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Promethius Percipient

a narrative poem

by

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Chorus

*Is art not creation, or just a medium
For all reality newly made manifest?
Ere creator creates, from what dark vacuum
Does that creator flow? All men solutions guess
And dream ideas new, but do they thus embrace
Objective truth or else creations of their own?
The god Prometheus, of ancient Titan race,
Had surely wrestled with such questions all alone
While shackled ages past to his Caucasian peak.
Perhaps they drove him mad, but we'll let you decide.
Let's first recall the tale, from poets who dared speak
Of gods, that ties him to his windblown mountain side.*

Prologue

Recall the ancient story poets sing,
Of Titan wise, betrayer of his kind,
Who help'd enthrone the golden Zeus as king
Of gods on Mount Olympus high. His mind,
They say, so quick and always devious,
Made Zeus distrust his turncoat hand,
So tasks no others sought Prometheus
Was given such as peopling the land.

Great Zeus, it is surmised, foresaw dull beasts
And dutiful, prepared to worship and adore.
Prometheus, as was his wont, displeas'd
His lord by then imagining much more.
The Titan sly designed humanity,
A noble race, so like Olympians,
Intelligent and self-possessed, and free
To think and doubt and tell the gods their plans.

He chose to give them practical science.
According to the tale, Great Zeus soon grew
Resentful, angry with their arrogance.
Before Prometheus could next pursue
The gift of fire, the king of gods forbade
Such generosity to those who die.
The trickster god would not be swayed.
He stole an ember from Olympus high.

Irate at this defiance bold of his
Clear will, Zeus chose to punish the fire thief
By chaining him high in the Caucasus,
And, ruthless, sending to the cold massif
A hungry eagle set to feed all day
Upon his liver, piece by bloody piece.
By night his vitals healed without decay
And so the eagle's task would never cease.

When tribes of wild Hellenes migrated west
From Caspian plains, a giant loomed on high,
Foreboding and icebound, and so they guessed
The Titan's lot. Lest others Zeus defy
Was he kept thus restrained, but not destroyed
Because of deep suspicion that this wise
Old Titan might know how Zeus could avoid
The fate of previous chiefs of earth and skies.

I

The old ewe paused and, bleary-eyed, looked up
Toward the craggy summit, far above.
Something seemed wrong. Continuing to sup
On gentian sweet and pasture grasses rough
Torn from the mountain lea, she could not cease
To feel, somehow, that mortal danger blew
From high, toward the land of Golden Fleece.
The ewe glanced round; the dog had sensed it too.

The dog, quite frantic, tried to be of help.
He raced around the furthest group of sheep
To round them up. The earth just moved! he yelped.
I must warn master! Acts like he's asleep.
The mountain moved again! What was that scream?
Oh master, listen to the mountain side.
It warns of peril we should heed. I seem
To know it's bad. We must now go and hide.

The Colchian shepherd gazed up in fright
And felt the wind on cheek and shoulder bare,
As gusts swept down from dreadful frozen heights
Dispersing seeds and thistle through the air.
What omen can this be? he thought, alarmed.
Only gods send signs like this. Are they angry?
I'm still alive - perhaps they mean no harm.
"Hephaestus, Lord, I'll sacrifice to thee!"

Then noticed he an eagle in the sky
And it reminded him of stories told
Of Titan chained and pecked on mountain high
For stealing fire to give to men of old.
Did sound of pain and feel of breath divine
Afflict this simple shepherd, as he feared?
He thought it so and man, like dog, inclined
To seek escape from fear in memory seared.

Promethius howled long and loud once more.
Not agony, for gods do not feel pain,
But in humiliation he did roar –
And rage – injustice drove him near insane.
His immortality restored anew
By shepherd's faith - both artless and untaught,
He railed against the vain and pompous crew
Of Mount Olympus: harsh and spiteful lot.

“How can such a pathetic god we mock
Hold Cronus’ earth and heaven in his grip?”
He shouted at the quickly parting flock.
“For mankind Zeus cares naught, yet men worship
One so savage, degenerate, unchaste.”
The startled eagle circled round the peak
Before it landed at the Titan’s waist
Resuming gory task with sharpened beak.

II

Cold dawn lit up the sky, when stamping sound
And whinnying of skittish horses stirred
Promethius, the daily morning round.
He cherish'd waking thus, brisk purpose heard,
Before the eagle came. The horses shied
As they were harnessed tight for their journey
With Helios across the heavens wide
From golden Colchis to the western sea.

Each day, Promethius would watch the team
Climb almost vertical, yet bending head
To keep the arc, while god with brilliant gleam
Would burn away the morning mist and spread
His warming rays of sunlight from on high.
Then witness'd their precipitous decline,
His brother Atlas, bent beneath the sky.
Headlong they fell into the swelling brine.

Still early, Helios his respects paid
To his cousin. Son of Hyperion,
The uncle of Promethius, he played
His daily role under Olympian
Gods' rule, despite his Titan lineage.
But he supposed that animosity
Would see him soon replaced from the ménage
Of Zeus' most ambitious progeny.

The sun god chided him over the force
Of his outburst. "No wonder Zeus distrusts
You, thief and rebel both. Showing remorse
Might help you gain favour on Olympus."
Promethius did bristle and stern reply:
"Zeus simply doesn't understand the worth
Of men. It's clearer as each day goes by
That humans will inherit this whole earth."

"At their creation, men were mostly base
And warlike beings - selfish or much worse.
As gods, our duty was to help their race
Become fit stewards of this universe.
For such a purpose, gave them I the key
To useful sciences and knowledge apt
Such as architecture, astronomy
And math, as well as navigation mapped."

"But little could they do without the fire
That Zeus held close and he, in jealousy,
Had sworn they never would such gift acquire.
So yes, I stole a burning coal. It had to be."
"Defiance bold!" said Helios dismayed.
"You could have shown them how, without a crime,
To find their fire in lightning or my rays.
You're thus condemned until the end of time."

"My cousin, no. He's not the arbiter
Of my end fate. It is not in his hands,
How long this punishment I must endure.
I've learned something that Zeus and all his band
Of self-absorbed Olympians know not.
I think I always sensed, from what I knew
Of man, our real relationship of thought,
But now I'm almost certain it is true."

Through ages I've lain bound, eagle and I
Grow bored by this absurd ceremony,
Despairing of an end. And by and by
Mankind forgot my generosity,
And ceased to think of me, and I've grown weak.
But when the odd shepherd remembers me,
Or poets sing, or playwrights mould mystique,
I feel a spurt of godly energy.

Suppose then for a moment that the fate
Of all the gods lies in the minds of men,
And not within their own divine estate?"
"That is a strange and dang'rous thought, so then
Best keep it to yourself," warned Helios.
"I must be off on my appointed round,"
He cried, mounting his chariot drawn close
Behind the peak and soon was skyward bound.

III

'Tis futile hope that uttered rash remark
Remains unheard, once impish winds have flung
It, swirling leaves alike, to corners dark.
Such places were of int'rest to sly young
Hermes, who then reported all the worst
To father Zeus. So once again the chief
Of gods was vexed by tales of the perverse
Old Titan he had exiled as a thief.

“Are not the mountains of the Caucasus
Distant enough” he raged “to never hear
His name again on our Mount Olympus?
He claims to see my fate, it does appear.
Can he know anything of consequence?
Go find out now, Hermes. Is this a trick
Or do his blasphemies make any sense?
Most likely he’s a raving lunatic.”

As Helios sank down to end the day
And shadows dark raced up from valley deep
To take the mountain top, the bird of prey
Let go at last and wiped its gory beak.
A moment later, startled from its perch
By something unexpected overhead,
The eagle flew straight up in fright to search
The new intruder out, and then it fled.

Promethius, in his tormentor's place,
Beheld a youth both slim and short of hair,
A godly glow emanating from his face –
Or was it just his arrogant cold glare –
Equipped with herald's staff, a trav'lers hat
And sandals gold with wings upon each side.
He'd heard of Hermes' role, but looking at
His brother's grandson now he felt no pride.

The golden boy showed scant diplomacy
In opening remarks. "O hear me, thief of fire,
And false betrayer of the gods; do we
Blaspheme as well? Great Zeus does thus inquire."
"Address your elders with respect, young pup,"
The Titan answered stern. "Great Zeus, indeed,
Deserves to learn, but he should listen up
When someone else has knowledge he should heed."

As Hermes splutterèd indignantly,
Promethius continued on, "Zeus has
Done me great service unintendedly
By chaining me to stone these ages past,
For isolation gave me new insight
I never would have had, if I had stayed
Just tending to my shrines and priests. I might
See clearly soon how fates of gods are made."

Tho' flush of indignation did suffuse,
Now Hermes was intrigued and earnest bent
On hearing revelations he could use
To serve his interest, perhaps augment
His influence on Zeus and gain respect.
"Then speak, Promethius," a little late
To show the courtesy one might expect,
"So tell me what you know of Zeus's fate."

“Did you not say just now, nephew, that Zeus
Wants to know what I know? Are you sure he’d
Let me share portents, open to abuse,
With him who’s first to ask? Has he agreed
It’s even wise to know his fate, lest that
Knowledge impair enjoyment of his rule?”
“You’ll tell me what you know,” Hermes spat.
“He’ll then deem you prophet or old fool.”

“Let’s first recall the cradle of our earth,
When Mother Gaia and Ouranos
Ruled all we know. To Titans they gave birth.
The boldest among these, the Great Cronos,
His father did castrate and seized his throne
As king of earth and sky and all between.
Then Cronos was, by his son Zeus, o’erthrown –
Succession swift of pow’r still unforeseen.”

“Foreseen not then, perhaps, but has Zeus not
Discerned a pattern now establishèd,
Of father overcome by son? A lot
Of sons, beyond my counting, he has bred.
Are you not one of these, my young nephew?
Beware his fear and wrath should he decide
Concealèd destinies to yet pursue.
So ask, and let me know how he’s replied.”

In consequence, and with no fresh protest,
Hermes bowed slightly to the Titan grave
And darted suddenly off to the west
Over the dark but silver-crested waves
Of Euxine Sea. Prometheus sighed deep
And lay against the frigid rock and chain
That was his only bed. He fell asleep
As liver torn began to mend again.

IV

As morning broke, and Helios's four
Were struggling up their steep arc undeterred,
The eagle settled to his wonted chore.
Betimes a plaintive lowing sound was heard
From gorge below. Pulled from its feeding spree
It rose into the air and twice did wheel
Before yielding with equanimity
To yet another interrupted meal.

Promethius peered down. A heifer white
Ran into view, all shivering from horn
To hoof. Her very flesh she tried to bite.
Some fate required she have the torment borne
Of horseflies buzzing round both eye and ear
And biting tender spots. At summit's crest
The flies appeared deterred by strong winds sheer
And to a sheltered crevice they recessed.

The old god gently asked by what error
Someone dared interrupt their fixed routine.
"I am Io, a priestess of Hera,"
The heifer mumbled with bewilder'd mien.
"What is this place?" she asked. "I know you, child.
I welcome you, daughter of Inachus,
To cold and barren peak. Here Zeus exiled
Promethius, high in the Caucasus."

“How did you reach this rock that I despise,
From grassy meadows sweet so far below?
And what am I to make of your disguise?”

“This is no willing masquerade,” Io
Replied forlorn. “I was seduced, nay raped,
By Zeus, the same who’s cause of all your woes,
Both evil twin and domineering mate
Of my good lady Hera of Argos.”

“When she discerned his infidelity,
Zeus then, to hide and keep me for his use,
Into the beast you now behold changed me.
Enraged, these vicious flies Hera let loose
To punish my unwilling part coerced
In his foul crime and drive me far afield
That he may not find me. Their rav’ning thirst
For blood deranges me - my shame revealed.”

Some secret understanding or instinct
Led wise Prometheus to comfort her:
“Your wanderings are likely, I think,
To last awhile; they still must Zeus deter.
But one day, Io, you’ll find peace again,
And take once more the form of youthful grace
That first attracted him. I am certain
You’ll give birth yet to a heroic race.”

“But what of Lady Hera’s blame?” she asked.
“Will she forgive me for my part in this?”
“You will more likely be forgot at last.
Her former spitefulness you may dismiss
Once you return, since her star is fading.”
“What do you mean by that?” Io demurred,
Protective of her lady still, degrading
And cruel, though, was all that had occurred.

“So do,” the Titan asked, “you really mean
To say that Hera is husband of Zeus,
A universal goddess, nay the queen
Of gods, enthroned upon Mount Olympus?
Is she the patroness of womanhood,
Of nature and the seasons of the year?”
“Most certainly, or so I understood,”
Io averred; “belief I held most dear.”

“Why then is Hera’s cult found in a brace
Of towns in Crete and the Peloponnese,
While not at all in Phrygia or Thrace?
Why Samos but no isles in other seas?
Is this how queen of heaven should be known?”
“Hera has shown them charity immense,”
Io demurred. “She treats them as her own;
So she’s adored by grateful citizens.”

“In many lands, Hera is twin of Zeus,”
Promethius went on. “Sister some say,
Or no real kin at all. Did she seduce
Lord Zeus while he was in her magic sway?
Or was it he who ravished her? Some hold
She is the three-phased moon and has regrown
Virginity each year. Others behold
Three seasons as well as child, bride and crone.”

“I ask you then, Io, does Hera know
Exactly who she is? Can she combine
Such personalities as these bestowed?”
“We served the Lady at her Argive shrine
But did not dare to wonder – or to ask,”
Io replied, somewhat defensive still.
“Can you, my Lord Promethius, unmask
My Lady’s truth, while not doing her ill?”

“Age helps, long isolation too and what
I know of man completes the scene I dress.
Before Hellenes arrived, Hera was naught
But Mother Great – omnipotent, changeless.
Female fecundity ruled everywhere,
Ensuring earth’s fertility enticed.
A queen chose mates each year, for arms to bear,
Til crops came in, then they were sacrificed.”

The land was then invaded by Hellenes,
Who venerated sun o’er female moon
And worshipped warrior gods. Some village queens
Were killed and shrines to Mother Goddess hewn,
To be replaced by a male pantheon.
Elsewhere, it’s said, new cults were simply merged
With local ones. Can you shed light upon
How marriage of Hera and Zeus emerged?”

“Tis told,” Io began, “that joy and mirth
Did summon all the gods to witness be
At their rich wedding feast. Our Mother Earth
To Hera gave a golden apple tree.
They spent their wedding night on fair Samos
And it, they say, endured three hundred years.”
“A pretty tale, indeed,” Prometheus
Replied. “So came it likewise to my ears.”

“I never thought to ask how a marriage
Resulting from seduction false – or rape –
Whoever was at fault, could encourage
That blissful wedding night. Truth now takes shape
And I can see that men tried to compile,
In spiritual way, their memories
That merging different cults on Samos Isle
Took them in all about three centuries.”

“My Lord Prometheus, what means this then?”
Io, now quaking asked. “I think I see
That gods exist alone in minds of men,
And that, perforce, includes both you and me.
Did Hera verily seduce her Lord
Or is't how native peoples try to see
Their compromise? Did Zeus rape his adored
Or does Hellene just boast triumphantly?”

“Both versions are the truth as each has roots
In faith held strong. This must be why we hold
From place to place such different attributes.
Mankind created us and stories told
That we now live, and in the end they'll find
A way to bring our stories to an end.
I will be freed, and you will leave behind
Bovine disguise; your torment they'll suspend.”

“I'm almost certain of this new insight.
Although men often show vile cruelty
They also want to trust in endings bright
In hopes that their travails and misery
Will lighten over time. These mortals lead
Hard lives while they await the dark abyss.”
“How was it that you came” Io queried,
“To such astonishing hypothesis?”

“My memory has gaps that cannot be
Explained. I know as clearly as a bell
The stories that men always tell of me.
I'm wise, and sly – deceitful some will tell –
Because such attributes explain my theft
Of fire Olympian so man prevails.
But I recall no moment of my youth bereft,
Or adult life not written in their tales.”

I used to just assume that when they called
Me different names, it was the distances
Or languages in which they were enthralled.
But now I'm more aware of differences
Between the rites when Babylonian
Priests call me by the holy name Ea,
To thank me for my gift of fire to man,
And praise heard in Hellas or Phrygia.

In India, fire thief is my proud name.
Though on behalf of man I stole, alas,
Fire from the Lord Agni, I'm not the same
As known in Babylon or bold Hellas.
Yet underneath, I really am the same
Because despite the unconformity
Collective songs of praise sustain my fame.
I am who each of them wants me to be."

"If we're no more than men's imaginings,
What is our fate?" Io cried in dismay.
"Mankind will always need their gods, but things
Can change. It's why Hera has had her day.
Already some say Artemis has blessed
Their women in childbirth and hunters' toil;
While Demeter, it is believed, can best
Support their cultivation of the soil."

The wind abruptly dropped and angry flies
Emerged to end Io's respite too brief.
As they attacked and swarmed about her eyes,
She lunged on down the path to seek relief
And then called out, from lower on the slope:
"Thank you, my Lord! Your thoughts are dangerous seed
If truth be told, but you have given hope."
Promethius heard sounds of hooves recede.

V.

That echo faint was soon replaced by flap
Of wings. His tormentor, returned afresh,
Set itself down once more upon his lap.
But naught ensued – no tearing of his flesh.
The Titan looked. Inches away he spied,
Two yellow-rimmed black eyes in liquid drowned,
Sitting a lengthy curved beak astride,
O'er-shadowed by a baleful feathered frown.

“What do you want?” he cried. “While I slept
My liver grew; your meal is my torment.
Does Zeus demand still more?” The eagle kept
Its steady stare conveying deep intent.
Promethius relaxed his grip, reclined
And studied carefully the eagle's face.
He calmed his beating heart and cleared his mind
And let his intuition roam apace.

A momentary pause, then he could see
In eagle's eyes full of liquid blackness
A rippling image of holy Delphi,
With oracle and Python's priestess.
He even thought he heard a priestess speak
In mumbled words. Whence comes this sight, he thought.
Aloud, he asked: “Why employ such mystique?
Does young Apollo try to warn me aught?”

The eagle stared intent, through feathered scowl,
And image new in ebon eye was shown.
Within Python's cleft rock, through vapor foul,
He saw the figure of a bent old crone.
Old memories surged forth. Prometheus
Could recognize Gaia, his grandmother –
The mother of his sire Iapetos –
In form she took when needing to confer.

His gaze Gaia met and he understood
Her sense, through melded thoughts come from afar.
"Grandson, you're too clever for your own good".
It was rebuke all too familiar.
"The perilous ideas you avow
Are such as even gods should not conceive.
I can't undo your understanding now,
But no-one else, henceforth, shall you believe."

"That dreadful curse has been forever tied
To gift of prophesy, so your new bane
Is clear foresight, by listeners denied
who'll mock your words and say you are insane.
I'm sorry but you brought this on yourself."
She disappeared, and eagle's surly glare
Was all the Titan saw on rocky shelf.
He closed his eyelids tightly in despair.

VI.

Throughout that day and through the starry night,
The Titan was assaulted with visions
Of how mankind would use their future bright
And manage their affairs. Some decisions,
At first, made him regret his role in their
Creation but, in time, he discerned both
Emerging signs of intellect and flair
And earnest striving after moral growth.

Hermes returned the following morning
Determined to extract information
From the old god, only to find him in
A state of complete mental exhaustion.
“Great uncle,” he began, with a degree
Of tact this time, “can I your guilt reduce?
Do you wish to atone for blasphemy
And earlier defiance of Lord Zeus?”

“Far from it, herald swift, but it occurs
That I can see so much more clearly now
And I am willing to give him answers.”
“That’s excellent,” relieved Hermes allowed.
“He wants to know what you may have been shown
That might affect his ruler’s destiny.
You mentioned that he could be overthrown
By son of his, so which child would that be?”

“I’ve seen a lot, but ere I say a thing
Can you assure me that he’s willing to
Accept responsibility for its knowing,
And lets me share his destiny with you?”
“Without a doubt,” replied Hermes glibly,
“And he would like to have all you profess
In plain language, not rambling poetry
Of some half-mad oracular priestess.”

“Then listen well. Three steps will bring about
Decline and fall of the Olympian court,
And men decide the process all throughout.
“Impossible!” said Hermes with a snort.
“Our destinies must be by gods conceived.”
“Step one,” Prometheus continued on,
Now not expecting he would be believed,
“will be a heroes’ war for ten years long.”

“The clan on Mount Olympus will be torn
Asunder by conflicting loyalties
To cities and causes that they have sworn,
Reflecting their own personalities.
They’ll be revealed in subsequent accounts
Of the great war, told from men’s point of view,
As self-serving, capricious gods, denounced
As cruel and dishonourable too.”

“But these are also human attributes,”
Hermes demurred. “It’s hypocritical
To blame their gods for similar pursuits.”
“Beware, nephew, you plead my rationale.
Men once expected such behaviour from
Their gods, and feared us for as much. They dreamed
Of gods who looked like them, but with aplomb,
Who whored and stole and permanently schemed.”

“But soon the time for gods to be unkind,
To be eternally quarrelsome louts
Uncaring of their impact on mankind,
Will pass, as Zeus and others will find out.
Man will, henceforth, expect of us much more.”
“That is not relevant! None can believe
The end of Zeus,” Hermes in anger swore,
“Could simply come from what humans perceive.”

“He’ll reign for some time yet. The slide downhill
For Zeus has just begun. His family
Will fade from relevance. For centuries, they will
Be parodied in plays and poetry.
Mankind will find, on Mount Olympus, two
Contrasting gods more meaningful to breath
Of mortal life, because they suffer too.
They understand the seasons, life and death.”

“His sister Demeter shows how rebirth
Of daughter lost, Persephone, can mean
Fertility and life returned to earth.
A new god still unknown will burst on scene.
Of mortal woman born, but son of Zeus,
He’ll celebrate joyful vitality
In nature felt. This Dionysios
Will also give to man vine husbandry.”

“A mortal born can never be the heir
To Olympus,” said Hermes testily.
“It is not he who will replace you there,
But he will join your divine family.
In the long run, Hermes, man will desire
To place a god born of humanity
On Olympus, because he does aspire
Himself to splendid immortality.”

“Young Dionysios will almost die
In his poor mother’s womb, but he’ll be torn
From there by Zeus and sewn into his thigh.
Hence he’ll be known to man as the twice-born.
These stories that men to each other tell
Help them their deepest heart’s desire express
That death can be o’ercome or that its knell
Means else than black eternal nothingness.”

“Such stories undermine authority,”
Hermes declared. “They’d be, by Zeus, condemned
Before they gained any real currency.
Hurt pride alone must put a stop to them.”
“The followers of Dionysios
And Demeter will learn it’s wise to hide
Their worship from his eyes as well as those
Of fellow men,” Promethius replied.

“New mystery cults with initiation
And secrecy will meet with great success.
Some rites will lead to possession,
Religious ecstasy and drunkenness.
The proselytes of Dionysios
Will prune the vine until it’s almost dead
So it returns with vigour after repose,
And dream of cheating thus the fate they dread.”

“Disciples of the lady Demeter
Will join in mysteries as well, though less
Frenzied. They’ll break their bread all together
In thanks, and ask for her their grain to bless.
Through secret communion, in the presence
Of either god, they’ll try to understand
The renewal of life innate and hence
How, mortals still, dread death might yet be banned.”

“Men’s worried thoughts are quite irrelevant
To Zeus, who sits upon his golden throne,”
Hermes impatiently averred. “Just grant
His wish to know by whom he’ll be o’erthrown.”
“We come then to step three,” Prometheus
Continued wearily. “My prophecy,
Is that the son who’ll overthrow Lord Zeus
Will not be one of his own progeny.”

“A god still not well-known, of minor race
Of Canaanites, will rise in jealous might.
His son, though modest, kind and full of grace
Will promise men life after death outright,
Their hearts’ desire, and this will cause, one day,
Complete demise of Zeus and all his kin.”

“Zeus must act now.” Hermes said, dismayed.
“Who is this god? We cannot let him win.”

“‘I am what I am’ is what he prefers,
So he’s not fully formed in peoples’ minds.
Before that comes to pass, his worshipers
Will be assailed by foe of many kinds.
They will be taken in captivity
To Babylon, beyond Lord Zeus’s scourge,

Where their god's striking personality
And final symmetry will full emerge."

"Then Zeus must kill the mother god," opined
Hermes. What is her name? Where does she lie?"
"She'll be a mortal maid, of royal line
But modest and hard to identify.
Kings far and near will try and seek them out,
A few to venerate and one to kill
Both mother and her son. She'll die no doubt
'Ere Zeus finds her, her destiny fulfilled."

"Lord Zeus is not so easily outdone,"
Hermes retorted angrily. "Defeat
Will never come if he destroys her son.
When will the fates have them in battle meet?"
"They'll never meet. After four centuries,
Believers in the maiden's son will then
Erase the cults of Olympus by decrees
And you will cease to be, in minds of men."

"But how could he, not even meeting Zeus,
Destroy us all?" Hermes asked, now shaken.
"Recall the long decline of Olympus?
Zeus will grow weaker day by day as men
Cease to believe in him. From birth of son
Four hundred years gone by, an emperor
Will then declare his cult sole religion,
And worship of your Zeus will be no more."

“You claim that mortal man will overthrow
Lord Zeus, the king of gods? You are insane!”
“Man created those gods and will outgrow
Them if his spirit they cannot sustain.
But don’t despair. Artists, writers, actors
Will celebrate your victories, your frauds.
You always will exist as characters,
Silk scarves or space programs, but not as gods.”

“Sheer madness, all of this. I will explain
To Zeus the punishment that he conceived,
And solitude, have rendered you insane,
And by such news he’ll only feel relieved.
Do not expect alleviation of
Your plight for these pathetic ramblings.”
Hermes leapt up into the wind above
And vanished from the peak on sandals’ wings.

VII

His turmoil was by revelation purged.
The ecstasy now fully spent, he heaved
Against the mountain side and almost merged
With icy rock. But then, as he perceived
A future that both frightened and amazed,
The chains that for centuries held fast
Did melt like snow in Helios's gaze,
And old Prometheus was free at last.

The eagle hovered nigh, not knowing what
Enormity had passed between the two,
But it could sense there was no reason aught
Its gruesome daily dance to continue.
As iron chains that held Prometheus
dissolved, it heard a distant sheepdog bark.
With call of nature helping it adjust,
It flew towards the sound in graceful arc.

Free though he was, Prometheus moved not.
He was assaulted by new visions spun
Of men who killed and maimed for wrongful thought
Such as how many natures had the son,
The proper order of the prophets four,
And merit of good works or faith alone.
Such disconcerting sights did underscore
That bigotry will anything condone.

Chorus

*Should tales of gods end so? Can such discovery
Be render'd meaningless by Zeus' response unknown?
Must blunt defiance end in sad ignominy?
Among Pandora's ills, delusive Hope alone
Remain'd to keep both men and gods from suicide.
What can creators do if creatures break their mould
And change to masters of their destiny? With pride
Like this, will man still need his fire giver of old
Or even think about the meaning of the debt?
Most likely not, but while Prometheus awaits,
The other gods and he do play the roles men set
In films and comic books, such are their awful fates.*

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