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Invincible

Dawn yawned and rolled onto her side, marking her place in the book she'd been reading with a finger. "Des?"

Des glanced aside, adjusting his glasses with a finger. "Yes, Shakhar?"

Dawn yawned again, covering it with the book. "M'bored. This book isn't as good as I thought it'd be."

Des rolled onto his side and looked at her. "Which book is that, anyway?"

Dawn shrugged, glancing at the title automatically. "*Little House in the Highlands*. My sister used to love it, but I'm kind of just bored. It's written for kids, and there's no adventure, and I think I'm actually more in the mood to watch something, anyway..." She sighed and put the book down behind her. "Wrong choice for right now, I guess."

"You can always peek at my book," Des said, pointing behind his back with a thumb. An orange book with an Ancient Egyptian ibis-headed god on its cover was lying, closed, near him. "Then again *Of Grammatology* isn't exactly super-ultra mega-fast paced." He chuckled.

Dawn grinned. "Yeah, I'll pass for now. Not that I don't like grammar rules — assuming that's even what the book's about — but I'm really not in the mood to read about them."

"Philosophy, actually," Des said. "Textual analysis, if I'm not mistaken." He rolled back onto his back, put his hands beneath his neck, and sighed. "Both my mum and a friend back home spit fire and sulphur on it, so I thought I'd see what's the hassle about."

Dawn made a face. "*Definitely* not for me right now. There's a reason I went for Ethics instead in the grade twelve stuff. Would've avoided that, too, actually, but..." She shrugged.

"Eh, not for everyone," Des said with a shrug. "Then again I'm glad I was able to take philosophy in school, even as an *al ezori* thing."

Dawn bit back a grin. “You know,” she said, “you’re really just making me happier that I dropped out. Even Ethics was mainly bearable because I didn’t have to do it in a classroom setting. Although — what’s *al ezori*? In... in area? Something like that? Oh, wait — an elective?”

“It actually means ‘super-area-al’...” Des paused and rubbed his chin. “Something like that, anyway, you get what I mean, I hope? It’s an elective you take in grade ten or eleven till grade twelve. It’s just about the only thing you’d study away from your own school, basically — like, in a different school, or in the university’s physics labs, stuff like that.”

“Huh, cool.” Dawn stretched a little and then curled up more. “Think my high school offered a Hebrew class at a university, if you got advanced enough, though I’m pretty sure Me’ira said they stopped by the time she got to grade twelve. Kind of a shame, I guess.”

“Huh, didn’t know that.” Des groaned. “My everything hurts. I did too much running in the last mission.”

Dawn patted his shoulder sympathetically. “That’s the worst. Well, okay, actually getting injured is the worst, but too much running gets annoying.”

“Well, I’m luck — no, I won’t say it, the IO will get me if I do,” Des said. Clumsily, he nuzzled closer to her. “You smell good.”

Dawn smiled happily and draped an arm over his waist. “Your hair’s all pretty in the sunlight.”

“Why, thank you, O Pretty One,” Des mumbled into Dawn’s shoulder.

Dawn’s smile became a grin. “Could’ve sworn I just called *you* the pretty one,” she said. “I *guess* we can both be pretty if you like, though.”

Des half hummed, half-grinned. “Beauty’s not a ‘I’m beautiful, nobody else is’ thing, Shakhar dear. We can be both beautiful and pretty and stuff.” He moved his shoulders, then grimaced. “Ow.”

“Aw.” Dawn moved a little closer, pulling him carefully into a hug. “And, point.” She nudged his head with hers. “And, hey — if I can make nearly it nine years without a permanent injury, then I’m sure you — whoops, nope, didn’t say anything, no way, nothing about injuries...” She sighed, glancing nervously upward. “Glaurung it. Well, if I get grievously injured sometime soon, you’ll come visit me in Medical, right?”

“Of course I will, silly,” Des said. He hugged her back. “Wait a sec,” he said after a moment, “nine years...? You know, I’ve been here for four years, ish, and that nearly bit into high school...” He looked Dawn in the eyes. “Did you skip school for this?” He waved his hand around.

“Well.” Dawn dragged the word out. “Not for the *Courtyard*, exactly, but... yeah, I joined the PPC in the middle of grade eight. It seemed like a great opportunity — and it was a lot more fun than school — and I just kind of... stayed. I mean, I bounced around departments, but there were only a few times when I seriously considered leaving, and, well...” She shrugged. “Obviously, I stayed.”

“Learn something new every day,” Des said. He let go of Dawn and stared into the distance. “I think this is the bit where I’m supposed to be horrified, but if your education system is anything like the Israeli one, it’s not that big a loss, I guess.”

Dawn shrugged. “No, it was okay. I mean, maybe high school would’ve been different — it was bigger, and everything — but I probably could’ve adjusted. Me’ira managed, more or less.”

“That’s kinda weird when you think of it, though,” Des said slowly. “I mean, you usually think about something like ‘school, army, uni, a job’ when you think about a person’s life. And, well. Here I am — chasing Sues instead of practicing the axe. And you, too, Shakhar. Grade nine?” He sighed and shook his head.

Dawn tilted her head to one side. “You know, Des, it isn’t exactly unusual for agents to have left school — we’ve got kind of a lot of former high schoolers, really. And middle school wasn’t so unusual when I did it, though it’s declined since then — think the youngest I’ve ever heard of was twelve, or maybe eleven, though that sounds kind of horrifying, now.”

“On one hand, you always hear about education being important, all that shit,” Des said in the same slow tone. “I mean, out of all of the people I know from my age group, back home? Exactly one dude dropped out of school. Out of two hundred-ish people.” He sighed. “Crazy guy, used to make bombs in his free time. Anyway.” He cleared his throat. “On the other hand, well. Considering the type of education we get back home, I can’t say I buy into that, or blame people who drop out. Especially agents; since when knowing how to differentiate a function helps a field agent?”

Dawn shrugged. “You could maybe use it to bring some logic into a Sue’s high school math class, if that ever happened,” she suggested. “Then again, I haven’t really seen that happen yet. Science, though...” She shrugged again and then hesitated for a bit, frowning.

“Well basically, if you go to DoSAT or whatever, you probably need the science-y and math-y stuff,” Des said, draping a hand across Dawn’s waist. “And there’s a value, I believe, to knowing the classics. But, look at me. I got math and for what? Calculating the probability of me falling in love with you?”

Dawn opened her mouth to say something and then closed it again, going pinker in the face. “I — um — d’you think there’s a high probability of that, then?”

“Hundred percent, Shakhar,” he replied with a smile.

Dawn swallowed, and leaned forward to kiss him softly. “I guess this is the point where I tell you that I actually did get math and stuff?” she said once she had pulled back, smiling. “T’Zar convinced me into homeschooling. I graduated high school... oh, last year. Got a certificate and everything. Meanwhile, my mom’s sending me photos from my *brother’s* graduation...” She sighed. “Oh, well. At least I got the thing. T’Zar’s happy, I know a bit more, and I could totally go to university at some point! Yay.”

“All’s well that ends well,” Des said.

Dawn shrugged. “I guess.” She sighed. “I think the main amusing thing about this is that it took a Vulcan to convince me to go to high school. And to get me through it, actually. I mean, seriously — a Vulcan? You’d think my parents would’ve managed it, or maybe I’d do it myself in the aim of being responsible, or something. You wouldn’t think I’d need help from an alien who doesn’t even exist in my home canon.” She sighed again. “At least I did it, though, I guess.”

“Which is what matters,” Des said. “Mikol melamdai heskalti: learn from everybody!” he added solemnly.

That got Dawn smiling again. “Yeah... Especially at the PPC, when there’s so much to learn from so many different people. It’s a shame *not* to learn here, really.”

“Though the things you learn are really, really weird,” Des said. “I can fire a gun!”

“I can shoot a longbow and use a flamethrower.” Dawn grinned. “I *also* know more or less how to control time sickness in Time Lord disguise. Well, so long as the time distortions aren’t too awful. It works well enough in milder badfics — milder in time distortion sense, that is.”

“No, I mean. Guns. They’re so weird!” Des exclaimed. “They should be impossible, and yet they exist. And they’re deadly. It’s not like an axe; with an axe, you can feel the person you’re fighting. With a gun? You could be hundreds of metres away.” He sighed. “It’s sad.”

Dawn reached out to cup his face with one hand. “Congratulations, Des — you just summed up one of the things my Earth’s been struggling with more or less since guns were invented. Or, well, some of the problems with them that people struggle with.”

Des gently took hold of Dawn’s hand with his own. “Guns are a sad, sad invention, Shakhar,” he said softly, “and I’m glad we don’t have any back home.”

Dawn's mouth curled up at one corner, briefly and without humor. "Don't think I've ever asked — does your home have bombs? Atomic, nuclear, what-have-you? Because, if you don't, I think you may definitely have the better deal."

"Nope, nothing like that. A-bombs were theorised on but given up as impossible." Des let go of Dawn's hand and leaned closer, hugging her.

Dawn sighed, and tucked her head against his shoulder. "Sounds nice. Wonder what a history class in your world is like without them — I mean, it's got to be pretty different, right? Hopefully, anyway." She sighed again, and pressed closer.

Des mumbled something, leaning his head against Dawn's. "Less people die," he said after a while. "What with duels being the way wars are decided."

"Sounds like something out of... out of a fantasy book, maybe." She wrapped an arm around him, loosely grasping the back of his shirt. "Or... wasn't there something a little like that in *Ender's Game*, except it was a simulation that turned out to be real...? Hm. I think I misremembered." She closed her eyes.

"It is something out of the great wide world outside," Des said and waved an arm around. "There are many strange things there. Like that simulation in *Ender's Game* — Ender and the rest thought they were training, but they actually commanded the fleet in the war against the Buggers."

"Yeah, that was an interesting twist," Dawn said quietly. "Or, at least, I think I thought that — it's been a while since I read the book, honestly." She sighed, and hugged him a little closer. "Really, though, I could've sworn I've seen that single combat idea before. Or maybe I'm just confusing it with Tamora Pierce's knights. I'm not sure."

"Single combat is hardly endemic to my home 'verse," Des said, nodding. "Even the specific, 'a lot rides on this duel' type isn't so uncommon as to be surprising."

"Oh, of course," Dawn said. "I just feel like I've heard the exact idea before."

"If you want silly, you can always have *Yu-Gi-Oh!*," Des said with a smile. "Oh noes! Pegasus kidnapped my grandpa! Gotta go play card games to save him!"

Dawn snickered. "Imagine if we had to do that with Sues. 'You've been shacking up with Boromir, Legolas, and Aragorn, all at the same time! I must play cards against you in order to restore canon!'" She paused, her expression shifting slowly to confusion. "Wait, Pegasus? Would that be some villain going by the name Pegasus, or the actual Pegasus? I'm never really sure with some canons."

“Maximillion Pegasus in the dub, Pegasus J. Crawford in the original,” Des said. He chuckled as well. “*Yu-Gi-Oh!* is weird like that.”

Dawn shook her head slightly, smiling. “And this is... a human? An actual winged horse?”

“Camp gay human,” Des said, his smile widening. “Well, he acts gay, but he’s actually a widower. He wants the MacGuffin in order to bring his dead wife back to life. We should maybe watch *Yu-Gi-Oh!* together. It makes for excellent riffing material.”

“Huh, alright.” Dawn nudged her head against his shoulder. “And sure, why not?” She grinned, rolling her head to the side so she could look at him. “You and riffing a weird show about card games solving everything — what’s not to enjoy?”

“Shall we, then?” Des said, stroking her hair.

“Hm, in a minute.” Dawn’s eyes were trying to close with every pass of his hand over her hair. “First we stay here for a little. Yes?” She smiled at him.

“Yes.” Des continued to stroke Dawn’s hair, staring into the distance.

And so stay they did.