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SCARLET by Marissa Meyer. She did not know that the wolf was a wicked sort of animal, and she was not afraid of him. One Scarlet was descending toward the alley behind the Rieux Tavern when her portscreen chimed from the Toulouse Law Enforcement Department of Missing Persons." Heart jumping, she swerved just in time to keep the ship's starboard side from skidding against the store was led from the Toulouse Law Enforcement Department of Missing Persons." Heart jumping, she swerved just in time to keep the ship's starboard side from skidding against the store was led from the detective assigned to her grandmother's case, but all she got was a stream of unembellished text. 28 AUG 126 T.E. RE: CASE ID #AIG00155819, FILED ON 11 AUG 126 T.E. THIS COMMUNICATION IS TO FILEUX, FRANCE, EF, HAS BEEN DISMISSED DUE TO LACK OF SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE OF VIDENCE OR NONSPECIFIC FOOL PLAY CONJECTURES. FIRED OF OF RIEUX, FRANCE, EF, HAS BEEN DISMISSED DUE TO LACK OF SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE OF VIDENCE OR NONSPECIFIC FOOL PLAY CONJECTURES. FIRED OF OWN FREE WILL AND/OR SUICIDE. CASE CLOSED. WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATRONAGE OF OUR DETECTIVE SERVICES. The comm was followed by a video ad from the police, reminding all delivery ship pilots to be safe and wear their, armesses while engines were running. Scarlet stared at the small screen until the words turned into a screaming blur of white and black and the ground seemed to drop out from beneath the ship. The plastic panel on the back of the screen crunched in her tightening grip. "Idiokered in mild irritation." You idioke the words to the words turned scream and slammed the port down on the ship's control panel, hoping to shatter it into pieces of plastic and metal and wire. After three solid whaps, the screen only flickered in mild irritation. "You idioked her benefit or the words can be a supplied to the screen only flickered in mild irritation." You idioked propentially the plastic panel or the same plant of the age of plastic and set with the same through the result of the age of plastic 
SCARLET by Marissa Meyer. She did not know that the wolf was a wicked sort of animal, and she was not afraid of him. One Scarlet was descending toward the alley behind the Rieux Tavern when her portscreen chimed from the passenger seat, followed by an automated voice:
It to court and see that every one of their turnip-head detectives was disparred and would never work again and—She shatched a gleaming red tomato in each fist, spun on her needs, and pummered the stone waiting to go into the compactor. It felt good. Scarlet grabbed another, imagining the detective's doubt when she'd tried to explain on the single per another in the picture of the detective's doubt when she'd tried to explain on the single per another in the picture. It felt good is a fourth tomato was obliterated. Scarlet froze, already reaching for another, as the tavern's owner draped himself against the door frame. Gilles' narrow face was glistening as he took in the slushy orange mess Scarlet had made on the single per another, as the tavern's owner draped himself against the door frame. Gilles' narrow face was glistening as he took in the slushy orange mess Scarlet had not here. Scarlet had not be my tomatoes." She withdrew her hand from the bin and wiped it down on her dirt-stained jeans. She could feel heat emanating from her face, the erratic thumping of her pulse. Gilles wiped the sweat off his almost-bald head and glared, his def ault expression. "Well?" "They weren't yours," she muttered. Which was true—they were technically hers until he paid her for them. He grunted. "Then I'll only dock three univs for having to clean off the mess. Now, if you're done with target practice, maybe you could deign to bring some of that in here. I've been serving wilted lettuce for two days." He popped back into the restaurant, leaving the door open. The noise of dishes and laughter spilled out into the alley, bizarre in its normality. Scarlet's world was crashing down around her and nobody noticed. Her grand mobile to the count of the shallow the shallow the shallow their spilled parting to the count of the shallow the proof the restaurant and labeled agains a dozen times over the years. "Scarling!" Scarling!" Scarling
ave of aggression was left to rot with the smashed tomatoes. When she could take in a breath without her lungs convulsing, she stacked the crate on top of the russet potatoes and heaved them out of the ship. The line cooks ignored Scarlet as she dodged their was to the cool storage room. She shoved the bins onto the shelves that had been labeled in marker, scratched out, and labeled again a dozen times over the years. "Bonjour, scarlet turned around, pulling her hair off her clamburgher in the doorway, eyes sparkling with a secret, but she pulled back when she saw Scarlet's expression. "What—" "I don't want to talk about it." Slipping past the waitress, she headed back through the kitchen, but seein the kitchen, but seein the waitress, she headed back into the lalleyway. "Because he's back." Despite the angelic blond curls that surrounded Émilie's face, her grin suggested very devilish thoughts. Scarlet pulled away and grabbe da bin of parsnips and radishes, passing them to the waitress. She didn't respond, incapable of caring who he was and why it mattered that he was back. "That's great," she said, loading go basket with papery red onions. "You don't remember, do you? Come now, Scar, the street fighter?" Scarlet said no hing, the waitress set the bin down and fished a pack of gum from her apron pocket. "He's always really quiet, not like Roland and his crowd. I think he's shy... and lonely." She popped a stick into her mouth and offered another to Scarlet. "A street fighter who seems shy?" Scarlet waved the gum away. "Are you listening to yourself?" "You have to see him to understand. He has these eyes that just..." Émilie fanned her fingers against her brow, feigning heatstroke. "Emilie stuck her tongue out after him. Settling the basket of onions against ner hip, Scarlet shut the hat ch and b rushed past the waitress. "Is table four her," Who, he's at large and provided part her waitress. "Is table four her," Emilie gasned "Oh "me odaft! I've been meaning to command ask about your of the stand parting the w
passed back through the steamy kitchen, Emilie gasped. "Oh, I'm so daft! I've bee in meaning to command ask about your g
                                                                                                                                                                                                                       -mère all week. Have you heard anything new?" Scarlet clenched her jaw, the words of the comm buzzing like hornets in he
 head. Case closed. "Nothing new," she said, then let their conversation get lost in the chaos of the cooks screaming at each other
                                                                                                                                                                                                                             across the line. Émilie followed her as far as the stor eroom and dropped off her load. Scarlet busied herself rearrangin
 the baskets before the waitress could say something optimistic. Émilie attempted the requisite "Try not to worry, Scan
                                                                                                                                                                                                                               She'll be back" before backing away into the taver n. Scarlet's jaw was starting to ache from gnashing her teeth. Eve
yone talked about her grandma's disappearance as it she were a stray cat who would meander back home when
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   she got hungry. Don't worry. She'll be back. B ut she'd been gone for over two weeks. Just disappeared witho
ut sending a comm, without a good-bye, without any warning. She'd even missed Scarlet's eighteenth birthous had seen her go. None of the worker androids had recorded anything suspicious. Her portscreen had
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     ay, though she'd bought the ingredients for Sc arlet's favorite lemon cake the week before. None of the farmhand
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          been left behind, though it offered no clues in its stored comms, calendar, or net history. Her leaving without i
was suspicious enough. No one went anywhere without their ports. But that wasn't the worst of it
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           Not the abandoned portscreen or the unmade cake. Scarlet had also found her grandmother's ID chip. Her
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             kitchen counter. The detective said that's what people did when they ran away and didn't want to be found ured most kidnappers probably knew that trick too. Two Scarlet spotted Gilles behind the hot top, ladling
 chip. Wrapped in cheesecloth spotted red from her blood and left like a tiny package on the
  they cut out their ID chips. He'd said it like he'd just solved the mystery, but Scarlet fig-
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   ing to get his attention, and was met with annoyance. "I'm done," she said, returning the scowl. "Comind slid the plate across the steel counter to her. "Run that out to the first booth and I'll have it ready
 échamel sauce on top of a ham sandwich. She walked around to the other side, yell
 ign off on the delivery." Gilles shoveled a stack of frites beside the sandwich a when you get back." Scarlet bristled. "I don't work for you, Gilles." "Just be
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          grateful I'm not sending you out to the alley with a scrub brush." He turned his back on her, his wh
ite shirt yellowed from years of sweat. Scarlet's fingers witched with omatoes, but her grandma's stern face just as quickly infiltrated the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            the fantasy of chucking the sandwich at the back of his head and seeing how it compared to the t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               dream. How disappointed she would be to come back home only to find that Scarlet had lost o
ne of their most loyal clients in a fit of temper. Grabbing the plat
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                e, Scarlet stormed out of the kitchen and was nearly bowled over by a waiter as soon as the k
chen door swung shut behind her. The Rieux Tavern was no
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   t a nice place—the floors were sticky, the furniture was a mismatch of cheap tables and cha
rs, and the air was saturated with grease. But in a town
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      where drinking and gossiping were the favorite pastimes, it was always busy, especially o
  Sundays when the local farmhands ignored their cr
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               a full twenty-four hours. While she waited for a path to clear through the crowd, S
carlet's attention landed on the netscreens behind
                                                                                                                        the bar. All th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                ree were broadcasting the same news footage that had filled up the net since the
night before. Everyone was talking about the Ea
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 alt h's annual ball, where the Lunar queen was a guest of honor and where a cyb
                                                                                                                     stern Commonwe
org girl had infiltrated the party, blown up so
                                                                                                                              e chandelier
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     s, and tried to assassinate the visiting queen ... or maybe she'd been trying to
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         seemed to have a different theory. The freeze-frame on the screens showed d strands of damp hair pulled from a messy ponytail. It was a mystery h
assassinate the newly coronated emperor
                                                                                                                                    . Everyone
a close-up of the girl with dirt smudges
                                                                                                                                    er face an
ow she'd ever been admitted into a royal ball in
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   lace. "They should have put her out of her misery when she fell on
                                                                                                                                      the first
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              p
d like h
hose stairs," said Roland, a tavern regular, w
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      e'd been bellied to the bar since noon. He extended a finger towar
                                                                                                                                     ho looke
d the screen and mimed shooting a gun.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  put a bulle
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         t right through her head. And good riddance." When a rustle of
                                                                                                                                      I'd have
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  Scarlet rolled her eyes in disgust and shoved toward the first b eet fighter immediately, partly due to an array of scars and bruises o
agreement pa ssed through the nearest
                                                                                                                                    patrons,
ooth. She rec ognized Emilie's hands
                                                                                                                                ome str
n his olive s kin, but more becau
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     as the only stranger in the tav ern. He was more disheveled than s
he'd expected from Émilie's swoo
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          ning, with hair that stuck out every direction in messy clum ye. Beneath the table, both of his legs were jogging like a windup toy. for splatters of grease, bits of egg salad, and untouched slices of tomato a
ps and a fresh bruise swelling ar
                                                                                                ou
Three plates were already set o
                                                                                                ut
                                                                                                                                                                                                        efore him, empty
nd lettuce. She didn't realize
                                                                                                e'd
                                                                                                                                                                                                  been staring at him until
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        gaze shifted and collided with hers. His eyes were unnaturally green, like so
ur grapes still on the vine. S
                                                                                                eť'
                                                                                                                                                                                          s grip tightened on the plate a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     he suddenly understood Émilie's swooning. He has these eyes ... Pushing the
ough the crowd, she depos
                                                                                                he
                                                                                                                                                                                          sandwich on the table. "You ha
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    d le croque monsieur?" "Thank you." His voice startled her, not by being loud
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    as right. Maybe he really was shy. "Are you sure you don't want us to just bring
or gruff as she'd expected,
                                                                                                                                                                                     er low and hesitant. Maybe Émilie w
                                                                                                th
you the whole pig?" she said, sta
                                                                                             cking t
                                                                                                                                                                                    he three empty plates. "It would save
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      the servers the trouble of running back and forth from the kitchen." His eyes
                                                                                                                                                                                    ted him to ask if that was an option, but
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       then his attention dipped down to the sandwich. "You have good food here.
                                                                                            et expec
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      n't normally associ ate with each other. "Fighting must work up quite an appet could see the table beginning to shake from his bouncing legs. "Well
She withheld a scoff. "Good fo
                                                                                             d" and
                                                                                                                                                                                    Rieux Tavern" were two phrases she did
                                                                                                                                                                                 eted with the straw in hi s drink and Scar
                                                                  finge
                                                                                              rs fidg
Enjoy," she said, picking up
                                                                                                                                                                                hes. But then she paused and tipped the plates
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        oward him. "Are you sure you don't want the tomatoes? They're the best p
                                                                                              he dis
                                                                                                                                                                               n garden. The lettuce too, actually, but it wasn't w
y drained from the fighter's face. "I've never tried the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         ted like this when I harvested it. Never mind, you don't want the lettuce. But
                                                                                              my ow
the tomatoes?" Some of th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           Scarlet arched an eyebrow. "Never?" After a hesitant moment, he release
                                                                                              e inten
                                                                                              cked u
                                                                                                                                                                                two slabs of tomato and shoved them into his mouth.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           expression froze mid-chew. He seemed to ponder for a moment, eyes unf
xed, before swallowing.
                                                                                                                                                                     l expe cted," he said, looking up at her again. "But not horrible. I
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     ord er some more of those, if I could?" Scarlet adjusted the dishes in her grip
                                                                                             ot what
keeping a butter knife fro
                                                                                                                                                                   ing off. "You know, I don't actually work—" "Here it comes!" said someon
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     e ne ar the bar, spurring an excited murmur that rippled through the tavern. So
                                                                                             m slipp
arlet glanced up at the ne
                                                                                                                                                                   They showed a lush garden, flourishing with ba mboo and lilies and sparkling f
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          rom a recent downpour. The red warmth of the ball spilled down a grand st
                                                                                              tscreen
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             shadows that stretched out into the path. It was beautiful. Tranquil. "I have ten univs that say some girl's ab
                                                                                             era was
                                                                                                                             abov
                                                                                                                                                                e the door, angled toward the long
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               by a round of laughter from the bar. "Anyone want to bet me? Come on , what are the odds, really?" A m rom the doorway and down the stairs, shattering the garden's serenity with her billowing silver gown. S
                                                                                                                                                                  someone shouted, followed
out to lose her foot on th
                                                                                             ose stai
oment later, the cyborg
                                                                                             girl app
                                                                                                                                                              red on the screen. She bolted f
carlet held her breath, k
                                                                                                                                                       at happened next, but she still flinc he
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     when the girl stumbled and fell. She crashed down the steps and landed awkwardly at their base, spra
                                                                                            wing wh
                                                                                                                                                      here was no sound, Scarlet imagine
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      e girl panting as she rolled onto her back and gawked up at the doorway. Shadows cut across the st
                                                                                             Though t
                                                                                                                                                     ures appeared abov e her. Having
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        e story a dozen t imes, Scarlet sought out the missing foot still on the stairs, the light from the ball
airs and a series of unre
                                     cogni
                                                                                            zable fig
                                                                                                                                                                                                           he a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                   rd th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 said Émil ie. Scarlet jumped, not having
                                                                                            girl's cyb
                                                                                                                                                     org foot. "They say the one on the
                                                                                                                                                                                                      left is
                                                                                                                                                                                                                    the qu
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             heard the waitress approach. The prince-no, th
                                                                                                                                                      stooped to pick up the foot. The girl
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           or the hem of her skirt, tugging it down over
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              her calves, but she couldn't hide the dead tenta
e emperor now—crept d
                                                                                            steps and
                                                                                                                                                                                                              re
                                                                                                                                                                                                                    ached f
                                                                                                                                                                                                                    ng. Not
cle wires dangling from t heir meta
                                                                                                                                                     carlet knew what the rumors were s
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            only had the girl been confirmed as a Lun
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              ar-an illegal fugitive and a danger to Earthen s
                                                                                            I stump. S
                                                                                                                                                                                                              ayi
ociety—but she'd even managed to
                                                                                                                                                      mperor Kai. Some thought she'd b
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              wer, others riches. Some believed she'd
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               been trying to start the war that had so long been
                                                                                            brainwash
                                                                                                                                                                                                                       after po
                                                                                                                                                                                                             een
                                                                                                                                                                                                                        f pity. Aft
n threatened. But no matter what the
                                                                                                                                                    ns were, Scarlet couldn't help a twin
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               er all, she was only a teenager, younge
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                r than Scarlet even, and she looked wholly pat
                                                                                            girl's inten
                                                                                                                                                                                                              de o
hetic lying at the base of those stairs
                                                                                           What was t
                                                                                                                                       hat about putting her out of her misery?" said
                                                                                                                                                                                                                          of the gu
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               ys at the bar. Roland jutted his finger
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 toward the screen. "Exactly. I've never seen a
nything so disgusting in my life." Som
                                                                                            near the e
                                                                                                                                      nd leaned forward so he could look around t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                ns at Roland. "I'm not sure I agree. I
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   think she's kind of cute, pretending to be all
                                                                                                                                                                                                                           her patro
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   hter. Roland thumped his palm on the bar, ra
helpless and innocent like that. Maybe
                                                                                                                                       her back to the moon, they should let her c
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  me?" He was met with robust laug
                                                                                            of sending
                                                                                                                                                                                                                              stay with
ttling a mustard dish. "No doubt that m
                                                                                                                                     s would make for a real cozy bedmate!"
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  ttered, but her comment was lost
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            he guffaws. "I wouldn't mind the chan
                                                                                           I leg of her
                                                                                                                                                                                                                               arlet mu
ce to warm her up!" someone new adde
                                                                                            and the tab
                                                                                                                                      les rattled with cheers and amusement. Anger
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  y back up Scarlet's t hroat and
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             he half slammed, half dropped the st
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                d its wa
ack of plates back onto the booth's table
                                                                                            She ignore
                                                                                                                                     d the startled expressions around her and shove
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ough th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   e crowd, circling to th e back of t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              he bar. The bewildered bartender wa
tched on as Scarl et pushed some liquor
                                                                                                                                     f the way and climbed up onto the counter that st
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   e length of the wall. Reaching u
                                                                                          bottles out o
                                                                                                                                                                                                                         ret
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ched th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               p, she opened a wall panel beneath
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                A roar of protest bellowed up aroun
                                                                                                                                                          All three screens went black, the p
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   den and cyborg girl vanishing.
a shelf of cogn
                       ac glasses and pluck
                                                                                          ed out the ne
                                                                                                                                     tlink cable
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                ace gar
                                                                                                                                                              wine off the bar. The glass shattered
d her. Scarlet sp un to face them, accide
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   oor, but Scarlet barely heard it
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                as she waved the cable at the ince
                                                                                         ntally kicking
                                                                                                                                     a bottle of
                                                                                                                                                                                                                              on the fl
nsed crowd. "You all should have some res
                                                                                                                                                                g to be executed!" "That girl's a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     woman yelled. "She should be
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  executed!" The sentiment was en
                                                                                                                                     l's goin
                                                                                                                                                                                                                           Lunar!" a
forced with nods and someone lobbing a cr
                                                                                         ust of bread
                                                                                                                                     at Š
                                                                                                                                                                 carlet's shoulder. She plante
                                                                                                                                                                                                                       d both han
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    s on her hips. "She's only sixte
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   en." A brash of arguments roared
                                                                                                                                                                  a ming about Lunars a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                    evil and tha
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   irl tried to kill a Union leader!
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    'Hev. hev. everyone calm down!
                                                                                          r feet a nd scre
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ward the jostling crow
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        "We all know crazy runs in her
Give Scarlet a break!" Roland yelled, his confi
                                                                                        dence
                                                                                                                                                                          ed by the whiskey
                                                                                                                                                                                                         on his breath. H
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                held his hands out to
                                                                                                                                                                           ing Lunar rights !" A parade of
family. First that old goose runs off, and now
                                                                                        Scar's
                                                                                                  defend
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ghter and jeers mar
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    ched past Scarlet's
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    ears, but were muddled by the s
ound of her own rushing blood. Without knowin
                                                                                        g how
                                                                                                   she'd
                                                                                                                                                                           gotten off the coun
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 he was suddenly h
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     alfway over the bar
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      bott les and glasses scattering,
her fist connecting with Roland's ear. He yelped
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 —" "My grandma
                                                                                        and s
                                                                                                  pun ba
                                                                                                                                                                           ck to face her
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        's not craz
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     She grabbed the front of his s
hirt. "Is that what you told the detective? When he
                                                                                                                                                                                                          I him she was
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            was crazy!" he yelled bac
                                                                                        questioned you
                                                                                                                                                                           ? Did you tel
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 crazy?
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              Of cours
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    e I told him s
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             e way she keeps herself h
k, the stench of alcohol flooding over her. She squ
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  et I wasn't the onl
                                                                                      eezed the fabric u
                                                                                                                                                                          ntil her fists
                                                                                                                                                                                                     ached, "And I b
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      y one. With t
oled up in that old house, talks to a nimals and an
                                                                                                                                                                                               s folk away with
                                                                                   droids like they're peo
                                                                                                                                                                          ple, chase
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         me, and he w
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             as an escort salesman!"
'm not one tinge surprised that Granny Benoit split
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             oved Roland hard with bo
                                                                                    her last rocket. See
                                                                                                                                                                         ms to me i
                                                                                                                                                                                            t's been comin
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  g a long while
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               Scarlet sh
th hands. He stumbled back into Émilie, who'd been tr
                                                                                      ying to get in betw
                                                                                                                                                                         n them. È milie screa
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   med and fell bac
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         k onto a table i
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             n her effort to keep Rolan
d from crushing her. Roland regained his balance, look
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   ed to smirk or
                                                                                      ing like he couldn'
                                                                                                                                                                         decide if h e want
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            snarl. "Better
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              be careful, Scar, or you'r
e going to end up just like the old—" Table legs screec
                                                                                     hed against tile and
                                                                                                                                                                          then the fighter
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      had one h
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             and wrapped
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               around Roland's neck, lif
 ng him clear off the floor. The tavern fell silent. The
                                                                                                                                                                         ncerned, held R
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             thing more than a doll, ig
                                                                                     fiahtei
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          t like he was no
                                                                                                      , unco
noring Roland's gagging. Scarlet gaped, the edge of
                                                                                     the ba
                                                                                                       r diggi
                                                                                                                                                                         ng into her stom
                                                                                                                                                                                                       ach
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        "I believe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          you owe her an
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             apology," the fighter said
in his quiet, even tone. A gurgle slipped out of Rola
led, leaping off his stool. "You're going to kill him!" H
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            Hey, let him go!" a man ye
                                                                                   nd's m
                                                                                                       outh. H
                                                                                                                                                                         is feet flailed in
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       search of
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             the ground.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          grabbed an iron bar for as
                                                                                  e gras
                                                                                                        ped the
                                                                                                                                                                         iahter's wrist, but
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        he migh
much as the limb budged. Flushing, the man let go an
                                                                                 d pulle
                                                                                                                                                                         ā punch, but a
                                                                                                         d back
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        n as he sw
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      na, the fight
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          er's free hand came up and
blocked it. Scarlet staggered back from the bar, du lly
                                                                                                                                                                        of nonsensical
                                                                                                                                                                                                                      lett
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         ss the fighter's forearm. LSO
                                                                                noting
                                                                                                         a tattoo
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         ers and numbe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   s stamped acro
P962. The fighter still seemed angry, but now there
                                                                                was als
                                                                                                         o the tin
                                                                                                                                                                        iest bit of amus
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                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          t in his expres
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  sion, like he'd ju
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        st remembered the rules to a
game. He eased Roland's feet back to the ground, sim
                                                                               ultaneo
                                                                                                          usly rele
                                                                                                                                                 as
                                                                                                                                                                        ing him and the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                    other
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           man's fist. Ro
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  land caught his
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       balance on a stool. "What's wr
ong with you?" he choked out, rubbing his neck. "Are
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            g?" "You w
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          pectful." "Disrespectful?" b
                                                                              vou som
                                                                                                          e lunatic
                                                                                                                                                 cit
                                                                                                                                                                       y transplant or
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 somethin
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  ere being disres
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              ing on out
arked Roland. "You just tried to kill me!" Gilles erupted from the kitchen, shoving through t
                                                                                                                                                he s
                                                                                                                                                                       winging doors.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 'What's go
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  here?
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              s guy's trying to start a fi
ght," someone said from the crowd. "And Scarlet broke the screens!" "I didn't break them
                                                                                                                                                                       iot!" Scarlet ye
                                                                                                                                                                                                              lled, though s
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             ho had said it. Gilles surv
                                                                                                                                               you id
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               he wasn't
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  sure w
eyed the dead screens, Roland still r ubbing his neck, the bro
                                                                                                                                              s and gl
                                                                                                                                                                      asses littering t
                                                                                                                                                                                                             he wet floor. He
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   at the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             street fighter. "You," he s
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 alowered
aid, pointing. "Get out of my tavern." Scarlet's gut tightened. '
                                                                                                                                             t do any-
                                                                                                                                                                        "Don't you st
                                                                                                                                                                                                               art. Scarle
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  h dest
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          ruction were you planning of
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ow muc
                                                                                                 t?" She bristled, her
                                                                                                                                                                     Il burning. "Ma
                                                                                                                                                                                                               ybe Í'll just tak
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        delivery and we'll see how vo
n causing today? Are you trying to get me to close my accoun
                                                                                                                                                face sti
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   b ack t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      he
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        lly
he
ur customers like eating spoiled vegetables from now on." Rounding the bar, Gilles snatche
                                                                                                                                                                     out of Scarlet's
                                                                                                                                             d the cable
                                                                                                                                                                                                             hand. "Do you rea
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      ink you're the only working fa
m in France? Honestly, Scar, I only order from you because your grandmother would give me
                                                                                                                                          hell if I didn't!
                                                                                                                                                                                                          her lips, holding back t
                                                                                                                                                                       Scarlet pursed
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   frustrated reminder that her gran
dmother wasn't here anymore so maybe he should just order from so
                                                                                                                                                                        anted. Gilles
                                                                                                                                              what he w
                                                                                                                                                                                                      turned his attention b
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          k to
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  the fighter. "I said get out!" Ignor
ng him, the fighter held his hand out to Émilie, who was still half c
                                                                                                                                           a table. Her fa
                                                                                                                                                                          ce was flu
                                                                                                                                                                                                             shed and her skir
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              was soaked through with beer, but h
er gaze glowed with infatuation as she let herself be pulled to her fe
                                                                                                                                        you," she said, he
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            y silence. Finally, the fighter met Gille
                                                                                                                                                                             r whispe
                                                                                                                                                                                                          r carrying in the unc
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                ann
s's scowl. "I will go, but I haven't paid for my meal." He hesitated. "I c
                                                                                                                                                                                sses
                                                                                                                                                                                                      s well." Scarlet blinked.
                                                                                                                      an pay for
                                                                                                                                          the broken gla
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               What?'
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          "I don't want your money!" Gilles screa
med, sounding insulted, which came as an even further shock to Scarlet
                                                                                                                                                                                          ill
                                                                                                                                                                                                es complain about money
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    his vendors were bleeding him dry. "I want
                                                                                                                         . who ha
                                                                                                                                      d only ever heard
                                                                                                                                                                                     G
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              and how
you out of my tavern." The fighter's pale eyes darted to Scarlet, and for a m
                                                                                                                          oment she sensed a connectio
                                                                                                                                                                                         n be
                                                                                                                                                                                                       tween them. Here they
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              re, both
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                outcasts. Unwanted. Crazy. Pulse thrumming,
she buried the thought. This man was trouble. He fought people for a living—o
                                                                                                                           r perhaps
                                                                                                                                                                                        n. Sh
                                                                                                                                                                                                     e wasn't sure which was w
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             e. Turning a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         the fighter dipped his head in what almo
st looked like an apology and shuffled toward the exit. Scarlet couldn't help thinking
                                                                                                                            as he pas
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       cing now than a scolded dog. Three Scarl
                                                                                                                                                                                       hat des pite all signs of brutality, he lo
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   oked
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           no more mena
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    it. She'd have to make two trips out to the s
et pulled the bin of potatoes out from the lowest shelf, dropping it with a thud on the floor before lugging the cr
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              ent beside
                                                                                                                                                                                     ate of tomatoes on top. The onions and tu
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  rnips w
hip again and that made her angrier than anything. So much for a dignified exit. She grabbed the handles of the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  up. "No
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              doing?" Gilles said from the doorway, a towel di
                                                                                                                                                                                   lower bin an
                                                                                                                                                                                                            d hoisted them
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            w what are you
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             "Look, I like your grandmother, and I like you. Yes
aped over one shoulder. "Taking these back." Heaving a sigh, Gilles braced himself against the wall. "Scar—I didn
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 out there.
                                                                                                                                                                                     t mean a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          "I find that unlikely.
 she overcharges and you can be a huge sting in my side and you're both a little crazy sometimes—" He held up both
                                                                                                                                                                                    hands defe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                   nsive
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                ly when he
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              saw Scarlet's
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            hackles rising. "Hey, you're the one who climbed
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       farm, and you still grow the best tomatoes in France
ıp on the bar and started making speeches, so don't try to say'it's not true." She wrinkled her nose at him. "But when it
                                                                                                                                                                                 comes right do
                                                                                                                                                                                                                   wn to
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 it, your gra
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        nd-mère runs a goo
ear after year. I don't want to cancel my account." Scarlet tilted the bin so that the shiny red globes rolled and thumped ag
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              d off on the delivery payment." He walked away before Scar
                                                                                                                                                                              ainst one another.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                   Put th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              em back, Scar
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      I've already signe
et could lose her temper again. Blowing a red curl out of her face, Scarlet set the crates down and kicked the potatoes back to
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             could hear th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          e cooks chartling over the dining room drama. The story had a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                   eneat
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             n the shelves. Sh
ready taken on a legendary air from the waitstaff's telling of it. According to the cooks, the street fighter had broken a bottle over Roland's head,
                                                                                                                                                                                                                   knock
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                ing him unco
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 nsci
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ous and crushing a chair in the process. He would have ta
ken out Gilles too, if Émilié hadn't calmed him down with one of her pretty smiles. With no interest in correcting the story, Scarlet dusted her hands
                                                                                                                                                                                                                  on her
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                eans and pace
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  d ba
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   ck into the kitchen. A coldness hung in the air between h
er and the tavern staff as she made her way to the scanner beside the back door—Gilles was nowhere to be seen and Émilie's giggles could be heard o
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  et ho ped she was only imagining the dropped glances. She wondered how fast
                                                                                                                                                                                                                   ut in t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         he dining room. Scarl
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             the ancient scanner. Out of habit, she inspected the delivery order that a
the rumors would spread through town. Scarlet Benoit was defending the cyborg! The Lunar! She's clearly split her rocket, just like her ... just like
                                                                                                                                                                                                                    ... Sh
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     e swiped her wrist ben
ppeared on the screen, making sure Gilles hadn't shorted her like he often tried and noting that he had, in fact, deducted three univs for the smashed
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          oes. 687U DEPOSITED TO VENDO
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             R ACCOUNT: BENOIT FARMS AND GARDENS. She left through the bac
                                                                                                                                                                                                                   tomat
k door without saying good-bye to anyone. Though still warm from the sunny afternoon, the shadows of the alley were refreshing compared with the sw
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        g kitchen and Scarlet let it cool her dow in while she reorganized the crates in the back of the ship. She was bel
                                                                                                                                                                                                                  elterin
ind schedule. It would be late evening before she got home. She would have to get up extra early to go to the Toulouse police station, otherwise she would lose a whole day in which no one was doing anything to recover her grandmother. Two weeks. Two whole weeks of her grand
mother being out there, alone. Helpless. Forgotten. Maybe ... maybe even dead. Maybe kidnapped and killed and left in a dark, wet ditch somewhere and why? Whywhywhy? Frustrated tears steamed her eyes, but she blinked them back. Slamming the hatch, she rounded to the front
of the ship, and froze. The fighter was there, his back against the stone building. Watching her. In her surprise, a hot tear leaked out. She swiped at it before it could crawl halfway down her cheek. She returned his stare, calculating if his stance was threatening or not. He stood a do
zen steps from the nose of her ship and his expression seemed more hesitant than dangerous, but then, it hadn't seemed dangerous when he'd nearly strangled Roland either. "I wanted to make sure you were all right," he said, his voice almost lost in the jumbled noise from the tav
ern. She splayed her fingers on the back of the ship, annoyed at how her nerves were humming, like they couldn't decide if she should be afraid of him or flattered. "I'm better off than Roland," she said. "His neck was already starting to bruise when I left." His eyes flashed toward th
e kitchen door. "He deserved worse." She would have smiled, but she didn't have the energy after biting back all the anger and frustration of the afternoon. "I wish you hadn't gotten involved at all. I had the situation under control." "Clearly." He squinted at her like he was trying to igure out a puzzle. "But I was worried you might draw that gun on him, and such a scene may not have helped your case. As far as not being crazy, that is." Hair prickled behind her neck. Scarlet's hand instinctively went to her lower back, where a small pistol was warm against her
kin. Her grandma had given it to her on her eleventh birthday with the paranoid warning: You just never know when a stranger will want to take you don't mean to go. She'd taught Scarlet to use it and Scarlet hadn't left home without it since, no matter how ridiculo
us and unnecessary it seemed. Seven years later and she was quite sure not a single person had ever noticed the gun concealed under her usual red hoodie. Until now. "How did you know?" He shrugged, or what would have been a shrug if the movement hadn't been so tense and
erky. "I saw the handle when you climbed up on the counter." Scarlet lifted the back of her sweatshirt just enough to loosen the pistol from her waistband. She tried to take in a calming breath, but the air was filled with the onion and garbage stink of the alley. "Thanks for your cond
ern, but I'm just fine. I have to go—behind on the deliveries ... behind on everything." She stepped toward the pilot's door. "Do you have any more tomatoes?" She paused. The fighter shrank back further into the shadows, looking sheepish. "I'm still a little hungry," he muttered. Sc arlet imagined she could smell the tomato flesh on the wall behind her. "I can pay," he quickly added. She shook her head. "No, that's all right. We have plenty." She shuffled backward, keeping her eyes on him, and reopened the hatch. She grabbed a tomato and a bundle of crooke d carrots. "Here, these are good raw too," she said, tossing them to him. He caught them with ease, the tomato disappearing in his large fist and his other hand gripping the carrots by their lacy, leafy stems. He surveyed them from every angle. "What are they?" A surprised laugh tu
nbled out of her. "They're carrots. Are you serious?" Again, he seemed embarrassingly aware of having said something unusual. His shoulders hunched in a vain attempt to make himself seem smaller. "Thank you." "Your mom never made you eat your vegetables, did she?" Their
jazes clashed and the awkwardness was immediate. Something shattered inside the tavern, making Scarlet jump. It was followed by the roar of laughter. "Never mind. They're good, you'll like them." She shut the hatch and rounded to the door again, whisking her ID across the ship
s scanner. The door opened, forming a wall between them, and the floodlights blinked on. They accentuated the bruise around the fighter's eye, making it seem darker than before. He flinched back like a criminal in a spotlight. "I was wondering if you could use a farmhand?" he sai I, the words slurred in his rush to get them out. Scarlet paused, suddenly understanding why he'd stalled so long. She scanned his broad shoulders, bulky arms. He was built for manual labor. "You're looking for work?" He started to smile, a look that was d
 ngerously mischievous. "The money's good at the fights, but it doesn't make for much of a career. I thought maybe you could pay me in food." She laughed. "After seeing the evidence of your appetite in there, I think I'd lose my shirt with a deal like that." She flushed the second s
   d said it—no doubt he was now imagining her with her shirt off. Yet, to her shock, his face remained serenely neutral, and she hurried to fill the space before his reactions caught up. "What's your name, anyway?" That awkward shrug again. "They call me Wolf at the fights." "Wolf at the
  "How ... predatory." He nodded, entirely serious. Scarlet swallowed a grin. "You might want to leave the strange tattoo could barely be seen in the dark, and she thought maybe she'd embarrassed him. Perhas Wolf was a beloved nickname. "Well, they call me Scarlet. Yes, like the hair, what a clever observation." His expression softened. "What hair?" Scarlet settled her arm on top of the door, resting her chin. "Good one." For a moment he seemed almost pleased with himself and Scar
 t found herself warming to this stranger, this anomaly. This soff-spoken street fighter. A warning time. Her grandmother was out there. Alone. Frightened. Dead in a ditch. Scarlet tightened her grip on the door frame. "I'm really sorr, but we have a full staff already. I don't need any more farmhands." The glint faded from his eyes and in an instant he was looking uncomfortable again. Flustered. "I understand. Thank you for the food." He kicked at the stem of a dead firework on the pavement—a remnant from la
  night's peace celebrations. "You should head to Toulouse, or even Paris. There are more jobs in the cities, and people around here don't take too kindly to strangers, as you may have noticed." He tilted his head so that his emerald eyes glowed even brighter in the wash of the sh
 's floodlights, looking almost amused. "Thanks for the tip." Turning, Scarlet sank into the pilot's seat. Wolf shifted toward the engine. "If you change your mind about needing a hand, I can be found at the abandoned Morel house most nights. I may not be gr
eat with people, but I think I'd do well on a farm." Amusement touched the corners of his lips. "Animals love me." "Oh, I'm sure they do," Scarlet said, beaming with fake encouragement. She shut the door before muttering, "What farm animals don't love a wolf?" Four The captivity
of Carswell Thorne had gotten off to a rocky start, what with the catastrophic soap rebellion and all. But since being transferred to solitary, he'd become the personification of a well-mannered gentleman, and after six months of such commendable behavior, he'd persuaded the only
female guard on rotation to lend him a portscreen. He was quite sure this would not have succeeded if the guard wasn't convinced he was an idiot, incapable of doing anything other than counting the days and searching for naughty pictures of ladies he'd known and imagined. And
she was right, of course. Thorne was mystified by technology and couldn't have done anything useful with the tablet even if he had had a step-by-step instruction manual on "How to Escape from Jail Using a Portscreen." He'd been unsuccessful in accessing his comms, connecting
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