

## Epilogue

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"You big jerk!"

In the span of a week, snow had blanketed the town, and still showed no signs of slowing down. It came down in a steady stream, falling lazily but constantly. Camellia was on her evening walk back home, now dressed more suitably for the environment with a thick coat and scarf. She was waiting at a crosswalk when she heard that familiar voice. And, more surprisingly, she felt something hit her shoulder.

Turning her head, she saw firstly that she'd been hit with a snowball, and secondly that her sister was running down the street, with a second snowball in her hands. She hurled that one as well; it would have hit Camellia in the face had she not ducked.

"Francine, what's gotten into you?"

"I'm sure you know already!"

Francine tried to scoop up another handful of snow as she ran, but she lost her footing and nearly fell over. Reaching forward, Camellia caught her by the shoulders and held her steady. Though Francine kept her gaze averted, Camellia caught a glimpse of her face. She looked more anguished than angry.

"Are you all right?" asked Camellia.

Francine brushed off Camellia's hands and turned her back. "Go on, laugh at me," she said, her voice quavering. "I know you want to."

"No, I don't, so quit making those kinds of inferences. Come on, tell me what's wrong?"

Francine tossed her hair aside, saying nothing.

Camellia sighed. "Alright, at least come inside with me. You'll catch a virus if you stay out like this."

Francine crossed her arms. "Hmph."

The intersection's walk light came on. Camellia walked to the edge of the curb. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw that Francine hadn't moved from her spot. She took a couple steps into the street and looked again. Francine still hadn't moved.

The walk light went off, replaced by the blinking hand.

Camellia stepped onto the opposite street corner. She walked a few steps farther, and finally looked again.

Sure enough, Francine was following, a short distance behind. Her hands were folded, and her gaze was downcast.

Camellia smiled to herself. If there was one thing that she'd learned over the course of her life, it was how to deal with impetuous younger sisters.

"So," said Camellia. "Have you been well?"

Francine mumbled something indistinctly.

"It's been almost a month since I saw you last – I hadn't thought you were still here."

She nodded slightly.

"Are you cold?"

She frowned.

As Camellia walked, she unfurled her scarf. Slowing up, she wrapped it around Francine's neck. Francine stopped and looked up at her. Camellia smiled and patted her on the shoulder. "There. That coat won't be warm enough for these winters, you know."

Francine looked down at herself. In truth, it was the heaviest coat she owned, but she knew that her sister was right. Not that she planned to let her know, of course.

They walked down the road in silence for a ways. It wasn't until they were almost to Camellia's front door that one of them finally spoke.

"Sis," Francine finally said.

"Mm-hmm?"

"Why've you got to be right all the time?"

"Well, I can show you the proof, if you'd like."

"Seriously."

Camellia chuckled softly. "I think I can guess what this is about now."

Francine gulped. "So you were right all along. Are you happy?"

Camellia stopped. She turned to look at her sister, and moved closer. "No," she said. "I'm not." Francine's eyes opened wide as Camellia hugged her, gently patting her back. "I'd never be happy to see my little sister like this."

Francine looked to the side. "Stupid, don't... don't treat me like..."

Before she finished that sentence, she burst into tears, burying her face in the sleeve of Camellia's coat. Camellia caressed her sister's hair. "There, there," she said. "It'll be all right."

"It won't... How could it be all right?! It was so perfect, everything was just so perfect! And then..." She looked up at

Camellia. "And then, do you know who I saw him with?! Jacy!<sup>1</sup> Of all people! That no-good scripter, without even an inkling of type safety, or equality, or –"

"We know," said Camellia.

"What does she have over me? Just... just because she thinks she's so good at the whole internetworking thing..."

"There, now, we're all good at different things," said Camellia, stroking Francine's hair. "And you'll be better off without him, believe me. Without all those unit tests, all those commit logs." Camellia hugged her tight. "So don't take it too hard. You're perfectly fine just the way you are."

"It's not fair... Why can't you be wrong for once?"

"Because," said Camellia. "Big sis knows best."

Francine put her cheek to Camellia's shoulder. "Hmph." They were still for a few moments longer, as Francine gradually collected herself. She took a deep breath and let go of Camellia. She took a few steps away. "Well, I won't bother you anymore," she said, brushing herself off.

"Going?"

Francine nodded.

"I take it you don't have anywhere to stay."

"I'll figure out something for the night. And... I guess I'll find my way back home, somehow."

Camellia held Francine by the arm. "Now, now, that won't do at all. Let's go inside, shall we? I'll make you some hot cocoa." She began pulling Francine toward the door.

"H-Hey, let go! I said I'd be fine, so –"

Camellia was still for a second. "Francine, I'm your sister, aren't I?"

Francine hesitated. "Y-Yes, but..."

"Would you hate your sister so?"

"N-No, I don't hate you! It's... It's just that..."

"That?"

Francine looked aside. "You remember why I left, right?"

Camellia tilted her head. "I won't make you practice dependent types, I promise."

"Not that. Well, sort of, but – that's not the real reason. It's more that..." She looked down. "Everything I have, everything I am... I multiply inherited it from Mother, from Father, and even from you. The two of us, we're alike, I know that. And you being older, you get all of the attention." She shook her head. "I didn't want to just be Camellia's little sister all my life. I... I wanted to be different, you know? And I thought... I really thought that it was finally working. That at least one person was finally impressed by all of this." She sighed. "Maybe it was hopeless all along."

Camellia shook her head. "It isn't. At the very least, I'm impressed." She smiled. "You'll always be Camellia's little sister, that's true. But you're also you. You're doing work in areas that I've never even been touched. Anyone who can't see that is a fool. A programmer, even. Don't let that stop you from just doing you."

"Don't just throw out tautologies..."

"C'mon," said Camellia, tugging on Francine's arm. "It's cold out, isn't it?"

"F... Fine," said Francine, blushing. "Just for tonight."

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<sup>1</sup> My apologies to JavaScript. (Sort of.)

"Ehehe, of course. Now, then, this way..."

"And, um," Francine began, as Camellia opened the door. "Are you still gonna make hot cocoa?"

"Of course! Anything you'd like."

"With whipped cream on top?"

"Just how you used to like it. So, maybe this won't be so bad after all, huh?"

Francine couldn't help but smile.

At the end of the day, it didn't matter about the grazes, the bubbles, or even the unidentified fantastic objects. Both were simply glad to have some closure.