

Playing a Dangerous Game Part Three

He didn't waste any time once we got back into the lobby. He danced elegantly through the crowds as if he was a ghost. It was nearly impossible to not bump into people, much less keep up with him. I had fallen several feet behind him when disappeared out the front door. Once I finally reached the door, I was amazed at what I saw sitting at the bottom of the steps. There was a huge ass limo. I would have never known that it was Cedric's if one: James wasn't there, and two: If James wasn't there squeaking over Cedric's arm. I could hear his panicked shrieks from the top of the steps, even over the hustle and bustle of the street below.

"Are you hurt? What were you thinking?" He then began fumbling with his shoulder.

"I'm fine James, really. You can stop fussing over me." Cedric stated. James then looked at him over his glasses.

"It's my job to be "fussy" over you." He enunciated fussy. I decided that it was time to go on down there. Halfway down the steps, Cedric saw me. His eyes lit up as if he had forgotten that I was following him in the first place.

"Lance!" He exclaimed, "Let's get go-" His sentence was cut off by James tugging on his shirt, essentially pulling him back to his previous spot. Cedric rolled his eyes and smirked at me. He then pointed to James far above his head, crossed his eyes and stuck out his tongue. I snickered.

"Stop that." James ordered without looking up. Cedric put his free arm on his hip and watched James fidget over him. After a few moments, James looked up and stepped away from him. He looked at the two of us, pushed his glasses up his nose and stated: "It doesn't look too bad. Some swelling has already started so to nip it in the bud; we need to get home A.S.A.P." Cedric gasped.

"But James!" We need to go shopping for Lance!" Cedric pleaded. James just looked at Cedric with a stern look on his face. "I don't care what you do. I'm adamant that we shop for him." James just continued to look at him. Cedric crossed his arms and then winced at the pain of the movement. James pointed to Cedric.

"See? You need to get that treated. We're going home now, no discussions." James then turned and walked to the front of the limo and opened the door on the passenger's side.

"How could you?" Cedric said with fake horror, "He's going to freeze to death." James turned around.

"Give him some of your clothes." he mocked just before disappearing into the cab of the limo. Cedric gasped and looked at me with his mouth hung open.

"How dare he?" He questioned. I could tell he was joking still. As if a light switch had been flipped on, Cedric's expression changed. "You know? That's not such a bad idea. Come on." He motioned for me to get in the limo with him.

I easily slid into the cab of the limo only after banging my head on the roof and my elbow on the door. I sat in the nearest empty seat which put me in front of Cedric. Even in the shallow darkness of the limo his eyes burned with an inner fire. He was sitting with his legs crossed with a glass of something bubbling.

"Champagne?" He raised the glass up to indicate what he was drinking.

"No, thanks," I answered awkwardly. For some reason the limo made me uncomfortable; kind of like a forbidden grotto. I looked at him. He was sitting there ever so elegantly, and staring dead at me. Wanting to break the silence, I said the first thing that came to mind.

"It's kind of dark in here isn't it?" Cedric didn't respond. After a moment of sipping the last bits of champagne from his glass did he move. In a fluid motion and without breaking eye contact with me; he reached over and plucked a few switches making the cabin instantly brighten. When my eyes finally adjusted to the change, I looked back at him. He was absent-mindedly playing with the empty glass between his fingers while his left hand lay gently across his lap. He just sat there and stared at the glass. *What is he thinking about? He's so mysterious. I haven't known him for more than thirty minutes yet, he knows basically everything about me, but I don't know jack about him. I don't even know his whole name. Figure I'll start there.*

"Cedric," I began, "What's your whole name?" He slowly tore his eyes from the glass to look at me.

"That's really what's bothering you?" *There he goes again with his psychic-ness.* "Very well," He took a breath, "Cedric Lee Stone." He said each word slowly and carefully, as if it was awkward for him to say his own name. He sat there still juggling the glass in between his fingers. "Anything else you want to know?" He practically sung the question; or perhaps that was my imagination.

"How long have you been competing in Airblade?" He looked to his right.

"Four years, but I spent three training." *Three years!? How the hell am I going to learn this crap?* "But don't worry yourself about that, you have me to train you." For some reason, that scared me even more; I continued asking questions.

"Uh, about what you said when first saw me. Did you..uh..really-."

"Ah, the part about you being soft?" He interrupted, "Yes, I meant every word." When I didn't respond he went on to say, "You are strong Lance, but as you saw today in the locker room, the competition is ruthless. You still have a child-like innocence about you. In order for you to succeed, you have to crush that." Something in my gut twitched and I was talking before I even knew I was.

"I think you're wrong." Silence followed. The statement hung in the air like poison.

"Oh? And what, exactly do you mean by that?"

"I just mean that, you still have an air of innocence about you." He looked at me like I was crazy, and frankly, I was just about thinking that too. When he spoke, his voice had a tinge of raspy-ness.

"Lance, there is nothing innocent about me." Before he could say more, I interrupted.

"No. You're wrong. I can see it in you." He shook his head, but it was barely noticeable.

"No Lance. Life has a way of killing innocence. There is nothing innocent about me. I lost all of that sometime ago." The way he said make my heart clench. He believed it.

"Cedric," When he looked at me I saw a flash of something that I had never seen or would have thought to have seen on his face.

Sadness.

The question died on my lips.

"Yes Lance? What is it?" His face was perfect again; completely and flawlessly masking the sadness I saw. Maybe I imagined it" He looked at me expectantly. Oh right, the question.

"Cedric, why are you competing?" He didn't answer immediately, in fact, I thought he wasn't going to.

"To prove myself." he stated the sentence dryly, no emotion. The answer was finite. I knew he wasn't going to say anything else about it.

The rest of the ride was spent in silence. It seemed to drag on forever. When I thought I was going to lose my mind, the limo stopped. He looked at me, his face stern. The door to my right opened and flooded the cabin with natural light. James appeared and helped Cedric out, then turned and helped me. My paw engulfed his. I got out of the limo and began to look around. This place was huge! I did a full circle of the driveway. It was ridiculous; the fountain itself was bigger than my old apartment! Cedric's voice rang out behind me. I turned to find him on top of the steps leading to his house. He had a smirk on his face. He threw his arms into the air:

"Welcome to Stone Manor."