

Cold Start, Toon Heart

By Stardiver

Dorian walks into the cold garage, bundled up with a sweater, scarf, and coat. He hated the cold, and now he had to go out into it to get groceries before the snow really came down and he'd be stuck with less food than he wanted.

Boots clomped across the concrete, moving toward a red, rather generic-looking red coupe, about the size of a compact car. The car's headlights were closed, the chassis was shifting up and down, and soft puttering noises were being made.

"Cedric," The human says. He taps the car's foot with his boot. "Hey, yo, it's time to get up."

There was a more uneasy sputter, sounding like a snort.

"Hey, wake up!" Dorian calls out, kicking a tire lightly with a foot. Black tires were splayed out on the floor, suspension stretched out like noodles as the car's body lays on bare concrete.

There's a popping noise from up front as a black, oily bubble breaks. The front of the car turns toward Dorian as if it were made of rubber, and closed headlights open up to reveal bright blue eyes, and its bumpers part to yawn, revealing a long rubbery tongue and the car's engine slowly ticking inside its bay.

"Huh...w-what happened?" Cedric sputters out, trying to wake up while his engine was turned off.

"Nothing. We need to run to the store before the snow hits and we're really stuck in here," Dorian says, opening Cedric's door, climbing inside, and closing it.

Plush seats flexed under the human's seat, and waterproofed hiking boots would touch the little coupe's pedals.

"Aww...but I *hate* the cold. My cylinders get f-frozen so easily!" The coupe protests, slowly rising on his wheels, Dorian getting lightly jostled as the car stands back up.

"I don't like it either, but your whole engine block is gonna be frozen if we don't get you more antifreeze, so we gotta."

Ever since he bought this car from a seller about six months ago, Cedric warmed up to him, from being a quiet expressive automobile to a much more opinionated one.

Ceddi grumbled and huffs. "Okay, f-fine."

Dorian sighs, and turns the car's key. Cedric rocks forward and his engine clicks over...and there's nothing.

"Oh, come on, man," Dorian says, pumping more gas into the car, before stopping and turning the car off.

Cedric pants and wheezes. "It's t-too cold!" The car continues to protest. "Can't you get a heater or something out here?"

"No, we're not doing that. You can do this," he says, and turns the car's key again. Ceddi shudders and clenches his headlights as the engine keeps trying to catch. His starter whirrs and groans, and after a couple of pumps, the car pants and sags slightly in place.

The driver groans. "Please, Ceddi. Work with me here."

"I'm trying. Hard to start when you're cold, you know!" Ceddi responds and stumbles back up on wobbly wheels. "Shame I don't have a warm bed to sleep in..."

"You really wanna squeeze your way into the house, huh?" Dorian says, and laughs. "Tell you what. You get going, and I'll think about it."

"I told you. I'm a toon, I can wiggle my way i-inside!" Ceddi says, sputtering and huffing.

Dorian sighs. "I know, I know. I'll think about it after we get back from the store," he says. "Now let's...get out of here," he says, turning Cedric's key once more. His rounded back end wobbles as his exhaust splutters, engine struggling to catch.

Dorian continues to make attempts to start the cold, red coupe. Ceddi jerks back and forth on his tires, his engine clunking as he tries to shake the oil in his system to move. He slumps on his back tires, gasping for breath.

"I can't...can't do it..." Ceddi huffs, tongue lolling out and dripping antifreeze.

"Yes, yes you can," Dorian says, holding off on Ceddi's gas pedal, knowing that at some point he's going to at least get them started...or flood the engine entirely. He rubs his temple, growing a bit more impatient.

The cartoony vehicle stands back up and shakes itself. "Okay. Let's...let's keep trying." Ceddi pants out, determined to get started at this point. There was a light sloshing from up front.

Dorian slams his boot to the floor as he turns Ceddi's key. The car hunkers down on his front as he tries to start himself up, starter struggling again and again to catch. His rear end wags left and right, while his tailpipe wheezes and makes wet pops and sputters.

Ceddi keeps trying to start, while his headlights and tail lights flicker and fizzle. The starter's attempts to keep going begin to slow, and the car pants and wheezes as his battery starts to fade out. Eventually,

Ceddi's engine gives out, and in a loud gasp, the red coupe collapses again on the concrete, popping his ragtop open.

Dorian's head falls on Ceddi's steering wheel. "Fuck! I should have known I'd flood your engine..." He grumbles into his scarf. "I'm sorry."

Ceddi gurgles a bit and coughs. Dorian pops open Ceddi's hood and checks on it, taking care to spread his legs over the car's panting, lolled out tongue.

With a normal car, you can't easily see what's wrong with internal issues, but with toon vehicles, they let you know exactly what's wrong. The carburetor was cartoonishly bulging out, and when Dorian touches it, it sloshes.

"Oh. Oh, that's not good." He says and looks down at Ceddi. "Maybe the choke will help?"

Ceddi just pants, and gives a weak nod before looking concerned. He hated having his choke pulled, but it was the only way to clear out the excess fuel, and hopefully start.

A gloved hand closes Ceddi's hood, and Dorian pats it before climbing back inside. Another boot to the gas, and twisting of Ceddi's key. The car clamps down on the ground, and as Dorian pulls the choke, Ceddi gasps and coughs as his engine sends some of the excess fuel through his systems. The engine gurgles, sputters, and coughs as the fuel is forced through, and Ceddi's front turns from red to a deepening shade of blue. His tailpipe shudders, backfires, and his rear wheels spin against the concrete before finally...

...a loud click and a rumble could be heard as Ceddi's engine finally catches, and Dorian releases the choke, taking a sigh of relief. The garage smells of rich, running fuel, and Ceddi's pants echo in the garage.

"Alright! You did it, buddy!" Dorian says, patting his door.

"Yea...yeah..." Ceddi pants as his engine chugs and sputters. "C-can we go?" He asks, turning his front to face the human inside of him.

Dorian nods, and drives off with him, the toon car wobbling a bit as it recovers, leaving a trail of smoke clouds on the way.

The trip to the grocery store was easy enough; the worst part of getting in was his car nearly slipping on ice, briefly stumbling on all four tires, and nearly dropping to the pavement.

On his return and loading Ceddi up with groceries (and antifreeze), Dorian looks toward his car before climbing in. "You holding up okay?" He asks.

"N-not really. Still don't like being out here...feels like my engine's gonna freeze solid!" Ceddi responds.

"Hey, just gotta head home and you'll be safe in the garage!" Dorian says, trying to be reassuring.

"Hey, you said you'd think about letting me *in* the house this time," Ceddi reminds him.

Dorian pauses. "You're right. You can come in. But you gotta promise not to break stuff while in there."

And with that, Dorian turns Ceddi's key. This time, Ceddi's engine catches and starts, with a rough, sputtering idle. There's a soft light from the instrument panel. Low fuel.

Dorian sighs. "Fuck." Slowly, he gets Ceddi into gear, and the car rolls and crunches the ice underneath it. The two drive off while the snow continues to build up, and the sky fully transitions into the evening. As Ceddi turns on his lights, he and Dorian end up hitting a patch of ice, skidding out and landing hood first into a snowbank.

Dorian is briefly stunned by the impact while Ceddi tries to pull himself out from the snowbank. Ceddi shivers from the sudden cold and his engine shudders and groans as he reverses hard, eventually managing to pop himself out of the snowbank. But, having his front shoved in a snowbank drastically cut off his engine's air supply. The extra effort required to free himself combined with the restricted airflow resulted in too much fuel to pour into his cylinders. As such, while he does manage to pop out of the snowbank, his engine was already much too drowned to keep going. With a few last struggling sputters it blew out a backfire and stopped, causing him to flumph to the icy ground below.

His engine was badly flooded, again.

As Dorian comes to his senses, he lays his head on the wheel and assesses the situation. They were out of the snow, but the engine has shut off and they were low on fuel. He turns Ceddi's key and feathers the pedals. Ceddi pants and wheezes while his starter once again tries to catch.

"Come on..." Dorian mutters while Ceddi's engine just clicks again and again. "Don't wanna run out of gas out here..."

"I'm trying, okay?" Ceddi protests as fuel is pumped in once again. He starts to pant and wheeze, the car wobbling more unsteadily as he drains his fuel, while kicking up snow around him.

"H-hey! Be careful!" Dorian says, feeling the car jostle around him. At this point, he has Ceddi's foot to the floor, and the car slips and flops onto the ground. Ceddi gasps and stumbles back up, wheezing as his engine groans and strains to get started. The toon car's fuel needle hits an eighth of a tank and is dangerously close to flooding for the third time.

Dorian risks completely draining Ceddi's tank by pulling the choke, and the car gasps, gagging on a lump of snow before his engine finally catches, with a loud, smoke-filled backfire. With a couple of hard pumps, he finally manages to get Ceddi out, and onto the road, spinning backward before righting himself. Ceddi pants heavily, the effort has brought his temperature dangerously close to overheating, while his tank edges ever closer to being completely out of fuel.

"Thank god. Now let's go home," Dorian says, as the snow falls on Ceddi's ragtop and the two chug and sputter on back home. Ceddi sags and huffs as Dorian tries to keep feeding him fuel with anxious pumps to his gas pedal. His tailpipe splutters and wheezes through the cold air. As the red coupe enters the garage again, he chugs, huffs, and promptly collapses on the concrete as the garage door closes behind him.

Dorian steps out and leaves Ceddi's key in. He pauses as he watches the red coupe wheeze and shiver.

He pauses. "Once I get the groceries in, you can come in for the night, okay? And we'll get you some gas tomorrow. I think there's still a tankful in here."

Ceddi's tongue rolls back into his mouth, and he raises up on his front tires. "R-really?"

Dorian would give an 'Mm-hm' with a nod, before unloading his groceries into the house. Eventually, Dorian sticks his head out of the door leading into the house, and calls out, "Come on! Just be careful!"

Ceddi gives an eager honk and hops toward the door. The coupe, while technically still too big to enter normally, manages to squirm and wiggle its way in, before getting stuck partway. Tires reach out towards Dorian, who made the decision to step back a few feet.

"I'm...I'm stuck!" Ceddi complains, his rear end wiggling on the other side of the door, suspension, and tires hanging out behind him.

"I don't know what I expected," Dorian says, and grabs onto Ceddi's tires, which manage to clutch onto the human's hands like a rubber mitt. He pulls, and groans, with Ceddi backfiring as he tries to push himself through. Eventually, the duo lands onto the carpeted floor, with Ceddi almost straddling him, the car sitting on his back wheels in an almost human posture.

A fire crackles softly next to them.

Ceddi looks toward the fire, and then at Dorian, before pulling him into a tight hug. Dorian gives a relieved sigh, and opens his arms to the car, feeling the car's metal body flex around him like it was entirely organic. Ceddi scoots over toward the fireplace, and while still holding his driver, licks his face.

Dorian laughs, and sighs, pressing into his car's softened, toony body, his knit sweater rubbing against surprisingly slick metal. He gives Ceddi's bumpers a quick kiss from underneath.

"Feeling better?" Dorian asks, trying to get comfortable with the car.

"Mmhm. Especially since you're here." Ceddi answers, softening his grip to almost cradle the human given the size difference, even after the toon's shrinking down to fit in the house.

Dorian nods. "Good. I'm glad you're here, too. I should have done this sooner."

Ceddi gives a happy beep and a couple of sputters, happy to hear that his owner is pleased with this new arrangement as well.