

I Get Knocked Down

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With thanks to Fiffolle for beta-reading.

Chapter 1

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A Primeval Fanon Short Story

Lyle's lungs were bursting. He'd thought he was pretty fit, thanks to the university football team and the OTC, but more than half the class seemed to be ahead of him and he was damned if he was going to fall behind any further. Sandhurst's Old College was somewhere off in the distance, oozing discipline, precision and tradition from every carefully placed brick. Lyle wanted to be a part of that.

He realised more men were passing him by. He'd over-stretched himself at the start of the run, trying to keep pace with the leaders and he was paying for it now. A body bumped into him. He lost his balance and felt himself falling.

"You all right there mate?"

He looked up into dark brown eyes. It was a cheerful London accent clearly belonging to the bald-headed Indian-looking bloke standing above him with a hand outstretched. Well, to be honest, he wasn't so much standing as leaning, with his other hand on his knee, gasping for breath as well.

Lyle took the hand and hauled himself up. "I'll survive. Jon Lyle, by the way."

"Hamza Sayed." Sayed straightened up. "We'd better get going again. Don't want to be the last back."

Lyle looked behind them and was pleased to see there were more people straggling along than he had first thought. "Not much danger of that, I think."

Hamza Sayed clutched on tight to the rock wall and wondered how on earth Lyle had ever persuaded him to come down here. He peered upwards at the ridiculously

shaped twist and curve of the tunnel above him.

“You reached the grinder yet?” asked Lyle’s voice.

“The what?”

“It’s not really much of a squeeze. Tends to take novices that way though and we call it the grinder for fun. You’ll have to wriggle round a bit.”

Hamza closed his eyes and reminded himself that the walls were not actually closing in on him and that the not-actually-a-grinder was going to be perfectly safe. He hauled himself upwards, wedged his left foot at right angles in some kind of crack and groped for the next handhold which Lyle assured him was on the wall behind him. His fingers scrabbled at some bare earth. Bits of dirt and gravel dropped down onto his face. He ducked instinctively, a mental image of being buried alive flashing across his mind. His left hand reflexively let go.

“Falling!” he managed to shout.

The line jerked taut, halting his descent.

“Caught you,” came Lyle’s voice. “How did you manage to bloody fall? I’ve taken school kids up that climb.”

“Momentary lapse,” muttered Sayed.

“That’s not like you.”

“I’m fine.” Sayed grabbed the rock face in front of him and began to climb once more. Caves, he decided, were definitely not his thing. Hopefully Lyle would stick to proper outdoors rock-climbing in future.

They were in a bar in Sarajevo but for some reason Danny Boy was blaring out on the speakers.

“Fucking Irish theme bar,” slurred Lieutenant Lyle as he downed his third vodka.

Lieutenant Sayed stared at his drink and tried to remember what it was. He was also trying to recall why drinking alcohol, after more than twenty years of abstinence, had seemed like the right thing to do two hours previously. The evening had started out on lager and cider, he remembered that. He took a cautious sip and decided the drink was probably some kind of whiskey.

“You’re a rotten Muslim, you know that,” observed Lyle.

“You trying to pick a fight, on the day your Dad died and all?”

“He’d have said the same thing. You are totally pissed. Never seen you pissed before.”

“I’m keeping you company.” Sayed remembered why he was doing this and downed the probably whiskey in one.

“He was a good man, my Dad,” said Lyle glumly.

It was never established how the fight started. Lyle claimed, in private, that one of the Paras had spoken ill of his father. Sayed vaguely recalled something about Islam. They both agreed that they had stayed standing which was the important thing as far as the two men were concerned.

Sayed made a mental note that Lyle’s opinion didn’t actually trump the Prophet’s, especially where alcohol was concerned.

“You’re crazy,” remarked Lyle as he checked Sayed’s ’chute.

“Then why are you here with me?”

“Someone has to watch your crazy arse.”

“This is hardly a war zone.”

Lyle peered at the mountains below them and shook his head. “Couldn’t we have done this somewhere sensible first?”

“Where’s the fun in that?”

“I’m thinking health and safety, sane behaviour, knowing what you’re doing.”

“Says Mr. Crazy Cave-diver. Don’t go all health and safety on me. I know your reputation. Anyway, we’ve skydived lots of times. This is just the same with a bit of extra fun involved.”

Lyle didn’t comment. Sayed was right that this shouldn’t be that dangerous. They both had the relevant training and safety equipment.

“Ready?” asked the instructor. He opened the door of the plane. Sayed jumped out. Lyle was damned if he was going to be knocked out and followed.

They opened their arms and legs and let the wingsuits steer them through the air currents.

When they reached the ground safely Sayed was grinning. “I’ve got to get some more BASE jumping experience. Imagine doing that along a cliff face.”

Lyle shook his head. “*You* imagine. You can have the skies and I’ll stick to the caves.”

The roadside bomb knocked the landrover down, tumbling it off the road and into the dry sand of Afghanistan.

Sayed kicked at the door, forcing it open. He crawled out into the sunlight, aware that Lyle was on his heels. Gunfire stuttered out from somewhere in the boulders surrounding them. Sayed made a dash for cover and heard Lyle opening fire behind him. Once he was wedged between two rocks, he opened fire in turn and watched as Lyle covered the distance between them.

“Driver was a gonner,” muttered Lyle.

“I saw.”

“Fuel tank is leaking.”

“Any other cheerful news for me?”

The rest of the convoy had halted. Soldiers were laying down a covering fire. Sayed and Lyle needed to get back to the main company, but Sayed didn’t reckon much for their chances out in the open. They both eyed the landrover thoughtfully. Suddenly a lick of flame sprung up in the fuel around the vehicle.

“We’re going to have to make a run for it,” observed Lyle.

“I agree.”

“Together?”

“As long as you don’t want me to hold your hand.”

The two men began to run, away from the landrover and back towards their troops. There was a large explosion and they were both knocked flying through the air.

“So this better offer? What is it?” Lyle was curious.

Sayed shrugged. “Desk job with a UN outfit, based in Geneva?”

“Desk job?” Lyle sputtered. In the half light of the campfire Sayed’s face was unreadable. “Give me a break! You’ll go stir crazy in a desk job.”

“Maybe I’m fed up of getting knocked about all the time.”

“No you’re not. Don’t give me that shit.” Lyle realised he was getting angry.

Sayed just shrugged. “Whatever mate. There’s a promotion goes with it. So it’s the quiet life for me from now on.”

And that was that. Lyle tried one or twice more to find out why Hamza had chosen to leave active service and each time he came away dissatisfied. Something

about the whole situation didn't ring true.
So they drifted apart.

Lyle was binding up Lester's wounds and wondering how to get the remaining ARC team out of the building safely.

"All the merry band here I see," Lester said acidly.

Lyle turned round to greet Jenny, Abby and Connor and his eyes widened in surprise at the UNIT Captain who followed them.