



Image from Freepik

## Dreamscape

Mark Putzi

I met a man in Dreamscape, the country he was from. He was a tall man, a short man, and many in-between like the rungs of a ladder man, but not Everyman. He was a fat man, a thin man, and many incremental widths, but not Everyman. He was a hairy man, a bald man, a stylish man or dressed in rags. He was a man you would not look at twice, or you'd fix your gaze on him and never pay attention to anything else.

Every time I looked at him, he was the same color. He never changed color from the first time I looked at him to the last.

He told me Dreamscape was inhabited by apes who ran. I asked what they ran from and he said predators. And so I asked, "Like lions?"

"No," he said, "Apes don't fear lions."

“Tigers?”

“No,” he said, “You have them in your country. We don’t.”

“What, then. Bears?”

“No. Rhinos.”

“But Rhinos don’t eat meat.”

“In my country they do. They are meat-eating Rhinos.”

“That’s a lot to run from.”

“Yes. The apes run to find trees, and then they climb. The Rhinos aren’t smart enough to climb after, but if they catch them with their horn before the apes get high ... KABOOM! I saw one ape who got so high,” he said, and then raised his arms. They were very thin and muscular arms like armbands. “The Rhino caught the ape’s pinky finger with his horn tip, and pried off the ape’s left hand, and then falling, they fell on him after he fell. And all the Rhinos gored him to pieces and ate him. It was horrible!”

I said. “It sounds like that ape had a very bad day!”

“He was never the same,” said the man. The man tipped his head and at some point I could see the top of his head only briefly, until I couldn’t. He continued. “They gathered together in a Pac to raise money.”

“Rhinos or the apes?”

“Both,” he said, “but these were Rhinos when I saw.”

“What kind of money do Rhinos raise?”

“Pac money.”

“What do they use it for?”

“They want to make Pacs into SuperPacs.” He raised his arms as if they were money, and tried to look scary and big. He looked scary, big, small and timid. Not Everyman, but he looked the way men look, mirrored over like cellophane. He’d tried to dress himself. He had a carnation.

“Isn’t just a Pac good enough for them?”

He said, "They don't have leaders. A leaderless Pac is not never anything, so they try to Super-impose."

I asked, "Who leads the monkeys?"

"They are apes," he corrected me angrily. "Even so, they insist they're not apes. I lead them," he observed. He looked very tall when he said this. He wore shoes.

I asked, "What are you going to do about the Rhinos?"

He said, "I tell the apes to run. They're everywhere, and that fruit on the trees. Chasing and eating us." He hunched over a little and attempted to sway his arms back and forth. He kept hunching until his knuckles dragged the ground in dirt tracks. Then he stood straight again. "I tell them always about the danger. The hunger."

I said, "Those Rhinos have to eat something."

He scowled, "Let them eat themselves! Cannibals! They're a contingency of cannibals, even a Kabal."

"You like that sound, don't you?" I observed, "That hard clicking clacking."

He said, "I like a lot of things. I say so the apes understand something serious. I lead them." As he said this, his hair grew long and then fell off and then grew again. His nose broadened and shrank, eyes bulged, then went sallow, less to lollygag. Not long or short or anything, it was his hair, the way he styled it with his hands. He had hands, and then the apes, three of them, came and preened him. Then they ran away, the apes, hands dripping fruit, and left him talking. And he talked.

"Those Rhinos, they're hungry," he concluded.

"You already said," I said.

"That's 'cuz they're always hungry. You need to run and climb a tree."

"I'm not an ape," I said. "I'll take my chances on the ground."

"You'll be trampled," he warned. "Overrun!"

"I'm already trampled," I said. I showed him the footprints. There were prints of hooves, and ape feet. And prints with claws at the ends of them, and the tracks of snails, many many slimy tracks.

“What are you?” he asked, clearly disgusted. He looked at me as if I were asking for money.

“I’m not Everyman,” I said. I didn’t look like him at all. I was more a chameleon. At the same time I was less a chameleon.

II.

All of the women were knitting when I saw him again. They were knitting, all the women, and he had changed color. He said, “I’m a woman, just like all of these.” He spread his arms, very thin and muscular, or fat and flabby and said, “They are all women just like me!”

I said, “You don’t look like a woman,” and he scolded me, saying, “What does a woman look like?” All of the women each took turns with a stern look of judgment. And they repeated, “What does a woman look like?”

“I don’t know,” I said, “I’ve never seen a woman.”

They laughed and went about their knitting.

The man turned to me and said, “You should be a woman too.”

I said, “Perhaps I am. Perhaps not. There are many things I should be.”

He said, “I, on the other hand, am exactly what I tell you.” The women looked at him and smiled saying, “He is exactly what he thinks he is.” They each were knitting a map of Dreamscape. It was a sampler with the alphabet and many symbols underneath, most of them religious. I didn’t recognize any symbols, but they glowed, each of them in shiny gold thread. You could tell these women were proud of their stitches, and the man who said he was one of them tried very hard not to say pride made them weary. Then, he finally said something despite his struggle not to, and they all looked at him told each other he was nuts. They told him nothing until he felt very much a rainbow of cellophane. He said, “I’m not crazy. Look. My color changed.”

I said, “They agree with you.” By his look, I knew this was important to him.

“But there are some,” he argued, “Why can’t they all agree?”

“I don’t know,” I said, looking them over. There were thousands and each knitted exactly the same map of Dreamscape. It appeared every one of them applied exactly the same stitch to the same map at the same time. They stitched like that as if they did so under oath. I said, “I’ve never seen a woman.” This time they scowled at me. The joke had soured both him and me to them.

To mark the occasion, I had worn a dress. It was airy and light and in the breeze it pressed up against the front of me, defining my shape. I felt myself defined by the definition of my full frontal shape. He said the breeze had been sent by god to show who I was. I said the breeze had been sent by particles of air all acting in the same direction. “But whose direction?” he asked, “And why are all of them the same actors?”

I said, “To be profound, you’d best be nondescript.”

He said, “You’re Tiresias or some facsimile thereof.”

I asked, “Did Dreamscape change shape as a result of their knitting?”

He said, “You’re not Tiresias, though you are blind.”

I said, “I don’t want to mislead you. I’m not in love with you.”

He said, “You say that to all the women.”

### III.

There were two groups of protesters, one group each on either side of the street. Each group was colored differently, and each was uniformly colored. Each group shouted the other did not belong. They held to the borders, but a few crossed over, and when they did, they immediately fought to the death. He stood in the middle of the street and shouted at them from the platform. He said, “Everyone deserves a voice!” He turned to one group and said, “You deserve a voice!” He turned to the other group and shouted, “You have a voice already!” He had a beard glued to the bottom of his head, a chin protruding like a cog, but then he raised his beard to hide his skin.

People on either side tried to climb the platform, but the scaffolding was covered with grease. There was a little raceway track that ran around the platform, and if you took a shirt and put it on, you could run around on the track and claim to be the winner of the race. The winner was to be placed atop the platform next to him, but that never happened. There was no staircase. He said there was a staircase, but there was not. A block away, I stood witnessing. I would die many more times, with each witness. Every now and then, he’d look over at me, and invite me without saying. He invited with his eyes and his face. He seemed to express a certain way, or held some specific expression, his countenance would compel me. We compared ourselves thus, each to the other, eating our neutrality. I wondered if it would be better to stay witnessing, or to go once

more a streetwalker. Once there, I couldn't call it sacrifice, just the same process of witnessing. And once more I'd die.

I had tried to communicate with the protesters. First one side of the street, then the other side: They kept insisting. They took pride in their respective colors. They maintained it was best to stay repulsed. Then one or another of them would go forward and fight to the death, or race to try to scurry up the side of the greasy scaffold. Or they would look up at him if they found him, and ask the staircase to preside, and now he wore a hat. He reminded them they had what voice they had or had deserved, and then he died as well and rose. Together we rose.

IV.

There were many people working. He picked up a shovel and pretended to work. They said he was magnificent and envied him his pretense.

V.

..... all good things, all good things, all good things.

---

Mark Putzi received an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1990. His fiction appears everywhere, if everywhere consists of about 60 places where fiction can exist, including *Griffel*, *The AutoEthnographer*, *The Coil*, *Rougarou*, and others. He lives in Milwaukee.