

Calming Cedric down was easier than I expected. It seemed that once he realized that he had begun to cry in front of me, he stopped and recomposed himself. I barely did anything except touch his shoulder. I doubt that I *could* have said anything. I may be very charming, but that's just it. I can get into the normal persons pants with no problem, but emotional things? Come on. I never wanted to get into emotional things, hence my awkwardness with Cedric when he wanted emotion from me. Ironical as it is though, I just can't walk away from Cedric. I can't explain it. It's like he has some supernatural aura that constantly pulls me in. I *want* to know more. I *need* to know more. I feel the overwhelming desire to help him in any way I can. No matter what. And here I was, thinking all of these things, reflecting on all of my past relationships, if you could call them that, walking behind Cedric and following him to a staircase. He said he wanted to show me some things and give me something. I knew this was an honor bestowed to those Cedric felt worthy simply by the way he said it. He had looked me dead in the eyes and for the first time since I met him, I felt he was talking as he was. No hidden agendas. No words between the lines. Just what he was saying and that's all that was too it. I looked around my surroundings. I had explored this area, only once though. I figured it was a dead end when I found the locked door at the top of the stairs. Cedric reached the door and looked at me. "Notice anything different about this door?" I hadn't actually. Once I discovered that it was locked I left. I shook my head. Cedric smirked. "This door is sealed by a prototype technology that isn't out on the market yet." Cedric reached into his shirt and pulled out a ring on a leather strap. Was that around his neck all the time? How could I have never noticed that? Cedric took the ring off the necklace and placed it on his finger. It shone brilliantly, although the surface seemed to shimmer. This wasn't a normal ring. Cedric must have noticed me staring. "It's a sapphire ring with a white gold band; however this ring is coded with a chip that is shared by the door. When they are brought back together..." Cedric grasped the door knob. What happened next stunned me. The knob and door glowed blue followed by the sapphire pulsing. It pulsed three times and the door gently swung open. Cedric just smiled at me and walked on through. Determined to see more, I followed. I stepped into the next room and didn't waste any time throwing out questions.

"How does that thing work!?" Cedric twirled around and presented the ring.

"It all has to do with this little beauty. When I first touch the door while wearing the ring on my ring finger, and it has to be my ring finger, the door opens. When I touch it again, it locks. That's the simple explanation. "

"And that stops anyone from coming in?"

"Well it locks the door quiet efficiently." Cedric laughed.

"But then can't someone just bust down the door?" Cedric thought for a second.

"Well they could. But then my ring would notify me. It also tells me when someone other than me touches the door." He winked at me. I blushed. Wanted to break the awkwardness I took in the new room. There were suits of armor everywhere! Swords, knives, shields, halberds, axes, you name it! It was there. My eyes widened and my ears pricked up.

“Wow Cedric, this is amazing!” He sat down on a little bench in the center of the room.

“Yeah, I’m a bit of a collector. Feel free to look around.” Did I ever. I was like a kid in a candy store. Cedric went on to tell me a little history about different suits, but I only half listened to him. I was too absorbed with the little boy inside me. I wanted to try on one of the suits but Cedric told me they weren’t created for wear, only to sit on mannequins. It was only a small let down. This was still really awesome. After I had my fill of nerding out over medieval stuff, Cedric took me further into the wonders behind the door. We left the armory and with a short walk down a hallway and a swing to the left, we went through another door. This one was unlocked. Cedric told me he didn’t bother locking these doors since the first one was the one that needed to be locked. I didn’t think that after the first room, nothing could compare to the pure awesomeness; however, once Cedric turned on the light I was quickly proved wrong. This room was basically an art studio. Paintings and drawings were everywhere, some strewn around randomly. Most of the drawings consisted of old buildings and the paintings averaged to be natural places such as forests. Cedric walked over to a covered stand and pulled back the white sheet that was covering it. It was an unfinished painting still sitting on the canvas that portrayed a very scenic cliff with a lighthouse and waves crashing up on the rocks. I looked at it stunned.

“Wow...” Was all I could muster. The attention to detail was staggering. This was the touch of a professional. “Where did you learn to paint like this?”

“I taught myself.” I looked sideways at Cedric. He looked away embarrassed, “I guess you become good when you use it as an outlet.” Cedric looked back at me. “It’s not that great.” Now I fully looked at Cedric.

“You should stop doing that. Selling yourself short. This is really amazing. I mean look,” I crossed over to some sketches laying on a table and grabbed a few and held them up, “at these sketches. They are beyond...” I couldn’t think of the right word to do them justice. I stood there with my gears grinding. I knew smoke was going to come out of my ears any second now.

“Immaculate? I shook my head not sure what that word meant.

“Yeah. That works. Just look at the attention to...” I paused. These sketches were of Leon. I felt blood rush to my face. Oh shit. I just stepped into bad territory. I looked at Cedric. I know he read my mind because he walked over, stood beside me and took the sketches from me.

“It’s ok. You can talk about him. I drew these simply because I missed him.” He thumbed through a few sketches before putting them back down on the table. “Nothing special.” The way he said the last part hurt me. It seemed like he was putting some old papers down, ready to throw them away; almost like he was attempting to forget Leon. Cedric turned on his heel and walked over to some other paintings. I just stood there and stared at the sketches. One was of him happy, smiling and maybe even laughing. Another was of him looking skyward and like he was about to cry. There were some that were nothing but his eyes and a few that were full body. Cedric really did love this guy. I don’t think he was in love with him, but he for sure loved him. I turned to watch Cedric for a bit. He was talking. Not like a

complete conversation, but jumping around like a kid avoiding a topic with his parents. I couldn't stand it. He really needed to talk about Leon. All of this bottled up, it was killing him.

"How did Joshua kill Leon?" Cedric's stiffened.

"I was wondering when you were going to ask about this." He looked at me defeated. Cedric sighed and in a rush of words explained: "It wasn't Joshua's fault, or that's what all the evidence pointed too, nothing but coincidence. True, Leon died by Joshua's hand, but his suit should have protected from it. The physical harm I mean. Investigations that I funded concluded that his suit had malfunctioned." Cedric turned from me back to shuffling through paintings.

"Well, yeah, but that doesn't answer how he died. What went wrong with the suit?"

"That's just it. Nobody knows. All I could get was "a malfunction in the mass force field generator." He turned back to me. "The tracks also have a force field generator that shields under the suits shields. Any blow that occurs after the suits shields are down should be protected. And no person could power through the charge that that generator puts off. It gives enough to protect all of New Alexandria if it had to. It's almost like neither his suit nor the track generators came on; like they never existed."

"But wouldn't the suit tell you if something went wrong?" Cedric shook his head

"You don't understand. These suits are beyond advanced technology. They are extremely complex. There is no way to know what happened unless I knew what I was specifically looking for. Going in dark, it could be thousands of things, a combination or a single component. It would take years to search blindly." That was it. That answer satisfied me. We stood there in the suddenly dark studio, leaving the rest of the conversation to drift unspoken between us. Cedric suddenly perked up. 'Come on. I have one more thing I want to show you.' Poor Cedric. Not only did he lose a very best friend, he also has no idea what happened on that day. That's about as tragic as something...My thought was interrupted. A sketch caught the corner of my eye. It was of a human male. It was a portrait, but what caught my eye was how sinister it was. His head was pointed down like he was looking at something on the floor, but at the last second looked up. It was like one of those comic book super villains. He made my skin crawl. "Come on Lance." I glanced up and saw Cedric standing in the doorway. Not wanting to keep him waiting, I put the sketch back down and scurried out the door after Cedric. Down the hallway, through a door, across a balcony, down another hall and to the right took us to our third and final room. This room was painfully simple based on the other two I had seen tonight. It was a room with three enormous windows framing the wall that faced to the city. The rest of the room was set up like a living room or parlor as Cedric would call it. In the center of the room, set between two chairs facing the windows, was a table with an ornate chest.

"This is the pinnacle of my sanctuary." Cedric waved his arms in the air. "If I've disappeared then this is more than likely where I am." He walked to a cupboard and opened a drawer. "And since you've seen this all, I feel comfortable giving you a key." He walked back over to me and handed me a brilliant ruby ring on a probably white gold band.

"Oh wow!" I exclaimed. "This is awesome!" Cedric beamed at me.

"Enjoy it. It functions just like mine."

"How many keys do you have?" I couldn't help but ask.

"Four. Mine, James, Sebastian, and you."

"So you had me one made from the start?" Cedric paused near a window. Realization flooded through me. Of course he didn't. My memory flashed back to the moment in the garden. "*The last person I gave a key for up there was...Leon. Gosh he probably still has stuff up there.*" I had Leon's ring.

"No." Cedric drew the word out like he was unsure if he was saying it right. "It was Leon's." A moment passed before he looked back at me. "But I want you to have it." I could hear the rest of the sentence: *Leon doesn't need it anymore*. Desperate to change the subject, I brought up the second thing on my mind.

"So, uh, Sebastian you say? I've heard that name twice now. Who is he?" Cedric turned from the window and made his way to one of the chairs.

"He's the head of security here at the manor. He also accompanies me practically everywhere. You could call him my bodyguard." I took the seat next to Cedric.

"That's interesting. I've never seen him and I've been with you everywhere for the past month now."

"That's the best part. Hardly anyone has besides James and I. He works behind the scenes." I just nodded. I figured I was asking too much into that. Needing another topic I turned my gaze to the chest between us.

"What's that?" I asked pointing to the chest. Cedric sat up straight in his seat.

"That, my dear, is a chest." He looked at me coy.

"Well yeah, no duh. What's in it?" He turned his head sideways.

"Now why would I tell you that and ruin all the fun of you not knowing? Besides you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Try me."

"It's...a relic from my past that I'm unwilling to part with."

"That hardly tells me anything."

"Regardless that's all I'm telling you. I'd show you, but I need all rings to open it, we only have two right here."

"Hum. That's shady." Cedric chuckled

"Call it what you like, but it is what it is." He stood up. "There is something that I want to show you." He walked to the far dresser in the corner of the room and came back with a bulging notebook. "I know you have questions about my past and well..." He thrust the notebook at me. "Here. Hopefully this will answer a lot." I opened the book and was greeted with loads of faces. It was a picture album. I flipped through page after page. Most of the pictures consisted of Cedric's mom and him in random places. Some of them were scenic pictures of places that I didn't recognize nor really care about. My interest peaked, however once I came across a sharp looking fox in a tuxedo. I looked up from the book looking for Cedric. He was standing by the window again looking out.

"Who's this fox in a tux? Without looking at the picture Cedric answered.

"My father." I looked back at the picture. He didn't look bad. He looked like a well-rounded fellow.

"That picture was before he got involved in all of his stuff. Ironical though, I still didn't have a good relationship with him." I looked up at Cedric.

"You said before that he was nothing but a drunk. If there was a time when he wasn't, why didn't you have a good relationship even then?" Cedric looked down.

"He was...he was always too...always too busy with his business to give me the light of day. My mom and sister always told me that he changed when I was born, almost like something in him changed." I closed the album and stood up.

"What do you mean changed?" Cedric turned and faced me.

"I don't know. That's all they would ever tell me." A loud gong echoed through the room. Cedric looked off to his right following the origin of the noise. Suddenly his ears pricked up.

"Oh no! It's 2 in the morning! We have to get up in about seven hours!" Cedric stepped past me and made for the door.

"Why? What's happening tomorrow?" I asked. Cedric turned around.

"Your first solo run. I feel you know the basics enough to race without me. I will be watching of course, however I will not be right beside you. In fact, you might just have to go against me."

"What!? I'm nowhere near where I need to be for that!" Cedric smiled at me.

"You should stop doing that. Selling yourself short. Have a little faith in yourself Lance." He walked to the door, opened it and stopped in the doorway, "I do." A silence followed. I was so shocked I couldn't say anything. "Anyways, stay up here all you like, feel free to use anything up here as well. Just don't...just don't destroy anything." He turned again to walk away.

“Oh and Lance.” He called out to me, “Thanks. Thanks for listening.” He turned and vanished around the corner. Suddenly feeling tired I slumped down in the chair that he had been sitting in. So much had happened in the last few hours that my head was spinning. Cedric had opened up. Really opened up. Part of me was still stuck in shock back in the garden and part of me was celebrating for this momentous step forward. Step forward? What part of me was happy about the step forward? The thought sat in my brain like a ten pound weight. Was I excited that I was this much closer to my fantasy coming true? The lucid moment of primal passion made my cheeks flare. However, at the same time my accusation didn’t feel like it rang true. No. I wasn’t just looking for sex anymore. I ridiculed myself. Well you’ve gone and done now dumbass...

I’ve fallen for Cedric.