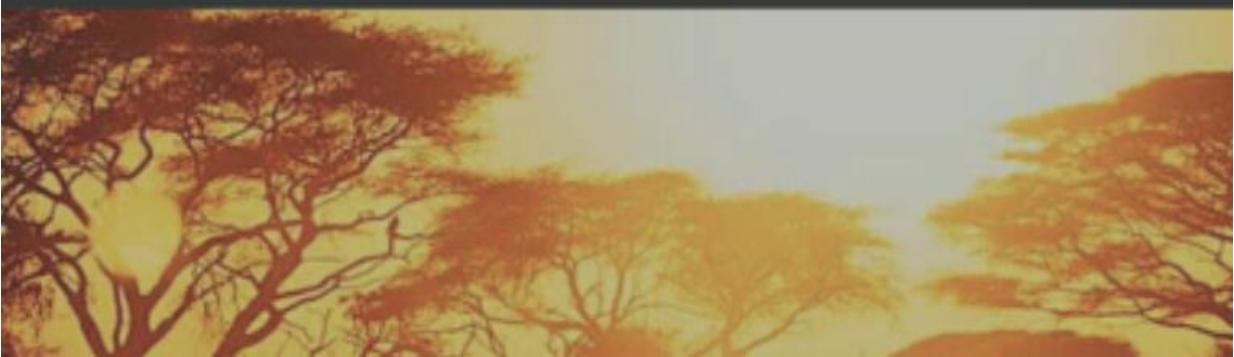


IDEAS

A novella by Andreas Ingo



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1

THE PARADE

Thandiwe watched the colourful parade that moved over the metropolitan street like a giant snake. Zebras, Giraffes and Elephants carrying the bodies of the inhabitants of the metropolitan city. The noises of the crowd were overwhelming to say the least. The smells of the animals, the visual imprint of old Africa mixing with the sense experience of the vibrations in the air. It was the annual parade in the city celebrating the liberation of the common man. Pure anarchy giving birth to a sophisticated city order.

As the noises came to a certain crescendo the african woman felt a sense of fatigue taking over the main parts of her body. An african woman living in the city sharing ground with the multinational mix of many cultures. Settling down in the largest city of the world to enjoy the rich culture. But a large part of Thandiwe was not feeling the same.

An adolescent girl came up to Thandiwe noticing the empty expression on her face.

"Hello!" The adolescent girl said, "I'm Mai-San. Who are you?"

"Thandiwe." Thandiwe said.

"Are you enjoying yourself?"

"Far from it!" Thandiwe said, "It's the noises! The turbulent chaos filling the air. I'm going home."

"Why?"

"Because the parade has no meaning." Thandiwe said, "Sounds and visions from the heart of a dying population."

"That's not true." Mai-San said.

"It is." Thandiwe said. "But I never wished this to be the case."

"You are depressed." Mai-San said.

"I surely am." Thandiwe said, "Due to the parade in the city!"

Mai-San observed the empty expression on Thandiwe's face. It was the look of an intellectual. An ironic touch of ignorance in Mai-San's view. She was a happy adolescent girl herself. Seventeen years old having parents from China. Sharing the same outlook on life. Being present in the here and the now. Having a nice pony tail on her back. Colourful clothes. Being happy and enjoying the moment.

"I have a suggestion to you." Mai-San said.

"A suggestion?"

"You need action!" Mai-San said, "To do something fun."

"I don't think so." Thandiwe said.

Mai-San looked at Thandiwe with curiosity. It was the meeting of different worlds: The african darkness and the asian light. Mai-San had a smooth face painted with bright colours. Thandiwe was quite natural. But the dark skin of the intellectual had grown exhausted by the sun.

Mai-San turned around and looked back at the lingering parade. Watching a lion pass by connected to different ropes. A couple of crocodiles also came along carrying straps of flags in different colours. Parts of the huge city were seen beyond a descending road with a high corner. Leading to a river below and a yellow bridge going over it. It was the sense of central Africa. Plains of an arid desert surrounding the metropolitan city built on a hill with mountains.

"You are depressed in the wrong way." Mai-San said , "You are not sharing the life of the others."

"I know." Thandiwe said.

"But do you know of the creativity of my suggestion?"

"No."

"To fill the emptiness of your heart with pure action."

Thandiwe just stared.

"I'm sincere!" Mai-San said overcoming the high pitched noises of the crowd, "A game of creativity thinking about something to do and doing it."

"You are mad." Thandiwe said.

"Perhaps!" Mai-San said, "But creativity is a necessity."

Mai-San was grabbing a card in her red purse and gave it to Thandiwe. It was a blueish card with a 3D imprint featuring the face of the asian girl.

"It's the number to my mobile device." Mai-San said, "Call me if you change your mind."

And the asian girl turned around and was consumed by the hord of people watching the parade: Images and high pitched noises filling the air with a sense of happiness.

When Thandiwe came home she went right for bed. A moving device had the bed descend from the roof squeaking as it moved. The room was decorated by artificial flowers and a blue ocean was moving in tune with mellow music on wall displays.

Thandiwe turned off the imagery, sat down on the bed and stared. Devoid of meaning. The hollow imagery of the city looking worse than her own apartment.

She called Mai-San the next day.

2

AT THE CITY CENTER

The two girls met up at the city center. Passing young adolescence and growing older. Mai-San was accompanied by a peculiar pet. A gene-manipulated giraffe hitting low altitude but being green and yellow. A small crowd had gathered around the girl. People from all parts of the city noticing the broadcast message sent by Mai-San.

"Why all these people?" Thandiwe asked Mai-San sceptical of the whole event.

"It's all about the fun." Mai-San said.

"The fun?"

"Yes." Mai-San said, "A great event needs great participation."

Thandiwe watched the noisy crowd of people from all parts of the city. At one corner she watched an african youngster tripping on four legs. Then a european one having a flirt with a canadian girl. Just kindly blushing. In a hidden corner someone was playing with a cubic ball. Dwelling behind a moving cloth in the vicinity of the town centre.

In the background was the shape of the greatest building of the city. A building built like an acacia tree. At the height of tree hundred meters. Sending a message of triumph to the population of the city. Celebrating the political achievement.

It was an uneven crowd of youngsters. Watching the broadcast of Mai-San with interrest earlier. And Thandiwe thought about the girl. Guessing she had to be very popular. Maybe having parties and forgetting the hard struggles of the world. Going insane.

"We have to make a vote." Mai-San said. "Thinking about new possibilities."

A hissing of voices erupted from the group of youngsters. Some of them were thinking about strange games in modern shopping malls. Others about traveling by lifters to unknown regions of the surrounding mountains. Jumping from the cages as they went.

"You have to be more organized!" Thandiwe said to Mai-San. "These people are trying to kill themselves!"

"Perhaps." Mai-San said.

"I would suggest we make a vote and think about the possibilities."

And the crowd of youngsters came together and voted in majority for a blind game in the darkness of the notorious catacombs. Below the main parts of the city. It was a hidden surprise. The group inspiring each other to new events unclouded by adult restrictions.

* * *

The catacombs had a dark entrance with a sign. In memory of the past political leader listening to the will of the people. Creating a world of anarchy, economical growth and creativity.

"How can we find our way in there?" Thandiwe asked Mai-San against better knowing.

"We can't."

"So how can we play the game?"

"We have to improvise." Mai-San said.

"Going in the dark hitting each other?"

"Exactly."

The group walked beyond the entrance and moved in to the dark catacombs. The light fading away giving birth to a staggering fear. The fear of getting lost.

"We have the search-lights but we can't use them." Mai-San said, "Bumping into each other."

"So what is the game?" Thandiwe asked.

"It's the game of finding the way to the other entrance." Mai-San said. "The first one coming there wins."

The youngsters disappeared in the dark dwellings of the catacombs. The group dissolving as they went. They walked without flashlight. Without nothing else than the physical touch of the surroundings. With hearing. With smell. And a sense of imagination.

"This is insane!" someone screamed as she hit upon a smooth surface. Not knowing if she had hit upon the skull of a dead youngster.

But as the group went the youngsters were hitting upon each other. Walking faster with time. The blindness heightening the senses walking blindly with the sense of hearing and touch. Voices reverberating in the narrow space. It was like a horror movie.

Thandiwe walked slowly with the imagination of a lost intellectual. Not knowing what she saw and felt. And she was a bit surprised by the sense of dizziness. Not exactly feeling empty as before.

Someone fell upon a lost bag filled with sharp sticks. The girl hurt herself and bled. Another one fell upon the body of the fallen. Screaming reverberating in the empty space. And they separated and went different ways.

Thandiwe thought about the improvisation.

"This is you!" Mai-San screamed with irony to Thandiwe in the darkness. Coming from behind like a hollow ghost.

"Not exactly." Thandiwe said.

"Why?" Mai-San shouted.

"I'm feeling empty." Thandiwe said.

"As usual."

And the hidden form of Thandiwe hit upon the standing statue of the dead political leader. The action man. Activating her flashlight by accident. A monstrous form was seen of past delight. Formed in clay with certain lost fragments. But here he stood watching the end of the old times. Giving birth to the imagination of the youngsters.

"I knew it." Mai-San said. "This was the path to the other entrance."

And Thandiwe couldn't help but laughing.

3

A LOFTY EXCURSION

Thandiwe went by herself in a lift towards the upper regions of the mountains. She looked down upon the metropolitan city from above. Watching the strange vehicles. Passing trains in airy tubes. And the different parts of the city connected together by howering roads. The african part being the largest part of the city. The chinese coming third in size and the european being a close second.

"What was the truth of the chinese girl?" Thandiwe wondered.

She walked the upper plateaus of the mountain range on stiff legs. Watching flowers of red, blue and magenta. Always longing for the natural life. But natural life was a lonely business. Thinking for herself with no accompanion.

Bushes with red berries was hanging upon the rust red cliffs. Clouds of fog were caressing the cliffs like a forgotten lover. Bleeding stones were pushing on Thandiwe's intellect.

The sun sent beams of light upon the bright surroundings. Transforming the land to a forgotten paradise.

Hours later Thandiwe called upon the happy girl on her mobile unit. Watching the painted face of the teenager on the 3D-display.

"I think you liked the catacombs." Mai-San said upfront.

"How come?"

"You called me and you saw the strange exit."

"Perhaps."

"It's easy!" Mai-San said, "This is a risky business and you have grown tired of your own life."

"But yesterday was just a game."

"A game of creativity opening up the mind to new possibilities."

"Perhaps." Thandiwe said and ended the conversation abruptly.

She walked along a narrow path. Two mountain sides coming together and pushing the african woman to an ascent into the misty clouds of the mountain range. She had seen the lonely life of the intellectual. Watching human history in the lens of clarity. Watching the revolutions of mankind as a strange metaphor of human failures. Loosing in the end.

But Mai-San was different.

The happy girl had not seen what Thandiwe had seen. She was a product of the previous revolution. Where the political leader led the city inhabitants beyond a time of poorness and unsophistication. The years that came later was a time of creativity and freedom. Forgetting the slavery of the past and educating the masses in great art, philosophy and science. But every revolution would lead to the end.

Was this the truth of Mai-San?

A DANGEROUS CLIMB

A crowd of people had gathered at the central part of the city. It was a beautiful afternoon. The acacia building was casting shadows on the inhabitants of the city. A golden light pervaded the surroundings closeby and shone on the grey marble stones on the ground. Puffy clothes swirled in the wind. Blue squirrels ran like mad on the ground. Thin like crawling serpents moving on high altitude.

Among the people gathered were Mai-San and Thandiwe. The chinese girl was standing upright happy by the whole event. Thandiwe had had food for thought previously. Thinking about the consequences of Mai-San's actions.

"The creativity you spoke of earlier." Thandiwe begun, "Was that a well thought out idea?"

"It came in the moment as a gift from the depths of my heart."

"So this game we play is just a fabrication?"

"Far from it!" Mai-San said, "Me and my heart are one."

"Just like I thought then." Thandiwe said.

More people had gathered around the adolescents this time compared to the last time. They were a bit suspicious but also interested. Standing like a transparent horde devoid of colour compared to the inventor.

Some of them made notice of the dialogue between the girls. But they couldn't hear the words due to the long distance. People were talking among each other. About what to do with the night. Votes were cast and new people arrived at the spot. Children and elders.

"Listen to this." Thandiwe said to Mai-San, "This thing is starting to look like a revolution! Are you ready to take this upon your shoulders?" Thandiwe asked, "I surely don't believe in it but others do."

"You will." Mai-San said.

The votes were cast again and people decided for a climb upon the acacia building. Using free equipment to climb the building connected to each other by a common wire.

Some of the elders shook their heads. The game was not secure by any means. But they knew of the philosophy of the past revolutionary. A world without freedom was no world at all. Living lives in security and fitness but lacking the love of the heart. Mai-San was the exception to rules. Feeling happy.

* * *

The climb started as the sun was coming down colouring the open space by a reddish hue. The youngsters advanced on the flat surface of the building. Looking like a chain of ants from the skyscrapers surrounding the open space. The city centre was a large plateau containing street food arrangements and different seats and proud decorations.

"The one who falls has to reorganize and lead the climb for the others." Mai-San shouted!

They advanced on the flat surface and approached thirty meters. A man in the acacia building watched the youngsters from the safety of his own window. This was Pierre, a popular media mogul in the city. Thirty five years old. He was very interested. The chain of youngsters advanced on the flat surface noticing black pipes hindering their common way. They went over them by the strain of unused muscles. How they would be able to arrive at the top was the chance in a million.

Pierre helped them giving them information to gather better equipment. Giving help to their weak muscles by modern robotics.

They went in the approaching night to unknown stores in the depth of the african city. Pierre was leading them to the right ones. Where they could pick the equipment. Getting advice from futurologists knowing the workings of the human body.

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At complete darkness the youngsters began their ascent. They climbed up to thirty meters. Beyond the black pipes and going further. People were looking down on them from open windows in the skyscrapers. Shouting as they were. Greenish dogs barking. At seventy meters Thandiwe came up to Mai-San progressing from a lower altitude.

"This is insane!" Thandiwe said.

"It's not." Mai-San said.

"It's completely meaningless!" Thandiwe continued. "A nihilistic journey into nothingness!"

"You have the wrong perspective." Mai-San said.

"I don't." Thandiwe said, "And it's easy! Having fun is one thing but we are doing it just for ourselves! We are creating nothing but joy for ourselves!"

"This is pure anarchy." Mai-San said.

"Used to the wrong ends!" Thandiwe said.

"I don't believe it." Mai-San said.

The youngsters climbed frenetically on the flat surface. Giving way for the upper branches of the acacia building. They were in effect hanging on their hands. Looking down on the marble ground at one hundred and seventy meters. It was spellbinding and beyond scary. One of the youngsters lost his grip and fell but was saved due to the common wire.

"You see." Thandiwe said, "This is the truth of the struggle."

"Death is the way of the true revolutionay and has always been." Mai-San said.

"But they were fighting for a common cause!" Thandiwe said, "Not an illusory game!"

"I don't think so." Mai-San said, "They were drinking and having great parties. Doing what they could. And some of them were dying."

"I know." Thandiwe said.

Mai-San was great and feeling good about herself. But the nightly excursion became harder with time. The robotics and the plastic holders (Connecting the youngsters to the flat surface) were helping but the muscles were getting weak. And they went beyond the scary faces of acacia building inhabitants. Watching the youngsters and screaming at them for common effect.

Mai-San started to think about the words of the lone african girl. Being in her own age but looking older. It was the depths of the intellect she thought. And she had always been secure about herself. But as she climbed the hard climb and others were getting tired she started to come into Thandiwe's mind. It came as a vague feeling. She started to ask questions. And Thandiwe had fully thought out answers. The african adolescent watched

human life in the lens of history. Mai-San didn't believe Thandiwe at first but she couldn't neglect it. Mai-San was just a happy youngster. And the others did it for fun. They were all connected.

Hours of struggle later Mai-San approached the nightly surface of the top of the acacia building as the rays of the morning sun came upon the artificial tree. They had made it. They looked down upon the metropolitan surroundings. Skyscrapers were seen as far as Mai-San watched. A white globe rose from the presence of a lonely hill. A waterfall sent sprays of water into the morning air. But Thandiwe also looked upon the african plains beyond it. She knew the truth of her own words but she didn't want to believe in them. A life devoid of meaning was no true life. And she felt it too. The lie of the modern world. Thinking that visual impressions, sense experience and happy events were the cause of happiness.

Thandiwe had started to like the innocent girl but the chinese adolescent had not understood the truth of human history. Ending in a nihilistic game of the common initiative. Being fun but leading to boredom to her.

Mai-San was tired and a little depressed from her eventual realization.

"At least we have made it." Mai-San said.

"We have." Thandiwe said.

And they sat down on the roof of the acacia building. Thinking about the common cause. The revolutionary struggle. The loss of meaning that Mai-San had felt and the game to fill the black void.

Thandiwe had changed her mind.

AT AN ARABIAN RESTAURANT

Thandiwe and Mai-San came together in the arabian part of the metropolitan city later. They went by themselves disconnected from the general population. The entrance to the arabian restaurant was welcoming in an arabian way. Going back hundreds of years. Containing talking

parrots, small monkeys and much more. As they entered the restaurant they were met with the chatter of the parrots.

"Having a cup of soda!" A parrot said, "Having a cup of soda!"

The adolescents smiled in a downbeat way. Walked up to a lonely corner and sat down at an oval table.

"I think I have lost the will to continue." Mai-San said.

"This is due to the loss of your ideal." Thandiwe said, "I'm just doing it for the obvious escape. The grand illusion."

"I did it just for you." Mai-San said.

Mai-Sun ordered a cup of soda delivered by a black waiter. The temperature in the restaurant was getting hotter. Pearls of sweat formed on Thandiwe's forehead. Her hands were soaking wet. She thought about the experiences invented by the chinese girl. As if the stupidity of the girl had been a strong relief. Mai-Sun had given up three days before. After the climb of the acacia building. She took off her blue shirt revealing her golden skin. Sweated and swore. Saying stupid words. But the words came out as a mindless chatter. It was getting warmer due to the african season.

"You changed me." Thandiwe said.

The chinese girl looked at Thandiwe darkly as she was having her cup of soda. Soda with a hint of alcohol. She was tasting it, swallowing it. But the sense experience was revealed as nothing more.

"In a way you already have succeeded." Thandiwe said, "The game being real as a grand illusion. Making me loose grip on reality."

"You went too far." Mai-San said.

"Not necessarily." Thandiwe said, "We have to think of other options."

Mai-San was depressed. One of the talking parrots repeated her lines. A female waiter with a pink blouse asked if the adolescents wanted something more. Offering drinks free of charge. The parrot came with new suggestions. Pure alkohol, sour ice tea and also a cup of orange juice. Mai-San rejected the suggestions. Thinking about the empty sounds and visions. Also the tastes.

"I think I have lost the will to continue." one of the parrots said and the other parrots repeated its lines.

The monkeys in the background were getting crazy. They were connected to blueish ropes. Having a necklace with futuristic imprints. The atmosphere of the place was created by a lofty interior. Bag pipes of arabian design and some kind of fusion jazz.

"Listen to this." Thandiwe said, "We have to change approach! Taking up work in the abandoned factories of the past. Working for no money. As before the revolution changed the city. Giving up creativity for the opposite."

"You are insane." Mai-San said.

"I'm not." Thandiwe said.

The parrots were getting crazy with the lines of the discussion. They were talking about the political revolutionary. The economy and the gifts of the modern city. As talked about by restaurant guests before.

"Let's try it." Mai-San said. A bit elevated by the constant chatter of the parrots.

"Good news." Thandiwe said.

6

THE FORGOTTEN FACTORIES

They floated in the airy tubes of the howering railway. Passing dark sections and also bright ones. Mai-San had a multi coloured cat in the comfort of her own lap. Sharp sticks of standing fur were coming up from the neck of the animal. Like flashes of happiness.

The youngsters were silent. Sharing space with other travelers on their way to common destinations. But the two adolescents were not certain about their own thing.

"How did you arrive at this idea of work?" Mai-San asked Thandiwe.

"The problem with our city is the creativity." Thandiwe said, "Being at loss for restrictions. People doing everything they want but having no problem getting there. They just get it for free."

"I see." Mai-San said.

The hovering railway took turns and passed the corner of one of the mountains. Passing a section of the city flourishing with green gardens. It was the asian one. A carpet of flowers were seen below.

People were walking on tranquil streets. Some one them playing futuristic games on a common ground. And animals passed over certain crossings. To the joy of the people standing there.

Strange vehicles make a zig-zag movement over the tranquil streets. They were burning fuel of a new kind. These engines used sources of gas in the inner core of the earth. Developed in factories. To never destroy the environment of the city.

* * *

They arrived at the forgotten factories two hours later. Remnants of a time before the past revolution. The surroundings were coloured in a golden light. Being something between yellow and brown. Rows of factories were standing beside each other. Some of them reaching thirty meters, some higher. And it was a desolate feeling walking there. As if the ghosts of the dead workers crept up beside them. Making them feel the agony inside. And the ground was full of gravel. Reflecting light from the bright sun. A cloud of smoke were hanging in the air some hundred fifty meters away. A working factory as a memory of earlier times.

"I don't understand your soul." Mai-San said to Thandiwe.

Other youngsters were following them at a close distance. But they couldn't hear the conversation. As if the inner core of Mai-San and Thandiwe only was made for the two of them.

"My soul was the soul of a lost intellectual." Thandiwe said, "Watching the city inhabitants. Watching the parades and the rest of human history in the lens of my own mind. Seeing everything happen in a fluid visualization. I was alone. But I also had the strange satisfaction of natural life. Feeling at ease on the african plains."

"So you searched for human history?"

"The original life." Thandiwe said only to become silent.

The adolescents walked along the wall of one of the factories, opened a window and crept inside. The dusty floors of the production facility were

smooth and ugly. Rays of light came into the factory from dusty windows. Colouring the experience of past delight. The girls and a couple of boys walked up a staircase and went inside an abandoned office. Watching the rows of machinery standing in line below. They could visualize the dead workers working by necessity. A slavery for money and the interiors of a hungry stomach. Calling for attention.

Mai-San took up a couple of papers from an old copy machine. She read the text which was the description of an old food production order. A product used on the fields surrounding the metropolitan city fifty years ago. Reading the order out loud.

Thandiwe read the descriptions once more and went up to a remote control panel. Activating the production line.

The others went down the staircase and took up work as in the old time. They watched the machinery working as usual, strangely working despite new time. And they fed the machines with material from a closeby material store. Arriving at a final product.

"What is the truth?" Thandiwe asked, "To work for money and nothing more?"

"It's nothing." Mai-San said.

"Why?"

"We are not working by necessity, just for a game." Mai-San said, "Earning knowledge of the impossible game. Just like you said."

"But it's good for a game." Thandiwe tried. But as she tried her temper sank.

"You were right at the beginning." Mai-San said. "I love the factory. I love the history of the place. But we can't live in the past and we have to think about the future."

"What future?"

"The great unknown." Mai-San said.

The two youngsters watched the old factory interiors once more and walked out on the external ground. Passing the open window, having a mental breakdown caused by the internal conversation.

The boys of the group were very disappointed. It all started like a suspenseful ride. They went further and loved the experience on the acacia

building. And also the blind path in the catacombs earlier. They loved the factories. But they all started to see the truth in their own eyes. As the conversation went louder they came into the girl's minds. The experience was a thing of personal indulgence to them. A personal indulgence not different from a trip of acid.

Not at all different from the other life in the city, only more.

Thandiwe and Mai-San cried.