The Plane Nap

By: Rainar Manteuffel

The plane was noisy. The hum of the engines screamed just outside the window. The other passengers were restless. As am I, Daoud supposed. The plane had just taken off and already he felt anxious.

I suppose I should try and sleep, it’s going to be a long flight and the on flight meal won’t be served for over an hour or so, he thought to himself.

With the thought of his destination in mind, Daoud drifted softly into sleep.

He awoke to sounds long lost in dreams. He wasn’t on the plane anymore. Instead he found himself in a damaged city. There was rubble everywhere. Every building was either damaged or knocked down completely. There was no mistake in Daoud’s mind as to what had caused this; he was in a city wrecked by war.

With that in mind he began to look for something to tell him where he was. In Chad maybe? Or perhaps one of the cities in Sudan? But no, the architecture of the buildings was all wrong. It even looked, European? Sitting down on one of the more comfortable rocks he tried to figure out how he had gotten there. He remembered the airport, the polite stewardess, the plane, but not how he got there.

“I must be dreaming,” Daoud said aloud. Standing up slowly he surveyed the area again. “But where am I?” A scrap of paper under a piece of rubble caught his eye. Moving the rock
aside, the scrap of paper turned out to be a front page of a newspaper. Not recognizing the
language, there was only one word other than the date that Daoud could discern: 1942, Berlin.

The sound of kicked rock on rock alerted Daoud to the stranger’s approach. It was a
young man, probably in his early thirties, of average height walking briskly down the road
towards him. Daoud would have called out to him but the man’s eyes were darting around so
much that he surely would have stopped had he seen him. Daoud knew that look; those were the
eyes of a survivor.

As the man passed him, Daoud remembered he was dreaming and decided to follow the
man to see if he could find the meaning of this dream.

The sun set quickly on 1942 Berlin and before he knew it, it was dark out. In the distance
he would hear the occasional rifle fire or idle chatter of what he assumed were soldiers. The man
seemed to take little notice of these sounds, but nevertheless, kept close to the shadows and
didn’t slow down.

As they approached the next corner the man slowed down and hesitantly peered around
the corner. Seeing nothing, the man continued his quick pace and entered an apartment building.
The man approached the elevator and pressed the up button. Nothing happened. A tenseness
began to fill the air, Daoud noticed. The man noticed it too, but to Daoud’s surprise, he headed
for the stairwell and began climbing. Daoud followed reluctantly.

When they reached the third floor, Daoud let out a small yelp of surprise. A woman was
standing right next to the stairwell door, and when she saw the man, began waving frantically for
the man to leave. The man took one look at the woman and swiftly turned around and ran back
down the stairwell.
Daoud couldn’t know for sure, but suspected what this meant. The Nazis were hunting this man and had set up an ambush in his apartment. Despite knowing that he wasn’t really there, he felt his own heart hammering inside of his chest and felt the fear of capture and of what would inevitably come next.

The man reached the apartment lobby and headed for the door. Outside a soldier silently stood guard. Daoud saw this and feared the worst. But the man didn’t stop. He looked at the guard, gave a short greeting and walked off. Daoud was baffled for a moment. The man was impersonating a soldier! And the guard was none the wiser in the dark of the night.

Watching in amazement, the man marched to the corner, turned it, and ran for his life once more, not looking back.

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Daoud woke with a start, once more on the plane. The dream still fresh in his mind, disturbed him. Was this a warning, a foreshadowing of the future perhaps?

Reflecting on the dream, Daoud remembered some of his own experiences. A year spent in jail being beaten by soldiers, facing a firing squad composed of 14 year olds that he not only knew but had watched as they grew up. He seemed to fare well the first time in those situations, but a second time? Who knew, maybe he wouldn’t be so lucky.

He was still thinking when the stewardess brought him his in flight meal.

He had had dreams like this before. Bombed and ruined villages, bodies in the dust, torture; but none since the dream of his brother had one gotten to him like this. It was something else altogether.
When he returned to sleep again it was only with the hope of understanding.

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Back in dreamland, Daoud was not entirely surprised to find himself following the same man from before. It seemed that this spirit had something specific for him to discover.

This time he found himself in a port, with the soft sounds of the sea rolling nearby. The man was stiff. He stood in line with dozens of others waiting to be processed through a rather formidable looking gate. Judging from the crowd and the proceedings of the departure, it looked like the ship would be leaving the country. This lightened Daoud’s mood, but left him more confused than before. This man didn’t look happy that he would be leaving. For him the war was almost over, but he showed nothing more than a stiff resolve.

When it was the man’s turn he checked his papers and walked up to gate. A guard at a desk took them and looked them over thoroughly. What was only 30 second felt like a small eternity to the man. Then without even looking up, the guard handed back the papers and waved him on.

This time Daoud did not follow the man, but instead stayed on the dock. He wondered what other difficulties the man must have had to make it here. What was he leaving behind? What was it that puzzled him the most about this man?

Right before the ship began sailing away, Daoud saw the man at one of the balconies. He seemed to give the port a long, hard look. That was when Daoud understood: this was goodbye. There was no relief for leaving, only sadness and a bitter resentment that he had to leave. The man seemed to know that he wouldn’t return.
Daoud woke on the plane again with the understanding of the dream. The man he had been following was a lot like him. He had faced hardships, lost friends and loved ones, and in the end, had been forced to leave. But more importantly was the voice if the dream left in his mind that seemed to say "Are you sure about this?"

Two hours later, the plane landed in a small airport in Sudan.