

# Wall of Fire Deleted Scene (Emery and Vander)

By Melanie Tays

*Note: This scene is from an early draft of Wall of Fire that was quite different in many ways—it's not a scene directly cut from the finished Wall of Fire novel as you have read it. Can you spot the differences?*

I ride the elevator up, tapping my foot in agitation. I don't know what floor he got off on. On instinct, I take the elevator all the way to the rooftop, hoping Eason will meet me there where we talked before, and I can get answers to some of my mounting and vexing questions. But when I exit the doors, the sky is black and the rooftop deserted.

Disappointed, I turn to leave, but then an idea strikes me. This is actually an opportunity that may be difficult to replicate. I look around for a loose rock or brick, anything I can throw.

There's only the dim halo of the city lights to illuminate the area, but it doesn't take me long to find a loose brick that

is just about the right size, maybe ten pounds. I move swiftly to the wall and take aim. A practice shot will help me be prepared when I have a package ready for Whyte.

I pull back my arm and launch the brick into the air. The trajectory is good, though maybe just a tad high. Still, it will easily clear the wall. I smile in satisfaction. But then I have to squint in the dark because something is wrong. Then—thwack—the brick sails back and smacks me hard on my left shoulder.

I yelp, rubbing at the injury. There doesn't appear to be any blood, but it stings like mad.

“What in the world did you do that for?”

I spin at the sound to find Vander standing behind me, observing me in mixed amusement and bewilderment.

“I...I just wanted to see...how far I could throw,” I stammer an explanation.

“Not very smart with the barrier field that runs through the wall,” he replies as he approaches and examines my injured shoulder.

“Ouch,” I complain.

“It's probably just bruised. I bet you'll be fine tomorrow, but if you want I can take you down to the medical bay for treatment.”

I do want treatment, because my shoulder really does

hurt and because it's an excellent opportunity to pilfer more of the supplies I need for Whye. But I don't want anyone thinking too hard about why I—a girl from the Fringe—might be trying to launch something over the wall. It's too big a risk. Besides, if a barrier field runs through—and apparently above—the wall, then my only plan for how to deliver the supplies just evaporated.

“No, I don't need any treatment,” I assure him. “Let's just forget this ever happened.” I'm suddenly anxious to get off the roof and find Eason. “I was actually looking for someone else,” I say. “I should go.”

I sidestep him. And then I freeze, because the woman's voice in the device attached to my ear resonates through my head.

*“Kiss Vander Stratton.”*

I stiffen and he turns to me, confused.

This isn't a Trial! What's happening?

And then it starts.

Beep..... Beep..... Beep.

Kiss Vander?

My mind races on overdrive.

Can the Trial Masters, or Council, or whoever it is that speaks to me through this withering device in my ear give me commands that aren't related to the Trials? Do I have to

follow them?

The tones grow progressively closer, blaring in my head like an alarm, and I know that the answers to all of my questions are yes. Yes they can, and yes I do if I want to survive.

*“Kiss Vander Stratton,”* the voice repeats.

Beep..... Beep..... Beep.

Kiss him how? On the cheek—on the lips?

I turn to Vander, but don't move and he watches me quizzically, unsure what to make of my behavior. Clearly he has not received this same command—to kiss me.

Beep.... Beep.... Beep.

My heart is racing, head pounding.

My only experience with kissing is when I used to sneak little pecks with Carson Pratt in the back of the classroom when the teacher wasn't looking. We were both eleven, so I don't think that counts as much.

BEEP.. BEEP.. BEEP.

And I'm running out of time.

I can't do this halfway because I don't have time for a second go if the Council isn't satisfied.

In a blaze of motion, I leap forward, closing the slight gap between Vander and myself. Thankfully, he doesn't move as I place my hand behind his head and pull his face toward

mine. My trembling lips meet his, and the beeping instantly ceases.

This probably feels more like an assault than an actual kiss. My body has gone rigid and a foggy haze confuses my thoughts. I don't know how much time passes—probably only seconds, but it feels like eternity—before Vander breaks away. But he only pulls back far enough to look into my eyes. He raises his hand to grasp my uninjured arm above my elbow, locking me in place.

I open my mouth to try and explain, but the way he's looking at me intimidates me into silence.

I don't know exactly what I expect at this point. Still, I'm surprised by the expression on his face. He's staring deep into my eyes, but I don't feel as though he's seeing me at all. It's as though behind his intense green eyes he's working out hundreds of complex calculations.

I don't try to escape his grasp or break his gaze.

Then, suddenly, he gives one sharp nod. "Okay," he says firmly and presses his lips to mine for a second kiss.

This kiss isn't colored by the threat of exile.

This kiss I can feel, and it's nice.

When I pull away from him, he releases my arm. I breathe deeply, raising my head to the night sky and see the twinkling lights. For one exultant moment, I think they're

stars—real or projected, I don't care. But with disappointment, I realize they're merely the lights of hover cams circling like vultures.

I still have no idea what just happened, or what to do now. My head is spinning, pulse racing as I turn back toward the door to the dining hall just in time to see someone wearing purple disappearing.

I gasp. "I think they saw us," I whisper to Vander.

He puts an arm around my shoulders. "Good," he says.

The cams are still hovering. In fact, even more have joined them, creating a little swarm above our heads. He leans closer, speaking right into my ear. "The cams got plenty of shots. That's the point, right. If we're going to be a couple, the whole city better know it or it won't earn us any votes." He explains. "Good idea," he adds appreciatively. "We'll certainly make a noteworthy couple, though I have to admit I never would have thought of this match myself. But look at you—a pro at working your advantages."

And now I understand what he was puzzling out in the interlude between our kisses—whether or not aligning himself with me as my boyfriend would help or hurt him in the eyes of the voters. I wonder what he factored into that equation that weighed in my favor. Even though it's all fake, somehow it still feels good that he considers me an asset.

Guilt claws at my insides as though I've lied to him. He thinks this was my idea, just a strategy. I wonder if I should tell him I didn't have a choice. Would that change things for some reason? I don't know. And until I do know, I decide it's best to keep that detail to myself.

I have no idea why the Council would make me do this. Was it just a test to see if I would do something unexpected and uncomfortable? That seems too simplistic an explanation. I don't have nearly enough information to make better guesses, so I just try to put it out of my head.