

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

by

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CHARACTERS

ANGELA BANYON

Early forties. An environmentalist.
Educated. Well-employed.

BARB MCCUE

Early forties. A server. Also educated,
but under-employed. Attended school with
Angela.

SASKI HANUMAN

Early forties. Works for a non-profit
"sustainable development" group. Also
attended school with Barb and Angela.

SETTING

A hip downtown café, called "Café Babylonian"

TIME

Morning. The present.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

(AT RISE: ANGELA enters. She is well-dressed in business clothes and carries a hip, professional brief case. She heads for a table and begins to station herself. She picks up a flier on the table and stares at it. Her phone rings.)

ANGELA

Angela Banyon... (Pause.) Damn it! I told her that is not going to work... I'm meeting with Saski now. Then lunch with the Mayor's task force. How am I supposed to meet the Attorney General on the other side of town and then back to the Mayor's office all in thirty minutes?! Just change the meeting!

(BARB enters and stops in her tracks.

ANGELA sees BARB. BARB starts to turn around.)

Barb! Is that you? (Into phone.) I'm sorry I'll have to call you back.

(She slams down her phone.)

Barb McCue?!

(ANGELA goes to BARB and hugs her.)

It's been years! What are you doing here?!

BARB

I work here.

ANGELA

You do?! I thought you worked for the city.

BARB

I did. In between jobs I guess.

ANGELA

Oh shit! Budget cuts.

BARB

I'm fine with it, really. Really fine.

ANGELA

Good. Listen. I'm about to meet with Saski Hanuman. Remember her? Public policy program?

BARB

I'm not sure I do.

ANGELA

Anyway. She works for the developers. "Sustainable development" whatever that means. But I would love to hang out with you some time. Could we do that? I have no time. But, we could, you know, exchange numbers.

BARB

Sure.

(SASKI enters. She is more hip, less professional, but carries a brief case, too.)

SASKI

Hi Angela. Sorry I'm late.

ANGELA

No worries. It's been a dog of a morning! You know Barb? She was in class with us.

SASKI

I believe I do.

ANGELA

We were great friends --

BARB

We knew each other...

ANGELA

Barb and I.

BARB

Pretty well.

SASKI

It's good to see you again. How have you been?

BARB

Alright I guess. Here at The Babylonian a couple years now.

SASKI

It's a good area to be in. I mean location wise it's on the rise. Angela? You would agree?

ANGELA

That's what we're here to discuss, isn't it? The rise?

SASKI

Yes. And I'm afraid I don't have much time.

(ANGELA's phone rings.)

ANGELA

Christ! Neither do I. Sorry. (Answers phone.) Angela Banyon... (Pause.) I told you I would call you back! Excuse me... Barb?

BARB

Can I get you anything?

ANGELA

Just a coffee for me. And whatever Saski wants.

SASKI

A latte. With soy, please.

ANGELA

Great. Thank you, Barb.

(BARB exits. Into phone:)

No way in hell!(Pause.) I cannot talk about this now I'm in a meeting. (Pause.) Good. 'Bye.

(She hangs up.)

Sorry. The dog is barking again!

SASKI

I can imagine. After all... It is an election year.

ANGELA

Something's gotta change, Saski. I can't keep up with this pace.

SASKI

Responsible progress has a steep price.

ANGELA

I suppose. (Pause.) Sometimes I feel like a fool.

SASKI

What do you mean?

ANGELA

The environment continues to crumble. And now I have congestive heart disease.

SASKI

Sorry.

ANGELA

Yep. The price we pay. It's not easy being an environmentalist when our entire cultural machine depends on environmental destruction. Do you know the stress that causes me? It's killing me. Literally. Any day.

SASKI

I'm sorry, Angela. But we do what we can. You're good at what you do.

ANGELA

You're kind to say that.

SASKI

(Sotto voce) In contrast. You know? I think I've heard something about her. Barb. Used to work for the city.

ANGELA

Yes. She fell on rough times I'm afraid.

SASKI

I don't think it ended well. Her job.

ANGELA

Really? I hadn't heard that.

(BARB enters with coffees.)

That was fast.

BARB

The soy milk was already hot. But plenty of foam.

SASKI

Just the way I like it.

BARB

Sugar's there. Holler if you need me.

(BARB exits.)

ANGELA

We should get started. Did you bring the paperwork?

SASKI

I have the location permits. Demolition could be done next week. And construction the week after.

ANGELA

Before we talk about all of that, I have to say I've run into a stumbling block on the location.

SASKI

I thought the city had approved.

ANGELA

Yes. But it's the rest of the council. You know we need unanimous consent from everyone.

SASKI

I don't understand.

ANGELA

It's the proximity of this... Rather tall... Tower --

SASKI

The tallest in the city, perhaps the entire country --

ANGELA

So close to the water.

SASKI

The mayor agreed it will be a big boon for tourism --

ANGELA

As you know, there are plans for a waterfront park --

SASKI

The construction as initially proposed will be entirely green.

ANGELA

But right in the center of the park.

SASKI

What better place for it! The only one hundred percent sustainably built skyscraper in the entire world.

ANGELA

But what does that really mean? A sustainably built tower of concrete and iron?

SASKI

It's green concrete.

ANGELA

Green concrete?

SASKI

It's in the plan. Does the Mayor know about this... obstacle?

ANGELA

Unfortunately, the Mayor is answerable to the Environmental Review Council and we are short the support to approve a tower this size at this location.

SASKI

What are your thoughts?

ANGELA

I think there are legitimate concerns.

SASKI

But you and I have discussed this for over a year!

ANGELA

The black water system alone could contaminate the park's entire water supply, Saski.

SASKI

Eight thousand new office spaces. Tens of thousands of new jobs!

ANGELA

I'm really sorry. In our previous discussions, I overlooked some important details. Barb!

(BARB enters.)

Some cream, please? Half and half, not milk. Thanks.

SASKI

Sweet and low?

BARB

No more? Sorry.

(BARB begins to exit.)

SASKI

Oh... And a bran muffin, please.

BARB

Right away.

(BARB exits.)

SASKI

I'm very disappointed. I thought we had communicated our needs to each other.

ANGELA

My hands are tied. I'll meet the mayor's task force today and we can begin scouting a new location.

SASKI

The entire project was designed for the waterfront.
(BARB enters with cream and packets.)

ANGELA

Thank you, Barb.

BARB

I'm heating up the muffin.

SASKI

Excellent.

(BARB exits.)

You know she chained herself to a tree.

ANGELA

What?! Barb? Nonsense!

SASKI

She was working for the city.

(BARB enters with the muffin, sets it down and begins to leave.)

ANGELA

And Barb?

BARB

Yes?

ANGELA

Never mind.

(BARB exits.)

She chained herself...?

SASKI

The mayor was going to cut down some old trees. Down by the waterfront.

ANGELA

That was criminal!

SASKI

They were drawing homeless people.

ANGELA

Seeking shade from the sun!

SASKI

Anyway. Bad for tourism. One up for the mayor.

ANGELA

So Barb...

SASKI

Chained herself to one of the trees.

ANGELA

She was always an angel in school.

(She stirs her coffee and sips.)

I wonder if anything came of it.

SASKI

Well, they saved the one tree. A memorial now or something. And then Senator Stephens, that buddy of yours, used it as an example for setting aside two thousand acres of protected forest land in the hills outside the city. One up for your team.

ANGELA

I feel like I've accomplished nothing with this administration.

SASKI

Today you've done your job. At my expense I might add. (Pause.) It's a shame, really.

ANGELA

What?

SASKI

You know... All those promising young women in our class. And we're the only two successful ones?

ANGELA

Saski. What is success, anyway?

SASKI

You have to ask?

ANGELA

The other side of success is a failure to take care of the one thing that matters most.

SASKI

What's that?

ANGELA

My health and wellness. Honestly. If only I could dress like you and get away with it.

SASKI

If I had your salary, I'd dress however I damn well please.

ANGELA

Not if you had to kiss the Attorney General's ass.
(ANGELA's phone rings. She looks at it.)

Oh Ka-righst!

(She ignores the call and slams it down.)

I mean what is "sustainable development" anyway, Saski? Nothing we do is really sustainable.

(BARB enters to refill ANGELA's coffee.)

BARB

Here ya go.

ANGELA

Thanks, Barb.

SASKI

And Barb? Fresh cream? This one's a little off.

BARB

Of course. Right away.

ANGELA

Wait. Barb?

(BARB stops.)

BARB

Yes?

ANGELA

Are you happy here?

BARB

(Pause.) You mean the work?

ANGELA

Is it true? About the tree?

BARB

Yes.

SASKI

Now you're here.

BARB

I've moved on. To bigger things. More important things.

SASKI

All relative I suppose.

BARB

Next week I'll be on a boat in the southeast seas.

SASKI

Very nice. I could use some time on a boat.

ANGELA

Something to do with this flier?
(She holds it up.)

BARB

Yes. We'll be intercepting illegal whaling ships.

ANGELA

Inter... Cepting... Really?

SASKI

On second thought, no thanks.

ANGELA

Hmmnn. Well... I wish we'd kept in better touch, Barb.
My fault I'm afraid.

BARB

Just different circles. That's all.
(BARB exits.)

SASKI

Do you have a thing for her?

ANGELA

If only I fell for people who stuck to their principles. And why do you care about fresh cream for your soy latte?

SASKI

I was protecting you from sour milk.

ANGELA

Here we are. Babbling about nothing.

SASKI

I hope you understand this is hardly nothing. You'd rather be out saving whales?

(SASKI laughs. BARB enters with cream.)

ANGELA

Thank you, Barb.

BARB

You're welcome.

ANGELA

Sometime I'd like to hear more about this... Project of yours.

BARB

We're looking for others. Seven more to crew our boat. Maybe you could pass it on? To your environmentalist friends?

ANGELA

It's the least I can do for you. I will.

(BARB begins picking up dishes and exits. ANGELA puts down money.)

I got it.

SASKI

No change?

ANGELA

She earned it. (Pause.) So, what exactly is it that we're doing?

SASKI

Trying to find a way to responsibly be alive?

ANGELA

And how is that working for us?

SASKI

You're calling the shots today. You tell me.

ANGELA

You know that tower's going up somewhere, Saski.
Waterfront or not.

SASKI

So, you're not behind this project.

ANGELA

It doesn't matter whether or not I'm behind it.
Progress these days is rarely if ever progressive.

SASKI

You're right. It will happen with or without us. I say
better with the awareness we can bring to it.

(ANGELA is entranced by the flier.)

ANGELA

I'm not sure the political machine is capable of the
kind of awareness we're talking about here.

(Her phone begins ringing.)

Oh shit.

SASKI

I'd better go. You just made my day a lot worse.

ANGELA

Sorry this didn't go your way. We'll be in touch.

(Quick hug. SASKI exits. ANGELA answers
her phone.)

Angela Banyon... Yes... I'm just finishing now. I'm on
my way... Next week? Let me look at my calendar.

(She looks intently at the flier. Pours
cream in her coffee. Takes a sip.)

I dunno. I think I might be on a boat next week.

(Pause.) In the southeast seas.

END OF PLAY