

The Kites are Flying

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Illustrated by Laura Carlin

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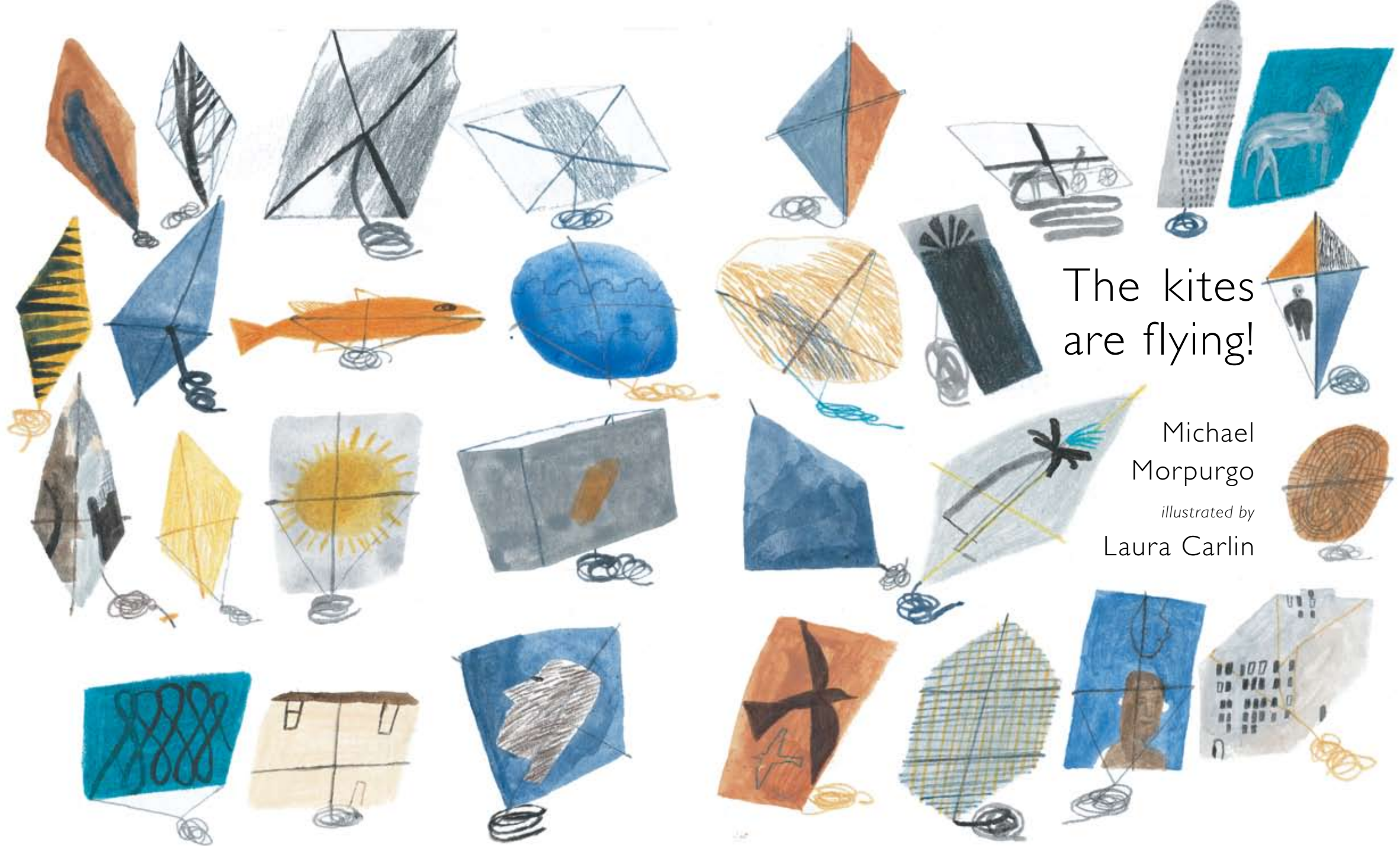
Extract

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1st May 2008

Nearly midnight. Gruesome hotel. Jerusalem airport.

Wish I wasn't here. Sometimes I really do wonder why I write a diary at all. It's useful enough I suppose when I'm actually filming – helps me to remember details I might forget, the sequence of events, and so on. But on nights like this I know I'm doing it just out of habit. I've written in my diary every day since I can remember. I can see the point of it after the truly memorable days, but then I would probably remember those anyway. The truth is that there have been so many days I just want to forget. Days like today.

Traffic jams all the way to the airport. Late arriving. Ages checking in. Plane delayed anyway, so I needn't have expended all that fury and frustration. Can't those security people at least try to smile while they're rifling through your bag? I mean, what's their problem? Then we had to fly into the most violent turbulence I've ever known. I should be used to it by now - I do enough flying. But this time I really did think my number was up. Some of the lockers



flew open, and the lady next to me started saying her prayers. We didn't land at Jerusalem. We bumped. Bumpity, bumpity, bump. It was as if the pilot was reverting to his childhood. The plane was a stone he was skimming across a lake. On and on it went, and we were inside it. Then there were more unsmiling security people. Late into this ghastly airport hotel where I know I'm not going to sleep. The sheets and towels stink of chemicals. The only air I can breath is noisy, because I can't switch off the air conditioning.

When I phoned home for bit of comfort, Penny said everything was fine. She sounded a bit sleepy, but she said I hadn't woken her up. Jamie had been a bit hyper apparently when he came home from school, but he was fast asleep now. She'd read him his King Arthur book, again. She told me that Jamie said I read it better than she did. She was a bit miffed about that. But I wasn't. It made me smile, probably my first smile all day. Makes a fellow feel better to smile. Penny told me she missed me, that she wished I could be at home, and then we wouldn't have to be phoning each other in the middle of the night. "Max, do you realise what time it is?" she said. She wasn't cross exactly,

but I could tell she didn't want to talk much after that. I felt very alone after she put the phone down. Still do. Mustn't get gloomy. Got to sleep. Can't be gloomy if you're asleep. Early start tomorrow. Must find out about the buses first thing. The food on the plane was disgusting. I only ate it because it was there, which was pretty stupid. And now I've got bellyache.



Hey, Mahmoud, are you there? Are you there? Can you hear me? I had my beautiful dream again last night, the same dream, about the kites. Uncle Yasser says it is a foolish dream. But it isn't foolish, is it, Mahmoud?

You're always telling me not to listen to old Uncle Gasbag. It's your dream, that's what you say. You dream what you want to dream, little brother. I like it when you call me little brother. You know something? You're not only my big brother, you're my best friend. Hey, I saw that girl again, the one in the blue headscarf. She was there again today, waving to me, and she was in my dream too. She was waving to me then as well. She does it every time!

Mahmoud, are you listening? I'm afraid to close my eyes in case I have that nightmare again. You told me the nightmares would go away when the dream comes true. What was it you said? 'You only dream the beautiful dream, little brother, because of the nightmare. It's like day always follows night. You can't have the one without the other. Light is only light,' you said, 'when you've seen how dark the dark is'. I still don't understand that, Mahmoud. There's a lot you tell me I don't really understand. But I don't mind. I like it when you





talk to me. I like it so much. Will you fly my kite with me tomorrow? Will you be there under the kite tree?’

It’s the same every time I have to go to bed. I want to go on talking to you all night long, Mahmoud. I suppose I shouldn’t talk to you as much as I do – you must get fed up with me - but there’s no one else I can talk to, no one else I want to talk to either, no one else who knows, no one else who was there. You are my big brother, 12 years old - that’s four years older than me – and I tell you everything. I’m always thinking about you, even when I’m not talking to you. I’m so proud of you - the fastest runner in the whole village! But you’re more than just my big brother, you’ve

been the father of the family too, since Father was taken away by the occupiers and put in a prison camp back when I was little. We haven’t seen him since. So you have had to help out on the farm with Uncle Yasser, Uncle Gasbag.

Everything you have ever planted grows well – Uncle Yasser says it’s your green fingers. Broadbeans, aubergines, sunflowers, olives, lemons - they all grow. But you have always liked the sheep best of all, sitting on the hillside all day long, looking after the sheep. You know all of them, and they know you. They love you and they trust you. It’s like you’re their big brother too. I like being out there with you and the sheep, Mahmoud. I like feeling the warm wind