

# Europa

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“What is it?” I said to the dog again.

“I’m not answering it. It’s just too much. Too many people. I can’t be bothered. If there ain’t no packages, I don’t see any reason why I need to go. I don’t give a fuck about the neighbours or the messages. I stay by myself. I prefer it that way.”

The dog stared intensely.

“You’re becoming ridiculous,” he said.

Europa looked down at him. He was lying on the rug with his head between his paws.

“You’re a dog.”

“Yes.”

“You are talking.”

“Yes.”

“You understand that this is not helping your argument?”

The dog sighed. He’d been doing that more lately.

I don’t know what he’s on. Is he on his period? Always yawning and sulking and moving around the house, asking me to play with him and his ball, and now he’s speaking like a human.

Talking.

He’s really speaking.

You know, I don’t remember taking any drugs.

Shit, I’ve got work to do. Got to get back to this drawing.

The apartment was finally quiet. The constant drilling had stopped, and no letters from immigration were coming through the post. Just the sound of the dog scratching the floor.

“You’re doing it again,” he said.

“What?”

“Pretending not to answer.”

“I’m sick of this.”

Europa looked at the dog, and the dog looked back.

“Oh, you’re hiding something.”

“What exactly am I hiding?”

“The truth that you can speak to me?”

“Oh, come on now.”

The dog walked towards the front door, put his nose on the lead and begged to go outside.

She watched him, but she couldn't be bothered. Still, she had no food, so they would need to go out eventually.

He was staring at the intercom.

It was one of those fancy systems where you could do everything from a keypad inside the lift itself. Not that she lived in a penthouse or anything. The place was becoming more like a prison.

Anyway, she looked at him.

“What?”

“You know what.”

“What?”

“I'm sitting.”

“I'm calculating.”

“I'm a dog.”

The dog said he'd been talking for three weeks and she had simply ignored him. According to him, she hadn't heard him at all, and he was bothered about it.

She looked at him like she had just seen a ghost.

He lifted his paw and pointed at the intercom. A new symbol had appeared among the rows of numbers.

She never paid much attention to them. They never lit up by themselves.

Until now.

“Do you remember the first combination?” he said.

“I'm stupid.”

“Yes, you are.”

“Press these buttons.”

So she did.

One, two and three.

Something happened.

She wasn't quite sure what, but she no longer felt inside her body. Maybe she had astral projected and was looking at herself from outside.

“Did this light up?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

Then the dog said nothing.

“Surely that’s worse.”

The lift doors opened and the dog walked inside.

Europa froze for a second. What would happen if she pressed the numbers?

The black dog looked at her.

“You already did.”

Something shifted.

The lift began to descend. Slowly, she watched the numbers falling.

“You don’t remember anything?” the dog said. “You’re useless.”

Europa looked at him, then at the door, then back at the dog.

“What are you?”

The dog tilted his head.

“If you can’t remember who I am, then go back to the beginning.”

The apartment lights flickered.

She was back inside the apartment, as if she had only just stepped towards the lift.

“It’s not the same thing,” she said. “We’re back to the beginning again.”

Then she found herself in the supermarket.

Or she could see the supermarket.

She was still inside her house without having left it, without having turned the key, and she didn’t remember pressing any combination.

She was simply back where she started, looking out the window at the shop and wondering if they could fly.

She wasn’t sure yet.

The situation was confusing, but she felt that she had power if she just followed her instincts.

So that’s what she did.

She opened the window and leapt.

All of a sudden the dog was out there too.

She was floating above the street, holding the dog and carrying his leash.

It was hot outside those days because global warming had really shifted in, and people weren't taking it as a joke anymore.

They were taking it real serious.

Everyone was sweating buckets.

Literally sweating buckets.

People walked along with floating sweat buckets beside them, each bucket assigned to a person, following faithfully through the heat.

Europa floated with them.

She finally landed and drifted towards the cool, air-conditioned supermarket.

Food. That was all she wanted. Food and a bit of peace.

As she reached the entrance, she was suddenly back in her building, inside an elevator made entirely of glass.

She could see the supermarket through it.

She could see the street.

She could see exactly where she needed to go.

But she couldn't get there.

I really need this food, she thought.

And where is the dog?

The dog had already gone.

Then she was outside again.

Her feet burned as she crossed the road. She was blistering, hungry, still trying to reach the supermarket.

But this time it wasn't a supermarket.

It was a large dining hall, with drinks and food abound, and the air conditioning was still on.

A white woman was walking through the hall when a floating man tried to attack her. She took out a mighty sword and slayed him.

Then there was another scene.

A Black man walking alone at night with his jewellery on.

Two men and a woman came towards him.

Suddenly a light, like an aura, beamed from within him and outside of him.

They were blasted away.

A puff of smoke, and they were gone.

Europa stared at her hands.

Two iron balls sat in her palms.

She threw them.

They burst like smoke, filling the room with a cloud of her own aura.

But the iron balls were not a defence. They were there to change her eyes, to make her see with different eyes, to have a different perception.

Now she could see the glows.

They were not random.

Some were bright and expansive.

Some barely existed.

Some were surgical, clinical, like the light above an operating table or the reflection on hospital glass.

Some people carried several glows layered together.

Then she noticed the dog.

“Why is that dog here again?”

She followed him.

“You see these people?” he said. “They have been through challenges in their life, and the glow within them represents those challenges. It goes before them everywhere they go, and into whatever they do.”

Europa finally found the courage to ask him.

“What is this?”

The dog looked ahead.

“You see that floating fish there? That is you.”

Suddenly they were underwater.

They were breathing, swimming in the deep, surrounded by every tone of aquamarine and fishes in great multitudes of every colour.

Ahead of her was a glowing circle, something like a basketball net, gleaming so brightly it almost stunned her eyes.

The dog had also suddenly become a doctor.

He chuckled.

“I have given you the diagnosis. The remedy is through the portal. This step you must take yourself.”

Europa looked at him.

A dog.

A doctor.

A dog again.

She went through.

The next place felt familiar, but only just. Like hearing the supermarket bell and beeps from another room and knowing where you are without actually being there.

The people were there again, but different. Their bodies seemed larger and their hearts glowed.

One person carried many different tones of yellow. Another green and blue. Another had colours Europa had no name for.

She began to understand the glows as things people had done and things that had happened to them, following them.

Not all good.

Not all bad.

At first she felt pity for them. She wondered if she could fix herself until her own glow disappeared.

But seeing everyone carrying something made her feel differently.

Compassionate, maybe.

“This is not acceptable,” she said. “Something is different. Something is not quite right.”

“Maybe it’s about you,” the dog said. “And you remember it how you remember it.”

Europa was getting utterly confused by the dog’s constant narration.

He told her that inside the portals, another reality could be entered once its colour had been worked out.

“But this looks the same, just more vivid,” she said. “I recognise the people, but I can see the possibilities. The possibilities are different. Some glows were stronger in the last reality than this one.”

The ghosts of the past were still there too.

She wanted to tell the dog.

She said nothing.

Then her own glow appeared.

It shone brightly, but it was a colour beyond description.

A flying telephone passed her face.

She grabbed it and tried to ring home.

“No,” said the dog.

She ignored him.

The realities began changing faster.

Europa sped through them at breakneck speed, almost like surfing through channels. Street. Room. Water. Light. Faces. Heat. Darkness. Another street. Another room. The dog. No dog. The dog again.

Then everything became a blur.

Eight realities.

Maybe more.

She could see multiple realities, but the ones she actually entered were three.

Different-coloured light moved in front of her eyes in long lines, faster and faster until there was no world left, only colour.

Then it stopped.

There was a gap in the light.

Inside the gap stood a humanoid.

Behind it was a machine.

Then another.

And another.

At first she thought it was a giant factory.

Then she realised it was a clinic.

People stood in lines and fed themselves into the machines.

Other people ate what came out.

A smiling humanoid approached Europa with a tray of samples.

She looked at the tray.

Then at the people entering the machines.

Then back at the tray.

The samples they gave to visitors were previous guests.

“No,” Europa said.

She backed away and found a button marked REGISTRAR.

Of course.

If there was anybody she could complain to, it would be the registrar.

She pressed it.

The floor opened.

There was no registrar.

There was a trap door.

Europa fell.

Below the clinic were lanes burrowed through the earth. She covered herself in oil and slid down one of them.

Suddenly everything was loud again.

She hit the ground with a big thump.

Underground was a metropolis.

Everything was out of order, glowing green, with powers everywhere.

People talked loudly over one another. Everyone had something to make and do.

Arguments crossed arguments until the arguing became music.

Whatever was happening above ground, these people had made an alternate reality underneath it.

Whenever they wanted to eat, they would stick their tongue out on a leaf, and the leaf would become a small lizard.

When they put it in their hand, the hand became fire.

Then they ate.

If they touched their faces, the burn left a mark and their skin suddenly regenerated.

Europa watched this happen over and over.

Nobody explained it.

Nobody seemed to think it needed explaining.

Then Europa began to melt.

Her body decomposed in front of her like a blast of starlight.

She was in the earth.

Of the earth.

Part of the earth.

She could see it from below and from above at the same time.

Perfect silence.

Perfect peace.

Perfect power.

And beside the perfect power, a regulated world.

Then came trembling.

A great cavern opened beneath her.

People fell into a pit, and the pits became tunnels.

When one tunnel was completed, it was filled in and replaced with another.

And so on and so on.

The people ploughed through with their heads in the soil, becoming hard like concrete, almost like screwdrivers unscrewing the different parts of the earth.

At first Europa thought the people were becoming soil.

But really, they were becoming light.

The light rose out of them.

It travelled through the tunnels and through the city and into the clinic above, through the machines, through the glass elevator, through the supermarket, through every aura she had seen.

For one second she could see all of it at once.

Then there was a key.

The lock opened itself.

The door stood slightly ajar.

That door led to another door.

That door led to another one.

And that one turned into another one again.

The more consciously she thought about it, the more doors appeared.

Starlight broke through all of them.

The doorways began disintegrating in front of her eyes.

Then the sky tunnels appeared: floating tubes suspended by nothing but light and filled with water.

Inside them were the fish.

The same fish.

Back at the beginning again.

“Europa!” the dog cried.

Europa looked at him.

“There isn’t a right one, is there?”

The dog said nothing.

Europa waited.

She waited for a minute, another second, another hour, ten more, then five, then twenty.

Almost forever.

The dog still said nothing.

All the portals remained in the sky.

She could enter any of them.

She could slide down different slides, explore them all, find another clinic, another city, another supermarket, another version of herself.

And go nowhere.

She didn’t feel like she needed more.

She didn’t feel like she needed a new reality.

She didn’t feel like she could keep attempting this forever.

For the first time, Europa stopped waiting for the dog to explain anything.

She began to inhabit herself.

The first thing that disappeared was the distance between them.

She could feel the rug beneath his paws.

She could feel the apartment floor beneath hers.

She could hear herself breathing.

She could hear him breathing.

Or maybe it was the same breath.

Europa looked at the dog.

The dog looked back.

And as she felt at peace and at one with her being,  
her body became him.