



PROMPT #1: Write about a god desperately trying to get their chosen hero to follow the path they set out for them.

The God-Maker

by **Laura Dixon**

Time was dead.

The remaining gods didn't mourn his death. No, they were thrilled. Delighted that their power would no longer be constrained by their lesser counterpart. For so long, the God of Time kept the others in check. He kept them fenced in, but now the fence was gone, and the others could finally roam free.

Oltana Killia hated that freedom meant war.

Her husband died in the fight— his body missing in a field of rubble. The other gods took it upon themselves to make mortal lives a living hell. *You'll die*, they mused. *Then you'll be in the afterlife. A better place.*

To the ancients, those words brought hope and peace. The world was broken, but it didn't have to shatter completely. Decades of war ravaged their lands, which brought decades of famine. Starvation seemed to be a worse killer than the sword, though no one was counting anymore.

Killia sought to ensure that her daughter remained safe. When the world was destroying itself, that was the only thing to be done. For the most part, it was simple work. She tended their garden, weaved their clothes, fed the sheep, and cooked the meals. Of course, her daughter Janika helped her.

She was a good daughter. Smart, loving, and gentle. And Killia loved her beyond anything else.

Killia had been returning from the sheep when a horseman rode past. Fast. A sickening feeling filled her as she turned to look where the man had come from. A large smoky cloud loomed over the horizon.

Dust storm.

The gods battled further south, but the repercussions could reach here. “Good sir!” Killia shouted after the rider. Thankfully, he heard and pulled his horse to a stop. Killia ran to catch up with him. “What news do you bring?”

“The Gods of Gravity and Death are battling again. I think... Death might lose.” He said, with an uncomfortable fear in his voice. Death losing. That was sickening news indeed. They lived in Death’s domain, sharing in his spoils and defeats.

If Gravity came here, she would surely uproot all their crops and bury their homes in rubble.

“I would offer you a ride,” he said, weary. “But I must get the message to town as soon as possible. We need to evacuate—”

“Where to? That dust storm will swallow us!”

The rider cringed, obviously seeing no good options. “Then ready your home and pray to the gods that they see reason.”

Reason. Gravity and Death weren’t capable of it.

Killia nodded in agreement. She needed to find her daughter anyways, and they lived a couple miles out of town. Her daughter was at home, sitting at the loom. She grinned. “Mother! Look here what I found,” she said, bent down, and picked up a pitch black cat. Its coat retained a sleek sheen— perfect.

It tilted its head to the side, curious.

“Drop that thing. A dust storm’s coming quickly. Tighten the windows. Hurry!” She exclaimed. Her daughter paled, then got to work. She ran outside with a bucket and filled it from the well as Killia collected all their towels and sheets. They soaked the cloth and stuffed it into every crevasse in the home.

Then waited.

The cat purred and crawled atop Killia’s lap. The creature... seemed to sense their worry, yet itself was not worried at all.

In fact, when the dust cloud struck and darkened the room, Killia noticed how its eyes glowed yellow. She stared into them, memorized.

Her daughter clung to her arm as the house trembled. “Ma, is the house going to hold?” She hoped so. Dust flew in despite their precautions, skinning their cheeks raw. Killia dropped the cat and pulled her daughter into a hug to protect her. She sang softly.

Sweet little child, fall asleep.

Where the flowers bloom, and the willows never weep.

The river runs clear and the ringlight never fades.

Sweet little child, do not fear.

For when you awake,

The gods will fight no more.

It was the song Killia’s mother sang to her many years ago. Apparently, there were days when the rivers weren’t muddy or red. When dust storms didn’t hide the ring. When the trees didn’t die with green leaves. When...

When the gods didn’t try to kill each other.

At that moment, Killia wished she had someone to pray to. The ancients did— they prayed to the God of Gravity, or Death, or Time, or Sleep, or Space, or Realms. But six of those were dead now, and only Gravity and Death remained. Powerful and terrifying, they ripped the world in two.

The cat crawled between them and kept purring, as if to comfort Killia’s soul. But she didn’t want comfort for herself. She wanted it for her daughter. She should be happy and smiling in a world that wasn’t held hostage by the sins of the gods.

Blackness. The dust cloud completely enveloped them. The windows rattled with the pressure of dust devouring them. It ground it, ravenous like wolves among sheep. Darkness. She couldn’t even see her daughter’s face even though they were only inches apart. But then, in the corner of her eye, she saw a flicker of light.

Drawn to it, she pulled slightly away to find the cat— no longer wedged between them, but sitting atop the window sill. It stared out the window as if it was seeing through the dust, and watching the gods bicker. Its glowing eyes were vicious, and in that moment, they were more terrifying than the dust that threatened them.

The cat glanced down at her— and its eyes came *alive*. A small insect crawled out of them, bringing the light with it. A firefly.

The little insect landed on her nose— flickered once. Twice.

They are not gods. The thing said. Killia screamed, pulled away. What— What was that? *They are not friends.* The cat said in her mind. Their voices sounded the same, but somehow Killia knew it was the cat.

They are human.

Killia only stared at the firefly. “Oh gods, don’t torment me,” she said, terrified.

We are not torments.

The firefly flickered. *We are Rth-Colum.*

Two-halves.

One whole.

Killia searched the room for her daughter, but in the darkness, she couldn’t find her.

“Janika? Where are you?”

“Here, ma.” She said, then felt a tug on her hand.

Right. Killia gripped her daughter tight. How much longer would this storm last?

Forever. The cat said.

We are Rth-Colum.

Killia shook her head and murmured. “I don’t know what that means. Are you some of Gravity’s henchmen?”

We do not work for the Hollows.

The cat seemed to smirk. *We made them.*

“You... made the gods?” Killia said. She didn’t know much about theology, but if something made the gods... then wasn’t that something the god instead?

They are not gods.

The firefly said, *but if you call them that, We are the god-makers.*

“What do you want with me?” She asked, holding onto her daughter tighter. “Ma, who are you speaking with?” Janika whispered. She couldn’t hear them? Killia shrunk back. Gods. She was going insane—

Insanity is for your gods, Oltana Killia. The cat said... humored?

Not! Gods. The firefly corrected.

The cat leapt down from the window and stood before her. With the dust shaking the house, flying into the house, and lashing them like a whip, the cat didn’t seem like a cat at all, but divine. The dust didn’t harm it— it couldn’t hurt it. Even in the darkness, Killia knew. Its black coat was as pristine as ever.

The firefly flew back into its eyes, causing them to glow once again. *We are Aen-Telin, one of the Rth-Colum. My people create the Hollows, or as you call them gods. They were meant to help the world function— to hold a power we ourselves have difficulty containing. Human souls are more... adaptable than us. But it seems we've made a slight mistake.* The creature spoke with two voices— the same voice, but laid atop itself twice. Killia held tighter to her daughter. *We wish to appoint a new Hollow, but we don't want to make the same mistake as last time. Before we chose people of great renown, now we choose you.*

Killia frowned. "Excuse me?"

We— the Rth-Colum— have thought hard on this. We will give you the power of Time, and kill Gravity and Death ourselves. You will harbor the powers for us. Yes? The creature spoke as if it was a completely normal conversation.

Killia took her daughter's hands. "Leave me, demon."

The cat tilted its head, offended. *We are not demons. We are Rth-Colum. Aen-Telin. We are the God-Makers, as your people might call us. We elect you to be a god.*

To replace a god. Why would Killia ever want to do that? Abandon her daughter? She gritted her teeth. "I said go."

Aen-Telin rolled its eyes. *Think, human. This war will continue until you all perish. We are doing you a favor here—*

"I said leave!"

I heard, yet you are not thinking. Don't you love your daughter? Care for her beyond anything else? I will give you a way to save her, and your grandchildren, and your grandchildren's children. You're friends' families, and their descendants.

As the creature spoke, the idea became more pleasing to her. Hope was something of the ancients, but in that moment, Killia thought she might have felt it. A fluttering of nervousness in her heart. Something she could grab hold of, practically see. "What do I need to do?" Aen-Telin lowered its head. *To become a... god, we Rth-Colum have made a new requirement. Something we hope will prevent this catastrophe from happening again. To gain the power, you will have to give up the thing you love most.* Janika. Tears welled up in Killia's eyes. "No." *Then you will perish.*

"I can't—" but even as she whispered it, she looked down at her daughter. She worried that her mother was losing her mind. Gods, Killia hoped she was. This whole idea was ludicrous. But *if* by any chance it was true, she should save all of humanity from this wickedness. She could save her daughter, but... "How will I give it up?" If Janika died, she would not do it.

The Rth-Colum seemed to sense her worry. *Your daughter will live, but will not remember you. She will see you and see a stranger. If you ever attempt to tell her the truth, she will die.*

“Janika,” Killia whispered. She cupped her daughter’s face in her hands and kissed her forehead. “I love you.”

“I... love you too, ma. What’s wrong?” She asked.

But Killia didn’t explain it— what would be the point? Her daughter would forget this all in a moment. “I accept, Aen-Telin. These conditions will suffice.”

Then it is done. Aen-Telin leaned forward and touched its nose against her.

Killia gasped and fell forward— her daughter catching her. But then, a moment later, everything was dull. Lifeless, and Killia felt a foreign power rage within her

Time.

She saw it all. The edge of the universe and everything to the center. Yet it was so much, her mortal mind could not comprehend it. Her soul, however, understood how to use the magic. Indeed, she was *not* a god, but she was close to it.

She pulled away from her daughter and headed for the door. Dust lashed against it, fragmenting and pulverizing the wood. “Hey! What— What are you doing?” Janika shouted, though she was too late to stop her. Killia opened the door, and the dust struck her mercilessly. Her skin split, yet no pain came to her. Jakina screamed as the storm ripped into her. Steeling herself, Killia stepped outside. This needed to be done. Her daughter could heal from those wounds.

Killia reached forward, her soul bubbling with new energy. She gripped it— not the storm itself, but the aetherial power that governed it. Time. She grabbed its fragments, compressing them into something moldable. The storm slowed. The wind stopped, and the dust slowly drifted to the ground in a weak haze.

“Who... who are you?” Killia turned to find her daughter there. Her face was bloodied, but the wounds weren’t very deep.

Killia suppressed her tears as she turned away. Don’t speak, she reminded herself. If she did, the truth would soon follow. Best just to leave...

The cat leapt atop her shoulder. *My kin have slaughtered the two dissidents, Killia. You alone are the only Hollow, ah god, now.*

“It’s too much power,” she murmured. She felt it grating against her soul, rampaging and feral.

You will get used to it. Aen-Telin said. My kin are traveling east to start a new dynasty of gods, so the power will become more tame in a short while. But they want you to remain here. I will accompany you.

Killia bent down to look the Rth-Colum in the eyes. “For how long?”

You are like us now. Immortal, for the most part. I will remain with you forever, Killia Hollow of Time. And ensure you do not abuse your powers.

“I don’t plan on it,” Killia said, picking the Rth-Colum up. It was quite cute really. AenTelin gave her a flat stare as she placed it on her shoulder. “Though I guess time corrupts all.” Aen-Telin chuckled. *Don’t forget you’re Time now. We can’t have you starting another war.*

She wouldn’t. Gods— dead or undead, real or fake— she wouldn’t. Killia tilted her head back and looked up at the ring. The bright white streak in the sky gleamed down upon them with new light. She would have smiled, but she was missing something important.

Her daughter.

She yearned for Janika, yet her desire would never be met. Never. Killia felt it in her soul. The Rht-Colum’s bane didn’t just stop with Janika. She wouldn’t be able to speak with any of her grandchildren either.

Well, maybe that was okay. They were safe. Now living in a world without such stringent suffering. Killia rubbed Aen-Telin’s chin and forced herself to smile. Her children would get to see clear streams and blooming flowers.

No matter what price Killia had to pay, that was far better than endless storms.