

An extract from 'Valley of Light' for you to read

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Out on the helipad was a medium sized helicopter. "Oh, a Jet Ranger," said Saskia. "Four seats, five at a squash. Glad we didn't do a complicated hair style, we need to wear headsets or we'll not be able to talk to James."

James looked at her in surprise but didn't say anything. I was a little surprised myself but then this *was* Saskia.

The helicopter was complete with pilot. Saskia and I sat in the back while James sat in front with the driver. Saskia turned out to be right. It was quite noisy, we needed the headsets to hear each other.

As we took off, I amused myself by watching the pilot and learning how to fly the thing. It seemed easy enough but I knew there was probably a lot more to it than just what I'd learned.

It was more boring and above all *slower* than flying as the SuperTwins. We were doing about a hundred and fifty miles an hour.

Somewhere north of Leeds was where our troubles began.

The pilot clutched his chest and slumped forwards slightly against his seat belt. I watched as his face turned quite grey. "Saskia, he's having a heart attack! James, see if he can still fly the thing."

"He's conscious but in a lot of pain, Saskia. What do we do?"

"I need to swap places with him. I'll fly it."

"You?"

"Yes. I can do it. Don't argue. Undo his seat belt. Try not to move the controls. We'll carry on as we are for the moment. Saskia, help me get him over the seat back here with us."

Super strength was required but we did it. The poor pilot was sitting on Saskia's knee. Half climbing, half floating I managed to get into the pilots seat. Saskia moved the man into my seat in the back.

"Saskia, he's in *so* much pain. I can't do *anything*," she wailed.

Suddenly I *knew* what to do. "Saskia, *take away his pain!*"

"I can't do that. How can I do that?"

"Here, hold my hand. Hold his hand. Now, take away his pain, like this."

I felt a jolt in my chest but poor Saskia began to writhe in her seat. "It hurts! God, it *hurts!*"

"Saskia, *Saskia!* Listen! Change! Change to you a few minutes ago. Do it!"

Nothing appeared to be different but Saskia stopped shaking and sat up in her seat.

"I'm ok now. That was - interesting. I need to be better prepared if I ever do that again. Neat trick."

"How's the pilot?"

"He's still with us. Looks a bit better now he's not hurting. How're you doing up there?"

"Ok for the moment. We're not going to fall out of the sky. Let me see what we need to do. Radio first I think."

I used the knowledge from the pilot to find the radio controls. The call sign to use was on a sticker on the instrument panel "This is helicopter Golf Echo Charlie Three Four Nine. Can anybody hear me?"

"Golf Echo Charlie, Leeds-Bradford Approach, do you have a problem?"

"Golf Echo Charlie. Our pilot has had a heart attack and is incapacitated. I need to declare an emergency."

"Understood, Echo Charlie. You have declared an emergency. Can you give me your position?"

"Saskia? James? Where are we?"

"Just north of Ripon, Saskia."

"Echo Charlie, Approach. I can't give you a grid reference but we heading north at flight level two thousand, just north of Ripon."

"We have you on radar Echo Charlie. Where do you want to go? You could land at Harrogate hospital, they have a helipad."

"Echo Charlie. Negative, Approach. I can make this thing go where I want it to but landing it might be interesting. I suggest I land with you - and you might need your emergency crew. We will need Helimed Nine Nine to transfer our pilot to Leeds General."

"Understood, Echo Charlie. Turn left at your discretion to a heading of one nine seven degrees magnetic."

"Echo Charlie. One nine seven magnetic. Beginning turn."

I found it easy to control the machine in level flight like this. I even knew how I was doing it. Feet on the pedals controlled the pitch of the tail rotor. That moved it to the right or the left so controlling the direction of flight. I had to push the stick between my knees to the left as well to let us bank over slightly. That made it easier to turn. While I was doing all that, Approach was busy.

"Lufthansa Two Three Lima Golf. Maintain flight level five thousand. Enter stack clockwise. Maintain stack condition until further notice."

A German sounding voice, "Lufthansa Two Three acknowledged. Flight level five thousand, clockwise stack."

"Speedbird Golf Victor Echo. Descend to flight level eight thousand. Enter stack clockwise. Maintain stack condition until further notice."

"Speedbird Golf Victor Echo. Acknowledged. Flight level eight thousand. Clockwise stack. Good luck Echo Charlie."

"Thank you Speedbird," I said. "Echo Charlie. Established on one nine seven magnetic, flight level two thousand."

In a break in the chatter James said, "What's all that you're going on about, what's *happening*?"

"We've declared an emergency so we're now under the direction of air traffic control which we weren't before. We've turned so we're heading for Leeds-Bradford airport where they can deal with us if we land badly. We'll not let that happen of course, but I really *don't* know how to land this thing properly. There are two other aircraft in our airspace. Approach has made sure they're higher than us and at different heights as well. They'll just go round and round until we land. Nice of the Speedbird to wish us luck. Speedbirds are British Airways planes."

"Remind me to always fly BA in future. What's this Helimed Nine Nine?"

"Yorkshire Air Ambulance. Another helicopter. They can land on the top of Leeds General Hospital. A *lot* quicker than a ground ambulance."

"Echo Charlie, Approach. Descend to flight level one thousand. Slow to below one hundred knots. You should have the airport in sight in two or three minutes."

"Echo Charlie. Acknowledged. Flight level one thousand. Slowing now, below one hundred knots."

"Saskia, why do you repeat everything he says?"

“Proves I heard him *and* understood what he said. Simple really. And I always say who we are so there’s no confusion.”

“Look! Is that the runway?” said James.

I looked. “Seems to be. Yep, that’s a runway.”

“Echo Charlie, Approach. We have the runway in sight.”

“Echo Charlie. VFR. Contact Tower on one one nine decimal seven. Good luck.”

“Echo Charlie. Contact Tower one one nine decimal seven. Thank you Approach.”

“VFR?” said James as I fiddled with the radio.

“Visual Flight Rules. Use eyeballs mark two. Golf Echo Charlie. Tower.”

“Leeds-Bradford Tower, Golf Echo Charlie. Good morning. Radar has you about three miles out. Begin descent at your discretion.”

“Echo Charlie, Tower. Good morning. Beginning descent for approach.”

I pulled the stick between my knees backwards to slow us down while pushing down on the collective stick with my left hand to let us go lower.

We’d need to cross the middle of the runway. Probably no traffic but best to be sure.

“Echo Charlie, Tower. Request cross active.”

“Tower, Echo Charlie. Runway not active. Cross at your discretion.”

“Echo Charlie. Understood.”

“What was that?” asked James. “Cross active? What’s that mean.”

“Later James, when we’re on the ground.”

“Sorry, Saskia.”

“Tower, Echo Charlie. Approach over the car park. You’ll see the fire trucks. Can you set down near them?”

“Echo Charlie, Tower. I’ll try at least. I’ll need somebody to shut this thing down when we land. I don’t know how.”

“Tower. Acknowledged. We’ll have somebody on standby. Nine Nine are on standby to ship your pilot to hospital.”

“Thank you, Tower. Making final approach now. Are the fire trucks on channel please?”

“Fire One, Echo Charlie. We’re with you.”

“Fire One, Can you count me down please. I’m not too good at this.”

“Fire One, acknowledged”

I was talking to myself to focus my mind on what I was doing. “Right. Pull stick towards me. Good, we’re slowing down. Push pedals until we’re facing the fire trucks. Ok we’ve stopped. Now, down on the collective, gently Saskia!”

“Fire One. About fifty feet - twenty feet – ten feet - slow a bit, five feet - four - three - two - one - skids touching.”

I pushed the collective stick all the way down and twisted the throttle to slow the engine. Not too much, that’d make the blades droop.

“Echo Charlie, Tower. We’re down and stable. Thank you Fire One. Can somebody come and switch it off for me please?”

The smallest fire truck moved towards us. A man in a fireman’s suit got out and a man in ordinary clothes. Ducking under the downdraft, the man came and opened the door on my side.

“Shut the throttle all the way, that’s it.” Then he reached in and threw switches. The engine began to slow down and eventually the rotors stopped turning.

An ambulance had appeared at the other side of the machine and Saskia and James were helping get our pilot out. My man with the switches on my side helped me out.

“Bloody hell. You’re only a girl! You were wonderful.”

"I trust by that you mean I'm only young and not that I'm a girl rather than a boy," I said, but with a huge grin so he knew I didn't mean it.

The fireman appeared next to us. "That was pretty good, even the radio procedure, we've been listening to you since you declared the emergency."

"Sorry about the parking," I said, "But as you might imagine I'd like somebody else to tidy it up for me."

"We'll stick it in a corner and wait to see who claims it."

James walked round the machine. "Ah, Boss. Better tell these people who's chopper it is or it might be on eBay as soon as we're out of sight. People, this is Sir James Robinson. He knows *everything*."

"Except how to fly a helicopter anyway. Go talk to Saskia, I'll sort this out."

I went to find her. She was sitting in the back seat. I climbed in with her.

"You were wonderful. I wasn't much use at all."

"Not so. Suppose you hadn't done that trick with the pilot, he'd probably have died from shock before we got here."

"But *you* showed me how to do it. How'd you know anyway?"

"Now *that* I don't know. It was just - there. Was it really awful, when you did it?"

"Put it this way, I now know what it feels like to have a heart attack. If we ever do it again we need to be prepared to change instantly."

James appeared at the door. "Right. Henry, that's your new friend, Saskia, is going to move the helicopter. We get to ride in the fire truck. They want to speak to us in the tower. Probably paperwork to do. Come on, quick march."

The big fire trucks had gone, probably bored with nothing to do. The small truck, which turned out to be a more or less standard four by four, was all that was left. The man I thought of as Fire One was the driver. James got in the front and Saskia and I got in the back.

As we set off, our driver said, "Look, here comes your friend the Speedbird." There was a large jet taxiing off the runway. "We'll follow him and you can wave."

By the time we got near the jet, it had done taxiing and people were getting off. We stopped near the nose and Saskia and I got out. The pilot was looking out of the window. I made helicopter movements with my hands and pointed to the machine still in the middle of the apron. He made 'come up here' motions.

James grinned. "Go on, go see what he has to say. There's no rush now."

Saskia and I walked round the nose and waited until the last passenger got off. At the top of the steps a stewardess tried to stop us but the door to the pilots cabin opened and a voice said, "It's ok, Rachael. They can come in."

"Were you on that chopper? No, you were flying it weren't you?"

"Mm. Sorry you had to delay landing. Your good luck worked, we got down first go."

"You did well. I'm not sure *I* could fly a helicopter."

"I can't fly one of these either, but hopefully I'll never have to. Mind you, I'd have said that about a helicopter as well until today. Anyway, got to go. Got to explain myself to the powers that be."

I stuck out my hand. My new pilot friend shook it, and then shook Saskia's hand as well. We waved at Rachael as we left the plane who had the good grace to smile and wave back.

Eventually we reached the control tower. Up on the top floor was a large glass walled room looking out over the airport. There was paperwork to fill in. We left James doing that and went to look out of the window. There was a voice behind us.

"Hello again. We've only met on the radio. I was on Approach until about ten minutes ago. Who was flying the chopper?"

Saskia pointed at me. "That's the miscreant, officer. Arrest her at once."

"I confess. It was me. I hope prison food is good, I'll be away for a long time."

"Food's rubbish but the medals are good. Which is what you deserve, a medal. Where did you learn all that stuff? The radio procedure was almost spot on. We were able to concentrate on what to do instead of listening to some screaming panic."

"The radio stuff is easy. I lived under a flight path. It was great fun listening to the planes and you controllers. The flying bit is more complicated. I know how helicopters fly, swash plates, collective, cycle, blade pitch and so on but that's the first time I've ever had to do it. Hence going in a straight line is easy, landing is a *bit* more difficult."

"We liked the idea of getting Fire One to talk you down. *Much* easier than trying to look at three instruments at once."

"You have my permission to nick the idea, file off the serial numbers and use it as you see fit."

"You do know that all the radio traffic is recorded? You put on a very good show. We'll be playing it to new recruits for ages."

I nodded. "Another reason for not having an attack of the screaming meemies."

James had finished his paperwork. We introduced him to our controller friend.

"You should be proud of these two. Very calm and collected under stress."

"Oh, I am. Don't worry about that. They'll hear about it later."

We left the control tower with a native guide to get us safely back to bits of airport we were allowed in.

"Now I can ring Arnold to come and get us. Until he gets here, I thought some lunch and you can both explain yourselves."

"Yes, James," we said together.

He grinned and shook his head.