Dad and I sat on the edge of the chimney. We lived in a two storey house and it was a long way down to the ground. We must have looked like Santa Claus and his helper perched up there in the middle of the night. And like Santa, no one was allowed to see us.

‘You have to be careful,’ said Dad. ‘If anyone sees you flying, you will drop like a stone. And once you start to fall nothing can save you. Even if the person stops looking.’

‘Dogs too,’ I said. ‘That dog I was telling you about stared at me when I was flying out of the well. And down I went.’

‘And cats,’ said Dad thoughtfully. He seemed to be remembering something he would rather forget.

‘What about rabbits?’ I asked.

‘I’m not sure about rabbits,’ Dad said. ‘They don’t look up much.’

‘Cows?’
‘Cows are really bad. You could be flying high across a paddock and a heap of cows look up. If they see you flying you can say your prayers. You will drop out of the sky. And die.’

‘Rats?’

‘No,’ said Dad.

‘Mice?’

‘Nah, they nick off at the first sign of a shadow. They think you might be a hawk or some other bird of prey.’

‘Birds?’

‘Birds are really dangerous. You could be way up there ...,’ he paused and pointed up into the sky where the clouds were drifting past the moon ..., ‘and a bird suddenly pops out of a cloud. ‘Down you go. Like a brick.’

‘Worms?’
We both laughed. ‘Worms don’t have eyes,’ said Dad.

‘What else then?’

‘Out of all of them, one is especially dangerous. The most dangerous animal on earth.’

I stared at him. Waiting.

‘Yes?’

‘Humans. They are curious. And they have binoculars. And planes. And remember, all it takes is one glimpse and down you will go. All the way to the ground.

He looked at me seriously. ‘That’s why I’ve brought you up here. No one must ever see you fly. A boy flying is something weird. If you are seen once, everyone will be looking for you. They will try to find the flying boy. Or should I say, Falling Boy.’

‘And you must promise me that you won’t fly more than a few centimetres above the ground. No high flying.’
Dad went silent, waiting for me to promise. Instead I asked a question.

‘If no one can see you. ...’ I said slowly. ‘If no one knows. ...’

‘Yes?’

‘What’s the point of it? There’s no glory. No show. I mean, you and me are the only people in the world who can fly. But what’s the use of it if everyone thinks we are just ordinary?’

‘Ordinary is ok,’ said Dad.

‘Not for me it isn’t,’ I said. ‘I want to be famous. What’s wrong with that?’

Dad paused again. ‘At your age,’ he said, ‘nothing. But I can tell you from experience that you don’t need it to be happy. Now promise me that you won’t fly more than a couple of centimetres off the ground.’

To tell the truth, I didn’t just want to be famous. I also wanted the girl who worked in the car wash to see me fly. I wanted that really bad.
‘Let’s go down,’ I said.

Dad sighed and looked around to see if the coast was clear. The backyard and the street were bathed in moonlight. Suddenly a cloud drifted across the moon.

‘Now,’ said Dad. ‘Go, go, go.’

He shut his eyes so that he couldn’t see me. I concentrated. I told myself to fly. I rose slowly from the chimney, still in the sitting position. Once in flight mode I straightened up. I must have looked like a giant, flying clothes peg. I floated forward and then slowly, slowly descended to the ground.

I stared up and Dad and then closed my eyes. ‘Your turn,’ I yelled.

‘Dad flying,’ he yelled.

‘Dad flying,’ I replied as I shut my eyes.

There was a soft thud on the ground next to me.
‘Gees, that was quick,’ I said.

Dad grinned. ‘I’ve had a lot of practice,’ he said. ‘And that’s what you are going to have to do. It’s just like running or weight lifting or anything else. You get better if you practise.’

‘I’m sleeping in my tent tonight,’ I said. ‘Mum said I could.’

I looked at the light coming from the kitchen window. There was no sign of Mum.

‘Why don’t you tell Mum that you can fly?’ I asked.

‘Think about it,’ said Dad. ‘If she saw me flying way up high and I fell to my death because of her - how would she feel?’

‘Guilty,’ I said.

‘Right,’ said Dad. ‘She would never get over it. So these days I don’t fly if I don’t have to. It’s better that she doesn’t know.’
I felt a bit sad. I didn’t like Mum being left out of it. After all, we were a family.

‘I want to tell her,’ I said.

Dad shook his head and changed the subject.

‘Sleep well, Ricky,’ he said.

I went down to the bottom of the garden and crawled into my little tent. It was a warm night but I zipped the tent closed to keep out any visitors. I was scared of snakes.

We lived in a country town. Even though there were houses all around us snakes sometimes came into back yards. What if you woke up night and found you had company in your sleeping bag? A red-bellied black or a tiger snake.

I shuddered.
Fortunately it was a good tent with a sewn in floor and an aluminium frame. I was safe and snug inside. I clicked off my torch and fell asleep, dreaming of fame and glory.

*

The next morning I made my way to school along the usual route through the park. I walked slowly, deep in thought. In three weeks’ time the school was having a concert to raise money for the flood victims. Every kid in the school had to pay five dollars to get in. The best act was going to win one hundred dollars.

I wanted to win. I wanted to go into it and amaze everyone. I was sick of being a nerd. After I saved the dog down the well I was a hero for a while. But then I just went back to being a nerd. Fame doesn’t last long.

There was something wrong with me. It was like I didn’t belong to the tribe. Like I was an outsider. I always wandered around at lunch time on my own. It was just as if I was invisible.

If I could get up on the stage and fly in front of everyone they would probably faint with shock. I would be famous all right. And it would last. I would be in the papers. On TV. Everyone in the world would know who I was. But I couldn’t fly if someone was looking. I would drop like a stone.
I was so deep in thought that I didn’t even notice how heavy my back pack was.

I made my way into a little clearing in the trees. I looked around for inquisitive eyes. No dogs. No cats. No people. What about birds? I couldn’t see any but you could never be sure that a whole flock of them wouldn’t suddenly arrive. I decided to give it a try. I looked up at a branch of a tree high above.

‘Fly,’ I said to myself.

I lifted a few centimetres off the ground. It was amazing. Fantastic. I could hardly believe it. Oh, wow. With the power of flight I could change the world.

‘Higher,’ I said.

Nothing happened. I hovered just off the ground but I couldn’t get higher. I clenched my teeth and strained my brain. I went up a little bit more – just a smidgen. What was wrong? Why couldn’t I get up to that branch?

The straps of my back pack were cutting into my shoulder. It hurt like crazy. It was full of books. Of course. The books. They were weighing me down.
‘Down,’ I said to myself.

I plopped onto the grass and shrugged off my back pack.

‘Up,’ I commanded. I slowly, slowly, lifted up. Up and up and up. It was scary doing it without Dad. It was a long way down to the ground and I could hear a bird chirping somewhere in the bushes. If I fell I would be history. The branch was just above my head but I decided to give it a miss.

‘Down,’ I said reluctantly.

I landed gently on the grass and thought about things.

‘You have to practise,’ Dad had said. ‘It’s just like running or weight lifting or anything else. You get better if you practise.’

I took a book out of my back- pack. It was a book about birds. Heavy.

‘Up,’ I said.

I rose up about half a metre.
‘Higher.’ I strained my brain and lifted just a little more. I could feel the blood boiling in my head. It was too much for me.

‘Down,’ I said. I plopped down on the grass, exhausted. I took out the books and examined them.

‘Every day,’ I said to myself. ‘I am going to fly with one more book. I have to practise. Build up my brain power. Overcome the brain strain.’

When I reached school I called in at the office and picked up a form. I filled it in slowly. There was a place for my name, my address and the name of my teacher. There was also a space for the name of my act in the school concert.

I didn’t know what to put. I couldn’t write singing because I couldn’t sing. I couldn’t write acting because I couldn’t act. I couldn’t write weight lifting because I was as weak as a kitten. And I couldn’t write flying because I couldn’t fly in front of a dog let alone the whole school.

I licked the end of my pencil and wrote one word. MAGIC. I would do a magic act in the school concert.
When I got home Mum and Dad already knew that I had signed up for an act. One of the canteen mothers had told Mum.

‘I didn’t know you could do magic,’ said Mum.

‘Neither did I,’ said Dad in a suspicious voice.

I pulled out a pack of cards and fanned them out. ‘Pick a card. Any card,’ I said.

Mum pulled out a card and looked at it.

‘King of spades,’ I said.

Mum’s eyes grew wide. ‘It is too,’ she said. ‘How did you know?’

Dad grinned and took it out of her hand and ran his finger over the king of spades.

‘Yes,’ he said. How did you do that?’
‘A magician never tells,’ I said.

I walked into my room and threw the pack on the table. Just then Dad stuck his head around the door.

‘Do you think it’s a good enough trick to do in front of five hundred kids?’ he said.

‘Probably not,’ I said. ‘They could boo me off the stage, couldn’t they?’

He nodded sadly. After he was gone I picked up my back pack and went down to my little tent with a pile of books. I crawled inside and zipped up the fly. Then I sat cross-legged in the middle of the tent and picked up a thin book. The tent was a good place to practise flying where no one could see me. I couldn’t go very high in there but I could work on lifting heavy weights. It was good exercise for my brain.

‘Up,’ I said to myself.

I rose about thirty centimetres. I hovered there for a few minutes then I lowered myself down. I picked up another book and tried with the two. Up I
went. But it was an effort. I only lasted for about one minute then I had to come down for a rest. I waited for a while and tried again with two books. Up I went. I timed myself with my watch. Four minutes with two books. Great – an improvement already.

I wrote down my achievements in a little exercise book. I would try again the following day. Next I would try to levitate with three books. And one of them would be really heavy – a dictionary.

So that’s how it went for the next three weeks. Every day after school I crept down to the tent with my books. Each time I carefully checked the inside to make sure no creatures were watching. Then I zipped the tent closed and levitated carrying books. I was safe. No prying eyes could see me.

After three weeks I could lift ten books and hover with them for five minutes. Sometimes my brain would start to boil and I would have to come down for a rest. But in the end I was ready to fly to the top of a tree carrying books or anything else. The only trouble would be making sure that no animal or person saw me.

Finally the day of the big concert arrived. It was time to do my magic act on stage in front of the whole school.
‘Do you think you are ready?’ said Mum. I could see that she was worried. She didn’t think my card trick was good enough but she was too polite to say anything.

‘Show us again,’ she said.

I took out the pack of cards. ‘Pick a card,’ I said. ‘Any card.’

Mum took a card from the fanned pack that I held out to her. She showed it to Dad.

‘It’s the king of spades,’ I said.

Mum turned over her card. ‘So it is,’ she said. ‘How did you do it?’

‘A magician never tells,’ I said.

Dad took the pack from my hand and shuffled through them. He laughed.

‘It’s an old trick,’ he said. ‘It’s a one act wonder.’
He was right. No one would fall for it.

I took the cards and put them in my back pack. I didn’t take any books to school. I had a different load to carry. Dad was waiting at the gate.

‘I know you’re up to something,’ he said.

‘A magician never tells,’ I said. He just nodded and gave me a knowing look.

‘Remember your promise,’ he said. ‘No high flying.’

Under my breath I whispered, ‘I didn’t promise.’

It was a long way to school but I finally got there. The day dragged on and on until it was time for the concert.

The hall was jammed with kids. It was packed. The usual mob of stirrers sat up the back ready to give a hard time to any weak acts. My knees started to tremble. It was stage fright. I felt like turning around and running home.
The first act was the school choir. They sang four songs and after every one they got good applause – especially after the last one which was a heavy metal number. Next was a kid who got up and did juggling. He managed to get six balls in the air at the same time. He was a school prefect and it wasn’t a bad effort. He got great applause.

After this it was James Maloney, the school captain. He played the saxophone. He was a really good looking kid and very popular. Everyone clapped like crazy when he had finished – especially the girls. So far no one had got booed.

Finally it was my turn. Mr Wethers, the school Principal read out my name. I walked up to the microphone.

‘I’m doing a magic trick,’ I said.

No one even seemed to hear me. Kids were talking and mucking around. Only the stirrers up the back had noticed me. I saw someone put a finger into their mouth and pretend to vomit.

I walked off the side of the stage and grabbed my little tent which I had stashed there. It was already erected. I dragged it into the middle of the stage and climbed inside. I did up the zip and sat down in my usual spot. Now I
couldn’t see anyone. But I could hear them. The babble of talking and laughing continued down in the hall.

Someone booed.

‘Boring,’ said a loud voice.

‘Quiet,’ I heard Mr Wethers say. ‘Give him a go.’

No one took any notice. The babbling from the audience just continued. All they could see was a small tent on the stage. They weren’t interested in the boy inside. No one could see me.

‘Up,’ I said to myself. Slowly I rose up a little. I could feel my brain starting to bubble with the effort. But it was okay. The practice was paying off.

‘Forward,’ I said. I moved forward a little. The noise outside grew less. Then it stopped altogether. The audience were watching. And waiting.

‘Higher,’ I said.

‘Forward.’
‘Faster.’

‘Circle.’

‘Faster.’

Now I could hear gasps and yells from the audience.

‘Look at that.’

‘Wow.’

‘Amazing.’

‘Far out.’

‘Fantastic.’
There were yells and shrieks. There was the sound of pounding feet. Some kids were scared and were running out of the hall. It was time to end the act.

‘Back,’ I said to myself.

‘Down.’

I landed with a gentle thud and climbed out of the tent. I bowed to the audience.

They went wild. They stamped their feet and shouted. They leapt up and gave me a standing ovation. I was a hero again. The applause went on and on and on. Finally I left the stage and sat down in the front row. People reached over and patted me on the back.

There were another seven acts and most of them were pretty good.

Finally Mr Wethers called me up to the stage.

‘There can only be one winner,’ he said. ‘All the acts were good but I think we can safely say that Ricky deserves the prize.’
He handed me a cheque for one hundred dollars. But I gave it back to him.

‘For the flood victims,’ I said.

There was more applause. Then Mr Weathers called for silence.

‘I don’t know how you did it, Ricky,’ he said. ‘But it was a fantastic act. A little dangerous but great. I don’t think any of us have seen a flying tent before. Lucky it didn’t fall on someone’s head. I don’t suppose you are going to let us into your secret.’

I shook my head.

‘A magician never tells,’ I said.

* 

When I got home Mum had heard all about it.
‘How did you do it?’ she said. ‘What was the trick?’

‘All the cards were the king of spades,’ I said. ‘There were no others in the pack.’

‘Not that,’ she yelled. ‘You know what I mean.’

I ran up the stairs, pretending not to hear.

I heard the sound of music. Mum had turned on the TV. She never missed an episode of *Doctor Who*. It would be safe to do a little flying. I threw open my window.

‘Ricky coming up,’ I yelled.

‘Ricky coming up,’ came back Dad’s voice.

I jumped out and flew up to the chimney to get my lecture from Dad.

It was going to be a big one. But it was worth it.