

O Giant

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A small child is the lone survivor of the rapture, and so seeks out his god to ask why he was left behind.

Contains descriptions of mass death, rotting bodies, fungus, and religious trauma/themes.

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*We all go back to dirt.*

His mother's words echoed in his mind.

*No matter how long it takes. In the end, we all go back to dirt.*

His hands brushed the dust which had settled on his mother's face, gently avoiding the open crevasse that the now-burst pustule had left by the edge of her snout.

*We all go to dirt.*

'I didn't go to dirt,' he spoke aloud, though he knew she couldn't hear him. His hand rested on her cheek, then her forehead. 'You're cold, again. They will struggle to take you, if you're cold.'

He tucked her blanket —a mouldy, hole-filled thing so worn the coloured threading had turned white enough it was near see-through— around her, and replaced her arm in its socket as it fell loose.

'There. I'm sure that feels better, now.'

As if in response to his words, a small, creeping brown bloomed in the corner of her closed eyes, and a growth of mucor sprouted to greet him.

The child said nothing, but rose from his knees to his hooves and stepped over the corpse to another; this one much more rotted and eaten by growths of lichen-like fungus.

'What an honour, father, to have been the first taken,' the child said, softly, as he tucked the man in and continued on. 'Thank you for trying to take me with you. I wish you had been able to pass your blessing on to me.'

*Immune.*

He had learnt that word quickly, as the blessing had spread.

*Immune.*

*We all go back to dirt.*

Not him.

He was immune.

An entire realm, taken by something so beautiful.

And *he* was immune.

He made his way from the inside of his house to the outside, his hooves leaving marks in the spore-coated ground as he made his way to the most beautiful thing in their world.

It was a prototaxite. So tall it pieced the clouds like a spear and vanished into the heavens. So wide it took an hour to walk a circle 'round it to find the same

path to exit from.

‘O Giant One, I come with questions,’ the child said, aloud.

There was no answer. Only silence and the hollow sound of the wind through the streets.

No birds.

No bugs.

No people.

Nothing remained but the rot and the child.

And so he sat at the foot of his god, on the old priests’ kneeling rest, and bowed his head ‘til it touched the ground.

Each breath was met with a swirl of the yellow, pollen-like spores that coated the pavement. He breathed them freely, wishing they would grip him as they had the others.

But, alas, he remained without blessing.

The Giant had been unbloomed for so long. Its sudden birthing had been so unexpected it had caused a riot in the streets as the people had scrabbled to inhale its spores and accept its call.

The rapture had been foretold many times by the priests, but none who walked this realm had *truly believed* that it would ever actually come. Especially in their lifetimes.

Not until it bloomed. Until it bit into them, sucking the life from all it dug its roots into.

Animal, insect, plant, person.

The Giant had decided that everything alive was to return to dirt, and had made it so.

And, still, *he* was untouched.

*Immune.*

He looked up at his god, and slowly cocked his head.

‘I will never be dirt,’ he spoke. ‘You have declared it so, O Giant One, and with your terrible mercy, I do not follow the others to your rapture. What have I done, O Giant, for you to scorn me?’

Silence.

‘*Please,*’ the voice of the child was quiet, scarcely a whisper. ‘*Please, O Giant. I cannot have offended you so. I have not walked this realm long enough to possibly be your enemy. Why do you scorn me?*’

Again, silence.

He drove his hands into the yellow, pollen-like spores, and gave a desperate bleat.

‘Swallow me, O Giant!’ he cried, loud enough it echoed the silent streets. ‘Take me to my family! Do not let me grow old alone!’

Nothing.

‘*Fine,*’ a tearful note took to the satyr’s tone as he withdrew his hands from the spores. ‘If you will not make me dirt, if you declare it shall *never* be, then I beg you make it so it shall never be. Do not let me live simply to let me die. Teach me how to walk forever. Tell me how to be what you declare I must be. I do not wish to fail you, O Giant. And if you tell me that I must not die, I beg of you to make me immortal, so I cannot ever disappoint you.’

Still, there was nothing.

So the child turned away, curling to press his face to his knees. His next question came out as nothing more than a squeak. A cry. A confused child's whimper:

*'What do you want from me?'*

A sound, behind the child, and he turned to see a piece of his god fallen to the ground.

Eyes wide, he crawled to it; his touch turning it to dust.

'You're dying,' he realised, aloud, whirling to his god and driving a hand to the hole that had been left by its rotted piece. 'Tell me what to do! Tell me how to help you!'

Black dust burst from where his fist drove into dry fungal flesh, and a pain—like a thousand needles being driven into his mind— suddenly stabbed the child.

A flashing array of images, of *orders*, were projected into the lone survivor of the realm, and he fell back to the ground with a shaking heave and seized as a million years of history was shared with him.

Silence followed his shout, broken only by his shallow breaths as his eyes fluttered open.

He pushed himself up, and shakily took his place back on the priests' kneeling rest.

'I understand, now,' the child bowed his head. 'All truly *does* become dirt, even gods. Rest in peace, O Giant. And I shall create in the image of you, so all the realms may see how beautiful you once were. I will remember you.'

He rose to his feet and opened his hands; coloured spores falling from them and taking to the air as he did. They spun, a rainbow of dust that disappeared to the heavens on the wind.

'I understand, O Giant,' said the child. 'I understand now, why I have been spared. Not for spite; but for honour. I will see your will enacted. I will see your realm remembered. I will create beauty that reflects your own!'

He clasped his hands together, then, and when he opened them apart he found a small, brown shroom grew between his palms.

'This?' he asked, holding it up. 'Is this where I should put my soul?'

A warm wind kissed his cheek, and he closed his eyes.

'So it shall be.'

The process was painful; agonising. But he did it without complaint, tearing his soul in two and placing the smaller part within the mushroom he held.

Heavy breathing followed the effort as he lay on the ground to recover, and spores fell to rest upon his body. The touch of his god was welcomed; and he likened it in his mind to a hand being laid softly over his fur....

A small cluster of mushrooms bloomed from the dust of his god's fallen part, slowly growing to form a circle, and the child's attention was drawn to the movement. He watched as it took shape and glowed, and through its centre the child saw another realm. Blue and green and bright, rather than brown and yellow and dark, it was like the opposite of all he had ever known before.

*Ugly*, he thought. But then he bit his tongue.

'If there is where you want me to be, to there I shall go,' he said, simply, and

rose to his feet again. But then he stopped, his hoof hovering above the portal as he glanced back to his god. 'O Giant?' he asked, softly. 'If I may make one small request, before I go?'

The quiet that met him was patient, and he took that as permission to say what he wished.

'I ask that you name me, O Giant. For I am reborn, and my old name does not serve my new purpose or self. Please. I am a newborn, and you are my mother. You must name me, O Giant.'

The wind blew again, whispering into the child's ears.

*Kordulf, the Creator.*

'As I shall be.'

And he let himself fall forward into the new world.

—END—

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