

The gods' honest Greek Truth
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CHAPTER 1

The royal table was filled with the best of everything, at least according to a servants' standards. Goat cheese from the mountain people who wanted it to snow less the upcoming year. Grapes from the valley people who wanted it to rain more. And semi-dried fermented brown balls from one of the rebels in between who said to the priest that it was the only thing left to offer to anyone after being robbed by the mountain lords and jailed by the valley authorities for not being able to pay his taxes. The Chief Officiator at the feast lifted the hardest of them up to his nose, noting an interesting earthy aroma to it along with other smells to it that only he could discern with his oversized nostrils.

"They call it shit, my Lord," his second in command related in a high pitched voice and a lisp that was more in keeping with those who bore offspring rather than provided the seeds to produce them. "The offering to us made to the Priests when they came around to collect from him. Which smells of blasphemy,"

"Or defiance," the Chief Officiator said with a voice more fatherly than authoritative to the son who most acted like, and wanted to be, his daughter both here in the colonies, and back at home. The Officiator allowed the odor of the detritus from the condemned man to linger in his nostrils for three more breaths. He stroked his long, white beard as he assessed the rest of the aromatic hints as to what else could have motivated this 'peasant' born from simple earth to do something so 'complicated'. "Defiance fueled by fear, anger, and maybe insights into life that none of the other dwellers of his village didn't stumble upon nor see. All expressed as something that we have never experienced, nor felt."

"Futile stupidity?" Apollo said. "For a punishment that carries with it a sentence to spend the rest of his time in his current consciousness in an even worse prison than where he was incarcerated?"

"Courage, my son," Zeus replied, feeling the painful wisdom of being a middle aged god just over eight thousand Earth years old. "Something that happens, sometimes, when you are not as smart as us, not as secure as us, and not as powerful as us," he said. "The product of small minds and large hearts inspired by...Hmmm." He pondered the matter as he looked over the table upon which there were golden objects from all portions of the Greek colonies to which Zeus and his crew had been assigned. The likenesses of him carved into the golden statues and plates were simplistic in design, accurate according to how he portrayed himself to their 'prophets' on occasion, such as Homer, who, by necessity, and the established laws that even Zeus could not change, had to be blinded.

The pictures the readers of Homer, and the other 'chosen ones' put into shape and form portrayed Zeus as being powerful, wise, and even kind. There was only one that was accurate with regard to his internal biology. He picked it up, noting the sketches carved into the flat rock, colored with blood rather than ink, from the man who offered shit to the gods as his final statement.

"Fear," Apollo commented, with a snide smile at the likeness of Zeus that was the most accurate of the likenesses offered by the colonials in honor of the Highest god's Feast Day. It was

actually the Mission Commander's birthday, as measured by the calendar back on home planet. A place which was still very inhabitable by those who were smart in the mind, but not to those who had opened their Souls to the quality of 'heart', and the postulated, but seldom felt existence of a Being without attribute and beyond description which was more powerful than ANY of the gods. An Entity which was best felt, and served, by the 'gods' from either of the two home planets who had come to earth. An Energy that needed no power to be expressed that, oddly enough, the undeveloped humanoids on earth had a better understanding of than the 'gods' from Zeus' home planet. An Essence that, perhaps by 'collaborative and cooperative investigation', could be understood better and served better by learning from 'Earth born' humanoids who were as important to human development in the universe as they were ignorant of the real origin of their gods.

Zeus knew that the future of his Spiritually sterile home planet and its equally vicious sister extra-planetary world depended on the success of this Mission. And keeping his most secret weapon in this War for Enlightenment secret. Away from his bosses back home. Away from the other race of 'gods' who came to Earth to plunder from the apelike humans here rather than to learn from them. And away from his those he 'loved', if indeed he was really capable of such an ill-described emotional dynamic. .

Those who he 'loved', if one can call it that, included his son Apollo, who was discovering the female side of his humanoid nature, after having bred with specially-picked earthling women who he found internally fascinating more than conquerable. His daughter Aphrodite, whose appearance on home planet was plain, or ugly, but whose features here on earth were considered the most beautiful and desirous by the earthling men, and women. And his adopted professional offspring, such as Heptaetus, whose expertise in measuring and manipulating time warps earned him the right to be left alone to fiddle around with machinery from home base which needed repair every now and then from colonial sources, and gold to fuel any translocation of material or personal goods from earth to home, or vice versa.

They and all the others came to the 'banquet' table in the hall built by the 'hairless apes' who scurried away whenever a thunderbolt would be manufactured by Nordic cousin Thor, or some kind of political, military or naturally-based 'omen' cooked up by Thor's trickster brother, Loki.

The sun rose in the sky above the Olympian landing strip, reaching its zenith at noon. On schedule according to the laws of Nature, a series of 'events' which governed EVERYone made of some kind of matter, or physically-expressed energy. "Time to transport up what we collected, and our reports of those we collected from," Apollo said as he consulted with another one of the time-measuring devices that Heptaetus inspired, or instructed, one of his most favored Earthlings below to construct. They worked better when Heptaetus let the 'hairless ape' student use materials from earth rather than home planet. "The conference as to what to do for the next earth year is about to commence as well. And everyone is here," Apollo noted.

"Not everyone," Zeus said, as the 'old man' looked up the sky for answers, then down to the valley below for real solutions. "Promethius is due back, any time now."

"His OWN time!" Aphrodite protested.

“Greek time,” Heptaetus said, experimenting in that odd human phenomenon called humor, in the form of a ‘joke’. “Which means that if you say noon, you actually mean sunset,” he continued.

“Then we will wait till sunset,” Zeus affirmed.

“While our competitors who are working with hairless apes from other parts of this wretched planet, will get ahead of us in this contest!” Loki said. “A contest that you will lose, and my father Oden will lose as well.”

“Along with our rights to rule this planet, and come home as heroes,” Thor appended.

“If indeed home planet will still be there when we lose this war,” Aries reminded everyone. “What happens on primitive planets like earth affects what happens on important ones like ours,” he reminded the Council.

“Which is why we will wait for Prometheus, till sunset, or however long it takes,” Zeus insisted.

The old man who was well past his prime in terms of popularity with his fellow gods, and many areas of worshippers down below, exerted his most powerful ‘mind stare’ to his children, crew and collaborators. He reached down to the innermost Core of his being, and prayed to the Beyond Energy for enough strength to hold on to that stare, and the intention behind it. For reasons beyond Zeus’ understanding, the gods under him didn’t voice protests, nor did they do any mutinous acts. They didn’t assault him all at once, or one at a time. The most opposition he got was a stare of vengeful rage from Apollo, and a snide condescending chuckle from Loki. The rest remained obedient, for now. Plotting whatever they were plotting behind their shifting and/or confused eyes. Meanwhile, the transporter beam shone down on the table, taking up the gold and leaving a few more instruction manuals on plates made of material common on home planet but not seen anywhere on earth, in writing that was to be read by the gods alone.

“Anything new to report?” the messenger from the ship asked through the audio transmitter.

There was LOTS new going on, some good, some bad. All potentially earth shattering material, to quote an internal pun that came to Zeus. But Zeus answered for all of the gods with a speech earthlings could not understand nor pronounce, no matter how their humanoid tongues were formed naturally or could be engineered to become by the gods’ best plastic surgeons, even the masters of ape biology from the good old days in Sumaria. “All under control and on schedule.”

Of course it was a lie, by anyone’s standards. Sparta and Athens were at each other’s throats again, now with enough military might to destroy all earthling humanoid life in the Mediterranean and beyond. And for each Army that could annihilate or further enslave earth, there was a god, or goddess behind the scenes, with their own secret mission. But, for reasons based in honor, wisdom or perhaps that most elusive faculty of higher beings, courage, Zeus held firm.

“We are waiting for Prometheus before we make any reports, or changes in policy,” he ordered his subordinates as he waved his superiors back to home planet. The ship left, leaving the gods alone in the laboratory they had created. Zeus smiled with relief.

“This is very dangerous,” ‘intel’ and battle strategy goddess’ Athena, warned her father. “We all have a lot to lose here.”

“And more to gain,” Zeus reminded them all. “In ways that, well....we will find out. After Prometheus comes back.”

“To sign our death warrants,” Apollo warned. “And unlike the hairless apes, we don’t have a ‘heaven’ waiting for us afterwards.”

Zeus knew that Apollo was right. He was fearful about even more now. But the anatomy of courage was that it’s about being terrified, but doing what you have to do anyway.

CHAPTER 2

According to Homer, Prometheus was sentenced to be chained to a rock for eternity to have his liver eaten away by night by eagles, and have that seat of emotions grow back during the day so that it could be devoured again. According to the legend, his crime was having given the gift of fire to the humanoid earthlings, against the orders of Zeus. Actually, it was against the orders of Zeus’ bosses, but it served those bosses and everyone else for the ‘mortals’ to believe that Prometheus was banned from Olympus forever for his transgression against Zeus. It served Prometheus’ own agenda as well, and the secret alliance he now had with Zeus.

“A wise man learns more from his enemies than a fool learns from his friends,” Promethius pondered as he walked through the streets of Athens on his daily ‘patrol’ of assessing who was a fool, an enemy or both. Promethius was now using a body which was moderately above average by earthling standards. Strong enough musculature on his arms to be acceptable for military service as a low ranking officer but not so huge as to be assigned the responsibility of being a Herclean hero. Slightly above average height, so that he would not be looked down on. Chissel-shaped bearded face topped off with a thick head of wavy black hair that was ‘good looking’ but not overtly handsome, pleasing to the eye but not distracting to the mind. It was a rule of Nature that anything more than moderately above or below average was culled or feared, on ANY planet bearing human life. Maybe such for the four legged creatures on this small planet as well.

Having an earthling body, that was moderately above average, did come without its ‘average’ needs, and desires. Every eight hours it got hungry and had to have something put into its oral orifice. Every 8 hours afterwards, the bi-products of that food had to be evacuated from the anal orifice, conferring sometimes more pleasure than filling the oral one. Every 30 days, the impulse to evacuate something more ‘sticky’ emerged from his penile organ, a common trait in both male and females which, when in synch, resulted in much pleasure, but if not in synch, a whole lot of frustration.

It was that time of the month again, and, well, a god assigned to duty on a primitive planet had ‘wants’ that, if he spent too much time amongst the hairless apes, would become ‘needs’. But he was all too aware of the dangers of inter-subspecies breeding, something the gods did all the time as part of their Mission here, though it was officially not part of the orders they were sent with. Such ‘scientifically-intended indiscretions’ resulted in earthbound gods who knew very little but thought they knew a lot, as well as ‘odd’ earthlings who just didn’t fit in with their fellow citizens, for reasons unknown to any mortals. If a god was to satisfy the human emotions inflicted upon him by the biology he had to acquire for duty on planet earth, better it be with a Godly woman, or man.

As such, Promethius’ travels that day led him once again to the house of Aspasia. To some she was an independent woman. To some an intelligent philosopher. To some an educator of women. To some a whore who ran a brothel. But to Pericles, the closest thing Athens ever came to having a virtuous, effective and trusted leader, she was the unofficial mother of his most beloved son, which allowed her to be whatever she wanted to be. In one of Aristophanes plays, she was a political force to be dealt with as well. A woman who stopped futile wars between men by convincing other women to not have sex with them until they laid down their arms and extended olive branches to their enemies.

Promethius had been a ‘client’ of Aspasia many times, never revealing his real origins to her. He timed his visits so that anything that happened between them would not produce another ‘god-man’, or worse, a ‘goddess-woman’. From his vantage point across the street, she looked particularly ravishing. Her white skin seemed angelic, her blue eyes deeper than the sky, her light brown hair blowing in the gentle wind creating a halo that only a blind man could not see, and only the most heartless of men not feel. She was playing a harp, inventing poetic verses of her own which rivaled anything that came from Homer’s mouth, or Apollo’s lute. By all her

accomplishments, she had to be part ‘goddess’ from Prometheus’ home planet, but according to every sensing devise to detect such hybrids, she was not. She was a self-made human, the most valuable for humanity, and the most dangerous for the gods. A mason behind Prometheus described her with a more base and painfully-popular term..

“A witch, some say she is,” the stonecutter said as he chiselled another chunk of ugly rock from what seemed to be becoming a beautiful stone. “Though she could have been a priestess if she gave homage to the Priests,” he continued, turning around to let Prometheus see him, then let Prometheus see that Aspasia and he had a very special relationship going on between them. “Love of beauty with her led to love of ...something beyond physical beauty.”

Prometheus saw that the beautiful Aspasia was playing this song for, and directing it to, this very common looking man. Actually a less than common looking man, whose body was stocky, whose nose was oversized, whose head was losing hair prematurely on the crown, and whose eyes bulged out of his head. But behind those eyes was the mind that seemed to have...great possibilities. Prometheus decided to investigate such, as the plan emerging between himself and Zeus to save this earthling’s planet, and their own, required Minds that could think beyond the realities of ‘inevitable projections’.

Being a smart enough god to listen to earthlings rather than ‘proclaim’ to them, Prometheus decided to see what this stonecutter was actually up to. He seemed to be a mixture of contradictions. A middle-aged man old before his time who wore the cloak of a slave, but who carried his head like a free citizen. A skilled mason who chiselled yet another stone likeness of the gods for one of the local temples with the artistic skill OF a god, but less love for his craft than the treacherous Apollo had for his father Zeus.

The mason’s inquisitive Mind and every part of his ugly body was focused on Aspasia and her many expressions of beauty.

“And...what is beyond beauty, that is worth our love or assertive investigations?” Prometheus asked him.

“Huh?” the mason said, not having been used to being asked such questions.

“I asked you a question, Sir,” Prometheus said with a courteous bow. He turned the mason’s attention again to Aspasia below, then the sky above. “What is beyond beauty that is worth our love or assertive investigations?”

The mason seemed confused. Perhaps it was because he was not used to answering questions. Or perhaps it was because Aspasia’s music drew in an important client, one in a lower officer’s military uniform, who carried himself off like a general, and who bore a striking resemblance to Pericles.

“What is beyond beauty that is worth our love or investigations is...wisdom. And virtue,” the mason said, struggling for the answers from a place deep inside himself while the officer took Aspasia’s hand, causing her to stop playing the music and accept an embrace from his well

muscled arms. Aspasia discretely related a 'I have higher priorities than you right now, as you have higher priorities than me as well' with her eyes to the love-stricken mason-philosopher.

Sensing his cue from an even Higher Source than Zues, or even Pericles, Prometheus edged closer to the mason. "And, wisdom and virtue, could we propose that they are the same?" Prometheus offered.

"We could propose it," the mason continued, as the officer closed the curtains over the window.

"We can propose it, but until we prove it is true, is it not unacceptable as fact?" Prometheus asked the mason as his hold on the chisel turned into a tight fist, raising it up as a instrument to tear open soft military human flesh rather than to chisel chips out of hard marble. "Is it not required to prove as fact, a proposition so it is more than a mere hypothesis?"

"Yes, it is," the mason said, regaining control of his emotions and most beloved perspectives. "Just as love of spirit is more to be valued than love of body. A love between minds which must supercede all interest in material wealth, social position, or physical comfort--"

"--or family responsibility?" rang out from behind the middle aged mason from a much younger woman. A woman far younger than the mason and Aspasia, but a voice crankier than Aphrodite when she was having her period, and uglier. She threw down a sac of food on the mason's lap, bread, cheese and olives by the looks of it, all smashed into one ball of mush. "Your lunch!" she barked out. "Not to be shared any of your 'soul expanding' philosopher friends, especially that herera whore Aspasia. Or Diotema, the witch who taught you the value of love of spirit over love of flesh."

"Diotema was not a witch," the mason protested. "And I can prove it. She was a philosopher."

"Which is worse than a witch, or a whore," the young woman whose jealous eyes made her look like an old hag continued. "All you do is talk, talk, talk, while others work. And then come home. To their wives and families. With..."

She stopped talking, looked at the stone the mason had been working on. "This is all you've done on this stone! You walk away from home without telling anyone, all you have to answer for the day's work is this?"

"It's good work, and your husband is very skilled at his job," Prometheus said.

"It could be GREAT work, and he could be bringing home more drachmas than philosophical inquires at the end of the day," she protested. "And who in the name of the Zues are YOU to interfere with a family affair between a loving, caring and devoted wife, and a self-absorbed husband who sees as his 'Calling' in life to help everyone ELSE in Athens, and the welfare of their souls instead of their purses, and families."

"But, are all people not one family?" Prometheus offered. "Born of the same two souls, and if that not be enough connection, bonded together by common purposes of collective survival of all, which requires compassionate caring for all and consideration of each individual's needs and

aspirations?”

“And are these aspirations not all ultimately good, and for the good, as we seek to know what is True, and by doing so, become both virtuous and happy?” the mason added, taking the words out of Prometheus’ mouth, and turning a proclamation into a question to be considered by student and teacher.

The woman was baffled, expressing her confusion with a growl more fierce than any four legged animal found or designed by the gods. The beastess gave further expression to her frustrations by smashing her fist into the lunch she prepared for the mason, converting it into something that looked more like vomitus or detritus than nutrition, then throwing it into his chest. “You can choke your day dreaming mouth on that. And so can your philosopher friend.” And with that, she stormed away.

“Your wife?” Prometheus asked the mason.

“My miscalculation,” he replied with regret. “Who, unfortunately, gave me three lives that I am responsible for. In a life where I am responsible for these people too,” he continued, pointing to people milling about the streets, nobles and slaves alike. All of whom he looked at with unbridled compassion. All of whom didn’t even notice the mason, or Prometheus.

“Well,” the mason said, untangling the lunch from his robe. “A strong body is required for a strong mind, and a strong mind is required for...hmmm.”

The mason let the thoughts linger in his head. As if he was letting an answer come to him from a higher place rather than accepting whatever opinion came into his head as fact, proclaiming it as ‘truth’ to all he could force or coerce to agree with him, or worse, follow him. Yes, he possessed something the advanced minds of the gods did not...humility. A trait that men and gods had to acquire if they were to survive the Disaster about to befall both of them, very, very soon.

Prometheus yearned to tell the mason the truth about his own struggles, experiences and origins, but such was not allowed, nor wise. All he could say were the words already forming in the old-before-his-time amateur philosopher’s head. “Yes, an unexamined life is not worth living. Art and love are connected to love of wisdom, and ethical values are the only thing that matters. And---”

“---Realizing such is a slow process for humanity, applying it is an even harder one,” he said.

“Yet, is it not the process, and struggle of Realization that keeps us Alive?” Prometheus added. “And, though it is illogical in a world that ultimately seeks good, no good deed goes unpunished,” he continued recalling the period where he really DID have to be tied down to a rock and have avian creatures eat out his liver every night after it had grown back during the day. The rock was a prison cell in a space ship, and the birds were metallic devices above him, but it was nonetheless real.

With that ‘no good deed goes unpunished’ paradox, Prometheus left the mason to return to

Olympus before sunset, a requirement for his having the freedom to roam the earth during the day. There would be no metallic birds waiting to eat out his liver, but a more gut wrenching experience to deal with amongst his fellow gods, and comrades.

CHAPTER 3

“No, play it again, you inferior piece of shit! If that music isn’t sensitive enough to make even me want to shed a tear, I’ll rip your eyes out! And don’t try to fool me, because I’m the one who created sensitive music!” Apollo screamed at the Priest in front of the sound-making machine which was designed partially by gods and partially by mortals, built with metals and other rare materials mined by slaves shared by both. The front end of the mathematically-designed music making machine contained 80 rectangular slabs of wood that when pressed down struck a particular string on a harp laying on it side in the back. Some of the slabs were white, others black. It lay on an altar in the most isolated chamber of the temple which was built in Apollo’s honor, but which actually served many gods’ purposes in ways neither Priests nor Priestesses were told about, by contemporary inference, lingering legend or direct communication.

High Priest Dialakis, who now wished he was a lowly beggar, took in a deep breath and tried again. Dialakis was born with musical talent. By the age of eight he had mastered every instrument made by the hand of man, and by the age of twelve he was able to use them to woo every woman seeking a man with such. He never knew where his ability to turn sounds into music came from, and neither did Apollo. The best theory that Apollo had was that Dialakis was one of those hybrids who was part god and part man, impregnated by the former with sperm or DNA with origins from other than planet earth. Which god it was, and from which of the warring planets, Apollo did not know.

There was no proof of this theory, but it was the only one Apollo would accept. Truth be told, Dialakis even on his dullest days, produced more emotionally moving music than Apollo did on

his best, and such was not acceptable to the god who still yearned to be the channeller of Godlike music from the God which was beyond all gods, and their ultimate Creator. It was an irony that Apollo, assigned to be the god of music for the earthly mortals, grew even less musical and artistic in his soul each year he administered the advancement of music, and the rest of the arts. But he knew that if he didn't use this administrative talent effectively, he would be sent back to home planet in disgrace, assigned an even more frustrating job---Chemical engineering of biological systems at the laboratory creating new variations of creatures of earthling life. Though Apollo was born of a scientific family, he sought and worked hard to be more. Going back to his uncle's laboratory back on home planet was no option, but Apollo did have a mathematical understanding of the human brain and the biology of sound, which he had used before, directly or indirectly. It was time to remind Dialakis of such, as the 50 year old Priest cried like a five year old child, fearing the worst from the gods who he once loved, and now merely served.

"My dear Dialakis," Apollo said with a maternal voice more worthy of his sister Aphrodite than his own gender, gently laying his tender skinned fingertips on the priest's shaking shoulders. "I know you can do it. You've taken mathematical melodies from me and my associates and turned them into musical song before. Songs that made weak men strong, cowards into heroes, impartial citizens into dedicated patriots."

"It was the uniforms and the flags that inspired them," Dialakis said.

"No, no, no, my dear movers of souls," Apollo went on. "It was YOUR MUSIC that converted the Athenians, and the Spartans, into men who stood up to and beat the Persian Empire! Inspired them to join their fellow Greeks to fight for their collected freedom! Moved them to convert love for their families, friends and comrades into action that liberated the world!"

Apollo found himself believing in his own bullshit, in part because much of it was true. Yes, the gods had a stake in keeping the Greeks alive so that their 'observational experiments' on Sparta and Athens could keep going, despite the fact that they were as different as Apollo and his sister Aphrodite. Yes, the gods in charge of managing the Persians were an inferior team, proven so by the defeat of the Empire they ruled over Asian Minor for so long. But, there was something about music that could be used to inspire humans to become better than they were. Music also had an effect on gods, particularly when it was created by men. Apollo noticed such when Dialakis put into music the mathematical notes Apollo had constructed.

There was a life Dialakis' music that Apollo could have never created, nor designed. Something bigger and deeper than himself. Dialakis used the newly designed eight note scale Apollo provided him and found, by artistic instinct, the best way to use the black notes in between the white notes. Variations that Apollo never imagined possible, but was now hearing.

Apollo felt tears about to flow down his cheek, but something else blocked that process which, in many other cases, caused gods to become more mortal, and lose their power. The scientifically-constructed portion of his overly-developed brain came up with another hypothesis. If music could turn insensitive souls into caring ones, dead souls into live ones, then perhaps another kind of music could turn dangerously sensitive and alive souls into dead and obedient ones. Ones

that were dead and didn't even know it. Ones who could be easily colonized, for this generation and others to come.

The Soul-dead god in charge of the most powerful instrument to awaken human souls imagined something even more insidious, and scientifically innovative. What if he could turn the all-powerful gods into helpless men, and women? Those listeners would learn to be helpless and would embrace lifelessness! In such a universe, soul-dead and tone-deaf Apollo would be king, queen and everything in between.

The postulate incubated in Apollo's head as he planned the big and small steps of such a scheme as Dialakis played on. Just when all the pieces were to connect, Apollo's thoughts were disconnected by the ring to meeting, a high pitched sound that only gods could hear, but some dogs and cats were, by accidental miscalculation, could detect.

Apollo vanished from the temple via the tunnels provided for him by its most entrusted and often subsequently executed builders. He then made his way to an astral projection porthole just outside the temple walls, where he had to wait on line for other senior gods and junior gods to go through first. It was after all 'rush hour' and some things even the gods couldn't change. Indeed, all of the gods were discovering that there were more things they couldn't change than they could. Unless of course they changed themselves first.

CHAPTER 4

The Council of Twelve, as it was known by the Priests and Priestesses below, sat down at the Olympian round table to discuss the fate of the world. Zeus' eye caught a glimpse of them on a vase made by a devout mortal, portraying the all-knowing, invincible head of the gods drinking nectar and wine. Zeus noted that he was actually now dining on rancid goat meat and stale bread. His stomach was upset more than usual, his head aching, his body having just recovered from another episode of uncontrollable shakes and tremors which, so far anyway, had not been witnessed by anyone, even his wife Hera. A condition considered 'epilepsy' in the world of mortals, attributable to something the gods or 'spirits' did. Curable of course by the sacred trio treatments of prayer, sacrifice and repentance.

But of course gods were immune from such ailments, and they never got sick. He hoped that none of the other gods who were still officially under his command would notice that he was, yes, dying. As measured in earth years, he was 8000 years old now, give or take a millenium, though everyone in his crew thought him to be only 6,000. He hadn't done very much more back on his home planet than rise up the ranks in a non-incidental manner that lacked ingenuity, drive and passion. He had done no more and no less than the tasks assigned to him by his bosses, accomplishing nothing that anyone else could have been trained to make happen. His soul felt regret and remorse, a disease which was far more painful than any affliction of the body. Such was not really very understandable to any of his 4,000 year old subordinates or 'spring chicken' 5,000 year old wife Hera. But there was one thing he could do for himself, and for his still beloved and sometimes trustable subordinates, which he requested all of them to do after they sat down at the table for the monthly conference.

"Let us pray," the mighty Zeus said, folding his hands and looking downward.

"To who, us?" Apollo mused, turning to the others and winning over most of them with laughter.

“And for what?” Aphrodite added, confused at why she should have to be so upset.

“The welfare of our Souls,” Prometheus added, from the back of the room, having taken his seat aside from the table as a non-voting member of the Council. “Which is dependent on the welfare of those we are assigned to teach.”

“You mean colonize,” Apollo shot back. “We are the teachers of these mortals, and if we teach them too much, they destroy one another, and will eventually destroy us. The facts revealed this in Sumaria. Egypt. Assyria. And let us not forget Atlantis.”

Everyone agreed, including Aphrodite. Zeus had other opinions that were incubating behind his troubled and secretive eyes. Apollo went on, walking around the table like a military brigand, or more accurately, brigandess, exploring and enjoying the feminine aspect of his nature which was now acceptable in this new Greek ‘experiment’. “Give humans on this planet self-rule and they will turn them into toxins that will eat away their minds and bodies, hairless apes that these earthling still are,” Apollo warned his comrades in intergalactic arms.

“Like democracy?” Prometheus offered. “Which converted this village of Athenian apes into a center of learning, wisdom and enlightenment. Where arts have flourished. Where investigative science has just begun to take root. Where these ‘apes’ are starting to examine and heal themselves, in body, mind and sometimes even spirit. All on their own, with minimal guidance.”

“Like the kind of guidance you maybe gave Aristotle when you encouraged him to consider that diseases of the flesh are from natural causes, which are cured by ‘natural’ medicines?” Apollo countered.

“I gave him some suggestions to such,” Prometheus conceded.

“And Hippocrates, his deluded follower, who refuses to take money for his services but will accept what amounts to worship from his patients. Hippocrates’ ‘genius’ with regard to diagnosing diseases and even curing some of them, was something that came from his own head?” Apollo continued with a condescending all knowing eye-roll that made him seem and feel a foot taller. “Tell me, truthfully, Prometheus. Speak to me with the love of wisdom and virtue you shared with that mason Philosopher today and tell me if Hippocrates’ genius as a healer came from his own head?”

“No, it didn’t,” Prometheus said, staring into space.

“You see, I was---“ Apollo countered.

“---His genius came from his Soul!” Prometheus shot back, springing up on his two tired feet, facing Apollo squarely in the eye. “And his Compassion, which is NOT merely intelligently-based self-interest.” He turned to the group. “And his sense of responsibility, for the benefit of all. Them and us. Like you, Artimus, who instead of merely giving food to people, teach them to hunt. And you, Athena, goddess of war and intelligence, who assist, as you are able to, wise and brave generals such as Pericles. And the Greeks who defeated the Persians and saved

Greece from enslavement by them and their gods. And you, Poseiden, who rules over and informs the mortals about the opportunities the seas present for travel, and the peril that befalls those who don't respect its power. And you Apollo," he concluded, turning to his adversary. "Who has been assigned the management of the arts and the science, but who has neglected to combine the two, particularly with regard to the art of healing mortal bodies, which are not unlike our own. Both while here, and back at home."

All eyes turned to Apollo, whose poor record with regard to maintaining health of the biological experiment that was now mankind was less than optimal. "Nature, both at home and here in this colony, sometimes has ideas which go against our intention," he said. "As we ALL know! And have experienced!" he said as he gazed around the table. "You, Artimus cut yourself in that hunting accident and it took you months to heal, and you still can't run like you used to. You, Athena, wish you had the physical beauty of Aphrodite, and no matter how many battles your champions win, you will always be her smarter but uglier sister. And you, Poseiden, no matter how well tuned your weather making devises are, sometimes the elements they move have minds of their own. And you, my dear father Zeus, who..."

Zeus held up his hand, silencing the lad. Apollo was not compassionate enough to see the pain in his eyes, and was as 'smart' a healer of the flesh as he was as 'talented' as an artist who could administrate, or potentially teach, but never do. But the group had to be told something to stay coherent. "So, Apollo, you are saying that with regard to medicine, that it is as fickle as a mare in heat, or a woman at the time of month where men prefer the company of other men, or themselves."

The male members of the council laughed, and even Apollo chuckled to himself with regard to his own frustrations. Hera and the other women enjoyed the fact that the men were laughing together rather than fighting again. Unlike his body, Zeus' wit was still functional, intact and 'omnipotent' with regard to settling affairs between warring subordinates. Only Prometheus kept his expressions focused, staring into Zeus' eyes which the Old Fart saw in a reflection were becoming yellow again, most probably due to liver disease, which, ironically, he had inflicted upon Prometheus as punishment for disobeying his command to not give fire to the mortals.

It was that fire which Zeus considered now. It could warm cold bodies, but also burn flesh. Fire could bring day into night with its glowing light, or quench the ability for sight entirely if purposely, or accidentally, placed too near the eyes. A simple product, on this planet anyway, of bringing static electricity into the vicinity of dried wood or grass. Ignitable by lightening from 'the gods' above, or the flickering of stones from stone age hairless apes below. Such was this new science of medicine as well, he pondered. Something which could, in healing hands, cure disease. Or, in the hands of those with less altruistic aspirations, create it. The scary part of that realization was that anyone, even Zeus, was capable of less than altruistic aspirations. And just as fire could make any mortal 'godlike', it could make any god something far more powerful and dangerous.

As for medicine and the qualities of art and science that could help it if combined, perverted it if they were not, Zeus had to say something. He was good at predicting the future on earth and not only because he sometimes secretly designed and implemented such futures. "I predict that there

will be at time on this planet when healers will demand more money than they are worth And that those who study the law will pervert it and make the jobs of those healers very difficult indeed. And that more drachmas will be paid to these lawyers than to the doctors. And that there will be so many people between patient and healer that they will never be able to find each other. And that when they do find each other, the patient will be more concerned with what the healer is wearing than if he has brains or manure between his ears.” All of the ‘and that’s’ got a laugh or a chuckle. Even Zeus found his spirit lightening up.

But there was one thing Zeus could not chuckle about. A message delivered to the device implanted behind his ears. “For your ears only. Plan ‘2B discovered’ compromised, and must be aborted. Security leak most likely there.”

What bothered Zeus wasn’t that ‘2B discovered’ was a great plan, but it was a secret one, that only he knew. What terrified the fearless head of the gods was that the only ‘there’ who could have had access to ‘2B discovered’ was sitting in front of him. Everyone was a suspect. His second in command Apollo. His visiting allies Thor and Loki, representatives of his former classmate back home at the Orionian Academy, Oden. His loving wife Hera, who seemed to be less than loving and less than a wife of late. Solid Soldiers Aries and Poseiden, who carried themselves in private with more stature than their assigned rank. Nurturing daughters Athena and Aphrodite who smiled at each other at group functions, but who were rumored to be whispering venomous secrets about each other afterwards And even Zeus’ his most entrusted and disobedient rebel, Prometheus, whose thoughts and speculations seemed more...distant than previously, perhaps still harboring hatred for having been punished for giving Fire to the hairless apes, a now pardoned punishment that would perhaps come back to destroy Zeus, and the Sacred Mission he was still dedicated to carry out. A Mission that would require less than Sacred methods to keep Alive now.

CHAPTER 5

There were two rules that applied to any of the gods or goddesses, no matter what their rank. The first was that they were not allowed to tell mortals who they really were and where they really came from. The second was that the human form they came to Earth with was what they had to use to present themselves to the human inhabitants with, and they could not present themselves to anyone as any other god or goddess. Violation of such would result in punishment far worse than the one Zeus had inflicted on Prometheus.

However, Athena knew there was no rule about trying to pass as an Earth-born woman who RESEMBLED another goddess. Such was a necessity, after all, when Athena decided to visit the Prisons in the city that bore her name. She shunned the helmet which was in keeping with her being goddess of military strategy, letting her hair flow down over her shoulder and face, hopefully hiding her oversized nose, masculine jaw and prematurely double-chin. She discarded her normal scholar-warrior cape, helmet and breastplate for a dress containing trim of five different colors designed to make her small breasts seem large, or at least larger. And she held her head up like an aristocratic lady more concerned with affairs of pleasure between the legs than Passion of intellect between the ears. Perhaps she would be perceived as a noble woman born to the goddess of beauty, Aphrodite. Or perhaps to the drunk, impressionable or half blind, she could actually be mistaken for Aphrodite. No one would refuse her anything as such, and in case they did, she could always fall back on the prime rule of earth-born human behavior. Treat people like vermin and they treat you like a saint, or a goddess.

It was not Athena's style to do such, but when in Athens, do as the Athenians do. Particularly in the quarters of the city where made her rounds, checking in on her own assigned duties here.

The official reason for her visit to the Athenian prison was to assess the compassion of the colonials in the city bearing her name, and by inference, their intelligence. To see if Pericles, as godlike and noble a mortal leader as any other in the last few centuries, was being effective as a ruler who was really dedicated to being compassionate, merciful and effective. Unofficially, she had other ideas.

"So, my lady, you wish to secure some slaves?" Sakadicus, the new Warden, said with a gracious bow in his chambers above his personal kingdom, hidden away from the rest of the city by walls that allowed no one to see in and no one to get out. He was more dog than man in temperament, serving the master who would give him the biggest bone, a former prisoner himself who earned his freedom by being more vicious to his cellmates than any jailer. "I can assure you that these prisoners are not worthy of serving you," he continued. "I can give you the names of

very reputable slave traders who can give you top quality merchandise, as I can see you are top quality lady.”

“Who will see what you have in here first!” Athena insisted with a bark bigger than Sakadicus’ fiercest bite.

“Only condemned men, and dying ones, my lady,” Sakadicus replied with subservient bow, keeping the curtains on the windows of his observation chamber closed. “I am a humble jailer obliged to follow orders. And this place is not fitting for any honorable lady.”

“It, and you, are what I say you and it are!” Athena asserted, pushing the implish man aside, opening up the blood-stained curtains covering the window that overlooked the group of cells that officially didn’t exist. What she saw below made her weep with pity and fume with anger. But such were not things she could show to Sakadicus. Her mission would be compromised if she did. As well, if found out for who she really was and why she was here, her flesh would be drawn and quartered, and by intergalactic masters of torture far more vicious than Sakadicus. To make matters worse, her physical endurance was giving out, having spent too much time that day already amongst mortals and away from the special nutrients her still-Orionian body could only get from the air, soil and crops on Mount Olympus.

“I will see your prisoners,” she commanded the jailer.

“Which ones?” Sakadicus inquired, taking out papyrus sheets containing their names and location, thumbing through them. “There are at least a hundred to chose from.”

“The ones who are most dangerous and offensive,” she said.

“For...what purposes?” the Warden asked, being a dominant man over what he saw as a cold, shaking and vulnerable woman. His eyeline went to Athena’s breasts, trying to see if they were real, or just padded. “For purposes of what labor?”

An idea sprang up in Athena’s head. “For purposes of...amusement,” she said, doing her best to put on a sadistic smile with the most perverted of purposes behind it. What she had seen on Olympus from her fellow ‘advanced’ beings all too often, disgusted that they displayed such emotions. And ashamed that she was not feeling them as well.

“I see!” Sakadicus grinned, at home in his element. “And for these amusements, do you mind if they are physically damaged?”

“No,” Athena replied, licking her lips, and stroking her breasts. “That will just make it more interesting. And if they escape today or die in their cell?” she continued, pulling out a purse of gold coins, putting it reach of the Warden’s eyes, but not his grasp, then placing it between her breasts.

“Of course, my lady,” the newly-assigned keeper of the lowest form of criminals said with a bow. He opened the door to the prison, dismissed all but his most trusted guards and beckoned Athena to follow him into the caves carved out of stone.

The stench in the dimly lit, windowless chambers keeping undesired men away from the world and sanity was what first hit Athena. Excrement, urine and degenerating flesh permeated into her nostrils, from the dead and the dying. Rotting flesh was, according to observation anyway, nothing more than blood and pus that emanated out of the body that had not been cleaned up. Or neutralized by the atmospheric gas Yelita, an element found everywhere back home but not in earth. Lingered around the dead flesh afterwards were small worms and insects forms that were as well, absent from Athena’s home planet. But it was the stench of learned helplessness that was worse. She recalled such from the ‘good old days’ back when the expeditionary forces from home planet were able to withstand a month at a time in earth’s atmosphere without their sensory or motor capacities. Back when the hybrids were being made, kept and studied in experimental cages made of manufactured aluminum rather than humanly-built stone walls. And when it was about mutually shared science between exploration teams rather than winner take all competition, most of it at the expense of the hybrids, so far anyway. No matter how many bottles of nectar were drunk and stories of past glories were sung, the days of the gods here on earth and back at home were numbered. Most of them anyway. It was written all over Zeus’ face whenever word from Central Operations came in to him and he gave his beloved crew and children that hallmark fatherly smile. The wider the smile, the more fear he seemed to harbor between his eyes---visible only to those whose eyes were really open of course.

But all of that aside, Athena had to keep her wits and wills about her if she was to find a special prisoner who could serve her very special, secretive needs in a desperate and daring plan she dared not share with anyone until she spoke to him directly.

“The first prisoner,” Sakadikis said, presenting Athena with a view of a man with a military tattoo shackled to a wall behind a thick, wooden door blood emanating from his groin. There was nothing between his two legs but exposed muscle and bits of bone. A penile projectile with testicles attached hung from the ceiling in front of his down-turned head, inches beyond his reach.

“And this one’s crime?” Athena asked, not able to see his face.

“Stealing and drinking a bottle of his General’s favorite wine,” he boasted with pride.

“And...”

“Having intercourse with the General’s wife,” Sakadicus continued. “Without her permission.”

“Or maybe with it?” Athena challenged.

“And having sex with the General’s four year old daughter, and six year old son,” the impish jailer continued. “Definitely without their permission,” he said with a rage of a father justifiably

protecting his own sons and daughters. “Who will never be the same again!” he yelled at the prisoner. “And who will hide their shame for the rest of their lives!”

“I see,” Athena said. “Crimes that have to be punished, but can never be reported.”

“Yes, my lady,” Sakadicus continued, moving on the next cell. “Like this one.”

Inside the cell sat a blindfolded man, bloody patches in the impressions where his eyes were, or perhaps may have been. “His robe seems to be that of a nobleman,” she commented.

“An imposter,” Sakadicus explained. “A visitor to our city from Miletus.”

“Where the Aspasia, the philosopher-whore, is from,” Athena thought but did not say.

“Who was granted citizenship of Athens by Pericles himself,” he continued.

“Who fathered at least one of his children in wedlock by the philosopher-cortisan?” she pondered, but did not give voice to.

“And who was present at many secret meetings for Athenian citizens alone,” the jailer who himself did not look like he was a citizen said with envy. “And who shared those secrets with citizens of Sparta!” he went on, with a patriotic fever. “The bastards who once stood up to the Persians with us but do everything they can to steal our colonies, prosperity, and daughters.” He looked into the cell and yelled at the condemned, blinded man. “Who will never see his home city of Miletus or Sparta again! And who will never see the face of a beautiful woman or trusted man! To be pulled by the hand of Hades to a land of eternal punishment in the underworld after you breath your last here!”

Athena knew all too well that her coworker Hades had no more real knowledge of the afterlife than Sakadicus had knowledge about her real birthplace and identity. And that a tortured prisoner was one that told you some things, but a manipulated one is one that told you everything. She would perhaps get back to this nobleman imposter and find out what he really knew about Athens and really told the Spartans, but such were the matters of men, not gods. Her skin was getting cold, her legs weak, and she had time left only to see and identify one more prisoner before having to head back through the porthole to the biological refueling station at Base Olympus.

“The next prisoner?” she asked. “The one you said was the bravest, stupidest and most dangerous of the lot? I should like to see him now.”

Sakadicus led her down a hall with an ‘I’m saved the best for last’ grin on his grungy, grimy face.

The prisoner was naked, most of his once strong and virile body covered with some evidence of beatings with things made of metal, leather or wood. Yet his eyes seemed still undefeated, and

hopeful, as he looked up to the sky, his hands folded in prayer, his lips moving in rapid uncoordinated motion, nothing audible coming out of his mouth.

“This one,” the jailer boasted. “He’s officially supposed to be burned at the stake, but any other corpse will do, for the appropriate handling fee of course. With some rest, cleaning up, and food, he can be as good as new. Dressed up as a god, if you like. Then treated like a dog, that you could have your way with. The most dangerous criminal here,” he said. “Who is not so dangerous now!” he screamed at the man. “After he dared to---“

“---Offer shit to the gods after being beaten by the Priests, tax collectors and magistrates,” Athena observed herself saying, having recognized the man she came to rescue. Somehow she let her emotions get in the way of her intellect, having said what she was not supposed to know, as only men were allowed at this man’s trial, and she snuck her way in through the ethers.

“Yes, he offered shit to the gods,” Sakadicus said, apparently more concerned with his own personal agendas than figuring out why Athena knew about this special prisoner. “After all the gods have done for us, this ungrateful man---“

“---Will be re-educated, under my care,” Athena said in the manner of a dominatrix noblewoman in need of fresh slave-flesh to break, then devour. “I will speak to him,” she said, feeling a burst of strength coming back into her body.

“But I am afraid he will not be able to speak to you,” Sakadicus boasted, boldly pulling a tongue out of his pocket. “I cut it out of him myself, as it was my honor do to so. I kept part of it, which I will offer it up to the gods myself in the upcoming Festival for Athena. There is no way this man will ever blaspheme the gods again! Those who do, as we both know, bring the wrath of the gods on themselves, and everyone around them. Is that not so?”

“Yes, it is,” Athena said, painfully knowing that for most of her extra-terrestrial comrades, such was true. “But what of this man’s education?” she continued. “He can still write,” she commented, seeing more special information and hard earned wisdom behind this man’s eyes than she had observed in any god for a long, long time, even Prometheus, or Zeus, or Hera, Zeus’ wife who was supposed to know about the affairs of goddesses rather than gods. “He can write about many things,” she said, sensing an intellect behind this defiant peasant’s eyes. “Things sensual, in service of his Mistresses on earth, and the gods above,” she said putting on one of those ‘beauty is all you need to get by’ smiles her sister did when wanting special consideration from her father, or any other god with a cock that wanted to be satisfied.

“I do not think so,” Sakadicus said. “He is illiterate. He cannot write, or read.” He yelled into the cage. “Is that not so, you insolent, ungrateful dog!”

The man nodded his head in a ‘yes’ that seemed genuine, and real.

“But, he can draw pictures,” Athena thought. She recalled how the man drew likeness of the gods on stone tablets when he was incarcerated at the temple, using blood to make images of Zeus, Apollo and even Athena which were perhaps not so accurate with regard to the flesh, but

accurate with regard to the eyes and what was behind them. Perhaps he could draw more images which Athena could convert into words, then actions to be taken against the appropriate gods, goddesses or mortals.

“Yes, I will take him,” she said, giving Sakadicus a fistful of gold coins and a small slab of wood bearing an address. “Where he will find himself after his accidental ‘escape’.”

“He will give you much trouble, but if you can manage him, perhaps much pleasure,” the jailer warned, not knowing how right he really was right on both points, and why.

CHAPTER 6

Simple mathematics regarding the human condition understood by even Euclid's donkey said that the best way to ascertain what was going on at the top was to see it from the bottom. Such was what Prometheus set out to do on the next day's excursion to Athens.

This time, he took a position at the wall of the city in the guise of a beggar. The wall was magnificent 40 feet high structure which not only surrounded Athens proper, but which extended in a corridor 6 kilometers to the South West to encircle the Port City of Piraeus, from which goods came in and scholarly ideas went out. Athens was now a city of scholars, artists and thinkers where democracy was taking hold, its elected rather than appointed ruler, Pericles, doing his utmost to see that the lower classes were also allowed participation in such. Of course, requirements for citizenry included being male, owning some kind of property, and being Athenian on both sides of one's lineage, a rule that applied even to Pericles' son born from Aspasia's foreign Miletusian womb.

Indeed, being a dweller or citizen of Athens was something sought by cities as far East as Persia and as far west as Sicily. But the 'all men, and in time women, were created equal' experiment did have some flaws in it. Slavery was still very active, and free men with little money employed by those with more of it were treated worse than those who were officially owned. And cities that did not want to be part of the Athenian 'Alliance' soon felt the wrath of the Athenian Army and even more so the fury and ferocity of its navy, an Armada of over a thousand ships which ruled the land by controlling the sea. Then again, there was much to protect and sustain during this Golden Age of Athens where the worse punishment for a dweller or citizen was exile.

The Long Wall of Athens and its various appendages was well guarded by soldiers who had strict orders to keep those inside of it safe, and dangerous elements out. Or, Prometheus pondered, as wandered the outside perimeter as an invisible, insignificant, harmless and unnoticed hunched-back beggar, an easy way to keep whatever was toxic inside, to be amplified. It was just a thought, on a day where there were many things to think about. Such as why his 'allergy' to the dusty air was now causing him to cough when there was little dust in the air. And such as why talk around the Olympian conference table seemed to be about nothing that really mattered, all parties avoiding discussion of what really did. And such as why five well-armed, well muscled noblemen, with beards lacking mustaches emerged from the city cursing angrily in their local dialect, intermingled with mention of Pericles.

The Spartan contingent knew enough to not allow themselves to be heard by anyone important of course, grunting between themselves only in the vicinity of beggars, who they actually gave bread, cheese and even a piece of dried meat to. Few affluent Athenians would do so, which maybe was why the Spartans did. Perhaps it was a way to demonstrate to the lower Athenian classes, including those in uniform guarding the wall, that they had something to gain by betraying their 'philosopher-king' Athenian ruler.

Such Athenians would encounter a different dynamic in Sparta, which had no walls at all, no crime and no democratically appointed assembly body. But Sparta boasted strong men and self-reliant women, and was a place where the welfare of all always was considered higher than the welfare of the one. True, Spartan boys were killed at birth or raised to be soldiers, and their

sisters, if they were allowed to survive, were brought up to breed babies that would be given to the State when they were seven. But what went into the mouths of common soldiers each morning, a mixture of grain and nuts void of as much taste as possible, went into the mouths of their officers as well. Such could not be said about the diets of the common Athenian soldier and his noble-born officer. No, Spartans shared their wealth, misery and austerity with everyone equally, or were trying to demonstrate such to their Athenian rivals anyway.

The Athenian Sergeant of the guard atop the wall fumed at the continued presence of the mustache-less Spartan visitors, but he dared not do anything. Neither did the 50 men under his command. They held on to their weapons and their tongues. After all, there was still an active truce going on between the two city states who combined forces to turn back the Persian Army, an imperial power that would have enslaved the rest of Europe if not stopped.

But despite what was written on parchment and signed by kings and generals, the peace between Athens and Sparta had ended. These two very different and potentially complimentary experiments, probably operated by two different sets of gods so it seemed, were about to go to War. And ones which would involve mortals and gods alike, and those potentially valuable souls in between.

One of those links walked past Prometheus. It was none other than the philosopher-stone mason who he had met in front of Aspasia's brothel for men and school for women. And educational facility for those of both genders who sought the kind of answers to questions not written on any papyrus sheets or posed in any Homeric poem. This time the stone mason didn't take notice Prometheus, perhaps because of the way the god stayed behind his hood and held his head, or perhaps because the stone mason had other agendas than to give his lunch to beggars that day.

The mason stopped in front of the Spartans and started to question them about life, death and everything in between. Then he did the same to, and for, the citizens of Athens who were accepting favors from their Spartan 'neighbors'. With each question the mason-philosopher asked, he seemed to ask it of himself as well.

Prometheus smiled at what the man was teaching, and discovering, as both were being done at the same time. And at the manner in which he was 'teaching'. By posing questions, rather than pontificating answers. "I taught him well," Prometheus said to himself, out of range of the various conversations that were taking place between commoners and noblemen, young and old, Spartans and Athenians, and between the ears of people who had been living comfortable lives based in lies, now faced with the opportunity to struggle with Truths. "Yes, I taught him well," he continued, with a louder voice.

Loud enough to be heard by a woman behind him who answered, "You didn't teach Socrates anything he didn't know already, or thought he knew."

Prometheus turned around, prepared to tell the wife of this philosopher mason that his husband had a higher calling and Purpose than to bring home bread, mutton and cheese to the family dinner table. Prepared to tell the young bitch that she should examine her own soul before

dissecting and destroying that of her husband, or anyone else. But what his eyes saw was different than what his ears heard.

“So, you find me interesting to look at?” a woman clad in a multi-patched commoner robe said. She was wearing mismatched sandals, both of them with worn down soles. But underneath all of that ‘commonality’ she was more beautiful than any of the gods on Olympus and more alluring than any mortal Prometheus had seen. “You have the feeling we have met before?” she continued as the god aspiring to be a more perfect man gazed into her coral green eyes, framed by a long main of flaming red hair hotter and warmer than the fire he had offered to humanity eons ago. “Yes, I think that means yes,” she said, taking his hand into hers. “Where are you from?” she inquired of him.

“Somewhere far away from here,” he replied, still in touch with most of his senses. “And you?”

“Somewhere not so far away from here,” she said with a warm and sincere smile. “Pireas.”

“The city that brings most of the goods into Athens,” Prometheus replied.

“And some of the ‘bads’, which when combined with the goods, make us...”

“...Alive,” Prometheus said, reading in the eyes of this young woman that she was rich in Eros, carnal love, but also connected to Agape, Love of Spirit, in ways that she could have only learned from one woman. “Where do you live? Where do you experience being Alive?” he asked.

The woman pointed towards the Western side of the city, towards a house that could belong to none other than Aspasia.

“We go be Alive together?” the woman offered.

“Yes...we will,” Prometheus answered, accepting the offer of whatever this woman had to give. A woman from somewhere in the lower and illiterate classes whose name didn’t matter. But whose instruction felt...necessary for reasons that was beyond the immediate understanding of any god, man or philosopher.

The young woman from Pireas who was a mother, lover, mistress, wife and friend, all at once, refused to give her name to Prometheus as she led him to Aspasia’s house. “I am whoever you want or need me to be,” she kept saying to each of the ‘god-man’s’ requests as to what to call her. For reasons Prometheus could not discern or comprehend, she kept drawing him closer, first with a wave of her hand to follow her, then with a touch of her electrifying slender fingers. His body felt light as he felt his feet carry him from one street to another. The muscular chamber that moved blood around his chest felt more like a heart than a pump.

The Pireasian woman’s path to her ‘Mistress’ School’ was more curved than straight. Prometheus lost sense of the Four Earthy directions, unable to discern which was North, South,

East or West. He almost lost sense of the vertical ones as well that lead back to home planet, which he still did not reveal as Orion, for fear that maybe one of these mortals would be able to get there on their own steam. Who knew? Maybe this woman who was able to move the seven humors of a god's body in the manner of the four that were in an earthling body could figure out time-space travel, as she seemed to be 'timeless'? Particularly as she took his hand, holding onto it with a kind gentility which hugged his love-starved heart with an tight, all-encompassing embrace.

"So, what are you taught in your Mistress' School?" Prometheus asked as she led him into a shortcut into the 9th curve that seemed more like a circle, checking in with his head so his heart would not lead it astray.

"Whatever we are able to and willing to learn," she answered in accent that was sounding more exotic, and less Athenian than ever.

But Prometheus wanted answers. And assurances. There was no shortage of gods who had become less than men after being with the wrong woman. And the result of creating hybrids with the wrong women were often biological mistakes defective in body, mind, spirit and moral fibre, who often became kings. The Persian experiment and a few to the East of that region was ample evidence of that. "Do you learn music? Philosophy? Painting? Science? Politics? Medicine? How to serve a man rather than just please him?" Prometheus inquired of the woman with no name.

"A little of all of those, and more," she smiled, with intelligence behind her eyes, as verified by Prometheus sensing the electromagnetic field around her head, portrayed by some artists as an aura, pulsing and expanding with a rythm that was as firey as it was musical. "And how to keep things that should remain secret as secret," she added, turning deadly serious.

"Like your real name, and mine," Prometheus said, finally cuing in to what this illiterate, or maybe not so illiterate, peasant woman was really worrying about. "One Soul's Purpose is not always the other Soul's, but there are always shared and common Purposes between all souls."

"And special ones," she smiled, looking into his eyes, then stopping abruptly three strides later.

Before Prometheus lay Aspasia's house. The windows were open, the sun shining magnificently upon it. She pointed to one of the doors. Prometheus felt himself to be at a fork in the road. As critical as when he had observed a small tribe of cold mortal barbarians about to die on a cold night, several infants about to expire from frostbite, the elders dying of starvation because they could not chew uncooked meat. That night long ago when Prometheus decided to give Fire to the humans, to these ones anyway. Who he never heard from again, and who shunned him when he came to the campfire a few weeks later as a beggar asking for a morsel of cooked meat.

"Above all do no harm," she said, as if reading Prometheus' Soul. "Is this not a good thing to practice?"

“A difficult one, particularly when your other mandate is to do as much good as you can in the world,” Promethius replied.

“Or maybe an easy one if you try to do as much BEYOND good in the world,” she smiled.

Promethius always sensed and preached that Truth was beyond good and evil, but that it was benevolent and virtuous in its expression. And that virtue and good led you to Wisdom and ‘Beyond Good’. And by inference to the Beyond God which was the real Source, Creator and Purpose behind every god, even ‘Mother Nature’, an evasive goddess whose identity was never determined by any of the ‘god teams’ from Orion, or the other extra-terrestrial planet bearing transportable and intelligent humanoid life. Maybe this nameless Pireasian woman was Mother Nature, about to teach Promethius the most important lesson for both man, and god...How to be Alive, big A.

But before anything happened, life, small l, interfered. Promethius heard stern voices from Aspasia’s chamber from behind the curtain, then yelling, then slaps and all manner of cursing. Everyone else mulling about moved away, adopting the ‘I saw nothing and will be seen by no one’ attitude, scattering from range of being seen or heard. As did the women in the other chambers of the house, leading their male clients out with their hands over their ears, instructing them to keep their eyes closed ‘if they ever wanted to see their wives or children again,’ as one of them warned.

But Promethius held firm, as did the Pireasan maiden. A wind blew in from the South West, paradoxically in exact alignment with the location of Sparta, Athens’ old rival, former ally, and soon to be new enemy, according to gossip that had become more reliable by the day. From the corner of his eye, Promethius saw the maiden’s hand shaking back and forth, as if guiding and directing that wind, but most probably just following it. It blew open the curtain, revealing inside, non other than Pericles himself with Aspasia. It could not be determined who was hitting who with words, angry stares, fists, or wooden objects, but there were injuries in both lovers’ eyes and flesh. The barbs delivered by mouth were exchanged in a language they alone could understand, some kind of manufactured mixture of Egyptian, Persian and Greek, by Promethius’ best calculations .

“I don’t understand what they are saying, but it is about one thing. Like it always is between them,” the Pireasian woman said. She waited for the word to come out. Voicing it with the lovers as they said it.

“Klitelia”, Promethius heard from Aspasia’s angry mouth and Pericles’ guilty one.

“His first wife, his legal Athenian one,” the maiden explained. “Whose name will never be written in any of the history books. Klitelia never accepted the divorce Pericles demanded of her, and though Pericles gave her away to another husband, he still looks after her for the sake of honor. She bore him two sons, Paratus and Xanippus, who do whatever they can to cause problems between Aspasia and their father, sometimes by saying things that are true, and other times by telling lies,” the Pireasian woman continued. “Until recently, Pericles and Aspasia used to discuss their personal family situations, but now, they don’t reasonably discuss anything, in

private anyway. Two powerful people who won't discuss things like civilized commoners, can create many problems for many commoners," she went on, her diction sounding Northern Egyptian, then Southern Egyptian, then indiscernible. "It is a dangerous thing for people in high places to have so much power and not enough reason."

"Or compassion, which is the natural byproduct of intelligence," Promethius said.

"On...most days," the Pireasian woman conceded. She turned to Promethius. "Do you want to go someplace else?" she continued, letting him determine what would be done there.

"Yes, I do," he said, requiring one more thing before this Divinely inspired 'accidental' meeting would be continued. "But first, I demand, no request, to know your name."

The woman remained silent, hiding a wealth of secrets behind her eyes.

"Or something I can call you," he said.

The woman still said nothing, the hurt behind those secrets torturing her yet again.

"Something you would LIKE to be called, but perhaps never were," he offered with a kind, understanding smile.

"Silikia," she smiled, as if the sound came from a fond memory from long ago that had not chance of becoming a reality again. "I would like it if you called me Silikia."

"Then I would like it if you called me Silikus," Promethius offered with a bow, extending his elbow to hers, inviting her to lead him wherever she wished, or needed to.

CHAPTER 7

Aphrodite and Athena looked over the upper fields below the peaks of Olympus, a flat surface visible only from the highest peak of that mountain. It was more fertile than ever, hybrid seeds had been combined from three continents to make the best wheat, beans and legumes available, containing a protein which was almost identical in composition to meat, according to the latest analysis. It beat having to obtain meat from four legged animals or defective two legged ones, and was more civilized. Even more civilized was that the gods allowed those who sowed the seeds, nurtured the germinating buds and harvested them at just the right time to keep 15 percent of what they reaped for themselves. And to eat it in clandestine hamlets that were protected by the Olympian gods from angry mobs of mortals below, competing gods from other mountains and elements that fell from the earth's sky that would cause them undue cold, heat or degeneration of their flesh. As for their flesh, it was as experimental and 'otherworldly' as the plants they made come out of the earth to feed their masters, protectors and creators.

"Do you think we can ever take them home with us?" Athena asked her sister as she gazed over the workers from a platform of stone, wood and metal adorned with silver, gold and bronze.

“It would create difficulties,” her sister Aphrodite replied, pushing her long, blonde hair back over her ears, feeling it flow down past her shoulders to the small of her back. One of the workers smiled at her, offering the best yiolik in the patch to her, bowing her way as he tossed the fruit her way. “They are so loyal, and so eager to please, and so hard working,” she commented, as she caught the prize fruit and/or vegetable.

“And so honest,” Athena added, smelling the cross between a tomato, lentil and pea which was as pleasant to the tongue as it was nurturing to the body. “One of these could feed a man, or woman, for a week here. A month back home.”

That word ‘home’ caused both goddesses to lament their positions on earth, desiring to be anything back home, even commoners. Or servants. It had been a far longer tour of duty on earth than anyone expected, and though Zeus was a fair commander, and more often than not a kind one, he was often as naïve as the workers who were tilling these high plains Olympian fields.

Athena pondered the matter of ‘home’, visualizing a plan in her head, an ugly appendage relative to her sister Aphrodite, according to earth standards anyway. “Yes, I think we should take these workers home with us,” she continued, admiring how these workers seemed to find purpose in laboring with their hands in a constant struggle to grow living plants from inanimate soil, something the gods didn’t do. And, to be fair, something the Athenian democratic philosophers and the Spartan soldiers didn’t do either.

“We can’t take them home,” Aphrodite said regarding the half-human, half-animal mutants her own sub-species had produced for some valid and some defective purposes. “They would be an embarrassment,” she continued. “Their reptilian skin mixed with mammalian fur. Their misshapen heads. Their twisted backs. Their legs that are snarly and insect-like, their scarred and deformed faces. And their eyes that can see little except what is directly in front of them.”

“And their tongues, which are unable to speak any words,” Athena commented. “Even though their ancestors, and perhaps they, were once...human. We made many mistakes with this species. But, we are responsible for them.”

“So we can make them gods when we leave,” Aphrodite offered. “Let them rule over the ‘healthy’ specimens of humans on this planet. This planet is not our responsibility anymore. You’ve heard the news from home. Things are changing there and if we don’t get back to claim our rightful place and positions soon, there will be no place or position for us there.”

“I know,” Athena said. “But...hmm..” She looked at her good looking sister, sensing something ugly about what she had said and how she said it. “There is a war going on at home with our rival planet. Which is also being fought here as well. A war for survival. And you are worried about ‘place and position’?”

“Mistranslation in words,” Aphrodite’s replied, apologetically. “You know what I mean. We get assigned to serving our planet in this wretched place. With these wretched humanoids. In

YOUR wretched city. Where 'smart' is considered 'sexy' now. Where I saw a mason carve a likeness of YOU as the image of beauty rather than me. What was his name anyway?"

"Socrates, as I recall," Athena said, proudly. "Who discourses philosophy better than he sculpts, or does anything else."

"Who, with you, will make YOUR plain looking face the new standard for beauty, while I, who have been given NO city of my own, will be considered...plain, common, then ugly." Tears came down Aphrodite's face, real ones.

Athena offered her sister a hug, but she refused it, turning away.

"Please, we're family," Athena said, not letting Aphrodite escape her eyes. "And always will be. Till it is our time to be ended. Be it here, or anywhere else."

Aphrodite seemed convinced of Athena's sincerity, and they embraced. Just as they had done when they were children, being trained for pioneering duty by their father. Who saw them united, for the first time in as long as he could remember.

Zeus smiled when he saw his two daughters united in a rare embrace. "This is good," he said to both of them. "My two favorite, even though they are my only, daughters talking instead of fighting. Which is particularly important because what I have to tell both of you is...bad."

"Bad down here, or bad up there," Athena asked, pointing to the sky.

"Both!" Zeus related. "The Spartans have sacked Attica, a colony of Athens, showing its superiority on land. The Athenian Navy, is sending ships out to the Isthmus of Corinth to secure the seas and everything on it."

"So, the honorable Pericles is finally going to get his hands dirty, fighting the Spartans," Aphrodite said with eager anticipation.

"Yes, and no," Zeus related. "Aspasia, at his instruction, has requested that all Athenians retreat behind the Wall of the city, and the long wall connecting it to the port of Pireas."

"So the battle can be fought at sea," Athena said.

"So that YOUR city gets to be victorious, again!" Aphrodite blasted at her sister.

"So that OUR interests are served," Zeus replied. "It is in the best interest of US, and ALL of the Greeks that Athens survives all of this."

"And what of Sparta?" Aphrodite asked. "Aren't they part of the hybrid Greek civilization we created and can show off with pride to our leaders back home?"

“You have a valid point. They are. But Sparta right now is more expendable than the Athenians,” Zeus related. “Athens has the thinkers, Sparta has the fighters. And ideology aside, most of our essential supplies for getting back home, or making this planet a home for us in the future, lie in Athens right now. Something I was obliged to arrange without any of you knowing about it. I didn’t even tell Hera, my wife and, I think, hope anyway, my best friend.”

“How?” Aphrodite demanded to know.

“Why?” Athena pressed.

“Because this sacred peak is not so sacred anymore,” Zeus said, looking over the slopes of what thus far had been a secure place, and a comfortable one. “And we need to share everything we know. Including, Athena, what the prisoner you rescued from the prison in Athens told you about us.”

“He said nothing,” Athena. “His tongue was cut out, if you remember. On your High Priest’s orders! And he is illiterate, so he can’t write anything.”

“I know,” Zeus lamented. “But he can paint pictures, and you can ask him questions about what he drew,” he continued, staring into Athena’s ‘found out’ eyes. “The pictures which he showed you in your private chamber.”

Athena’s private chamber at the Temple dedicated to her in Athens was supposed to be private. There was no way Zeus or anyone else was supposed to gain entry into it. But he, or someone did. “I think the prisoner can be useful to us.”

“Not if those pictures he drew for you get into the wrong hands,” Zeus warned. “Show them to me, now, please,” he begged, from a place of vulnerability and fear that his two sheltered daughters had never seen.

Athena showed her father, and commander, the drawings the prisoner who offered shit to the gods had drawn for her. “It looks like a place where small creatures are created in closed dishes,” she said. “And these tiny demons all have their own personalities.”

“Maybe these demons operate in their own world, Athena,” Aphrodite offered. “An imaginary world made up by this deluded and sick man who needs for us to take care of him. Or more accurately, ME to take care of him.”

“Which may be a good idea,” Zeus said.

“But---!” Athena protested.

“---you will be needed to help protect the city named after you, Athena,” Zeus instructed her warrior princess daughter. “And you, Aphrodite, will take possession of this unfortunate man, and teach him that we mean him no harm. Not anymore anyway.”

“I can teach him, but if he doesn’t choose to learn?” Aphrodite inquired.

Zeus gave his two daughter that ‘mi rotas’ answer. “Don’t ask,” roughly translated, which meant that whatever was necessary had to be done, for the common good in the long term. No matter how much bad had to be done in the short term. It was the way of the gods, man and all universes in between, each of those realms in danger of being destroyed and vanishing without a trace, as did Troy, Atlantis and perhaps soon, Olympus.

But there was one thing he did say in defense of everything. “If not for the fear of retribution from us, and rewards for obeying the laws we passed on, or suggested, to these earthly humans, they would, and will degenerated into animals who will destroy each other, then themselves. I pray to the God beyond all gods that I am wrong, but fear that I may be proven right, very, very soon.”

CHAPTER 8

When it came to emergency situations amongst the Olympian exploration unit, whatever Zeus said went. Even Hera, his beloved wife, who advised him to send someone else to do another observation on the Athenian mortals on a cold, damp morning which was making his cough, arthritis and headaches even worse. As for Hera, her ears ached at the rucous around her at the port of Pireas, securely connected to the 3 mile long wall which at its North extended around all of Athens. The eyes under her hood covering her shivering, wet face were overwhelmed by the crowds of mortals. They were overloaded with their most valued possessions as they poured into the city gates. After of course being checked out by soldiers who were taking instructions from a woman, Aspasia. Some of the incoming people needed more convincing, soldiers discretely behind them with drawn swords. “We have other places where we can discretely watch, and change, what is going on here,” Hera said to beloved but frustratingly pig headed husband.

“And other identities to portray ourselves as,” Hestia, goddess of chastity and family values protested, running her fingers through the skimpy prostitute outfit assigned to be placed around her body, now covered with alluring tattoos, which she assumed were removable with the special brand of soap which was still in the supply kit of goods from back home. Now stored in the temple of Athena, 6 miles up the walled corridor in the main city. “I still don’t know what we are doing here,” she went on.

“As do all the rest of us,” Apollo, Zeus’ officially second in command answered from behind a fake beard which he was told was necessary because ‘too many people of power and influence knew his face.’ “What are we doing here, and why?”

The rest of the gods, in mortal costumes that mostly displeased them, agreed with Apollo, for the first time. The gods all asked questions of Zeus, inquiries that Hera assured them would be answered at “the appropriate time.”

Of course she knew they would be answered whenever he knew what those answers were. But there was one question Apollo asked that required answering immediately.

“Promethius,” the effeminate god who was now forced to act manly, noted. “I don’t see him here. “Where is he? This is a day when we’re all working and he’s playing philosopher with his whore, so I am told, through sources I will tell you about at ‘the appropriate time’.”

Zeus did not seem to know. Apollo then looked to Hera and her eyes revealed that she didn’t know either. But there were two things Zeus DID know. First, there was an enemy amongst his fellow gods working behind the scenes to destroy, or pervert, what he was assigned to do here. Second, to keep whatever gods were still loyal to him, and the Purpose to which he was dedicated, he had to tell them something about his favorite ‘spy’. “Promethius is manning the Poseiden weather machine so that things go well for the Athenian navy at sea,” he explained.

“Which I know how to operate better than he does,” Poseiden, god of the oceans, clad in a common seaman’s cloak protested.

“And maintaining the force field around the walls so that any Spartan Army thinking to attack by land has second thoughts,” Zeus continued.

“With machinery that I built,” Heptaetus, god of metal working grumbled. “And that he’ll probably break before any approaching Spartan approaching the force field gets a headache or feels a heaviness in his chest. Which...” he noticed something about Zeus. “You, Sir, seem to be breathing heavily and with some difficulty,” he said with an official sense of concern.

“I’m still breathing,” Zeus barked out, wiping the blood coming out of his mouth from his beard. “Which is all that matters!”

“So, where is Promethius now?” Apollo challenged. “We need to know, so that in case anything happened to him, the machines in his hands don’t fall into the wrong hands.”

Apollo was right. Hera gave Zeus that ‘tell them what you know so we don’t lose everything’ stare. Zeus looked upward to that Spirit which he asked help of only when he needed to. The ‘Almighty’ head of the gods voiced a silent prayer, offering all he had for one sign that such a Spirit did exist, and did care about the mortals on earth, and the gods from extra-planetary sources entrusted, by intent of accident, to take care of those mortals.

As for those mortals, unrest was brewing. Voices of thankfulness for being sheltered from the oncoming Spartan army by the Great Wall of Athens were replaced by worries about what would happen to their farms and villages outside the walls. And then protests to the Athenian soldiers, demanding that they be allowed to leave and defend their homes in the colonies on their own terms.

By means Zeus was unable to determine, his prayers were answered. “Ships approaching!” he heard in Greek, then at least ten different other languages, including Persian.

All rushed to the port to greet the ships. A hundred Athenian warships, by crude estimate, and as many supply vessels. All filled with goods that were distributed democratically and generously to those on shore. As for the soldiers, they seemed pleased with themselves, as was their commander. Pericles stepped off the boats, took to the highest platform and addressed the crowd.

“Welcome!” he stated boldly. “Rest assured, that the Spartans will not come here, and if they do, it will be for a short time, as the only people they have at home who know how to farm their fields are slaves, bossed around by women who do not know how to be bosses over anyone except their Spartan husbands, who they insist not leave home for more than a month at a time.”

The crowd laughed. The orator skilled at entertaining people and making them feel self-assured, both at the same time went on.

“Please accept these gifts,” he said. “Goods taken back from the Spartans and now given to you, our friends, allies, and comrades as proof that your free decision to accept our offer of protection is justified, and wise. In the common cause of democracy and freedom!”

The crowd rallied behind the cry of that word, ‘freedom’, even the slaves. As did Zeus, privately anyway, especially when he saw the picture-painting prisoner Athena had purchased from the prison cell amongst the mob-turned-congregation, mouthing ‘freedom’ with a mouth that could speak no audible words, but with a fire of liberation that warmed Zeus’ heart. Fire was put back into his belly when the rapidly aging Orionian Commander saw Prometheus hop off a ship of Egyptian design, bearing two metal boxes containing the weather-making devices with which he was entrusted. And with the woman he seemed to trust more than even himself. “This is Silikia,” he boldly said to Zeus, bringing her with him to the congregation of gods who were doing their best to act as mortals.

“And these people are?” the seductive cortisan with the heart of gold, as Zeus perceived it anyway, asked Prometheus.

“My...family, and friends,” Prometheus said.

“An interesting group of family and friends, Silikus,” she commented, seeming to know, or want to know, more than her station as a cortisan or mortal allowed.

But then again, it didn’t take a genius like Socrates, Hippocrates or Homer to suspect something odd about this group of refugees who preferred to talk rather than take their fair share of goods from the peer. Just as it didn’t take a genius to figure out that there was more than love of spirit and comradeship going on between Pericles, a man whose political position was predicated on virtue, and Aspasia, a cortisan whose official occupation was pleasing men who had lost of forfeited virtue.

The rest of the gods seemed more interested in ‘Silikus’ than anyone else, though. And of course, Silikia. Prometheus was a confirmed Revolutionary, his only lover being Free Will. Pleasures of the flesh were considered mischief in the eyes of the gods and noble men as well, and diversion of man or woman into mischief led them away from true Revolution, a fact that Dionysus, god of festivals and partying, knew very very well, and used a lot to keep the potentially rebellious masses occupied, and when necessary, drunk. And as for Prometheus getting involved with a woman, be it a goddess or a mortal, was against his ‘Religion’, as it would involve forming bonds with family which would interfere with his ability to serve the Collective. But lower emotions were now diseases of the gods as well as mortals.

Zeus noted the latter on Aphrodite, clad, by order, as an aging, common midwife, not unlike her mother Hera. She seemed jealous of this ‘Silikia’, but with some other emotion brewing in her head as well. Something which Zeus was about to discern when Silikia, commandress of the vessel bearing food which smelled more appealing than any other on the docks, asked ‘Silikus’ if she could burrow his ‘aunt’ (Aphrodite), to assist her in unloading the goods, insisting that her beloved Silikus get re-united with his family.

Silikia gave Silikus a parting kiss to seal the order. Zeus waved his left hand, dismissing Aphrodite so she could go with this odd, but interesting mortal, motioning with his right that the rest follow him.

Apollo gazed at his sister and the tattooed whore who had commanded the captured Egyptian supply boat. “I think I will remain here,” he said to Zeus. “Look after my sister.”

“Do what you want to, but do not forget to do what need to afterwards. You know where we will be,” Zeus said as Apollo went out to the docks, as a commoner, assisting and his sister in unloading Cretan fish, Syrian dried meat and flattened Egyptian barley bread, under the vigilant command of the very mortal, yet now empowered, Silikia. The alluring and wise Pireasian peasant-cortisan held on to bags of seed in her pocket with special care, as if knowing they would be used for replanting the pillaged and burned fields of Attica and the rest of the Athenian colonies, and countryside.

With that, the gods joined the line of mortals receiving ‘recaptured’ goods from Perciles, who most likely did as much stealing as the Spartans did. Zeus looked at the map of Athens which showed where they would take their lodgings that week, where the goods they needed for their own getaway back to home planet would be soon afterwards. The lodgings contained underground tunnels that were built by mortals in past generations who were promised everything by the gods, and given a one way ticket to places where they would not be seen again by their fellow mortals. “Ascendance to Heaven” was the official story given to the families of those mortal builders. “Blasted out into space, to places I do not know about by bosses I once trusted” was the reality that Zeus knew most painfully. And now...humanly.

CHAPTER 9

The Great Long Wall of Athens held. No Spartan soldier came within range of throwing a spear, shooting an arrow, or blasting out a 'come back victorious behind your shield or dead over it' battle cry at Athens to destroy it. They didn't have to.

The first death happened a month after the arrival of the victorious Athenian Navy and the armada of supply ships via Pireas. People said the mute prisoner who had offered shit to the gods deserved the fever, headaches, vomiting and diarrhea that ravaged his body as it emitted coughs and death rattles. And some said that the pustules on his skin had spelt out a warning to any who doubted the gods' power, or sincerity.

The next deaths happened to less deserving souls, including his two legitimate Athenian sons. People started to wonder what the gods were doing, and what they had done wrong to offend them. Aspasia, was now free to proclaim the son she bore Pericles, who DID follow in his father's noble footsteps, as his rightful heir.

The next series of deaths decimated another several thousand inhabitants behind the Great Athenian Wall, irrespective of class, rank or morality, involving now a quarter of the population of the overpopulated city. The victims included Pericles' beloved sister and his not so beloved but still cared for ex-wife. Those believing in witches suspected Aspasia as behind that death. Others stopped believing entirely in what they could not see, wondering if the gods still existed at all. By logical inference, made noble and acceptable by the philosophers, if the gods didn't exist, then the law of retribution for doing evil and reward for being virtuous was also illusory. Socrates was not touched by the plague, a stroke of luck that those still believing in witchcraft considered something else. Still, he did his best to make people ponder the real meaning of life, and face themselves on the Inside. While in uniform as a soldier defending his country or clad in his hole-ridden commoner robes, he continued to put a mirror in front of people's Souls, even at the time of dying. Somehow he made being courageous, truthful and kind the same thing. Many of those with whom he posed questions and co-discovered answers went to the Afterlife better than they had lived in the present one.

But despite Socrates' sharing his Soul with the sick, and Aspasia sharing what she had of medicines, food and material goods, it was not long before mob rule started to replace Athenian law in many quarters of the city, and morality-based honor. Force was becoming the way one got things needed to stay alive, and greed was how one kept them. That is if the plague chose to allow you to remain amongst the land of the living. Its mathematics were 'democratic', though,

delivering one in five mortal inhabitants behind the wall irrespective of social rank, biological age or moral fibre to the underworld..

Though sheltered in underground lodgings where no earthling humans were allowed, and only a selected few knew about, the gods were not fairing much better than the mortals. They gathered around the dinner table that night in Athena's temple to imbibe the evening's meal and discuss the events to happen the next day. As a gesture of good will, and because her cooking could make even the most plain of earthly foods seem palatable, and even enjoyable, Aphrodite volunteered to prepare the meal, serving each of her family and colleagues exactly what they wanted, along with what she felt that they needed.

Despite the fact that Temple Bread was Poseiden, favorite, he vomited out two bolus' of bread for every one he ate, the earth under his shaky feet as steady as the seas which rocked in a fierce wind, finally experiencing what seasick sailors not accustomed to the oceans did. Dioneysus, god of festivals, felt a headache that rivaled any hangover from overdrinking which any of his mortal subjects had ever had. Demeter, goddess of grain and agriculture, encouraged them to try to eat something, despite the fact that even bland barley bread tasted like rotten sewage to her ulcerated mouth. Nothing in their cases of emergency medicine from home planet, which never had been opened until now, seemed to do anything to stop the diseases plaguing their now very humanized bodies. But all were in the land of the living, thanks to the Spirit of spirits, save one.

Zeus stared at the cheese, olives and lamb in front of him, his emotions, thoughts and theologies drawn and quartered in four different directions. After the epidemic started, his health had, miraculously, improved. Perhaps because everyone around him, gods and mortals, needed it to. Or perhaps because it would allow his mind to be that much more tortured because of the poor health that afflicted the Soul closest to him in life, who he now yearned to join in death.

"Your wife Hera was a good woman, she will be taken care of well in the afterlife," Hades assured his Commander.

"And you have firm evidence of this because you know what actually happens to us after our bodies stop breathing?" Zeus challenged. He rose up out of his chair and then barked at the god sitting next to the god who was supposed to be manager of the underworld, in the eyes of the mortals anyway. "And you, Hermes! You sit here eating cheese, fish and olives while my wife, and your adopted mother, lingers somewhere out there waiting for passage to a 'better place' as you promised the mortals, and now us?"

Zeus then turned from Hermes' pale face and glossy eyes to Aphrodite's face, which was as healthy as his own. "And you, who were charged with being the goddess of justice. Aphrodite, whose face is too beautiful and pure to tell a lie! You tell ME why I'm now healthy as a horse, when I was the one who deserved to die!"

"Ask Apollo!" Aphrodite, one of the blessed ;'unaffected', burst out without seeming to think first. "Or Prometheus. Or Athena. They're not sick," the goddess of beauty whose face was still filled with robust color, and completely absent of pustules offered.

“Why?” Promethius challenged.

“How should I know?” Aphrodite replied. “Mending sick bodies is Apollo and Athena’s job, not mine!”

“Yes, Aphrodite, queen of Eros. Your job is to tempt those with healthy bodies and minds into getting diseases from unhealthy ones by encouraging recreational fornication, who---”
Heptaetus, the god in charge of metal works offered, the rest of his speculations were silenced by an emitus of bloody gruel from his mouth as well as flatulent fluid from his bowels.

“I don’t have to take this!” Aphrodite protested, getting up from her chair. “Father, tell these horny men, and jealous women, that all of this, and the death of my beloved mother, is their responsibility. Talk to them like Percicles talks to his insubordinate fools.”

“Yes, Pericles,” Zeus said with admiration, envy and hope.

“Who is as healthy as a horse,” Apollo offered.

“Yes, thank God,” Zeus said. It was the first time he uttered the G word in the singular tense. Something which would be an offense punishable by death for any mortal anywhere in Greece. A concept which the stone mason by the name of Socrates was instilling in his fellow citizens, students and ‘followers’ each day, as he was discovering what ‘God’ was about himself.
“Thank God for Pericles. A self made man who we had no part in creating. Not me anyway.”

“A man who can maybe help us?” Athena offered.

“Yes. Through science, and scientists, who we, I anyway, have had no part in creating,” Zeus continued.

“Who I have been working with, to use sound and music for purposes of---“ Apollo offered.

“----keeping the spirit strong, or directed, yes, I know,” Zeus said. “And you have been doing a great job of it. But we need another kind of wisdom and knowledge here.”

“I’ll go and talk to Pericles,” Apollo offered. “See what I can do.”

“No, you won’t,” Zeus commanded in quiet, calm voice that spoke volumes because of its composure. “He will,” he continued, pointing to Promethius.

Promethius pushed aside his mostly uneaten meal and got up, as if knowing exactly what to do.

CHAPTER 10

“So, this man from Kos, Silikus,” Pericles said to Promethius after he had worked his way through the guards at the Royal, now ‘Presidential’ Palace, which was now a hospital, in which the best doctors, earth healers and witches in Athens were finally working together to try to stem the tide of the plague. “What is his name?”

“Hippocrates, Sir,” Promethius replied. “A man of highly advanced medical skills.”

“Who claims that the gods have nothing to do with the ailments of man, or woman,” Promethius went on.

“And that we can heal ourselves of the afflictions Nature inflicts on us, or perhaps we inflict on ourselves,” Promethius continued, realizing that Pericles knew more about Hippocrates than maybe even he did.

“And this heretic in the service of humanity, from Kos,” Pericles inquired, his eyes drawn to another ten litters brought in by the stretcher bearers. “How did you, a commoner from neither Athens nor Kos, and I trust not Sparta, who still holds the affections of a foreign woman from Pireas dear to your foreign heart, hear about Hippocrates?”

“Socrates, Sir,” the champion of defiance replied with a subservient bow.

“A stone mason by profession, philosopher by passion,” Pericles smiled. “An unpaid philosopher,” he chuckled, en route to a more sinister emotion. “Who claims to have been influenced with regard to his ideas about honor, virtue and love by Aspasia.”

“Yes, Sir,” Promethius answered.

“And, ‘Silikis’,” the idealistic statesman who also knew about the underbelly of human nature went on. “How do you propose to pay this miracle man from Kos?”

“He does not accept payment for his services, Sir.” Promethius said.

“A man who doesn’t value payment for his services can be said to be someone who doesn’t value, or trust them, himself,” Pericles said. “Do all human beings, be they born of man or god, not want something in return for their service?”

“Perhaps, for consideration, they seek be remembered beyond his death, or for his work to be carried on after such?” Promethius answered, sensing that Pericles was a man who not only sought the Truth, but deserved it to be told to him. “Perhaps, I would propose, to know at the time of leaving this life that he did something important in it that changed humanity forever in ways that no one else could, or did? And perhaps every moment when we are alive, really alive, we are living in the past, present and future at the same time? A timeless place where we die and are reborn to something beyond death, both at the same time?”

“You sound like a philosopher, with all of these statements posed as questions,” Pericles chuckled, his face seeming to be pained by the first smile that came across his lips in months.

“Which is not such a bad thing, Sir?” Prometheus replied.

“But, an ineffective thing if you pose too many questions,” Pericles offered as a teacher. “And a dangerous thing if you pose these questions to non-questioning rulers,” he warned as a father. “And...as for this matter of bringing in Hippocrates all the way from Kos...” he went on, about to reject Prometheus’ suggestion regarding the heretical healer whose presence in Athens would anger the gods as well as his political opponents.

Pericles’ desire to continue discoursing about Truth was interrupted by an impish, middle aged soldier running into the door. By chance, or perhaps design, it was Socrates himself in full military uniform, delivering a message sealed in wax.

Pericles turned his back, read what was on the message, and then turned around to Prometheus. Pericles looked back to Socrates asking if whatever was in the message was true. Socrates shrugged his shoulders in a ‘I don’t know either’ gesture. But they did know something between them.

It was unusual for a god to now know the secrets between mortals. Usually it was the other way around. But as Prometheus knew, and had worked for from the first day he gave fire to mankind, the black and white line between being godlike and human was fading into an etherial and functional zone of foggy gray.

Pericles dismissed Socrates with a slight bow of the head, returned by the philosopher-mason with a deeper one. While Socrates ran back on his way on his hobbly, very ungodly legs, Prometheus attempted to see what was on sealed papyrus message. With a skill worthy of an Olympian god, Pericles hid it from his sight.

“I will give you my fastest ship I have to bring this Hippocrates here from Kos,” Pericles pledged.

“And I will see to it that the winds and the seas will bring him here with maximal alacrity,” Prometheus promised with words that should probably have been better chosen. He anticipated the next questions from Pericles. Such as how a mere mortal could promise winds and seas to obey his command. And how a mortal who is a commoner used words such as ‘alacrity’ rather than ‘speed’. Though the gods were on their way to being ignored by many Athenians, those gods still had to obey rules set down by their Commanders at home, and one of the first of them was to not reveal their real identity to anyone not on the official list. Violation of that Prime Order resulted in trans-planetary destructive rays that killed prematurely-informed humans before, as well as the civilizations they lived in.

By some kind of intervention beyond the Heavens, or the Stars, Pericles put practicality before theological inquiry. “Get Hippocrates here as soon as you can, anyway you can!” he commanded.

“Of course, Sir,” Promethius said, having enlisted himself very freely as an obedient servant in Pericles Army.

“And tell no other man about this,” he continued. “If word gets to the Spartans about how bad things are here, and what we are trying to do to stop it, things could get far worse.”

“Of course, Sir,” Promethius continued.

“And tell no women of this either. Particularly those who we are fondest of,” he warned.

With that Pericles’ attended to duties of state, assigning four of his strongest sailor-soldiers to Promethius’ command.

“Your orders, Sir?” the most senior and superior of them asked Promethius.

“To tell me why Pericles doesn’t want Aspasia or her cortisans to know where we are and what we are doing,” came to mind, but not voice. Such would be perhaps something to figure out later, assuming that there would be anyone left in Athens to figure it out with, or for.

CHAPTER 11

By day, the ship under Promethuis’ command moved at an unprecedented speed of 40 knots per hour, made possible by oar power from human muscle power, and wind power made possible from the weather-making machine entrusted to Poseiden. The devise was working at only 35

percent efficiency now, but Mother Nature, whoever she was, allowed it to have a maximal effect. Captain Ionesis, who considered himself the ship's father, commented on the rapidity of the voyage to fetch Hippocrates.

"I'm proud of you, lad," he said to the vessel of common design doing uncommon feats. "Faster than any horse on land, any bird in flight and anything that I've seen swimming under the water."

"This is your boat then?" Promethius commented, feeling a bit seasick, but he feared plague sick.

"He's a ship," Ionesis boasted.

"A 'he'?" Promethius asked. "Boats, and ships, are usually 'shes'."

"Well, Gluteus is a man," the proud Captain bellowed though his thick, black beard. "Who I've known as a boy. A baby actually. Born of wooden planks, nails, and twine that I myself put together. And used for many purposes, and many commanders. Most of whom are dead now. But when it comes time for Gluteus to become splinters of wood and metal again, be it by swells against rock mounted by the sea or the volley of fireballs launched by man, such will be the day I face the Beyond as well," he said with a warm and dedicated smile. "And even when I am asleep, I can hear what Gluteus is doing, thinking and feeling."

Perhaps the boat, or ship, did have a personality. Perhaps the inanimate hunk of wood and metal was resurrected into living form by a man who believed it to be alive. Such is what seemed to happen to the sculptures of the gods made by the artists who created them, at least in the inner imaginations of both mortals and gods who observed and felt their artistry. Such warmed Promethius' heart, though it also worried his mind. There was no way that Ionesis would sleep so soundly that he would not notice Promethius summoning the winds to move the ship to a time-space porthole, or try to make Poseiden's weather machine move the portholes to him. And even if he could, Hippocrates was no fool either. This self-made, 100 percent biologically earthling, man of medical science who Promethius had discretely mentored as a boy was well aware of any interference from the gods, and if exposed to too much of the gods' technologies, would be able to figure out how they worked. Such would lead to duplication and abuse by those clever and less honorable than Hippocrates of course.

Yet, the lives of mortals and gods hung in the balance. Every hour, according to most recently calculations, Hippocrates' arrival was delayed would cost another beloved soul to be lost, and plunge at least one into deep mourning. As Captain Ionesis went into a vigilant one-eye-open 'sleep'. Promethius looked to the tall mountains on distant horizon, hoping and praying that the distant shoreline would meet Gluteus' battletested bow sooner than later.

Hippocrates was seated under a tree, a class of students. It was not the 500 year old oak that was said to be the location of his school in Kos, but when on the road, any big tree would do.

Promethius listened from a distance, thinking himself to not be seen. The lessons today were about how to observe the human body when it was ailing, and what one could ascertain about it after it was dead. Though he spoke about the four humors, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, being the essence of life, imbalances between them being the basis of disease, he did not seem to believe that such was all there was to it, his inwardly looking eyes seeking the real answer behind each fact proven by observation and logic. He went on to describe some of the diseases which were a result of bad diet, bad environment or bad luck, one of them being 'the shakes' which take away people's consciousness and control of their bodies for brief periods of time. Though he could not say why these 'epileptic' seizures took place, he was sure it was not something from the gods, or the spirits. No, every kind of disease was caused by something from nature. If you were watchful on the outside, you could detect what was going on in the inside. Such as swelled fingers and webbed digits in people with heart disease or 'cancers' (as he called them) in the lungs. As for treating diseases, the power of prayer was not discounted, but not relied upon either. No! Disease was caused by natural phenomena, observable by human senses, and curable by human means using human tools and the 'medicine chest' of naturally occurring plants, animals and inanimate elements.

The students, men and women, seemed amazed, and astounded at the old man's wisdom. Some recorded it on slabs of wood and papyrus. Others let the spoken words permeate into their heads. All of them had the Healer's sense of intuitive wonderment and dedication imprinted on their Souls.

"Nature never gives you a problem without a solution," he proclaimed to his student. "Such as emetics, laxatives, blood letting in congestive diseases. Willowbark and assorted other herbs for painful ones. Opium to induce slumber for surgery. Surgery to extract cancerous masses and arrow-tips, pig fat for burns, after which the flesh can be best put together by..."

Hippocrates stopped, having spotted Promethius in the bushes.

"Things we will discuss later this afternoon," Hippocrates said to his students. "After you have absorbed what I told you now, and offer your own opinions and intuitions on the matter. As long as they are based in firm observation and logical reasoning!"

As the students dispersed, Promethius approached. The now middle aged Hippocrates had many questions to ask his old friend as he hobbled down the hill from his arborous lectern. "I have one question for you, my friend," he challenged. "How is it that with every year I get older and you don't?"

"Eating well, exercising a lot, copulating less," Promethius offered with a smile.

"Somehow I don't think so," Hippocrates replied, phasing into asking the one question which Promethius never answered truthfully. "Tell me, old friend, what is your name? This time, I mean."

Promethius felt footstep approaching from behind him. Prior to his instruction, his private Athenian guards, dressed as civilians but armed as soldiers, stood on both sides of him.

“Silikus,” Promethius said to Hippocrates, both men knowing it was a lie. And knowing that the soldiers aside Promethius needed to know it as the Truth.

“And who do you have with you?” Hippocrates inquired.

Promethius decided to relate the most easily told and humanistic truth first. “To my right is Ionesis, a skilled man of the sea and builder of great boats.”

“Ships!” Ionesis shot back. “Ships, not boats.”

“Who speaks with an Athenian accent,” Hippocrates noted as he approached Promethius and his ‘civilian’ friends, his powers of observation becoming stronger with each bold step he took forward. “And who has with him men with Athenian swords. Military issue swords from Pericles’ special guard. And one of them has a wound that is filled with...” Hippocrates led his eyes to where his nose saw first. “Miasmata,” said as he lifted the soldier’s kilt and smelled the wound underneath. “Dirty flesh caused by some kind of dirty creatures I have not been able to see with the two eyes on either side of my nose, but sense with the one just above the bridge of it.” He commented. “If you don’t get that wound treated, you will lose the leg.”

“And you know this because?” Ionesis challenged, as a Captain, and an Athenian.

“I have seen many wounds with miasmata in them, made by many Athenian swords, on many fellow Greeks,” Hippocrates shot back defiantly at Ionesis. The same kind of righteous defiance that Promethius had shown, in the past anyway, when defying Zeus order to not give fire to mortal men, women and children. And after that, the gift of reading. And the ability to use critical reason to evaluate what you read.

A battle of wits and wills was about to start between Hippocrates and Ionesis. No matter who won, the losers would be the citizenry of Athens at the hands of the plague.

“We need your help,” Promethius said to his old medical friend.

“By ‘we’ do you mean you, or perhaps the Persians?” Hippocrates challenged. “I am honor bound to give medical services to anyone who needs them. But I will not bring to health diseased Persian tyrants, or any tyrants, who will use that health to destroy the lives of others.”

“I know, which you have proven before,” Promethius said. “When you were summoned to help the King of Persia.”

“Who was defeated by Greeks UNITED against him, as we all remember, or should anyway,” Hippocrates said.

“The Spartans started this war,” Ionesis barked out like a trained dog. “And it’s job to finish it, and them!”

“And you are Athenian enough to need to believe that, I suppose,” Hippocrates said with compassion and pity. Treating this loyal canine his philosophical defects would take another kind of treatment. In the meantime, Hippocrates felt himself called once again to duty, one that called his father and grandfather before him.

“What is this Athenian problem you have, Silikus?” Hippocrates asked.

“Plague,” Promethius replied. “A very bad one that no one has been able to stop.”

“Hmmm...In Athens,” Hippocrates said in a slow talking voice.

“Yes,” Ionesis replied, humility back in his voice, fueled by desperation and vulnerability.

“A city of the highest respected scholars, artists, writers and scientists, ruled by a democratic assembly rather than a king who held that position because he had the good fortune to come out of the right queen-mother’s womb,” the Old Healer said.

“Yes,” Ionesis replied, proudly.

“Where I have not been granted citizenship, because of where I was born, and where my parents were born,” Hippocrates pointed out, angrily.

“Pericles is doing the best he can to change that ancient law, but some things take time,” Promethius said.

“In time for his illegitimate son born to a foreign cortisan to be a legitimate citizen of the city he may rule one day, Silikus?” Hippocrates offered, seeing that Ionesis, despite his rank, was not aware of what was common gossip in the ranks below him.

“Will you help your fellow Greeks, from many places, who are now in Athens?” Promethius pressed. “There is no time to lose.”

“After I do a few things first,” Hippocrates said.

“Which are?” Ionesis asked.

“First, I treat that wound on your Seargent’s leg,” Hippocrates asserted.

“Great! Fine, I mean, thank you, I...”

“Then, I finish lecturing my students, as I have promised them another session to ask questions of me, and promised myself another session to seek answers from them.”

“Of course.”

“And, I can take any of them who wish to come to Athens as my assistants, to be treated as my equals, and equal to any Athenian citizen, in all manners.”

“As long as Pericles reigns below, and the gods reign up high, such will be the case,” Ionesis assured the stubborn old healer.

The deal was struck, the provisions made. Little did Hippocrates know that the ‘as long as’ pledges were based on more past glories than present realities.

CHAPTER 12

Captain Ionesis slept surprisingly soundly on the journey to the port of Pireas, thanks to something in Hippocrates’ pouch that was supposed to be good for his eyes that could not see so well in the dark and his legs that could not run as fast as they usually did without extreme pain. It gave Promethius a chance to do some things under the bow and behind the rudder with Poseiden’s weather machine that made the boat move three times faster than any natural speed, and when directed into a stream of stilled waters, the ride was smooth as silk. Unfortunately, Promethius’ sense of direction using Earthly transport routes was not as clear as it used to be, as the three fold increase in Gluteus’ speed had taken them on a course that was two times more distance than it should have been. But, the arrival into Pireas was ahead of Pericles’ anticipated schedule. Unfortunately it was well behind the schedule of the plague which was now everywhere in Athens and the wall-enclosed port. From a distance, though the city seemed to be well protected and healthy.

“Soldiers, on every tower,” Hippocrates noted. “Looking very healthy.”

“And still,” Promethius said. “Motionless, most of them. Very upright, and motionless.” He maneuvered the boat closer into port, between the heavily armed guard ships, their decks minimally manned. One of them waved him through, a junior officer throwing him the most recent map of underwater spikes which were inserted to keep undesirable boats, and ships, from docking.

As Promethius moved closer into port, his other senses became painfully operative.

“What’s that?” one of Hippocrates’ students, a pampered nobleman’s son from Thebes who was not allowed back home till he made something of himself somewhere else, said as he smelled the air.

“The smell of death, Linolakis” Hippocrates replied. He looked to the other student, Wilikus, a commoner from Aspasia’s home town of Miletis built like Hercules, barfing his guts out over the side of the boat after seeing the bodies lining the streets, some in piles, some remaining where the tortured users of them died.

One of the bodies of the upright and attentive soldiers on the wall at the observation tower swayed back and forth in an upcoming wind, two figures in black hoods and capes with their mouths covered rushing over and propping up the corpse again so he would come to life in the eyes of any oncoming observer or invader.

“Alive men on the ships away from the walls, dead ones behind it,” Hippocrates said. “which means that---“

“Someone say something?” Ioniesis blurbed out of his mouth having been awakened by a bump on the bow of a boat, the cause of which were two dead sheep and one lifeless dog.

“Hoyst those dead animals up,” Hippocrates said. “I will be needing them.”

“For what?” Linolakis said.

“Observation and analysis,” Hippocrates replied. “As I recall, Athenian law still forbids us from cutting open dead bodies, even if it is find out what is killing those who are still alive.”

“A law which will be changed, very soon,” Promethius said, pointing to Pericles’ waiting on shore with his imperial guard, including the stone mason/philosopher/soldier Socrates. They were all clad in commoner’s attire, so as to not arouse suspicions from anyone. Something that seemed to upset some members of the guards who were assigned the identity of being commoner women. All seemed healthy.

“Sir!” Captain Ionesis said to his Commander in Chief with salute, trying to not let him see that he had been sleeping. “We have delivered your agricultural advisor, on schedule,” he said.

“And with the gods’ speed, Captain Ionesis” Pericles said. “Did you see or were you seen by any Spartan ships?” he inquired. “Or boats? Or anything else on the water that looked suspicious?”

“No, Sir,” Ionesis replied with assurance. “As far as I know, the only ones who know about what has been happening here are you.”

“And now us,” Hippocrates said, his eyes, ears and nose fully sensing what was around him, communicating their raw data to a mind that allowed that data to find its natural slot rather than one he pre-made for it. “How many are dead?”

“Twenty thousand, by crude estimate,” Pericles said. “A quarter of the population.”

Hippocrates examined the three most recently dead body on the port, a boy of no more than three years old, in the arms of a woman who looked like his mother, the protective arm over them from a terrified man who was probably his father. “How many of the dead are Athenians?” he asked, suspecting something foul going on behind his inward and outwardly focused eyes.

“Enough of them!” Pericles blasted out in a manner not in keeping with his normal temperment nor position as a thinking statesman. “And you are supposed to be a man of medicine, not politics!”

“Which is true, and which is why I want and NEED to know, proportionally, how many Athenians and foreigners have fallen victim to the plague,” Hippocrates said, calmly.

“The plague is killing everyone equally,” Pericles said. “Irrespective of rank, status or moral fiber,” he continued, declining to mention the death of his two sons, sister and ex-wife.

“Yes,” Promethius added, regarding the subpopulation of gods who Pericles did not know about, nor was allowed to. “This plague is affecting everyone equally. Irrespective of rank, status, or moral fiber.”

“Or profession?” Hippocrates asked.

“Aspasia’s ladies are equally affected,” Pericles replied.

“And Aspasia?” Hippocrates inquired.

“Well, so far. And doing what she can to minister to the sick, and consol the dying” Pericles answered. “As is Silikia, her valued assistant.”

“Productively, I hope,” Hippocrates said. “Though medicine seems like a defiant Calling, saving people from naturally occurring disease and death, the most effective rule of this godlike profession is to first, do no harm.”

“By standing by and watching disease kill people?” Pericles blasted out, his patience wearing thin. .

“Observing, thinking, then acting,” Hippocrates said, as he examined the dead bodies, carved out appropriate parts, dipped them in fluids of various odors and colors, then gave them to Wilikus to put in his wooden chest. He related the medical details and medical notes in his head to Linolakis, whose penmanship was probably better and whose skills at animal or human dissection were far worse than his semi-literate classmate.

Pericles and Ionesis were impressed by the old man’s skill. Promethius was proud of his ingenuity. Truth be told, all Promethius mentored Hippocrates about were matters philosophical, the inquisitive and intuitive boy becoming a wise man in the ways of medicine completely on his own. Yes, the gods were instructive eons ago pushing evolution ahead by various experimentation on hairless apes, but the humanoid they produced on this mostly heart and less head oriented planet were becoming...godlike themselves. Perhaps one day Promethius’ planet and this one could converse openly, as comrades.

“But, tell me something else about how those are fairing who professions other than Aspasia’s, Pericles,” Hippocrates said after having completed his preliminary surveys and observations of the dead. “Sailors, who are offshore most of the time, for instance. Are they afflicted as proportionally as the others?”

“Yes,” Pericles said, as a boatload of dead sailors came into port, unloading bodies on the shore to be identified. One of them was still breathing, and recognized immediately. “Themikus!” Ionesis cried out, grabbing the still breathing lad in his arms from the undertaker.

“He will be, soon,” the undertaker replied. “Let him die in peace!”

“My son will die not die!” Ionesis blasted out, his fiery red eyes aimed Hippocrates. “You make him well! Now!”

Hippocrates rushed into emergency mode, saying silent prayers to some kind of God to be an instrument of Its healing will. The body was covered with pustules, the tongue oozing with ulcers, and the head feverish, the breath sounding more like rattle than air. But the blood letting, pustule draining, and elixors forced into his mouth and pushed into his veins were to no avail. The final burst of energy that comes to the Soul just at the time of dying surged into his body. The lad of 15 who was trying to pass himself off as a sailor of 20 opened his eyes and looked to his father with an assured and satisfied smile. “I’ll be alright...I’ll be...”. As was built into Nature, or this species of mankind designed by other ‘men’, answers at to what is on the other side of the abyss were lacking.

Promethius put his hand on Ionesis’ shoulder, allowing virtue to spill from his mouth rather than truth. “He’ll be alright where he is going,” he assured the fearless Captain who had lost many men under his command to the sea or to enemy arrows, but never his son. “Your son will be alright,” Promethius assured him yet again.

“But he won’t be!” Ionesis grunted though angry teeth still shattering, staring down Hippocrates. His hands found their way to the old healer’s throat, as he did his best to squeeze the life out of the ‘witch’ who had killed his son.

Pericles pulled Captain Ionesis off the ‘agricultural advisor’ from Kos, instructing his men to be gentle with the manner of restraining him. Hippocrates advised that he be confined as well.

“So, we were talking about professions and people who are not afflicted by this plague,” Hippocrates said to the elected ruler of the city which was now become lawless, and unrulable.

“I haven’t noticed any,” Pericles said. “And neither have our physicians, all of whom are now...” Tears of guilt came down the face of the leader who embodied everything strange about this Truth-serving city. But as soon as they came down, he wiped them off, noting fear in the eyes of Hippocrates’ young assistants.

“Me and my fellow healers know the risks of what we do,” Hippocrates said. “As does the impish, philosophically-looking man in the military uniform next to you does,” he continued. “What is his name?”

“Socrates,” Pericles said. “Stone mason by profession, philosopher by Nature.”

“Your reputation precedes you, Hippocrates,” Socrates said.

“And yours is only beginning, I sense,” the medical master said. “But be aware, that no good deed goes unpunished.”

“So I have been advised by my friend here,” Socrates said regarding Promethius.

It was a proud moment for Promethius, seeing two of his students finally meeting. But a perilous one as well, as every moment spent in prophetic prediction of the future could cost the life of another mortal, or god, who would not live to see it.

“So, my dear and still very much alive Pericles, show me where the living still are, and where the dead were living before they died,” Hippocrates said.

With that, the tour of his city, as it was, started. Usually, Pericles was proud of Athens and on such tours he invited his guests to interact with and partake of the various varieties of bounties for the mind, body and spirit that abounded in this jewel of man-made, and woman-supported, civilization. He was objective, truthful and voiced his preliminary speculative opinions about one thing--- putting trust in the wrong women. Something that didn’t seem quite fit the logic of the day to Promethius. But after the tour of the dead, dying and still healthy was done, as well as their environment, Hippocrates voiced his preliminary speculations in private, with his students.

Promethius was not allowed in to the metal-works shop which was converted into a medical laboratory, by Hippocrates’ request. “My students get inhibited in their creative thinking if they are around people with too much authority and power, as do I,” he had said prior to cloistering

himself in to the now windowless building. “And besides, I need for one truthful man I can trust to be with other men who are probably less truthful,” he final explanation for leaving Prometheus to watch Socrates and Pericles, or perhaps leaving Socrates to watch Prometheus and Pericles. But it didn’t matter. What did matter was the reason, logic and intuitive spark of discovery that came out of Hippocrates’ eyes when he and his students, now probably able to be teachers themselves, emerged from the discretely guarded doors of the shop bearing no sign over its archway.

“I have observed that metal working craftsmen working away from the general population, and in hot, dry air, are still healthy. And that the areas where the most dying happened was where water is stagnant. And that the undigested bread coming out of the mouths and anuses of the dying, and dead, and the pustules on their faces and sputum on their nostrils are infested with miasmata,” he announced.

“Small worms or other creatures the eye cannot see,” Prometheus explained to Pericles and Socrates.

Hippocrates threw the god-man a ‘shut up and let me talk’ stare. Prometheus backed off, allowing his now liberated and dignifiably compassionate former student to continue.

“It is my opinion, based on what we have observed, that to stop the dead from killing more of the living, you must burn all of the bodies,” Hippocrates said. “And to stop the healthy from becoming sick, you keep them away from stagnant water. And the water people need to drink had to be boiled first to kill the miasmata, and where it is not possible to boil the water, you move it around rapidly so that the miasmata have a harder time replicating themselves.”

“And to treat the dying?” Pericles asked.

“A case by case situation,” Hippocrates said. “I cannot guarantee that the medical ‘tricks’ in my bags and books will save everyone who is sick, but I think we can save most of them from dying.”

“And the cause of this disease?” Socrates inquired. “If we can determine the cause of something wrong, can we not make it right, by knowing how it went wrong?”

“In matters of the human mind, probably yes. But in matters of the human body, not always,” Hippocrates offered. “But yes, my dear stone mason whose wife and sons have been miraculously spared from this plague. You are correct, in that we can gain much information about what caused this disease by looking at the first victim of this disease.”

“An ingrate who offered shit to the gods,” Pericles said. “Who was diseased in the head.”

“As a result of something wrong in his body, perhaps” Hippocrates said. “And where is his body? I pray to whatever any of us still holds as Holy that it is still around.”

“No one dared to touch it, or look into its eyes, for fear that they would be touched by his madness,” Pericles said.

“Interesting,” Hippocrates said.

“What? All of this death?” Pericles shot back, confusing Hippocrates’ mental detachment for lack of caring.

“Interesting that superstition, fear of people touching or looking at his corpse, serves the science of finding out what killed him,” the ‘possessed’ philosophical physician who collected no money for his services said. “Please, take me to him, while my friend Silikus tends to matters that he must.” He turned to his old friend. “How many of your family are in need of care, Silikus?” he asked.

“Twelve, now eleven,” Promethius replied. “Half men, half women. One old, the rest average age adults, all things considered. And...one woman, who will be joining them soon as my wife, should she consent to being so.”

Hippocrates instructed Wilikus to dole out the appropriate ration of medicinals from his chest, refilled by the remaining Athenian herbalists he had allowed into his private pharmacy. He assigned Linolakis the task of writing out the formularies on a wooden plank, handing it to Promethius. “

“I’m no physician!” Promethius blasted back, scared of what would happen if he administered the medicine and the medicinal interventions incorrectly. Incurring the wrath of his fellow gods for doing them harm, or chastised if he didn’t do them enough good.

“See one, do one, teach one,” Hippocrates said. “Your hands did most of those procedures for me at least once.”

“But they are your hands,” Promethius replied, his blood and pus stained hands shaking.

“And you look like an intelligent enough man to command those digits to do what needs to be done,” Hippocrates affirmed. “Or find someone with better hands than you to teach.”

Hippocrates seemed to mean far more than what he said. Something that used to be possible only by gods, or god-mortal hybrids. There was something about what Hippocrates said that seemed to be divinely inspired, perhaps channelled from a Wisdom beyond the understanding of man, or god. “Misgata”. And Pericles’ lament and fear of trusting women who were untrustable.

Promethius let it all incubate between his ears as he headed back to the secluded chamber his fellow ‘gods’ were still using as headquarters, or perhaps a group coffin, to do what he could for his kind while Hippocrates and his fellow mortals did what they could for theirs until the very private meeting between Promethius, Hippocrates and Pericles would take place regarding the ‘index case’. And an important thing about the index case was that the real findings stay private.

Particularly because ‘miasmata’ was something that human beings on earth were not scheduled to discover for another thousand or two years. Tiny enemies you could not kill with a fist, sword or even prayer that had emerged on planet earth a long time ago. A group of creatures that had been eliminated back on the gods’ home planet...or perhaps resurrected by renegade gods here for their own malevolent purpose, aimed first at its most powerful and informed mortal.

CHAPTER 13

Within a week of Hippocrates’ visit to Athens, two hundred people died within Athens’ walls by the second week, it was less than twenty, most of them due to the usual causes of death. Degeneration of the brain in the demented. Breakdown of bones and joints in the old. Regret and learned helplessness in the underachieved. Heartache and lament in those who could not find a way to live without their beloved departed.

As for the gods, the medicinals and instructions as to how to use them saved most everyone from getting sick or dying. But Artemis and Dionysus had unofficially ventured off into the woods to have a hunting party with fresh bread and cheese they had stolen from starving peasants, coming back looking more like prey than predator, too late for the Hippocrates’ Given the fact that there would soon be few animals left to hunt on earth after agriculture took off and urbanization afterwards, and festivals for the gods were on the decline, it was no great loss to earth, or the gods’ mission. Besides, the two crew members had taken way too many risks before intermingling with the mortals, and it was only a matter of time till they got their luck ran out.

Hippocrates’ students were given official papers designating them doctors by the Old Man, deciding it would be a good thing to stay on in Athens, as they would be taken well care of when they were hungry, sick or in need of recreational diversion. As for the students’ mentor, he got what he wanted most of all, citizenship in Athens with the right to speak his mind in the Demos and vote, privileges that would have to be availed at a later date, after his teaching and medical duties in other cities were fulfilled. But before he left, it was Hippocrates’ sacred medical duty to do one more examination on one patient, the first to die of the plague, whose whereabouts were finally found, and still kept secret.

Sakadicus,, Pericles’ most trusted jailer in a city that officially had no prisons, and still buyable low life who could report on others of his kind, led the congregation of ‘visiting commoners’ down the street, then an alley, then a path leading to a tunnel that took them to the outskirts of the city. Hippocrates donned the hooded robe of a Syrian merchant, Pericles’ as his brother. Behind him was Socrates, clad as a miller. Then Prometheus as a carpenter. Then a beardless

Zues as his grandmother, his face devoid of hair for the first time since he reached manhood. Though Apollo would never let old man live it down, it was all 'legal' according to the rules the gods had to obey while on Earth, and necessary, as they passed more temples which were now empty, and houses where Priests and Priestesses were cutting up their holy robes to make rags and bandages for those still recovering from the plague.

"Most of the material looted from shops and houses owned by the dying, dead or weak were returned to their owners, or survivors of such," Promethius noted to his Grandmother in Egyptian, since she was not able to understand Greek.

"Not so for the Temple of Athens, or the temples built for, and by the rest of us," Zeus said, remembering that the vaults of grain, cloth, herbs and jewels offered to the gods were now empty. "And there seemed to be no one who wants to fill them again."

"Maybe Apollo can compose a song that will draw the people back to the temple, warm their hearts, make them feel good about themselves, and good about us again," Promethius said. "We'll only take what we need this time, and try to offer them something real in return instead of just more hope for their miserable futures."

"No, I don't think so," Zeus said. "We still have storage supplies in Delphi. And no mortal has dared to climb Olympus. But, in time they will. By which time we will be gone. Or departed. Our purpose here is coming to an end you know."

"Yes, but not today," Promethius reminded his Grandmother, and still Mission Commander. "We stay here till the job is finished."

"You don't want to go home again, taking whatever you can with you?" Granny Zeus said. "Most everyone else in our unit does."

"What I want doesn't matter anymore. And it shouldn't matter to you either, if you are still the man, or woman, I believe you to be," Promethius' reply.

Zeus smiled with glowing satisfaction, his favorite rebel reminding him of the duty that he was about to abandon. Yes, the myths about hope and nobility on a planet where might seemed to always triumph over right were real, made so by the men and women who wrote them, and those who believed in them. Perhaps the most enlightened life forms in the universe were those who had the most cynical minds but idealistic hearts. Be they humanoids who walked on two legs, fur covered creatures who got around on four, or breeding failures that were in-between, still tilling the fields and guarding the perimeters around the spaceships hidden in the caves on Olympus.

"Granny Zeus" feet were aching, his chest tired, his lungs struggling to grasp breath as the path become slope, then a hill, then a series of large steps which seemed like mountain boulders. He decided to see if Apollo's music was all he formulated it to be. In a hum that could double as a male or female voice, he began the melody, escalating it to a song with non-sense words, then real words in Greek. But by the time the first stanza was completed, Sakadicus raised his hand, noting a white rag stained with blood attached to a tree-limb on the left, a slab of hairy leather

which seemed like human hide on the right. Crows feasted on disposed body parts of two and four legged creatures in the field just ahead of him.

“Brings back memories,” Promethius said to Granny, looking at the scars still lingering on his belly wall.

“I’m sorry,” Zeus said regarding Promethius’ punishment of having his liver being eaten by night and growing back by day for having given too many powers to the mortals ahead of schedule. A schedule that he himself soon wanted to accelerate, but couldn’t, for fear that he, or his beloved wife, would get an even worse punishment from his superiors. But Hera was gone now, and Zeus had nothing to lose.

Sakadacus motioned for the group to follow him through a small path to his left, covered by jagged red rocks made so by blood, according to the smell. It led to small hut made of rock which was sculpted with an accuracy that could be only done by an extra-planetary machine, or workers who worshipped such.

Zeus recognized its design and stopped dead in his tracks.

“There’s a problem here?” Sakadacus said. “Your grandmother can’t stand the smell of blood, or is afraid of heights? Or maybe ghosts?” Sakadacus did his best to make spooky sounds to scare the extra member of the party he was only told about the last minute. But Granny Zeus held firm, recalling that this was where things were done to and on life forms long ago, before it was decided that humans should be treated as servants and not insects. He had done his training in such a place, long before he was given a command of his own. And had told none of his subordinates about his experiences there, or knowledge of such places. Zeus saw black ghost oozing out of the white rocks, growling at him and beckoning him to enter the abyss that he, even though he was under orders, had thrown them into. He felt himself thrown on his back, held hostage with a terror that made every bone in his body shake.

“Come on,” Sakadacus said as he opened to door. “No ghosts of demons inside. See?”

“He’s right,” Promethius assured his commander, this time in a language from their own planet, with vibrational sounds no one with earth ears could hear. “And it was YOU who demanded to come here to find out why this man who offered shit to us in the temple died first. Unless you want to go on believing that it was a curse we put on him.”

“No, we go forward,” Zeus replied, picking himself off the ground, finding real earth under it, and using it to propel his still shaking limbs upward to the others.

The chamber was large, its walls nothing but plain rock now. But the edgings scratched on to them were identical to those delivered to Zeus when her first encountered the dead man’s artwork. With even more detail than any he had seen before by this dirt poor painter who spoke blasphemy about the gods with his fingers. Zeus saw before him a likeness of the facilities in

which he was trained when just a cadet in the Pioneering Academy. Places that didn't exist anymore, at least according to the information given to his team of Exploratory Pioneers. Laboratories that created small creatures more hideous to the eye than any Homer portrayed in words as large monsters, or Aristophanes tried to replicate on stage in his plays. It was said that these small creatures originated from large monsters which had been made small. Dinosaurs and dragons, as they had been called by some, who were now shrunken down into smaller creatures who would do far more harm by being smaller than what the eye could see than by being larger than any tower buildable by mortal man. Making miasmata was against all rules of interplanetary warfare now, but as Zeus finally figured out, all is fair in love, attempts to make a species in your own image.

The only thing that lay in the chamber now was a lump of dead flesh that had once been a live man, wrapped in the manner of a Pharaoh but by an attendant who has a tenth of the cloth required for the task. The sloppiness of the job revealed that said attendant was either very drunk, or in a big hurry to finish the task. After unwrapping the very dead man whose body was feared more than when he was alive, Hippocrates examined the skin and orifices with his eyes, nose, and fingers. He then used his knife to cut open the organs and examined the contents thereof, placing some of the extracts into pre-made jars of crystalline material and fluids, some of which changed color when inorganic matter met once live tissue. No one asked what he was doing, as they all knew why he was there. "Yes, this man was infested with miasmata," he said. "He suffered much with them," he continued. "But it wasn't the pustules on his skin, the congestion in his lungs, or the wasting of his intestines and stomach that killed him. It was..." Hippocrates sniffed the extracted material, then the dried up urine around him. He looked up, and offered the samples to Prometheus for his olfactory assessment.

"It smells, 'mousy'," Prometheus said.

"Rats?" Pericles offered.

"The two legged kind," Hippocrates replied. "Who gave this man an overdose of hemlock. Which causes the body to shake uncontrollably, causing his wrists and ankles to be torn to shreds by ropes that were probably tying him down. His pupils to dilate rather than constrict, as is usual at the time of death. And for his facial muscles to contort, making him look possessed."

"A horrible way to die," Socrates said, seeming to put himself in such a position. "But by whose hand?"

"The goddess Athena," Zeus heard from behind him from a woman who entered the chamber. "Who was the last person seen with this man," she continued as she walked in, seeming to need to give no explanation as to why she was there or how she found it. But though she seemed to find her way to the chamber, she didn't know what was on the floor, slipping on a slick rock, her head about to break open on a sharper one.

"You are sure, Silikia?" Prometheus said as he rescued her unblemished head from being cracked open, holding her with the same affection and love that Zeus had for Hera. "You saw the goddess Athena with this man."

“A woman with a helmet, armour, long curly blonde hair and a nose that...looks like your grandmother’s,” she said, pointing to Zues’ oversized olfactory outlet.

“My Mother,” Promethius said by way of creative explanation as Zeus himself pondered the possibility that his most virtuous daughter could have been involved in such a malicious biological warfare plan, and such a gruesome killing to silence the mortal who found out about it. To his shock, then anger, Silikia provided fine stroke to the horrible painting forming in Zeus’ head.

“Athena, yes, this woman visited him often in a house outside of the city, after she purchased him as a slave before he could be tried as a heretic,” she said.

“I thought you said he escaped,” Pericles said to Warden Sakadicus with an accusing stare. “After a Spartan spy sneaked into your prison as a guard.”

Before Skadicus could conjure up a believable explanation to cover up his lie about having been well paid for the man’s premature liberation, Silikia continued. “Athena, the goddess of virtue...With a man who looked like this.” She pulled out a picture she had drawn, showing it to Pericles, then Hippocrates, then Socrates, the finally Promethius. Tears of fear ran down her face.

Red blotches of rage came to Zeus’ face as he saw that it was a very accurate likeness of Apollo. The one of his real face rather than the one the artists drew of him to incur his favor, or please the Priests enough to give them top drachma for their work.

“I wanted to tell you, my dear Silikus, but if I did, they said they would kill me, and do worse to you, and to...” she looked down at her belly. “Yes, our child. Who I can’t hide the truth from anymore. And from Aspasia, who...well.”

She turned to Pericles, whose mind was now cast into doubt. “She is not who you think she is. Or I thought she was.”

It was a lot for a god, or enlightened mortal, to take in all at one time. Truth is small doses is learning. But so much truth at one time was forced enlightenment. Zeus felt betrayed and alone. His daughter Athena engaging in interplanetary biological warfare using the city that Zeus gave to her as test subjects? His son Apollo involved in a plot to take over his father’s Mission, and colony? And his favorite surrogate offspring, Promethius, getting this commoner pregnant at the worse of times, seeming to be more dedicated to her and his hybrid child than to the Cause of nobility and freedom that had always kept his heart pure and mind clear.

Pericles’ sure and noble heart considering the worse of all events possible. Aspasia, who he loved more than life itself, who understood his mind and heart, was most probably...something and someone else.

Hippocrates and Socrates remained...observant, thinking between themselves, sharing the third brain between them as to what the real truth of the matter was, and what could be done about it. Sakadicus remained... opportunistic, seizing the moment of maximal confusion and doubt.

“We have better get out of here, now,” he said, having heard an unusual cawing of a bird outside. “That crow caw isn’t from a crow. It’s from Spartans, approaching on the East and South flank.”

The story was believed by the mortals, and Zeus himself found himself considering that it was possible. So many impossible things after all were becoming possible, and real.

CHAPTER 14

Zeus had arrived early to the conference at the ad hoc meeting table in the underground atrium in the temple, official orders from home in front of him printed in Orion rather than Greek, and on flexible aluminum sheets rather than papyrus. His eyes remained fixed on the message, his hand firmly grasping the memorandum that all of the gods were now required, and finally allowed, to read for themselves.

“Our rival planet Sirius declared war on us. Those who wish to come home can. Those who chose to continue fighting from there can. Those of us who have defected to their side can’t be allowed to continue,” Promethius, peering over seasoned but not necessarily accomplished Commander’s shoulder, read it Greek, a language that now came easier to his tongue than his native speech, perhaps because that tongue had acquired a liking for the taste of earth-bound food or the flesh of one particular earth-bound woman. He turned to the congregation of gods, the ones still alive anyway, reading the rest of it in Orion. “Justice must be served. Relate your plans to us.”

“Our battle plan,” said Aries, the god of war who up till now was getting too comfortable with spoils of peace. “Which is based in Artemis’ hunting instincts.”

“Or Dionysis’ wine and celebrations to numb our senses so we can do the unthinkable when such is required,” Poseiden added.

“Or Hera to sew up our flesh and mend our bones when they are ripped apart by earth-made swords or Siriusian lasers,” Hestia lamented. “Or this plague that, for the moment, has stopped.”

“Not before it stopped the one who promised us that he could stop it on his own,” Apollo blasted out, pointing to Zeus’ motionless body. “Interesting that he died so suddenly, Promethius.”

“And that you were the last of us to see him alive,” Hades noted.

“After the two of you disappeared, without telling any of us where you were going,” Aphrodite added. “What do YOU have to say about what happened to my dear father!”

“That he died, as the Spartan expression goes, ‘with his boots on’,” Promethius said as he looked at the stone-cold body of his prosecutor in the distant past, his most beloved friend until the mucus coming out of his mouth turned to blood, the pimples on his skin turned to pustules and the fire in his often overfed gut ate up what was left of his stomach and intestine. All his life Zeus had somehow beaten the odds. But this time the wheel of misfortune came around to claim him. Most likely it was something the plague did, but those miasmata needed help from somewhere else. No, Promethius’ best intuition and medical reasoning said that some pre-existing disease of the body, mind and spirit had allowed death to finally triumph over live,

biologically anyway. What it was, Prometheus did not know. Maybe another conspiracy that was beyond the current understanding of gods or mortals. Or maybe something as simple as Hera's death, the Old Commander having felt responsible for it, combined with the guilt he was carrying for surviving on this Mission that she wanted no part of, but endured anyway, to advance HIS career. HIS quest of glory he could take back home. HIS need to make something of himself in his own eyes and in the eyes of his overachieved brothers who were Commanders on Missions elsewhere on this planet, and perhaps others.

Questions raced through Prometheus' head, some 'hows', some 'why's', some 'wheres' and some lingering 'whos'. As if reading his mind, Apollo voiced what was going on in his.

"I find it interesting that it is YOU, Prometheus, who is behind Zeus' shoulder now," he said. "You, the one who defied him ever since you gave fire to the mortals before they were supposed to get it, then knowledge of other things that they would use for destructive and perverted purposes against each other."

"And against us," Demeter added, dispassionately. "You remember what happened in Troy."

"A city that has no gods or mortals left in it!" Heptaetus said. "Without so much as a single marker of what was there."

"And those lies about what really happened there spread by Homer," Aries added. "Which we were ordered to promote to the mortals here as being true. Just as the legend about you stealing fire was embellished and painted as being something it wasn't." He turned to Hermes, blasting away something that had been eating away at his mind for centuries. "And YOU, god of the afterlife, who would make MY life easier as manager of war if you made JUST ONCE, a hologram of a fallen hero to come back to his men as a resurrected warrior, to convince at least their eyes that to die for a noble cause is to live forever!"

The 'blamefest' continued, every one of the gods blaming each other, the mortals, or Prometheus for having screwed up the Mission to advance civilization on earth, causing the Greek Expeditionary Unit to remain in the field centuries longer than originally planned. Everyone was angry at someone, voicing their opinions with rage, save one. Athena remained silent, staring at Zeus as if she knew his time had come, and that warfare between the gods in his now leaderless unit was inevitable.

Finally, Athena felt Prometheus' stare on her, saying everything with his eyes and nothing with his mouth as he saw her squirm, struggle then finally belt out "Hey! Prometheus!" she yelled out louder than anyone else. "If you have something to say to me, say it!"

The room turned silent.

"The truth speaks for itself, I regret," Prometheus said. "Which starts with a fact that we all know, or accept as true anyway. Is it not true, or accepted as such, that a mortal man who saw a picture of a miasmata manufacturing laboratory that only a god, of goddess, could have built,

who offered shit to the Preists when they came around to collect offerings for us, was kept alive for questioning in a segregated cell?”

“Yes, yes,” Athena said. “And stop ranting on like a philosopher who wants me to answer your questions like a trained monkey.”

“Which I, nor any of our other comrades, are not,” Promethius noted. He paced around the room, staring at empty space, the other gods, and sometimes Athena, feeling the rhythm of his discourse evolving with each step he took, and every permutation of logic that materialized in his mind, one discovery at a time. “This man, who was supposed to be kept alive for questioning, by us, so he could tell us why miasmata which have not been made or seen on our Planet or Sirius for thousands of years, were being manufactured again here, against all implied and accepted rules of interplanetary warfare. Microbes that some of us suspected were behind two of the plagues that Moses unleashed on the Pharoahs.”

“Which I suspected all along,” Aries grunted.

Promethius knew that Aries was as uninformed and naïve about the realities of microbial warfare than most of his other comrades, even Demeter. Had he known about it, he would have used it for his own purposes, being a very lazy warrior god. “But getting to the matter at hand here, and now,” Promethius said. “And what happened to this man who saw something he was not supposed to see, somehow. Whose only known crime to the mortals was that he offered shit to the gods and insults to the Priests. And whose tongue was cut out before he could say anything. The base of that tongue having been found in....a house 3 point 2 kilometers southeast of the Parthonen. With ivy over the archway in the shape of olive branches.”

“With a shelf filled with leather bound papyrus?” Demeter added, terrified of the realization coming to mind. “With copies of plays by Aristophenes. The most recent of which was ‘The Behemeth’”.

“Which portrayed me as someone who had less control of the Oceans than Apollo has over his desire to ‘educate’ young boys in the art of erotic love,” Poseiden, god of the Oceans noted.

Before Apollo could display his latent manhood by chocking the life out of Poseiden’s throat, Promethius held up a jar of elixor. “Hemlock!” he proclaimed. “What killed this prisoner who we all needed to get information from! Found in said house with the ivy hanging over the archways 3.2 miles Southeast of the Parthenon. Which belongs to..”

Promethius pointed to Athena. “The goddess, or perhaps demoness, who destroyed the city that chose to take on her name with plague. Then tortured, and killed, the only witness with hemlock. Which I found in your house. Along with plans and materials that could be used to build a miasmata making laboratory.”

“That’s absurd!” Athena said.

“No, that’s evil,” Aphrodite said. She approached Zeus, interested more in matters of emotion than political maneuvering. “She stroked his now hairless face, his long hair, and kissed his once all-mighty right hand. Her tears of grief drenched his face as well as “Our Father entrusted this city to you, Athena, and you killed it. How could you do it? Why would you do that?”

“I didn’t do anything!” Athena blasted out to Prometheus, then every set of eyes around her as they considered the possibilities. “I didn’t do anything!” she repeated again and again.

“We have a witness that says you liberated the prisoner as a slave-seeking noble lady, for pleasures of the flesh,” Prometheus said. “A jailer who goes by the name of Sakadicus.”

“Who will say anything to become a drachma richer or grow a day older!” she shot back.

“Who has as much of a right to be heard as any of us in this democracy,” he said. “And who had no reason to lie to us when we questioned him.”

”Us’ being you, Prometheus and Zeus. Or you and that Pireasian whore you’ve been keeping company with,” Athena shot back.

The gods mumbled amongst themselves, wondering what was true and what was false, using the best of their available opinions and impressions. All had something to consider, and gave voice to it. All save Apollo, who received a ‘do something about this’ stare from Aphrodite.

“I think that I should be conducting this investigation,” Apollo said. “As second in command.”

“Not anymore,” Prometheus replied, pulling an aluminum sheet incriminated with Orionian writing from the pocket of Zeus’ robe. He passed it around. “I found it in his hand. You will all note that it is in his own writing. And all note that it is genuine. And all accept, I hope, that I had nothing to do with it. And wish he had never written it.”

Being last the line Prometheus created, Apollo finally got hold of the last will and testament from Zeus. “He could not have written this. He was delusional. ‘I entrust Prometheus to be my second in command, as my son Apollo lacks the moral and mental discipline to control his lower emotions’. This is false! A fabrication!” He went on, his face turning beet red, his hand grabbing the handle of Aries’ metal sword with the laser ray emitting unit built into its tip, pushing aside every god between him and Prometheus. “A lie from a blaspheming bastard who will die!” he grunted, the tip of the sword edged against Prometheus’ neck.

“Go ahead, do what you must,” Prometheus said as the battle of wits and wills between he and his rival between their eyes lasted for several moments that felt like eons, culminating in what had to come eventually for the god who know that ‘no good deed goes unpunished’. “Do what you must, Apollo. But think about it first. Think.”

“As did all of us,” Poseidon said. “In a vote we just took. A democratic vote.”

Hestia gently took hold of Athena's left wrist, Demeter laying a firm but unmoving hand on her shoulder as she tried to get up to leave. The over-muscular hand of Aries grabbed back his sword from Apollo's 'bitch-fist', while Hermes and Poseiden pulled him back. Using the belt of metallic wires on his utility belt, Heptaetus quickly fashioned metal restraints for Apollo's wrists and clasped them shut.

"This is not over, Promethius!" Apollo pledged.

"No, I fear it isn't," the new head of the gods said, having never sought that position. The rebel who always saw his Calling as destroying corrupt systems now felt himself in charge of one, with building blocks that could crumble easily, and without warning. At stake was not only the welfare of his own home, but the Greek colonial experiment whose fate was now irreversibly connected to it.

CHAPTER 15

For better or worse, Zeus was a Commander who valued not only what was accomplished but by what means it had been done. At least at the end of his life. He would have wanted Athena and Apollo to be judged fairly, to be heard before they were silenced. Back home, the truthfulness of their assertions and the guilt for their transgressions would have been quantitated with a brain

scan. Punishment would be doled out according to what would be most effective to deter others to do such transgressions.

Promethius reflected on that, and so many other criminal actions as he took the porthole to Mount Olympus, to test for himself the story that it had been compromised and the base camp on that mountain was infested with radiation after having been destroyed by Siriusian laser guns that finally were able to find a way to break through the force field. Such as not the case, as he looked over the mutants in the high mountain valleys from the observation post nestled under the mountain's rock peak. The part-reptilian, part mammal and part anything else that didn't work products of genetic modifications on hairless apes that went wrong seemed happy, perhaps because to them, everything was the same. At they were unable to speak, they learned to communicate with sign language and telepathy. They seemed to be saying more to each other than any of the gods were saying to each other as they gathered their crops, placing the lion's share of them on the altar for the gods with ultimate reverence, and proudly taking the rest back to their families in the huts below the fields. Fields that were still being warmed by extra-terrestrial means, watered by technology they nor any other humans would not know about for thousands of years, and protected from invasion by anyone else by electrostatic force generators powered by gold, still the most potent fuel for transporting materials or energized molecules on this planet or any other Promethius knew about.

"Yes, We should take them with us when we leave here," Promethius said, recalling that Athena mentioned voicing that opinion to Aphrodite. Promethius considered what Athena's time table was for such, and what to do with her. And Apollo. Yes GTBA, guilt-transgression brain analysis, made the most logical sense, but only in a universe where the operators and interpreters of the machinery were trustable. And present. Neither seemed to be the case now, according to the best of Promethius' intuition and the last words Zeus scribbled on the aluminum sheets he gave to his surrogate son, who he once cast out of Olympus. "None of us can be trusted, but you have to trust someone." Justice required that Athena and Apollo be assessed for what they did with a moral compass based on more heart than brains. Practicality required that it be done discretely, and that whatever they were planning to do to destroy Athens, or any other earth colony, would be stopped. Then there was the matter of the Siriusians, whose recent view of the Spirit above all spirits was that it was one that they were the Chosen Humanoids who should rule the universe, having already experimented with warfare techniques by choosing the Hebrews as their representatives on earth, as once led by Moses, a hybrid who was very effective at doing what the voices sent into his head told him to do without asking where they really came from..

For the moment, the plague in Athens was halted, but it was only a matter of time till it started again. Demeter was observing lingering cases of plague in bakery workers and millers, but the official word was that Hippocrates had eradicated the disease. The official military authorities in Athens were trying to convince the public that the plague was caused by something the Spartans did, somehow. The Priests offered the explanation that the Spartans had bribed and tricked some of the gods into creating plagues, as the Hebrews did in Egypt with their God. Some believed the stories, some didn't.

In the meantime, Promethius ordered Athena and Apollo to be locked away in places where no renegade gods would set them free, and no Spartan raiding parties led by Siriusian Commandos

would find them. That is IF they were traitors. Athena continued to assert her innocence, as did Apollo. There would be one way to ascertain if those assertions were true or false, given the fact that Orionian guilt-scanners back home were now being run by very guilty magistrates.

“A trial. In a place where we would not be noticed by any Suriusian spies or their unknowing Spartan puppets,” Promethius said to his now second in command, Poseiden, as he approached the platform decked out in a Athenian Navy Junior Officer’s uniform, his beard removed to make him look young enough for the role, and unrecognizable according to the imprint on the medalions the seagoing Athenian warrior wore around their neck for good luck. Poseiden’s uniform was spotless, in mint condition. His weather making machines were not so well oiled or preserved.

Poseiden adjusted the cranks on some, noting that the knobs on others fell off when he tried to calibrate them. “Every one of them is broken, or un-trustable,” he noted with frustration. “And this time it wasn’t MY fault for leaving them out in the rain that I caused or the salt winds that they, or Mother Nature, decided to blow over and into them!”

“I know,” Promethius said.

“It was the hand of man, or perhaps other gods who now disabled me to make the seas kind to the Athenian Navy and harsh for any Spartan supply or troop ships that want to break through the blockade,” he said.

“I know,” Promethius said.

“But I still have one unit that I think will work,” Poseiden said. “I had Heptaetus verify that everything was in working order as well.”

Promethius hoped that Heptaetus could still be trusted, and thus far he could be, as Apollo and Athena were still in the cells he constructed to confine them. Indeed, Promethius hoped that Poseiden was still to be trusted as well, and he wasn’t leading the Athenian Navy into a malstrom which would wipe it out. He had given up hope of trusting Aires, whose love of war was too close to the Spartan ideal, and who had recently shaved off the hair on his upper lip, in the manner of the required ‘fashion’ for all red blooded men in that city. Hades was voicing disparaging remarks about Athenian democracy, and, according to Silikia, giving false gossip stories about the Athenian elite, and even Socrates to Aristophanes so he could put them into fictional plays that the citizenry could believe as fact.

But there were three other mortals Promethius could still trust. The jailer Sakadicus was still trustable as long as he was well paid, and complimented on his manhood, the latter task taken care of by Silikia. Socrates was more in love with Truth than any woman, or familial relation, placing it above all human comforts or connections. Pericles seemed to be a model man, created entirely by earthling blood, he was godlike in all ways that mattered. In all ways that Zeus, and Promethius, valued in any case in their more intelligent and caring modes. Indeed, perhaps the ideal man created by the same Creator who created the gods, then decided that humans needed

more heart than brains, and the inevitable byproduct of the combination of those two qualities--- intelligently-driven compassion on good days, conscience on rough ones.

Such was what went through Prometheus' mind as he took one of the only remaining and terrestrially-linked astral portholes to Athens to seek the right time, place and people to conduct a trial. One of the ideas he was envisioning as he was carried through the walls of light that penetrated the earthly realm without being visible to any mortal eye was a play by Aristophanes. Perhaps the writer of plays who knew how to merge education with entertainment could set up a story whereby the traitorous Orionian gods were being tried by their still-loyal peers, and the decision as to their guilt and/or punishment decided by a vote. Perhaps by the audience goes. Or perhaps Pericles could be convinced to hold court at which Athena and Apollo would be stripped of their godlike powers by Zues' 'inactivator' units, and assessed strictly for their involvement with bringing poisonous miasmata imported from Sparta behind the Athenian walls, and tried for civil treason. Perhaps they would confess what they really had done, and who they were working with, so that the laboratory making the miasmata would be destroyed, and the remaining miasmata floating around Athens would be found and eliminated.

The most reliable place to find and speak to Pericles and Socrates would, of course, be Aspasia's house. Perhaps Hippocrates would be lingering there, accepting hospitality of Eros as well as Agape and Philos, from one of the 'peasant whores' who she had turned into educated courtesans. Prometheus materialized discretely in front of the house, and saw that it was nothing like what had it been the last time he saw it. There was no music coming from inside, and most of the men around the house were soldiers now, very well armed. They were posted outside of Aspasia's window and at every other potential entrance and exit point in her once-open house. Silikia approached Prometheus from behind, startling him.

"What happened?" Prometheus asked. "Where is Pericles?"

"Dead," Silikia replied. "At the hand of the plague, according to what Hippocrates student said after his Master had sailed away. At the hand of Aspasia, according to 'them'," she continued, pointing to an angry mob demanding Aspasia's scalp, head and eyes, being held back by another detachment of soldiers.

"And Socrates?" Prometheus inquired, noting that the 'born of the earth for the earth people' Silikia seemed very comfortable in a noblewoman's dress. "The brilliant philosopher who is a mediocre mason."

"Out fighting Spartans with Creon, who replaced Pericles," she said. "After he was elected to the position democratically.."

"Elected by an assembly or a mob?" Prometheus said.

"At this point it doesn't make a difference," she answered. "My city is at War with Sparta again."

"Your city being Pireas, or Athens?" Prometheus inquired.

Silikia answered with a smile. One of those secretive ones that he himself gave to so many people he wanted to assure with lies rather than inform with the truth. She gently kissed him on the cheek. “Soon this will all be over for us,” she affirmed. “We will both go someplace far better than this place and be happy,” she pledged. “I promise.”

Had Silikia pledged that they will be ‘together’, Promethius would have perhaps believed her intentions, and trusted the plan inside her head. But she said ‘happy’, a concept that the Passion-driven mortal from Orion did not know, or trust. A word that someone who was a ‘higher being’ always said to a ‘lower one’ to keep it subservient. A word that the gods used to the mutants so many times on Olympus and the mortals in the cities below its peaks. A word that now was as toxic as the plague, the etiology of which now had to be determined with an even greater sense of urgency.

CHAPTER 16

Apollo looked at the walls around him, noting his new and perhaps final relationship to them. “Metal chains hammered into stone walls,” he noted. “Primitive, but very effective. Just like perhaps your own instincts. Perhaps a bribe of gold would enable you to find your way to the key to these locks that keep me shackled here?” he continued, turning to the most likely man to unlock them. “I have storages of gold in places that NO one know about, except perhaps me and you?”

“I can’t be bought with gold,” the jailer said.

“You can spend it on anything you want,” the god who could once travel through rock mountains replied, feeling pain in his arms, weakness in his legs, helplessness in his soul. “Buy your own city if you like. Or, find a way to magically transform yourself to someplace else. Everybody has a price, and I can match yours.” He watched as the jailer considered the offer, imagining

what it would be like to live a life exactly as he wanted to, without restraints from men, gods or even Mother Nature.

“You pose an interesting proposition,” Apollo’s jailer said, looking upward to the ceiling in the cell designed to let in just enough light to see the stars at night, and the sun during the day. “This gold would enable me to create my own future, here, or elsewhere.”

“Or ‘elsewheres’ that are beyond your imaginations!” Apollo said. “And within my ability to make those imaginations real.” He thought about it, and decided it was time to cross over the line that thus far no Orionian god had. “My charriots in the sky have horses that require gold, and those horses can take you up above the clouds, and to the stars, where there are worlds you have never dreamed of! Worlds more powerful than this one. Where you will be happy, invincible and fulfilled.”

“And who are you to make such promises?” the jailer inquired, demanding a very real answer.

“The son of Zeus!” Apollo screamed out at Promethius. “Who knows things about this world and ours, and many in between which you can’t even imagine. Which you are incapable of knowing. And which you were never entitled to know.”

“But which you will tell me about now,” Promethius replied, calmly.

“And why should I do that! After you did everything you could to depose me from my position as Zeus’ replacement!” Apollo spat back. He noticed a small flock of crows perched at the opening of to the cell forty very inaccessible feet above him. “Interesting,” he said. “Zues officially had eagles eat out your liver by night. And you are sending crows my way to eat out which of my organs? I will offer them my testicals, of course, as I do not need them anymore, either for breeding or becoming more manly,” the beardless god whose face, and now torso was looking more female each day. “Hmm,” Apollo said, gazing down at his chest and the two flat flabs on either side of it that seemed to rise up like leavened bread. “I never thought that I would get to see breasts on my body in this lifetime. Perhaps in the next, they will be bigger. Stronger, and I will find my way to you, in your present incarnation or another one, make you fall in love with me, and then break your heart, and destroy your dreams and Visions.”

“Someone I fear has already beat you to it,” Promethius replied, unlocking Apollo’s chains and offering him a fresh set of clothes.

“Silikia?” Apollo inquired as he put on a robe lined with fine silk on the inside, coarse burlap on the outside, with exotic designs from places very much south of the Mediteranean on the trim. “Silikia...That slut from Pireas.”

“A cortisan now, from...given her knowledge of things far beyond her station, and profession, someplace else,” Promethius replied.

“And you are telling me this because,” Apollo inquired, wondering why Prometheus opened the door to the cell, and was inviting him to leave it. “You want me to get killed escaping,” he surmised. “Which would be an admission of my guilt. Which you will use against me.”

Apollo shunned the robe that his unexpected liberator, and former rival, had offered him, throwing back on the urine and blood stained robe which he had been wearing for three of the longest and hardest days of his life. He went back to his station by the chains and slapped them back upon his wrists. “I will have a fair and open trial, as will you, and we will let the judges decide who gets to rule Olympus and the Greek colonies assigned to it. Which is supposed to include Athens and Sparta, two different sister cities, but in the same family, working together against a common enemy. Such as when we all fought the Persians, and their Sirusian allies.”

“Who you have no alliances with?” Prometheus asked.

“On my word as an Orionian, NO!” Apollo replied. “What will it take for you and the others to believe me?”

“Our working together against a common enemy,” Prometheus replied. “Please.”

“And this common enemy is?” Apollo demanded.

“Ignorance, cruelty and maliciousness manipulations.”

“What we used to bring civilization to the hairless apes on this planet ourselves, my..well...”

“Fellow servant of the one God who is above all gods, and men?”

Apollo considered the idea, and deep down, he did believe in the Spirit above and within. Even though It had betrayed him, he still sought to honor and become merged with It. And now at the time of his dying, one way or another, he felt a connection with It. A connection which had a very earthling human emotion to it. “Love...Is that why you want me to work with you now?”

“As my enemy, officially,” Prometheus said. “And unofficially, as my brother, in a common Cause.”

“An interesting proposition,” Apollo postulated. “But on two conditions.”

“The first being...”

“That you tell me what you know about this plague that has killed one in four Athenians so far, as proportionally as many of us.”

“Agreed. After you tell me your second condition.”

“We all go back home as soon as this is over,” Apollo replied.

Promethius smiled a 'yes' to the second condition that was more brotherly than any words he had ever spoken to Apollo. For the moment, that was enough to work with. Keeping in mind, of course, that the most vicious of battles could occur between siblings, be they gods or sister Greek cities whose fate was now interwoven with the former.

CHAPTER 17

Wilikus was a peasant back in Ionika, an island village no one in Athens ever heard of, and whose very existence would not reach any of the history books by any Athenian or Spartan writer. The overmuscled fisherman knew less about catching fish than Athenian history. But after having found his way to Hippocrates, doing slave labor to become his student, then being one of the only two students to volunteer to assist him in a REAL plague, Wilikus was making history now. His fellow student, Linolokis, born and bred to be pampered aristocratic brat, had taken sick, then died while on duty in the Eastern section of the city heroically taking care of other patients, boldly disobeying the precautions Hippocrates had told him to take, but making his mentor and parents proud, at having finally done a heroic deed. The only thing standing between life and death for the newest patients in the 'lumber and nails' storehouse in the Eastern corner of the city was now Wilikus. It made the 26 year old man with the oversized nose, nearly missing chin and his conjoined eyebrows as big as overfed catapillars who was charged with taking care of the most recent victims of the plague that, according to the new rulers of Athens feel...important. For the first time in his life, Wilikus was required to do something that no one else could do, and with Hippocrates now far away from Athens, the student had to become his own master. Unfortunately, an important lesson to be learned was that man is never truly master over Nature, the most recent reminder of such in his arms, a young woman with long, blonde hair, coral blue eyes and an face with rosey cheeks whose body had gone from pale to lifeless.

“Another one of the bakers?” Promethius asked the Herclean-built newby Physician who wished he could cry for the departed, but knew he couldn’t.

“She said I was handsome, something that no woman except my mother, after she had drunk too much wine, had ever said to me.” Wikinus related as he took one more look at her face before it was time to cover it with a blanket. “And that she wanted to have children with me,” he went on. Even if I didn’t save her, she said she wanted to have children with me. It doesn’t make sense. None of it makes sense.”

“It will soon, if you continue to minister to the living, and observe the dying,” Promethius said.

“How! I’m not a god, even though these patients want me to be one!’ Wilikus blasted back in a hushed voice after he had moved far enough from the other patients to not be heard. “Maybe YOU can talk to the gods and make just ONE of them shine favor on us. Even though, according to Hippocrates, diseases are caused by ‘natural phenomena’ and not gods, or goddesses.”

Promethius yearned to tell him more about who he really was, and was able to do. And NOT able to do now. How he yearned to tell this healer in training whose education was being accelerated faster than even Hippocrates could envision what the real story was. That is, once Promethius DID understand the real story. As for such, he reviewed the facts with Wilikus, with as many details as was prudent to.

“What do we know about the dead?” Promethius asked himself, as well as his new student. “That those who bake bread or mill grain represent a third of the new patients. And the others? Where do, or rather DID, they live?” he continued, looking at a map of the city. He inserted nails into each of the locations where the known dead, or dying, had been found by Creon’s special squads sent out to find them before their presence would alarm the public.

“No pattern that I can see here, Silikus,” Wilikus said.

“Any pattern you can feel?” Promethius pressed. “With your innermost mind, and Soul, connected to Ancient truth and contemporary fact?”

Wilikus dove deep into himself, to a place far more primal and Alive than any Socrates could direct him to, or perhaps had been to himself. He pondered with his eyes, which grew a year for every second he let them piece together all of the facts, figures and speculations. His inner mind expanded to places where no god, mentor or mortal had ever gone before. Indeed, there was a light around this failed fisherman’s head that made him seem like a Saint, a Visionary or even more powerfully- a Promethian Mortal who defied morality. He gathered all of the information in his mind, hands, and heart and came to one conclusion with regard to the pattern of disease which was about to become rampant again. “No, no pattern to this at all, given the information we have now,” he concluded. “Do you see one, feel one, intuit one?”

“No, I can’t, Wilikus” Promethius confessed.

“But what about other people who died?” Wilikus asked. “Ones YOU knew about. And who maybe you aren’t supposed to talk about, or know,” he pressed. “Maybe you saw things you weren’t supposed to, with people doing things they weren’t supposed to, that you remember, Silikus? And your new friend, whose name you never told me, who you said would be here with more information, and medical supplies. Where is he?”

“Spying on someone who I thought was a closer friend,” Promethius answered, wondering why Apollo was late getting back to him with regard to Silikia’s whereabouts, activities and aspirations. Which, according to plan, she was supposed to share with Apollo. Who had been called upon by her to help distribute barley grain to the people of Athens when the boats from Pelopenesis came into Pireas a week before the first plague started.

“And what of the people you know, who died of the plague,” Wilikus said. “Perhaps there is something you don’t remember about them?” he continued, not knowing how profound an inquiry it was.

“Those who perished all...ate bread,” Promethius said, recalling how Artemis and Dionysis had gone out on a hunting expedition, packed up with fresh bread for their lunch. And how Poseiden and Hades had gone green in the gills at the gods’ dinner table at the Temple of Athena. And how everyone at the dinner table was served by the one person who didn’t eat because she didn’t want her beautiful figure to remain girlish. And how that same woman, clad as common midwife, was solicited by Silikia to help distribute grain at the port of Pireas which was taken from special holds in special ships. And that this woman cried more tears over the death of Zeus than any of the other gods. “Aphrodite!” Promethius realized, the word spilling out of his mouth without realizing it.

“Who was Athena’s loving sister in the presence of her family, but who said nothing complimentary to her face to face,” Apollo said in Oreon as he came into the officially closed, officially non-existent hospital for the sick and dying bearing three large sacs over his back. “Who would like nothing more than to have her smarter and wiser sister put in her place.”

“And you have evidence of such?” Promethius asked.

“Silikia thinks I’m her friend, and a useful ally,” Apollo replied, laying down a sac filled with medical supplies he would not allow anyone to open, especially the increasingly suspicious Wilikus.

“How did you win her over?” Promethis asked, continuing in his Native tongue.

“Silikia, Aprhodite and Athena,” Wilikus said. “I didn’t understand any of the other jiberish you were talking about, but I understand those three words, which says to me that this conversation is about something very important that I deserve to know about.

Promethius looked at Apollo, as did he to Promethius. Perhaps it was time to break the seal. And this time, to let the mortal who it was broken for live. But they kept their silence.

“Alright then, these patients here deserve for have me know about what’s really going on,” Wilikus demanded, pulling them aside from his assistants and patients, hoping the former would not become the latter, but knowing it was a matter of time till such happened. “Or maybe I’ll climb up Mount Olympus and somehow find Aprhotide and Athena and ask them myself! Ring it out of their necks if I have to!” he continued, shaking in his sandals as a result of blaspheming the gods, even though it was in the service of humanity.

“You won’t find out anything from Athena,” Apollo replied, putting his hand on Wilikus’ shaking shoulder.

“But one of us should maybe should visit Aphrodite.” Promethius suggested.

“ALL of us,” Apollo said, looking to Wilikus as a promoted being. And to Promethius as a brother.

“Yes,” Wilikus said. “But if we’re going to climb mountain Olympus, I better get a warmer clothes, boots and get rid of these sandals, and my fear of heights.”

“No need, my friend,” Apollo said, opening up his bag of medical goods, a map on top of it. “We can be there in an hour.”

“Half an hour,” Wilikus pledged, “I know a short cut.”

Wilikus called over his assistants to distribute the medical goods inside Apollo’s bag. “Echanasia” he noted regarding one of them.

“To make their bodies stronger to resist disease,” Apollo said by way of explanation, with the same pride Promethius had when he suggested to freezing and starving humans a long time ago that fire is your friend rather than your enemy.

“Something I already have,” Wilikus continued. “But, we can always use more. With that, he also distributed some material from his own. Most particularly from a wooden box that he finally unlocked. He told his assistants which patients get what herbs, along with a special one which he explained as being ‘mold extract that kills miasmata’, with specific instructions as to how much to give by mouth and how much to insert under the skin. It was to be used very sparingly, as it was in short supply.

Promethius marveled at how these hairless apes would could not come up with medicinals that kill small microbes. Maybe it was a miracle herb, which was needed now by gods and mortals alike. Particularly if whatever Aprhodite and Silkia was plotting on a mass scale was set into motion. After, of course, appropriate explanations and apologies were related to another woman.

CHAPTER 18

“So, this is the secret hide out where the bitch lives” Athena said as her eyes feasted upon the wooden walls held together by mortar and rusty nails, extra iron posts preventing the creaky roof from falling down on the shack nestled into the thorny-wooded hills completely out of view of Athens, even from the Parthenon.

“And where Aphrodite apparently makes others die,” Promethius continued, pointing to cages made of wire and sticks, dead mice in and around them. Each with pustules on their formalin-preserved carcasses, the number of pustules correlating with how much black barley grain was in their feed box.

“And where she pretends to be me,” Athena continued, the remainder of feeling finally coming into her fingertips after the shackles had been removed from her wrist. She leaned down to pick up the costume items in question. “My shield, helmet and toga,” she sighed. “Freshly polished,” she commented, seeing her reflection in the armour that was supposed to be hers alone, which she had not put on ever since the Athenians and Spartans beat the Persians back to Asia Minor two mortal generations ago, barely a blink of an eye in Orionian time. “Which she used to kidnap the prisoner-painter who gave us an offering of shit after he, somehow, somewhere, saw what we thought would never materialize on this continent or any other on the planet.”

“A Siriusian microbial manufacturing factory,” Apollo added. “Officially run by the Spartans.”

“Or the Persians?” the new member of Apollo and Promethius’ team added. Someone Athena didn’t recognize, nor trust.

“Who’s the...’citizen’?” she inquired of her fellow gods regarding the stranger they brought into the investigation that was supposed to be very discrete.

“I’m not a citizen, my lady,” he replied with a humble bow. “Not from here anyway.”

“Then you are citizen of where?” she pressed, watching him squirm. Seeing that he knew very little about where he was, and who had taken him there. “By your cloak, you are Greek. But what kind of Greek?”

“One that does not want to see Sparta and Athens destroy each other,” he replied.

“Because...?” she pressed, demanding another kind of answer with her angry eyes. “Because you are from perhaps a place far away from Sparta and Athens yourself?”

“Siruis, you mean?” the potential Siriusian spy who looked and carried himself more like a mortal than any other Sirian, or Orian, Athena ever met. “By the name of Wilikus? Who knows more about medicine than my two TRUSTED friends here?”

The mortal had no answer, and neither did Prometheus or Apollo when forced to consider the issue. Fearing for his life, Wilikus made a rush towards the locked door, then used all of his power to try to loosen it. Apollo and Prometheus looked at each other, agreeing to the same conclusions.

Apollo took in a deep breath, considered the matter, and pulled out his laser gun from under his cloak, prepared to electrify the memory of this place out of Wilikus’ consciousness. His attempt to do so was halted by Athena grabbing hold of the gun and shooting the lock on the door open. Wilikus ran for the hills while Athena threatened to decorticate Prometheus and Apollo with the weapon, adjusted to ‘maximal fry’.

“What are you doing?” Apollo said. “He’s getting away!”

“Knowing things about us that mortals have never been told!” Prometheus blasted.

“Stories that, yes, will be believed,” Athena said, looking out over the horizon as Wilikus ran over the hill, descending down into the valley where human populations were still plentiful, and still very uninformed about the universe around them. “But not before we do what we have to do here,” she continued, taking stock of other items in the room. “Like showing the other Orianian gods, our once disliked but still trusted comrades, that my sweet, kind, sister, goddess of beauty was growing these lovely flowers which when processed appropriately, makes the most deadly hemlock this side of the milky way, which she planted into my private chamber as being mine. Which she used to kill the tongue-less painter-prisoner just as he was about to tell me, discretely, in pictures and with a sign language I was working with him on, where the Siriusian germ warfare manufacturing factories are.”

“On whose orders?” Prometheus challenged.

“Zeus himself! Who perhaps she killed as well with hemlock, untraceable after she had his body burned in the funeral she held for him that the ‘good gods’ attended.” Athena shot back. “You and Apollo are not the only confidants my father had. He had many secrets that he shared with different people,” a tear came to her eyes as she remembered the good times with her father. The confidential conversations they had about wisdom, knowledge. The special discourses they shared about the God beyond all the gods which could not be defined but must always be felt,

and served. And the special smile he would throw Athena's way when Aphrodite was in the room being 'Daddy's little girl', telling Athena in no uncertain terms that she was his most trusted and beloved daughter. Perhaps he gave one too many of those discrete looks to Athena while the emotionally-insecure, attention-addicted Aphrodite was watching, an oversight which was costing everyone everything right now.

Somehow the memory of Zeus came to mind as well as heart. An idea and ideal came to Athena's Soul. She allowed her mouth to give voice to it. "It's time that we all share the secrets that my father shared with us. As he told us all more than once, 'Life never gives you a problem without a solution.'"

"And we are each other's solutions?" Apollo challenged.

"There's no choice left in the matter," Prometheus offered, taking a step toward his friend, slipping on the floor and pushing up two boards that nearly cracked his head open. Perhaps it was the ghost of Zeus or the intervention of that Spirit Higher and Deeper than him. Sheets of papyrus and aluminum popped up from below, smacking Athena in the face. When Apollo read what was on them, his jaw turned white and shook with terror. Prometheus' face fumed red, infused with anger.

"So that's where it is," she said. "A place we can easily get to."

"But in enough time, and with enough people?" Apollo said.

"And the RIGHT people?" Prometheus added.

"Whoever is willing to do the right thing is the right people," Athena said, that word 'people' being used, for the first time, to include mortals, gods, mutants and every two legged form of life in between.

CHAPTER 19

Apollo felt the wind in his face as he looked down on the bow of the rapidly moving ship that Captain Ionesis considered the best in his personal fleet. The wooden vessel now reinforced with metallic sheets was being captained by a man Apollo didn't know, whose upper lip was hairless and whose eyes were Spartan fierce. Yet he seemed to be a competent sailor, for a Spartan that is. He gave clear orders to the men manning the sails to keep them filled with wind, and commanded the rowers to keep up the pace, ignoring the bubble of water behind the rudder which his Commandress said was 'a gift from the gods that should not be questioned, on a boat that Silikia acquired from Ionicus without explaining how she did so the Apollo, other than a condescending 'he wasn't doing anything with it at the time'.

"Straight ahead, full speed!" the Spartan Army officer turned sea Captain commanded, as the boat went into more curves than straight lines, its movement resembling a desperate drunk trying to flee a knife-holding tavern owner trying to collect on his tab and to get back home before his grudge-holding wife woke up back home.

It raised the question to Apollo that he had to ask his collaborator in this race to 'someplace critical'. "Where are we going?" he asked Silikia, for the fifth time.

"You'll see when we get there," was her reply, for the eighth time. "And when we do, everything between us is going to be better than it ever has been." She smiled at him like a maiden promising everything nurturing a woman can give a man. But her eyes said that it would be for a higher price than Apollo originally bargained for. As he predicted, the terms of such were laid out, with even more questions this time.

"How is it that you know Silikus?" she inquired.

"I told you, we were in the Army together," he replied, trying to get a better look at the kind of engine placed under the boat to see if it was stolen Orionian or recently sent down Siriusian technology.

"The Athenian army? Neither you nor he look like very fierce or manly soldiers," she noted, loud enough for the Spartan sea-captain to hear her, coincidentally getting in between Apollo's line of vision and the engine under the rudder.

“Neither do most of the men in the Athenian Army look fierce or manly,” Apollo said snidely, allowing the Captain to hear him. “Or navy,” he said to the soldiers turned seamen under the Captain, who were doing their best to not barf their rigidly-conditioned brains out of their rumbling bellies. “Athenians fight wars by debating the philosophical significance of them, then take a vote, and while someone who set a bet on the vote cheats the count, Spartans get their asses into gear and do the real fighting. Like the 300 Spartans who kept an Army of 10,000 Persians held in peninsula that separated our world from theirs.”

“Until a passage to their rear was revealed by a traitor in their midst,” the Captain said. “Who I heard was part Athenian.”

All eyes turned to Apollo, including Silikia’s. “I shared with you everything I know,” he told her, then the Captain.

“Everything maybe you think we want to know,” the Captain said.

“I’m here, am I not? With you?” Apollo asserted to the Captain. “Am I not entrusting my life to your seamanship, and come to this ship unarmed? Would I not be a fool to come here as such if I did not believe in your Mission, and trust you, even though I am not completely informed about what this Mission is?”

“A statement of facts which you say with questions,” the Captain noted.

“Yes, indeed.”

“Like an Athenian philosopher,” he continued. “Who babbles on about dreams in his head and who hums melodies that make real men’s minds soft and weak,” he went on. “Making their minds wander aimlessly as well.”

“Oh like eh...” Apollo shouted back, recalling a melody in his head that he specially formulated for the Spartans during the Persian War that kept the three hundred’s minds strong while their bodies were being weakened by hunger, wounds and cold. He started to hum it, then sing it, then pull out every devise on the ship that could make a sound which could be perceived as music. All of a sudden, the rowers pushed the water with more coordinated strength than before. The holders of the sail could somehow find the best part of the wind and make it work for them. And the boat’s course went forward with an alacrity that amazed even Silikia.

She seemed please with Apollo, kissing him on the cheek, her lips saying ‘you are the only one’, a sentiment that Apollo thought was reserved for Prometheus.

Apollo felt like defending his former rival, and now secret ally. But he couldn’t. Instead, he kissed her back, pretending to love both her and womanly flesh. “You look tired,” he said. “Maybe you should get some rest. I will wake you up when we get to our destination. Which is...”

She pointed straight ahead, to an island of earthly rock pushed upward from the sea by a technology which was definitely Siriusian, by the shape of the rocks, and the five-sided barrier they formed. The design that every Siriusian fortress was built after for technical or religious reasons not known to any Orionain, or for that matter any Athenian or Spartan. Maybe the Pireasian Commandress Silikia knew the reasons for such. Most probably the woman on shore with a warm, tender erotic smile did as well.

“Thelikia!” Silikia said with a warm wave of her hand to the lover she had on the same side of the gender line as herself. The Pireasian peasant-turned-cortisan had good taste in female flesh as well. Never did Aphrodite look more beautiful, or confident. Or loved.

Apollo trusted that Aphrodite would not reveal his real identity to Silikia, the mortal who seemed to be neither earthling, nor Orionian, nor Sireasian. Or maybe she was a combination of all three, which would make her a more formidable opponent. In any case, what concerned Apollo most was finding out what was on this island which was not on any known map, being able to get word to Prometheus and his forces to stop whatever was going on there, and doing so, if possible, by getting off the island first.

CHAPTER 20

“A maismata manufacturing factory,” Athena decoded from the binomial code Apollo used to transmit signals back to Athens via the only remaining satellite between there and Sparta from her position aboard another one of Captain Ionesis’ ships, this one manned by the Athenian Captain himself. “Making the worst kind of materials that can be imagined. Which I am now afflicted with,” it said.

“So,” she asked the sea-drenched survivor in the water who she had recently rescued from King Neptune’s vortex of turbulent waves. “How is it that you made it here with this affliction, and how?” she inquired of the man who produced the radio transmitter from his clenched fist while he gasped for air through waterlogged lungs with a chest that was beaten down to the bone, a back which had been flogged with over thirty had lashes, his beaten face covered with more open sores than flesh.

“I ran away from there, any way I could,” he replied with shallow breaths gradually becoming functional. “And am only here because of the grace of the God above all gods who Zeus prayed to, and you, Promethius, seek to make an agreement with.”

“And you are sure you weren’t followed to me here, Apollo?” Athena said. “And to us?” she repeated, drawing her new secret ally’s attention to the five ships carrying the most trusted Athenian sailer-soldiers she could find, along with Promethius, decked out in Athenian military armour reinforced on the inside with metallic coating that would prevent Siriusian death rays from penetrating, the coating on his own armour thinner than that given to any of his men. Along with him was Wilikus, prepared to put his combat medical skills to the test in a War which, even though he did not understand, he was now committed to.

“It’s no use for any of us to go to the island,” Apollo warned. “They have ODD’s working at full capacities.”

“What are ODDs?” Wilikus asked.

“Orion Detection Devises,” Promethius wanted to say, but still couldn’t, for fear that if he did, it would require Wilikus’ permanent abduction to Orion, or permanent residency in a sanitorium for crazy people here on earth.

“And they have advanced LDDs as well,” Apollo said, with even more terror in his eyes.

“And they are?” Wilikus demanded to know.

“Lacto Dilrius Dulikium,” Promethius replied. “An herb that is very rare which when given makes people tell the truth about their plans or intentions.”

“Like a potent bottle of wine and a beautiful whore with open ears,” Wilikus said, seemingly recalling his own experiences with revealing secrets unknowingly, satisfied with Promethius’ fabricated answer.

“And the masmata factory is being operated by mutants, defended by them as well,” Apollo said.

“And by mutants you mean Spartans who were not stupid, muscular or impressionable enough to become soldiers,” Wilikus replied in the manner of a proud but somewhat Athenian, which he now considered himself to be, even though he wasn’t officially a citizen yet.

“No,” Apollo replied to Wilikus’ smart assed quip, making him consider the most dire of consequences.

“How did you get away?” Promethius asked Apollo as Wilikus tended to his very earthly wounds, which had torn apart a now very earthly body. Indeed, Promethius and Athena felt the elements of earthly nature on their bodies more intensely than ever now, the only part of them that was still Orionian being their minds. Gone were the superpowers of self-propelled flight, X-ray vision, and super-keen hearing which they had when they arrived on earth, and which were still somewhat function until the Plague hit Athens via the ships in Pireas, and probably Base Olympus from Suriusian robot crafts. But, there were two capabilities that the Plague and the Suriusians made stronger.

Promethius’ intuition and courage merged into an insight which required two steps that were essential to save this primitive planet, and the one they still called home above the heavens. “We have to assess which of our brethren are still with us,” Promethius said.

“And liberate our own mutants so that they might save us,” Athena replied.

“Ask our own slaves to fight for our freedom?” Promethius said.

“And theirs, here or back home, whichever they choose,” she replied. “An offer which they must accept for their own survival.”

“If indeed they understand it,” Promethius replied.

“We’re supposed to be teachers, right, Silikus?” her reply.

“But how will we communicate with them? And how will they communicate with us?” he said, holding back of course that the powers of speech were either not put into the genetic experiments which resulted in mutants, or were extracted out of them.

“By talking to them, you pretentious idiots!!!” Wilikus interjected, gathering enough of the conversation to know the solution, even though he was not completely aware of the problem. Something physicians did all the time with regard to diseases they didn’t understand but were somehow able to cure.

CHAPTER 21

“If you want us mutants to work with us, or lead us, first you have to become one of us,” Dionekeus said to Promethius as his workers kept tilling the fields on the Olympian plain that had been their comfortable home, and inescapable prison for as long as any of them could remember. “It is the only way,” the defective mutant who somehow learned to asculate said in a guttural Greek which a slurry tongue from a mouth which was closed tight on the left side, and hung as loose as a willow-branch on his right. Though his mouth hurt beyond measure with each word he spoke, he spoke anyway, even to the point of the swallowing muscle in his mouth bleeding. With the larger eye on his right side he lifted his brow, staring Promethius in the face with it while his smaller left eye, located in a socket just under his cheekbone, whirled around in circles, taking in everything in its visual field, somehow.

“But we are not you,” Promethius replied. “Our biology---“

“---can be transformed,” Dionekeus interjected, even though his head hurt with a pounding ache each time he used it to think in words. It was the first time in centuries that a mutant interrupted a god. “The legends say you transformed us into who we were from mounds of flesh. You are flesh and can be made into mounds then transformed into us.”

“And find our way to the miasmata factory to destroy it from the inside,” Promethius said. “Which is the only way it can be destroyed,” he continued.

Dionekeus could have followed up with many questions. Such as why his people were forbidden to go down Olympus and people unlike his own were forbidden to come up. And why the gods skins, bodies and sense organs were all symmetrical, right and left matching each other. And why the gods didn’t have backs that looked like snakeskin and feet that were shaped like fins. And why the gods could talk and no one but he amongst his own people could. But he asked one question which proved to Promethius that it was time for these mutants to be heard, and honored.

“What are mismatsas?” Dionekeus forced out of his mouth.

“Beautiful looking small creatures you can’t see with a naked eye that do horrible things to people, and animals.”

“And everything in between, like us?” Dionekeus replied. He held his mouth, holding in the blood coming from his tongue as a result of using it for purposes for which it was not designed. “I think I can convince my people to help your people,” he continued. “But I’ll first need--- AHHH!” he stopped speaking, the pain in his head and mouth becoming too much to bear.

“For us to make that tongue of yours able to talk,” Promethius offered. “Which is possible. And as for us...” Promethius looked to the door of the genetic modification laboratory below the Olympian rock shelf, hidden from view by man, or Siriusean gods. So far anyway. It had not been used for centuries, yet the knowledge of how to operate it was known to even the most

technologically-challenged Orionian. Prometheus he looked at his arms, legs and chest, thinking about what genetic changes would have to be done to them to convert them into being 'mutant', or at least non-Orionian. Wondering what would come out the other end of it after he, and Athena, and Apollo, or any of the other Orionean gods he recruited walked into the transformation chamber. Knowing that if they didn't take that walk, all would be lost.

It would be a temporary transformation, he told himself, hoping it wasn't a lie, fearing that it was. Just then, he heard an awesome sound above. He looked up and with his still Orion eyes, could see the outline of a Siriusian ship, blasting rays that seemed to send down mists of dust onto the ground which the plants and animals seemed to be repulsed by. It passed by, apparently not seeing what it was looking for. For now anyway.

There was one thing that Siriusians enjoyed more than doping up leaders of independent states and making them puppet, or tricking united Orionians into gauging each other's eyes out, or seeing their images on walls in temples devoted to sacrificing virgin girls and newborn babies for their favor. "Phonesian figs, Babylonian cheese and Egyptian wheat wine," Promethius assured the new and most appropriate Captain of the vessel.

"Racing into port on an island that no one has ever put on a map under a pirate ship with Spartan colors on it," Ionesis said as he looked at the sail above him, as equally offended by the Pirate as with the Spartan flag. But most notably, he was angered at what was coming out of his mouth. "Cold air, without my mustache to keep it warm," he grumbled, stroking his fingers on his recently shaved upper lip, matching his uniform below it. "It isn't right for an Athenian to have a Spartan's shaved upper lip, or a tunic from that city that does nothing except make soldiers who think they are gods, and mothers to pump out babies who never get old enough to think for themselves before they are trained to be soldiers." But then he looked at Promethius, and seemed to count his blessings. "You and your sister got me out of that holding cell I woke up in after someone stole my best ship," he said. "For that I thank you, and agreed to take you where you need to go. And I pray that whatever curse the gods put on you, Silikius, you get it lifted by whoever you are going to see on this which you say has been ressurected from the deep sea rocks. And that they lift up not only your spirits, but whatever has turned the skin, on your chest, arms and legs into..."

"...Scales, fins and rotting wood," Promethius said as he glanced over what used to be a perfectly looking and functioning Orionian humanoid body, worthy of being a god according to any earthly standard. "But," he said as he lifted his right paw-fin over the convoluted space above his two maligned but still very functional eyes. "I still have hair on top of my head."

"Which looks more like seaweed," Captain Ionesis commented. "And smells worse."

Promethius glanced over to Apollo, who emerged out of the transformation machine with even less luck than he had. The god who was once proud of his slendor body which was beautiful by both male and female standards still kept his long, wavy, black hair, and actually had more of it. The only problem was that it was on most every part of his body except the top of his head, which was as bald as a melon, reflecting the sunlight with a blinding glare. By the way he wore a hat over his still thinking, and vengeful head, it was the part of the transformation into mutant that he hated most.

"Your friend looks like an ape who got in too many fights with a female hyenas while he was trying to pleasure her," Ionesis said as Apollo limped, hobbled or crawled from one area of the boat to another with the map of the facility on the island that he put onto paper, being sure that all of the real mutants knew exactly what to do after they were put ashore at the worker's entrance. "What did he do to offend the gods? And what of those who listen to what you say but don't answer back with anything but a 'yes', 'no' or 'go screw yourself until you have something real to ask me'?"

“We like the last answer most of all,” an exceptionally-beautiful woman said to Ionesis as she came up from behind him. He turned around, his jaw dropping out of his mouth. Except for the eyes, he hardly recognized her.

“Yes, it’s me,” Athena said. “The woman who rescued you from your Spartan captors.”

“Who looks like---”

“----but is NOT Aphrodite,” Prometheus replied.

“It is blasphemy for a mortal to make herself look like a god,” Ionesis replied, looking towards the lifeboat on the ship. “Or you are a witch who is making me see things that I shouldn’t see. No wonder why you, Silikus, have a body that is cursed. And your companion is a mutant ape who looked like he used to be a man. And that your army of volunteers are all---”

“Mutants, yes,” Prometheus said. “Who have as much to lose or gain as the Army of Athenians who you brought along as your crew.”

“And the Spartans who we’ll enlist in this battle,” Athena said, in a voice that she had converted to sound like her sister Aphrodite’s.

“A battle against who? What?” Ionesis said.

“Persians,” Wilikus, the only non-mutant human besides Athena with Silikus, said. “Is that not so, Silikus?” he continued, turning to his Commander. Wilikus looked over the horizon at large rock that seemed to pulse as it seemed to emerge out from the calm sea, the small ripples in the water around the boat turning into waves, then minor swells.

“Yes, we are fighting Persians,” Prometheus said. “And the witches and demons who fight with them.”

Ionesis seemed convinced enough to continue. At least, for now, he didn’t call off his crew, the only ones who knew how to operate the ship. That craft being the only way any human or mutant would be able to get off the island, assuming they could accomplish their mission once on it.

CHAPTER 23

The cloaking devise on Ionesis’ ship was on its last legs. It finally gave up the ghost after the craft made through the rock canyon between the first and second point of the Suriusian star, then

a tunnel of hardened dark mud, then a steel corridor. Athena jumps off board, commanding the mutants as Aphrodite to go back to their stations, and that they would be forgiven their attempted escape if they increased their work quote. Men with beards lacking mustaches, some wearing Spartan uniforms and some not, lined the ceilinged peer. Some carried swords, others lasers as they unloaded supplies from other ships, or placed thick, metallic boxes with Siriusian stars on them. There were Siriusian mutants to help with the heaviest of the labor, two of them beaten into unconsciousness after they failed to keep up their comrades.

To keep the first line of guards happy, and distracted, Wilikus directed his personal slave mutant, Promethius to give them a sac filled with figs, and his bald ape-man helper a satchel filled with cheese. The Egyptian wheat wine, or something that Promethius hoped would smell and act as such in a Surusian body, was saved for their Commander. Wilikus offered it to them.

Most of the soldiers seemed elated with the gifts offered from the Spartan-hired pirate who was part of the private Army which was that cities' only hope of breaking the Athenian blockade on the seas. Those whose stern faces did not turn into happy, childlike smiles when exposed to the aromas that were hard wired into the pleasure center of Siriusian brains were obviously Spartans. Some of those Spartans seemed content to do their jobs as told to them. Others seemed drugged, even more so than the mutants. Most particularly the Spartan Commander, who Ionesis recognized immediately.

"Kliriumus," the Athenian Captain mumbled to Promethius. "The illigetamate son of King Lionsis himself. The man who commanded the 300 Spartans who held off the Persian army of over ten thousand, or more! Many, many years ago. Some say his mother was a whore, others say she was none other than the goddess Athena." Ionesis glance turned to Athena, who was looking at the proudest and, according to some, smartest General in the Spartan Army with regret that then turned into anger. "'Aphrodite' is angry him," he commented to Promethius. "I don't suppose you will tell me about what," he grumbled.

The answer to that question from Promethius' mouth, or Aphrodite's next actions, was quenched by the entry of another woman to the underground loading dock. "So, there you are, my dear goddess!" Silikia said to Athena, giving her a big hug.

"Where else would you think I would be?" Athena answered, as her more beautiful and bitchy sister. "I'm working down here, seeing that everything is going according to plan. Your plan."

"Our plan," Silikia said as she hugged Athena with an affection which was far greater than any woman shared with any man. At least to Promethius, Apollo, Ionesis and Wilikus. Each of the four men watched the women exchange loving glances between their eyes, then a kiss that glued them together. While such was going on, Athena used her left hand to give Promethius, Apollo, Ionesis, Wilikus and the now 'talking mutant' Dioneus hand signals as to what the plans were. It was in a binomial code that the Orionians used centuries earlier when their equipment was not working quite right. A language which, at the time, they thought that mortals could not comprehend. But Wilikus and Dioneus could keep up with every motion of her fingers, sending signals back with clicks, taps or show of their own fingers just as quickly.

All was set in motion. All would be done according to plans laid out by collaboration between gods and mortals, mutants and Orionians, men and woman. Each would take their assigned places in the laboratory, sabotaging the miasmata manufacturing machinery in such a way that it would produce microscopic creatures as lifeless and inert as the music composed by the artistically-talentless Apollo. And as self-destructive as Prometheus' instincts for falling in love with the wrong women. That woman, for the moment anyway, seemed to be pre-occupied with showing her love for Aphrodite.

There was one thing that Prometheus wondered about as he dragged his half-reptilian, half ape-like body to open up confinement chambers where disobedient mutants and overly-smart Spartans were being held for interrogation, execution or both. Was Silikia lying to Aphrodite, or was Aphrodite lying to her? Or were they both lying to each other? Love, after all, in its happiest form, is built on optimistic hopes or intentionally-believed lies. To help answer that question, the real Aphrodite stepped into the chamber, demanding to know what was going on.

"Silikia!" she screamed out, not seeing who she was with. "Who is this woman you are with, when you should be with ME!"

With that, Silikia turned around, stunned and astounded to see Aphrodite with a laser aimed at..herself. When Silikia turned back around to the woman in her loving arms, she was not sure which Aphrodite was real, and which was someone, or something else. "This Aphrodite loves me," she said as she looked into Athena's eyes, seeing exactly what she wanted to see, and what Athena had perhaps planned all along. "And I listen to what she tells me to do, not you, who is a hologram, a witch, or some other being who I command to be gone." Silikia flung her wrist in that authoritative way that all women of power but little wisdom do when dismissing those they consider insignificant, or useless. But this time, the dismissed remained.

Aphrodite fired three shots from her laser at her sister, recognized by something in her vengefully-smiling eyes. The first missed and converted rocks into pebbles. The second shot converted one of the Suriusean mutants and two of the Orionian ones into melting flesh. The third bypassed Athena's heart, flashing past Silikia's head as she defended her REAL lover. Silikia's flaming red hair quickly went up in a burst of fire, then burnt into a pile of ash that lay over her hairless head, a hole in the skull made by the burn. Her voice turned demon-like, and her eyes acquired a red glow. Instead of fearing the consequences being around her, mutants, Spartans and Suriusians alike were terrified of being near her as she commanded them to kill the Aphrodite, calling her a demoness.

Meanwhile, Athena snuck away from the bedlum which was beginning to materialize. As did Prometheus and his male compadres. Each disappeared into the chambers outlined in Apollo's plan of the instillation which he was able to assess before he was assessed, and found out. Prometheus wondered why and how he managed to escape from such a fortress with merely wounds on his body, but such wounds were enough to turn him into something ugly by godlike and human standards. And Apollo volunteered to become 'mutanized'. Logic said that he could be trusted, but intuition said something else, one of those 'I'll figure it out when the Right time comes' things which Prometheus learned to accept as part of life on earth. A planet which he now felt that he would die on. But not without having truly lived first.

While Apollo went on his way to liberate prisoners, and kill jailers who had torn apart and mutilated his once beautiful Orionian humanoid body, Prometheus crawled his way through a small tunnel leading to the main manufacturing chamber. He had one shot at inserting the reversal mutation generator unit which Apollo had constructed from the remnants of what was left of the lab on Olympus after the elements and perhaps some Suriusian spies, got a hold of them. Apollo had been a chemist who had apprenticed in a life-creation lab before being rescued by father Zeus and given his 'god' assignment on Olympus, and he knew technology very well. Hopefully well enough to have more than one reversal agent wave generator left in the unit, which he threw to Prometheus, after he took on more adversaries than his apelike mutant body could handle.

There was one shot was still in it, and it was ready to go. The difficulty was in getting it through the tunnel, a dark enclosure in which hungry birds of prey flew back and forth below the ceiling, feasting on remains human limbs strewn about the mud-soaked floor. "My liver is not for sale, rent or leasing," Prometheus told a small flock of three vulture-crow hybrids with a third eye on their forehead that pulsed with an intense red glow as they plopped themselves directly in front of his forward progress. They stood their ground, as if ordered to by some malevolent power they did not know but felt compelled to obey. The lead bird straddled to Prometheus, landing on the only portion of his arm that was not covered with avian feathers, fish scales or reptilian 'leather'. The small portion of human flesh still on his bones seemed pleasing to the bird's smell. And reminiscently familiar.

"I can bring you back to being human again, if you let me pass," Prometheus said to the bird whose eyes he seemed to now be able to both relate to, and read. The avian leader looked to his compadres, and beckoned them to stop, and listen. "I can bring all of you back to who and what you were before the Suriuseans got a hold of you," Prometheus pledged, as well as prayed to be able to do.

Maybe it was the tone of voice, or maybe the words he used, or the bird squeaks between the still mammalian speech Prometheus was able to ascoltate from his hybrid tongue. The birds moved away from Prometheus, allowing him a free pathway ahead. Made so by the trio scaring away flesh eating rats, venomous eagles, flying snakes and finally at the other end of the tunnel, two Suriusian guards, junior officers by the look of them. These gods-in-training had arrogant eyes that said they had high level clearance and the right to use their lasers on anyone or anything that made it that far into the tunnel. They aimed those weapons at the mutant with four legs who knew how to stand up on two of them, but were unable to fire as the vulture-crows chewed off their fingers before they were able to use them. The birds then had at it with the hands that fed them from the wrists upward. Meanwhile, Prometheus made it through the iron-gated door and the force-field behind it.

The lab was as impressive as it was dangerous. Nothing here was old, and everything seemed to be working in top order. It was run by blinded workers, some mutants, some lower level Suriusean humanoids and some mustache-bearing Spartans, whose fingers seemed to know what to do, their ears clogged with wax. But within that wax were small transmitters connected to wires that attached to their skulls. Prometheus' compass time piece, attached to his angle under

the tangles of fins and feathers, told him that it was time for Apollo to meet him here at the South end of the machinery so that the one shot at deactivating it could be delivered to the right outlet. But the smell in the air from the miasmata about to be released into the distribution pouches said that there was no time to lose with regard to getting the devise into the manufacturing unit.

With eyesight still intact, and soles of his feet covered with soft non-noise generating feathers, Promethius worked his way to what looked like the main processing chute and placed the devise inside. He turned it on, waited for it to buzz, then held it in place for three, four, then five seconds. It felt like an eternity, as he felt the eternities finally catching up with him. With his last breath, he felt something everlasting happening. Something he knew he would not be able to see, at least from the land of the living.

CHAPTER 24

Promethius did not know what had happened when he woke up, somewhere, somehow on a barge with a design he had never seen on its hull, floating in a calm sea containing more oil than water on its surface. The first thing he felt was cold. The next, warmth from a stack of wood set ablaze with fire. Tending and directing the flames was none other than Dioneakis, whose mutant body was now completely humanoid. Promethius noted that his own mutantly transformed body was now 100 percent humanoid. “What happened?” he asked the leader of the ‘wards’ who tended the fields atop Olympus.

“The plan worked out the way you said it would,” Dioneakis said, pointing with his own 100% humanoid, flesh covered, five-fingered hand to the other members of the crew. “After the miasmata were made back into what they had been before, something happened to everyone else after they breathed the air after the machines exploded. Every one of my people now look like your people,” he continued as Promethius saw healthy, non-deformed humanoid bodies around

the eyes of those tortured souls who had been bred or modified at Team Olympus' genetic translational unit. "But, I don't think they have any of your people's powers."

"They have their health, a brain to see that it lasts as long as possible, and a soul that allows them to be happy," Promethius said. "That is more than any of my people ever had."

"And your people came from?" Dioneakis inquired.

Promethius remained silent. Dioneakis prepared himself to be told another half-truth, or well-intended complete lie. But one fact, and truth, that they could both take with them to the grave was that the miasmata-manufacturing Island that merged out of the sea was now reclaimed by it. The only thing visible to the human, or godlike, eye were bubbles pushing their way up to the surface along with debris from Siriusian machinery and bodies. Both were equally distasteful to the birds of prey and other forms of naturally-created scavengers.

"Who else other than us are still alive?" Promethius asked the spiritual, now-military, leader of the Orionian mutants.

"Of your people, from Olympus, nobody," Dioneakis said.

"You are sure?" Promethius said. "My people seem to like being deceptive around your people."

"I'm sure," Dioneakis answered. "I saw the bodies, and their eyes as they were dying in them." A cabin boy brought him a map, asking if the course they were heading in was the correct one.

"And Wilikus?" Promethius asked. "The doctor."

"On his third ship by now, tending to the wounded," Dioneakis' reply as he pointed Promethius' attention to the vessels around him. "I think he's on that one now." he said of a particularly small boat containing the highest concentration of passengers on its deck. The Passengers were as varied as the kinds of escape vessels they had obtained. They included Spartans who now seemed as compassionate and vulnerable as Athenians. Mutants made by Orionian and Siriusian technology, both discovering human bodies that could walk with upright backs and mouths that could speak actual words that could be understood by others. And members of Ionesis' original crew. But as for their Captain.. "Your Athenian Captain died defending our people who he considered his. He was on his favorite ship. Which when it started to sink, he---"

"---Took charge of it himself, got everyone else off board, set the ship ablaze and headed into the middle of the enemy's fleet," Promethius said.

"How did you know all of that?" Dioneakis replied. "You were unconscious. All but dead when a party whose name I am honor bound not to reveal rescued you."

"I saw it in a dream," Promethius said. "And knew that such was Ionesis' dream in real life. And as for my rescuer, perhaps it was Silikia, or whoever her name really was. Having come to her

senses after having been hypnotized by a Siriusian, I mean, Persian implant in her head that stopped working when the miasma manufacturing machine was put into reversal mode and..." Promethius kept his tongue silent, as it was listening to his heart rather than his brain.

"...you want me to tell you that whatever you just said is true, 'Silikus'?" Dionekeis said. "To make noble legends about flawed and tortured people become fact once you accept them as true. Like the historians who will put together what other people saw here."

"Not unless you are the historian," Promethius replied. He looked out over the ships that had fled the Siriusian island before it and all of its contents were reclaimed by the sea and the volcano under it. He was particularly drawn to the faces of the mutants, whose new bodies, now somehow fit their eyes. There was one emotion that settled into all of them, one way or another, after the constellation of other emotions had run their course.

"Fear," Dionekeis said. "I know. They don't know where they will go next now that they don't have masters to tell them what to do. Some will embrace their freedom. Some, I am afraid, will not be able to handle it. What to do about them? Where will they be able to go? From you did tell me clearly, our village on Olympus can't sustain us, or you. So, with you being the only one of you left, at least the only one of you who we can trust, please, 'Silikus', tell me what to write in the history books about all of this. For those who want to really know what happened here."

"No one would believe it if you told it as fact," Promethius said. "And if you portrayed it as a legend, as Homer did, even the hard facts would be considered fabrication. It's enough that we prevented a world wide catastrophe, so that Athens and Sparta are left to their own devices to hit each other with sticks rather than fight with sharp arrows and spears containing toxins far more powerful than they can imagine. But, you are free to do what you want or need to with the facts, and fantasies."

"And free to tell my people, and those whose bodies were released from mutant forms by 'the Persians', the truth about you?" Dionekeis shot into the depths of Promethius' now even more human soul.

"And free to come back home with me, as Comrades, to my home. If it is still there," Promethius said after careful consideration. "I will see to it that you are given food, shelter, and respect."

"You can guarantee this?" Dionekeis replied. "Like you guaranteed that no more than one in ten of my people would die in this battle that you say history will never say happened!"

Promethius quickly calculated the number of returning heroes and heroines on the ships, relative to how many he had brought into battle.

"Yes, 'Silikus', three of every ten of my people died fighting this war started by your people! One of them my son."

“Who will be honored in the history books in MY homeland. This I DO promise,” Promethius replied. Just then a brisk wind came from the North, swooping around him and Dionekeis, then whirling up to the sky in a tunnel of dust, then light.

Dionekeis had seen things in the sky before, but not this. He seemed cautious, and vigilant, but not afraid. Promethius looked at the ge-timepeice strapped to his arm. The vague cloud of light up in the sky lingered, pulsating with a three four musical rhythm, putting out a song that Promethius’ ears could thankfully still hear.

“So, it’s time for something important to happen that I’m not supposed to know about?” Dionekeis said.

“I can, and will, tell you everything,” Promethius said. “Particularly those of you who chose to come with me.”

“To where?”

“Someplace where you can never return back from, at least for a long while, Dionekeis. A place which is in need of people like you far more than it realizes. I can’t guarantee anything for you there except that you will live, or perhaps die, doing something that is very needed.”

“An arrangement which, I and some of my people would be willing to accept, on one condition,” Dionekeis said. “That you tell me one thing.”

“The location of my homeland, on a map?”

Dionekeis edged his way to Promethius’ terrified yet heartfelt face. “Your real name.”

Seeing that there were others around eaves dropping on the conversation, Promethius decided to conduct the rest of the negotiations in print. On an aluminum sheet that had been blown on the deck of the ship. Grabbing hold of a knife, he wrote his name and showed it to Dionekeis.

“Promethius,” Dionekeis smiled. “I thought so. As promised by my ancestors.”

“Huh?” Promethius answered, his godlike mouth dropping down into mid air.

“A child who was cold one night who you warmed up by showing them how to build a fire,” Dionekeis smiled. “It was many generations ago, and many languages, and many cultures, but that ancestor of mine is grateful for having saved his life.”

“And when I came back as a beggar, asking for cooked food at the campfire, and was turned away by everyone?”

“My ancestor was out hunting. He gave his friends shit for turning you away after he got back. But we’ll talk later about how that story is going to get into print on these sheets of metal in your homeland or the kind of papyrus manuscripts here which I saw on our way through Athens.”

“And you don’t want to be a citizen of Athens?” Promethius said. “I could possibly arrange it with the few contacts I still have there. It would be a safe and comfortable life, no matter how the War with Sparta turns out.”

“Safe and comfortable are for the dying, challenge and exploration are for the living,” Dionekeis replied. He looked up at the light above him, which seemed to focus on him alone. “Agreed!” he said with a bold, Promethian smile, channeling something very Real to Promethius. An Energy that needed no power to be expressed. A Benevelance which was beyond the worldly expressions of good and evil. A Wisdom that knew all and was constantly in the process of knowing more. The God beyond the gods, the nature of which would be better connected to by humanoid life on Earth and Orion working together now. And perhaps in the future, working with humanoid life on Sirius as well. After a peace perhaps negotiated and created by Earthlings, who no doubt would be better at managing ET civilizations than ETs were.

A fable, yes, but within all fable there is fact. And when mixed with human Passion, very Real possibilities.