

Firewater

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Luis Luzaro woke up in a familiar living room, or at least what used to be a living room. A cold breeze swept through the doorway, shocking him from his sleep. He groggily turned toward the door and saw it was hanging on just one hinge. He reached for his flask, or rather, grabbed at the air where his flask would have been had the coffee table not been reduced to broken pieces of wood. Taking one long look around the room, he began to notice the other signs of last night's destruction: the ceiling fan resting in a large dent on the floor, the couch sagging more than it ever had and missing an arm, and the wall opposite him with a fist-sized scorched hole in it (with reverberating damage circling from the point of impact and across the room).

What happened last night?

As Luis groggily tried to remember the details, his eyes rested on the sticky note attached to the broken flatscreen. Luis made his way from his charred seat to read it, but the feeling of a jackhammer in his skull caused him to slow down and slump against the wall.

No moving fast today. Noted.

Taking a deep breath, Luis focused on the message: "Don't wake anyone in the morning. Just get out. Don't call. – Amy."

Crap.

Scant images made their way past his alcohol-addled brain: Luis dancing with a pretty woman, taking his next shot in a string of many, people running out of the apartment.

Not being able to remember more, he took the time to get his balance back and picked up his flask from where it had landed the night before. While he did not know where his jacket had ended up, walking through the house looking for it seemed like a bad move at this point. He resigned himself to the chilly city air, and headed out of his two best friends' apartment. As he took his fourth staggered step down the third-floor stairs, he realized just how terrible his balance still was.

I guess I have to take the elevator.

Luis chuckled to himself and pulled out his flask, quickly taking a shot. As the sweetly burning tequila made its way down his throat, he could feel his muscles growing larger. He maneuvered as far from the railing as possible, then took off running quickly toward it. As he approached it, he shot out his hands, grabbed the metal bars, and threw himself over the edge toward the ground below. The wind rushed by his growing frame for a few fleeting seconds as the ground grew closer and closer. As his now hardened body hit the street he tucked into a roll, tumbling forward fifteen feet before he could stop, right himself, and suddenly he remembered kissing the woman he had been dancing with, sliding his hand down her back, throwing a chair at an indistinguishable figure.

Where the heck did that come from?

As the warmth of the alcohol left his chest, he felt his muscles soften and slight bruises

began to form on his exposed arms. Now in more pain than before the drink, Luis turned in the direction of his apartment twelve blocks away. Keeping his tired eyes trained all around him for any sign of trouble, he began plodding home.

I really should have taken Steel Cranium up on his offer of a jetpack.

After walking eight blocks or so, Luis started paying more attention to the sounds around him, or rather, the lack of sounds around him. Silence pervaded every aspect of the environment, and even the cold wind made no noise as it brushed the hair on his arms.

Could we not do this today, please?

At that moment, Luis felt a sharp impact on his back and fell face first into the sidewalk. He saw himself back at the apartment, getting punched in the face by the indistinguishable figure. Back to the task at hand, he turned rapidly, unscrewed the lid of his flask, and began swallowing the tequila without tasting it, causing the wonderful sensation of his muscles growing and hardening to course through his body. An all-too-familiar voice then rang out, shocking his ears – which had become accustomed to the silence – painfully.

I really need to get a costume so this will stop happening.

“My, my, Brawler!” exclaimed the voice, calling Luis by the name of his alter-ego, “We are starting early today, aren’t we? You can’t just get rid of me in that bottle like you do the rest of your problems. No, you have to actually man up and face me. Do you like my new toy? I call it the auditory cancellator. Quite a nice name if I do say so myself.”

Sound Striker was tall and lanky, wearing a baby blue latex suit and a hat that looked like it belonged more in a comic book than it ever would in the gray city they were standing in. He held an ostentatiously large megaphone, with far too many dials on it for anyone’s good. Luis struggled to get his words out, because along with his increased muscle mass and greater speed, the large amounts of alcohol impaired him, as it is naturally wont to do.

“Striker, I really don’t have time for this.”

I am just four blocks from my apartment. Ugh.

“I do wish you would use my full name, Little B. I keep telling you this, but once again you just don’t listen. I saw your pretty little mess last night, and figured I’d have to come and teach you a lesson about being so . . . theatrical.”

“You saw what happened? What did I do? Did anyone get—”

At that moment Sound Striker turned one of the many dials on the auditory cancellator, and all of the sounds of the surrounding city began to flood Luis’s ears. Above the rush of the wind and distant car horns, his hungover brain was assaulted by the sound of seemingly spontaneous screaming, sending another memory to the forefront of his brain: his fist connecting with the unknown man’s gut, the look of fear on the woman’s face, the screams of people fleeing the party. Forcing himself through the pain in his head, he regained focus on the screaming happening around him and started calculating the distances between them and himself.

The men’s voices are thirty yards northeast in the alley and Wilhelm is roughly forty feet west.

Luis saw a flash of light to his right, sure sign Sound Striker’s henchmen were here, and they were packing. He headed that direction, choosing to take care of the men first. As

Luis turned into the alley, he saw someone with Sound Striker's emblem woven into his grey suit pointing a sound-firing rifle at two cowering citizens. One off-balance punch later and the goon went sprawling against the hard concrete. Turning to the almost-victims, Luis raised his voice, "Get out of here. Now." They were more than happy to comply.

Why does Striker need to "teach me something?" Who the heck does that jerk think he is?

Letting that thought drive and enrage him, Luis' fists erupted in flames, hot enough to burn on anyone he hit. He swiftly ran around the block, deftly knocking out goon after goon – taking swig after swig from his flask – and never quite landing a punch on Sound Striker. As he became more enraged and drunk, Luis' fists started erupting in flames at every punch. Finally, the police arrived and encircled the scene, Sound Striker and Luis stood alone in the middle: one standing tall and haughtily, the other barely standing but with arms engulfed with fire.

"Oh, you poor foolish boy, look around you—tell me what you see." Luis stood agape, not comprehending through his stupor the destruction he had caused to benches, parked cars, and building walls. Sound Striker continued: "It isn't me who is destroying your home, but I think you know what is. Now you get to clean up the mess. Hahahahaha!"

Sound Striker pointed his auditory cancellator at the ground and turned another dial. A sonic boom rang out, reverberating off the surrounding buildings, and momentarily blinded all those present. When they could all see again, Sound Striker was gone.

One last memory shoved its way to the forefront of Luis' brain. Chad's face, indistinguishable no more, scrunched up in pain as his body hit the floor, and he saw Amy's horrified expression as she saw Chad fall.

Luis felt something small touch his back, and then gasped as the Taser's electric shock coursed painfully across his nervous system. He felt the rough arms of two men pull him away, and an authoritative voice called out, "You are under arrest for public intoxication, destruction of property, and the assault of Chad Landon."

His thoughts from the night before finally made sense. The officer lowered Luis into the squad car.

"But I couldn't have done that. I'm a super hero!"

The car door shut.