

Looming Job Prospects

By: RaddaRaem

Sliding a hand along the side of her face, the panther brushed aside the auburn locks of hair draping over her ears. Cool autumn air was drawn into her moist black nose as her chest expanded, the feline's chocolate colored sweater clinging gently to her modest curves. Exhaling softly, twin streams of mist drifted out of her nostrils and dissipated before her.

"So what do we got here," she mused aloud. Her eyes drawn towards the manila envelope in her hands, the rising sun bathed it in a warm golden glow. She hardly noticed she was veering off the sidewalk as she drank in the folder's contents, at least not until a sudden drop gave her tail reason to stiffen. Shaking off the sudden jolt from the six inch plummet, she contentedly meandered through the empty city streets. The legs of her dark blue jeans shuffled against each other as she rose and fell with the dips and grooves in the road.

A series of tremors followed by a gale rushing past nearly ripped the envelope out of her hands, the panther's hair whipping back and forth in its wake. Courtesy of an early morning jogger whizzing by with callous disregard for Felicia, the rush of wind served as a gentle reminder that these streets had been repurposed long ago into pedestrian paths. With a quick, sardonic circuit of her amber eyes she directed herself back onto the sidewalk. This bit of mental effort on her end—actually having to look where she was going—proved just enough of a mental distraction to permit her to tear her eyes away from the latest applicant's portfolio. The sight that greeted her brought a gentle smile to the panther's face. Apartments, laundromats, restaurants, convenience stores, they all blended together here. Everything was so personable and accessible; nothing was condoned off to one side of the town or the other, everything just flowed into everything else! This was what she loved above all else about the place she called home. "Can't believe we don't have more people gushing and guffawing about just how good we have it," she murmured, hints of awe and disbelief forcing a waver from her soft tone.

A flick of her long inky black tail accompanied a contented giggle. Hopefully being promoted to web editor for the local newspaper would let her share that endearing sense of pride. Still, as proud as she was of her wordsmithing, Felicia could only paint so vivid a picture using her words. What she needed was a photojournalist; someone who could immediately convey the quaint charm of this lovely place they called home in a much more literal manner than the panther ever could.

Following the papping of the manila folder against a furred palm, Felicia noted this latest applicant's resume was looking... She snuck another glance at the sticky note slapped to the folder—Angela was it?—Angela's resume was mighty impressive. If she was lucky, Felicia's search might have ended before it even begun!

Turning the corner round the latest stretch of brick apartments, the panther's favorite café came into view. She couldn't deny that favoritism, and the fact that her interview with a prospective employee was taking place here—oh Lord those muffins of theirs were so good—had a little something somethin' to do with the fact that she stopped here for breakfast every day. Nibbling away at those delicious pastries out on the pavilion and oh God what was that?!

Squinting her eyes, the café burst into focus—though with an anomaly she did not at all expect. Some sort of mass was occupying the entirety of the pavilion, having displaced all those rustic tables and

chairs out onto the street. She ventured closer. Correction—no mere mass, a person, and a very large one at that, was plopped down and hogging up all the outdoor seating.

“The hell does she think she’s doing here? There are plenty other joints around here that serve folks her size.” Kitty cat face curled down into a frown, Felicia’d have to settle for eating in. As she ventured closer though, the panther caught her gaze darting back and forth between the large lagomorph and the folder firmly in hand. Could it...

Well. Urf. “I suppose it’s remotely possible...”

Drawing ever closer and closer, the feline rehearsed her inquiries. “You wouldn’t happen to be—I’m not too forthright in presuming you’re... oh come on Felicia this isn’t that hard.” Every so often her eyes would flick up to catch the massive rabbit’s gaze. Tail flicking wildly, the panther approached the lone table left on the pavilion, conveniently placed immediately before the big bunny, and inhaled deeply—

“Looking for an Angela Braig by chance?” Long cream colored legs pulled up against her chest, the rabbit tried to compress her form as much as possible.

“Y-yes.” Felicia scuttled towards the lone table left standing.

Curling her fluffy toes, Angela tried not to start off her interview by flattening her potential future boss. “You were uhh...” the rabbit painfully stamped out the welling silence, “expecting someone smaller?” Thick whiskers swayed with every twitch of her pale pink nose.

“Mayyyybe.” It wasn’t like Felicia had walked into this intending to display much in the way of professionalism and composure, but holy crap what little she did possess was slipping through her fingers. “A little.”

“Yeah, I get that a lot.” Floppy ears draped to the sides of her head, Angela dug her buck teeth into her bottom lip.

“You could have mentioned as much on your application,” the panther politely chimed in.

“Don’t remember seeing the field where I indicated my size on the form I downloaded from your website.” Those floppy ears of hers perked up somewhat, standing tall amongst the blonde forest of hair upon her head. She leaned forward and rested her chin on her knees. Her stern defense was clear. “All it said was to provide my contact information and the best samples I had from my portfolio.”

A fair enough assertion, Felicia concluded. “I guess I’m just surprised is all.” Felicia rubbed at the back of her neck. “I’m so used to persons of your,” she gestured to all of Angela, “stature, seeking employment in construction or public works!”

“Not everyone likes getting their hands dirty with hard labor.” Her tone struck an uneasy balance between chiding and informative. “Just because I’m more than capable of ripping up and repaving roads doesn’t mean I want to.” Angela cocked her head to the side and half-jokingly followed up, “What, am I not allowed to pursue other career opportunities?”

“No no no, that’s not what I’m saying!” Felicia insisted, palms held out cautiously. Guhhh, giants always got so touchy when they felt they were being shoehorned into roles. “Then again, not like many people do,” the panther had to admit aloud. “You’re free to do so it’s just that, well... oh, never mind.” So much for first impressions. Pulling a chair out of the street and before the table, its metal legs scraped

loudly when it lurched over and onto the curb, Felicia plopped down with a sigh. A clawed finger plucked at the rubber band holding the manila folder's contents together, anticipation forcing its repeated, meaningless movements.

"So. Like what you see?" Angela inquired innocently. Lips curled up into a knowing smile, strands of white could be seen poking out where the fur on her cheeks bunched together. The weight of the tone behind her inquiry twanged with a noticeable imbalance between arrogance and genuine curiosity.

"You're a smug one alright," Felicia groaned in derision under her breath. Brows flattening, however, she eventually huffed, straightening her posture: "There are only so many ways a person can act though when they're good and they goddamned know it." Tossing aside the folder's flap, she spread Angela's resume out onto the table. Five pictures flitted about the table's metal surface.

The first was an aerial view of one of the retired rail lines running through the town's heart. Three parallel lines comprised the picture; two blackened and repaved roads flanking the orange and rusting mesh of steel running vertically through the center.

"How did you even take this?" Was what Felicia wanted to ask the first time she laid eyes on it. Every time she set foot in city's center, drinking in the sights of the revitalized urban environment, it was all but impossible not to be bathed in the shadow of that railway. It stretched out towards the edge of the picture, smothering the streets below with what remained of its legacy.

Flitting her gaze upward, she sighed. She knew what it was. All that rabbit would have had to do was lean over to take the damn thing. The panther rolled her eyes as she dwelled on it further. There may not have been much magic or mystery explaining the how behind it, but... damn, it was aesthetically pleasing, and that's not something she had thought herself to be totally ready to admit. But...

"Well?" Angela's thick toes twiddled against the ground, the vibrations rumbling through the legs of Felicia's chair. The ebony feline's silence had caused the flow of the interview to lurch unexpectedly, putting a damper on Angela's ready supply of confidence—however small.

A seemingly never ending cityscape flapped gently in between two of the panther's padded fingers. Peering down a city street, red brick apartments loomed in the foreground, curving inward. "Really looks like we have a little world to call our own here," Felicia mulled. The view stretched on for blocks, buildings and businesses shrinking and converging in the crowded background. She had left her prospect waiting long enough by this point.

"Well... I mean... pfff I can tell you've heard as much before," Felicia said, gaze shooting back up from the picture and toward her potential employee. Professionalism was, admittedly, not the ink black feline's preference, and she certainly did not mind showing it when warranted. "There's no denying the quality presented here."

Even if she was long used to praise, a relieved smile lit up the big bun's face.

"These are outstanding," Felicia continued, a little hushed in an attempt to avoid exaggeration. Her clawed fingers brushed over another picture, one that effortlessly captured the transformation slowly taking place within the city's interior. A soot covered factory with boarded up windows immediately adjacent to a restored shipping center, repurposed into a breeding ground for countless bakeries and coffee shops.

Urban blight rubbing shoulders with a revitalized city life, Felicia concluded. Powerful.

“Far better than I could have ever hoped for,” Felicia admitted, now making the decision to look the rabbit in the eyes. Angela easily blew so far past all her expectations; the interview may as well have been done and over with.

The rabbit ran a hand through her relatively short hair, ruffling morning dew out of the blonde mess that curled around her ears. “Then... this the part where we discuss my pay and hours?” Easing up on that blunt and overbearing confidence, Angela’s voice had a hopeful sing-song tone.

Still, the feline wasn’t content with just rolling over and giving the position to her. For all the nice-nice she’d already handed out like candy on Halloween, the rabbit would have to work for it, at least a little. “I don’t ever remember saying the magic words, do you?”

For a reaction, all Felicia got out of her was a sudden twitching of those floppy ears. Girl could hide dejection pretty well.

“So you’ve proven you’re more than capable for the job, fair enough. I can say that with certainty. You *are* talented.” The panther’s tail twirled in circles behind her. “But what do you bring that no other photojournalist can? Why are you the person I can’t go without, that I can’t pass up?”

Angela’s eyes widened. She hadn’t expected this much pushback, and so quickly. The rabbit took to quiet contemplation without so much as looking away.

“Take your time.” Maybe she was being a teensy bit harsh, but for goodness’ sakes she was the one giving the interview here! Even if she only did just barely come up past the rabbit’s ankles, Felicia needed to exercise at least some semblance of control over the situation.

“My perspective,” the big bunny replied without missing a beat, already having regained her composure.

“Hmm?”

“Think about it. How many giants do you guys currently have on staff?” She giggled as Felicia clacked her mouth open and shut, mouthing out one unsatisfactory answer after the other.

“You’d be the first,” the panther eventually relented. The illusion of control was nice while it lasted... but she was pinned.

“Which strikes me as odd, given the demographics of this place,” Angela continued, turning her head over her shoulder. Felicia followed her lead; multiple persons of size meandered about, plodding through the center of the streets. A colossal collie jovially waved down to one his smaller brethren keeping safely to the sidewalks. “What, giants make up a third of the population here now? They read your site too, you know.” The rabbit wrapped her arms around her chest. *Would it be pushing it to pour on the charm? It’s not sucking up if it’s true*, she hurriedly rationalized to herself. While she still commanded her future boss’, not potential but future boss’s attention, she donned a warm smile. “As do I.”

“The rebounding economy *has* been drawing in folks of all shapes and sizes,” Felicia admitted to herself. She had been the one to condense down and publish the latest census data last year after all.

Hah, and that attempt at stroking her ego hadn’t gone unnoticed.

“Pictures from a point of view they’re intimately familiar with would draw them right in, I betcha. That and... think of it this way: I can help you provide a brand new look at the city people your size have lived in all their lives. That’s more than one demographic we’re appealing to.”

Throwing her hands up in the air beside her, what remained of Felicia’s resistance came crashing down. “Alright, alright, I’ll quit stringing things along,” she said with surrendering laughter. “You got the job.”

Leaning back, Angela furiously stifled an excited squeal, toes clenched tight as she stuffed down that giddy display of excitement. “Sweet! Er—” the enormous rabbit cleared her throat and forced a swallow. “S-so when do I start? Do I get a tour of where you work or anything?”

“Heh, slow down. Here’s the deal: I’ll email you a transcript for my next story in the following weeks, after we go over the finer details of your new employment.” Guess those muffins would have to wait for another day, the feline thought wistfully, shoulders drooped with an accompanying sigh. Business took precedence, after all.

Brushing off her legs, Angela rose to her full height of forty feet, give or take, taking care to duck as she took to the sides of the street, waiting patiently for culminating details.

“Uhhh... and about that tour,” the panther’s head leaned back as she tried to take in all of the rabbit. “Oh thank God the newspaper shifted to all digital last year.” Not like their newest photojournalist would have fit in the building otherwise. She’d wipe her brow to *that* if there was anything congealed there. “Don’t be getting too antsy now.” She couldn’t help but smirk as her newest employee subconsciously pouted, which proved quite visible to the smaller cat. “You still need to clear your background checks, after all.” Tallying off all that remained to be done, Felicia tapped down one finger after another. “Fill out all the nitty gritty paperwork, submit proof of residence, corroborate your references with prior employers, etc.”

“Yeah, sounds great,” Angela added quickly. “Just pretty glad this whole thing got sorted out. I’m allowed to say that now that the interview’s over, yeah?”

Felicia smirked, beginning to stand up herself. “You’re getting it.” With a quick brush of her sweater, the panther continued, “Let’s not get carried away though. I’m still your superior, big bunny.”

Angela twirled lazily as if antsy to leave. “Yeah yeah... but...” Suddenly her movements stopped, and she crossed her arms with one last playful leer toward the dark cat below. “It’s a little obvious those words aren’t totally yours. You’ve been dying for this formal stuff to end.”

Felicia’s ears perked, then flattened in accordance with her realization that Angela was quite a bit more observant than she’d thought. “Er...” Damn. She got her again. “Okay, alright, fine. I think you totally have what it takes and I respect your confidence. Really do.” She began scooping the pictures back into the manila folder from whence they came, angling each to fit properly. “At the same time, it would also be wrong of me as an employer not to test you a little, or say that it doesn’t come across as a little... childish.” Again, a quick facial pout from the titanic rabbit, much to the satisfaction of Felicia. “And as your boss, I can say this whether the interview’s over or not: I’ve got your paycheck in my hand. I *did* just say not to get carried away, after all!”

Angela shook her head and softly chuckled. “Looking forward to your thoughts on my next couple pieces, Felicia. I’m sure they’ll be quite worth the hassle!” She began to trod away, soft and attenuated thunder accompanying every step.

“Right,” Felicia muttered. Then, flicking her tail as the white rabbit prepared to turn the corner, she repeated, louder: “Right!”