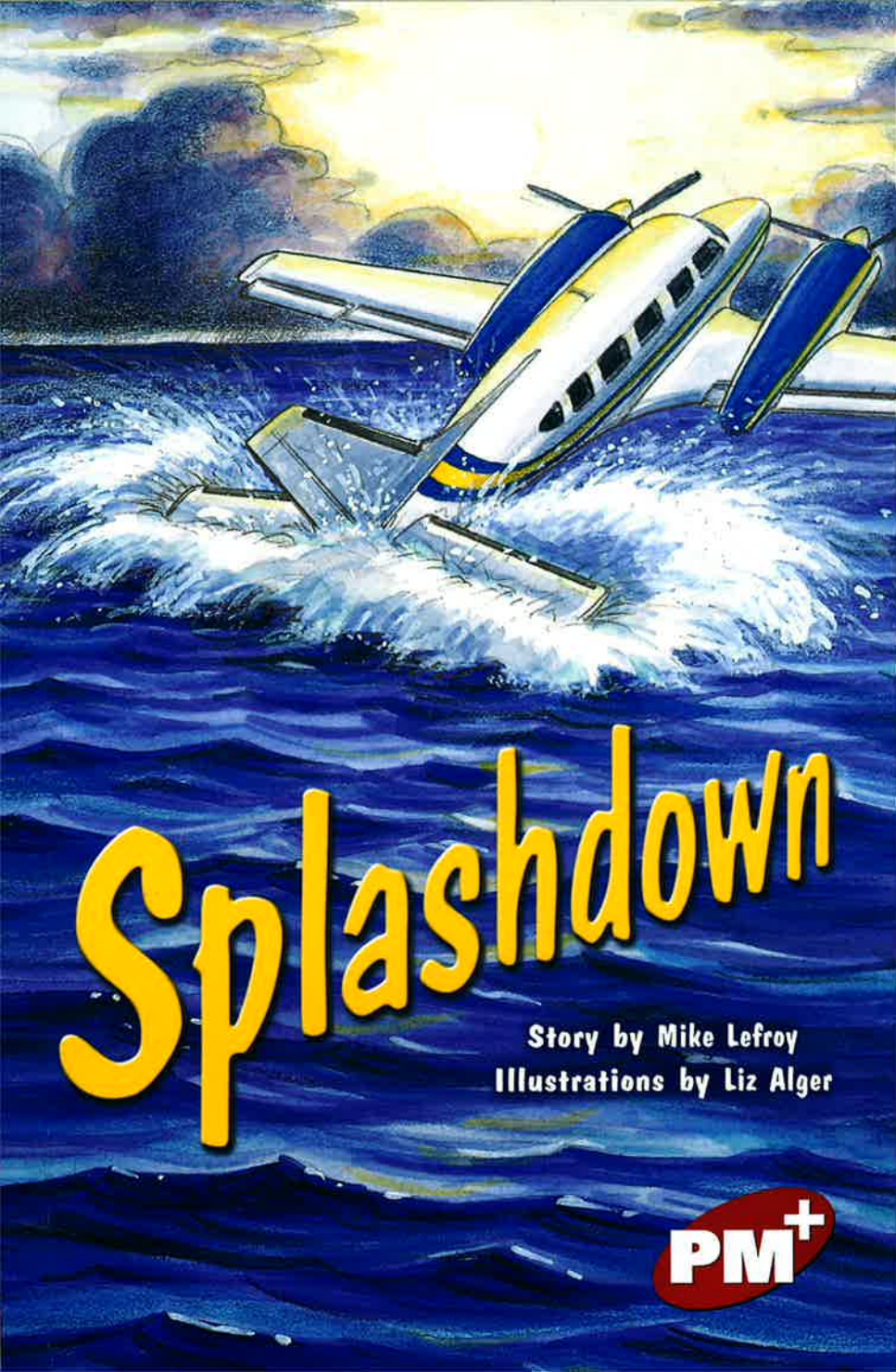
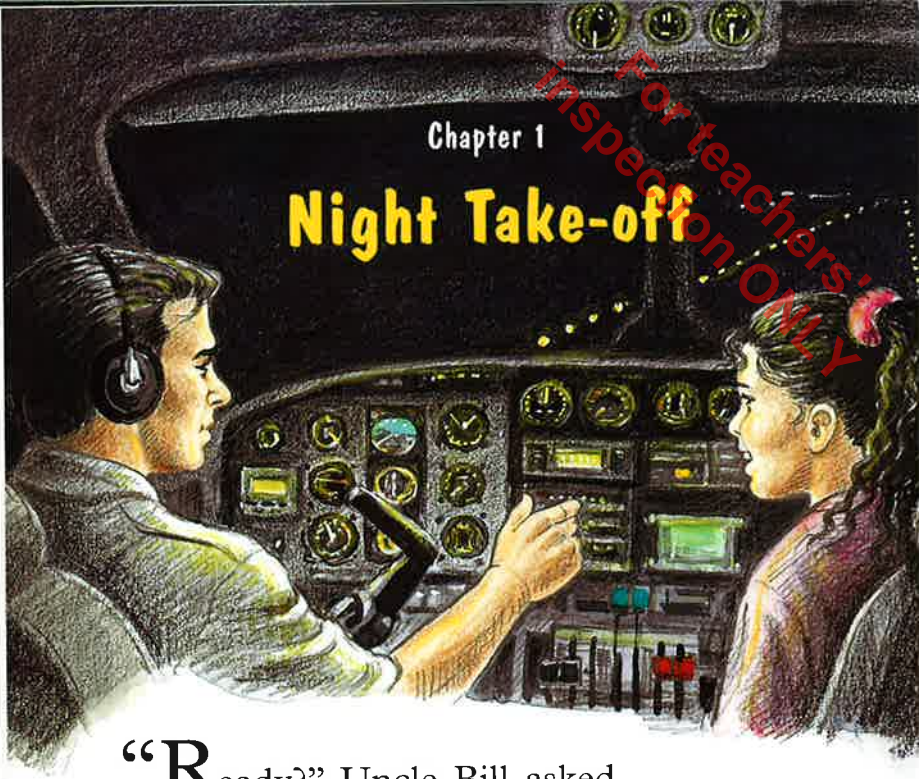

Splashdown
Story by Mike Lefroy
Illustrations by Liz Alger
PM+

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Chapter 1

Night Take-off

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"Ready?" Uncle Bill asked.

"Ready!" replied Cassie, sucking in her excitement and bracing herself against the seat.

Uncle Bill turned the key. The engines started with a cough and the small cabin shook like a wet dog. Cassie watched her uncle's face glowing in the dim light. His hands danced over the instrument panel. The speed and certainty of his actions gave her a feeling of comfort and safety.

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Uncle Bill released the brake and the plane slowly began rolling down to the runway.

Finally they turned and stopped. Cassie could see a long corridor of lights stretching into the blackness.

It was the night before her twelfth birthday and this was Cassie's special treat. She had been pestering her mother for some time to be allowed to fly to the island with Uncle Bill.

"You go, why can't I?" she had said.

"When you're twelve," was her mother's reluctant promise at her last birthday.

Just last week Uncle Bill phoned to say he had a plane to deliver to a new owner on the island, and asked if anyone would like to come along for the ride. Cassie worked on her mother for three days until she finally relented.

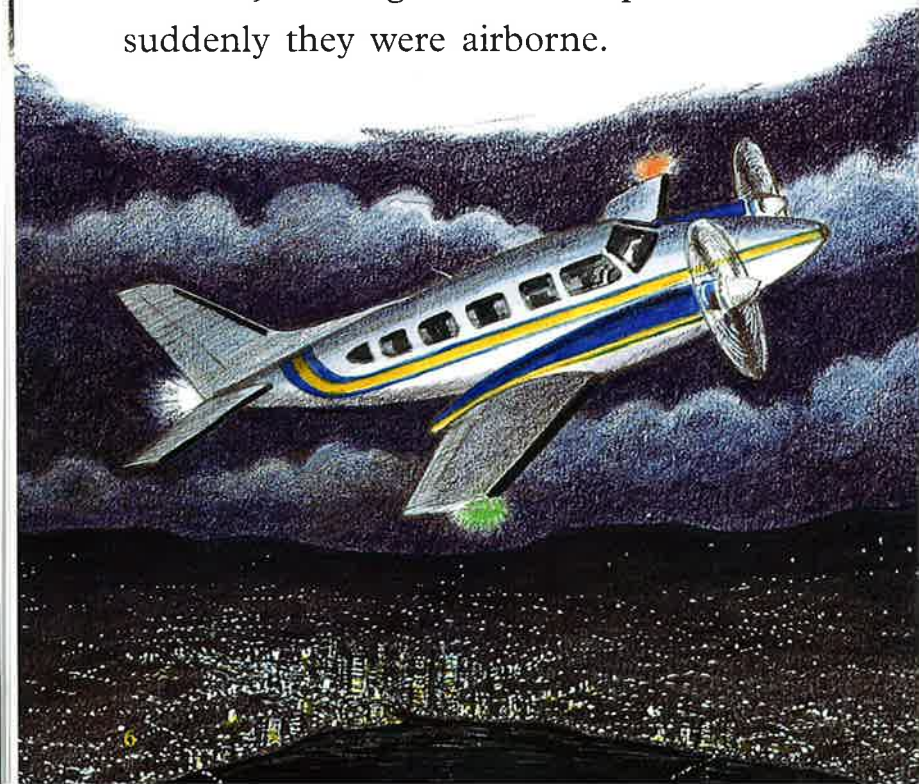
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At last a voice crackled in the cockpit. It was the OK from the control tower.

They were on their way.

Uncle Bill looked across at his young co-pilot and gave a quick thumbs up.

His hand went to the throttles and he steadily moved them upwards. The engines roared, the plane surged forward and Cassie felt herself sinking back into her seat. Outside, the lights flashed past and then suddenly they were airborne.



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The plane climbed steeply then banked slowly to the left. Below, Cassie could see the lights of the city shaping roads and houses.

Ahead of them there was nothing.

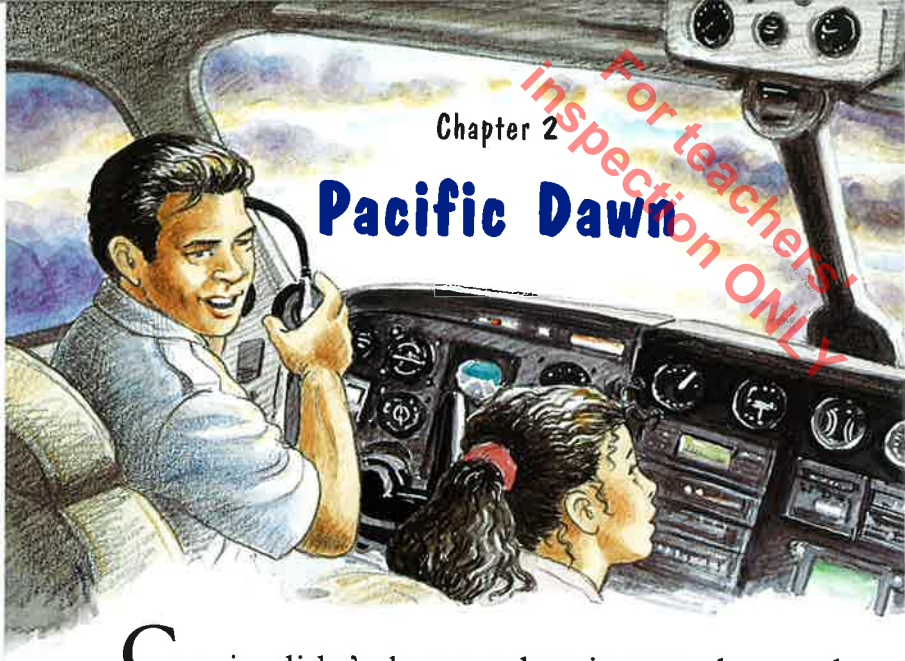
"The sea!"

The noise was overwhelming but Cassie could lip-read Uncle Bill's words as he pointed through the windscreen.

She remembered their conversation as they were walking across the tarmac to the plane. Cassie had flown with Uncle Bill many times before but this was her first night flight. He had explained that the late take-off meant they could fly all night and land in daylight.

"The first part will be dark and noisy. Try to sleep and save yourself for the dawn. It really is beautiful over the water."

She put on her own headphones, slipped a minidisc into her player and settled back into her seat.



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Chapter 2

Pacific Dawn

Cassie didn't know what it was that woke her. Perhaps it was the first streaks of light or maybe it was a slight change in engine noise. Whatever it was she was suddenly wide awake.

"Hi, sleepy head. Happy birthday!" said Uncle Bill, removing his headset.

"Where are we?" she asked.

Uncle Bill picked up a clipboard from beside the seat and pointed to the map.

"Here. About half way. Sleep well?"

"Yes, fine," yawned Cassie.