

### *Rework-3*

Thomas left his economic class looking forward to taking it easy for an hour before history. His first class of the semester felt like he'd been studying for a month with how hard his father had pushed him to study over the weekend in preparation. The scheduled game of Shoot 'Em-up with his friends had almost needed to be canceled until his mother had reminded Eric breaks were important to learning, and pulled his father into their bedroom for the two's favorite pass-time.

But that has been the weekend, and now, with his father busy with his own student, Thomas would enjoy some relaxing reading about the basics of economic in the lounge, instead of trying to shove every bit of information in his head the way his father would—

"Thomas," his father greeted him the instant Thomas was out of the classroom. "How was the class?" Eric placed an arm around his son's shoulder and started walking. "I don't have long, but based on the layout of the campus, I found you a great place where you can study before you history class."

Thomas stifled the groan. Of course, his father would know where he was. He had built the schedule after all, helping him pick with from the available economic, history, and Studies for success classes he would go to. And because his father couldn't keep from running Thomas's life, it now looked like he had taken it on himself to plan his on campus free time too.

The study space was half-way to his history class, a room at the corner of the building, with green space outside for when the weather was good.

Before Thomas knew it, twenty minutes had passed, and what had been open blocks on his schedule for him to do whatever studying or relaxing was needed was filled with notes from his father on how to best prepare for the next class or lab, or how to go over the information he'd gained in his previous class so he could make sure he remembered as much of it as possible.

Then his father hugged him. "I really have to go, but if you need me, I'm just one message away, and don't worry, I'll do my best to drop by when I have the time and check in on how your studying is coming along."

Before Thomas could work up the nerve to tell his father he shouldn't bother, Eric was out of sight.

Thomas took out his phone, hesitated, then typed the message.

How did you survive? He sent Victor.

Hey, congrats on your first day of class. Sorry I couldn't be around to offer emotional support.

I'm serious. Dad's going to drive me insane, or cause my brain to burn out. He's just taken a reasonable class schedule and filled it with so much study time I might as well sleep here.

You'll get used to it. Me and Judith survived. You will too.

Thomas wasn't sure of that anymore.

I'm not you, or Judith. I didn't start college in the top one percent of my classes. Don't down play yourself, Thomas. You've averaged As throughout high school. That's impressive by itself. And I know it feels like Dad's trying to turn you into a valedictorian, but he just wants you to do the best you can.

Thomas was typing his less than flattering reply when his brother sent another message.

I'm going to be slow to reply. The twins are in need of attention.

He looked at what he'd called their father and deleted the message. Victor was right that Eric's intention were good. Thomas just wished they were not that intense.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thomas dropped face first in his bed.

He was done. There was no two-ways about it. The week was only halfway through and his brain was already leaking out of his ears with all the information he had to retain from his classes. No wonder he'd seen some students recording what the Teacher's Assistant said on their phone. He was starting doing that tomorrow, then he could listen to the class again at his leisure.

His phone buzzed and he groaned. If that was his father reminding him there was still an hour to go before dinner and that he could cram in more study time, he was... he had no idea what he'd do, but it wouldn't be pleasant.

He pulled it from his pocket and saw the message was from Paul. He groaned again. He called his best friend and put the phone on the bedside table.

"I swear," Thomas said as soon as the golden tiger answered. "My dad was raised by ninjas."

"I'm pretty sure he was raised by your grandfather and that Magnus had more interesting things to teach him than how to sneak up on you."

"Then maybe it was from Grandma Hertz, because I don't know how he does it. I'll be alone in a hallway, minding my business, and then he right there, asking about the class, what I'll be studying, and instead of ending up at the lounge or the cafeteria so I can take it easy for a few minutes, I'm sitting in whatever spot he picks was my study place."

"Well, you can take it easy after dinner."

Thomas groaned. "I can't play." He covered his eyes with his hands. "I'm dead. I can't think, I can't move, and believe me, if my dad gets here even five minutes before dinner's ready, he'd insist I get more studying in. So after dinner, he's going to have my nose in my classwork. We might as well scratch every game off the schedule all the way to the end of college. And beyond that, because I don't think I'm going to survive this."

"It won't be that bad," Paul offered.

"You don't live here, Paul. He's relentless. And if I get five minutes to breathe, it's because he's going over Roland's training schedule, or his classes. Because it's not because he's going to turn my brother into an NFL superstar before he hits college that my dad will also not make him into a Nobel prize winner in something or other."

Paul chuckled. "If you hate it at home so much, you should look into student housing."

“Good luck making that happen,” Judith said, walking into Thomas’s room. “If it was possible, I’d have been into one of them.” He leaned against the wall by the door.

“Hey Judith,” Thomas and Paul greeted her in unison.

“She’s right. We live close enough there’s no way my parents would be willing to pay for it, and I can’t afford that on my own.”

“You can get a loan.”

“That’s a good way to prepare for your future,” Judith commented, “by adding yet more debt to it.”

“And I have zero credit, so I’d have to get my parents to cosign. And that means explaining why I’m willing to get in debt to move out.”

“Mom would be heartbroken,” Judith said.

“And you’d miss her cooking,” Paul added.

“You’re the one who brought up student housing. Don’t also make a case for me staying home.” He looked at his sister. “How did you survive to make it to Senior year?”

She shrugged. “Me and Victor have been living that hyper intense dad since our first day of school. If not before. You weren’t old enough to notice it, but dad was trying to get Victory into advanced math when he was six. Nothing changed for me when I hit college. It was just more of a lot of studying.” She thought about something. “Well, when these came in, things changed slightly.” She grinned as she motioned to her breasts.

Thomas did not look at them. His sister wasn’t adult movie endowed, but she had a good set, if she said so herself. And she said so often. And their parents agreed. It was so embarrassing. His ears were burning just remembering the times they talked about her breasts and the guys it was drawing to her.

“Somehow,” she picked up, “Dad completely missed you were also in school until you mentioned that application you sent to get into university. I think I heard the gears jumped. He looked at you like you should still be crawling on all fours of something. Then he look at Roland like he was surprised he wasn’t the size to fit in his arms anymore. Then the gears reengage, and I could see him making plans.”

Thomas groaned. “Don’t talk about plans. I’m dying from them.”

She chuckled.

“I’m serious,” Thomas said. “Someone should warn Dad he can’t get the father of the century award if his son doesn’t survive the parenting. He won’t let me breathe.”

“If student housing is off the table,” Paul said, “pledge week’s coming up. You might be able to find a frat willing to take you in and next year you have a room for a lot less than housing.”

Thomas scoffed. “Oh right, and put myself through the humiliation of all those ‘tests’ I need to pass just of the privilege of having one of those frats talk to me? No thanks. I’ve seen what pledge week looks like.”

“Wow, Thomas,” Judith exclaimed, stunned. “Where do you get your information? Some teenage fantasy porn?” She smiled. “Now, wouldn’t that be a dream?”

“I’m with your sister. Pledge week isn’t some game show ripoff. It’s when the frats get most people interested, so it’s booths explaining what they’re about, what we can expect

from them, what they expect from us.”

“Sounds like you’ve been to a few,” Judith commented.

“Mostly research,” Paul answered. “And a few video tours previous students put together. I wanted to know what to expect when I go.”

“You’re going?” Thomas asked.

“Of course. Frats aren’t just about getting a room of your own. It’s about making connections with people in the domain you’re interested in. Biochem’s something of tight knit community, so getting in with the right people will help me get to where I want to be.”

“Remember, Paul,” Judith said. “When you start making perfect men, they can’t all be gay. I want a few of them too.”

“And again, I’m not going to ‘make’ men. I’m just going to design supplements to help them improve themselves. So you will be more than welcome to find the man you want, buy the supplements I’ll make and get them to whatever level of physical perfection you want.”

“What, you aren’t going to give samples to your best friend’s sister?”

“You’ll have to take that up with whatever pharmaceutical company I end up working at. They’ll be in charge of that side of things. I just want to be making the supplement.”

“Work on him for me, okay?” Judith said, bending over to kiss his forehead. “And don’t sweat it. You’ll get through this even if you live in this house for the entire time you’re in college.”

“Go away,” Thomas protested the show of affection from his sister. “I’m not one of the guys who falls for your charm with a batting of your eyes.”

She chuckled and left his room.

“So?” Paul asked.

“I know better than to work on your so my sister’ll get your magic pill.”

The tiger chuckled. “I mean, are you interested in coming with me to pledge week?”

“I doubt my Dad’s going to let me have the time to go.”

“Just tell him it’s class related, that way—”

“Are you insane?” Thomas asked. “If I tell him that, he’s going to have them all listed in alphabetical order and then he’s going to use that as something to get me to pick a major.” Thomas sighed. “I’ll go, even if it means I have to sneak out of the house to make it happen.”