

Disclaimer: I do not own White Collar

Summary: Neal gets to vent to Peter on the events of Season 05 and Peter gets a reality check.

“The friend con”

By PadyandMoony

Peter knocked on the door. He was happy. The whole mess with Hagen had been dealt with, he had nothing on Neal, on Peter on even Mozzie. Neal was just a few short months from the end of his sentence and for the first time Peter actually believed he could do it.

Yes, he hadn't. If he was honest with himself, he never had. He had always been looking for Neal to slip. Maybe if he hadn't, he would have recognized the Hagen mess for what it was. Neal having gotten in trouble for saving him. Instead, he made things harder. He winced as he remembered being angry and yelling at Neal. That was way out of line. And after some soul searching he realized that if that was his automatic response, no wonder Neal didn't come to him for help. But that was over now. Crisis averted and they could go back to normal. And for that purpose he brought a bottle of wine for Neal, a six pack for him and they could have a nice evening as friends.

He smiled as the door opened and lifted both hands with his offerings. “What do you say about some alcohol and a game?”

Except Neal didn't give him the usual smile and complain about the game moving aside to let him in. Neal didn't move at all and his face was set into the same closed mask as when he opened the door.

“I say that’s the kind of thing you do with friends, Agent Burke. I understand that’s a foreign concept for you but why don’t you go look the word up in a dictionary and see if you can con some other shmuck in believing you are really his friend for three years.”

Peter took a deep breath. No need to go off the handle here. After how Peter reacted, Neal had every right to be angry with him. “I thought we could celebrate, you know. We dodged the bullet. I covered- for yo-“

“You covered for yourself,” Neal interrupted him and Peter felt slapped. “If your job hadn’t been on the line you would have been only too happy to slap those cuffs on me and throw me into prison again and make yourself look good. Except you weren’t counting on Hagen being smarter and making sure there was proof to tie my stealing the coins to your release, just in case I wasn’t useful to him anymore and he needed to blackmail you. Don’t think I don’t know that.”

“Make myself look good? I thought you were stealing again just for fun,” Peter tried to defend himself. “If I’d known why-“

“Pft,” Neal snorted. “The secret of a con Peter, is to know when to cut your losses short. Stop pretending you hadn’t known from the get go why I stole those coins. I don’t believe you anymore. I don’t trust you anymore.”

And that hurt more than he cared to admit as he remembered a drugged Neal admitting to Peter being the only one he trusted.

“I realized your con. You just pretended to be my friend, to be a good person, so that you could use me when you needed, oh, and never directly. No. Can’t have Agent Burke admitting to getting his hands dirty, now can we? No, you send in Elizabeth,” and here Neal affected his voice in what was supposed to be a clear mockery of Elizabeth’s voice. “*Oh Neal, please sabotage the tape with evidence of Peter trying to bribe a judge,*” “*Oh, Neal, do whatever you*

have to get Peter out of jail in time to save his job even if that is illegal and lets all pretend I'm not going to tell him about this conversation and he will not know what you did and pretend to actually be stupid enough to believe your father would confess."

Peter shook his head, denying what Neal was saying. But even as he did so he could see why Neal had thought that because deep down, Peter hadn't believed James had made that call, and had known Neal must have done something to get him released and he just hadn't wanted to dig deeper and, as Elizabeth said, get emotionally involved. Instead, he started treating Neal as a suspect without caring what the reasons behind his actions may be. And that may be fine for other agents. For Siegel to have done. But he was Neal's friend. Neal had trusted him to have his back like Neal had had his. Like he had known Neal had had his. But he hadn't. He had been one more obstacle in the way and now Neal thought the worst of him.

"See," Neal leaned closer. "You tipped your hand that day, when you came here and let me know that to you I am a criminal and only a criminal. That was your mistake. For three years you managed to pretend you believed I could be rehabilitated, and you let that slip," Neal shook his head. "Put me on alert, and the thing with glass walls is that they permit for lip reading. So your little talk with Siegel "I'll befriend him to make him slip", yeah. I know about that. Granted, I wish Siegel hadn't been caught in the crossfire with Hagen, but other than that I really don't have much respect for either of you. Because I may be a con, a criminal but that is one line I never crossed. I charm and I smile and I lie but I never tell people I'm emotionally invested unless I really am. My friends know they can count on me. As you know, after all you used and abused that fact to the very last drop didn't you?"

"I believed you were a good person, Peter. But you're worse than Hagen, Keller, Adler. At least with them, you knew they were going to screw you. You, *no*, you pretend to be this upstanding citizen, good guy, but you're just waiting for an opportunity to stab me in the back. Don't

pretend to have done anything for me. You only covered for me for the only thing you care about. Your precious job.”

And with that, after that monologue and not letting Peter get a word in Neal slapped the door shut on Peter’s face and Peter was at a loss at what to do. He did care about Neal. He loved Neal as mixture of brother and son but he had acted just like Neal said and could understand why Neal would believe Peter had been conning him all along. All he could do as he stared at the closed door was wonder how the hell had he let things get his bad and how was he going to fix it.

The end

A/N: Okay, this was an exercise in venting after seeing the promo for episode 9. I truly hope the promo is completely misleading or else I’m afraid that will be the last episode of White Collar I’ll ever watch.

Anyway. I may continue this one day, but this ending is how I feel right now. I have hated Peter a bit more with each episode of the new season and after that promo I felt as if they had completely killed the Peter I fell in love with and have no idea how to get him back. But I also have this insane hope that the promo was wrong. That that scene with Peter and El discussing what to do only because arresting Neal and Mozzie affects Peter’s job was an error of the editor. That that scene isn’t actually in the episode. Or that scene has Peter correcting El and saying, “No, that’s not why I care. He is my friend. He is in this mess for trying to save me. I have to help him!” So, this is a mixture of that. My disbelief at the direction the show is taking and my hope that they won’t completely ruin the show.

I hope you liked this exercise in ranting.

Thanks for reading!