



## Extract from A Rat's Tail

### Book One of the Circular Scrolls

#### Flying

“No” said Sam. But that wasn’t quite true. Her head didn’t understand, but something did. She was about to ask a question but Kevin said,

“Let’s listen. That’s why we’re here.” So she did.

“Well now: this is how it all began. This fox approached me a few days ago. Yes, *your* Fox. He said he needed an “inside” person. Asked if I’d ever been inside yonder fortress” He waved an arm without turning his head “As it happens sez I, I have. And a grim place it is too, for my knowing. Ah, sez he - as I thought - but different people see different things. There is a young person, he says, who must penetrate that fortress. She must know its secrets and go beyond. Ah, sez I, I’ve never been *beyond*. No matter, says he, once in she will find her way. So we makes a deal. Now I can see what you’re thinking. What does a fox have that the likes of me would want? Well, he has a beautiful coat that would keep me warm in the winters nights, and a tail...Ha Ha!”, as Tig growled, “Just my little joke. No, he can show me the way back. I don’t come from around here see. No, I come from a place where it’s always warm and the skies are blue and food is plentiful and your Mr Fox, well he can get me back there. If - I get you to where you want to go first. So I thought about it for a bit - but that was only for show really. He know’d I was going to say yes.”

“What can you do for us” asked Sam again “And how will Fox know you’ve done it and where we are?”

“So many questions!” laughed the little man. “Let’s just begin shall we. I expect you’ve been set a lot of tasks. What have you still got to do?”

“We have to cross three, no two now, rivers and go through two more storms and, oh yes, climb three mountains.” It was exhausting even to talk about it.

“Not got very far then.”

Sam sucked in her breath but Kevin bit her finger and she swallowed her indignation.

“Never mind Come and sit here,” and Mini-man jumped down from his rock and sat cross legged on the ground patting the space either side of him. Sam and Tig sat where he indicated; Kevin sat on Sam’s knee.

“Now all join hands- or paws, whichever you happen to have”. He was enjoying this!

“What are we going to do?” said Sam, as Tig tried to sit in a begging position and hold Kevin’s paw at the same time.

You come over here”. Kevin swapped places.

“That’s better. Right. We are going to fly my dear, fly! Close your eyes. No peeping.”

This last comment was particularly addressed to Tig, accompanied by a reprimanding look. So they all sat hand in paw and the little creature began to hum a soft melody. It sounded vaguely familiar but as Sam tried to remember where she had heard it before she found her mind just drifting away. After a little while she started to feel light and fluffy and found herself gripping Kevin and Tig more tightly as if to prevent herself floating up in the air. But Kevin readjusted his paw in her hand and she relaxed again. And suddenly she was flying. No, not flying exactly, more like floating fast - as if she had been picked up like a leaf by the wind. Except now she was high above the trees, for she could look down and see their tops just below her, greens and golds glinting in a fluorescent light; the sensation was not a foreign one. And once something was accepted into your realm of experience, thought Sam, you recognised it the next time and you weren’t afraid of it Excitement, anticipation, maybe, but not fear.

And the flying experience itself held no fear. Sam had flown on holiday - in an aeroplane, and had thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of the experience. An aeroplane? She was the aeroplane! Looking to her left and right she saw the others, all seemingly floating too, their shapes recognisable but almost transparent. She looked down again and saw they were passing over a huge vibrant river studded with rapids and waterfalls. No sooner had she noticed it than it was behind them. She wanted to look back but found she could not turn her head. She could only look to the front. Then the air current seemed to become stronger and colder and lifted them all up even higher. The cold caught her breath and made her eyes water and she closed them for a few moments. On opening she could see they were now travelling over a vast range of mountains split by huge glaciers, with blue white peaks and rainbow crystal slopes. It was beautiful and frightening all at once and it made her gasp.

Without warning, from nowhere came a low moaning howl and blackness descended upon them. The kindly supportive air stream became a swirling tempest. They were flung from side to side; they were hurled against one another like particles of sand. Sam gritted her teeth and prayed silently in her head and just as she thought her body would be rent apart limb from limb, the twisting force was gone and the sky was light once more and filled with bird song and the forest was below them again. *Was it possible that if you accepted what was happening and went with it, rather than fighting against it, then it didn’t last so long? Was it possible to make things worse by focusing on to them in your head?*

They were moving fast now, and the air stream was flattening her ears to her head, and her hair and clothes were streaming out behind her. They seemed to have climbed higher still, and so glancing down, at the water below, she saw it was a mere trickle, a silver thread woven into a carpet of green, like embroidery on a velvet cushion. They flew through white stuff, which she recognised as cloud, and she realised that height and speed had reduced the final watery challenge to a hop, skip and jump. On and on they flew, alternately cold and damp from the moisty clouds, and warm from the golden light above. And then, with no warning, up ahead, out of the mist, loomed a

shear wall of rock. With no time to alter course (even if she could have) Sam put out her hands before her in an instinctive, but totally inappropriate attempt to save herself, and shut her eyes tight, bracing herself for the impact. *This is what comes of thinking about roller-skating!* But there was no impact and daring to peek, she found herself gliding apparently without harm or impediment through a jagged slash in the sheer rock face, her body angled slightly, like a hawk in flight. Glances to left and right showed her the others, just behind, doing the same. Her heart was pounding, yet some intuition told her the passage would be easier if she relaxed. Forcing herself to breathe out slowly and in again equally slowly, the crevice walls seemed to part a little further. She repeated the exercise and was gratified to find that the gap became wide enough to allow all to travel abreast. Except mini - man... Of the newest recruit to the band of travellers there was no sign.

But there was no time to wonder. Up ahead there was another sheer wall but this time Sam kept her eyes open (though her teeth were tightly clenched). A hair's breadth from the rock face their direction changed abruptly and they were all shooting upwards, sucked through a vortex of light. Faster and faster they travelled, the space around them vibrant with colour, like being sucked up through an enormous kaleidoscope. Sam began to spin like a top but with no sensation of dizziness. Then suddenly it was over, and they were all out in to clear, light space and all around them were the ice capped peaks of an enormous mountain range. Very gently Sam's feet touched firm ground and she found herself standing alongside the others, on what appeared to be a wide flat ledge.

*But it wasn't a ledge, it was a round flat place, like the top of a tower ..... a memory - or was it just her 'other' self intruding again?*

*She was at the top of a spiral flight of stone stairs. The next step would take her on to a little round place - the summit of a circular tower. And she was afraid.*

*She stepped out, looking at her feet. She had never experienced a feeling like this before. With her stomach tightening to a knot she raised her eyes. There was a parapet before her and beyond that ..... sky... Nothing but sky. The terror hit her like a hammer, flattened her against the wall of the tower, unable to move. Each time she tried to raise her head, waves of nausea washed over her, forcing her eyes shut. There she stayed, held rigid by the panic and sickness while others climbed past and went and peered over the parapet edge and chirruped their delight at the view.*

*How old was she? Why was she so afraid? Why now and not ever before that she could remember?*

But what felt like hours was only seconds and it was fading and as she merged with Jennie once more and saw outwards with Jennie's eyes again, and slipped from alternative consciousness to this, so the fear, too, evaporated, and the tower became a flat ledge once more.

And she was no longer afraid, To prove it she looked down, and below, stretched out before them, lay a verdant plain of many colours, greens and golds and a wonderful azure blue. And in the distance was the citadel.... The extraordinary light gave it clarity. Its enormous entrance was flanked by turrets

and from one flew a small flag. Screwing up her eyes Sam focused hard on the other. She could just make out the shape of an owl.

*Extract from A Rat's Tail, Book One of the Circular Scrolls, by Bridget Trafford.*

*ISBN 142510657-9*