

## Wolf on Fire

Wolf ran out of his house on fire. His house wasn't on fire, *he* was on fire.

The phone call from his lawyer had set him off. Wolf was mad as a cut snake. The cash he'd been talked into investing in the sure thing start-up was gone. The company was gone. The owner was in jail.

"Goddamn it," Wolf screamed into the night sky.

He couldn't tell his wife, Millie, because she hadn't agreed with the venture and said she'd kill him if he made the deal. He promised her he wouldn't. She even told him how she'd do it—poison in his coffee.

Christian, who lived next store, was there when she'd made the threat. He warned her not to joke like that. He said if Wolf ever went missing or dropped dead, he'd have to tell the police what he'd witnessed.

That's when their affair started. It was a preemptive bribe.

Seconds after the phone call, Millie came out to the front yard and confronted Wolf. "Who was on the phone and why are you so angry? You're practically on fire."

"No one. Everything's fine."

They'd been married fifteen years, so she knew he was lying. He would have come clean if it were anything else. That ill-conceived investment was the biggest contention in their marriage.

Why don't you come in for a cup of coffee? It might settle you down.

The EMT and police vehicles lit up the lawn and neighborhood houses. People left their homes in slippers and bathrobes to gawk, attracted by the carnival air.

Millie told investigators that Wolf had been drinking coffee. "He just up and slumped over." She said he'd been worried lately and acting strangely. It took about three hours in total, but the street went dark again. Everyone back inside, and Wolf was gone.

Christian waited an appropriate amount of time—he called it a *decent* amount of time—and paid Millie a social visit.

"Whadda *you* want?" She didn't even pretend to be upset with Wolf's demise. She'd been planning to leave him anyway and was using the investment as an excuse.

Christian said, "I wanna forget the whole thing, but I do love your cabin on Lake Passamaquoddy. I hope they don't ask me too many questions when they start canvassing the block tomorrow or whenever. I do have memory lapses upon occasion."

Millie: "The cabin?"

"Yes, and a roll in the hay once in a while. Like before."

"Sit down, Chris. You want some coffee?"

"No, thanks, it'll keep me from sleeping."

Millie said, "One more thing: I didn't do it."

"Okay, good night."

That night at two a.m., it dawned on Millie that Christian's dog was barking for real, not in her dream. She looked out the second-floor bedroom window at the same time the motion-activated floodlights popped on. She caught a glimpse of a hooded man running to the street. Looking down, she saw flames climbing the outside wall of the house.

Wolf would've known what to do.

END