

Thursdays

Zach Muir

Part I - Morning

It is Thursday 24 June 1939, and Thomas is looking at himself in the mirror. His face is smooth, blank, pale. His eyes are dark, his hair is dark, bags under his eyes are dark. The suit he wears is dark, and creases as he bends over to peer at himself. His nose bumps the mirror. It leaves a little oily smudge. His eyes are red-rimmed as he stares impassively at himself.

He has always been rather lumpy, he thinks. His cheekbones stick out at a funny angle. His lips are always turned down, and eyebrows drawn together as if he is thinking. Even when he was little, wearing white dresses and cream bows and playing in the sand with his brother. A perpetual frown. The few faded photos of his childhood show his puffy red little face with its downturned mouth, just the same as it is now. He still has a babyface, just with lumpy cheekbones.

He turned eighteen last year on the family trip to France. On his birthday, Thursday the 13th, he was asked by an old lady whether him and his fourteen-year-old brother were twins. “*Des jumeaux?*” She had asked, and not received a reply. Thomas’ mood had matched his sour face for the rest of the day.



His hands skate nervously across the lapels of the jacket, smoothing away invisible dust. There are tiny grey pinstripes streaking the fabric; up and down. They are nearly invisible unless you are Thomas, standing centimetres from the mirror, inspecting himself. They make his legs look longer, and his shoulders look wider. Well balanced. Masculine. Good, he thinks.

He stands sideways, still looking into the mirror, and presses a hand flat against his chest. He hunches his shoulders forward. It does not help. He pulls them back. His mouth twitches downwards sadly. He presses his hand harder. This also does not help.

He sighs and stands front on to the mirror again. All the leaning and turning has allowed his hair to become dislodged from where he had arranged it this morning. It is harshly undercut, with the top being just long enough to brush his cheekbone when it falls forward, as it was doing now. Thomas takes great pride in his hair. The same photos of him as a child feature austere, perfectly combed looks that match his austere expression. He pushes his hair back off his face and arranges it into the off-the-forehead swish it had been in previously. Good.

Thomas stands up from where he had been peering into the mirror, and sets his shoulders back, puts his hands by his sides, and the heels of his shiny black shoes together. He tilts his chin down and levels his gaze at his mirror self. It is Thursday. He has a funeral to attend.

Part II – Evening

Thomas lays on his cold bed with his shoes still on and stares at the ceiling. His jacket lies on the floor mirroring his spread-eagle arms. The room is dark as the single bulb above him struggles to light up the space. It winks on and off periodically.

Funerals were new to him- both his maternal and paternal grandparents had died before he had been born, and nobody else had died since. He only had the stories of his friends to rely on. Edward had told him about attending his grandmother's funeral at age nine. His description was imbued with the magic only a half-forgotten childhood memory could have.

“My da stood in his black suit, stoically standing dere with mam on his left and his own fader on duh right. Dey stood out like burnt trees against the great greeey sky of duh winter. Me mam's brilliant gold hair flashed like sparks in the wind.”

He had gestured up at the sky above when he said *greeey* in his wonderful accent, drawing it out between his hands as big as the heavens. His eyes had been wide, looking past Thomas at the memory, as if he could just see it over his shoulder.

Thomas had not asked Edward what grief felt like that day. They had been kids, barely twelve, but felt all-knowing as they sat together. He would never get to ask Edward how it felt, but he knew now. It was not a feeling imbued with child-hood magic. It was a cold seeping dread, knowing that your best friend was in the ground, surrounded by stinking dirt that other people walked over to see their own relatives' graves.

Knowing that you'll never get to see them again, watch them laugh, pat them awkwardly on the back when they cry, help them shave their head, have them come to you to help re-set their nose because their brother only taught you how to do it before he left. Knowing that they will rot in a box at barely eighteen, and you will age and grow without them.

Thomas was still and quiet as tears fell from the sides of his eyes and began to pool in his ears. His lip trembled.

Edward had been his closest friend since they were eleven. Always full of life, huge gummy smiles as he whooped and yelled, running down the street to the beach, red hair blazing a trail behind him. He was a flame of passion, always one hundred percent himself even when it got him in trouble, hence the broken noses.

Death did not suit him at all. The open casket had been the worst part. His freckles had been painted over, and he had been shoved into a sad grey suit he never would have worn. His short curls had been parted neatly on the left and slicked flat in a fashion Thomas had never seen him wear. His attempt at a moustache had also been shaved off. It had made him sick. Edward had looked *normal*.

It was as if when the morticians had pumped him full of preservatives, they had pumped out all of the personality; all of the little remaining life within him. Thomas wondered whether he, himself, looked like that usually. Pallid and grey, dark hair, dark eyes. An incredibly unassuming little boy. He hoped so. He was not like Edward. He could not shout and yell with a full and booming voice, flex his muscles, or even change with all the other boys for P.E.

He lived in fear that someone would discover his secret, that someone would find his lies, that he would never be able to live a normal life.

But boy did he wish.