

The Inventor's Children

By ReadWorks

"Wait, what? When is the presentation? How much are we missing?" Cara's father was having another loud argument over his cell phone at the breakfast table.

Cara and her brother, Zeke, shared knowing looks across their bowls of oatmeal. It was the first day of summer vacation, and their father had promised to take the day off work. They were supposed to go to Six Flags, the nearby amusement park, and dinner at Giordino's, their favorite pizza place. Both Cara and Zeke had taken their father's enthusiastic plans for the family day with a grain of salt, especially since every year for the last three years family day had been cancelled at the last minute.

Zeke leaned over as their father left the dining room to continue the phone conversation with his colleague. "I didn't even think we'd make it to breakfast, honestly," he said. "This is better than last year, when he cancelled the night before. We're making progress." Cara rolled her eyes and responded, "I guess. If you can call canceling the entire day progress. I mean, I get it, though; you know how important his work is."

Their father was a physicist in charge of one of the biggest laboratories in the country. The lab specialized in military defense, and a lot of the projects their father worked on were top secret. Anytime something went wrong, he had to be there to fix it and make sure everything got back on track. His job meant that he was absent a lot, but by this point Cara was used to it. "I think it's time we roll out the back-up plan," she said. "What do you want to do? I vote for an afternoon movie and ice cream."

Zeke smiled at her with a wicked glint in his eyes, "Oh, I have something else in mind, a fantastic idea." Cara felt her stomach grow queasy. Zeke's idea of fun was usually something that was against the rules. There was the time he tried to bungee jump off the roof using tied-together jump ropes, and broke both of his arms. Or the time that he almost burned down the house while trying to make his own fireworks. Zeke was covered in scars from injuries he had gotten while trying out his "fantastic ideas."

Just then their father returned to the dining room. "Kids," he said. "I'm sorry, but I have bad news."

"Let me take a wild guess. An emergency at the lab and you need to head there right away?" said Zeke. His voice was full of resentment. Their father's brow furrowed, and he looked upset.

"Well, yes... I'm so sorry," he replied.

Cara gave Zeke a swift kick under the table. The last thing their stressed-out, overworked father needed was a guilt trip. "Don't worry, Dad," she said. "We can go to the amusement park another time. Really, we have the whole summer in front of us."

"Yeah? That'd be great. I really want to take you both there. The roller coasters are perfect examples of some of the basic concepts of mechanical physics in action, and it'd be fun to combine the rides with some informal science discussions," their dad enthused.

Zeke opened his mouth and Cara kicked him again, before he could deliver another wisecrack. Somehow Cara didn't imagine that science lectures were what Zeke wanted to hear at the amusement park.

"I'll leave you two some money," said their father. "Order some pizza and head to the pool, enjoy the day, and we'll have a nice dinner this evening. I'll make sure to be home promptly at 6 p.m."

"Promise?" asked Cara.

"Promise," said their father. "No matter what." He grabbed his briefcase off the table and was out the door, racing off to the lab to solve another dilemma.

"All right," Cara turned to her brother. "Spill. What's your big master plan for the day?"

Zeke's eyes lit up with anticipation. "Today," he said, drawing out each word for added effect, "we go into... Dad's private lab."

Behind the house, their father had converted the garage into a two-story building where he tinkered with his own personal experiments. Neither Cara nor Zeke had ever been inside. Some of the stuff inside was dangerous, their father had told them. All of it was off limits.

"Zeke..." Cara chastised. "We can't jeopardize his work like that. Besides," she added pragmatically, "the door is locked. We can't get in unless you've gained lock-picking skills in the last few days."

"Cara, Cara, Cara," Zeke said her name in a way that suggested he was disappointed in her lack of vision. "First of all, yes, I am good at lock-picking. That's how I've been reading your diary for the past five months and I know that you'll help me so that I don't tell Dad you have a boyfriend."

"Really, Zeke? Blackmail?" Cara sighed. "Okay, but the lock on that door is going to be a lot tougher than the dinky plastic one on my journal."

"It's not a lock at all," said Zeke. "It's a twelve-digit password, and I think I know what it is."

Zeke got up and headed for the door. He paused to turn back to Cara, "Well, are you coming or not?"

Cara sighed. Zeke was going to break into the lab whether she helped or not. She might as well go along to make sure he didn't break anything too important or blow up the whole neighborhood.

Zeke was already punching in the numbers when Cara caught up to him. The door to the lab was steel and heavy; there was no way they could possibly break in if Zeke didn't have the code. The door let out an angry buzz. Cara peered over Zeke's shoulder and saw the message "Code Error."

"Umm, Zeke?" said Cara. "Don't these systems usually alert the police if you enter the wrong code too many times?"

"Yeah," said Zeke as he punched in more numbers. "But you get three tries. At least, that's what it always looks like in the movies. Anyways, the second try just worked, so it looks like you don't need to worry. It was our birthdays. Dad says that he always thinks of us, even when he's at work, and I guess he was telling the truth."

The door swung open onto a lab that gleamed with white counters and complicated machines. In the center of the room was the most beautiful car either of them had ever seen. It looked like a sports car, but sleeker and with metal wheels.

"Wow," said Cara. "It's gorgeous."

Zeke had already hopped into the driver's seat. "Come on, Cara, let's take it for a spin!"

"Zeke, you don't even have a license," Cara responded. She hopped into the passenger's seat. Instead of a normal dashboard, the inside of the car was covered in knobs, buttons, and gauges. Zeke reached out and pressed five of them in a row.

"Let's see what this can do!" he yelled.

Suddenly the car started vibrating. Cara watched as the room around her appeared to melt, the colors dripping into one another. Zeke reached out and grabbed her hand; this was more than even he had imagined. When the car stopped vibrating, they were no longer in their father's private lab. Where there had been counters and machines, there were now trees and a river.

"What happened?" Zeke asked Cara.

Cara didn't respond but pointed across the river. There, calmly grazing, was a *Triceratops*.