Something Maternal

By C. Jade Wyton

Scarecrow had spent the day preparing to assassinate a demon. She had received an offer she couldn't refuse; her services in return for information on where her stolen selkie cloak could be. During this planning, however, she came across her acquaintance, Tiffany, and seeing how stressed the woman was she decided to escort her home. Finding themselves alone together, the two women decide to discuss their situations— And their children. And in doing so they find themselves forging a deep, maternal connect connection.

A collab with my wife.

Contains mentions of abuse, stalking, kidnapping, paranoia, and grief.

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It was late evening. The Los Diablos night was just beginning, and the only real difference between now and the daytime was the lack of blazing hot sun constantly beating down against the pavement.

The open desert cooled the earth quickly and Scarecrow knew that soon the night would become cold.

Not that it mattered to her. Not as an ocean-dweller; she was built for the freezing-cold nights at sea and tonight had the pricklings of that crisp kind of air that reminded Scarecrow of home.

Home.

Scarecrow gave a haughty sniff as she glanced to her nervous companion. She had agreed to escort Tiffany back to her own home from Maria's house. Scarecrow had found the woman hiding herself with a magical disguise earlier that day, and could tell immediately how much pressure the triton was under and so allowed her to trail along with her and Martinez for the rest of the day.

Tonight had not turned out completely like she had expected. It had originally been intended to be a night of sushi and drinks with her co-worker. But somewhere among the conversations it had become a conspiracy to assassinate a demon; a bit of a stark contrast in moods, but Scarecrow didn't mind.

Killing Constance would bring her one step closer to getting back her cloak… one step closer to going home….

"Scarecrow?" Tiffany's voice squeaked from Scarecrow's side, and the selkie acknowledged her friend with a grunt. "Thank you again for walking me home. It's helping."

It didn't look like it was helping, Scarecrow thought as she side-eyed Tiffany.

The woman was still very clearly stressed. She was visibly tense, with her tail tight to her body and her shoulders held close and high. She walked at a pace that was clearly making her out of breath; casting constant glances over her shoulder as if expecting that they were being followed.
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And every time she glanced around Scarecrow could see her slip her hand against her pocket to thumb at the taser that she had hidden away; clearly trying to reassure herself with its presence….

There was no point in telling her that a taser would have minimal affect on a creature like Constance, was there?

No.

So, instead, Scarecrow opted to reply with a simple, sincere statement; "It would be irresponsible for me not to."

Tiffany let out a breath, her shoulders slacking as her hand took a much more natural position at her side and her posture relaxed. It was a subtle change. Perhaps one that would have gone unnoticed by someone without Scarecrow's trained eye. But still a change….

Relief.

"This— This is my place," Tiffany noted as they came to an apartment block.

It was a different apartment to the address she had given Scarecrow when they'd first met (which was not unexpected, as she had been talking about moving— Scarecrow just hadn't expected it to have already happened), and the selkie made a mental note of the new location as Tiffany led her into the building's elevator.

"A working elevator?" Scarecrow smirked as she entered the metal cage. She watched as Tiffany pressed the button, making a mental note that the triton was on the 5th floor, before nudging her friend. "Thank the Deep God."

Tiffany let out a quiet giggle in response, folding her arms over herself in a way that was half-comfortable, half-anxious. "Yeah. It's nice…."

She trailed off into silence, and Scarecrow's smirk slowly fell. She could see Tiffany starting to fidget. She licked her lips. And touched her gills. Rubbed her fingers together and stared a little too intensely at the patterns on the wall.

Shortly, a bell dinged and the number 5 on the screen above the door illuminated. The selkie motioned for Tiffany to go first before following her close behind.

Tiffany seemed to not be any less anxious, and Scarecrow frowned as she followed her down the hall. In fact, the closer they got to her door the more nervous she seemed to become. As if she was expecting something —or someone— to be waiting for her inside.

Scarecrow recalled Tiffany's tearful talk at Maria's apartment and winced; their mutual friend, Creedence, had betrayed Tiffany's trust and told Constance where she lived. The man had then broken into her home and intimidated her. She'd said something about her sons, though the details were vague and unclear….

Scarecrow was honestly surprised that Tiffany wasn't mad at Creedence for it. If he'd done that to her, she'd have been furious.

Clack!

Scarecrow sighed as Tiffany dropped her keys on the floor and fumbled to retrieve them. Her hands were trembling so much she was having trouble unlocking her own front door…. It was pitiful, really. She was a mess.

Finally, Tiffany managed to open her door. Though she didn't enter her apartment.

Instead, she stood in the hall at her half-open door, staring into her dark apartment with wide eyes.

Scarecrow watched the woman hesitate; the nervous swallow, the twitch of her tail, the way her hand slowly moved back to the weapon in her pocket….

Tiffany was scared that someone was in her home. It was as clear as a barreleye.

"If you're scared, let me go in first," Scarecrow offered. "I'll make sure there's no one here."

Tiffany nodded, stepping back from the door and pressing her hands together apologetically. "I…. Y…. Please."

Scarecrow gave a gentle nod before drawing her revolver from it's holster. She gripped the door handle and slowly pushed the door properly open, poking her gun's barrel through first.

"Is anyone in here?" she asked loudly and waited a moment. *Nothing*. "I'm armed! If there is anyone here, declare yourself now, or I won't hesitate to shoot!"

Again, nothing. Scarecrow sniffed and frowned as she slowly crept into the apartment.

It was quiet; the only visible light coming from down the hall.

She should check that out.

Scarecrow flicked on the main room's light and glanced around. It seemed empty enough. Messy, but in a way that was to be expected with two children living there; not in a way that seemed like it had been disturbed by an outsider.

But still, she wanted to check out that light.

She made her way down the small hall and glanced into the lit room. It was clearly Tiffany's bedroom.

Several boxes sat beside the large bed, half-unpacked. The cupboard was open to reveal clothes that definitely did not belong to a pair of young boys. And there was a very pretty-looking shrine that Scarecrow could only assume was for Tiffany to worship her patron god.

"*Mrew!*" a cheerful mewl came from Scarecrow's side and she turned to see a young cat lounging on a carpet scratching tree.

That must be Tiffany's familiar, Scarecrow thought, stepping back out of the room. 'You usually leave your bedroom light on?' she asked across the apartment.

"Y-Yeah, for B.B!" Tiffany replied.

"Right," Scarecrow acknowledged before turning to the other doors in the hall. She opened each in turn, revealing a bathroom and two bedrooms, before finding herself satisfied that there was nobody there.

She started back for the front door, casting one last glance to the bathroom when she felt something catch her foot and she fell to the ground with a surprised scream.

Tiffany let out her own short, sharp shout as Scarecrow landed on the floor with a loud thump, and Scarecrow saw her retreat further into the hall. "Scarecrow? Sc-Scary?!"

"Yeah!" Scarecrow called out as she rolled to check what she had tripped on. It was a fucking box of books that someone had just left in the middle of the hallway. She got up, grumbled, and made her way back to the door. "I tripped on a box."

Tiffany let out a long, deep breath and doubled over, putting her hands on her knees. “You scared me half to death!” she managed.

“My apologies. It’s clear in there,” Scarecrow shrugged. “Well, except for the boxes.”

“What is going on out here?!” croaked an older man’s voice from an apartment across the hall. “Oh, it’s you again. It’s just been noise from you *all day!* Have some damn courtesy, would you!”

Tiffany didn’t respond to the neighbour as Scarecrow pushed her inside, but as the door was closed she heard the triton muttering desperately under her breath: “*Oh my gods, I’m going to get kicked out if this keeps up….*”

“Don’t worry about him. Men like that are more bark than they are bite,” Scarecrow reassured. “But if he gives you any trouble, let me know and I’ll get him to leave you alone.”

“Hm,” Tiffany gave a quiet grunt in response, and rubbed at her arm. “Thanks….”

“Hm,” Scarecrow echoed. “Well, anyway. You’re home now, but I can tell you’re still anxious. Would you like me to make you a coffee?”

“Yes. Please,” Tiffany breathed, stumbling to the dining table and collapsing into a chair. “That would be good. Thank you.”

“Milk? Cream? Sugar?” Scarecrow asked, before tutting and making her way to the kitchen. “Actually, looking at you? It’ll be better for you black.”

“Yeah. Black’s fine,” Tiffany squeaked out. She sounded like she was tearing up again; something Scarecrow was starting to think was going to happen every time they met up…

Switching the kettle on and waiting for it to boil, she couldn’t help but take in the apartment. It was messy. Very messy. It seemed that Tiffany was still in the process of unpacking— Or, more, she had gotten halfway through the process of unpacking and then given up. It was clear this whole ordeal with Constance had made her too anxious to focus on making her home feel like a home. Nothing had a place, yet. Even the furniture was haphazardly scattered across the house in desperate need of some organisation. Though, at least the dishes were done….

It was clear this woman was at her wit’s end— And all because of one man.

Hm…. But *why?*

Why was Constance so focused on harassing a random triton woman? There had to be more to it than she realised.

Scarecrow figured there was no point beating around the bush. Not for a question like this one. So, as she returned to Tiffany and placed their coffees down, she just asked it outright:

“Why has Constance taken such an interest in you?”

Tiffany flinched at Constance’s name, and wrung her hands together as she began to stammer; “I, uh- He um…. My… my boys. He… he thinks that uh…” she paused to swallow and lick her lips. “You remember how I said to uh. Not worry about looking for their father? That I’d… found him?”

“*He’s* their father?”

“Either him or Creedence,” Tiffany said. “But I don’t think Constance cares about that *or* part.”

“I see,” Scarecrow nodded and crossed her arms. “Well, that explains a lot.”

“I…. I don’t know what to do,” Tiffany admitted. “I’m so scared. All the time— I’ve never been scared like this, before. Not for my life.”

“Scared for *your* life? Or scared for your children’s?” Scarecrow asked as gently as she could. “Because from what I’ve seen, it seems more like the latter.”

“It’s both,” Tiffany confirmed, her hands moving to rub her forearms. “I have no idea what Constance wants with us and I-I couldn’t bare it if he hurt the boys. I just couldn’t…. And I can’t…. I feel like I can’t even….” she paused, her lip quivering for a moment before she bit it. “None of my friends have children. They don’t understand how scared I am. And it’s not that they’re not *trying* it’s just that…. They *can’t* understand how scared I am. I feel like I’m completely alone with this. Nobody I know has ever felt like this, and I don’t know how to even begin explaining it to them.”

Scarecrow watched Tiffany with a long stare before taking a sip of her own coffee.

She should tell Tiffany, shouldn’t she?

It was clear the woman needed support and understanding from someone who understood— Someone who *really* understood…. But… she wasn’t sure she was ready.

Was she ready?

Eleven years, and it still felt like a fresh wound….

A moment of silence passed between the women as they stared their drinks; neither of them actually touching their steaming coffees.

Tell her.

Scarecrow took a deep breath.

“Now, Tiffany…. I don’t know if you consider me a friend, but I want you to know I understand. I’m…” she trailed off as she stared into the coffee in her mug. *Deep breath. You can do this.* “I know exactly what you’re going through. And I mean that. I had a child too, once. A long time ago. But she’s gone now….”

Tiffany’s face softened with sympathy, and she slowly picked up her drink. “I consider you a friend,” she said quietly, lifting the cup to her lips. “What… happened? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“Ernest Sinclair,” Scarecrow scowled. Gripping onto her mug tight, she bared her claws at the thought of that horrid man— Then she caught herself and let out a breath, forcing herself to relax. “Ernest Sinclair is… Well. He *was* my husband. How much do you know about selkies, Tiffany?”

“My mother used to tell me stories,” Tiffany sighed, her eyes trailing down to her drink. “He must have been the one who took your cloak, hm?”

“Yes. And he’s the father of my child as well,” Scarecrow took in a deep, shaky breath that came out as a growl. She gripped her mug tight again and had another long, hard drink of her coffee. “He stole my cloak the night we made coitus, and eleven months later Paisley was born…. *Only good thing to have ever come from stepping on land!*”

Tiffany gave a slow, understanding nod at Scarecrow’s mutterings. “I…. Maybe it’s not a good comparison, but I feel the same way about my boys and drinking.”

“Hm,” Scarecrow returned the nod. “Maybe *not* the best comparison…. But I understand what you mean.”

"What…" Tiffany looked away. "What happened to Paisley?"

"It's a long story…. When Paisley was five, I found out that Ernest—" Scarecrow gave a huff and felt her eyes grow wet. "He'd sold my skin. Traded it to some collector! And I just… I just became so *angry* that I beat the man near to death! The court case was messy, of course. For a lot of reasons. It was hard for me to even be treated as a person during it because I'm considered an "exotic" fae— For him to be charged with kidnapping I had to be seen as a person; which meant I was facing a charge for attempted murder.'

"Oh… I see."

"Mm…. The court case it…. It dragged on. And on. I'm happy to say that Ernest was eventually charged…. But then came the arguments over *my* sentence. If what I did was to be considered self-defence or not…. Paisley was taken away right at the start of it all and put into foster care until we knew if I was going to walk free or not and… and things just kept dragging on. It was so messy. And so complicated. And… my lawyer said it didn't look good. That I should prepare for the worst. I panicked, then. And I fled the country."

Scarecrow felt a tear escape her, and tried to blink it back— But in doing so she only blinked more out, and felt the salty wet lines rolling down her cheeks.

She saw Tiffany slowly put down her drink, her brow furrowed in concern. Though she didn't speak, the look she gave Scarecrow very clearly asked; *why didn't you take her with you?*

"I had no idea where they'd taken Paisley to. Not a clue," Scarecrow answered, knowing she'd read Tiffany right when the woman's gaze turned to the floor and she squeezed her eyes closed as if in pain. "If I did I would have taken her with me but…. It's been eleven years, now, since I last saw her…."

Scarecrow trailed off, tracing the rim of her mug with a clawed finger as Tiffany let out a trembling, mournful breath and wiped her own eyes.

For a long moment, both women were quiet. Then, Tiffany let go of her drink and stood, stepping around the table so that she could take the seat next to Scarecrow. She shifted it close, until it was all but pressed up against the selkie's own seat, and then wrapped her arms around the woman and squeezed her tight.

"*I'm so sorry,*" Tiffany whispered. "*I'm so,* so *sorry*…."

"So am I…" Scarecrow didn't bother to hold back her tears, anymore, and let them flow freely. "*So am I*…."

Tiffany's snout buried into Scarecrow's shoulder, and she felt Tiffany's own tears drip to her skin. Small, wet droplets that gathered and rolled down her collar to her arm to catch on her sleeve and soak into the fabric.

They were sharing something, Scarecrow felt. *Something strong and instinctual.*

Something they'd never been able to properly share with anyone else before. Not for lack of their own reaching out, but because the feeling ran so deep that somebody who had never felt it themselves couldn't even begin to fathom the intensity of the sharp emotion.

Maternal, Scarecrow realised. *They were sharing something maternal.*

The most ancient, immeasurably terrifying fear that loomed over motherhood.

Losing a child.

“Is there anything you can do to find her?” Tiffany asked, quietly.

“If I can get my skin back, maybe…” Scarecrow gave a choking cough and straightened her back. She wiped her eyes of her tears and tried to take on her usual stern demeanour; though she didn’t push Tiffany away. “If I can get my skin back then I can return to Scotland and look for Paisley, but I…. There isn’t much else I can do. *Not without my skin.*”

“That’s why you want it back so badly, isn’t it?” Tiffany asked as she sat up, a look of understanding in her eyes that told Scarecrow she didn’t need to answer.

Scarecrow nodded, regardless, and wiped her nose on her sleeve.

For a long, long while, the two girls were quiet. Scarecrow watched Tiffany from the corner of her eye; the woman was clearly in deep thought as she rubbed a hand up and down Scarecrow’s back.

Finally, Tiffany spoke. “Scarecrow?”

Scarecrow looked up at Tiffany with tired eyes. “Yes?”

“I don’t think Constance is going to leave me alone. Even if you try to use your favour with the avarcians to warn him away,” Tiffany said. “I think that he wouldn’t consider me and the boys as… high value as whatever it was you traded him. You know? So maybe you could….”

She trailed off. And though Scarecrow didn’t need to finish her sentence, she still did. “Use my favour to find Paisley? Maybe…. But I don’t know…. It’s been so many years, Tiffany. What if she doesn’t remember me? What if she misunderstands the message? A letter… that’s *nothing*. Not compared to me returning in person. Not compared to being able to throw my arms around her and hold her close and tell her why I left; if I can do that, maybe she’d understand….”

“You could at least tell her she’s loved. Then at least she’d know.”

Scarecrow looked solemn and doubtful. “Even if I managed to message her. Even if I managed to tell her I loved her. Would she even respond to me? I wouldn’t. I’m a horrible person, and I’m only getting worse.”

“*I don’t think you’re a bad person,*” Tiffany said, quietly. “All I’ve ever seen from you is… you going out of your way to help people….”

Scarecrow felt Tiffany’s arm fall from her back then, and she looked over as the triton sat up and cleared her throat.

“You know that… one of my biggest fears right now is that Constance takes my boys away from me. Right?” she said, a calm-but-sad note in her voice. “That terrifies me. So, so deeply. But… even more than that I’m…. I’m scared that if he *does* take them away they… they’ll think that it’s *their fault*. That they *did something wrong* and I stopped loving them…. If that happened I would…. I think I would actually kill for the opportunity to let them know it wasn’t their fault. That they’re good boys. That I will always, *always* love them….”

Scarecrow watched Tiffany and nodded, before taking the woman’s hand and giving it a firm squeeze. “I won’t let him take them from you. I promise. If I can…. If I can at least stop you from losing your boys, then maybe I’m really *not* as bad as I think I am. I’ll help you take care of Constance. That way we both win.”

“Thank you, Scarecrow,” Tiffany gave a sniff, and wiped her eyes. “And I promise, if I survive this, I’ll help you find your cloak. Okay? I’ll help you get home to your daughter—“

A sudden knock sounded at Tiffany's door, and Tiffany jumped and let out a fearful squeak before whirling around to stare at her front door with wide eyes.

Scarecrow drew her revolver and aimed it at the door.

"Who's there?!" she demanded.

"*US!*" came a loud, boyish cry. "Let us in!"

Tiffany was immediately on her feet, putting a hand on Scarecrow's own to gently lower her gun. "*Put it away— Put it away! It's the boys!*" she whispered, before hurrying over to the door to let her sons in.

The selkie quickly holstered her gun and covered it with her jacket. "Ah, hello Logan. Hello Trent. It's nice to see you both again. It's certainly been a while."

The boys rushed into the apartment and immediately froze as they laid eyes on Scarecrow.

Trent looked worried, his eyes wide and confused; while Logan looked suspicious, his eyes narrowed in a way that Scarecrow found endearingly familiar.

"We don't know you," Logan said, slowly.

"We've met once before," Scarecrow corrected, feeling a small-but-warm smile find its way to her lips. "Though, I looked rather different at the time…. I think *you* were distracted by meeting Johanna—" she pointed to Logan, and then to Trent in turn. "And *you* were bothering two suited men into giving you free food."

"Oh, yeah, I remember that!" Trent's worry faded, and he grinned. "Mum was really mad at me for that!"

"As is to be expected," Scarecrow gave a slight nod; her eyes flicking to glance behind the boys as two more triton women came into the apartment and embraced Tiffany.

They spoke to her quietly, in hushed whispers that Scarecrow didn't quite hear, before pecking her on the cheek and heading back out.

"G'night, boys!" one called as she left. "You behave yourselves, now! I don't want to hear about you giving your poor mother any more lip, understood?"

"Night, Grandma!" Trent called back, glancing over his shoulder. "We'll be good! Promise!"

Logan didn't reply; nor did he look away from Scarecrow. He continued to stare at her, an untrusting look in his eye.

"Hello, Logan," Scarecrow said again. The way this child was looking at her with such suspicion reminded her of herself. And she wasn't sure if that was such a good thing…. "*What?*" she asked flatly, leaning forward.

Logan stared for another moment, his eyes slowly trailing Scarecrow up and down. Then, his gaze fell on her holster and he paused— And Scarecrow realised that it had come uncovered when she'd leant over.

She pulled her jacket back in place, but it was too late.

"*You have a gun,*" Logan said, quietly. Then he raised his voice. "Mum! Why does she have a gun?!"

"She has a *gun?!*" Trent exclaimed, turning back to Scarecrow with a mix of fear and excitement. "Mum! Logan said she has a *gun!"*

"Yes, I know! I know she does!" Tiffany quickly pulled her sons close, petting their shoulders to keep them calm. "It's for her job— She works with the police."

"The *police?!*" Trent squeaked, before barraging his mother with questions.

Scarecrow sighed at the commotion being made about her presence. She didn't like to be noticed that much and right now, after such an emotionally exhaustive experience, she wasn't sure she was up to being the centre of attention. "Yes. Your mother's right. I'm a detective. I work with the Los Diablos Police Department…. Maybe I should go?"

"You don't have to," Tiffany reassured. "They'll behave. Won't you boys?"

"No," Trent replied with such an honest and innocent tone that Scarecrow couldn't help but laugh aloud at it.

"*Won't you boys?*" Tiffany repeated, her tone warning.

Trent seemed to get the hint, then, and quickly nodded. "Oh, yeah. I'll behave."

"Good…. Logan? Are you going to behave?"

Logan didn't answer. He just kept frowning at Scarecrow.

"*Logan?*"

Logan's suspicious look turned, then, from Scarecrow to his mother. "Is she here because of everything that's been going on? Is she going to shoot someone for you?"

"What— No!" Tiffany exclaimed.

"Most likely, yes," Scarecrow answered at the same time.

There was a moment of stunned silence as everyone stared at Scarecrow. The boys looked at her with a mixture of interest, anxiety, and concern— It was clear that Logan hadn't *actually* expected her to say yes to that question, and it had thrown him off…. Meanwhile Tiffany was giving Scarecrow an incredulous look. She was clearly unhappy with what the woman had said, though Scarecrow wasn't sure why; Tiffany had told her that she didn't like lying to her boys. And it would be lying to say she didn't intend to shoot people— Why else would she have a gun?

"I mean if it comes down to it, Tiffany, I will," Scarecrow said with a shrug. "It's my job, after all."

She wasn't sure why Tiffany sighed.

"I knew it!" Trent shouted. "You're going to *kill* someone!"

"Trent, no! Shush!" Tiffany scooped a hand over her son's mouth to hush the child. "Nobody is going to kill anybody!"

"Right, why don't we don't keep our voices down?" Scarecrow muttered, keeping her own voice as low and calm as she could. "Don't want to be yelling that sort of thing with nosy neighbours around, do we? They might think it's murder instead of work, right?"

Tiffany looked very tired, at that, and shook her head at Scarecrow.

Logan let out a quite gasp, and whispered under his breath. "*She* is *going to kill someone….*"

"Boys, no! Nobody is going to kill anybody!" Tiffany lied (and it was a lie— there was no way that Tiffany had *already* forgotten about their discussions on killing Constance), before guiding both her sons in the direction of their bedrooms. "She's *not* killing anybody! Scarecrow was just— She says things like that. Just like how Aunt Ruby says she's going to set things on fire…. Scarecrow! Don't put ideas like that in the boys' heads! Okay?"

"Hm. I'm sorry," Scarecrow said, sitting up straight and giving a sniff. "I didn't

mean to cause any trouble."

Tiffany sighed again, and shook her head. "It's fine—"

"—I don't *want* to go to bed, yet!" Trent complained loudly. "Mum! It's still an hour until bedtime, remember? We have a new bedtime!"

A very new, very relatable kind of exhaustion showed itself on Tiffany's face— One that Scarecrow felt herself every time that she had to deal with Browyn.

"Yeah," Logan grumbled. "And you can't just shunt us off to bed every time we start asking questions! You have to start answering them sometime!"

"Oh— Logan!" Tiffany let out a sigh. "Please. No. Don't start this again. I'm tired."

"Why are you tired?" Logan asked suspiciously.

"I just *am,*" Tiffany responded. "It's been a long day. That's all. I... had meetings with people."

"*What* people?!" Logan interrogated.

Tiffany was a terrible liar, Scarecrow thought as she watched Tiffany attempt to give vaguer and vaguer answers. *Though she could understand why, of course, Tiffany was having such a hard time with it all....*

"Mum, I'm hungry!" Trent cut in, interrupting Logan's questioning.

Tiffany took the opportunity for an out with absolutely no grace whatsoever as she scooped an arm around her son and led him to the kitchen, asking if his grandmothers had fed him.

"Yeah," Trent admitted as he vanished into the other room with his mother. "But I'm still hungry!"

And then Scarecrow was left alone with Logan; who immediately turned his frustrated glare on her.

Hm. Alright....

Scarecrow glared back.

She let her eyes squint tight, returning Logan's distrustful glare with a cool look as she leant forward and rested her hand on her knee.

For a moment, the pair just stared at each other....

Then Logan faltered.

He looked away, growing nervous, and Scarecrow leant back to sit properly in her chair again.

"You seem stressed, kid," she said. "You want to talk about it?"

Logan looked back to Scarecrow —though this time he didn't meet her eye— and slowly made his way over to sit with her. He sat opposite to her, on the seat his mother had originally sat in upon getting home, and leant over the table to whisper to her.

"*Do you know who Constance is?*" he asked.

"Yes," replied Scarecrow, simply.

An inquisitive spark flashed in his eyes. "Who?"

"A bad guy," Scarecrow answered. "A *very* bad guy."

Logan's brow furrowed, and he fidgeted in much the same way his mother did. "What does he want with Mum?"

"Wish we knew," Scarecrow replied in a gruff tone. "Then maybe your poor mother could get some sleep."

Logan looked away again. "I could figure it out, I reckon."

"Absolutely *not,*" Scarecrow warned in such a serious tone she saw Logan flinch. "Don't you try and Scooby Doo things on your own! This isn't a movie where everything turns out okay in the end— Constance has hurt people before, and I don't think he'd appreciate you asking around about his business…. You know that your mother's just trying to keep you safe, right?"

Logan let out a huff and crossed his arms, glancing down to the floor as he did. "*Mm*…."

"Mm," Scarecrow echoed, curtly.

She watched as Logan shifted quietly, and listened to Tiffany and Trent chattering in the kitchen.

"Mm," she repeated, as she watched Logan scowl to himself.

If she could redirect Logan's frustration into some sort of productivity, it might relieve some of the tension that was clearly building in the family….

Ah. She had an idea.

Scarecrow pulled out a business card from her pocket and held it out to the boy. "Listen, kid. I need a favour, right?"

Logan looked up at her, his frustration replaced with curiosity and confusion.

"I need you to keep an eye out for anything… *unusual* around the house or on the streets," she told him. "Or with your mother."

"With Mum?" Logan's eyes grew tight again, and he slowly took the card. "Why do you need to know about Mum?"

"She's stressed," Scarecrow said, her voice low. "I'm worried about her. Probably at least half as much as you are. And she seems to like keeping things to herself instead of asking for help, right?"

"Yeah. She does," Logan confirmed.

"Right. Well. I want you to watch out for her for me," Scarecrow told him. "Let me know if it looks like she needs help with anything. Okay?"

Logan hesitated, for a moment, before giving a slow nod. "Okay…."

"Good boy. Now, you keep this conversation between us, alright?" Scarecrow said. "I've told you much more than your mother would be happy with, and if she finds out I was talking with you about Constance I think she might push me out the window."

"Oh. Okay," Logan cast a glance to the window besides them. "What about Trent? Can I tell Trent?"

"No offence to your brother, but he doesn't seem like the sort of kid to be able to keep a secret," Scarecrow chuckled. "And if he tells Tiff about all this, you won't be able to keep an eye on her for me, will you?"

Logan shook his head.

"Exactly. I'm relying on you to keep me in the know," said Scarecrow. "Can you do that for me?"

"Um… yeah. I think so," Logan shifted in his seat before, tentatively, holding out a fist.

It took Scarecrow a moment to understand what he was doing. But when she did, she moved her own fist to bump against it. "And I'm serious about not running off on your own— If I hear you've been running off on your own, I'll get my friends in the force to throw you in jail. You understand me?"

Logan's eyes widened, and he gave a fearful nod.

“Good,” Scarecrow rose to her feet, then, and made her way to the kitchen.

She found Tiffany helping Trent cook on the stove, and motioned her over to the adjoining arch.

“Scary?” Tiffany asked.

“I think I’m going to take my leave, now,” Scarecrow said, softly. “But just remember, Tiffany, that you’re not alone in all of this. Alright?”

Tiffany nodded, rubbing at her arm and licking at her lips nervously.

“Mm…” Scarecrow gave a grunt, casting a glance around to both of Tiffany’s distracted sons before she leant in close and dropped her voice to a whisper. “*I promise we will get through this, Tiffany. Together. Fae’s word.*”

“*You mean that?*” Tiffany whispered back.

“*Yes, I mean it,*” said Scarecrow. “*And to prove how much I mean it I’ll share with you a very, very important secret…. My real name is Muriel.*”

—END—

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