

### *Rework-13*

“You know,” Paul said, as he pulled into his house’s driveway, “I can always turn around and drive us over the state line. I don’t think they can chase you there.”

Thomas looked at his best friend, horrified. “And miss Sunday dinner?”

The golden tiger chuckled. “Then maybe you should stop fidgeting. You’ve been bouncing that knee since I got off the highway. I know you’re horny, but I doubt that’s why it’s bouncing.”

The rat stilled his leg with a hand. “Sorry.” He sighed. “I wish I could have arrived closer to dinner. Dad’s going to sit me down and get me to go over everything. I just know it.”

“Yeah, sorry,” Paul replied. “My mom needs me back now, so.”

Thomas nodded.

“If you want, you can come in and go to their house later.”

Thomas was about to agree when he spotted Roland, three houses down, at the Leslies, looking in their direction as he talked with Niel. He sighed. “Roland’s seen us arrive. He’s going to make sure Dad knows, and if I take too long, he’s going to come to check in on me.” He stepped out and looked in his parent’s house’s direction. Yep, there when Roland and Niel. “Are you still good to drive me back?”

“Sure, I’ll call you around eight.”

Thomas nodded, wondering if it might not be better to get one of the guys from the frat to pick him up as soon as dinner was done. He couldn’t bus back, not with his screen, as well as other things he needed to bring to the frat, and he couldn’t let his dad drive him. He’d ask to look over his chemistry lab results. And that would mean going in the frat, where Thomas wasn’t sure he could trust the guys around his father, especially not Limbani.

“I’ll be ready,” Thomas said. “Say hi to your mom for me.”

He walked the four houses and across the road, then opened the door to the smell of food, and sounds of his mother and Judith in the kitchen, by the tone of the conversation, she was recording, explaining steps to preparing steak for searing, with Judith asking for clarification. If he’d been here an hour earlier, it could have been him helping his mother, and ensured his father couldn’t corner him into—

His father walked down the steps and smiled at Thomas.

Or it could have been an extra hour of studying. He waved to his mother and Judith as he walked by the kitchen’s archway.

“Welcome home,” she called, then looked at the camera on the tripod. “Thomas just got home for dinner. He’s in college now, living in a frat with a bunch of hot guys.”

Thomas hurried along, hoping that was going to get edited out.

“Did any of them come with you?” Judith asked, sounding like she was smirking.

Oh, please God, have that be edited out.

One of her mother’s thing when it came to her show was that it was clearly in a house with her family, so one of them might show up, or get pulled in. She did behave for them,

but it wasn't like his mother knew how to not talk about her life while cooking, so anyone watching them knew she had an active sex life, and now her audience might know about his sex life.

"I'm glad you could make it," Eric said, keeping his voice low to ensure it didn't carry to the kitchen. "William tells me you're doing well in his class."

Thomas stared at his father, trying to work out who this William was.

"He gives your chemistry lecture and supervises the lab evaluations. [this will probably need to be adjusted for the realities of university classes]

Thomas hadn't known Professor Henly's first name was William. It also didn't surprise him that he'd reported to his father. Or that formed an opinion after only two weeks of classes.

"How about we head to my office and go over some of the weak points he noted while your mother finishes? I wouldn't want you to have trouble this early in the year."

Thomas nodded. What was the point in being annoyed? He'd known this was going to happen.

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"Then I just elbowed the opposing quarterback on his ass and Rol had an open way to the posts," Niel finished, then proceeded to devour his food.

"I guess that means I'm going to see a great game next Saturday," Stuart said. "Will you be there, Thomas?"

Thomas looked up from the perfectly seared steak he was enjoying and worked at regaining the thread of the conversation. He'd tuned out Niel halfway through because there was only so much football he could take during a meal.

"I don't know. I guess? I'll see what comes up."

Judith snickered. "Oh, I know what's coming up."

"Now, now, Judith," their mother said. "There's no call for that. It's a good thing that Thomas has so many things coming up around him now."

Thomas's ears burned, and he prayed that no one would add anything.

"This is great, Nadia," Stuart said. "What did you roast the vegetables with?" When Thomas looked up, the raccoon winked at him.

"Garlic butter along with rosemary and oregano," she answered.

"It's very good."

Thomas agreed, but then again, everything his mother cooked was good.

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Dessert was a strawberry shortcake with vanilla ice cream, both made by Nadia. It was a rare day food in this house wasn't homemade. Even on the rare day his mother didn't want to cook, everyone else had learned enough from her to manage something passable. It was one thing he really missed with being at the frat. Over the last two weeks, too many dinners had been delivered. It had all been much higher quality than what Thomas thought of as delivery, but it missed that quality only cooking the meal could add.

Laurence was a decent cook, although Thomas has the feeling barbecue was the extent of what the armadillo knew. Gilbert had offered to cook and was categorically vetoed

by the older frat boys. Something about that armadillo's cooking methods being too unpredictable, when Thomas had asked for a reason.

When there was no dessert left and the table was cleared, Eric started filling the sink. No sooner had he turned the faucet on that Nadia joined him. She draped herself over him and whispered. Thomas was happy he had his back to them, because it wasn't long before his father moaned quietly.

"Mom," Thomas said, "we have guests."

"There aren't guests," Roland replied, offended. "They're our neighbors."

"It's okay," Stuart said. "It isn't like it's the first time I've been here when they get... going."

Why was it that everyone seemed to be okay with his parents doing that around them?

"I don't see why you have a problem with them," Judith said, smiling. "It's not like you haven't done worse in a restaurant filled with people."

"What?" Roland demanded, glaring at Thomas.

"Yeah," she answered. "Something had come up with his friend, so Thomas had to go down and see to it, isn't that right?" she grinned at him.

Roland stood and stormed off.

"Thanks a lot," Thomas grumbled. Now Roland knew his brother had no self restraint either. At least Roland had Victor to look up to as someone in their families who wasn't doing everyone and anyone at the drop of a hat or pants.

Although, even Victor had stories from before he was married. And while he and his wife were more restrained than their parents, they still also had stories of their own at any of the family gathering they attended.

"Well, on that," Stuart said, as Thomas caught motion out of the corner of his eye from his parent. "Me and Niel are going to head home. He still has some homework to do before bed. Have a good night Eric, Nadia."

"You," his father grunted, "too." His mother didn't reply.

Thomas put his head in his hands, his ears burning as the Leslie headed for the back door. Couldn't they have taken it to the living room? Thomas would have handled the dishes.

Judith stood. "I'm going to go deal with something," she said.

Thomas was right after her, the realization he'd be the only one left spurring him into action, and heading up the stairs.

He paused before his old bedroom door. Remembering his mother's promise. He cracked it open and peeked in. Everything looked in place. The bed was even made. He sniffed. There was no lingering scent of sex. He still eyed the bed cautiously as he entered. He took a box from the closet and put picture frames in it, along with books, then set it next to his screen. He added more clothing to the box, then looked around, trying to figure out if there was anything else he needed to bring.

Not finding anything, he checked his phone. Not quite seven yet. His parents being busy meant that at least there wouldn't be more studying, but now he had to figure out what to do for that hour.

He looked at his screen. It was still plugged in, and one of his friends had to be

online. He did a search, then sent Donna and Mark an invitation and connected his phone to the screen. It didn't make for a great controller, but he'd still manage for a few games of Shoot-'em-up. And maybe he could score another game of keeping that Fel-Lou-Max player from going anywhere on the map. Managing that with his phone as controller should earn him some bragging, right?