Gods of Piloria

SAMPLE

Chapter 1

EARTH….

Los Angeles, California.

The air is cold. Trash litters the ground along with burnt plywood, crushed houses, abandoned dogs and cats, and broken-down cars. A group of three teenagers walk along the wreckage of a burned down playground. Underneath their feet, tossed shoes, squashed toys, splinters of mulch and remnants of a life they once had. It's silent. All the birds have flown away. People have either evacuated, lay dead in their destroyed homes, or currently hide in wait for an unforeseeable future.

"I don't think we're gonna find food anywhere around here."

"We gotta find something. Dad's gonna wring our necks if we don't."

"Why don't we just run away then? I'm tired of gettin' hit."

"And go where, Rosie? The fault line's completely separated us from the rest of the country."

"What's a fault line?" Rosie asks, tiny hand clasped in her older brother's.

"That's a lesson for another day," Aspen, her older brother, answers.

"There's a pizza joint not far from here," Conner, their school friend, adds.

"So what?" Aspen asks. "Not like there's any pizza left. Everyone ransacked the place."

"We might find some supplies. Maybe flour or something," said Conner.

Aspen grunts. "Guess we can check. There's nothing else to do."

As they cross the street, not bothering to look both ways, they get closer to "Ralf's Pizza."

“Hey, Aspen?” Rosie asks. “You think the gods will come down to help Daddy?”

Aspen sighs. “Who knows.” He opens the door, staring into the rundown pizza joint that stares back. It’s covered in sawdust and dirt, the ceiling caved in. Further inside, they hear grunting.

A group of starving men come out of the kitchen area, holding guns. Their eyes light up at the sight of the kids, who hear the *shink* of a pocketknife being equipped.

Aspen, not surprised, stares at them with a mix of dread and exhaustion. He’s long since given up.

Conner takes out his own pocketknife, hands shaking.

“Probably not,” Aspen says, dropping Rosie’s hand.

Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The breeze is strong as the shudders outside the windows crack against the glass. The neighborhood of posh cars, white picket fences, and four-story houses built in a neat line across from one another are barren and abandoned.

A small child holds the blinds open, looking through them sadly. *No one comes out to play anymore....*

The rain falls hard like bullets. She knows nobody will come out to play in this weather. It's nearly impossible to see the other side of the street. She can see that the lights of the house across from hers are on, so she knows her neighbors are still there.

Everything feels a little too quiet to her. Even with the buzzing of the tv and the thunder from outside, things are too quiet. Her baby brother is still clinking away with his toys in the living room, but even that sounds muffled.

The flashes of color from the tv reflect against the window, but the child doesn't turn around to watch whatever her dad is watching. *It's probably the news. Mommy always told me not to watch the news.*

She can see the wind pick up speed. The trees whack themselves against each other and on the walls of the house. There's a high-pitched wail coming from underneath the door, and small amounts of debris fly through the air.

Her mother shuts the garage doors, walking in through the kitchen. She sets the groceries down on the counter, stomping into the living room to fetch her son. "Steve, turn that damned tv off. We don't need any more negativity in this house."

The little girl looks away from the windows, meeting eyes with her cat Marmie. The black cat stares on the bottom step of the stairs, her tail flicking back and forth. For a second, the girl's sure she sees the cat's eyes flash gold but thinks it's just a trick of the tv's colors.

She turns to the living room, finding her answer. Her father is, in fact, watching the news.

"Another hurricane, the third one in a month, has hit Florida yet again. It's beginning to cross miles more than we anticipated...."

"Sam, get away from the windows," her mother says, picking up her younger brother. "We're gonna have a tornado tonight, stay away from them." Sam jumps off the windowsill, taking her mother's hand. "Let's have some lunch. Steve, don't make me tell you again—"

"What's the point, Val? The world is ending, might as well be prepared."

The hair on Sam's skin rises as the clock strikes noon. Her little brother cries as her mother takes them to the kitchen. The howling grows louder, the entire house shaking.

"Please go and check on something useful, won't you? Like preparing the bunker."

Steve rolls his eyes, getting up from the couch. “After tonight, we're leaving and traveling up north. I've about had it with these crazy storms.”

“The storms aren't so bad,” Val says, setting her son down in a highchair and searching through the cabinets.

“Almost everyone in the neighborhood has packed up and left! There's no point staying, we're living in an abandoned town!” Steve yells.

“And how are we going to get anywhere?! The airports have shut down!” Val yells back.

“Take a car, we'll drive!”

The lights flicker. The house sways as the wind picks up even more. Marmie moves off the steps to jump onto the windowsill Sam was just looking through, eyes looking outside.

Sam's brother cries even harder, scared by all the noise. Sam gets tense. Val starts to shakily make sandwiches, trying to ignore the growing sense of doom in her chest. “For the last time, go to the bunker. We need to make sure we have all we need.”

Steve huffs, before heading to the back doors. They open, before slamming shut.

“Mom?” Sam asks, nervous.

“Everything's fine, sweetheart,” said Val. Across the street, the neighbor's house collapses on itself. The lights go out. “Just pray. The gods will protect us.”

Marmie trots into the kitchen, meowing at her owners. Sam frowns at the animal, turning to look out the glass doors into the backyard. Outside, her father Steve struggles to get to the bunker. The wind rips at his clothes, hitting him so hard every time he gets up, he’s knocked back down again.

The wind screams as it rushes into the house underneath the front door, no longer a whistle. The house creaks and groans against the pressure, trees outside getting uprooted.

Val is now frightened. “Alright. Here, take this sandwich.” She hands it to Sam, picking up her son. “Things are rougher today. Let's just move to the bunker now.”

Sam quickly picks up Marmie and runs to the backdoors. She struggles to get them open, the wind pushing against her. Outside, she sees her father has made it to the bunker.

Before he can get it open, he suddenly freezes. He turns his head to the left, all the color draining from his face.

Val quickly gets to the door, trying to help pry them open with her son in her arms. With her help, Sam is able to squeeze through. She's immediately hit by the fast winds, tripping over herself and feeling her feet leave the ground for a second.

“Sam!” her mother shouts, stumbling outside and grabbing onto her daughter’s shirt. “Steve?!” The rain feels like rocks against everyone’s skin, Sam growing welts that are quickly red and irritated. Marmie, although in pain, stays calm in her arms.

“Quickly!” Steve shouts, white as a ghost as he unlatches the bunker. He then runs over to try and help Sam, who cannot stay on her feet.

The rain turns, hitting the family in the side. The water is now coming at them from the right, pushing them with a force they've never felt.

Steve helps his family to the bunker, and Sam turns to see what made her father so terrified.

She wishes she hadn't.

A tornado barrels through downtown. Sam's seen her fair share of tornados, but never one she would describe as *demonic*. It’s black, wide, and she’s sure it can cover downtown all at once. It’s so strong, it’s calling for the winds all the way across town. She can hear the quiet rumble even though she’s miles away from it.

She realizes that the gods have abandoned them.

Marmie watches with her golden eyes widening little by little as she watches an entire city get brought to the ground in seconds. Gael, who witnesses all of this behind those eyes, is so shocked by it, his soul gets jolted out of the animal's body. He's sucked back into the air with tremendous force, entering the heavens and shoving himself back into his body.

PILORIA….

Gael yelps in pain. Hidden within the forest of his family's temple, the vines connecting himself to The Trees of Life pull themselves out of his spine. Blood splatters, his eyes flashing from gold to brown like he's been shocked by electricity. He falls to the floor, blood pouring out of his orifices. He groans, his body pulsing as it hurries to heal the damage. The forest twists and turns, his head feeling like it's been stabbed through.

"Master?"

Gael flinches, turning his head. He looks at a malformed god through his brown curls. This god sits like a rabbit, muscular thighs to his chest. His pink nose twitches along with his large white rabbit ears. His pink eyes are far apart on his face, staring down at Gael with concern.

"Cotton…?" Gael asks, trembling as he tries to sit up. The lesser god of life, the God of Rabbits, Cotton, scoots closer to help. His hands are long, thin white fur on his knuckles. Gael accepts the help, sitting on his knees as he looks at the rabbit god with shock.

"What are you doing out here? I told you to stay out of sight."

Cotton's nose twitches, nervous. His pink eyes flick left to right as his foot thumps the ground angrily. "Master needed help."

Gael grins, reaching over to pet his head. Cotton is a god Gael made himself. While Gael cannot give birth, as the God of Life, he can make life from other life forms. He was walking along the same forest he sits in now and found a baby albino bunny left for dead by an apple tree. Weak and near death, Gael walked over to it and mixed his own life force with the life force of the animal. Gael did not know that kind of magic would turn that little baby into the god he is now.

Nobody else in Piloria knows he can do this. He plans to keep this a secret. Unfortunately, Piloria is a place filled with gods that think like humans. With Cotton being as malformed as he is, Gael worries they might cast him out. He also worries his power might be used for… less than appealing things.

And Cotton has horrible anxiety. As far as Gael knows, he is the only person Cotton is willing to talk to. Gael used this same power on a fox to give Cotton a friend, but Dingo is quite the character. He's very extroverted, while Cotton is not. They don't get along.

"Is Master sick?" Cotton asks, noticing Gael has gone quiet.

Gael smiles, shaking his head even though the pain is slowly getting worse. "No. Just thinking about your creation day."

"Birthday?" Cotton asks, ears twisting.

Gael chuckles. "Sure, yeah." He tries to stand, his knees wobbling. He catches himself on a tree, Cotton inching closer with worry.

"Master—"

"Blood."

Cotton flinches, his ears falling back as he hops a couple of feet away.

Gael tilts his head up to smile at Dingo.

“There you are. I knew you were close by,” says Gael.

The fox god stands tall with long legs covered in orange fur. His arms also have tuffs of it with his orange pointed ears up.

“Bleeding,” Dingo says.

“I’m alright,” Gael says, the entire forest starting to spin. He tries to wipe the blood off his face the best he can. “I just need to lie down for a while.” He leans away from the tree, walking down the path. “I’ll be back to see you both soon.”

The two lesser gods of life watch silently, before turning to look at each other. They frown.

Gael makes it back to his temple, falling through the glass side doors into the living room. Diana, his mother and the leader of Piloria, sits on a meditation mat with a folded letter next to her. Her eyes open when her son stumbles inside. Della, Gael’s twin sister, is reading a book on the couch, her eyes looking up at the dramatic entrance.

“Brother?” Della asks, watching him flounder down the hall to his bedroom with blood following him. Della, shocked, gets up with her book falling to the ground. “Brother? Are you bleeding? What’s happened?” She hurries into the hallway, Gael ignoring her as he throws open his bedroom door, slamming it shut in his sister’s face.

“Gael? What’s going on? Open the door!” She wiggles the handle, surprised that it’s locked. “Gael!”

“Come back, Della. He’s not going to open the door for you,” Diana says from the living room.

“Mother, are you not at all concerned? He was bleeding!” Della asks, hurrying back to her side.

“He’s been dealing with this for years. You know this. I don’t disrupt him when he goes to heal.” Diana closes her eyes again to continue meditating

“To heal?! Mother, he was so pale—”

“Gael is an adult now, Della. He can take care of himself.”

Della stares at her mother for a few seconds, before scoffing and turning away. She heads back down the hall, hesitating in front of her brother’s room, before entering her own.

Gael leans against his bedroom door, his head pounding with the entire world twisting around him. Blood seeps down his chest and over his robes, pouring from his nose like a faucet. Trying to get his bearings, he stands there for a few seconds, before heaving himself up. He stumbles over to his beside cabinet, his hands fumbling for the handle. He gets it open, grabbing the pills inside. He takes two, swallowing them before grabbing a tissue and stuffing it into his nostrils and ears.

His head throbs, the pain striking behind his eyes and he grunts. He falls onto his bed, unconscious.

Suddenly, he’s in a cave. He can hear the dripping water fall from the stalactites, his hands feeling the bumpy walls of the wet rock. Other than water, there’s no signs of life except for the man crouched in a fetal position on the floor. Gael can only see his back, walking up to him.

“Hello? Sir?”

Gael flinches at the sound of sobs.

They’re horrifying. They’re low, and quiet, short exhales of breath in a pattern.

While terrified, Gael can't help but feel for the man. He kneels next to him, feeling his own eyes water. "Oh, please don't cry…." He sets a hand on the man's arm, and the cries stop.

There's a pause, before the man sets his own hand on top of Gael's. Gael thought this would frighten him, but the hand, though cold, is comforting.

Gael wakes back in his bedroom. His intense migraine is gone, and someone had come in to put him under the covers. He raises his head, looking around the room. His curtains are pulled closed, meaning it's dark out. He takes a moment to feel around the temple with his abilities, noticing that nobody is inside.

Gael rips the sheets off as a foreboding feeling overcomes him. For some reason, he feels like he needs to tell someone about the dream he just had. He takes another deep breath, using the bedposts to help him stand. His legs shake like a newborn fawn as he limps to his bedroom door. He opens it, turning to his sister's room next door.

"Della? Della—?" He stops in her doorway, looking around. Della's room is stacked high to the brim with books. There's a tiny pond in the corner that helps her meditate, the parrots and other small birds chirping from within their cages.

But her bed is made.

Gael, still trying to catch his breath and get rid of the fear, looks down the hall desperately. "Della?!"

No one responds.

"Mom?" he calls, walking into the living room.

There's not a single sound within the temple. Not feeling their power, Gael is only getting more and more confused. *They didn't tell me they had things to do today, so where could they be?*

He flinches when he hears a scream of horror. Outside the glass doors, gods are running through his open backyard.

"What in the name of—?" Gael inches closer to watch as the gods flee in the direction of the High Court.

Gael opens the door, feeling the sunshine on his skin as he looks up and down the fleeing crowd. Just down the white stone street is the main square where the High Court is built. All the gods are running up the steps, rushing to get inside.

"Hey! What's going on?" Gael shouts through all the screaming.

One god stops, face red with panic. "The gods are disappearing! One by one!" He continues to flee.

"Disappearing?" Gael's face pales as the memory of what he'd seen in the Forest of Life hits him. The tornado, the starving men, the high winds, the burned playground.

"Shit." He was so concerned over his own pain and healing that he had completely forgotten about that horrifying scene! He shuts his back door, hurrying back to his room to change.

Gael hurries out the temple through the front doors. He walks fast down the porch and over the cobblestone walkway.

"Master!" Gael stops, in shock. He turns to his right, Cotton kneeling within the bushes nervously. "Master all better!?"

“Sh!” Gael snaps, running over as he looks around. “Cotton—! What are you doing out here?! Go back into the forest!”

“Had to check on Master,” Cotton replies, his voice lower in a shouting whisper.

“Quiet down. I’m fine now, so go—” He pauses. “Did you tuck me in earlier?”

Cotton blushes. “Master was cold—”

“You stepped into the temple!?”

“Nobody saw me,” he whimpers, ears lowering.

“How do you know?!” Gael sighs, covering his face with his hands. There’s no way Diana didn’t know about it. She’s too strong and too paranoid. While she won’t wake up when her children enter and exit, she would if a foreign energy entered.

Screw it. I’ll deal with it later.

“Cotton, just go back into the forest. I’m all better now, thank you for your concern. But I’m running an errand right now, and I’ll be back in a couple of hours.”

Cotton raises his ear, pink eyes wide. “Late!”

“Yes, I know it’s late—”

“Dangerous!”

“No, it’s not—”

“I come with!?”

“No!” Gael shouts, before covering his mouth. He glances around, waiting a couple of seconds to see if any gossipers start to peek around the corners. Though, he doubts anyone would be out and about with gods disappearing. He turns back to Cotton. “No. I’m going on my own.”

“Master—”

“Don’t talk back.” Cotton purses his lips, pouting. Gael cringes at himself yet again, not believing how much he sounds like his mother. “I told you an order, follow it please. I’ll bring you back some carrot cake from Tina.”

Cotton perks up, the pouts now gone. “Okay! I wait in forest!”

“Yes, wait in the forest.”

“I go to forest!”

Cotton turns on his legs, hopping back into the trees and Gael sighs with relief. “Geez…. Kids are hard.”

Technically, Cotton is in his eighties, but with that shot of adrenaline, Gael is now wide awake as he restarts his journey to the High Court.