

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Making the deal~

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Ten million definitely isn't too much. A man like Uppercrust, relied upon by so many powerful entities, has to be swimming in cash. Hell, the office they'd just come from was evidence of that. The place was incredibly upscale, the sort that clearly saw a ton of cash flow.

More than that, once Lucas healed Uppercrust and gave him his life back, the man would be able to earn even more money as well. He would no longer be dying; he would have decades to enrich himself further.

You couldn't really put a price on living longer anyways, even though that's precisely what they're about to do. A long life and good health was absolutely priceless, so Lucas could technically ask for just about anything. However, that went back to what he really wanted from Uppercrust.

If it was just the money, he could seem himself milking the other man dry for everything he was worth. Or at least asking for an exorbitant amount, like a hundred million dollars or something. Except Lucas didn't just want money. He wanted Uppercrust's good will and a solid working relationship with the man and his branch of the Elite going forward. After all, if he couldn't rely on those things, how could he rely on the security system he wanted Uppercrust to make for him?

No... in the end, it was only partially about the money. And so Lucas comes to a decision. Uppercrust's question lingers in the air between them.

What sort of time are you offering me and how much is it truly going to cost me?

Lucas finally answers.

“That... is entirely up to you, I should think.”

Uppercrust arches his brow in response to that, prompting Lucas to offer a wry grin in turn.

“Before we talk money, let’s discuss other things of value we both want. I know for a fact that I want you to build me one of your systems as part of our deal, for instance. The best you can offer me for whatever place I end up buying with the money you’ll be paying me.”

After a moment, Uppercrust inclines his head.

“That seems feasible to me, yes.”

“... And you want something as well from me, besides your good health. You want my silence regarding your daughter’s slip up.”

Both Uppercrust and Vibrant stiffen at that. Vibrant looks a little pale, while Uppercrust turns calculating.

“You would be willing to make that part of the deal? Your own power would enforce such a thing, would it not?”

Lucas nods even though he’s pretty sure he can break his own deals with far less consequences than the people on the other end. He doesn’t necessarily intend to test it any time soon though regardless.

“Indeed it would. If we make my silence contingent on this deal, then so long as you uphold your end of the bargain, nobody will learn Vibrant’s parentage from my lips.”

Of course, this also meant Uppercrust wouldn’t do anything so stupid as trying to silence Lucas in a more permanent way once their dealing was done and he was healed. So they both came out ahead for this. Finally, after thinking about it for a moment, Uppercrust nods.

“Very well. Then that only leaves the matter of compensation.”

Lucas hums.

“Indeed. My offer, therefore, is one million dollars per year.”

Uppercrust and Vibrant both blink, while Lucas shrugs.

“Do you want to live ten more healthy years? That will be ten million. Fifty? That will be fifty million. Simple enough, right?”

Narrowing his eyes, Uppercrust snorts derisively.

“Simple... and incredibly low.”

Ah... had he undersold himself? He didn't feel like he had, really. It was-

“One hundred million.”

Wait what.

Uppercrust looks to his daughter and then back to Lucas.

“Fifty years of guaranteed health for me and fifty years of guaranteed health for my daughter. In return, I will pay you one hundred million dollars and make you the finest security system that Bet has ever seen. And you will tell nobody of my daughter's parentage.”

Vibrant looks shocked but doesn't try to protest her father's decision. Which in the end, let's Lucas know that Uppercrust is right... he DID significantly underbid here. This was on Lucas though, in the end. He clearly didn't have a concept of what rich truly looked like. Uppercrust wasn't just rich, he was *rich-rich*.

That said, trying to ask for more money now would be a little bit pathetic, wouldn't it? And besides, it was hard to imagine something Lucas couldn't accomplish with a hundred million dollars at his disposal... especially when he

could always find someone else in need of a deal if he decided he needed more. Hell, letting Upper crust take advantage of him here would probably endear the man to him even further, and therefore open up doors to such deals going forward if they were ever needed.

Was he getting scammed just a little bit? Maybe. But at the same time... Lucas can't help but grin as he offers Upper crust his hand.

"You've got a deal."

They shake on it and the one hundred million dollars is transferred soon after. Upper crust rises from the bed, his new body here to stay and the man standing tall without a single hint of age or illness. Vibrant looks like she wants to rush in and hug him, but she manages to keep her composure, even as Upper crust takes a moment to just breathe before looking to Lucas.

"Shall we discuss what sort of system you would like? And perhaps how the Elite might be able to help you and your operations going forward as well."

Lucas just chuckles.

"Sure, though I feel like I need to be clear now that I won't be joining the Elite officially. I have my own plans for the future."

Upper crust just smiles.

"Of course. The Elite holds hands with many different groups outside of our organization. Yours would be no different, in the end."

Well now... this had been a very productive, profitable trip indeed, hadn't it? Lucas can't help but feel good about himself, even as they leave the bedroom behind, Sveta and Emily rejoining him as Upper crust leads them to the 'work area' of his mansion.

He hopes Alice is doing similarly well, whatever she's dealing with right now. Lucas had done everything he could to set her up for success of course... but the rest was up to her.

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Alice steps into Dragon's workshop and very carefully does not squeal like a schoolgirl. Sure, she fully believed herself to be the best Tinker ever, especially after Lucas enhanced her abilities... but Dragon was still Dragon.

That was why, when comparing the two offers she'd received from Toybox and the Guild, Alice had ultimately gone with the Guild. Well, that and the egos. Not that she'd even met with Toybox to negotiate or anything, but Alice wasn't an idiot. She herself had an ego and she knew most of her fellow Tinkers did too. Toybox in particular was sure to be filled with some truly gargantuan egos and Alice... just didn't feel like dealing with it.

The offer to collaborate with Dragon directly, combined with the fact that they would almost certainly be the two most prominent Tinkers in the organization, made the Guild the more appealing option in the end.

"What do you think?"

Looking to the side, Alice doesn't blush as she lays eyes on Narwhal and her... appearance. To her credit, the other woman was not currently doing her whole 'nude but covered by her power' thing right now. She's wearing denim jeans and a jacket over a purple unicorn shirt at the moment.

However, she's still a seven foot tall amazon who could fold Alice up into a pretzel at a moment's notice... and her clothes are tight in all the right places.

Alice blames Lucas for awakening her libido, quite frankly. She hadn't been a very sexual creature before meeting him, more focused on her schoolwork and grades and graduating at the top of her class. Even after triggering, sex had been the furthest thing from her mind until he'd come around.

But then, before he'd come around, her mind had been... broken. Part of it was her power influencing her towards conflict, but part of it was Alice herself. She was better now... and part of being better led to her having more... sexual thoughts than before.

Of course, Narwhal is waiting for an answer and Alice is standing there staring at her like an idiot. Flushing a bit, Alice tears her gaze away and looks back to the rest of the lab.

"It looks amazing. No less than I expected from the legendary Dragon's workspace, however."

Narwhal lets out a bark of laughter... while the woman herself finally speaks up from over a speaker.

"Thank you for the compliment, Catalyst. I'm a big fan of your work as well. Most Parahumans, even Tinkers, do not immediately think to use their powers for good. Certainly not as much good as you did. Saving all of those people from their time loops was inspiring in a big way."

Alice straightens up at that, her chest puffing with pride. At the same time though, she furrows her brow in consternation, looking around the laboratory.

"Thank you in turn, Dragon. However... I assumed we would be meeting face to face, given this is your place. Are you not currently present?"

There's an awkward pause at that, in which even Narwhal shifts uncomfortably from foot to foot. When Dragon finally speaks, she sounds apologetic.

"Ah... I'm sorry but no, I'm not physically present on location. It's something of an ill-kept secret, but I suffer from an autoimmune disease that prevents me from interacting with anyone face to face directly."

Oh. That was... disappointing. And yet, Alice isn't stupid enough to say so out loud, especially not when Narwhal is watching her carefully, clearly looking for her reaction. Hm, was this a test? If she reacted poorly, she might find her

invitation to the Guild rescinded. Not that it would really stop her, she could always pivot to Toybox after all.

... But in the end, Alice feels more compassion for Dragon than she feels annoyance over the subterfuge. She understands why she wasn't told before now too. Hah, this is exactly what she was thinking about earlier. Before, she would have only thought of herself and how disappointing it was for her that she couldn't work with the legendary Dragon face to face.

Lucas' help made it easier to empathize with people, and so in the end Alice is able to smile without even having to force it, nodding in understanding.

"I get it, it's alright. Thank you for trusting me with your secret, Dragon."

It's like both Dragon and Narwhal were holding their breaths waiting for her response. Narwhal literally, the seven foot tall woman exhaling explosively and even stepping forward to pat Alice on the back.

"Knew you'd understand, Catalyst!"

Even regulating her strength, the woman sends Alice forward half a step with the simple 'pat'. Alice quickly catches herself though, clearing her throat and giving Narwhal a 'look' that causes her to hold up her hands in surrender and step back. Meanwhile, Dragon lets out a relieved sounding laugh.

"Thank *you* for reacting so well, Catalyst. Not everyone I've collaborated with in the past has been so understanding."

Alice chuckles and shrugs.

"Well, you know Tinkers... some of the biggest egos around."

Narwhal gawks at Alice basically talking down to herself, while Dragon just chuckles some more. Internally, Alice fist pumps. Nailed it! Outwardly...

"So, shall we get started?"

Glancing at Narwhal, she arches her brow.

“Are you going to be acting as our assistant or something?”

The Guild’s leader finally lets out a bark of laughter of her own, grinning at Alice.

“You’re cute. But no, I’ll head out and leave you two ladies to your date. Now that everything seems fine and all... Dragon?”

“Hm? Oh yes, of course. We’ll be fine. Thank you for escorting Catalyst here, Narwhal.”

Alice watches Narwhal wave goodbye and walk away, trying not to blush too hard at being called ‘cute’ by the bigger woman. Of course, she belatedly realizes she’s definitely staring at Narwhal’s ass the entire time... and the other woman probably knows it if the exaggerated way she’s swaying her hips is any indication.

Weirdly though, Alice finds herself imagining what it would look like if Lucas was pinning Narwhal down to the ground and fucking her ass from above like some conquering hero taming the big bad amazon...

Tearing herself out of the fantasy, Alice turns her attention back to the task at hand... namely, Tinkering with Dragon of all people.

This... this was going to be *fantastic*.

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!