

**D.M. Gordon**  
from *Escape Velocity*

Four. The Family Recipe.

I work for Daddy. And that wouldn't be so bad—he's semi-retired to Boca Raton with his third wife—except that Daddy's has this idea about me, that I'm right where I belong, in Accounts Receivable. He won't fire me; he'll never promote me.

I'm also one of eight quality checkers in charge of keeping the Wilkinson Family Chowder exactly like it's been since my great, great grandfather Wilkinson made the recipe one hundred and thirty-six years ago. I can scout out tiny variations in nutmeg, sodium, even the hickory in the bacon. I should be able to...I've been eating this soup my whole life. It's a wonder any of us Wilkinsons can stand to open a can, but there it is. When we expanded sales to England and Holland the quality checkers started getting a fat bonus.

And I saved mine up. I didn't tell Kris about the extra money, well, because I knew it would never be enough to rebuild the house, and that's what he would want to do with it and it would only ever get half done.

Daddy said a long time ago that Kris and I have no place running any business and he was right. We made our choices; we'll never be rich. We won't ever replace the trailer; the trailer is it. My job at Wilkinson's is it. Why shouldn't I spend my bonus exactly like I want? Well, I did, didn't I? I bought an ultralight kit, a tiny little helicopter.

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Five. Trying to explain why this is.

The first time I saw one in a magazine at my car mechanic's, it stopped me cold. There was a picture of a man taking off from his yard, and an article about how he built it himself, and learned to fly from books. It even listed titles. I couldn't get it out of my head. I fell to sleep at night imagining my hair wild with whoosh. Imagine. Beautiful rotary blade on a light little frame that actually flies from your door. Who wouldn't want one? Mosquitoes, they're called. It took me five years to save up.

Kris was so mad when the UPS delivered all the boxes to the barn, you would have thought he'd discovered I was having an affair.

"Lorelei, what were you thinking?" he said.

"That we're bored." I said. He used to tell everybody he married me because he knew he'd never be bored.

"Bored, right," he said. "How much did you spend?"

I told him.

"Send it back."

"It's my money."

"This is some rich man's toy. It's not us."

"It is me."

"You don't have any more sense than a peanut."

I told him not to daddy me.

"Help me," I said, "It will be something different."

"Send it back," he said.

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Here it comes, I thought. So I raised my voice too and gave him my thirty-year math, how much it would cost to re-build something, my income, his income, Trinity, taxes, insurance, our credit card debt...

It wasn't anything he didn't know already, but we hadn't said it out loud, hadn't made it real. He went back to smoking pot, something he hadn't done in years. He stayed stoned for a while, and by the time he was straight again, I wouldn't let him or anybody else touch it. My machine. Mosquito. The hours and hours I spent alone building it, the ring of light, and the dark beyond, the cold silence of the barn; that's what I wanted. I made a lot of mistakes, but I fixed them. It took me three years to finish, and by the time I was done, I knew how I was alone.