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Lucas's stomach rumbled as he pulled into the garage of his Richmond townhome and turned off the engine. Was it already lunchtime?

After crashing at his friend's condo last night, he'd only had a cup of single-shot coffee and a protein bar.

Warmth surged through his veins. He didn't need any more coffee. Last night, he'd sipped on more caffeine than his body needed while walking Renée through the steps to fix her website. He showed her how to load her curriculum, and after he organized her menu and added a contact plugin for her students, she'd looked at him like he'd hung the moon. Or slain her dragon. Whatever the look in her eyes, he hoped to see it again.

He grabbed his overnight bag and laptop out of the trunk, closed the garage door, then took the steps two at a time to the first floor. When he opened the door, silence greeted him.

"Lights on." He said the voice command half-heartedly and light flooded the room.

Home sweet home.

As he dropped his bag on the floor, a thud echoed down the hall. He'd need to pick up some throw rugs this week. After a year the place still felt sterile and new. What color throw rugs?

The blue-green hue of Renée's eyes flashed across his mind. They reminded him of the Atlantic Ocean. When he fell asleep last night, the color mingled with his dreams, and he didn't want to wake up.

"Why didn't I ask to see her again?" He placed his laptop bag on the coffee table and flopped into his favorite club chair. "Because you're an idiot, that's why."

While he'd worked on her website, their conversation bounced from her love of hiking to his obsession with baseball. She was a blackbelt in martial arts, and they both agreed history should be cherished, not ignored.

He pinched the bridge of his nose. "But did she seem interested?"

After they closed down the coffee shop, he walked her to her car, where she thanked him, and promised she'd call if she had any issues with her website.

Not good. He'd slipped right past the friend zone to tech support.

"Open blinds."

At his command, the blinds lifted, bringing more light into the room.

"Tell Renée to call."

The home assistant complained it couldn't complete his request.

He huffed a sigh as he fished his laptop out of his bag and opened it. Maybe if he did some work, thoughts of Renée would vanish from his mind. *Please, God, crash her site.* He laughed. *I'm kidding, God. But maybe You could have her call her IT guy?*

He pushed the power button, and his screen jumped to life. With two more investors, office space, and a date to go online, his dreams of launching his new retail app, *Legacy*, were shaping up to be a reality.

Can I do this? He shrugged off his concern. It didn't matter. When *Legacy* went live, nothing could hinder him from going forward. Nothing.

A vibration shook the bottom of his bag. He set his laptop aside and pulled his phone out. He didn't recognize the number. "Hello."

"Mr. Bennett. You've been ignoring my emails."

Ice crawled through his veins. "Professor Carlson?" He'd been out of school a year, but he'd recognize that voice anywhere. "I'm not ignoring them. I have nothing to say to you."

"On the contrary. We have a lot to discuss."

"No. We don't."

"When does *Legacy* go online?"

"That's between me and my investors."

"Investors? Interesting." Carlson snorted a laugh. "The rich boy from Richmond needed more than his silver spoon to fund his hobby."

Lucas clenched his teeth.

"Unless, of course, you've left the spoon at Daddy's table." Another pause. "That's it. Isn't it? Daddy Bennett doesn't know about your side hustle."

He pinched his eyes shut. The last thing he needed was to give Carlson any ammunition to hold over his head. The man had no basis for his claims that he helped generate *Legacy*. Other than greed.

"The Bennett bank account isn't funding you and now you're floundering out in the real world like the rest of us." Carlson snickered. "How's it feel?"

Lucas's eyes shot open. "Did you have a point to this call? If not, I'm hanging up."

"I've hired a lawyer, Mr. Bennett."

Heat wrapped around his collar. Carlson had crossed a line. If he wanted to play hardball, then so be it. "Good. I have ten. See you in court."

Lucas ended the call and pitched his phone onto the table. *Legacy* was his brainchild. He'd written every square inch of the program.

Springing from his seat, he stomped into the kitchen and

pulled a prepared meal out of the freezer. “A lawyer. Really?” He slammed the tin pan onto the counter. “Unbelievable.”

He’d spent months preparing for *Legacy’s* launch. Months begging investors to take a chance on him. Months editing code, and months hiding his progress from his family. A sour feeling crawled around in his belly. *What if Carlson tells Dad?*

Lucas yanked the lid off the single-serve pan and turned on the oven. He didn’t want to hide *Legacy*, but his dad, Sinclair Walker Bennett, the patriarch of the Bennett empire, would have nothing to do with his new idea. The app was, in Dad’s words, “a college kid’s school project. A silly pastime.”

His neck muscles twisted like spaghetti code. Dad hadn’t cared that he’d won all those awards in STEM. Or if he did, he didn’t show it. Dad was too concerned with the status quo. Keeping old clients happy and keeping a century-old family corporation buried in the dark ages.

What about new clients? Lucas slumped onto a metal stool. He didn’t want to skirt his dad, but he wanted to step out on his own—not brand himself with an old family legacy. *I want to put my stamp on the world.*

Renée’s face flashed across his mind. He wanted to be someone she’d look up to. Her knight in shining armor. Short-circuiting her technology villains with a single click of his mouse. He bit back a laugh. “It’s official. I’m a nerd.”

The oven beeped. He jumped out of his seat, slid the pan into the oven, and set the timer. In twenty minutes, he’d have a hot meal. In twenty minutes, he’d be eating alone. Again. Hopefully, that would change one day.

His thoughts trailed to memories of Mom as he grabbed a glass and filled it with water. “Play relaxing piano.”

After a few seconds, piano music floated from the built-in speakers in the ceiling.

When she was alive, his father was happy. Carefree. Then his father remarried, and everything changed.

Lucas's throat burned, and he took a drink. There's no point in living in the past. He needed to look to the future. To *Legacy*.

He retrieved his laptop out of the living room, set it down on the counter, and punched in a few keys to get past the firewall leading to his software. An anomaly caught his eye. He typed again and searched out the problem. It was only an update. Nothing problematic. If everything kept moving forward, he'd be online by the fall.

His phone buzzed again making his heart jump. "If that's Carlson ..." Lucas grabbed the phone and took a swipe at the screen. Dad. Wonderful.

There's a meeting tomorrow at three. Plan to be there.

His gut coiled into a knot. He'd been out of school for a year, traveled the world, and now he'd need to face his fate—taking his position at *Bennetts*.

Can't make it.

Could he avoid taking up the mantle at *Bennetts* for a few more months?

There's nothing more important than this.

Pounding from his chest rushed to his ears. Nothing he ever did would be more important than the family business. Ever.

I'll see if I can change my schedule.

Tapping his fingers on the counter, he waited. There was no response.

That's how it always ended. Dad's demands weren't up for debate. There was no wiggle room if you were the sole heir to the Bennett family fortune.

But he wasn't. Was he? The sole heir. What about Preston? His stepbrother.

Lucas slid his fingers over his phone and typed out a second message.

There's a three o'clock meeting at
Bennetts tomorrow. Dad wants us there.

His pulse ticked up a notch. He was tired of being the one on Dad's radar all the time. Maybe it was time to give Preston some family responsibility.

He took a second to send a follow up text.

No excuses.

Not bothering to catch Preston's response, he pulled a set of silverware out of the drawer and placed it next to his water. When the timer went off, the scent of baked spaghetti floated through the air.

I wonder if Renée likes spaghetti. The thought filled him with warmth. How could it be that after only a chance meeting, his heart cried out for her company?

Sitting down with his meal, he said grace, then slipped a fork full of spaghetti into his mouth.

She'd mentioned she had graduation and family coming into town, but maybe he'd need to drive to Newport News for a cup of coffee.

And commandeer her favorite booth.

A smile tugged at his lips.

This time, if they ran into each other, he'd move beyond tech support and ask her out on a date.