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One morning the following week Wolfe entered the office at eleven o'clock, got seated at his desk, removed the paper-weight from the little stack of morning mail, and took a look.

One of the office rules is that he is to see all incoming checks, whatever the source, before I stamp the endorsement on them and take them to the bank. That morning there were two. The first one was from a client for whom a confidential errand had been performed two months back. Wolfe put it aside, picked up the second one, frowned at it and then at me, and demanded, "What the devil is this?"

"You have instructed me," I replied, "never to reply to a rhetorical question, but since it's you who ask it, that is my personal check on the Metropolitan Trust Company, dated today, to your order, for sixteen hundred twenty-four dollars and thirty-seven cents. Do you want me to go further?"

"Yes."

"You told them that day in the DA's office that I was your client, and I know what you invariably do to clients when you get their job done, especially if you provide fireworks. I have waited ten days for you to soak me, but you have not given me a bill or told me to make one out. With my fingers crossed, which was an ordeal on account of my sore knuckles, I have made out that check for the amount of the expenses you incurred, and there it is."

He grunted. "Do you remember what I said to Miss Eads about my self-esteem?"

"I do. I remember everything."

"Very well, I still have it. It's a costly indulgence, but I choose to keep it." He took the check, with thumbs and fore-fingers at the middle of its top edge, tore it across, put the halves together and tore again, swiveled, and dropped the shreds into his wastebasket.

"Gee, that's wonderful," I said gratefully. "I appreciate that warmly. And knowing how much you value your self-esteem, I want to do all in my power to help you keep it. I myself spent close to two hundred bucks that week—taxi, phone calls, meals for myself and others, incidentals. I haven't put in an expense account for it, but now I will, since you feel so strongly—"

"You will not!" he roared. "Not a cent!"

"Okay." I waved it away. "It's your self-esteem, not mine." He's a hard guy to please.