**Persephone**

***Roy Lisker***

**Chapter 1**

**What horror!**

**To be dipped**

**(without warning)**

**into**

**the Waters**

**of the**

**Well of Experience!**

**Yet such is the essential fabric of our lives, in endless renewal.**

**For,**

**(in a sense),**

**the Void does not exist;**

**the Well is never empty;**

**one cannot speak of Emptiness.**

**Supreme Reality of Existence**

**It**

**can**

**never**

**know**

**deprivation.**

**For**

**It**

**Will**

**Always**

**Be**

**Filled:**

**Either**

**With**

**Love**

**Or**

**Hate.**

**Yet ,never so full ,**

**that it cannot**

**hold**

**more**

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**When once it was**

**that Persephone walked,**

**four**

**seasons**

**of the year,**

**gathering flowers**

**from the hills,**

**meadows**

**and valleys,**

**of the Earth,**

**Sowing their seeds**

**in desert wastes**

**and on the rocky heights,**

**eternally youthful,**

**ever with child,**

**ignorant of sorrow,**

**unknowing of guilt**

**or shame;**

**When the sunlight fell**

**(shattering into golden shards)**

**with the**

**clinking**

**sounds**

**of**

**metal**

**coins,**

**through the**

**bristling leaves**

**of the matted trees,**

**and the sky was bluer then than now ....**

***I Picture The Scene!***

**Yet:**

**how**

**describe**

**that**

**tropical glade**

**wherein**

**all**

**creatures**

**came**

**to birth?**

**In the beginning of time , the early days, the land lay hidden beneath heavy canopies of primitive ferns, huge like hills that , (rustling their great cavernous leaves) shed pearly sprays of mist throughout the teeming jungles.**

**While in other places they were dry, and tensile, and willowy, growing one above the other as overtones will pile atop anthems.**

**And all things that, pregnant with life, dwelled in this jungle of paradox and form , rang with their reedy chorales.**

**What are those many voluptuous flowers,**

**Black- petaled ,**

**and of freakish stripe,**

**Falling**

**like**

**a shadow**

**across that**

**lurid,**

**deep purple eye ,**

**concealed in the depths**

**of the tropical forest?**

**I see orchids dropping in manifold numbers,**

**like calls and cries,**

**I see plantain leaf,**

**and rhododendron leaf,**

**I see incredible riot,**

**and dense outlandish troughs,**

**and wet sickness!**

**In the**

**twenty-four hours**

**of**

**the moon**

**did these**

**exotic flowers**

**luxuriate**

**in extravagant**

**creative**

**im-**

**possibility.**

***Behold!***

**Animals of strange eyes;**

**birds with horns;**

**the striped bodies**

**red tongues**

**and wild eyes of terrified zebra**

**in rapid passage ;**

**parrots ;**

**manticore;**

**unicorn;**

**the wyvern of the huge**

**bat-like**

**wings,**

**of awkward gait**

**and mien;**

**the hideous man-lion**

**and the inscrutable chimera.**

**Yet:**

**contrasted**

**as ever in beauty,**

**to these disfigured**

**beasts**

**were there mermaid,**

**and faun,**

**dryads,**

**elves and fairies,**

**and the mischievous satyr,**

**Whose**

**(Whose)**

**piping (echoed)**

**(piping ) (flute)**

**flute echoed**

**(echoed)**

**everywhere**

**in this Primal Wilderness,**

**This**

**festive,**

**heedless,**

**entangled Chaos,**

**this Original.**

***Oh lovely abandoned Eden!***

**So tenderly nurtured**

**by its kind mistresses .**

**Demeter and Persephone,**

**both Mother,**

**both Daughter,**

**both Love.**

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**And of the winds that swept over Arcadia**

**(that bountiful land!)?**

**From whence did *they* spring?**

**Those arising from the surface of waters were not unknown to them in that time,**

**and ever were the valleys**

**and the great meadows**

**enshrouded in mists,**

**causing them to appear infinitely distant ,**

**immersed in an ocean of crystal,**

**and ruby**

**and pearl,**

**clothed in a perpetual morning,**

**to which All Creation arose,**

**new born.**

**The heavy winds of Time had not yet entered onto the scene**

**to blast away the mists.**

**Mankind thrived,**

**unself-conscious,**

**uncaring of His destiny,**

**fulfilled,**

**ever fecund,**

**self-loving**

**ignorant of spite.**

**Nor knew He**

**aught**

**of evil, and grew,**

**strong, with Love,**

**tending to his simple wants,**

**wishing neither for recognition**

**nor understanding.**

**Nor knew He of Time;**

**Today and Tomorrow were the same,**

**Nor any sign of what was past;**

**And Eternity whispered**

**, but deafly ,**

**and to no avail.**

**I imagine this Original,**

**this splendorous yet gentle Eden,**

**as an endless Maze,**

**from which there was no hope of,**

**(nor wish for),**

**escape,**

**inexhaustible of corridors,**

**unique in fruits and flowers,**

**the Ever Promising,**

**where each day was equally provident in its renewed and unimagined delights;**

**yet forever unchanging ,**

**that the world**

**Was,**

**Is,**

**and Shall Be,**

**were *all* in the same breath;**

**That,**

**in the pure dream that was then the Earth,**

**was there nothing unseemly,**

**no realm devoid of light,**

**no object untouched by Love.**

**And the Sun was an eternal gladness.**

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**Did Demeter and Persephone**

**(twin goddesses of intimate relationship)**

**possess the secret**

**knowledge of entrance**

**to this**

**primordial**

**unspoiled**

**labyrinth**

**of the world?**

**Indeed: and they alone.**

**Alone they traversed its length and breath,**

**sowing,**

**cultivating**

**culling**

**flowers**

**in woodlands**

**and clearings,**

**rendering in all things**

**Surprise,**

**and Wonder**

**through their caring**

**surveillance.**

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**A Riddle moved through the Maze,**

**moving like an ocean**

**a vibrant hum,**

**soundless**

**yet ever manifest,**

**everywhere present,**

**Saturating all lush Creation**

**with the overtones of Enigma;**

**Imparting mystery**

**and magic,**

**Resonating at the crossings**

**of the knotted pathways,**

**and**

**with**

**every**

**subtle**

**change,**

**Surging forth**

**from the hearts**

**of floral plants,**

**and through the hissing sheets**

**of hedge leaves.**

**By the Riddle was Creation stirred to its very heart.**

**By all beings was its’ Wonder apprehended.**

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**How was the Riddle perceived ,**

**when,**

**( grazing a man’s face),**

**its’ strong heat moistened his brow with sweat?**

**To what did his ear attend,**

**as its’ Voice,**

**o’er-brimming with its’ manifold ramifications**

**, gripped heart**

**and soul**

**with sadness, and**

**fear!**

**What he heard, in his astonishment , must have been something like this :**

***“ I embody that knowledge of despair***

***which you have yet to learn;***

***though already my voice***

***fills you***

***with a wondering***

***anxious***

***yearning.***

***In my reedy hum,***

***in my vibrant murmur,***

***are tragedy, punishment, and pain ,***

***of which you***

***(as of yet)***

***know***

***nothing!***

***though my anticipation catches your soul***

***in mid-passage ,***

***and you ache***

***with the desire***

***for the undiscovered “.***

**Another voice interrupts ,shrill, crying out in anger and love:**

***“ Cease! Cease! Speak no more ! For there will be a time for speech.***

***Desist; and Behold!***

***How beautiful are all things are in this verdant paradise!***

***How happy is All Creation!***

***With what abundance of joy does nature run riot with itself,***

***overflowing in surfeit***

***of ecstasy***

***and voluptuous complaint!”***

**Commingling with these**

**emerges a third**

**(and final)**

**voice,**

**saying:**

***I am a premonition of the Mystery of Self;***

***Be anxious for my sake;***

***Confess your bewilderment***

***through the meandering of my churning streams;***

***Tremble at the Impossibility***

***that lodges***

***at the ground***

***of your***

***Being;***

***Let your consciousness be invaded***

***by my resonance:***

***now in the morning sun-filled glade;***

***now in the sad wet evenings beneath the aged willow trees;***

***or on the banks of the flowing streams;***

***sighing in the resinous barks of saplings and pines;***

***coursing through the black roots of sturdy oaks;***

***bursting from the breasts of flowering vegetation!***

***I return unto myself in contradiction :***

***and Lie and Truth***

***abide,***

***entangled***

***in my***

***rhyme.”***

**Of all these voices, it was this that most disconcerted him . Often, while crossing rivers, or in strange forest clearings, would he stop in confusion to ponder this message, that struck his ears always in moments when he least desired to hear it. And always afterwards would he experience an insatiable loneliness.**

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**But then it came to pass,**

**that the ground heaved**

**and split,**

**tossing up**

**white-hot**

**boulders**

**from the**

**blazing**

**depths,**

**laying**

**waste**

**the land**

**for many miles.**

**There was a clap of thunder, as Pluto ascended in his chariot from the abysses of Hades, his evil retainers at his sides. His left hand gripped the straps of the Apocalyptic horses, the black-spurred whip bandished in his right .**

**And in the May afternoon,**

**when poppy covered the hills,**

**asphodel the fields,**

**and bounteous columbine**

**carpeted the forest floors;**

**When,**

**in the blue translucent sky,**

**each small billow of cloud**

**rested,**

**suspended backwards**

**as if cresting the winds,**

**layer raised beyond layer,**

**out into the distance**

**like many floating**

**porticos and arches,**

**( this floating non-support**

**detaching each cloud**

**from its surroundings,**

**investing it with**

**essence , different**

**and unreal);**

**While,**

**on the horizon,**

**many monumental**

**whirlpools of diaphanous substance**

**stood poised,**

**suspended**

**like stars;**

**On a Bright Day,**

**when Love poured down**

**from all the essences of Nature,**

**(each in its own way) ,**

**All these turbulent events reflected**

**in the gentle movements**

**of Persephone,**

**Her head bowed as low**

**as the many herbs and flowers**

**harvested in the pockets of her apron,**

**gathering medicinal simples**

**from their ample stores**

**so that Demeter, her mother, should be**

**no longer ill,**

**as she had been languishing now**

**for many days ;**

**Her breast and body gently swaying,**

**even as**

**each**

**subtle**

**transformation,**

**(and every delicate breeze)**

**gave her up to its**

**own**

**suggestion,**

**all peace**

**and**

**beauty**

**in the untarnished scene**

**and pristine glade;**

***That***

***Pluto***

***seized her***

***from her labors***

***deep in the sun-filled pocket***

***of the Rarian plains,***

***and carried her off***

***to the***

***Land***

***of Death!***

**Thus it was that all eyes were blasted by light; and Tragedy became the common inheritance of the creatures of the Earth.**

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**How portray that Beauty**

**which was,**

**(in her age)**

**Persephone’s**

***alone!***

***Have I the presumption?***

***Have I the lyric power?***

***Do I dare begin?***

**Full sure it is**

**that her spectral plenitude,**

**her fulgurant radiance of light,**

**her dazzling aura.**

**(visible for a thousand leagues**

**across the flourishing plains),**

**must have awakened**

**some rare**

**foretaste**

**of bliss!**

**So to have**

**afflicted**

**the heart**

**of Hades’ king;**

**So to have driven him,**

**( despite the**

**hatred**

**of men**

**and**

**the gods)**

**to so bold an expedient!**

**Yet:**

**how little for their opinions**

**he cared**

**how little their reproaches**

**he minded**

**how little he paid**

**attention**

**to their paltry**

**fetters**

**of custom**

**and law.**

***He!***

***Pluto!***

***Most hated of all the gods!***

***Most feared!***

***Most despised!***

**The legends inform us that news of events on Earth came to him only through the echoes of the fists, beating on the ground, of those that cursed him.**

**Only once did Pluto forsake the horrors of his Stygian Kingdom; and that was when he sallied forth to abduct Persephone.**

***Only that one time,***

**when,**

**joyous,**

**unsuspecting,**

**she labored in the blazing sunlight,**

**engrossed**

**in her tasks**

**in the**

**fields**

**of the Rarian**

**plains;**

***Only that once* did Pluto depart from his merciless pavilions!**

**To carry off Persephone;**

**to steal Arcadia’s guardian;**

**To bind her fast in Hades!**

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***Behold Her!***

**an eternal presence in Arcadian meadows,**

**standing alone,**

**bowed low with toil,**

**Or pausing, erect, from her labors,**

**heralding**

**each day**

**anew**

**as a**

**spontaneous**

**revelation;**

**Or ,**

**in the late Spring,**

**in happiest communion**

**with Demeter,**

**her mother.**

**To her breast**

**she presses**

**the fledgling blossoms,**

**of**

**incoming**

**autumn;**

**Time covers her**

**with its shroud**

**of confusion,**

**wraps her in Enigma.**

**Her satin robes are bathed**

**in the mists;**

**her hair,**

**(*supple as finely spun gold,***

***visible as a halo***

***over boundless distances***

***in the fertile plains*),**

**falls to her waist.**

**Her eyes alive**

**with the sparkle of**

**uncut**

**gems.**

**Standing,**

**Kneeling,**

**Dozing,**

**Alert;**

**Sowing,**

**Cultivating,**

**Ploughing ;**

**Cutting**

**deep**

**furrows**

**into the**

**ground,**

**Sweltering beneath the**

**tyranny**

**of the**

**afternoon**

**sun,**

**Harvesting**

**in the**

**unlicensed**

**showers**

**of autumn:**

**So unknowing is she**

**of her natural grace,**

**that one could imagine**

**all her movements,**

**(flexible,**

**mechanical,**

**spontaneous,**

**random,**

**pre-ordained)**

**are being performed**

**in obedience**

**to the commands**

**of some**

**higher**

**force.**

***Oh, Beauty!***

***Frail mirage!***

***Fleeting miracle!***

***So filled with vain pride, yet so vulnerable!***

***Poised, as on a knife’s edge;***

***as on a flame’s sheath,***

***Between an eternal consummation,***

***and the inexorable doom!***

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**Chapter 3**

***Oh thou sacred lyre!***

**Aeolian,**

**Ionian,**

**Doric;**

**(or slumbering in a grotto**

**hard by Lydian shores):**

**Let thy strings be swept by Time’s nimble fingers,**

**To tell us how it was,**

**that Proserpine,**

**most beloved of all goddesses,**

**Unknowing of care,**

**free from malice,**

**Happy and fulfilled**

**in that hedgerowed land;**

**That**

**prolix**

**wilderness**

**of**

**inexhaustible**

**fertility;**

**permeated by the mysteries;**

**nurtured**

**by**

**turbulent**

**rivers;**

**full of**

**birdsong,**

***Sing to us!***

**(once again)**

**of how**

**Persephone’s**

***splendor***

**was beamed**

**like a crimson star,**

**to every horizon,**

**like an iridescent beacon,**

**guiding all wanderers**

**through that primeval wilderness,**

**Tell us once again:**

**how Persephone**

***dared***

**expose**

**her Beauty**

**without fear!**

**And, can you explain this to us?**

**Can you help us understand?**

**How it could have ever come to pass?**

***How* could it *ever* have come to pass?**

**that she,**

**Persephone,**

**bewitching queen of vegetation,**

**Spell-binding daughter**

**of the crop mother, Demeter**

***could* have,**

**through no fault**

**of her own,**

**(beyond perfection)**

**been rudely seized,**

**abducted,**

**bound in chains,**

**and carried off to Hell!**

**Yet, such was the**

**will**

**of Cosmos,**

**the judgment**

**of Moira,**

**the decree**

**of the Gods:**

**that she**

**(who was most**

**beautiful)**

**should co-habit,**

**with he**

**(who was most**

**hideous)!**

**Learn, and be silent.**

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**Chapter 4**

***Narcissus***

**But now I must step aside, and permit the Lyric to speak for itself:**

***“I am that voice which proclaims Rebirth***

***At all times and in all places***

***I speak to all who know the ecstasy of love,***

***And to all those who perish through hopeless longing.***

***“ In my message are braided, like the bodies of entwined serpents:***

***Love,***

***Reality,***

***Hope,***

***Despair,***

***Death,***

***Comfort,***

***Bondage,***

***Liberation!***

***“I proclaim, further, the Fate of Narcissus!***

***Self-loving, chaste and vain***

***Seduced by his own reflection***

***in a pool’s pale mirror***

***His smile warped***

***in the Infinite Enigma of Love***

***His body weak and helpless; paralyzed***

***through***

***contemplation***

***of the sole object***

***of his desire,***

***day day***

***after equal delight***

***in and***

***torment;***

***through of***

***the beholding unattained,***

***unattainable***

***perfection!***

***This same Narcissus of Delphic fame.***

***He: the Self-Infatuated!***

***immolated in the***

***passive***

***dream***

***of Self;***

***None other than He!***

***In eternal bondage to the chains of his own longing,***

***Finding in his pain more delight than in life itself***

***Knowing that what he desired he could not have,***

***(Nor yet could it be had by another.)***

***It being***

***none other***

***than He.***

***Oh Beautiful Creation!***

***What if,***

***one day in early summer:***

***(when the crops first show their heads***

***upon the stalk,***

***and the blossom***

***on the branch,***

***when the cries of returning birds are heard,***

***once again***

***upon the hills,***

***and mysterious voicings***

***issue anew***

***from the woods,***

***Narcissus should return,***

***(once again),***

***to the banks of this stream,***

***seeking once more his image;***

***only to behold,***

***rising from the troubled ripples***

***of the waters,***

***the witch’s***

***face,***

***the face***

***of Hecate,***

***shrouded***

***in weeds,***

***in her upraised hands***

***the blossoming***

***henbane,***

***her face creased***

***and wrinkled,***

***with jagged nose***

***and bent chin,***

***ugly as stone,***

***grim and hideous with reality***

***and bitter truth;***

***Yet truer even than thee, Narcissus!***

***though she appear but for an instant,***

***her loathsome head***

***quickly dissolving,***

***amidst***

***the rushing of waters ,***

***down the current of the stream;***

***Little didst thou know , Narcissus!***

***in thy horror,***

***that***

***even as thou didst confront***

***this cruel apparition of thy soul,***

***that all of Nature sang,***

***and clamored***

***about thee,***

***for thy love!***

***That the trees shook and the leaves beat!***

***Yet thou didst reject,***

***in thy conceit,***

***One who would have soothed thee***

***in that time***

***of calamity!***

***Thus did he earn Nature’s hate, this Narcissus,***

***and though she could not hope for his love,***

***curse him she could,***

***and did.***

***Yet even her curse was engendered by the bitterness of Love.***

***And thou didst lose a friend***

***who would have succored thee in need,***

***but rather banished thee instead,***

***to tread the way***

***to Hades,***

***To smile forever at thy pale,***

***translucent shadow,***

***weak and helpless,***

***sighing in the depths of the darkness.***

***Yet what can compare to this in sickness!***

***Still to gaze upon one’s image,***

***though it be in the waters of the Styx !***

***Choosing to foster the sewer for love of oneself,***

***rather than regard another!***

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***Chapter 5***

**Thus did Narcissus arrive at his fate. Concerning Pluto there is more to tell. In another place, and at a later time.**

***But of Demeter again***

***And Persephone?***

**Well did they love their work,**

**together in the first Eden of the world. From their shared Mysteries,**

**their shared delight in cultivation,**

**their inner sympathies**

**were formed**

**fierce bonds**

**of endearment,**

**voluntary fetters**

**of Love.**

**Mother and Daughter,**

**they loved one another**

**Nor had they need of others.**

**Of all the gods and goddesses of antiquity, none else were so content in their mutual companionship.**

***Mark the legends, and learn:***

**Ares and Aphrodite in chains;**

**The malice of Hera;**

**The merciless pride of Artemis;**

**The cruel judgments of Apollo.**

**Think upon Adonis;**

**And the grievous strife**

**that arose**

**twixt Aphrodite**

**and Persephone herself!**

**Experience is ever the midwife to Tragedy; ponder this in solitude.**

**If the truth be known they, Demeter and Persephone, were happy in Arcadia. The legends inform us that Pan himself found no sweeter abode on Earth. And indeed, after its’ passing, he died, unable to bear its loss. Often did mother and daughter pause from their work among the reeds, to listen to the sounds of his pipes coming to them from over the distant hills.**

**And they smiled to one another,**

**happy to have made**

**such a haven**

**for such a god.**

**They were happy in their own country,**

**And even Homer pays them honor.**

**Full sure such happiness was never made to last. And, once lost,**

**it could never return .**

**For:**

**when the mists had cleared,**

**Mother and Daughter reunited,**

**and Arcadia restored**

**discovered**

**was *Paradox***

**It that had**

**arrived!**

**asserting its tyrannical will,**

**claiming dominion**

**and not to be displaced;**

**Though Beauty reached a compromise,**

**Yet fatal to itself.**

***Oh, Pluto!***

***Misfortune’s Sovereign!***

***Hades Emperor!***

***Lord over Darkness!***

***Evil King!***

**Even**

***you***

**cannot**

**be**

**blamed**

**for**

**events**

**foretold**

**before**

**the beginning**

**of Time!**

**How can you be**

**held accountable**

**for the**

**Inexorable?**

**How can you be**

**condemned**

**for the**

***relentless***

**churning**

**of the**

**mechanisms**

**of the stars?**

**For Fate would have its will.**

****

**Chapter 6**

**It was Demeter who bittered,**

**she who had been**

**made**

**childless,**

**bereft,**

**in the blighted**

**meadows**

**of Arcadia.**

**And she would not be comforted.**

**Did not Zeus himself**

**(by way of consolation)**

**offer her**

**the golden**

**apples**

**of the**

**flourishing tree**

**in the**

**gardens**

**of the**

**Western**

**Hesperides?**

***And saddest notes***

***Orpheus his upon his***

***struck upon his***

***lyre;***

***well to lose***

***For he knew a loved one***

***to Hades*.**

**It was at that time that, also, that**

**Aphrodite**

**chanced upon**

**Adonis,**

**fast asleep**

**beneath the**

**spreading canopy**

**of the**

**smoking**

**almond;**

***Dire encounter !***

**from which**

**Persephone herself**

**would not be**

**spared**

**the**

**consequences .**

**And even Metaneira;**

***Metaneira!***

***To whom,***

***(as is well known)***

***Demeter’s meddling***

***had brought***

***untold***

***sorrow,***

**forgave her**

**in this**

**time**

**of**

**suffering;**

**and sat**

**by**

**Demeter’s**

**side;**

**the two of them,**

**together, weeping**

**through the long night.**

**All The Realms Of Nature**

**reiterated the**

**echoes of**

**Demeter’s**

**Lamentations.**

**Rivers overflowed their banks in flood!**

**The tempests roared, shattering the gaudy**

**canopies of Arcadia;**

**Fruit spangled the ground**

**and rotted,**

**unharvested;**

**The bellies**

**of the**

**wild**

**creatures**

**festered**

**with**

**miscarriage!**

***The Bacchantes aborted their unborn whelps!***

**And this story has been received from many sources:**

**That it was then**

**that**

**the anemone,**

**(ill-omened flower of Aphrodite,**

**(and harbinger of the**

**hideous reprisals**

**yet**

**to come)),**

**Blossomed**

**for the**

**first**

**time!**

***Woe! Endless woe!***

**Vast the lands laid waste,**

**innumerable the fields**

**infected with blight,**

**the corn swollen,**

**pregnant with Death.**

***And of all this was Demeter unknowing.***

***Nor would she have cared had* she known.**

***So all-consuming was her grief.***

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**Chapter 7**

**And after a time (some say it was years, others eons), Demeter arose and summoned**

**All Creation**

**to hearken**

**unto her.**

**And her commandment was obeyed at once,**

**with solicitation, anguish, and love:**

***Flowers of the fields,***

***Flowers that spangle***

***the meadows,***

***mountains***

***valleys,***

***canyons;***

***Flowers of all hues and textures;***

***polychrome,***

***monochrome,***

***bariolated,***

***corruscated,***

***darkly saturated***

***multi-faceted,***

***rainbow-nurtured;***

***Flowers with fluttering leaves***

***like the robes of angels,***

***or like whirling stardust;***

***Flowers by rivers,***

***floating on lakes,***

***dancing in shallow pools;***

***twinkling with beads of***

***summer light;***

***The***

***embroidery***

***of***

***wayward***

***forest***

***paths ;***

***perfumed,***

***pungent,***

***sultry,***

***narcotic,***

***spiced,***

***dusty,***

***sweet,***

***bitter;***

***Arise!***

**Go to Demeter:**

**For Persephone**

**can no longer**

**be**

**among you,**

**or gather you up**

**in her**

**apron**

**or transport your salves**

**in wicker baskets,**

**or distill your perfumes,**

**or fashion your**

**medicines**

**and dyes.**

**In vain do you await the loved gleaner!**

**The nurturer!**

**The midwife!**

***Yet all in vain!***

**For you will die ere she return.**

**Henceforth are you commanded,**

**From your own hearts,**

**roots,**

**sinews,**

**To distill your**

**poultices**

**balms,**

**elixirs;**

**unguents**

**infusions,**

**tinctures**

**tonics,**

**ointments,**

**salves!**

**Speed unto Demeter,**

**the stricken Earth-Mother,**

**Even**

**as**

**pollen**

**is**

**blown**

**about**

**by**

**the**

**winds!**

***Purge her soul’s infection;***

***Suck out the poison in her heart;***

***Race over Arcadia;***

***Can you not see that Demeter is grievously sick?*  
 That Nature**

**Is barren?**

**That**

**Death**

**rules**

**over**

**the**

**Land?**

**And yet:**

**All that you do**

**will be**

**in vain.**

**For even you,**

**in your so bewildering array,**

**your immense capability,**

**will not be able**

**to ease**

**the bitterness**

**in her heart.**

**Far too deep**

**lie its**

**sunken roots**

**Inevitably,**

**she will reject even you ,**

**neither calling for your aid,**

**nor wanting it.**

**And she will neglect all things:**

**the seasons;**

**the fallow time;**

**the time of latency;**

**the time of harvest;**

***And***

***you***

***will***

***all***

***perish!***

**And you ,**

**and she,**

**will rot together**

**in the**

**Land of Blight**

**Thus did Demeter spurn the sources**

**of her own deliverance.**

**And she would not be commanded**

**Nor command;**

**Nor did she.**

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**Chapter 8**

**And,**

**after a spell of time,**

**did Demeter,**

**(wrapped in shrouds),**

**repair**

**to the**

**abode**

**of the**

**3 unholy sisters,**

**in the desolate**

**wastelands,**

**nigh unto the**

**Well**

**of Experience.**

**And she would suffer no other companions.**

****

**Yet: What is this Well of Experience of which we speak?**

**Wide it is; and deep and few there be that dare peer**

**into its thickened waters, for fear of the reflection cast therein.**

**Yet where else can one find,**

**where else seek out**

**those earliest moments,**

**those vanished echoes of the past,**

**overcast yet never erased by disillusion?**

**Whence cometh that melancholy strain,**

**that threnody**

**ever audible in the dim expanses**

**of the forested glades?**

**That sonorous melody**

**that forever haunts us,**

**in waking or dreams?**

**Full of Time it is ,**

**and grievous**

**with recollection.**

**Sounding**

**through**

**the many**

**circumstances**

**of our lives**

**we hear it ever and again.**

**And many things**

**are changeable,**

**and do change,**

**but this never.**

****

**Thus,**

**at the lip of the Well**

**of Experience**

**did Demeter willingly accept**

**the hospitality**

**of the three haggish sisters.**

**Nor would she**

**ever entirely**

**leave**

**their company.**

**Though what bonds of community could she have made with these**

**dreary spinsters?**

**She spoke to them of her misfortunes,**

**and they understood her**

**She spurned her Creation;**

**and in this they assisted her.**

**She took their part,**

**and they hers**

**Together they rejected**

**all other companionship,**

**desirous of**

**understanding**

**from none**

**besides**

**themselves.**

**Together they blighted:**

**first the corn;**

**then the trees withered;**

**the sheaves of wheat became**

**chaff**

**upon**

**the stalk.**

**Hecate despised not Demeter:**

**teaching her,**

**as a woman teaching woman’s lore,**

**the miraculous powers of the poison henbane,**

**the virtues of the mandrake root,**

**spells by leaves,**

**by roots and branches,**

**the magic of shape and form,**

**the**

**arts**

**of**

**blight.**

**And Core assisted her. And Cybele.**

****

**All things considered, there was a measure of solace to be found, merely through sitting beneath the cool shadows of the Well’s enclosure. Here it was possible (if temporarily) to forget misfortunes which seemed to have happened so very long ago, in that dimly remembered time, to which her hosts never referred.**

***O, miserable Demeter!***

***How could you endure the ordeal?***

***The suffering?***

***The shame?***

***Scorn!***

***Scorn fall***

***on***

***their***

***heads***

***who have it***

***not***

***in their hearts***

***to***

***pity***

***her***

***in that time!***

***Nature herself,***

***who hated you,***

***should***

***instead***

***have mourned.***

**For your soul was sick.**

**And you:**

**neglected the orchards;**

**allowed the fruit to drop unharvested;**

**trampled the olive beneath your bare foot;**

**burned out the vineyards with the sisters’ arts.**

**Together they poisoned the springs,**

**Together drew the brackish waters of the Well,**

**to initiate the soil**

**in famine,**

**and blight.**

****

**And at last it came to pass,**

**that the**

**pear tree,**

**sacred**

**embodiment**

**of**

**Demeter’s fecundity**

**wasted away;**

**And the very soil of the fields was acid,**

**And Demeter cursed her womb!**

***Woe, Demeter, woe!***

**You suffered and bittered.**

**And the centuries ring your tears.**

**For such is the message**

**of Time**

**and Reality.**

****

**And in the Land of Blight did Humankind first hear the message**

**of Emptiness.**

**The Void enveloped Him.**

**Infinity gaped appallingly at Him.**

**Then did the Voice of Tragedy speak to Him, saying:**

***“Suffering and sorrow shall be your lot for all the measure of your days. And there will come a time when you will turn to me for consolation”***

**Points of flame encircled the horizon;**

**shrill cries**

**torn from the constricted hearts**

**of plants and vegetation,**

**rippled across the grasslands.**

**Tragedy spoke on:**

***“I shall become the object of all your contemplations, investing even your solitude.***

***“My harmonies will be soothing to your ears, deafened by adversity.***

***“Nowhere upon the surface of the Earth will you earn respect.”***

**And Mankind wept,**

**astonished**

**at the voice**

**of Tragedy.**

**The very rocks crumbled before these pitiless utterances.**

**The poisoned springs**

**sang**

**to him**

**with their maligned**

**voicings,**

**saying:**

***“There is a sweetness which you have not tasted,***

***that of diseased fruit. Yet sickness has a sweetness of its own.”***

**Mankind recoiled before so vile a strain!**

***“And what will prove more bitter to you than the poisoning of Love? And do you imagine that you will be exempted?”***

**And then it seemed to him**

**that he wished**

**for**

**nothing**

**more**

**but to**

**die**

**at once,**

**to forever**

**disappear**

**from the face**

**of the Earth!**

**Yet he had no choice but to live.**

**Though suffering has since been his lot.**

***Oh, Demeter!***

**We dare not presume to accuse you of willful cruelty,**

**although it was you**

**who poisoned the springs;**

**blighted the harvest;**

**and drove out the kine**

**with the matted staff.**

**Ought one not**

**(rather)**

**to blame**

**Pluto,**

**Lord of the Underworld,**

**God of Death,**

**Who**

**carried off**

**your beloved daughter**

**to his hateful,**

**fetid realm?**

**Or, perhaps, should (perhaps) the judgment not (perhaps) fall on Eros,**

**whose pernicious dart**

**so wounded**

**Pluto’s heart**

**that he could have**

**no other**

**desire?**

**Or was it simply the way of Fate,**

**that,**

**pounded to a**

**refined dust**

**in the**

**pitiless crucible**

**of Time,**

**circumstance should**

**follow**

**upon circumstance;**

**and it was, truly,**

**the**

**Well**

**of Experience**

**that**

**thirsted**

**to be filled!**

****

**Chapter 9**

**Consequences, in pre-ordained succession , followed upon consequence . Unable to longer bear the spectacle of a barren Earth, Zeus demanded the return of Persephone to the land of the living. And Pluto had no option but to submit.**

**But of Persephone’s sojourn in Hell? Gloomy indeed was her throne, though no more so than her abductor’s. That Pluto was a god made little difference: his ways were coarse, his manners those of a warrior, bereft of all decency, empathy or humanity.**

**Remarkably, though seeming to hold Persephone in contempt, he idolized her. The proximity of such a paragon of beauty infatuated him to the brink of madness. But the situation was far more serious than that; in fact he loved her.**

**But let us (as was often done by the ancients) pose the question: what *is* Beauty? When all is said and done, can anyone prove that Pluto was less beautiful than his abducted queen? Is it Are not all things, even the most hideous, even the most grotesque, grounded in pure Being?**

**Blinded by layers of convention, it is natural for us to assume that Persephone was beautiful and Pluto ugly. The reality is both more subtle and more rich in overtones.**

**For now, in this altered perspective, we can understand how we ought to judge him: Pluto, that unkind, lonely, rapacious king, violent, insolent and cruel, who stole the most ravishing creature on earth for his queen, and suffered that she did not love him, though she pitied him for his loathsome form.**

**Persephone leaned over and, speaking softly, struck his ear:**

**“Pluto: truly you have been named the Universal Host; for you have never turned anyone away from your doors. You are the final reckoning, the invincible conqueror, the judge beyond appeal.**

**“Yet you, in your turn, are no more gifted in Understanding, nor wise in Experience, than I. “**

**Pluto turned to her with surprise, astonishment written across his brow. His response, long delayed, mixed humiliating mockery with forced laughter:**

**“Come now, my troublesome queen! I am eager to learn of your great experience!” Shaking a finger, as one might do with a naughty infant, he continued:**

**“ Come, come; speak up! And do not forget, Persephone darling, to whom you are speaking. For I Am Death!”**

**What**

**are the chains**

**that bind**

**Experience**

**to Beauty?**

**Does Experience**

**do more**

**than disfigure**

**Beauty?**

**Consider the most beautiful women of antiquity:**

**Daphne**

**Helen Leda Ariadne**

**Aphrodite Persephone Phaedra**

**Laura**

**Would it have enhanced them to have partaken of Knowledge?**

**Was**

**not**

**Being,**

**in**

**and**

**of**

**itself,**

**sufficient?**

**Yet**

**without Experience**

**Perfection itself**

**is not**

**complete.**

**Or**

**does**

**not**

**Beauty**

**(perhaps)**

**already**

**encompass**

**all of**

**what we call**

**Experience?**

***What is this Experience to which Persephone lays claim?***

**She spoke again:**

**“I am not so naive, Pluto, not to recognize that even with me,**

**frail and powerless as I am, untainted by hardship and ignorant of woe ,**

**you will be forced to strike a bargain.”**

**“How charming!” Pluto played with the curls of her hair, “Tell me about it.”**

**“Think not, Pluto, thou god, honored through curses, that you are**

**anymore the wiser for having carried me off to your insalubrious realm.**

**For I know much that you will never know.**

**“Do you imagine that I have had no news from my mother? That I do not know:**

**That the fields**

**are**

**desolate?**

**That the birds**

**drop**

**from hunger**

**in the sandy marshes?**

**That the fruits rot,**

**dead on the branch?**

**That Demeter,**

**my mother,**

**wastes away**

**to a pale shadow,**

**sick**

**unto death?**

**“You *do*  know these things, of course. Yet you knew nothing of the powers of my mother when you kidnapped me; but I was not ignorant of them!”**

**Pluto snorted with impatience:**

**“So?what is that? What is that to me? That is nothing to me! Whatever is hateful to me I can repel! Suppress! Ignore! Many eons ago did I cast the vast body of my woes into the fathomless pool of Lethe.**

**“ I fear nothing, I tell you!**

**Life and Death hold no mysteries for me!**

**Joy and Sorrow are nothing to me!**

**Nor is there distinction between**

**Forgetfulness**

**and Remembrance!   
 It were far better**

**that you**

**maintain**

**silence!”**

**Emboldened, Persephone defied his threats:**

**“Pluto! Be on your guard! Persephone is not so easily deceived. Nor is she unschooled in the ways of the heart. I will reveal things about you that even you do not know:**

**“ Just look at yourself!**

**Thou, vile, loathsome old man;**

**Bloated up with vanity and self-pity;**

**Stuffed with fantasies,**

**and cruel self-deceptions!**

**Proud of your stinking flesh,**

**Your decrepit,**

**disgusting**

**body!**

**“What I see, you see. You see all that I see, though you deny it.**

**And I will tell you of what I have learned, even in this short stay in Hades: That even Death is not invincible to Love.”**

**The mighty, dreadful god panicked;**

**He stormed about the throne-room,**

**blustering, throwing out wild threats:**

**“Mark my scars!” he bellowed,**

**“Here!**

**Here!**

**And here!**

**And again here!**

**“Mark well my battle helmet!**

**“Withhold not your gaze**

**from the dreadful motley**

**of my battered face!**

**Do not**

***pretend to misunderstand***

**what you may read therein!**

**Merely to look upon me should fill you with dread!**

**I tell you again: *I am Pluto: Hades’ King!*”**

**“Indeed, Pluto.Yes, indeed you are”**

**“All of Living Creation bows down before me! Mark me well! With a single blow of my fist I can dispel the last of your words!”**

**“Of all this am I aware, Pluto: you are beyond**

**Joy**

**Sorrow**

**Birth**

**Love**

**Fear.**

**Hate**

**Death**

**Yet, shortly,**

**with the passage of time,**

**(in only a few days),**

**The messengers from Olympus will arrive,**

**and you will have to release me.”**

**Pluto started up with violence; his breath caught in his throat. Convulsed with anguish, he staggered about the room, grasped at the pillars for support. Disconsolate and weary, brooding on his heartbreak, he returned to his throne.**

**It was some time before he recovered. His rage had dissolved into a deep depression. When he spoke again, it seemed as if some tenderness had entered his heart, if tenderness could:**

**“Stay with me, Persephone!”, he pleaded, “If nothing else, the respect owing to age is due to me. The messenger from Olympus will be here shortly and, indeed, I will have to release you.**

**“Never can I hope to restore to you all that you have lost; neither the blazing sunlight , nor the joy of living, nor the glory of the fields.**

**“I cannot pretend than I am anything more than what I am:**

**a wretched,**

**lonely,**

**broken old king,**

**ruling over a kingdom stinking with**

**pollution,**

**more barren**

**even**

**than his own**

**heart!**

**“And yet: I also know of things of which even you,**

**O Persephone,**

**of spotless innocence**

**and purity,**

**are ignorant.**

**Already I can fortell the heavy burden of guilt,**

**that will**

**crush your heart**

**owing to the**

**cruelty**

**with which**

**you**

**rejected**

**a god**

**that**

**loved you,**

**old and ugly**

**that he be,**

**uncouth, no better**

**than a brute.**

**In spite of all your self-righteous wisdom, you will neither have understood nor defeated me.”**

**Persephone fell silent,**

**her eyes downcast,**

**her face flushed with shame**

**for she knew**

**that**

**what he said**

**was true.**

**Unable to dissimulate yet unwilling to consent, she spoke:**

**“I grant you cause, Pluto; yet I cannot consent to it. You must give me leave to return to my mother. Until that happens her thirst for vengeance will never be appeased. She will lay waste the Earth, and that Zeus will not allow.”**

**“Forget your mother.”**

**“No; that is impossible.” And she thought some more.**

**Heraclitus taught that all things spring from the couplings of Love and Strife; and there be none among the living wise enough to discern the first embryonic stirrings of their progeny.**

**For the unraveling of these mysteries,**

**Tragedy itself is impotent**

**It is**

***Enigma***

***alone***

**that determines**

**the decisions**

**of the heart,**

***Enigma***

***alone***

**that can resolve**

**its manifold**

**antinomies:**

**Beauty**

**Ugliness**

**Desire**

**Repulsion**

**Innocence**

**Experience**

**Life**

**Mortality**

**Death.**

**Persephone spoke up once again: “Pluto, it is this way: I will spend 9 months of every year in Arcadia with my mother, and 3 months in Hades, with you. This decision is irrevocable.”**

**Pluto roared in outrage! Madly careening about the room, he smashed everything in sight. Yet when, exhausted from his futile peevishness, he spoke to her again, it was in a tone of helpless desperation:**

**“Three months? Only three months?” Heart-broken, Pluto pleaded:**

**“Do you really love me *so* little ? I beg of you: make it six months!”**

**“Three months; I cannot consent to more.”**

**“So be it.”**

**And Pluto**

**bowed his**

**aged head**

**in grief.**

**Thus did they come to an arrangement.**

**In spite of which Pluto,**

**not trusting Persephone to keep her word,**

**employed**

**the ruse**

**of the**

**pomegranate seeds,**

**( as is well known).**

**What is not generally known is that everything had been decided**

**beforehand. It was only employed because Pluto was old, and could not**

**change his ways**

****

**Chapter 10**

**Thus,**

**at the appointed time,**

**did Persephone**

**reappear, in the black**

**and burning land**

**that was,**

**(once),**

**Arcadia,**

**now**

**resembling more**

**the country**

**she’d just**

**left**

**than the country**

**which,**

**(in former days**

**of peace**

**and plenty),**

**she’d once**

**known.**

**Each new footstep**

**(as her winged sandals carried her,**

**flying over the hills,**

**through the deserted wastelands,**

**across the withered meadows,**

**over the brackish rivers**

**and the**

**barren deserts.)**

**replenished the soil.**

**Then did Demeter,**

**sitting alone,**

**in the abode**

**of the 3 dark sisters**

**in the shadows of the**

**poisoned waters**

**of the**

**Well**

**of Experience,**

**behold Persephone’s**

**arrival**

**from a**

**great**

**distance.**

**Her hair had grown long in Hades;**

**the blond tresses gleamed**

**like the quivering gold dust**

**in mountain streams.**

**Her livid face blushed,**

**pallid,**

**in the sunlight.**

**Demeter arose,**

**hesitant,**

**unable to believe her eyes.**

**Then her heart rebounded**

**in her breast,**

**and her arms opened,**

**slowly ,**

**to receive**

**Persephone,**

**her daughter,**

**returned**

**to her**

**(at last!)**

**from Hades.**

**And in their reunion,**

**(witnessed by its 3 attendants**

**with much misgiving,**

**disconsolate regret,**

**and not a little jealousy),**

**was there much weeping and rejoicing.**

**Thus were reunited**

**Mother and Daughter,**

**and the Earth**

**redeemed.**

**Demeter had resigned herself to the agreement between Pluto and Zeus to leave the world barren for three months of the year. What had once been could not be recovered,**

**that**

**bounteous**

**vanished**

**Paradise**

**which**

**they**

**had cultivated**

**(together!)**

**in former days of**

**peace and plenty.**

**And there were compensations: it was not altogether a bad thing that the land should rest for one season of the year. Life would spring once again, perpetually renewed, from the ruins of the past. Once unshackled, Nature was free to embark on the grandiose adventure of Evolution, rising to ever higher levels of complexity.**

**And although Paradise could never be restored,**

**the cycle of the seasons**

**engendered**

**a new harmony,**

**new vistas,**

**new ways of rejoicing!**

**Thus was Humankind**

**compelled**

**to seek**

**for purpose and meaning**

**in life.**

**And has been seeking since.**

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***Roy Lisker***

***1959; 1996; 2012; 2014……***

***(It is the author’s intention that the editing of this***

***lyric will never be definitively terminated)***