

"The moon landing wasn't staged, Ozzie." Reginald shot his brother a sideways glance from his hospital bed, the faintest smirk on his face. "I can't believe you still think like that."

The indignant huff from the younger boar was audible from the other side of the room, and served only to make Reginald laugh. "That's not what I'm saying at all!" With a groan he got up out of the chair he was sitting in, wandering closer to the bed. "I'm just saying that we should probably be a little more skeptical. That's all."

"So you are, or are *not* saying that it was a hoax?" As Oswin groaned again and buried his face in his hands, Reginald placed a hand on his younger brother's arm. "Relax, Ozzie. I'm just riling you up."

"I know. I'm just... There's a lot riding on today. You know that already." He wandered over to his brother's chart and looked it over. "If things go well, we can have you back up and walking instead of spending all day in a hospital bed rebuilding the same model over and over." He would've smirked if the dire situation on what was outlined in his brother's medical report wasn't worrying him to no end.

Today was the day that Oswin had been dreaming off for years now. All the countless nights experimenting in the lab. All the talks with his siblings over what he wanted to accomplish and what he wanted to become. His sister was happily married, and while had no children it didn't seem to factor into what she wanted out of life. But her field wasn't one that could potentially stop their brother from dying. There was a proper way to do things but Oswin was long past wanting to play things right or fair. It wasn't fair that by some defect in his cells that his brother was dying, it wasn't fair that the medical board had denied him from running a proper trial on his new medicine, which is what got them here.

While still a hospital, it was one far from their home. Conducting an experiment on this scale could have been done on their isolated manor atop a mountain but the availability of equipment was too good to pass up. Not to mention Florencia insisted on a proper hospital for the main reason she was here.

"Nervous?" Reginald called over to his brother to pull him away from the chart. "You said there's a lot riding on today, but here you are with me instead."

"Where else would I be?" Oswin sat down the chart with a sigh, adjusting his glasses. "Being on the floor would have me running about triple checking everything and fretting about any little thing that could go wrong."

"Which... sounds like a good thing? It's not like I'm going anywhere." The older boar gestured to himself bedridden, a sarcastic smile on his face. "Don't think so anyway. Could always get abducted by aliens though." The stern and unimpressed face Oswin shot him in reply got him laughing though, even as he turned to the window. "Not that I need to rely on extraterrestrial technology to cure me. That's what I've got you for, right Ozzie?"

"Of course!" The pride in his voice was apparent, broad smile and chest puffed out. "Anything for you, brother." He contemplated what he'd said for a brief moment before amending it quickly. "And if Flora asked, anything for her, too. Naturally."

"And Benson?" The sly sideways glance was all it was to make Oswin jolt slightly, eyes going wide as his brother razzed him. "You two were always close, even before father mysteriously passed away."

“You can’t honestly expect me to have any fond regard for that man that sired us, do you? He was deplorable.” His smile had faded immediately, instead replaced with an expression that read only as disgust. “As far as this ‘mysterious death’ he suffered, he got what he deserved.”

“Oswin, you really didn’t ask Benson to kill father for Christmas, did you?” It was the bluntest tone Reginald could muster, though his smirk was giving him away.

“No.” Oswin folded his arms, giving his brother a stern look. “But I thought about it.”

The two boars took a few moments to stare at one another with their serious faces before bursting into laughter. A laughter that caused the bedridden Hammond to go into a coughing fit and the other to rush to his side concerned.

“Oswin, have you thought at all about a name yet?” Reginald rested back, eyes half closed as he tried to get his breathing under control.

“A name?” The question didn’t make sense to him in the moment, warranting the older brother to raise his eyebrows and slowly look at him until he got it. “Oh, you mean for... Right, uh... No. Not yet.” Resting his head on his arms, upon the bed before him, he sighed. “I’m more nervous about that if I’m being honest. Medicine I can do. *Science* I can do. But raising a child? How do you even do it? They’re like... They’re alien, Reggie!”

“I really hope you see the irony in how you’re feeling now compared to how emotional you were when Flora offered to be a surrogate for you.” He gently removed the glasses from his younger brother’s face before placing a hand carefully atop his head. “You can’t be any worse than what our father was.”

“I’m just scared.” Oswin closed his eyes as his brother lightly stroked the top of his head. “What if he doesn’t like me? What if I screw up? I’m not off to a great start already not even knowing what to call him.”

“Maybe you’ll know in the moment. You have time.” As he removed his hand, Oswin looked up at him, eyes glistening from the onset of tears that were about to happen. “Oh come on, Ozzie. Cry when you meet your son. I can’t go there to see him so you’ll have to introduce me.” He smirked again, playfully shoving his brother back into the mattress. “Just hand me the kid before you break down and start crying. Don’t want to drop him.”

—

Hours passed. The doctors doing their rounds meant that it was time for Oswin to leave his brother and sat about occasionally checking his pager. There’d been no word from anyone about anything that he’d been a part of. No word from his sister about the baby, no word from Reggie or his doctors about his condition, or even from the floor upstairs where the medical trial was being conducted.

It’s what caused him to end up in front of a vending machine, rummaging around in his pocket for some loose change. “Come on... I know I have some change somewhere...” Failing the first pocket, he tried the next, eyes never leaving the double chocolate caramel treat taunting him from behind the glass.

“I never expected you to be hard up for cash, Ozzie.” Oswin almost jumped out of his lab coat, coins scattering on the floor. “ He turned quickly to the new arrival, going from outraged

shock to placid surprise in half a second. "Or quite so jumpy!" With a satisfied giggle his sister tucked a strand of hair out of her face and went to kneel down, stopping abruptly and clutching her stomach with a groan.

"Flora! You shouldn't be out of bed! Or... really doing anything physical at all!" As quickly as his sister had made to pick up the coins, Oswin started to scramble to pick them all up while shooting her an unimpressed look. "You have a baby to be careful about!"

"Oh, he's fine. Though I really should have taken the epidural." Again, another laugh as she straightened herself up, grimacing as she rubbed her stomach again.

"I told you to take one. There's no need to avoid taking one." He shook his head, counting up his change with a sigh. Rising to his full height he placed the coins into the machine and after a moment's hesitation input the code for an oversized cookie. "Besides, poor William. Or his hand, anyway."

Flora laughed, shaking her head. "He took it well enough. Though I don't imagine he'll be signing papers with that hand for a while." She watched curiously as Oswin retrieved the cookie from the dispenser, confused as it wasn't what he was clearly eyeing up beforehand.

Unwrapped in seconds, the cookie was split in half and then offered out for Florencia to choose which half she wanted first. "Go on. This is something we can share, and I probably don't need the extra sugar today anyway." He watched carefully as she debated which half to take, one clearly bigger than the other. Though she opted for the smaller.

"You turning down sugar? That's a first." She bit into the cookie with a coy smile. "Heaven forbid your son turns out the same. It's a good thing that you can afford a good dentist."

"Among other things." His smile faded quickly into a look of worry, the cookie remaining uneaten in his hand. "Hey, Flora. I was speaking to Reggie about this hours ago but... What do you think?"

"About?" Having finished her half of the cookie she eased the other half out of Oswin's hand without him putting up a fight.

"Me being a father." Only just noticing that all he was holding was the wrapper, he scrunched it up in hand and then placed it into the trash sitting nearby. "It's a lot, right? So many opportunities to screw up... This isn't a science experiment, this is another life. Another actual living thing that I'm in charge of."

The look Florencia gave her brother was deadpan and cold. "And the children upstairs in your trial?"

"That's different." He quipped back.

"Different how, Ozzie?" She took a few steps forward and placed a firm finger in the middle of his chest. "Each of those children are helping you fix our brother. You're in charge of them almost as much as your son."

"After the trial I won't need to worry about them. They'll go home to their families and rather than one hundred and one children it'll just be one, hopefully." He groaned, rubbing his head. "Unless you're about to tell me it was actually twins this whole time."

"Nope! Just a single healthy baby boy. If a little small and underweight, he'll be fine." Flora half skipped around her brother to check the venting machine for any abandoned change and pouted when the coin return was empty. "Have you spoken to Benson about any of this? He's pretty level headed."

“He’s busy.” The reply came quick and dismissive, though Oswin looking anywhere but his sister told the truth.

“So you haven’t even called? What are you waiting for, to hold your son first before calling?” There was a roguish smile dancing on her face. One that Oswin picked up on and recognized right before she was about to suggest doing something she probably shouldn’t be.

“What are you planning?” Oswin looked up and down the hallway, voice tinged with concern.

“Nothing!” She already started walking away wistfully, though her tone implied the opposite. Even as Oswin called back to her, she kept moving until eventually Oswin was rushing after her. “I’m *serious*, Ozzie. I’m not up to *anything*.”

“Yeah, I’ll believe that when pigs fly.” He rolled his eyes, hands in his pockets.

A feigned gasp of horror came from his sister as she stopped hard in her tracks, hand over her mouth. “Ozzie! How racially insensitive of you!” She shoved him playfully though it wasn’t enough to really move him. “You should know already that we’ve been able to travel by private jet for years now.” Oswin went to retort but quickly had his nose flicked, causing him to squeal from the shock. “You don’t want your son thinking you’re some racist.”

“He won’t!” Oswin stomped his foot, causing his sister to look at him from head to hoof. “I promise!”

“Yes, well... I probably should get back to William. No doubt he’s noticed I’m not in my bed by now.” She chuckled, shaking her head and throwing her hands up in a shrug.

“I’m surprised he didn’t notice sooner.” He turned to his sister, seeing her arms open wide in an offer of a hug. “I’ll chat to you later, Flora. Hopefully I’ll have some good news soon.” Gingerly he gave his sister a hug and started to make his way down the hall, mind going a mile a minute with thoughts of his family.

He continued to check his pager, nothing. Almost too suspicious to hear nothing at this point, he headed upstairs to the testing floor. Much like his pager, the many beds that existed were quiet. Not deathly so, but it was calm all the same. He wandered the floor, seeing what children were milling about quietly, some with their parents and others interacting with each other, and some just asleep having already had a dose of the drug.

Each of these children were sick, and terribly so. Anything from being vaguely life-threatening to being similar to Reginald in how dire their state was. If his miracle cure was going to work, it needed to truly cure anything and everything. His eyes lingered on one child in particular, expression hollow and distracted by the small doll that he held. Curiosity got the better of Oswin and he checked the chart, eyes widening upon seeing that this child had nothing wrong with him. “One of the controls...” But this wasn’t all he noticed about the chart. That last name he knew quite well, if only because the boy’s parents had been money-hungry fools that seemed more interested flogging the body of their deceased daughter over the loss of her life.

It pained Oswin to put that chart back and turn away from the room, as opposed to seeing if the boy was alright. After all, what could he say? What could some spoiled rich kid with far too much intelligence and not nearly enough wisdom do to put that boy at ease? The answer was nothing, and doubt started to creep in again as to his qualifications as a father himself.

Excusing himself from the floor he rode the elevator down, heart beating hard in his chest. He’d been the smart one of his siblings, and for that there was some level of allowance

given his way for what he wanted to do, but he wasn't the first born heir his father wanted. He wasn't even older than his adopted sister. He was still far younger than anyone should be in the position he found himself in, or at least that's the reason why he told himself why he didn't feel ready.

Bracing his hand against a wall he caught his breath, feeling as though he'd just run a mile despite not gone very far at all. Pulling out his cellphone he struggled with shaking hands to dial a number, holding the phone up to his ear.

Meanwhile at the same time on a manor on a mountain far away, a phone rang in a lonely study. It rang twice, and as it was about to ring a third time I was answered by an otter in a crisp waistcoat, each movement measured and delicate as he brought the receiver to his ear. "Hammond residence."

"Theodore!" He regretted shouting and could feel the otter on the other side of the phone recoil briefly. "Sorry, I... I just..."

"Calm yourself, Master Oswin. Do you require something of me?" There was enough of a smile in his voice that the stammering from Oswin's side stopped. "Though I do appreciate you checking in. How are you, m'boy?"

"Nervous." It was punctuated with a grunt as the boar dropped into a nearby chair to rest his feet. "Do you have any advice?"

"Have I ever told you about the time I assassinated the foreign diplomat?" There was a fond smile on the otter's face as he recalled one of his earliest jobs, lightly stroking his mustache as he did so.

"Multiple times, yes." Oswin breathed out. "You were nervous given the amount of money you were being paid, the amount of security was a lot higher than you expected, and you were almost caught multiple times. But when the time came you were able to put a bullet quietly through the diplomat's head."

"Oh." There was a pause born of surprise from the otter as he seemed unable to place what he should say next.

"It's alright, Theodore. I just... Flora's delivered the baby, and Reggie is still hanging in there." Oswin rolled onto his side, head propped up on an uncomfortable hospital cushion.

"And what about you, m'boy? What has you spooked enough to call me?" Benson straightened, adjusting his tie. "Did you need me to come and get you?"

"No, at least not yet." Oswin chuckled, shaking his head. "Reggie thinks I'm going to drop my son when I show him off though."

"Ah, in that case I'll be sure to have the car ready." The pair shared a small laugh before Oswin sat up, rubbing his eyes. Benson however had little idea on what to do next and went to hang up the phone before deciding against it. "One last thing, if I may Master Oswin?"

"What is it?" Much like the otter, the boar was about to hang up himself but returned the phone to his ear.

"I'm proud of you, m'boy. Best of luck for today." It was a statement that Benson let linger for a few moments before hanging up the phone.

It left Oswin stunned. Looking for comfort he came away from the phone call with something akin to ease but he felt almost as lost as when he started. Benson was proud of him? Of course

he knew that, but hearing it felt different. It made him feel different, at least enough to get out of that chair and go for a walk.

Pager still silent, he wandered the halls again. It was about time to check in with Reggie again, or perhaps upstairs given the rest of the children should all be dosed by now. Perhaps with Flora knowing that the baby was delivered. Maybe that's why he found himself in the maternity ward, pausing as he came to stand in front of a large window. Inside the room the window was attached to were rows of cribs, most were empty but a few of them had children, newborn babies resting quietly. Oswin's hand lightly touched the glass as he peered at each in turn, wondering if his son was among them.

"What are you doing?" The sudden question combined with the fingers dug into his sides from behind almost gave Oswin a heart attack, doubling over as his sister giggled with glee behind him.

"What happened to checking in with William?" Oswin shot Florencia a sour look, taking his time in standing back up properly.

"Oh, he's fine. The nurse bandaged his hand up and he's taking a nap." Florencia started to braid her hair casually as if mentioning her husband's injury was a second thought.

"You gripped him *that* hard?" Oswin took a step back, looking his sister over with a level of concern.

"Hey, I pushed a living being out of myself today. All things considered I feel great. A lot stronger than I imagine I ever would have thought I would." The comment was greeted with an uneasy smile and an equally terrified nod. "Oh, ease up, Ozzie. Though speaking of!" She grabbed his arm suddenly and pointed to the babies in the other room. "What do you think?"

"Of babies?" Oswin went back to looking at the cribs, though the low light while they slept made it hard to even make out the names listed on each.

Rolling her eyes, Florencia grabbed her brother by the hand and made for the door to the nursery. Though despite his protests, he immediately dropped in volume once they'd crossed the threshold. His protests went from her unhanding him to them not supposed to be in here, which was met with a blank stare from his sister. "We're his parents. Well, you are anyway, I just carried him for 9 months on your behalf."

"I can't even tell which one he is! We should go!" Oswin gestured to the door, not wanting to get in trouble any more than he was going to be running an illegal medical trial upstairs, and the last thing he wanted was to rope his son into it.

"Oh live a little. If it makes you feel any better, I'll bring him out there if that's where you'd rather wait." No sooner had she said it, she looked up to see Oswin standing eagerly on the other side of the glass. Hands clasped together nervously to perfectly match the grimace he was pulling. "Oh yeah, you're going to be a very different father than the one we had..." Oswin watched as Florencia wandered down the cribs and stopped before one, carefully raising a bundle out of it. His eyes were trained on her as she opened the door with her foot and came to stand in front of him.

"So this is...?" His hands were shaking as he looked upon the small child in Florencia's arms. Swaddled comfortably in a bright red blanket, his rusty red fur already starting to grow in.

"Well you haven't named him yet, but yes. This is your son." Florencia looked to her brother with a satisfied smirk. His eyes were wide and sparkling, mouth slightly agape, a familiar sight to the expression he had on the many Christmases they'd spent together.

“He’s so small...” Oswin gulped, worried that if he even moved that he’d break the child he wasn’t even carrying. “And he looks... healthy?”

“He looks like you, brother. Bright blue eyes like yours too, though he’s sleeping at the moment.” As if on queue, the baby yawned and settled again, oblivious to the outside world. “Did you want to hold him? Do you think you could without dropping him?”

“It’s only a baby, Flora. I’ll be fine.” Though the moment the baby was offered out to him he shrieked, a reaction that made the other boar laugh while still safely holding the child. “Okay, maybe I’m not fine. What if I break him?”

“You won’t break him, but you really should stop referring to him as just... ‘him’. He needs a name.” Florencia, with her smug expression, raised an eyebrow. “You can manage that much, right?”

“Of course I can.” Oswin huffed, struggling to come up with something. Now that he’d seen the child, his idea of being inspired on the spot flew out the window. “I just want it to be suitable, that’s all.”

“Since when was suitable an option? You’ve hardly ever been the most conventional, Ozzie. And that’s coming from *me*.” Florencia’s attention was taken as the baby in her arms began to stir, though didn’t wake just yet. “Come on, maybe holding him might help. If you want to sit down, that’s fine too.”

“I can see he looks like me but it still feels so...” He caught himself with a short chuckle, thinking back to what he’d said with his brother earlier that day. “Alien.”

“He’s just a healthy boy, much like you were when you were born. And trust me, I’ve seen your medical records.” Florencia gestured with her head to the bench nearby and Oswin sat down, his sister dropping down carefully beside him. “But this was everything you ever wanted, right? You finally get to have your family and be the loving father you always wanted to be.”

“Yeah... But I’m scared like you wouldn’t believe.” Oswin mumbled.

“So you keep saying.” Florencia quipped back. “The moment you hold him I’m sure it’ll feel right.”

“...Alright. I think I’m ready.” Gulping hard, he held out his arms with shaky hands. Florencia gave him a look and withheld the child until she had seen that her brother had his breathing under control.

But as the baby was being passed over, Oswin’s pager went off. Not once or twice, but constantly. A chain of pages all coming in at the same time. It was enough to break Oswin out of his reverie. The baby just shy of being placed in his arms went forgotten in favor of the small device that called his attention. Upon seeing the code though, his heart sank, eyes went wide, and all the colour in his face drained.

“Oswin? What’s wrong?” Florencia shuffled back to give him room as she saw that he immediately started to hyperventilate. In her arms she cradled his son protectively, unsure of what her brother was seeing.

There was no reply though, just a look of dread as he bolted from the bench they were sitting on in the direction of the elevator.