



VEILED PASSIONS

Book I in the Engineered IV Love series

by Jeanie Johnson and Jayha Leigh

CAVEAT

This work of erotica contains adult language and sexually-explicit scenes, which are smoking hot. This book is intended only for adults, as it is defined by the laws of the country in which the purchase is made. Keep this book out of the hands of under-aged readers.

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Cover Artist: the completely badazz Celia Kyle

Shout Outs

As always to our Mr. Me's. And also to Robert Mackenzie who shamelessly spoils my bambina. To Antoinette and her Sven. To Von, Rolanda and Dréa who get jiggy with it on a regular basis. And a special shout out to Chandra in Switzerland for introducing us to the Teuscher champagne truffle. *OH MY GOODNESS!!!!!!!* Jeanie and Jayha

The First Partner: Njarðar –the brain

Chapter 1.a: Structures and Environment

The phrases 'professional engineers' and 'getting jiggy with it' so didn't belong in the same sentence, Isoke Morehouse thought as she shook her head at the debacle surrounding her – the debacle being the annual convention of the NSPE-National Society of Professional Engineers. But what could she expect? It wasn't as if engineers were accustomed to getting jiggy with it. Nope, the majority of engineers with which she was acquainted, suffered some degree of OCD. And it didn't get any better when you gathered a bunch of engineers in one place. If there was anything worse than a handful of engineers trying to get jiggy with it; it was a horde of engineers trying to get jiggy with it. Looking around at her colleagues, most of whom had doctorate degrees, she simply shook her head as she watched the debacle unfold. This was sad on a whole new level, she thought as she watched two engineers launch into a heated discussion about the mathematical cosine.

Looking around the banquet hall she came to the conclusion that large groups of engineers didn't mix with a lot of things including: a-the general populace; b-copious alcohol; and, c-any place where she planned to be ... and she said this being an engineer herself. It was moments like this that she wondered what had ever prompted her to become an engineer in the first place. Oh yeah, the money, the opportunities for career advancement, the respectability, the way it made her momma shut up about her future.

She should've simply been a racecar driver for a NASCAR team, but there was that whole squeezing her voluptuous self into that tiny car window and though flesh was malleable, she had way too many titties, ass and hips to be climbing into a car à la Duke Boys style. So instead of being a race car driver, she marched off to North Carolina A&T State University and got her B.S. in Mechanical Engineering and learned how to soup up anything that had an engine. And she meant anything. Once she learned the fundamentals of the combustible engine, and subsequently learned how much it cost to do those things, she marched off to grad school and kept

marching until she had a Dr. in front of her name and a proper corporate job.

Had she listened to her inner self, she would've been at Talladega, surrounded by the sounds of roaring engines and screaming fans with the sights of butt crack and shiny cars zipping around the 2.66 mile oval instead of here in the Sonoran Desert being bored amongst other things. Since they were hell bent on coming to Arizona, they should've had the decency to schedule the convention to coincide with the race at Phoenix International Speedway. But noooooooooo, that would've made this convention less sucky and we can't have that.

She'd tried everything she could to get out of attending to no avail. It wasn't that she didn't like Phoenix or the resort. Their bosses had put them up in the best suites in the spectacular resort and spa and had supplied them with a more-than-generous per diem. She didn't find fault with the beauty of the area or the hospitality; it was that she didn't like being that fucking hot. It wasn't simply hot; it was practicing for an extended stay in Hell hot. The average temperature in May was in the nineties and yet so far the lowest high temperature since their arrival had been a balmy ninety-seven degrees Fahrenheit. Whoever had decided that Phoenix was a good place to be at in May needed their ass handed to them.

She grimaced thinking about her first step into the hot Phoenix sun. As soon as she'd stepped from the plane she had to fight the urge to re-embark and punch Scandinavia in the throat for bringing her here. By Scandinavia she didn't mean the Nordic countries of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and their homies Finland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands, but the group of men who owned the engineering firm for which she worked. She called them that because a-they all hailed from the aforementioned Nordic countries; b-it was easier to recall then their last names, all of which ended in -son; and, c-she really didn't give a damn what their individual surnames were as long as they continued to sign her checks. Damn, they tried her last nerve ... all except for her direct boss Dr. Njarðar Valdason who was the polar opposite of his five homies.

Njarðar was the only reason that she hadn't quit on day one. Whereas the other guys that made up Scandinavia were bone fide assholes who'd fuck anything that moved and fight anything that challenged them; Njarðar was one step above a recluse. Njarðar wasn't a scary loner; he just enjoyed his solitude.

Despite being one of the owners, Njarðar was quite laid back. He insisted everyone use his first name instead of calling him by his title, which was good, since she had every intention of interacting with him on a first-name basis. Since he insisted on such informality she took it one step one further and nicked his name, as was her God-given right as a southerner. Though the last part of his name was actually pronounced closer to Thor, she called him Roar. She just couldn't call a man Thor unless he wore a loincloth and carried a hammer. And every time she thought of Roar in a loin cloth she almost pissed herself laughing knowing that he'd press creases into it.

There was simply something about Roar that appealed to her inner advocate. In spite of being the quintessential privileged white male, there was a loneliness about Roar. He didn't seem to bask in his wealth, intelligence, or good looks. In fact, it seemed that he did everything to understate all of the things that people seemed to value. While the rest of Scandinavia strutted around flashing their wealth and beauty, Roar generally dressed in a plain white dress shirt and dark, cuffed dress slacks and wore his hair tied back in such a way that one could only guess at its texture and length. Though he attempted to downplay his looks, it wasn't working ... at all. Roar possessed the kind of fine that didn't need dressing up. She didn't tell him that though, choosing to let him believe that no one noticed those devastating hazel eyes and glossy, sable hair.

Whereas it wasn't difficult to spot the rest of Scandinavia, as they were usually the ones with a supermodel in one hand and a beer in their other hand, Roar was the one who always stood alone even when amidst the boisterous presence of the rest of Scandinavia. Currently, he was nursing his bottle of water looking like he'd rather be any place but here. He could've remained back in Atlanta while the rest of Scandinavia attended

(and subsequently, she could've remained home also) but they'd bugged him to fucking death until he gave in. They probably wanted him to play nursemaid to them. You know, make sure that they had a designated driver for their drunk asses, make sure that the women they picked up were actually women and weren't on fire with STDs ... that sort of thing.

Roar was the sole reason she stayed. One day, she'd exact vengeance on both their behalves. She'd invade their countries and establish herself as a benevolent despot. Perhaps she'd offer them jobs kissing her ass. She'd spare Iceland, being that that's where Roar hailed from. And she'd decree that everyone was to leave him the fuck alone, or die. She got giddy thinking about that. Ah, the possibilities. She didn't know that she was smiling or that Roar saw it.

Having gotten her body heat stabilized and already gone over her dreams of invading Scandinavia, Isoke now had time to realize two things. First, she was bored and not simply run-of-the-mill bored, but watching-wet-shit-harden-into-a-lump-of-dry-shit-would-be-more-amusing bored. Second, she was hungry, which was ironic being that she was at dinner. True, she was at dinner, and in spite of the hotel's five-star rating, she was duly unimpressed. Blame it on her good southern genes, but she just couldn't in good conscience eat food that only had one redeeming quality, that being that it was pretty to look at. To think that the chefs who prepared this were considered masters. *Masters of what, she wondered.* As far as she could tell, they were only good at putting too small food onto too big plates. She smiled thinking of what her grandmomma's reaction would be to it. Her grandmomma would storm into the kitchen and snatch the head chef up by his or her ear and deliver a sermon on hellfire and damnation and grease and gravy.

Isoke was wondering how she was going to spend the rest of her night, when her musings were interrupted.

SLAP!

Chapter 1.b: Solid Waste Management

Few things have the power to shake you out of your reverie or shut the world the fuck up like a sudden unexpected bit of violence. Violence is an effective and expedient device for begetting not only silence, but provocation and internal debate. Violence has power, not just physical power but change-bringing power that affects not only individuals, but entire communities and whole worlds. Violence has the power to take you back, to transport you to pivotal moments in not only your own life but your life as a citizen of the world. After the moment, after the chorus of collective indrawn breaths, there is a tipping point. That is, there is a point in the aftermath where you either withdraw for reasons of physical safety (yours or that of the aggressor) or you retaliate. You can retaliate with moral authority and turn the other cheek or you can retaliate with more violence.

And then there's option x. And make no mistake about it, there's always an option x. Option x is the option that's not offered; it is the option that neither the victim nor the aggressor expects. When the rage stops and the smoke clears what is left is the *Mercy*, the *Oh My*, the *Oh Fuck*. The blasphemies can bring destruction or usher in a new beginning.

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There I was, in the banquet hall reserved for our company, minding my own damn business, sitting next to the complete asshole known as Phil, listening to the most demeaning conversation about women that I'd ever had the misfortune to overhear. It was the kind of conversation that would get his ass fired if any of Scandinavia had heard it and the kind of conversation that would get him disemboweled if he was anyplace other than a work function. Phil was stupid and though he might've been born at night it wasn't last night, therefore he made sure that his totally inappropriate conversation wasn't overly loud. In fact, it was a bit hush-hush ... unless you were sitting near him. Oh, there were other people at the table but they were in two camps: those in Phil's party of assholes and those who were seated because they were already three sheets to the wind

and couldn't do more than manage a half-assed kind of stagger. So yeah, there I was sitting right next to needs-a-fucking-foot-in-his-trifling-ass Phil listening to him go on and on and on. Even though Phil wasn't talking loud, I *knew* that Phil knew that I could hear him. And just as he knew that I could hear him; even with his less-than-stellar mathematical skills he most likely calculated that eventually I'd say something.

And eventually had come and gone so I broke my '*no speaking to complete dicks rule*' and addressed Phil.

"Phil, while I do appreciate your First Amendment rights and your attempts at discretion, I don't appreciate the conversation at all. Perhaps you could table that for a more appropriate venue." *Like when you're sitting around Hell's anti-chamber.*

"Bitch," he replied.

"I see that your conversational prowess is equal to your mathematical prowess," I returned.

"That's your problem. You think that you're fucking better than everyone else."

'No, I don't think I'm better than everyone else; I just know that I'm better than you' is what I thought but what I said was:

"No, Phil. I don't think that I'm better than everyone else, and there's a lot that I don't know but I know this: I can out-math you any day of the week."

"Yeah, because it's not like you have anything to distract you from your math ... you know, like a life. You don't have a man. Hell, you don't even have a dog so I guess you should be able to out-math even Pythagoras himself."

"I probably could take old P-thag (*that's what I called Pythagoras because well I'm southern and I'm entitled to totally fuck up someone's name*), but that's neither here or there being that he's not here to defend

himself or his theorems. As far as my life goes, it's none of your business, Phil."

"Seventy years ago, it would've been my business."

"And we can add history to the ever-growing list of things you suck at, Phil."

"I remember a time when fat broads knew their place," he sneered.

"And I remember a time when a male dissing my looks would've hurt me, but then I had my ninth birthday and I've been badass ever since."

"You're pretty much all ass."

"And yet the fact that I won't give you the time of day eats away at your fragile ego. Grow up, Phil. We're never going back to pre-Civil war times. For that matter, we're never going back to the 1950s. Not only are women discovering that they can be anything; they're also discovering that they can say no to all kinds of things including antiquated paradigms of femininity and your advances. Sucks to be you in the modern era, doesn't it?" I asked.

"It doesn't matter how far in the future we are. A man is still a man and women are made for us."

Though I couldn't see my own face I was pretty sure that my eyebrows had disappeared somewhere up in my hairline. Phil was fucking serious. His presence usually annoyed me; his prior conversation had made me want to vomit in my mouth, but his last statement made me want to break every rule of mathematics, physics, and the space-time continuum and throw him into a black hole in a galaxy further away than far, far away.

I was busy daydreaming about ways to keep the human population safe from Phil when the unexpected happened. No, the earth didn't open up and swallow Phil like it did to Korach and his cronies; nope, this time the earth was still. Then again, this wasn't the Book of Numbers. The earth may have been still, but Phil was not. Phil reached over and copped a feel

of my ass. Oh, he was good. He was all Houdini about it. No one else may've seen it, but I'd felt it and touching my person uninvited was the number one 'Oh hell no'.

Before I describe what went down, let me first say that Phil Grant was not only an asshole, but a wannabe member of Scandinavia. He had the looks, the wealth, the same disregard for everyone around him, and the same air of entitlement, but what he didn't have was any damn sense whatsoever. How that man found his way out of pre-school still puzzles me, so you can understand that I have no idea how that man got a master's in engineering.

Some people name-dropped, but Phil university name-dropped. He went to all of these so-called top-ranked universities and yeah, whatever. As many times as he bored everyone with the story it seems like I would remember what universities he attended, but alas all that I recall is that they had a 'tech' somewhere in their name. It wasn't that I didn't care, well actually it was. I'm an Aggie and a Tarheel and as far as I'm concerned, that trumped everything on Phil's C.V. And that's not merely bias. After listening to the man talk, it became increasingly obvious that Phil got into those prestigious universities on legacy, not academics. To think that he descended from a long line of assholes.

Now back to him cupping my ass. Before I even had time to work out whether I was going to cut his hand off or his whole arm, the liquor he was tossing back like it was going out of style must've robbed him of his last iota of sense, because he backhanded me. The blow rocked my head back and ushered in a silence that was deafening. I pulled the napkin out of my lap and carefully set it on the table as if any sudden movement would shatter my good sense, or compromise my hold on my cool. Turning to Phil, I meant to ask if he, in his customary semi-inebriated state, meant to put his hands on me. Really, that was my intent. Alas, it didn't go like that ... at all.

You know when you sit around shooting the breeze with your buds, indulging in those barbershop conversations, playing the game of what you'd do in such-and-such situation. And you know how you say you

wouldn't take it. And you know how in your mind you imagine yourself going all *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Mortal Kombat*, and *Tombstone* because you have all of those years of those hand-to-hand combat training under your belt. And even more than the training, you have a bunch of mean ass brothers who taught you to fight and a special-ops daddy who taught them.

I had all of that, the training, the confidence, the skill, but it all went to hell in a hurry because what I also had was a strain of southern that manifested itself into straight up, undiluted crazy. Regardless of my delicate, sleeveless, cream silk blouse, I grabbed my plate and slammed it into Phil's face. And then I grabbed every damn plate that I could get my hands on and launched a full-frontal assault on the motherfucker that dared violate my personal space boundaries and put his grubby hands on me. Plate of salad; threw it. Bowl of soup; flung it. Phil's surf and turf; chucked it. Glass of juice; hurled it. Carafe of coffee; slung it. Decorative center piece on the table; swung it. Cutlery; tossed it like they were ninja stars.

And then his buddies rocked up. And if Phil was a Scandinavia wannabe, those motherfuckers were *homo sapiens* wannabes. I stayed the fuck away from them. If I stepped onto an elevator and they were in it; I exited. If I walked into a room and they were present; I settled myself as close as possible to Scandinavia. I might not like Scandinavia, but hanging with engineers, the pickings for alpha men were kind of slim. Besides, Scandinavia just made me want to establish myself as their ruler and make them my personal gofers, whereas Phil and Company gave me the heebie-jeebies.

I don't know if they were there to help or hinder but I took their presence as a threat and altered my attack. Having depleted my supply of shit to launch at him, I hefted a chair and wondered which one to take out first. But before I could finish that thought, I felt Roar's presence and fell back instinctively knowing that everything would be okay. Shifting to shield him from Phil and the assholes that he rolled with, I felt Roar's hand on my hip. And even in the middle of battle, my body paused to revel in the

feel of his hand on my body. Until that moment, Roar had never touched me. In fact, he'd always remained a respectable distance away insuring that he did not invade my personal space. Now he was not only touching me, he was all up on me. He was so close that I could feel his leashed anger. I'd never seen Roar be anything but calm. He had a serenity about him that I admired, but right now that serenity was gone. Seeing the rest of Scandinavia making their way over and knowing that they weren't about to let anyone sucker punch Roar, I turned to look at him, to tell him it was okay ... and stopped cold.

This was a Roar that I'd never before seen. A Roar that I would never have guessed existed. This Roar was the antithesis of calm, cool, and collected. This Roar was undiluted fury ... and unbelievably fucking hot.

Though I was in his eyesight, I knew that he didn't see me. His eyes were locked onto Phil and company and for a fraction of a nanosecond, I felt sorry for them. Scandinavia might not exactly be the evil empire, but right now it was pretty fucking threatening with Roar as its commander and the –sons his hardened soldiers ready to follow him into battle. In this moment the coating of privilege they wore with pride was nowhere to be seen. In its place was straight up Viking warrior. Mapmakers were about to get paid because Roar had the 'getting-ready-to-lay-waste-to-your-country-kill-your-men-and-demand-your-land-as-a-spoil-of-war-for-daring-to-piss-me-off look about him.

Mesmerized by the sight of Roar, it was a moment before I realized that he'd relieved me of my chair. Before I could object, he had me pushed behind him and had Phil's throat comfortably within his hand. I didn't see much, being pinned behind Roar's back, but I clearly heard Phil's gasps. *Mercy, Roar felt good ... and smelled good ... and felt good.* That was the last thought I remember thinking.

Chapter 1.c: Structural Analysis

Njarðar did not want to be here. He had made that perfectly clear to his friends ... and right now, he was using the term ‘friends’ lightly. Sigtrygg Diðriksson, Falkor Sigfússon, Torsven Óðinsson, Yngvi Aðalmondsson, and Tage Kristjánsson might be his business partners but right now he was trying to remember why they were his best friends. Oh yes, because they wouldn’t go away and allow him to be the hermit that he longed to be. They said that being alone all of the time wasn’t good for him so they dragged him out hoping that he’d be more like them. Sighing, he knew that his friends meant well, but womanizing, drinking, and clubbing had long ago lost their appeal. Actually, those activities had never appealed to him. He much preferred libraries, museums, and the company of his beloved texts to that of human beings.

He wasn’t a misanthrope; he simply couldn’t stand most people. They bored him and it wasn’t simply because he had an IQ in excess of 190. It was because despite millennia of evolution, the majority of humanity could be summed up as ‘blah, blah, blah, look pretty, accumulate stuff, be like everyone else, blah, blah, blah.’ And in between they had constant quarrels and made never ending noise. He was a man who enjoyed his quiet. He didn’t mind conversation, but he found that most people had little to say ... or rather what they said, he didn’t want to hear.

Excusing himself and slipping away from his friends, he found a deserted corner that had his name all over it. Grabbing a bottle of water, he slowly sipped it as he scanned the room. Though he pretended to scan the room, in reality he was looking for one person in particular – Dr. Isoke Morehouse. Isoke was brilliant, even without all of those letters behind her name. She had to have the most interesting C.V. in the office. Sure she had the obligatory M.S. in engineering (environmental), but just this year, she’d completed her Ph.D. in engineering. That however, wasn’t the impressive part, the impressive part stemmed from what she omitted. She omitted the fact that she held a *Juris Doctorate* and a Masters in Regional Planning. Currently, he was the only one in the company that knew that interesting fact, courtesy of the extensive background check that he performed on

employees. One day, he'd get up the nerve to ask her about it. Certainly, if her colleagues had such an impressive C.V., they'd throw a parade, post banns, and hire a village crier to announce their accomplishments to all.

Isoke may have had the brain of an engineer, but she had the personality of Carnival. Damn near everybody's best friend, she held rock star status in their building. Whenever she walked into a room, everyone from the mailroom staff to the lead engineers shouted greetings. And Isoke smiled them back. She had a ready smile, an unbelievable sense of humor, and an infectious laugh.

Though she didn't brook interruptions when she worked, when it was time to go, there was always a bevy of people standing outside her door to walk out to her vehicle with her. She was like the Pied Piper, albeit without the rats and revenge plot. And she was better-dressed.

Isoke might be an engineer but he'd bet cold hard cash that she didn't have a cotton button down shirt anywhere in her closet. She dressed like she was on the verge of taking over something. Her style of dressed said respect me and - not or, but and - suffer the consequences. Despite not wearing any noticeable name brands, Isoke not only looked like a high-powered businesswoman; she looked like she owned the company. And that was saying something considering that his partners damn near wore out every high-priced designer in existence, especially if they had an Italian name.

Despite the intellect, the popularity, the aura of confidence, and her burning desire to invade an entire block of countries, Isoke was genuinely nice. You had to work to get on her nerves and when you did, not even the lake of fire could thaw the freeze that she put on you. He knew, because he'd seen it. Though Isoke was nice enough to him, whenever she was in the company of his partners, it felt as if an ice age was looming. His partners grumbled that Isoke didn't like them and he could understand that because she didn't like them ... at all. They couldn't fault her work; they simply found it difficult to accept that there was a woman on earth that didn't give a damn about them. And that had made him smile ... and keep

her close to him. It was fun watching his partners get shot down, especially when they had no idea that they were engaged in battle.

His partners accused him of having a spot soft for her ... and maybe he did. She treated him like he was anybody else, meaning that she didn't kowtow to him because he was her boss. Nor did she fuss over him like other females were wont to do. Not once did she make him coffee, bring him coffee or adjust his tie in an attempt to touch his person. He laughed thinking of Isoke's reaction if he even suggested that she should fix his coffee. He'd seen her with her best friend Karlo and after hearing Karlo put people in their place, he was sure that he didn't want any part of that telling off.

If anything, Isoke treated him like ... a friend. She simply accepted him as he was. That was a new experience. Usually people attempted to spruce him up, make him better, and encourage him to be like other guys. Isoke simply let him be.

The consummate extrovert, Isoke didn't let the fact that he was the paradigm for introverts prevent her from including him in her good time. Though she respected his need for space, she didn't hesitate to nick his name or tease him about everything from his voracious sweet tooth to his lady company (what little of it there was). *Did you check that woman for STDs/psychotic baby daddies/the correct genitalia?* Though he was glad that Isoke didn't look at him with the disgust that she reserved for his partners, he did sometimes wonder what it would be like to have her look at him and recognize that he was a prime male.

He truly liked Isoke. Not only was she brilliant, but she had a bone-deep integrity that was evident in the way that she went about her work, treated people, and approached life. Under her rock star veneer was a scholar. The written word was her vice and the bookstore her strip club. She had VIP status at the eclectic bookstore Jeanie's Lounge and was admitted before opening hours to get her daily fix of reading material. She often tossed out stimulating subjects which the whole office inevitably ended up debating. Though they didn't do a lot of face-to-face since he

holed up in his office, they debated via email. Even when they were on opposing sides of an issue (which they inevitably were), she didn't simply dismiss his position, but gave it due diligence. And when she had the stronger argument (which she did at least half the time, which was a first for him), she didn't use it as a mechanism for indoctrination, instead she handed it to him as another option.

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Seating himself at one of the many tables in the banquet hall, he was contemplating a topic for debate when he saw Phil strike her. He was a mild man. He rarely raised his voice, and though he was well-versed in martial arts, he'd never engaged in a fight. But then, there had been little reason to do so. No one bothered him and in return he didn't bother them. At 6'3" and 235 pounds, he wasn't the biggest man, but he was a man and Isoke, despite her solid 5'10," 170 pound frame, was still a woman. And no man would ever put his hands on her with impunity. Rising from his chair, he made his way to the other side of the banquet hall.

He'd never forget the sight of Isoke's anger. Ever. And he was sure that neither would anyone else present. If Phil's slap had startled the room into silence, Isoke's defense of that slap spurred the room into getting the hell out of Dodge. She'd already cleared the table of all of its contents – most of which Phil was wearing, and when she ran out of stuff to throw; she picked up the chair and hefted it like a shield while using the leg that she'd broken off as a sword. Though she looked confident, he recognized the fear under her anger. And that was simply unacceptable as Isoke was ... *hvaðeina, sérhvað* ... he finally admitted. Isoke had always been *hvaðeina, sérhvað* (everything).

Coming up behind her, he relieved her of the chair with one hand and grabbed Phil's fist within his free hand. Slowly crushing the hand that had dared touch Isoke, he stared the man down as he pushed Isoke behind him. He held her in place knowing that she'd try and help him. He appreciated that but what she didn't know was that currently it was taking everything within him not to outright kill Phil. If she helped him and suffered further

injury, he would not only kill the man; he would also kill the men with him. She didn't know it, but Sigtrygg, Falkor, Torsven, Yngvi, and Tage knew it. He saw them approach from the corner of his eye. Though men that enjoyed the perks of their privilege, they were foremost men. They didn't speak; they allowed their presence to speak for them. Emitting a grunt of gratitude, he continued applying pressure until he felt the bones of Phil's hand give.

He would've continued until he'd crushed the bones to dust, but he felt Isoke tremble. Knowing that her adrenaline rush was wearing off, he turned and caught her before she hit the floor in a dead faint. Cradling her to his chest, he handed her to Torsven along with a look that demanded that he protect her or suffer the consequences. Turning back to Phil and his group, he smiled. And noting the fear that bloomed over their face, he loosed booming laughter right before he gave them the fight that they'd been looking for.

Chapter 1.d: System Dynamics

Njarðar didn't recall much of the battle. He simply knew that it was short. It had to be, for he had to see to Isoke. Only when the last man lay on the floor writhing in pain, did his anger diminish enough to allow him to do something other than deliver pain. Before he could shake off the last remnants of anger, Torsven handed him back Isoke and a directive to see to her while he dealt with the fallout. He needed no further urging. Though bordering on dangerously adventurous, Torsven was the most level-headed of his partners.

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Handing over Isoke, Torsven sent Njarðar to see to his woman. Turning to Sigtrygg, Tage and Falkor, he indicated that they should follow Njarðar knowing that at the moment, Njarðar's sole focus was on the future that he was cradling in his arms. Grabbing a fistful of Yngvi's shirt before he could find some new shit to get into, Torsven went to see about the garbage that was littering the floor of the banquet room. Phil and company might be damn fine engineers, but they'd crossed the fucking line when they put their hands on the one person that Njarðar lost his fucking mind over.

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Njarðar couldn't help but look at Isoke. Isoke was beautiful. The slight bruise that had begun to form on the left side of her face prevented his anger from completely dissipating. Feeling his anger rise up, he had to force himself to hold her gently instead of crushing her to him like he wanted to do. Handing his partners his keycard, they unlocked the door but knew not to step foot in the room being that he had Isoke there.

"Do we need to call a doctor?" Tage asked.

"Have one on standby. I'll call you when I need you," he said as he shut the door.

Disregarding the food residue stuck to her clothes, he laid her on the bed. Going to the bathroom, he fetched a cloth and ran it under warm water. Shucking out of his jacket, he tossed it and made his way back to Isoke. Gently he wiped her face and hands. Her clothes were a mess but there was nothing that he could do about that. He dared not undress her knowing how vulnerable she was in unconsciousness and how violated she'd feel if she woke undressed. When she was cleaned up to his satisfaction, he tossed the cloth to the floor and pulled up a chair and watched her sleep.

There was no doubt that she was descended from Nubians. She had prominent features of which she was proud, and hell she should be. Isoke did nothing to diminish the woman that she was. She wore her Senegalese twists pulled back in an intricate chignon, which allowed others to see the beauty of her face. Having Nordic features himself, albeit he had dark brown hair and green eyes, he was fascinated with Isoke's features. Her round forehead, flatter nose, and thick lips were beautiful.

He smiled considering the scores of beautiful women he knew that didn't step foot out of the house without full face coverage. All of them wanted to conceal, play up, or diminish their features. Isoke, on the other hand, wore very little makeup, choosing to present herself to the world on her own terms. After a discussion about the fashion industry, he'd asked her why she wore only a minimum of makeup. Instead of getting angry at him and accusing him of meanness, she'd smiled and answered knowing that he meant no insult.

'Whenever I see my image, I see my history. I see my mother when I look at the shape of my body, my grandmother when I look at my cheekbones, my father when I look at the color of my eyes, my grandfather when I look at the shape of my nose, and the shell of my ear. I see my ancestors when I look at the shape of my face and the color of my complexion. Whenever I see me, I see my history. And knowing my history, why would I put something on my face to conceal or diminish who and what I am?'

She was proud of her features not because she knew that she was striking but because her face was a living genealogy. He liked the way she viewed life and her place in it. If he was being completely honest, he'd admit that he liked damn near everything about her.

His quiet was interrupted by a disoriented Isoke waking up.

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Tage had never seen Njarðar anything but calm ... until tonight. After seeing Njarðar angry, he was sure of a few things. One, he never wanted to see Njarðar angry again. It wasn't a normal anger that he'd witnessed tonight. It was a soul-searing anger that incinerated everything that it touched. Two, Njarðar was deeply in love with Isoke Morehouse. He always suspected that he held a soft spot for the contrary woman, but now he knew it for what it was – love, and not simply any kind of love but the walk to the ends of the earth kind.

Regardless of how much Isoke despised them, something in him twisted at the thought of her being hurt. And something dangerous reared its head recalling that it was a man who'd hurt her. He didn't abide men striking women ... period, ever, or under any circumstances. That thought brought him to point number three. Phil and his pals had to go unless they wanted to have their teeth kicked in ... every time he saw them.

Having used his good looks and name to sweet-talk the desk clerk into giving him the name of doctors on the premise, he quickly scanned the room for the first one on his extremely short list. The pickings were somewhat slim being that most of the rooms were reserved by engineers, but as luck would have it there was one here tonight – a Dr. Snapdragon Rice. A damn odd name for anyone, but he wasn't interested in anything but the 'doctor' in front of his name. Tage hoped that the doctor didn't have any plans; then again he didn't really care. Njarðar's woman needed a doctor therefore Dr. Snapdragon Rice was simply going to have to rearrange his evening.

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Isoke woke in a panic. Not knowing where she was, she gasped, frantically trying to get her bearings. Before she could jump from the bed, Roar's calming voice slid over her.

"Isoke, you're okay."

"Roar?" she questioned.

"Yes, Isoke," he replied as he helped her to a sitting position.

"What happened? Where am I? What?" she began.

"You're in my suite."

Glancing at the bedside clock, she noted the time. Only a few minutes had passed. She was fully-dressed, albeit covered in remnants of food, and she was with Roar. Closing her eyes, she exhaled, thankful that she was okay.

"Why am I here?" she finally asked.

"You fainted. I thought it best that I not leave you on the floor of the banquet hall."

"Though I don't recall the last few minutes, I do know that I didn't hit the floor."

"Well, I had my reputation to protect as a man and all," he joked.

"Oh yeah, that," she joked back.

"Tage has a doctor waiting. Are you ready to see him?"

"You were with me the whole time? You didn't leave me after I fainted?" she asked.

"I didn't leave you, Isoke."

"Well, then I don't need the doctor. Thank you for asking though, and thank you for looking after me Roar," she said as she reached out and hugged him.

“You’re welcome, but you’re seeing a doctor ... just to be on the safe side,” he said as he called Tage on his cellular phone.

Isoke wanted to protest but it was obvious that Roar was so not listening to her at the moment. Fine, then. To appease Roar, she’d allow the doctor in, but that didn’t mean that she was going to let the doctor do more than check the basics.

Watching the doctor enter the quarters, she noticed his handsomeness straight away. The good doctor was fine with a capital f. About an inch taller than Roar, he had a severe haircut that only served to highlight his beautiful features. Standing to greet the man, she noticed that Roar seemed agitated by the doctor’s presence.

“I’m going to be in the sitting room. If she screams or makes any sound of distress, you’ll die,” Roar growled.

“If she screams, I assure you that it won’t be distress,” the doctor said.

“You better,” Roar began.

“I better what?” the doctor asked.

Oh fuck, Isoke thought. First, Roar was acting so caveman it wasn’t funny. Well, actually it was because standing there in his tailored clothes with his five-thousand dollar watch, and half a million dollar education, he was the antithesis of a caveman. Second, the doctor had a southern accent, which meant that he probably liked NASCAR. While she had no intentions of actually letting him do more than check her pulse, she had every intention of talking sports with him. But first, she’d have to insure that he and Roar didn’t come to blows. Roar didn’t hide the fact that he was angry, and while the doctor did his best to hide his agitation, he was failing miserably.

“Roar,” she purred. “Let the doctor do his thing so he can go. Okay?”

“Fine,” he said as he made his way to the door. “But I’ll be in the sitting room if you need me.”

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Snap was an easygoing man. A patient man. A nice man, but right now he was about yay close to being a man on death row. If any one of the merry little band of lunatic engineers threatened him just once more, it was on. He didn't want to be at this convention in the first place, but Zoysia had whined and pleaded and finally given him the big puppy dog eyes in order to get him to come. And now he was here, did he get to golf and chill and indulge in the first class activities for which the resort was renowned? No. Instead he'd had to attend seminars on shit he would've been perfectly content to go the whole of his life not knowing.

On top of his absolute annoyance, it was fucking hot. A southerner born and bred, he was accustomed to the heat but this was beyond ridiculous. And being kidnapped by a crazed Scandinavian engineer didn't sweeten his mood one bit. If it wasn't for the bit of desperation in the engineer's eyes, he would've put up more of a fight. He should've brained the engineer and called the police, but noooooooooooooo he had a conscience. Dammit all to hell. But none of that mattered at the present. Right now this woman who was so desperately trying to prevent a battle, needed him and he felt his heart softening. Oh that wasn't to say that Tage whatever-the-fuck his last name was, wasn't going to get a retaliatory beat down, but that would have to come after he saw to this woman's pet.

Looking at her, he could see that she'd been through a lot. And it wasn't simply because she had food stains covering the better part of her. It was her eyes and the fact that she had a pretty good bruise going on the left side of her face. Though he wanted to jump right in and ask her what happened, he realized that first he'd have to build some rapport.

"I'm Dr. Snapdragon Rice, but you can call me 'Snap.' And before you ask, no my parents weren't high when they named me," he said as he noticed the laughter in her eyes.

"Thank you for coming Dr. Rice. I'm Isoke Morehouse, please call me Isoke. The unusually taciturn man that just left is my boss, Dr. Njarðar

Valdason. Though I'm laughing, please know that it's not solely at your expense. It seems that between the three of us, we have names that southerners are just bound to mess up and nick as they see fit," she joked.

Hearing the laughter in Ms. Morehouse's voice and discovering that she was a fellow southerner softened his mood. "You don't know how good it is to meet a fellow southerner," he joked.

"I'm going through food withdrawals," she admitted.

"Me too. For me, it's biscuits and gravy," he said.

"Fatback," she laughed, "though I don't need any more of either."

Sharing mutual laughter, and having established a measure of trust, he reached out and gently tilted her head to get a better look at the side of her face.

Did he do this?" he asked.

"What?"

"Did your boss do this? If he hit you, just tell me and I will go in there and beat his ass ... for free," Snap offered. Though he tended to prefer the company of animals over humans, he had a soft spot for women. They were never to be abused regardless of the circumstance. If that man had hurt her, he was going to get an ass whipping, and not even her pleas would stop him.

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Isoke was trying to think of a pleasant way to tell the doctor that his time had been wasted. She was fine and saw no reason to go through with even a cursory examination. Smiling, she was about to speak when he introduced himself ... and from that moment the conversation was on. Feeling a kinship with the doctor, she didn't flinch when he reached out and gently took her chin in his hands. However, when he'd asked if Roar had struck her, she couldn't keep the laughter from spilling forth. *Roar hit a woman? He'd rather set himself on fire.*

Isoke couldn't help it. She laughed. Snap was not only a southern boy but also a good man.

"No, Snap. Roar did not strike me otherwise you'd be here to see him. I have this bruise due to a small brawl that jumped off in the banquet hall. Though I was struck, you ought to see the other guy," she smiled.

"Some guy hit you?" he asked.

"Yeah, and that's where it went bad," she returned.

"Let me guess. Your boss and his friends retaliated?"

"Well, yeah, but that was after I'd got in a lick or seventeen."

"So I'm here to see ... you?" he asked.

"Yes, but I assure you that I'm fine. I really don't need you here except to reassure Roar that I'm going to live."

"You're definitely fine, but are you telling me that I'm here to check on you?" he asked again.

"Yes. Why? Is there a problem?" Isoke asked. It was obvious that the doctor was unhappy about something but she couldn't get a feel for the something.

"The problem is that a-those fucking men are nuts and b-I'm a veterinarian," he began.

Isoke heard the word veterinarian and lost it. Was Scandinavia so drunk off its collective ass that it procured a vet for her? *What the fuck?*

"Um, can you hold on for one second?" she asked.

Walking to the door, she opened it and called for Roar. Seeing him pacing back and forth she calmly approached and asked, "I hate your friends. I despise them. I loathe them. I abhor them. Do you know what this man is? Do you?" she asked.

Not giving Roar a chance to respond, she answered the question herself. “He’s a vet, Roar. A vet. Why are your friends so fucking stupid?” she asked.

Turning to the doctor, she held out her hand. “I’m so sorry that you were disturbed. Please accept my apologies. I’m sure that Mr. Valdason will compensate you for your time.”

Looking at Roar, she raised a brow and said, “Won’t you, Roar?”

“Yes, of course,” Roar said.

“You know what? I don’t want your money. It’s been a long day and I just want to get back to my room and rest,” Snap said as he walked out of the suite.

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Njarðar did not want to be in the sitting room while that man was in the bedroom with his Isoke. Why the hell couldn’t Tage have found a decrepit old man who rivaled the Crypt Keeper in both looks and temperament? Trust his friends to find the only doctor that could’ve been a cover model for one of those calendars that women drooled over. If that doctor so much as touched her inappropriately, he’d beat his ass. Scratch that, he was going to beat the doctor’s ass anyway for his smart comment about Isoke screaming. Isoke might not like him, but damn if he was going to allow her to take up with Dr. Country and Western.

He was contemplating ways to kill him when he heard the doctor’s rumbling laughter mixing with the unmistakable sound of Isoke’s laughter. What the hell could be so funny? He was two seconds away from barging into the room, when the door suddenly swung open and he was face-to-face with an irate Isoke.

She yelled something about a vet and compensation, but all he cared about was that she was still fully-dressed and the doctor was leaving. Roar watched as the doctor gave him a look of disgust before he marched to the door. Njarðar clearly heard the doctor level some extremely unpleasant

insults at his partners through the closed door. It appeared that the doctor was not in a good mood. Oh well, at least he wasn't in a room with Isoke.

He debated whether he should apologize to Isoke or go kick Tage's ass. And then he met Isoke's eyes and doubled over in laughter. A vet. His friends were morons.

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Isoke watched as Roar watched the doctor. And then she watched that motherfucker crack up. His laughter flowed from him like the molten lava flowed from Vesuvius. And while it didn't incinerate everything in its path, it did warm her. Walking over to him, she hugged him. There was no reason to be angry anymore, although she so wasn't letting this go she thought as she snuggled into Roar.

She was surprised with the ferocity with which he returned her hug. Not even bothering to question herself, she burrowed in closer. Right now she needed to feel his arms around her. Smiling as the last remnants of their combined laughter faded, she couldn't help but sigh when Roar picked her up and walked back to the room with her in his arms. Not even bothering to protest because she simply indulged in the feel of Roar holding her.

Though she should be concerned about soiling his pristine clothes or the opulent comforter that covered the king-sized bed, at that moment she couldn't be bothered. Right now, she needed comforting and Roar was doing a damn fine job of it. And it didn't hurt that he felt so good. She didn't know how long that they stayed like that, but when she next woke she was alone.

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Snap was through. Not only had he been kidnapped. He'd been falsely imprisoned ... by a bunch of idiots. Seeing said idiots when he walked out of the room, he let out a sound of disgust and flipped them off.

"I hate each of you," he said as he walked towards the elevator.

Damn, he was tired. And Zoysia Livingstone owed him. She owed him big time.

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When Isoke hugged him and snuggled into him he could not hold back his instincts. Sighing, he hugged her back. Easily lifting her voluptuous form in his arms, he sat on the bed and gathered her close to him. For the first time, he gave free reign to his emotions and opened himself up to Isoke and everything that she caused him to feel. Isoke felt good in his arms. No, she felt perfect in his arms he thought as his eyes swept over her.

When Isoke fell asleep in his arms he knew that he had to take a metaphorical step back. Though she didn't say it aloud, her actions fairly screamed it. Isoke trusted him. And he would do nothing to violate that trust even if it meant denying everything that he felt. He held her tighter, resigned that this was the last time that he'd have this opportunity. He had to savor this moment, because it had to last him for the rest of his life. Isoke was the one woman that he wanted above all others but she also represented the future that was off limits to him. She only saw him as some guy while he saw her as his *hvaðeina*.

He loved Isoke. He loved her with everything he had, everything he was, everything he'd ever be in this lifetime ... in all lifetimes combined. For him there would be no other woman. No other woman could fulfill his needs – any of them. Not physical, not emotional, not spiritual. To try and find what he felt for Isoke with another woman would not only be adultery, but blasphemy to the truth, to his spirit, to his very life, to the God to which he prayed and who gave him the gift of life. No, there would be no other women for Isoke took up all of the room in his heart and God took up all of the space within his soul.

Njarðar held her for hours. Before the sun broke the horizon, he resettled her on the bed. Taking a few minutes, he gathered his clothes and toiletries, repacked them and with one last glance at Isoke, let himself out

of the room. Calling the front desk, he transferred the room to her name since he could not step foot in there again. Not only did every space in the room serve as a reminder of her presence; the room now smelled like her. How could he lie on that bed where she had lain, where they had lain together, and not want for that which he could never have? Forcing his eyes away from her, he turned and left the room.

Having no where else to go, he made the short trek down the hall to Torsven's room. Of all of his friends, Torsven was the closest to him. Regardless of the inconvenience, Torsven would open his door to him and ask no questions. Right now he needed space, and Torsven would grant him that. Once Torsven opened the door, he merely shoved his bags in the room before turning and walking away.

He wandered the grounds of the upscale resort but his tears blinded him from its beauty. So deep into his despair, he didn't hear his partners approach. In fact, he didn't notice them until Torsven set a plate of food in front of him.

"Eat, brother," was all that Torsven demanded.

He ate but tasted nothing but the bitterness of his situation.

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Torsven didn't know when Njarðar was going to show up; he simply made himself available for when he did show up. Though Torsven had plans that involved a delicious-looking redhead, he'd called and offered her his apologies, and sweetened it with a vase of roses. Njarðar was going to need him, and his friendship with Njarðar took precedence over not only the business but also random pussy.

When Njarðar showed up, Torsven was prepared for everything except for what the brief glimpse of Njarðar revealed. It was rumored that Njarðar only had two emotions but that wasn't true; Njarðar was a man of deep passions and he'd seen them all except for this one. For the first time in his life, Njarðar looked ... defeated.

Kicking the bags further into the room, he got on the phone and dialed the front desk and used his rich man privilege to assure Njarðar's safety. That done, he roused Falkor, Sigtrygg, Yngvi, and Tage. He didn't care that they might be between the thighs of beautiful and willing women. They'd get their asses down here and with the quickness or he'd give them an ass-whipping to go along with their annoyance at having their good times interrupted.

Chapter 1.e: Introduction to Differential Equations

Isoke wasn't an attention whore, but she was human and that is why the sudden coldness that her colleagues greeted her with hurt. Hell, actually coldness would've been an improvement. Right now her colleagues were acting straight out hinky around her. For that matter even the other engineers and hotel staff acted hinky. If she entered an area, they stayed as far away as possible. It was like she had a force field around her that extended ten feet in all directions. Sure they waved or nodded their heads in acknowledgement, but they quickly moved on after that uncomfortable exchange. Damn, she wished that she could remember all of the details from the other night. Maybe she'd committed some hideous *faux pas* in the midst of her attack. Perhaps she'd screamed out something totally inappropriate like, *'the quadratic equation is totally overrated and calculus isn't shit.'*

Oh well, she couldn't worry about it now. What's done was done. But could it be undone she wondered as she noticed one of the –sons lurking nearby.

Ever since being introduced to Scandinavia, Isoke had been on the edge, on the brink and on the verge of kicking their collective ass. After the last day and a half, she had one foot and four toes from the other foot on the first step of the metaphorical clock tower. It wasn't that Scandinavia was behaving worse than normal; it was that they were being ... tolerable.

Since first contact, she'd spent the majority of her time keeping interaction between them down to a bare minimum. It was a plan that had worked well for the past two years but now it was as if some world leader had directed Scandinavia to tear down the wall. Not only had they torn down the wall, they were fully attempting to establish diplomatic ties instead of simply enjoying the unobstructed view. Establishing diplomatic ties meant that they had to talk to her. *Ewww*.

Though they'd left her in peace since the incident in the banquet hall those motherfuckers were always within eyesight. She hoped that they

weren't trying to be stealthy or anything because if they were they were fucking that up royally. Someone should've told them that stealth required well, something other than a perimeter of platinum blonde that was dressed to the nines. The first time that she'd spotted all five of them she chalked it up to bad karma – penance for fucking up the resort's banquet hall. The second time, she attributed to coincidence, but by the third time, she couldn't discount their presence. They had some fucking nerve being in her presence after calling a vet for her. Marching up to them she asked.

“What?”

“How long are you going to be mad at us, Isoke?” Yngvi asked.

“Oh you ask that as if there was a time that I wasn't mad at you. And even if I wasn't mad, after the vet incident, oh yeah.”

She watched them squirm. At least they had the decency to be sheepish about their screw-up.

“We're sorry,” Tage said.

“Yes, you are. Now tell me why I'm being followed by wall-to-wall blonde? Is it because y'all are concerned...” she began.

“Yes,” he interrupted. “We are concerned.”

“Well, I appreciate your concern and all, but perhaps y'all need to concern yourselves with your own safety,” she said looking pointedly at the group. Though stylishly dressed, a hodge-podge of bruises accessorized their outfits. Tage sported a black eye as did Falkor; Torsven had a split lip; Sigtrygg had a knot on his head; and, joy of joys Yngvi was limping ... a lot.

Though she'd had a hell of a last day and a half, it didn't escape her notice that the rest of Scandinavia shot Tage a dirty look before turning back to her.

“Isoke, despite our penchant for getting into scrapes, I assure you that we can handle ourselves. And even if, hypothetically, there were some men

who could take us on and win, it would not negate the fact that we continue to be concerned after the events of the other night,” Torsven stated.

“What are you so concerned about, might I ask?”

“That there will be some kind of international incident,” Falkor added.

“Um, okay from that sentence I can ascertain that geography isn’t your strong suit. That’s okay. Y’all have other talents. Even though I harbor fantasies of initiating a coup in your countries, I hold no such fantasies for my own country. See that would be treason. Even if I had a desire to have a truly fucked up rest of my life, overthrowing my own government wouldn’t qualify as an ‘international’ incident. That would be a domestic incident,” she clarified.

“That isn’t what we meant, Isoke,” Torsven said.

“And you know what, if I was going to take over some place, it wouldn’t be Phoenix. Though a beautiful area, perhaps you’ve missed the fact that the normal temperature is inferno. I don’t care to be too hot or too cold,” she finished.

“Perhaps climate is not your strong suit, Isoke. The Scandinavian countries are rather cold in the winter,” Yngvi smirked.

Of all of the –sons, she hated Yngvi the most. “Climate isn’t my strong point however, world domination is my specialty. And that is why, Mr. Something-Something –son, on my way to world domination, I’ll establish both a summer spot and a winter spot. Now again, why the hovering?”

“When we said that we wished to avoid an international incident, Isoke, we weren’t speaking of you. We were speaking of Njarðar. If something else were to happen to you, he would tear this place to pieces,” Torsven inserted, effectively ending the battle of words between herself and Yngvi.

Torsven's admission had taken the wind right out of her sails. Suddenly needing to sit down, she didn't protest when Torsven corralled her to one of the meeting rooms. Though she was surprised, she didn't fail to notice that none of them touched her ... which is why they kept their hands.

"Explain yourselves," Isoke demanded once she got her bearings. Scandinavia responded with a collective deer-in-the-headlights look. Expecting to receive a better reaction, she frowned at them. This was one of the reasons that Scandinavia drove her nuts. If the conversation was about big titties, fast cars, or about them, you couldn't get them to shut the fuck up. Now that she needed them to talk, they just sat there looking annoying.

"Isoke," Falkor began softly. He gave her a genuine smile, which kind of creeped her out being that she was accustomed to seeing arrogance all over his features.

Fighting back the urge to smack him, she prayed for patience before asking. "Where's Roar?"

"He has taken himself away from you."

Of all of the answers that she could've anticipated, this was not one of them. Roar has taken himself away from her? What the fuck did that mean?

"What and why? You're not making any sense."

"Njarðar has strong," the -son closest to her paused. He fumbled around for his next words. "Passions, when it comes to you. After the incident at dinner, he thought it best to distance himself."

"What the hell does that mean?" Isoke asked. "I understand if he's pissed about dinner. A brawl in the middle of a five-star restaurant can't be good for company image."

"I think that you misunderstand," Yngvi said.

“Well then help me understand. Spit it out. Did Roar send you guys to fire me?”

Scandinavia once again looked at each other again before answering.

“Now, I know that you totally misunderstand. Roar doesn’t want to fire you; Roar wants you,” Torsven whispered.

“Roar wants me to what? Resign? Fine then,” she said as she rose from her seat. She wasn’t even all the way out of it when Torsven’s words stopped her cold.

“Isoke, Njarðar desires you. When Phil first put his hands on you, he sealed his own fate. He just better be glad that this is the twenty-first century otherwise he would’ve received a death warrant instead of his walking papers.”

“But,” she began.

Torsven ignored her interruption and continued. “When Phil dared touch you, Njarðar was across that hall with the speed of an Olympic sprinter.

“Do you remember much after Phil hit you?” one of the others asked.

Isoke lowered her eyes and breathed in deeply. “No. I just remember being shocked, hurt, furious. I recall throwing something at Phil and then somehow ending up behind Roar.”

“Oh, you more than threw something at Phil. You threw every damn thing at Phil. I believe the phrase you Americans use is *‘everything but the kitchen sink.’* And I have a feeling if it had been within reach you would’ve thrown that at him too,” Sigtrygg said.

“Oh,” was all that Isoke could think of to say.

“You know, I completely underestimated the splatter-effect of hollandaise sauce,” Tage remarked.

“Just like the chef overestimated its taste,” she answered.

"Who needs a sink when you have a chair?" Sigtrygg smiled. "You broke that chair by the way."

"I can pay for it," she said.

"Actually, she broke that whole section of the dining hall," Yngvi said.

"Oh, damn. Is that why everyone is staying away from me?"

"Everyone is staying away from you because we decreed it," Torsven answered.

"Why?" she asked truly perplexed.

"Because Njarðar has no sense when it comes to you. After Njarðar relieved you of the chair and pushed you behind his back, he caught Phil's fist and crushed it," Falkor added his five cents.

"In fact, he broke every bone in Phil's hand," Tage jumped in.

"Wow..." Isoke gasped.

"The adrenaline rush must've worn off because you fainted, but Njarðar caught you before you fell to the ground. I was instructed to hold you," Torsven added proudly.

Yngvi picked up the story. "I know that Phil was sorry that you fainted, because once Njarðar had you safely away, he proceeded to beat Phil to within an inch of his sorry life. Now he has a broken arm, elbow, and clavicle to go along with his broken hand. And his friends didn't fair any better."

Isoke listened in rapt fascination as Scandinavia regaled her with the tale. She could feel her heart beating a mile a minute. The ever calm, ever cool and collected Njarðar had wilded out? Over her? Impossible! Was it? She looked at the faces of Scandinavia and noticed that they were busy grinning proudly as they spoke of Njarðar and what he'd done – for her!

"I had it handled," Isoke said softly.

“You did, but being the object of Njarðar’s affections, he came in and finished it in such a way that no other male is going to think about putting their hands on you. And then he let everyone know that if they weren’t interested in losing their jobs, their dignity, or their wellbeing, they would give you a wide berth.”

“Njarðar likes me but he doesn’t like me like that. He was probably just worried that...” she began.

In addition to being an engineer, apparently she was also a stand-up comic because all of Scandinavia burst out laughing after looking at her with looks that said variations of the same thing: *Oh she is so cute.*

“If he liked you any more, you’d be pregnant with your twelfth child,” Torsven said.

Though she hated them less, Isoke had to talk herself out of braining them with something.

Chapter 1.f: Heat Transfer

After being in the company of Scandinavia, Isoke needed a nap. Even though their conversation proved to be enlightening, it still took a lot of energy to talk herself down off of the metaphorical clock tower and taking them out. Even when being helpful they had that little something-something that just made you want to end them with all due expediency. It was bad enough when they were back home in the ATL, but it was even worse now that they'd set themselves up as her impromptu bodyguards.

Walking into the luxury suite, she closed the door and leaned against it. She took a moment and looked around the suite. Though every room at the resort was beautiful, only four rooms surpassed this one in opulence and they were presidential suites. This was a luxury suite, and it was also Roar's. When she woke, she attempted to return to her own room only to be informed that this room was hers for the duration of her stay. At the time she'd wondered why Roar had made the change, but after her lengthy talk with Scandinavia, she was pretty sure that she knew.

Slowly exhaling, she breathed in the silence. She needed the physical silence because after processing the information to which Scandinavia had entrusted her, her heart and brain had teamed up and were brainstorming. Her head was their dry erase board and right now they were going full throttle. Eyeing the king-sized bed, she wondered how long they'd be planning. She was tired. She was needy. And after talking with Scandinavia, she knew that she was loved. Collapsing onto the bed, she went to sleep with a smile in her heart.

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Njarðar stretched. He didn't need to look at the clock to know that he'd slept late. After almost two days of sleeplessness, his body had told him in no uncertain terms that it was tired. Stretching, he rolled his neck

and shrugged his shoulders to relieve the taut muscles. Pushing his hair out of his eyes he was contemplating brunch when his phone rang. Flipping it open, he answered.

“Valdason,” he greeted.

“Njarðar, drag yourself out of bed and get dressed,” Yngvi instructed.

“And I should listen to you, why?” he asked, tired of accommodating them even though they were his partners and best friends.

“Because we have a staff meeting in an hour.”

“It’s not like you cannot handle that sort of thing,” he replied.

“True, but you need to be there,” Yngvi insisted.

“And if I choose not to be?”

“Well then, the rest of us will exercise our power and vote to dismiss Isoke and give her a negative reference,” Yngvi threatened.

Njarðar couldn’t stop the growl that made its way past the outrage that had settled itself in his gut. *How dare they?*

“I’ll be there, Yngvi and you should make certain that none of you is within my physical reach,” he said as he slammed down the phone.

Calling room service and ordering brunch, he headed for the shower. Twenty minutes later he felt almost human again but the beast was nearby. Partner or no, no one threatened Isoke with impunity. Finishing his lunch he dressed in his usual attire: Dark, cuffed trousers, crisp white shirt, stainless steel watch. This time however, he added a tie. Though it was too hot for a jacket, he still wanted to look nice ... in case he had to get dragged off to jail. There was simply no reason for a bad mug shot. Records could be expunged, but mug shots were forever, he thought as he made his way to the conference room that they’d reserved for their meetings.

“So did you call him?” Tage asked as soon as he walked into the conference room.

“Yeah.”

“And?” Sigtrygg asked.

“And I had to play our trump card, and he’s understandably pissed,” Yngvi responded.

“What trump card might that be?” Torsven asked, thoroughly concerned.

“I intimated that we’d gang up against him and fire Isoke ... and give her a bad reference.”

“Do you not understand how mental he is over that woman?” Tage shook his head.

“Look, just because you got beat up by a girl,” Yngvi began.

“That’s because I don’t hit girls back. You, however, are not a girl. Well, maybe you are. You are rather ... puny,” Tage mocked.

“Your last girlfriend didn’t have any complaints,” Yngvi returned.

“No, but her brother said that you were a bad lay,” Tage answered.

“While you boys are busy sniping at each other Yngvi, have you forgotten about Njarðar’s passion for Isoke? He’s been in love with her since day one. He’s going to kill you,” Torsven barked out.

“It’s all good, Torsven. Njarðar’s my friend first and my partner last. At the most he’ll give me a sound beating. He likes my mother,” Yngvi responded.

“You are so dead,” Sigtrygg tsked.

“What did he say to that?” Falkor inquired.

“Let’s just say that I’m not sitting next to Njarðar today.”

“Just to be on the safe side, you probably shouldn’t sit next to him ever again,” Torsven said.

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Torsven shook his head in complete amazement. No wonder Isoke couldn’t stand Yngvi. He was a moron. Truth be told, she couldn’t stand any of them, but she had a hand-crafted, limited edition kind of hate for Yngvi. Being that she was likely to be Njarðar’s wife, they’d better make an effort to win her over. If they didn’t, they’d lose Njarðar. He could handle losing Njarðar as a partner, but not losing him as a friend.

Despite being privileged, well perhaps because of it, they’d spent the majority of their life indulging ... in everything. They had women, but that was primarily because they possessed wealth and a willingness to spend it. Subsequently, they always had women. It didn’t matter what they did as long as they swallowed; it didn’t matter if they had a thought in their heads as long as they screamed out their name when they came. Their women were shallow and they’d never given a damn as long as they met their stringent requirements of big titties, small waist, and long hair.

Not so Njarðar. Njarðar had always had standards. And now it was paying off. Isoke wasn’t a size six, and she didn’t give a damn. He didn’t know what she took into her mouth, but what came out of it was wisdom. She didn’t care about a man’s wealth; she cared about his integrity. Isoke was a good woman. Njarðar couldn’t have picked a better woman with which to fall in love. He’d be all kinds of lucky bastards if Isoke let him in her life.

He better make his move, but first, he was going to need some help. Actually, he was going to need all of the help that he could get. Picking up the phone, he called their personal physician. Living in the same area, they all shared the same doctor. It made things easier when one of them had a medical emergency and having a bunch of wealthy guys who liked to drink and womanize, they had their doctor on speed dial. What he was doing was presumptuous, but later Njarðar would thank him for it ... or kill him. It

was a good thing that medical practices were connected, fax machines were prevalent, and courier services open 24/7.

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Isoke stood under the massaging jets and sighed as she lathered herself with Philosophy's Coconut Frosting. The cool water felt good after her long soak in the opulent tub. She didn't really need another bath; she simply indulged so that she would feel extra fresh when she got all up on Roar. And make no mistake about it - she planned to be all up on him. Massaging Carol's Daughter SweetHoneyDipChocolateBrownSugah body butter into her skin, she dressed in a royal purple lingerie set. Pulling on crisp jeans and a v-neck black sleeveless shirt, she stuck her feet into her handcrafted black iguana lizard leather cowboy boots that sported a studded harness and a steel toe rand. Covering her lips with vanilla birthday cake lip gloss, she shoved her black Stetson on her head, grabbed the bag holding her laptop, and walked out of the door whistling the theme song from *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*.

Scandinavia had told her that there was a meeting at two p.m. They had assured her that they would do whatever it took to insure Roar's attendance so she should be there. If she chose not to, they would spend the rest of the week throwing big-tittied blonds Roar's way. She scoffed. She might not be blond but she had titties for days and an intellect that surpassed her E cups. A stickler for promptness, she got to the conference room just as the clock turned to two p.m.

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The meeting was at two but Njarðar arrived half an hour early knowing that his partners would already be assembled. He had a thing or two to say to his partners. Walking up to Yngvi, he greeted him with a right to the jaw.

"Don't ever threaten Isoke again ... not even in jest," he said as he took his seat. "Dr. Morehouse (he stressed her title) has the most impressive C.V. in this organization. She not only does her job, she exceeds

all expectations. She will leave this company only when she feels like it. I hope that I've made myself clear and if I haven't, you can have my resignation and stake in this company right now."

Checking to see that his jaw was still in place, Yngvi pointed to Torsven to indicate that he should attempt to talk Njarðar down.

"Yngvi is an idiot at times, but he meant well Njarðar."

"And Yngvi is a dead man if he ever again fucks with Isoke."

"Agreed, but I'm sure that he will never again attempt such a foolish thing again," he said as he threw a warning at the rest of the men in the group.

"We just wanted to insure that you'd show yourself," Torsven continued.

"And why is that?" Njarðar asked.

"We have someone coming to the meeting that you'd be interested in," he said.

"Torsven..." Njarðar began.

"Look if you're not interested you can leave and we won't bother you for the entirety of the next month. In fact, take it off. Hell, take the whole of summer off. But for right now can you just sit there and pretend to be interested in the plebes. Is that too much to ask?"

"Fine," he said.

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Isoke took the nearest empty seat, which just so happened to give her an unobstructed view of Roar. And damn, what a view. He was as impeccable as ever, but there was something different about him. She couldn't quite put her finger on it, but she racked her brain trying to name it.

Being that Scandinavia was a whore for parliamentary procedure, they had a long way to go before they got to new business. Grabbing her red pen, she quickly scanned through the minutes of the last meeting. Noting that there was nothing to dispute, she uncapped her pen and corrected grammatical and spelling errors while she listened with a half-ear to the reports of officers, boards and committees. That finished, she absently doodled and peeked at Roar while old business was discussed.

Damn, she hated meetings, but she was about to piss herself laughing at the attire of her colleagues. Just as engineers should be banned from getting jiggy; like four-year olds, they should also be banned from picking out their own clothes. Though none of them rocked red galoshes, they were mighty close. Being that this was the last official business event for the day, Scandinavia had let it be known that employees could dress as they wanted. She wondered if they knew that their decree would result in a wardrobe free for all. And being that there was a sudden cold front – it was a frigid eighty-four degrees instead of ninety-seven, people had lost their ever-loving minds.

Scandinavia was as stylish as ever, and though Roar wore his customary outfit of white dress shirt and dark dress pants, he'd gone buck wild and added a tie. And then there was everyone else. She'd never seen so many Hawaiian shirts per cubic foot since ... ever. The sad thing was that that wasn't the worst fashion statement in the room. There was the Randy "Macho-Man" Savage style t-shirt that featured the fringe on the sleeves; there was the t-shirt that James rocked that said 'T-shirt'; there was the smattering of throwback jerseys ... and not the jerseys-of-the-old-school-players throwbacks, but the I-was-doing-mathematics-with-an-abacus-and-was-seventy-pounds-lighter-the-last-time-this-fit throwbacks.

And then there were the shoes. Wow, just wow. Sure there was the smattering of Crocs, flip-flops, and Birkenstocks, but it wasn't so much the shoes as it was the feet. She wouldn't be a foot model at any point in this lifetime, but when your feet looked like you've been stopping your car with them or make people wonder if one of your parents was Predator, then yeah, you needed to keep them dogs covered.

She was just about to have an internal conversation about the headwear of her colleagues when she locked in on Roar ... and figured out what was different about him. It wasn't the tie. It was his aura. Roar looked ... gangsta, and it looked good.

One of Scandinavia had just called for new business when her pussy decided to put in its two cents.

'Roar doesn't just look good; he looks damn good and he'd look good with his head between our legs. We should fuck him ... right now.'

'Shut up, you whore,' she told it.

'You shut up. We haven't had a man in so long that it's stealing from your healthcare company for the Ob/Gyn to even conduct the STD screening part of your physical,' it complained.

'You know what? You can just kiss my whole, entire ass,' she spat. *'I've been busy.'*

'Whatever,' it sing-songed.

She was about to hurl a comeback, but then she glimpsed Roar who was mid-exhale. Seeing that wide chest expand had her pussy shouting damn, damn, damns. Apparently her brain sided with her pussy because before she could protest, it seized control of her body. Two seconds later, she was out of her seat and heading towards the front of the conference room ... towards Roar ... via the top of the conference table ... on her hands and knees.

"Roar," she purred. "Why are you avoiding me?"

"I'm not avoiding you, Isoke," he answered.

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Njarðar was having a difficult time concentrating on the meeting and it was all Isoke's fault. He didn't want to be there, and was contemplating leaving the meeting when Isoke strolled in looking like all of his fantasies

and smelling like a come on. His whole body had gone immediately hard. Damn her for being so striking, so intelligent, so tempting. Damn her for being oblivious to what she did to him physically and emotionally. Damn him for not having the courage to tell her how he felt.

He had to call upon all of his willpower to remain seated once he saw and smelled Isoke. Isoke sat before him and his damn conscience sat in judgment of him like the sword of Damocles hovering over kings. How he sat through a single minute of the meeting he'd never know. Not only was he hard, he was fighting himself. The modern man wanted to be noble but the primitive man wanted to smash everything that stood between him and Isoke. The primitive man wanted to do whatever it took to make her his.

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He was contemplating leaving when he saw Isoke rise. He didn't know what she was about but damn she looked good in those jeans ... those tight, ass-hugging jeans that she would be banned from wearing again if he was her man. And then she got up on that table and he lost all of his mind. Gone was his fluency in higher-level mathematics; gone was his grasp of physics; gone was his common sense; gone was everything and in its place was Isoke.

His eyes were filled with her curves. His mouth was filled with chants of her name. *Isoke, hvaðeina, Isoke, hvaðeina, Isoke*. His body responded to the challenge that she issued and when she was close enough, he snatched her up and crushed her to his chest. Once he had Isoke in his arms, he simply held her. For long moments he didn't do anything except for breathe in her scent and try to control the shaking of his hands, the beating of his heart, and the beast within him that demanded that he take her.

Finally he gathered himself enough to respond to her question.

"I'm not avoiding you," he responded.

"Then why did I wake up alone after falling asleep in your arms?"

“Because if I hadn’t left I wouldn’t have let you go,” he admitted.

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Torsven, Sigtrygg, Yngvi, Falkor and Tage noticed the look of determination in Isoke’s eyes a moment before she rose from her seat. And Torsven, being closest to Njarðar, noticed his erection. Making eye contact with the rest of his partners, he decided to table the rest of the meeting until a time after Njarðar and Isoke finished ... talking. Standing, they managed to hustle everyone out of the conference room just as Isoke locked onto Njarðar and rose from her seat.

By the time she’d climbed onto the table the employees, who didn’t give a damn why they were being excused early, were on their way to find their own good times. In fact, they’d fled from the room so fast you would’ve thought that they were being chased by an axe-wielding sociopath. Damn, maybe they needed to liven up their meetings. Oh well, at least they had cleared out. It wasn’t that he thought that what Isoke and Njarðar were doing was wrong – hell, he was actively encouraging it- he just thought that it was private and not fodder for gossip. Isoke was a first class woman and she should be talked about for her brilliance, not her lust.

He had to admit that Isoke was impressive, and it wasn’t just the cowgirl boots and the Stetson. It was the woman wearing them. Damn, an ass like that and the best brain in the company. Njarðar was a lucky man, he thought as he walked to the exit.

Right before exiting the room, he turned and cleared his throat ... several times. When that didn’t work, he yelled Njarðar’s name. Loudly.

“Njarðar!”

“What the fuck do you want, Torsven?”

“To wish you luck, and to give you this,” he said as he tossed the envelope that the courier had delivered onto the table.

He tossed it because he wasn't about to get anywhere near Njarðar's woman at this time. Right now Njarðar was dangerous – more animal than man and he wasn't trying to die.

“I'm calling dibs on being the godfather,” he said before he closed the door to the conference room and stood sentry in front of it.

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Growling, Njarðar resettled Isoke in his arms and snatched the envelope that Torsven tossed to him. Tearing it open, he smiled. He owed Torsven and if he could get Isoke to have him, he might indeed make him the godfather of their children.

Chapter 1.g: Thermodynamics

Isoke moaned at the feel of Roar's body. Not a light woman by any means, Roar seemed to be handling her 170 pounds just fine. Locking her legs around him, she indulged in the feel of that much man between her thighs. Though he was holding her close, she sought to get closer wanting, needing to be closer. Right now, nothing else mattered but the feel of Roar's hands on her, the scent of him in her nostrils, the protection she felt in his arms.

Glancing around when Torsven called Roar's name, she noticed that her colleagues were gone. Only Torsven remained in the room babbling about who the hell cared. Roar smelled so good and tasted even better she thought as she ran her tongue down his neck and kissed her way back up and over to his tempting lips. She'd been looking at those lips for a minute and she wanted to taste them and she would if Torsven would shut the fuck up and get out. For some reason Torsven was still talking and subsequently fucking up her flow. She didn't know what he was saying nor did she give a damn.

Grinding herself harder against Roar, she heard his gasp and dove in to sample the treat she craved. He might've still been talking but she simply swallowed his words and took her time tasting his mouth. Damn, the man tasted better than the Teuscher champagne truffles that were her favorites. Oh goodness, she wondered if they could make the Njarðar Valdason truffle.

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"Roar," she moaned his name when she had to come up for air.
"Roar."

“Isoke,” he rasped back. “You have to stop while I’m still able to,” he said.

“No,” she challenged.

She wasn’t going to stop and he could simply shut the fuck up and fuck her.

“Isoke,” he groaned again.

She responded by unbuttoning his shirt and raking her hands across his flat nipples. She couldn’t help the smile that slipped out when she heard Roar groan and felt him shake. Right now she needed his full attention on her. Taking the paper from his hands, she scanned it quickly. Noting that it was the results of his most recent physical, she smiled and tossed it behind her. Being on oral contraceptives, and now knowing that she didn’t have to worry about disease, she kicked her seduction into high gear.

Stepping back, she grabbed the hem of her shirt and lifted it over her head. She didn’t know if Torsven had left the room and neither did she care. Taking advantage of Roar’s surprise, she grabbed the mechanism that held back his hair and tore it out. Raking her hands through his hair, she gasped noting that Roar’s sable hair was thick and fell to the middle of his back. Damn. She didn’t know that hair was a turn-on, but apparently, it was.

Eliminating the few millimeters between them, she stepped between his legs and forced him back. She didn’t stop until his back hit the wall. Grabbing a fistful of hair she dug the fingers of her other hand into the hard muscle of his bicep, surprised at how big he was, how hard he was. Thankful for the extra two inches of height her cowboy boots gave her, she forced his head down and took his lips.

“Isoke,” you have to stop.

“If I don’t, would it be rape?” she asked.

“No, but...” he began.

“Then get on your fucking back,” she demanded as she pulled the condoms out of her pocket.

Hooking her leg behind him in order to take him down, she was surprised when Roar took the condoms from her hands and hurled them across the room before sitting her on the edge of the conference table.

“I’ve been dreaming of having you in my bed for too long to even think about having anything separate me from your fiery heat.”

Smiling at Roar’s admission, she asked. “I know that you don’t have anything but you don’t know that I,” she began.

“Yes, I do know. I know that you haven’t had a man in the two years that I’ve known you.”

“And you know that how?” she asked with a quirk of her brow.

“You always arrive promptly at nine; you leave promptly at five. You take lunch in the office. There have been no flowers deliveries for you even on the important days such as Valentine’s Day, your birthday, your graduation.”

“So I like being prompt, and maybe I don’t like flowers,” she interjected.

“If you’d had a man and he hadn’t done those things, I would have told you he wasn’t worth your time, but it’s not just those things, Isoke. I know men. There’s no way, a man would allow you to leave his bed without putting his mark on you, his scent on you. There’s no way a man can have you as a woman and not make his presence in your life known.”

“A shower takes care of the scent and a high collar takes care of the markings,” she tossed out.

Roar laughed ... a deep, rich sound that stroked her. He mumbled something but all she caught was something about being proper.

“And you consider yourself a proper lover?” she asked.

“Oh Isoke, please don’t mistake me for those foolish men with which you’ve had the misfortune of wasting your time. I desire you too much and have waited for you too long to engage in ‘proper’ love-making,” he said as he located her shirt and redressed her in it.

What was Roar doing? She didn’t realize that she’d said that aloud until he answered.

“I am dressing you so that we can go to my room where I can love you most improperly,” he said as he pulled her to her feet.

Dammit, this was her seduction. He couldn’t simply come in and bogard it. “What if I don’t want to wait?” she asked as she stroked his cock that was straining against his pants.

She was surprised when he bent her over the table, but she liked it. Thinking that he was going to take what she offered, she smiled and ground her ass into his erection. She was totally surprised when she felt the hard smack that landed on her ass.

“What the fuck?”

She was going to get up and get in his face when she found herself pinned under his strength.

“Isoke, I might be a quiet man, but don’t let that lull you into a false sense of security. And though you tempt me with that delicious body, we are going to wait until we get to the room because I plan to have you every way I imagined. I need space and privacy,” he said.

“Oh, because you’re kinky?” she smart-mouthed.

“Especially because I’m kinky, but also because when I spank your ass and pound into your cunt like I need to, I don’t want your keening to alarm anyone. I also don’t want to have to blind anyone for accidentally walking in and seeing my woman in a compromising position. And I plan to have you in compromising positions for the rest of the week. You’re going to

take my cock every way and every where,” he promised as he scooped her up and strolled out of the conference room nearly running down a surprised Torsven in the process.

“Is all well, brother?”

“It will be. Neither Isoke or I will be available for the remainder of the week,” Roar stated in passing.

Oh damn. Her pussy was weeping in anticipation. Where did Roar get this gangsta side?

She didn’t speak again until Roar stepped through the door of his room and tossed her on the bed. She watched in awe as he tore off his clothes. Not being able to help herself, she cupped her breasts as she watched him.

“Get your hands off of my stuff,” he said.

“Make me,” she challenged.

“Gladly,” he said as he stalked her.

“Okay, Roar, before you get completely out of control, we have to have the pregnancy talk.”

“No, we don’t. The reason that I’ve been celibate for so long is because any woman I take to my bed is not only intellectually stimulating; she is also good wife material.”

Oh damn. “I’m,” she began.

“Going to enjoy this week,” he finished.

“Yeah, whatever, but. Hey,” she said as he pulled her up and stripped her of her shirt and bra. Before she could stop him, he had her jeans and panties off and had her back on the bed.

“Okay, that was so unnecessary,” she complained as she looked at the remnants of her lingerie.

“Isoke, if you aren’t sure that you want this, tell me now. Otherwise accept that I’m the man in this relationship. I control your pleasure and it is my pleasure to do so.”

“And that benefits me how?”

“I’m taking your continued presence as an unconditional yes. Is it?”

“It is, but you still haven’t answered my question, Roar.”

“And I’m not going to. Instead I will show you.”

“When?”

“Now, but first let me give you something better to do with your mouth besides run it,” he said as he grabbed her twists and shoved his cock into her mouth.

Waiting while she adjusted to his girth, he began to talk shit. “Suck me. You’re going to take all of this cock, in your mouth, in your cunt; anywhere that I want to put it. You’re going to take it for tempting me with that sweet cunt, with that impressive intellect, with that voluptuous ass.”

She wanted to tell him to go to hell, but her mouth was filled with a thick cock. All she could do was relax her throat as Roar fed it to her inch by inch. Damn, Roar was ... so damn hot right now. Though she was tempted to close her eyes, there was something about the ferocity with which Roar looked at her that didn’t allow her that option. A classically handsome man, right now Roar was hotness personified. Gone was the reserved engineer who had a passion for books and a preference for solitude. Right now, Roar was undiluted passion – fiery, blazing, and scorching.

Moaning around him, she dug her nails into his powerful thighs for leverage. Where the hell did her engineer get muscles like this? Finally closing her eyes she took him all the way into her mouth and hummed out her pleasure at her accomplishment. She smiled inside upon feeling Roar

inhale and hearing his ragged exhale. Before she could bask in her victory, Roar pulled out and pushed her to her back.

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Njarðar was through pretending. He was through pretending that Isoke was simply another woman. He was through pretending that he could be around her and appreciate just her mind. He was through pretending that he could be reasonable when it came to her. Every time she walked into his line of vision he had to force himself not to pin her against the wall and slide into her cunt. Every time another male looked at her he had to remember why he just couldn't up and kill them for simply existing in the same plane as his woman.

Like he said, he was through pretending. Isoke was every damn thing that he'd ever wanted, wished for, dreamed. Isoke had it all. She wasn't just a few of his favorite things; she was all of his favorite things. Like he said, he was through pretending. She enticed him with her responses; she lured him with her integrity; she tempted him with her openness; and, with her acceptance of him as he was ... she'd slain him.

He was hers and the first thing that he had to make clear to her was that though he might be a quiet man; he was all man. She was a take-charge woman accustomed to directing people. Her demeanor got things accomplished, and while he didn't fault her for that, he didn't like the way that she pushed aside her needs as a woman. As her man, he wouldn't allow her to neglect herself. And neither would he allow her to think that she could punk him like she did his partners. He was going to be her man; not her bitch.

Taking a deep breath and turning her over, he smacked her ass – hard. And his cock got even harder. After letting a little bit of his beast slip out, he grabbed her up and marched to the door. Barking a decree at Torsven, he marched to his room.

Kicking the door closed, he strode across the room and threw her on the bed. Stripping off his clothes, he bared a little of his soul and gave her

one last chance to say no before he made her his. The beast was fully unleashed. Hell, it had been unleashed once she'd asked that ridiculous question about rape. Would it be rape? What the fuck was wrong with her? Did she not realize what she did to him ... every time he saw her? She must not have but after today, she would know. Everyone would know. The soreness of her muscles, would tell her; his marks on her, his ring on her would tell others.

He planned to hold nothing back. Physically, he'd fuck her hard. And though he'd insure that her orgasms rolled through her justice and rivers, he wouldn't make his testimony with his cock. He'd make it with it heart.

Rasping her name, he waited for her to look into his eyes. When she did, he crawled between her voluptuous thighs. He went slowly so as to savor the unique feeling of being caressed by her softness even as she wrapped him within her strength. She felt so good in his arms. She felt like everything and he could not stop the chants of her name that filled his head.

Hvaðeina. Hvaðeina. Hvaðeina. Hvaðeina. Hvaðeina. Hvaðeina.

He chanted it as he slid into her heat. He chanted it as she closed around him and locked her legs around him. He chanted it as he grabbed her hip to hold her in place. Forcing himself to stop thrusting, he threw his head back, closed his eyes and breathed in deeply. Forcing air through his teeth, he opened his eyes and looked down at Isoke.

Unable to conceal the shaking in his voice, he spoke, forcing the words past his lips. "Isoke, I can't. I can't."

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Isoke loved being loved by Roar. He felt so right. She could feel his passion. His body practically vibrated with it. Even his voice resonated with it. She didn't know what he was saying, but that motherfucker meant every syllable, just as he meant every touch. When he grabbed her hip, she felt his strength as well as his love.

Archiving into him to prod him on, she was surprised when he stilled within her and admitted that he couldn't. Though reserved, Roar was not afraid of anything as far as she knew.

"You can't what, baby?" she asked.

"I can't hold back," he admitted.

"I don't need you to," she answered as she pulled him down to her.

"I don't want to hurt you."

"If you hold back any part of yourself you will be hurting me. I don't want part of you, Roar; I want all of you," she said.

"Are you sure?"

"I'd rather you fuck me with honesty rather than make love to me with deception."

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Njarðar heard her words and fell deeper. Isoke's body made him hard; her perception pushed him over the edge. Pushing her thighs further apart, he plunged back into her heat. Relentlessly, he powered into her, giving her no quarter. Her gasps made him crazy; the frantic way that she pulled at him, spurred him with her nails, thrust her hips into his pushed him into a frenzy.

"Mine, Isoke. Mine. For two years you've tempted me. Every day I learned to deny myself the one thing that I craved above everything else. I spent damn near all of my time watching you," he admitted as he thrust into her on odd words and pulled out on even words.

"You turned me into a voyeur. I spent eight-hour increments watching you. Watching every fucking male in the building flock to you roused the beast, but watching you keep them at a distance kept them safe. Watching you break down problems to their basic elements and solve them caused my cock to get hard. Watching you look at my partners with barely-

disguised contempt made me laugh and knowing that you preferred my boring over their flash made me yours,” he panted as he slammed into her.

“Every day,” he clenched his teeth as he bottomed out. “Every day,” he said as he repositioned her legs on his shoulders. “Every day,” he began as he roughly palmed her breasts. “I came to work and was your slave. And every night, I went home tense from wanting you, hard from not having you, and disgusted at my cowardice for not telling you.”

“Roar,” she moaned.

“That’s right, Isoke, moan for me. Scream your pleasure. Work my cock with your tight cunt. Dig divots into my back with the heel of your cowgirl boots; dig grooves into my biceps with your nails; take chunks out of my flesh with your teeth. Brand my body, Isoke like you’ve branded my mind. Tempt me with your sultry cries, caress me with your intellect, open for me so that I might pour myself into you,” he whispered as he pulled her to him so that they were breast-to-chest.

“Do you know how much I want this, need this? Do,” he said as he used his thighs to open her legs wider. “You know,” he rasped as he dredged up every remaining ounce of strength and slammed into her. “Who you are to me?” he finished on a roar as he poured himself into her.

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Oh my, damn, fuck, fuck, oh damn. Roar was working her. He was hurting her pussy so good, so good, so fucking good. His big cock rocked up to her pussy like gangbusters and demanded entrance. He thrust into her and made her back arch. He pulled out and had her following. He thrust back in and had her convulsing. Again and again he thrust and again and again she answered him like the wanton slut he’d made her.

And when he stroked her spot – you know the spot that made her legs shake so bad that she could no longer circle his waist. Yeah, when Roar stroked her spot she let her legs fall to the side and laid there and took it because she could do nothing else. For that matter, Roar’s rhythm was the

only thing keeping her breathing. She inhaled when he thrust in and exhaled when he withdrew. And all the while she looked at him amazed at his passion and wondering if it would consume them.

He was candy so she bit into him for a better taste. He was water so she licked him to quench her thirst. He was shelter so she snuggled into him so close that he would've had better luck trying to shake his shadow.

Roar was working her out. He took up so much room that she felt like she'd been in a permanent splits since jump. Her thighs were sore; her muscles were burning from exertion. Her hair was flung out all over the bed, her pussy was purring in pleasure, her heart and brain were exchanging 'oh damns.' She'd come so many times she'd lost count.

She had no more cream, no more energy, no more voice, and above all, she had no desire to leave the protection of Roar's embrace. She was a hot mess ... and she'd never felt better. And then Roar came and pleasure shot throughout her body. Like mini lightning strikes the pleasure sparked and her body crackled in response. He roared out his release and flooded her womb and her pussy screamed out yeses and led the rest of her body in a cheer. Counting off by twos it asked who it appreciated and her body screamed out Roar's name.

Damn, he'd worked her good. She didn't even have the energy to roll over. Sighing out her pleasure, she didn't move until Roar lifted her and laid her on his chest. She smiled at the gentleness he used to arrange her.

She only had enough energy to moan out his name. Lucky it was only one syllable. "Roar."

"Yes, *Hvaðeina?*" he answered as he lightly stroked her back.

"So good, so good," she said as she succumbed to sleep.

"The best, the only," he said as he held her tighter as he watched her sleep.

Njarðar could've spent the whole of his life waiting for this one moment ... waiting for this one woman and it would have been worth it. Isoke was his and as the man, it was his duty to protect her ... and the children that he planned to have with her. Rousing her, he smiled noting the mutinous expression she gave him.

"You have to get up."

"No," she pouted.

"Yes," he insisted.

"Wanna stay here."

"In the bedroom?" he asked.

"In your arms. Now leave me alone."

"I can't do that."

"Why?"

"Because you are *hvaðeina*."

"What is *hvaðeina*?"

"Everything. You are everything, Isoke. You are everything. Marry me and be my future."

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Did Roar just tell her that she was his everything? Roar had called her that for a while now. She doubted that he even realized how long he'd called her thusly. And now that she knew what it meant, there was no way in hell she was going to say no to him.

Wrapping her arms around him, she dropped a passionate kiss on his lips and breathed her yes into his mouth.

‡~‡~‡ J&J ‡~‡~‡

*This concludes Book I in the Engineered IV Love (E4L) series.
Thank you for reading. We hope that you enjoyed the tale as much as we
enjoyed writing it. Read on and take a peek at the teaser for book 2 in the
E4L series Passions Revealed.*

Jeanie & Jayha

Praises, compliments, adulation and the like for Jeanie and Jayha can be
left at:

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The Second Partner: Torsven – the x’s and o’s man

Chapter 2.a: I Like Big Butts...

Antoinette Kolisi was unimpressed with the food, the company and panties - which is why she wasn't wearing any - as she listened to yet another "expert" on commercial engineering. Listening as the expert droned on Antoinette had to amuse herself lest she slam her face into her soup tureen out of sheer boredom. A small smile spread over her face as she imagined the ramifications of doing just that. Despite the mess and inconvenience of doing so, the temptation remained.

Glancing around, she caught the eyes of a decidedly Nordic-looking man who was staring in her general direction. Discreetly turning her head she easily spotted the red head that he was looking at with a 'get-on-your-knees-and-suck-my-cock' expression. The woman was dressed to be undressed in less time than it took to unwrap bubble gum. Typical, Antoinette thought with a roll of her light brown eyes. Already bored of the playa and his wannabe one night stand and realizing that the expert was still talking, Antoinette looked around for something else to distract her. And finally it happened ... a reprieve. Woo hoo!

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Torsven Óðinsson watched the woman sitting directly in front of his conquest for the night. Now if he could just remember her name ... Susan? Suzy? Sharon? It didn't really matter all that much. Either way, she was guaranteed to be easy. Hell, she'd been the one to seek him out. That wasn't all that unusual. The females always did at these types of gatherings. It was like shooting fish in a barrel. Women just knew that where he and his business partners – with the exception of Njarðar, whom only had eyes for Isoke Morehouse - were as free and single as any millionaire playboys should be.

But hello ... who was she? Torsven knew she was an engineer but he just couldn't put a name to her exotic features. He'd seen her talking with Isoke just yesterday. He'd been intrigued by her looks. She wasn't African-American like Isoke; rather she was the color of rich caramel. The woman reminded him of a travel ad for the South Pacific. Ahh, Torsven remembered now, she was the brain trust behind the New Zealand engineering firm. Multilingual and intimate with engineering principles, she was in high demand. She had engineering firms in Australia, Europe and the United States panting behind her. Torsven gave himself a mental pat on the back as he correctly recalled her details. Now he just needed to remember her name. Was it Italian? Spanish? Romanian? No, French, her name was Antoinette.

Torsven's pale blue eyes raked over Antoinette's lush curves. She was wearing a silky, black shirt dress that fell to just below her knees with black, leather boots. The boots were as simple as the dress, yet on Antoinette it made for a sexy ensemble. It also left much to the imagination and Torsven's was going wild. Her skin appeared to be flawless. Though she wore only lip gloss, her shimmering lips distracted him. He couldn't help but wonder what flavor she favored. He was just getting into the part of his fantasy where he imagined how she'd taste when he heard the unmistakable sound of a slap and the deathly silence that followed it. Reluctantly pulling his gaze from the Polynesian temptress, he turned just in time to see the first phase of a slobber-knocker.

Isoke Morehouse went straight crazy and Njarðar was on his way over to help. This was not going to end well. Shaking his head, he followed his partners into the fray wondering how much this was going to cost them. Isoke had already fucked up most of the dining hall and Njarðar was well on his way to breaking Phil. Dammit, now they were going to have to replace not only Phil, but the assholes who'd decided to join Phil in his suicide mission.

Cursing under his breath, he knew that the red head would have to wait until at least tomorrow morning. His eyes glancing back at Antoinette, he smiled. Hmmm ... perhaps he could get with her tomorrow night.

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Though she was bored, Antoinette was thankful for the fact that these people weren't stingy with the air conditioning. Though it was relatively cool in the room, the presence of so many bodies kicked the heat up a notch. It had to be at least sixty-five degrees in the room, but considering the average temperature in Phoenix, she didn't complain too much. She simply stood under the vent and wondered if she was the only one who thought that Phoenix 'close-to-the-core-of-a-volcano' Arizona was not the best place for a convention during the month of May.

Taking a sip of her water, she hazarded a glance around the room. Smiling, she noted that everyone was decked out in their finest. Engineers cleaned up pretty good, especially those Nordic men from that engineering firm based in Atlanta. Her musings were interrupted by the distinctive sound of a slap followed by the sounds of all hell breaking loose. Backing up, she turned to see whether the commotion required her to get the fuck out of the vicinity.

Standing six foot even, she managed to catch sight of Dr. Isoke Morehouse throwing everything but hot grits at the male standing next to her. Oh, oh, this was going to end badly for that guy. She didn't know Isoke all that well, but she knew southern black women and yeah, this was going to end badly for that cat. You'd think that he'd back off being that he was starting to look like the inside of a dumpster, but no, he was a man so he kept on, even after Isoke broke off that chair leg.

Noticing some of his friends step up like they were going to do something, she put her drink down and headed that way. Isoke might be handling the one asshole, but no way was she going to stand by while some more motherfuckers jumped into the fray. Besides, she not only respected Isoke; she liked her. Though Isoke had credentials out the ass, she didn't have an ounce of arrogance about her. She did however have a kickass sense of humor, and a 'take-me-as-I-am' aura about her. Antoinette hoped that she'd get an opportunity to establish a friendship with her as it was

rare for her to meet a fellow engineer who didn't judge her on her appearance or want to spend time trying to one-up her professionally.

Yeah, she liked Isoke and as such she couldn't simply stand there and let some dudes jump her. Stepping past the many guys who were simply standing there like stink on shit, she rocked up to the nearest one and smashed her fist dead in his face. Smiling as he slumped to the ground, she didn't notice the man behind her who simply yanked her out of the fray before she could cock back and down another one.

Turning to face the man who had his hands on her person, Antoinette noticed that it was the same man that had been staring at the red head behind her. Before she could tell him off, she was safely away and he was at the side of the silent man who was part of the Nordic contingent. She watched in fascination as the only dark-haired one in a sea of blonds relieved Isoke of the dismembered chair she was about to use as a weapon and pushed her behind his broad back. She listened as he emitted a laugh that could cool even the hottest Arizona afternoon and was glad that she wasn't the source of his anger. Taking a seat, she signaled one of the tray-bearing waiters and took a juice as she watched the man beat the living daylight out of the guy who'd slapped Isoke.

Antoinette nodded her approval. It was about time these men started acting like real men. Though only the dark-haired one threw a punch, no one else needed to. This man was a whole bunch of crazy wrapped up in a beautiful package. Watching him defend Isoke, she wondered how long he'd been in love with her.

His partners were merely there to stop him from outright killing the men who'd threatened Isoke. She couldn't help but admire the physicality of the Nordic engineers. Being so tall herself, it was rare event to meet one guy taller than her much less six. Seeing the last man go down, she sighed realizing the festivities were over. Dammit, she hated for it to come to an end so soon but at least that expert had shut up. Looking around, she realized that now was a good time to make her exit. Her colleagues were way too caught up in guzzling as much alcohol as possible and the

aftermath of the commotion to notice that she was gone. Rising from her seat, she didn't bother to say a word to them as she headed to the exit of the dining room.

"Toni?" a slightly whiny voice called her name.

Antoinette took her time turning towards the voice. She knew the owner of the voice yet that did nothing to quell the shiver of revulsion that rippled along her skin as she met the eyes of her ex-boyfriend. Truth be known, Louis was actually her ex-fiancée, but the key part of either descriptor was the 'ex.' For a moment she considered forcing a smile, but then she thought better of it. She was through being polite to people who didn't deserve it.

"Louis," she said his name like she would the words dog shit. Her tone didn't go unnoticed by him or the blonde stick that he had his arm around.

Ever conscious of his public image, Louis ignored her disgusted tone and came back with a compliment.

"You look stunning," he said.

Yeah, he'd paid her a compliment but there was disbelief in the motherfucker's tone! Antoinette silently counted to ten in Samoan. When that didn't lower her desire to rain down violence upon Louis, she thought of her parents who'd sacrificed so much so that she could attend university. Taking a deep breath she chanted the names of her parents and waited as a feeling of calm washed over her.

"What do you want?" she asked.

She almost flinched at the venom in her tone. Really, she hadn't meant for those four words to come out like she wanted to rip his head off and spit down his neck, but then again she wasn't accustomed to engaging in polite conversation with people who'd fucked her over. Louis had spent the whole of their relationship cheating on her romantically and professionally. Fucking around with his bevy of slim blondes was bad, but

trying to steal her fucking ideas so that he could sell them to the competition was over the fucking line. Luckily, she had friends who were paranoid and had passed it on to her or her reputation would've been dirt.

"I saw the article in the newsletter that detailed your findings in physiology," Louis said slowly.

Antoinette wondered if he spoke slowly so that his current slim blond would understand. She'd scarcely finished that thought when the woman spoke.

"Is that like psychology, babykins?" the blond asked.

Antoinette mashed her lips together to stop the laughter bubbling up and spilling past her lips. The flush that crossed Louis' face didn't escape her notice, nor did the fact that he pointedly avoided her gaze. She didn't blame him. If she had a date that stupid, she'd keep him tied to her bed ... where he could concentrate on things that he was good at.

"No, it's more to do with the body," he explained.

"So it's like PE class" the blond asked.

"Um, no. I'll explain it later, Bambi," he began.

Antoinette couldn't help it. After hearing the woman's name she had to walk off before she fell to the floor in a fit of hysterics.

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Having had a history of dealing with the aftermath of shit that one or all of them had gotten into, Torsven was an expert at dealing with angry managers, the authorities and such. After much discussion with the manager of the resort, they'd quickly reached an agreement on monetary compensation. Tage had called to inform him that he had procured a doctor for Isoke and Yngvi had called an ambulance for Phil and his friends, who would have their jobs just long enough to pay the hospital bills that they were going to incur. Everything sorted for the moment, Torsven needed a drink ... or three.

"Hmm hmm. I would love a chance at that," Yngvi said with rumbling appreciation. Looking up from his beer, Torsven turned to see whom Yngvi was speaking about. Realizing that it was Antoinette, a frown replaced the grin that was on his face just moments before. He couldn't explain the flash of irritation at his friend that seemed to come out of nowhere. Hypnotized by the sway of her voluptuous hips, it wasn't until Antoinette was within touching distance, that he noticed the frown marring her striking features. It appeared that she was completely oblivious to them watching her ... or at least she was until Yngvi started singing the opening line of Sir Mix-A-Lot's "*Baby Got Back*."

There was a moment of silence as Antoinette stopped mid-stride and turned to face himself and Yngvi. Her frown was gone, but utter contempt and loathing had replaced her former expression. Torsven braced himself for the fallout from the curvaceous woman who'd caught his eye. He didn't know a whole lot about her outside of her professional credentials but judging from the straightforward way that she'd waded in and cold-cocked one of the idiots who'd sided with Phil, it wasn't a stretch to guess that she'd have something to say about Yngvi's little song. Of course Yngvi the idiot thought to capitalize upon having gained Antoinette's attention. Flashing his trademark cocky grin, he stepped forward and extended his hand to her. Torsven watched the scene unfold before him. It was like watching a car accident happen, except that it was all in slow motion.

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Hearing the lyrics to one of her favorite party songs, Antoinette snapped to attention. There was something about that song that made you forget to take life seriously for a few minutes. But as great as the song was, it was not meant to be sung by just anyone, and the man singing it was straight out mangling it with his textbook elocution.

Looking around for the man who sang it, she quickly spotted him. With a shake of her head, she realized that he was part of the Nordic contingent. And obviously he was really drunk or really stupid to be singing that song to her. She watched in fascination as he strolled her way.

Sticking his hand out to her, he gave her a look that clearly said that he thought the sun rose and set with him.

Though the male had his hand out, Antoinette looked over at his friend and found that he was looking at her. Though she normally had her head in a book, she was alert enough to realize that look for what it was. He was flirting with her. What the fuck? Returning her attention to the fucker who'd dared to sing '*Baby got Back*' in her direction, she released a sound of disgust. She'd had enough of fuckheads for the evening. With one final look at the two Nordic engineers, she turned on her heel and walked away.

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"Well that was rude," Yngvi said as Antoinette disappeared down the corridor presumably heading towards the elevators. Torsven had nothing to say. Instead he slapped his long time friend in the back of the head. Yngvi was rubbing aforementioned head when Falkor rang his phone alerting him to the fact that their presence was needed. Neither man spoke of the incident as they made their way up to Njarðar's suite.

Jeanie Johnson and Jayha Leigh

Besides being intelligent divas who pen kickass prose, Jeanie (the shagacious wordslinger) and her momma, Jayha (the ninja master of prose), are dessert-eating, take-no-shit, tell-it-like-they-feel instead of tell-it-like-people-want-to-hear-it women. They are women who have brains and aren't afraid to use them; feelings and aren't afraid to express them; and, middle fingers which they'll happily use to salute out of line peeps. Independently, both are forces of nature that leave you begging for mercy or begging for more.

A kickass tag team duo bound together by the pen, they plan on ruling the world side-by-side. Jeanie will be ruling in her favorite hoodie and her Chuck Taylors; Jayha will be wearing her Crocs, a blue t-shirt along with her halo. Of course, all ruling will be done swiftly as Jeanie is always out getting into sh*t and Jayha is busy indulging in her torrid affair with ESPN.

See people, this is the kind of praise you get when you have Yvonne as your MMFIC and Rolanda as MNWIC. Thanks Von and Rolanda.