

NERO WOLFE

"PRISONER'S BASE"

FADE IN:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie Goodwin sits at his desk, writing out CHECKS. Nero Wolfe is at his desk, studying some papers.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

Every Friday morning at 11, after Nero Wolfe comes down from the plant rooms on the roof, he signs the salary checks for Fritz and Theodore and me. He never likes spending money, but that particular day he was more sour than usual.

Archie brings the checkbook over to Wolfe's desk, and Wolfe signs each with a flourish, then passes one over to Archie.

WOLFE

Thank you for waiting for it.

ARCHIE

What's the matter? Bugs on the orchids?

WOLFE

No. But I saw your bag in the hall, and I note your finery. Straining as you are to be gone, it is gracious of you to wait for this pittance, this meager return for your excessive labors in the week nearly ended. Especially since the bank balance is at its lowest in two years.

ARCHIE

That deserves an answer, and here it is: As for finery, I am headed for a weekend in the country, and am dressed accordingly. As for straining, I am not.

He makes a show of checking his watch. He's got enough time.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

As for pittance, right. As for excessive labors, I have had to spend most of my time recently sitting on my prat only because you have seen fit to turn down four offers of jobs in a row.

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

As for the bank balance, there I admit you have a point, and I'm willing to help. It's only a pittance anyway, what the hell.

Archie takes the check, tears it in half, then in half again. He drops the shreds in the wastebasket, then heads for the door.

WOLFE

Archie!

Archie wheels and glares at him. Wolfe glares back.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Pfui.

ARCHIE

Nuts.

And Archie storms out, leaving Wolfe to stew.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie sits at his desk, going over some paperwork, pointedly ignoring the TORN-UP CHECK sitting on his blotter.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

By Monday morning, the air might possibly have cleared if it hadn't been for the torn-up check. We both knew the stub would have to be voided and a new check drawn.

Archie steals a glance over at Wolfe, who sits at his desk with a book, pointedly ignoring him.

ARCHIE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

But he wasn't going to tell me to do it without being asked, and I wasn't going to do it without being told. A man has his pride.

Archie shuts a drawer loudly just to annoy Wolfe. It works.

ARCHIE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

And with that between us, the stiffness Monday morning lasted through lunch and beyond, into the afternoon.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

Archie goes to answer the RINGING DOORBELL.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

For all I cared, it could have lasted
into the next decade.

Archie opens the door to find a BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN in a peach-colored dress and tailored jacket, carrying a suitcase and hatbox. Archie gazes at her appreciatively. She doesn't notice, or doesn't care.

ARCHIE

Can I help you?

She brushes past him into the house.

YOUNG WOMAN

You're Archie Goodwin. Will you
bring my suitcase in? Please?

He does so, depositing the suitcase against the wall. She puts the hatbox down next to it.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

I want to see Nero Wolfe, but of
course he's always up in the plant
room from four to six. That's why I
picked this time to come. I want to
see you first.

ARCHIE

I'm flattered.

She looks around.

YOUNG WOMAN

That's the door to the front room,
the door to the dining room on the
right and to the office on the left.
The hall's wider than I expected.
Shall we go to the office?

Archie shrugs and leads her -- although she seems already to know which way to go.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie gives her a chair and sits at his desk.

ARCHIE

So you've been here before?

YOUNG WOMAN

A friend of mine was here a long
while ago, and then of course I've
read about it.

ARCHIE

Hope it lives up to the advance
billing.

YOUNG WOMAN

I wouldn't have come if I hadn't
known a lot about it and about Nero
Wolfe and you. I thought it would
be better to tell you about it first
because I'm not sure how I would put
it to Nero Wolfe. You see, I'm trying
to work something out. I wonder --
do you know what I think I need right
now?

ARCHIE

No. What?

YOUNG WOMAN

A coke and rum with some lime and
lots of ice. I don't suppose you
have Myer's?

Archie goes to Wolfe's desk and presses the button for Fritz.

ARCHIE

As you probably already know, we've
got everything.

Fritz comes in.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Coke and rum with lime and lots of
ice.

(off her look)

Myer's.

Fritz nods and goes.

YOUNG WOMAN

Fritz looks younger than I expected.

ARCHIE

You're welcome to a drink, even a
Coke and rum. And I'm enjoying your
company, that's okay, but if you
want me to tell you how to put
something to Mr. Wolfe, maybe you'd
better start.

YOUNG WOMAN

Not until I've had the drink. It's
warm in here.

She gets up and slips off her jacket and hat. Archie watches
appreciatively. Fritz comes in with the drink on a tray.

FRITZ

Madam.

YOUNG WOMAN

Thank you, Fritz.

He's too good to look surprised -- but he does shoot Archie a look. Archie grins back, and Fritz leaves. She takes a couple of sips from the drink.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

I'm beginning to get myself together.

ARCHIE

Good. Don't rush it.

YOUNG WOMAN

I won't. I'm not a rusher. I'm a very cautious girl. I've never rushed but one thing in my life, and that one was enough. I'm not sure I'm over it yet.

(then:)

Does the door of the south room on the third floor have a bolt on the inside?

ARCHIE

No. Why, do you think it needs one?

YOUNG WOMAN

Maybe not, but I thought I'd feel better if it had. You see, that's where I want to sleep.

ARCHIE

Oh? You do? For about how long?

YOUNG WOMAN

For a week. Possibly a day or two more, but certainly for a week. I would rather have the south room than the one on the second floor because it has its own bath. I know how Nero Wolfe feels about women, so I knew I'd have to see you first.

ARCHIE

That was sensible. I like gags, and I'll bet this is a pip. How does it go?

YOUNG WOMAN

It is not a gag. For a certain reason, I had to be -- I had to go away.

(MORE)

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

I had to go somewhere and stay there until June 30th, some place where no one would know and no one could possibly find me. I thought it over and decided the best place would be Nero Wolfe's house. A hotel or rooming house wouldn't do, because they need to know names. Would \$50 a day be enough?

ARCHIE

You aren't going to tell us your name?

YOUNG WOMAN

No.

ARCHIE

Where you live? Anything at all?

YOUNG WOMAN

No.

ARCHIE

Have you committed a crime or been an accessory to one? Are you a fugitive running from justice?

YOUNG WOMAN

No.

ARCHIE

Prove it.

YOUNG WOMAN

That's silly! I don't have to prove it.

ARCHIE

Are you going to stick to this no naming or identifying?

YOUNG WOMAN

I certainly intend to.

ARCHIE

Then you'd better leave Mr. Wolfe to me. I'll take you up to your room and leave you there, and when he comes down, I'll tackle him. It might help if he saw some cash. Sometimes the sight of money has an effect on people.

She doesn't mind that idea. She opens her purse and takes out a THICK STACK OF BILLS. She peels off seven 50s and hands them to Archie.

YOUNG WOMAN
Seven days at \$50 a day. \$350.

ARCHIE
With the understanding, of course,
that it's not a deal until Mr. Wolfe
accepts it.

YOUNG WOMAN
Of course.

They share a smile and we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - GUEST ROOM - DAY

Archie puts her suitcase on a rack at the end of the bed as
the young woman looks around.

YOUNG WOMAN
It's a big room. I appreciate this,
Mr. Goodwin.

She lifts her hand as if to touch his sleeve, but lets it
drop.

ARCHIE
I'll have to watch you unpack.

YOUNG WOMAN
Watch me? Why?

ARCHIE
For the kick.
(off her confusion)
There are at least a thousand people
in the metropolitan area who think
Nero Wolfe has lived long enough,
and one or more of them might have
decided to take a hand. His room,
as you apparently know, is directly
below this.

YOUNG WOMAN
What do you expect to find?

ARCHIE
What I expect to find is a brace and
a bit in the suitcase and a copperhead
or rattler in the hatbox. Are they
locked?

She studies him to see if he's kidding, decides he's not,
and opens the suitcase. On top is a BLUE SILK NEGLIGEE,
which she lifts and puts on the bed.

YOUNG WOMAN
For the kick.

ARCHIE

It hurts me worse than it does you.
Just pretend I'm not here.

She tries, as she unpacks a variety of beautiful, elegant, and undeniably suggestive lingerie. It's not quite beneath Archie to enjoy the show, although he keeps most of that from her. When everything is out of the suitcase, he picks it up for a good look, checks the lining and the construction of the case. Nothing. Same for the hatbox.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I guess that'll do. I haven't inspected your handbag, nor your person, so I hope you won't mind if I lock the door. If you sneaked down to Mr. Wolfe's room and put a cyanide pill in his aspirin bottle, and he took it and died, I'd be out of a job.

YOUNG WOMAN

Certainly. Lock it good. That's the kind of thing I do every day.

ARCHIE

Then you need a caretaker, and I'm it. How about a drink?

YOUNG WOMAN

If it isn't too much bother.

He shoots her a grin, steps into the hall and locks the door, and heads downstairs. CUT TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie is at his desk with the checkbook, not even looking up as Wolfe comes into the room.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

When Wolfe came down, he got his 4000 ounces seated and noticed right away the seven fifties on his desk.

As Wolfe takes his seat, accepting the beer Fritz puts down for him, he sees the bills fanned out under a paperweight. He looks at the bills, then at Archie, then at the bills.

WOLFE

Did you put this money here, Fritz?

ARCHIE

No sir, I did.

Wolfe turns to Fritz.

WOLFE

Indeed. Thank you Fritz.

As Fritz leaves, Wolfe gets his 18-carat opener from a drawer, uncaps a bottles and pours.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Well? Flummery?

ARCHIE

No, sir.

WOLFE

Then what?

Wolfe sets down his BEER GLASS.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

So I explained.

We LAP DISSOLVE from a FULL BEER glass to an EMPTY ONE. And we are back on Archie for the finish...

ARCHIE

...she seems educated and refined and will probably want me to read aloud to her, so I'll have to ask you to lend me some books, like Pilgrim's Promise and Essays of Eila. She also seems sweet and unspoiled and has fine legs, so if we like her and get used to her one of us could marry her.

WOLFE

Pfui.

He turns back to his book. Archie is not deterred.

ARCHIE

However, the immediate point is that, since I am responsible for that handy little contribution of cash, you may feel like signing a replacement for the check I tore up Friday.

Archie takes the checkbook over to Wolfe who, finally feeling like he knows what's going on, signs the check and slides it across to Archie. Wolfe regards him with what looks like amiable appreciation.

WOLFE

Archie, that was an impressive performance. Friday I spoke hastily and you acted hastily, and the *fait accompli* of that torn check had us at an impasse.

(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

By contriving one of your fantastically and chronically puerile inventions, you made the problem itself absurd and so disposed of it. Admirable and satisfactory.

He takes the paperweight off the bills, jiggles the edges even, and extends them to Archie.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

I didn't know we had fifties in the emergency cash reserve. Better put them back. I don't like money lying around.

ARCHIE

That didn't come from the safe. It came from a visitor as described, now up in the south room. I invented nothing, puerile or not. She's a roomer for a week if you want her. Shall I bring her down so you can decide?

WOLFE

Bah.

He reaches for his book. Archie thinks for a moment, then presses the button on Wolfe's desk. Ignoring Wolfe's glare, he waits for Fritz to arrive.

FRITZ

Would you like another beer?

ARCHIE

A little point of information. Mr. Wolfe thinks I'm exaggerating. Our lady visitor you took a drink to up in the south room, is she old, haggard, deformed, ugly, and crippled?

FRITZ

Now Archie, she is quite the opposite. Precisely the opposite!

ARCHIE

Okay, thanks.

Fritz darts a look at Wolfe, gets none in return, and leaves. Wolfe waits for the sound of the kitchen door closing, then puts his book down.

WOLFE

It's true. You have actually installed a woman in a room of my house?

ARCHIE
Not installed, exactly. That implies
I have a personal --

WOLFE
Where did you get her?

ARCHIE
I didn't get her. As I told you,
she came. I wasn't inventing. I
was reporting.

WOLFE
Go up and give her back her money.
It'll be dinnertime in 20 minutes.
Get her out of the house in ten.
Help her pack.

ARCHIE
Normally, I would. But acting as
your agent, I practically promised
her you would see her.

Wolfe grunts.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
For you, she'll probably can the
mystery and divulge her name. And
if so, the resulting fee might provide
for my salary checks for a year.

Another grunt. Archie gives up.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Okay. She'll have to find some
bacalhau somewhere else. Maybe East
Harlem -- there's a lot of Portuguese
around there. I shouldn't have
mentioned it to her.

WOLFE
Bacalhau?

ARCHIE
Yeah. I happened to mention we were
having it for dinner, and she asked
what it was and I told her, and she
said salt cod couldn't possibly be
fit to eat no matter how it was
cooked, not even if it was an
adaptation of a Portuguese recipe by
you and Fritz.
(he shrugs)
Skip it.

Archie picks up the seven fifties from Wolfe's desk.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Since this is to be returned to her, I have contributed nothing to the bank account, and the situation regarding my salary check snaps back to this morning, that leaves me no alternative.

Archie reaches to his desk for the check, takes it in the middle and --

WOLFE

Archie! Don't tear that!

And before Archie can, the DOORBELL RINGS. Archie drops the check and goes out...

INT. BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

...to the entrance, where he checks the door before opening it to reveal PERRY HELMAR, 60s, in a grey suit with a briefcase.

ARCHIE

Can I help you?

HELMAR

My name is Perry Helmar, I'm an attorney, and I want to see Nero Wolfe about a matter of utmost urgency.

Archie studies Helmar for a moment as he mulls a thought:

ARCHIE'S VOICE

Ordinarily, when a stranger calls, I let the caller wait while I go check with Wolfe. But I wanted to give Wolfe another tack to sit on and postpone a showdown over our roomer.

Archie motions Helmar inside.

ARCHIE

Right this way.

He takes Helmar's coat and hat and leads him in to:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Helmar enters. Wolfe is too busy glaring at Archie to pay much attention to him.

ARCHIE

This is Mr. Perry Helmar, attorney-at-law.

HELMAR

Mr. Wolfe, I am a senior partner in a law firm of highest repute. A young woman for whom I am responsible has disappeared, and she must be found as quickly as possible.

Archie opens a drawer to get out a notebook, barely bothering to suppress a grin at Wolfe.

HELMAR (CONT'D)

I will pay you \$5000 and necessary expenses if you will find her and put me in communication with her by June 29, six days from now. I will pay double that if you will produce her in New York, alive and well, by the morning of June 30.

Archie recognizes the date immediately. He looks over at Wolfe, who doesn't seem to have noticed the coincidence. Wolfe sighs good and deep.

WOLFE

Tell me about it briefly. Since you're a lawyer, you should know what I need to decide whether I'll take the job.

HELMAR

Why shouldn't you take it?

WOLFE

I don't know. Tell me about it.

Wolfe just waits. Finally:

HELMAR

I am Priscilla Eads' legal guardian, and I am also the trustee of her property under the will of her father, who died ten years ago. I called on her this evening to discuss some business, but she wasn't there, and the maid was alarmed, as she had expected her mistress home for an early --

WOLFE

I don't need that much.

Helmar stops, and skips ahead a few beats.

HELMAR

I found on her writing desk an envelope addressed to me. Inside was a handwritten note.

He reaches for his briefcase and takes out a FOLDED SHEET OF BLUE-TINTED PAPER, then removes a spectacle case from a pocket and puts on his reading glasses.

HELMAR (CONT'D)

It reads: "Dear Perry: I hope you won't be too mad at me for standing you up. I doubt if you will hear from me before June 30, but you will then, all right. Please, don't try to find me. Love, Pris."

Helmar folds the letter and returns it to his briefcase.

HELMAR (CONT'D)

June 30 will be my ward's 25th birthday when, under the terms of her father's will, the trust terminates and she takes complete possession of the property, 90% of Softdown, a large and successful corporation that makes towels. There are complications, as there always are.

WOLFE

Such as?

HELMAR

Eric Hagh, Priscilla's former husband, her one disastrous blunder. She ran away with him to South America when she was 19, left him three months later, and divorced him in 1948. There was no further communication between them.

WOLFE

How does that blunder complicate her inheritance?

HELMAR

Two weeks ago I received a letter from him claiming she had signed a letter shortly after their marriage granting him half of her property.

ARCHIE

You say her name is Priscilla Eads?

HELMAR

Yes, she took back her maiden name.

ARCHIE

I think I've met her. Do you have a picture?

HELMAR

Certainly.

Helmar takes THREE PHOTOS out of his briefcase and hands them to Archie. They're of THE YOUNG WOMAN we met earlier.

HELMAR (CONT'D)

I doubt if his claim has any legal validity, but morally, that may be a question. It is indubitably a question with my ward. The letter came from Venezuela, and I think she may have gone there to see him.

Archie hands the photos to Wolfe.

ARCHIE

She's worth looking at. Not only the pictures, but, as I thought, I've seen her. Just recently. I forget exactly where or when...

(to Wolfe:)

It was the night we had *bacalhau* for dinner.

WOLFE

What the devil are you gibbering about?

ARCHIE

You heard me.

He looks Wolfe in the eye. Wolfe thinks it through, then turns back to Helmar.

WOLFE

I'll sleep on it and if I decide to take it, I'll call your office tomorrow at ten in the morning for further details.

HELMAR

Tomorrow? I need action now!

WOLFE

What would you think of me if, solely on information furnished by you here and now, I accepted this case and started to work on it?

HELMAR

What would I think? That's what I want!

WOLFE

Surely not. Surely you would be employing a jackass.

(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

I have never seen you before. Your name may be Perry Helmar, or it may be Eric Hagh. I have only your word for it. I am capable of boldness but not temerity. If you want the kind of detective who will dive in heedlessly on request from a stranger, Mr. Goodwin will give you some names and addresses.

Helmar thinks about exploding, then gets himself under control. He snatches the photos off Wolfe's desk and storms out. Once the FRONT DOOR SLAMS:

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Bring her down here.

ARCHIE

Okay. Do I brief her first?

WOLFE

No. Bring her here.

And on Archie's smile, we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

As Archie unlocks the door, then knocks.

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE

Come in.

Archie goes in to find she's made herself at home. One of the beds has been turned down; it's coverlet, neatly folded, is on the other bed. Seated at a table near a window, under a reading lamp, doing something to her nails, is the young woman we now know to be PRISCILLA EADS. She's in the blue negligee, barefooted.

PRISCILLA

I had given up. In another ten minutes I'll be in bed.

ARCHIE

I doubt it. You'll have to get dressed. Mr. Wolfe wants you down in the office.

PRISCILLA

Now?

ARCHIE

Now.

PRISCILLA

Why can't he come up here?

ARCHIE

Because there's no chair on this floor big enough for him. I'll wait outside.

As he leaves:

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Archie leads Priscilla -- now back in her peach suit -- to Wolfe. She marches across to his desk and cordially extends a hand.

PRISCILLA

You look exactly right. Just as I thought! I would --

She breaks off, seeing he's giving her a deep freeze.

WOLFE

I don't shake hands with you because you might later think it an imposition. We'll see. Sit down, Miss Eads.

She draws back flustered, opens her mouth to speak, then closes it again. Looks at Wolfe, then Archie, then, apparently deciding that restraint is called for, she moves towards the red chair, but before she gets there, she jerks around to him.

PRISCILLA

What did you call me?

WOLFE

Your name. Eads.

PRISCILLA

How?

(to Archie)

Why didn't you tell me? But how?

ARCHIE

Look, you had a jolt coming, and what did it matter whether from him or me? Sit down and take it.

PRISCILLA

But you couldn't possibly...

She trails off, then goes to the red chair and sits.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

Not that it makes much difference.
(MORE)

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

I suppose I'll have to pay you more, but I was willing to anyhow. I told Mr. Goodwin so.

WOLFE

And he told you he was taking the money you gave him tentatively, conditional on my approval. Archie, get it please, and return it to her.

Archie gets the money and proffers it to her. She doesn't even lift a hand.

ARCHIE

Take it. If you want to balk, pick a better spot.

He drops the money on her lap and returns to his chair.

WOLFE

Your presence here, Miss Eads, is preposterous. This is neither a rooming house, nor an asylum for hysterical women. It is my --

PRISCILLA

I am not hysterical.

WOLFE

Very well, I withdraw it. It is not an asylum for unhysterical women. It is my office and my home. For you to come here and ask to be allowed to stay a week, sleeping and eating in the room directly above mine, without revealing your identity or any of the circumstances impelling you, was grotesque. Mr. Goodwin knew that, and you would have been promptly ejected if he had not chosen to use you and your fantastic request as a means of badgering me -- and also, of course, if you had not been young and attractive.

PRISCILLA

I'm sorry. I'm extremely sorry. I'll leave at once.

She starts to rise, until Wolfe shows her a palm.

WOLFE

If you please. There has been a development. We have had a visitor. He left here only a few minutes ago. A man named Perry Helmar.

PRISCILLA

Perry! You told him I'm here?

WOLFE

No. He wanted to hire me to find you. He told me of the communication he received recently from your former husband, now in Venezeula, regarding a document you once signed giving him half your property. You did sign such a document?

PRISCILLA

Yes.

WOLFE

Wasn't that a foolish thing to do?

PRISCILLA

Yes, but I was a fool then, so naturally I was foolish.

WOLFE

Mr. Helmar offered to pay me ten thousand dollars and expenses if I would produce you in New York, alive and well, by the morning of June 30.

PRISCILLA

Produce me?

WOLFE

That was his phrase. The moment Mr. Goodwin recognized the photographs and informed me, I was of course in an anomalous position. When I am offered a proper fee for a legitimate job in the field I cover, I don't refuse it. I need the money. So. A man I've never seen before comes and offers me \$10,000 to find and produce a certain objet by a certain date and by chance -- by chance alone -- that object is locked in a room in my house. Is there any reason I shouldn't disclose it to him and collect my fee?

PRISCILLA

I see. That's how it is. It's lucky he brought the photographs for Mr. Goodwin to recognize, wasn't it?

(to Archie)

I suppose I should congratulate you, Mr. Goodwin?

ARCHIE

It's too early to tell. Save it.

WOLFE

There was no legal, professional, or ethical obstacle to prevent my disclosing you to him and demanding payment. But confound it, there is my self-esteem. And is. I can't do it. Also, there is Mr. Goodwin. I have rebuked him for installing you and told him to get rid of you, and if I now collect ransom for you he will be impossible to live with or work with.

ARCHIE

He's got that right.

WOLFE

But if my self-esteem will not let me profit by your presence here, neither will my self-interest permit me to suffer loss by it. So I have two alternative suggestions to offer: The first is simple. You told Mr. Goodwin in effect there was no limit to the amount you would pay to stay here. I now say \$10,000.

PRISCILLA

This is blackmail!

WOLFE

I doubt if you can properly --

PRISCILLA

It's blackmail. You're saying that if I don't pay you \$10,000 you'll tell Perry Helmar I'm here and get it from him.

WOLFE

I'm saying no such thing. I said I had an alternate suggestion. If you don't like that one, here's another: You can be out of here in five minutes, with your luggage, and there will be no surveillance. We will not even so much as spy from a window to see which way you turn. We will forget you exist until 10 tomorrow morning. At which point, I shall phone Mr. Helmar, take his job on the terms he proposed, and start after you.

PRISCILLA

I'm not going to pay you any \$10,000. It's ridiculous.

WOLFE

As you please. You have no time to lose if you expect to make it a job for me. Archie, will you bring her luggage down, please?

Archie gets up, in no hurry.

PRISCILLA

I can manage, thanks.

She stalks out of the room. Archie follows.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Archie escorts Priscilla to the front door and carries her suitcases.

ARCHIE

Watch your money. You have plenty. Don't give it to a stranger to hold.

PRISCILLA

Sending little sister off to camp?

ARCHIE

I will not file the brand and number of the taxi. However, I am making no promise that I will permanently forget your name. Some day, I may think of something I'll want to ask you.

He opens the front door for her as she takes her bags.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

If I don't see you before June 30, happy birthday.

She studies him for a moment, then leaves. He watches as she hails a cab and, as one pulls to the curb, closes the door. And we:

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Wolfe, a great mass in YELLOW PAJAMAS, stands by a window, massaging his scalp with his fingers as Archie comes in.

ARCHIE

Good morning. Fritz said you wanted to see me.

WOLFE

Good morning. What time is it?

Archie glances significantly at THE TWO CLOCKS -- one on the bed table, one on the wall -- then decides to humor Wolfe. He checks his watch.

ARCHIE

:32.

WOLFE

Please get Mr. Helmar at his office sharp at ten o'clock and put him through to me upstairs. Meanwhile, it won't hurt to ring Miss Eads' apartment to learn if she's at home. Unless you already have?

ARCHIE

No, sir.

WOLFE

Then try it. If she's not there, we should be prepared to waste no time. Get after Saul, Fred, and Orrie at once, and tell them to be here by eleven o'clock if possible.

ARCHIE

No, sir. I don't refuse to play, but I will not help with any fudging. You told her that we would forget her existence until ten this morning. I have done so. I have no idea who or what you're talking about. Do you want me to come upstairs at ten o'clock to see if you have any instructions?

WOLFE

No!

Angrily, Wolfe heads for the bathroom. Reaching it and opening the door, he yells over his shoulder.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

I mean yes!

He disappears into the bathroom, slamming the door behind him. Archie shrugs, picks up the breakfast tray, and carries it out.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

Archie rushes out of Wolfe's office to answer A RINGING DOORBELL. He peers through the one-way glass.

HIS POV - THROUGH THE GLASS

It's INSPECTOR CRAMER, and he looks upset.

BACK TO SCENE

Archie opens the door.

ARCHIE

Inspector.

CRAMER

Hello, Goodwin.

ARCHIE

Mr. Wolfe will not be available for two hours, which you know already, since you are as familiar with his schedule as I am. Will I do?

CRAMER

You will for a start.

Cramer walks right past him to:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie follows him. Cramer ignores the red chair and goes to a yellow one, pulling it up to Archie's desk.

CRAMER

Last night a woman was murdered, and your fresh fingerprints are on her luggage. How did they get there?

Archie knows what this means and who's death it implies, but he hides his discomfort.

ARCHIE

That's no way to do it. My fingerprints could be found on women's luggage from Maine to California. Name and address and description of luggage?

CRAMER

Priscilla Eads. 618 East 74th Street. A suitcase and a hatbox, both light tan leather.

ARCHIE

She was murdered?

CRAMER

Yes. Your prints were fresh. How come?

Archie swivels and pushes a button on the house phone.

INTERCUT WITH

INT. BROWNSTONE - PLANT ROOM - DAY

As an annoyed Wolfe snatches up the phone.

WOLFE

What?

ARCHIE

Inspector Cramer is here. A woman named Priscilla Eads has been murdered, and Cramer says my fingerprints are on her luggage and wants to know how come. Have I ever heard of her?

WOLFE

Confound it.

ARCHIE

Yes, sir, I double. Do you want to come down here?

WOLFE

No.

ARCHIE

Shall we go up there?

WOLFE

No. You know all that I do.

ARCHIE

I sure do. So I unload?

WOLFE

Certainly. Why not?

ARCHIE

Yeah, why not? She's dead.

And as Archie hangs up and turns to Cramer:

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Cramer turns to a fresh page in his NOTEBOOK. He's filled a lot of them since Archie started talking.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

Cramer expressed appreciation for the information I provided, taking dozens of pages of notes, After a
(MORE)

ARCHIE'S VOICE (CONT'D)
 long while, he even started calling me Archie, which had happened before, but not often.

Cramer shuts his notebook.

CRAMER
 I guess it's all on the level.

ARCHIE
 Are you too busy to answer a question from a citizen in good standing?

CRAMER
 I'm due at the DA's office at 10:30.

ARCHIE
 Why did you want to make it so tight about the time Helmar left here? It was more than an hour later that Miss Eads left.

Cramer takes out a CIGAR and rolls it in his fingers.

CRAMER
 A little after one last night Margaret Fomos was found in a vestibule on East 29th street, strangled with a cord, not very thick, her purse stolen. Back when she was still breathing, she was a maid for Priscilla Eads.

Cramer glances at his watch, then sticks the cigar in the corner of his mouth. He doesn't light it.

CRAMER (CONT'D)
 Around four o'clock, one of the investigating officers, a young fellow named Auerbach, started to wonder why she was strangled over a bag. Going over the contents of Fomos' bag with her husband, one missing item stuck out -- the keys to the apartment where she worked.

ARCHIE
 That officer will have your job someday.

CRAMER
 He's welcome to it now. They found Priscilla Eads on the floor in her apartment. She'd been hit on the head with a fireplace poker and strangled with a cord, not very thick.

(MORE)

CRAMER (CONT'D)

The killer was waiting for her when she got home.

ARCHIE

Thanks for answering my question.

CRAMER

Least I could do considering how cooperative you've been. I believe you, for a change. Especially since Wolfe has no client, and none in sight. He'll be in a hell of a humor, and I don't envy you.

Cramer jams his cigar back in his pocket and heads out. And on Archie, giving what has been said some thought, we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - LATER

Wolfe sits in his chair. Archie's at his desk.

WOLFE

Mr. Helmar will soon know, if he doesn't already, of our stratagem, and I doubt if it's worth the trouble to communicate with him. He wanted his ward alive and well, and that's out of the question.

ARCHIE

But he's our only contact, and no matter how sore he is, we can start with him.

WOLFE

Start? Start what? For whom? We have no client.

ARCHIE

She was here and wanted to stay, and we kicked her out, and she got killed. I should think that would have some bearing on your self-esteem, which you were discussing last night. I should think you do have something to start -- a murder investigation. And you also have a client -- your self-esteem.

WOLFE

Nonsense.

Archie gets up.

ARCHIE

Okay, I guess I knew how it would be. You realize that I have my personal problem and it's different from yours. I put her back on the street, I put her in the taxi that sent her home and she got it.

WOLFE

Archie. No man can hold himself accountable for the results of his psychological defects, especially those he shares with all other men, such as lack of omniscience.

ARCHIE

I can get along without omniscience, but I can't get along with a goddamn strangler going around being grateful to me for sending his victim to him and I don't intend to try.

WOLFE

Bah.

ARCHIE

I'll quit if you prefer it, but I'd rather take an indefinite leave of absence, starting now --without pay, of course. I'll move to a hotel, but I suppose you won't mind if I drop in occasionally in case I need something.

WOLFE

Do I understand you? Do you intend to go single-handed for the murderer of Miss Eads?

ARCHIE

I don't know about single-handed. I may have to bring in some hired help. But I'm going for him.

WOLFE

Pfui. Poppycock. Is Mr. Cramer such a bungler? And his men? So inept that you must assume their functions?

ARCHIE

I'll be damned. That, from you?

Archie gets a SHOULDER HOLSTER from a drawer and straps it on, then takes a MARLEY .32 and fills the cylinder.

WOLFE

It won't do, Archie. You're trying to coerce me, and I won't have it. I will not undertake a major and expensive operation, with no chance of income, merely because you have been piqued by circumstances. Your bluff won't work.

Archie snaps the cylinder shut and slides the gun into the holster.

ARCHIE

I'll do my best to see that everyone knows I'm not working for you. Some of them won't believe it, but I can't help that. If you decide you'd rather have me quit, okay. I haven't got time to discuss it now because I want to catch the guy before lunch.

Archie slips on his jacket and walks out, leaving Wolfe, lips pressed tight, scowling.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

As Archie storms out and marches with quiet determination down the street.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

I had a pretty good idea where to start. Priscilla Eads stood to inherit 90% of Softdown Inc. if she lived to be 25. She missed by six days.

WIPE TO:

INT. SOFTDOWN, INC. - LOBBY - DAY

As Archie approaches an ancient GUARD at an information booth.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

I called my friend Lon Cohen at the Gazette and learned that now her 90% was going to be divided between a handful of Softdown officers.

Archie quickly flashes HIS ID, too quickly to be read.

ARCHIE

Goodwin. Detective. Where's the boss?

The guard points off down the hall.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Tell'em a detective is coming.

Archie goes in that direction.

WIPE TO:

INT. SOFTDOWN, INC. - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

FIVE PEOPLE sit around the conference table, staring up at Archie as he comes in. They were waiting for him. He displays his ID.

ARCHIE
 Goodwin. Detective. I'm
 investigating the murder of Priscilla
 Eads.

Archie turns to JAY BRUCKER, 50s, expensively dressed and radiating confidence. Brucker sits at the head of the table. Archie flips open his notebook and holds his pencil, poised to take notes.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
 Your full name, please.

BRUCKER
 J. Luthor Brucker.

ARCHIE
 What does the J stand for?

BRUCKER
 It's J-A-Y. Jay. I'm President.

ARCHIE
 When did you learn of the murder of
 Miss Eads?

BRUCKER
 On the radio this morning.

ARCHIE
 Can you account for your whereabouts
 last evening?

BRUCKER
 I was in bed. I have a suite at the
 Prince Henry Hotel.

ARCHIE
 You understand the situation, Mr.
 Brucker. A lot of people stand to
 profit from Miss Eads' death. How
 much of this business will you
 inherit?

BRUCKER
 Under the provisions of the will of
 the late Nathan Eads, son of the
 (MORE)

BRUCKER (CONT'D)

founder of the business, 19,362 shares of the common stock will come to me. The same amount will go to four other people -- Miss Duday, Mr. Quest, Mr. Pitkin and Mr. Hellmar. Smaller amounts go to others.

Archie scribbles in his notebook.

ARCHIE

Right. I'll get names down.

He turns to a well-dressed man in his 80s.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Yours, please?

QUEST

I am Bernard Quest. I have been with this business 62 years, and have been sales manager for 34 years and vice president for twenty nine.

Archie turns to VIOLA DUDAY, 40s, crisp and efficient. She doesn't wear lipstick or make-up.

VIOLA

Viola Duday. I was Mr. Eads secretary. During his last illness, the last fourteen months of his life, I ran the business. My present title is assistant secretary of the corporation.

Archie moves his eyes to the next person.

ARCHIE

You sir?

OLIVER PITKIN, 50s, sniffs and dabs at his nose with a handkerchief.

PITKIN

Oliver Pitkin. Secretary and treasurer of the corporation.

The next person, DAPHNE O'NEIL, a bombshell in her 20s, speaks up.

DAPHNE

Daphne O'Neil. But I don't think I belong in your little book, Mr. Detective, because I wasn't in Mr. Eads' will. I was just a good little girl when he died., and I only started to work for Softown four years ago. Now I'm the Softdown stylist.

Her voice edges perilously close to babytalk. It clearly puts Viola Dудay on edge. Or right over it.

VIOLA

Perhaps you should know that if Miss Eads had lived until next Monday, Miss O'Neil would be looking for another job. Miss Eads did not appreciate Miss O'Neil's --

QUEST

Is this necessary, Vi?

VIOLA

I think so. No one is going to be able to hide anything, so why not shorten the agony? They'll dig up everything. That for ten years before Nate Eads died, you tried to get him to give you a third of the business and failed. That Ollie here, beneath his mask of modest efficiency, is fiercely anti-feminist and hates to see a woman run anything.

PITKIN

My dear Viola --

VIOLA

That my ambition and appetite for power are so strong that you four men, much as you fear and distrust each other, fear and distrust me more, and you knew that when Priscilla was in control, I would have had top authority. They'll learn that this Daphne O'Neil -- my God, what a name for her, Daphne --

DAPHNE

(helpfully)

It means laurel tree.

VIOLA

-- that she was playing Perry Helmar and Jay Brucker against each other, and with June 30 approaching she was getting desperate and so were they. That Jay --

Daphne SLAPS HER across the mouth. Viola raises her hand as if to strike back, but merely covers her mouth with it, recoiling.

QUEST

You asked for it, Vi.

(MORE)

QUEST (CONT'D)

And if you're counting on Ollie and me being with you, and I think you are, this is a big mistake.

DAPHNE

I've been wanting to do that for a long time. I'll do it again.

That shuts everyone up. Archie waits to see if Viola's going to start up again, but she doesn't.

ARCHIE

Miss Duday is absolutely right. It'll all come out, the bad with the good, and the quicker the better.
(to Brucker)
It wouldn't hurt a bit, Mr. Brucker, if you followed Miss Duday's example. What was this conference about?

Brucker looks down his nose at Archie.

BRUCKER

We were saying that we would have to accept that fact that the manner of Miss Eads' death created an extremely unpleasant situation for all of us. We agreed that it was unthinkable that any of us could possibly have been involved in the murder of Miss Eads.

ARCHIE

It's not like any of you had motives.

Brucker lets that go.

BRUCKER

We spoke of the letter received recently from Eric Hagh, Miss Eads' former husband. Do you know about that?

ARCHIE

Yes.

BRUCKER

The letter was sent from Venezuela, but he could have come to New York by ship or plane-- or he didn't even have to come, he could have hired someone to kill her.

ARCHIE

Why?

BRUCKER

We don't know why. We were only trying to find some plausible explanation of the murder.

ARCHIE

Yeah, but how could you figure Hagh for the killing? If she'd lived a week longer he would still have his document and she would have a lot more property for him to claim half of.

VIOLA

One possibility would be that she had denied that she had signed the document, or he thought she was going to, and he was afraid he would get nothing at all.

ARCHIE

But she had stated that she had signed the document.

VIOLA

Had she? To whom?

ARCHIE

I'm asking the questions here, Miss Duday.

ROWCLIFF'S VOICE

Well, by God!

Archie turns to see LIEUTENANT GEORGE ROWCLIFF standing with TWO UNIFORMED OFFICERS in the doorway.

ROWCLIFF

(to Archie:)

You're under arrest.

ARCHIE

In writing?

ROWCLIFF

I don't need any writing. I'm taking you --

(to the group)

I'm Lieutenant Rowcliff, Manhattan Homicide. Downstairs this man said he was a policeman. Did he --

BRUCKER

Isn't he?

ROWCLIFF

No. Did he --

VIOLA

We're a pack of fools! He's a reporter!

ROWCLIFF

He's no reporter. His name is Archie Goodwin, and he's the confidential assistant of Nero Wolfe, the private detective.

Rowcliff shifts his focus back to Archie.

ROWCLIFF (CONT'D)

I'm taking you in the act of impersonating an officer of the law. Handcuff and search him, Doyle.

The two uniforms step towards Archie. He thrusts his hands in his pockets, slumps, and slips forward in his chair so that more than half of him is beneath the table.

ARCHIE

Both downstairs and up here I identified myself with my name and the word detective and I showed my license, which no one took the trouble to examine. I didn't say I was a policeman. I asked questions and they answered. Apologize now and get it over with.

ROWCLIFF

Questions about what?

ARCHIE

Matters connected with the death of Priscilla Eads.

ROWCLIFF

So you lied to Cramer when you told him Wolfe had no client.

ARCHIE

It wasn't a lie. He had no client then, and still has no client now.

ROWCLIFF

Then what are you here for?

ARCHIE

I am interested for my own personal reasons, and Mr. Wolfe has nothing to do with it. I'm strictly on my own.

ROWCLIFF

For God's sake.

(MORE)

ROWCLIFF (CONT'D)

So Wolfe has a c-c-client.

(starting to stutter)

And a client he doesn't dare acknowledge. And you actually have the gall to try to cover for him by telling another outrageous lie.

ARCHIE

Lieutenant, it has always been a pleasure to lie to you, and it will be again, but I want to make it clear and emphatic that my interest in this case is personal, and Mr. Wolfe is not concerned. If you --

ROWCLIFF

That's enough. More than enough. Giving false information, withholding evidence, material witness, obstructing justice, and impersonating an officer law. T-t-take him, Doyle.

Doyle moves towards Archie, who quickly sizes up the situation, sees the looks on the faces of the Softdown suspects, and makes a decision. He gets up slowly.

ARCHIE

Please be careful. I'm ticklish.

And as Doyle grabs him, we CUT TO:

INT. DA'S OFFICES - NIGHT

Archie sits on a hard chair in the corridor, ignored by all who pass by.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

I spent four hours being asked the same questions by every member of the NYPD, and when they'd run out of interrogators, they handed me over to the DA's office and then stuck me in the hall to wait. They were probably trying to rustle up a troop of boy scouts to take me on next.

Archie stands, stretches, and makes sure no one cares where he goes.

ARCHIE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

I figured they owed me a few phone calls, at least -- preferably in a quiet office with a door that closed.

Archie walks down the hallway, looking into offices, trying to find one that's free and open. He's going past a partially open office door when he hears a VOICE and freezes.

WOLFE

This whole performance is based on the idiotic assumption that Mr. Goodwin and I are both cretins.

Archie peers in the door and sees

INT. DA'S PRIVATE OFFICE - NIGHT

Wolfe sitting with Cramer, Rowcliff, and D.A. BOWEN.

WOLFE

I will acknowledge, to humor you, that at times in the past I have humbugged and hoodwinked to serve my purpose. But I still have my license and you know what that means. It means that on balance I have helped you more than I have hurt you. It means also that I have known where to stop and Mr. Goodwin has, too. That is our unbroken record and you know it. But what happens today? Mr. Rowcliff took advantage of the absence of Mr. Goodwin, whom he fears and petulantly envies, and entered my house by force --

ROWCLIFF

That's a lie! I rang and--

Wolfe roars, interrupting him.

WOLFE

Shut up!

Rowcliff does. After a moment, Wolfe continues, not roaring but not whispering, either.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

He was ass enough to suppose I would speak with him. Naturally I ordered him out. When I persisted in my refusal and turned to leave him, he took me into custody under warrant, conducted me out of my house and, in a rickety old police car with a headstrong and paroxysmal driver, brought me to this building.

In the hallway, Archie bites his lip.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

I had assumed, charitably, that some major misapprehension had driven Mr. Rowcliff to this frenzied zeal.

(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

But I learned from you, Mr. Bowen, that it was merely an insane fit of nincompoopery. You suspect that I have a client, that I know something you don't know and would like to, and that you can bully it out of me. You can't, because I haven't got it. But you're correct in thinking I have a client. I admit it. I have.

ROWCLIFF

I knew it!

In the hallway, Archie looks intrigued. Who the hell is this client?

WOLFE

I didn't have a client this morning, or even an hour ago, but now I have. Mr. Rowcliff's ferocious spasms, countenanced by you gentlemen, have made the challenge ineluctable.

ROWCLIFF

Who is it, Wolfe?

WOLFE

As you may know, Mr. Goodwin is not indifferent to those attributes of young women that constitute the chief reliance of our race in our gallant struggle against the menace of the insects. He is especially vulnerable to young women who possess not only those more obvious charms but also have a knack of stimulating his love of chivalry and adventure. Priscilla Eads was such a woman. Within three hours of her eviction by him at my behest, she was brutally murdered. He bounded out of my house like a man obsessed, after telling me he was going single-handed after the murderer.

(then:)

It was pathetic, but also humane, romantic, and thoroughly admirable, and your callous and churlish treatment of him leaves me with no alternative. I am at his service.

ROWCLIFF

You mean Archie Goodwin is your client?

BOWEN

All that rigmarole was leading up to
that?

Archie pushes open the door and steps in. Everybody swivels to stare at him. But Archie ignores everybody but Wolfe.

ARCHIE

I'm hungry. I had a soda fountain lunch and I could eat a porcupine with quills on. Let's go home.

Wolfe rises without a word, gets his hat and stick from a nearby table, gives Archie a pat on the shoulder, then growls at the others:

WOLFE

A paradise for puerility.

He walks out and Archie follows. No one moves to stop them.

CUT TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Wolfe takes his place behind his desk. Archie takes off the shoulder holster and puts it away, then sits in the red chair as Fritz comes in with a beer for Wolfe and a glass of milk for Archie. Fritz looks at Archie, puzzled.

ARCHIE

I'm a client now, Fritz.

Fritz leaves. Wolfe glowers at Archie.

WOLFE

Buffoon.

ARCHIE

No, sir. I sit here not as a gag but to avoid misunderstanding. As a client, the closer to you the better. As an employee, nothing doing until my personal problem is solved. Tell me how much you want for a retainer and I'll give you a check. If not, all I can do is bound out of your house like a man obsessed.

WOLFE

Confound it, I'm helpless! I'm committed!

ARCHIE

Yes, sir. How about a retainer?

WOLFE

No!

ARCHIE

Would you care to hear how I spent
the day?

WOLFE

Care to? No. But how the devil can
I escape it?

He leans back and puts his fingers together to listen and we

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Fritz brings in another beer and sets in on Wolfe's desk as:

WOLFE

How many of these five people could
you have here at eleven in the
morning?

ARCHIE

As it stands now? With no more bait?

WOLFE

Yes.

ARCHIE

I wouldn't bet on one, but I'm ready
to try. I might get something more
from Lon Cohen to use as bait if I
buy him a thick enough steak --

WOLFE

Do so. Invite him to dine with us.

And on Archie's nod, we CUT TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Wolfe and Archie enter, going to their desk. LON COHEN takes
a set in the red chair.

COHEN

That was some steak, Mr. Wolfe.

WOLFE

I'm in a pickle, Mr. Cohen. I am
committed to investigate a murder
and I have no entree. I need a
toehold. Who killed Priscilla Eads?

COHEN

I was intending to ask you. Since
when have you needed an entree?

WOLFE

Are you in my debt, Mr. Cohen, or am I in yours?

COHEN

I'll call it square if you will.

WOLFE

Good. Then I assume I have credit. I'll read your paper in the morning, and others too, but here we are now. Do you mind telling me what you know?

COHEN

Priscilla Eads routinely and completely changed her life every two years, going from college student to New Orleans party girl to South American wife to divorced Salvation Army tambourine shaker and finally to a corporate executive.

Ron glances between Wolfe and Archie, neither of whom seems too impressed.

COHEN (CONT'D)

If it helps any, an informal poll of the reporters working this case favors Oliver Pitkin as the killer, although not for any convincing reason. The male reporters, anyway. The women seem to like Viola Duday. And Franklin at the Times is betting on Sarah Jaffee, but he just likes impossible odds.

WOLFE

Sarah Jaffee?

(to Archie)

Is that a name you've come across?

ARCHIE

Nope.

COHEN

No reason you would -- unless you like impossible odds, too. She was probably Priscilla Eads closest friend.

WOLFE

Is she mentioned in the will?

COHEN

No, and she already owns ten percent of the company. Her husband was an executive in the business, until he was killed last year in Korea.

Closes his eyes and starts puffing his lips. Cohen doesn't know what to make of it, but Archie does. He politely escorts Lon out over:

ARCHIE'S VOICE

Lon was probably mistaking Wolfe's expression for indigestion but I knew better. Something Lon said had got Wolfe thinking...which meant I could expect a very busy morning.

WIPE TO:

INT. SARAH JAFFEE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

It's swank. Archie comes down the sixth-floor hallway.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

My conception of a widow was formed in my early boyhood from a character called Widow Rowley. I've known others since, but the conception has never been entirely obliterated.

He stops at an apartment door, checks the number, and knocks.

ARCHIE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

So there's always an element of shock when I meet a woman who has been labelled widow and I find she has some teeth, can walk without a cane, and doesn't constantly mutter to herself.

The door opens, revealing SARAH JAFFEE, 20s, and about as far from Archie's conception of a widow as can be imagined.

ARCHIE

Good morning, Mrs. Jaffee. I'm Archie Goodwin.

SARAH

Please, come in.

She leads him into:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - DAY

As Archie follows her through the foyer, his eyes fall on a MAN'S TOPCOAT thrown over the back of a chair and a MAN'S HAT on a table.

ARCHIE

Thank you for seeing me on such short notice.

And when they come to the breakfast alcove, there are TWO PLACES SET. She sits at one of them and picks up a spoon.

SARAH

I was in bed when you phoned. I assume you've had breakfast, but how about some coffee? Sit down.

He starts to sit at the set place, but:

SARAH (CONT'D)

No, not there! That's my husband's place.

(then:)

Olga! A coffee cup please!

The kitchen door swings open and a VALKYRIE comes out with a cup of coffee. She gives it to Sarah, who offers it to Archie. He takes it and sits -- not at the set place.

SARAH (CONT'D)

It's all right. I'm a nut, that's all. You know my husband is dead.

ARCHIE

So I understand.

SARAH

He was in the Reserve, a major. When he went away, one day in March a year ago, he left his hat and coat in the hall. I didn't put them away. When I got word he had been killed, three months later, they were still there. That was a year ago, and there they are, and I'm simply sick to death of looking at them, but there they are.

He gestures to the set place.

ARCHIE

This was his breakfast place?

SARAH

I'm sick of looking at that, too. Weren't you surprised when I told you on the phone, all right, come up?

ARCHIE

A little, maybe.

SARAH

Of course you were. A while back I decided to quit being a nut. And I decided the way I would do it: I would have a man sit here with me at breakfast, in Dick's place, and have

(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)

him take that awful hat and coat out of that hall. And did you hear me?
 (mimicking herself)
 "No, not there, that's my husband's place." I simply lost my nerve. Do you suppose I really am a nut?

Archie gets up and takes the set place, picks up the plate.

ARCHIE

That piece of toast, please.

She goggles at him for a moment, then gets him a piece of toast.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Excuse me, but I suppose I ought to eat it if you want this to stick, and it's that godawful cellophane special, so if there's any jelly or marmalade...

She gets up and brings him a tray of jams and jellies, then sits.

SARAH

If you hadn't been rude about the bread, I would soon have been crying.

ARCHIE

Yeah, I thought so.

SARAH

Will you take the coat and hat away with you?

ARCHIE

Certainly.
 (then:)
 I understand you were Priscilla Eads' best friend. When did you last see her?

She dabs her lips with the napkin nervously.

SARAH

I don't think I want to talk about it.

ARCHIE

That's just fine. You owe me three dollars.

SARAH

What? What for?

ARCHIE

Taxi fare here to take your husband's place at breakfast, which is why you let me come. It'll be more going back because I'll have to stop at the Salvation Army to get rid of the hat and coat. Three bucks will cover it, and I prefer cash.

Sarah looks at him for a moment, then:

SARAH

Have I ever met you before?

ARCHIE

Not that I remember, and I think I would. Why?

SARAH

You seem to know exactly the right things to say.

She takes a deep breath, then:

SARAH (CONT'D)

Pris and I have been friends since we were four. We got to be like sisters. We shared a place in the Village after college... then all of a sudden she was off. The next thing I knew, here came a letter saying that she had found her prince and married him and they were off for Peru. Maybe I still have it. I remember she enclosed a picture of him.

ARCHIE

Did you hear from her after that?

SARAH

One day she phoned, back in New York, back to her maiden name. She had decided to take over her father's business, and wanted my help.

ARCHIE

Your help? Or your shares?

SARAH

Both. She said she wanted to elect a new board of directors, all women, and we would elect Viola Duday president of the corporation. Is that right, president of the corporation?

ARCHIE

Sounds right. Look, Mrs. Jaffee, I'm here under false pretenses. I said Mr. Wolfe and I wanted information, and of course we do, but we also want help. You know that with Priscilla dead five people will own most of the Softdown stock?

SARAH

Yes, certainly.

ARCHIE

We want you to bring an action against those them. Use your own lawyer, or we'll recommend one. We want you to ask a court for an injunction restraining them from exercising any of the rights of ownership of that stock until it is determined whether one or more of them acquired it by commission of a crime.

SARAH

Why should I do that?

ARCHIE

Because you have a legitimate interest in the proper handling of the firm's affairs. Because you were Priscilla's oldest friend. Who do you think killed her?

SARAH

I don't know. I wish you-- don't do this.

ARCHIE

We can't march in like the cops. We have to find some way of getting at these people, and this will do it. And you can be darned sure that Priscilla Eads would be asking if she could talk.

But Sarah gets up and walks to a door.

SARAH

I won't do it. I won't do that!

She walks out, and after a moment, a door closes. Archie sighs and heads in the opposite direction, to the front door. But he stops in the foyer and glances back at the coat rack, then goes back, picks up the coat and hat and take them along. And we CUT TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie enters to find Wolfe at his desk, reading a MAGAZINE. Wolfe doesn't even bother to look up as he speaks.

WOLFE

Judging by your lugubrious gait and sour expression, I assume that your endeavors achieved nothing.

ARCHIE

There could be some buried clue or significant fact that showed itself but I missed it.

WOLFE

Then you better type your report.

ARCHIE

You mean my complete report? You want me to type it up, verbatim.

WOLFE

Yes.

ARCHIE

It'll take all afternoon and maybe more.

WOLFE

I suppose so.

Archie stands there, staring at him. Now Wolfe looks up.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

I asked you to type that report.

ARCHIE

Yeah, I heard you. But that was only a stall, and you know it.

WOLFE

Archie, you may remember that I once returned a retainer of \$40,000 which a client named Zimmerman paid me, because he wanted to tell me how to handle his case instead of leaving it to me. Please type the report.

Wolfe returns to his magazine. Archie marches over to his desk, sits down in front of his typewriter and, as he gets down to work, we hear:

ARCHIE'S VOICE

I sat and looked at him with his damn magazine.

(MORE)

ARCHIE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

It would have been a pleasure to take a gun from the drawer and shoot it out of his hand but I regretfully decided it was inadvisable. So I swiveled, pulled the typewriter to me, got paper, twirled it in, and hit the keys.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - EVENING

Archie is still typing, as Wolfe enters.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

Three and a half hours later, at six o'clock, I finished typing my report and someone rang the bell.

Archie rises, drops his report on Wolfe's desk, and goes to the door.

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - EVENING

Archie opens the door. Standing there is ALBERT IRBY, a bald, impeccably dressed man in his 40s, clutching a briefcase.

ARCHIE

Can I help you?

IRBY

My name is Albert M. Irby, I'm a lawyer and I represent Eric Hagh, the former husband of Priscilla Eads. I would like to speak to Mr. Wolfe.

Archie steps aside, lets Irby in, and leads him to the front room.

ARCHIE

If you'll wait here for a moment.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie enters, closing the door behind him.

ARCHIE

Eric Hagh's lawyer, Albert Irby, is here to see you.

Wolfe looks up, surprised.

WOLFE

Where the devil did you get him?

ARCHIE

I didn't exactly get him, he came.

WOLFE

What does he want?

ARCHIE

To talk with you. Since you don't like a client horning in on a case, I didn't press him for particulars.

Wolfe grunts with indignation.

WOLFE

Bring him in.

Archie goes to the door sliding doors, which separate the front room from the office, and opens them, ushering Irby in.

ARCHIE

Mr. Wolfe will see you now.

Irby nods to Archie and quickly approaches Wolfe's desk.

IRBY

I appreciate your seeing me, Mr. Wolfe. But I am not surprised, because I know of your great services in the cause of justice, and that's what I want, for my client, Eric Hagh. I was asked to represent him by a colleague in Venezuela, with whom--

WOLFE

(interrupts:)

My time and attention are not infinite, Mr. Irby.

IRBY

Of course, forgive me.

Irby sits down and rests his briefcase on the little table at his elbow.

IRBY (CONT'D)

I have with me a Photostat of a letter, dated August 12th, 1946, written and signed by Priscilla Eads Hagh and witnessed by Margaret Fomos, in which Priscilla gave her husband, Eric, a half interest in all property then hers or to become hers at any time in the future.

WOLFE

This is a legal matter and I am not a lawyer.

IRBY

I came to see you not on a matter of law but a matter of fact. Miss Eads told me on Friday that she signed the document in good faith, and offered my client a \$100,000 settlement. He rejected it. So I went to see Mr. Helmar.

WOLFE

I fail to see what this has to do with me.

IRBY

Mr. Helmar claimed she never signed any document and accused my client of forging it. So I called Mr. Hagh and told him to get on the first plane to New York and bring the original document with him.

Wolfe glances at his watch impatiently.

WOLFE

In five minutes, my dinner will be served and I will be leaving this room whether you are finished speaking or not. You might consider arriving at your point sooner rather than later.

IRBY

It occurred to me that you can speak to the authenticity of the document. Miss Eads came to consult you and spent hours here. Surely the document was mentioned, and surely she acknowledged that she signed it. If Mr. Goodwin was present and can also speak, that will clinch it.

Irby glances at Archie, then back to Wolfe.

IRBY (CONT'D)

Such assistance would be of great value to Mr. Hagh, amounting to five percent of the total sum received by him in settlement of his claim.

WOLFE

Mr. Hagh is coming to New York?

IRBY

Yes.

WOLFE
When will he arrive?

IRBY
Tomorrow afternoon, three o'clock.

WOLFE
I want to see him.

IRBY
Certainly, I want you to. I'll bring him straight here from the airport. Meanwhile, I'd like to prepare affidavits--

WOLFE
(interrupts:)
There will be no affidavits until I have talked to your client, and then we'll see. I think there should be a meeting of those concerned in this matter, both sides, with you present, in this room, tomorrow evening at nine o'clock. I'll undertake to get Mr. Helmar and his associates here.

IRBY
I would welcome such a meeting. But I would want some assurance that--

WOLFE
(interrupts:)
No. By making me a flagrantly improper offer, you have forfeited all right to amenity. You'll have to take it as it comes.
(glances at watch:)
My dinner is served.

Archie picks up Irby's briefcase and hands it to him with a smile. Irby rises, obviously upset.

IRBY
Very well, then. Good day.

Archie sees Irby out, then turns to Wolfe, who is already marching for the door himself, no happier than Irby was.

WOLFE
Are you satisfied?

ARCHIE
No sir. And neither are you.

And as Wolfe passes, we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie is at his desk, doodling.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

The next morning, I decided for the thousandth time I didn't have the right temperament for working with Nero Wolfe. If I had, I would have long ago quit being exasperated by his assumption that there was no point starting the day's detecting activities until he came down from the plant room at eleven o'clock.

The phone rings. He snatches it up immediately, glad for something to do.

ARCHIE

Nero Wolfe's office, Archie Goodwin speaking.

SARAH

This is Sarah Jaffee, Mr. Goodwin.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SARAH JAFFEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

As she talks on the phone with Archie.

ARCHIE

So it is. Good Morning.

SARAH

I just had my breakfast and I wanted to phone you. There was no place at the table but mine.

ARCHIE

Good. In the long run, that'll save a lot of breakage on dishes.

SARAH

It will save more than that.

(then:)

I knew I was glad the coat and hat were gone, and I knew you had done a wonderful thing for me after the way I acted. I'm a terrible coward. I always have been.

ARCHIE

It's all right, Mrs. Jaffee, I--

SARAH

(interrupts:)

No, please. Let me finish or I won't. I slept better than I have for a long time. A wonderful sleep. And while I was eating breakfast, I realized I had to do what you asked. That thing with the lawyer? I'll do it...

ARCHIE

You should call your lawyer.

SARAH

I don't want to tell him about it because he might not approve and I don't want to argue with him.

ARCHIE

Then Mr. Wolfe's lawyer, Nathaniel Parker, will be asked to act on your behalf and you couldn't possibly do any better.

SARAH

I don't think I'm still a nut, but I'm still a coward, so I'm pretty brave to do this and I hope you know it.

ARCHIE

I do and I appreciate it.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Wolfe, Sarah, and NATHANIEL PARKER, 30s, Wolfe's well-dressed and handsome lawyer. They are talking, over which we hear:

ARCHIE'S VOICE

We gave Parker all the details, as well as all of our intentions. He was not enthusiastic, which was nothing new, and he made it plain that since he would be Mrs. Jaffee's lawyer of record, her interest would be his primary consideration.

PARKER

I will need a dollar, Mrs. Jaffee.

SARAH

What for?

PARKER

My token retainer.

She opens her purse and gives him the money. As they conduct their transaction, Wolfe nods to Archie, who picks up the TELEPHONE RECEIVER and dials. Wolfe picks up the extension and listens.

ARCHIE

(into phone:)

Mr. Helmar, please. Nathaniel Parker's office calling. It's regarding a legal matter concerning Mrs. Sarah Jaffee and Softdown Incorporated.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HELMAR'S OFFICE - DAY

As Helmar picks up his phone.

HELMAR

Helmar speaking.

ARCHIE

Please hold for Mr. Parker.

Archie hands the phone to Parker, who is calm, cool and anything but pugnacious.

PARKER

I'm Nathaniel Parker, an attorney. I'm preparing to start an action for a client, and I'm calling you as a matter of professional courtesy. The client is Mrs. Sarah Jaffee. I believe you know her?

HELMAR

I've known her all her life. What kind of action?

PARKER

Perhaps I should explain that Mrs. Jaffee was referred to me by Mr. Nero Wolfe, who suggested this course of action to her.

Helmar is outraged.

HELMAR

That crook? That damned scoundrel? What did he tell her to do?

PARKER

To ask the court to enjoin you and the board from assuming ownership of any of the capital stock of Softdown Inc. and from attempting to exercise

(MORE)

PARKER (CONT'D)

any rights of ownership -- until it is determined whether any of you acquired the stock by murdering Priscilla Eads.

HELMAR

This is an act of malice! No judge would grant such an injunction.

PARKER

That remains to be seen, but I think an effort should be made to avoid going to court and that it be made tonight, at Mr. Wolfe's office, and that all those involved be present.

HELMAR

At Wolfe's office? Never, Never! He's a murderer himself.

PARKER

I will draft the application and have everything in readiness, including a date with the judge, unless I receive word by three o'clock that all five of you will be in Mr. Wolfe's office at nine this evening. Good day, Mr. Helmar.

And with that, Parker hangs up and looks at Wolfe.

PARKER (CONT'D)

They'll come.

(then:)

Damn you, Wolfe. I have theater tickets.

WOLFE

Use them. I won't need you.

PARKER

And leave my client defenseless?

Ha!

(to Sarah:)

Mrs. Jaffee, one of my functions as your attorney is to keep you away from dangerous persons and influences, and these two men together represent all the perils and pitfalls you can imagine. Will you have lunch with me?

SARAH

I'd be delighted, Mr. Parker.

She smiles and together they walk out.

WOLFE
 (to himself:)
 Pfui.

And on Archie's smile and Wolfe's scowl, we

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The place is packed and everyone is taking their seats. There's the five Softdown directors, as well as Sarah Jaffee and Nathaniel Parker.

ARCHIE'S VOICE
 The Softdown crowd showed up on time,
 as expected.

Arthur Irby and his client, ERIC HAGH, are the last to enter. Archie eyes Hagh, 30s, who is blond, handsome and wearing a wrinkled, white linen suit. Hagh takes a seat beside Sarah.

ARCHIE'S VOICE (CONT'D)
 And we finally got to meet Eric Hagh. There had been so much talk about South America, I had expected him to be a cross between Diego Rivera and Peron, but I couldn't have told him from a Viking if it hadn't been for his clothes.

Wolfe enters and goes to his desk, which isn't easy, considering his girth and how many people are crowded into the room.

WOLFE
 Good-evening.

Before Wolfe gets satisfactorily adjusted in his chair, Perry Helmar stands up, holding a paper in his hand.

HELMAR
 I have a prepared statement which I would like to read.

WOLFE
 Go ahead.

HELMAR
 "Speaking for myself, I challenge the propriety of participation of Nero Wolfe in any discussion of the affairs of Priscilla Eads, deceased, or of any matters relating to her, including her death.

(MORE)

HELMAR (CONT'D)

I base this challenge on the fact that Nero Wolfe, by his concealment from the undersigned of the presence in his house of said Priscilla Eads, and by his gross and premeditated deception of the undersigned, contributed to her peril and thereby became to a considerable degree responsible for her death by violence. The full details of his deception have been supplied to the District Attorney by me in a signed statement."

Helmar sits down, leaving the paper on Wolfe's desk. Wolfe ignores it.

WOLFE

I could reply to Mr. Helmar's indictment of me, but it would take time and we should get on. First, I'll make one thing clear: my status in this business. I have been engaged to investigate the murder of Priscilla Eads and that is my sole interest.

HELMAR

By Sarah Jaffee?

WOLFE

No. My client's identity is not your concern.

HELMAR

For the record, the threat of legal action on behalf of Mrs. Jaffee is an unjustified, unprovoked, and reprehensible attempt at coercion.

WOLFE

In my opinion, it is entirely proper for Mrs. Jaffee, as a stockholder in the corporation, to bring the action contemplated, but that will be determined not by my opinion or yours, but by a court tomorrow unless developments here this evening make it unnecessary.

PITKIN

What developments would make it unnecessary?

WOLFE

Any of several. For instance, my discovery of the identity of the murderer.

Wolfe's eyes move deliberately over the crowd, prolonging the moment for effect. But no one moves or speaks.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Another possible development would be for me to conclude, after inquiry, that none of you five people was involved in the murder. The purpose of this meeting is that inquiry by me.

HELMAR

The purpose of this meeting is an explanation by you and Counselor Parker of this whole outrageous proceeding!

Wolfe's gaze pins him.

WOLFE

Do you really mean that?

HELMAR

I certainly do.

WOLFE

Then get out.

Wolfe waves his hand.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Out! I've had enough of you.

The five don't move, except their heads, to exchange looks.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Before you go, Mr. Helmar, I accuse you of an impudent lie in an attempt to defraud. In this room Monday evening, Miss Eads told Mr. Goodwin and me categorically that she signed that document, and of course you knew --

HAGH

(interrupts:)

Bravo! That is honesty for you, gentlemen!

Hagh jumps out of his chair, pulling an envelope out of his pocket.

HAGH (CONT'D)

(waves envelope)

Here it is! Here it is!

HELMAR

This is fantastic. We submit to trial on a charge of murder, before you as a judge and jury?

WOLFE

No, not as you put it. I have no electric chair in readiness. But if Mrs. Jaffee asks for an injunction, and you dispute it, that will be a disagreeable experience for you. You may be able to prevent it by debating it here, privately, this evening.

VIOLA

What do you mean by inquiry?

WOLFE

Put it this way: I say to you, Miss Duda, there is a suspicion that you had something to do with the murders of Priscilla Eads and Margaret Fomos, that you may actually have committed the crimes with your own hands. What have you to say to remove or discredit that suspicion?
(looks at his watch:)
You have five minutes.

HELMAR

That's a subtle and dangerous trick, Viola.

WOLFE

How dangerous to the innocent?

VIOLA

(to Helmar:)
I think I'll take a chance on the danger.
(to Wolfe:)
It's true I'll get a large block of stock, as they will--

She motions to the other four directors.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

--but they can outvote me and push me out if they feel like it. Whereas if Priscilla had lived, I would soon have been the active head of the corporation, in complete control. Does that seem pertinent?

WOLFE

Did you know that Mrs. Fomos would be a director?

VIOLA

Yes. Priscilla wanted all the directors to be women. Although she was not fond of me personally, she thought women should have more positions of power. She resented it that they--

(glances at the four men:)

-- did not conceal their doubt of her ability to understand the mysterious process of making and selling towels.

WOLFE

Do you know of any reason why Miss Eads decided to seek seclusion here?

VIOLA

My guess is it was because they were pestering her, especially Helmar, and she had enough of them.

WOLFE

Why especially Helmar?

VIOLA

Because he had more at stake. Helmar is not an officer of the corporation, but he has been drawing \$40,000 a year as counsel. After June 13th, I doubt he would have drawn anything at all.

HELMAR

That's false and you know it. That's utterly unfounded.

WOLFE

You'll have your turn.

VIOLA

He can have it now. That's all I have to say.

WOLFE

Very well, Mr. Helmar?

HELMAR

My income from my law practice, exclusive of the payments from Softdown, is adequate for my needs. And even if I had been desperate, I would not have resorted to murder. The idea that a man of my training and temperament would perform so vicious a deed and incur so tremendous

(MORE)

HELMAR (CONT'D)

a risk is repugnant to every reputable theory of human conduct. That's all.

WOLFE

Not quite. You leave too much untouched. If there was no question of desperation, why did you offer me \$5000 to find Miss Eads within six days and double that to produce her, as you put it, alive and well?

HELMAR

I told you why. I thought she'd go to Venezuela to see her former husband and I wanted to stop her before she reached him. I was afraid she might do something foolish.

Helmar points an accusatory finger at Wolfe.

HELMAR (CONT'D)

And you had her here, in this house, he kept it from me. And after I left you sent her to her death!

Wolfe, once again, ignores the accusation.

WOLFE

Then you're conceding the document Mr. Hagh was waving around is authentic? That his wife signed it?

HELMAR

No.

WOLFE

If she hadn't and it was a fake, why would she go flying off to Venezuela?

HELMAR

She was wild sometimes.

WOLFE

You can't have it both ways, Mr. Helmar. Did she acknowledge to you that she had signed it or not?

HELMAR

I'll reserve my answer to that.

WOLFE

I doubt if aging will help it. How do you explain her backing out of her appointment with you and asking you not to try and find her?

HELMAR

She knew I was coming with proof that Miss Duday was utterly incompetent to handle the affairs of a corporation. I think it likely she was already aware that she would have to abandon her idea of putting Miss Duday in control and she didn't want to face me and admit it.

VIOLA

What a monstrous liar you are, Perry.

WOLFE

What about Miss O'Neil?

HELMAR

I have nothing to say about Miss O'Neil.

WOLFE

Oh come. She may be a mere voluptuous irrelevance, but I need to know. Was she intimate with both Mr. Brucker and you, or neither? What was she after, diversion, treasure or a man?

Helmar can barely hold his anger in check.

HELMAR

It was stupid to submit to this at all. You make ignorant and malicious insinuations about a young woman whom you are not fit to touch. In her innocence and modest merit she is so far above all this depravity -- no! I was a fool to come.

WOLFE

I take it you are through, Mr. Helmar?

HELMAR

I am.

WOLFE

Mr. Brucker?

BRUCKER

I would like to tell you, Mr. Wolfe, that I regard this action by Mrs. Jaffee as completely justified. I welcome and appreciate your assistance in arranging a compromise.

WOLFE

You are wasting time, sir. I am an investigator, not a negotiator.

(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

I'm after a murderer. Is it you? I don't know, but you do. I ask you to speak to that.

BRUCKER

I'm just a plodding, hard-working businessman, Mr. Wolfe. I remember a day in 1932, the worst year for American business in this century. It was a cold, December day, and word had gotten around that several of us in my section would be fired...

WOLFE

Do you think this is pertinent?

BRUCKER

I do, yes, sir. On that cold, December day, Mrs. Eads came to see Mr. Eads and brought their five year old daughter, Priscilla, a lovely girl. She roamed the halls while her parents talked. She asked what my name was and I told her, Jay. Do you know what she said?

He waits for a reply, forcing Wolfe to mutter, against his will:

WOLFE

No.

BRUCKER

She said 'Jay? You don't look like a bluejay!' She was simply irresistible. I had a little yarn in my pocket, a short strand of bright green, and I put it around her neck and told her it was a beautiful necklace I was giving her for Christmas. She was delighted, making cries of glee. When her parents came to get her, she showed them her necklace and you know what she said to her father?

WOLFE

(reluctantly:)

No.

BRUCKER

She said, 'Daddy, look what Jay gave me. Oh, Daddy, don't make Jay go with the others. You must keep Jay.' And I was kept. You can imagine how I feel now knowing that I am suspected of killing Priscilla with these hands.

He extends his hands, which are shaking.

BRUCKER (CONT'D)
 These hands that tied that necklace
 on her twenty years ago!

There is a moment of silence, then:

WOLFE
 Well, sir?

BRUCKER
 I have no more to say.

WOLFE
 You're not serious.

VIOLA
 Oh yes, he is.

WOLFE
 Manifestly, sir, either your mental
 processes are badly constipated or
 you think mine are. Let's jump twenty
 years to the day before yesterday.
 You told Mr. Goodwin that you had
 been discussing the notion that Miss
 Eads had been killed by her former
 husband, Mr. Hagh.

HAGH
 Who said that?

Eric Hagh gets up and turns to confront the others.

HAGH (CONT'D)
 Who said that?

WOLFE
 Sit down, Mr. Hagh.

HAGH
 I want an answer.

Archie heads for Hagh.

ARCHIE
 Back up.

HAGH
 I've been accused of murder!

ARCHIE
 Why not? So has everyone else. Sit
 down and listen and start cooking up
 a defense.

Irby puts his hand on Hagh's arm, urging him to sit with a gentle tug. Hagh reluctantly takes his seat. Wolfe turns back to Brucker.

WOLFE

I am impressed by your enterprise in hustling off to Venezuela for a candidate for the killer when there was no lack of eligibles near at hand. What was in it for Mr. Hagh? Why would he want her dead?

BRUCKER

I can't tell you.

WOLFE

That's a pity, since the simplest way for you people to make me doubt your guilt would be to offer an acceptable substitute. Have you one?

BRUCKER

No.

Wolfe's gaze went left, to Mr. Quest.

WOLFE

Mr. Quest?

The old man clears his throat.

QUEST

I've been in this business sixty two years. In 1923, when I was made vice president by Nathan Eads, he promised me that someday I would be given a substantial block of the corporation. In the years that followed, the promised was repeated several times, but it was never kept.

WOLFE

I assume you will be returning to the present day shortly, Mr. Quest?

QUEST

In 1942, he died and when his will was read, I found that once more he'd broken his promise to me. So I decided to kill his daughter Priscilla, then fifteen years old. I decided to strangle her.

Everyone is shocked. Viola gasps.

VIOLA

Bernie!

QUEST

I found some clothesline in an alley. I had to know how much tension was needed to choke off the air and sound and make her helpless quickly...so I tried it on myself. I wrapped it around my neck and pulled.

BRUCKER

My God.

QUEST

I awoke on the floor...I stared at the cord in my hand.. felt the livid ring around my neck...and came to my senses. I couldn't do it. For ten years, that cord, neatly coiled, has been on a tray on my dresser, where I see it morning and night. I have often been asked what it is and why it is there, but I have never told until now.

WOLFE

Is it still there?

Quest is startled.

QUEST

Ofcourse!

WOLFE

Has it been there continuously?

Quest is even more startled.

QUEST

I don't know. I haven't been home since Monday morning. I've been staying with my son in town -- I want to phone.

Quest gets to his feet.

QUEST (CONT'D)

I want to phone!

Archie offers it to him.

ARCHIE

Here.

Quest comes over and quickly dials. Everyone waits.

QUEST

Della?....this is Mr. Quest. I am sorry to get you out of bed.

(MORE)

QUEST (CONT'D)

I need you to do something for me.
You know that piece of old clothesline
on my dresser? I want you to go and
see if it's still there.

All eyes are on him as he waits. Wolfe picks up his own
phone and listens in.

QUEST (CONT'D)

Yes, Della? It is? You're sure?
No, I just wanted to know. Good
night.

Quest hangs up the phone and turns to Wolfe, who also sets
down his receiver on its cradle.

QUEST (CONT'D)

I could have used it, Mr. Wolfe,
that's true, but I couldn't possibly
have put it back, because I haven't
been there.

Quest reaches into his pocket and puts TWO DIMES AND A NICKEL
on Archie's desk.

QUEST (CONT'D)

It's a quarter call, with tax. Thank
you.

Quest returns to his seat.

WOLFE

That was well conceived and superbly
executed, flummery or not. You have
nothing to add?

QUEST

No.

WOLFE

So you also know when to stop.

Wolfe turns to his right.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

And you, Mr. Pitkin? Were you, too,
blessed with a catharsis many years
ago?

PITKIN

I'm not sure I know what a catharsis
is. Will you define it?

WOLFE

I'd rather withdraw it. What have
you to say to remove or discredit
suspicion that you are the murderer?

PITKIN

That's not the way to do it. That's un-American. First show me the evidence, if there is any, and I will answer it. That's the American way.

WOLFE

There is no evidence.

PITKIN

Then you have no suspicion.

WOLFE

Either, sir, you're an ass or you're masquerading as one. When there is evidence that you have murdered, there will not be a suspicion, but a conviction. If I had evidence that one or more of you were guilty, I wouldn't sit here half the night, inviting you to jabber. I would phone the police to come and get you. Now -- are you capable of deliberate murder?

PITKIN

No, because of the way I look at things.

WOLFE

How do you look at things?

PITKIN

From the standpoint of profit and loss. One rule is this: if the risk of a transaction is very great, it should not be considered at all, no matter what profit it offers if it is successful. You apply that to murder, and what do you get? Profit and loss, Mr. Wolfe.

Pitkin thinks of something and turns to Sarah Jaffee.

PITKIN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Jaffee, your average income in Softdown dividends for the past five years has been \$40,000. Have you earned one cent of it?

SARAH

My father did the earning.

PITKIN

(to Hagh:)

And you, Mr. Hagh.

(MORE)

PITKIN (CONT'D)

You're demanding a share of Softdown profits, but you certainly haven't earned anything and nobody related to you or connected with you has earned anything. Isn't that correct?

HAGH

It is perfectly correct. And I feel no embarrassment being put in the same class with the charming Mrs. Jaffee.

Hagh smiles at Sarah, who TURNS AWAY, suddenly very uncomfortable. Pitkin turns back to Wolfe.

PITKIN

The income I will get from Softdown stock is called unearned income, but actually I earned it from years of devoted service. I deserve it, unlike them.

WOLFE

How about Miss Eads? Wasn't she also a parasite? Or had the interest she'd recently shown in the business made her an earner?

PITKIN

That was no service to the corporation. It was an interference.

WOLFE

Then she had earned nothing and deserved nothing.

PITKIN

That's right.

WOLFE

But in a week, she would have taken title to 90% of the company's stock, leaving you earners with nothing but your salaries. Wasn't that deplorable?

PITKIN

Yes, we all thought so.

WOLFE

You, perhaps, with uncommon warmth because you are fiercely anti-feminist and hate to see a woman own or run anything?

PITKIN

I merely feel that women should be subject to the rules of bookkeeping and be permitted to take only what they earn, and on account of their defects of ability and character, they are incapable of earning much more than bare subsistence.

Wolfe puts his palms down on the table. He's finished. He looks around at everyone.

WOLFE

I think I've had enough of you. I'm not at all sure the evening has been well-spent, whether, as Mr. Pitkin puts it, it shows a profit or a loss.
(then:)

It's past midnight. I must digest what I have heard and seen. I make only this commitment: Mr Parker will take no action on behalf of Mrs. Jaffee until he has heard from me some time tomorrow.

And as the guests file out we WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Archie closes the door on the last guest, then turns to find Wolfe stepping into the elevator.

ARCHIE

Which one?

WOLFE

Which one what?

ARCHIE

Excuse me. If you're as stumped as you look, God help your client.

WOLFE

Archie, do you know who killed Miss Eads and Mrs. Fomos?

ARCHIE

No, sir.

WOLFE

I do, or I did, but there's a contradiction. What about Mrs. Jaffee? Is she a snake or a cheat?

ARCHIE

No. Nice odds, say ten to one.

WOLFE

Then I need to ask her something,
after consideration. Will you please
have her here in the morning, at
eleven?

ARCHIE

Yes, sir.

And with that, Wolfe ascends and we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - ARCHIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Archie is sound asleep when the PHONE RINGS. He grabs it
after two rings.

ARCHIE

Yeah?

SARAH

I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Goodwin, did
I wake you?

ARCHIE

Not quite, Mrs. Jaffee. Go ahead
and finish it.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

She's talking on the phone in the living room, across from
the foyer. The room is drenched in shadows.

SARAH

I guess I should have waited until
morning, but I thought you might
have found them and wondered whose
they were. Did you find any keys?

ARCHIE

No. Why, did you lose some?

SARAH

Yes, two on a ring, to the door
downstairs and my apartment. They
were in my bag.

Archie sits up, fully awake now.

ARCHIE

Where are you now?

SARAH

I'm home in my apartment.

ARCHIE

How did you get in?

SARAH

The night man . He has a key. I might have lost them in the Flamingo Club or the taxi, but I thought I ought to phone you in case you found them. I'm sorry I bothered you. Good night.

ARCHIE

Wait. Don't ring off.

Archie moves to the edge of his bed and checks the clock. It reads 1:50.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Is Olga there?

SARAH

No, she doesn't sleep here.

ARCHIE

You went to the Flamingo Club with Mr. Parker?

SARAH

We stopped for a drink and a dance.

ARCHIE

When did you miss the keys?

SARAH

While I was coming up in the elevator. I went to get them from my bag, and they weren't there.

ARCHIE

Why didn't you notice downstairs on the sidewalk?

SARAH

The night man was there with the door open.

ARCHIE

And Parker didn't go up with you.

SARAH

No.

Archie takes a deep breath. He is very concerned now. He starts to get dressed as he talks to her.

ARCHIE

Okay, don't ring off. Keep that phone at your ear and mouth.

SARAH

Why? What--?

ARCHIE

Nothing. A million to one it's nothing, you lost some keys, that's all. I'm just nervous about keys. After the night man let you in to the apartment, how long were you there before you phoned me?

SARAH

I called you right away. I wanted to get you before you were asleep. What do you mean, you're nervous about keys?

ARCHIE

I mean I'm coming right over right away. Where's the phone you're talking from?

SARAH

In the living room.

ARCHIE

That's at the other end from the foyer?

SARAH

Yes.

(then, nervously:)

Did you say you're coming over here?

ARCHIE

Listen carefully. This is almost certainly a false alarm, but listen anyway. Don't ring off. When I say, 'Go ahead,' you say this to me, quote, 'I don't think so, but if you'll hold the line, I'll go to the foyer and see if it's there' unquote. Do you want me to repeat that?

That only makes her more nervous now.

SARAH

No, you don't need to.

ARCHIE

Good. As soon as you say that, put the phone down -- just put it down, don't ring off -- walk to the foyer, go straight to the outside door, go through it and close it with a bang. Go to the elevator and push the button, and keep your finger on it until the elevator comes. Go downstairs with the elevator man and wait for me. Did you get all that?

SARAH

Yes.

ARCHIE

Will you do it just that way?

SARAH

Yes, I -- I will.

ARCHIE

That's the girl. Don't forget to bang the door, because I'm going to keep the phone to my ear until I hear that, and then I'll go. After I get there, you can have a good laugh at me for being so nervous and then we'll decide what to do next. For one thing, I'm a better dancer than Parker and it's only two o'clock. Are you all set?

SARAH

Yes.

ARCHIE

Go ahead.

SARAH

I don't think so, but will you hold the line? Uh -- hold the line and I'll go see if it's in the foyer.

Archie holds the phone tight, tense with anxiety and concern.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

It had been a lot of years since I'd played prisoner's base. The phone in the living room was one base, and the elevator outside was another, and it was up to Sarah Jaffee to make the run without being tagged. I didn't hear the door bang... maybe she forgot, but I doubted it.

Archie drops the receiver and runs out of his room.

EXT. SARAH JAFFEE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A TAXI screeches to a stop out front. Archie jumps out and starts banging on the glass entrance door. After a moment, the uniformed NIGHT MAN appears.

NIGHT MAN

What do you want?

ARCHIE

I want in!

NIGHT MAN

For what?

ARCHIE

To see Mrs. Jaffee. I'm expected.

NIGHT MAN

At this time of night? Nuts. What's your name?

Archie groans with frustration, pulls out HIS GUN. The Night Man raises his hands, terrified. At the same moment, the TAXI speeds off, TIRES SQUEALING. Archie breaks a hole in the glass with his gun, reaches in through the hole and opens the door.

INT. SARAH JAFFEE'S APARTMENT - LOBBY - NIGHT

Archie enters, keeping his gun aimed at the night man.

ARCHIE

Have you seen Mrs. Jaffee in the last half-hour? Or heard her? Talk fast. Have you?

NIGHT MAN

No.

ARCHIE

Into the elevator. Step on it! Sixth floor.

He obeys.

NIGHT MAN

That hackie will have a cop here in no time.

ARCHIE

Good.

And the elevator goes up... and we CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

They go up to Sarah's door.

ARCHIE

Get out your keys and open the door.

NIGHT MAN

But I'm not supposed to--

Archie aims his gun at him.

ARCHIE

Do it.

Archie presses his finger against the bell button while the Night Man fumbles with his keys and unlocks the door. Archie pushes the door open... and there she is. SARAH is lying on the floor, her body in a twisted position, a dark bruise around her neck, her eyes bulging, her swollen tongue sticking out of her mouth.

NIGHT MAN

Christ almighty.

ARCHIE

Take the elevator down and stay there.
The police will want it.

Archie shoves him out and steps inside.

INT. SARAH JAFFEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Archie closes the door and looks around. He takes note of an OPEN CLOSET DOOR and a BRONZE TIGER BOOKEND and a COILED CORD on the floor.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

She had followed instructions all right, but had never reached the outside door. Three paces from where she lay, he came out of the closet, struck her with the bookend, then finished up with a doubled cord from a Venetian blind. Everything was right there.

Archie goes to the phone. The receiver is still resting on the table. He cradles the receiver, waits a moment, then dials.

WOLFE'S VOICE

Hello?

ARCHIE

It's Archie. Get this, because we may be interrupted.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Wolfe is in his enormous bed, holding the phone to his ear.

ARCHIE

Sarah Jaffee phoned me, her keys were missing from her bag and the elevator man had let her in. I said I would come over and told her what to do in the mean time. I came, and I'm phoning from her apartment.

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

She did what I told her, but she's here on the floor, dead. The next time she's in danger, she should phone someone else.

WOLFE

Archie.

ARCHIE

Yes, sir.

WOLFE

I said it is vainglorious to reproach yourself for lack of omniscience. That is also true of omnipotence. Report in when you can.

ARCHIE

Right. Happy dreams.

Suddenly two police officers burst into the room, runs drawn.

OFFICER

Drop that phone and get your hands up.

And as Archie does as he's told, we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Under Archie's voice-over, we see him being interrogated by ROWCLIFF and other cops. A stenographer takes everything down.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

I spent over eight hours at police headquarters being questioned and gave, several times, a complete account of the meeting in Wolfe's office and my phone call with Sarah Jaffee. After that, they let me go...

WIPE TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - CORRIDOR - DAY

We see Archie emerge from an office and wander down the corridor, looking for someone. It has now been roughly 24 hours since Archie last slept, and he looks it. Cramer is emerging from Commissioner Skinner's office when Archie corners him.

ARCHIE

I need to talk with you.

CRAMER

Are you on another errand for Wolfe?

ARCHIE

No. Look, Sarah Jaffee's murder wasn't just bad luck. While she was on the phone with me, her killer was in the closet waiting for her. I told her what to do. I could have told her to run to an open window and scream and that might have saved her. But I didn't. I had something better and I was wrong.

CRAMER

What do you want, a medal?

ARCHIE

I will not go home and sit on my ass waiting for Mr. Wolfe to have a fit of genius. I want to sit in on your interviews with the suspects and offer my comments when it might help.

CRAMER

A typical Wolfe approach.

ARCHIE

This is strictly personal, purely because I don't expect to feel like sleeping for a while. I was there, I can help you, and I will do anything else you think will be useful.

CRAMER

If this is a dodge, I'll hook you good. Nothing goes to Wolfe, not a damn word, or to anyone else.

ARCHIE

Agreed.

CRAMER

This has already made a big noise. Two dozen copies have been made of your full report. The commissioner himself is studying one of them right now.

Cramer motions down the corridor.

CRAMER (CONT'D)

Deputy Commissioner Wade is in the room down the hall with Brucker, D.A. Bowen is with Miss Dудay, Mandelbaum is going to start on Hagh, and I'm going to do a retake on

(MORE)

CRAMER (CONT'D)

Helmar. You can join any one of them or come with me.

ARCHIE

I'll go with you.

WIPE TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - MONTAGE

Under Archie's voice-over, we see him in a MONTAGE OF INTERROGATIONS, starting with Helmar and on through the rest of the suspects (Pitkin, Fomos, Brucker, Quest, Duday, and even Nathaniel Parker). As time wears on, as day becomes night and then day again, Archie looks worse and worse.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

My first appearance as informal adjunct of the NYPD lasted five hours, the rest of the interrogations were nearly as long. All of the suspects, including Parker, had solid alibis.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - DAY

As Archie enters, showered and changed, but still looking terribly haggard.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

Finally, at five on Saturday morning, a day after Sarah Jaffee's murder, I returned to West 35th Street for a shower and a meal before returning to the station.

He starts poking around, looking for food as Fritz enters. Fritz is shocked by Archie's appearance.

FRITZ

Good God, you look awful.

ARCHIE

Thanks. What's for breakfast?

FRITZ

Sit down and I'll get it started.

Archie takes a seat as Fritz begins his preparations.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

This is getting to be a habit.

ARCHIE

What is?

FRITZ

This early breakfast. Yesterday about this time, I was poaching eggs for Mr. Wolfe and Saul.

ARCHIE

You were what?

FRITZ

Poaching eggs for Mr. Wolfe and Saul.

ARCHIE

Saul's taking over my job, I suppose?

FRITZ

I don't know anything about what Saul is doing.

Archie gets out of his seat.

ARCHIE

Poached eggs sounds good to me, too. I'll be right back.

WIPE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie comes in and goes to Wolfe's desk. He starts searching through the papers. He doesn't find anything and goes to Wolfe's safe instead. He opens it and finds a slip of paper inside, which he studies.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

There was nothing on the desk that gave any hint of what Wolfe wanted with Saul, but in the safe I found a slip of paper that hadn't been there before: A notation that Wolfe gave Saul two grand from our emergency fund. That was interesting, so interesting I forgot about breakfast and went right back to the station.

WIPE TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Another MONTAGE of interrogations, Archie pouring through reports, drinking coffee, and even napping on a bumpy old couch.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

I got five hours sleep between Saturday and Monday morning.

(MORE)

ARCHIE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

The rest of the time, I sat in on interrogations, read dozens of police reports and transcripts of interrogations I missed and even those I didn't.

We end with Archie asleep ON A COUCH, being nudged awake by Cramer.

CRAMER

Commissioner Skinner wants to see you.

Archie runs a hand through his hair, tucks in his shirt, and follows Cramer.

WIPE TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - SKINNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie sits with Cramer, D.A. Bowen, Rowcliff and Stebbins. Skinner addresses Archie.

SKINNER

During the last forty hours, we've had more men on this case than any other in my time and I can't see that we've gained an inch. Those keys were lifted with twelve people present in the room, someone must have seen something.

ARCHIE

I agree, but not one of them has cracked yet.

SKINNER

We want to take them back to Nero Wolfe's office and repeat, as closely as they can, everything they said and did Thursday evening. We can't compel Wolfe to let us in with them, much less to do his part.. so we want you to ask him.

ARCHIE

Me?

SKINNER

We want him to say yes.

ARCHIE

So do I, but I don't think there's a glimmer. He's going to say no whether you ask him or I do.

SKINNER

It's extremely important that he agree. It must be done.

ARCHIE

When do you want to stage it?

SKINNER

As soon as possible. We can have them there in half an hour.

Archie looks at his watch then goes to a phone and dials.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Wolfe is at his desk when the phone rings.

WOLFE

Nero Wolfe speaking.

ARCHIE

Good morning, sir. I am calling you at the request of the People of the State of New York, represented by Commissioner Skinner all the way down to Lt. Rowcliffe, which is quite a distance.

Rowcliffe scowls at him.

WOLFE

Indeed.

ARCHIE

They've bestowed on me the great honor of making a request of you on their behalf. They are all sitting here gazing at me so tenderly, I have a lump in my throat.

WOLFE

How long are you going to drag this out?

ARCHIE

I'm done dragging. Here's the point. We've flumped. We've got to try something different. We want to do a playback of the session at the office Thursday evening, with the original cast. All you have to do is let us in and play your part. I have told my associates I am practically certain you will tell us to go to hell, and since nothing gives you more pleasure--

WOLFE
 (interrupts:)
 Very well.

Archie is taken aback.

ARCHIE
 Sir?

WOLFE
 I never refuse a reasonable request from a client. This request seems reasonable, therefore, I grant it. Shall we say twelve o'clock, will that be convenient?

ARCHIE
 (still stunned:)
 Yes, sir. That will suit fine. I'll come over pretty soon and get things arranged.

WOLFE
 No, you will not. Your associates at the Police Department need you more than I do. Be here at twelve.

END INTERCUT. Archie hangs up and turns to the others.

ARCHIE
 Mr. Wolfe says okay. We're to be there at noon.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

All the folks from the previous big meeting are back, in their previous seats, joined by Skinner, Bowen, Cramer, Stebbins, who stand or sit along the back walls. SAUL PANZER sits where Sarah was. Wolfe enters and has a hard time squeezing through. Standing behind his desk, he looks at everyone, settling on the D.A. and cops.

WOLFE
 You gentlemen don't look comfortable.

CRAMER
 We're all right.

Wolfe sits, taking his sweet time.

ARCHIE'S VOICE
 There was a tingle in my spine. I knew from his look and manner as well as I did his voice, and there was no doubt about it, he was going to pull one, or try to.

Wolfe turns to the D.A.

WOLFE

I assume, Mr. Bowen, that these people know why you have brought them here?

BOWEN

Yes, it's been thoroughly explained to them and they have all agreed to cooperate.

WOLFE

Then we may proceed.

Wolfe address everyone from his desk.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

Miss Duday and gentlemen. You understand that the purpose of this gathering is for us to iterate our words and movements of last Thursday evening. But before we do, I wish to make some remarks.

Inspector Cramer grunts skeptically, knowing full well they are now in for one of Wolfe's performances. Wolfe ignores the grunt, leans back and gets comfortable.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

After you people left that evening, I told Mr. Goodwin that I thought I knew who killed Priscilla Eads and Margaret Fomos. I based that on two things: first, my impressions of all of you, and second, the fact that Mrs. Fomos was killed.

CRAMER

What? How does the fact Mrs. Fomos was murdered solve her murder?

WOLFE

The supposition that Mrs. Fomos was killed for her keys is not acceptable. If that was all that was wanted, it would only have been necessary to snatch her bag. A dozen women's bags are snatched every day in this city. Killing Mrs. Fomos greatly increased the hazard of killing Miss Eads.

CRAMER

Maybe she recognized her attacker and that was why she was killed.

WOLFE

That assumption is not impossible, but it implies that the murderer is an egregious bungler and I doubt it. I prefer to assume exactly the opposite -- that Mrs. Fomos was killed not because she recognized her attacker, but because he knew she *couldn't* recognize him.

BOWEN

Is all this necessary?

WOLFE

Perhaps not, but I'm exposing a murderer and claim a measure of indulgence. You did expect to spend hours here anyway, did you not?

SKINNER

Is this for effect? Or do you think you're getting somewhere?

WOLFE

I am already somewhere. I've just told you who the murderer is.

The room buzzes. Stebbins rests his hand on his gun, eyes on the cast. Archie has figured it out.

ARCHIE'S VOICE

I won't say I caught up with Wolfe, but at least I could see his dust.

Archie goes and stands behind Eric Hagh, glaring at the man with barely disguised hatred. Wolfe looks at Archie with concern.

WOLFE

Archie?

ARCHIE

It's okay. I'm not warped enough to break his neck.

Hagh glares at Wolfe. Cramer is totally lost. He turns to Wolfe.

CRAMER

Go on and spell it out.

WOLFE

I knew all this Thursday evening, but there was a contradiction that had to be solved.

(to Archie:)

What is that contradiction?

ARCHIE

That Eric Hagh is not Hagh, he's a ringer, and both Miss Eads or Mrs. Fomos would have known it. So why didn't Sarah Jaffee say anything Thursday evening?

Wolfe nods, pleased.

CRAMER

Go on and spell it.

Wolfe regards some papers on his desk, which perhaps we will recognize as Archie's typed report.

WOLFE

I will read an excerpt from Mr. Goodwin's typed, verbatim report of his conversation with Mrs. Jaffee on Wednesday:

(reading:)

"The next thing I knew, here came a letter saying that she had found her prince and married him and they were off for Peru. Maybe I still have it. I remember she enclosed a picture of him."

(then:)

If Mrs. Jaffee had seen a picture of Hagh, why didn't she denounce this man when she saw him here? It was to get an answer to that question that I asked Mr. Goodwin to have her here Friday morning.

CRAMER

Why didn't you ask her then and there?

WOLFE

It was late at night and I was tired. Of course, I regret it. I regretted it only two hours after I had gone to bed, when I was awakened by the phone and Mr. Goodwin told me Mrs. Jaffee had been murdered.

Bowen is getting upset.

BOWEN

You're saying you knew the identity of the murderer that night -- and you didn't notify anybody?

WOLFE

It was only a hypothesis.

(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

It only became more when Mrs. Jaffee was killed and it was violently, tragically and completely validated. But I still had no evidence. So I phoned Saul Panzer and supplied him with money, a newspaper photo of the man calling himself Mr. Hagh, and sent him on a flight to Cajamarca, Peru, where the document was signed. At Cajamarca, he found people who had known Hagh. He learned that Hagh was a professional gambler, that he had not been in Cajamarca for three years, and the pictures were not of Hagh.

(to Saul:)

You tell them.

SAUL

They all knew about the paper he had, signed by his wife, giving him half her property. He said it had been her idea to give it to him, but he was too proud a man to sponge on a woman and he was keeping it as a souvenir. I couldn't ask Hagh about it because he died in a snow slide three months ago. The man I had pictures of, the man I am looking at now, is Siegfried Muecke, also a gambler, and he was with Hagh in the mountains when the slide happened. Nobody has seen Muecke since then.

Wolfe regards Muecke.

WOLFE

Looking at his face, which appears rigid in paralysis, I doubt if he will explain himself to us.

Wolfe pauses, to give Muecke the chance, and when Muecke only glares at him, the detective continues.

WOLFE (CONT'D)

At some point he decided effective pursuit of the claim would require his presence in New York and of course it would be fatal to his plans if either Miss Eads or Mrs. Fomos ever got a glimpse of him. There was only one way to solve that difficulty: they must die.

(then:)

Did he arrange for the murders or did he commit them himself?

(MORE)

WOLFE (CONT'D)

That can, of course, be established by inquiry of airline personnel. I think you will find he did them himself.

CRAMER

So why didn't Mrs. Jaffee say anything?

WOLFE

Because it was not in her character to do so. She didn't like to get involved with anyone or anything. She came here Thursday to lend her name to a legal action only because she was under great obligation to Mr. Goodwin.

(then:)

No, she did not denounce him, but indubitably made him aware that she knew he was not Eric Hagh. She may have done so merely by the way she looked at him...

And we FLASHBACK TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Hagh responds to Pitkin.

HAGH

...and I feel no embarrassment being put in the same class with the charming Mrs. Jaffee.

Hagh smiles at Sarah, who turns away, suddenly very uncomfortable. And we END FLASHBACK.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Wolfe sighs heavily.

WOLFE

He knew he was in deadly peril from her and in one of the commotions he acted quickly and audaciously, and with dexterity, taking her keys from her bag.

(to Muecke:)

You waylaid Mrs. Jaffee, struck her and strangled her, exactly as you had done with Miss Eads and Mrs. Fomos.

Stebbins lifts Hagh out of his seat and places him in handcuffs. Wolfe glances over at Archie who smiles back.

ARCHIE'S VOICE
 As Nero Wolfe's client, I thought
 his performance was satisfactory.
 Very satisfactory indeed.

And we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOLFE'S OFFICE - DAY

Archie Goodwin sits at his desk, writing out CHECKS. Nero Wolfe is at his desk, studying some papers.

ARCHIE'S VOICE
 Every Friday morning at 11, after
 Nero Wolfe comes down from the plant
 rooms on the roof, he signs the salary
 checks.

Archie hands him the checkbook. Wolfe signs them with a flourish, then pauses.

WOLFE
 A check seems to be missing.

ARCHIE
 And which check out that be?

WOLFE
 Yours.

ARCHIE
 I like to get paid for my labors as
 much as the next man, but last week,
 I was on leave.

Wolfe writes out a check, tears it out, and hands it to Archie.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
 What is this for?

WOLFE
 Enough of this flummery. Take your
 check.

ARCHIE
 Technically, I wasn't here as your
 assistant but as your client.
 Therefore, I believe it is I who
 should pay you.

He hands the check out to Wolfe.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
 This is all I can afford at present.
 I'm not paid much.

Wolfe refuses to take the check.

WOLFE

Pfui.

ARCHIE

(shrugs:)

Very well.

And as he starts to tear it, Wolfe actually rises out of his seat--

WOLFE

Archie!

And we FREEZE FRAME.

THE END