



# GAIA

*Rising*

A short story by  
**MELISSA DELPORT**

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Adam Johnson hated the trappings of technology. He possessed both an inexplicable connection to the Earth, and an aversion for the digital age. Adam didn't understand the point of social media, he believed any question could be answered by his original set of Encyclopaedia Britannica, and he had never owned a cell phone. His mother had been an environmental activist, his father a man of God. His mother had spent time inside for disturbing the peace. His father had visited every morning and prayed for her safe return. Adam's brother had married his childhood

sweetheart straight out of college and gone on to build a successful and somewhat shady business in order to provide for his ever-expanding family. The young wife was a devout Catholic who didn't believe in birth control. She found she was a natural mother while Adam's brother found only the bottom of the bottle and slowly lost his faith.

Adam had never been married. In fact, he had never experienced even a fleeting relationship with a woman, unless one counted his almost oedipus-esque idolisation of his mother. He had not yet found the right woman, but he was certain she was out there, waiting for him as he waited for her, until fate deigned it

was time for them to meet. Until then, Adam took care of his body, used his resources wisely and lived his life in a rather unusual manner. He experienced adventure the way other people experienced breakfast. Mountaineering, sailing, and deep-diving his way across the globe, he contemplated his existential dilemma.

Adam had lived off the grid for years, growing more and more enamoured with his own company until the BBC had offered him his own program. *Into the Wilderness*, they called it, *Man in Isolation*. The marketing department had chest-bumped themselves. Adam had taken one look at the state-of-the-art equipment and

pristine brown-booted crew and cursed the irony. The money, however, had been too good to refuse. A three-year contract, which, if seen through, would set him up quite comfortably for the rest of his life. He would be free in his early thirties. How many could say the same? Adam signed on the dotted line, stifling the gnawing guilt that he had sold himself out.

When the three years were over, shinier, more lucrative contracts were drawn up. Templed fingers rested against smug lips, the atmosphere pregnant with euphoric anticipation. Purses would be lined for decades, private schools had been selected, trips to Bermuda were

already planned. To the apoplexy of the network, however, Adam dropped his pen in liberated ecstasy and walked right out the front door.

Free to do as he pleased, Adam's adventure continued without the hindrance of camera or crew. Two months later found him hiking the Tibetan Plateau – the Third Pole, Roof of the World – with nothing but the pack on his back and the setting sun for company. He was in a no man's land between mountain kingdoms, with no destination in mind. He would simply turn back when he had sated his lust for loneliness, or when he ran out of food, whichever came first. Or perhaps he

would lie down and die here, in this fortress of solitude, returning his bones to the dust. It certainly was a beautiful place to die.

It was while he was contemplating this very thought that Adam received company. The first sign of her presence was a low rumbling of the earth. A quiver beneath his feet, so faint he might have imagined it. Then came the growling heave, as if the rock itself had begun to breathe. Adam paused, arms outspread to steady himself and the ground churned underfoot, rising and falling with an ever-increasing rhythm. Hissing and moaning, as if in the throes of labour, sending seismic contractions up Adam's muscular

legs. With one last, almighty push, the earth birthed its progeny. And so it came to pass that in the loneliest place on Earth, Adam Johnson stumbled across a woman, as naked as a babe.

She was inhumanly beautiful, with eyes of gleaming ruby and lips deeply curved – an echo of flesh, their shape a perfect miniature replica of the swell of her breasts. It was no easy feat for Adam to raise his eyes from the temptation of that flawless form, only to find himself lost in the wonder of her face. Slowly, luxuriously, she stretched, her bones clicking into place like a jigsaw puzzle. She held herself awkwardly, like someone who had been sitting in one position for

too long and hadn't regained muscle control.

She glanced down at her own body and gave a small nod, as if satisfied with what she saw. Adam nodded an echo of her action, in utter agreement, for she was perfection in motion. Shaking out her long limbs, she did not seem embarrassed in the slightest by the intensity of his regard, and she greeted him as though this method of meeting was the most natural thing in the world.

“Hello.” A musical voice, soft and slightly rasping, as if it hadn't been used in a while.

“Who,” Adam cleared his throat and swallowed the lump that had lodged itself

there before trying again. “Who are you?” Her full lips curved into a smile as evil as it was endearing, but she did not answer. Instead, she turned westward, toward the red haze of the setting sun. Toward Adam’s home, over seven thousand kilometres away.

A small sigh danced through her parted lips and she closed her eyes for a moment, basking in the warmth of the dying day. It blazed across her skin, setting it alight in a fiery bronze glow that made him shield his eyes. She seemed to absorb it, feeding off the heat and light, until the fire slowly died, leaving her even more radiant than before. Adam stood motionless, his feet leaden, his heart

hammering in his chest. He suddenly found that he didn't want to be alone anymore. He wanted only to kneel before her, press his face to her belly and get lost in the coppery smoke of her skin.

“My name?” the woman said, turning back to face him and fixing him in her hypnotic stare. Something flickered in her ruby eyes, something sinister and ugly. Before he could recoil, Adam felt a shooting pain in his chest, knew a moment of pure, unadulterated terror and realised he might not want to know after all, but it was too late. Her mouth has already formed the words. “My name is Gaia.”

The world itself seemed to shrink at

that name, like a frightened child, drawing in on itself until Adam could see everything in startling clarity – Everest looming in the North, Africa behind them, small enough to trample with his boot. He watched fish darting cool silver through Lake Eyre, crocodiles sunning themselves in prehistoric langour on the banks of the River Nile, grey wolves charging through the snowbanks of the Arctic, Hooded Vultures circling the bloodied carcass of a day old fawn. He saw his mother working in the garden, her arthritic hands trembling as she planted peonies, his father on bended knee, praying for his safe return. He saw his brother in bed with a woman who was

not his wife. The whole world advanced toward him, within arm's reach, and yet, so magnificently magnified that he could hear the children's laughter and feel the hum of the earth's magnetic fields.

“What is happening?” he asked, dropping the pack and falling to his knees. Gaia offered him her hand, and, as he took it, he felt the rough sandpaper of ancient age belying the silken façade as she drew him upward.

“It's ending,” she rasped, her voice fainter, more laboured, and yet somehow more vicious.

Adam watched as she raised her arm and sent the oceans south, to decimate everything in their wake, flushing away

everything it had taken so many centuries to build. To the North, she charged an army of ice, splintering and smothering whatever stood in its way, defying the global warming which had long tortured the bergs of its brothers. Eastward went the earth, rising and hissing, a beast hunting its prey with ruthless precision. And to the west, toward Adam's home, she sent the wind, a gale of ruin and rage that would shred flesh from bones and reduce industry to rubble.

It was a few moments before the screaming started. The calm before the storm, while humanity sinned in reckless abandon, knowing not what was coming for them. Father, mother and child alike

fell victim to Mother Earth's vengeance, and Adam watched it all as if in slow motion.

“Please!” his usually tanned face was pinched white with horror, his bloodless lips pleading for mercy. “Please let them live. Spare them!”

“Why?” she asked innocently, her delicate features a stark contrast to the power which radiated from her. Flurries of dirt rose and fell at her feet, hovering only seconds before dropping back to earth as if they dared not venture too close. “It is always the same. I offer myself up to man, and man destroys me. I destroy man and the cycle begins again. You have brought this upon yourselves.”

Almost to himself, Adam lamented, “what have we done?”

Gaia smiled then, showing small, even white teeth. “If I showed you, would you see?”

She began to reform, her infinite beauty falling away to reveal the atrocity that lay beneath. Like a serpent, she shed her skin and showed him what man had done. One by one, she gestured at her flaws. Her hair, brittle and lifeless, were the trees of green that had been decimated to make way for skyscrapers and cinemas. Her skin, the earth, arid and parched. As he watched, bits of it peeled away, exposing the maggot-infested flesh beneath. Her veins, protruding rivers of

filth, her lips, the same lips he had admired only moments ago, blistered and bleeding. Adam wished for nothing more than to look away, but she held his gaze captive, forcing him to face the sins of man. “My fruit,” Gaia clasped her hands over the swollen, distorted shape of her womb. “It wasn’t good enough for you, so you warped it, twisted it, into something unnatural. You pumped me full of growth hormones, and I could not withstand long enough to regenerate.” Adam could not bear the hideousness of the bulging mass but he had to withstand it, trapped helplessly in her dominion.

“We didn’t know,” he whimpered.

Satisfied, she released him, and he fell

away from her, clutching his stomach as he heaved tainted bile onto a tainted earth.

Marching on toward the cardinal points, her warriors paid no heed to age, sex, race or religion. They devoured without discrimination. And they were drawing nearer to his home – to his family.

“What will become of them?”

“They will be buried within me.” She touched the place where her heart would be if it wasn’t a shrivelled knob of coal, pumping poison rather than life through her ravaged essence. “And I will cover their bodies with my flesh and bone.”

“We will die.”

“As you have so many times before.”

Adam clapped his hands to his ears, trying to block out the sounds of the dying as heart-wrenching wails of agony rending the air around him. Slowly, mankind succumbed. They could neither run, nor hide, from their fate, and still, Adam clung to the hope that she might be swayed. That she might show them compassion.

“Let us live. I beg of you.” Youthful squeals cut through his fingers. “There are children out there, for God’s sake!”

Gaia didn’t so much as flinch at the blasphemy.

“You are all children,” she explained, “and I am your mother.”

“A mother would protect us!” Adam raged.

“Do you think, child, that I should sacrifice myself for them?”

He thought then of his own mother, her quiet confidence, her steadfast belief, and he knew that she would die to protect her sons.

“Yes!” A triumphant roar, but she only shook her head.

“Don’t you see that, without me, they are doomed to die anyway? At least this way, I can save you.”

“Save me?”

“Yes,” her voice held an evil promise but she did not elaborate.

“How many times?” he demanded,

recalling her words. “How many times have you destroyed us?”

“Too many to count. My compassion is what kills me, and what allows you to survive.”

Adam dragged his eyes westward. The fury had reached his home town, the razor gales cutting through the memories of his childhood. He saw no compassion here.

“It is better not to look,” said Gaia. And so, he closed his eyes as those closest to him were taken and he did not speak for a long time.

“You are sad,” Gaia sighed after a lengthy silence. “I can ease your pain, if you wish.”

“I don’t want to be alone.” The words struck Adam as absurd, considering his life’s endeavour had been in seeking solitude. “Can you spare one – just one? I will do anything.”

“No.” her bloodied eyes bored into his own, red versus blue. “Over and over I have made the same choices – granted man a mate and ensured another life cycle. Over and over I have prayed that you wouldn’t make the same mistakes - but now I see that the mistake is mine. I have given you too much credit. I have looked for good in you when there is none. You are the destroyer of worlds, and no matter how many times I reset, it always ends this way.”

Adam's face seemed to burn and then freeze, his eyes blurring. He lifted a hand and felt the unfamiliar wetness of tears on his cheeks. Mortified, he tried to brush away the pain.

“I will die alone.”

“No, Adam, you will not.”

His heart stuttered, the warmth of hope's return lifting his beaten spirit.

“You will grant me a mate?”

“No.” she shook her head, wisps of dried snow drifting from her head. “I will grant you myself.”

He howled then, throwing back his dark head and cursing his own kind, cursing every person who had taken from her, and in return had incurred her wrath

upon the world. He cursed technology and industry, and corruption, and greed. He cursed humanity, and its arrogance. How powerful they had believed themselves to be, and how easily they had been subdued.

Lost in the torture of his own existence, he did not see Gaia's crone face split into a grin, yellowed stubs of teeth barely visible against a patchwork of grey rot. When his screams finally ended, all was still. A deafening hush. The world had fallen silent.

He crushed his face in his hands, trying to hide from his own fate. Oceans withdrew, ice thawed, winds died. The earth rose up, creeping over carcass and

chaos before it was quiet once more, but Adam witnessed none of it. He did not see the muddied ponds become clear, or the tiny buds rising bravely from the ground, bursting into seed and filling the world with colour. He did not see the fruit grow heavy on the vine, or feel the crisp, clean water which rained down upon him and cleaned away the last of mans' sin. When he finally lowered his hands, he saw only her. A beautiful, naked woman, her lips pink and moist, her breasts jutting proudly above a trim waist, her thighs long and lean. Her hair tumbled and fell down her back, cascading over her slim shoulders.

“Who are you?” Adam asked,

swinging around, his eyes searching for something, although he wasn't sure what.

“I am Gaia,” the girl spoke, and her voice was crisp, clear and powerful.

“Gaia?” A vague memory stirred inside of him, but as quickly as he snatched at it, it flitted out of reach. He gazed out at the oasis surrounding him. The lake was cool and inviting, shaded by a canopy of trees. The carpet of green beneath him called for him to remove the heavy boots trapping his feet. The clothing he wore stifled him, aggravating his skin and weighing heavily on his body. He shrugged it off, feeling only blessed relief as the last shred of cotton fell away.

Gaia glided toward him, her hips

snaking as she moved, her breasts swinging gently to and fro, a hypnotic pendulum. Adam's mind was as clear as the sky above him, devoid of any pain. He knew nothing of the past. She had given him this gift, so that he might live again.

Adam held his breath as she drew nearer, feeling the heat of her body teasing him, warming him. Gaia took his trembling hand in her own and caressed the calloused palm. His body responded to her every touch.

“Where are we?” he asked, more curious than bewildered.

A small smile tugged at the corners of her mouth in secret amusement before

she lifted her eyes to his.

“Eden,” she breathed, lifting her lips to his.

As they walked, Adam marvelled at the wonders around him – the beauty, the light, the isolation. He didn't hear her words, nor would he have questioned them if he had, for he knew nothing of the horrors of the past. He was the last, and also the first. He would trust in her guidance. He would follow her example.

Gaia, experiencing her creation for the first time through human eyes, felt the thrill of anticipation. She had never indulged in human flesh, but gazing upon the virile young man beside her she concluded that she had chosen a fine

specimen with which to start.

Unheard by her mate, Gaia vowed, under her breath, that she would never again allow the weak to inherit her earth. This time, she would not begin the cycle with men. She would spawn a new race. One that would not betray her. One that would inherit her kinship with the Earth. This time, she would begin with Gods.