

Comingled

by

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Lola stands under the flicker of a blue awning that reads *SOCIETY*. She wears a long red velvet dress. The lace sleeve looks inlaid in her chalk-white skin. The door handle is lumpish and gold.

A doorman offers a deep, uncomfortable catcall with his eyes.

She says she's meeting someone, says it with confidence, and slides past before the lie can spoil. Also, he just assumes she's a whore. Because *SOCIETY*.

Inside, the air hums with polished laughter and unmindful gestures. Crystal glasses. Dark leather.

She picks the bar. Takes a stool near the center, then scrapes it across the wood. A few feet to the side. She still has a bit of bruise-blue pigment on her fingers from her latest beeswax painting.

The bartender polishes glassware like penance. He doesn't ask what she's drinking. He already knows: red wine, the house shit, which would be featured as premium-like at most places.

There's a man two stools away. Quiet. Broad-shouldered. A Nazi tattoo bleeds out from under his sleeve. He watches without moving, eyes half-dead.

Then another man sits beside her. A fruit-slicing type of suit. He smells like self-importance.

"I'd like to,,,"

"Interrupt me in my bliss?" she says.

"Know who let you in."

"My mother," she says. "Straight from her old birth canal."

He wings up one side of his mouth with condescension. "Clever. But this is a private establishment."

"The bartender didn't seem to mind."

"That's because he lives in your world," the man says, motioning for another drink. "But I'll be speaking to his superior."

“Which world is that?”

“The one where you think walking in off the street in your sorceress costume makes you belong.”

“Well, what if it’s the real thing?”

“You’ve got potential,” he says. “A good head. A body that could’ve done something.”

“You’re spot fucking on about my tits,” she says, “but what’s this about my head?”

“There must be order. Separation. Otherwise, everything turns to mud.”

“The mud’s where we were born.”

“I could buy your whole world,” he says, “and watch it spill upside down.”

She leans in.

“What is it you do for work?”

“I’m in fracking.”

Her laughter cuts through the low jazz.

“Bartender,” she says, “two glasses of frack water.”

Dude slings two brackish highballs down the bar.

“I don’t have to drink it,” he smirks. “I have access to endless clean spring water.”

“Until the earth dries up and goes all *Audrey Two* on your ass,” she murmurs.

“I’ve risen above emotion,” he boasts. “I’ve made arrangements to survive whatever comes.”

“Fuck me,” she says. “They don’t teach irony in that musty *future dark lords of the world* school you went to?”

He snaps his fingers toward the room.

“Shall I have you escorted out?”

“What happens to the men and women who built your bunker?”

“I don’t make the rules,” he says. “Only the technology.”

She stands. Smooth. Unbothered. Takes a sip of wine.

“One thing before I go.”

“Yes?”

“When you die,” she says, “you expect to stay rich, yeah? Special cigar room in heaven. Arturo Fuentes. Loch Lomond. And people like me don’t get in.”

“Well, I’m more of a Montecristo man, but yes. Higher frequencies stay together.”

“And in your mind,” she asks, “are you still old and white there? Or a younger version of an asshole?”

He stiffens.

“Grant me one wish,” she says.

“No, I won’t give you money.”

“Your hand then.”

He recoils.

“Now you’re threatening me?”

“Is that fear I smell?” she says, leaning close. “Because of little old me with the good head?”

“You think death levels us?” he hisses. “I built a legacy.”

“You built fences,” she says. “And got trapped in them.”

He slaps his palm on the bar.

“Fine. Indulge your little performance. Touch me.”

She nods. Slips on gloves. Sweeps her thumb and forefinger together, crushing a liquid onto his hand. Then places her palm, gently, over his.

A few crusty patrons gather around.

“All I ask,” she whispers, “is that when you get back, you tell me what you saw. Tell me how you looked without eyes.”

“You haven’t experienced it?” he sneers.

“Do we have a deal?”

“You leave after?”

“Like the wind.”

Suddenly, his pupils shatter.

His body folds sideways like a severed marionette.

The stool skids. His watch cracks against the bar. Then splat.

Down goes the suit.

The bartender doesn’t stop polishing.

The tattooed man stands and inhales through his nose in anticipation of violence.

After a few murmurs...

The suit gasps. Reaches out blindly from the floor.

Stumbles to his feet, wobbling.

Then flees out the door into the night like a one-legged leopard.

Lola finishes her wine.

"And that," she says to no one in particular, "is frequency."

The tattooed man's eyes follow her as she leaves.

Outside, traffic moves thick like blood.

She walks. Past a man preaching at a bus stop.

Past a bedraggled mother in a broken pointe shoe and tutu, humming *The Nutcracker Suite*.

She keeps walking until the noise softens.

Laughter.

Music.

A park.

Lanterns swing from tree branches.

A clown twists balloons into doggos and such.

A fountain glows faintly green.

Lola buys a rainbow headpiece from a vendor and puts it on proudly.

She sits.

Puffs into a balloon, cradles it in her lap.

Hauls her skin across the rubber and makes that awful flapping sound before twisting it in two.

A voice from behind.

"I live clean. Righteous. God will reward that."

Lola turns.

A woman in cross-trainers and virtue stands over her. Sweat. Performance pantaloons. Judgment.

"And how does He react," Lola asks, "to you sticking your nose in other people's oxygen?"

"Every day," the woman says, "I see the likes of you holding hands, dirtying up coffee shops."

"Oh, I'm not gay," Lola says. "Just a crazy person for clean air, healthcare, reproductive rights."

"And gayness," the woman snaps. "You left that part out."

Lola twists too hard.

Pop.

"Bugger."

“You think God doesn’t see?”

“Can I get you a balloon?” Lola asks.
The clown hands one over.
The woman grinds it to death with her teeth.

“Jesus!” Lola howls.

“It’s a disease, and the whole world is covered in it,” the woman says.

“Do you believe God gave us hormones and DNA and whatnot?” Lola asks.

“Jesus. Here we go.”

“How boring would it be if we were all the same?” Lola says. “Like, what if we all ate only kale and avocados all day and colored our hair a certain shade of Champagne, and fucked off at SoulCycle four hours a day? Very gay, by the way. I mean, what would the universe, or God in your case, ever learn if he just sent down a bunch of robots that were pre-programmed with all the same components?”

Lola stiffens her limbs and does her best attempt at a robot’s movement and voice. “I do not know what to do because nobody has told me what to do.”

“I didn’t need to be told not to stick my tongue in another woman’s vagina,” the athlete snaps.

“And that voice inside you that guides you,” Lola says. “You don’t think anyone else has access to...”

“God created me in his image,” the athlete shoots back, “and when I die, I will be reunited with him and my family.”

“So that’s it? Do you spend eternity with your family? What if you don’t like the Basterds? I’d say at least be open to the opportunity that you can visit others after you die.”

“The holy ones. Yes.”

“I didn’t think the unholy ones got through the door,” Lola says.

The woman moves closer.
“You going to sit here all night?”

“I’ll leave on one condition.”

“I’m not kissing you.”

“Let me hold your hand.”

“Try it and I’ll break your nose.”

“I need you to tell me whether your relatives are in little mud-brick houses singing Kumbaya or if the person that greets you is Liba fucking Race with enough one-hundred percent grade A Colombian gold glitter to make your wings burst.”

She raises her fingers. The woman slaps her palm on the table.

“Fine. You’ll leave the park!”

Lola reaches across.

Palm meets palm.

The liquid spreads.

The woman gasps.

Collapses.

The clown keeps twisting balloons. Can’t stop.

Won’t.

The woman thrashes.

Then silence.

Then a breath.

Then chaos.

She opens her mouth. Gibberish.

Limbs flail.

“We had a deal,” Lola says. “Tell me what you saw. Saint Sebastian? Archery practice? I have to know.”

The woman runs.

Doesn’t look back.

Lola exhales.

The clown hands her a dragon. With a fucked-up tail.

The man with the tattoo stands beyond the fountain. Watching again.

Expression grim.

She walks past him.

The city feels thinner now.

Like something vital has been drained.

She passes a bakery that smells like exhaustion.

Rubs paint from her skin and nails.

A small salon glows on the corner.

Inside, a stylist brushes a wig under soft light.

Lola enters and sits at an empty station.

“Huh. Maybe that’s the best I can hope for?” she says. “A wig that fits snugly.”

A bell dings softly. Footsteps echo.

The man with the tattoo enters the space.

He begins to circle her slowly, inspecting her without a word. The stylist keeps brushing the wig.

“Nobody out there buys this shit,” the man says, gesturing toward an unseen audience.

“What about you?” she asks. “You buy this shit?”

“And you seem to be quite judgmental yourself for someone who has no idea what’s what.”

“I’m assuming the difference between you and me, judging by the ink on your arm, is that I am genuinely curious about all things and how I could become a better person. It’s not so hard... let’s give it a try.”

The man reaches out and grabs her hair in a fist.

“This is bullshit. You’re a phony.”

“What do you do for a living?”

“Fuck is it to you?”

“Like I said... curiosity.”

“I’m a crane operator.”

“That’s actually fascinating. Now, just to prove my point, if I had to, for some unforeseen reason, get into the cockpit of a crane. Should I listen to your guidance or some witless YouTuber who tells me I shouldn’t believe in cranes?”

“Cab,” he snaps.

“I’m sorry?”

“Cockpit is in a jet fighter. The cab is where you sit to operate a fucking crane!”

He finally releases her hair.

“I believe in racial entitlement. You should be thankful for the color of your skin. Instead, you’re out here making people think there’s no purpose to life at all.”

“I believe you’re looking for community like the rest of us, but your community lives in a hole deep within the earth’s crust that doesn’t want to let any drops of light in,” Lola says.

“You can’t deny who you are. You can’t deny what we are meant to do.”

He grabs a set of shears from the station. Then sets them down.

“Touch a hand, cue the blackout, then the seizure. Audience claps like seals. I think it's all a setup.”

“In one sense, you’re correct...”

He lunges and grabs her hands. Bracing. But nothing happens.

The stylist stops brushing the wig. Watching now. Still silent.

“You’re not meant to be in this part,” she says quietly.

Without warning, the man yanks her out of the chair by her hair. She kicks wildly but can’t connect.

“Which part was a boy who had to drop out of school and start working so there would be enough money for his father to buy meth with, supposed to play?”

“You can still change.”

“You’re a phony. Why do you think you’re any better than anybody else?”

He slams her to the ground, straddles her, and pins her arms with his knees.

“I’ve heard the shit before. We can’t control what happens to us, but we can control how we react.”

He starts unbuttoning his shirt.

“Well, let me tell you what... I was always going to react to a fruity little bitch like you by shuttin’ her mouth.”

Somehow, she shifts just enough to drive her knee into his groin.

He recoils.

In that instant, the stylist hurls the mannequin head. It smashes into the man’s skull.

He slumps. Groaning.

She scrambles on top of him. Her fists find his face over and over, driven by panic, rage, fire.

“Make me one promise!” she shouts, punching each syllable. “When you get back, you tell me how superior you feel when you realize that we all come from the same fucking place. Tell me how it feels to be swallowed up in glorious pools of black blood. Tell me when you get back what you heard when you no longer had ears!”

His body goes limp.

Blood pools around his face.

She stops.

Breathless.

Staggering back, she drops into the salon chair, stunned.

She stares at her bloodied hands.

A moment of silence.

The man stirs.

Spits blood.

Three pigeons watch through the glass door.

He pulls himself upright. His ego crumpled. Points upward, speaking in tongues. His fingers grope his swollen face.

“Motherfucker! It worked.”

The man, deformed now, slumps to the door. And out.

Wild. Rapturous applause seeps into the mind of Lola.

A smile creeps across her face.

She bows.

“Now, get up out of your seats and go...”