

# Dreamtime

A short story by Andreas Ingo

I' m sitting at a bar. A group of jazz players plays an atmospheric tune using improvisation to attune to the lonely night for city dwellers in the eastern side of New York. I' m lonely but surrounded by other people sharing the same predicament. As the jazz band comes to a crescendo I look to it to order a beer and some snacks to feel better about myself. Adept to use what is given for an easy escape.

After the play I exit the bar to walk along the cluttered street close to the bar. There is an intimidating silence along this street. Prostitutes can be seen. Brown rats rushes by. The sparse traffic occasionally makes sounds with horns pushing their heavy vehicles along the street at night.

As I come into a dark alley I walk along quite drunk from the alcohol usage. I continue along the alley. Watch my steps. Watch the rats, the paper bags and feeling the smell from the street. I' m hit in the back with a sharp object. I scream, turn around and watch a young man with a knife.

“Give me your wallet.” The young man says, “Give it to me.”

I hesitate. I try to scream. But the chock of the moment makes me paralyzed. The young man stares blankly into my face, makes a jump and cuts into my flesh with the knife. I fall to the ground, heavily injured and the young man takes hold of the wallet in my jacket. He runs away. I try to call for help but loses consciousness.

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The next day I wake up in a hospital. The ceiling of the hospital has a white armature. It penetrates my eyes with

blinding force. I close my eyes, turn my head to the right and watch other patients sleep close to me. I'm not lonely. Other patients makes disturbing noises too. It's a stressful situation with many nurses taking care of patients.

As I turn back in initial position I watch a huge bandage upon my chest. The guy from the dark alley had penetrated one of my lungs. I can hardly breathe steady. I fall back into blackness as a helpless victim from theft abuse.

A month later I'm back in my neighbourhood in eastern New York. I have started to think. To reflect upon my mistake to walk the dark alley at night. It had felt so surreal. So dark and imposing. Still I had done a common mistake. To walk into a dangerous area contrary to reason.

Not much longer after I meet a woman along a harbour area that walk a walk passing boats. I pick up a conversation with this lady. And I tell her that the water looks inviting. To swim along the watery surface. Like a dolphin.

"You surely have a point." The woman says, "Many walk by, not many enter the ocean."

"I wish I could swim." I say, "But I was attacked by a thief a month ago and lost the function of my left side lung."

"Too bad." The lady says.

We walk together along the harbour area for several minutes. Watching a huge ship pass by with tourists using cameras and video-tape recorders. They are singing along. Putting up happy faces. They sing sailor songs to the rhythm of the ocean waves.

The lady and I enter a long conversation about thieves, injuries and the chain of events that led me to my new condition.

"The problem with you may be that you live like a dreamer." The woman says wearing a red cape. "You should just wake up to the reality of the modern world."

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that bad things happens but it’ s mostly due to our inability to adjust to reality.” She says, “We live like in a play. A theatrical stage of dark suspicions, shallow dreams and reality constructs. In your case, if I may suggest, it may be due to some event in your past or just a chance occurrence.”

“I shall just think about it.” I say.

We exchange phone numbers and I get a last look at the ocean and the harbour area as I leave the woman alone for some refreshments in a nearby cafe.

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I start to think about what had been said. The quite surprising but also honest opinions given by the lady with the red cape.

It was about reality. About the dreamy representation we have about reality. That a dark alley can look quite sad but also quite comforting. That some unknown force dictated my steps that lonely night. It was about the wrong choice. As I think about this I realize I had to become a jazz player.

I had envied the rulers of the jazz scene as far as I could remember. The improvisation. The right licks. The stage persona of someone that had given up their shallow concerns for the magic of the night.

What if I could become one of those? What if it was possible to transcend the notion of failure in art and in other areas? What if reality was a dream just well hidden?

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I’ m back at the bar where I listened to the jazz band earlier. I’ m back there. I listen to some music by a similar jazz group. I see a thin shape emerge on stage. A pale white face on a young man looking like the thief in the dark alley. I walk up to the stage. I fixate my eyes on the young performer. And I wonder if

the guy is the thief or if it is someone else? I almost want to scream. Call to the police or ask someone standing close to me if they recognise the thin guy with the pale face.

As I walk back to the bar I'm hit with several suggestions. Suggestions coming up blending jazz licks with strange tonalities and notes from the melodic minor scale.

It is the guy I say to myself. It was dark when it happened but I recognise his voice as the thin guy starts to sing. I walk back to the stage. I take hold of a lady and asks her about the male singer. Is he from this neighbourhood?

I get no clear answer.

I walk up on stage, look into the eyes of the male singer and asks him about the event. I get no answer. I start to hit him. He screams. I wrestle around with him. Punches him in the stomach as I suddenly realize I have hit a woman!

I'm sent home to evaluate the night from another perspective.

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I have to call the lady with the red cape. I need comfort. I need someone to talk to. Someone that can help me to put everything in perspective. I call to her. As we join on my balcony for some red wine and olive sandwiches the lady starts to describe my condition.

It was the same for her in younger years. She was raised in a family that left her alone to play in her room. Taking it easy. Playing soft melodies on her portable stereo. It was an easy childhood. A childhood of happy faces, television, snacks, burgers, fries and pizza.

Nothing outstanding could be said about the way she was raised. But she never made contact with external reality. She was playing songs, playing a role, playing the sweet girl without contact with a reality that demanded something in return.

In time she had to reconsider.

“It is the jazz!” I say to the woman in a high tone, “My dream about jazz and the connection between jazz and external reality.”

“I could almost have guessed it.” The lady said.

“I never could observe reality from the perspective of someone doing hard analysis. Getting the hard facts of things from a cold perspective. I honestly think it was the presence of the gods of jazz that made me feel immortal the night I was hit by the thief in my chest. I really start to remember.”

“You might be right.” The lady says. “The problem is that we can’t observe with our own eyes, make sound predictions. To evaluate situations from a dispassionate frame of reference. And this is clouding our minds so that we can’t make the right decisions. It is like a movie script lacking connection to true research building on years of investigation.”

The two of us went inside to play some poker and had a couple more shots of wine. We dulled our minds with trivia concerning New York, the commune and the currents of jazz in modern times.

We had a lot of heroes. Who were our enemies?

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The next day I take up an instrument. It is a trumpet. I try to push air into the nozzle of the instrument. It makes some sound but I can’t connect to anything resembling jazz music.

What is a good improvisation after all? How can I find the right lick? A good tune? The magic of story telling pushing the listener into another dimension?

That’s where I’m hit with a realization: That “common-sense reality” is a mix between true observation and subjective interpretation. Mixing inside the brain to allow for deviances

such as my mistake to mix the female jazz singer with the young thief with the pale face.

I push more air into the trumpet. Makes several attempts to play the melodic minor scale from top to bottom. To reverse the pattern of the notes. And some sound emerges from the instrument.

But it doesn't sound like the melodic minor scale at all.

I have a clear sense for it though. But "sense" and reality are two different dimensions. As I put more pressure on the instrument and make the sounds come across I realize that consciousness doesn't work as supposed.

It is the mistake to evaluate a scene from particular memory fragments. These fragments are strands in a bigger puzzle. And that puzzle is the puzzle of our entire lives. Fed upon television, illusions about jazz legends, illusions that no players can be murderers.

Or that ordinary people have ideas about us that don't connect to true life experience.

That is the movie. The soundtrack of our lives. The real life scenario created with the clash between "what is" and "what should be".

Combining facts with illusions.

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The next night I walk with the lady along the harbour area once again. We walk along the harbour area close to the spot were we previously talked about swimming.

"We shall go for it tonight." The lady says and points her fingers towards the water.

"Go for a swim?"

“Yes.” She says, “Doing it right now. Doing it for the reality of the moment. Not second guessing. Not building reality models. Just taking a good swim and then talk about the temperature of the hot water.”

“What for?” I ask.

“To transcend the notions of common sense reality.” The lady says and laughs. “Beyond comprehension.”