Encroaching

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by elo

Summary

The first time Floyd saw Riddle Rosehearts he thought it would be easy to bully him out of his seat.

Notes

This was written before the second Beans Day event established a canon first meeting for these two - I still like my take though.

Floyd looked up from his textbook for the first time since Azul and Jade sat him down to study, having been a diligent student for a good portion of the afternoon, only to see that Jade was already watching him.

Floyd tilted his head, hoping Jade got “why are you checking on me” out of the action, and Jade smiled in return before nudging Floyd's foot with his own. He shouldn't have been able to do that, they made sure to sit away from each other so Azul had plenty of room for his papers, but Floyd must have been stretching out slowly, taking up more space as the afternoon went on.

Floyd hadn't realized it himself, but now he sees he's bored. Spellbook reading was good so long as he could flip to the things that sounded fun, but while “constriction spells” were fun to read about at first he'd started to wonder whether they'd be as satisfying as using his tail and lost his train of thought entirely. He didn't know what he was supposed to be finding, and at this point he didn't care.

With both of them aware of Floyd's boredom, Floyd and Jade looked to Azul. He was long past his own classwork, now poring over the student records book he'd cut a deal with the librarian to borrow for the day. Looking for customers was great, seeing that Azul's list of names had gotten longer reminded Floyd that the semester wouldn't be entirely boring, but there was nothing Floyd could do to look for customers himself and if Azul was thinking about the business then he wouldn't care if Floyd was skipping out on schoolwork for a moment.

“I'm gonna go nap,” Floyd announced, drawing himself up to go as he did. Jade gave him a small wave. “Meet ya in the lounge.”

Azul didn't even look up from the note he was writing, “Try not to sleep through opening.”

Floyd knew Jade would make sure he got there on time no matter what, so he was able to forget the warning the instant he got up and walk to his favourite spot in the library without a thought in his head.

The college's library was confusing compared to sea libraries, so much more square and stuffed together than any building in the sea, but Floyd didn't need to know how to navigate the whole thing to find the stairs and start scanning for a good nap spot.

There weren't many comfortable places in the library, most of its seats were elaborate old-fashioned desks with worn-out plastic chairs, but there were a couple of sitting areas with plush couches intended for reading. From what Floyd gathered they were mostly used for slacking off, every time he's been in the library he's seen at least one animal-eared student sunning themself on a couch, but as long as you were quiet the librarians didn't mind and Floyd took full advantage of that policy.

He even had a favourite seat, a worn-out brown couch that had a good view out a window and flat enough arm rests that it wasn't painful to drape his legs over the side, but as Floyd approached that very same seat he could see it was occupied.

The student in Floyd's favourite spot had hair as red as any merperson's colouring, a Heartslabyul ribbon on his sleeve, and a small frame that suggested he was a first year. Easy to spot, easy to pick on without Azul caring, and easy to intimidate.

Floyd almost whistled on his way over to the seat, but settled for a grin as he got into place, standing slightly to the student's right and leaning forward enough to loom.

“Gooooooood afternoon little first year.”

He expected the student to jump, maybe even to squeak, but the student wasn't surprised at all. He looked up at Floyd evenly, with a slight furrow to his brow, and asked: “Aren't you also in your first year?”

No hint of fear in his voice whatsoever. Floyd smiled even wider.

“Good job, not everyone notices.” Floyd sat down on the low table across from the student, willing to tolerate the surface for now so his new opponent could see him at eye level. If his height hadn't impressed the student, a better look at his teeth might do the trick. “Or maybe you know who I am already?”

In response to Floyd getting closer, the student straightened his back and rested his hands primly on the book in his lap. Everything about his physical features suggested he'd be easy prey, but everything about his posture suggested alertness, certainty, and an unwillingness to back down.

“I have no idea whatsoever who you are, I only know you're in my year because you and your twin stand out. Would you mind telling me why you're talking to me?”

In that moment it became clear to Floyd that trying to scare the student wouldn't make a difference; he wasn't going to be intimidated and it was time to switch tactics.

“Well, you seem fun!”

The student stared at him blankly, seemingly unable to process Floyd's new approach, and as he turned the cogs in his head Floyd took his chance to go ahead and get on the couch.

He sat away from the student, his back against the couch's empty armrest and his legs swung up onto the couch. He kept his legs bent and his knees up close to his face, but he and the student surely both knew that he could choose to stretch out at any moment and get in the student's space immediately.

Floyd wanted to hum again. The couch was sinking down just the right amount, exactly as he remembered it, and the student was turning to look at him in total confusion.

“And what, pray tell, does that mean?...”

“Don't tell me you don't know what 'fun' means,” Floyd said, even more satisfied as the student's eyebrow twitched in response. “That's a basic word and I'm pretty sure you're a human, you don't have an excuse not to know.”

“Of course I know what it means,” he huffed in response. “I'm asking what your meaning of the word is right here and right now.”

“I mean what I said and I said what I mean. You're sitting in my favourite spot and you seem fun, won't you let me join you for a bit?”

Floyd relaxed one of his legs, stretching it out until the tip of his shoe was nearly touching the student. The student minutely scooted away and Floyd thought that he was right, this guy was super fun. His face was even turning slightly red.

“Don't sit down without an invitation!”

“It's a public couch, isn't it? I shouldn't need an invite.”

“That's not what I—” the student sputtered and Floyd continued to smile at him. “Never mind rules, this is in violation of common manners by anyone's metric, what in wonderland are you hoping to accomplish with—”

Floyd stretched out his other leg and poked the student with his toe.

The student emitted a high-pitched screech of some sort.

Floyd continued to grin at him, “I really like it here so if you want to be alone, what about you play me for it?”

“RIDICULOUS!!”

The student sprung to his feet, face as red as his hair and the book he was reading held to his chest indignantly.

“IF I HAD THE AUTHORITY IT WOULD BE OFF WITH YOUR HEAD!!”

“Wooooow, I thought humans weren't allowed to behead at all anymore.”

“I DIDN'T MEAN THAT LITERALLY!!”

“What's your meaning of the term then, right here and right now?”

To have his words thrown back at him left the student stock still and sputtering, still red in the face. Floundering like this, he looked completely fish-like, moving his lips for no sound at all. Borderline cute if Floyd was being honest.

The student stood frozen in front of Floyd, fists tight with barely contained rage, for a few seconds longer. Floyd wondered if he was going to start a fight despite his size for a few moments before the student gritted his teeth and huffed.

“I don't have time for this.”

He pivoted away before Floyd could physically react, his uniform jacket flapping in the air from the turn. He stomped his way through the library aisles with as much energy as he

yelled, and Floyd watched the show with a smile until the student turned the corner out of sight.

Floyd sighed contentedly, sprawling out and letting his head rest on the couch's arm.

That was the most fun he'd had teasing someone since school started, and with the student being in first year Floyd had three more years of teasing the boy to look forward to.

Between his satisfaction at a job well done, thoughts of the student's goldfish red face, and the sun shining nicely through the window Floyd was able to get napping in no time, blissfully unaware of the scolding that awaited him when Azul found out the student Floyd chased out of the library was almost certainly going to be a dorm leader before the year was through.

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