

MAISIE VS ANTARCTICA

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crow*



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How to Write a Book

BANG!

The plane jerks violently, like it's been whacked by a giant with a baseball bat. A howling wind slaps me in the face. My eyes snap open.

For a fraction of a second, time seems to stand still. The pilot is slumped forward, his head almost touching the control panel. Dad looks at me, his eyes wide in shock, then turns back to the controls.

The air hits me again, so hard it presses me back against the seat. A siren wails and the little plane shakes like a bobble head in an earthquake.

“Dad, what’s happening?” I shout. He’s pulling

on the control stick. “Dad?”

The windscreen is smashed. That’s where the air is rushing in. If you’ve ever opened your car windows on a motorway, that’s what it feels like, but right in your face.

Dad is pressing buttons on the control panel. “Mayday, Mayday,” he says into the radio, but no one replies. Some of the dials spin wildly.

The plane is falling out of the sky.

Dad turns round. “We’ve had a little problem, Maisie,” he says. “We’ve hit a flock of birds. Nothing to worry about.”

A little problem? Nothing to worry about? Most definitely not true.

Smoke streams out of the propeller, which is supposed to be spinning but now turns slowly.

“LOOK OUT!” I scream.

“All under control,” says Dad, although it clearly isn’t. He’s almost shouting to be heard over the rush of air, but his voice still sounds calm.

We’re plummeting towards the sea. Dad keeps pulling on the control stick.

This is not how my first adventure was supposed to end. I’m only eleven. Much too young to die.

“WE’RE GOING TO CRASH!” I scream. I

don't know how this will help, but I have to scream something. At least it's accurate.

"No, we're not." Dad flicks more switches on the control panel. "Well, actually, yes, we are. But it's fine. Oh, look, there's sea ice ahead."

It really is a bad time for sight-seeing. "IT'S NOT FINE!" I yell. "WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE."

Maisie Macleod. Born just a few years before she died. Greatest achievement: finding all four corner pieces of a big blue jigsaw.

Dad tuts. Unbelievable. We're hurtling to our deaths and he still finds time to tut at me. "I wrote a book, remember? *How to Crash-Land a Plane*. Don't worry, Maisie, I know what I'm doing. We're going to be just fine."

Dad's never flown a plane in his life. He has no idea what he's doing.

I really hope I'm wrong and that he does know. If not, we're going to hit the water faster than a brick on a motorbike.

The dark blue of the sea is almost close enough to touch. We're still speeding forward and at the last second the blue turns to brilliant white. We're bathed in cold light as the world comes up to...

★ ★ ★

No, wait. What am I doing? That's a really bad way to start a story. I've dropped you straight in the middle.

I do actually know how to write a story. I'm writing a novel about a ghost pirate called Nyteshade. She's on a quest to defeat her greatest nemesis: a mer-vamp. Mer-vamps are mermaids that have been bitten by vampires. My teacher said the first chapter was like something out of a dream. Well, actually she said it gave her nightmares.

Dad writes books too. But his aren't about normal things like vampires or mermaids. In fact, he doesn't write stories at all. That would need imagination. I know he doesn't have any imagination because when I was born he wanted to call me Georgina.

Which sounds fine, except his name is *George*. George Macleod.

Fortunately my mum's dying wish was to give me a good Scottish name – Maisie – and you can't ignore dying wishes. So Maisie Macleod it is.

No, Dad writes books that explain how to do stuff. I'll tell you some of the titles, but before I do, I want to make absolutely clear that although they sound exciting, they're not.

Here are three of them:

How to Wrestle Crocodiles

How to Build a Zip Wire

How to Defuse a Bomb

See? If you didn't know better, you'd grab one, find yourself an extra large beanbag and settle down for the day.

That would be a mistake.

The first chapter of *How to Build a Zip Wire* lists all the tools you'll need and all the different types of bolt you should use.

The next few chapters list all the tools you *won't* need and all the different types of bolt you *shouldn't* use.

I don't know what the rest of the book says. No one's ever read it. No one ever makes it that far.

But here's the terrible secret. Dad's never done the things he writes about. There are no zip wires or unexploded bombs in our back garden. And he's never had a single flying lesson. So when he tells me not to worry because he's written a book about crash-landing planes, it just makes me scream even louder.

Anyway, *this* book, the one you're reading now, is about me and Dad, and our great adventure. This

is my guide to *How to Survive Even When Your Dad Crashes You into a Continent*.

And, unlike Dad's books, every word of it is true.