

House call, Case 1822, 1958

“Can you come right over?” she said. “I know it’s late. Olaf has just passed out. It must be a stroke. Very bad, you know.”

I hurriedly drained my coffee cup, got into my car, and was on the way. The Svenson front door was unlocked and sported a large Christmas wreath. In the kitchen, Olaf was lying supine, silent and motionless, stretched out under the cluttered table.

Before I could bend down to examine Olaf or ask her more questions, Helga, Olaf’s wife, gave me a hurried account.

“I know it’s not his drinking,” she said. “Olaf promised that he would stop drinking. I threatened to divorce him if he touched another drop. He promised. On a Bible, he promised. Just finished our supper when he stopped talking. Then he fainted and slowly slipped under the table.”

It wasn’t easy to get on my knees and squirm cautiously over to Olaf’s side, but, as I did so, Olaf opened his eyes and placed a finger across his lips. Lying on the floor beside him

was the emptied wine bottle. I silently buried the bottle as deep as I could in my medical bag and performed a basic physical examination. The only problem I could discover was that Olaf was drunk.

Helga continued her ongoing account of the incident: “It must be a stroke,” she repeated again and again. “My daughter told me I should call you first before I called emergency. Is Olaf all right?”

“Olaf is fine,” I told her. “He’s just tired and sleepy. Let him stay where he is. He’ll be okay in the morning.”

Then I said good night and quietly closed the door behind me.

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