

## Broken

by Ian Heinzinger

Ben was wasting time with that robot again. We don't have the equipment to fix it and don't even know what equipment we need. He's good at fixing things, some things, but never an autonomous machine, and he's far from as smart as our parents were.

It's been nine years since they were killed. We hid under the house. They said not to move or make a sound until the scavengers left. We heard everything. They pleaded and said they could take whatever they wanted. The intruders laughed and I didn't understand some of the words they said or why my parents suddenly became defiant. A scavenger shouted, "My gun!" There were five shots and three thuds. Another said, "Shit..." I knew that word and I knew our parents were dead. I wished, for so long, that they did what those awful people wanted to make them go away. People is an overstatement. They were monsters. Grandma Rose found us and raised us on her farm. When I was older, she told me what those other words meant. Some things are worse than death.

Rose wouldn't let Ben work on the old robot. She let him study it though. There was a manual but it was for another model and it was missing pages. He insisted he could make it work but Rose said no. He didn't listen.

One night, I saw a light in the robot's shed and Ben's bed was empty. You idiot, Ben. I snuck out to the shed, opened the door, and blinked in surprise. There sat our robot, looking around then looking at me. Its loose jaw swung oddly from its face. He did it. Ben, you genius. Then I saw

Ben on the floor, motionless. Ben, you idiot! A power surge knocked him out for hours and numbed him for days. Ben's shocked himself more times than I have freckles. We told Rose he fell off the ladder but she knew better. She passed away last year and we've been...managing ever since.

That sound, the breathy hum I heard when that strange girl with the crazy bike came. Her eyes would glint orange in the light and somehow, she fixed Ben's broken arm. Her veins glowed orange too when she did it. We offered her food but she shrugged, said she had better food, and offered some to us. She didn't say much other than she knew where some parts were and that Ben should be able to fix the robot. Other people came and went. They would say similar things just for a meal but they never came back. She did.

Now I was shocked and Ben was too.

She pulled up and said, "These are for the robot and some books to help you both."

We just stood there, staring at her. She put everything down and left as soon as she arrived. We managed to squeak out a thank you as she sped off.