

An unpublished children's story  
Written for Marty when he was six

### **Prometheus, Champion of Mankind**

It was summertime. Summer was Nicholas's favorite time because when school ended he went to the cool hills of Kentucky to spend a month with his grandma and grandpa. He loved the tall shady climbing trees on their front lawn and the cool lake where he swam with his summer friends. He loved, too, his grandma's strawberry shortcake and her soft voice and warm brown eyes. But, most of all, Nicholas loved bedtime.

Bedtime meant that Grandpa would pull his cozy rocking chair next to Nicholas's bed, turn the lights low, and tell him a story. No one could tell stories like Grandpa, not his mom or his dad or Ms. Jackson, the teacher he had just had for second grade.

"Grandpa," said Nicholas, "What kind of stories will you tell me this summer? I hope they're grown-up stories. You know, I *am* eight years old."

"Eight years old already?" said Grandpa. "Well then, I guess you are ready for *very* grown-up stories. I know what: how would you like me to tell you about the very first heroes, the ones who lived when the world was new, in Greece where your great grandfather was born?"

"Heroes? Like Superman?"

"Something like that, but even more important because to the people who lived in Greece 3000 years ago these heroes ruled the whole world. Some were their gods. Some were the ones their best storytellers told them about."

"Were they like men? Like you, Grandpa?"

"Most of them looked like men and women, but they were far stronger and usually much wiser and even more beautiful. Some had wonderful powers. I think, Nicholas, tonight I'll begin at the beginning and tell you how the Greeks believed the whole world started, and I'll tell you about Prometheus, the first great friend men ever had."

He put his hand on Nicholas's hand and began:

*In the beginning, there was a great dark, yawning emptiness called Chaos. Out of this dark Chaos came a murky place called Tartarus, full of gloom. And Night came. And the two most important things of all to come out of Chaos were Love and our universal mother, Mother Earth.*

*Mother Earth was all alone, so she created the sky and called him Father Heaven. She filled him with shining stars and made him big enough to cover her on all sides.*

"Grandpa, did Heaven and Earth look like a man and a woman?" asked Nicholas.

"No, they looked like the sky and ground. But their children looked like men and women."

*Together, Earth and Heaven had twelve children, all very important and very powerful. Some of them were Ocean, whose waters circled his mother; Hyperion, who ruled the sun; Themis, who made the laws; Mnemosyne, who gave everyone memory; Phoebe, who helped guide the moon; Theia, mother of the Dawn; Tethys, who bore 3000 spirits for the rivers and streams; Rhea, mother of the king of the gods; Prometheus, who could see the future and was the wisest of Earth's children; and, finally, the last and boldest of the children of Heaven and Earth, Cronus.*

*Heaven was a strange father. He hated and feared his children. He tried to keep them buried within Mother Earth. But she and Cronus made a plan and attacked Heaven, and all of Cronus's brothers and sisters were freed.*

*Father Heaven was furious. He bellowed, "You cruel and thankless children. You may have won a victory today, but there will come a time when you will pay dearly for attacking me, your father. From now on, I will call you Titans." And that is what these twelve children of Earth and Heaven came to be called.*

*Cronus married his sister, Rhea, and they bore children even stronger and more beautiful than the titans. Their names were Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon and Zeus.*

*Earth and Heaven told Cronus that, just as he had overcome his father, so would Cronus be conquered by a son of his. It's hard to believe what Cronus did when he heard this. He swallowed each of his children, except Zeus, who had been hidden by his mother, Rhea."*

Nicholas's eyes opened wide. "He swallowed them, Grandpa? He killed them?"

"He swallowed them, yes, but he didn't kill them. The titans and their children were immortal. That means they can't die. In fact, Cronus couldn't even keep them swallowed for very long."

*Sure enough, Zeus made Cronus cough up all his brothers and sisters. They fought a huge battle against Cronus. The battle lasted ten years. On one side, on Mt. Olympus, were the titan Prometheus and all the titans' children, the gods and goddesses. On the other side, on Mt. Othrys, were Cronus and all the titans except Prometheus. The earth trembled as they fought. The seas roared. The heavens howled. Finally, Zeus*

*seized the thunder and lightning from Father Heaven and hurled all the titans into gloomy Tartarus, where he kept them bound.*

*But the great titan Prometheus, who was wiser than any god, was allowed to live with the gods at their home high on Mt. Olympus.*

*One thing about Prometheus, however, troubled Zeus: Prometheus, a son of Earth, loved the people who lived down on her, the race of men and women. Prometheus pitied their weakness and ignorance, and so he taught them how to make tools and weapons out of bone, how to build huts, how to plant crops, how to count and make words with letters.*

*Once, Prometheus played a trick on Zeus. He divided a freshly sacrificed ox and disguised it in such a way that when Zeus chose which part would go to the gods, he chose the bones and left the meat for the humans on Earth.*

*This made Zeus angry. "You, who love the weakling race of men so much, you have tricked me. For that, I declare that none of the immortals shall ever give to men the holy gift of fire."*

*Despite this command of the king of the gods, Prometheus, because he loved the people of Earth so much, took a hollow fennel stalk, stole fire from the gods, and gave it to the people on Earth. Now they would have fire to warm themselves in winter and cook their food and make tools and weapons of metals to defend them from beasts of prey.*

*When Zeus saw smoke rising from the huts on Earth and realized that men had fire, he grew red with fury. The whole sky trembled as Zeus thundered, "Who gave those weaklings fire?"*

*"I did," said Prometheus.*

*Zeus was new to power and not yet able to use his power kindly. He sent for Might and Violence, two horrible twin giants without pity. He sent for lame-footed Hephaestus, the blacksmith of the gods, who pitied Prometheus very much but had to do what the king of the gods ordered. Zeus commanded them to bind Prometheus with iron to an icy cliff on Mt. Caucasus where no plants or flowers grow. As the freezing winds howled, they bound his head so it couldn't move, and they drove an adamantine stake through his breast.*

*The daughters of Ocean and Tethys, the Oceanides, came to comfort Prometheus.*

*"Thank you, lovely water spirits," he said, "for the love that brings you to me. Yet I, who can read the future, know that I shall be bound in great pain for 10,000 years. But there shall come a day when the cruel Zeus who holds me here shall have great need of me and will seek my good will."*

*Then, in agony, Prometheus cried out, "See, oh great Mother Earth, how I am wronged! See what a deathless titan must endure at a deathless god's command, all for giving my beloved race of mankind the heavenly gift of fire."*

Nicholas asked, "Grandpa, didn't anyone visit Prometheus in the whole 10,000 years?"

"Oh, yes indeed. I was just going to tell you. An eight year-old should know how to be more patient."

*One day, a cow, followed by a horrible hundred-eyed monster, came to the rock where Prometheus was bound. Prometheus recognized who the cow really was, though. He said, "Good afternoon, pretty Io."*

*"You know me?" said the cow.*

*"Of course. I am Prometheus who knows all things. I know what a beautiful young woman you were until, to protect you, Zeus changed you to a cow to shield his love for you from the jealous eyes of Hera, queen of the gods. I know, too, that Hera was not fooled, and that is why the hundred-eyed Argus watches you constantly."*

*"Great titan, whom all of my race adore, when will Zeus free us, you from your shackles, me from this cow's shape?"*

*"Pity me not, gracious Io, for my suffering will not end until Zeus falls from power."*

*"Is such a fall possible?" asked Io.*

*"Very possible, fair one, for one day Zeus will make a marriage which will produce a son mightier than the father."*

*"But can Zeus not escape his fate?"*

*"Only by releasing me."*

*"Then you will be free one day?"*

*"Yes, but not one day soon. In fact, mother of heroes, I will be released by a descendant of yours. He will come from your body in the thirteenth generation. But first you will wander far, to Egypt, where Zeus will restore your woman's form by the Nile and bring a son from you. Five generations later, 50 of his great, great granddaughters will return to Greece, to Argos, fleeing men whom they will marry but later kill, all but one cowardly one who will beget a race of kings. One of his descendants, centuries from now, will be a great archer, the greatest of heroes with the strength almost of a god. His*

*name will be Hercules, and he will free me. But first I will suffer even more than I do now."*

*Soon after Io departed, the wing-footed Hermes, messenger of the gods, sped from Zeus to Prometheus.*

*"So, your suffering continues, proud titan," Hermes sneered. "Tell me, for the all-powerful Zeus wishes to know: what is the marriage that will harm the king of the gods?"*

*"You insolent lackey to a tyrant," answered Prometheus, mankind's champion, "I have no wish to answer you or your heartless master. Be gone."*

*"You fool!" snapped Hermes, "for this your torments will increase. Now Zeus will strike these rocks with his terrible lightning and thrust you inside. And to make you curse your own stubbornness, a hungry eagle will come even this day to feast on your liver, which will grow again tonight and every night, as surely as he will feast on it every day. Such is the fate of those who refuse the will of the master of the universe."*

*And no sooner had Hermes sped back to Olympus than the lightning bolt cleft Mt. Caucasus and a cruel-eyed eagle sped down from the sky.*

Nicholas pitied Prometheus. "Grandpa, how many days did Prometheus suffer that way?"

Grandpa saw Nicholas's sadness. He was pleased that his grandson had love enough in his heart to be saddened by the suffering of others. Yet, he had to tell him the truth. "It wasn't just days, my grandson. Or weeks or months. It was years, hundreds and hundreds of years."

*Prometheus suffered on that mountain for longer than you can imagine. But if you are wise, and Prometheus was the wisest creature Greece ever knew, suffering can teach you how to love better than before. So, when one day the Oceanides reminded Prometheus how he had hated Zeus and desired his fall from Olympus, Prometheus was sorry he had ever felt such anger, even for his great enemy. He said, "I have learned since then and am sorry for my anger. I wish no living thing to suffer pain."*

*Just then, Hermes returned with Zeus's great, fierce hounds. "Have you felt enough of Zeus's might, foolish titan? Will you reveal the secret threat to Zeus's throne, or do you wish to suffer even more than you do now?"*

*Prometheus spoke softly but firmly. "Once again, you must return to your master without the knowledge he wishes."*

*The enraged Hermes summoned the Furies, who pursue those who anger the gods. One of the Furies stared into Prometheus's eyes and said, "Reveal what Zeus wants to learn or suffer the torture only a Fury can inflict."*

*Prometheus answered, "You do the work of the king of the gods, but I am king over Prometheus. I will tell you nothing."*

*The Fury was smart and knew nothing would torment Prometheus more than to hear of agony among the race of men whom Prometheus loved. "Well then, stubborn titan whom Zeus might have done well to cast into Tartarus with your defeated brothers, know that those puny playthings of the gods, your beloved men, suffer constantly at each others' hands. The good among them can do nothing, and those who can do something are not good. The gentlest to walk among them will be mocked and laughed at and killed. That is the fate of those who endure deep wrongs for mankind, as you yourself now know well."*

*"You do your cruel work well, Fury, for your words make me suffer in my soul. And I pity most those whom your words would not torture. Yet, they make me only more determined to endure."*

*When the Furies left, without the answer Zeus wanted, Mother Earth, to comfort her pained son, sent to Prometheus other spirits who had seen mankind's future.*

*"Be cheered, glorious titan," said one, "for the Furies have not told you all. I too have seen what will become of man. I have seen freedom and hope and victory, all of which they first learned from you. And I have seen something greater still: a spirit whose footsteps pave the world with light. His name is Love, and he hovers over all."*

*"Yes. Love," said Prometheus, "the greatest hope man has." Even as he spoke, Prometheus could feel his own heart filling with love for all things, even his tormentor, Zeus.*

*High on Olympus, Apollo, the radiant god of the sun, could feel the glowing total love of Prometheus and knew his own sun would forever shine more brightly.*

*Deep in the seas, Poseidon, tempestuous god of the ocean, could feel the joy of Prometheus's love and knew his waters would fill with life.*

*All over the world, Mother Earth could feel the glory of Prometheus's love, and she sent to him her greatest hero, the brave and powerful Hercules.*

*"I come, titan, to put my strength at the service of your wisdom, courage and long-suffering love."*

*As he said this, Hercules took an arrow from his quiver, drew the bow that only he could draw, and shot down the eagle which had tormented Prometheus for so many*

*years. Then, in his mighty grip, Hercules took the iron shackles Hephaestus had forged 10,000 years before and broke them and flung them from Mt. Caucasus.*

*Freed at last, Prometheus stepped toward Hercules and embraced him and said to Mother Earth and to the Oceanides who had been by him almost since the beginning of time, "Now, my friends, is the new age for my beloved race of men about to begin. Now, thanks to your comfort and strength, I can return to them and help them use their arts, their music and their words to create new beauty. Now I can teach them all I have learned of love and freedom."*

*And so, Prometheus was freed and a new age began on Earth.*

"Grandpa, that was wonderful story, but still I wish Prometheus didn't have to suffer so much," said Nicholas.

"That part was sad, it's true. But remember that toward the end he didn't suffer at all," said Grandpa.

"Not at all?"

"Of course not, Nicholas. Remember, his heart filled with love, and when your heart fills completely with love there is no room for anything bad."

"Yes," said Nicholas, "I guess that's true."

"Yes, it is true," said Grandpa. "Good night, Nicholas. I love you." And Grandpa stroked Nicholas's soft black hair until long after the boy was asleep.