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Tags: [travel](#), [France](#), [incarceration](#), [Palestine](#)
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As time went by, my security hazard rating was downgraded. It was slowly dawning upon my captors that my subterfuge was indeed limited to doubtful banking practices. And in an area that was an archipelago of tax havens, such misdemeanor was an invitation to the good life: no one would hold it against you, unless they worked for Internal Revenue.

I found myself amongst the prison community's small fry, those who had been brought in by the great, indiscriminate, global dragnet against international terrorism. There was a library, and endless discussion amongst the prisoners. It made me think of Robben Island University, where Nelson Mandela and his fellow prisoners had engaged an endless intellectual project of reconstruction. They were going to change the future, heal ill and make a better world, and they succeeded. But here there was great dissipation. All began and ended with religious texts, why this was forbidden or that might be permissible via some tortuous ritual. Here we were being buried in the archaic dogma of the past.

My companions were amazed at my being Palestinian, coming from Jerusalem. There were those amongst them who wished to impose their ghastly homily of blowing Jews to bits in an act of purifying sacrifice. I told them how the Jews had become exiles and had returned home, but the price for that had been our own exile. And in their eyes I could see the same blind belief which I had seen in the eyes of so many Jews, belief in some sort of divine ordinance which prevented them from comprehending such elementary injustice. It was as if the thinking minds of such people had been declared vacant, had been filled with an inflated balloon which crushed all rational thought against the inner surface of their skulls.

One day I was ushered into the interrogation room, was seated upon the swivel chair facing the table. My interrogator came round and gave the chair a brisk spin. 'The American tax payer has decided to stop funding your tropical vacation', he said. 'We're dropping all charges against you.' I was unaware that any had been laid. I was a free man. My belongings were returned to me, the clothes in which I had left Jerusalem had been to the dry cleaners. I was placed in a truck and driven to the ferry, which took me across the estuary. I was allowed to descend and stand on the deck. The sky was low and grey, the water black and sleek. No sound of birds. I boarded a small passenger plane, which was half empty. I was offered a can of Coca Cola. And all this time I felt not personally involved, as if I had left myself behind, facing the vacuum of a null-and-voided future.

I spent a night and a day in a waiting room at Miami Airport. At first I was the only person there, but as time went by I was joined by fellow travelers. There was a caretaker, an ancient black man who hobbled around the

room using a medical rolling walker. Every few hours he would take a broom and sweep the entire floor, moving forward with a slow shuffle, dragging the broom, and cleaning as far as he could reach out while leaning against the walker. I was transfixed by his effort. He would finally finish, gasping, and go to the open door and smoke a cigarette. Then he would disappear, the tapping of the walker on the tarmac outside receding, coming back finally and handing out sandwiches, one packet per person. I asked him whether he had no pension fund, or family to support him, he turned away muttering 'no work, no pay'.

In the evening we were put on a Boeing 727. It appeared to belong to a charter company, with a seventies psychedelic paint job. It might have been done yesterday. But no visible name. I almost expected a juvenile version of Sir Richard Branson to come down the rear gangway to greet us, cocktails in hand. This was Miami, after all. But inside, the carpet was threadbare and the seating upholstery worn down to the springs. We were a smattering of passengers in the second class section. The plane made a low, lethargic take off, heading out to sea as the sun set behind us.

I slept. In the small hours I was woken, we were in an unknown airport, being herded into a waiting room. The day passed, we were fed and ignored, finally someone told me that we were in Nova Scotia.

We took off in the evening again, over the sea, the moon rose sharply and set. We were traveling eastwards, towards Europe. Restless and unable to sleep, I roamed the central aisle, and pushed aside the curtain into the first class section. That part of the plane was chock-a-block with head-bowed people, hands cuffed to their seats. A sharp shoulder shoved me back through the curtain, an individual came around and pushed me with both hands, cursing me to my seat. I went, and again I slept.

When I woke, we were over thick cloud cover. No idea of where we were heading, I had lost track of time as well. Western or eastern Europe. The sun was up, but we were coming down and the brilliant light paled as the aircraft skimmed slowly into the cloud. We were told to fasten our seatbelts, and there was turbulence, the aircraft would suddenly drop, then it would groan and rise as the pilot countered at full throttle. The insipid nothingness of the clouds went on forever. I began to wonder if it had become a permanent state. There was a shudder as the undercarriage came down. And at last we were through the clouds, and I peered desperately for a landmark. We were over a large city. And there it was, the Eiffel Tower, its antenna ripping the low cloud. I was in Paris.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Joseph Rabie.