

Lost In New America

A short story by Andreas Ingo

My name is Philip Canton. I'm an architect, a designer/construction artist from the depths of old America. I'm on a highway. Driving my car on the rugged surfaces on the American mainland. Going west from New York, passing buildings with torn and windswept walls. Looking like something from the old, old west.

I have pretty good moods. The sense of the realization of a teenager dream. Projecting my will into construction design in a far off village along the American highway.

When I arrive at the village I'm not met with handshakes and fine gestures. Instead I walk by myself to inspect the torn and dusty buildings of the village. Some old dogs and a sneaking cat make their appearance among the buildings.

The sun is hot. The desert surrounding the village is dusty. Decorated with sand and a few bushes. The desert stretches for miles up to the horizon. And only a couple of thin clouds are seen upon the sky.

Eventually I'm walking up to the construction office. To shake hands with the supervisor overseeing the whole construction business.

"You are a bit early." The man says, "But feel free to inspect the surrounding areas. We really need something to draw people into our village. Gambling worked for Las Vegas too."

"You are correct." I say and inspect the blue collar look of the construction supervisor.

A newspaper can be seen in a close by stand.

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I start with the first sketches of the gamble centre. A lot of space is needed combined with initial vectors to create a first impression. A look discussed by the boss of the construction company.

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As time moves on I try to hide it. I try to neglect the impressions I get from the local towns people.

I met a woman in my walk to a nearby grocery store the other day. She looked at me with the most hollow eyes. Eyes that maybe had been drained from new impressions. I said hello and she said hello in return. Not much more could be said.

I use game machines too. I put up a lot of coins to spend some time away from my hotel room. Away from my office.

Now I'm walking with the supervisor along the expansive area where the gambling centre will be built. It's a yellow and dusty area of flattened ground. Newspapers are blowing in the wind.

"Hey Philip!" The supervisor says to me, "Are you finished with the gambling centre design?"

"I have only begun." I say, "This area needs some grand touches." I say, "It will be easy for many to find leisure."

"I think so too." The supervisor says.

We walk together to visualize the grand design of the new gambling centre. It will be like a miniature version of Las Vegas. Something for lonely truck drivers driving along the American highway at night.

"You take care of it." The supervisor says, "I trust your company."

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As time progresses forward I'm struck by the hard reality of the engineering work. I had pictured something more eventful. Something more daring and different. But I'm stuck in an average American village. A prey to indifferent forces just waiting for the sign to begin with the construction work.

I put pressure upon myself. I picture the whole gamble centre with the powers of my subconscious mind. I need inspiration. I need feedback. I need a helping hand and good suggestions.

But it all amounts to the static observation of my construction design software. Stuck with a portable computer waiting for commands.

I walk into a bar and buy some beer to calm my senses. I look around to catch the attention of the bar owner and some other locals. They are drinking beer with dull faces. Some bad sense of humour make the locals laugh dry laughs.

“Hi.” I say to them, “Can I join you for a game of poker?”

“You surely can.” One of them says to me, “If you tell us about the details of the game.”

“I’ll do it.” I say and walk over to the local’s table.

Well at ease in my hotel room I open a beer can and start to search my mobile phone for messages. I look at one message and read a text from an anonymous source.

“Dial me.” The message says and I do it without thinking.

As I dial the number a female voice greets me in a scrambled tone.

“So you called me at last.” The voice says, “Your days of good fortune is over.” The voice continues, “And it is all about your personal will.”

“What are you talking about?” I ask drunk.

“Your personal will.” The voice says, “That is one thing that is going to change in the future. Your dreams. Your projects. I will see to it that you go down in time.”

The conversation ends abruptly.

I look at the dark shape of my black mobile phone cover. A dead skull is painted upon it. A white skull from some young design artist.

Working for some remote company.

“Who could that voice be?” I ask myself.

* * *

I drive out into the desert the next day to open my trunk and take out a shotgun. I put down some beer cans, walk away a bit and shoot at the cans with furious speed. Reloading. Shooting again. And one of the beer cans is hit with a bullet.

It feels needed.

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As events unfold silently I have to adjust to some degree. The hollow looks from the locals are something I have to accept. The dry working conditions, the eerie experience of my construction design software. I sleep a lot. I work morning hours. I work late at night and switch approach as the deadline comes to completion.

The full design is a design that is building on the visions of similar projects along the American homeland. It's not something new. Rather something easily recognizable. Something average to make people recognize the buildings at first display.

“Is this the dream?” I ask myself. “Is this what I was paid for?”

Not much more can be said or be done. I put the final touches on the “grand design”. Laugh a dry laugh and walk out with my portable computer to the construction office.

I have delivered on schedule.

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A week later I'm back in New York to talk with my boss about my latest job and the details concerning my next project.

“You really hit the ground out there!” My boss says. Having a huge grin on his face. Knowing about the perils of my journey.

“I was met with a low-key attitude.” I say to him, “The customer really wanted something easily recognizable and conventional.”

“It's easy to understand.” My boss says.

“Yes.” I say to him, “The threatening voice on my mobile phone really bugged me too.”

“It made matters worse for sure!” My boss says, “You need to find some perspective. To value the job you do differently. And even if you do succeed some people will be jealous. Some will hate you too.”

“So what about the next job?” I ask my boss.

“Come with me.” He says to me.

Both of us walk away from the office and sit down along a table in a roof-top restaurant. We drink some wine. We exchange some comments concerning ordinary matters. Talking about the latest adventures of my employer’s kids.

“Here it goes.” My boss says later, “Some people have contacted me regarding a design project for central park here in New York. I need you to take this project very seriously.” He says, “You get to work with a good team of other creative people. Designing something suitable for the park we all share. Are you ready for this?”

I look at my employer with the most exhausted eyes. I try to hide my exhaustion. My numb brain. My disillusioned condition. I try to project some good-will and also a winning smile.

“This is a good chance for sure.” I say to him. “I’m on to it.”

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It’s peculiar how a change of scenery can make wonders for the wandering brain. I’m introduced to the creative team responsible for the “grand design” of the central park installation.

We walk the park like occasional tourists. Watching the casual walk patterns of the locals. Some of them walk an easy walk and others walk more upright with a certain strain.

“So you’re pretty accustomed to these kind of projects?” One woman asks me with a keen sense of curiosity.

“I’m experienced.” I say to hide my background a bit, “ But it’s also a great opportunity.”

“I think so too.” The woman says.

The team of designers join together in an office pretty close to the Empire State Building. We share some drinks with low alcohol percentage. The new situation is a great contrast to the lonely business along the American highway. Gone are the dusty roads. The yellow desert and the blazing sun.

The loneliness.

We join together for a presentation of the ideas for the central park project. Some of us abandon the portable computers for a whiteboard in one corner of the office.

We drag lines and connections between different concepts and ideas. We forget the hard details of the project and start to focus on the basics. The big strokes knows no limits in this early phase. We make our common voices heard.

We also make creative leaps without harsh judgments.

“Ok.” One of the designers says to the rest of us. “As we pass the first phase of the design procedure we have to concentrate more on the necessities. The details. The juicy details.”

I listen to the man. His creative temper. His happy outlook of a cutting edge designer working for a large company. He has made himself push beyond ordinary states of consciousness. His comments regarding the project are pretty impressive coming from such a young man. But I don’t see him as a superior. Instead I challenge him. I ask him pretty rare questions regarding the project design. I’m not afraid to astound myself concerning the questions I ask him.

The day ends with a well sought after pub round. With a celebration of creative powers coming from such a well paid team. I lose myself in the moment. The well cherished moment of goal oriented individuals

coming together in central New York. I should be grateful. I should be the one to surrender to the creative powers of the team.

But days later I'm caught in a bad mood.

It's hard to describe it. Different talks, different design details. The mix between older and younger people with different genders. It should be an adventure. It should be the defining moment of my career.

But I'm caught silent between the different project designers discussing the details of the project. This happens as I start to see that I'm over-qualified regarding the project at hand. I'm a bit older than the others. I find it easy to put up critique regarding different phases of the project. It should be a rare display of a central park attraction. A miniature replica of different key buildings in the city.

Grand architecture.

In time though I get to see that the talk just is talk to impress colleagues. Pretty average ideas in the end lacking real power. The project becomes something that on the surface is a mind-bending mix of well educated individuals. But in reality just becomes an exercise in good looks, good manners and pretty average ideas.

And one day when I'm walking the New York streets alone at night I'm hit with a heavy pole in the back of my head and lose consciousness.

* * *

I find myself in a room looking like a cell in an abandoned prison. I'm feeling a great pain in my neck. I'm drowsy. Lonely again. Searching for my mobile phone but it's gone.

The pain in my neck is getting worse. I have to lie down on a simple bench to consider the situation. In time I rise to walk up to a single door. But the door is locked from outside.

Dust rats have formed on the floor. A cold and dusty floor having a blue colour.

The voice of heavy steps can be heard from outside.

“Where am I?”

A key can be heard unlocking the door from outside. A woman in black clothing steps inside with a gun in her hand.

“You?” I say to the woman easily recognizable as a prior colleague in the construction design company.

“Yes it’s me.” The woman says with the name of Iris. “A middle-age woman with blueish eyes lacking any sympathy.

“Why did you do it?” I ask her.

“You remember you stole my position in the construction design company?” She says to me, “It happened contrary to your own attention. But you were always bugging me.”

Iris stands upright overshadowing me to make me sit down on the bench. To notice the difference in height between us. She doesn’t say much at first. She makes threatening movements with the gun. To push me down on the bench to feel the difference in height between us.

“Let’s put it this way.” Iris says to me, “I know about the teenager dream of your professional pursuits.” She says, “I know about the so called will of your heart. You were fast to never notice me. Fast to never notice the qualified part of my own profession.”

“You were one of the others.” I say to defend myself, “I never saw you as a threat to my own position.”

“You should have done it.” Iris says. “Now the hard part of your professional life has come to the surface.”

Iris lowers the gun.

“The hard part to never fulfil the wish of your employer.” Iris says, “You should never have had any form of will. You should have worked against your initial desires. Used your intellect to other pursuits. And never confronted me to steal my position.” She says, “I will prove this to you in coming times.”

Iris hits me in the head with the pistol and I fall down on the dusty floor like a fallen angel.

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The following weeks passes as a dark nightmare. I constantly hear the voice of Iris echoing in my head. I try to put forward ideas. I'm getting scared due to the imposing threat.

I'm actually released from the empty room. But I can't focus on my job. I do my best to melt in with the other designers working on the last details of the central park design.

"How are you?" One woman asks me in a friendly tone. She has found out about the crime and actually wants to help me get over it. "Can we help you?"

"Well I'm actually fine!" I say and lie, "It's only some memory fragments."

I try to hide my new condition. Hide it as I know that a colleague can be a colleague one time but also an enemy.

The central park installation design completes the following weeks. The team presents a working design that is heralded as a good achievement due to much of my own efforts.

I feel a temporarily sense of victory, of accomplishment. The team walk the central park again with a good temper. The customer (actually the New York commune) say they are pleased with the result and will think about new job opportunities in the future.

I'm put to my own devices. I have to consider my latest efforts. I have to forget the crime. The prospect of a sudden death haunts me in moments. But also, as I witness the result of my professional craft, I come to see that I'm actually an alien in a designer suit.

I wear a suitcase and a portable computer. But I'm just dressing up in a good costume to hide my true emotions.

* * *

I meet my boss a week later to discuss the job I have completed and also to be calmed down concerning the crime I have described to others.

“What does it amount to?” My employer says.

“It amounts to some fear and headaches too.” I say and lie, “But I’m getting over it.”

“You should.” My employer says.

The conversation continues awkwardly from my part. My boss explains new territory. A merging of times. Of the future coming in to current times: “New America”.

An open land of construction opportunities where the technologies of past visionaries have merged with current times and new construction design have changed the reality of the business.

“You will learn this sooner or later.” My employer says.

“I think about getting some vacation.” I say to my boss contrary to personal image, “Is this possible in this situation?”

“Yes.” He says, “Why would I even bother?”

* * *

I’m leaving New York.

I’m on a journey towards a new destination. This journey is a journey towards the heart of the American mainland. Later to Canada, Alaska and small villages passing by in hazy movements.

I have been thinking about the comments from Iris.

Her idea was that I should have worked against my initial desires. My own will. This contra-intuitive thinking of a simple criminal is something I on the one hand can’t take as serious but I also sense something terrifying regarding these thoughts coming from within.

That my initial vision, my dream, was leading me into big business but that this business presented violent clashes.

I stop my car alongside a road sign. I open the door of the car, walk away a couple of meters and puke on the ground.

The snow has started to fall. A cold and penetrating feeling of a climate so different from the climate on the American mainland. I'm lost to my own devices. To consider the professional work I have chosen as my last and final pursuit.

As I start to think I go back to the car. I sit down on the driver's seat and put on the radio that is buzzing with a voice upon the buzzing feed. A voice complaining about the state of the world. About crime, about fear and anarchy.

And I sense the reality of my own situation. That I was born with the desire to surpass myself. That I entered big business due to the certain rush concerning the prospect of position, prestige and money. But I never thought deeply about personal concerns. I never thought about the prospect of value creation.

A mind with no desire but to perpetuate its own existence. Creating value in an empty void.

"I can't think like this." I say to myself. "I don't dare to."

I switch channel on the radio and still hear another complaining voice. A voice on the news. A tale of robbery and murder. About bad working conditions. About a wake-up call for alcoholics and drug addicts.

I'm afraid.

I walk out again to feel the sudden cold of remote Alaska. The freedom. The remote coldness of a continent lost to time.

I later enter empty villages. Remote towns. Ghostly shapes of old people. Never knowing or wanting the stories of a fallen man reverting to something still unknown.

I go back to Canada. I find houses, people, and social gatherings with individuals working their way up the food chain. And I look to it that I pass these individuals in search for an empty cabin. A cabin were I can lay out the details of my own life.

To explore these ideas. Push others aside. To find meaning in an empty void. A void created by the craving mind. Searching for fulfilment in a world ruled by capital interests.

Using intellect to change perspective regarding the profession I have chosen.

Resigning into “atonement”, the reality of the craving soul.

To discover true creative expression.