# Lost and Found

**Summary**

Peter and Neal are asked to look into an unusual case at the Frick museum, only to learn that things are not what they seem.

Even when there wasn't a case to be working on Neal was expected to be on call in one of the conference rooms, waiting to be useful. It was a boring way to spend the day so that morning, like most other mornings, he took to spending hour after hour doing card tricks, practicing his sleight of hand or walking quarter after quarter along his knuckles. Anything to keep his skills from getting rusty and to keep himself from dying from the monotony.

There was the occasional moment of fun, like when some hot shot agent from California blew into town full of bluster and self-importance. After one dismissive statement too many Jones bet the man Neal could lift his wallet without him being the wiser. The man blanched and gave a five minute diatribe as to how it would be impossible for anyone to get close enough to him to even attempt to get their fingers into one of his pockets. It was almost humorous to see how much paler he got when Neal calmly handed over not only his wallet, but credentials, badge, watch, tie clip and school ring.

Of course Peter found out about it; it had taken a mere five minutes for the story to spread throughout the building. And before long he called both Neal and Jones into his office, admonishing them both for what he deemed 'unprofessional behavior,' but couldn't quite hide his grin as he did so. Chastisement over, they turned to leave only to have Peter call out, "Oh, no. Not so fast. You," he pointed to Neal, "Sit."

Jones gave Neal a half-hearted, apologetic smile as he fled the room while Neal, sulkily settled down into one of the chairs. "It was all in good fun, Peter. Besides, what does it say of an agent when they are so oblivious that they can-"
Peter held up his hand for silence, cutting Neal off from explaining further. "I don't care about Agent Callahan, the man deserves whatever ribbing he's going to get from your stunt. I need you to tell me what you know about a man called Gondorff."

Neal rubbed his chin, leaning forward in his chair, his interest piqued. "I assume we're not talking about Paul Newman's character in The Sting?"

"No, we are not talking about Paul Newman's character in The Sting," Peter countered with a touch of annoyance in his tone.

Neal raised an eyebrow and released a slow breath. "Gondorff. He's good."

"How good?" Peter pressed.

"Legendary."

"As good as you?"

Neal shifted uncomfortably in his chair, staring just over Peter's shoulder at some far away spot out the window. "Better. Gondorff. Gondorff’s… Gondorff's cons are incredible. And his forgeries? They don't get discovered unless he wants them to be. Expert after expert will authenticate his forgeries, mistaking them for the real thing. And he never signs his work. He doesn't do it for the recognition," Neal shook his head, sounding slightly confused as he added, "Or even for the money. He does it for the thrill of knowing he's accomplished something that no one else has. He simply enjoys the con. If he's real."

"What do you mean, if he's real?"

Neal shrugged, looking oddly rumpled and vulnerable. "He's the Keyser Söze of the white collar crime world."

"The Keyser Söze of the white collar crime world."

"Are you going to repeat everything I say?" Neal pursed his lips, looking down at his thighs as he smoothed the crease in his pants. "He's the legend. He's everywhere and nowhere. The stories about him have reached epic proportions. No one's ever admitted to meeting him, but everyone knows someone who knows someone who may have heard something…."

Peter waved away Neal's continuing explanation. "I get the picture. But I have to ask, what is it with this guy and movie references?"

"Well, to be fair, it's not as if he calls himself Keyser Söze, I was just using the name to give you a better sense of what kind of criminal you're dealing with. You thought the Dutchman was hard to catch? That was child's play in comparison to Gondorff."

"Oh, great," Peter grumbled, smacking the desk as he pushed his chair back and stood in a huff.

"Peter?" Neal asked, a little taken back by Peter's display.

Peter turned, leaned up against the window and looked over at Neal. "There was a minor situation at the Frick this morning. You're familiar with the Frick?"

"Lovely little art museum on the east side of the park on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Seventieth Street. It has an incredible collection including works by Rembrandt, Turner, Constable, Whistler, Van Eyck, Vermeer—"
"Okay, okay, no need to show off. Anyway, there was a small flood, something to do with a plumbing issue of one sort or another, and several works had to be moved out of storage to prevent them from being damaged. Things were going along quite nicely until two versions of," Peter paused, returning to his desk and rifling through a few loose papers before finding the right one and reading off of it, "Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' Comtesse d'Haussonville, this picture here," Peter said passing Neal a photo, "were unearthed."

"Huh, nice painting." Neal smiled. "Something tells me there is not supposed to be two of those though."

"No, there isn't."

"I can see how that could be considered a problem."

"They're calling in experts to determine which is the original, if either one actually is."

"Which makes sense. But," Neal's eyebrows raised as he asked, "How do you know Gondorff is behind it?"

"How do you know Gondorff is behind anything?" Peter countered.

"He usually plays his hand when the situation is right. When it will embarrass the most people. In theory anyway," Neal added quickly.

"And he does that..." Peter made a 'go on' motion with his hand.

Neal removed his hat and ran his fingers through his hair before resettling the hat on his head with a flourish, making it obvious he had no wish to be rushed. "He leaves behind playing cards, a royal flush with an ace high. Which suit did he pick this time?"

"All of them."

"All of them."

"And who's parroting who now? Yes, all of them. Come on, we've been called in for you to share your expertise on the matter." Peter headed to the door, opened it, waiting for Neal to get up and follow him.

"I was hoping for a bit of clarification," Neal explained as he stood, a bit of a smirk on his face, and purposely brushed past Peter as he walked through the door. "Where the cards were, how they were
discovered, that sort of thing. You know. Clues."

"Oh, you're interested in clues now," Peter said, letting the door close as he and Neal headed down the hall and out of the building.

"Hey, know thine enemy, or, well, thine prey in this case. Are Jones and Cruz coming with us?"

"Nope, they're gathering together everything we have on Gondorff. A lot of it is innuendo and rumor so it'll take a while. May as well let them do the grunt work." Neal's face lit up at that and Peter added, "I did happen to notice that paperwork and you aren't quite the best of friends."

"I always knew you were perceptive, Peter." He looked over when Peter stopped at the curb, examining the oncoming traffic for something. "Are you driving or...."

"There's no parking there, I thought I'd get us a cab."

Neal lay his arm on Peter's shoulder for second. "Allow me," he said, signaling as he spoke, which garnered a frustrated sigh from Peter when a cab instantly pulled to a stop in front of them, seemingly out of nowhere.

"One of these days you're going to explain to me how you do that."

Neal laughed at Peter's grumbling tone. "Either you have it or you don't. It's not something I could teach you. However, consider yourself lucky," he gave a half bow, holding the cab door open for Peter, who nodded his thanks, "that I consider my skills all part of the service," he said, as he slipped carefully into the cab so not as to crease his pants.

Traffic being what it was, the eight mile trek took much longer than it should have. The fifth time Peter glanced at his watch Neal spoke up, saying, "Hey, at least it's not rush hour!" which earned him one of Peter's patented glares. All in all the drive, which should have taken fifteen minutes, took closer to thirty, but it did provide ample opportunity for Peter to bore Neal with the credentials of the experts that the Frick brought in, the history of the modern playing card and that of the royal flush in poker, and also the minutiae of the case in such detail that Neal was blinking heavily just to stay awake.

"Oh, and it was one of the museum volunteers who found the cards," Peter finished up quickly as the cab pulled up in front of the Frick, "Discovered that each and every jacket in the coat check had a royal flush in its pocket. Didn't have any idea why, of course." They got out of the cab, Peter paying as quickly as possible. "Which begs the question—"

"What was the volunteer doing rifling through all those jacket pockets?" Neal asked, breaking into Peter's train of thought, earning him a momentarily annoyed glare that quickly morphed into a quirked eyebrow of concern and acknowledgment of an important question having been posed. "No one thought to ask that one, did they?"

"No. I suppose they were all a little too concerned with what the royal flushes represented and wondering how the cards got there. And that's not even as interesting a question as trying to come up with just how Gondorff knew his work had been discovered in the first place."

"If he had something to do with the plumbing problem that would explain it, wouldn't it?"

Peter shot him one of his incredulous look again. "Yes. Yes, it would."

"Don't look so surprised, Peter, there is a reason it took you three years to catch me. I am very good at what I do."
Peter poked him in the chest. "What you used to do. What you *used* to do."

Neal held up his hands in a conciliatory gesture. "And what I do now. Using my skills to assist the FBI."

"Right. Assisting. And don't you forget it. You're mine for the next four years, Caffery," Peter said, turning to lead the way into the Frick.

"Like that could ever slip my mind while I have this on," Neal muttered, looking down at his ankle to make sure the tracking device was still covered by his pants leg after the uncomfortable cab ride. He was only a step or two behind Peter when suddenly a car screeched to the curb, three large men pouring out of it before it had even come to a complete stop. The first man grabbed Neal's arm, yanking him off his feet and pushed him into one of the other men.

Neal stumbled, trying to get away but only managing to tear his shirt for his troubles. He managed to shout out, "Peter!" before a punch to the stomach stole all his air. Peter spun around and Neal saw him start to go for his gun, but then something came down sharp across his temple and the world faded out as he felt himself being dragged toward the waiting car.

It was late in the day when Neal woke up, a hazy orange shaft of sunlight streaming through a window and onto the bed he was lying on. It wasn't some cheap cot shoved into the corner of an office somewhere, but a magnificent four poster bed with a hand-carved headboard. There was no one else in the room so Neal took the time to take stock of himself. Someone had cared enough to clean him up before putting to bed, the torn shirt removed but not replaced. He tentatively fingered the bandage on his head, then the bruise blossoming on his stomach and finally his left ankle. His bare ankle. Which was both a good thing and a bad thing, depending who had grabbed him and why.

There was a quick rap at the door, a staccato five beat and Neal snorted at the familiar code. Of course. He should have realized who'd taken him. "You may as well come in, Henry. Considering you probably knew the moment I woke up, I'm surprised you waited this long."

The door opened slowly, laughter preceding the man that poked his head in. "It's a good thing you've got a hard head, kid," he said, a look of sheepish concern on his face.

"Henry Gondorff." Neal shook his head, wincing when it protested the movement. "Fancy meeting you here."

Gondorff didn't resemble Paul Newman in the least; he was a rather nondescript elderly Black man, although Neal, always a man of tact and having a placating nature, had once likened the man to an older Cab Calloway, a compliment that Gondorff had rather appreciated.

"I suppose you haven't had anyone call you kid in a years. Seems like yesterday I had you under my wing."

Neal sat up, groaning a bit at the pull on his abused stomach muscles. "That was a long, long time ago. Seems like a lifetime ago."

"Although you can still make the ladies swoon, I bet. I wasn't sure, when I decided to take advantage of this morning's chaos, if your FBI friends knew about your early days with me."

"For all they think they've learned about me, they've barely scratched the surface." Neal gave Gondorff a long look. "Grabbing me like that? That kind of violence? That isn't you."
"Working for the Feds isn't you, kiddo. I did what I had to do to get you away from them."

Swinging his feet over the side of the bed, Neal stared down at his bare ankle. "Did anyone get hurt?" he asked, meaning 'Did Peter get hurt?' but not quite able to verbalize his concern to Gondorff in that manner.

"No one but you." Gondorff leaned over and grabbed Neal's chin, forcing his head up until their eyes met. "They were under orders not to fire on anyone, just brandish their guns around and make it obvious they were grabbing you against your will."

"They did grab me against my will," Neal pointed out.

"Details," Gondorff scoffed with a wave of his hand. "I can get you away. You can be in Paris by tomorrow morning. Or Cairo. You don't belong there, working with them."

"I have my reasons."

"Kate." Gondorff took a step back, pursing his lips. "I taught you better than that."

"There are things more important than the con." Neal stood up, slowly, wobbling on his feet for a moment before regaining his equilibrium.

There was a momentary look of disdain on Gondorff's face. "You can't stay here in the City trying to pull her out of whatever hole she's dug herself into. Not like this."

"I can if you let me go. Just drop me somewhere. With the original Ingres, if possible. I'll spin a story about your people grabbing me so you would have time to get away before I could lead them to you."

Gondorff laughed. "Lead them to me? Even you aren't that good." Then he waved away Neal's comment. "But that's neither here nor there. I don't have it. Didn't have anything to do with the heist for that matter."

"Even if that's true, they don't know that. Peter..." Neal trailed off, leaving the thought unfinished.

"Peter likes you. He's fallen for your charm, hasn't he?"

"I don't know if I'd go that far, but we're," he cleared his throat, "partners of a sort."

"And just what kind of partners are we talking about here? Partners or partners?"

"He's married, Henry." Neal started poking around the room, looking for a shirt.

"That never stopped you before."

"All right then let me clarify; he's married and I have Kate."

"Neal," Gondorff said, a little sadly.

"I can't Henry. She's here. I can't just leave. And I don't want to be on the run, looking for her and looking over my shoulder the whole time. Peter's good. And he's like a dog with a bone, he'll never stop chasing me. Especially like this, if he thought it was his fault for losing me in the first place."

"So, he is the tenacious type?"

Neal laughed. "I'd go as far as to say that word was invented for him."
Gondorff grimaced, thinking. "There is nothing that I can say to convince you to take this opportunity and run, is there?"

"No," Neal replied quickly, before turning and raising an eyebrow. "Unless…"

"I don't know where Kate is. And, to be honest, I'm not sure I'd help even if I did."

"Henry, I appreciate everything you've done for me. If you hadn't been there for me when I was first starting out," Neal paused, uncertain how to continue, eventually just shrugging.

"You had a good head on your shoulders. And enough charm to worm your way into the coldest of hearts. You would have done all right." Gondorff reached into a bag that had been half hidden on the floor and pulled out Neal's ruined shirt. "It won't be pleasant, having to sell your capture and escape to the Feds."

"I know," Neal said as he slipped the shirt on. "I don't suppose my hat is in there too?"

Gondorff laughed as he walked back to the door. "It's still on the sidewalk where my guys grabbed you, unless your FBI man picked it up."

Neal sighed. "That was a Borsalino."

"I'm sure you have at least five more in your closet."

"That's besides the point."

"Neal."

Neal held up his hand in defeat. "You can't blame a man for trying."

Gondorff rapped on the door. "We're ready," he called out and the three men who'd grabbed Neal walked into the room, one carrying a syringe. "You're sure this is the way you want it to go?" he asked Neal. "Milan awaits."

Neal just shook his head. "I have to stay, to see this through. At least until I find Kate, anyway."

"Have it your way," Gondorff said, a touch of disappointment to his voice. "And don't worry, my boys know what they're doing, it'll look bad but there'll be no permanent scarring."

"Permanent what?" Neal spun around, seeking clarification, when suddenly he was jabbed with something and the world grew dim.

The next thing Neal was aware of was an antiseptic smell and the feel of rough fabric against his skin. There was a shuffling noise off to his left and he lay still, pretending to still be unconscious, as he tried to figure it out. A slight displacement of air, back and forth. Pacing. He was in a hospital bed and someone was pacing, waiting for him to wake up. The air conditioning clicked on and when the air shifted Neal could detect the scent of a familiar cologne.

Peter.

So Gondorff had been good to his word and dropped him off somewhere the FBI had been able to find him. But, how? Had Gondorff been caught? What had—

"He's waking up!" Peter called to someone. "Neal?" And then Peter was suddenly right there, next to his bed, a hand on his shoulder and worried tone to his voice that Neal had never head before.
"P'tr?" There was no point in playing possum anymore, since Peter obviously knew he was awake, but Neal was surprised to discover the huskiness and slurring of his words as he tried to speak.

"Hey. Neal. Hey, there. Don't try to talk yet. Wait. Here." And then a straw was being pressed against his lips.

Neal wasn't sure water ever tasted so good. After drinking, slowly since his stomach was lurching just a little, he leaned back, releasing the straw and cracked open his eyes. Peter looked terrible. He cleared his throat. "Are you all right?" Even when Peter had been chasing him, he hadn't looked this bad. There were dark circles under his eyes and a scrape along his jaw. His clothes were rumpled and unkept. And he hadn't shaved. Peter always shaved.

Peter almost seemed to laugh at Neal's question. "You're the one in the hospital and you ask if I'm all right," he muttered.

"You didn't answer my question." Neal moved to sit up and gasped, surprised by the pain such a simple movement caused.

"Here, wait, let me raise the bed for you." Peter pressed something and the bed slowly started shifting into a more comfortable position.

A doctor walked in then, one of those overly harried sorts that seemed to have other, more important things she'd rather be doing and wanted nothing more than to quit wasting her time with the pesky, unwelcome aspects of her job that were getting in the way so she could get back to them. "Well, look who decided to wake up. If you'll step out," she directed to Peter, "I can do a quick neural check now."

"A what?" Neal looked over at Peter, confused. Gondorff had just knocked him out with that drug, hadn't he? Although, there was that pain in his side and the bandages....

Peter pulled out his phone, gesturing to it and said, "I'll call it in. That you're awake and okay. Mostly. And make sure Elizabeth knows. She's been worried."

"Here, now," the doctor said as she leaned over the bed to get a better look at Neal. "It'll be quick," she added before blinding him by shining an incredibly bright light in his eye.

Neal squawked in surprise and pain. He'd just about settled when she did it again to the other eye, muttering to herself, "Hmmm, pupils normal and reactive. How are you feeling? Headache? Nausea?"

"I was fine until you practically blinded me," Neal grumbled, his head pounding as he looked past the doctor to where Peter hovered in the hallway. Peter was being oddly animated, pacing and gesturing with his free hand as he gripped the phone tightly in the other.

All in all, the examination was brief and Neal barely paid attention to most of the Doctor's comments about blood gases and chem panels and the like. Although he did learn, much to his dismay, that rohypnol was found in his system and that he should be happy happy? to know that there was no evidence of penetration or rape trauma. There was also something about cracked ribs, a concussion and deep bruising to his stomach and kidneys, but Neal barely paid it any attention. Apparently, they thought there had been a risk of him being raped. He mentally snorted at the mere thought. Gondorff would never do such a thing, he had never been interested in Neal for something like that. It was just another example of Gondorff's planning ahead, Neal could be as fuzzy on the details of his capture as he wanted and no one would question it.
Lost in his own thoughts, Neal didn't notice the doctor getting ready to leave until an overly cheery Peter swept into the room with a, "So, how's he doing, doc?"

"Another twelve hours of observation is called for in a case like this. He can be released in the morning, barring complications." She jotted some notes on his chart. "I'll write a script for some pain medications just in case he need them, so stop by the pharmacy after the paperwork is done."

"Thanks, doctor," Neal said and waited for her to leave before turning to Peter. "You never answered my question. You look terrible. What happened? Were you hurt when I was grabbed?"

"No, no, no. I'm fine." He rubbed his throat right under the scrape. "I hit the pavement a bit hard is all."

Neal thought back on what happened, he'd called out and Peter had spun around, hand going for his gun but the last thing he'd seen before getting hit Peter had still been on his feet. "When I was grabbed? I don't remember."

"That's a side affect of the rohypnol. It was a pretty hefty dose you got, probably given to you straight away right after they took you. The side effects are memory loss and confusion; they said you probably wouldn't remember anything after you got drugged. Although, come to think of it, the concussion probably wouldn't help matters either."

"So what happened? How long did it take for you to find me? You did find me, didn't you? How? What time is it anyway? How long," but he broke off his questions then, seeing the slight flinch they caused Peter.

"They grabbed you almost two days ago. Right off the street in front of the Frick and I couldn't." Peter was pacing again. "It was very quick; it all happened so fast," he added quickly, as if he thought the explanation was necessary. "I couldn't fire, not the way they were holding you and they had you in the car and had pulled into traffic before backup could arrive."

"The tracker?" Neal leaned back against the pillows with a slight sigh, his head throbbing.

"Cut off and left in a garbage can outside a McDonald's." Peter gave a wry smile at Neal's grimace over the thought of McDonald's. "The car was there too, swept clean and there was no sign of you at all; nowhere to even start looking."

"I didn't want to go with them, Peter," Neal said quickly, his voice almost cracking with the intensity behind it.

"I know. I know." Peter pulled the chair that had been crammed into the corner of the room over and sat down right next to the bed. "I, uh, saw your face when you tried to pull away. You." Peter cleared his throat. "You couldn't have faked that surprise, even you are not that good."

"The painting. Did you figure out which one was the fake?"

Peter shook his head in disbelief. "All this happens to you and you're still worried about the painting?"

"You've had two days to work on the case, I figured there was a lot I needed to be caught up on."

"Well, it turned out you were right."

"Of course, I was," Neal murmured. He'd had closed his eyes but cracked one open to look at Peter. "What was I right about?"
"The museum volunteer? The one who'd found the cards? You thought there was something odd about how he happened to discover them and you were right. No one had considered examining the cards more carefully once someone recognized the significance of the royal flushes."

"Because everyone in the art world knows that's Gondorff's signature, but it's not. Not like that. That's what was bothering me when you first mentioned them. There were too many cards. It was too showy. That, that's not Gondorff's style. He only plays his hand when he has something to gain and how would he benefit from claiming responsibility for what appeared to be a failed heist?"

"Yeah. Except no one but you made that connection," Peter said wryly. "Everyone at the Bureau simply followed the clues as they were laid out for us; a heist plus a royal flush equals Gondorff. End of story. It didn't even occur to anyone to look further than that, thinking they had the answers laid out for them."

Eyes closed again, Neal made a slight, derisive noise at the Bureau's ability to interpret the facts of the case but said nothing.

Peter chuckled lightly at that, the tension finally leaving his shoulders a little. "Right. So, while I was busy chasing after the guys who took you, Jones was looking into the cards. It turns out they were all from the Frick's museum gift shop and a careful search of the building unearthed the decks they'd been pulled out of."

"That sounds," Neal began to say before Peter cut him off.

"Suspicious? Like maybe the whole Gondorff thing was just an elaborate smokescreen in an attempt to direction suspicion away from the true guilty party? Yeah, that's what we decided as well." Peter leaned forward in his chair and reached out, tugging the sheet up to cover Neal a bit better. "Cruz and Jones did a little digging and that volunteer, Jonathan Standish? The one who found the cards? They discovered that Mr. Standish just so happened to have had a significant deposit made into his bank account last Friday. One that was made in cash, in nonsequential bills no less."

Neal tried to bite back a yawn before saying, "Now that is interesting."

"Interesting enough for him to be held for questioning. Last I heard he hadn't said anything, but Jones got a warrant and they'd begun to search his residence."

"Last you heard?" Neal murmured.

Peter fidgeted for a minute, fingerling the sheet next to Neal's hand, before admitting, "I was focusing on finding you."

"I'm okay, Peter."

"You really don't remember what happened? No, you already told me you didn't, and the doctor said it'd be unlikely. I assume that whoever hired Mr. Standish to exchange the painting heard you were working for us and knew you'd put us on the right track for solving this case so they snatched you before you could examine the evidence. Of course, they couldn't have known you'd already have given us the clue we needed." Peter cleared his throat. "Standish claimed not to know anything about what happened to you, even going as far as to say he'd never even heard of you."

"But you found me," Neal said as he shifted, trying to find a comfortable position.

"That's not entirely accurate. You were dropped off in the ambulance bay downstairs suffering from respiratory depression this morning, which is apparently a side effect of the drug you'd been given. The only identification of any sort you had on you was my card. We think, well, the assumption is
that they didn't want to risk a murder charge on top of everything else."
"Lucky me."

Peter snorted at Neal's comment before giving Neal's arm a quick pat and said. "You look exhausted, you probably should get some rest."

"All right." Neal was half asleep already, despite the uncomfortable hospital mattress and rough sheets. He'd nearly drifted off when he realized Peter hadn't moved from his chair. "Elizabeth must be waiting for you. Go home."

"I'm not going anywhere, and El wouldn't expect anything else from me. She was," Peter paused in what seemed like an attempt to find the right word, finally settling on, "upset when she found out you were missing. And besides, you need a guard of some sort, just in case. It may as well be me."

Neal smiled at that and was about to comment on it when Peter tapped his forehead lightly.

"Now go to sleep. I need you back on your feet, we have a case to crack in the morning."

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