunter Stout, both Quakers. Shortly after his birth the family moved to Wakarusa, Kansas. He was educated in a country school, but by the age of nine he was recognized throughout the state as a prodigy in arithmetic. Mr. Stout briefly attended the University of Kansas but he left to enlist in the Navy and spent the next two years as a warrant officer on board President Theodore Roosevelt's yacht. When he left the Navy in 1908, Rex Stout began to write free-lance articles and worked as a sightseeing guide and an itinerant bookkeeper. Later he devised and implemented a school banking system that was installed in four hundred cities and towns throughout the country. In 1927 Mr. Stout retired from the world of finance and, with the proceeds from his banking scheme, left for Paris to write serious fiction. He wrote three novels that received favorable reviews before turning to detective fiction. His first Nero Wolfe novel, *Fer-de-Lance*, appeared in 1934. It was followed by many others, among them, *Too Many Cooks, The Silent Speaker, If Death Ever Slept, The Doorbell Rang*, and *Please Pass the Guilt*, which established Nero Wolfe as a leading character on a par with Erle Stanley Gardner's famous protagonist, Perry Mason. During World War II Rex Stout waged a personal campaign against Nazism as chairman of the War Writers' Board, master of ceremonies of the radio program "Speaking of Liberty," and member of several national committees. After the war he turned his attention to mobilizing public opinion against the wartime use of thermonuclear devices, was an active leader in the Authors Guild, and resumed writing his Nero Wolfe novels. Rex Stout died in 1975 at the age of eighty-eight A month before his death he published his seventy-second Nero Wolfe mystery, *A Family Affair*. Ten years later, a seventy-third Nero Wolfe mystery was discovered and published in *Death Times Three*.