

An Excerpt from **Middlemarch**, Part 2 of **FAMEPUNK** by Liz Mackie  
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### *From Chapter 5: Flamingo World*

They all four walked together now. This was nice. Helm was also rather hungry. She had a memory of visiting this part of town some years ago, when she'd left the hotel more. Here were more houses—small, white, clapboard, wearing flags and flower boxes—and shabby businesses purveying tourist wares, their windows full of t-shirts, fishing gear, floating toys, curios fashioned from shells, names for the flavors of ice cream. Now Wolfie sniffed excitedly at a smell of deep-fried seafood wafting from a small patio shaded by corrugated tin and hand-painted italicized signs: *Flamingo World's Finest. Come On In! All-Pure Ingredients. Try Our French Fries! Serving The World's Best Since 1932. Queen of the Sea Conch. Deep Fried Conch.*

“Let's go here, Helm!” When Ilya made a noise, she added “So? You don't have to—go back where we went last night.” Right across the street where she was pointing, a much better place with tables outdoors; Italian. Helm had no preference. She'd be in Rome soon, she'd eat Italian food there. “Lookit this place, Helm—look, it's historic.” There was a little plaque nailed to a peeling roof post.

“Yes,” said Helm. “It's nice.”

Wolfie agreed. “It's okay,” she told the Kasimovs. “We'll sit in view. We won't have pie—just entrée.” And so their party divided.

A gay waiter stepped out to the patio, stopped short, and said. “Oh. It's you.”

“Yeah,” said Emma. “Could we sit out here?”

“Suit yourself.” He snatched two menus off a stack by the door and slapped them down on a bad table.

Emma looked at him with narrowed eyes. “It was an accident.” The gay waiter raised his chin and curled his lip; his moustache expressed hostility. Emma tried again. “Lala fell down.”

“You made her! It was your fault!” Emma looked at Helm, who looked at the

waiter, whose impassioned tone took a sharp turn towards revulsion once he had surveyed her whole: “Oh my God you’re that German!”

“Could we just sit down? Here you go,” said Emma, taking the menus, gesturing Helm into a long-legged café chair at a round wooden table for two with a view of the street. “C’mon, we’re really famous, we’ll talk you up.” She seated herself.

He sniffed. “Like we need your approval.”

“Hey, never turn away free advertising.” He knew she was right but it didn’t make him like her any better. Emma glanced over the grimy laminate in her hand and laid it down with satisfaction: everything looked pretty cheap. “Do we even need menus? I think we just wanna try some of that famous deep-fried conch—oh and French fries.”

“It’s konk not conch.”

“Huh?”

“It’s pronounced konk.”

“But it’s spelled conch.”

“It’s a special case.”

“Fuck.”

“Just deal with it.”

“I’m not dealing with that.” Helm could see that the English language bothered Wolfie also. “I’m not going along with that—how come you go along with that? I would change the sign, man. Just change it. K-o-n-k.”

“We’re not changing the sign, we’re landmarked.”

“Yeah but, so, you’d have influence.” He looked fed up, then he went all professional:

“Could I bring you ladies something to drink?”

“Um.”

“Beer,” said Helm. “Bring me a beer.”

“Could I see some ID?”

“No.” She wasn’t carrying any. She waited. The gay waiter made a spot decision to serve her but not the other one. He took her order for something imported.

“And you?”

Emma told him, “Glass of water, please.”

“But you are eighteen,” said Helm. The waiter let it pass.

“Oh yeah, I know. Just a glass of water,” she repeated. “Thanks. And the food.”

Helm was disturbed. “But the water here wo—the water, you should not drink. It

is not safe here like in your New York, this is not the same. Don't. You have bottled?" she asked the waiter.

"Honey, does it look like we serve bottled water here?"

"Lemonade!" Emma remembered a sign out front. "Cool refreshing tart-made lemonade, I'll have that instead a water."

He was pleased to disillusion her cruelly. "It's concentrate," he said, and retired with the order, leaving the menus. Helm was left to frown across the table at the strange girl.

"This is for training you don't drink?"

"Oh. No. I just don't." Emma tossed the menus onto a neighboring table. She and Helm were the only customers on the patio. She glanced across at the Kasimovs having a good time; that place was crowded. "My mother was kind of a wino. You like this place okay, Helm? I'm sorry it's so crappy, I thought it looked a lot nicer last night."

"No, I like it here. It's nice." Helm looked around; she was so relieved to be the only other customer with Wolfie. "I like history."

"Oh yeah? Me too, I love history." *Draw him out! Ask questions!* The article had advised this. "What's your favorite historical period?"

Helm smiled. "What is yours?"

"I asked you first!"

"The dawn of time." Helm had always liked the way this sounded on English language television.

Emma blinked. "The dawn of time, Helm! Jeez, I was gonna say the nineteenth century."

"But this is already so crowded then."

"Well yeah, I guess." She smiled. "Good action, though."

Helm shrugged. "Possibly." Compared, in fact, to the birth of continents, she didn't really think so.

"What's your favorite city, Helm?"

"Berlin."

"Oh man—what's East Berlin like? Is it great?"

"Oh. There I—I don't know." Helm sat a little stupidly as Wolfie explained why she longed to see East Berlin. What on earth had made her say Berlin—what a stupid answer. Helm also liked Paris, she even liked New York. Those would have been good answers. Helm frowned at herself as she listened to Wolfie's animated

description of East Berlin: pale gray all over like newsprint, everything gray—buildings and windows and sky, cars, clothes—with dots of brilliant color moving everywhere as if upon a great gray screen, all the bright-colored headscarves of Communist women; all this Wolfie imagined and wanted to see for herself:

“While there’s still time, Helm.”

“Yes.” Helm admired the eagerness in Wolfie’s eyes, which glowed.

“You seen that big wall?”

“Oh, yes! I like it—this is so interesting, people are writing here poems, designs, art. It is colorful. You would like it, I think.” Helm felt slightly awkward giving the Berlin Wall such a positive review. “It’s very long,” she added, in mitigation. “Oh good.” The waiter was back with the order.

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