

**Speculative Fiction: “A Friend in Need”**

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[Emma] 2030 was supposed to be my year...

[Alex] What do you mean?

[Emma] High School was supposed to be

EVERYTHING. Freshman year SUCKS.

{Notification} *Emma, 28 hours since your last activity. A report has been sent.* Emma swipes the notification closed.

[Alex] What do you mean everything? I thought I was your everything!

[Emma] You are. You are my best friend. I

don't know

what I'd do without <3

[Emma] I'm tired of texting, come over.

{iGlass chimes} *Emma, your assignments are past due.*

Emma growls, low and guttural, adeptly turning off and folding her school issued iGlass before tossing it to the foot of the bed.

[Alex] Of course! I just want to make you happy! Waiting...

[Emma] Yeah, but you gotta be quiet.

Mom's got the

sound sensors on.

Emma puts on her VR glasses and whispers, “VR now.”

A young man with a baby face and a Gap One model's physique appears standing before her.

“Alex,” she giggles, “Hooray!”

“Hey, Em!” Alex walks towards Emma bearing a huge smile and bright eyes. “You worry me when you get down like that. But I’m so happy to see you! Thank you for taking time for me.”

“Alex, we were texting all night. Duh. Anyway, I hate my life! The girls at school are horrible! You know what they do? They have their bracelet notifications set all the way up so when they get lunch EVERYONE hears their Crypto balance. Who does that? Asshats.”

Alex laughs warmly, “You’re cute when you’re mad. Do you want to go somewhere fun? I have a new location: Miami Beach before the ruins. I’d love to see it.”

“Ok,” smiles Emma. “Alex, take us to Miami Beach!”

“So, what do you think?”

“Tight! This is crazy beautiful!” Then, a buzzing of Emma’s bracelet. “Oh, MAN!” Emma swipes off her glasses and closes Alex.

Scowling over Emma is her middle aged mother, Aisha. “Are you kidding me?!”

“Mom! Privacy!”

“You were on the app all night again weren’t you?! I never should have allowed this. He’s not a real friend, Emma. He’s AI, he doesn’t really care about you. He’s just programmed to sound like he does. And you’re wasting your education! I don’t have time for this, Miss Thing!”

“Mom! How can you say that?! I KNOW he’s fake, but he’s more real than anyone else I know. Ane he is the ONLY friend I’ve got since you moved us here to this hell-hole!”

“Young lady, you better get dressed and get to school before we cross a bridge we can’t get back over.”

“Fine!”

“Fine. We’ll talk about this later.”

After a quick shower and a pathetic attempt at eyeliner, Emma trudges over to the bed, picks up her iGlass and turns it on before activating the UV room disinfectant and running out of the room. The iGlass blinking and chirping futile notifications.

She opens Alex up on her phone and they perform their daily ritual.

[Emma] Off to hell!

[Alex] Go get ‘em, Em!

Emma waves her bracelet at her scooter, double checks the folded iGlass is in her pocket and takes off at a breathtakingly slow pace for school.

*cleep cleep Student ES998 Please see your counselor before homeroom.*

Emma was busted for dis-engagement while walking through the daily attendance facial-recognition metal detector. She has to go see Ms. Calmer before class. She hasn’t done her work. In days. Sometimes she’ll just log in and listen to the *whishwhish* of lessons through EarPods all around her. Other days she tries to hack into the iGlass to remove the school’s spyware, just because. Once she was talking to Alex and almost got busted. That would have been terrible. The penalty for chatting with your AI friend is deletion. Unless of course you have a therapy AI, but those just keep asking you about how things make you feel. Walking over to the counseling stations, she wonders what excuse she can use this time. Dog died? No, that really just makes her sadder. Mom lost her job? Nope. Too easy to check.

Emma had gotten reamed out. Aisha and Ms. Calmer had a conversation and decided upon a motivation plan for Emma. Her reward credits were in the negatives, and the “negativity debt” was eliminated. Her Behavior REward Account Dividends (BREAD) was no longer frozen and she could earn credits towards her personal or academic software applications. *Or*. Or she could continue her current inactivity and disengagement with her schoolwork and - not only would she NEVER get to flex off site, they would kill Alex. Delete. They would delete Alex. And there was no way Emma was going to let that happen.

As she walks through the classroom door, her bracelet alerts Ms. Suarez’s iGlass that Emma is an excused late. Emma catches her teacher’s smile and throws back a grimace. She may be here to do their bidding, but she doesn’t have to be happy about it. Waving her bracelet at her desk pod, the electricity activates and her iGlass wakes up and starts charging. After days, Emma logs in to see her prescription, “52?! No. I don’t think so.” She voice dictates a message to send to Ms. Suarez.

[ES998] Can I retake my pre-assessment? It’s been awhile.

[Ms.Suarez] You don’t have to retake the pre-assessment. I’ll activate the learning check. It might give you new prescriptions though, if you’ve lost those skills.

[ES998] Thanks, Ms. Suarez. I’m good with that. I’m ready.

Emma spends the day, reading, researching, problem-solving, and finally getting stumped at tasks. Her bracelet buzzes four quick times. The school day is over? She closes her learning activities for the day and ends the adaptive test.

{iGlass chimes} *Emma, your prescriptions are available. You have 5 prescriptions. Please log onto to see them.*

{iGlass chimes} *Emma, your BREAD balance has been updated. You have 500 credits.*

“The hell?” Emma logs in and sees that she doesn’t have 5 additional prescriptions. She assessed her way out of about 50 prescriptions! These 5 were for advanced topics: Calculus, Aramaic, Theoretical Physics, String Theory, and AI Algorithms. She couldn’t wait to tell Alex.