

Persephone

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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



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)

pipng (echoed)

(pipng) (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.

◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊

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 splendidous 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.



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.

☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉•☉

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.

*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

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.**



Chapter 2

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
fettters
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!



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!



*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)

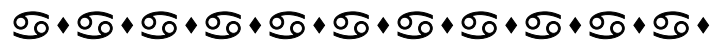
should co-habit,

with he

(who was most

hideous)!

Learn, and be silent.



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 after day
equal delight
in and
torment;
through the beholding of
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!

❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖

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

It was that *Paradox* 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

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.

◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊◊

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.



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,

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 malignant

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
 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.

~~~~~  
~~~~~

Roy Lisker

1959; 1996; 2012; 2014.....

*(It is the author's intention that the editing of this
lyric will never be definitively terminated)*

