

# Ends and Means

by Tanaqui

*Don't let anyone rob you of your imagination, your creativity, or your curiosity. It's your place in the world; it's your life. Go on and do all you can with it, and make it the life you want to live, —*

Mae Jemison

oOo

Heather hunched her shoulders and turned her back to the cold wind gusting across the flat factory roof. To her left, a huddle of men were fussing around the wooden cradle that held the first experimental set of blades for the wind turbines.

"Stand back," Ted had advised, and she'd done so, trying not to feel too much resentment. He had a point: the blades were heavy, and the guys were much stronger than she was. And it wasn't as if Ted didn't respect her input, even if no one else seemed to.

She gritted her teeth, remembering how every suggestion she'd made—when she'd been able to make herself heard in the conversation at all—had been greeted with a moment of slightly incredulous silence, and then someone would make a non-committal noise, before they went right back to discussing whatever wrong-headed idea she'd been trying to steer them away from.

Ted had picked up on it sometime late in that first day they'd spent trying to figure out the turbine design. Probably catching the muttered "I said that three hours ago" that she'd finally not been able to contain. Not that he hadn't occasionally tried to backtrack the conversation before that, but it seemed like "Heather has a point...." were the magic words to get him ignored too.

In the end, the two of them fell into a sort of routine during the course of the next day: she'd make the suggestion, and get ignored, and then Ted would bring it up five minutes later as if he'd thought of it himself. He'd get the congratulatory slaps on the back, as well, and Heather tried not to mind too much, because at least they were making progress. Not that Ted had wanted the credit; he'd blurted out an apology that evening, after their shift was over, while he walked her back to where she was staying her first few days back in New Bern.

Heather had shrugged it off, because it wasn't at all surprising, and at least Ted knew what he was doing and felt bad about it. There'd been plenty enough times in her past when she'd had her ideas hijacked without so much as a nod in her direction.

Stamping her feet against the cold, she again pushed away the memory of Jake immediately recognizing she knew what she was talking about when it came to the ventilation system in the med center fallout shelter, and willingly handing over repairing it to her. She'd been a fool to make so much of simply getting some basic respect, or to think it meant something more.....

Glancing over at the group gathered around the turbine, the wind stinging tears from her eyes, she saw the preparations seemed complete at last. A moment later, with a count and a heave, the men had levered the turbine upright and secured it in place.

Ted looked across at her and gave her a small nod and a smile, before he released the brake that locked the blades in place. There was a long moment when the blades hung motionless; the wind had awkwardly chosen just that moment to die down. Heather hesitated, wondering whether she

dared suggest they give the blades a spin to start them off, and risk attracting yet another look to say she was a damn fool woman who knew nothing about designing turbines. Because she was pretty sure that suddenly she *would* get all the credit for the design, or all the blame, if it didn't work.

Before she could speak, the wind gusted and the blades slowly began to turn. After a few more seconds, the turbine had settled down to a steady whirl, and Heather blew out a relieved breath.

Ted came over and clapped her on the back. "Not bad, huh?" he offered with a grin, and she gave him a grateful smile. Of course, they'd barely begun to solve the challenges of getting steady power out of the thing: the governor was still little more than the series of sketches on paper and scribbled calculations that she and Ted had begun working on while the rest of the guys had machined and assembled this first set of blades.

But it was a start.

"Here." Heather held out the ammeter they'd borrowed from the High School science lab that they'd be using to test the current coming out of the turbine.

Ted shook his head. "You do it." He gestured toward the turbine with a smile.

Nervously, Heather approached, half-expecting one of the other men to reach out and take the ammeter from her, but they parted to let her through. With fingers made clumsy by cold, and by the awareness of so many pairs of eyes on her, she attached the crocodile clips leading from the ammeter to the wires trailing from the alternator that was, for the moment, mounted directly behind the blades. Eventually, the governor would sit between the two, keeping the alternator's rotor turning at a steady speed.

The ammeter's needle hopped about a little as the blades rattled unevenly in the gusting wind, though not as badly as Heather had expected. She guessed the weight of the turbine blades in themselves provided some inertia. The trick with the governor would be to keep them the same speed whether there was a light breeze or a raging gale.

Still, the needle was hovering somewhere between eleven and twelve amps—more than she'd expected. She didn't really need to do the calculation in her head to announce, "Output's about thirteen hundred watts."

"Well, damn, and there was me thinking we'd be lucky if we could hitch up a lightbulb or two. Sounds like we could power half of City Hall with that thing." Heather looked up from the ammeter to see Brett Daniels grinning at her. He shifted his gaze past her. "That governor design of yours ready to go, Ted?"

The flush of excitement Heather had felt died within her. Not that she hadn't half expected things to be this way.

Ted stepped closer to Heather, putting his hand on her shoulder and giving it a light squeeze. "If Heather says so. She's the expert."

Heather caught a moment of skepticism on Brett's face as he shifted his attention back to her. She gave a quick dip of the head. "Yes. I think we're ready. There's still a few things we're not sure about, but a prototype'll help us figure them out."

"Okay." Brett nodded curtly and turned away. "Let's get out of this damn wind, then."

Heather pressed her lips together, trying not to let out the bitter laugh that bubbled up inside her. Instead, she turned to Ted, still standing next to her with his hand resting on her shoulder, and smiled at him. Most guys were idiots, but not all of them.

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