

Persephone's Choice
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They tell us there was a world once where Ceres ruled,
A world of no shadows, where summer winds prevailed,
Imagine her astonishment—Ceres' only child—on seeing
A flower born of harsh winter's snow, the sharp hyacinth
Reeking of baby's urine and poignancies yet unnamed.
She picked the specimen and drank in its strange perfume,
Fatal judgment we are told, for it was baited to trap her.
Rushing up from the sulphurous underworld, Hades, with
Matched team of fiery stallions, grabbed her swooning
And dragged her lightness into his leaden Kingdom.

Erth's first crime: he raped and imprisoned her, enflamed
And impregnated her. The world above wept and faltered.
What messenger did Ceres send to negotiate her only child?
We only know an unholy deal was struck: Persephone
Would be held for one year and, if she consumed no food
During that dozen moons, she would return, but smeared
With the lubricant of Hades' forge, catalyst between realms.

How the wounds of immortals strike fresh coin
For those of us who feed off the malt of myth
And use the drowsy golden pollen of hops and
Poppy to dream away our own reality, in time.

We can only imagine Persephone settled into Hades'
Household, wore his keys around her thickening waist.
We can only believe he loved her furiously, false note
In that luckless place. We can only guess what light
She brought to that nether zone and to those souls
Trapped there, slaves of their own infinite debt.
And, knowing the one who grew beneath her waist
Arose from both worlds, she—with unspeakable effort—
pushed back the darkness to create a nursery
of light and shadow. Daughter of Ceres could do
no less for her child. There, she planted a seed

found in her apron pocket and washed with her tears.
This pomegranate seed, native to desert's fierce heats,
Bore a tree, where she lay when her time fell to bear.
The hosts of hell drew near as she lifted that traveler
From a world which would never be again, to her breast.
Hades knelt to wash her feet with a vial of Erth's water.
The shades moaned. Never would this moment be forgotten,

Lethes' quenchless drink no proof against this watershed
Where immortality gave way to humanity at Persephone's
Breast. Hades, architect of their fall, wept obsidian tears
And swore he would never relinquish his rights to the child.

All hell stopped their labors to watch this trinity ripen.

Love flowed, have no doubt. Persephone could do
No less. So it is any wonder that—on the last night
Before her return—she plucked the solitary fruit from
That faithful tree, companion from a vanished world,
And, opening its leathery Moroccan carapace, took the
Harvest of ruby seeds. There, under that hostage tree,
She squeezed the juice of all but three seeds for her
Daughter, whose infant eyes widened with visions, a
Torrent of legacies. And then deliberately, for all to see,
She ate one seed. Then a second, weeping. Hades
Came rushing to see the final seed lifted and consumed.

Then the ground opened with a groan, and all hell poured
Through the crack onto Erth's dying surface. Winds rose
And rain came thundering down. We know by now
How Ceres held both daughters through that long night,
How Hades withdrew his legions at the sight of that
Union to which he was forever alien. He need only
Keep his house whole for the inevitable return.

How Ceres keened when she intuited Persephone's
Choice and the consequences for all her creatures:
Now night, now shadow, now the cycles of birth and
Death, repeated. Repeated. And repeated. Now
Disease and all the other dis-es rang down upon the
Race of men, of beast, and plant on Hades' anvil of time.

Her vow—Persephone, first child, then mother—tore us
From the grave of immortality and stamped us with this
Sacred charge: to wrestle light from darkness, each day.
That is why, in the lilac's sharp scent, in the crackle of
Leaves underfoot, we are pierced by her choice afresh.