



THE COPTER KIDS

*Life is a magical opportunity, but you
have to create the magic!*

Kate and Kyle were sitting at the breakfast table staring at their cereal bowls when Mom asked, “Have you kids given any thought to what we discussed at dinner last night? How we thought it would be fun for you to spend some time at my law office so I can show you what I do. And you can spend a day with Dad at his office and see what engineering projects he is working on.”

“Yes, I remember. But to be honest, Mom,” Kate said, “they sound boring and our science teacher got us excited about aviation and becoming helicopter pilots. We studied everything that flies: from planes to helicopters to rocket ships. We read about Leonardo da Vinci and he

HELICOPTER HARRY

got me excited with his hang glider and helicopter. A few weeks ago the Coast Guard landed their helicopter in the school football field and that was so exciting!”

“That’s great,” Mom said.

“It was so much fun,” Kate continued. “We watched as it glided in and landed and I thought how magical that was. And the whole school got to climb into the helicopter, and sit in the pilot seats and play with the controls. Sitting in that big seat with my hands on the controls felt like I was in another world. That really sold me on being a pilot. Oh my god, I want to fly so badly, Mom. I closed my eyes when I was at the controls and imagined flying like a bird.”

“I never thought you had such an interest in aviation. And I didn’t know the Coast Guard had come to your school. That must have been so exciting for you both. We can always chat about it when you are older if it still interests you. Aviation is a man’s job. Being an attorney is probably a better choice for you. And your father won’t be happy since he loves his work and thinks Kyle will make a wonderful engineer like himself.”

“Sure, Mom,” Kate hesitated. “I know, but I’m a tomboy and like getting muddy. I’m more into guy things and I don’t like dolls. And being an attorney sounds so girly.”

“Hmm.” Mom, stared. “Do you think you want to be a pilot like your sister?”

“Yes, and I can’t wait. I know you and Dad will be upset, but I’m really excited about helicopters. And our

THE COPTER KIDS

science teacher said helicopter pilots are looked on as superheroes, since they save people's lives."

"Okay, then. Do you have capes?" Mom joked.

"No. But we are working on it! You can start sewing them," Kate joked.

Mom laughed. "You might need something to fall back on if your superhero gig doesn't work out." She smirked. "And you may see more opportunity and money as an attorney or engineer. Let's talk more about this later. What are your plans today?"

"We're going to Paradise Park to play with the remote control helicopters you got us," Kate said.

Mom thought to herself. *Oh yeah, I sort of planted that seed.* "Okay, that sounds like fun. Would you like a ride?" Mom asked.

"No, we'll ride our bikes," Kyle said.

"You be careful not to cause any trouble. Don't talk to any strangers and stay at the park so we know where you are."

"Yeah okay, Mom," Kate said.

As Kate and Kyle played with their helicopters at the park, they noticed that not many kids were there. Kate and Kyle were excitedly chasing each others helicopters when two older kids came out from behind some trees. The boy and girl were about thirteen years old. Both were wearing purple baseball caps turned backward, purple tennis shoes, white T-shirts, blue jeans and dark sunglasses. They had the letters "AS" circled on their

shirts. “What are you kids doing in our park?” the boy demanded.

“It’s not your park. We’re just playing with our remote helicopters, so leave us alone!” Kate said sternly.

“Yes, *it is*—*s* our park, and you need our permission to be here.” The boy punched Kyle in the eye and Kyle fell to the ground. The boy then stepped on Kyle’s helicopter, and the sound of crunching plastic echoed in the abrupt silence.

“Stay down, kid!” The boy shouted.

“Hey, leave my brother alone!” Kate cried. “And you’re going to pay for that broken helicopter!”

“Make us, punk!” the girl said.

Kate gently pulled Kyle up and saw a red patch forming around his eye. A flash of pure anger swept through her. “Come on, Kyle. Let’s fight these bullies!” she said.

“Not so fast, kid,” the girl said. “Don’t ever come back here or I will totally beat you up!” She stamped on Kate’s helicopter and threw a punch at Kate’s face, right in her eye. Kate landed on the ground beside her ruined helicopter.

Kate wiped away a tear and bounced up. “Hey, you bully, let’s do this!!”

They were ready to fight when thunder roared in their ears and made their heads vibrate. The teenagers ran off at the sound of the approaching chopper “Watch out!” Kate yelled. “It’s headed straight for us. Hurry! Grab your helicopter.” She scooped up her mangled copter and dragged her brother away. Kate and Kyle ran as fast as they could through the park as a large red and black Huey helicopter

streaked by. Then it circled back and hovered over them. Looking up at it, they tripped over each other's feet and then fell on top of each other.

"Get off me, Kyle!" Kate shouted.

The chopper was fifty feet above them, and the wind generated by the rotor blades made it difficult for them to stand up. The chaotic atmosphere also made it hard for them to hear each other. Then a voice came over the loudspeaker. "Are you okay?"

They could not understand what the pilot had said as it was so noisy. "Maybe it's the police coming to get you," Kate yelled. She huddled next to Kyle, both of them looking up at the red belly of the chopper that appeared to be closing in on them.

"More like, they're after those bullies!" Kyle yelled back.

Although Kate and Kyle were twins, Kate usually took the risk whenever adventure appeared. They were both dressed for a warm, sunny day with shorts, T-shirts and tennis shoes. As excited as they were about helicopters, they could never have imagined what this day had in store for them.

Suddenly there was a loud bang as flames and smoke exploded out of the engine-compartment door, blowing it clean off. Kate and Kyle watched in horror as the door sailed past them and stuck into the ground like a giant knife. The chopper wobbled back and forth as it attempted to land nearby, white and black smoke trailing

behind it. The air smelled chokingly bitter from burning fuel. Smoke surrounded Kate and her brother.

As the chaos began to subside, Kate shouted, "Let's follow it!"

Kate and Kyle raced through the park and down a narrow alley. A fence loomed in front of them.

"That must be where the chopper was supposed to land!" Kyle said worriedly.

He and his twin sister clung to the fence like monkeys, their fingers sticking through the chain link. A no trespassing sign dangled underneath the rusty barbed wire that stretched along the top of the fence. The doomed helicopter was diving to the ground just beyond them. Smoke was pouring out of the cockpit, and flames billowed from the engine compartment. The heliport consisted of three tan warehouses and a couple of stationary helicopters. The windsock was made of underpants that were inflated by a slight breeze. The fence stretched as far as the eye could see.

"It's out of control!" Kate cried. "What can we do?"

Kyle had no time to answer. The chopper crashed just inside the heliport and burst into flames.

"Oh no. What about the pilot!" Kate yelled.

Just then, the pilot kicked the crumpled windshield out of the burning chopper. He rolled onto the tarmac, extinguishing the flames covering his clothes. He stood up just as flames engulfed the copter. The burning metal crackled and shot sparks into the air. Noticing Kate and Kyle, the pilot stared at them over his aviator glasses,

THE COPTER KIDS

pushing them up his nose as he headed toward them. Smoke trailed from his clothes.

“Whoa —” Kyle murmured.

The pilot was a long-legged, chiseled guy with wide shoulders. His baseball cap was tilted to keep the hot sun off his stubbly face. His blue jeans and flight jacket were charred and his skin was covered in black soot. As he neared the fence, the air became heavy with the pungent smell of jet fuel and burned wreckage.

“Looks like it’s toast, mister,” Kyle said.

“That’s not the best way to land a helicopter!” the pilot said, shaking his head. Then he grimaced. “Now it’s a million-dollar piece of rubbish, unless it undergoes major reconstruction.”

He paused, “What are you kids doing here?” he asked.

“Uh...we were getting bullied by a couple of kids in the park when you flew over us. They ran off, but we followed you. We want to be helicopter pilots like you,” Kyle said with shining eyes. “Can you teach us about helicopters?”

“So they gave you both black eyes?” The pilot shook his head. “I wasn’t sure if you were in trouble but it looked like those kids were bothering you.”

“Yeah, they punched us, but we couldn’t hear you over the noise. But we were ready to fight when you buzzed over us.”

“Do you want some ice for those black—and—blue eyes?”

“No. They don’t hurt. Do they Kyle?” Kate said.

“No, not really,” Kyle said.

“I see they destroyed your toy helicopters. Toss them in the trash and I’ll get you new ones.”

“That is nice of you, mister,” Kate said, “but Mom said not to accept gifts from strangers.”

“That’s very good advice, no new helicopters, then! And I hate bullies. Sorry I didn’t fly over sooner.”

“Helicopters are very cool, and I’m glad you’re a fan like I was at your age.”

The twins sighed, and they let go of the fence. The chopper let out another loud explosion, as if to say its final goodbye. Kate looked back. “How did you survive a fiery crash like that, mister? Most people would have died...unless you’re some kind of superhero.”

“It’s more about knowing your ABCs,” said the mysterious man, with a dimpled smile.

“We know our ABCs!” Kate fired back.

“Not the ones that count,” he said.

“Look, mister, we’re on a mission, to learn more about helicopters,” Kate said. “That’s why we’ve been hanging around near the heliport. Our science teacher recently taught our class about the magical world of helicopters and how it’s a miracle they can even fly. He even told us about a legendary helicopter that the public has been forbidden to see. They say it can fly like no other helicopter on earth.”

The pilot shrugged. “I have no idea what you’re talking about, kid. And you’re not supposed to be here,” he said crossly. “Helicopters are for grown-ups, not kids.”

THE COPTER KIDS

“Are we in trouble?” Kyle asked. Are we going to be arrested?”

“Maybe,” the pilot told him. “You *are* trespassing.”

“Hey, you have a British accent. Are you a secret agent?” Kate asked excitedly.

The pilot smirked. “Bond, James Bond!”

“Nice try, mister,” Kate said.

“Now, as you can see, I’m pretty busy at the moment. You kids aren’t in trouble, but it’s time to go home and have your eyes looked at.”

Kate put her arm around her brother’s shoulders and they began to walk away with their heads down. As if it wasn’t enough for them to get bullied, then rejected by the mysterious pilot!

He watched as they walked away. “Okay, wait!” the pilot called out. “I love your enthusiasm for helicopters. Do you two live around here?”

“About a mile away,” Kyle said, turning around. “Our parents don’t want us to become pilots. They told us it’s too dangerous, so we should quit dreaming. They said we should keep our heads out of the clouds and stay focused on school.”

“I see. That’s a shame.” The pilot gazed at some white puffy clouds and then returned his gaze to them.

“You do need to focus on school, but you also need to follow and nurture your dreams.” He suddenly looked worried. “Do your parents know where you are?”

“Yeah,” Kyle said. “They think were playing in the park with our toy helicopters.”

HELICOPTER HARRY

“What do you say we give them a call? I’ll pretend to be James Bond.”

“No. You can’t do that!” Kate pleaded. “We’ll get in big trouble if they find out we were talking to a stranger, let alone an indestructible pilot.”

“Mom warned us not to talk to strangers in the park. Now we are in trouble,” Kyle said.

The pilot hesitated, looked at his watch, and said, “Well...I’ll show you a few things, but then you need to be on your way so your parents won’t worry.”

“Woo-hoo!” the twins cried with excitement.

The pilot walked up to an eye scanner on the gate. The scanner had flashing red lights that turned green as he pushed it. He moved his sunglasses up to his forehead and looked into it. The latch clicked as he pulled the black metal gate toward him. He slid his glasses back down and held the gate open just wide enough so the children could slide through. The gate slammed behind them with a loud clang. It locked and the lights turned red again.

“This gate is pretty secure. Can’t have any brats sneaking in here to check out the choppers,” he said.

“We’re not brats!” Kate said.

He chuckled. “Sorry, I meant ‘kids.’ A lot of kids come snooping around here.” He extended his hand to shake Kate’s.

“I’m Helicopter Harry.”

“I’m Kate, and this is my twin brother Kyle. Why did you circle around us in the park?”

THE COPTER KIDS

“I got a call from some parents to search for some lost children. Are you lost?”

“Of course not,” Kate said. “Although that would be something my mom might do.” She rolled her eyes and smiled, poking Kyle.

“But you’re not lost, right? Could it have been your mom calling me out on a search?”

“No, no, it’s fine,” Kate said with a smile. “We aren’t expected back till later. That must be other kids who got lost. Don’t you have to get back to searching for them? Or call to say your helicopter blew up?”

“I detect an attitude about your parents,” Harry said.

“Yeah,” Kate said with a sigh, “we love them, but they hover over us all the time. They always think they know what’s best. Why can’t they give us some space and let us follow our dreams? They must have had dreams once too. What happened?”

Harry gave her a gentle smile. “Maybe they’re jealous of your dreams to be pilots because they do jobs they find boring.”

“Oh, that’s deep, dude,” Kate said, laughing.

“What’s Kate short for? Katrina? Katherine? Or just Katie?”

“If you must know, it’s short for Katherine, but please just call me Kate.”

“Careful, Harry. She’s a feisty one,” Kyle said, grinning mischievously.

HELICOPTER HARRY



Harry chuckled. “Quite right! Tell me about yourself, then. I don’t see many girls sneaking around here who want to be pilots.”

“Kate’s a tomboy and adventurous. She hangs out with my friends more than hers,” Kyle said.

“Oh yeah, I like video games,” Kate chimed in. “And my brother is a book nerd. He doesn’t watch TV and just reads book after book. But he plays video games with me.”

“I see. What do you like to read about, Kyle?” Harry asked.

“Well, I’ve read a lot of books on aviation. But I like to read science fictio too.”

A dragonfly with rainbow-colored wings landed on Harry’s shoulder.

THE COPTER KIDS

“That’s the largest and prettiest dragonfly I’ve ever seen,” Kate said.

“He’s as tough as they come for an old fossil. Isn’t that right, Machismo?” Harry said.

“Pretty funny, dude,” Machismo said. “Maybe that’s because I’m the closest thing there is to a prehistoric helicopter.” He turned to the twins and continued. “I’m a relative of the giant helicopter dragonfly from South America, the birthplace of dinosaurs.” Machismo stood up on his hind legs, puffed out his yellow chest, and pounded on it with his feet.

“What the...?” Kyle said, his eyes wide. “Machismo can talk?”

“Yep, all the animals and helicopters here speak, which is part of the android magic of this place,” Harry said, gesturing in the distance as he circled around, pointing his finger towards the vast area surrounded by a chain-link fence.

“What’s android magic?” Kate asked.

“Well, it’s man and machine. The people here in the special place are not real people but cyborgs. And the animals here are not real animals but androids. After the real animals died out, they were rebuilt as robots—but robots that can speak and fly,” Harry said.

“So this is, like, a mythical world?” Kyle said.

Harry smiled. “Oh yes, Kyle. It’s like nothing else you’ll ever experience in your lifetime. I’ve spent years working with cutting-edge technology to bring these beautiful creatures and machines back to life.”

HELICOPTER HARRY

“Oh, you’re a scientist like Doctor Frankenstein?”

“Scientist yes, mad no. The technology is beyond belief. The choppers can morph from animal to helicopter. I know it sounds like a fantasy, but it’s quite real. The helicopters can fly themselves but I like to fly them too.”

The children stared at Harry, unable to believe what they were hearing. Kyle whispered to Kate, “This is creepy. Maybe we should go home.”

“Oh stop it, silly,” Kate said. “It’s just a fun adventure. You’ll see!”

“Um—okay. This is a lot to take in Harry. How did you get the name Helicopter Harry?” asked Kyle. “Seems like an odd name.”

Harry removed his soot-covered sunglasses, revealing a pair of piercing green eyes. “Well, my parents didn’t support my dream of becoming a pilot either. So when I turned eighteen, I left home and joined the military to make my dream come true. But before I share any more about myself, I must advise you that my life is top secret. You both must swear that you’ll never reveal this information to anyone.”

Nervously, Kate replied, “Of course, Harry. I swear.”

“Me too, Harry,” Kyle said. “I’ll never tell a single soul.”

Harry extended his hand, and Kate and Kyle reached out and shook it.

“I was assigned to a test project called Whirly Wings,” Harry said. “I had a real copter pack attached to my back. It was the coolest thing ever. I wore a motor on

my back and had a propeller extending above my head. I know it sounds funny, but I actually flew, which was incredibly exciting. I flew secret missions behind hostile territory, searching for troublemakers. Unfortunately, I had a bad accident one day. Some of the troublemakers heard me flying back to base and began to shoot at me. I was two-hundred feet off the ground when bullets pinged off my silver motor casing. The copter pack was supposed to be bulletproof, but a bullet pierced the motor casing. The motor exploded and disengaged the rotor sending the motor to the ground. The next thing I knew, I was spinning out of control upside down when I hit the ground.”

“I bet that hurt,” Kyle said.

“Yes, and the propeller went through my back and came out between my lungs with my heart skewered on the end. When I hit the ground, I died.”

“Oh my god, you died!” Kyle, said, chuckling under his breath. “You’re pulling our legs. Your heart was skewered?”

“Really? You died?” Kate said, laughing.

“I was dead alright! But I had an operation that brought me back to life as a cyborg.”

The twins had slack jaws.

“Luckily, I was found in time and rushed to the cyborg chamber. Special top-secret technicians inserted subdermal titanium body armor under my skin. It makes me bulletproof while rebuilding my mangled body with new smart-brain technology that’s controlled by my smart

watch and phone. I can make my hands turn into rotors that enable me to fly. I am more machine than human—now,” Harry said.

“Wow, not human but machine?” Kyle repeated.

“Yes, but I still have many human characteristics. Like my skin and body. I still look human but I now have a motherboard for a brain which is programmed to the smallest detail of being a human.”

“Whoa, that’s so cool!” Kyle said.

Harry demonstrated his hand rotors. He stretched his arms, interlaced his fingers and cracked his knuckles. This disengaged his fingers as silver hand rotors popped out. Harry activated the rotors and controlled the speed with his thoughts as he lifted off.

Kate and Kyle giggled and couldn’t believe their eyes, as Harry hovered over them for a minute and then landed. “Can we have hand rotors too?” Kate asked.

“Maybe someday when you become cyborgs,” Harry joked.

“Wow, Harry. Maybe we could ride on your back and fly over to our school. We could dive-bomb the school yard at lunchtime and scare the kids,” Kate said.

“That would be fun alright, but maybe another time,” Harry said with a laugh.

“And then what happened?” Kyle asked.

“My friends nicknamed me Helicopter Harry. And I flew a few more missions behind enemy lines to eliminate bullies.”

“You’re a superhero!” Kate said.

“Sure, you could say that. Yeah, a superhero,” Harry said.

“Who were the people you were fighting?” Kyle asked.

“They are hostile people, and they have become bullies, which come in all sizes and ages. I’m sure you have playground bullies at your school like the kids from the park.”

“Oh, yes. They are always picking on us at school and giving us wedgies. They say bad things on social media about us being twins and short,” Kate said.

“So,” Kyle looked at the ground. “How old do we have to be to learn to fly?” he asked.

“How old are you right now?” Harry asked.

“We’re ten years old,” Kate said.

“Then ten it is! As long as you believe in yourself and have a limitless imagination, you’re already a sort of a superhero. How much do you two know about helicopters?”

“We know they’re really cool,” Kyle said.

“And they can fly fast,” Kate said. “Oh, and this old guy named da Vinci sorta created one five-hundred years ago but it never flew. We learned that in science class.”

Machismo darted over Kate and Kyle.

“Here comes more of my team,” Harry said excitedly. “I’m sure you’ll both want to meet them. Billy Bob the bumblebee and Chantal the hummingbird!”

“Did you rebuild them into androids as well?”

“You bet, but some of them have a screw loose, like our class clown, Billy Bob.”

“We all know da Vinci dreamed larger than life and had his head in the clouds like the rest of you knuckleheads!” Billy Bob shouted. He laughed as he buzzed around everyone’s faces. Billy Bob was a country bumpkin with a small black head and big blue eyes. His yellow belly was so big that he almost tripped over it. “Helicopters are just glorified android robots anyway,” the plump little bee said with a laugh.

“Oh, what a cute hummingbird and bee,” Kate said.

“Mom loves her hummingbird feeders and collects bee honey from the neighbors’ bee hives,” Kyle said.

“How nice, kids. I’m always looking for new feeders to raid. Is your place close by?” Chantal said.

“About a mile. It’s the dark red house on Pine Cone Drive,” Kate said. “You can’t miss it.”

“Perfect, thank you.”

“Sure, but leave my honey hives alone, kid,” Billy Bob said.

“Kids, don’t pay any attention to Billy Bob. He’s just jealous because there aren’t any choppers designed after him.” Billy Bob darted around everyone, stopped and bowed. Chantal strutted around, preening her blue-green feathers and pointing her long, pointy beak in the air.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, like we care about old farts, smarty-pants,” Billy Bob said. “Jealousy has nothing to do with it, although your beady black eyes do have a way of penetrating right through me.”

“We did find it interesting that we celebrate the same birthday as da Vinci, and that he was left-handed like us,” Kate said. “When is your birthday, Harry, and how old are you?” she asked.

“Well, I’m older than you, but not as old as the King of England. How’s that?”

Kate giggled.

“Do you know how da Vinci came up with the idea of the helicopter?” Harry asked the twins.

Kyle shrugged. “Not really.”

Kyle and Kate leaned in closer, almost touching noses with the mysterious Harry.

“We love reading about da Vinci and his inventions. He was way ahead of his time,” Kate said.

“Yeah, everyone in the class loved it when we studied his art and cool inventions,” Kyle said.

“So, who’s the fastest?” Kate asked.

Machismo flapped his fluorescent wings. “Dragonflies, of course! We’re the closest thing to a real helicopter, because our wings act almost like a chopper’s rotor. They flap 100 times per second, and I can fly at 60 miles per hour. I’m the world’s fastest, stealthiest insect.” He zipped forward and back a few times, before coming to an immediate stop above everyone. He then bowed, wrapping himself in his wings like a cloak.

Everyone laughed.

“You know,” Chantal said, “leave it to an old fossil and a bumblebee to brag about being the best, but when it comes to wing speed, I win. My wings can flap 200 times

a second.” She flapped her wings; zoomed up, down, and around; and whizzed by upside down near the twins’ faces. “What’s more, I can fly 50 miles an hour while upside down. I also get power from my wings when they come up, not just when they go down like most other birds. This allows me to hover like no other.”

“Excuse me!” Billy Bob shouted. “The great pollinator has something to say. Although my wing-flap speed is 160 times a second, it’s still faster than any pesky dragonfly.” He fluttered his wings, sputtering as fast as he could.

“And if it weren’t for me and my friends pollinating every plant in sight, you might not have anything to eat.” Billy Bob landed on Harry’s right shoulder, leaned back, and pushed out his big belly.

“Oh my god, maybe back off the honey and start flapping your wings faster,” Chantal said.

“And if your wings didn’t flap 200 times a second, you would never get your pudgy flight-challenged body off the ground,” Machismo scoffed.”

“And besides, how fast can you fly?” Chantal said.

“On a good day, with a wind at my back, 30 miles an hour.” Billy Bob stuck out his tongue at her and made a fart sound.

The twins laughed.

“I rest my case,” Chantal said. “And it’s a miracle of science that you can even fly.” She turned to the children. “Billy Bob fell on his head during one of his historic flights, in case you were thinking he’s a little slow.”

THE COPTER KIDS

Everyone except Billy Bob laughed.

“I dream about the time when dragonflies roamed the earth with the dinosaurs and were larger than life,” Machismo reminisced. “Back then we had a wingspan of three feet.”

Billy Bob laughed. “Hey, Grandpa, why don’t you fly back to your rest home and reminisce with your dinosaur friends?”

Hearing the flapping of wings, Kyle looked up and saw a pterodactyl circling overhead. “Who’s that up there?” he asked, not believing his eyes.

Kate looked up as well. “What the, a dinosaur? This keeps getting better and better.”

“Oh,” Chantal said. “That’s the patriarch of the neighborhood. At least, that’s what he thinks.”

Brutus the pterodactyl appeared as a wizardly sorcerer from out of a white cloud. He swooped in and landed on a grassy area and slid to a stop. He had a muscly body and a commanding head. He had long sharp teeth that protruded from his jaws when his was mouth closed. His leathery skin stretched over his body, and his massive wings spanned twelve feet.

“Oh, great,” Chantal remarked, as she touched wing tips with Brutus. “Now ya did it, big bad Brutus. You’re just another show-off, always wanting to strut your stuff.”

“Thanks, Chantal, for the introduction,” Brutus said. “But you’re just a bunch of amateurs. Who cares about wing speed? Let’s cut to the chase. I have millions of years of experience, and I’m not even going to brag about my

wing speed, since I could flap you all back into history. Da Vinci was a bright guy—I could tell you stories about him and his inventions until you all died from boredom!” Brutus looked at the twins, paused, and laughed, as did the twins. “But you two aren’t here for that.”

Kyle beamed. “You’re right, but we think pterodactyls are the coolest dinosaur ever!”

“Why, thank you, son. Carry on, Harry.”

“Brutus and I have things in common when it comes to taking out bad people. Brutus has a special interest in bullies and likes to eat them.”

“Really? Kate asked.

“Oh yes, and the bigger the better.”

“Do you eat children?” Kyle asked.

“Only if they are bullies.”

“Maybe you could stop by our school sometime,” Kate said.

“We know some kids you could eat right now!” Kyle said.

“The ones that gave you black and blue eyes, I’m assuming,” Brutus said.

“Yes, can you please!” Kate said.

“Well, I have to find them first,” he said.

“They were at the park and wore purple baseball caps and purple tennis shoes,” Kyle said.

“I’ll go take a look, and see what I can find,” he said and flew off.

Harry paused and looked Kate and Kyle up and down. Okay, I showed you a few things, but shouldn’t you go

show your parents your black eyes now? Won't they be worried?"

"We've had black eyes before from school bullies because we're so small for our age. And it's still early in the day, so they won't be worried. Can you please teach us to be superheroes?" Kate asked.

"Um...well," Harry hesitated and scratched his chin.

"Okay. Let me tell you something. And again, you can't reveal what I'm going to tell you."

"Okay, Harry. We promise," Kate said with a big smile.

"I have a superhero bootcamp here, where I teach kids who have unique qualities to become superheroes."

"A bootcamp? You had us fooled!" Kyle said, giving his sister a fist bump.

"And what is the purpose of your bootcamp?" Kate asked.

"I need help to fight Will, who is the leader of the Kommando Kids, which is a group of school bullies. Maybe we should call and ask your parents if this is okay, since it will take all day."

"Like I said, they will say no and tell us to come home right away," Kate said. "But I will send them a text and tell them we will be at the park all day. Okay I sent it."

Kate's phone dinged with an incoming text. "They said okay," Kate said.

"Alright, then." Harry hesitated again. "If you think you are ready. There are eleven stages to this bootcamp, and you will be tested mentally and physically through each one. The people and machines you meet along

the way will be evaluating you. They are all cyborgs and androids. If you do make it to the end, you will be rewarded with your own superhero powers and a tattoo that represents a true superhero. There will be missteps along the way, and you might even die. But they are designed to make you stronger.”

“Cool, a tattoo!” Kyle said.

“Yes, a tattoo on your inner wrist to show that you have conquered the challenge of bootcamp and not to mess with you.”

“What does it look like?” Kate asked.

“I’ll only show you if and when you succeed.”

Kate looked at Kyle and said, “Let’s do it!”

“Not so fast, sis, Harry said we might die. Maybe we should think about this, talk to Mom and Dad, and come back another day,” Kyle said.

“I know it’s scary, Kyle, but I have an idea. Let’s flip a coin—heads, we stay or tails—we go home,” Kate replied.

“Okay, go for it Kate,” Kyle said with a concerned look on his face.

Kate pulled a shiny quarter from her pocket and flipped the coin. He caught it before it landed on the ground. Harry slowly opened his hand, with his and Kate’s eyes locked onto his long fingers. Without blinking, he slowly unpeeled one finger and then another. The suspense built on the kids’ faces as his last finger opened, “It’s heads!”

“Woohoo,” Kate screamed with excitement.

“So, we won’t die, Harry?” Kyle asked.

“Sorry, I can’t promise you, Kyle.”

“Okay, let’s do this!” Kate said. “We’re fast learners, and we love hard work and near-death experiences. Don’t we, Kyle?”

“Sure, Kate. And if we die, we come back as cyborgs, right Harry?” Kyle asked with anticipation.

Harry laughed. “Sure thing, Kyle,” He winked at Kate.

“Okay then, but let’s take a timeout so you catch your breath and grab a drink of water since we have a lot to go over.” They all walked over to the water cooler and handed each of them a paper cup with water in it. They all sat down on a nearby bench.

“Thanks, Harry, we needed that. We are ready to get this party started,” Kate said. “Isn’t that right Kyle?”

“You bet, let’s get to it!” Kyle said.

“Okay, let’s start with the pilot’s ABCs,” Harry said. “*A* is for Attitude: always be positive. *B* is for Brave, like a superhero. *C* is for Cool. Yes, you want to look cool, but more importantly, you want to stay cool, calm, and collected in the face of danger!”

“What kind of danger?” Kyle asked.

“I’ll be honest, flying helicopters can be dangerous. However, there’s no danger in flying with the right attitude.”

“Okay,” Kate said, and fist-bumped Harry. Kyle also fist-bumped Harry.

“Follow my lead,” Harry instructed as he stood and gestured for the twins to do the same. “As I close my eyes, close yours as well and visualize. Your brain is your

HELICOPTER HARRY

strongest muscle, and the power to believe is in your mind. As you believe, so shall it be.”

“Nothing’s happening,” Kate said after a few moments. “And this is a little scary. What are we doing? Is this safe?”

“It’s okay to be a little worried; most youngsters are,” Harry said. “Just relax and take a deep breath.”

“Okay, Harry, I feel a little better,” Kate said.

“You must activate your imagination, which is more powerful than any superhero power. Believe and declare you’re superheroes, capable of anything you want to achieve in life! Each of you, take my hand and prepare to be empowered.”

Harry’s muscular hands enveloped the twins’ hands and squeezed them tightly. His energy passed from his hands to theirs. The kids’ faces lit up and they became energized.

“Now repeat after me,” he said. “We believe. We believe we are superheroes.”

The children looked at each other and chanted, “We believeeevvvvve! We believeeevvvvve!”

“I think something’s happening,” Kyle said.

“That means it’s working,” Harry said.

White T-shirts, blue jeans, and boots appeared on Kate and Kyle, followed by baseball caps and sunglasses. Finally, their tattered flight jackets appeared.

“Wow! Aren’t these the coolest jackets, Kate? This is fantastic!” Kyle exclaimed. “Are we dreaming?” He stared directly into Kate’s eyes through his new aviator glasses and turned his hat backward.

THE COPTER KIDS

“Is this for real?” Kate asked. “Wow! I feel like I drank five energy drinks. Are we superheroes?”

“Not quite, but you are on your way,” Harry said.

“Are we cyborgs?” Kate asked.

“Nope,” Harry said.

“Then can I be a superhero princess?” Kate asked with a grin.

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Is there such a thing?”

“There is now,” she said proudly.

“Okay. Princess. Your flight jackets will empower you, but without them, you’ll just be ordinary children. So don’t lose them.”

“Oh my god! Check me out, Kyle. I’m a superhero pilot!” Kate said.

“Me too! These are the coolest jackets,” Kyle said. “I totally feel like a superhero.” In a British accent, he added, “Bond, James Bond.”

Kate bent over, laughing. “Nice try, Kyle.”

Machismo called out, “Harry, Chantal, Brutus, and you too, Billy Bob, come over here for a second.”

They all gathered away from Kate and Kyle behind another helicopter, out of earshot.

“What is it with you and these brats, Harry?” Machismo said. “Kids come up to the gate all the time, and you almost always send them away...”

Harry stroked his chin. “I don’t know, there’s something different about these two. They have big imaginations and think anything is possible. They remind me of myself when I was their age.”

“But we’re all top-secret androids and can’t be discovered,” Machismo said, looking concerned.

“Oh, would you stop already?” Chantal said, shaking her head. “They’re just little brats barely out of diapers. Until we know they’re not spies, we have to treat them as such. Companies are starved for cutting-edge technology for their next chopper. Can you imagine if our smart technology got into the wrong hands? It would change the world—and not in a good way. I’ll stay high and keep an eye on the twins. Brutus, give guidance as needed but don’t eat them.”

“Only if they are spies,” Brutus said.

“Okay, deal. Billy Bob, just be the dumble dork you are, and try not to talk too much. I’ll help Harry with the training.”

As Kate and Kyle watched Harry and the gang talking, Kate nudged her brother. “Mom would freak if she saw us now.”

Kyle laughed. “Oh yeah, superhero kids.”



MACHISMO

You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

Harry said, “Tell me more about your parents. What do your parents do for a living?”

“Like we said, Harry,” Kate began, “they’re not really supportive, but we do love them as our parents.”

“Mom is an attorney,” she said, “and Dad is an engineer. They work downtown and are stuck in traffic for hours at a time. Sometimes They don’t get home till after dark and past dinner time. Dad seems stressed most of the time. I don’t think they like their jobs. I’ll hear him pull into the garage at night. And he will slam his car door and speak to himself—*Not another day of this madness*, after he kicks or throws something. He then opens the door to the kitchen and says, —“*Hi honey, I’m home.*” And he

always asks the same thing—“*How was your day?*”—to everyone in a cheery voice. It’s the same thing every day. We don’t tell him we can hear him speak to himself.” Kate said.

“Hm. Although those sound like frustrating professions, you’ll make more money doing one of those than being a pilot or a superhero.”

“Boringggg. Sitting in an office all day staring at a computer, stuck in traffic, and wanting to barf! Maybe that’s good for them,” Kyle said, “but not for us!”

“Okay, then. Simply put, the helicopter is a combination of animal and machine that vibrates around five quarts of oil—connected by a few rubber bands,” explained Harry.

“Very funny,” said Machismo who was sitting on Harry’s shoulder. “But let’s show them the chopper that was designed after me.”

“Sure, let’s see some magic!” Harry said. Machismo fluttered his wings, and then flew off Harry’s shoulder. When he landed on the tarmac, he grew until he was several times the size of the children. The flutter of his wings made a vibration that sounded like a rotor blade spinning through the air: *WHOOSH*.

“Wow! That’s so awesome, you are a magical one! You’re big enough to ride, Machismo,” Kyle said. “Can we go for a spin?”

Harry smiled. “Why not? It’ll blow your minds.”

Machismo smiled too. “Hop aboard, kids.”

Kyle and Kate climbed onto Machismo’s back, and then they took off and flew over the heliport. They flew

up to five-hundred feet and could see their neighborhood beyond the park. A loud buzz came from Machismo's wings as they fluttered through the air. The children looked down and saw Harry waving at them. He appeared small, while the mountains loomed large in the distance.

"Hang on tight!" Harry shouted up to them.

"Oh man!" Kate yelled, as the wind blew in her face. "This is so much fun."

"Yeah, this is the best. Can it get any more fun?" Kyle said, catching his hat before it blew off his head.

"Yes, it can," Machismo said, gently landing back on the tarmac. "Climb off, and watch this."

The twins climbed off Machismo's back and then backed away as he transformed into a helicopter. They stared in awe as Machismo's blue, yellow, and red insect body cracked as he steadily increased in size, revealing a bright yellow and red helicopter fuselage.

His tail rotor popped out from the end of his body. Then, his rainbow-colored wings fluttered feverishly and dissolved into a large, shiny rotor that reflected the sun's rays as it slowly spun to a stop. Machismo's head morphed into the cockpit. His eyes were on either side of the bubble windshield, and his mouth was below the windshield.

"Go on, you two. Climb inside," Harry said.

Kate and Kyle climbed inside the cockpit, their mouths hanging open.

"How in the world did Machismo do that?" Kate asked.

“That’s part of the magic of this place. Don’t even try to question it,” Harry said, “because it goes beyond the unbelievable.”

Machismo spoke up.—“You’ll refer to me as the Macho Machine from now on— the most magnificent helicopter ever!”

“Oh, stop, Machismo. You’re far from the best, Maybe you are one of the strangest androids ever,” Harry said with a laugh. He walked over to the helicopter and gave the glistening rotor a spin. “Kate, Kyle, this is the helicopter most kids learn to fly in. This big, honking shiny piece of metal is the rotor. It’s like the wing of an airplane and spins incredibly fast to generate lift, just like on your toy helicopters.”

“Let me give the lesson!” Machismo said, interrupting Harry.

“Be my guest, Machismo.” Harry stepped back. “The stage is yours.”

“How fast does your rotor spin?” Kyle asked.

“Its speed can get up to 400 miles an hour,” Machismo responded, puffing with pride.

“Wow! That’s fast!” Kate exclaimed. “Do you fly that fast?”

“No. As a helicopter, I can only fly about 150 miles an hour, and that depends on how much gas I have in the tank.” Machismo said. “But I prefer to cruise at about 100 miles an hour.”

The children laughed and stared at Machismo with enormous grins on their faces.

“Kyle, grab the cyclic stick located in front of you,” Harry said. “It’s also known as the joystick. It makes the helicopter fly forward and left and right. Move it around. Think about flying a helicopter like you’d drive a car. You have a key for the ignition, as well as a gas pedal and a steering wheel. It’s that easy.”

Kyle took a hold of the cyclic stick as Harry continued to guide him. “Yeah, Harry,” he said, “we know a lot about driving a car. We snuck out with our mom’s Camaro one night and crashed it into a telephone pole.”

Kate rolled her eyes at Kyle and put her finger over her lips.

“Yeah, Kate, you crashed it into a telephone pole and blamed me since you knew how mad Mom and Dad would be!” Kyle said.

“Oh, you d-didn’t!” Harry stuttered. “You two aren’t such little angels after all—Maybe you’re even a little wild.” He shook his head. “What have I gotten myself into? Okay, by pushing forward or side to side on the cyclic, you can steer the helicopter like you would a car.”

“Hey, don’t push so hard on the stick,” Machismo hollered. “It doesn’t take much to steer me—just a touch.”

“Sorry, Machismo,” Kyle said. “It’s just like the joystick on my video game.”

“But unlike your video game,” Machismo said, “the cyclic stick can take you places you’ve never dreamed of!”

“And this black bar is the collective,” Harry said, pointing to the black bar next to the seat. “Go ahead. Grab it, Kate. By pulling up on the collective, you make

HELICOPTER HARRY

the helicopter go up. By pushing down on it, you make the chopper go down. It's that simple. Now check out the gas pedal. It's a throttle grip, like a motorcycle has," Harry continued. "It's located at the end of the collective handle and gives gas to the chopper, just like you'd roll on the throttle with a motorcycle."

"This is very confusing Harry," Kate said.

VROOM! VROOM! Suddenly they all heard the sound of a motorcycle approaching.

"Speaking of motorcycles," Harry said, "that sounds like Carlita. Here she comes on her new, cool, torch-red sport bike."

Carlita pulled over, removed her red helmet, and shook back her long black hair. Her black leather jacket and pants, which fit her body like a glove, glistened in the sunlight as she got off her bike. "*Hello, handsome,*" she said as she waltzed over to Harry. Harry grabbed her by the hand, spun her around, kissed her on the cheek, and then spun her back.

"Hello, sweetheart. I'm teaching Kyle and Kate about helicopters. Would you like to help? We were discussing the throttle."

The twins climbed out of the cockpit to greet Carlita.

"Cool bike, Carlita," Kyle said.

"Quite the greeting, Carlita," Kate said.

"Oh, it's nothing. It's how we greet each other all the time," Carlita said.

"She shook their hands and noticed Harry's still-smoldering chopper. "I see you've been practicing your crash landings again, Harry.

“Hey,” Kyle said, “Do you work here?”

“You bet!” Carlita said, winking at Harry.

“Are you a cyborg like Harry?” Kate asked.

“Oh yeah,” Carlita said. She looked at Harry, winked, again, and asked, “Shall we dance?” Both she and Harry engaged their hand rotors and zoomed around the heliport in unison. They stopped within a foot of each other in mid-air. They were twenty feet above the twins. They each turned one hand rotor off, embraced and took a few dance steps and then landed.

“Wow. You guys are so romantic!” Kate said.

“That was unreal!” Kyle said. “So how did you die and become a cyborg?”

“Harry and I were racing. I was driving my motorcycle and Harry was driving his new electric cybertruck down the freeway at 150 miles per hour on a beautiful, sunny crisp morning. I was pulling ahead of Harry and he was letting me win. I was pretty far ahead when out of nowhere a giant truck broadsided me, causing me to crash. I hit the pavement hard, and then the other driver turned around and ran over me. It was either Will or one of his gang—Will had recently been booted off the team for being a bully. He started out like you at ten years old. He was a good kid. But then his brother died and everything changed. He said he didn’t like being treated as a toddler and ended up being kicked out of school and wouldn’t listen to adults. And then he became a bully and terrorized younger kids. He was eventually run over by a group of kids that he bullied. We thought that was the

end of it until he was rebuilt into a cyborg. Something went terribly wrong after the operation to rebuild him. He got the wrong chip or motherboard since Harry couldn't chase him like the others because he has superpowers that Harry can't match. I died shortly after Will ran me over and he needed to take me to his top-secret technicians. In two hours I was back in the saddle of my motorcycle with titanium under my skin. I was equipped with lasers, hand rotors and rocket launchers and I could fight like a ninja warrior. I could also ride my motorcycle and not worry about dying."

"Maybe he thinks you or Harry ran him over, and this is payback," Kyle said.

"Wow, that's a hard one to understand," Kate exclaimed.

"Hold on, you didn't tell me you have rocket launchers!" Harry said.

"Yes, I came with upgraded technology," Carlita answered.

"I see," Harry said. "I should be ready for an upgrade then."

"So far it's only for new cyborgs," Carlita said.

"Oh jeez," sighed Harry.

"That sounds like the kids that bullied us in the park," Kate said. "They had the symbol AS on their shirts. They were intent on hurting us until Harry swooped in with his chopper."

"Can we go for a ride on your motorcycle?" Kyle asked.

"Let's ask Harry," Carlita said.

“Sure, go ahead and scare them! Just kidding,” Harry joked.

“Kyle, climb onto the motorcycle and give the throttle a twist.”

Kyle watched excitedly as Carlita started the motorcycle. It crackled to a roar and sounded fast. He climbed onto the sport bike and straddled the seat in front of Carlita. *VROOM! VROOM!* As he twisted the throttle handle, he felt the vibration of the motor throughout his body. Harry handed him a helmet.

“Easy there,” Carlita said. “Just a twist. It doesn’t take much to make this baby fly.”

“Incredible!” Kyle said. They spun around the heliport following the white line that guided the choppers in and out of hangars. They were back in a matter of seconds.

“My turn!” yelled Kate. She was as eager as Kyle, as neither of them had ever been on a motorcycle before. She climbed on, stretched herself out over the gas tank, and then twisted the throttle. Kyle handed her the helmet, and Kate put it on. *VROOM! VROOM!*

“Can we go for a ride?” she asked Carlita.

“Sure.” Carlita climbed on behind Kate, grabbed the handlebars, and said, “Let’s take a quick spin around the heliport.”

Carlita quickly released the clutch lever. The front tire lifted off the ground, and the bike did a wheelie as they took off. Kate screamed with excitement as they raced around the heliport, zigzagging between helicopters.

HELICOPTER HARRY

Carlita had Kate twist the throttle, and she pulled a wheelie as well.

“Wow!” Kate screamed with joy.

They pulled over to Harry and Kyle, and Kate got off the bike.

“Thanks, Carlita,” Kate said. “That was awesome.”

“Jump back into the chopper, kids,” Carlita said. They hopped in and sank into the seats.

“What do your parents think of you riding motorcycles and flying helicopters, not to mention being a cyborg?” Kate asked Carlita.

“They’re not happy about it, to say the least. They say flying a helicopter is a man’s job, and riding motorcycles is too dangerous! And they’re right—I died riding my motorcycle. And they wanted me to be an attorney.” She stuck a finger in her mouth like she was going to gag. “I went to law school but dropped out and used my tuition money for flight school. I think it was the right decision for me but only you will know if the decision you made today is right for you.”

“Wow, Carlita. I like you,” Kate said. “Mom and Dad want me to be an attorney too, and they want Kyle to be an engineer. So boring.” They all stuck their fingers in their mouths—even Harry—and pretended to gag.

“Yup, you never hear parents say, ‘You should be a pilot.’ It’s always a *standard issue* for boys and girls. And I can tell you’re smart. Just listen and do as Harry instructs, and you’ll be fine,” Carlita said.

“You’re a pretty wild girl, Carlita,” said Kate.

“Well—an old boyfriend told me something that’s always stuck with me: ‘Live life on the edge or die on the porch.’ Most people live boring lives and then grow old and die on the porch. So take that, for what it’s worth.”

“Yeah! I’m going to live life on the edge! That reminds me of what my science teacher told me when we were talking about dreams,” Kate said. “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing!”

Carlita smiled. “That’s the key to life, and you’re on a daring adventure. You go, girl.”

“Hey, what are these funny-looking pedals on both sides of the floor?” Kyle asked. “Can we pedal the helicopter?” he joked.

“Yeah right!” Machismo replied. “The pedals also help steer the helicopter. By pushing on them, you keep the helicopter flying in a straight line.”

“Have you ever pushed the pedals on a piano?” Harry asked the twins.

“Yes, we have one at home. We love playing with it,” Kate said.

“By pushing the pedals on the piano, you keep the air pressure continuous and balanced, just like in a helicopter. So think of flying a helicopter like playing a musical instrument. Everything must act in concert, like in the symphonies Mozart and Beethoven wrote.”

“Piece of cake, right Kyle?” Kate said.

“Sure sure, sis,” Kyle said.

“Come on. Let’s roll through the instrument panel real quick,” Harry continued, leaning in and pointing to the

gauges. “This gauge tells you how fast you’re flying: slow, fast, or really, really fast. And this gauge will smile or frown depending on how the chopper feels. The chopper likes to fly when it’s cool outside. When it’s hot and humid, he struggles to fly.”

“Keep it cool,” Machismo said. “When it’s hot and sticky, I have a hard time breathing.”

Carlita took over. “These are your headsets.” She handed the twins red headphones that were plugged into the dash, and they put them on. “The headsets allow you to chat with and listen to other pilots as well as the people working at airport control towers.”

“Can you hear me, kids?” Machismo asked.

“Yeah,” Kate said. “We hear you loud and clear, Machismo.”

Machismo said. “We want to know where other choppers and airplanes are when they’re flying so we won’t collide.”

Kate said, “I hear chatter. Chopper tango is requesting permission to land.”

“Wait a minute, Kate,” Harry said. It’s a trap and the crazy Will wants to land. Tell him no, he’s not clear to land and to find another heliport.”

“Okay, Harry. Sorry, the heliport is not clear today. You must find another place,” Kate said.

“Are you sure about that, kid?” Will asked.

“Yes, I am. Now go away!” Kate said sternly.

“What’s the problem, with him?” Kyle asked.

“He’s that rebellious teenager.—Will, who despises authority and is hell-bent on hurting people like you and

me. And until I find a way to eliminate him, I don't want to deal with him," Harry said. "But he will be back."

"Eliminate, really?" Kyle said.

"Yes, he's a very bad kid."

"Okay, these headsets are awesome," Kate said.

"Don't let me forget the most important gauge," Carlita said. "Your *gas* gauge! The chopper is thirsty when it comes to gasoline. Always, always, always make sure the tank is full before takeoff!" She tapped the gas gauge with her index finger.

"Yeah, guys," Machismo said. "There's no reason to autorotate to prevent a crash if you don't have to."

"If the helicopter runs out of gas, are we toast?" Kyle asked Carlita, remembering Harry's crash landing.

"Not quite," she replied. "The helicopter comes equipped with an emergency horn. It makes a loud sound in the cock-pit to alert you that the helicopter needs immediate attention or you could crash and die. It's a cockpit warning noise. It repeats itself until the appropriate action has been taken," Carlita said.

"Wow, how funny," Kate said.

"Even more importantly, you need to keep the engine running just right. If the engine slows down, it might stall and cause you to crash. The horn will remind you when the engine needs throttle. And if you get too low on gas, it will alert you to get ready to autorotate. Although this chopper is an android, it's not perfect. The chopper was designed to land without the motor running, but you must still know the basics!"

“Flying a chopper doesn’t sound so easy anymore,” Kyle said, looking pale.

Carlita shrugged. “A flight instructor once told me, ‘There’s nothing to fear but fear itself.’ Flying helicopters has its challenges, just like almost anything in life worth doing. Just remember to stay cool, calm, and collected in the face of danger. And besides, you can easily learn autorotation like everyone else. When the engine stops, the rotor will spin through the air—you hope—allowing the chopper to come in for a landing.”

“Really? Boy, I feel better now,” Kyle said.

“Machismo pitched in. “I have an idea. Let’s practice autorotation.”

“Okay, sounds like fun,” Kate said with a grin. Kyle punched the air. “Way cool! We’re going flying!”

“First take a look at the wind pants flying on the pole over the heliport roof,” Machismo said.

“You’ll want to take off with the wind in your face. Now turn the key.”

“Watch your gauges as we warm up, and plant your feet firmly on the pedals,” Machismo instructed. “Right hand on the cyclic, left hand on the collective. Kate, gently pull up on the collective and get this chopper off the ground.”

“Oh,” Kate said. “We’re lifting off. Wow, what a weird feeling!”

“Now gently push each of the pedals with the same pressure and keep us straight.”

Kate stretched her legs as far as she could in order to push the pedals and not slide off the seat.

“Does it feel like your stomach is in your mouth?” Machismo asked. “That feeling will pass.”

“Yes, I have that exact feeling,” Kate said, looking queasy.

Kate and Kyle were airborne at one-thousand feet above the heliport when Machismo made an announcement. “I’m going to pretend to run out of gas, turn off the engine, and let you do an autorotation. Hold onto the stick, Kate, and gently lower the collective and roll off the throttle. That’ll result in a safe landing. Watch your gauges, and keep the nose up. More right pedal! We’re coming in too fast! We’re going to crash!”

“Can you give me a little help here, Machismo?” Kate shouted, as the ground approached ever too quickly. Kyle flashed her a terrified look.

“Come on. Man up, kid,” Billy Bob teased. He was sitting on Kate’s right shoulder. “Be strong. Be brave like me. You can do it.”

“Hey, where did you come from? Anyway, I’m just a kid. Give me a break!” Suddenly, Kate grabbed a barf bag and threw up.

“Jeez, kid. You gonna be alright?” Machismo asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Kate said, wiping her mouth.

“Get lost, Billy Bob,” Machismo said. “When was a bumblebee ever strong or brave?”

As everyone laughed, Machismo told Kate, “I turned the engine back on because we had some room for error.

I have the controls now, so you can let go of the cyclic stick. Good thing we were just practicing, or this could have gotten really ugly.” He flew back up to one thousand feet above the heliport to demonstrate the autorotation again. Kate sat frozen and pale, with little beads of sweat on her brow. “Okay, Kyle,” he continued, “you want to try it this time?”

“Maybe next time,” Kyle said.

“Don’t be a chicken, Kyle,” Kate teased. “Here’s a barf bag just for you.”

“That’s okay,” he said, patting her shoulder.

The view from a thousand feet felt like they could see for a thousand miles in each direction on a clear day. The hills were as green as could be and the mountains radiated in the distance.

“Watch as I ease back on the cyclic to bring the nose of the chopper up and ease the collective down,” Machismo said. The cyclic stick self-adjusted to its neutral position as they gently glided in and landed. “See how easy that was?”

“It’s not that easy, Kyle,” Kate said, wiping the sweat off her brow. “Trust me.”

Kyle nodded. “I know, sis. I saw you barf, and I can still smell it.”

Kate pulled the elastic band on Kyle’s underpants and snapped him with it.

“Ow! That stings!” he yelped.

MACHISMO

“I have an emergency I gotta take care of, kids. I’ll see you down the road, I’m sure,” Carlita said, and peeled away, creating a cloud of dust.