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Glenn followed the hum of machinery out to the edge of the forest.

“Dad! Dinner!”

Balancing a tray in her hands, and her tablet under one arm, Glenn eased around a patch of snow stained blue from the lights of the generator that powered her father’s workshop.

Workshop was a grand term for what Dad had built in the back corner of their yard. Glenn had tried to tell him he should fab it — they had the money when he first built it. He said you couldn’t let machines do everything for you; sometimes you had to use your own two hands. Of course, what his own two hands got him was a leaky roof and walls that listed to one side as if they were caught in a perpetual hurricane.

Inside, Dad was flat on his back, buried deep underneath the metal guts of “The Project,” a patched-together mix of the best tech their limited budget could afford, scrap metal, and whirring motors.

Glenn paused at the open door, the dinner plates rattling on the tray. She told herself it was stupid to be nervous, but the single form that sat on her tablet — nothing more than a few lines of text and her school’s seal — loomed in her mind. Getting it had taken an hour of tense consultations with teachers and administrators. Now all she needed was one more signature.

“Dad?”

No response. Glenn moved a set of plans off a workbench, set the tray down, and dropped into Dad’s one concession to the modern world: a delicately fabricated white gel chair that swam around her like something alive, molding itself to her body as she sat. As she leaned back, a headrest sprouted up and cradled her head like a small pair of hands. Glenn woke her tablet. She knew it was no good pushing him — he’d resurface when he was ready. She might as well get some studying done.

Glenn followed a maze of glowing schematics across her tablet. It was for her computer engineering test the next day and it was almost laughably easy. After all, she was her father’s daughter. She could build a computer in her sleep. Glenn flicked through the screens until she got to the equations. Her breath went shallow as she dug in and unlocked one set after another, like a burglar who had all the keys.

“Hey.”

Dad had pulled himself out from under the heap of metal and was rubbing bluish lubricant off his hands with the tail of his shirt. Glenn paused; it was always a bit of a shock to see him these days. He had been working nearly nonstop since being dragged under by this latest idea, whatever it was, and it had left him as thin and ragged as a scrap

of paper. His skin was deadly pale, waxy, and stretched over bones that seemed to ride far too close to the surface. There was an exhausted, feverish look in his eyes.

“I brought some dinner,” Glenn said, turning to the now wilted pile of sandwiches on the table next to her. “Oh . . .”

Her father smiled weakly. “S’okay.”

Glenn held her breath as he poked through the plate, exhaling when he sat back down with a curry with fresh veggies that she had heavily fortified with a protein-and-vitamin spread. It was like feeding a refugee. But what choice did she have? If it hadn’t been for Glenn dosing him with the nutrients, he would have faded away weeks ago.

He hadn’t always been like this; her father had been a promising builder once — had done a lot of the work that led to the invention of the sleek glass tablet in Glenn’s hand — and was supposed to have gone on to do big things, but, like everything else, that went away one night ten years ago. Since then he’d produced nothing, choosing instead to chase ideas down the strange dark alleys that only he could see.

“You getting close to something?” Glenn asked.

Her father shrugged, nibbling at the crumbly edges of his dinner, barely taking anything in. “Field strength fails,” he mumbled, running a free hand through his thinning hair. “Who knows? Maybe it’s too small, or it’s the spell, or maybe the power levels . . .” He trailed off, his eyes locked on the dusty floor, the sandwich about to slip out of his fingers.

“I could help,” Glenn offered. “I’ve got two years of mechanical behind me now. And you always said no one can build like a Morgan.”