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Can you hear me? Mr Harcourt

by Richard Rewell

The Egyptologist Josh Harcourt passed through the dusty revolving doors of the Alexandria Museum of Antiquities and out into the Mediterranean's bright scorching sunshine. The forty-eight-year-old Trinidad born Britain then stepped towards the curb-side and hailed a cab, happy that there were still hours before his flight home. And then his world turned black.

A hood had been thrown over his head. He screamed "What the hell!" Then he heard the screech of brakes and felt a violent shove that sent him downwards into a car.

The car's engine roared and the automobile's acceleration threw him backwards onto what he surmised was the rear seat.

"What's going on? What do you want?" shouted Josh sensing a person either side of him.

"Can you hear me? Mr Harcourt. Can you hear me?" said a voice to Josh's right.

Terrified, Josh offered a weak "Yes" to the accompaniment of the sound that he thought was a silencer being screwed to the barrel of a pistol.

"Oh God what do you want?"

"For the moment just you. Mr Harcourt. Just you" replied a cruel sounding voice in a heavy Arabic accent.

Blaring music suddenly exploded in front of Josh. He jumped. Then heard a click. And the cacophony was silenced. The car radio was off.

"Where are you taking me? asked Josh as the hood began to stick to his face. "Look I'm just an Egyptologist. What have I possibly got that you want?" certain he could hear somewhere overhead the drone of a helicopter.

There was no answer but from his left he detected a tapping. Someone was punching in a number on their mobile. A hushed whisper in Arabic. Then nothing. The only sound he now heard was a distant siren. And was that a mosque they were passing thought Josh. Yes, he could hear the caller inviting people to prayer. One of those taped versions.

"Look I am Josh Harcourt of Exeter University. I lecture in Egyptology. I am a British subject."

"Quiet!" screeched the cruel voice from the right.

Children. Josh thought. He twisted his head, he heard them shouting. A school. Then the car slowed. There was a rattling from behind. From the boot. Something metallic was loose and now banging around. A jack. And then he felt it. The silencer jabbed into the base of his neck.

"Quiet" whispered the cruel voice from the right, adding just before the car began to slow "Or shoot you!"

Josh bent his head. He felt so alone. So desperate.

The voice to the right said something in Arabic and although Josh was an Egyptologist, he had never mastered Arabic, but he thought the man had said "Slowly, down here. Second berth. Hurry!"

Suddenly he heard the theme to "Game of Thrones" burst from the mobile of the occupant to his left. Josh could not help holding back a bleak smile. "Was he going to end up like Ned Stark? Dead!"

"Shit! Stop!" screamed a man's voice from his left as Josh heard the car doors being jolted open followed by gunshots.

Josh wriggled to the footwell. He was shaking, praying, listening. Then footsteps. Steel heeled. Loud. Confident. This was it. He was going to die.

"Can you hear me? Mr Harcourt. Can you hear me?"

"Yes." Josh trembled.

"Peter Headly. British embassy. Bit of a cock-up by ISIS. They were meant to get Jake Harcourt, the American consulate. How are you feeling?"