

Caroline and Lola

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By Tom Peters

Prancing down the steps, free from her car and the week's long duties of work and Saturday chores behind her, down the steps towards the Pacific on a balmy September evening. Hitting the sand, she trots gracefully as her trailing ponytail sways from side to side, she reaches the water's edge and takes in the setting sun that without clouds looks lonely and tired.

The ocean has as many aromas as days in the year, dependent on too many variables to count. Caroline has surfed Topanga Beach for several years and has a stored memory of the ocean's temperament and scents. This particular evening highlighted a warm breeze that flowed over her entire backside to the back of her slender neck, and around her slightly muscular back and shoulders, whirling around her waist and forming goosebumps on the length of both of her stretched out legs.

Mock orange traveling with the westward Santa Ana wind and clashed with the kelp, fish and pungent smells off the Pacific. The tops of waves have a mist blowing off them, common this time of year.

She has taken it all in and now negotiates Topanga's rocky bottom, thankful for a shortboard that makes it to balance herself through the slippery stones. A large swell brings enough volume to pounce on her board and start paddling. Surf time has arrived.

Caroline lives in the San Fernando Valley and takes this trip to Topanga State Beach through Topanga Canyon most every Saturday evening. A reward for hard work of the week.

The sunsets attract 12 to 20 surfers. Caroline, being a regular, takes her turn when opportunities come and enjoys several good rides before returning to her apartment in the Valley. Sitting alone now, the studio apartment is dark except for ambient light from Ventura Boulevard creeping in spaces where the blinds slightly separate. She has showered off the saltwater and rinsed her bathing suit and hung it on the shower curtainrail. It's dark and quiet with the windows close. Only the hum of the air conditioner and refrigerator compete for her attention. Saturday evening part two, a late meal and music.

Paoli's Pizzeria & Piano Bar is a short walk and one of Caroline's favorite late night hangouts. Strolling along the warm sidewalk, off come the sandals until she reaches the doorway through the patio seating to Paoli's friendly entrance. Familiar smiling faces steer Caroline to the bar while the piano player imitates Billy Joel.

Caroline spots an open seat but suddenly finds herself shocked to see the outline of curvaceous, stylishly dressed and stunning beauty of a former lover at the end of the bar. She hadn't run into Lola since she started performing at the Queen Mary Lounge, a popular trans and cross-dresser's haven.

Caroline met Lola at Pierce College nearly eight years ago while taking classes. Cis-gendered men bored Caroline and her bi-sexuality lifestyle was too full of drama to even want to date. Lola was just finding herself at that stage of her life and much of Caroline's information about Lola came out in the Psychology class and chats after the class. Caroline knew Lola was troubled between hormone treatments and psychedelics. It was often a challenge to get close to Lola, but an affair was what they

both needed at that time in their life.

They both struggled with family acceptance, prevailing attitudes towards the LGBTQ community in general and life's challenges in their twenties. The affair was too hot, too complicated and too short for Caroline. Now approaching Lola excited her immensely.

The warm color lights, heavy air, buzz of numerous conversations and a favorite Sinatra song drifting seductively from the piano player set the stage for what Caroline hoped would be a cathartic night. Lola raved about her sex change only 4 months earlier. She beamed from every cell of her body explaining her pent up joy to someone she still felt love and admiration for.

Caroline was so happy for her, she suggested celebrating at Roy's or one of the high end restaurants in the valley. Lola blushed and said, "Sure honey, maybe someday soon, that's so dear of you." "No!", Caroline said. "I mean now, let's try, are you hungry?" "Sure" Lola replied.

Caroline once dated the manager of Roy's. She called him on his cell and asked if there was any last minute cancellations where she could grab a private table for two. "It's getting late but if you can get here within an half hour, we can squeeze you and your date in," the manager said. "Thanks love, we'll be there soon," smiled Caroline.

Lola offered to drive the short distance to Roy's but they first stopped at Caroline's apartment so she could pick up some heels and slip on a comfortable yet sexy spaghetti strapped, mid-thigh dress in an ivory white to show off her natural tan.

Heads turn as the maître d escorts the two stunning women to their cozy table for two in the back of the exquisite restaurant. Caroline's friend Troy, the manager, was

chatting it up with comedian Chris Rock and his agent when he spotted the two as they were being seated. Curious, Troy excuses himself and gracefully swaggers over to Caroline's table to introduce himself to Lola and ask what they'd like to drink. "Thanks for this short notice favor Troy," Caroline says. "My pleasure, what are friends for, I must say you two could be held responsible for injuring some of my customer's necks by that entrance," Troy replies with his million dollar smile. "Drinks to celebrate whatever you're both celebrating?" Caroline studies Lola for a quick second then asks, "Martinis or champagne Lola?" "Martinis, just like we used to drink in the day," Lola says smiling. Troy says, "Let me guess, Hendrick's up, a little dirty." "Perfect," the two women say and silently clap.

The food was as one might expect from the famous Roy Yamaguchi's hot spot for Valley celebrities. A magically dinner that Caroline wished would never end. Lola explained her life after performing and her love affair with a real estate mogul from Santa Barbara, Jacob, who financed her sex change. Lola explained that before the operation the relationship was romantic and filled with lavishly orchestrated weekends together. Jacob had a family, status and money to burn. Lola was his secret lover and she knew her place. Lola explained that after the operation she felt him drifting away and the relationship ended only a month ago. The goal to become a complete woman overshadowed the pain of the breakup. Lola knew her place.

Caroline shared her life since their parting and after a second martini, dessert and closing out the tab, Lola drove Caroline home.

"Can you park and come up?" Caroline asked. They locked eyes.

The door shut and Caroline pressed against Lola and they kissed with passion not felt for years for both of the women. "I'm different now," Lola whispered. "I know," Caroline said as she tried to catch her breath.