

THE FIERCE PROFESSIONS SERIES

FIERCE REBELLION



HARLEY AUSTIN

HARLEY AUSTIN'S
THE FIERCE PROFESSIONS

FIERCE
COMPETITION

FIERCE
REBELLION

FIERCE SURVIVAL

COMING SOON

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THE FIERCE PROFESSIONS

FIERCE
REBELLION

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*For my beautiful angel;
the love of my life and the very best friend
anyone could ever hope to have.*

FIERCE
REBELLION

PROLOGUE

Three Years Ago

WHERE IS IT!?" the big man slammed the tall thin twenty something Millennial against the still wet dumpster lid in a part of San Francisco that was home to a more seedy tech crowd who'd not been lucky enough, or talented enough, or connected enough to land better employment. The apartments in this part of town were happy to see rents approaching a thousand a month; most were closer to half that for a trashy studio.

"I don't have it! I—I couldn't get close enough! I swear to God! I tried! Security was everywhere!"

"YOU'RE FUCKING LYING!" The big man punched the youth a few times. Not too hard. He just needed to loosen his lying tongue a little. He let the brat slide off the metal lid and onto the concrete, rolling and doubled over, the wind knocked

out of him. He booted the skinny guy for good measure. He needed to let the little bitch know who he was dealing with.

Two other goons lifted the kid to his feet with him still whining and half crying, his face crumpled like a little girl. "I don't have it—I swear to God!" he cried.

"So I'm out a hundred G's!? Is that what you're telling me? You get paid and now you don't deliver? Kid doesn't know the value of real money, gentlemen," the big man eyed both of his henchmen.

"I can get it! There's still time!"

"Oh, no," the big man shook his head. "No, you see, we're all outta time tonight, Robbie. The drive was supposed to be in my hand. Right now," his New York accent calm all of a sudden. Robbie suddenly didn't like the look in the big man's eyes.

"I swear to God! I—I can get it. Tonight. I just need to get back to the office."

"It's after hours now. You don't have clearance, or access to the data vault."

"Please," he whimpered. "I tried. Really! There's still a couple more days."

"Ah, don't lie to me again, Robbie." The big man patted his face. "I know what's going on inside dat place. I got eyes and ears everywhere. Security clearances were all revoked at 5:00 o'clock today. There was a data breach. Someone fucked up accessing data dey weren't supposed to. Now I wonder who dat could have been, eh, Robbie?" The big man grew a half smile.

He nodded. "There was a lockout. But it wasn't me!"

The kid doubled over again as the big man pulled his heavy fist away from the kid's non-existent abdominals. Jesus the stooge was beginning to try his patience.

"How about we try dis again?"

The kid was seething through his teeth as one of the goons pulled his head back by his short half-bleached ponytail hair.

“Now I know you got da data. You got da money. All I need is da drive.” The big man talked like he was a gentle father delightfully scolding a child.

“I. Don’t. Have. It! I couldn’t get it! Dammit!”

“Aww,” he mocked the youth. “Well if *you* don’t have it. Maybe Carlisle does?” he offered in a sickening kiddie tone.

“YOU LEAVE HER ALONE! SHE DOESN’T KNOW!”

“Oh, I bet she don’t,” he picked up his phone and pressed a speed dial button. “Hey, Charlie. Da kid’s holdin’ out on us. Let me talk to da dame.”

The youth glared at the big bald man.

“What do you mean she’s not home?! You’re ‘posed to be tailin’ her.”

The big man watched as the kid took on a slight grin while he listened.

“Oh well dat’s just fucking pathetic. You screwballs can’t keep track of one fuckin’ dame for one fuckin’ day!?” the big man glowered into the phone.

He continued listening.

“Yea, yea. Fuckin’ shut yer pie hole, Charlie, I’ve heard enough.” He ended the call.

“So she doesn’t know, huh?” the big man met eyes with the kid. “You know you’re fucking dead, Robbie—” the big man waved his finger in kid’s face angrily.

“Fucking touch me and you’ll never see one bit of that data!” the kid threatened.

“Oh is zat so, Mr. Bigshot?”

“Yea. I got—”

Five loud shots rang out into the alley. The kid never even saw the gun in the big man’s hand. Wide-eyed surprise was still written all over the kid’s lifeless face as his bloodied body was tossed into the dumpster.

“Now what?” one of the goons asked his boss after the lid had slammed shut.

“Go help Charlie find the fucking bitch. She’s got da drive. She can’t have gotten far.”

“What if she doesn’t have it either?”

“Then I’m out a hundred G’s. Dat don’t make me happy.”

1

Mr. Fierce, Ms. Wise from Business Development is on line three; and lines one and two are still holding.”
“I’m a little busy at the moment, Angela. Tell Tami to call me back.”

“If you don’t take Tami’s call I’m quitting.”

“Again?”

“Now.”

“Judas Priest,” he mumbled under his breath grumbling, pausing and setting the hand-held video game onto his desk. The new game from one of his entertainment studios was simple but addicting; and it had been easily monetized. He’d already dropped fifty bucks into power-ups and upgrades himself, and it was just his first week playing the thing. He’d been putting off Tami’s calls all week. He already knew what she wanted. The call was just a formality of getting onto his

schedule. He picked up the handset punching the button, his tone taking on a most professional and pleasant tone. "Tami, so good we could finally connect ..."

* * * * *

Jay Harvey had a dozen other things he could have been doing at this precise moment, and the close to five o'clock dog and pony show he'd been lassoed into by Fierce's assistant, Angela, was not at the top of the list. His other un-favorite executive was Wise. What the hell did she do around here anyway? She always looked busy, but he'd seen nothing from her or her so-called department the whole time she'd been here. But he already knew why. The only reason Tami had been hired was because she and Angela had been roommates in college. Tami had obviously used her connections with Angela to worm her way into a VP position with Angela pulling the strings. Now she had a whole department of people under her in Business Development that technically rolled-up under his own R&D division. He had no idea what any of them did; but Business Development was next to harmless. He'd asked Finance numerous times to reduce her budget so he could eventually cut the bitch loose and term her whole department. Jesus, they were spending \$80 million a year now out of his development funding. But each time he'd tried, Fierce had just increased her funding instead. He'd even seen one of her capital budget requests at close to a third of a billion. God! What the hell was Wise doing with all the money?!

He wasn't sure what her background was even in, but as long as she was best buddies with Angela she could do as much damage to the bottom line as she wanted, he guessed. Now he was stuck in an elevator with her, heading for the parking garage with three other executives and a couple of the typical security detail.

"I'm glad you could make our event this afternoon, Gentlemen. I know all of you have a very busy schedules," Tami smiled.

At least she was good with the small talk. She wasn't hard on the eyes either. The bitch could give Angela a run for her money in the sexy business dress department. The hot professional attire was just this side of an LBD, only purple with a subtle line pattern to the fabric that hugged and curved with her hourglass figure like a fine glove wearing high heels. Her natural blonde was mid back and the natural full wave half covered one of her eyes. He wasn't buying into the whole mysterious debutant routine that everyone else fell all over themselves with whenever she showed up at one of the campuses like she was some corporate celebrity. She was only a VP for goddsakes.

"Where exactly are you taking us, Tami?" Harvey asked, an almost imperceptible twinge of annoyance in his tone.

"Peter is waiting for us in the parking garage." She pleasantly put the blowhard in his place. What an asshole. She'd stopped counting the number of times he'd tried to have her fired. Harvey was good at his job; no one was better at digging up new projects that turned into billion-dollar spin-offs, but the guy's arrogance was off-putting. He'd been brown-nosing Peter for years trying to worm his way into Peter's inner circle. But Fierce really didn't have an inner circle. She'd gotten Harvey's backstory from Angela years ago. Now she just avoided the idiot whenever possible. "I think you'll be intrigued with what we have to demo for you." Tami smiled.

He sure as hell hoped so. After this little encroachment into his afternoon schedule he was going to have a heart-to-heart with Fierce about the expenditures. At least get her moved off of his division's budget. God. He rolled his eyes to himself. He wondered if she and Angela were office-fucking like they probably did in college as roommates? They had similar

mannerisms. She always seemed to set off his gaydar when the two of them were together.

Their elevator door opened onto a floor of the building's underground parking garage Harvey had never seen before and didn't even know existed.

"Where are you taking us, Tami?" Harvey followed the small entourage of executives through a number of security checkpoints.

"We're almost there."

The small crowd entered a medium-sized conference room typical of the upscale ones all of them were used to. Only this one smelled new. Someone had gone to a lot of trouble and expense remodeling this floor of the parking garage. They'd obviously hire a talented decorator for the remodel and not just the mundane builder-grade nonsense typical of business-class buildings. That wasn't cheap. The waste of money for this place was way over the top. Still, it looked impressive.

Both Peter and Angela were already in the room and seated. Harvey grew a professional smile as everyone entered. All of them took seats at the long thick table.

"I don't want to take up too much of your time, Gentlemen, so I'll keep the presentation short and simple," Tami began with a smile.

"Excellent," Harvey returned her grin. This was sounding better already. "Please. Begin."

"I already have."

All of them looked around the room at the rather blank faces of the rest of the executive team who simply returned their own looks of curiosity; then all of them returned to looking at Tami. No screens were lit with projectors; no presentation folders were on the table.

"I think I'm missing your PowerPoint, Tami." Harvey offered her a plastic smile.

"No worries, Jay, it's under the table."

Now all of the executives slowly pushed their chairs back away to look under the conference room table.

Peter never left his chair but was the first to raise his head back up, looking at Tami with a wry grin. Nice entrance. He offered her a wink as others were now leaving their chairs, kneeling down in their business suits looking under the heavy hard wood carved table. His Chief of Finance was suddenly under the table, crawling like a baby in his Armani suit, feeling the underside of the smooth wood. He quickly exited on the other side the long, wide conference table and stood, straightening his jacket.

“How does it work?” the Chief of Finance asked her point blank.

Tami dropped down to her knees folding her legs beneath herself onto the plush new carpeting that looked like it had never been used until today. Fierce also now left his chair and dropped to his knees as well, then down to his side looking at her from under the table—a table that clearly had no legs. But just hung in the air, with nothing supporting it.

“Unbelievable—” and other murmuring now broke out around the room of executives now sitting on the floor instead of chairs.

“Tens of thousands of years ago, maybe hundreds of thousands, who knows? man discovered something that would give him dominion over all the animals of the Earth. Any idea what that was?”

“Fire.” The CFO was hanging on her every word.

“Some say it was a gift of the gods.”

“Prometheus,” Peter offered.

Tami nodded. “But the gods were not happy about man receiving such a gift, something that would kindle our imagination, protect us, illuminate our minds.”

“Tami, are you trying to say we didn’t invent this—?” Harvey looked at the levitating table.

“We didn’t invent the knowledge, Jay, but we sure as hell invented new ways to use it.”

Fierce now stood up, along with the rest of the executives.

“You mean we stole it.” Harvey leveled.

“No. Actually, it was given to us— anonymously. We don’t know where it came from. Several years ago I was working in our mail room as an executive clerk, for Angela.”

All of them nodded.

“There was a FedEx with Peter’s name on it. All of those pieces get scanned and processed before Peter ever sees them. Standard security protocol. Only this piece had no return address, no letter, not even a sticky note. We even had to pay the postage to receive it. The only thing in the envelope was a high-capacity flash drive. When we plugged it in, we found that it contained what we thought were gigabytes of highly compressed data.”

“What kind of data? I assume we’re not talking about someone’s analytics here?”

“No. Images actually. It took us weeks just to figure out what we were looking at. The language of the images is simple, but it’s heavily nuanced. Like nothing the linguists we hired have ever seen before. We finally found someone who could help us read it. Once that happened, things began moving rapidly.”

“What was the language?” one of the executives asked.

“Something very close to ancient Phoenician or Palaeo-Hebrew.”

“Phoenician—?” Peter’s CMO, asked. “I assume we’re talking about images of some extant MSS then?”

“That’s exactly what was on the drive, Jeff. You’re very perceptive.”

“I was a seminary student before I got into Marketing.”

“Good. Then you’ll appreciate the find. Someone had gone to an awful lot of trouble to meticulously photograph

hundreds of very lengthy and rather well-preserved scrolls. None of the linguists we talked to had ever seen anything like them.”

“How many people know about these scrolls?” Harvey asked.

“Just my executive team. Even the original linguist we hired as a consultant works for Peter now.”

“Interesting.” The CFO looked pleasantly impressed. “Please, continue.”

She nodded. “For the past few years I’ve been heading this clandestine division exploring the contents of the scrolls we found on that flash drive. What we learned from those ancient writings is how we built this,” she knocked on the hard wood of the levitating table.

“Well, that is what Research and Development does, Tami,” Fierce’s COO smirked. “It’s nice work. Good job, Jay,” he complimented the CRO.

“We’re actually funded by Business Development, Kurt.” Tami corrected. “The truth is, we couldn’t get any kind of budget through Mr. Harvey’s rather iron-fisted lock on R&D.” Tami nodded at the Chief Research Officer. Everyone knew Harvey had a reputation for being exceptionally tight with development funding. “With Angela’s help, we setup this new division under BD. Mr. Fierce approved the funding.”

“You mean Angela approved the funding,” Harvey corrected. “It was her signature pulling funds out of my budgets. I should have known about this!”

“I did try to get you to fund the operation, Mr. Harvey. Years ago.”

“We’re a public company, Miss Wise. We have SEC reports that need to be filed so stock holders know where and how their money is being spent. You’ve placed Fierce Capital in danger of being sanctioned or fined with all of this secrecy. At worst you could get all of us indicted.”

“Jay does have a point, Peter,” the CFO offered.

“Mr. Fierce, you were kept in the loop.”

“You’re right. I was in the loop. Unfortunately, you’re fired.”

“I’m sorry?” Tami scowled at him.

“I’m not talking to you, Tami.” Fierce looked at his CRO. “Harvey, pack-up. You’re done. You’re supposed to be on top of stuff like this.”

“What?! Peter—I—I had no idea that any of this was even—”

“Precisely why you’re fired. You’ve stifled my R&D budgets for the last time. Get out.”

One of the security detail approached and then escorted the middle-aged man out of the room and back toward the elevators. The rest of the executive staff watched in stunned silence until Harvey was no longer within earshot.

“Peter! What the hell!?” Kurt began. “Jay’s one of the most brilliant minds we have.”

“Had. No. I agree. A little too brilliant. He thought he was smarter than me.”

“What?”

“Harvey’s been funneling our R&D to the Danforth Group. Then slowing down our own research by cutting their budgets—allowing Welston to launch his products ahead of ours. It’s taken me a couple of years to track this down.”

“If that’s true, Peter,” the CFO chimed in, “then you just let one of our biggest competitors know what we’re up to with this demo. Why would you do that?”

“Because we’re not through here, gentlemen,” Tami offered. There are others within the organization that still need to be rooted out. Peter might be back in control of iCore and our funds, but Danforth still has his people spread throughout a number of the companies. It’s why this project was kept so secret. Not any of the top chiefs knew about it—except us.”

“Peter, Tami,” the CFO continued. “I see every penny that floats in and out of Fierce Capital. Please tell me you two didn’t just spend half a billion dollars on a floating conference table.”

“No, you’re right, David. The conference table is merely the tip of the iceberg. It’s taken us years to study what was in those scrolls; it will take us decades more to develop the data even further.

Fierce pulled up one of the conference room chairs again and sat down along with the rest of the remaining executive team. He pushed down onto the top of the table. It didn’t budge. Something was holding the table right where it was. It didn’t feel like it was ‘floating’ at all.

“This isn’t just some minor R&D discovery, people.” Fierce looked around the room. “Whoever owns the original scrolls—probably, most likely, already knows what they have, and is keeping a lid on them.”

“Peter, how could people,” the CFO shook his head, “a few thousand years ago have this kind of knowledge? Antigravity?”

“Tami?” Peter looked at her.

“The scrolls are incomplete, David. Whomever imaged them was really only interested in the knowledge they contained, there’s not much history, only bits and pieces. As near as we can tell, the scrolls were origin to a group of ancient peoples who lived in and around the cradle of civilization, a people we call the Nephilim.”

“The Nephilim were a mythical race of demigods, Tami,” the Chief Marketing Officer, offered. “Giants, like Goliath in the Old Testament. They don’t exist.”

“I really hate to disagree with your Seminary studies, Jeff, but your knowledge of the Nephilim is about to get expanded. The Nephilim did, in fact, exist. In fact, we have it on good authority that they are still living today.”

“So where are they?” he asked.

“They’re all around us. Living very clandestine lives; they actually hide within Humanity itself.”

“Hiding from what?” David raised his brow.

“The gods who created them. Again, the history we have is sketchy at best, but it looks as if they acquired some knowledge of their creators; whether they stole it or it was given to them, it’s not clear. But these gods, whomever they were, they were hunting down the Nephilim and destroying them, by the thousands. Apparently there’s only handfuls of them left—clans they’re called in the scrolls we have.”

“And now these Nephilim, demigods if you will, have dumped this knowledge into our hands?” Jeff raised his brow. “This is a little more than just discovering how to use fire, Miss. Wise.”

“I agree. Completely.”

“And if these Nephilim did steal the knowledge of these gods, whoever *they* were, what’s to keep them from coming after us for the same theft?” Kurt asked. “Like you said, we still don’t know where this knowledge came from, right?”

“It’s all conjecture at this point, Kurt,” Fierce chimed into the conversation, “but we think the knowledge was given to the Nephilim and then to the Egyptians. Perhaps, we think, that at least some of the Egyptians were Nephilim—especially some of their Pharaohs. It also appears that the Hebrews took some of this technology when they were exiled from Egypt. They used it to escape their captors and even defeat vast armies and cities, like Jericho.”

“Wait,” Jeff began. “Are you telling me these scrolls contain weapons?”

Tami nodded. “Like nothing we’ve ever seen before. The Egyptians used the tools to cut and carve stone; then move the massive blocks as if they were weightless.”

“Unbelievable.” The CMO shook his head.

“They are nothing short of miraculous,” Peter assured.

“Are?” Kurt shot glances between Peter and Tami. “Have we actually built some of these weapons?”

“We built the table,” Fierce admitted.

“And?”

“Perhaps it would be easier just to show you.” Peter turned in his chair and then stood facing a curved glass wall of the conference area. Tami moved to the wall of the long room. A pair of six-panel sliding glass doors slid silently open as she approached while soft lights glowed slowly to life illuminating what was clearly still a concrete parking garage. The only vehicle within this closed section of the garage was a stunning concept car. The design of the vehicle was typical of newer Italian sports models—with one exception. This model sat on nothing; rather than sitting on its tires and wheels, it hovered mere inches above the concrete floor.

“I thought you were going to show me a weapon?” Jeff walked around the vehicle, impressed with its fine lines but the two-seater was more elegant than over-the-top sporty.

“I am. You’re looking at it.” Peter offered matter-of-factly.

“Are we being cryptic?”

“Somewhat,” he admitted. “This is the first functional prototype of a new vehicle developed by Fierce Aerospace.”

“Peter,” the COO began. “We don’t *have* an aerospace group.”

“Of course we do. It says so on the vehicle.” He smirked. The other executives surrounding the shiny black car were suddenly chuckling. David moved to the back of the vehicle. “Rebellion, huh?” he read the branding.

“*Some* of us wanted to just call it the ‘Rebel’,” Peter began looking at Tami. “But the rest of the team were too butthurt over the historical implications.”

“Butthurt, Mr. Fierce?” Tami glowered. “‘Rebellion’ was a little more marketable name.”

“You mean it was more politically correct,” he snarked.

“Whatever—”

Kurt stepped into the middle of their banter. “So it hovers over the road—” he was pretty sure he already knew the answer, considering it was already not sitting on the floor of the garage.

“Like a dream,” Tami assured. “The smoothest ride you’ve ever had.”

“How high? How high can it hover?”

“The Revel doesn’t just hover. It will take you into orbit and back, if you like,” Fierce revealed.

“Just like that? What about flight crews?”

Tami smiled. “Current orbital vehicles have limited ability, most notably based on their weight and fuel capacities; with that they need to be able to achieve escape velocities. As such, they have to be planned by teams of engineers plotting trajectories, rendezvous points, launch windows.”

Kurt nodded.

“But what if you weren’t limited by fuel, weight, or the need to achieve escape velocity? What if you could just—float—into space?” Tami offered rhetorically.

“Then you’d have a technology revolution on your hands,” Kurt agreed.

“It’s going to be more than just a revolution in human transportation,” Fierce added. “Soon roads, bridges, freeways, toll-roads, it will all be a thing of the past.”

“Soon?” Jeff raised his brow. “Ha. I think you underestimate the bureaucracy of the FAA, Peter. They’ll not just have a cow over this, but a whole herd trying to figure out what to do with it.”

“Jeff’s right, Peter,” David began. “The military applications of this new antigravity are incalculable. If I were sitting in the Pentagon right now, and one of these things flew overhead, I’d be wondering how to shoot it out of the sky and shut it down, not mass produce it for the general public.”

Fierce nodded.

“David raises the question all of us have been asking for the past several years,” Tami continued. “None of this technology is really ‘new’; in fact, it’s ancient. The Egyptians were using it; the Hebrews; the scrolls even discuss a place these Phoenicians called Atlantia.”

“Atlantis?” David raised his brow.

“If I recall, the gods destroyed Atlantis,” Kurt offered.

“It’s all pseudohistory, Kurt,” Jeff offered pedantically. “No one really knows what happened or even if Atlantis actually existed.”

“I—wouldn’t be so quick to dismiss its existence, Jeff,” Peter assured. “The scroll images are rife with Atlantia’s place in ancient human development. It was a continent ruled by the gods.”

“Why did they destroy it?”

“For some reason, the gods were at war with each other. We’re still not exactly sure why. But some of them were trying to protect Humanity while others were trying to destroy us.”

“Apparently that’s always been the case,” Jeff quipped. “It seems much of the mythologies we read are all about the gods trying to destroy Humanity while others were trying to save it.”

“Nice, Peter. Are you sure you want to bring this Rebellion to market? Not only will you give the Pentagon conniption fits, GM will be having nightmares and these illusive gods, whoever they are, will be coming after us with a vengeance. Government regulators and competition are one thing, but you’ll be starting World War III with this.” He nodded at the car. “No one is going to allow us to sell a single unit. It’s just too advanced.”

“And that’s exactly the reason why it needs to be sold. These gods for far too long have kept Humanity in the Dark

Ages, David. It's about damn time mankind came out into the light."

2

How was the concert, Mr. Fierce?" Angela set several thin folders onto his desk. He eyed her movements; the way she walked. She knew he was gay; so why was she always trying to grab his attention? Today's outfit was a white, sheer number that dropped only to mid-thigh. Although completely opaque, he was pretty sure she didn't have on any underwear. He wondered if he'd *ever* seen her wearing any.

"Not bad. Talented kid."

"Did you ask him out?" she sat on the side of his desk with a smirk. Now he was positive she wasn't wearing any.

"I was going to, but then I got a little preoccupied last night when a pair of rather annoying MI-6 showed up to completely ruin the evening. You set me up, Angela. Why?"

"You know why."

"Listen, I didn't ask for the extra security."

"You wanted to play in the big leagues, Mr. Fierce, now you're in the big leagues. Do you have any idea how many families are going to come after you now that the news of the new tech has leaked? I'm not taking any chances." The drop-dead brunette smiled.

"I get it."

"There's an uneasy truce now with the Danforths, but after this, GM's stock is going to tank worldwide."

"Along with everyone else's," he stated matter-of-factly.

"I need you to become more powerful within the families than Welston ever thought of being. This little leak, along with a few others along the way, will help us get there."

"Sure, but he'll still call it a vendetta. He'll demand another 'reunion' of the Consortium, the kind no one likes to attend. I still can't believe they let him back in." He shook his head.

"The Danforths are resourceful. I'm keeping my eye on them."

"I'm glad someone is. So now that we have the prototype, we need to make a really big splash to bring it to market. A way that keeps the Danforths and the rest of their ilk playing catch-up."

"I'm sure you'll figure it out, Mr. Fierce." She stood up.

He leaned back into his chair. "You know, if I didn't know better, Angela, I'd say you're actually enjoying putting me in hot water like this."

"I wish I was, Mr. Fierce. But right now, MI-6 has its hands full preparing for your—global meltdown. Which is why I requested the additional security."

"You could assign Thad to my personal detail?" Fierce half-grinned. "He's part of MI-6 now."

"Nice try. But I need you, *undistracted* for the foreseeable future, Mr. Fierce. Sorry. You're stuck with London and Misty."

Peter scowled.

* * * * *

“Fired you just like that, did he? Well, that’s not exactly surprising, Harvey,” the old man on the other end of the phone conversation quipped. “You should have known what was going on in that basement.”

“I was trying, Mr. Danforth. Security down there was insane. I had to be careful.”

“I’m sure it was. I assume you’re still in contact with our people in the building?”

“Fierce Capital owns practically the whole waterfront now, Mr. Danforth. They’re all one big common complex. Our people are in *every* building, not just Fierce Towers.”

“Good. Exactly what I wanted to hear. The only thing is, what the hell was on that drive? Ancient scrolls? That makes no sense.”

“I’m just relaying what I heard before they escorted me out of the building.”

“Well, whatever it is, Fierce has had years to develop it—and he was doing it right under my nose. No wonder he wanted iCore back so badly.”

“He needed the R&D capital, obviously.”

“Obviously,” Welston agreed. “I wonder what was holding that table up?”

“Whatever it was, Mr. Danforth, I couldn’t see it. Maybe that’s what the demo was supposed to be, some new way to make something invisible. It’s not like the table was actually floating. It felt really solid to me, like it was sitting on some really sturdy base we couldn’t see.”

“Interesting. That would be something Fierce would dive into, no doubt. Illusion. A bunch of us have been working on making things radar-invisible for decades. Maybe these old

scrolls gave them some ideas about how the ancients did things. New thinking, even though it's been old and forgotten."

"That would be my own thinking as well, Mr. Danforth."

"Alright, Harvey, stay in town and keep in-touch with our people. I need to find out more about what Peter is up to."

3

San Francisco?! What happened to Ogden?"

"There aren't any modeling agencies in Ogden, Dad!"

"There are too! Several."

"None with any real work!"

"You've gotten auditions with some of them."

"Auditions are not work. San Francisco is real work."

"Emmanuel Grayson! I will not pay one cent to have my son descend into Sodom and Gomorrah just to make a few dollars through some sordid modeling job."

"It's not sordid at all. It a product work. I'll be doing demos on the convention floor at CES."

"You'll be staying in the City of Sin—" Grayson Bramble's dad fumed. "I won't have my son immersed in all of that debauchery and illicit behavior. Gambling. Prostitution. Do you have any idea what goes on at night on those streets?"

"I don't care what other people do, Dad. I just want to make some money on my own for once. You guys pay for everything—I'm finally twenty-one, it's about time I started paying my own way."

"You're still in school. You don't need to pay your own way."

"Mom! Would you talk some sense into him?" he appealed to his mother who sat quietly on the sofa of the family's lower middle-class living room.

"She doesn't need to talk any sense into me!" his dad shot back with anger. "I already *know* what's going on here. The answer is no. I'm not letting you throw your life away, your career, your education on some pipedream!"

"It's not a pipedream! Dammit!" he cursed glaring at his dad.

"DON'T YOU USE THAT KIND OF LANGUAGE IN MY HOUSE, YOUNG MAN!"

"FINE!" Grayson shot back. He turned, gathered his school backpack and heavy jacket and headed out the door, slamming it hard as he left.

"He's just trying to find himself in this world, Dennis."

"Every year he gets more and more disrespectful. It's like the Holy Spirit has left him. All he thinks and talks about is modeling, modeling, modeling—" he lifted his hands in frustration. "I'm sick of it, Becky! There's no money in it. I know—I was a musician. It's feast and famine, and mostly it's famine. Eventually he'll find that out the hard way." He fumed landing hard in a worn easy chair that had seen better days a decade ago. "He'll be back once he gets cold enough."

"No. He won't," she half mumbled.

"He will. I have his keys and phone, and his debit card."

“Those aren’t his, they’re yours,” she corrected. “He just wanted to talk to you—man-to-man. He just wanted to say goodbye, Dennis. He wasn’t asking for your permission.”

“He wasn’t—what!?”

“I tried to tell you earlier. The agency really liked his portfolio. They’re flying him to California for some model training and then to Las Vegas for the show.”

“They’re what?! Right before Christmas?”

“If you’d have stopped yelling for half a minute he would have told you that.”

Grayson had slipped into his heavy jacket. His Uber ride was already waiting for him. He heard his dad calling his name, running toward the car from across the snow-covered yard. He closed the car door.

“Let’s go.”

All Grayson’s father could do now was stand on the freezing shoveled sidewalk in his stocking feet as the car pulled away down the street with him calling out the name of his son.

4

I think you're sitting in my seat."

Grayson looked up to see a tall, dark-haired guy, maybe a little older than himself. He was dressed in a nice teal-colored T with a black dress jacket, faded blue jeans and suede cowboy boots. The t-shirt looked like it was straining to contain someone who was built like Superman beneath it. Jeeze, he could see the guy's abs through the shirt.

"I'm sorry. I can move. I just liked the aisle."

"Oh you do? Don't get up then, I like the window."

"Oh? Sweet. Are you sure?"

"Positive. Don't get up."

Grayson half inspected the buff guy as he slipped in front of himself getting to the inside first-class seat. Either the cut of his button-fly jeans was super roomy, or the guy had some very decent packaging filling out beneath them. Grayson

watched him turn and then settle the nice backside of his jeans into the wide comfortable chair.

"I've never sat in first-class before," the handsome guy smiled.

Jeeze did God even make guys this good-looking? Grayson smiled back. "Never been on a *plane* before."

"Oh? Really?" the handsome guy looked surprised. "Well, just so you know, this is not what flying is really like. Look back there. That's what flying is usually like."

Grayson chuckled. "I saw the herds. No thanks. I definitely like it better up front."

"First time going to the Bay Area?" the muscular guy asked.

"First time going anywhere out of state."

"Oh—" the guy looked surprised. "You dress like you live in the Bay Area."

"Thanks. You sound like you're from Texas."

"Yea, I wish. Tulsa, actually. But my folks did name me Houston." He extended his hand.

"Really?" he chuckled. "Grayson," he shook his hand. "At least your name fits you."

"Grayson's a cool name."

"Well, it's my middle name actually. I'm not big on 'Emmanuel'."

"Your family's either Mormon or Catholic," he smiled.

"Utah, Salt Lake City, hello?"

"I dated a Mormon girl once," Houston grinned.

"For twenty minutes?"

Both chuckled.

"No, a couple of weeks, actually; until she found out I wasn't big on joining her religion. Then she dumped me."

"Yea, I'm not big on it myself anymore."

"I hear that a lot. People leaving the church their parents raised them in."

"I don't think the older generation understands ours."

"Yea, I'm sure they told their folks the same time when they were our age."

"I'm sure."

"Are you gentlemen comfortable? Can I get either of you something to drink?" a flight attendant asked.

"Yes, Ma'am," Houston spoke up. "Scotch and soda?"

"Sure. Anything for you Mr. Bramble?"

"Just a Coke, please."

The attendant left to get their drinks.

"Bramble, huh?" Houston grinned.

God, the guy's smile was disarming. "I'm so changing my name when I get to San Francisco," Grayson frowned.

"Are you moving there?"

"I don't know. Hopefully."

"Expensive place to live. What do you do?"

"Oh, I'm just a student right now. What about you?"

"I graduated this year with a BA in business. Still looking for a decent gig that pays enough to cover rent and the loans."

"I have another year. No loans yet though. Thank God."

"What's your major?"

"Finance. Dad wants me to take the CPA Exam."

"You should. Those guys make great money. I, on the other hand, hate numbers. I'm more of the sales and marketing kind of guy."

"Oh, I hate you guys," Grayson chuckled.

"Oh?" Houston smirked.

"All the women flock to the marketing majors and the finance guys, we're lucky to see a girl in class."

"Yea, well, don't be too disappointed. They're all stuck up. Trust me."

"All of them?"

"All of the ones I knew."

"You're nice looking, Houston. I would think women would be throwing themselves at you."

"They do; were, I mean, did, in school. All the wrong ones apparently. Show me a decent looking girl and I'll show you someone who can't stop looking at herself for five minutes."

"They're not all that way."

"Yes, they are. Trust me. Dated one too many of those."

* * * * *

"Welston—" the old man answered his phone.

"It's Harvey, Mr. Danforth. Good news. We're inside."

"Are you serious?"

"We got past their vetting. I've already started getting reports."

"Harvey that's excellent! Took long enough. What do we know?"

"Not much yet, Mr. Danforth. They just got in. We need to give them some time to snoop around. Gather intelligence."

"Sure. Sure. Just keep me posted. Let me know the moment we hear anything."

"I will Mr. Danforth. And, Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas to you as well, Harvey. Thank you."

5

Grayson stepped out of the cab in front of the Bellagio, looking around like a lost star-struck tourist; only his over-filled backpack slung around his shoulder with everything he had in the world. It was cool outside right now, but not half as biting cold as the winters in and around Salt Lake. At least it wasn't hot. He'd take the cold any day over the scorching summers he'd grown up with. And Vegas could get even hotter. It had been several weeks since he'd left home for some training with the new agency in San Francisco. It was the first time he'd spent Christmas alone in a hotel room the agency had put him up in. But for some reason, they were pulling out all the stops for him. His classes weren't even really that hard, but he was learning a lot and getting some professional tips from a handful of really big names, some of whom he knew and some he didn't.

The Bellagio was packed with people. He checked in with the front desk and then made his way deep into the posh hotel, exploring, taking in the sights of the casino floor, the pools, and shops along the promenade before heading up to his room.

Letting himself into the nice suite he was suddenly startled by someone else in his room.

“Houston?” Grayson looked wide-eyed. Mostly because the guy was totally shirtless and wearing some odd-looking workout pants barefoot. For long moments both just stared at the other. Houston wasn’t just cut, he was unbelievable. Perfect layer upon layer of hunky rippling muscle cascaded in a symphony of movement as he turned to face Grayson.

“Oh,” Houston smiled with his own look of surprise. “I guess you’re my mystery roommate.”

“Ah—I am? I mean, we are?” Grayson half dropped his backpack watching Houston’s six-pack as the guy slipped on a workout shirt that matched the odd design of his pants.

“Didn’t Angela tell you?” Houston asked.

“Tell me what?” Grayson finally regained his composure.

“The hotel is way overbooked. To help them out, the agency is moving people around, doubling them up. I just had no idea that you were with Infinity.”

He nodded. “Yea, I’ve been getting private acting lessons for the past two weeks. Believe me, I needed them.”

“They’ve been giving those to all of us,” Houston assured.

“All of us? How many of us are there?”

“Six or eight, I think. They have us working in four-hour shifts for the new Rebellion unveiling. Kind of weird you and I ended up roommates. On the plane and now here?” he smiled.

Grayson took a few steps closer to him into the room. “Did you see it?”

Houston shook his head. "No, I've just been studying the literature for the past few days. Haven't actually seen it yet. Have you?"

"No, I wish. It's like, unbelievable though. They say it really flies."

"I'm sure it does. I say it's about time. We should have had flying cars before either of us were born, if you ask me."

"Probably." Grayson watched as Houston examined himself in the mirror. "What *are* you wearing?"

"Floor uniform. It's what all of us will be wearing while meeting and talking with clients and attendees." Houston flexed in the sleek, futuristic-styled snug black and charcoal Lycra gear that hugged every square inch of the guy's immaculate body and hid next to nothing of his build beneath it. Even the pants were split-cheek showing off both sides of Houston's finely rounded body-built backside. The long-sleeved shirt with a high turtleneck-like collar was embroider-branded in red on the right side with the sleek but ominous-looking 'Rebellion' logo. "We'll be dressed like this all week."

"Are you sure this is for CES and not MegaCon instead?" Grayson grinned. "You look like a cosplay villain."

Houston nodded, half rolling his eyes. "The technical term is 'booth babe'."

"Really?" Grayson scowled. "That's why they hired us?"

"Dude, have you looked in the mirror?" Houston nodded at him. "I noticed your build when we were on the plane. You're just as ripped as I am, Handsome."

"Ah, not. But I appreciate the compliment. You're a lot bigger than I am."

"Maybe a little, but you're the perfect size and cut for what Infinity was looking for. Face it, we're the male version of cheesecake, Grayson. That's why we got hired. Better get used to it."

* * * * *

"I'm fascinated by CES," Welston sipped his scotch in the elegant suite of another themed hotel not far from the convention center. "I'm a little surprised to see you here."

"I'm always at CES, Mr. Danforth. CES, E3, even South-by-Southwest has gone high-tech. It's what I do."

"I'm always impressed with your work, Harvey; but I'm sure you didn't stop by to ask me for a raise." Welston snickered.

"Hardly. We now know what Fierce has been working on, and it's not office furniture."

"I've heard it's a car," Danforth interrupted with a scoff. "Fierce wasn't satisfied booting me out of my own company; now he wants to muscle in on Danforth Dynamics as well. I should have put a bullet in the bastard when I had the chance."

"He's not just muscling in, Mr. Danforth and it's not *just* a car."

"What's so special about it?"

"If flies."

Welston chuckled. "Ha. We've been showing those for years. Old news. Our mini-jet prototype was at the show last year. It will do a hundred plus, on the road or in the air; can land and take off vertically like a helicopter from any airport."

"Yea, I know. I gave you those designs. Here's what Fierce was hiding from us—he doesn't need an airport."

"We don't either, really."

"Or jets."

"What powers it?"

"Or even wings."

"What? How the hell does it got off the ground?"

"Hold onto that glass of your, Mr. Danforth. It uses some kind of antigravity."

Welston's eyes drew wide. His mouth opened. "That conference table you told me about."

"You have a good memory, Mr. Danforth."

"Damn right I do. So Fierce wasn't working on some stealth tech, the table really was levitating then."

"It wasn't just levitating, Mr. Danforth, the surface was rock solid. It didn't budge a millimeter."

"Antigravity, huh?" Welston's gaze narrowed.

"That's what we're calling it. At least that's what it does."

"Shit."

"Several of our team said the same thing, more or less."

"So, this intel is coming from our man on the inside now?"

"It is. The agent is in deep cover. We need to be careful with how we use them. We don't want to blow it."

"No. No, I agree."

"Learn as much as you can, Jay. In the meantime, I need to talk this over with Barratt. We need to tread carefully; otherwise our automotive holdings across the globe—"

"Automotive—try Airbus and Boeing."

"Nah, nah, I get it, Jay. Trust me. Listen, keep it up. I need to make some calls."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm gonna make damn sure all of us don't end up becoming something next to worthless by the end of this week."

6

Underway in Las Vegas, Nevada, the International Consumer Electronics Show where thousands of companies are on display, exhibiting the latest innovations in technology, communications and entertainment. Vehicles on display have been nothing new to CES over the past decade, with everything from small gadgets like backup cameras to extreme innovations in self-driving and even a couple of flying vehicles. But certainly nothing this year has so far even come close to comparing to the unveiling of a radically new kind of car from none other than intrepid entrepreneur, Peter Fierce—a vehicle the company is calling the ‘Rebellion’. Unquestionably sleek in its design, the Rebellion, we’re being told, actually flies. But that is not what makes the Rebellion unique here at CES, it is the way the Rebellion achieves flight is without question the world’s first.

How does it fly? So far, the company spokespeople have been very tight-lipped, saying only that the wingless vehicle uses a new gravity-defying technology the company is calling “graviton propulsion”. That’s right. It’s one of the latest innovations here at CES that has left almost everyone excited and talking about ...”

“Alright, Brad, turn it off; we’ve all seen the news reports since the first of the week.” The Secretary of Defense pulled his chair in closer to the briefing room conference table where a couple of generals including the Secretary of the Army had also gathered informally and off the record.

“Damn impressive, Andy,” the Major General offered to the SecDef.

“So what does the President want to do?” Chris, a Lieutenant General asked the Secretary of the Army. He was younger for a three-star, but he held a lot of sway within Pentagon and other Washington circles.

“I don’t give a shit what Brett wants,” Trey grumped. “He sold all of us out a long time ago. Fuck him.”

“He didn’t sell us out, Trey. For God’s sakes,” Andy countered. “They all get bought and paid for by someone. Who knows who’s pulling the strings of these elections these days?”

“Andy’s right,” Brad chimed in. Only God knows who running these governments now. It could be these Ra themselves for all we know.”

“Speaking of Ra, the intel we have, gentlemen, says the Fierce tech came from a set of Phoenician scrolls. Ring any bells?”

“Dominion Dynamics’,” one of them offered while the rest were nodding. “But that was a few years ago. I thought we took out the Mafia gang that perpetrated the theft?”

"We did," the SecDef offered. "But we never recovered the drive from the girl. I guess now we know where it ended up. Fierce Technologies."

"Those scrolls didn't show how to build hoverboards, Andy," Brad offered. "We've been working on this stuff for decades now. Where'd he get the help?"

"Obviously the Dominion." Trey didn't have any love loss for that unholy religion either.

"No, I don't think so," Brad countered. "The clans don't want any of us near their tech."

"That's because they don't want us kicking their half-breed asses," Trey grumped. "That's why."

"You're making my point," Brad continued. "The Ra don't want us having their stuff either. In fact, it doesn't even work for us. It barely works for the halfbloods."

"So who's helping Fierce with his math homework?"

A projector came on as the light dimmed. Brad picked up a remote and began flashing several pictures across the screen, their own closed-intranet of what they knew about Fierce Technologies.

"This is, of course, Peter Fierce. Graduated fifteenth in his class from a no-name state school. The typical tech geek; only now he plays hardball within the high-rolling circles of the Oligarchy no thanks to his connections with iCore."

All of them nodded. They knew his history.

A very hot brunette showed up on the screen next. A soft whistle floated out of Chris' mouth as a few sexy pics moved across the screen.

"This is Fierce's Second-in-command, someone who only goes by the name of 'Angela'."

"What's her story?" Andy asked.

"Don't know, still working on that one. She supposedly went to the same college as Fierce, but in our interviews with classmates, no one remembers her."

"I'd remember that ass," Andy quipped.

"Goddamned Ra is what she is," Trey grumped.

"Our suspicions as well," Brad agreed. "She's wicked smart, hot as a gas fire, and privy to all things under Fierce's control."

"You mean she's the intelligence behind Fierce Technologies," Trey offered.

"A rogue Ra funneling their tech to Humanity?" Andy quipped. "That doesn't make any sense."

"No, it doesn't," Brad agreed. "But that's what it looks like on the surface."

"There's got to be more to it. Who's this other chick?" The screen advanced to the next slide.

"Tami Wise, the lead VP behind the technology that's built into the Rebellion prototype. From what we can gather, she's Fierce's golden-girl behind the project. It also appears that both she and Angela were roommates in college."

"I thought Fierce was gay?" Chris mumbled.

"He is. Evidently he doesn't mind surrounding himself with hot women."

"He's not surrounding himself with hot women, gentlemen," Trey corrected. "He's being used by the Ra. He may be smart, but he's not that smart. None of us are that smart."

"Speak for yourself, General," Andy chuckled, as did the rest of them.

"I think Trey makes a good point," Brad continued, "but the only question really on the table is why? Prometheus gave us fire, or so the legend goes. He was excoriated by the gods for doing so. Who's giving us fire now—?"

"And what are these Ra going to do once they find out we have it?" Trey spoke rhetorically. "I'll tell you exactly what they're going to do; they'll descend on us like angry bees on

honey and wipe every damn one of us off the face of the planet.”

Brad looked around the room at faces in quandary.

Finally, the SecDef spoke up, his fingers holding his chin. “I don’t know about that, Trey. They’ve had ample time to wipe Humanity off the face of the globe more times than we can remember. There’s more going on here, something we can’t see yet.”

Brad nodded, setting down the remote as the lights came back up. “I agree.”

“Well, we can’t just let Fierce keep going with this and monetize it for goddsakes,” Trey countered. “The whole world will be flying these things inside of a decade.”

“I agree,” Chris chimed in again. “We need some time to look at what Fierce has built and analyze the effect this is going to have on our defensive capabilities.”

“Do you gentlemen want us to sew it up?” Brad asked, looking around the table.

Houston slipped his key card into the door of their hotel suite letting Grayson in first and then following in behind. “Jeeze, if I have to try to explain theoretical gravatics to one more pinhead know-it-all—” he quipped after closing the door.

“You’re going to punch someone?” Grayson smirked.

“I wouldn’t go that far—but I might be getting there.” He unzipped the dark-grey jacket of an Adidas warm-up suit. Both wore the clothes not only to keep warm on their taxi ride back from the convention center, but also to cover up the body-hugging costume-like uniform that left almost nothing to the imagination of the build and bulges of the two guys who’d been wearing the cosplay-like clothes all day. Both guys slipped out of their warm-up pants, hanging the expensive sweat suits up in the small closet before heading into their suite’s spacious bathroom.

Grayson already had his costume's shirt off and a toothbrush in hand when Houston walked in a minute later. Obviously, the guy was heading for the shower. Houston followed Grayson's lead with his own toothbrush.

There was certainly nothing at all wrong with Grayson's athletic build. Houston casually watched the guy in the mirror taking his time. Grayson had a handsome toothy smile and used a toothbrush like he was playing a fine instrument. Houston half marveled at how nice the guy looked shirtless. There was nothing at all wrong with his build.

On the convention floor Grayson had been complimentary about how Houston looked in his costume, but he never seemed to give himself credit about how he looked in the same clothes. The truth was, Infinity's casting had done an excellent job of selecting the two of them. Both guys had more or less the same broad-shouldered build; both had been blessed with great genes that left each of them with smooth hills of fine muscles and nicely cut ridges. They weren't exactly twins, Houston was a little taller, by maybe an inch and outweighed Grayson by a good twenty pounds, but if the agency had wanted a pair of look-a-like product spokesmen, they'd done a masterful job. Even their natural hair color was about the same. Now with similar haircuts, only their different but handsome faces kept the two from looking like brothers or even twins.

"I think those girls from Hitachi were checking out your tush again," Grayson smirked and leaned up from the sink, the tooth brush still sticking out of his mouth. "They stopped by how many times today?"

"They and a few thousand of their closest friends. I've never taken so many pics with women before."

"Or guys?" Grayson snarked.

Houston shook his head. "It would be nice if someone were actually interested in the car again."

“The ‘Rebel’ is old news now, Houston. It was only exciting for the first three days, everyone’s seen it, now it’s boring. Flying car. Big deal. What’s next?”

“Yea, don’t let product catch you calling it the ‘Rebel’”, he smirked, grabbing his own toothbrush.

“That’s what everyone else is calling it. Even the press.”

“I know, marketing should have just stuck with ‘Rebel’ for the name. But everyone hates the connotation the name has with the South and the Confederacy.”

“Not everyone.” Grayson rinsed his toothbrush.

“You don’t count. You were raised Conservative.”

“Ha. You have no idea,” Grayson agreed. “I’m going to grab a quick shower before dinner.” Houston watched him slip out of his Lycra pants and lay them folded onto the sink counter. Marketing had insisted on no visible underwear lines with the uniforms, and with the way the split-cheek pants fit like a G-string, hugging their skin both in back and up front, that more or less meant that both had wear the bodysuits commando.

Whoever designed the pants seemed to have only women in mind wearing them—at least that’s what it felt like. There wasn’t any room in the front of the pants for arranging one’s male equipment. It felt like to Houston that the gun-metal gray pants had been designed to do just that—put their male parts on display along with the rest of their build. At least the women on their team had suits cut to fit their chests, or was it to emphasize them? Knowing the marketing people, it was probably the latter.

“There’s more than enough room if you want to grab a shower too,” Grayson offered.

Although they’d been roommates all week, this was the first time Houston had actually seen Grayson undressed. Sure, he’d seen him in the cosplay clothes that hid next to nothing

about either of them, but this was the first time he'd seen him loose. Jesus the guy was hung.

"You go ahead, I'll grab it when you're done." Houston smiled continuing to brush while nodding at Grayson in the mirror.

"Oh—ah, okay." Grayson offered a shy smile and then stepped into the shower alcove turning on the rain head from the tall ceiling above.

Houston watched the guy wet his skin for a moment through the stationary glass shower wall that was opposite the large mirror over their suite's dual sinks. He shook his head still brushing and watching Grayson move a small bar of soap slowly, almost sensuously over his skin, like he was in a shoot modeling the bar's lather. He knew what the guy was doing. But he wasn't sure if *Grayson* knew what he was doing.

All week the guy had been dropping nice compliments about how Houston's uniform looked on him, even complimenting his ass. Grayson never used the word 'ass', he'd been raised a little too religious for that kind of language. Still, Houston had been subtly hit on more times than he could count in the gym and on other modeling trips not to know what a subtle advance looked and sounded like. He was pretty sure Grayson had no idea what he'd been doing all week. Houston watched the guy obliviously soaping himself standing just outside of the ceiling's rain head shower stream. Jeeze, was he really having these kinds of thoughts about Grayson right now?

Houston watched him through the mirror as soap suds cascaded down the tucked rounded ass of his new friend and roommate. He sighed, shaking his head.

"Oh—hi." Grayson wiped the water from his face, suddenly noticing that Houston had joined him. He'd been trying not to get his hair wet, but it was a little harder with the

rain shower. “Decide to share the shower after all?” He looked a little surprised but also glad to see Houston there with him.

Houston grinned. “I guess it would save some time.”

“Help yourself,” Grayson stepped back from the wide drizzle of the rain head, “the water feels really nice.”

Houston moved into the warm rain trying to keep his own hair dry as well. He could all but feel Grayson’s eyes dancing over him from head to toe. Houston turned in the water. He knew Grayson had been looking at him, staring sometimes, during the week. May as well give the guy a show. He slowly finished wetting his skin while his roommate took in an eyeful.

“Jeeze, Houston, hung much?” Grayson admired with a shy grin as Houston drenched his skin.

“Ah, you should talk, my friend. You’re bigger than I am.” Jesus, Grayson was big. Houston had not really noticed that about him before. Sure, he’d seen him in the pants, but Grayson had always tucked his schlong down. Houston had just stretched his own lengthy male off to one side under the material of his pants, it was way more comfortable but a lot more revealing. Grayson was obviously trying to hide his size in the uniform, but it wasn’t working – it just made him look even bigger the way the material hugged his jewels. It was also probably why he was getting a lot more chick pics than Houston was.

“Not. But I appreciate the compliment.”

“You’re the one all of the women have been stopping by to talk to, Gray. They all want to get pics with you and your,” Houston paused giving a nod to his male equipment, “stunning personality.”

“Ha. Not. You’re a lot nicer looking than I am.”

“Is that what you think? Really?” Houston looked at the drop-dead handsome features of his roommate, his masculine jaw, fine full lips complimented by great dimpled smile, and piercing green eyes under thick dark waves of hair.

"I think so."

"You're delusional. The only reason people were hanging around me is because of you."

Grayson wasn't sure if that was true. He'd never really been told he was handsome at home, or that he had a nice build by his family. Physical looks weren't something their church approved of emphasizing. His parents had even received complaints that he was spending too much time in the gym. He'd seldom been complimented on anything he did at home.

"Maybe we're both hot?" Grayson smirked.

"Hot together, maybe." Houston couldn't believe what just fell out of his mouth. "You and me working the floor probably makes both of us look better." Ooh, bad recovery.

"Maybe, but you're still way bigger than I am. Just admit it."

Oh, good. Church-boy Grayson didn't pick-up on his faux-pas. "I'm not Grayson. Jeeze," Houston was trying somewhat to change the subject of the conversation. "This isn't a contest."

"Oh. I'm sorry," Grayson realized that maybe he was being rude. "I guess I'm being crass. Sorry."

"No worries. You're not being crass," Houston reassured. "I guess I'm just not used to talking schlongs with other guys in the shower."

Grayson nodded. "I'm not either. But five bucks still says you're bigger. Or better yet, dinner."

"Oh, good God," Houston chuckled. "Seriously? This is a bet now?"

"Hey, we're in Vegas. Prove me wrong," Grayson challenged with a grin.

Houston rolled his eyes with a groan but played along. "Alright, you're on. But I don't want to take your money. You'll need it to buy some glasses." Houston snarked what he hoped would be the end of it.

“You’re just afraid you’ll lose the bet because you know I’m right.” Grayson grinned.

Houston sighed. The guy was huge. There was no way he was bigger than Grayson. But the challenge gave him a rare peek to check out the lengthy guy at least for a moment or two. Damn. Now he actually had him wondering. “You really want to compare, huh?”

Grayson stepped out of the water and moved his hand around his flaccid length, sliding his fingers around his male, holding himself out. Houston felt his groin twinge. God that was a sexy move.

“Alright—” Houston stepped out from the falling rain and moved up close to in front of Grayson and into his personal space. Each looked down between their wet skins and past thick pectorals and ripped abdominals as each held themselves out. Houston’s pubic area was neatly trimmed around his shaft with short dark hair that left him almost bare. Grayson had never seen a guy trimmed like Houston was before. His own pubic area looked like a thick dark forest surrounding his male by comparison. Both moved in closer to each other, wet skin touching wet skin, as each pulled themselves out as far as their male lengths would go. Houston’s sheathed helmeted tip was now buried into Grayson’s thick pubic patch while Grayson’s cut length was a full half inch shy of reaching Houston’s trimmed skin. Grayson rested his other hand on Houston’s shoulder to steady his balance while both seemed to try to fully extend their endowments that were now side-by-side between the two of them.

“See, you are bigger,” Houston assured. Grayson’s cock was easily fuller in girth and a noticeably thicker than his own.

“No, you’re way longer than me,” Grayson countered.

“Not ‘way’,” Houston corrected, “just by a little. No one is ever going to notice half an inch. We’re not talking about length here.”

“Yes we are.”

“A little longer is not ‘bigger’.” Houston countered as he watched Grayson try to gently pull himself all the way to his trimmed pubic area, but the thick guy was already as long as he was going to get—flaccid anyway.

“I didn’t know guys shaved down here.” Grayson nodded at Houston’s neatly manicured pubic area.

“Not shaved, really. Just trimmed.”

“It looks nice. I guess I have a few things to learn about men.”

“There’s nothing wrong with being bushy. It’s nice actually.” Okay, he admitted it. He rather liked seeing Grayson’s wild bush around his cock.

Both stood close, holding themselves out in their impromptu comparison; Houston placed his hand on Grayson’s shoulder, not so much to steady himself, but because he just wanted to be touching the guy. Grayson watched as Houston’s tip moved and brushed, just a little, around and through his thick pubic hair.

For long moments that turned into more than just a few seconds both guys stood close together, looking at their sizable comparisons. The seconds then turned into something that was quickly becoming close to a minute with neither saying a word.

As close as they were to each other, Houston heard his friend draw a quick but shallow breath.

“You know your cock’s touching mine, right?” Houston watched Grayson as he felt himself filling out. He’d already noticed Grayson’s length had gone from flaccid to something that was wanting to start lifting straight up, but Grayson’s hand kept him sticking straight out. Unbelievably, he’d gotten even thicker and a little longer.

“Yea—” Grayson looked up, their faces only inches apart. Grayson now noticed something different in Houston’s eyes. He’d seen the sort of curious look in Houston’s face before, but

it'd been one of those fleeting kinds of looks as Houston had always turned away. Only this time, Houston wasn't turning away. Grayson could feel the hard, thick tip of the long guy pushing against him, just ever so slightly moving against and through his pubic hair.

"I think you need to let me do that for you—" Grayson's hand pushed Houston's gently aside, taking over holding his now very hard thick shaft and moving the tip of his cock through his wild fleece.

Houston closed his eyes with a slight grimace as a new feeling tingled through his extremities. He groaned soft and low, his lips parting to release a deeply bated breath.

Grayson felt Houston's warm fingers encircling his own still hardening shaft now, smoothing and half dancing over his thick helmet until he'd become rock solid. Houston was still holding him straight out even though it was obvious his cock wanted to be standing vertical.

"You know your hand's wrapped around my cock, right?" Grayson breathed, feeling Houston's nose brush his own with his lips just barely out of reach.

Gor an inexperienced noob, Grayson had some nice natural moves. Houston felt himself being reeled in—the only problem was, he didn't mind. Damn Grayson was hot.

"Looks like I owe you dinner." Grayson breathed a sweet warm breath.

"I guess you—" Houston felt Grayson's lips parting his own. Was he really doing this? Feeling his lips folding into those of another guy—in the shower? While holding his cock? Yea—he was. The guy's lips were magical.

God Houston was hot. Grayson wasn't really sure what he was doing. He'd never kissed anyone before in his life. He'd seen people making out in movies, seen some friends kissing in high school. He never in his life thought his first kiss would be with another guy. Especially not in the shower! But he'd

been watching the Houston all week. Even when they'd first met on the plane. Even while the guy was slipping past him getting into the next seat. For some reason he'd wanted to just take hold of the front of his jeans and—well, now it was happening. Houston was hard and getting harder by the moment. He wanted to show Houston how he'd been feeling about him for the past several days, seeing him in his uniform. Houston had a nice ass and he wasn't just cute and handsome; the guy was beautiful. Grayson just let his lips and his hand wander where it felt like Houston needed them to be.

Houston greedily took in the feeling of Grayson's lips, how it felt with his hand playing the tip of his cock while another moved down over his ass.

Houston's hand moved from Grayson's shoulder to the side of his face and neck as both drew in each other's lips. It wasn't long before he was tasting Grayson's tongue as their kiss quickly heated up.

Houston had to come up for some air. "Haaahh, shit, where'd you learn to kiss?!"

Grayson was suddenly alarmed. It felt like Houston had been enjoying it. "I—I guess I didn't. I'm sorry. I've never kissed anyone before."

Houston pulled back to look at the guy. No one as good-looking as Grayson could have gotten through high school without snogging dozens of women. "Huh?"

Grayson nodded.

"You're serious—" Houston looked into his eyes. One hand still gripping Gray's cock while his other hand moved over his wet chest.

"I'm not going to lie to you."

"You've really never kissed anyone?"

Grayson shook his head with a sheepish smile. "Just you."

Houston flooded with not just surprise but also emotion. He was Grayson's first kiss? "Wow. You kiss really well. I don't think anyone's ever kissed me like you do."

"You're really good yourself," Grayson smiled, suddenly relieved. He rested his forehead onto Houston's.

Both dove back into a warm make-out with hands moving not just over cocks, but ribs, abs, pecs, chests, and gripping asses.

"God I've been wanting to do this to you all week." Grayson had let go of Houston's cock to grip both sides of his very hunky fine rounded glutes, pulling the two of their hard cocks together.

Houston could feel Grayson gripping and pulling at his ass. With both of their lips paused, he grabbed both sides of Grayson's ass as well. "I saw you looking at me. You should have just grabbed my ass. I would have let you, you know."

"You would have?"

Houston nodded into their kiss.

"I guess I was just too shy," Grayson admitted.

"I—may have had my eyes glued to your ass over the last couple of days. I like the way your uniform fits between your cheeks. Someone needed to be grabbing your ass."

"Someone already was," Grayson pulled away from his lips to catch another breath. "Some of the Hitachi girls already beat you to me."

"No, I saw them. They were grabbing mine too."

"Dude, that Kennedi chick was all over you."

"More like both of us."

Grayson nodded. "I kind of thought you might be looking at me. I mean, it kind of felt like you were."

"I know. I kind of was. It's just, I'm not—into guys at all. At least I didn't think I was."

"Maybe you just didn't meet the right guy?" Grayson pulled back from their embrace and picked up the bar of soap

he'd been using. He began moving it over Houston's abundant pecs.

Houston lifted his thick arms, locking his fingers onto the top of his head to give Grayson full access to his rippled torso. "Is that why you never kissed any women?"

"Kissing is a sin unless you're married—at least according to the little church we went to."

Houston rolled his eyes, nodding. Watching and feeling Grayson soap down his body was making him throb. His thick legs felt suddenly weak as Grayson turned his slick lathered fingers loose and slow all over his high-rise male and then jewels. Houston held onto Grayson's shoulders, exhaling deeply.

"You okay?" Grayson watched him grimace.

Houston nodded his approval. He felt Grayson's fingers dance all over and around the base of his shaft, then lightly cradle his jewels. He spread his feet to give the guy's talented fingers better access to all of his male equipment.

Grayson's soapy fingers slipped between his legs to massage his hard groin, then one of his digits slid between the cheeks of his ass, gliding over his sensitive star.

"HUHHH!" Houston cocked his head back as the new teasing sensation rippled through his groin into his limbs. "Jesus! Grayson! Dude, you're gonna make me come doing that."

"Really?" Grayson smiled with both of his soapy hands working over Houston's very hard groin.

Grayson slipped himself around Houston, moving the small bar of soap over his broad back. He made Houston spread his feet over the floor and his hands against the thick glass wall of their shower. Houston could see himself in the mirror, his tall cock rising up past his navel, as Grayson soaped and lathered his back, his legs, his ass, between his cheeks and

over his sensitive hole again. Damn! The guy had touch down well.

Houston couldn't help but watch himself in the bathroom's mirror while Grayson's fingers slipped and slid over his cock so smoothly it caused his toes to curl. He could feel Grayson's own soapy thickness now moving between his legs against his ass and groin while his fingers worked an arcane magic all over his jewels and shaft.

"God, I love the way you fuck, Gray," Houston whimpered feeling something building deep within him and tingling his jewels.

"I wanted to fuck you like this, days ago." Grayson whispered from behind him, his hips grinding firmly against Houston's ass with his own cock sliding and protruding from between Houston's spread legs. Grayson wasn't sure if he'd ever used the word 'fuck' before today, but God it felt good.

Both were watching each other in the mirror now, through the shower wall glass. Houston had never had to whimper with the slowly building feeling of sex in his life, but he was sure as hell whimpering now. "Fuck, Gray—" he exhaled again, his face grimaced. Houston winced as a new euphoria bolted through his jewels and groin, but he still wasn't anywhere near close to coming yet. "What are you doing to me?" Houston's hips were now moving in rhythm with Grayson's.

"I like to do this to myself sometimes," Grayson admitted in a whisper. "Do you like it?"

Houston winced again. "HMMMM, yea—shit!" he whimpered as the gentle teases sent dire signals of euphoria deep into his body and thick libs.

It didn't take long for Grayson's teasing to move Houston to the point where he was calling out softly with the building urge that was almost there. Grayson could see Houston's open

jaw and pleading eyes as he called out and winced as if in some deep pain. "AHHH-AHHH!"

Grayson felt every pulse of Houston's long, thick cock as warm seed shot hard, high and plentiful against the glass of their shower wall. Grayson looked at Houston's face, watching him, their eyes locked in the mirror while his body erupted in painful deep euphoria. He wanted Houston looking at him; he wanted the guy to know who it was delivering his heart-pounding release. For long moments Houston's thick body tensed, reveled and writhed under the excruciating climax of pain, but never once did he leave eyes with Grayson's.

Far too much sooner than he wished, the intense feeling abated leaving only his spent body still gasping trying to catch breaths.

"I think we made a mess on the wall." Grayson kissed the side of his face. Houston had come hard and copiously. He wasn't sure how, but it looked like a lot more of his seed was running down the glass than what he normally did.

Grayson had begun his own kind of whimpering now, feeling his thick cock sliding against Houston's groin. Houston brought his feet closer together, trapping Grayson's thick length between his thighs. The new sensation propelled Grayson quickly to his edge.

"Oh, God, Houston, I'm gonna cuuummm—" Grayson whimpered. Both guys were still watching each other as Grayson drove his length hard between Houston's upper thighs and ass, pushing his cock out between the front of his legs and suddenly splashing the glass with a heavy white spray that audibly struck the window hard. Pulse after pulse hit the shower glass with both guys' gaze locked in the far mirror. God Grayson looked hot when he was coming, his face, the way his eyes looked so lustfully into his own.

Grayson's euphoria was finally exhausted, and nothing but dribbling seed leaked out from his half sore cock. Half sore

because he wasn't used to fucking anyone and because he suddenly realized that soap wasn't the best lubricant. Houston watched as Grayson finally broke eye contact with him and half collapsed gripping onto his back, holding Houston from behind, leaving light kisses on his back and shoulders.

Feeling Grayson's body spent, Houston turned into his weak embrace, their lips met all over again.

"God—I'm so going to hell," Grayson whispered into his lips, a tone of longing still rising within his voice.

Houston returned his kiss, his voice soft, low and masculine in its Midwest drawl. "Not without me you're not."

* * * * *

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