

## HALCYON part II

By Eileen Cloonan

Knowing you for years, seeing you grow and change, evolving like a caterpillar to a butterfly. Watching you slowly unfurl your delicate wings, presenting yourself in new skin to a greyscale world.

You are the only colour I know.

I am captivated by your sleepy eyes and your dry voice. The warm lighting and incense burning, a stick of charcoal and a smooth, creamy sketchbook occupying my hands, pillows littering the floor, like fallen leaves.

Sitting cross-legged and strewn out comfortably. A coffee table bearing ashtrays and this morning's coffee mugs. Soft rock in the background and the nightlife orchestra harmonies. All fitting like a jigsaw puzzle; or the clasp of our hands.

I inundate myself in your presence, mimicking the gentle curves and sharp edges of your body.

The scratching of burnt willow depositing on dead tree.

A metaphor for life;

How beauty and new functions can be born from the ashes or body of the deceased. Though these instruments did not simply die, but were killed in that past life, and resurrected for this purpose.

Like us.

Your breathing is unfluctuating, fatigue has tempted you to the land of slumber. You have ended your day but mine is still conscious. My mind races with memories, as paper cradles in my weary fingers; bearing the image of tranquility,

The image that lies solid before me.

I cannot physically measure the volume of which I love you; I live for you. Let me be your friend forever in this day, encircled forever in halcyon. I ache to know you for the rest of my life.

## Persephone

by Sadhbh Goodwin

I once heard that Persephone had golden skin

like sunset,

And that her hair was like hazel, or amber. Brown and alive.

She was made of sunlight and Demeter her mother, who made the crops grow

Must have wanted her all to herself, and greedily placed barley ropes and

responsibilities

around her daughter's wrists and ankles to stop her

from ever being

out of sight.

And when Hades first saw her he probably thought that

such a jewel

only belonged under the earth with him

As all the gems and crystals from the earth did.

And so he whisked her away, barley ropes and all

down to the underworld

Which was pitch black and sulphurous, full of vengeful ghosts and trapped

spirits who writhed and wailed.

Hades wanted her all to himself as well, so to prevent her escape

He hungrily placed bronze shackles on her ankles and chained her to the bed, an ugly basalt slab

So she would always be there to fulfil his wants and ugly wishes.

She lay there for weeks, legs chained to the bed, torso held down by

the crushing weight of the cavernous god.



New words, to fill up the space where "Mother" had been

"Friend"

yes, friend sounded good

"God"

that one she threw back into the underworld where it belonged

"Hope"

would fit there instead

"Own" she swapped with "Free"

"Dark" with "Moon"

For Artemis would light her way

The cellar seemed brighter now, and even though it had no windows

moonlight seemed to seep from some

Unknown source and illuminated the raw grey bands

around her wrists

Where the shackles and barley rope had chafed away the gold

revealing vein and vital arteries

that throbbed painfully

Persephone clenched her fist and watched as a trickle of blood ran down her wrist and seeped between her fingers

She felt a longing in her chest, a longing not to belong to anybody

No mothers with wasp-sting slaps and barley ropes and

celestial

responsibilities

No Death-gods with cavernous craving for jewels and fresh meat, invading being and bodies and

breath

She gritted her teeth and pounded her torn fists on the locked door.

Her mother wasn't going to rescue her

none of the gods would

They were all too petty, too

greedy

She would rescue herself, not be owned by anybody, or owe anything to anybody

She would be free.

She tore long strips from the black bridal gown and bandaged her ankles and wrists

In the cellar she found a blunt dagger and with this

she hacked off the rest of her hair

And started again

She found an old sword buried under decades of dust

so heavy that it hurt to lift

but she swung it

Again and again at the door until eventually it cracked open

she left everything behind except her dagger

and fled

To a forest so tangled and wild that even Demeter had not been able to tame it

Persephone ran through the trees

seething

Leaving wisps of tattered black lace caught on twigs and angry thorns behind her

Her legs burned and her heart beat hot in her chest

but she didn't stop

Dodging trees and barbed-wire brambles she caught the sun going down and the night fell upon her

Unable to see she tripped on a tendril of tree root and found herself sprawled on the cold, mossy earth.

She lay on the ground and breathed in the smells of the forest, rotted wood and leaf mould and pine-needles.

And looked up at the moon which was just a sliver of light through the clouds,

"Artemis will light my way," she whispered

She felt another moon glowing in her stomach, it's silver light was pumped through her bloodstream

"Hope."

She closed her eyes and slept

Soundly for the first time in weeks

Listening to the sounds of the dryads in the trees whisper,

Their voices were wind through the leaves

She awoke to shards of sunlight that had broken through the canopy,  
Her feet were aching and blistered and her lips were chapped and cracked,  
Blood trickled painfully through her teeth

in little red streams

But she was alive and this gave her hope  
And her hope made a well from which she drew strength

She climbed stiffly to her feet and looked around

The trees grew claustrophobically close together

their roots entwined in a chaotic crochet

The sun sliced through the canopy in gaudy yellow rays, dripping though the leaves like honey  
Shadows shied away from the sweet sunlight but Persephone drank in it's warm nectar

She decided to build herself a home in the heart of the forest

Woven together with brambles and honey, dewdrops and earth

She fastened branches together to make a shelter

And covered them with moss to keep the rain out

Using pine needles she sewed herself a cloak of animal skin and ferns

And created a place where none of the gods would find her.

At first she lived off nuts, which cracked her teeth and were dry and bitter on her tongue

And berries

Their juices staining her lips violet.

She strained to sip rainwater, collected in bowls of bark

But it wasn't enough and once again Persephone felt herself

slipping away...

She made her first spear.

Used her dagger to sharpen a slender branch she had found lying under fallen leaves

It was a flimsy weapon and she was no skilled hunter or markswoman

The days passed and still she had caught nothing

Her hunger had made her clumsy and in the shadows she had nothing but birdsong to aim at

But slowly she learned and finally succeeded

And built a small fire on which to cook her prize

The meat was tough and tasteless but she picked the bones clean

Licked the dripping fat off her fingers and reclined

Drowsy and full in front of the crackling fire.

After that it got easier,

Persephone learned how to walk so softly on the mossy ground that

Not even the dryads heard her footsteps as she stalked her prey

Whispering lullaby spells that her mother taught her

She sung the deer to sleep as her arrows expertly navigated their way through the animals soft hide

Before embedding itself in its vital organs.

She learned to carve arrows so sharp they couldn't be felt as they sliced flesh from bone

Weaving bow-strings from vine and sinew

Persephone thrived and bloomed in the shadows, hidden from the gods

And all who wished to possess her.

Meanwhile, Hades grew more and more bored of the underworld's macabre entertainment

He no longer found thrill in the torturing of souls

And even when he gazed down, into the pitch black depths of Tartarus

He felt none of the usual exhilaration

His rotting heart beat fast only when he thought about the golden nymph

That had slipped out of his closed fist like

a snake through a trap.

Golden ichor pumping through his veins to the sound of her name, filling him with bitter longing

He remembered how her mother had stolen her selfishly away

And then announced to the Olympians that Persephone was dead

But she wasn't

Hades of all people would have know that.

Persephone remained among the living

For now at least

Demeter had her and Hades wanted her back

He would get her

Hades always got what he wanted.

Demeter had grown increasingly unpredictable  
Flitting like a locust between seasons  
She spat blight at crops, wilting wheat with ergot and feverish fury  
Winter enveloped the earth as Demeter lamented her lost property  
It was all Persephone's fault  
After all it was her daughter who had gotten herself kidnapped  
and locked away  
It wasn't Demeter's fault  
Demeter had just been doing a her job as a mother  
And when she came home from Olympus to find that once again her daughter had gone  
Hades was to blame  
He always was  
But Demeter would reclaim her prize  
And she would punish whichever god was responsible for stealing it  
Dressed in corn-silk and lurid crimson poppies she set forth to find Hades and make him beg for mercy  
She vowed that Death would fall when spring came to Tartarus

Deep in the forest Persephone had changed  
She was taller now, and strong  
No longer her mother's daughter she had shed gold in exchange for skin  
As dark as the mossy ground and as tough as tree bark  
Her hair had started to grow back after she had hacked it off in her mother's cellar  
Her hands were calloused, cracked and caked in mud, and her legs always ached after  
Long days spent tripping over tree roots while hunting but  
Persephone was happy  
In a way that Demeter had never seen  
In a way that Hades never would  
She learned spells from the dryads who whispered willowy guidance  
As she cast glowing enchantments that spiral through the forest like ethereal glow worms  
She learned to etch runes into her arrows so they would never miss

She was growing into a goddess and she knew  
Persephone had become less sunlight and more sorceress  
More power than petals and stinging pomegranate lips  
More predator  
The gods could tear themselves apart  
and they would  
But Persephone was not going to fall with them