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744 words

## **Turn Around**

**By Matthew Schnell**

“Get out and don’t come back,” was the last thing Sam heard from his father.

Grasslands and reed bushes surrounded the highway. A thick layer of fog, overcast grey skies and a light drizzle obscured any color outside of white and grey. The drizzling rain soaked through Sam’s sweatshirt and pants as he worked on the open panel to his powered suit.

“All right, let’s give that a try,” he said. He climbed into the cockpit and turned the key. After a click and a rush of air through the compressor, the 3-meter-tall machine purred before it cracked a loud fart and a cloud of black smoke from its exhaust port. “God, damn it.”

Sam hopped out of *The Prodigal Son* and headed down the road. After barely walking 30 yards, a hover trailer blasted its horn. Sam jumped. Inside the cabin sat a balding, middle aged man. “Where ya headed?” he asked.

“Anywhere that’s not here.”

“That’s where I’m going. Let me pop the crane and I’ll get your suit. Hop in.”

Sam nodded and climbed into the cabin.

“Mike,” he said, offering Sam his hand.

“Sam,” he said and shook the proffered hand before he buckled up.

Mike tapped the console and the electromagnetic crane moved over the broken powered suit and loaded it into the truck bed. The suit secured, he popped the clutch and got back on the empty road.

“Thanks for the ride, Mike. *The Son* doesn’t do so well when it’s raining. Or humid. Or ever really.”

“Don’t mention it. Where can I drop ya off? Home?”

“Anywhere except home.”

“Trouble?”

“You might say that.”

Mike nodded and let the silence hang in the air for a minute. “The folks find your porn stash?”

Sam laughed and looked at Mike. “No, that’s got a three-layer encryption on it. My Dad thinks he’s going to get me to take over the nerf ranch.”

“What, you don’t like nerf burgers?”

Sam looked at Mike, “Do I look like a nerf herder to you?”

Mike shook his head and smiled.

“That powered suit you loaded up? I made that. Scavenged all the parts, put it together, painted it and named it. And it’s not the only one. I made a quad legged power loader, without an A.I. to assist it, and got it to work. What did my Dad do? He sold it to a scrap dealer. I said, I hope a meteor crashes, kills every nerf and burns everything to the ground but you.”

Mike nodded. “I about said the same to my Pappy when last I saw him. Shame I didn’t get the chance to tell him I was sorry before he died.”

Sam blinked.

“I don’t suppose you’ve got your permits for that suit? It’s got a micro-fusion reactor. You need a class 3 license to drive it in urban areas. If we get to Von Braun and you don’t have them on you, or a guardian to get you through, I’m gonna have to take you in.”

The truck jumped when it hit a dip and knocked a badge loose from its holder.

Sam gulped. Sweat beaded on his forehead.

“Legal issues aside, you really like tinkering with these things, huh?”

“Yeah. I guess I always have been. I’ve always been making stuff outta scrap. I love it.”

“Sound like you’re pretty good at it. Ever tell your Pappy that?”

“Why bother? He only thinks about nerf herding and getting me to take over when he croaks.”

“Maybe if you just talk to him, respectfully, he’ll understand. There is a market for these things, and if my boy talked to me about it like you did I’d be thrilled.”

Thirty minutes later, they pulled into a solar station. Mike hooked up the batteries to the truck and Sam got out, pacing with his hands in his pockets..

A minute later, a truck carrying farming equipment pulled alongside Mike’s. Smoke poured out of the transmission. Sam held his nose and approached the driver.

Mike just finished refilling the batteries to his truck when Sam ran up to him. “Hey Mike, do you have any pressing business in Von Braun?”

“Not really.”

“I made a deal with that trucker. For fixing the leak on his reactor shielding, he agreed to part with one of the manure drones. If I can get that home, I just might have something to placate my Dad. So... would you please, turn around?”