

No Second Chance

Caleb's fingers flew across the keyboard. Enter, Shift, Quotation Mark, Shift. His fingers did the work for him as his mind flew through the story running in his head. It was almost finished; he had just one more paragraph and then the hero would be there to—

“Caleb! Did you not hear me?”

Caleb's fingers stopped mid-sentence. His eyes diverted from the screen and looked over his left shoulder toward the figure at the door.

“What?”

“I've told you four times; it's time for dinner.”

“Yes, Mother.”

Control, S. His fingers clicked those two important keys and shut the laptop with a click. Ugh. Family dinner, every night. Him, his father and mother, plus his two younger sisters, all of whom just stared at their phones as their forks picked at the dry meatloaf, crusty potatoes, and slimy beans. Except for him. He ate his plate of food in about four bites, then wiped his mouth with a napkin.

“Son, I'm really concerned about you,” Caleb's father said, not looking up from his phone. “You aren't like the rest of us.”

“I know.”

“It's just not right for you to be so engrossed in what you're doing,” his father continued. “You're not spending the proper time with your family. What is it you're doing that takes up all your time?”

It was really awkward talking to his father with that thing blocking his face. Caleb wasn't even sure his father was listening to him.

“Writing.”

“Writing? Harrumph. That's a terrible profession. You have to take up something worthwhile. Do something productive.”

“It is productive. When I sell it, I'll make lots of money.”

“Sell it? You'll never sell anything. Books don't sell. People don't read anymore.”

“It's easy to see why.”

“Oh?”

“Look at you! You, Mother, Hailey, Anna. You’re all on your phones constantly. You don’t have time to appreciate good writing. It takes talent to write; writing is an art.”

“This is art too.”

“No, it’s not! It’s just computer images flooding your brain and making you think it’s art. Bunches of pixels put together randomly isn’t art; art is crafted by human hands.”

“Was this not made by human hands?”

“It’s not art!”

“Who cares about art? Art is a lost cause. Writing is going away; painting and drawing are going away; music is going away. Face it, Caleb, you’ve got to change with the times.”

“I’m not changing.”

Caleb pushed his chair back so forcefully that it nearly topped. He threw his empty plate into the sink; he was satisfied to hear a chip fly off and hit the counter. He stomped upstairs into his room and then opened his laptop.

The hero took a great battle-ax and chopped at the villain, only to miss and drive the blade into the ground. The hero tried to pull out the ax, but to no avail. The villain grabbed the hero by the throat and started to constrict him. The hero summoned all his inner power, and with a—

CRASH! Caleb’s door burst open. His father stood in the doorway, a heavy mallet in his right hand. The phone still stayed in his left.

Without even looking, Caleb’s father calmly brought the mallet onto the computer with a forceful swing. Caleb tried to block the mallet with his hands; the only result was cracking knuckles. Caleb tried to shove his father away, but another blow crashed straight through the screen. Caleb saw the words flicker on the screen, then fade to blackness. Caleb’s face dropped into his hands as blow after blow landed on the laptop.

As if that hadn’t been enough, Caleb’s father set down the mallet and picked up the computer. He strode to the window, unlatched it, and calmly heaved the laptop to the sidewalk. Caleb heard only one final crunch.

Still not looking directly at his son, Caleb’s father dug into his right pocket. Pulling a black phone from the pocket, his father handed it to Caleb.

“I left you no second chances. It’s time you became like the rest of us.”

Caleb’s father left the room.

As soon as his father had left, Caleb took the phone and heaved it away as hard as he could.