

An extract from 'The Race' for you to read

Copyright Ian Berry Manchester 2013

A particularly strong gust of wind chose that moment to try to blow us over. Didn't succeed of course. We stayed put.

"Getting a bit wild," I said. "I think perhaps we should change to Kyra and Katya and get some height, have a look around."

"Good idea. Could be some storm damage."

Quickly changing to be the SuperTwins in our little costumes. we lifted into the air. At several thousand feet we were well into the cloud base, that didn't matter, we could see through the clouds as if they weren't there. If anything, the wind was stronger up here. Aeroplanes would have been blown all over the place but not us. We hovered in place, rotating gently to look around.

"Saskia! Look up," called Saskia.

Looking up as directed, I could see what she was worried about. The clouds were spiralling around in a tight circle, like a miniature hurricane.

"The eye is centred on the South Industrial Area, where the newspaper offices and stuff are."

That was the opposite end of the town from the Robinson plant but we'd been there often enough, to the newspaper building at least.

"The spiral's getting lower," called Saskia. "What can we do? Anything?"

"Even we can't stop that sort of natural effect. All we can do is stand by and see what happens. It'll be ok until the spiral touches the ground. Then we get ourselves a twister."

"Should we warn people?"

"It's Sunday. There won't be many people around. We could ring the police station and warn them I suppose. They'll not have seen this yet."

Saskia made the MI5 phone appear - she just changed to be holding it. It's just about the most untraceable phone number in the world. Nobody could figure out where we were calling from. She spoke to Harold, the desk sergeant.

"Harold? It's Katya. Yes, that Katya. You may have a problem in the South Industrial Area. We think a whirlwind will touch down there or thereabouts. We're in the air above the factories, watching the wind spiralling round. If it touches down, there might be some damage."

The noise of the wind was too great for me to listen in to the other end of the telephone. If I turned up the super hearing to listen to the phone, the wind deafened me - not literally of course.

"He asked if we could stop it."

"Were you sarcastic?"

"Heavens, no. This is too serious for that. I just said we were sorry."

Our wind spiral was now a vertical funnel in the air, still just clouds at the moment but really dark and sinister. The bottom of it was still sinking towards the ground.

"We can't stop it," I said, "but maybe we can guide it."

"Guide it? How? And where to?"

"Always questions," I sighed.

"I have an enquiring mind. Now, answers please."

"Right. Basically we blow it, use our super breath. Might work. It looks like it'll touchdown in that factory car park. Twisters move from east to west, to do with rotating - later if you want to ask. The wind is south west. It should move more or

less north-ish. That'll take it to the river. There we'll get a waterspout, pretty, but more importantly it'll take energy from the twister, damp it if you like."

Saskia laughed, "Damp it. I like that. Mind you, soak it through is what you should have said."

"Whatever. We need to try and make sure it goes down Fourth Avenue and hits the river."

"Should we check there's nothing loose on the Avenue? Cars and stuff?"

"Good idea. We've got perhaps three or four minutes."

At super speed Saskia and I zipped about on what we hoped would be the track of the whirlwind. We picked up several cars and moved them to less exposed positions. We did the same for the one or two cars in the car park where the twister would touch down.

"I saw one or two people looking out of windows, probably wondering why the hell we were nicking their cars."

"They'll find out soon enough."

We stood on the car park waiting for the spiralling wind to touch the ground. Saskia stood with her hands on her hips, the wind blowing her hair and cape so they streamed out behind her. She looked wonderful. I had no doubt I looked the same. It was a good job we didn't mind showing our underwear to the world - we were - the wind was seeing to that, our little skirts were everywhere except where they should be. Then - touchdown!

Instantly the funnel of wind grew darker as it picked up dust and dirt from the ground. The noise increased as well until Saskia and I were shouting at each other.

"Deep breath and blow," I screamed at her.

We did this. It worked - sort of. Super breath certainly moved the base of the twister - but not quite in the direction we expected.

"Move round to the right a bit. The Coriolis force is pushing against us."

"The what?" screamed Saskia.

"Talk later - *blow* now."

By moving around we finally managed to get the thing going where we wanted it. However, there was a further problem.

"Saskia!" screamed Saskia. "There's a man in that gatehouse. Bloody thing's only a shed. The wind's going right over it!"

Even as she spoke, the shed was torn off its foundations. In a second it was in the air. Without a floor, left behind on the concrete base, the poor man was in danger of falling out. I took off immediately.

The quickest way was directly through the twister. Without hesitation, I dived at the spinning wall in front of me. If I'd not been a super girl, I doubt I'd have survived. As it was, it didn't bother me at all. It was dark in the funnel, I had to use super vision. Going directly across meant I had to cross the eye in the middle, I had a momentary glimpse of clear air upwards, all the way to the stratosphere, then I was through and out the other side.

I collected the shed with the poor man hanging on for grim death inside it and carried it out of the worst of the wind. I set it down at the side of a road, checked the man wasn't badly hurt, then took off to fly back to help Saskia who'd been trying to guide the beast all alone.

"Is he ok?" she shouted.

"Yep, he's fine."

It seemed the twister had got the idea of what we wanted it to do. It moved down the Avenue a little faster. A few more minutes of blowing and it approached the river. For

a moment it seemed to hesitate then it moved out over the surface of the water. Now instead of dust and dirt, it was sucking up water, much heavier and much more plentiful. As we watched, our column of spinning air became a column of spinning water - a waterspout.

"It's stopped moving," yelled Saskia over the noise of the wind and water. It sounded like several express trains all passing at once.

"Good. The effort of lifting the water should drain it's energy. It ought to dissipate."

The waterspout grew higher and higher. I estimated it at several hundred feet.

Suddenly the twister just fell apart. The funnel touching the water rose back into the air much more quickly than it'd come down. All that was left was a vertical column of water. Gravity reasserted itself and umpteen tonnes of water fell back to the ground - right on top of Saskia and me!

We weren't particularly affected - apart from getting a bit wet - well, a lot wet actually - but we could deal with that. Once all the water was back where it belonged, on the ground, I copied Saskia as she changed to be dry. She hates wet ratty hair, and so do I.

By now the emergency services were beginning to appear. Several police cars, fire engines and the odd ambulance. The latter we pointed at the poor man still cowering in his security shed where I'd dumped it. I thought the three ambulances and paramedics who converged on him would be more than enough.

"I think a bit of house to house - well, factory to factory actually - to check for damage and injuries don't you?" I said to the police.

"Oh-o." whispered Saskia. "*Trouble.*"

"*What, Twin? Oh, it's only Archie and that nice photographer.*"

"*Yes but quick, can you remember? Have we - Katya and Kyra - been introduced to Archie?*"

"*Mm. No. Not that I can recall. Mr. Spencer then?*"

"*Yep. Look out, incoming.*"

"Girls, that was *amazing*. We watched the whole thing from the office. Dan here got some brilliant shots. Do you have a few words? Just for once we're going to scoop the TV."

"Mr. Spencer, isn't it?" asked Saskia. "We just happened to be passing so to speak. I'm Katya, and this is Kyra," Saskia indicated me. "I don't suppose you can tell us apart, it doesn't matter anyway."

"Before you ask," I said. "We don't give interviews. Comments, yes - interviews, no. Sorry."

"I understand, really," said Archie. "Don't really blame you. Can you tell me just how you prevented disaster?" He pushed a little voice recorder at me.

"Hm. Right. The Earth's rotation means the twister moves from east to west, Coriolis force that's called. The prevailing wind is from the south west today. The whirlwind is only that - wind. The wind blows the twister along, basically northwards. Luckily that's where we wanted it to go. We added to the wind by blowing and herded it to the river. There it picked up water, that requires energy, that energy came from the rotation of the twister. Eventually there wasn't enough energy left to maintain the rotation and it all fell apart. How's that?"

"That's brilliant, thank you," said Archie.

"Mr Spencer," said Saskia. "The telly people will be here in a minute. We don't want to stay, besides, that'll spoil your scoop. If Dan has enough pictures, we'd like to go. Anyway, I think his camera shutter might have melted, he's been clicking away so much."

Dan grinned, rather ruefully I thought. "I've taken one or two."

"Thanks anyway, girls," said Archie. "It's been nice meeting you."

"And you, Mr. Spencer," said Saskia. She lifted into the air so I followed her. I could see Dan still clicking away below me.

"Hm. Naughty pictures," I said. "Looking up girls skirts indeed."

"Bothered, Twin?"

"Not really. If you've got it, flaunt it - and we've got it, you and me."

"Hm. Interesting," said Saskia. "Kyra doesn't mind wearing the smallest super costume in the known universe. Saskia, on the other hand, draws the line at a smallish bikini."

"Ok you. Katya is like Kyra, doesn't mind what she shows to the world. However, don't I recall some harsh words when we had to wear a mini-dress in 1973?"

"It's different for Saskia somehow. She's a demure young lady, cares what people think of her, wants people to like her for herself. Katya doesn't feel the need for all that. Must be different sides of the same person."

"Sigmund Freud would have a field day with us two. And before you say it, I *know* you know who Freud was. Being serious for a moment - which we were, I know - I think we should cruise around up here and check there's no more damage that'll take a super girl or two to sort out."

The wind was still blowing hard. It didn't affect either of us of course, we just drifted along as if it was dead calm. Casting about with super vision soon revealed another problem.

"There's a lot of people running about near that wind farm on the hill over there," said Saskia.

"Look," I said. "One of the turbines is going much faster than the others. Let's go take a look."

Within a couple of seconds we were landing next to the offending wind turbine. It was making a noise like a aeroplane engine! Seeing us land, a couple of the men came running up.

"I don't know if you can help. The automatic feathering mechanism's jammed, we can't control the speed."

"How does that work? Like an aeroplane propeller, or a helicopter rotor?" I asked.

"Basically, yes. There's a set of weights that swing out as they rotate faster, that pushes a lever that turns the blades in their sockets. That's jammed. If we do nothing, the bearings will seize and the blades may be flung off."

"So we can get to the mechanism?"

"Yes - but it's too dangerous."

"For you, maybe," grinned Saskia. "But not for my sister and me. Show us the way."

The way up involved a ladder inside the tower. There would only be room for three of us so only one of the men came to with us. Gallantly, he elected to be first up the ladder.

"*I'm glad he's going first,*" I whispered from my position as last in the line. "*I'm getting a brilliant look up your skirt.*"

"*Nothing you've not seen before. Now shut up and think about what we're going to do. I'm relying on you.*"

"*Your confidence is gratifying - if possibly a bit misplaced.*"

There was no more time for idle chat, we'd reached the top. Noisy wasn't the word. The machine was making so much noise that our telepathy cut in.

"I don't think it's supposed to go this fast, Twin," said Saskia in my head.

"I can see why it's jammed," I said. "The shaft's rotating so fast that the collar is stuck by centrifugal force. Hm. Just slowing it down a bit will probably free it off."

"How'll we do that?"

"Like this should do it."

I put both hands round the rotating shaft where it joined the gearbox connecting it to the alternator. I gripped hard - then harder - then harder still. I could smell the oil that had been coating the surface beginning to get hot, it boiled away round my hands. The shaft itself began to get hot, it glowed a dull red colour as the heat generated by the friction against my hands built up. It was slowing down!

"It's working. I don't know how much I need to slow it."

Almost as I spoke, the weight collar unstuck itself and shot down the shaft pushing the rods that controlled the pitch of the blades. I continued to slow the mechanism down until the collar began to slide back up the shaft. At that point it was back on automatic and I could remove my hands. I turned to find that Saskia had her arms round our native guide from behind.

"This is no time for a cuddle, Twin," I said. "What's that all about?"

"He tried to stop you touching the gubbins. Restraining him was the only option, he couldn't hear me."

"Well you can let go of him now, before he starts to enjoy it." I was grinning at him. He grinned back. "That was amazing. I'd not have believed it if I hadn't actually seen you do it."

"All in a day's work. You'll need to get the thing checked over, heating it that much can't have done it any good. Anyway, bit of a design error? It should be able to handle a little wind like this."

"There's a manual override. We were doing all ten on the farm, this one was last and we just weren't quick enough."

Going back down the tower, we reversed our ascending order, I went first. I couldn't be bothered with the ladder, I just jumped into the shaft and let myself float down. Saskia did the same thing. Then we had to hang around and wait for our poor man to climb down the ladder.

"Thank you girls. That could have been a bit nasty. Those blades are heavy."

"If you're ok, we're off to see if anybody else needs our help," I said. "Take care."

There was quite a bit of devastation. On our way back home we moved a few trees that had blown down - one neatly across a car. That wasn't going anywhere - it was a *big* tree. Saskia moved it on her own, which impressed the hell out of the people watching. There were also a couple of HGVs on the bypass that would move better now they were back on their wheels instead of lying on their sides.

Eventually we got back to the house just in time for lunch. Changing to be two somewhat windswept Saskias, we went in to investigate the lunch possibilities.

"Ah. The wanderers return. You've missed lots of fun. Those two friends of yours have been busy, at least according to the radio news people."

"Friends, Dad? Oh, you mean Katya and Kyra. Not surprised. It's a bit wild out there. We could see the top of a tornado or something off over the trees."

"I think 'bracing' is a word for today, sir," I said. "You should have come with us. We've had a great time being blown inside out."

"What d'you want for lunch, Dad? All this wind makes you hungry."

"Oh, it's the wind," I whispered. "*Somehow I thought it might be all the hard work we've been doing.*"

"*Shut up you and help with lunch or you'll get a thump.*"