

Scarecrow and the Wolf

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Timeline: Fall, early first season.

Author's notes: This is a songfic of a different ilk. Inspiration came on a Friday night last fall, at a high school football game. Our team was well ahead, and when the band began their halftime show, which included excerpts from "Peter and the Wolf", my mind started to wander. This story is the result of that little sidetrack.

This is the story of Peter and the Wolf. There is a bird, light and delicate, with feathers like silk, a dumb duck with a broad bill and large webbed feet, and a pussycat. She is smooth, but greedy and vain.

There is a wolf, with sharp teeth and sharp claws, who is always hungry. There are hunters, searching the woods, firing their shotguns. There is a wise old grandfather. And he worries about Peter all the time.

And, of course, there is Peter.

Lee strode through the bullpen doors and headed toward his desk, feeling on top of the world. Things had been going exceptionally well for him lately. After a busy week's work, he'd broken the Prospect case. Billy was delighted that he'd been able to turn it around so quickly. Now he just had to finish up his report, and he'd be done.

He picked up the phone to call Amanda. It was only Thursday afternoon, and if she could do the typing for him Friday morning, he'd have a shot at a real weekend for the first time in recent memory. As her phone rang, he smiled to himself and thought of his four little black books. Should he blow the whole weekend on one name, or would it be better to have a little variety? A vision of the weekend's activities began to form in his mind as he listened to the ringing.

"Hello?"

The sound of her voice on the other end of the line intruded into Lee's randy reverie. Annoyed, he came back down to earth. "Uh . . . Listen, I have a report that needs to be typed up as soon as possible. Can you get to it tomorrow morning?"

Amanda sighed. Not so much as a 'Hello'. The man had no manners. "Oh, Lee, I'm sorry. I can't. Tomorrow I'm chaperoning Jamie's class field trip to Rock Creek Park. They're doing a

project called 'Nature All Around Us', and they're supposed to be at the park to have a picnic and collect some specimens."

Lee was vexed. He was really looking forward to getting an early start on the weekend, and Amanda was the only other person he knew of who could actually make sense of his handwritten notes. If he tried to finish it himself, with his typing skills, he'd be here half the weekend. "Amanda! This is important. Isn't there some way you can get out of this school thing?"

Standing in her kitchen, Amanda was torn between exasperation with Lee's 'request' and guilt at leaving him high and dry. "I can't 'get out of it', Lee," she said, as firmly as she could manage, "and Mother's leaving early for a weekend with Aunt Lillian, so she can't take my place. But I suppose I could drive my car to the park instead of riding with the kids, so I could drive straight to the Agency when the kids leave. If you can meet me there a little after one o'clock, we'll go over your notes."

Lee had another thought - maybe he could get the early start he'd hoped for anyway. "Amanda, would it be all right for me to bring the report to you at the park, before the kids get there? I sorta had some plans for the evening, and once you've had a chance to look over my notes and ask any questions, you really don't need me around while you finish it up."

"Well, sure, Lee," Amanda said, rolling her eyes. She'd heard enough around the IFF water cooler to have a good idea what Lee's 'plans' entailed. Pulling her mind back to the conversation, she continued. "I guess that would work out okay. "The kids are arriving at the Nature Center, right off of 16th Street, at 10:00. When and where did you want to meet?"

"Do you know where the old log cabin is?" Lee asked. He'd know he could count on Amanda to get the report done for him.

"Sure," Amanda replied. "You mean the Miller Cabin, on Beach Drive, right?"

"That's the place. I'll meet you at the picnic table behind the cabin about 8:30, okay?"

"Sure, Lee," Amanda said. "That'll give me plenty of time to look over your notes. The class will be touring the Nature Center first, so it won't matter if I'm running a little late. But I really want to be there when they go outside to meet Rocky."

Lee hesitated. "Rocky?"

"You know," Amanda supplied. "Rocky the raccoon - the Nature Center's mascot. He's the hit of every school visit, and the kids can't wait to see him."

Lee didn't know quite how to respond. "Well, I'm sure you'll get back in plenty of time to meet Rocky, Amanda. Can you have my report ready and on Billy's desk by three o'clock tomorrow afternoon?"

"I think I can manage that," she replied.

"Great! I'll see you tomorrow morning, then." Lee hung up the phone and leaned back in his chair, fingers interlocked behind his head and feet propped up on his desk. He'd have the notes to Amanda and be on his way by 11 at the latest. Plenty of time to get the weekend off to a good start, and he had just the thing in mind. He pulled one of the black books out of his desk drawer, located the number, and began to dial.

It was early morning when Peter walked out of the house. He opened the gate and went out into the big green meadow. On a branch of a tall tree sat a pretty little bird. "All is quiet and beautiful this morning," she said. The bird was Peter's friend.

It was nearly 9:30 before Lee pulled into the parking lot. Looking around for Amanda, he spotted her slim figure perched on a picnic table behind the cabin. Her back was to him, and she was looking out over the creek. Putting a smile on his face, he approached her quietly from behind, stopping only when he was within arm's reach.

"Good morning, Amanda," he said as he laid a hand on her shoulder. "Have you been waiting long?"

She jumped in alarm at the sound of his voice and the unexpected warmth of his hand through her sweater. She'd been speculating on why he was late, afraid that he'd gotten into trouble of some sort but aware that the explanation was likely something much more mundane. In the short time they'd worked together, she'd learned that he wasn't what one could call a 'morning person'. Of course, the rumors that followed him through the halls of the Agency like a wake follows a boat made him sound like some sort of wolf, prowling the Washington social scene on a regular basis and bringing his prey home with him at night. She blushed slightly at the thought. 'Not my cup of tea, for sure.'

She banished those thoughts from her mind and flashed him a brilliant smile as he sat near her. The packet of files was tucked under his right arm. "Oh, Lee, good morning! Isn't it the most beautiful fall day you could imagine? I've been here a little while, but it didn't feel like I was waiting for you. Well, of course I **was** waiting for you, because we were supposed to be meeting and I was here and you weren't, but it wasn't **really** waiting, because I was enjoying it so much. When I got up this morning, I could just tell what a wonderful day it was going to be, and I just had to get myself into the outdoors as soon as I could so I just grabbed my purse and sweater and a thermos of coffee and dashed out the door to the car to hurry down here and after I got the boys to school and explained to their teachers that I'd be meeting the group here, I just came on over to the cabin so I could enjoy my coffee and have a chance just to soak up all of the scenery and now you're here too, and I'm nearly finished with my coffee and everything seems to have worked out just right, don't you think?"

He shook his head in amazement. "Uh, yeah, sure, Amanda. Whatever you say." How could anyone be so effusively cheerful this early in the day? And how did she manage to fit so many words into one breath? "Are you ready to get started?"

They spent the next 40 minutes going over his notes, until both felt sure that Amanda understood everything that she needed to know about the case. "I guess that wraps it up, Amanda," Lee said as he stood and stretched his muscles. "Now, you'll have it typed and to Billy by three, right?"

"No problem, Lee," she answered. "It's really straightforward, now that I understand what all your new little symbols mean."

Just then, the dumb duck waddled by. He was glad that the gate had been left open, as there was a deep pond in the meadow, and he wanted to swim.

Seeing the duck, the bird flew down and settled next to him.

Lee was ready to say goodbye to Amanda so he could get on back to his apartment to finish up his plans for the weekend when a motion behind her caught his eye. He looked up, surprised to see someone quickly leaving the path beside Beach Drive and coming towards them. As the figure drew nearer, Lee realized who it was. A brief frown crossed his face. Things had been going so well; he didn't need this just as his weekend was getting ready to start.

Amanda turned just as the man reached the cabin. She shot a questioning look at Lee. He seemed to know the strange little man whose worn white tuxedo looked like it had been slept in. In the Park. On several occasions.

Oh, well, if he was a friend of Lee's . . . She graced him with a 24-karat Amanda King smile.

The bird, who was very sweet, said, "What kind of a bird are you if you can't fly?"

"What kind of a bird are you," the duck said snappily, "if you can't swim?" And with that, he haughtily dived into the pond.

That led to an argument. They argued and argued, the duck as he splashed around the in the water, the bird hopping angrily on the shore.

Lee sighed and made the introductions. "Amanda King, this is Hans Schmutzig. He's part of my family."

Amanda looked at Lee in surprise. "Family?" she said weakly, then turned back to Hans.

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet you!" she managed, almost with enthusiasm. It was hard to believe, but if Lee said he was family, who was she to argue? Such a strange name; she hadn't realized that Lee had German relatives. "There's really not much of a resemblance, is there? You must be a cousin, or maybe . . ."

"Amanda!" Lee's exasperated interruption turned her head back in his direction. "Not **that** kind of family. Schmutzig is part of my network. I have people all over the city who keep up with what's going on - a sort of underground intelligence community. They help me out by providing information." He glanced in the snitch's direction and added, somewhat sourly, "Sometimes for a price."

Amanda could scarcely hide her embarrassment. She'd done it again; her foot was firmly entrenched in her mouth. Why did Lee sometimes seem to bring out the worst in her? Well, she'd just have to make the best of it.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Schmutzig," she started. "It must be exciting for you, being out there and helping Lee."

"Yeah, right!" Lee and Hans responded simultaneously.

Hans turned and gave Amanda an appraising, head-to-toe leer. "Frau King, please, my friends call me 'Hands'. You know, I could use somebody like you. Ever wurk in a restaurant?"

Amanda was confused. "Well, yes, when I was in college, but . . ."

"Oh, a college girl, hmm? I guess Lee is looking for smarter companions these days." He glanced at Lee, whose eyes were slowly darkening from their normal hazel to a deeper jade, then looked back at Amanda. "I haf jüst opened a new place, und I could use some extra help. It's a really wunderbar place, you understand. Ve serve der schnapps from really nice bottles, mit der original labels on dem und everytink, und ve add almost no wasser to das beer at all." He looked her up and down. "Ach, du lieber! Haf you ever done any dancink?"

Amanda's mouth had dropped open. Rendered momentarily speechless; she just shook her head. "Dat's OK, you could start out vaitressing. Die ooniforms are ausgezeichnet! Dey are all black on der bottom part - high heels, und fishnet hose, und a kleine little fake leder skirt, und on top you vear a tight white T-shirt. Of course, it's a little trouble, keepink der T-shirt vet_ while you take care of the customers . . ."

Amanda's jaw dropped farther and her eyes widened in astonishment as he talked. What on earth was this sleazy little man talking about? Did he really think that she would . . . She shook her head in disbelief. The thought wouldn't even form in her mind.

Lee practically growled the warning. "Schmutzig . . ."

The snitch turned his eyes to Lee and found a look that stopped him dead in his tracks. "Ach! Not der type, hmm? Vell, maybe sometink else vill come up." He turned back to Amanda. "Vhy don't you gif me your nummer und I'll gif you a call?"

"Mr. Schmutzig, I don't think . . ."

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*Just then, something caught Peter's eye. The cat. The cat was stalking through the tall grass.*

*The cat thought, "That bird is busy arguing, I can probably get her now." And on velvet paws, she crept even closer.*

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Lee's attention was distracted when he saw Francine approaching from the parking lot. 'Oh, no,' he thought. 'Weren't things going downhill fast enough without her help?' He glanced at Amanda. She seemed to be holding her own against Schmutzig for the moment. He left her to her own devices and went to intercept the tall blonde agent.

"Billy said I'd find you here, Scarecrow," Francine said as she looked at Amanda, who was now slowly backing away from 'Hands', a file folder held tightly in front of her chest like a shield. A disturbingly familiar figure came after her, matching her step for step as he continued his pitch. "What's gotten into your little housewife this morning? She looks like she's seen the devil himself."

'Close enough,' Lee thought. "Lay off her, Francine," he said tersely. "She's had enough for one morning. She doesn't need you digging your claws in as well."

"Lee, I would never do such a thing," Francine purred as she glided smoothly towards Amanda.

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*"Look out!" shouted Peter, and the bird flew up into the tree, just in time, while the duck quacked angrily at the cat - from the middle of the pond.*

*The cat walked round and round, looking up at the bird and thinking. "Is it worth climbing so high, I wonder. By the time I get there, she'll have flown away."*

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Francine padded quietly towards Amanda, who was picking up speed as she backed around the picnic table, still keeping her distance from Schmutzig.

"Amanda, look out!" Lee shouted. There was going to be a collision if something didn't give.

Amanda heard Lee's voice but didn't understand what he had said. It didn't really matter; she just wanted to put something solid between herself and this disgusting lump of a man who wouldn't leave her alone. Lee was behind her, and he was the very thing she needed. She started backing even more quickly in his direction. One step, two steps . . .

"OUCH!" The cry came from behind her, just as she set her foot down on a rock or something. 'Rocks don't yell ouch,' she thought as she turned and darted behind Lee.

"Francine!" she squawked, seeing the other woman for the first time. For some reason, Francine was rubbing the top of one foot while she hopped around on the other high heel, looking something like a drunken jackrabbit on a pogo stick. "What are you doing here?"

Francine's face was red with fury. "Amanda, dear," she started, but another voice cut her off.

"Francine . . . Liebling." Schmutzig's oily, nasal voice grated across her nerves like fingernails on a blackboard. "Do you know my new employee? Ve vere just gettink acqvainted mit each other. Come, Amanda, don't let Francine spoil tinks between us. Come back und let's talk some more."

Francine ignored the obsequious little man as she began advancing toward Amanda, who was now moving in tight circles around Lee in an attempt to keep him between Francine and herself. After a couple of revolutions, Francine gave up the pursuit - it just wasn't worth the trouble, and besides, her foot was killing her.

Lee looked back over his shoulder at Amanda, who now was standing still, with a death grip on his right arm. "Amanda, will you excuse us?" he asked, trying to pry her fingers loose. "I need to see what Francine wants, and I need to speak privately with Schmutzig."

"Oh, sure, that's OK," she twittered with relief. "I really need to be getting back to the class. They're probably about ready for that hike now. And besides, I need to get these to my car." She indicated the files, relaxing her hold slightly when she realized that she'd been gripping them tightly enough to make her knuckles turn white.

She reached down for her purse, but her hands were shaking badly, and the contents spilled out onto the leaf-covered ground. Lee gave Francine and Schmutzig a look that said 'Stay!' and helped her retrieve the contents. Purse secure and car keys in hand, Amanda quickly bade them all goodbye before flitting back up the path to the parking lot without so much as a backward glance.

Francine was slowly recovering from her recent indignation. For \$50, she'd just go back to the Agency and let Scarecrow handle his problems by himself, but Billy had sent her to find Lee, and she might as well see what he was up to before they returned to the Agency. She turned back to the two men and listened closely to what the snitch had to tell Lee.

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Grandfather came out of the house and through the open gate. He was puffing on his pipe. He never liked Peter to go out into the meadow. "Not really the place for you, grandson," he said gravely. "Wolves and things. Do you know anything about wolves? A dangerous lot, wolves."

Peter said nothing. Of course, he was not afraid of wolves, but he really couldn't argue with his Grandfather.

Grandfather led Peter home and locked the gate securely.

"Scarecrow, I told you to stay away from this case. It's FBI business, and we have no reason to get involved." Billy was fuming.

"But, Billy, I didn't go out with the intention of getting involved," Lee protested. "I don't know how Schmutzig found me. I was just dropping off some typing for Amanda to do, and the next thing I knew, he was there." Lee had bent this particular rule on more than one occasion; he wished Billy could understand that he was innocent this time. "I had no idea that he even wanted to talk to me, much less what he had to say."

"And it's probably a good thing he did find Lee," Francine interjected. "Otherwise, we wouldn't have known about the drop tomorrow afternoon."

"All right," Billy sighed. "Tell me again what's supposed to happen."

"Schmutzig says he's to be the middleman for tomorrow's drop in Rock Creek Park. He's delivering a new set of engraving plates to a fellow named Wolfgang Wildehund. He's the head of the counterfeiting ring, Billy, and he has connections to the Stasi. If we could get him, we'd stop the whole operation cold."

"Yes, and we might do just that, if it were our case," Billy answered. "But it's not, and I want you to stay out of it. I put you on the line often enough for cases that **are** our concern. I don't want you sticking your neck out when it's none of our business. Stay out of it, Scarecrow, and that's final. I'll let the FBI know what Schmutzig told you, and they'll take care of it."

Lee didn't bother to respond. As squalid a character as Schmutzig could be, he was part of his family, and Lee didn't want to lose him in some kind of an FBI foul-up. The drop was tomorrow afternoon. Billy had made his mind up to keep Scarecrow out of it, but that didn't mean that Lee couldn't just 'happen' to be in the vicinity, keeping an eye on things.

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*No sooner had Peter gone than a big, gray, hungry wolf came out of the dark forest. The cat turned and saw him. In a twinkling, the cat scampered up the tree. And the duck quacked hysterically, but in his panic, foolishly jumped out of the pond.*

*The wolf spotted the duck and went for him like a shot. And no matter how hard, how fast the duck tried to run, he could not escape. The wolf in hot pursuit was getting rather angry. Catching up, catching up with him... And then he got him, and swallowed him hungrily with one enormous gulp!*

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The next afternoon, Lee arrived at the parking lot just as Schmutzig got out of his car. Dressed in a t-shirt and jogging shorts, the agent pulled a baseball cap down over his eyes as he walked to intercept the pudgy little man. "Vhat are you doink here?" the snitch asked in a panic. "I f he sees you, he vill kill me."

"Nobody's going to get killed," Lee replied. "And what are you doing here? You told me that the meet was going to be down by the old mill."

"I t is not my fault," 'Hands' protested, wiping his brow with a soiled handkerchief from the pocket of the grimy tuxedo. The garment now showed definite signs that it could have stood on its own. "Volf called me early dis mornink und changed der place."

"Then it's a good thing that I followed you instead of believing you. I just wanted to be nearby to watch over things. Where's the exchange going to take place now?"

"Der." Schmutzig replied, pointing to the picnic table behind the cabin. "Look, I must get ofer der. Volf vill be here any minute."

"Go ahead," Lee agreed, turning to jog slowly up and down the parking lot, stretching his muscles to play the part of a Saturday afternoon jogger. "I'll be watching you."

Schmutzig hurried down the path to the appointed meeting place, his nerves settling a little. Of course he'd be better off with Scarecrow on the lookout. He sat down at the table but couldn't help casting a glance back toward the parking lot. Panicking when he didn't see Lee, he stood up to have a better look. The agent was nowhere to be seen. What was he going to do now?

No one else was in the area. Looking over his shoulder one last time, Schmutzig took the two plates, wrapped in a protective cloth bag, from his pocket and slipped them to the ground underneath the picnic table. A couple of quick kicks and they were buried in the thick layer of dry leaves. At least Wolf wouldn't kill him until he had what he wanted, right?

As Lee began to jog away from the parking lot, Francine peered out from the utility building she'd been hiding behind. With disgust, she watched Schmutzig coming her way. How had the man managed to stay alive this long? She'd followed Lee, leaving her car out of site a little further down the road when he'd pulled into the parking lot. Now she crouched behind the utility building, determined to do what she could to keep Lee from getting himself into trouble this time, and it looked as if he'd need the help. Schmutzig was sure to give him away.

Before she could take action, though, a long black car pulled to the side of the road near the cabin, and a lanky, gray haired man emerged from the driver's side. He stood near the car for a few moments, looking around the area until he had satisfied himself that nothing was out of the ordinary. There were a few cars in the parking lot a couple of hundred yards away, and one lone jogger was making his way along the roadside, heading in the opposite direction. There was no one else in sight.

Francine ducked back behind the building. She was stuck now. There was no way she could get out without Wolf seeing her. She watched as the tall, lean man approached Schmutzig. The strained greetings turned quickly into an argument, and then the sordid little man turned and ran. Francine snorted to herself in amazement. 'As if he thinks he can get away.'

She watched as the snitch circled the cabin, with Wolf hot on his heels. Before he'd rounded the first corner, the gray man caught him. Grabbing him around the neck like a chicken destined for the dinner table, the tall man shook with anger as he dragged his prey back to the car.

Francine fingered the handle of her gun and looked down the road. The solitary jogger was slowly heading this way, and as he approached, she recognized Scarecrow's determined face in the shadow cast by the brim of his cap.

"Damn it," Lee said under his breath. "Where's the FBI when you really need them? He slowed his pace even more. If he approached too closely with Wolf so near the car, he'd just jump in and drive away. 'Keep it cool, Scarecrow, Wolf hasn't pulled a gun yet,' he told himself quietly, watching as Wolf opened the trunk of the car and shoved a wildly gesticulating Schmutzig inside before slamming the lid shut again and heading back toward the cabin. Lee slowly made his way closer, his eyes on Wolf the whole time.

Back in the parking lot, unnoticed by any of them, a station wagon pulled to a stop in one of the parking places and a tall brunette headed down the path toward the cabin.

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*Now, this is how things stood.*

*The cat was up a tree, sitting on one branch. The bird up the same tree, on another branch. But not too close to the cat. There was no affection between them.*

*The wolf walked round and round the tree, staring at the both of them with greedy eyes. He was licking his hungry chops.*

*Peter saw it all, thinking, 'So the wolf wants one of them. Well, two can play this game. I'll trap him. Yes, that's how it should be done. That's how it must be done.'*

*So Peter went to his room and found a strong rope, which he worked round and round smoothly until he made a noose. He slipped it through his fingers and tried one or two quick throws.*

*He went out, and noiselessly climbed up the stone wall, over which one of the branches of the tree stretched. Silently, he took hold of the branch. Peter eased himself onto the tree.*

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It was all Lee could do to keep from jerking his head around when he caught a glimpse of Amanda out of the corner of his eye. What the hell was **she** doing here? She was nearly to Wolf, who was walking through the area behind the cabin, furiously kicking at the leaves covering the ground. He couldn't do anything with her so close - she'd probably get close. Why, oh, why did she always seem to show up at such inopportune times?

He had to come up with a plan. He'd keep one eye on Amanda of course, as long as she was anywhere nearby, but surely she'd leave soon, and he'd be able to catch Wolf by surprise. He

left the jogging trail and silently took position around the corner of the cabin from where Wolf was still kicking up a cloud of dust.

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*He whispered to the bird, "Be a good little bird. Fly down and tease the wolf a bit, but not too close. Just enough to keep him busy for a moment or two."*

*The bird obeyed and fluttered overhead, almost touching the wolf. The wolf ducked and struck upwards and sideways, snapping his huge sharp teeth. But she was a clever little bird, and the wolf couldn't catch her.*

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"C'mon, Amanda, just walk on by and get out of here." The exhortation was, of course, made silently, but he prayed that somehow she'd hear his thoughts. She had no idea of what she was getting herself into. Still, if she distracted Wolf's attention for a moment . . .

Amanda neared the cabin, smiling as she looked down at the creek running nearby. 'Another beautiful day,' she thought to herself. She was at the cabin now, and she suddenly realized that she wasn't alone.

"Hello," she called perkily. "You must have lost something in the leaves, too."

Wolf spun around. He'd been so intent in his searching that he hadn't noticed her approach. "Yes, you could say so," he replied, with an attempted smile that somehow looked more like a toothy snarl. "I was walking around, enjoying the scenery, but I somehow managed to drop my sunglasses, and now I can't find them anywhere."

"Oh, I know just how you feel," Amanda replied brightly as she began her own search underneath the picnic table, where she'd dropped her purse the day before. "I met a friend here yesterday and . . . Well, let's just say that things got pretty confusing, and before I knew it, I'd dropped my purse and dumped everything out on the ground. I thought we'd found everything, so I left to get back to the class - I was here chaperoning my son's field trip, you know - but I must not have gotten everything, because this morning when I was getting ready to go out, I couldn't find my favorite lipstick, and I had to use the old one, which really isn't all that much of a disaster, I suppose, but I really don't care much for that color any more, and I thought that, just maybe, if I came back down here and looked again, I could find it and I wouldn't have to go out and buy a new one - do you have any idea how much they charge for nice lipstick these days? - and . . ."

Wolf stood stock-still at the other end of the table, his search momentarily forgotten as he listened in amazement. What on earth was this crazy woman chirping on about?

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*Meanwhile, Peter took the rope firmly in his hand and, without the wolf knowing it, he slid the noose over the wolf's tail ever so gently.*

*Then he pulled the rope with all his might. Done! The wolf was caught! Caught by the tail, the wolf jumped wildly, trying to escape.*

*Peter tied his end of the rope to the tree, so the more the wolf struggled, the tighter the noose became.*

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This was his chance! Scarecrow crept out from behind the cabin and, in seconds, came up behind Wolf, pressing the barrel of his pistol into the side of the man's head. The lanky man spun around ferociously, knocking away the gun with one hand while delivering a sound punch to Lee's nose and mouth with the other. They struggled for a few minutes before Scarecrow regained control of the situation, wrenching one of Wolf's arms high up behind his back. The more the man struggled, the closer the arm came to breaking. He slipped a pair of handcuffs on the captured counterfeiter, cuffing him securely to a nearby tree, then retrieved his gun and went to stand by Amanda.

"What in heaven's name were you doing here?" he almost shouted. "You could've gotten yourself killed! You have to stay away when I'm on a case."

"Lee," she returned, looking up at him with wide eyes. "I had no idea that you'd even be here, much less that you'd be on an assignment. I just came back to look for my lipstick."

"Well, Amanda dear," Francine offered as she neared the trio, "lipstick can be very important, but I've never seen it as worth risking your life over. Did you find it while you were turning the world on its ear?"

"Not exactly," Amanda admitted. She continued with a grin at Lee. "But I think I might have found something you'd be interested in."

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*Just then, Peter saw the hunters come striding out of the woods, moving towards him, their double-barreled shotguns gleaming in the sunlight, poised and ready.*

*"Stop shooting!" Peter shouted, but the hunters couldn't hear him. Again he shouted, "Stop! Put your guns away! Birdie and I have caught your wolf. Now take him to a zoo."*

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Lee reached for the cloth bag that Amanda was holding out to him when a half dozen men, all dressed in camouflage gear descended on them from all directions. "This is the FBI," a voice announced over a bullhorn. "Drop your weapons and place your hands on your heads."

Lee carefully placed his pistol on the table, then turned to face the man in charge. "Richardson, is that you? Where the hell were you guys when all the excitement was going on? Amanda could have been killed."

The short, stocky man lowered the bullhorn and stared malevolently at Lee. "Scarecrow, what do you think you're doing? I heard you were told to stay out of this." Richardson's face was turning an interesting shade of vermilion, despite his struggle to control his anger. "This was an FBI case, Stetson. The Agency had no business getting tangled up in it."

"Maybe so," Lee agreed. "But if we'd waited for you, this guy," he nodded towards Wolf, "would've gotten away. Face it, Richardson, you weren't here, and we had to catch the bad guy for you."

"Just wait till I file my report," the irate agent told his counterpart, his voice threatening.

"Personally, I can't wait to read it," Lee replied with an insouciant grin. He winked at Amanda as he took the bag she still held. "Be sure you include the part about the civilian who retrieved the bogus plates for you, okay?"

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*And then, the victory parade.*

*Peter at the head, followed by the hunters, leading the wolf. And at the rear of the column, the cat and Grandfather, still puffing on his pipe and shaking his head quizzically. "Well. And if Peter hadn't caught the wolf? Hrmph. What then?" But he decided to let it pass. Pussy said nothing.*

*Above them flew Birdie. She was quite pleased with herself. "Just look at what Peter and I have caught," she chirped.*

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Shortly thereafter, Billy pulled his car to a screeching halt near the cabin, his lips held tightly together as he held himself in check. Scarecrow had done it again! Not fifteen minutes earlier, he'd received the call from the head of the local FBI office, explaining how his most intractable agent had wound up in the middle of their case. The only saving grace was that not only had Scarecrow managed to catch the crook, he and Mrs. King had come up with the evidence needed to put him away for a long time, too.

He sighed and popped a handful of Tums into his mouth, then got out of the car and headed for the rowdy group. Lee was leading Amanda back toward the parking lot, trying to keep her from fussing over the bloody nose and rapidly-swelling split lip that he'd received when he'd let Wolf get in the surprise punch. Behind them, five of the FBI agents formed a ring around the handcuffed Wolf as they led him toward the car that would carry him off to jail.

Shaking his head, Billy caught up with Francine and walked with her at the tail of the procession back to the parking lot. "He'll never learn," the Section Chief said quietly. "If he doesn't start being more careful, someday he's going to get himself into real trouble." He looked again at his favorite agent and his new "partner", then shook his head again, this time in amusement. "But, somehow, I think that situation might just take care of itself."

Francine walked beside him, keeping her thoughts to herself.

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*And if you care to listen, you might still hear that dumb duck quacking away, inside the wolf. You see, in his hungry attack, the wolf had swallowed him alive.*

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"Help me! Somebody get me out of here." The muffled sounds couldn't be heard above the talking of the retreating group. Schmutzig gave up and lay back down in the trunk. 'At least it is not too varm,' he thought. 'It is kind of comfy in here. Might as vell catch a quvick nap. Dey will find me when dey come back for das auto . . .'

**Finis**