

## ANGELA'S PLACE

To the casual observer the sides walk at the corner of Lake and Webster was an eye sore. A disarray of boxes and papers were strewn around. Graffiti covered a back wall. A large, round, garbage bin stood next to a shopping cart that was piled high with grey brown matter. Dawn Sprew was homeless for nearly a year when she happened on the encampment known as Angela's Home. When the other "guest" would go meet anywhere it was always, "I'll meetja back at Angela's." Angela was thirty-five or maybe fifty or sixty. When Dawn asked her how old she was, even Angela could not remember.

Angela with her wild grey hair covering a good portion of her face, to this day, wears the same long dress and sweat shirt. Dawn has been in a wheelchair since an accident. She's what books on the news stands would call fat. She has learned to cope with her disability. Although, Cecie, one of the roommates helps dress her on occasion. She is delighted when Cecie draws interesting designs of dragons and monsters on her thick arms. Dawn first met Angela on a rainy night when all the available doorways were taken by people who where not feeling generous enough to include her. She decided that she would wander the streets until the libraries opened. As she passed by Angela's home, she sneezed. Angela popped up and said, "Bless you!" It was raining and all the available doorways were taken by people who where not feeling generous that night. Dawn looked at the huge pile of boxes and pieces of cloth and plastic.

"Got room for a visitor?" Angela never answered. She simply disappeared in the rubble. There was plenty of room. Before the night ended two other people arrived, Cecie and David. Dawn could never figure David out. He was young and healthy with blond hair that he kept combed straight back. He moved around The City on a skate board, getting cited by the cops. What was wrong with him and why couldn't he find a place to live. Cecie was a lesbian turned maternal when she found David beaten up and hiding under a highway over pass. As a matter of fact it was only days before they arrived at Angela's place. They stayed and Dawn stayed and from what Dawn could discern Angela wanted them gone, quietly wished them away. But what could she do - evict them? After all wasn't this street everyone's? Dawn realized how she cared less and less for others. "The absolute struggle for survival does that to us," she said to herself as she washed her face in the faucet near the library.

Dawn rolled herself around the corner in the wheelchair she covered with offensive bumper stickers, SHIT HAPPENS, FUCK THE GOVERNMENT and FREE IRELAND! "Hey Angela why don't you go to the library and wash up? Hey! Hey! I'm talking to you." Angela could not be expected to do two things once, and at that moment she was too involved with folding papers and mumbling to herself to respond to Dawn's silly questions. "I always feel better after I clean up a bit," Dawn said pulling out a brown bag from the pouch on the back of her chair.

"Look, I brought you something to eat from St. John the Beheaded's soup kitchen. Come on € here € eat!" Angela ripped the bag from Dawn's hand. Maybe she hadn't realized how hungry she was or maybe she did. She stuffed the cheese sandwich in her mouth, so fast, that she was also eating parts of the napkin it was wrapped in. "Why do you save garbage? Don't we have enough problems with rats and roaches? And where's Cecie and David?" Dawn said in a voice

that appeared far superior to her present station in life. "They've taken over the zoo 'cause they want to give the animals back their freedom." Angela said in an "I could care less" voice. "Back their what? Are you crazy? Geez, ask a stupid question." Angela looked away from Dawn squatting down and mumbling to herself. "Oh god, why do I bother talking to you?" Dawn grabbed the wheels of her chair and rolled back and forth in front of the homestead in a pacing fashion. "They weren't at St. Johns. I don't believe they'd use good bus tokens to go to the 'ZOO' would they?" "They did." Angela was invisible now. Only a weak voice could be heard and she wasn't sure that it was hers. She covered herself with cloth and bags. She thought these intruders would never move out but they did, finally. "Is that David's voice?" She asked sweetly. Dawn realized David was Angela's only love outside the encampment. David and Cecie were calling out, "Angela, Angela!"

How did they know she was home Dawn mused then realized Angela rarely left home except to remove her feces in plastic bags and put them in city garbage containers. The others found bathrooms or went to another area. She told Dawn that her only showers were from the rain. If you asked her how long she lived like this she would have answered, "since yesterday" or "for a hundred years" because Dawn guessed she didn't really know.

"You'll never guess where we were?" David asked from his skateboard. "Nope," Cecie added, "No you won't believe where"

"Not the ZOO!" Dawn interrupted sarcastically."

"Angela you told her!" David said as he turned over the rubble to find his hostess. Angela found him irresistible and stood like a statue smiling her open mouth smile. "Did you tell Dawn what we did?" Cecie asked. Angela turned away as if to ask what business was it of hers. There were a few times when Angela said outright, "Go away you two," pointing to Dawn and Cecie. "Oh yeah," said Dawn, "She told me you gave the animals back to the jungle."

"We did!" Cecie and David exclaimed in unison. "Come on you two! You're getting as goofy as Angela." David bent down and touched a strand of Angela's hair. "It's true. Angela wouldn't lie, would you dear? We took some wire cutters from a work site and cut openings in the cages. You should have seen the animals leave their cages. They were free to roam wherever they wanted."

"I don't get it," Dawn said, "where were the humans who visit the zoo and work at the zoo?" "I don't know. I guess most of the humans were leaving because we didn't see any. Where were the human's Cecie?" Cecie was still getting a grip on what they did. She thought she could become addicted to the Adrenalin rush. "We let them all out, Dawn, the big cats, the elephants and giraffe, the monkeys and birds and bear. Then everyone was quiet. David pulled on his ear lobe. It was a silence filled with emotion. Then David said, "But you know what? None of them left. Oh, some came out of their cages and looked around but then they went back inside. We thought they would be glad to be free. It was disappointing." "I told you David," Cecie said, "It's probably because it was getting dark. Maybe they'll sleep and run free in the morning."

The sidewalk tribe talked into the night. They talked about the animals at the zoo and the occasional rats that visited their encampment. David bought another lottery ticket. Each person put in a quarter except David, who put in fifty cents to include Angela. During the day and on

weekend nights David, Cecie and Dawn went in different directions to "pan handle" which sounded better than begging. People who don't "pan handle" and who live in houses rarely have the opportunity to share intimacies with strangers. As the street lamps dimmed and the sun became brighter, Angela woke and began singing her favorite song- Freight Train. Her husky voice carried through the slow bustle of the streets: "Freight train, freight train, going so fast- Freight train, freight train, going so fast - please don't tell 'em what train I'm on, so they won't know that I've gone." "Hey! Would you stop your howling?"

Dawn hated this intrusion of trains into to her morning dreams. This revelry would crackle through the air each morning. She lifted her self onto her wheelchair. Angela continued to hum softly. Cecie pulled herself from under folded cardboard boxes and stretched and yawned and laughed. "Must be time to get up. I hear the train alarm." She waved her arms toward Angela. "Hey, come on now Angela it's barely lights out, calm down." Angela wished these house guests of hers would pack up and move on. No one complained about her singing before. "Where's David?" Cecie asks. "Who cares?" Dawn answered, "Maybe he's found the girlfriend he's always talking about. You know the one that doesn't exist." "No, no!" Angela cried out, "I'm his girlfriend."

"Oh would you shut-up Angela, "Dawn said, "I don't think David has you in mind."

"You know Dawn I tire of your negative attitude." Cecie was using a "hand-I-wipe" to clean under her arms. "Here he is. Hi David." David had gone to get a newspaper, "Hey where's that lottery ticket we bought?" Dawn handed David the lottery ticket, "Here it is for whatever it's worth which is probably nothing." Would anything shake Dawn into good humor? "Let's see if we won the lottery." She pulled out the agreement that each had signed. Every week they signed the agreement, each week scratching out the date and putting in a new one. The agreement read as follows: We the people of the street. The people who live at the side steps of Grant Department Store would like to share the winnings of this weeks lottery ticket. We each honorably put 25 cents into the hands of one of us so we could get a lottery ticket and share one quarter of it with the others of us.

"Sounds legal to me," Cecie said, "This here's our contract and our names: Cecie Flood, David Levié Jones, Dawn Sprew and Angela Questioné Mark, because we don't know if that's her real name." You didn't go spending a bunch of money on a paper did you? I mean it cost 50 cents!" Dawn worried about wasting money. It was bad enough to get lottery tickets. She already objected to the tapes David bought for the communal "boombox." David laughed, "Naw, someone was nice enough to leave this at the bus stop for me. He nodded at the others, "And you and you and you." David passed parts of the paper around so everyone had a section. "Hey listen to this' I mean let's get real here. We gotta think about what we wanna do if we win. Look at... just look, houses for millions of dollars each. How do you live in a house like that? Oh, oh look there's a little piece here about the zoo." Cecie looked over David's shoulder to the article in the paper. "Whatz it say?"

"Not a lot. Listen: Last night zoo keepers discovered several cages had been vandalized. Repairs were made and all the animals are unharmed and accounted for." "That's it?" Dawn frowned.

"Why does that depress me? We should look for a job. . How about Human Resources Manager? What the hell is that? Hey, maybe we could use some ourselves, uh? And the dude that lands this gig gets sixty thou a year? Says they need someone with a pleasant disposition Damn! I just know I'd have a better disposition if I got 60 thou a year wouldn't you?" "Oh hey you guys, listen to this, "A group calling itself CSA -" "CSA?" "That's what it says, c-s-a. Ah, a group - oh yeah anyway the important part is that they are taking responsibility for cleaning the streets and getting rid of us - 'They are a health hazard to our communities,' One CSA officer told the Bulletin. The group dresses in black and covers their faces with identical maroon scarves. They refuse to name their spokesperson. They swoop down on homeless at night while they are the least aware and beat the homeless with aluminum bats." So far three men in different parts of the city have been beaten and brought to General Hospital for treatment." Angela read the numbers so low no one could hear her at first. She read them while the others fretted over the CSA's. She read them again while Cecie told her story - the one about how she lost her job and couldn't pay for the room she rented from a former lover. She said it wasn't her fault that she was homeless and she thought they should all move to the mountains where the air was cleaner.

Angela read the numbers again. David's mother died and he suspected his father did it. Oh no one would ever accuse him. He quit high school and stole from stores in the down town area. He fenced the goods with a couple of older prostitutes he met on the train from 10th Street and Lincoln. "They are nice couple of o'l ladies," he said. "3, 5, 8, 14, 30" Angela said to the uncaring roommates. "Oh, don't tell me you're all going to start feeling sorry for yourselves?" Dawn said disgusted. "Try this out for size, an uninsured driver hits an unemployed person and she spends the rest of her life in a wheelchair and homeless." David and Cecie both reached over as to touch Dawn. She moved away from them. " I don't want pity," She said moving her chair to another part of the encampment. It was then she heard the numbers, "3, 5, 8, 14, 30." Dawn: Whaja say Angela? David: What did she say? Cecie: Angela let me see that!

"Oh shit we won!"

Dawn looked at the lottery ticket and appeared in shock, like someone who had just seen a famous person or found a bag of money, or got hit by a truck. "Shit! Can't be." Cecie didn't know whether to break out in hysterical laughter or turn herself into a fetus and weep and sob. David jumped around first on one foot then the other. Angela could barely make out what he was saying. She thought it was something great and all because of her and her numbers from her section of the paper. He put on a tape of his favorite music. He grabbed Angela from behind the cardboard and paper bags and swung her around and back and forth around the - soon to be destroyed - encampment. That's right their soon to be burned home. "So no one ever wins uh?" Cecie said to Dawn. "Look € Oh man! I still can't believe it." Dawn held her hands out to Cecie and Cecie pulled Dawn around in her chair in a dance of their own. They sang loudly to the music. No one but Angela paid attention to the people trying to avoid contact with the encampment. People passed by day after day occasionally leaving a quarter in Angela's straw hat. Angela jumped in the middle of a group passers€by and raised her arms and tossed her wild hair and screamed.

"WE WON! WE ARE THE WINNERS!" She pointed to the confused crowd trying to take the

bus home after a long, hard day of work. "Does that make you, dear people losers?" Dawn joined in, "Ho no, everyone wins when we do. That is a fact of simple economics. Yes, it is." David said he was going to buy a Porch and drive it to the most expensive hotel in the world, where he could have his pick of the most beautiful women. He did not care about his house mates at this point. David would dress handsomely - he would work out and improve his physic. Women would find his suave manner irresistible. "Just like a man," Cecie teased, "but, what do I care. I want a house with a fireplace and plants that don't have used car oil stuck to the leaves, and a big orange cat." Dawn turned her chair around and faced the street, "I'm leaving. I'm going far away and forget I was ever poor. When I see poor people I will cross the street. When I see poor people I will blame them for their misfortune and enjoy my prosperity. The slobs!" The others were not surprised. They also seemed to want to use this money to buy their way to happiness. One would think they were realistic to a point, all except Angela who said excitedly, "Wait, wait, I know what I want. I want to save Joan of Arc from the burning stake. I want to hold court with Nefertiti to sit on a throne next to the first Elizabeth of England." "No, no Angela," David said, "you can't buy those with money. Something's just not right about this whole thing." "Yeah." Cecie agreed, "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" "I don't want to be rich all by myself." Dawn thought after this out-burst. These were friends. They had an unwritten covenant. It was witnessed by their intimacy.

This closeness was experienced by smelling someone's urine - by catching another's cold, by discussing the best place to defecate and copulate in uncomfortable situations. These were some of the things that united a group of humans even more than ideas and the niceties of civilized behavior. Even Dawn came around to the thought that they should continue to pool their resources. They decided they would buy a big house and find people they liked to share it with. Cecie would plant a vegetable garden. David would build a skate board arena and invite anyone who wanted to skate, particularly those who had been harassed by the police for skating on the streets. Angela had a few questions, "And my things? My things? Can I bring them with me? Look I have things that are useful, a Brillo pad, this stick would make a perfect wooden spoon, and this pillow can be for our cat. For our big orange cat?" "I don't know Angela," Dawn said, "I think we'll be able to buy new things." Angela gathered some objects in her arms and said, "No no. I want these things." David put his arm around Angela, "Of course you can have your things Angela. We'll have a special place in the house just for your things. And I won't buy a porche. No, we'll need a van maybe a couple € wheelchair accessible." "And we'll buy land in the country." Dawn was radiant now. With this money we could buy lots of land. We'll have clean air and clean plants growing freely - everywhere! And maybe goats and sheep and couple of beautiful herd dogs."

It is unfortunate that they were so engrossed in their plans for the future that they didn't notice the men with bats headed their way. They were from the hate group CSA. They were men who held grudges. They needed little reason to go pounding the pavement in black S.S. boots. They talked a long while about killing vagrants. They spoke in frightening tones that rose from recesses of their chests. Just before the CSA's were to bare down on the encampment Dawn remembered saying, "You mean we're not buying a country manor? Why not a big house with land on one side facing the ocean and on the other side we'll see the woods?" The soldiers of fortune were getting closer. One look at them would have sent chills through combat veterans. "Yes, that's a

good idea," Cecie said, "and we'll have gardens and we'll cover the walls of our houses with paintings of artist we know. And we'll pay them and..." Suddenly the CSA fell upon them. The two men who were wielding bats and shouting, "PIGS, SCUM, TIME TO DIE!!"

The men pushed and shoved. They grabbed pieces of the encampment and began burning it in the middle of the street. No police came. No fire department. Was it that the sore eyes of on lookers could take no more? Maybe this would solve the problem of homelessness? Even the traffic was rerouted by a passersby.

"Get outta here GET OUT!" One of the vigilantes shouted. "We're sick of lazy creeps like you cluttering the streets." The other added. "My things my lovely things, please don't touch my lovely things." Angela cried out as David pulled her away from the swinging bats. Dawn tried to roll her wheelchair away and realized - she dropped the winning ticket. "Oh god no € NO! I've dropped the ticket!" She rolled her chair back but was hit on the head with a bat. David was hit on the arm. Cecie grabbed the back of Dawn's chair and pushed her to safety. They didn't look back to see if the men had their lottery ticket. The ticket that Angela's friends thought would buy them the luxuries of a home and good food. They went in different directions. Finally, a stranger called the police who called an ambulance for Dawn and David. Angela slipped into an ally and waited there a few days before returning to the street corner she called home.

During the Malay one passerby after another gathered to cheer on the booted men. They were, undoubtedly, the reincarnations of those who brought their lunches and cheered lynching in the south. When David's boombox was tossed into the fire it screeched out an old Janis Joplin song, "Oh lord won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz..." Hours passed before the fire department was sent to extinguish the final blaze. The back steps of the Department Store seemed too bare € too gray. Angela found her way back. After all, this was her home and no one was going to take it away. She found a new shopping cart and sang louder than ever before. She sang love songs and old cowboy songs and freedom songs. She brought new and equally interesting things to her home as though redecorating. And if she were evicted again she would come back again. This was not so much because she possessed a righteous indignation at being homeless but more because she preferred familiar surroundings. This was where Dawn found her months later.

"Honestly Angela you're like the animals we freed at the zoo, you can't seem to leave your despair." "Despair? I am quite happy. Now go away before you cause more trouble." "Oh don't worry, I got my life sorted out. The social worker at the hospital found an apartment for me to live in. And guess where Cecie is working?" "Working?" "At the Zoo taking tickets at the kid's zoo. She lives with some people in an apartment near the 20 bus line." Angela busied herself. She tightened her lips. Evidently, Dawn did not understand that she wanted her to take her bad luck else where. Dawn seemed homesick, "Look at this. It's as though it never happened. No street home, no ticket. I almost died.

They told Cecie at the hospital that she couldn't come it to see me because she wasn't a relative." Angela had only one question for Dawn, "Where's David? When is he coming home?" Dawn lied to her. Poor Angela did not know that. She said that David would come and visit her soon. David left the state with his new girlfriend and told Dawn he would never be back for any reason.

He went to the forest to become a lumber jack. "Bye Angela."

"Yes, yes you must run along now. I'm terribly busy. Much too busy for visiting." Later, Angela turned a square piece of paper over and wondered if she should sign it or wait for David. She decided to wait for David. He would know what to do with this ticket. She said the numbers aloud, 3, 5, 8, 14, 30. Then she put it in her pocket. David would definitely know what to do with it. So she would wait for him to return.