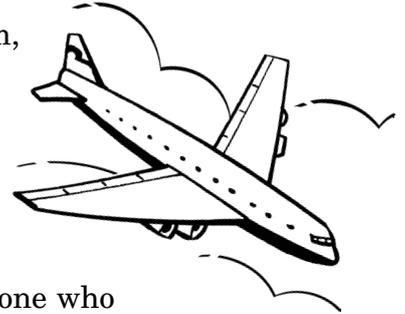


# From London to Muscat (Part 1)

The journey from London to Muscat is known as a 'long-haul' flight, unlike flights within this country, which are called 'domestic' flights, or flights to destinations in Europe, which are given the term 'short-haul' flights. The title long-haul flight is enough to tell you that you will be sitting in your aeroplane seat for several hours and, unless you are wealthy enough to afford First Class or Business Class, you can expect to be quite uncomfortable.

With these thoughts in mind, the Mackenzie family – Mum, Dad and the twins, Beth and Tom – had packed various items in their hand luggage that could keep themselves busy. Mum had a book of Su Doku puzzles, Dad had the guide-book for Oman, Beth had a book to write in ('you're mad,' Tom had said to her) and Tom had ... well, Tom hadn't packed anything. After several arguments, he was the lucky one who had won the right to sit next to the window, as Beth had eventually conceded that actually she didn't care.



Even Mum, who normally feared nothing, looked a little anxious as the plane taxied to its take-off position. "I don't mind once we're up there, but I'm not keen on the take-off," she said.

It seemed ages until the plane reached the runway for take-off but suddenly it began to move forward, then to pick up speed rapidly. Tom felt that he was being pressed into the back of his seat but he was able to turn his head to watch their progress. It certainly was fast. The airport building seemed to be moving very quickly in the opposite direction to Tom and then, the moment he had been waiting for, the plane made a shallow angle with the ground and they were airborne. The houses and cars and a river and a reservoir and a railway line and some fields with cows in looked so strange from above.

Tom felt absolutely exhilarated and he glanced around to see if the others were excited as him. He couldn't believe what he saw! Mum had her eyes closed, Dad was reading the papers and Beth was already writing.

He turned to look through the window again. He couldn't see a thing – just whiteness – but then the plane shot out of the cloud and into bright sunshine and the world, as far as Tom could see, consisted of an endless bumpy, rolling 'landscape' of brightly lit white clouds, which were below him rather than above him. In the distance a spark of light caught his attention then he realised that the sun had reflected off another plane and he watched that plane's progress until his own plane's engines changed tone and it levelled out after the climb.

