

UNBONDING

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The Chovek house has Peterbilt and Kenworth truck models and symbols on shelves, vying for space with family photos, curling pictures, blown-glass knick-knacks, along with small ceramic airplanes.

One picture shows a beaming Mr. Chovek holding a quiet infant, Damian, with his wife Sonja smiling next to them, all standing in front of a red biplane. Their older son, Mark, is peering up from the cockpit. The higher wing's shadow is over Sonja and half over Damian, splitting the picture into two distinct shades of contrast.

Sitting at the far end of a long kitchen table, Joe Chovek's face - older and sadder than his picture - is wrinkled in concentration. He is in his forties, dressed in well-used casuals with streaks of grease and translucent finger blots of dried glue.

At the other end of the table, Sonja is forty-three-going-on-sixty. She has on a full apron that is splattered with multi-colored food stains. Her graying hair is unraveling wildly from a tie-back. Her face is splattered with oatmeal and streaked with reddened wrinkles.

Damian, their young autistic son, is wearing a dirty bib. He flails blindly at every move that his mother makes.

Chovek is reading a thin, green-bound report that is titled, *Annual Report, Chovek Truck Centre*.

He roughly marks a section with a big circle.

"*Missed* this, Murty! Used sales cost of goods sold is applied to *Service!*"

He shakes his head angrily.

A splat of oatmeal hits the report. A wild *groan* emanates from Damian, who is fighting off his mother's spoon.

Chovek stares with disgust at the splat. "Ah for chrissake!" He wipes off the oatmeal, awkwardly holding up his finger with the glob on it. He avoids looking at his wife.

Sonja is getting flailed by Damian. She persists in feeding him small spoons-full of oatmeal, grimly smiling while protecting her face from Damian's swinging arms.

The mess is overflowing into the living room. Her quiet tears mix with the oatmeal.

Damian emits a wild, "NOOOO!"

Still holding the one finger up, Chovek uses his free hand to toss the report roughly at a couch in the livingroom.

"I'm going out to the garage, Sonja!"

Sonja, distracted, mumbles, "What?"

"I'M GOING OUT TO THE GARAGE!"

She spares a glance from the battlefield at her departing husband, then turns her attention back to feeding Damian.

As the door closes behind Chovek, the garage becomes a dark zone of silence.

Chovek stands in the dark for a minute with his head down. He tries to think of better times, before they had... children.

He remembers when they were both younger, living in their first apartment. The memory clarifies. In their old dining room, Chovek is seated sideways playing a

classical piece on a guitar, in shorts and tousled hair, leaning his scrubby chin over the guitar with a blank expression, expertly picking through the complicated notes.

A younger and prettier Sonja, dressed in a silk gown, is bringing him a plate of perfectly sequestered eggs.

He stares at the cooling eggs as she places it with both hands precisely in front of him.

He leans the guitar against another chair.

"Sonja, honey..."

"Yes, dear?"

"I'm very fragile this morning. I was wondering if..." He shakes his head.
"Oh never mind."

Still blank faced, he gets up with the plate and takes it into the kitchen.

BEEPS from a microwave can be heard.

Sonja sits stiffly, one fist flexing and unflexing.

Coldly, "Honey? What are you doing? Don't you like the eggs?"

A radio news broadcaster can just be heard from the living room.

Sonja gets up sharply and goes into the living room.

The broadcaster can be heard saying, "...surprise lift off from the Peruvian plateau that has stunned world leaders. Reporting from Lima is Darrel McAlister..."

Chovek's head pops around the kitchen doorway.

An "off" click can be heard from the living room.

"Sonja. Can you turn that up, please?"

She comes back into the dining room and again sits stiffly at her place.

"Never mind the radio, Joe. I want to hear what you don't like about the way I make eggs."

Chovek jumps for the living room radio. He angrily punches it back on, then slowly backs into a chair, listening to McAlister.

"...apparently purchased from the Russians, which the group shipped to a port west of Lima, on a remote part of coastal Peru. In the meantime, over twelve hundred members of the group were secretly building their spaceport..."

The microwave dings.

"Joe. Whatever you were burning in the microwave is ready."

Frustrated, "*Shushsh! I'm listening!*"

"Well, there's no need to get hostile... And I'm still waiting for an explanation."

McAlister carries on, "...will report more fully on this remarkable situation when we reach the spaceport. This is Darrel McAlister reporting from Lima, Peru."

Chovek stiffens. "*Shit! It's over!*"

He leans across to slam a finger into the radio's power button.

Staring angrily at the carpet at his feet, Chovek seethes.

"Sonja, for chrissake! Couldn't you see I was trying to hear something that was important?"

She gets up, hands on hips. "And what am *I*? *Not* important?"

Sonja straightens to her full height of almost five feet. "I was trying to find out why you took the eggs I prepared for you and threw them into the microwave!"

Still seated with his head down, Chovek is unrepentant, but tries to be reasonable. "You *are* important, Sonja. But what they were saying on the radio was..." He looks at her. "well - we could've had this conversation *after* the news and then I could've heard it."

Keeping her advantage, Sonja presses on. "Honestly! I don't know what's got into you, recently!" She faces him with arms crossed as he walks back into the kitchen. "Joe. Are you seeing someone else?"

Chovek straightens up in surprise, towering over her.

"*Huh?* What're you talking about?"

His anger rising, he shakes his head.

"I get cold eggs, so I go and heat them up and then I want to hear *news* that'll probably change civilization on Earth, but you want to make up some cockamamie story about me *seeing* someone else?!

"Well maybe I bloody well *should*, if *that's* the way you're going to be!"

Shocked at what just happened, Sonja stands stock still for an instant, then slowly covers her mouth with her hands. She rushes out, then slams the door to the bedroom behind her.

Crying can be heard from inside.

Chovek looks at the bedroom door.

Quietly, "Go to hell. I'm not falling for that shit."

Chovek's flashback ends, leaving him with a solid shiver.

With a sigh, he flicks on the garage lights. His eyes look haunted. Tears follow the lines in his cheeks, blurring his view. He wipes his eyes, twice.

In the bright light before him, a twenty-foot-long plywood table holds wooden jigs, around which an ivory-colored wooden airplane fuselage is forming.

Next to it, a similar long table holds the right-side wing of a nascent airplane. Bright fresh wood almost shimmers in anticipation of flight.

Another wild groan from his son in the kitchen shakes Chovek again.

Remembering the oatmeal on his finger, he wipes it with a rag that he gets from his workbench. Half dried, it takes several rubs to get the sticky mess off. Then he finds some oatmeal on his eyebrow, which takes vigorous rubbing to get off.

Finally feeling clean, Chovek replaces the rag on a nail over the bench and sits on an old bar-stool. Without looking, his hand reaches to a panel of switches to one side of the bench, where it gives a flick of a remote switch to get the radio on. Beethoven's *À Thérèse* begins to play softly.

Turning on the stool, Chovek goes to the almost finished wing. He fondly caresses the new wood, inspecting the wing's interior.

Mumbling, "Inside needs a final sanding. Do that on the driveway. Nice day."

He goes to the big door, unlocks it at three places - dusting off a cobweb as he lifts a slide-lock - and opens the garage to happy sunlight.

Next door, his neighbor is trimming their mutual hedge. They wave at each other.

Chovek steps back inside to release the chocks at each of the wing-table's casters, then carefully maneuvers the table outside to the driveway.

Chovek wheels the table a few feet past the garage door where he locks the front casters.

The neighbour, Allen, comes over, shears in hand.

"Hey, Joe! What'cha got there?"

With a leery glance at the shears, "Morning, Allen. It's one of my wings. For that airplane I told you about."

A muffled wild yell comes from the house. They both hear it then resume their conversation.

"It doesn't look like it's gonna be done any time soon, there Joe."

He runs his fingers not-so-gently over the leading edge. Chovek stiffens as the shears get close to his prized wood.

"Oh sure. I could get it done this year, if, if..."

Allen holds his head down, peeking through an eyebrow.

"Listen. Joe?"

Chovek is occupied in locking the rear casters of the table.

"Yes?"

Allen eases into a request. "You know how you said, ah, a while ago, Joe, that, like..."

Chovek cringes as Allen absently waves his garden shears very close to the wing's perfectly sanded leading edge. He uses deliberate calm to avoid any sudden movement, placing his hand with a smooth motion to be between the shears and his prized wing.

"Ah, Allen, watch the wing, there."

Allen starts, "Huh? Oh! Yeah, shit, sorry Joe!"

He steps back a bit. Then moves forward again.

"Listen, I was wondering if I could borrow a few tools next weekend. Vera wants me to, ah, do a few things in the kitchen."

He tries to judge how that was received. Chovek is looking blankly at the lovely, rounded wing leading edge.

"You're the only guy around here who's got, like, a full wood shop and I was wondering, if you won't be doing anything in particular next weekend you could, like, bring over a few tools and help me take down those old cupboards."

He gauges Chovek again.

"And put up, help me put up some new ones."

Chovek catches on. "Just bring a few tools over and re-do your whole friggen kitchen next weekend? Is that all? Maybe we should do the floor too?"

A wry smile from Allen.

"Ah, well, might have to leave the floor for another week. What do you say, ol' buddy? I'd really appreciate it and it'd be a good diversion for you."

Allen gives a short nod back to Chovek's house.

Chovek shakes his head.

"What the hell. Sure. Got nothing better booked."

Allen grins and pats Chovek's shoulder.

Chovek nods at his wing.

"She's gonna be a real dilly, Allen. Can't wait to fly her. Why..."

Allen cuts in, "Listen, Joe. You sure this thing is gonna be strong enough to hold a guy in heavy winds?"

"Strong enough?! This design's been around for years, Allen. No problems at all. It'll carry two people and some baggage. She's stressed for 8 Gs positive and 4 negative. I used only the best wood. It takes Sitka spruce for the spars and the ribs, and then it gets covered with high quality aircraft-grade one-eighth Birch plywood. I'll probably cover it next week." Grins wryly, "Or the week after."

Chovek proudly runs his hand over the finished, perfectly smooth, D-section leading edge. The interior of the wing, showing the spars and ribs, shines with the ivory white of expensive wood.

"The guy that designed it used to work for a French aircraft company. He was an aeronautical engineer and he came over to help out at the... well. I'm not supposed to say - or *know* - but he was working in the Loughheed Skunkworks."

Allen is unimpressed.

Chovek presses on, "You know!? They designed the spyplanes - the U2 and the Blackbird?"

Hesitantly, "Oh! The *Skunkworks*..."

Smiling, Chovek goes on, "Right! He knows what he's doing! This wing is extremely strong, because of the special materials used and the design. It has to take all kinds of loads, in tension and compression, plus torsion, 'cause the wing going through the air wants to twist up and away."

He holds out his hand, palm down, then slowly twists his palm and moves it up and back.

"Especially at the speed it's gonna go at. When you bomb along the highway at fifty miles-an-hour, I'm just taking *off* at that speed, and then I keep going to over a hundred! Downhill, or with a bigger engine, it can do almost *two* hundred!"

Now impressed, Allen is looking for a chink.

"Must be expensive. Even to build one yourself."

Chovek smiles broadly, "Well, it *can* be. Some of those fibreglass machines are well over a hundred thou'. But if you know what you're doing, get some good deals on stuff, well, I figure this one's only gonna cost about twenty-five thousand. Including the engine.

"I got a bunch of good deals at Oshkosh. That's an annual get-together that we have in Wisconsin. About a million people show up, and over twenty thousand airplanes of all kinds. They have what they call a *Fly Market*, where lots of people bring their stuff to sell."

He hitches a thumb back at the garage.

"Last year I picked up some instruments and the special glue that's used for this wood. You have to coat one side with one part of the glue and then the other side with the other glue part -- sort of a..." he leers and winks at Allen, "male-female thing. When you put 'em together and clamp 'em tight overnight, she sets up solid. I got a real deal on *this* bunch of glue cause it was older than they want to use for the factory jobs."

Allen touches the wing's leading edge again. "It was old glue?"

Chovek looks up at the clouds as he answers, "Well, yeah, but they have very tight regs for factory machines. We don't have to worry about the same set of regs for homebuilts."

Still not convinced, Allen turns away from the wing. "Yeah. Ok. But you're not gonna catch *me* off the ground in one of these things!"

"Oh come on, Allen! These machines are so well designed that," Chovek prepares to demonstrate by raising a stiff palm above the main spar.

"They're as solid as a rock!"

As he slams down on the spar, it falls apart into its constituent pieces, rattling off the table and onto the driveway.

The pieces keep dribbling down.

Chovek's hand stays extended over the former wing for a minute.

His face turns as white as the ivory wood.

Allen walks away shaking his head, muttering. He snaps his shears twice.

"There's angels and there's idiots. I'm not sure about *you*, Joe..."