

A RED EAGLE FALLING

A DRAMA IN TWO ACTS

By Ken Jones

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A RED EAGLE FALLING

By Ken Jones

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(FIVE MEN, ONE WOMAN)

MANFRED von RICHTHOFEN A German fighter pilot. At 23 years old he has aged well beyond his years. He was recently wounded, and is now seeing the spirits of the pilots he has shot down. (532 lines)

CAPTAIN A British fighter pilot*. The spirit of a man who recently died in battle. (307 lines)

KURT SCHAEFFER A German fighter pilot. He is young and ready to fight. The idea of war is still a heroic one. (178 lines)

KATIE OSTERDORFF A German nurse. She is kind and caring. She fell in love with Manfred, but cannot break through his tortured world. (208 lines)

MAJOR A British fighter pilot*. The spirit of a man who died in battle. (106 lines)

LIEUTENANT A British fighter pilot*. The spirit of a man who died in battle. (111 lines)

**Men of MANFRED'S subconscious mind.*

NOTE: Since the play is in the world of Manfred von Richthofen, it is suggested that the German characters use no dialects at all. The British pilots should use slight British dialects.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play occurs during the spring of 1917 in the room of Manfred von Richthofen, somewhere in German territory.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1Manfred's room. Early morning.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2Manfred's mind.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3Manfred's room. Evening of the next day.

ACT TWO, SCENE 1Manfred's mind. A nightmare.

ACT TWO, SCENE 2Manfred's room. Morning.

ACT TWO, SCENE 3Manfred's room. Same morning.

SETTING

The room of Manfred von Richthofen. The room is part of an aging house, once a place of peace, it is now a place of war. The walls are covered by the haunting serial numbers of the airplanes shot down, the pilots forgotten, but the numbers remembered. The room contains a bed and several tables. Upon one of these tables are the personal belongings of Richthofen. Books, pictures, and a group of silver mugs cover the table from one end to the other. In the center of the room is another table shrouded by an enormous map. Chairs are scattered around the room.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

The scene opens with MANFRED, a German fighter pilot, caught in a nightmare. The room takes on a fiery glow as MANFRED begins to stir in his bed. Airplane engines crank and soon turn over into a steady hum. "Deutschland uber Alles" begins to play and builds with the roar of the engines. MANFRED, trapped by his blanket, struggles to get free. The music and the engines suddenly stop. The CAPTAIN, a part of MANFRED'S subconscious mind, is sitting on the top of a dresser. He is singing. The room is lit dimly by the last traces of moonlight pouring in through the window.

CAPTAIN: JOHNNIE GET YOUR GUN, GET YOUR GUN, GET YOUR GUN, TAKE IT ON THE RUN, ON THE RUN, ON THE RUN. HEAR THEM CALLING YOU AND ME, EV'RY SON OF LIBERTY

MANFRED: *(Sits up holding his bandaged head.)* Oh!

CAPTAIN: Can't sleep?

MANFRED: *(Terrified to see the CAPTAIN.)* Oh, God!

CAPTAIN: Bad dreams?

MANFRED: Why are you still here?

CAPTAIN: I once had bad dreams but not anymore.

MANFRED: I've told you to leave!

CAPTAIN: But did you really mean it?

MANFRED: Yes!

CAPTAIN: You know, Manfred old boy, that head wound of yours doesn't seem to be getting any better.

MANFRED: It is fine! *(Grimaces in pain.)*

CAPTAIN: See? Maybe you should get someone to look at it. How about that nurse?

MANFRED: Shut up! *(His wound hurts again.)*

CAPTAIN: Cuts right through to your soul, doesn't it?

MANFRED: It is nothing.

CAPTAIN: You're something! When I'm in pain everyone knows about it!

MANFRED: Yes.

CAPTAIN: You should clear your mind.

MANFRED: Yes.

CAPTAIN: Try not to think of anything.

MANFRED: I have tried.

CAPTAIN: No luck? Well, I don't know what to tell you.

MANFRED: I am fine.

CAPTAIN: All right. Why don't you get some sleep?

MANFRED: Thank you.

He tries to sleep but the CAPTAIN won't let him

CAPTAIN: Flying tomorrow?

MANFRED: What?

CAPTAIN: Are you flying tomorrow?

MANFRED: If the weather permits.

CAPTAIN: That should clear your mind. Flying.

MANFRED: It did once, but not anymore.

CAPTAIN: Maybe you could try singing? *(Begins singing.)*

JOHNNIE GET YOUR GUN, GET YOUR GUN, GET YOUR GUN

MANFRED gets out of bed.

CAPTAIN: Where are you going?

MANFRED: Outside.

CAPTAIN: It's raining.

MANFRED: Damn!

CAPTAIN: Why don't you get some sleep?

MANFRED: You keep saying that over and over again, but you never let me sleep! Why? Why won't you let me sleep?

CAPTAIN: Have I kept you awake?

MANFRED: I could kill you!

CAPTAIN: *(Smiling.)* Now, wouldn't that be a bit redundant?

MANFRED, frustrated and angry, gives up on the idea of going to sleep. He crosses to the desk and removes a piece of paper and a pen. He moves to the table to write his letter.

CAPTAIN: I see. You're going to ignore me.

MANFRED: I am going to try.

CAPTAIN: What? A letter to your mother?

MANFRED: Yes.

CAPTAIN: You certainly write to her often enough.

MANFRED: She worries.

CAPTAIN: Why don't you write a letter to your girl?

MANFRED: I do not have a girl.

CAPTAIN: You know to whom I am referring.

MANFRED: Yes.

CAPTAIN: She's not your girl?

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MANFRED: No.

CAPTAIN: Why not? I bet you both could make a few nice round German babies together.

MANFRED: I hardly know her.

CAPTAIN: You were together for two weeks! How much time do you need?

MANFRED: *(MANFRED ignores the CAPTAIN and begins his letter.)*
April 21, 1917.

CAPTAIN: My birthday was next week.

MANFRED: Dearest...

CAPTAIN: ...Katie.

MANFRED: *(Tears up the letter.)* I am writing to my mother!
(Starting a new letter.) Dearest mother...

CAPTAIN: I hope your health has improved

MANFRED: ...since I wrote to you last. I have not...

CAPTAIN: ...heard from Lothar since he received...

MANFRED: ...his wound. I trust he is much better now.

CAPTAIN: Why don't we mention your wound?

MANFRED: Good idea. *(Writing.)* My wound is healing nicely.

CAPTAIN: I have blacked out several times

MANFRED: ...while flying...wait, no, I do not want to write that! *(He scratches out the line.)*

CAPTAIN: Why not?

MANFRED: She will worry.

CAPTAIN: She already worries. You said so yourself.

MANFRED: Yes. *(He tries to gather his thoughts.)* My wound has healed nicely. It gives me no problems.

CAPTAIN: Lying to your own mother!

MANFRED: Yesterday I shot down my forty-ninth...

CAPTAIN: ...victim

MANFRED: ...enemy! *(He pauses.)* He was a very courageous pilot.
I almost...

CAPTAIN: ...wish I had not killed him. He might have lived had I not followed him down and...

MANFRED: *(Hits the table with his fists in anger.)* No! *(He pauses.)*
I am grateful he died instantly for...

CAPTAIN: ...a pilot of his caliber should not have to suffer a violent death.

MANFRED: *(Confused.)* I was going to land and collect a piece of his machine as a souvenir...

CAPTAIN: Why didn't you?

MANFRED: ...I...

CAPTAIN: You were afraid you might have seen the face of the man you had just murdered'

MANFRED: *(Holding his head in pain.)* No. *(He pauses.)* Please tell father I enjoyed his stay here at the barracks. I hope he was not

CAPTAIN: ...repulsed -

MANFRED: ...when he witnessed me shooting down an enemy over the field. *(He pauses.)* I must get back to the squadron now.

CAPTAIN: Sincerely

MANFRED: ...with love...your son Manfred. *(Puts his head down on the table.)*

CAPTAIN: Now, are you ready to go to sleep?

MANFRED: No.

CAPTAIN: Then what about the...

MANFRED: I know what you are going to say and the answer is no!

CAPTAIN: Come on, Richthofen.

MANFRED: No.

CAPTAIN: Just once more?

MANFRED: I do not want to play the game!

CAPTAIN: Maybe it'll make you sleepy.

MANFRED: It will make me tired, and I am already tired.

CAPTAIN: It may help.

MANFRED: I do not want to play the game!

CAPTAIN: Why?

MANFRED: I am not in the mood.

CAPTAIN: Afraid you might lose?

MANFRED: Shut up.

CAPTAIN: You are never going to give me my chance to defeat you?

MANFRED: You had your chance.

CAPTAIN: Only once.

MANFRED: You only get one chance at life.

CAPTAIN: This isn't life; it's a game.

MANFRED: I do not want to play your silly games!

CAPTAIN: It must be your Prussian blood. A Prussian never loses.

MANFRED: Be quiet!

CAPTAIN: They never allow themselves to be caught in a losing situation.

MANFRED: *(Exploding with anger.)* Get away from me!

The CAPTAIN places his chair next to MANFRED, and both face the audience. The game is a dogfight with words.

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CAPTAIN: I am in the clouds above you.

MANFRED: I am not listening to you.

CAPTAIN: I dive.

MANFRED: No! I refuse to play...

CAPTAIN: I dive!

MANFRED cannot help but play the game. He assumes his flight position in his chair and begins the battle. NOTE: During the game, use of visual aides such as old "dogfight" films or special lighting effects may increase the excitement of the moment.

MANFRED: I assume you are coming out of the sun?

CAPTAIN: Yes.

MANFRED: I fly straight.

CAPTAIN: I level out, and I am on your tail.

MANFRED: Yes, you are on my tail but at a good distance. I fly straight.

CAPTAIN: I stay with you, and I fire.

MANFRED: You are out of range. I fly straight.

CAPTAIN: I'm still with you, and my plane is faster than yours.

MANFRED: I break for a wing-over...

CAPTAIN: Tight bank - still there.

MANFRED: My wing-over is a tight turn but with a slow stall. Your bank was fast. I believe I am behind you now.

CAPTAIN: *(Nervously.)* I side-slip. We are side by side!

MANFRED: Nice move. I stall.

CAPTAIN: I weave behind you.

MANFRED: My stall has placed you in front of me. I fire.

CAPTAIN: *(Frightened.)* A barrel roll!

MANFRED: Stall.

CAPTAIN: I fly straight!

MANFRED: I am behind you.

CAPTAIN: I can outrun you.

MANFRED: If you wish to run...

CAPTAIN: I'll bank right!

MANFRED: I am on top of you!

CAPTAIN: I'll fly straight; open throttle!

MANFRED: I am right there. I open fire.

CAPTAIN: I weave to avoid fire.

MANFRED: Your weaving slows you down so I may catch up. Do not panic when under fire. You should have flown straight; you would have escaped. *(He pauses.)* I believe you are dead -- again.

CAPTAIN: Damn you!

MANFRED: *(Laughing.)* I am going to sleep now. *(MANFRED climbs into bed. The CAPTAIN rushes to his side.)*

CAPTAIN: You will lose one day.

MANFRED: *(Singing.)* JOHNNIE GET YOUR GUN, GET YOUR GUN, GET YOUR GUN...

CAPTAIN: I hope I'm there when it happens.

MANFRED: I am sure you will be. And I will meet you in hell when I get there.

MANFRED rolls over and goes to sleep. The CAPTAIN crosses back to his spot on the dresser and sits. After a moment, he crosses to the trophy table, lifts a mug, and reads the inscription.

CAPTAIN: British captain - name unknown - - killed by Manfred von Richthofen.

There is a knock at the door, but neither MANFRED nor the CAPTAIN answers it.

CAPTAIN: Richthofen. Oh, Richthofen, we have company.

Finally, the door opens and KURT SCHAEFFER, a young German fighter pilot, is pushed into the room by the wind. KURT is wearing a flight suit, which is soaked, by the rain. Making sure MANFRED is asleep; KURT crosses to the trophy table and takes one of the silver mugs. Slowly, he removes a bottle of wine from his jacket and pours himself a drink. Unseen by KURT, the CAPTAIN watches.

CAPTAIN: Manny, old boy, wake up.

MANFRED stirs in his bed. KURT hides the bottle behind his back and places the mug back on the table.

MANFRED: What time is it?

CAPTAIN: Early.

KURT: Five o'clock.

MANFRED: My God! What are you doing here?

KURT: Waiting.

MANFRED: Waiting for what?

CAPTAIN: You.

KURT: The weather.

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MANFRED: No need to wait, it will be there even if you sleep until eight o'clock.

KURT: Eight o'clock may be too late.

MANFRED: Too late?

KURT: I want to get the jump on the enemy.

CAPTAIN: Good plan.

MANFRED: There is no doubt you will, but not in this weather.

KURT: The weather will change.

MANFRED: Not today.

KURT: Then tomorrow.

CAPTAIN: Or the next day

KURT: Or twenty days from now, and I want to be ready.

MANFRED: Kurt. You need your sleep. Hell, I need my sleep.

CAPTAIN: Yes, you do.

KURT: I will get some sleep.

MANFRED: You will get some sleep in the air!

KURT: (*Annoyed.*) I will get some sleep.

CAPTAIN: (*To MANFRED.*) Control.

MANFRED: A pilot who is not in control of his senses is dead.

CAPTAIN: I love that part.

KURT: I am in control. Good pilots are always in control.

CAPTAIN: I'll have to remember that.

KURT: I am always aware!

CAPTAIN: Sure you are!

MANFRED: (*To CAPTAIN.*) Be quiet.

KURT: What?

MANFRED: Not you. (*He catches a glimpse of the bottle behind KURT'S back.*) Have you been drinking?

KURT: Does wine count?

CAPTAIN: Good answer.

MANFRED: You know my orders on alcohol and flying.

KURT: Yes, sir.

MANFRED: Then why have you deliberately disobeyed my orders?

KURT: I was celebrating.

MANFRED: Celebrating?

KURT: Yes, sir. Rittmeister, sir.

MANFRED: And what special event demanded it necessary to break my orders and drink in excess before flying?

KURT: I received word, sir.

MANFRED: About what?

KURT: My kill.

CAPTAIN: My friend.

MANFRED: Yesterday's kill?

KURT: Yes.

MANFRED: Well, what is it?

KURT: Confirmed.

MANFRED: Confirmed! Why didn't you say something?

KURT: I was waiting for you to ask.

CAPTAIN: Good job.

MANFRED: When did you find out?

KURT: Four hours and forty-three minutes ago!

MANFRED: And you did not say anything?

CAPTAIN: What's to be said?

KURT: You were asleep.

CAPTAIN: He never sleeps.

MANFRED: So, how does it feel?

KURT: What?

MANFRED: To be an ace.

KURT: You certainly must know.

MANFRED: It has been a long time since I first became an ace.

KURT: Well, I feel very good. No, I feel great! I just can't believe it!

MANFRED: You cannot believe it? I cannot believe it!

CAPTAIN: I can believe it!

MANFRED: Do you remember your first mission here?

KURT: Too well!

MANFRED: Not only did you nearly shoot down one of our own planes, but you also landed your crate on my new automobile.

(They both laugh.)

CAPTAIN: Here come the old flying stories!

MANFRED: *(To the CAPTAIN.)* Be quiet.

KURT: Sorry.

MANFRED: *(To KURT.)* Not you.

The CAPTAIN begins to sing quietly in the background.

KURT: The next kill will be yours.

CAPTAIN: COME JOSEPHINE IN MY FLYING MACHINE,

MANFRED: I do not know.

CAPTAIN: GOING UP, SHE GOES, GOING UP, SHE GOES,

KURT: Just one more and you'll have fifty. Fifty kills!

CAPTAIN: BALANCE YOURSELF LIKE A BIRD ON A BEAM, IN THE AIR SHE GOES, WELL, THERE SHE GOES..

MANFRED: Just one more

CAPTAIN: It's always one more.

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MANFRED: Well, let us not worry about my future victories. Congratulations! Twenty years old and already an ace!

KURT: Twenty is old. Werner Voss is nineteen and he has more kills than anyone except you.

MANFRED: Yes. I am twenty-three. Twenty-three going on a hundred.

CAPTAIN: Von Richthofen is young.

MANFRED: Von Richthofen is tired.

KURT: You're still the best pilot alive.

CAPTAIN: Alive is the key word!

MANFRED: No, Kurt, I am not the best.

CAPTAIN: Careful.

MANFRED: I am careful. There is a great difference between skill and caution. I only attack sure kills.

CAPTAIN: It must work. You are still alive.

KURT: In my eyes you are still the best.

MANFRED: Someone would like to prove you wrong.

CAPTAIN: I would die for that chance!

MANFRED: *(to CAPTAIN.)* I think die is the key word.

CAPTAIN: Good one. Nice shot.

KURT: Die? What?

MANFRED: *(Loses control and argues with the CAPTAIN in front of KURT.)* Yes, you had your chance.

CAPTAIN: Touchy.

KURT: I had my chance?

MANFRED: Yes!

CAPTAIN: I think I could take you.

MANFRED: I think you are wrong!

KURT: I am wrong? Rittmeister are you all right? Is your wound acting up again?

MANFRED: *(Holding his head in pain.)* It is nothing.

KURT: Maybe you should have it looked at by a doctor.

MANFRED: No!

KURT: Maybe Fraülein Osterdorff could come here again?

MANFRED: No! Definitely not! We do not need women wandering around the machines.

KURT: But your wound?

MANFRED: It will heal.

KURT: What about the hallucinations?

CAPTAIN: *(Snapping to attention.)* Present and accounted for, sir!

MANFRED: The hallucinations will heal with the wound. I hope.

CAPTAIN: (*Singing.*) COME JOSEPHINE IN MY FLYING MACHINE,
GOING UP, SHE GOES.

MANFRED: (*Stumbles, holding his head.*) Why do you play these silly games?

KURT crosses to help MANFRED.

CAPTAIN: GOING UP, SHE GOES

KURT: What games? Are you all right, Rittmeister?

CAPTAIN: You must learn to fear.

KURT: Why don't you let me bring in a doctor?

MANFRED: I am afraid! I am always afraid!

KURT: Afraid of what?

MANFRED: (*To KURT.*) Fear will save your life some day!

KURT: Rittmeister, fear will make you run.

CAPTAIN: Is running...

MANFRED: ...so bad?

KURT: Yes, running is bad.

CAPTAIN: I hope you change your mind.

MANFRED: One day you may need to run.

KURT: Good pilots don't run.

MANFRED: Good pilots run fast.

CAPTAIN: That's why they're good.

KURT is like a child who has just lost his hero.

KURT: Sir, maybe you should lie down. You're not making any sense.

MANFRED: Why? Because I run away every chance I get?

KURT: That's not true, Rittmeister.

CAPTAIN: Yes, it is true.

MANFRED: If I can escape, I do.

KURT: You don't know what you're saying.

MANFRED: Oh, yes, I do. When that bullet hit me in the head, I knew. I knew I was afraid.

KURT: Afraid of fighting?

MANFRED: I would rather not find myself falling four thousand meters to the ground. I would rather not make my machine my coffin. Do you understand? I am scared. I am so scared every time I take off that I cannot even control my own bladder!

KURT: I don't want to hear this!

MANFRED: Why not? Forty-five kills from now you will be as scared as I am.

KURT: You're wrong! Forty-five kills from now I will be closer to becoming the top scoring ace of this war!

MANFRED: (*furious.*) Never say that! Not if you care about your life. I said that once I believed that once and now it is too late!

KURT: I wish you could hear what I say. I want to live but how can you be living if you're just getting by? You have to fight. Every minute. Every second. If you are bringing something back with you kicking that stick over and turning towards home is the best feeling in the world. But...only if you bring your Fatherland a victory. A kill.

MANFRED: You do not bring your country anything when you kill. You just take away something from another country. I cannot believe Germany will only be proud of me if I kill. (*He pauses.*) Every time I line up my sights I wish to God I did not have a trigger under my finger. But I do. I press gently like I was trained to do. The bullets explode out of the barrel like they were made to do. And the canvas and flesh plummet to the ground like they were destined to do. (*He sits.*) I am happy for your victory. I am happy that you are an ace, but I wish to God you were not so happy about it.

They sit for a moment.

KURT: I suppose we will never be able to understand one another. Maybe that's good; if we understood what we saw might frighten us. (*He pauses.*) I hope we make it through this war together.

CAPTAIN: That's nice.

MANFRED and KURT sit silently for a moment as the CAPTAIN lies on the bed.

KURT: So do you think the storm will continue?

CAPTAIN: The storm will always continue.

MANFRED: I think we are getting the worst of it now. Tomorrow morning we will be in the air.

KURT: They will have the draw on us.

MANFRED: I know. The wind will blow the clouds past them hours before we see light.

KURT: Do you think they'll take advantage of the extra time?

CAPTAIN: Probably not.

KURT: Are they smart enough?

MANFRED: Do not underestimate the enemy. I once did, and my mechanic pulled twenty bullets from my wings.

CAPTAIN: And one from your head.

KURT: I respect the British and the French, but these new Americans, they seem lost in the sky. *(He pauses.)* I do not understand how these men can fight when their own country is afraid. What do they fight for?

MANFRED: They fight for their lives. I do not think it will be very long before America gives up its neutrality and joins the war. As for those Americans already fighting, I rather admire their courage.

KURT: But the extra need to win is not there.

CAPTAIN: *(Sings.)* OVER THERE, OVER THERE, SEND THE WORD, SEND THE WORD OVER THERE,

MANFRED: The need to survive is there. I wish I had it.

CAPTAIN: THAT THE YANKS ARE COMING, THE YANKS ARE COMING, THE DRUMS RUM TUMMING EVERYWHERE

KURT: You do.

CAPTAIN: SO PREPARE, SAY A PRAYER,

MANFRED: I do not know; I just don't know.

CAPTAIN: SEND THE WORD, SEND THE WORD TO BEWARE, WE'LL BE OVER, WE'RE COMING OVER.

KURT: Why do you worry? You tell me how careful you are and how important life is to you. Isn't that the will to survive?

CAPTAIN: AND WE WON'T COME BACK TILL IT'S OVER, OVER THERE.

MANFRED: I suppose.

KURT: Sure it is. You have forty-nine kills.

MANFRED: I know, but I...I hate it.

CAPTAIN: What?

KURT: Sometimes people are forced into situations. It is a war. You have to kill.

MANFRED: I would rather fly.

KURT: If you just flew, you would be killed. You have to fight.

MANFRED: It is so beautiful. You can see everything. Like the clouds. *(He thinks for a moment.)* When I was a child, I would stare up at the clouds and try to decide what they were shaped like. *(Laughing.)* I never came up with anything. My brother, Lothar, could see a thousand creatures in one cloud; I saw only a cloud. *(Crosses to the trophy table and removes a photograph.)* In pilot training school, I began looking at the clouds from above. I would fly over a cloud and stare at it until my eyes hurt. They still looked like clouds to me. *(Shows KURT the picture.)* One day a

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new instructor arrived at the field; he was replacing our old instructor who had been killed the week before. Anyway, he had an enormous bulbous nose, and when he put on his flight cap, he looked like a cloud. I saw him in every cloud I flew over. (*Replaces the photograph.*) Now I see twisted faces and broken planes in the clouds. If I could just see that instructor, or even a plain old cloud again, I think I would be all right.

CAPTAIN: (*Sarcastically.*) How moving.

MANFRED: (*To the CAPTAIN.*) Shut up.

KURT: I didn't say anything.

MANFRED: No. It's not you.

KURT: That ghost?

MANFRED: That nightmare.

KURT: You see too much.

MANFRED: I dream too much.

CAPTAIN: Nightmares.

MANFRED: Is that so bad?

KURT: It is if the pilot behind you is not dreaming.

MANFRED: But how can you not dream in the air? Flying is a dream!

KURT: Dying is not a dream.

CAPTAIN: Nightmares.

MANFRED: (*To CAPTAIN.*) I know.

KURT: You taught me that you have to be alert. Know where the enemy is at every moment.

MANFRED: Yes. I suppose I did.

KURT: Don't fly over the clouds, fly through them.

MANFRED: I cannot

CAPTAIN: It's just a cloud.

KURT: You are afraid of clouds?

MANFRED: I feel smothered. I feel trapped.

KURT: I love the clouds. I love to fly straight into one, then shoot out the other side. A bullet exploding out of a rifle.

MANFRED: You are not afraid of what is on the other side?

KURT: I look forward to it. The unexpected is exciting!

MANFRED: All right. What if you fly out of a cloud and hit a mountain?

KURT: I will crash.

MANFRED: What if you fly into an observation balloon?

KURT: I will die.

MANFRED: What if a pack of French Nieuports is waiting for you?

KURT: (*Angry.*) I will kill them! You cannot be afraid of the unknown. There's nothing you can do.

CAPTAIN: True.

MANFRED: That is why I am afraid, I need to be in control.

KURT: (*Confused.*) I did not mean you are not in control.

MANFRED: Then, what did you mean?

CAPTAIN: This should be good.

KURT: Well, there is nothing you can do as far as the situation goes, but once you are in the situation, it is your choices that will decide your fate.

MANFRED: What about flying into the mountain or the observation balloon? What was your choice?

KURT: To die.

They sit for a moment. KURT begins to remove his flight gear.

MANFRED: Leave it on. It is freezing in here.

KURT ignores MANFRED and removes his coat. The CAPTAIN crosses to the trophy table and points to the mug that KURT had used earlier. MANFRED examines the mug.

MANFRED: Kurt, did you use this mug?

KURT: Yes.

MANFRED: Why?

KURT: Because my hand cannot hold enough wine.

MANFRED: I do not care for your clever response. I just want a straight answer! Why did you drink from this mug?

KURT: I don't know.

MANFRED: You know what these mugs mean to me?

KURT: Yes, I've seen you making love to the second one quite often.

MANFRED: (*Grabbing KURT.*) Let me remind you. I do not drink from a mug until the victory is confirmed.

KURT: I'm sure the man you killed would be touched to know you wait for confirmation before toasting his death.

CAPTAIN: No, not really.

MANFRED: Let's not forget our ranks.

KURT: Yes, sir! How could I, Sir?

MANFRED: Do not ever drink from these cups again. Do not even touch them!

KURT: But by the time the war ends, I'll have to touch the mugs just to get inside the room.

MANFRED: Then, I will kill you! (*He is shocked by his own statement.*)

A RED EAGLE FALLING

KURT: I'm sure you would.

CAPTAIN: You could get another mug.

MANFRED: Leave me alone.

KURT: What if I start seeing mugs in the clouds?

MANFRED: *(holds his head as a pain cuts through him.)* That is enough.

KURT: All the men and all the mugs!

MANFRED: You are out of line!

KURT: What if I see the man you shot in two?

MANFRED: Please...

KURT: The poor pilot you followed down. Was he French or...

CAPTAIN: ...British.

KURT: I know you could tell. You were close enough to see his face.

MANFRED: Stop this!

KURT: His rudder was gone. There was no way he could have lived but you had to make sure.

CAPTAIN: Boom, boom, boom!

KURT: The brave Richthofen

MANFRED: Kurt...

KURT: Only the strays and the weak.

MANFRED: It is the only way.

KURT: You re wrong!

CAPTAIN: Is he?

KURT: A gentleman does not attack the helpless.

CAPTAIN: A hunter does.

KURT: Good pilots battle for their kills!

MANFRED: I am the best!

KURT: In numbers, maybe, but not in skill.

CAPTAIN: True.

KURT: I would love to fly against you.

MANFRED: You are out of line.

CAPTAIN: Shooter versus Hunter.

KURT: I could take you.

CAPTAIN: Flyer versus Killer.

KURT: Do you watch the bullets rip them apart?

MANFRED: No!

KURT: That pilot was he laughing or crying?

CAPTAIN: Neither.

KURT: Remembered by a silver mug!

MANFRED: He was already dead! He was not waving. The wind was moving his arm! He was not waving! *(The CAPTAIN begins to wave at MANFRED, who is confused. The CAPTAIN laughs.)* I

did not mean to pull the trigger. *(To the CAPTAIN.)* I did not even realize you were in my sights. I didn't know. I knew you were doomed. Going down. *(He stumbles to KURT.)* I tried to convince myself I shot him to save him from the crash. I couldn't help it. I saw the British insignia, and I pulled the trigger. *(He pauses.)* He kept waving. Why didn't he stop waving?

CAPTAIN: Just a friendly man, I suppose.

KURT: *(Helping MANFRED to the table.)* Men do strange things when they're about to die.

CAPTAIN: Men do strange things when they're about to kill.

KURT: I'm sorry, Rittmeister. I did not mean what I said.

CAPTAIN: Yes, you did.

MANFRED: What?

KURT: I've had too much to drink.

MANFRED: Drink?

KURT: Yes.

MANFRED: What drink?

KURT: Would you like one, Sir?

MANFRED: Please.

KURT: But your orders were no drinking before flying.

MANFRED: Are we flying today?

KURT: We still have to wait for the weather. But the storm can't last forever.

MANFRED: It seems like forever.

KURT: If the wind would die down, we could take off. This time in the skies, I will be an ace.

CAPTAIN: An ace is just a man.

MANFRED: I am happy for you, Kurt. Really I am.

KURT: Thank you, Sir.

MANFRED: Now, pour me a drink.

KURT: Yes'sir. *(Crosses to the trophy table.)* We need cups.

MANFRED: All right. Use the damn mugs.

KURT: *(Grabs two mugs.)* Let's drink to victory!

MANFRED: No. Let's just drink to our airplanes

KURT: To the little red machine.

MANFRED: To my little red machine!

CAPTAIN: Bottoms up!

MANFRED and KURT drink.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

The CAPTAIN is alone downstage in a small pool of light. He begins to sing during which dog-fighting airplanes can be heard battling in the distance. He holds a silver drinking mug, a trophy from MANFRED'S collection. He sings the song as though it were a German drinking song.

CAPTAIN: COME JOSEPHINE IN MY FLYING MACHINE, GOING UP SHE GOES, THERE SHE GOES, UP SHE GOES *(An airplane can be heard falling to the ground. There is a loud crash.)* BALANCE YOURSELF LIKE A BIRD ON A BEAM, IN THE AIR SHE GOES, WELL, THERE SHE GOES *(A British MAJOR steps into light sharing it with the CAPTAIN. The MAJOR like the CAPTAIN is a part of MANFRED'S subconscious mind. The two men salute each other, and the MAJOR joins in singing the song.)*

BOTH: COME JOSEPHINE IN MY FLYING MACHINE, GOING UP SHE GOES, THERE SHE GOES, UP SHE GOES *(Two more airplanes can be heard dog-fighting in the distance.)* BALANCE YOURSELF LIKE A BIRD ON A BEAM, IN THE AIR SHE GOES, WELL, THERE SHE GOES *(Again an airplane is heard falling to its death, and again the crash of the machine is heard. A BRITISH LT. joins the other two men. Like the others he is a part of MANFRED'S subconscious mind. The LT. is dressed in flight gear. The MAJOR has already removed some of his gear. The CAPTAIN hands out silver mugs as they all sing together.)*

ALL: COME JOSEPHINE IN MY FLYING MACHINE, GOING UP SHE GOES, THERE SHE GOES, UP SHE GOES BALANCE YOURSELF LIKE A BIRD ON A BEAM, IN THE AIR SHE GOES, WELL, THERE SHE GOES. *(They hold their mugs up in a toast, and then they drink. Lights fade.)*

BY KEN JONES

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