

When I first saw that it was Ange at the Starbucks, I was flooded with three memories. Number one was the email she sent me the initial time I reached out to her, the first person I ever admitted to with real truth about my drinking problem. Her website, a community and resource for young women struggling with alcohol abuse, was referenced in an article I read that set me in motion for a world that would have previously embarrassed me but which I later would embrace, religion-like: *recovery*. Hooked by Ange's online personality, I worshipped her confidence, generosity and how she had all of that without alcohol.

My second memory was the time we met in person after discovering we both lived in the city. We spent almost an entire night talking about our childhoods, parents, upbringings, romance, careers, and sex. We had so many similar experiences, I felt I was meeting my present self and future self. By then, because of her blog, I had been sober for about six months. Still, my sobriety had begun to feel more of a forced habit, rather than a natural way of life that I could fully embody. On that night with Ange, and the moment before we parted, when we stood outside a post office on Geary Street, close to where I lived in the Richmond District, she took me by my shoulders and looked at me. Her eyes, green, hazel, black, whatever they were, were glistening. Her hair was pinned in a low bun, and she looked geeky but beautiful with about ten clunky barrettes holding her wisps back. Her eyeliner and mauve lipstick countered the harsh hairdo, making her entire look commanding and breathtaking. If I could reach up and touch her face, I would feel a softness and a firmness that would allow the stroke but only for a moment.

It was always uncomfortable when people over-used my name, but when Ange did it, it was like I was being called into full human presence. She used it to start a thought, mid-way through a thought, and to change subjects. In retrospect, I think it was a part of her control issues. I think she said names pointedly as a way to ensure she spoke the most important words and to clarify that she was the giver of information, never the receiver. That night on Geary, she gently pushed my right elbow with her left arm to place me where she wanted me. Even through my red peacoat, I swear I could feel her skin on mine. She was a few inches taller than me,

and more so in her silver Doc Martens. She seized my shoulders, and her grip was enough to ground me for a lifetime. I never wanted to be anywhere but there.

"Amanda," she said. "I know you can conquer this. I know you are scared. Amanda, I want to hold you like a baby. I want to remind you of the little girl inside you that didn't have a first chance. I want to give to you whatever you need to allow that child to emerge, and to shine. I don't want you to ever think it's too late to be the woman you are meant to be. If you need permission, I grant it to you now. Amanda, if you need love, I give you all that I have. If you need faith, I present to you my belief. If you need somewhere to fall, I'll be here." By the end of her vow, I was sobbing, and her eyes had pooled up but nothing had fallen from them. We hugged for an eternity and I felt safer than I had with anyone, anywhere, ever.

The last memory was the night I pressed 'post' on a comment on her blog, when I told the world that Angela Anelli was a fraud. That she had sold herself as a sobriety and alcohol-free lifestyle coach and mentor, stating and sharing her own struggles and recovery as points for her legitimacy and expertise, not to mention, relatability. To the public or anyone and everyone who read her blog, I made it clear that Ange was not sober. I had recently seen her not only drink, but get *drunk*, and I explained that this person who claimed to have authority on the sobriety process did not actually understand it at all. I announced that Ange herself admitted to me that she had only been sober for four months in the past 20 years, and that she told me this when she was drunk and that she did not expect me to ever see her that way. This conversation happened at a music festival in Golden Gate Park, on a kind of day that plays its own games with inhabitants: offering a sudden and unanticipated respite from fog and gray, gracing the city with color and heat. In these bizarre moments during the year, it seems like everyone in San Francisco actually *wants* to live there.

That we ran into each other at a crowded festival was a feat in and of itself, but complemented much of what I had been studying in recovery about vibrations, manifestations, and purpose. Ange had a clear plastic cup in her left hand, wore dangling silver and feather earrings, and perfectly played the role of an unflappable hippie overtaken by music. She still had a type of orb around her, and now it glowed

as she danced with her booze prop. I'd wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt, that she might just be holding it, trying to keep up with the Jones' of this event, and even though that falsity was maddening in its own way, it was better than what actually happened: she slammed the entire beer, and then stumbled into someone she seemed to know, marking the fact that it was not her first drink of the day.

Ten minutes later, after my initial approach and accusations, she and I were headed up a path away from the concert and toward a wooded area. I was keeping my calm in addressing her, but I knew I'd have to start yelling soon, because she was both totally denying what I was accusing her of and also, because she was drunk. "'Manders,'" she started, and leaned her head far back as if both searching for the sun and also as if a boneless puppet, completely done with everything. She straightened up and then slouched but managed to look at me. "Come on. Come on, girl. It's me, Ange."

"Yeah, so?" I said.

"Look, ok, whatever. I'm not perfect, none of us are—"

"This isn't about perfect, it's about being real, Ange, which is *all* you've ever talked about!"

"Dude. Don't you get it? This is real. This is really me, girlfriend. This is who I am. I'm a fucking alcoholic, and I don't even care not to be."

"Don't say that, that's not even true. Of course you care. You care enough to help, like, hundreds of girls get out of the shit they're in. *Bullshit* you don't care!" I was starting to tear up.

Then, she pulled the move: hands on shoulders. Her touch was ice cold. She started to knead my skin a little and then in my peripheral vision, I also saw that she was fidgeting with her own fingers, maybe gouging her nails together.

"Amanda, look....Does it even fucking matter? Does it matter if I am drunk, an addict, sober, recovered, a psycho, or anything? Does any of that matter, if I actually *did* help you? Who cares *how* you got help, honey. You got it! You got it and you're better now, and for fuck's sake, you are not going back! So, what difference does it make what *I* do?" Her eyes were glazed but pleading. They sparkled bright. They hadn't been altered by the booze, or pot, which I smelled on her breath, too.

"Amanda, you are an incredible angel in this world. Nothing about me has to do with that. That's inside you." She pointed her right finger and made a move as if she was going to jab my heart, but instead ran her finger gently down my collarbone to my sternum and rested it there. I realized I was holding my breath. Ange was looking down at her finger and it dawned on me that she might be sick or about to black out. I tipped her chin up with a crooked finger. Her eyes were half-closed.

"Ange? Angela, wake up." I gently cupped and then tapped at her left cheek with my right hand. I steadied her slight body, and then wrapped my arm around her, guiding her to a bench. Purpose filled me right now: the need to take care of her, and it didn't dawn on me to be mad again until about an hour later when Ange's friend found us and took her away, after Ange had come around a bit. She didn't even look back at me. Had I, at any point, actually thought that I would impact her life? The answer didn't crystalize, but it was obvious. I wanted her to need me the way I needed her, and I wanted to believe I had a part in her maintaining sobriety; that my progress, my strength, was keeping her going in her own recovery.

Of course, a desire would come, and I knew not to try to avoid it or wish the impulse away, but to instead, live in it. I could have taken a different way to the entrance to the park, walking longer, but steering clear of the beer garden. That would have been easier. But I didn't. I intentionally walked toward it, close to it, and passed it. The instinct was there, the voice in my head guiding me to the booze, to just have one drink, fully justifying it particularly because of what had just happened. The thoughts rushed over me, and the images of the taste and smell and warmth just one sip would have on me; the way the substance would fill me up so quickly with ease and slack and joy when I was feeling anything but those things. In my mind, I went up and got a beer and no one noticed or cared; I easily slipped in with this crowd of fellow youngish people doing what looked like fully experiencing life. I let my mind consider that if Ange was drinking, of course I could, too. But I kept moving. Soon, I was past the stage and the booths and tents

and sea of people with hats and sunglasses and windbreakers around hips, and I was at the entrance to the park nearest to my street.

It was then that I knew I'd out her online. I thought of something I had forgotten all about until that moment. Ange had once promised we would go rollerblading in Golden Gate Park, that she would get a whole group of us recovery girls together for skating, kite flying, or even just a random dance party where we could act goofy together and prove that we didn't need alcohol to let loose. It was going to be epic, and a marking point for many of our lives. It would be a claim to our community, and to the world about each of us with our very own choices and self-love that people on the outside could never understand. It would be all ours. That event never happened, and back then, I just assumed it was because Ange got busy with something bigger or more important; maybe someone's life needed saving. Now, I see that the utopian moment she dreamt up and shared with me was just that: a made-up vision of a world she wanted to create but never did.