

Wednesday, January 9, 2:20 p.m., Tracy Island

"Okay now, Alex. Hold the racket like this..."

Scott put a hand over his younger brother's, subtly shifting its position. Alex frowned; the grip didn't feel natural to him. He held the grip though, as Scott backed off.

"Now I'll lob the ball your way, and you hit it." Softly pitching the tennis ball towards his brother, he watched as the boy tapped it a little with the edge of his racket. Scott sighed.

They were on their first tennis lesson. It had taken a while to get around to this sport as Gordon had been the primary physical education coach, and tennis was not one of his favorite games. He tended to choose what he liked to do. Tin-Tin or Alan would have been better teachers, but Tin-Tin was wrapped up in bringing the new dicetyline cannon online, and Alan... Scott scowled, unaware of his facial expression as he went to fetch the ball. When he returned, Alex had a hurt look on his face.

"What did I do wrong?" the boy asked.

Scott suddenly realized his mistake and, taking a deep breath, smiled at his younger brother. "Nothing, Alex. Really. I was just thinking of something else, that's all. Let's try it again, okay? This time, you want to hit the ball with the sweet spot, not the edge." He heard a clatter to one side, and glanced that way. "You'd better be watching, Spud. You're next." Tyler reached over to grab his racket, then settled back down to watch, pouting.

This time Scott lobbed the ball a little higher and faster than before. Alex swung the racket and made contact in the proper place. The ball bounced just before reaching Scott.

"That was better, Alex!" Scott said. "Now, try to hit it harder."

He pitched the ball again, and this time, Alex's arm pulled back and he hit the ball just as instructed. It headed back along its original trajectory too fast for an astonished Scott to move out of the way, and it smacked into him several inches south of the solar plexus. He let out a groan and dropped to his knees.

"Scott!" Cherie dropped her racket and ran to her older brother. "Are you all right?"

Alex joined her, his face full of apprehension. "I'm sorry, Scott! I didn't mean to! I'm so sorry!"

Tyler, on the other hand, sat on the sidelines and laughed, hugging himself with his skinny arms.

"I... I'm okay," Scott ground out, grimacing. He staggered to his feet, leaning on Cherie to stand upright. "It's okay, Alex. I know it was an accident." He groaned again. "Teaches me to look at this as an actual athletic event, and take the usual precautions." He shot a glare at the still giggling

Tyler. "We'll come back to this a little later today, I think, and when we do, Tyler's first."

"We can't come back this afternoon," Cherie explained. "Miss Cassie invited me to a tea ceremony; it's at five."

Scott sighed. "All right. Tomorrow then." He waved his students away. "Go do something active!"

"Last one in the pool is a rotten egg!" Tyler exclaimed. He dropped his racket and turned to run.

"Spud!" Scott's shout stopped him in his tracks. "You'll be the last one because you get to pick up all the balls and rackets and put them away properly."

"Aww, Scott!" the boy whined.

Scott grinned, and motioned to the equipment. "Maybe next time you'll think twice before you laugh at the teacher!"