

House 92

by Natalia Remish

House 92 on Kalver Street was always full of children. They ran in the hallways laughing, sat on the windowsills staring up at the sky, and played hide and seek in the garden. Sometimes you could hear them arguing loudly, and sometimes they were quiet.

Although from the outside it sounded like a lot of fun, other children, who did not live in the house, preferred to walk on the other side of the street. House 92 was an orphanage.

Angela lived in House 92. Her mother always longed for a son, and when the nurse brought her baby girl to her bedside, she cried sorrowfully. She pushed the baby away, neither kissing nor holding her.

This is how Angela came to be lying in a crib in House 92.

“She looks just like an angel,” said the nurse when she saw the baby’s sweet face. “Let’s call her Angela.”

As Angela grew up, she could see through the slits in the fence that separated them in House 92: the boys were treated differently from

the girls. The boys seemed to be having a lot more fun, and she knew that wasn't fair. While the girls were taught to cook and make meals for themselves and for the boys, the boys were taught to make toys that only they played with afterwards. At other times, the boys made birdhouses and even went on a trip to hang them in trees around town. Angela longed to make a birdhouse and find the perfect place to hang it, for everyone to see. Instead, she had to stay with the other girls and mend clothes for the boys.

Angela made herself a promise that one day, she would become Head of House 92 and would change all the rules. "The girls in my House 92 will stop doing everything for the boys, and these boys will learn to do things for themselves. Then the girls will have time for adventure too!" she whispered to herself.

This whisper inside of her grew, and Angela decided to take some immediate action! She would go and see the boys' world for herself. In the morning, when everybody left for lessons, she went into the sewing room and borrowed some of the boys' clothes to change into. Looking in the mirror, she tucked her hair under a hat and snuck through the fence into the boys' section.

The boys had a sports lesson that morning. They were standing in a row in the courtyard. Angela quietly came downstairs and joined them. A boy standing last in the row turned to look at her and nodded hello.

"I'm Jack," he said over his shoulder.

"I'm Ang—," she caught herself just in time. "How you doing? I'm the new boy."

Mr. Jaap was shouting at the boys, explaining the rules of football. When he looked her way, Angela's heart skipped a beat. What would happen now? But Mr. Jaap just continued talking. He didn't even notice

the ‘new boy’. The boys were divided into teams, and he blew his whistle and threw them the ball.

Angela, never having played football before, had no idea what she was expected to do. She just ran alongside the other boys, doing her best to copy them.

“Hey, new boy! You’re on the other team. Go to the other side,” Jack shouted to her as he ran past.

“Thanks,” Angela puffed. She could see how confident all the boys were and she mimicked their confidence.

After the lesson, Mr. Jaap was praising some of the boys: “Great job, fantastic goal, what a tackle! The national football team needs to look out—it’s got some competition!”

When it was Jack’s turn, Mr. Jaap patted Jack on the shoulder. Angela was standing next to Jack, looking down at the ground. Her palms were sweating furiously. “What if they discover my secret now?” she worried to herself.

“He’s the new guy,” Jack said to Mr. Jaap. “It was his first game! Not too shabby either!”

“He was alright; he’ll learn soon enough,” said the teacher.

Mr. Jaap nodded his head towards a boy sitting on the bench, adding, “Although some people never learn. Tim, you’re such a wimp!”

The other boys, looking at their feet, all laughed along with the teacher.

“Wimp?” Angela said to herself and looked across, trying to make eye contact with the boy on the bench. Tim curled his shoulders and wrapped his arms around himself, his head hung heavy.

“Eyes up!” Mr. Jaap kept on at him. “We will have to send you to the girls’ section, won’t we, boys? And you’ll be making our porridge with them!”

Angela shook her head incredulously, thinking, “So, that’s what they say and think about us girls!”

Mr. Jaap was unrelenting. “We’ll make you mend all our clothes as well. Look, this T-shirt has a hole in it,” he said in an exaggerated, high-pitched tone. Mr. Jaap threw the T-shirt at Tim’s face. The boy caught it without raising his head and angrily tossed it onto the bench.

“Come on! Say something! Do you want to stay on the boys’ side or do you want to look out of the windows with the dumb girls?” Mr. Jaap provoked.

Angela rose to her feet; the hat fell from her head. “It’s not like that!” She couldn’t believe the words had actually come out of her mouth. “Girls are not dumb. They are smart and brave. They can play football and build birdhouses! Why don’t you cook your own food and mend your own clothes?”

As Angela’s hair fell onto her shoulders, they could all see this was not a new boy—she was a girl. The group of boys and Mr. Jaap were staring at Angela.

Angela looked straight back at them. “Why aren’t any of you saying anything?”

Her voice was loud, and her face grew crimson with anger.

“How did you get in here?” asked Mr. Jaap, trying to compose himself.

“I live here in House 92. Over there, on the other side,” she pointed.

She knew that in a matter of minutes, she would be taken back there and punished. She did not have long to tell those boys and that teacher what it really felt like to be a girl in House 92.

“How is it fair that you are playing while we are mending your socks?” she asked firmly. “And how come you can do things we are not allowed to do? And who says that it’s ‘dumb to be a girl’? Over there, we do not put



each other down, or call each other wimps.” She looked disapprovingly at Mr. Jaap. “We support each other and help each other with our troubles. Who decided that you are better than us?”

“We don’t think we are better than you,” Jack responded.

“It is unfair that you have to mend our clothes, while we are playing football,” whispered Tim.

“It is unfair that we are not allowed to play football with you,” replied Angela.

“Why don’t you all join the game? There are never enough of us to play properly anyway,” added another boy.

“They could, couldn’t they?” Jack turned, seeking permission from Mr. Jaap.

Mr. Jaap looked at the faces of the boys. They were united against him. “Oh, well. I can’t see why not. It would be great to play a proper game of football for once, with twenty-two players on field!”

One of Angela’s teachers arrived in the yard to take her inside. Angela was certain that she would have to spend the rest of the day in her room as a punishment.

“I was watching what happened from my office. You were so courageous, Angela. I’ve got an idea.”

A few days later, it was arranged for the boys and girls to gather in the kitchen for the first time. The teachers helped them cook their first meal together. They laughed as they ate and argued a little about whose food was the best as they did the dishes. Afterwards they all played football. It was a fun day for everyone, and it was the start of a new tradition, a new way for boys and girls to be together in House 92. Soon enough, the trees of the town were adorned with birdhouses made by both the boys and the girls.

Twenty years later, Angela did become the new Head of House 92. She continued to make sure that all of the children played football together and built birdhouses together, and she made sure that everyone learned how to cook for others and mend their own clothes. The children listened, enthralled by the way things used to be at House 92, and Angela listened, enthused by the ideas the children shared for living better together.