

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

A/N: Meeting Uppercrust.

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In the end, Lucas knows he's better off just waiting. Pulling out the big guns now just to shock and awe Uppercrust isn't a good idea on multiple fronts. First, it had the potential of spooking the ailing man, which wasn't a good idea when he led an Elite Branch. Second, it gave away too much of Lucas' abilities for free, which simply wasn't ever going to be a good idea.

Besides, if Uppercrust does say 'no', Lucas isn't entirely sure he would want to force the issue anyways. Better to just take the 'defeat' gracefully and move on. There were other rich people that he could probably approach with a bit more research.

And so he stays right where he is, watching the woman from the Elite talking to Uppercrust while Sveta and Emily are both standing at his side. Emily is trying her best not to fidget, while Sveta is staring the Elite representative down, as if she's ready to pounce if they don't get the answer they want from the other woman.

Finally, the woman steps back over to them and wordlessly holds out the phone to Lucas. He's only a little caught off guard... of course Uppercrust would want to try to get his measure by phone before meeting with him face to face.

"Hello? This is Pact."

The voice that comes through the other end of the line sounds tired but with an underlying strength to it.

"Pact... I'm told you have an offer for me. An offer some might say is too good to be true."

It's tempting to just connect with his power over the phone right then and there. But Lucas is reminded of the thought he'd already just had... showing too much of his hand, especially to a man he didn't fully trust, could be risky. While it was technically true that he could handle this entire deal without ever meeting Upper crust face to face, just like he'd done with Sveta... Lucas didn't necessarily want to reveal that.

Instead, he holds back on the urge to metaphysically reach out across the phone call and instead focuses on injecting confidence into his voice.

"Those who lack vision might say such things. But I assure you, my offer is quite real, Upper crust. I can and will heal you... for the right price."

There's a pregnant pause for a moment... and then a raspy chuckle from the other end of the line.

"Of course. And what would that price be, exactly?"

Lucas knows what he wants of course. Money. But how do you put a price on saving someone's life? Especially someone as wealthy and well-off as Upper crust? Do you ask for everything? No, of course not. Even if they went for it, there would be resentment afterwards. Still, putting an exact number on things... Lucas hesitates because he doesn't know exactly how much to ask for. But more than that, he also...

"An exact number would need to be assessed face to face, I'm afraid. However, I can tell you that on top of a sum of money, I would also want your expertise. A personal security system built into a specified location for me and mine. In exchange, I'm confident I can give you the most priceless currency of all... more time."

There's another pause, a lengthier silence this time. Until finally, Upper crust responds.

"... But you need to be face to face with me first, is that it?"

Lucas tilts his head to the side, even if the man on the other end of the line can't see it. He's not going to insult Upper crust's intelligence by trying to clarify this isn't a trap or anything. Hell, saying something like that might make Upper crust think it IS a trap. Instead, Lucas stays calm and confident, composed as he answers Upper crust with one single, self-assured word.

"Yes."

Again, Upper crust is quiet, clearly contemplating the risks versus the rewards. Lucas doesn't blame the other man... if he were in his shoes, even dying, he would be leery of letting unknowns get close to him. And yet... it's not like Upper crust has any other options.

"Hand me back to Vibrant."

Arching a brow at finally having a name for the Elite representative standing in front of him, Lucas wordlessly hands the phone back to the woman, watching as Vibrant takes it and places it against her ear. Her lips purse for a moment, her eyes darting to him and his girls... and then she brings the phone away, the call having ended as she tucks it back into a pocket.

"Come with me."

She doesn't wait for them to respond, simply turning on a heel and click-clacking her way across the marbled flooring to the elevator. Lucas follows after her while Sveta and Emily follow him. They go down from there, finding themselves in a garage and then piling into a car that Vibrant winds up settling into the driver's seat of.

It's not a particularly fancy car or anything like that... indeed, it's relatively nondescript, probably by design. They pull out of the parking garage and are on the road soon enough. As they drive, Vibrant looks at Lucas through the rearview mirror.

"... Panacea couldn't even help him long term. The illness is in the brain as well as the body. Are you really confident that you can do more than she did?"

Again, Lucas is a little surprised when he probably shouldn't be. Even if Upper crust was technically a villain, he was legitimate enough that the heroes left him alone. No, more than leaving him alone, they relied on him and some of his protective systems he made with his Tinker power.

That they'd tried to get Panacea to fix him up shouldn't be surprising at all... but it's definitely not worrying either.

"I am. So long as he agrees to the deal, he'll be healed. That much I can promise."

He's not being overly confident either. If his power can literally build Sveta an entire body and also alter and take away Parahuman Abilities, why the hell shouldn't it be able to cure a man of a disease, brain or otherwise? Plus, Lucas can feel the potential for a deal in the back of his mind with Upper crust. He can tell from his power that he can definitely use Upper crust's desperation to his advantage. He wouldn't be feeling that connection trying to form if he couldn't help the other man, now would he?

Vibrant just falls silent after his response, focusing on the road. And after a short drive of maybe ten to fifteen minutes, they pull into a gated property surrounded by massive hedges and make their way up a winding driveway to a well-appointed manor home.

As they pile out of the car, they're approached by large, muscular men who can only be the estate's security. But Vibrant just holds up a hand, stopping them in their tracks.

"They're with me. Upper crust requested them personally."

There's a pause before one of the security guards radios it in. Within moments they're let through as he gets confirmation from somebody, likely Upper crust himself, that it's all above board. From there, Lucas, Sveta, and Emily are led into the manor and escorted up some stairs before finally arriving in front of a pair of large double doors.

There's more security here and Vibrant herself is the one to stop them now. She points at Lucas while glancing sharply at his girls.

"Only you come inside. The others will remain out here."

Sveta bristles but Lucas just places a hand on her arm and smiles.

"That's more than acceptable."

After a moment, his most devoted servant backs down. Hopefully she realizes the same thing he already knows... he can literally summon her to his side with a thought if he really needs to.

Which is good because as they step through the double doors, Lucas hears a hum that makes him think this entire room specifically is protected by something... abnormal. Something parahuman in nature. Indeed, as the large doors close behind them, the hum intensifies.

Of course, even as Lucas is noting this in the back of his mind, the lion's share of his attention is on the room's primary occupant. There, laid up in a hospital bed surrounded by life-extending equipment, is Uppercrust. Lucas knows it to be him not just because of all the context clues, but also because he's been feeling the desperation from and ability to form a connection with this man since Vibrant first placed a phone call.

His first impression... is that Uppercrust is in a worse state than any of the rumors online even knew about. The man can't be older than fifty based on how long he's been active as a cape, but he looks like he's in his eighties. Whatever illness he suffers from, its caused him to quite literally waste away.

And yet... there's a strength in his sunken eyes all the same. As Lucas approaches, Uppercrust studies him closely, focusing on him with a sharpness that bellies his current state. Vibrant had said the illness was in the brain too, and yet... Uppercrust doesn't seem to have a single ounce of mental weakness as far as Lucas has seen.

“Greetings, Upper crust. It’s a pleasure to meet you face to face.”

Grunting, Upper crust speaks slowly... deliberately.

“Pact. The pleasure will be all mine... if you prove capable of what you have promised.”

Smiling thinly, Lucas sees no reason to keep beating around the bush. With a flicker of thought he finally lets the connection between the two of them form, a deal starting to take shape between them almost immediately. Upper crust’s eyes widen and his decrepit body jerks as if struck, prompting Vibrant to step forward with a growl.

“Dad! What are you doing Pact?!”

Her hands glow a bit with contained power, but Lucas doesn’t panic. Instead, he lets Upper crust do the talking even as he files Vibrant’s slip up in the back of his mind.

“Vibrant. Stand down, now. He’s done nothing... yet.”

Upper crust’s eyes move back to Lucas, who just smiles slightly. Those same eyes narrow and Lucas feels a slight tremor of trepidation down his spine, though he doesn’t show it. There’s every chance that Vibrant’s slip up is going to make Upper crust want to kill Lucas and his girls by the end of this... if a successful deal isn’t made, anyways. Things just got quite a bit more serious than they already were.

Deciding to be a bit magnanimous, both to upsell his services and to make sure Upper crust doesn’t spend too long thinking about silencing him to keep Vibrant’s parentage a secret, Lucas reaches out mentally even as he speaks in a carefree tone.

“How about a free taste of what I’m offering? Though... I can’t do entirely free. So let’s say... fifty thousand dollars will get you perfect health for the length of this conversation.”

There’s a pause at that... followed by a sharp nod from Uppercrust.

“Done.”

The deal is made and Vibrant is employed to ensure the financial transaction. As soon as fifty thousand is transferred to an account for Lucas, he feels the deal itching to be completed on his end. With a flick of his will, he makes it happen.

The transformation that Uppercrust undergoes is as visceral as it is immediate. Age seems to almost slog off of the bedridden man, a sharp inhale coming from him followed by a long exhale without a single hit of rattling. His back arches and he clutches at the bedding beneath him for a moment before dropping back down.

When it’s done, he looks amazing. But then, Lucas had promised perfect health hadn’t he? Still, he can’t help but be a little pleased at the wonder on Uppercrust’s face... and the shock and awe on Vibrant’s. He’s got them right where he wants them.

Though, to Uppercrust’s credit, the man does recover with admirable swiftness. He regains his composure and pushes himself up into more of a seated position on the bed, breathing easily and staring at Lucas intently.

“You’ve certainly proved your point, young man. The question is... what sort of time are you offering me and how much is it truly going to cost me?”

That was the question, wasn’t it? Lucas knew he wanted Uppercrust’s expertise. He wanted the man to use his Tinkertech to protect whatever property Lucas wound up buying with Uppercrust’s money. The question though became, how much money did he ask for? Ten million at a minimum, he thinks. But is ten million lowballing it for a man like Uppercrust? Or is it too much?

Hm...

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