

Coffee with Galene

The cafe Travis had chosen was a local favorite. Close enough to the water, that he could sometimes get a whiff of sea air when the door opened. The baristas behind the counter would bustle back and forth, taking orders and delivering the light blue mugs and plates. Retired fish netting hung up above with stuffed jellyfish hanging between the lights. A big, rubber octopus lurked by the register and held a black chalkboard of daily specials in two tentacles. Light pop music played from the speakers punctuated by the harsh whine of the espresso machine whenever a drink was being made.

Excitement and fear bubbled in Travis's gut as he took the first sip of coffee. He liked showing up to dates early, hoping it presented him in an air of confidence. At least it gave him time to collect his nerves before Gail showed up.

The doors of the coffee house swung open with a gust of wind, nearly shoving Travis out of his seat. Paper napkins, coffee sleeves, and stirring rods kicked up in the whirlwind. When the wind settled, Travis heard people yelling and screaming. He looked up and saw a large wave thundering towards the coffee shop, heading straight over the wharf and into the concrete streets. The wave slowed and thinned out, splashing into the sewers until a shape emerged from the raging wave.

The figure rose, taking on a humanoid shape with long, delicate fingers running through churning curls of hair that settled over the shoulders. The water figure strode forward on newly formed legs and started to solidify. Tall and pale, the being strode into the coffee shop, wrapped in a white cloth as the body took on a more human color. Dark brown hair framed her face in loose waves and a splash of freckles formed under her pale blue eyes. As she stepped into the cafe, her bare feet left wet imprints on the floor.

Locking eyes with Travis, the figure stepped through the coffee shop and smiled at him.

“Hi,” the figure smiled down at him, her voice heavy with an Irish accent. “I’m Galene. I think you’re my date?”

“I...what?”

Galene reached into her garment and pulled out an old, waterlogged phone. She tapped at the screen a few times and showed the results to Travis. The messages he’d been sharing with Gail on the dating were on the screen, down to the one he had sent last night to ask her for coffee. She’d never sent him pictures, but the woman at his table looked like how Gail had described herself. Before Travis could respond, Galene sat across from him and folded her hands on the table. The servers were desperately trying to reorganize the coffee shop but kept a safe distance from her table.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve been out of the ocean,” Galene smiled. “Thanks for organizing this.”

“You’re Gail?”

“I shorten it when I’m online,” Galene said, trying to brush it off. “For safety. Besides, you can’t google me if you don’t have my full name.”

“I still feel like there are some other things you’re not telling me?”

“Can I get a coffee first?” Galene smiled. “Maybe get into the full story?”

Travis waved a hand, flagging down one of the baristas. The timid girl came forward and took out her pen and order pad, as her hands shook. “Can I get...” Galene looked over the menu, pinching her lip between to fingers until she came to a decision. “A Lat-ee? Am I saying that right? I’ve only ever seen it written...”

“Sure thing,” the server said and rushed away. Galene smiled and folded her hands on the table.

“So,” Travis said, “about the obvious, wet elephant in the room?”

“Right,” Galene grit her teeth and swallowed. “I’m a water goddess.”

“A water goddess?”

“I’m a goddess of an ancient Celtic well, but the Romans demoted me to a sea nymph. After a few thousand years, though, I’m looking to get out of that same well.”

“Can’t say I can relate,” Travis said, nervously sipping his coffee. “I mean, your profile said you liked the beach. I didn’t think that meant you were the beach.”

Galene snickered a little and smiled at the server when she came back. She thanked the young girl before the server rushed back behind the counter with her friend. She brought the cup to her lips and choked, spitting the coffee back into the mug. “It’s hot!”

“First time you’ve had coffee?”

“This is the first time I’ve been on land in about three thousand years,” Galene said, blowing on the coffee before attempting another sip. She swallowed the small sip and grinned to Travis. “I have lots to learn.”

“Alright,” Travis licked his lips. There was a moment of quiet in the café as Travis took a sip of his coffee. A customer dropped a spoon and the ringing resonated like someone had thrown a pan against the wall.

“You’re upset?” Galene asked, sensing the answer. “I’m sorry, I...well, it’s hard to meet people and you were charming and friendly.”

“Why not rescue a sailor or something? I mean, what do you want of a relationship with me that a goddess can’t get with the sheer force of her will?”

“I’m not interested in just anyone. And the ‘Forcing Will’ thing never works out. I want a real relationship.”

“Well, if you’re being honest with me, I should tell you I’m asexual.”

“That’s fine.”

“And I get that you could have anyone because you’re a literal goddess, but—what?”

“I understand. I’m kind of over sex myself. It lost its appeal around five hundred...”

“The year or the number of partners?”

“Unbelievably? Both...”

“That tends to put a lot of people off. A lot of people have walked away when they found out that sex wasn’t on the table. It seems to put a stop to most relationships.”

“That must be difficult.”

“It is,” Travis said, “but it’s important to let people know.”

“And I thank you for telling me, but I promise I wasn’t interested in you for sex.”

Travis looked up and saw everyone still watched their table. They had managed to pick up for the most part, but Travis saw the cafe manager’s hand hovering by the phone. The cafe watched him, praying that he said the right thing.

“So...why me?”

“You’re funny,” Galene said, running her fingers around the rim of her coffee mug. “And kind. Sex is all well and good, but I’m hoping for more than that from a relationship.”

“Like what?”

Galene reached across the table and touched her hand to the base Travis’s wrist. Her fingers were soft and cool to the touch. He hesitated for only a few moments but turned his palm to fit into Galene’s. Galene smiled, warm and gentle. Her eyes were alive and excited,

but she managed to tame that part of her nature for now. Travis turned to the others in the coffee shop and a mixture of frightened and curious faces peered back at him.

“I hope I haven’t put you off,” Galene said. “It’s been so long since I’ve seen or touched someone. It’s even been a while since I’ve taken a form other than the rushing currents.”

“I just...there’s a lot about this I don’t know: dating deities or dating in general. I’m gonna mess up a lot, intentionally or otherwise. Why would you want to date any human when you’re so...divine?”

“Deities aren’t so different from humans. We have wants and needs. There was a time when I received riches and gifts. After the Romans came in, I was left with a few spare worshippers when it didn’t get in the way of their gods. And now? Well, I mostly pick trash out of my offerings with the occasional coin for compensation. Since the ages I was worshipped have passed, I chose to want for simpler things...a connection between myself and another person. Not worship, but a mutual balance.”

“And so you turned to a dating website?”

“It was on the phone when I found it.”

Travis laughed and looked down at their still joined hands. The tension in the coffee shop seemed to ease when he laughed and even the barista behind the counter drifted away from the phone to check on some other customers.

“For next time, I have to make a suggestion...”

“Oh?”

“Maybe don’t enter in the form of a tidal wave next time? It’s impressive, but you don’t need it.”

“In fairness, the last time I was onshore, it wasn’t so crowded...”

Travis laughed and sipped his coffee. The barista brought out a mop from the back room and the din of the cafe resumed at its normal volume.