

Tomb Raider: Raw Recruit

Chapter 2

To earn the respect of her squad, she had to be competent and reliable. To win over her superiors and climb the ranks, she had to go above and beyond what was expected of her. And, to transform the Vanguard's from a cutthroat mercenary band into a more altruistic, respectable organisation, she'd have to be a true member of the band – not seen as an outsider.

Those three goals, Lara repeated over and over to herself. When she was running drills, when she was mopping and cleaning the barracks, when she was cooking alive in a too-hot camp kitchen. She repeated her goals. Reminded herself why she was here.

Earn the respect of the men around her. Win them over with her hard work and dedication. Become a true part of the group.

Be competent and reliable. Go above and beyond. Become one of them.

When her squad leader – Brock – assigned her as the team's cook and cleaner, roles 'befitting her gender', Lara took it in stride. Didn't complain, didn't fight it. Just got to work with her new tasks and responsibilities.

When he commanded her to be their 'waitress', she saluted and accepted the humiliating role.

Starting low would just make her rise all the more impressive.

Wearing her go-to shorts and tank-top combo, she hefted a tray piled with cooked meats and steaming vegetables. Walked the short distance from the kitchen to the small barracks where her team was waiting.

Her cheeks flushed pink as soon as she entered, drawing the gazes of half a dozen young men.

"About time!" One hollered. "I'm starving!"

"Finally!" Another added with a cruel chuckle.

Lara ignored them, their hungry stares – pretended it was the tray of food they were looking at, and not her chest.

She strode towards them, the bed they were all lounging around. One sitting on either end of it, muddying the sheets with their dirty boots. One was sitting on the trunk at the foot of the bed. One leaned against a nearby wall. The other two sat in camp chairs beside the bed. *Lara's* bed.

"Put it down here," Brock ordered, tapping the middle of the bed. "Is that everything?"

"N-no," Lara said, hesitating before leaning over and placing the tray of food on her bed. "There's another."

"Then go get it," Brock said, eyes never leaving her chest.

She hopped into a salute, rushed off to get the second tray.

Every pair of eyes followed her as she went.

Likewise, every man she walked past on the way back to the kitchens made sure to look her over. After just a week at camp, she was almost used to the constant attention. The only female in the camp. And, from what Lara could tell, the only woman in the entire Vanguard's.

She collected the second tray, ignored the stares on the way back to the barracks, strode over to the group and set it down besides the first.

Inwardly, Lara grimaced at the mess the guys were making on her bed. Grease from the meat, chunks of vegetables. She suppressed a shudder of revulsion. Had to remind herself – yet again – that this was necessary. She *had* to earn the respect of these six men.

"We should get her a maid outfit," one of them said, shovelling a fistful of carrots into his mouth.

"I wanna see her in *less*, not *more*."

"All in good time," Brock chuckled, eyes roaming up and down Lara's figure. "Only a matter of time before this cocktease realises her place. Mark my word."

She bristled, straightened her back. Her mouth opened, ready to shout at and scold her team. Talking like that about her – it was *totally* uncalled for. But no words came.

They're testing you. Seeing if they can break you, how much it takes to rile you up. Don't give them what they want.

If she threw a fit over 'boy talk', they'd never accept her as one of them. She'd always be the uptight bitch on the squad, the one who didn't fit in. Who took things 'too seriously'. If she wanted these men to see her as an equal, there was only one way she could respond to this kind of testosterone-heavy type of talk...

"Me in a maid costume?" She said, a little too loud. Her face flushed hot. "Never gonna happen, boys. Now, fully kitted out fatigues with a nice chest rig – that, I'd be happy to wear."

All six men stared at her, expressions blank and unamused.

Lara blushed brighter.

"Croft?" Brock said.

"Sir?" Lara snapped to attention.

"Shut the fuck up."

"Yessir."

Brock shook his head, and the six men went back to their conversation. Commenting on the merits and drawbacks of a 'camp maid'.

Lara listened to it all, face beet red.

When she woke the next morning, the sound of wake-up trumpets blaring through the camp, it was with a feeling of intense unease.

She couldn't put her finger on it at first.

Sitting up in her cot, she looked around the barracks room she shared with her team.

Then it struck her.

Every one of them was already up, dressed, wide awake.

And all of them were looking at her, glancing her way when she wasn't paying attention to them. Waiting for... *something*.

She climbed out of her cot, looked down at herself.

Wearing the same shorts and tank-top she'd had on yesterday. A little stained and dirty, with the faint aroma of body odour clinging to it. But nothing to warrant the odd feeling in the air.

When she walked to her trunk, opened it to collect a change of clothes, Lara froze.

Her bras and panties were missing. All of them.

There were the ones she was wearing, but she couldn't keep *those* on. Not after all the exercise and sweating she'd done yesterday.

"Ha, ha," Lara said, kicking her trunk closed. "Very funny guys. Where are they?"

"Where's what?" Someone piped up, voice giddy with glee.

"My underwear. Where've you put them?"

None of the guys answered.

I need to draw a line. This is... this is unacceptable.

She put her hands on her hips, stared at each man in turn until one-by-one they looked away. All but Brock, who just smiled.

"Where are they?" She asked, keeping her voice calm.

"You won't like the answer," he smiled.

Lara glared at him, waited.

"It's a rookie's hazing," Brock shrugged. "A rite of passage. Everyone in the

Vanguards has gone through the same. Including all of us.”

The other guys all nodded solemnly.

“Hiding underwear is a ‘rite of passage’?” She couldn’t keep the scorn from her voice. A tiny part of her whispered a silent warning. She needed these men to accept her. “Fine, whatever. So where did you hide them? Or is ‘finding’ them part of it?”

Brock’s smile widened. Several of the guys in the room chuckled.

“What?” Lara demanded.

“They’re not hidden,” Brock told her through a big grin. “They’re *gone*. Burned to ashes. The bonfire was last night. We set it up after you went to sleep.”

Lara blinked. Shook her head.

“You’re messing with me,” she said – more to herself than the guys. “There’s no way you would’ve-”

“Nope,” Brock smiled smugly. “Like I said, it happens to everyone. None of us have any undies left either.”

No underwear? But...

Two conflicting thoughts rammed their way through Lara’s brain in that moment. A screaming voice from the past – her own voice – telling her to beat these assholes into piles of bloody pulp, leave this place and go back to adventuring solo. And a quieter, softer voice urging her to calm down.

If it happens to everyone in the Vanguards, it means they’re beginning to see me as one of them. Someone they can mess around with and prank. That’s a good thing, right?

The old Lara thrashed in its mental cage, demanding action.

“I... I get to keep the ones I have on right now, right?” She asked, already knowing the answer.

“Not a chance,” Brock smiled. “As soon as you’re done changing after your shower, you’ll hand ‘em over to me. From now until basic training is over, none of us are allowed underwear. Got it?”

Lara hesitated, torn between the two voices in her head.

“Croft,” Brock snapped. “I asked you a question.”

She automatically snapped to attention. “Yessir!” She squeaked out. “I understand!”

“Then hop to it! Shower, now!”

Running laps without a bra...

Embarrassing at first. Though that quickly faded away as the pain took over. Two big, heavy, dense mountains repeatedly slamming into her chest. Bouncing high, only to come down hard on her ribs. Nipples chafing against the practical tank-top she had on. The more she ran, the more the wild weight on her chest winded her, slowed her, made her struggle. What should’ve been a regular run, barely worth breaking a sweat over, turned into an arduous race against the rest of her squad.

A race that, ultimately, she lost.

She was the first to bow out, throw in the towel. For the first time in her life, Lara Croft had come *last*.

As she hunched over, gasping for air and trying her best to ignore the aches and pains, her squad came over to her. Their laughter ringing out, their whispered comments inaudible to her – yet shameful all the same.

“Croft,” Brock’s voice cut through her heavy breathing.

She forced herself to stand up straight, arms at her side.

Sweat glued her tank-top to her torso, slightly askew. Her ponytail was drenched, brow practically a waterfall. She could feel the warm beads dripping down her face, falling into a valley of wet cleavage.

“Sir,” she panted.

“Pathetic,” the younger man spat. “I haven’t seen a slut with endurance this low

since..." He paused to think for a moment before shaking his head. "You know, I actually can't think of any. You are, by far, the worst recruit I've ever seen."

Lara bit back a retort. *He* was a recruit too. Why was he acting so high and mighty? And endurance wasn't the issue!

"Got something to say?" Brock demanded.

"N-no," Lara shook her head quickly. "Sir."

"Squats," Brock ordered. "Fifty. With your hands behind your head. Consider it punishment for holding the team back."

"But-"

"Are you arguing with me, Croft?"

"No sir," Lara bowed her head.

She inhaled a deep breath, spaced her feet apart, intertwined her fingers under her ponytail.

When she began lowering herself, it was with the eyes of every man in her squad watching her. If she took too long, she knew, it'd mean a worse punishment for her. She had no choice but to go as fast as she could, bouncing on the spot and wincing every time her breasts flew up and came crashing back down.

The old Lara fumed inside her.

But... but she deserved this.

She was letting her team down.

I need to prove myself. Earn their respect.

Not that there was anything respectful in the way they leered at her, watched her breasts bouncing.

Time. It'd just take time, was all.

They'd see her for who she really was soon enough.

They'd grow to respect her. Appreciate her.

"No," Brock said, folding his arms over his chest and staring coolly into Lara's eyes. "You're wasting too much hot water showering alone. From now on, either you shower with the rest of the squad, or you don't shower at all."

Every part of her tensed. Old Lara coiled like a snake, while the ever-growing meekness wanted nothing more than to shy away and hide.

Her body was drenched. If not for the smell, an onlooker might've thought she'd gone for a swim in the river with her clothes on. There wasn't a part of her that wasn't covered in sweat and aching for the blissful massage of a hot shower.

"But..." Lara whispered.

Brock's eyes were firm. Unwavering.

"...Okay," she dropped her head.

Too exhausted to argue. Too shocked to think.

A few of her squad cheered and whooped. Brock just smiled, walked up beside her and put a hand on her back. Without a word, he guided her firmly in the direction of the camp's showers. The whole squad followed right behind them.

And what could Lara do but comply?

The showers were central in the camp, one of the few structures with fully functioning plumbing and electricity. It had its own generator and boiler, was probably the cleanest building in the camp – kitchen included.

As the squad of seven entered the building, headed into one of the four shower rooms, Lara's breath caught in her throat.

This was really happening.

The room was decently sized, a row of showerheads on one side and a bench along the opposite wall. Large for one person alone, but for seven showering alongside? It'd be cosy, to say the least. Until now, she'd always had a room to herself when she

came here.

"You know the drill, gentlemen," a smug Brock said, continuing to guide Lara to a spot in the middle of the bench. "I don't want to see you acting up because of... our present *company*. Twenty minutes in and out!"

The rest of the squad hopped into action, taking spots along the bench and undressing.

"Don't be a prude," Brock whispered in her ear. "We're all on the same team here. You want to be one of us, don't you?"

He stepped away, moved to his own spot and slowly began unbuttoning his army-green shirt. Not looking her way or paying her any heed.

As Lara glanced around, she saw that all of her squad were intentionally looking away from her.

Just a shower, she told herself. Nothing lewd or inappropriate. Just an ordinary group shower...

Cautiously, with trembling hands, she reached for her tank top, grabbed it both sides of her waist and began lifting it up. Her heart pounded, loud in the near silence of the room. Her tank-top peeled off her body, the air tickling the freshly exposed skin beneath.

She wavered when the bunched-up bottom of the tank-top reached just below her breasts. Another inch, and her underboob would be visible to all. A little more after that, and her nipples would pop out to say 'hello'. Could she really do it? Expose herself to these men who so constantly objectified her, humiliated her?

Start at the bottom. Earn your way up. This is just another rung on the ladder. You can do it.

She inhaled a breath, steeled herself.

Then pulled her tank-top up and over her head in one quick motion, like peeling off a bandaid. Fast, firm, not giving herself time to stop and rethink it.

Keeping her eyes on the bench in front of her, the folded white towel sitting there, Lara set her top down and continued to undress. Not daring to look over at the guys, knowing they must be watching her. Not wanting to see the glee in their eyes. She pushed her thumbs under the waistband of her shorts, tugged 'em down her legs.

Her boots came off easily enough. The socks too.

And, in mere moments, she was standing there in her birthday suit.

Behind her, a sharp *hiss* cut through the air.

The showerheads being turned on.

Water rushed through the pipes, poured from the wall-mounted showerheads onto the tile floor. Steam rose, slowly started filling the room.

Lara kept her eyes on the wall in front of her. The bench where her clothes were piled. The white towel.

Footsteps – bare feet on tile – told her that the rest of her squad had moved to the showers. She was the only one standing back, waiting. For what? Lara didn't know. But her body didn't move, refused to join the others under the showerheads.

Just a shower. Nothing weird. Just an ordinary shower...

She looked down at herself, her nudity. Large, bouncy breasts with dark, swollen nipples. Skin prickled and muscles tense. She was strong, fit, with bulging biceps and abs that could grate cheese. But with a womanly figure that men couldn't help ogling at no matter where in the world she went.

What was she *doing*?!

The quiet part of her mind answered before Lara could act on the thought.

Fitting in. Earning their respect.

She inhaled a deep breath, turned on the spot, walked towards the nearest showerhead. Her breasts wobbled and bounced a little with her motion, but she ignored them. Ignored the guys sneaking peeks at her.

Show them you're a team player.

The shower itself was uneventful. Save for the eyes constantly on her, it was no different from any other shower. The guys didn't comment, make lewd suggestions. They barely made a sound at all as she scrubbed away sweat and grime, cleaned herself off.

Twenty minutes or so in the shower's stream, staying in her spot while the guys stuck to theirs. Then it was over.

The showers cut off. The guys returned to the bench.

Lara followed suit.

As she was drying herself off with her towel, silently scolding herself for making such a big deal about taking a shower with her squad, a strange sound caught her attention.

A hooping, fan-like *swishing* sound.

She tensed, not quite sure why.

Then came the *CRACK*.

Lara jumped on the spot, spun to the source of the loud noise. Her body automatically fell into a combat-ready stance.

One of the guys yelped, jumped on the spot, his hands clutching his ass. He hopped in place, barked out a surprising variety of cusses and curses.

"What the *fuck* man?!" He barked out, glaring at his assailant. "The hell'd you do *that* for?!"

The squaddie he was shouting out was holding a towel, curled up into a makeshift whip.

"What're you talking about?" The guy with the towel-whip said, eyes flicking to Brock. "Just a bit of tomfoolery, like always. Last one out of the shower gets a lil' reminder to keep 'em from dallying next time. You know, like *always*."

"What the *fuck* are you talkin-"

"Like always," Brock said loudly, cutting him off. "Except Anders wasn't the last one out of the shower this time. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it was Croft this time, wasn't it?"

Anders took a moment to catch on. Then his angry scowl morphed into a look of pure glee.

"Yes... Yes it was..."

As one, every member of the squad turned to face Lara. Swirling their towels into whips, stepping closer to her.

"Hold on," Lara said, dropping her towel and raising her hands placatively. "Wait a moment."

Why did she drop her towel? Much better to roll it into a whip herself, use it for defence. Why had she given up such an important tool? It was so unlike her.

"Sorry Croft," Brock chuckled. "Them's the rules."

The first towel whip lashed out.

A *crack* filled the air, followed immediately by Lara's yelp of pain. Her ass had gotten swatted. But, as she backed away from that attacker, another struck her from behind. In seconds she was surrounded on all sides. Nowhere to go, no possibility of retreat.

Crack!

Pain flared on the underside of a breast, then on her thigh, her butt, her chest, her nipple. One after the other in quick succession, the guys gleefully whipping and lashing her.

Crack. Crack. Crack.

Lara tried to shield herself, cover her crotch and chest with her arms. She was rewarded with painful bruises on her knuckles. Each time a towel whipped through the air, she flinched and yelped and cried out.

Until, at long last, it stopped.

She crouched, hugged her aching body – covered as it was in welts and red marks – and bit back tears.

Don't let them see you cry. They'll never let you forget it.

Hazing. That's all it was. Hazing the woman on the squad.

Once she got through it, showed them she was as tough as any of them were, they'd accept her. See her as a real, integral part of the team. She just had to hang in there, endure the punishment, not let them see any hint of weakness.

Biting her lip, Lara forced herself to stand tall.

She only wished her body wasn't tingling with excitement as she did. Shameful as it was, heat flared between her legs.

Why?

There was no time to think on the question. Already, the rest of the squad were getting dressed. She wouldn't let them leave her behind.

Quickly, she rushed to her spot at the bench.