

Rework-4

Thomas turn the alarm on his phone off as soon as the buzzing woke him, then remained in bed, appreciating the silence. The length he had to go to just to get some—
Foot steps above him.

Thomas grabbed his phone and checked the time. Three minutes past five in the morning. No. There was no way. His father should still be asleep. He'd set the alarm two hours early, specifically to get at least an hour with no chances of his father coming by to ask about his studies or offer to tutor him, since they were both up.

The joke in the family was that Eric didn't need sleep. The only time in was in bed was with his wife and he wasn't sleeping then.

Right now, Thomas was questioning how much of that was a joke and how much was that he was the worse luck the world offered.

You up? He messaged Paul. The chances were good he was. His best friend liked to get in studying before leaving home and even if they didn't have classes today, he might still

—
Just got out of the shower. What are you doing up so early?

Hoping you aren't going to mind if we get started early. My dad's already up, and every minute I'm here is a minute he has to snag me into a 'quick' study session that's going to eat the entire day. We can stop by the Starbuck on the way, and I'll pay for your coffee.

Alright. Give me fifteen minutes and I'll be at your door.

Thomas hurriedly showered, then dressed. Stopping only as steps sounded along the hallway, remaining still and watching the door in case the handle moved. A door opened further down the hall.

"Come on, sleepyhead," Eric said. "You have practice today."

Roland mumbled a reply Thomas didn't make out.

"Yes, which is why you want to get there early, getting a good workout session. You want to impress the coach, don't you?"

Another reply Thomas didn't make out.

"That's the spirit. I'll be back in five minutes and we'll get going."

The door closed, and the steps moved away, then the stairs creaked as Eric went up one flight.

Thomas was out of his room, pulling the shirt over his head and in the kitchen, going through the fridge for something that would do for breakfast. Last night's spinach lasagna called to him, but that needed to be reheated, and his father was coming down from the third floor again.

He grabbed two bananas off the counter and hoped they weren't something his mother would need, then headed for the door.

He was outside, gently closing the door, when the garage door opened. He rushed to the sidewalk and checked the time. Thomas thought about jumping behind the Leslie's rose bushes when the car ease out of the garage, but opted for staying still and counting on

another well known Eric Hertz trait to keep him safe.

His father stopped the car, exited it and went back into the garage, the door lowering behind him without ever looking around.

His father hyper-focused.

It made being on the receiving end of that focus nearly unbearable, but it meant that if he could avoid drawing attention to himself, Thomas could go entirely unnoticed by his father.

Paul pulled up next to him, and Thomas was in as his father exited the house. Thomas did not look in their direction, only making out the man and his brother in his peripheral vision as they headed to his father's car.

"What are you waiting for?" Thomas whispered. "Start driving before he notices us."

With a chuckle, Paul stopped looking over his shoulder and drove away, and then Thomas could relax.

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His best friend sighed appreciatively as he finished the coffee, then stepped out of the car to join Thomas.

Thomas looked at the coffee shop by which Paul had parked, both because it was closer to where Pledge week was being held and because he expected the University's parking would already be filled.

Because of how early they'd left, they'd taken their time getting there. Paul had scoffed at the banana Thomas had offered him, instead stopping at an affordable place and buying them both breakfast.

Now, The Knoll, the park there was reaching, was already active; people manning booths and others visiting them. Paul was quick to point to this one and that. And laughed at Thomas thought he'd seen his father heading toward them, only for it to be some other rat with black fur covering his head.

Thomas launched into a rant about how his father ran his life, which only ended because Paul left him to check a booth. Then there were attempts on his best friend's part to get Thomas interested in this frat or that, but the rat couldn't muster much of an interest.

Then came the oddest way someone could get roped into going to a frat party, but the monkey treating it as a fait accomplie. Limbani had all but claimed to have seen it in a crystal ball, and Paul had been more than willing to side with them instead of his best friend.

And now Thomas Was headed to his Studies for Success class with Paul keeping him company since the tiger's Advanced Chemistry lab was in the afternoon.

"You know that monkey's in for a disappointment, right?" Thomas said. "Like I told him, there is no way my dad is going to let me go to a party, even if I don't have classes the next day. That's just free time I can fill with more studying, as far as he's concerned."

"Not going to sneak out?" Paul asked. "Laurence seemed to have thoughts on how you could make that happen."

"You planning on teaching him how to dance?" Thomas replied, diverting back to the golden tiger.

Paul chuckled. "That's on him, but I think Limbani's the one I have to watch out for.

He seems to me like the kind of guy who'll do just about anything to get in your pants."

"You mean yours."

"No, I'm pretty sure it's yours he was trying to get his hands in. If he danced with me, it'd be because he thinks it would make you more open to the idea."

Thomas looked away and grumbled his reply, hoping no one would notice the tent forming in his pants.

"What's that?" Paul asked, smirking.

"I said, I am open to the idea. Leaving aside how way too forward he is, yes, I'd like to experience the sex you said happens at that party, but it's not going to happen, Paul. My dad isn't—"

"You mean the man who can't seem to stop having sex with your mother won't appreciate you getting some too?"

Thomas snorted. "It's not the same. My Dad compartmentalizes. There's his life with my Mom, his life with his family, and his life at university. Then, it's his life with Judith, his life with me, and then with Roland. I'm not going to say never the twain shall meet, but when he's in one mode, he doesn't really make the connection with the others. I'm not Thomas Hertz, son of two really sexual people who can't wait to get laid on his own. I'm his son, undecided student, disappointment."

"You're being too hard on yourself."

Thomas shrugged. "He's still not going to let me go. And no, I'm not sneaking out. It's one thing to get out of dodge before he realizes I'm there and sits me down to study, but he already has my weekend planned out."

"Then at least ask him. Don't chicken out, Thomas, just because you think he'll say no. As him and see what happens. If he says no, I'll come over and study with you."

Thomas started to protest that Paul didn't have to sacrifice himself on his account, then saw the smile and glint in his best friend's eyes.

"Neither one of us has biology," Thomas pointed out.

"Maybe you're thinking of making that your major, and me, as your best friend, is helping you find out?"

"You realize that if Judith walks in on us, we are never hearing the end of it."

Paul smirked. "You say that like I have a problem with it."

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Thomas stepped into the house to quiet and he chuckled to himself. Now that he had the house to himself, he wanted to study, just to get the monkey out of his mind. He'd forgotten they shared a class in Studies for Success, and Limbani had plopped himself next to him and not stopped smiling knowingly the entire time.

Even two hours of Chemistry after that hadn't been enough to get the idea the monkey might have been willing to pull him under the desk and do it right there out of his mind, or that Thomas thought that would have been hot as hell.

If he was watching it in a porno. He was never doing something like that in real life. He'd get expelled, and then he'd have to explain that to his father and...

Yeah. He was never having that conversation.

He dropped his backpack in his room, then continued past Judith's room on his left, Roland's on the right and Victor's old room, facing it. He pulled the bathroom door opened and found himself staring at his younger brother's muscled body. Those defined muscles, under damp short black fur, continuing where it turned white. And he had no problem imagining those muscles continuing under the towel Roland had wrapped around his

waist.

His brother glared at him just as Thomas started to slam the door shut. "Do you mind?"

Thomas swallowed as he leaned back against the closed door, trying to chance the image of his half naked brother out of his mind. The image of his hot half naked brother out of his mind.

When had Roland turned into such a hunk?

And why was Thomas thinking of his fifteen-year-old brother as a hunk?

He headed for the stairs and the third floor. Judith would kill him if he used her bathroom, so he had to use the one attached to his parent's bedroom for the ice-cold shower he needed to chase the image of his brother dressed only in that towel that didn't want to leave his mind.

There was no doubt about it now. He had to get his father to agree to let him go to that party.