I stared into the backpack my child had appropriated, Ark still completely unaware of my presence as he continued to rummage through the cupboard on the other side of the kitchen. I had to admit he was a neat packer, but what I could see of his foresight was woefully lacking. I took one of his child-size shirts and held it up in front of me, the nondescript black uninterrupted on both sides.

“What are you doing?!” I lowered the shirt to see my own son staring indignantly at me from the opposite end of the table, immediately slamming down the last few cans of tuna we had for the week. I raised my brow at him as I re-folded his shirt and put it on the table next to the backpack, which sent him into one of his tiny furies, the eight-year-old stomping around to grab it and hurl it back inside. “No! You’re not stopping me!”

I completely ignored his outburst, pulling out another shirt, this one light gray with a pre-faded design on it. “You only have three days’ change of clothes?” Ark yanked at the bottom hem in an attempt to pull it from my hands, but couldn’t overpower my grip on the shoulders. “Kid, you aren’t prepared in the least.”

Ark stumbled back as I let go of the shirt to spread around the contents of the bag, curious to see what he had prepared. A blanket my mom had made for him as a Christmas present was interwoven throughout as a layer of protection for each item, separating the container into four sections for clothes, electronics, food and a pillow uncomfortably stuffed into the bottom. I took out some more of the contents, taking an inventory of his handhelds’ games and recognizing one of them as mine, which I wordlessly stuck into my pocket. Ark let out a frustrated wail and tried to pile the games back into the quickly-emptying section, but I absently pushed him backwards by the forehead with my free hand. After a few minutes, he finally got the hint and stormed over to the nearest chair, throwing himself into the seat with a huff as I appraised his planned luggage.

The backpack was pretty small, so even with what little he was planning on bringing along the container was straining a little. The lunchbox cooler was only large enough to bring a couple items, full of squished-together sandwiches that would probably not even last the day. Curiously, underneath the lunchbox lay a single, green-covered notebook.

I recognized the notebook as one of mine, but it looked to be some ancient relic rather than one of the more well-kept sketchbooks that more or less created the foundation of my workroom. “Where’d you get this?” Ark shifted angrily in his seat, obviously still unwilling to talk. “Yeah, you don’t know, it just landed here. Come on. Even I haven’t seen this in years.” I couldn’t help but sit down next to him, cracking open the notebook to the approximate middle and nudging him with my elbow to try and get him to look with me. Realizing he wasn’t going to get anywhere without at least feigning interest, he cocked his head up to follow my lead as I leafed through the pages.

“…Huh.” This was all old concept work for *Grand Robo*. I flipped to the beginning of the section, scanning over what I’d written a little over ten years ago. *How did I manage to have* better *handwriting back then?* Background notes, character notes, there were a few sketches of unused ideas in what would have otherwise been blank space. I remembered writing a lot more than this as a concept piece, though; a lot of the pages were missing. Entire sections on some of the finer points were nowhere to be found. I recalled that at least a few were ripped out of my own volition when I needed reference on some things without wanting the whole notebook, but what remained was a mere fraction of what it used to be even then.

“Did you tear out some of the pages from this?” Ark shook his head, no longer hunched over the table and looking at the sketches with about the same level of fascination as I was. Maybe now that I’d been actively penning it, I no longer needed the concept works and they simply began to lose themselves to the ages. Who knows.

I continued to absently turn over the same pages, playing with some of the frayed edges against the tip of my thumb. “Look… I’m not mad at you for trying to run away, you know. God knows I did my share of trying to leave from what I thought was unfair rule when I was your age.” I reached around and pulled Ark’s chair, the scrape of wood on tile along with the sudden movement making him jump slightly but stopped there as my arm wrapped around his shoulder. “An’ I know this probably won’t be the last time, either.” The kid looked up at me with one of those confused looks only a child would give to a parent, an utterly mystified *You were my age?* stare.

I turned my eyes back down to the notebook and flipped over to an empty page in the third section. The decade-old paper seemed almost insubstantial, as if trying to write on it would instead result in completely destroying the page. “I have to tell you right out, though; you’re pretty terrible at thinking of what you need to live on your own. A couple sandwiches and half a week of clothes won’t last you as long as you think.”

Ark’s brow furrowed softly, incredulous. “Are you helping me leave, now?”

“No; I’m just saying. If you really run away, I’d at least want you to survive to the next town, or something.”

He slumped back down in his seat, staring at the notebook and my finger absently trailing over the faded lines. “Is Mom going to know about this?”

“H’nah. Your mom doesn’t have to know, I think I can figure out why you tried this in the first place. Just don’t do it again, or I’m gonna tell her about this time when I’m telling her about that one. Okay?” The implication got a bit of fear to reflect in his eyes, and after a moment of consideration he nodded before I ushered him out of the kitchen. “Go to bed.”

I stared back down at the empty page, index finger tapping against it in the silence of the room. I had an urge come over me, one of those moments of irresistible, divine inspiration. Of course, I’d come down here for a drink, not a need to draw; no pen, no pencil to be found in the area. With a more forceful few taps, I picked myself up out of the chair and returned Ark’s belongings to the backpack, pausing for a few moments once everything else had been stuffed back inside. Making a final reach across the table, I slid the notebook into the outside pocket, before taking my leave back to the bedroom, hanging up the backpack on his door. Hopefully he won’t write too hard in it.