

Become Death

Joe Bayne

The room was violently lit. A created sun cast its rays through the blinds of the bunker, penetrating wherever it could reach with radiant tendrils of energy. Deep and sharp shadows came right after the light found its way in. The faces of the men in the room were cut into harsh shapes from the contrast. Smiles of success and completion were separated into half-faced grins as they turned from facing the blast of light towards each other to revel in what they had accomplished. Everyone was glowing with excitement while the gleam of the young sun, now in its final seconds of life, faded to let the star in the sky take back its normal duties.

One man stood still, facing the remains of the collapsed landscape ahead of him. He was tall, and made up of sharp lines, even before the shadows formed in the room, and was currently lighting a cigarette with a flame from a lighter that seemed harmless to the touch when compared to the ball of fire he was watching explode in the distance.

A thought cascaded from the darkest and most primal spaces in his mind. He couldn't think of his own words to form it. This thought sifted through the rest of his brain until it reached knowledge recalling certain religious texts. Suddenly he had the words for what he was feeling, words that he couldn't produce on his own because he was merely human. He needed a god to say them:

"Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

These words he had borrowed from the Hindu god of destruction, Vishnu.

The man supposed everyone in the room thought that in one way or another.

The commotion of the test had begun to die down shortly after the old sun's rays retook the room. Everyone was beaming and basking in the good news.

The sharp lined man was about to let the last of his thoughts of destruction fade, just as the young star's light had, but before the final rays of thought left his head, they were cut off. A hand on his shoulder trapped these thoughts and buried them back in his brain to be rattled around and reflected upon later. The hand belonged to another sharp man, who was very different from the tall one. This man that belonged to the interrupting hand was sharp in attitude, posture, and abrasion. His sharpness was used as a force to pierce its way into the world.

The new man talked.

"We did it. The breakthroughs created by this team have finally come to a head and we now have the power of the gods at our disposal. We have the perfect weapon."

His words were very true. The weapon was perfect and being a man of the military, that is all he cared for. He gave the tall man a pat on the back one more time and let his stabbing presence fade back toward the other figures in the room.

The talk of gods brought back the idea that the tall man had let recede back into his mind. But again, before he had any time to reflect on it, he was his own force to stop himself this time.

He started to smile, but his mouth stopped halfway in the process. Concerned by this, he consciously forced his lips to complete the rest of the grin. He deserved to be happy with such an accomplishment.

With his newfound smile, he finally turned to face the rest of the room. He joined in the ecstatic nature of the group that he had worked with for so many secret months on this singular task. The celebration was dying down by the time he made his way to joining in. It was time for many of them to work. Data had to be collected. Science needed to be done.

After the rest of the day's work, the sharp-lined man headed home for the night to reflect on the results and then go to bed feeling well accomplished. He was certain he would sleep well tonight since he had done such a wonderful job.

Certainty is a hard thing to achieve in science, and even harder in predicting the human mind.

The man sat at the edge of his bed, staring down at the floor as if he were looking toward the great distance of height between himself at the top of a cliff and the ground at the bottom. That sort of height can be scary, and the man was currently afraid.

The thought he had left to fall into the back of his mind had forced its way forward.

The last time man had been given the power of god, the one who gave it away had been punished. Prometheus had taken the power of fire from the heavens and given it to man. For this act, he was chained to the rocks and forced to endure a hell created to last forever. This hell became his world for an eternity, the only world he could be part of.

The man worried, perched atop his cliff that was the edge of the mountain that was his bed.

"Have I become Prometheus?"

This thought formed into a horror that crashed its way through his head, causing shock waves to tremble the rest of his physical body. He wanted to jump off the edge of the cliff he was staring down. He had given man a new fire and the gods themselves could be angry. He had stolen the sun.

He suddenly understood why the gods were so angry at Prometheus. The Titan had given humanity the power to burn. Fire would be used to kill in the most gruesome of ways, and the purpose of stealing the power of the sun was for just that. It was a perfect weapon. And a perfectly horribly one.

The man imagined a future where his world could be swallowed by the thousands of suns that he helped create. He felt a guilt grow inside him. His conscience could not take the pressure that his mind was forcing upon it.

His life's greatest work, his theft of the sun, was a mistake.

The guilt overtook him and the urge to throw himself off an actual cliff, among other desperate thoughts, raced through his mind.

The man didn't want this regret. He needed nothing more than remembrance and respect for his work, but now he was left with a heavy conscience and hatred for his actions.

He had helped mankind become death, with the actual potential to destroy the world.

The hell Prometheus was forced to endure would be no match for the havoc that mankind could now create upon each other. Humanity had the real capability to make hell on earth.

Images of a scorched world flashed in his mind. It was a landscape that was painted with nothing but orange flames and blackened, burnt corpses. This land and all the life that it provided for had been murdered, and he had provided the sun that burnt it into the hell it was.

He knew that at some point soon, this mental picture would become a reality somewhere in the world. Fire would fall en masse from the sky and he had helped it happen.

He jumped off the edge of his bed, knowing that sadly, it wasn't a real cliff. He began to pace the room, wondering what he could do to take this guilt away. How could he turn himself in to the gods and ask for their forgiveness? He couldn't reach them from where he was and the man felt hopeless and small when he imagined them scheming to punish him.

He didn't want to wait for their justice.

The man paced his way into his living room where he found himself reaching into his hanging coat's pocket to grab his lighter and cigarettes.

He paused and stood still in front of a window.

It was morning and the old sun was beginning to rise. A soft light found its way into the room, enveloping everything inside in a warm glow, banishing the dark shadows of the night as well as the blackness of the absence of thought and action of what the man could do to absolve his guilt.

He interrupted his stillness to pull a cigarette up to his lips. He produced a flame from the lighter, lit the cigarette, and gazed out onto the world as it started its new day; a day that he didn't want to be part of.

The sharp lined man inhaled an almost endless drag of tobacco, and before letting out the smoke from his lungs, flicked his fiery cigarette into his curtains that framed the window. The cigarette hit and the flame that caught began to spread.

He exhaled the smoke from his cigarette and breathed in once more, taking in the smoke from his burning living room as the world around him caught fire.