

Prometheus

Jacob Carson

Zeus became angry, for he thought that Prometheus desired to take his place as ruler over the gods. He sent a vulture to torment him with its beak and talons. It was hard to suffer thus for doing what he had thought was right and good ...

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The deep sanguine of proud avarice bled from the limp national flag. It dripped behind the esteemed congregation of the American upper-class and press.

‘For Mr Julius R Oppenheimer’s critical contribution to the war effort through the development of the atomic bomb, that we would like to congratulate him with the Medal of Honour,’ the suited middle-aged man finished.

A dignified applause emanated from the audience as the president hung a gold medal around the physicist’s frail neck. The sparkling disc hung as an inescapable weight on the tortured man’s soul.

Oppenheimer shook hands with the President. He turned to look at the sea of gathered admirers and frowned. A sudden stab of fear attacked him as he looked down at his crimson hands, dripping with congealed blood.

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And Prometheus determined to help mankind by doing a daring deed.

The abhorrent heat of the New Mexico desert pervaded the physicist's modest office.

Oppenheimer's mind ached with the complexities of the problem that lay in front of him. His hand was numb from hours of investigating.

The solution flirted with the edge of his consciousness as his exhausted brain began to lapse and reality shifted.

The outlines of the brick building around him began to drip as if melting, and the brown leather chair beneath him crumbled to dust.

The deep blue of the free American sky shot through the roof and morphed into a murky cloud of asphyxiation. The steady thrum of overloaded computers was replaced by the blood-curdling screams of men, women, and children.

No longer sitting in his US laboratory, Oppenheimer's throat burned and constricted as he was forcefully guided through a set of desolated suburban streets. The simmering smell of roasted flesh malodorously filthied the surrounding air. Piles of charcoaled bodies burnt beyond any recognition were stacked by the edge of each pathway, being devoured by the surrounding insects. The kanji of a factory's sign lay crushed to a thousand pieces among the indiscernible rubble that indefinitely littered the winding network of streets.

A young girl emerged from the flat skyline and began walking towards Oppenheimer. Her pink dress was torn and black. The smooth lustre of her raven-black long hair had been melted back to her bloodied scalp. Despair and terror began to arrest the physicist as he took in the abominable scene of annihilation that so confronted him.

As the mutilated child was about to pass Oppenheimer, her features began to distort. The shimmer of her straight black hair was replaced with filthy brown curls, and her tanned complexion grew paler. The smoky Japanese sky was abruptly replaced with an almost black rush of tumultuous clouds. Thick sheets of rain gushed from their mouths, the only light provided by a sadistic crack of lightning.

An entirely different scene of misery confronted Oppenheimer. He turned to see the transformed girl join a queue of Jewish people. They stood upon a stretch of land that seemed to drop off near the front of the line. A pain struck the physicist's heart as he watched the girl's uncontrollable sobs rack her ribcage. A gloomy sense of despair hung in the ash-filled air of Auschwitz.

A peremptory command was spat from a looming uniformed man in a guttural foreign language. The queue gradually advanced until it was almost the girl's turn.

The colour drained from Oppenheimer's face as he realised where this anonymous child was about to go. He screamed with a desperate ferocity at the children to leave, to run. His cries fell on deaf ears, powerless. Why was no one helping them?

Salty tears carved a path through the grime of the young girl's cheek as she reached the front of the line. The officer half lifted her away and kicked her knees down, forcing her to kneel next to the pit. With a sneering smile on his face, he sent a bullet through her skull. The girl's lifeless corpse added to the revolting sea of indiscriminate Jewish bodies.

Sickness rose into Oppenheimer's throat as he looked down upon the stench-filled mass grave. Embittered, he looked to the

heavens. The hostile cold of Poland ceased, and the world began to take on an amorphous ethereality.

Oppenheimer gasped as he escaped his reverie and came to in his desk chair. Now he was certain.

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*Prometheus stole the fire which the gods held
sacred. After they had received this gift, the savage
men began to grow wiser ...*

* * *

Anticipation hung thick in the air as the world's first atomic bomb was lifted to the top of the massive hundred-foot tower. The whole world would soon determine the worth of Robert Oppenheimer's past three years of research.

The desert before them was utterly quiescent; no wind, no movement, no sign of life.

Despite the dark early hour, none of the men could sit still. Oppenheimer watched anxiously as the clock was about to strike 5:30 am.

Then it happened: the atomic age began.

The entire country was inundated with a tsunami of searing light. It was as if the radiance of a thousand suns burst into the sky at once. Every crevasse, line and peak of the nearby mountain range was illuminated with an unparalleled level of lucidity, beauty and terror. The sound produced was almost supernatural. It reverberated across the mountain planes and echoed throughout the whole universe.

As quickly as it came, the light was swallowed up by the weapon, leaving a wake of grey clouds to replace the natural ones.

PROMETHEUS

Among the cheering and celebration of his colleagues,
Oppenheimer threw his head into his hands.

* * *

Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.
(XI,32)