

streetwise mid humanity

By Jerold London

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Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout rain! ...
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness ...
You owe me no subscription: then let fall
Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave.
– King Lear

streetwise mid humanity

**Summer in the 2020's. In a yard some distance outside a convent
three homeless men and one homeless woman:**

JAKE (wearing a straw hat),

JOE YA-KNOW (with a singer's deep voice),

RATTLER (with a limp), and

**MOLLY DEE (wearing a fancy pair of mid-calf boots, not tightly
laced) are being instructed by SISTER ANGEL (in her 20's, a secret
smoker) as to the repair of a damaged rock wall on convent land.**

SISTER ANGEL

See?... She wants it a couple of feet higher than before. Like I said.
And ... well, you know, patched up. Tidied up a bit. You know what to do.
She said you would.

JOE

Who? Your mother?

SISTER ANGEL

Yes. Our Mother Superior.

JAKE

Which rocks do we use?

SISTER ANGEL

The rocks lying around. There are plenty. Pick any of them; we trust you.

RATTLER

[in a questioning manner] The rocks ... lying around

SISTER ANGEL

[indicating] You know. What you see ... around here. And in the woods.

MOLLY DEE

Are there enough?

For what your Mother Superior wants us to do?

SISTER ANGEL

Jesus provides what we need.

MOLLY DEE

Beg pardon?

SISTER ANGEL

Jesus. Do you know Jesus?

MOLLY DEE

I walk with him every day.

He was my only friend once, after me Mum died. Except for one.

Before my friends here.

JOE

Yeah. We all know Jesus.

JAKE

He was poor and homeless, just like us.

RATTLER

With not a coin to his name....

Life's a circle, you know. It's a struggle. Like traffic.

Life's like that. If you want to truly find Jesus, look among the homeless.

SISTER ANGEL

Call me, if you have any trouble. Or need any more water than what's here.
I am Sister Angel.
But call me Sister Ann. Everybody does.

JOE

Glad to meet ya, Sister Ann.
Joe Ya-Know.

JAKE

Jake.
Touches the brim of his hat.

RATTLER

Rattler's the name.
But I'm no rat; and I'm no snake.
I'm a freight train. On my way out one day.

JOE

He's been sayin' that more than a year or two.

MOLLY DEE

Molly Dee.
Daughter of a plumber.
And daughter of a proud Welsh woman.
An orphan.
Except for my friends here.

SISTER ANGEL

Well, we're glad you all know your Savior.

JAKE

How did you find us?

SISTER ANGEL

Mother Superior saw you building a shed.
Under an overpass.
Riding in a car.

RATTLER

I think she knew me before.
And Boxcar.

SISTER ANGEL

That was your dog?

RATTLER

Yeah. My dog.

SISTER ANGEL

She told me.

RATTLER

He was goin' blind.
And I tried to walk him to see everything before it went away from him.
Before I caught my next train, and got myself outta here.

JOE

[surprised] Rattler ... I never knew you had a dog.

RATTLER

Accept it, Man.
There's a lot you never knew.
And still don't.
Not about me.

MOLLY DEE

You called him "Boxcar?"

RATTLER

It means bad luck. Like me most of the time.

SISTER ANGEL

Mother Superior likes you. Consider that your good luck.
And that we all know the Lord.
Like, that's the best luck in the world, and the best friend you can ever have.

MOLLY DEE

I know Jesus, but these friends of mine are as good as any.

SISTER ANGEL

No one's as good as Jesus.

MOLLY DEE

There've been three pillars in my life, Sister:
God, whom I call Good, who is Love.
Satan, whom I call Evil, who preaches hatred in my ear when I'm not careful.
And passion, whom I called happiness,
which I've lost along the way. Getting so hungry.
The rest of life is simply a chaos that luck and tragedy swing around.
It all depends upon how you choose to look at it.

Beat.

SISTER ANGEL

Well, I don't know now, if you *do know* the Lord. Not the way we do.

RATTLER

You a smoker, Sister? A secret smoker?

SISTER ANGEL

What business is that of yours?

RATTLER

None.

But don't go figurin' you know everything about what homeless people know.

SISTER ANGEL

What are you trying to say?

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, Sister Ann?

SISTER ANGEL

[*beat*] I don't know. Lilies of the field? A broken wall?

MOLLY DEE

A lizard.

Bells ring the hour. They all listen.

SISTER ANGEL

Time for me to go, and for you to get to work.
I'll be here, if you need me. And food at Noon.
And remember: "Good fences make good neighbors."

She exits, and the others silently begin gathering suitable stones. They work on

**the wall as they talk and occasionally
have a drink of water.**

MOLLY DEE

I've always wanted a dog I've never had.

RATTLER

My dog saved my life.

JOE

How's that?

RATTLER

Livin' is about findin' a way to keep feelin' human.
That's the worst part, bein' homeless:
bein' treated like you're not human....
And without a friend. Livin' is about findin' a friend.
Sleepin' rough eats away at the feelin' of bein' human.
I'd been sleepin' under bridges for nearly eight years before I found Boxcar.
And then one day he came runnin' to me.
I think some kids were chasin' him to drown him. He was just a runt.
How I was feelin', life fallin' apart for me.
And he looked at me.
And I knew: It's not dogs who really have the bad eyesight.
I don't know what I would have done without him.
He got my heart, straight away.
He gave me confidence back. And something to live for.
Life's not so scary when you have someone else with you.
He'd sleep at my feet when I was standing on the street, panhandlin'.
Lookin' out for him.
And, at night, he'd look out for me.
Sometimes the thoughts would come. To end my life.
But I'd think: who'd look after Boxcar if I'm gone?
He was the reason I stuck around.
I had to keep goin', for both of us.
And if I ever didn't have enough food, I'd feed him first.
But then I could tell he was goin' blind.
I guess people just don't understand.
I guess people just don't know.
I guess I just didn't understand.
I guess I just didn't know.
All my life I thought I'd change.

JAKE

I had a dog, too.
That died.
Before I got on the streets.
I know what you mean, Rattler....

RATTLER

I tried to be his eyes for him.
On the streets, and everywhere.
But one afternoon he ran out in front of car, and that was that.
I don't know why he did it. What got into him.
The driver stopped. Nothin' we could do.
I asked him to give us a ride. Out here actually.
I had something in mind.
These woods I'd seen.
Carryin' him in my lap.
Thinking: Now's the time to throw in the towel.
I couldn't imagine life without him.
After I got out, still with Boxcar in my arms, Mother Superior came out.
I guess that's who she must have been.
She asked me what happened, and I told her.
And she got their gardener; and he and I buried Boxcar in those woods there.
And with his blood on me, she had her driver find Joe.
He'd sung at church a few times; and she knew he's a good man. And

JOE

[*beat*] We hung together. Not talking much.
And you never told me a thing about your dog.

RATTLER

Yeah, we hung together. But I couldn't....

JAKE

Then *I* found you two.

JOE

You could say that.
[*sings, loud*] Hallelujah, to you and me.

MOLLY DEE

[*sings*] Like a bird on the wire
Like a drunk in an old midnight choir
I have tried in my way to be free.*

* *link at the end*

JAKE

Ya know, Molly Dee, I do love that voice of yours.
And tell me, where did you get those fancy shoes?

MOLLY DEE

On the street.
A woman came walking past, and stopped to look at me,
and told me I was the one.
She'd gotten these shoes that she said were too small for her,
and wanted to find someone homeless who'd take them.
And, I guess, with me pink bunny slippers ... //

JAKE

Pink bunny slippers??

MOLLY DEE

They were when I started. Before the streets darkened them.
And I was happy to trade them in.

JAKE

Why not lace them up?

MOLLY DEE

I like the feel. Loose.

**They go on working, talking a little from
time to time.**

MOLLY DEE

You know? Life's boring when you have nothing new to do. Nowhere new to go.
Waking up. Going to get your free shower.
And then all day, scrounging for money to get something to eat.
Every day like the last.

JAKE

People think we do nothing all day.
No clue how a person struggles just to feed himself.
And if you get wet in the rain, how you can't get yourself dry.

RATTLER

They look at you like: Why have a dog when you can't even get a home?
They don't get it: How having a dog helps, especially mentally,....
[beat] It's just, I had nowhere to go. No place to turn to after my parents died.
I didn't know what to do. That's why I ended up on the streets so young.

**Lights fade into temporary darkness.
When they return, the wall is nearly
completely repaired.**

**SISTER ANGEL enters. A puppy in is her
arms.**

SISTER ANGEL

Nice work.

They stop and stare at the dog.

RATTLER

[with a catch in his throat] No!

SISTER ANGEL

Yes.

For you.

Yours.

**She offers him the dog. Pause. He takes
it from her. And no longer able to hold it
in, he sobs, burying his head into the
fur.**

JAKE

Never thought I'd see the day....

Life's that way, I guess.

You get to find out who.

Who.

Who's goin' to help you along the way.

I always say: Charity begins at homelessness.

SISTER ANGEL

Charity begins with Jesus.

Jesus is the one always there to help us along the way.

And Mother Superior wants you four to start tomorrow.

To build a dozen small homes.

Over there. Near the woods. Like the shed you built.

With kitchens, and running water, and locks on the doors.

For you.

And for others.

She understands.

And you'll have all the help you need.

Beat.

MOLLY DEE

So many people weren't so friendly like you.
But it wasn't that. It was the emptiness.
Like fear isn't the dark.
It's the silence.
And the aloneness.
And no locks in the night.
Never knowing who might find you.
Alone.
Empty of people around.
And no dog.
And take everything you have.
Or worse.
When you get on the streets, you got to learn fast.

JAKE

It's the land that holds us.
Tight.
If we had the land we could build ourselves homes.
It's land that grows humanity.
Like this little acre out here.
God's.
Like in the beginning.

RATTLER

This *is* the beginning, Man.

**They circle RATTLER, and pet his new
dog (SISTER ANGEL included).**

END



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**We should all see more.
And we should all care more.**

Like a Bird on the Wire, click [here](#)