

The mummy and the night market

Jasper K. was once just an ordinary man. However, for reasons I could never work out, he had created an alternative persona on top of the ruins of what used to be him. Now he has to crawl through so many layers and underground tunnels before he can figure out his own emotional state, to then express it in comprehensible form, is the kind of challenge with which most humans do not want to be confronted too often. Embarrassed by the red tape in which he has wrapped himself, is one way to describe the situation. He wants to spend time with people, but this need forces him to ... go down unlit Bohemian alleys, cross narrow medieval stone bridges, and make his way down dusky Transylvanian backstreets to perhaps eventually reach the town square and the market where the people meet.

And wouldn't he like to talk? But now he sits, like a mummy in red bandages in his temple. And he looks – at everything that is beautiful, at everything that is ugly. And he tries to cut and carve this perceived reality like a puzzle to fit the pieces into the small holes in the floor where a mosaic once lay. So he can spread a map across the floor to know where to step to get out the door. And by that time the people at the market and in the town square had already gone to bed.

Nevertheless, in my opinion he's doing all right. He himself admits he sleeps seven hours a night, sometimes eight. He goes to the movies three or four times a week. He's also started eating breakfast again. According to his own lengthy and sometimes academic explanations he's digging "foundations" and building "one bedroom houses on the wide open plains." And the "mansions" will apparently be honoured in the press very soon. In short, the life of Jasper K. is good, or at least better than it was last year. A while ago he even explained in a long and rather boring monologue how he has a better understanding of the universe than the pope, and for reasons that the pope would apparently understand.

Since it seems to be going so much better these days, I was a little shocked when I heard recently that he was planning to

flee the country. And he might just have done so, if I hadn't convinced him to buy a share in a washing machine.

"Strange," he told me the other day, "but I have vivid, fresh images in my head of a time when I left the city more often, when I even went out some nights ... if the night was dished up promisingly enough."

We were at a bustling night market downtown that evening. I could see Jasper was deep in thought, on his own really, busy talking to himself most of the time. We had decided beforehand to have dinner at an eatery in one of the crowded aisles. Arriving at the cluster of red plastic tables and small stools, I put two bowls in my tray and started filling both with lots of green leaves, and cabbage, onions, bean sprouts, carrots, corn and a few pieces of red pepper.

"I can also remember people usually applauded when they saw me," Jasper continued, still a few paces from the eatery, "and then asked for my name behind my back. I can even remember that there were times when I was lucky enough to hijack a perfectly innocent conversation in a bar or on someone's balcony with a more interesting topic than the one that was being discussed. Did I really?" His incredulity made him appear even more divorced from his surroundings. "Was I honestly able to do that?"

I handed our bowls full of leaves and other vegetables to the guy behind the wok. I wanted to confirm whether Jasper also wanted goat meat, but then just turned to the cook and said "yang rou," and illustrated goat horns with two index fingers on the sides of my forehead as if it were part of a satanic ritual. Then an idea came to me.

"Hey, Jasper," I called over the heads of a group of Taiwanese teenagers. "Since you're here now, in the town square – in a manner of speaking, in the middle of town, the people you're always waiting for may be induced to return to that Eastern European market in your head." He must have heard me, because he stopped mumbling to himself. "I'm sure you can imagine yourself being just a regular guy," I continued,

“someone who simply had to run down to the market for bread and eggs.”

NOTE:

THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS TEXT FROM
**“THIRTEEN MINUTES – NOTES, HALF-TRUTHS
AND A FEW INCIDENTS”**
BY BRAND SMIT.

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