

For the Name, Gaia

by Ashlee Winters

A woman is crying on the other side of the glass. She sounds like a whale, and the cloth she holds to her face doesn't muffle her. There is a man too; A short one with a misshapen body, resembling a chihuahua yapping insistently. He pounds a fist into the glass, shouting something about Gaia.

*Gaia was a good girl; she was my baby. Gaia this. Gaia that.*

I rolled my eyes as his fist struck again. I imagine he thinks it's my face, but a dog cannot touch one so divine. I almost feel like I'm a beautiful fish, although my limbs are strapped to my sides. Yes, I am the catch everyone wants to see.

The man pressed a photo of the girl to the glass, "Look at her! You had no right!"

I can't help the thoughts that rot my brain when he speaks. Was it right, the death of a girl like her?

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It's a Wednesday afternoon, and I'm following my daily routine. Step one: get coffee at the Art Gal Cafe across from the small-town university. I watch the students while I drink in the pristine art section of modern mythology paintings. I like to be surrounded by my kin of gods and goddesses while searching for another to join.

Step two: pick. College students are up to par. They're at their prime curve in age, so it's only right to search the crowd. I judge their features— their hair, the imperfection on their skin, and their natural shape. If I don't find them fitting, I dismiss them. They are not to be glanced upon again.

The bell on the door rings as more customers enter. They are students with a volume not meant for the small shop. I sip the rest of my coffee and set the mug down to grab cash out of my wallet.

"Gaia, are you working the bar tonight?" A boy asks.

I stop flipping through money. *Gaia? Mother earth, the goddess, in the same sentence as bar?* I glance over my shoulder.

"No, I'm going to that party tonight with Johnny," Gaia says.

I'm horrified. The girl has pink hair that is split and dry. There's metal poking out of her ears and face and ink sunken permanently into her body. She wears stockings torn up the sides of her legs and a skirt so short her ass would show if she took another step.

*I can fix this before Gaia is disgraced and her body tarnished further.*

Step three: lure and capture. I stand and walk to Gaia, who's bent over the counter as she places an order. I can buy her coffee, try and compliment... her. I drape my jacket over my arm.

"Can I buy your drink?" I ask, grinning.

"Sure," Gaia says. She straightens and follows the burly boy to a table.

"You're Gaia, yes? I'm Charles," I say, stopping her. I give her a once over, trying to look past the heavy eye makeup. "You have the name of a goddess."

"Yeah, and?" Gaia asks, crossing her arms.

I force a smile, "Surely you know how superior she is."

*I'll teach her manners as well.*

Gaia rolls her eyes, "Look, old man. Thanks for the coffee, but I'm not interested."

I clench my fist and go to speak, but she cuts me off by raising her hand. "And if you're one of those preachy people who think I should step into the name, it's my body, and I'm not a goddess."

I take a calming breath, "Of course, I didn't expect otherwise."

I'm not giving up, so I turn on my heels, and I walk away.

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Keeping myself at a distance, I follow Gaia as she finally leaves the cafe. She's dumb enough not to realize I'm with her on her walk home. Thanks to the loud friend, I overheard her plans for the night— leave late and meet at the party. As Gaia shuts her door and the friend leaves, I walk closer to the shack she calls home.

*Once I fix her, she will not step foot in something so lowly.*

I try the front door, and a resisting click stops the handle. I release it and scout the windows. There's an odd variety of them, some have cracks in the glass, and the blinds on others are crooked and bent. I find an open window with a chunk of the blinds missing. It looks into what I assume to be Gaia's bedroom.

I widen the opening in the window and push the blinds in, taking one gentle step at a time to enter without noise. I see Gaia in the bathroom, bending over the sink and examining herself in the mirror. I take a few steps toward her, and she backs away from the mirror. A cigarette plumes smoke. She blows what's remaining out her nose and the crack in the side of her mouth.

"Unforgivable," I say.

Gaia turns to me, and her eyes bulge. The cigarette falls as she's shouting. I ignore her.

My fists shake at my sides, "You need to be purified."

I take immediate steps to her, taking the pocketknife I've always kept on me out. Gaia backs into the tub and falls. She is screaming now, but it sounds underwater to me.

"I can only save you, Gaia, by returning you to the world," I say.

She bats at my arms and chest, struggling under my body weight. I hold her hands down with my free one and restrict her movements further.

"Please, don't," Gaia cries. Her black makeup pools at the corners of her eyes and streak down her face.

I stroke the side of her head with my knifed hand and coo, "You did this to yourself by not caring about the goddess you tarnish. Your body is impure, your hair, your skin, your lungs. All of it. You are not worthy."

I lift my knife, letting it be guided and kill her, "May Gaia forgive you."

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I'm in my garden now, shaded by moonlight. "You wouldn't believe what Gaia looked like." I pluck a dying leaf off its thin branch. "She was no goddess. She could never be, no matter how much work I was willing to put in."

I lay on the grass near my newest statue. "Gaia had potential; She had the form." I wave my hand around the air. "She could've been the living Gaia, genuinely perfect. Tattoos I can fix, holes I can fill, but lungs are tainted forever. "

"I could've finally had one of you breathing. Don't you think?" I ask, turning my head to the side.

And there she is, the mythological sister of Gaia, Thalassa, with her back to me. She lays with a hand resting beneath her graying cheek, her hair flowing over her shoulder. The other hand rests an inch in the water as if she is petting it.

She is a girl I chose from the college with hair perfect for Thalassa, a goddess of the sea. Thalassa is beautiful, with no imperfections needing to be altered. Even now, vines stretch through her chest, and earth overgrows her body, but the world blooms exquisitely from within.

She looks like a vestal, a siren by the creek in my garden. Seductive pulls from her waters, and if she'd ask, I'd drown in them. But as the statue she is, she does not speak, although made from the hands of a God.

I shiver, reaching a hand towards Thalassa's hair. I want to be closer to her, but I hear sirens down the street, and I yield. I stand and walk out the gates of my garden and close the iron. I calmly round to the front of my house and go to open my front door.

"Freeze and put your hands above your head," an officer booms over police sirens.

I do as they wish, dropping my keys to the ground. Car doors open and close, and officers charge toward me.

"Charles Phanes, you are under arrest for the murder of Gaia Goodland," the officer says, lowering my hands behind my back. He takes me away from the door while other officers run

past the house to check the backyard. For what, I do not know? There was nothing worthy back there for incrimination.

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After a long and tedious trial, I'm convicted and sentenced to death. I didn't deny I killed Gaia, and I didn't try hiding any evidence. It was an act of service. However, a bad execution, I will admit. So currently, I sit strapped to a chair in front of a viewing window with a crying couple on the other side.

"Look at her. You had no right," the man says, holding a picture of a fake Gaia.

And now we're back to our original question. *Was I right to kill Gaia?*

I grin, *yes*.

The man flinches at my smirk, and his profanities heighten. A snicker echoes in the execution chamber. I forgot I wasn't alone in here; I look to my right. There stands a young man in a guard's suit, bringing his fist up to his lips and coughing to hide his slip-up.

He's the only guard in here with me. I squint to read his name pinned to his button-up, *Zeus*. I judge him head to toe, and when I reach his eyes, I laugh. Zeus's eyes give it away, crinkling at the corners as he cringes at the photo of Gaia.

"You agree with me," I sing in a whisper.

Zeus looks to the window; the couple can't hear us over the sobs of the woman. He looks to the door, shut and waiting to be entered, and then his eyes reach me.

"I can show you the gods," I say.

Zeus' breath hitches and his eyes repeat his previous actions. "Where?"

"Forty yards from my house is a garden. It's yours, but I have rules," I say. "Inside my home, you'll find a journal under the kitchen sink. Follow what is written."

Zeus nods, looking again. "What else?"

I grin at his eagerness. "Do not touch my statues but keep the ground they stay on clean. They deserve to be worshiped."

The door opens, and Zeus looks away. Two officers prep me and stand to my side. One is spouting nonsense about my 'wrong doings'.

Then Zeus asks, "Is there something you'd like to say before you die?"

"When I am gone, and my work is all that's left, hear me and call me God," I say.

End