



My brother, no less!

"That's him! It's Craig, I'm sure of it!"

I had just returned from India on a flightpath that tracked over Istanbul, Belgrade and Frankfurt. Now I was looking at an article in *The Independent*, showing a similar map:



the route of a soldier returning from Cyprus after WWII. The author's name and I.D card made it obvious to me that the column was written by my half-brother, someone I knew existed, but had never met. It was a defining moment in my life.

A few days later, in London for work, I called The Independent office. Eventually I found myself speaking to a very pleasant female voice, who seemed happy to pass my phone number on to the author of the piece.

"Do you know the author of the article?" I asked, trying to be as casual as possible.

"Yes, I know him quite well," she responded. *"I'll ask him to call you back."*

Just a couple of hours later I found myself talking to my half-brother for the first time in my life. We agreed to meet a few hours later that same day at Starbucks on Clapham High Street; it was the only place I could think of that would be easy to find. We gave brief descriptions of our appearance and clothing, although I knew instinctively that we would recognise each other regardless.



And so it was, when he walked in there was no hesitation. Bespectacled as I am and of similar height and build, I was slightly envious of his comparatively lush growth of hair (even though he was nine years my senior). He rounded the door and came straight towards me, looking embarrassingly fit. After a firm handshake, we then quickly agreed to move to the nearest pub, *The Alex*.

“Starbucks is really not my sort of place,” I told him.

“Me neither” replied my brother. *“In fact, it’s the first time I’ve been in one.”*

The pub was a cosy little affair: well-worn wooden-floors and wood-panelled walls adorned by antique photographs. We stayed there at a small table, chatting for the best part of two hours. In the main, the conversation was around my questions and his recollective answers about his earlier life, and our father. It felt like we had known each other for years; just some sort of ghastly glitch that had prevented us from meeting face-to-face.

After several pints of bitter he invited me home, and it was then that I met the person I had spoken to on the phone, earlier in the day. The *‘Yes, I know him quite well’* voice from *The Independent*, turned out to be my brother’s partner in life, who held a senior position at the newspaper. We joked about that through dinner, and I became more than slightly drunk, but what the hell, it’s not every day in life’s long venture you meet your brother for the first time in 50 years!

Amazing now, as I look back. What seemed such an insoluble puzzle, came together so easily in the end. I still find it hard to believe the coincidence of the maps and our almost identical tracks across Europe, him on the ground and me thirty kilometres above.

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