

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

God Killer

by **Anna Flannery**

“You know the Fates decide how the gods die, and I cannot intervene with their visions.”

The old god of the forest stood before her anyway, in her home of soft light and sleeping souls. He looked around him, in awe of the peace the goddess of death had to offer. He yearned for it.

“You are to die of old age, dear Galan.”

“I am old enough already, Elaina.”

“Not quite.”

She smiled at him, the beautiful and comforting smile of the death goddess.

She rose from her throne to comfort her old friend, his ancient eyes pleading with her. She placed a delicate hand along his cheek and granted him the brief feeling of tranquil peace. His eyes closed and a tear fell.

“Thank you,” he murmured.

Elaina took her friend’s hand and felt the gravity of his fatigue and loneliness. She recognized these feelings in herself when she was just a young goddess and not yet accustomed to the fear and hatred humanity felt towards her. The god standing before her was the one who had helped pull her from that darkness so many centuries ago, and now she was needing to do the same for him.

“I will help you in all of the ways that I can, Galan, but I will not kill you. I care for you too much to let you go, anyway. There are good things ahead for you.”

Galan patted her hand in return, not able to meet her gaze as he left.

Later that night, Galan disguised himself as a horned owl and entered into the human realm. He whispered to the Winds to steer him where he wished, and they pushed him into the outskirts of the nearest village, which was notorious for being especially vile.

Men and women spilled out of taverns spewing obscenities and cursed the gods. Vomit, waste, and either wine or blood trickled through the rat infested streets.

Any of these people would be willing to kill a god, it appears, Galan whispered to the Winds. *Why are you taking me any farther?*

The Winds quickened, sending him deeper into the wretched alleyways of the village until they released Galan at the entrance of a gutted brothel. He shed his owl body for that of a man just in time to catch a small set of eyes staring at him in the darkness.

A young blonde boy, no older than six years Galan assumed, stared at him in frozen wonder having witnessed his transformation from bird to man. At least one human in this village still revered the gods.

If no god will kill me, Galan thought, *then I will train the man who will.*

The boy had no family, no friends, and no hope for a future in a village like that, but a human had never dwelled in the realm of the gods before. However, Galan's forests rarely received visitors anymore. This human boy had the opportunity to live amongst the river and forest nymphs and animals without ever worrying about seeking out food or shelter again. Galan told the boy that he was the chosen hero of the forest god, and that he now had a home. And that one day, he would be called upon to kill a god.

Galan knew that his motives were selfish, and that there were plenty of humans and nymphs who would not think twice about killing a god. In fact, some would froth at the mouth for a chance to do so, he was sure. However, the other gods in the realm would never allow Galan to openly inquire about such a request. Some gods would be concerned for him, but the greater concern would be planting the idea in the minds of humans that they *could* kill a god.

So he trained the boy in secrecy. He named him Terran, after a fawn that was born in the spring with the same yellow hair as the boy. Galan tried to instill a sense of coldness into the boy early on so that when the time came he would not hesitate to draw his blade. However, Terran had a natural empathetic nature about him. After weapons training, the boy would ask for grain to feed the deer and waterfowl.

Galan should not have been surprised at his failure to turn the boy into an unfeeling soldier. He possessed the same empathetic soul, but it had been centuries since the last time he remembered he had one at all.

During breakfast on the morning of Terran's twelfth birthday, the boy placed his spoon on the table and said, "Galan, where is your wife?"

Galan stared at the boy.

Terran stood and walked to the fireplace mantle and traced the carved grooves of an inscription as he read it aloud:

"For Ophelia, she who warms this home."

Galan turned away from him and left the cabin without a word.

On Terran's nineteenth birthday, he was triumphing over any woodland or water nymph in a spar and could split a bullseye arrow while riding horseback. He had grown into a man of over six feet tall, with hair the color of an autumn wheat field, and warm brown eyes that betrayed the kindness within his soul. His affinity for animals made him a favorite amongst the forest dwellers who often followed him to and from his training.

Galan watched Terran from the cabin window as the boy wrestled with a grizzly bear named Yarly. The boy still used care while they played, as if he could actually inflict injury on the bear twice his body weight. Galan ran a hand over his face.

Yarly and Terran disbanded when he caught sight of Galan watching from the window. He smiled up at him and jogged toward the cabin. Galan descended the stairs to meet him by the hearth.

Terran was guzzling water when Galan entered the room and silently sat on the stone hearth. His eyes did not meet Terran's as the boy coughed out fits of laughter.

"Yarly says that you are the best wrestler in all of the god realm and have never been defeated."

His eyes darted to Galan and he assumed a crouching stance.

"I say she lies. Come on old man, let us crown a new champion."

Terran approached Galan, still crouching, and began swatting at the god, egging him for a match. Galan did not return Terran's joy.

Terran straightened and let the sound of his laughter fade.

"What is it?" He wiped his face and sat beside Galan on the hearth. He was staring at the older man with concern now.

Galan turned to the boy, a young man now, and said quietly, "The day has come. The day you have been training for since I brought you here."

Terran immediately stood and began pacing before Galan. Punching his own palm and shouting.

"Oh, Galan, I was hoping it would be today! I feel it in my blood that I am ready. Even as a child I knew I would be ready for this day, to protect this place. Our home. Our animals, land, our friends. You. Me. This is our home, and the only way I can think of ever repaying you is to defeat this god. I only wish to honor you."

Terran bent his knee before Galan and bowed his head deeply. He gripped the hand of the man who trained him, sheltered him, raised him, and looked up to meet his eyes.

"Tell me Galan, who am I to kill?"

Terran was taken aback by Galan's stricken face, before he quickly cleared it away into an empty slate. Galan placed his own hand on top of Terran's and squeezed.

"Me," he said flatly. "You will be killing me today. And there will be no fight, I'm afraid. I have been waiting for this day for a long time."

Except the last sentence was no longer true. Not at all. And that realization tasted like poison on his tongue and a stab to his heart, because it felt like a betrayal to Ophelia. Now, looking into Terran's horrified expression, he felt like he had betrayed everyone.

Terran's mouth snapped shut, then opened again as he viciously gripped the old god's hands.

"Do not ever make such a jest again."

"There is no jest."

Terran released Galan's hands and lept from the floor. He began pacing once more.

"Me, kill you? YOU have just killed ME."

"Terran, I -"

"No. How dare you? How dare you raise me with such kindness and compassion and love and then expect me to betray you in this way?"

Galan flinched.

"Do you think I do not know the kind of god you are? The kind of god who has such love in his heart for all around him? The love for his late wife, Ophelia? The deer and fowl have told me tales of the great love you two shared. The otters and the tortoise told me how she was

taken from these woods and murdered, and how you have been left a hollow shell ever since. But the sparrows, the sparrows told me that you have changed. Me being here has changed you. Why do you think I have trained so hard my entire life to kill someone on your behalf, when I have no wish to hurt even a worm? I have made peace with the idea of killing a god if it meant that I was protecting *you*, Father.”

Galan’s heart splintered at the title of *Father*. His head remained lowered when he replied.

“When Ophelia was taken from me, I had no will to live. For centuries I tried to just wither away. I eventually pleaded with the goddess of death to take me early. She would not. It was then I sought the help of the Winds to help me find a hero to help me....cross over to my Ophelia. They took me to you, Terran. I decided to raise you here as my own chosen hero because I, foolishly, thought you would grow into any ordinary man with an insatiable desire to kill a god. I was wrong.”

Terran sat beside Galan and clutched his hand. God and man looked at each other.

“I am no god killer,” Terran said.

“No, you are not,” Galan said with tears in his eyes.

“You are my son.”

The goddess of death stood before her loom and pondered the life threads before her. Each thread represented a human life. She gingerly ran her fingers across the taut threads, searching.

Ah, found you. She gently ran a finger along one particular thread.

She saw the future of Terran before her. He would fall in love with a woodland nymph and have many children. His children’s children would live in the same cabin with the engraved fireplace mantle. And, when the Fates come to take Galan in his old age, Terran would inherit the title of god of the forests and gain immortality.

She smiled to herself and closed her eyes. She sent this vision into the dream realm for Galan to see that night. *A gift for you, my dearest friend.*