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Jack Jackman

**MAISIE**  
VS  
**ANTARCTICA**

**MAISIE**  
VS  
*THE*  
**HIMALAYAS**



CROW



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*To Flor,  
my steadfast companion on all  
my best adventures.*

*J.J.*





## How to Confront Certain Death

From the front, a deathstalker scorpion looks like a fish with spider legs glued on. I know this because there's one on my hand.

It's staring at me with two beady black eyes. It's got tiny pincers, which look harmless, but Dad says when it comes to scorpions, it's the stinger that counts.

This one has a massive stinger. It's pointing at me like I've done something wrong.

Dad says deathstalkers can kill an eleven-year-old girl. He says it like all the scorpions in the Sahara Desert are out to get me personally. The snakes too. And the spiders.

He says you're fine as long as you don't stick your hands or feet into dark shadows. Which is what I've just done.

The deathstalker and I stare at each other. Neither of us moves. Dad once stared at me like that when he caught me eating my birthday cake the night before my birthday. To be fair, it *did* have my name on it.

"I'm sorry?" I say. The scorpion is not impressed. Neither was Dad. The scorpion's pincers open, ever so slowly. Dad didn't do that. It waggles its bottom a little. Dad has never done that.

If I leave my hand there, it might sting me. But if I snatch my hand away, it *will* sting me. Hmm. Fortunately I have another option.

The scorpion twitches. Its stinger rises.

I stop time.

I can do that, by the way. I can stop time. That's actually Dad's special power. Mine is that I echo other people's powers. So I can stop time because Dad can.

Stopping time always makes my head hurt and twists up my stomach. But this time there's a pain in my thumb as well.

It's the scorpion's stinger. I wasn't fast enough.

The tip is in the side of my thumb.

I snatch my hand away.

There's a hole in my thumb. And milky pus  
round the hole.

I've been stung by a deathstalker, the deadliest  
scorpion on the planet. The one that can kill a  
human, if the human is Maisie-sized.

There are no hospitals, no other people for miles  
and miles. We're stranded in the Sahara Desert with  
no hope of help.

I've got minutes left to live.



## **How to Tell a Story in the Right Order**

You probably have questions. You're probably thinking, what happens next? Are you now dead?

You might also be thinking, Maisie, what on earth are you doing in the middle of the Sahara Desert?

That's a great question. The short version is: it's Dad's fault.

Actually it's Dad's fault in every story.

It was Dad's fault we crashed in Antarctica, and Dad's fault that we got trapped in a cave in the Himalayas. It's amazing how I got told off for eating a bit of birthday cake when my own dad keeps getting us into life-or-death disasters.

Anyway, this here is the long version, and to tell it properly, we have to start at the airport. All my adventures seem to start at an airport. This one is in Cairo, the capital of Egypt. We're here to research another one of Dad's **How to** books.

That's Dad's job, by the way. He thinks of the most exciting things in the world, like skydiving or swimming with sharks. Then he writes a book about it using his incredible talent for making everything as boring as possible. **How to Build a Spaceship** has six chapters about metal alloys and none at all about laser cannons.

So instead of writing about ancient treasure or mummified cats, Dad's writing a book called **How to Break Codes**. And that still sounded exciting till Dad told me he's been studying Egyptian hieroglyphs looking for repeated patterns. It's basically Maths, which everyone knows was invented by the Ancient Egyptians to send children to sleep.

I'm going to find out how mummies come back to life. Unlike Dad, I write proper books, and in my new story – *Nytshade vs the Goblin Skeletons* – my hero Nytshade has to battle an army of undead goblin skeletons using only a

paper clip and a rocket launcher.

Dad doesn't like me to come on these trips, but he's trying to show that he trusts me. Also he said he wants me where he can keep an eye on me.

Outside Cairo Airport there's a row of cars. It's late at night, so late that in fact it's very early in the morning. Even so we're pestered by people trying to get us into their taxis. Dad and I are not morning people and we're both yawning. "No, thank you," says Dad, over and over. "We don't need a taxi. We've got a car waiting. No, really, we don't need one."

"Are we going straight to the pyramids?" I ask.

Dad shakes his head. "Hotel first. We're meeting Dr Tariq in the morning."

"Is Dr Tariq a mummy or a skeleton?"

"Neither, Maisie, she's the archaeologist I told you about."

She sounds disappointing.

Further down there's a man holding a sign that says 'George Macleod'. That's Dad's name, by the way. I point him out to Dad, who nods. I trundle my wheelie bag along behind him.

"Mr Macleod? Author of **How to Find Buried Treasure?**"

We turn. There's a giant behind us. Well, not a proper giant, but he's massive, a walking bag of muscles in a black T-shirt. Dad's pretty tall, but he has to look up to find the man's face.

Dad nods. "Aye, that's me. Have you read it?"

The man looks very serious, like someone's just kidnapped his teddy bear. "Yes. Some of it. I am Dr Jozef Tariq. I'm here to pick you up." I thought Dad said Dr Tariq was a woman.

**"Please come with me."** Jozef's voice suddenly sounds different and doesn't match his body at all. It now sounds like the voice of a robot pretending to be human. And his sentences sound like questions. Perhaps he's a curious giant robot. "A cu-bot," I say to myself, just to see what it sounds like. Maybe it should be 'curi-bot'.

Jozef frowns at the sound and looks down until he finds me. I'm a long way down. He stares at me in surprise. That's normal, though. I've got bushy orange hair that sticks out in all directions like it doesn't believe in gravity.

"Who are you?" Jozef demands. That's pretty rude but I guess nobody has good manners at this time in the morning. His hair is so short I can't even see what colour it's supposed to be but his eyes are so

brown they're almost black. He's wearing mirrored sunglasses pushed up on to his forehead like the sun might pop up at any moment and take him by surprise. Dad says I shouldn't talk to strangers but also that I shouldn't be rude so I don't know what to say.

"My daughter," Dad says into the silence. "Maisie."

Jozef grunts. "She will come also." Maybe this is just how people talk in Egypt at four o'clock in the morning. He points to a big white car. The car has a dent in the side and one of the back lights is broken. It looks like it's lost an argument with a cricket bat. "**Please drive, Mr Macleod.** We will discuss hieroglyphs on the way." He's using his curi-bot voice again.

"OK." Dad walks into the road to get to the driver's door. Cars screech past him, horns blaring, close enough to touch. He ignores them and climbs into the driver's seat.

That's strange. Dad hates driving. Well, to be accurate, Dad hates other people driving. He says that nobody knows the rules. There don't seem to be any rules here so I guess it's not a problem.

Jozef opens the back door. "Maisie Macleod,

**please get in.”**

My toes and fingers are tingling, I'm so tired. I look down the row of cars. The man with the George Macleod sign is still there, yawning and checking his watch. “Dad, shouldn't we check with that other man? He's got a sign with your name on it.”

“Coincidence,” says Jozef, staring at me. “It's a common name.”

Is it? I don't know any other Macleods. But Dad puts his seat belt on and starts the engine.

I stare up at the robot giant. “Dad says there's no such thing as a coincidence.”

Jozef's jaw juts out. “The vizier Djau had five brothers all with the same name. It happens. **Please get in.**” He snatches up our two bags as though they're full of nothing but balloons.

This is way too early for people to be telling me facts. “Dad doesn't have any brothers. And I don't know anyone called Djau. Why are you using that funny voice?”

Jozef's grip on the bags tightens a little. “I am Dr Tariq. I am here for the writer George Macleod. Therefore that man must be waiting for someone else. **Please stop arguing and get in the car.**” He says that last line with such emphasis, I think he might

go Full Robot if I don't do as I'm told. I bet he has laser beams in his eyes.

Jozef and I are clearly not going to be friends. I get in and put my seat belt on. Jozef puts our bags in the boot and slams it closed so hard the car bounces. Then he climbs into the passenger seat.

Dad pulls out into the road. Straight away two cars cut in front of him. Car horns surround us like a gaggle of angry car-geese. Dad's knuckles turn white as he grips the steering wheel.

“**Please relax,**” Jozef says in his robot voice. “Statistically, we are unlikely to crash.”

To my surprise, Dad's shoulders drop and he starts humming. He actually seems to be enjoying himself. I've never seen him drive so calmly before.

“But not so slow,” Jozef adds. “We cannot waste time. We must reach the Red Pyramid urgently.”

The Red Pyramid must be the name of our hotel. And we do urgently need some beds. My toes and fingers are still buzzing, like the car's electrified. We leave behind the bright lights of the airport and join some kind of motorway. Most of the traffic fades away. I rest my head against the window. Dad'll wake me up when we get to the hotel.

Spoiler Alert: we will never get to the hotel.