

Ten years. Ten *years* of this bullshit. Of being handed back and forth between Cyric and Kharōn and forced to do their bidding, humor their whims, stroke their egos, grovel in the dirt for forgiveness at the slightest mistake...

But it had gotten easier with time. The bruises to his ego never went away but Feyran was able to ignore them, at least. Every now and then the occasional wince is drawn out, but as Cyric's influence expanded, the god had more to devote his attention to than just watching Feyran's every move and monitoring his every last thought. He's had peace and privacy - not much, but some. Kharōn is clingy in his own way, and his general attitude and personality only ever get worse the more Cyric's power grows.

Still, Feyran bears it silently. Cyric takes his silence and cooperative attitude as obedience. He assumes his Chosen has surrendered to his fate, as he should. His soul is securely in the claws of the God of Lies, after all. The best course of action he has is to behave himself and hope for whatever mercy Cyric is capable of when he dies. There's no point in fighting when escape is impossible.

And now things are coming to a head - not only has Cyric's Church grown, but Kharōn has continued to smuggle him souls. Cyric has gotten more powerful, and thus his boons have become more useful and longer lasting. And considering the mission he's about to be sent on, he will need every bit of help he can get.

Feyran waits in silence next to the Shattered Throne for Kharōn to arrive, so Cyric can finally reveal his grand plan to the Ferryman.

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The deity was distracted. He had always been easy to distract and after a decade he hadn't changed this habit. Right now? He was still in the Material Plane resting on top of a tree as he observed a group of new adventurers. They talked, they planned, they held hands... Almost absently he caressed the back of his cold, pale fingers. Kharōn was familiar with the gesture and

brought melancholy to his mind whenever he saw others enjoying the simple contact of hands.

He used to hold the hand of Lords of the Dead when they ascended. Always proud of his masters. Also when reassuring mortal-borne gods that everything would be alright, that they were doing a good job -he blatantly lied sometimes-. The Ferryman breathed in, memories of Kelemvor flooding him. His current master who went from a saddened human who endured betrayal, to a cold god. *Merciful. Ruthless. Like Death. And like him*, the lesser deity liked to think.

The sun was setting. Blue eyes darted again towards the group of adventurers. Gone now. He had lost his focus for hours. How many hours? Why was he there in the first place? He was supposed to be at the Shattered Castle! And now he remembered the present, instead of the past. Ten long years stealing souls, accompanying that mortal. Chosen, blessed and cursed. All in the name of his own ascension from lesser to greater deity. Kharōn would love to think he had managed to understand him. And sometimes when “agape” decided to show up, to bring him comfort before his ego and whimsical nature attacked him. *His Feyran*. His, because mortals were property. As the thoughts of the ten long years became like whirlwinds in his brain, his body and soul drifted towards the Lower Planes, and from there to the Shattered Castle. The howling winds were worse than ever and his ears suffered from hearing what sounded like a symphony of laments and screams. No wonder, this layer was told to drive visitors mad if they stayed too long. Despite it, Kharōn thought it was always worth going there, just to enjoy the presence of his old master Cyric. Especially when they were allied for this plot, towards ascension. It was a mutual benefit, right?

Managing to reach the place, Kharōn first searched for...

“Feyran.” He immediately purred, landing next to him as soon as his gaze found the mortal. “Will this be a glorious day? Or just a speech of my beloved Dark Sun?”

His wings fluttered in anticipation. If he ignored the winds, he quickly could relax in the Chosen's presence.

Feyran doesn't answer, and this is the correct choice, as moments later Cyric appears in a plume of purple fire.

"You would ask the mortal to speak of the plans of the divine?" Cyric scoffs, but his mood is not terrible. Ever since his power had started to grow again, his temperament was less constantly 'pissed', and he even had moments of...not quite *happiness*, but he was more often pleased. The closer the day came to restoring his glory, the more agreeable he became towards Kharōn. There were more compliments, more praise, more casual conversation. He would even let Kharōn babble to him for hours without complaint.

Only Feyran was subjected to the worse moods, these days - usually out of Kharōn's sight, but not always.

"We're on the brink of true ascension, Kharōn." Cyric says, and his tone and expression are frightening - he's fit to burst with the glee and anticipation of glory and power. "All we require is a simple theft, a spell, a trap, and a subsequent murder. Then we ascend."

Feyran continues to say nothing, keeping his head down and his arms folded behind his back. Divine affairs are not his to speak upon. He will wait and listen until he is addressed.

The Lesser Deity was about to insist on Feyran answering him but his words were interrupted by His presence. Changing his focus completely towards his old master, Kharōn offered, once more, his hand. Out of habit with other Gods. Although he never expected this gesture to be reciprocated. Maybe in their future ascension, he liked to think.

“Is that so, Dark Sun? If true ascension is within our grasp, let’s hear the plan.” It sounded exciting to him. Finally, after millennia and millennia of being bound to the river, to his mission as *only the Ferryman*.

However, Kharōn’s attention sometimes drifted towards Feyran. What if his mission ended and he was to be disposed of? Some Gods did exactly that. Maybe it was not the case, but it’d be a pity. The mortal hadn’t even “*lived*”.

“Although... I so wish that your Chosen could be given a great reward... So many years of service. So obedient, so nice in front of my presence.” By his smile, Kharōn was saying the truth, that he really thought the mortal here deserved something in exchange for serving them. More than the death’s deity little gifts. “Hm, I’m sorry, I didn’t want to interrupt. Please, tell us.”

“There is an aasimar.” Cyric explains, not acknowledging the remark. “He is in possession of a dagger. One designed to drain the magical energy from wizards and other magic casters. I’ve developed an enchantment to place upon it, to enhance its power. It will become powerful enough to drain not just mages, but the power of gods themselves.” He steeples his skeletal fingers together. “We are going to trap minor deities, kill them and take their power for ourselves.”

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Kharōn remained silent as Cyric explained his plan and route of action. Tricking a minor deity into falling into a trap, was what sounded most difficult of all those steps to him. Not even killing a celestial. But he wasn’t lacking confidence. No, he was overconfident. Slowly blinking his blue eyes, he hovered around the other’s god body for a moment.

“An aasimar. A dagger. A lesser Deity.” He recited, almost purring. A sound he made when he was content or even excited. Like at this very moment. “It shall be done, my Dark Sun. I

cannot wait for our Ascension, for the moment the others shall tremble. When we reclaim what we have always deserved!"

"This has been a long time coming." Cyric hisses, pacing as he strides back and forth. "You must go and retrieve the dagger. Now."

"Master the duplicate-" Feyran forces himself to speak up, and immediately finds his throat in Cyric's claws, gasping for air.

Cyric looks as though he's genuinely contemplating killing him, but at the last second his expression relaxes and he drops the half-elf to the ground. "Ah. Yes. Another step of the plan...in order to keep the aasimar from potentially alerting his wretched father to the theft of the weapon, drawing divine attention to ourselves, I had Feyran make arrangements to have a duplicate made. You will acquire this duplicate from where it has been forged, and then make the switch before bringing the weapon here. My Chosen knows where to take you."

-Brows furrowing, the death's deity gaze turning to worry for just one second. And in the span of that second he moved from his old master's side to be next to Feyran, crouching down. Cold hand caressing his neck in a gentleness so different from the choking grasp he suffered from his god.

Maybe around the seventh year or the eighth traveling with the Chosen, Kharōn had come to understand these gestures were not perceived as blessings. That the punishments didn't elicit honest "*thank yous*". That deep down there was no love for the deity or deities that behaved like this. Fear, rage, however were present.

"Ah... It's okay. A copy, to replace the stolen dagger. You are ever so smart, my Dark Sun!" He turned to face Cyric, smiling. Fake smile. "We will depart as soon as the mortal recovers his breath."

And so he sighed. Concern that flooded him for a second started to be pushed away again. Replacing it with excitement.

“I’m fine.” Feyran gets to his feet, dusting himself off. “Let’s go. Our first destination is in Waterdeep.”

Cyric retreats to his throne, sitting back and drumming his fingers on the arm. “I will have everything ready upon your return.”

Just a brief nod. Nothing else to discuss until their return. Gaze shifting again to face the Chosen, Kharōn offered him his hand. In this case, he expected Feyran to take it..No choice given, as they should planeshift.

“Where should I take us? Let me know and we’re on our way.”

Contradictory nature showing in him. The order, spelled in a way it sounded like a question, and almost a request, even with a soft voice accompanying it.

“The east outskirts of the city. Close to the docks. I can lead us from there.”

“Then we shall depart, my *Hamartia*.” As Kharōn said that, he specified in his own mind the destination. The pull was immediate, taking them both there. “And now here, you shall guide us; this deity will follow.”

“You need to be subtle.” Feyran’s voice is low. “You must pretend to be a mortal of no consequence. We do not want to draw any attention to ourselves or what we are. It could jeopardize everything. Can I count on you to do this?”

That caused the deity to snicker. He always failed at pretending to be mortal, unable to understand the reactions of those around him, even when told. Yet, he nodded.

“I will try, one more time. But you know how upset I could become if I fail again.”

He should know, right? This mortal should understand him, despite being just that. He glamourised himself, appearing as a gray-skinned tiefling. Not hovering, walking.

“Ready.”

“If you leave the talking to me it will be simple. But the aasimar might sense the divine about you. You will have to resist his flattery. Claim to be a cleric with a strong connection to your patron. Something.” Feyran approached the door to the shop. “Think on this while you wait out here. Plan your lie. And remember that your ascension depends on this.”

And Feyran disappears inside the building to acquire the duplicate.

He couldn’t protest against the decision of waiting outside. Kharōn would try to follow such advice, trying to remember how clerics of other deities behaved as he waited. It was easy, when he thought about it. But in the practice, he knew he’d forget again how to be a mortal. Pondering, he thought of Feyran. Ten years. But was he a good example of a mortal?

So he had to turn his head towards the people walking by. Again to observe. Hopefully this time he’d understand something. Or not. Something akin to anxiety at not being able to

fulfill this task made him open the door of the building, quickly looking for the half-elf. At least, he was walking and not floating. Trying to fake his nature.

Feyran is just finishing up his transaction with the person behind the counter. He's handed not one but two copies of the dagger they're about to steal, one of which he tucks away under his shirt before turning to the exit.

He freezes for just a moment when he sees Kharōn. "...grew impatient?" He guesses, voice as nonchalant as possible.

He gives a quick nod. His eyes were distracted by some of the decorations of the shop, and he didn't notice anything.

"Yes..." Kharōn decided to confirm his words, voice weak and lacking his usual confidence, as if the previous gesture wasn't enough. The deity's gaze darted towards any person who entered the place. The urges at just hovering away or making his presence known with his aura were gnawing at him.

"This is not working, the facade is fated to fail... You know I trust you more than anyone at this point, right? Could you help me before going for our prey?"

Feyran relaxes when Kharōn does not question the extra duplicate and approaches swiftly, putting a hand on his shoulder and guiding him out of the shop, down an empty street. "What do you require."

"Being so close to our ascension, I feel my performance will be *lacking*. You know how hard I try to understand you and your kind, right?" He asked, with a frown that pointed at mild frustration. Yet the touch on his shoulder was welcoming. Almost comforting. "Could you give me a last day, you having free will, so I observe? My last attempt at learning."

Internally, he blamed three out of his four masters for this. He was born divine, but three masters were completely devoid of emotions, making him even more detached from reality.

“Only if time allows. It can be half a day, too.”

Feyran’s brow furrows and he shakes his head. “We are expected back within the *hour*. We don’t have time for such a thing. And it’s not even *my* call to make. You often seem to forget that you are not the one who owns me or commands me, Kharōn. Cyric is waiting. You can’t fail him now for a moment of sentiment.”

“Did my Dark Sun give only one hour?” Exciting, actually. Dreadful, too. Especially for one fear Kharōn had ingrained in his being. “What if you become useless after we ascend? And we end your life? Aren’t you nervous? Or happy to see us succeed?”

That, he would not admit, was his fear. His possibility of being close to a mortal; completely gone. Even under the prospects of his ambition being fulfilled. But as the deity smiled and started to walk, he tried to put it aside.

“You are right. I have no say. Even in what he’ll do with you afterwards. But I will try my best this hour to look like a cleric of Kelemvor. Even if I still feel unprepared.”

Feyran finds it amusing in a twisted way that Kharōn doesn’t actually wait to hear his response to any of those questions. Because Feyran’s thoughts and feelings don’t *truly* matter after all, no matter what Kharōn has convinced himself. If Cyric told Kharōn he would need to

kill Feyran over and over in order to ascend, the god would still do it - just lament how hard it was for him the whole time.

Or that was Feyran's assumption, at any rate.

He resists the urge to roll his eyes. "You will not need to speak to anyone. I will distract the aasimar with conversation and questions while you locate the blade and switch it out with this." Feyran hands Kharōn one of the duplicates. "Then our job will be done."

He didn't even need to speak... Just try to look sufficiently mortal and replace the dagger. Kharōn gently grabbed the duplicate from Feyran's hands, his blue eyes examining it. The real one was waiting to be stolen, waiting to spill divine blood over its blade. He hid it in one of the pockets of his robe.

And thus, the deity's smile widened. He just followed the half-elf's steps, feeling his feet light as feathers.

Before arriving, though, Kharōn quickly quickened his pace. Just to walk next to him.

His eyes narrowed, as he looked around. Presence of a celestial, presence of the aura of an aasimar nearby. He tensed up, trying to not react to it.

"Feyran, you'll tell me later your answer to my question... But know that I don't want these ten years to end, if that makes sense."

Kharōn lowered his head, one step back. His tiefling appearance was good enough for this task.

Feyran closes his eyes. “I am honored you found such pleasure in my insignificant company.” He knows he needs to humor Kharōn, but he is impatient and anxious to continue their quest. It is a fine line to tread.

“More than a pleasure. I’ve been happy at times. I hope you too have enjoyed, at least the seconds of free will where I allowed you to speak your mind.”

Tilting his head, the smile of ambition faded for a moment. Replaced by another kind of smile, more genuine. That fleeting moment was unimportant. Both because Feyran can’t see it, being ahead. And because it was finally time to get the job done.

So he stood there, waiting. The deity knew perfectly what he had to do. And reminded himself what he couldn’t do.

Feyran kept the aasimar occupied easily. It only took one question to make the curator ramble on for several minutes at a time, and it was a simple matter to keep his attention on explaining to Feyran every detail about the various artifacts at the front of the museum.

The dagger was in the back, in his private collection. Too dangerous to let the public be aware of it, was likely the reason. This hadn’t stopped Feyran from discovering its existence but he was exceptionally good at learning secrets. Normally he was also exceptionally good at stealing things, but an aasimar’s security system was nothing to sneeze at. It would take a god to get past the various alarms and barriers protecting the weapon.

But that was what Kharōn was for.

The conversation he keeps up with the half-god keeps him distracted and fixated on Feyran, giving Kharōn more than enough time to make the switch. After almost an hour he bows and takes his leave of the museum, stepping outside and walking a few blocks before stopping somewhere secluded and waiting for Kharōn to appear - and hopefully to announce that he had succeeded.

Before proceeding to make the switch, Kharōn had enough time to take a quick glance at the aasimar. Curious. He kept his low profile while he looked around the place until finding the door leading to the private collection of the Curator. How this place reminded him of his vault, he felt tempted to stay and check everything. But the dagger was awaiting him behind traps and such wards.

But getting past them proved to be easier than expected due to his sight. Detecting and avoiding most traps, except the barriers which he wouldn't dare to deactivate to not raise the alarm. The deity hovered to dodge it and there it was! Looking the same as the duplicate, Kharōn took the relic and left the fake one in its place.

And then, job done, he immediately went towards Feyran who waited for him outside this museum, gracing him with a smirk of renewed confidence.

"My disguise as a mortal did not fail... The dagger is *ours*, inside the left pocket of my robes."

Feyran has a bit of sweat on his temple as he holds out his hand, speaking with a calm voice. "May I see it? You will be the one to deliver it still to my master's hand, but..."

"I understand. You are curious to see and touch this tool for our plan." His hands were gentle when showing it and handing it over to Feyran, believing his assumption about curiosity driving the mortal. "Of course, I cannot wait to return to the Supreme Throne."

A long, dreamy sigh.

Delicately, Feyran takes the blade in his hands. His eyes run over the ornate carvings, feeling the way the powerful magic hums in his palms. "...incredible..." He murmurs. "And beautiful..."

"It is, it is! If I had known of this precious dagger before, I would have given it as a gift to you. Can you imagine?" Kharōn was feeling so compelled to move, impatience starting to build up. "Maybe when we're done, if you end up alive, I'll shower you with gifts. But let's go now, please?"

Feyran stares at the dagger for a few more seconds, gaze intense. Then he closes his eyes, and hands it back. "Yes. The master awaits. At your leisure, Ferryman."

After securing the weapon inside his pocket again, the ferryman would not even wait. With eyes sparkling vividly, his cold hands grabbed Feyran's, as he crossed planes. Again to hear the howling, frenzied winds, and to see the prison of the Mad God. In the lesser deity's mind, every other concern was replaced with his desire.

"And here we are!" How he purred in happiness, letting go of the half-elf's hands. Back to the other deity, with more enthusiasm than his very Chosen.

Feyran did trail behind, arms folded in front of him and chin kept low. He keeps his mind and mouth both quiet. He's done all that Cyric has asked of him. So, as is expected, when they both approach the throne, only Kharōn is recognized.

Cyric sits up, sockets burning with impatience. "Do you have it? Give it to me. *Now.*"

"Yes, yes. You are welcome, my beloved, magnificent Dark Sun."

Flattery that never ceased, and the knowledge that he wouldn't be thanked. Not that he

minded it. Why should he? If emotions, as he understood them, divine, overflowed at this moment.

However, there were concerns at the dawn of their ascension. He didn't know if Cyric would heed them.

"Your Chosen. What will be his fate after we're done? And how will we lure a lesser deity here?"

Cyric snatches the dagger from him, examining it and giving a greedy, exhilarated chuckle. He doesn't take his gaze off of the blade. "I will lure the lesser deity here. You should know by now to leave the complicated scheming to me, Kharōn. If you were clever enough to be involved in such things you would have ascended on your own long ago."

It takes several seconds for him to even register the other part of the question. "If he did his job *right* then he will continue to live, and be gifted with the honor of continuing to serve me."

Feyran's sigh is silent, but heavy and resigned.

"I am clever when I desire..." An almost silent protest to those words.

But at least, he confided that the mortal would be spared. In his opinion he did a good job. Today, and all these years. So he looked at Feyran and smiled proudly. Confident that this half-elf would live.

Didn't he want to ask him a question, before they went to steal the dagger? Again, Kharōn forgot, but there was a lingering feeling. He promised to ask something; he wanted to know an answer from Feyran. "Are you nervous? Are you happy for us?" he muttered, unsure those were the questions.

Attention back to their scheme, the deity crossed his arms, impatiently waiting for more instructions.

“All that remains...” Cyric holds out his hands, and the knife floats between his fingers. He mutters an incantation, fingers and palms glowing with dark magic as forbidden energies swirl and circle the blade, empowering it from mage killer to godkiller. The aura radiating from it is pure malice and doom, spelling a definite end to almost any deity it impales. “Finally...” Cyric whispers, grin stretching across his skeletal face. “Can you feel it? Can you just *taste* it? My ascension, so close at hand...”

The ferryman struggled to not correct him. “Our” ascension.

Dark tendrils of magic essence flying around. Kharōn rarely saw magic so corrupt nowadays, not within the pantheon. And that dagger... With the power to extinguish divinity. His cold breath almost was labored, and it was out of sheer emotion. Everything surrounding him was just fading away, blackened. Only the image of the dagger, the tool of ascension, mattered.

“Of course we feel it. Even *taste* it, yes.” His left hand trembled. The one he used when someone ascended. But this time he had it close to his own heart.

Cyric chuckles. “Yes. As you should.” Cyric places the dagger into his belt. “This way. I will show you the trap we will be using. You must know how to activate it when our quarry comes.”

“Yes, I am waiting for your instructions and command. That’s the very last step so we complete our grand plan. You and I.” He paused, looking at the Chosen for a brief second. “And Feyran... Yes, tell me what to do.”

“First, you will need to walk upon the ground. Or you will not be able to activate the trap

I have placed into the floor of my realm. I know it is not how you prefer to traverse but you must suffer this temporary indignance in order to achieve our glorious future, hm?”

Cyric gestures at a series of runes on the floor, carved in a circle. They are glowing just slightly. Feyran follows closely behind them both, keeping completely silent.

The mad god ignores him entirely, perhaps not even noticing him there. “That is where you will stand - from there you will be able to magically activate the hidden trap a few yards away while I lure the foolish god into it. Shall we practice?”

Runes, walking... Uncomfortable to him.

“Is it necessary that I do it? Feyran could be the one to do this in case something goes wrong. Although I doubt we will fail now...”

Kharōn thought again about what he just said. If something went wrong with the trap, maybe this mortal would die. Did he want that possibility? No. “Forget it. It’s right. As a god I should be the one triggering this trap.”

Descending to the ground, he followed the runes, trying to read them, to feel their energy still dormant. The deity stood in the middle as instructed. It should be easy.

“What now?”

Cyric smiles. “Now, you fulfill your purpose.”

He snaps his fingers, and the sound resonates, echoing around the throne room before the sound fades out.

Except for Kharōn.

To Kharōn, it only grows louder, and louder, until it feels as though it’s bouncing around the inside of his skull with enough force to break it apart from the inside. The vibrations it sends

through his body feel like a million insects crawling through his skin and weaving between his bones and muscle. The way their legs scrape against their carapace start to sound like whispers, telling Kharōn *he's a god, he's ascended, he's nothing, he's dirt, his skin is melting off, his eyes are on fire, his blood is freezing and bursting out of his skin as snow...*

Madness. Delivered directly by the Mad God himself.

Crippling enough to bring a deity to their knees.

This took him by surprise. He should have known better and yet never expected his mind to be affected. The throbbing headache was followed by sensory hallucinations. On his cold skin which burned, his eyes which saw things that weren't there. He even heard the howling winds whispering loud and clear. The voices made sense because he ascended and yet was nothing at the same time. Being such a greater deity meant he understood the winds. No, it couldn't be this surreal.

A part of the psyche trying to fight and not managing to do it, against the other that was perceiving a fake, fake and twisted reality.

"D-dark Sun..." He managed to say, kneeling down in fear he'd fall down, that his own shadow would attack him" Everything... Everything's shaking! Is this normal? Is our ascension this powerful?"

Conscious and lost at the same time. Kharōn felt as if he was submerged in a very confusing world. "Or is it a sweet, painful lie? What is happening?"

Somewhere through all the chaos, Cyric is laughing. Chains made of a magic that was painfully familiar erupted from the ground and seized Kharōn in their clutches, binding him to

them. The energy woven into the metal was forged out of the blades of daggers that Kharōn had blessed, and now they were serving as his prison, holding him tight and digging into his flesh.

“Finally...I’ve endured your *insufferable* presence for far too long! Your pitiful offerings of souls barely made it worthwhile to keep you around. The toll I had to pay, pretending to *care* about you, pretending to see you as an *equal*. But you’re beneath me! *You’re all beneath me!* But fret not...*ahahahah!* Soon you will serve an actual purpose...”

Cyric draws the dagger strapped to his side, and Feyran tenses, just slightly, watching with intense eyes.

“I will kill you, absorb the power of the ferryman...and your unfettered access to the souls of the dead will be *mine* for the taking. Not only will my own power grow but I will *cut off* the wellspring of power for the rest of the Pantheon! They will crumble beneath me as I rise ever higher, unstoppable, and I will make them *bow and grovel and plead for their worthless lives before obliterating them all to dust!*” His fiery sockets are manic with the glee of a long brewing desire for absolute domination finally being brought to fruition. The dream of a madman, obsessed with himself and deluded with the belief that he was the greatest, were approaching the borders of reality.

It didn’t make any sense. To the deity, it barely made sense. Why would he kill him, if they were ascended? A low hiss left his throat. What felt like chains looked like claws and severed hands holding him down.

“What do you mean!? Do not touch my portfolio nor domain!” He could, finally, fully understand the meaning behind the speech. Not that his sanity had returned.

And that made his fear double, his heart raced. With all those hands clawing at his skin

and fire making his vision blurry Kharōn was in a very, very dangerous place. No matter if he tried to wriggle free of the chains, he only screamed at the stings of pain inside his head. “You cannot... you cannot betray **ME!** I was your very, your **only** loyal ally!”

Yes. Cyric could do this. And he was warned a decade ago. Where was... he? Hamartia, Feyran. He helped for all of this to happen, he betrayed him, when the half-elf hated betrayal itself? Now both his mind and heart were falling apart. And no, he didn’t understand why, adding to the chaos whirling around him.

“Do not dare... *Do not dare...*” And then the begging started.

“Finally...” Cyric sings again, raising the dagger and pulling Kharōn’s head back by the hair, leaving his chest open and unguarded. “Mine...*mine all mine!*”

The dagger drives down, piercing the deity’s chest - a fatal blow, for a mortal, but not for a divine. However the forbidden enchantment of the blade would do the rest of the work, crawling through the very fabric of Kharōn’s being and unraveling him, absorbing his divinity through the dagger and giving it all to Cyric.

“Yes...yes...!” Cyric’s grip on the hilt tightened in expectation, eyes blazing.

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Nothing happens.

“WHAT?!”

Cyric jerks the blade back out and stares at it - the enchantment he had just empowered is gone. There's no magic at all. It's a fake. His mind is visibly racing...

He turns his glare to Feyran. **“You!”**

Feyran's breath catches and he takes a step back. “I-”

“You ***brought me a fake!*** Only the real blade would have been able to carry such a strong enchantment! That damn aasimar...he must have been tipped off somehow...he must have known...” Cyric hisses, stalking towards Feyran. “And you *fell for it!* You useless little fool! How could you not have seen it was a fake?!” He grabs the half-elf by the hair before he can try to run, forcing him to his knees and yanking his head back as he kneels over him, practically screaming in his face. **“Once again you have ruined EVERYTHING!”**

“Leave my ascension alone, Dark Sun!” He yelled, chains rattling. In his delusion he still thought it had been done, just to be betrayed. His power stolen. All the agony Kharōn could feel was worse due to madness and due to the fog covering his brain.

The blade of that damned dagger appeared in the middle of his vision. Slightly distorted, until pain took him. The hand holding him, the knife inside his chest. His death. It was going to be now... But despite the seconds yelling and writhing of pain, of blackened blood that composed his insides being spilled, the moment did not come. For a moment he thought it was because he was incredibly powerful.

Then Cyric turned to Feyran, screaming in rage. Threatening him? As time went on, the

words again were distant and the speech impossible to understand, but he had a hunch it was not good. “*Were you scared? Were you happy?*” What a moment to remember the questions he had wanted the Chosen to answer with honesty and free will! Ironic. And if he died he wouldn’t be able to answer, ever. Selfish until the end, he needed him to survive.

“Cyric! Leave him alone! Leave him!” The deity growled. Flickering blue flames that quickly were extinguished by the magic binding him.

“I didn’t know-” Feyran begs, voice shaking and eyes wide with fear. His ears are low and drawn back, every inch of him quivering. “Master, please, it was a mistake-”

“***Do you think that MATTERS?!***” Cyric shrieks, pleased by the terror in his Chosen’s eyes but not appeased. Not remotely. “After all I have done for you! The power I have given you! The honor of serving ME! You might have even lived to worship me for the rest of your days! My most trusted servant! The greatest honor a mortal could have ever had! But I was a ***fool*** to think you were competent! To think you were *grateful*! But I see now...”

Feyran’s breath quickens as Cyric’s hand raises the dagger again, its blade already stained with Kharōn’s black blood. “Master-!” He begs. “Please. Please. ***PLEASE!*** I don’t want to die! Let me live! L-let me serve you! I will atone for my error I swear *please!* CYRIC-!”

‘*Closer...*’ Feyran thinks, eyes fixated on the knife in Cyric’s hand as his own palms are clasped together in desperate prayer. ‘*Almost...*’

“There is no longer a place for you at my side, you wretched *disappointment!*”

The dagger comes down, and Feyran screams as the blade is driven into his back, between his shoulders. He chokes, wide eyes staring at the sky and arms dropping to his sides while Cyric continues to hold him up by the hair.

Even if distant to his dulled senses, the sound of flesh pierced was clear. The deity could not control himself, trying to stand up to no avail, growling and hissing.

“Please, don’t... Leave him, I said!! My hamartia... Don’t kill him.”

He didn’t want to see. Kharōn was sure that if he looked and managed to focus his gaze, that rotten soul he came to like so much would fly towards him and cause the deity to confirm its death. For now it wasn’t happening. It wasn’t.

“Look at me!” The god snarls, grabbing his chin and forcing eye contact. “I want to see the life leave your eyes - I want to savor every last moment of fear. Know what awaits you! I will not let your soul have a SECOND of rest! You will spend eternity begging for me to destroy you and I will *not grant it to you!*”

Feyran stares at him and says nothing, feeling blood seeping down his back where the dagger is buried.

And then, as Cyric speaks, his expression suddenly shifts from fearful shock to cold, hollow anger.

Cyric barely notices the change - and by then, it is too late.

“How dare you look at me with-!”

The sound of a dagger piercing Cyric’s skeletal, decaying flesh is sickening. For once, the god is speechless, as his eyes turn down to stare at the dagger lodged into his chest. The weapon hums quietly, its menacing aura making the air thick and hard to breathe.

The godkiller.

Feyran had not brought back a fake.

He had switched the weapons when Cyric was occupied with Kharōn, taking the real one for himself.

And now it was embedded into Cyric's rotten, fetid heart.

His blue eyes widened, fully opened. Should he feel relief? Or terror at seeing a God stabbed, and his essence breaking apart? Slowly the haze was starting to dissipate and very slowly allowing him to see. And Kharōn's thoughts switched to fear and concern. Betrayal and death, in just one day.

Even worse, or better, who knows... A mortal had managed to do this. The pool of his own black blood and the pain were going away along with the insanity. Everything hurts now. Somehow it all hurts when clarity is coming back. Kharōn tugs at the chains still holding him; these still look somewhat distorted, like rotting arms. Sickened by the hallucination, he tries again to free himself. And he can't.

"Dark Sun... Free me from this." He silently calls, eyes darting again to the scene.

Betrayed and still calling for him. He shook his head.

"Feyran? Hamartia. Come here..." His call was different. Not demanding, but worried. Dread clinging to the deity's voice.

"You...little...*rat*...!" Cyric's voice is a hoarse scream as he starts to collapse, grabbing for Feyran's throat. "You cannot do this! I am above all! The one true god! *The greatest of the pantheon* -!"

A scream as the magic takes full root, twisting itself inside of Cyric and pulling him apart, dragging his essence into the weapon as he starts to break apart.

“I. Don't. Care.” Feyran spits, his eyes, which Cyric had grown used to being dead and empty, were bright with hatred and long brewing resentment. “I don't care who you are. Or what you are. The moment you betrayed me, your days were numbered. Did you think you had broken me?! Did you think I was bowing to you?! My knee may have been bent but I have only ever been biding my time.”

“Arrogant *fool*! You'll die too! I've already made sure of it-!” Cyric's myriad of voices start to break apart into nothing but screaming as his face crumbles away.

“I don't care if I die. All that mattered was taking you with me.”

There's one last, enraged burst of magic, one final attempt to break free from the pull of the dagger, before Cyric is consumed by the blade entirely.

The chains holding Kharōn break away, and Feyran braces his hands on the ground, still tightly clutching the god killer. “...finally...” He murmurs weakly. “Finally...finally...”

Gone. The chains, the madness coursing through him. His Dark Sun, too. And Feyran was there. Mentally exhausted, and physically despite being divine, he fell to the ground just to quickly vanish into white moths. He had to flee, to escape that place. Avoid... No. He should not. The white swarm, some tainted of black blood on their wings came near the mortal, Kharōn materializing again. He feared him, and making someone divine fear who is -was- a Chosen was admirable in its own way. No matter how this deity appreciated his former master; to see him killed, slayed, gone... This “hamartia”, this “tragic hero” survived and won the day. Even if his ascension, of course, had been a lie all this time.

“Feyran.” He knelt down, his breath shaky and labored. “You must be exhausted. And you’re bleeding.”

Pointing out the obvious, it was an attempt to make the half-elf look at him.

“Your eyes are beautiful today.” Then he added.

“I’m tired.” Feyran murmurs, giving a wet cough. The pain caused by the dagger still buried in his back is growing numb. “I’m so tired, Kharōn...” His voice is soft, resigned. “After everything...I don’t want to celebrate. I don’t want to dance on his grave. I don’t want to scream to the sky. I just want to...sleep for a bit...”

“You feel this way because you’ve lost too much blood, wait-” He soon realizes he shouldn’t remove the dagger. It would only make it worse.

And Kharōn also realizes he cannot planeshift. He was also exhausted. But this mortal could die at any moment. An outcome he didn’t desire. Not now, not for several decades.

“I’d advise to resist the urge to sleep but I know how this is. Too many times seeing it. Unavoidable.”

Like now. The deity could only manage a weak “Calm Emotions”, to make any feeling go away. To make him feel warmth.

“It’s fine...” Feyran murmurs, coughing as blood starts to pool in his lungs, and spraying drops of the thick red liquid over both of them. “Shit. Sorry. Aha...” He lets his weight rest on Kharōn’s arms, shuddering. “It’s fine...I don’t...mind dying...anymore. He won’t get my soul. The wall isn’t much b..better but...fuck...” He wheezes, opening his eyes and seeing that his vision is dark around the edges. “...h-honestly...? This is more...p-peaceful than I ex..expected to go...”

“Don’t be sorry... Death is *merciful*, did you know? It ends the suffering that life is, and Kelemvor will be fair. Just rest, until my light appears in your darkness to guide you.”

Strange. He was trying to contain something wet inside his eyes. He only cried when Myrkul was killed by Mystra. *Never for a mortal.*

He still needed a little more of his Calm Emotions to work to make him sleep peacefully. Without a god he’ll qualify as faithless. So it wouldn’t be the last time Kharōn would see him. Even if sad, the deity was already imagining himself guiding him to the gray Hades. Jergal reading Feyran’s life. Kelemvor dictating sentence. Myrkul, reduced to quasi-deity, shared this time domain with Jergal, and would also be there.

His gray wings immediately tried to cover him, feathers full of dust trying to bring more comfort.

Feyran had imagined dying in a lot of horrible ways - typically by someone murdering him in a brutal fashion. But Cyric’s dagger had driven home cleanly and he hadn’t had the time to make it a torturous process. The pain is minimal, really, for someone like Feyran who has been through quite enough torture.

There’s no sense of desperation or regret, or any sadness over dying. He’s just tired and ready to sleep.

He coughs again, into his hand this time to catch the blood - but before he can close his eyes, he sees it. The thick, dark red on his palm...it starts to glow.

And turn golden.

“...no.” Feyran’s eyes widen. His slowing heart starts to quicken again, and the flickering light in his eyes catches fire again. His cold flesh heats up, and he rises from his knees to his feet. The sensation of his life leaking out of him and draining away is suddenly reversed, and the surge of energy has him choking. “Shit. Shit, shit shit shit. **No!** Kharōn! Kharōn make it *stop!*”

Make it *stop! I don't want this!*" The half-elf's eyes are wide open and wild with panic, even as his blue irises catch fire and flood his sockets with purple fire.

"What-?" Kharōn was startled by the sudden reaction. This warmth wasn't his poor, weak effect. Much less the golden blood, the divine and clean ichor. Oh, sweet Ao... A portfolio vacant, so the former god was replaced immediately. "Oh no... I am sorry. It won't..."

It won't work. Maybe Kharōn would have loved this outcome, if not for the terror Feyran was experiencing. He removed the dagger from his back, trying to cause a fatal, last blow. But if this was Ao's will... It would not work. The portfolio of lies belonged to a Greater Deity. He wouldn't die.

"GAH!" Feyran clutches his temples as the surge of energy is joined by...something else.

Knowledge? Information? Something...

Things started to make sense without being explained - this realm, how Cyric's powers had worked - and worse, there was the sound of *prayer*. Whispers in the back of his mind that, in time, would be easily ignored or heard without requiring much if any concentration...

He felt...more detached from his body. He felt *bigger*. He had hands reaching down into the mortal realm wherever the church was, ears wherever Cyric's followers whispered their mad, greedy prayers, eyes wherever the priests had erected his banners.

It's all so much...and yet so much makes sense. The reason why gods never cared, Feyran had always known, was because they were too big and too powerful to spare energy to most individuals. But now he really *understood*. A million, billion tiny little *ants* with their demands and outlandish dreams and delusions of importance when they were all. So. *Small*.

Feyran sinks to one knee, staring at the ground in silence for several seconds as he takes it all in - the new mantle of divinity and all the power, all the knowledge and understanding and responsibility that came with it...

“...this is *bullshit*.”

Very few times Kharōn had seen this firsthand. Mortals ascending immediately. During the Times of Troubles, Ao had a speech with them. After the Spellplague, the rules were changed. Less intervention, but more confusing.

He waited silently, dagger in his hand. He quickly threw it to the ground as soon as he noticed its presence stained with blood. And he waited until hearing that word before trying to even speak.

“Feyran... You don’t need me to explain what happened.” He paused. “But I am truly sorry.”

Almost all mortal-born deities lose their humanity. He’d be the same, right? Blue eyes looked away from the scene as if avoiding the new reality.

“Ao’s will.”

The half-elf looks around.

The Shattered Throne looks the same, for now. Still maddening. Still nonsensical in its structure. But it was a reflection of Cyric. He had no longer been the god of madness, but he was still the Mad God. What would this place become, now that its former master was gone?

“...” Feyran takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. He takes the dagger he had used to kill Cyric (the enchantment making it capable of killing deities was used up and expired) and put it into his belt. “...I’ll have my fit later. For now...”

He opens his eyes again, and they fixate on the Ferryman. *"We need to talk."*

Unlikely to see in the ferryman, he flinched at those words, even hissed defensively. Feyran, with this portfolio, classified as a Greater Deity and after ten years of enduring his whims... Yes, he was fearful. He started to fear the consequences of past actions against the mortal that was now gone.

"Speak, Hamartia... I shall listen to every word."

There's a brief flicker of satisfaction at Kharōn's obvious fear, but Feyran ignores it for now. There's more important things to deal with. He holds up a hand, brow furrowing in concentration.

Approach.

A command that echoes throughout the realm, but it is only for specific souls to hear.

After a moment of silence, the wailing monstrosities of souls that Cyric has been siphoning of power and torturing for his amusement shuffle forward. Not all of them, but a good many. They gather in the throne room, leaving a wide, empty circle for Feyran and Kharōn to stand in. Their aura is truly tortured, and gathered together, their cries for mercy and for an end to their suffering are almost unbearable.

How many, Feyran wonders - how many stolen souls were here, brought over the last decade? He can only keep count of the souls in this realm that had pledged themselves to Cyric. The rest are not his.

His gaze scans the crowd for a few moments, before he waves a hand, and their screaming dies to whimpering. He needs Kharōn to be able to hear him.

“Ferryman. What is your charge, as a god? What is your role in the Pantheon? Tell me as though I do not know.”

This had been partly his doing all these years. He couldn't ever bear to look at these... these things! Yet looking away was not an option and soon Kharōn just nods to answer.

“My portfolio has been named Transition for twelve thousand years. My domains are the Grave and Death. I serve as Lesser Deity for the Lords of the Death. As for my role? Your question?”

He sighs.

“I guide the souls of the deceased to their afterlife. To their gods, masters or to the Hades for judgment.”

A chill ran down his spine. When he stole these souls, usually faithless, the deity did so without wanting to think if he was damaging the balance the Overgod loved so much, or the consequences to the dead.

“This is a shame upon my job. I am aware. Why did you ask?”

Guiltiness overflows now. It took ten years.

“These souls were entrusted to you. And you *betrayed* them.” Feyran's voice becomes a hiss of anger. “And you traded them like coin for the chance at more power. They have *suffered*. Because you failed them.”

Feyran lets the silence hang for several moments, before speaking again.

“You will return them to where they belong.”

It had to be a joke. The pantheon would know of his deeds and of this plot. It was enough to make his face turn pale and his skin ever colder.

“You can’t be asking this. Keep them to yourself.” Denial at the thought of justice being delivered. And with justice, the ferryman feared a fitting punishment.

And that anger he saw in the newly ascended’s eyes. Was the mortal the same? Or did his personality already change?

It wasn't the moment to think about this.

“I can... remember the gods they belonged to. They’re going to just be so rageful at me. And some of them I have to deliver to master Kelemvor... He’ll ask and I will have to tell everything. Why are you punishing me?”

“This is not punishment. This is cleaning up the mess that you and Cyric made. Punishment would be me allowing these souls to take their own revenge on you for what you did to them. No. If you think that your thefts went unnoticed by Ao, you’re a bigger fool than I thought. You will have to face the consequences of your actions sooner or later. If you refuse to return what you stole and confess your sins, then I will simply do it for you.”

And he was in no place to refuse to obey a command of a greater deity, especially regarding his own portfolio. His blue eyes were focused on the ground, ashamed and not daring to look around. He couldn't bring himself to do it yet.

“My Hamartia... I will do as you ask of me. You are right these souls suffered and I

betrayed them when I should have delivered them to their rightful fates.”

He took a deep breath. After minutes his strength was coming back as he'd be able to planeshift to do his task and face any and every consequence before the other deities.

“Could you just... accompany me to Hades? Please?”

Feyran closes his eyes, considering. “...I will accompany you. But I will not speak on your behalf.”

A wave of his hand, trying to focus to dematerialize all souls. They were in such a lamentable state... And he felt that the fake warmth he always used to calm the deceased didn't even work.

He'd requested going to the Hades so there they'd go first.

Kharōn walked towards Feyran, hands offered for planeshifting. As he always did. He wondered if his skin was still warm. He wondered... And if not for this new task, he'd ask.

“Can you see it?. The gray, dull, boring crystal spire Kelemvor created. Let's go.”

Closing his eyes, he planeshifted them both.