

Rework-30

The darkness was cold but, somehow, not as much as Thomas thought it should be. His shivering stopped at some point, so it was still too cold for him, and then voices came. Distant, then closer, but always loud in their fears, worries, and anger. They resolved themselves into the voices of his father and grandfather, his mother and sister, and one more voice, a man he couldn't place.

Someone picked him up, and he moved. He moved through the varying degrees of darkness, aware of the weight on his body and the cold seeping in as he was carried. Then huddled in a warmer place, his shivering returning and the sense of movement was faster. The voices were indistinct again as darkness claimed him.

When he was aware of moving again, it qualified as being manhandled. He was prodded, his eyelids were opened and a light so bright appeared it should have pulled him out of the darkness, but he fell right back into it once his eyes were allowed to close. And the voices receded.

There was a beeping, monotonous, but insistent. Something heavy over him, hot, so damned up he wanted to push it off, but he didn't have the strength. Something pricked his arm, and it pushed the darkness away enough he made out a form in white. She called someone as darkness claimed him again, and this time, even that annoying beeping didn't register through it.

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Thomas was looking at a soft light when he realized he was awake. A white ceiling. A scent filled with disinfectant registered. In his peripheral vision, he made out forms and turned his head.

"Thomas," his mother said, relief heaving on her voice as she took his hand.

He tried to respond, but his tongue was thick, his mouth filled with cotton. Why would anyone do something like that to him?

"You gave us quite the scare, young man," Eric said from over his mother's shoulder. The tone was stern, but he could read worry on his father's face.

He tried to speak again, but before he could figure out what he wanted to say, that cotton prevented it.

"You must be thirsty." His mother moved away and was back, putting a straw to his lips. With a tentative sip, water entered his mouth, and he moaned at how good it tasted. He sucked harder and protested when he pulled it away.

"Careful," she cautioned, "don't overdo it."

"What happened?" he asked, and was surprised to find the water had dissolved the cotton and made his tongue shrink.

"We were hoping you'd tell us," his father said.

He looked at him, confused. A knock kept him from asking for details.

A nurse entered. The monkey smiled at them and he motioned to something hidden from Thomas's view. "I need to check your son's vitals. You can stay. I'll just be a couple of minutes."

Eric moved out of the way and Thomas saw the heart monitor. He felt his heart speed up, matching the display.

"There's nothing to worry about," the monkey said, "it's just to track your progress." He was attractive, if on the thin side. "How are you feeling?"

"Confused," Thomas replied. "Where are we?"

The nurse's smile was marred by worry. "What's your name?"

He rolled his eyes. "Thomas Hertz. I live on the Minneapolis side of the Twin Cities. I have no idea how long I've been sleeping, so I don't know the date."

The smile returned. "Someone's seen their share of medical dramas."

"I need something to do between studying and waiting for a guy to fuck me. Oh my God." His whole body burned with shame and the monitor responded by beeping. "I have no idea why I said that."

The monkey chuckled, looking the readings over. "You don't have to worry. I've heard much worse from others who came out of delirium." He placed a sensor on Thomas's finger. "Based on that statement, do you have a preference as to which orifice this is going in?" he took the thermometer off the holder attached to the heart monitor.

Thomas raised an eyebrow. "With my parents standing at the end of the bed? That's going in my mouth." That would have to be at least ten times thicker and lubed to be any fun.

"There goes my fun," the nurse said, putting a plastic cap over the end before putting the thermometer under Thomas's tongue. A few seconds later it beeped and both it and the sensor were removed.

“How is the patient doing?” a dachshund in a lab coat asked once she was in the room.

“He’s doing well, Doctor,” the monkey responded. “His vitals are steady. The glucose levels are still a little low, but they’ve made it within the acceptable range.”

She looked at the tablet in her hand, but her neutral expression didn’t change. “I’m Doctor Argent,” she introduced herself to Thomas. “Can you tell me what happened? There seems to be some confusion from your family as to the sequence of events.”

Thomas opened his mouth and closed it as his ears burned. “I was... resting. The door opened and then—” he was falling. Then he was dark, cold. “There was vertigo, and I lost consciousness.”

She tapped a note, her expression still the same. “I’m sorry if my questions get too personal, but I need to make sure we’re treating the right problem.” She looked him in the eyes.

“Okay,” he answered, wondering what kind of question needed that warning.

“Do you have any problems eating?” she asked flatly.

“No,” he replied,, and she frowned.

She looked at his parents. “Would you mind giving us privacy? This might go better if it’s just the two of us.”

“Now, wait a minute,” Eric said. “My son does not have an eating disorder.”

“What?” Nadia looked at Thomas in worry.

“Mister Hertz,” the doctor said in that stern tone TV doctors used when dealing with a difficult patient. “I understand that you might not want to believe your son has a problem, but parents are often the last to know.”

“I’m not bulimic,” Thomas said. They all turned to stare at him. “What? They bring it up every semester of high school. They’re paranoid there about that stuff. I don’t have an eating disorder.” He kept himself from adding that no one would do that to his mother’s cooking. This was not the time to levity.

“Mister Hertz,” she said, turning her stern tone on Thomas. “You might think so, but the sooner you stop being evasive, the sooner we—”

“I’m not being evasive,” he snapped. He knew she was only doing her job, but being doubted like that pissed him off. “We had Christmas dinner where we all ate our fill. Then we opened presents and there was talking and we started turning in. Because the room I’d picked was taken over by Aunt Corina and her fiancée, I had to share with Roland, but he was already there and he was—” his ears burned again “—busy. I went to use the murphy be in Grandpa’s office and—” he paused and the doctor’s confusion made sense no.

He swallowed and avoided looking at his parents. “When I said I was resting. What I was really doing was being discreet about...” he couldn’t get himself to say it out loud and used a hand to make the pumping motion over his groin. “Hey, over-sharing is my parent’s job,” he said at her raised eyebrow. “If you want me to trip over my tongue, I’m going to want that cute nurse back in here.” He covered his face as what he said sank in. When the doctor didn’t comment, he opened and eyes to find she was smiling.

“Are you certain that’s what you were being evasive about? We are here to help if you need it.”

“I don’t have an eating disorder,” Thomas replied, sighed. “I never had vertigo before either and I’ve also never blacked...” he trailed off as he realized that one might be stretching it. Unfortunately, they were now looking at him expectantly. “If you plan on having me going into detail about the orgies I’ve been in, my parents definitely need to be out of the room. But I doubt it’s related.”

“Oh, and why is that?” the doctor asked.

Thomas grumbled his response. “Because I haven’t gotten laid in over twenty-four hours.”

She smiled as she shook her head in amusement. “Alright, I’m going to take you are your word and treat this as a freak occurrence. But if it happens again, don’t just roll with it. The information about this incident will be on your file so which ever doctor you see will be able to refer to it.” She made more notes, then left with a nod to his parents.

Nadia had his hand in hers again. “Are you sure you don’t have a problem?” she asked, searching his face.

“Mom, I swear I have no idea what happened, but how can I have an eating disorder with you as my mom?”

“You haven’t been eating my cooking other than on Sundays recently,” she replied.

“Okay, but Madoc would throw a fit if he thought I was malnourished.”

She nodded, then relaxed. She offered him the glass of water, and he took a few sips.

“What can you tell us, Thomas?” Eric asked. “Judith wasn’t particularly helpful, even once she calmed down.”

He tried to recall anything else. “I sort of remember her voice, then—” him mid-jerking off, her looking at him in surprise. He shook his head. “That’s where I blacked out. What does she said happened?” he did his best to keep the trepidation out of his voice.

“She doesn’t know,” Nadia said. “She thought she’d seen you enjoying yourself and yelled in surprise, but once she calmed down, she said it had to have been her imagination, since you weren’t in the room and the window was locked.” She was searching his face again.

“I really don’t know what happened,” he insisted. “I was... pent up. I wasn’t going to deal with that in the same room as Roland. I was getting close when the door opened. Judith called to Grandpa and then—” he was falling, there was darkness and cold. “I don’t know.” He looked around the room. “Is everyone at Grandpa’s?”

“In the waiting room,” Eric said. “The doctor didn’t want us to crowd you.”

Thomas nodded, and a yawn cracked his face. “Well, if they want to see me, they’ll want to hurry.” His eyelids were suddenly heavy.

“No rush,” his mother said as he closed his eyes. “They’ll be here when you wake up.”

Thomas didn’t hear if he replied to her, the darkness claiming him again.

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Thomas woke as someone places something on his finger. “How are you doing?” the monkey asked.

He yawned. “I’m not going to get any sleep if you keep waking me up.”

“You’ve been asleep for four hours.” He took the thermometer from the holder. “Your parents aren’t here.”

Before Thomas could respond, someone chuckled. Ettore was seated, reading on his phone. Thomas opened his mouth.

“Still looking good,” the nurse said once he took the thermometer out. “And your blood sugar’s up again. Looks like you’re on the mend.” He put that and the sensor away and left.

“Where’s everyone?” Thomas asked the other rat.

“We’ve been taking turned keeping you company.” Ettore put his phone away and stood. “You gave us all a scare, vanishing like that.”

Thomas nodded. “Can you let them know I’m awake? Not that I don’t enjoy your company, but...”

“In a minute.” His expression turned serious as he reached the bed. “What happened, Thomas?”

“Didn’t Mom and Dad tell you?” He really didn’t want to go through this again. “I was jerking off. Then Judith walked in and scared the shit out of me and...” Falling; darkness, cold. “Vertigo, I guess. Whatever it was, I passed out.”

The rat searched Thomas’s face with an intensity that outclassed the doctor. “You can tell me the truth, Thomas.”

Thomas slumped. “If I know the truth, I’d tell you. I have no clue what happened.”

Ettore bit his lower lip. “Thomas, I’m not sure how much you’ve worked out regarding the families that make of the frat, but the Lewistons... We have enemies. I didn’t think they’d target Corina’s family to get to me, but if they have. If they are coercing you into silence, I need you to tell me. We can protect you and your family, but I need to know who is doing this.”

Thomas stared at his future uncle-in-law, surprised at how seriously he was taking this. “If someone could do this, why would they? This is alien abduction level fuckery, except that this time something did happen. I just have no idea what.” He rubbed his face. “The first moment I have a sense of someone else being there is when my parents found me along with Magnus and... you were there too, right?” now he thought it had been Ettore’s voice he’d heard. “Everything else if just being cold and unable to move.”

Ettore’s lips became a line, but finally, he seemed satisfied. “If you think you can remain awake, I’ll get the others.”

Thomas only had the time to drain the glass of water before someone barged into his room. To his surprise, it was Roland, and Thomas was sure he’d seen relief on his brother’s face before the usual scowl was back in place.

“Asshole,” Roland said. “You just couldn’t bear not being the center of attention, could you?”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Like almost freezing to death was some big attention grabbing scheme.”

Roland stepped to the bed, and Thomas swallowed. He was confident this wouldn’t be a repeat of the Thanksgiving football game, but he was keenly aware of how vulnerable he was at the moment.

“How did you do it?” Roland asked, sounding genuinely curious. “No one saw you leave the house and there were no tracks to the cave.”

Cave? “You mean I was passed out in the grotto?”

Roland nodded. “Dad had a hunch to start looking there. You’re lucky he did, otherwise we’d never have found you and you’d have to come back with your tail between your legs.”

Thomas gesture to the machine and the bad of liquid. “Or, you know, died of starvation and hypothermia. Roland, I have no idea what happened, but whatever it was, nearly killed me.”

Thomas saw the annoyance give way to worry and maybe a hint of fear. Roland opened his mouth just as the door flew open and the rest of the Hertz clan barged in. When the hugging was done, he looked around for his brother, but this time, it was Roland who'd pulled a vanishing act.