

# Lab Rat

By C. Jade Wyton

*Victim of a mad scientist, a small brown rat finds himself changed forever.*

***Contains descriptions of nudity, torture, medical procedures, and abuse (towards both people and animals).***

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The basement lab was dark and damp, and the cold of the air clung to the thick metal cage with a grip that bit through fur down to skin.

A small brown rat, thin and dishevelled from abuse, barely clung to his life as he wheezed and panted clouds of mist into the air.

His pained whimpers were echoed in the dark by various other tortured creatures; loudest by the tabaxi woman in the cage next to his own.

She was sobbing, as she did every night after too much of her blood was drawn, and by the sound of her metal bars *tap-tap-tapping* against the brick wall, she was trembling from head to toe.

But the rat barely listened, too distracted by his own agony. And, slowly, he closed his eyes to sleep.

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It had been a month since what that girl's mother had been referring to as the "Incident" and Ratrick, despite the painful situation, wasn't really all that bothered by the girl's outburst.

It was entertaining, really.

If that was how the princess expressed her discomfort with his choice of dress, then so be it! What was he, to argue with a unicorn?

Sniffing, Ratrick stubbed out his cigar on the castle wall and made sure his new (but still rather grotty) trench coat was wrapped around himself properly before he hefted himself off the old dining chair he'd dragged outside to sit on.

'Alright, girly,' he said into the thick garden of trees. 'Your mother said ten minutes, and it's been fifteen. Out you get.'

'Do I have to!' a voice called from the trees.

'Not for me, you don't,' he said, simply. 'I'm not one to argue with the daughter of God. But then, while you're above me, take a moment to consider who is above *you*.'

A moment of silence passed, in which Ratrick waited patiently.... And then a young satyr crept from the trees.

'That's what I thought,' Ratrick commented, crossing his arms.

And then, his coat fell open.

Wonda's snout scrunched up in disgust. 'Why are you like this?' she asked as she straightened her hair and passed him.

Ratrick simply didn't respond as he cut his eyes at her, watching her shove open the castle's door and return inside.

'It ain't *that* bad, girly.'

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Gasping, sobbing, scrabbling.

The tabaxi woman gasped for air as Mori released her, pulling free the belt that he had wrapped around her neck to strangle her with.

She coughed and wheezed, desperate to catch her breath, as Mori stepped from her cage and kicked it shut.

It *clicked* loudly as it locked, and the rat watched as Mori picked up his clipboard and scribbled down his notes.

'Fifteen minutes without air,' he said aloud. 'You should be dead.'

The tabaxi was sobbing too loud to respond, as she retreated to the corner of her cage and pressed tight into it; instinctively trying to escape the man who had been choking her.

'And it's been... six months without food or water,' he noted. Then he put down his clipboard and crouched by the cage, peering in at the trembling woman with a curious spark in his eyes. 'What *are* you, Plume? Tell me!'

The tabaxi just whimpered and sniffled, shaking from the ends of her ears to the tip of her tail.

Mori slammed his hand into her cage, his curious look changing to one of anger. 'Plume of Feathers, you *will* answer me! WHAT ARE YOU?! *WHY ARE YOU IMMORTAL?!*'

'*I don't know!*' she squeaked, breathless through her crying. 'I don't know what I am! Please, let me go! Just let me go....'

*Let me go. Let me go,* the rat echoed in his mind, resting his head on his tail. *Let me go. Let me go. Let me go.*

*Let me go or let me die.*

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Wonda was trembling as Ashdown wrapped a bandage around her head; her fresh wound dripping blood and antiseptic down between her eyes.

Ratrick hadn't known it was horn-cutting day. If he had, he might have let her play for another five minutes. But as he sipped his cold soup (found in the kitchen, abandoned by the cooks as it had turned out saltier than God preferred and a new batch had been made for her) he knew it had to be done.

He pet the girl on the shoulder, sniffing loudly as he offered her his half-drunk cup. 'It ain't that bad, girly.'

'Yes it is,' Wonda cried, pushing the soup away. 'It hurts! It hurts so much! You've never felt anything as painful as this— Not even *half* as painful!'

Ratrick disagreed; though he didn't argue. 'Well. Who am I to argue with the daughter of God?' he grumbled, sipping again at his food.

'Why does Mori make it hurt so much?' Wonda sniffed. 'Why?'

Ratrick didn't answer. He wasn't sure he *had* an answer. All he knew was that

Mori was a bastard....

Ratrick sniffed again, loudly, and removed his trench coat.

‘Ew! Ratrick!’ Wonda cried, covering her eyes. ‘Why are you *like* this?!’

Again, Ratrick didn’t answer. Instead he simply left the room and, with a glance down each direction of the hall to confirm nobody could see him, leapt at the wall and scrambled up its brick texture to a deep hole near the roof.

The hole was no bigger than an orc’s fist. But now, Ratrick was small enough to match, and with very little effort the animal pushed his way inside and skittered through the castle walls.

He paused only at the cry of an upset voice; his little ears twitching as he poked his head out another hole.

‘Leena!’ a clownfey woman, Oobleck the Strange, was knocking furiously on the door of her charge. ‘Leena Benson, you open this door! *Now!*’

Ratrick sniffed, then, and hurried out of his hole. He rushed between the clownfey’s legs unnoticed and, with perhaps a bit more effort than it took to fit into the hole in the wall, squeezed his way through the large gap under the door.

Leena was sulking by her window; looking out over the courtyard with a look too furious for a girl so young. So Ratrick rose to two legs and cleared his throat.

Leena screamed as she turned and saw the almost-naked man standing in her bedroom.

And Ratrick simply motioned to the door; which she ran to and unlocked so she could leap into Oobleck’s arms and hide in them.

Oobleck looked at him with a tense expression, seemingly unable to decide whether to thank him or scold him, and Ratrick simply shut the door on her and leapt onto Leena’s windowsill; his body shrinking as his clawed hands and feet gripped the side of the castle’s textured stone walls so he could climb along it.

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The rat trembled in his cage.

Something in his body had changed.

Something was pulsing through him.

Probably whatever that Mori man had injected him with.

It hurt. It was complete agony.

Every joint.

Every muscle.

Every bone.

Every tiny little inch of him hurt like he was on fire.

He saw a blurry hand reach for his cage door clasp and hissed, biting out in fear— And heard the gasp of the tabaxi in the cage next to his as his teeth met her flesh.

He released her immediately and she withdrew from him, pulling her arm back through the bar of her cage to examine the blood that speckled her fur.

Then she glanced back to the rat and reached out again; straining as far as she could so her fingers brushed the clasp that held his cage shut.

‘*If I can just...*’ she mumbled under her breath. ‘There!’

The rat’s ears twitched as there was a *click* and a quiet *creeeeeeee* and his

cage's door slowly creaked open.

A thrill rushed through him as he leapt from his cage, rushing forward to collide with the floor and skitter across the ice-cold concrete towards a hole in the wall.

Then he paused, turning to look back at the tabaxi that had freed him.

'Go!' she told him. 'Get out of here!'

He hesitated.

'Please!' she urged. 'If I can't save myself, let me save you! *Please!* Get out of here! *Live!*'

He understood her words.

He had never *understood* words, before.

But he understood her now.

And he did as he was told; squeezing into the dark hole and running as fast as his tired legs would let him.

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Ratrick stood, small and hidden, within the shadows in the corner of Mori's lab.

Mori was distracted, as usual, shaving the glowing chunk of crystal-coloured bone into fine powder and taking notes as he worked.

It was all too easy for Ratrick to slip by him unseen.

Not that Mori would recognise him, if he was spotted.

Mori hadn't recognised him three years ago, when the scientist had somehow stumbled upon him in the basement of a broken-down old rot of a house he had been living in.

Ratrick had intended to leave until he had seen Her.

*God.*

Listening to make sure Mori hadn't turned, Ratrick hurried to the back of the man's lab, where tubes of thick translucent liquids held the man's newest experiments.

He didn't care for the new bodies that God was trying to make herself.

She was perfect as she was.

These new bodies they were trying to make weren't for her.

They were too pretty. Too young.

And God was not pretty. Nor was she young.

She was an old and imperfect creature, much like himself.

A beautiful, horrid thing whose body told a thousand stories of torture and violence. Each torment she had endured was etched into her flesh. Piercing deep through her skin, her suffering stung her all the way to her bones and bloomed out of her like the flowers in Wonda's garden.

Oh, it made Ratrick want her in the most carnal ways.

There were very few who understood the pleasures of agony like he did. And even less who embraced it.

*The only other soul who could ever truly understand him was long gone*, he thought as he squeezed himself behind the life-sustaining tubes and found their power supply.

*For Plume, he thought as he bit down. And for me.*

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Electricity sparked through the rat's tiny body, agony coursing through every muscle and joint as his fur smoked and his eyes burnt and his flesh stung.

It had been only two weeks since he had been freed from that hellish lab. And a new emotion he had never felt before had gnawed at the back of his ever-growing brain, whispering to him over and over to go back.

*Go save her.*

He had not known what else to do. Though he was growing smarter by the hour, he was still just a rat. So, he had done the one thing he had always known how to do. And he had chewed.

He had chewed and chewed and chewed. On anything in that horrid house that he could reach.

Boxes and bones and books.

Anything he could put his mouth on, he put his teeth in.

And, then, he had seen that bastard man carrying a rabbit by the scruff of its neck. And he had seen him trap it within a cage too small. And he had seen him inject it with serums. And clip it with metal pegs. And shoot it with strange currents that made it writhe in pain.

And the rat had an idea.

He had seen those cables, rare in this world; lightning created by magic and stored in boxes to use as a source of power. Expensive and powerful, and full of otherworldly energy, he knew if he bit into it, it would cause a magical burst that would disrupt the man's research and create a distraction.

What he hadn't expected, however, was the explosion.

His ears rung and his body ached in a pain that was so strong it spun back around into a sick feeling of pleasure.

He knew he should have been dead. But something in his blood —something that man had done to him, he was sure— didn't allow it.

So he lay on his back, twitching, and stared at the unconscious half-elf who lay slumped against the wall.

Slowly, the rat rolled over.

And he saw the now-dented door of Plume's cage slowly swing open.

*Go, he willed as she stumbled out. Get out of here.*

She staggered across the room, unsteadily rushing for the basement door and disappearing up the stairs.

*'If I can't save myself,'* the rat said, aloud; the common tongue finding its way to his lips as he slowly rose to his feet to follow her. *'Let me save you....'*

By the time he had clambered up the stairs, the tabaxi had vanished into the night.

So he did the same; running down the cobbled town road to the woods beyond its edge.

And as he ran he felt himself rising onto two legs and knew, deep in his bones, that he was changed.

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