

streetwise and homeless

By Jerold London

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A person sees only what they can comprehend.

streetwise and homeless

Summer. Under an expressway overpass three homeless men – JAKE (wearing a straw hat), JOE YA-KNOW (with a singer’s deep voice), and RATTLER (with a limp) – are busy laying out their plans and design for constructing a shed. Two-by-fours, sheets of plywood, corrugated roofing panels, and other materials are resting on the concrete near them. A couple of tents are pitched further back under the overpass, upstage. A young, homeless female (maybe a redhead), MOLLY DEE, enters, pulling her belongings (on wheels) behind her, wearing pink bunny slippers that are almost black. She stops.

MOLLY DEE

Cheers.

JOE

Same, to ya.

MOLLY DEE

This used to be me place, you know.

JAKE

No place is your place, Sweetheart, if it ain’t staked out.

MOLLY DEE

No worries.

I’m sleeping in a parking garage.

The manager doesn’t make me get out till 6:30.

And only ten blocks, up Center, to a free shower every morning.

And clothes, every other week.

RATTLER

Rattler’s the name.

[*beat*] But I’m no rat; and I’m no snake.

I’m a freight train. On my way.

JOE

Been sayin’ that a year or two.

MOLLY DEE

Molly Dee.

JOE

Joe Ya-Know.

JAKE

Jake.

Touches the brim of his hat.

MOLLY DEE

What are you doing?

JAKE

Buildin'.

MOLLY DEE

A fort?

JOE

A shed.

MOLLY DEE

What for?

They'll just tear it down on you.

RATTLER

Let 'em. We'll just build it back. It's not meant to be permanent or nothing.
But you can't stop doin' just because somebody's goin' to do something on ya.
You've got to hold on to doin' something yourself.

MOLLY DEE

Get any help? Down here?

RATTLER

There's traffic. And all *this* stuff.
Yeah, people help.
People who are goin' to.
Others can fuck off.

JAKE

Life's that way.
You get to find out who.
Who.
Who's goin' to help you that way.

MOLLY DEE

So many people aren't so friendly now.

RATTLER

Life's a circle.
It's a struggle.
Like traffic.

JOE

Yeah.
Life is endless.
Like traffic.
If you're not patient.

Bells ring the hour. They all listen.

JOE

Time to get to work.

MOLLY DEE

I can help.

RATTLER

You??

MOLLY DEE

Me Pa was a master plumber.
And before he died,
sort of all of a sudden,
he taught me how to work.

RATTLER

No plumbin' here.
Just a shed against the wind, and rain, and people's eyes.

JOE

You know eyes?

MOLLY DEE

Some.
I've been around. Some.

JOE

She got to see most of me last week, I told ya.
Till eyes came stumblin' along.
Why we need some privacy around here.
It's only natural.

JAKE

All of you, in all your glory, Joe.

RATTLER

In all of your basal glory.

JOE

Oh, she heard me all right.

RATTLER

Sing Hallelujah.

JOE

[sings, loud] Hallelujah.

MOLLY DEE

[sings] Well baby I've been here before
I've seen this room and I've walked this floor
I used to live alone before I knew ya
And I've seen your flag on the marble arch
And love is not a victory march
It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

JOE

[surprised] For Christ's sake, this girl can sing!

MOLLY DEE

And I can work, too.

JAKE

Well, today's a good day.

MOLLY DEE

Every day's a good day to have a good day, me Mum used to tell me.
Before she passed.

RATTLER

Then, let's get rattlin'.

**Lights fade into a temporary darkness.
When they return, a skeleton of two-by-
fours is standing, and the crew is**

**preparing plywood sheets for the walls
(with space for two doors).**

JOE

[to MOLLY DEE] Sorry for ever doubting.

[beat] What's your story, Molly Dee?

MOLLY DEE

God's left me alone....

I met a boy, who could have lifted my heart right out of me.

But he was a loser.

An expert on how to lose friends and lovers.

RATTLER

Do you fuck?

MOLLY DEE

Let me tell you. This is about all I own.

But I own every bit of it.

And I don't intend to let it be used.

Especially not to make another wandering soul in a heartless, homeless world.

RATTLER

Just askin'.

MOLLY DEE

I've lost my best friend.

In all the world.

My deepest breath.

My sense of circulation.

My sunny clouds, drifting.

My thumbs.

My understanding eyes.

My meridian of time.

My best piece of hope.

With a string attached to it.

Flying down city streets.

A perfect wind blowing.

With no friend to come help mend a broken heart with me.

[beat] And do you know what that makes me?

JOE

[beat] No. What?

MOLLY DEE

It makes me love all the more what little is left.
Nothing under the sun lasts forever. Not even the corona virus.

JAKE

Anything else?

MOLLY DEE takes a piece of paper out of a pocket, tears it into several smaller pieces, and puts them on her tongue. Then, making a face, she moves her tongue, back and forth, in and out of her mouth a few times, wiggling the pieces of paper on it.

MOLLY DEE

What am I?

JAKE

I don't know.
A fishing boat?

MOLLY DEE

A lizard.

JOE

Anything else?

MOLLY DEE

Swallowing, then pointing at her ears.

To mine ears, butchers hook, me Mum oft times said,
right down to her ante-penultimate breath:
If you cross-eye a glass of a wine when 'twas red,
be prepared for a fate worse than death....
About the last thing I remember her telling me.
Except she loved me.
I'm from Wales, you know. Me Mum was.

A man passes by, looking.

MOLLY DEE

[*to him*] Sir!

Embarrassed, he hurries away.

MOLLY DEE

What I said.
Heartless.
It's amazing to me how many people are.
Nowadays.

RATTLER

People, a lot, aren't good.
And every man's got his own.

MOLLY DEE

What?

RATTLER

Fear. And embarrassment. And cold.

MOLLY DEE

Hold onto what's your own, is what I believe.
Hold on to being you, whatever that is.
I didn't wake up one morning, and say, "I'm going to be homeless today."
Me Mum died, and I walked out, into it. Sudden as the wind.
But I can take it. And I can do something with it. For the while....

People tell me there's no recovery from homelessness.
Not when poverty's all you know,
and you don't have a friend.
Sheltering where you can. Becomes like an addiction.
But I don't believe it. And I just keep walking, and waiting, and hoping....
I've slept on benches.

JAKE

Haven't we all?

MOLLY DEE

On the streets. In a parking garage now.
But still with an eye half open. Always.
And an ear to the ground, for death riding near.
Don't know if I could sleep so well in a bed again. For a while.
I've gotten so used to cement.

JAKE

Rats, and mice, and cockroaches, in the summer.
And lots of cold in the winter, sometimes thinkin' I'll never be warm again.

RATTLER

I got this limp, homeless, in this town.
Run down on the sidewalk by a bicycle.
A bicycle, of all things.
Who'd expect.
Wasn't looking.
He must have weighed two sixty.
At least.
I was in the hospital a week.
Last time I had a bed that long.
Rough sleepin' is rough on ya.
Is all I can say.

MOLLY DEE

And not knowing.
But you've got to be genuine. You've got to hold on to that.
If you ever hope to get something real out of life.
More than worrying where your next meal is coming from.
I'm so thin.
No wonder he walked out on me.
No wonder I feel sometimes I don't belong here.
Parts of me are everywhere.

JOE

That's why we're here, doin' this.
To make something we can be proud of.
Not to feel we're useless.
Even if we see it come crashing down like all the rest of our dreams.

**Lights fade into temporary darkness
again. When they return, the shed is
complete, with two doors.**

JAKE

It's done. We've got a friend.

RATTLER

I'd rather have a dog, if I had my choice.
But this is nice enough, for now....
Good job, guys.... And dolls.

JAKE

I hid in a shed, once. Full of junk. Packed with it, thank God.

MOLLY DEE

Oh?

JAKE

Yeah.

My brother went crazy.

Had a brick he was goin' to bash my head in with.

An' I ran. An' hid in a shed.

He thought I might be in there, but he couldn't see me.

With all that junk and lawn mowers.

After that I put on a disguise, left for the city, an' never looked back.

I don't go near my family anymore.

MOLLY DEE

You'll get yours back.

With your folks.

Life always repays us in accordance with our deeps.

Caution is repaid with caution.

Evil is repaid with evil.

Love, with love.

Hate, with hate.

Faith, with faith.

Generosity, with generosity.

I met a girl once, on the streets, who found a pigeon with a broken wing.

She panhandled most of the day for enough money to take it to a woman.

Got a cab and everything, to go to this bird whispering woman.

And what happened?...

JAKE

[*beat*] Yeah. What happened?

MOLLY DEE

The bird's wing got better, I suppose, and she happened to meet this man, with lots of money.

And he got her a place to live. Paid for it. For women only.

And found her a job.

And ... there.

JOE

Some just cry some burns.

There and here.

I feel rich when I have enough food.

Pause.

MOLLY DEE

There's been such a hollowness in me since he left.
But that's just another flavor of homelessness, isn't it?
You get used to....
Sure happy to be part of your crew.

JOE

Good to have ya, Molly Dee.

MOLLY DEE

What are you building next?
It's so hungry, out here, without someone you can really talk to.

JAKE

You can join us.
Sure.
But all we eat, mostly, is Ramen noodles.
We survive on Ramen noodle.

MOLLY DEE

Sounds good to me.
Let Ramen noodles save my life.
My feet, at least.

She sits down.

JOE

[sings, loud] Hallelujah.

**He, JAKE and RATTLER sit down with
MOLLY DEE, to share some Ramen
noodles and a look at the shed.**

END



Photo from [Wikimedia](#)

To an artist, this is the emptiness of grief and homelessness.
Empty, without a friend.
Feel it, without judging it, or dismissing it, or suppressing it.
It can come in waves.
In Switzerland. By Albert Gyorgy. Entitled "Mélancolie"

Hallelujah, click [here](#)