

I have become Death by Mohammad Khan

The fighting above creates cracks in the bunker ceiling that will bury us among the skeletons. I sit with my neighborhood and many nearby families as the fighting continues above. The bunker is unfinished with a dirt ground and bricks rising up the walls forming an arched ceiling. A small lantern hangs from the center of the arch.

I am the only able-bodied one of the group except for the quiet old man sitting against the bunker walls. The mothers are busy calming their own children to worry about the safety of the rest. I walk around the bunker trying my best to comfort the families, knowing full well the entrance to this bunker had been sealed from the debris above. The old man stays undeterred from the fighting above. I had seen the old man only once before the attacks. He was working in his home and talking with government people quietly in the home.

We can hear the fighting above. The men shouting as bullets rain into them and the bombs explode around them. The lantern flickers from time to time casting the bunker in darkness.

I walk to the old man. He hasn't said a word since we got down here.
"Mister", says I. "We'll get out of here soon. Do not despair."

The old man stays still with his back against the wall looking forward in a trance. I sat beside him and looked at him more closely. His skin had sunk to his bones from malnourishment and his eyes didn't seem to be human eyes, rather bottomless chasms. He had dirty white hair on perimeter of his bald scalp. You'd mistake him for a corpse if his chest didn't move from respiration. An utterly broken man, not from war, but from some torment beyond human facilities to comprehend.

"You cannot fathom the amount of despair I feel", he said in low monotone voice. His eyes were fixed at one spot of the dirty floor as he continued. "The world will not be the same."

"We will win this war. That is certain", I replied reassuringly.

"Few will be held responsible as I. When we built it. Few people laughed. Few people cried. Most were silent But we knew the world would not be the same. Ends with me as the Old Guard."

"I'm sorry sir, but I don't quite follow."

Slowly, his skeletal head turns slightly to face me. I started into his eyes, seeing a tormented soul lying behind.

"My colleagues and I sought to prevent other lives from perishing and ending this war. To stop one danger, we had inadvertently created a larger one."

The attack continues above. Each attack chips the brick walls of the bunker. Pieces of clay fall on top of the old man but he remains unfazed.

"What is your profession?"

"I was a physicist for the government."

"Why would the government need a physicist?"

"Manufacturers for the most deadly arsenal this world has ever seen."

"Surely, the government will protect us from the invaders. This weapon will not fall into the hands of the enemy."

"I'm afraid it already has." He spoke in quiet honesty as if wary of an invisible enemy lurking in the bunker watching and listening. He continues.

"I remember the line from the Hindu scripture. The part about Geta. Vishnu was trying to persuade the prince to due his duty and, to impress him, takes on his multi-armed form. And says 'Now I am become death, destroyer of worlds.' I suppose we all thought that, one way or another."