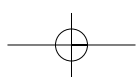
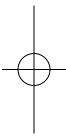
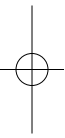




Also by M.G. Harris

The Joshua Files: Invisible City





Ice Shock

((a/w lettering))

M. G. H A R R I S

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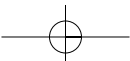
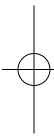
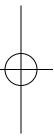
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*Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am
the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I
am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me,
but I am the fire.*

Jorge Luis Borges



The Lebanon Reporter

News for the English-speaking community of Lebanon

Paragliding daredevil steals ancient Sumerian artefact

Paragliders enjoying the views from Mount Lebanon near Beirut were the first to spot the lone American who launched his flight from behind the mountain's cedar trees.

Under an electric blue canopy, the thief with a taste for a daredevil stunt rode the air currents until he reached the luxurious villa owned by successful banker Abdul-Quddus Al-Thani, 52.

Under the nose of Souraya, 32, the wife of Abdul-Quddus, as well as six armed security guards, the paragliding madman swept over the high perimeter walls of the property, cut himself free of the canopy and landed in the azure waters of the villa's 20m swimming pool.

The reckless bandit then held the terrified wife of Abdul-Quddus at gunpoint with a Beretta 92F pistol and forced her to pour him a glass of her husband's liquor, before helping himself to the wealthy banker's most prized possession – an ancient Mesopotamian artefact rumoured to be protected with a magical – and deadly – curse.

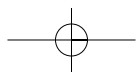
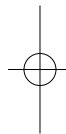
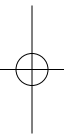
A curse to which the robber seemed strangely immune. . .

"Once he had the artefact in his hand, no one dared to go near him," Souraya told our reporter. "When the piece was originally brought here, our houseboy died. He got too close to it. Everyone in my household was terrified of that artefact. That's why we kept it behind glass."

However, Abdul-Quddus's wife refused to comment on claims that the object was originally stolen from the Baghdad National Museum during the Iraq War, later purchased by her husband as part of a collection of relics from the ancient Sumerian city of Eridu, near modern-day Abu Shahrain in Iraq.

The theft was captured on closed-circuit TV cameras around Abdul-Quddus's villa. The daring thief made his getaway on a vintage Ducati motorbike stolen from Abdul-Quddus's own collection.

Although the ruthless outlaw wore a helmet throughout, the image proved enough to identify him as US citizen Simon Madison, a suspected terrorist known to be wanted by both the FBI and CIA.



1

The sound of humming gives it away. I'm wide awake within seconds, listening to a sound that I haven't heard for months: the unforgettable sound of a UFO. This time it's hovering above my house. By the time I pull on a sweater and some jeans, the sound has gone. I'm left waiting.

Minutes later, there's the roar of a motorbike riding up my street on a chilly December morning. I lean out of my window to see the outline of a guy in a leather jacket zoom up to my front door riding a Harley Davidson. I peer at him through the early-morning gloom.

"All right, Benicio?" I mutter as casually as I can. But inside I'm fizzing with anticipation.

Benicio here, in Oxford!

The sound of my voice is swallowed by the damp air. My second cousin Benicio pulls off his helmet, shakes his hair free of his eyes. He peers back at me.

"Yes, thanks, Josh, I'm all right."

We stare at each other for a second.

“You gonna come down, then?”

“You’re not coming in?”

“I thought we agreed. Safer to go somewhere away from your house. So get a jacket cos it’s *really* cold!”

I can hardly remember what I’d agreed. I mean, when you get a call at two in the morning on a strange-looking mobile phone that you’ve never heard ring before . . . a phone you thought you’d switched off. . . Well, you’re not in the most focused state of mind.

Mainly, you’re excited.

A call like that comes in and it shakes everything up – in a good way. In a great way. I needed to be woken up like that. Feel like I’ve been asleep for months.

Josh, there’s something I need to tell you, to show you. Some important news from Ek Naab. And . . . I’m gonna come in person.

Good old Benicio – I can always count on him.

Only a few minutes later I’m squeezing my head into Benicio’s spare helmet, wrapping a scarf around my neck (it really is freezing), closing the front door softly and joining Benicio on the back of that Harley.

We zip down our little suburban Oxford street and head out towards the main event – Sunnymead Meadow – where Benicio’s hidden the Muwan aircraft that flew him from Ek Naab in Mexico to Oxford.

"Ek Naab isn't exactly a dump."

"Small horizons, my friend. Sometimes I think it would be nice to live in the outside world."

With that, the window seals. Benicio grins, does a mock salute, then raises the Muwan slowly over the trees.

And with a sudden whoosh of air being sucked upwards, he's gone.

I tighten the scarf, zip my jacket, check my watch. It's only six a.m. Still buzzing from the rush, I walk out of the park.

Practically floating.

BLOG ENTRY: BLUE IN GREEN



I've had the dream every night this week. By now I'm pretty exhausted. Here's how it goes.

On a hot, sunny day, I'm taking a stroll. I don't recognize the street, but something tells me that I should. Then I realize what's so strange - there are no cars. I'm walking, then I notice I'm barefoot. The tarmac is warm, feels good on the soles of my feet. The sky is a deep powder blue. Not a cloud in sight. Every garden I pass is filled with rosemary and lavender - the air is thick with the smell. I notice grapevines and fig trees, all plump green leaves. I'm just beginning to wonder where I'm going when I see my house. That's the first time it hits me that I'm on my own street.

The door to my house is open, swinging gently on the latch.
There's no one in sight. It feels eerie - there's always someone
hanging around in this neighbourhood. Today it's just me.

The door blows open, inviting me in. Faintly, I hear music playing.
Miles Davis - a tune from *Kind of Blue*.

And my heart picks up a beat.

I wander into the kitchen. It's all been cleared, no food in sight.
The fridge door too - none of the usual papers or my fading artwork
from year five.

There's just one postcard.

There's a noise behind me. I swirl around and nearly faint. He
walks through the kitchen door. It's him - my dad.

He's so tall, so alive. Tanned, a picture of health, wearing his
usual check shirt and cords, dark hair slicked back with gel. Watching
him standing casually in our kitchen, as though he'd just dropped in
from college, I can hardly breathe.

Dad doesn't look at me, just reaches for the fridge door.

"Hey, son. Do you ever feel like you forgot something? A little
thing? I do it all the time; overlook things. Detail, that's the name of
the game. But then, you've already begun."

That's all he says. He pours himself a glass of milk.

Maybe I finally manage to mumble something, I can't remember.
Whatever I say, he gives me a quizzical look. "Where've I been? Well,
yeah. Been meaning to talk to you about that."

He takes my arm. "Listen, son, your mother and I, we've had some
problems. This is how it goes between grown-ups sometimes. You know?"

I shake his hand away, frozen. "I *don't* know." Mouth dry, I tell him, "I thought you were dead."

Dad looks disappointed. "It wasn't my idea."

"What?!"

"The whole death thing. Not my idea."

He shakes his head now, looking annoyed.

"Then whose?"

"Your mother's."

"And you agreed?"

He pauses, hands on hips. "Yeah."

I stagger, lean back on the kitchen worktop for support.

"You and Mum . . . decided to make me think you were dead?"

"*She* decided."

"What?!!"

He says nothing for a while, just stares at me as though wondering what to do next. "I guess so, son. Like I said, I'm sorry. I was in Mexico."

Now I'm starting to feel furious, betrayed.

"You were in Mexico? Why didn't you call? One lousy phone call? You left me thinking you died?"

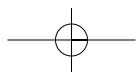
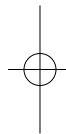
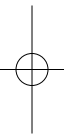
His eyes fill with sorrow. I'm totally confused, not to say upset. What kind of parents would deceive their child like that? And how the heck did he engineer that plane crash?

Then (always then), the dream ends; I wake up.

The first few times, it feels so real that I wake up in actual tears, sobbing.



Then in some weird way, I start to enjoy it. Somehow, it's like seeing my dad alive again. Even though we keep playing out the same little scene, it feels real. I sense myself in his presence again. That's way better than nothing. I go to sleep and I'm hoping it's going to happen again, the dream.



2

My recurring dream is something I don't want to think about. Just remembering that Montoyo and Benicio know about it makes me cringe.

Get some therapy?

It's the last thing I want to talk about. That's why I was blogging . . . so much easier when there's no face-to-face reaction.

And the dream is definitely not something I can discuss with Mum.

Things were better between Mum and me when we came back from Mexico, but only for a while. It didn't take long to work out that she'd been taking extra-special care not to upset me. I really scared everyone, going missing in Mexico like that. Every so often I can almost see the question forming itself on her lips.

What on earth happened to you?

And yet – Mum never, never dares to ask. Not seriously;