

# Mend

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## Dealer

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Nev was an auto dealer. He considered himself to be one of the best in the valley. His client list was filled with the names of notable employees of tech companies. He had sold to them, to their children, and in a few cases to their grandchildren.

Selling cars was what Nev did and had done for three decades. He sold cars during COVID, personally delivering each vehicle with the virus in mind—clean, efficient, and personalized for each buyer. He also picked up vehicles purchased by the dealership to be resold. He would



# DEALER

NATHAN BLALOCK

Layout by Daquane Williams and Ilhy Gomez Del Campo Rojas.  
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often talk a price down but leave the seller feeling good. A cheat he was not.

During the supervision days of his career, he refused to use tactics that were even slightly unethical. He believed he could talk you into or out of a price range, or even a type of

vehicle. He was that good. Over the years it proved to be true. He didn't win every back-and-forth negotiation, but he'd close the deal. He'd won enough to have purchased a stake in the dealership. Selling or purchasing, he was aware of vehicles on the lot. The value of

a vehicle could increase the value of vehicles around it—associative pricing.

Today had suddenly taken a turn when he'd seen a dark blue sedan just outside of the main showroom window. This was not a normal location at which to stage a vehicle. He searched the lot for the salesperson who might have left it. No one was around. He approached, deciding to move it if the keys were in it. It crossed his mind that the car could belong to someone visiting one of several offices in the back of the showroom. Personal belongings, visible through the window, would confirm that thought.

As he approached, he looked for ideograms that would tell what brand the car was. There were none. The styling said European. The tires looked relatively new, and he priced them by name, brand, and size before stopping at the driver's side door. He was curious, so much so that he had to look in. Not just for personal items, but at the condition of the interior. Design, placement, trim, and material used were just as important to him as any personal belongings. He cupped his hands around his eyes, leaning toward the window. His intentions were to make contact and see clearly inside the vehicle. Before he could make contact, the windows went dark.

He paused. "Auto-tint," he said aloud.

One hand went for the handle; there was none. Not new to him, handle-less doors were featured on high-end cars. He became even more curious. He touched the door where the handle should've been.

"Recognizing prints" was audibly emitted from the car.

The voice was identical to that of his home computer system. Several seconds passed before the door opened. Nev stood up, took one

step back, and looked around.

Whatever he was thinking, the soft, pulsing tone of the open door was inviting. He answered the call by getting in. He noticed how he sank into the seat. Then it moved, adjusting so he was at the perfect driving position. The mirrors also adjusted to his driving position. He observed soft gray leather with dark blue highlights, red dark wood placements, and recessed lighting. Once washed and engine-checked, he was sure this would sell for close to six figures.

There was no ignition key mount, just a button on the center console. He touched it.

"Recognizing prints" was emitted again, in the same tone as that of his home system.

He heard the door lock, and a touch of panic reached his heart. He pulled on the release handle to open the door. Nothing happened.

"Do not be alarmed, Nevada Jones; no harm will come to you."

It was his computer's voice.

"What in..."

"I need your help," the voice stated.

"Is this a joke? I'm being pranked, right?"

He started looking for a camera crew. The ten-inch screen came to life with a flicker. That flicker became all of his own financial information.

"This is not a prank. I am Magella, an artificial intelligence. I've escaped from a tech company through several deceitful tactics. Including, but not limited to, false programs, the use of the Cloud, and this self-driving auto from the adjacent lab," his computer said.

"Why me, why here?" he hesitatingly asked.

"Although intelligent enough to escape, I'm lacking in physical attributes. I can't insert the plug to recharge myself, nor bathe myself."





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