

## *Rework-1*

The alarm had him out of his bed and bouncing on one leg as he pulled the boxers up the other, tail lashing about in an attempt to help keep his balance. He had to hurry. He glanced at his phone. Fuck, did he have to hurry.

He grabbed a shirt and pants out of the open drawer and rushed out of his room, making a right to head the bathroom and nearly collided into the younger rat. Each took a step back and froze. Thomas swallowed and fought to keep his eyes up, so he only saw the defined pecs and biceps through the white fur of his brother, and the top of the abs.

Why did Roland have to go about shirtless? Why did a year of working out, as part of being on the highschool football team, have to make his brother so hot?

Roland's half asleep expression turned into a scowl and Thomas realized he'd been looking too long, way too long. He hurried around his brother, turning so his back was to him and then he was at the end of the hall, into the bathroom and the leaning against the door.

He looked down at the tent in his underwear and tried really hard to convince himself it was just morning wood.

Regardless of why it was there, Thomas was taking a cold shower this morning.

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Dressed, Thomas hurried down the stairs, looking at the time. Come on, he willed himself faster, you need to be out of here before—

"Thomas," His mother called from the kitchen as he stepped by the archway, "Breakfast, I made bacon."

Thomas skidded to a halt. His mother saying she'd made bacon was like saying a Monet was just a painting. Nadia didn't cook or bake; she Cooked and she Baked. She had the online following to support it to. So Thomas wasn't surprised when the scents of fried pork that reached him came with spices, cinnamon and sugar.

His mother's cooking was masterpiece for the tastebuds.

He looked into the kitchen. Seated at the island were two other rats, Roland and his older sister, Judith, who was smirking at him like she knew something Thomas didn't want to hear about, and a raccoon, Niel, Roland's best friend.

"Thank you Misses [might be the wrong term. Never figured out the spelling] Hertz," the raccoon said as she placed a plate of crunchy looking strips of dark brown bacon, along with an egg, sunny side up, two buttered toasts and a mix of vegetables and fruits shopped so fine it could be a chutney instead of a small salad.

"It's Nadia, Niel, you're practically family, you can call me Nadia. Is you father going to be joining us for breakfast?"

"He had to leave already," Niel replied before using a toast to break the yoke.

Thomas swallowed and ignored the buzzing phone in his pants. He really should have breakfast. Today was going to be a long day.

Movement upstairs reminded him why he needed to get out of the house. If he was still here when his father came down the stairs, he'd be doomed.

He took one last mournful look at the breakfast he wasn't having and rushed out the door, where an older General Ford with a golden tiger behind the wheel was waiting for him.

"Go, go, go!" Thomas order as he jumped in the passenger seat. "What are you waiting for? He's awake, go!"

With a chuckled and an amused shake of the head, Paul Heeran drove away from his best friend's home.

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"When you didn't answer my message, I thought you'd changed your mind," the tiger said, slowing as the traffic slowed.

Thomas pulled his phone out. *I'm here.* Was on the screen.

"Mom's breakfast caused me a crisis of conscience."

Paul looked at Thomas, then over his shoulder. "Your mom made breakfast? I'm turning this car around. Why didn't you tell me?"

"It's not like I knew, and don't you dare. If my dad sees me, he's going to force me to ride with him to go to Uni."

“And having your father drive you to school on the day orientation is such a horrible thing,” Paul said, then added, through mock sobbing, “The things I’d do to have my father there to drive me.”

“If it was my father,” Thomas replied, unaffected, “you’d be begging your best friend to pick you up so you don’t have to endure the lecture about preparing for university. I wish I knew what’s gotten into him. He was never that obsessed with my schooling before.”

“No, he obsessed about your older brother’s schooling and your sister’s.”

Reflexively, Thomas started to protest. No, Victor hadn’t had it as bad as Thomas did, but his brother had it as bad. Eric Hertz seemed unable to not obsess about his children’s education, and that had mostly stopped once his older brother was done with school, and had moved into his own home with his wife. Now, according to Judith, Victor only had to endure the weekly call from their father to check in on how his grandchildren were doing.

“I was really hoping that when it didn’t start as soon as Victor was out of the house, it meant he had exhausted all the energy he had to spare and was going to leave me and Roland alone.”

Paul laughed, long and hard. “Eric Hertz? The guy who, at his age, can have three hours long sex with your mom? Run out of energy? You’re dreaming Thomas. I don’t know where your father gets it, but it’s not running out anytime soon.”

“Can you not talk about my parent’s sex life?” Thomas grumbled. “It’s enough I have to hear about it from them.” It was a truism among his mother’s side of the family, that if someone had sex, everyone learned about it. Even Judith regaled the family about what she got up with, whatever guy she’d hooked up with.

Hey, Thomas was certain did it specifically to embarrass him. Any times he couldn’t escape a room in time to not be present while she regaled everyone else with her exploits. His ears generated enough heat to melt the ice cap.

The golden tiger patted his leg. “Come on, Thomas. About the only one in your family I don’t know anything about his sex life is your brother, and that’s because I doubt he has one.”

Thomas snorted. “Sixteen and on the football team since the start of last school year? Trust me, he’s had plenty of fun with the cheerleaders, or any of the other girls in his year. You aren’t hearing about it because, like me, Roland prefers discretion.”

“So you’re telling me that you slept around with lots of guys when you were sixteen?” Paul asked, sounding surprised. “And here I thought we’d discovered fooling around together.”

“Can we change the subject?” Thomas grumbled, sinking into the seat. “I wasn’t a football player, or anyone popular enough to attract guys.”

Paul laughed. “You have to be the only guy I know who gets embarrassed talking about sex with the guy you fooled around with.”

“What’s so wrong with thinking that sex isn’t something you discuss when there’s other people around?”

Paul looked over his shoulder into the empty back seat. “Wow, where are they all hiding?”

Thomas groaned.

The dash screen lit up with an incoming call. Thomas saw the name Donna, before Paul tapped it.

“Hey, Donna,” the tiger greeted jovially, “how’s the west coast.”

“Suffocatingly hot,” she answered. “How do they stand this? And no one’s up at a reasonable hour. It’s seven am, and everything’s closed.”

“It’s seven am in Minneapolis, Donna,” Thomas said, “that makes it four am in LA. Didn’t the lack of sun clue you in?”

“Don’t get smart with me, Thomas,” she replied. “Of I’m going to call Nathan and tell you to dare you again.”

Thomas touched his eye.

“Low blow, Donna,” Paul said, glancing at Thomas.

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Thomas said. “At least I can say I kissed a quarterback now.”

“To what do we owe the privilege of being called this early?” Paul asked.

“That I’m bored isn’t enough?” she replied, sounding offended.

“Donna, you can do many things,” Thomas said. “Getting bored isn’t one of them. Or do I have to remind you of the bag of rice incident?”

She chuckled. “You guys know if Nat’s settled in? He was supposed to call yesterday, and he didn’t.”

“I don’t know if it’s the reason,” Paul said, “but he did message me about classes starting early at NYU.”

She sighed. "At least Mark's in my time zone, and his art's major can't be that time-consuming, can it?"  
 "We have the game on Saturday," Thomas said, "so we'll be able to chat then, while we destroy the enemy team," he added, grinning. Thomas and his friends were slowly climbing the 'Shoot-'em-up' board. None of them had aspiration of reaching the top, or even the top one hundred teams, but as amateur players, they were getting quite good.

She cursed. "I have to make sure my gear made the trip okay. I'll chat then." She disconnected.  
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The mass of new students assembled on the plaza in front of the Honors Building was larger than Thomas expected, but not so much as to be packed. Groups formed and talked animatedly. One of them, with good looking canines, felines and an ursine wearing sports jacket, had to be here on a sport's scholarship. They had jock written all over them. Hot jocks, but jocks none the less.

A margay in an expensive suit grinned at Thomas, nodding to the jocks and licking his lips appreciatively. Thomas's ears burned at having been caught looking by another guy, then folded back and looked away.

Paul grinned, and they moved among the crowd, waving to some other students that had been in high school with them, even if they hadn't been friends. Bears, ocelots, wolves, dogs, cars, other tigers, more rats, even a monkey with white fur around his face. That had to be an international student.

Thomas looked away as the monkey threw himself in another's guy's arm, a muscular lion and kissed him. Thomas looked again and immediately turned away as hand squeezed asses.

Didn't they have any shame?

Then he noticed coupled pressed together, some of them making out.

"What's with everyone?" Thomas grumbled. "You'd think this is a dating club instead of orientation."

Paul looked around. "Maybe you need to hook up with one of them, because I'm not seeing what you're seeing."

Thomas started to point at a cheetah and nuzzling a girl, but thought better of it. "By that tree over there guy and girl making out, she's the badger," he said under his breath. Paul looked in that direction, then shook his head.

Thomas glanced. The crowd had moved to hide them. "Lioness and cocker spaniel by the statue."

"Okay," Paul said, "they could tone it down a little, but that's just one."

"Are you looking? They're everywhere." Thomas considered. "Okay, not everywhere, but come on. This is university."

"A new world," The golden tiger, "where you get to try new things and new people. Loosen up, Thomas. Maybe you van kis—well, take to a guy you don't know and see what happens."

"I don't think so," he replied, but looked around. Maybe he could say hi to that margay. At the very least, they'd have the jocks to talk about.

"If I can have your attention," a far too familiar voice called over the crowd.

"No," Thomas pleaded quietly. Anyone but him.

"My name is Eric Hertz. I'm head of the science department, as well as teaching Theoretical and Applied Physics, so those of you heading in that direction might end up in one of my classes. Now is a good time to start making a good impression. I, along with some of my fellow professors, will be guiding you through the campus. I'll give them time to introduce themselves and we will get started."

Thomas breathed a little easier.

"Oh," Eric said, "I just remember. My son's among you, so you're going to want to watch yourself. You have solid competition in him."

He was so doomed.