

Persephone's Ransom

Excerpted from *Living Myth: Exploring Archetypal Journeys*

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A chapter on Ceres begs to be followed by one on Persephone.

Persephone is the daughter of Ceres and is essentially the perfect daughter. She does what mom tells her and in return is supported in living a perpetually puerile existence. Until something happens, that is. Something terrible and dramatic that causes her to have to grow up and start being her own person.

Here's the story: Hades (a.k.a. Pluto), the Lord of the Underworld and King of the Dead, notices Persephone and takes a marriage-minded, Lord-of-the-Underworld sort of interest in her. Being the honorable type, he approaches her father (who's also his brother) Zeus to ask for her hand. Zeus knows mom (Ceres) will never go for it, so he arranges that Gaia invent and place in Persephone's way the most beautiful flower, knowing that Persephone as a virginal maiden is all about, and will be totally captivated by, a most beautiful flower – especially one she's never seen before.

One day, Persephone is wandering about with her wood nymph gal pals, picking flowers and frolicking in the fields – a favorite activity. Everything's like it always is, with the puerile innocence that fills their days reigning supreme. But then she spies a particularly beautiful flower, a kind she's never seen before. She stops to admire it, unaware that it was dreamed up and planted in that spot just so she'd tarry...so she can be snatched away by Hades. What happens next is pretty typical: a crack in the earth opens up and Hades emerges, driving his chariot drawn by four black horses (I want them to be breathing fire, but I can't find a source that says they do) and snatches her, taking her below the surface to be his bride.

She spends some time down there as his captive, and then Mercury is sent to retrieve her. Just before she goes back to the surface with him, though, Hades offers her a pomegranate seed (or six, depending on the source) and she eats it. Unbeknownst to Persephone, eating something down there means you have to stay – it means you choose to belong down there. Eating food offered by the Lord of the Underworld turns out to be a contractual-type gesture.

Ceres freaks out that her daughter's been taken. The being she believes she exists for has been nabbed. There's a huge and noisy powwow with some other gods wherein she tries to get the marriage undone. But it can't be undone – she ate the seed of her own volition, in effect making the deal. The result is that Persephone has to spend a third of the year in the underworld, as Hades' bride/Queen of the Dead. The other part of the year, to her mother's relief, she can head back above ground and resume life as normal (as if that were possible...).

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Some Threads in Persephone's Story As We Live It

Not everyone will experience all of these situations, but if we're living Persephone's story, chances are that we'll live at least one.

Living in the Mother's Shadow

Everyone's done this at some point in life. It's a part of what we do. We choose to emerge into our own world at various times for our own reasons, and with varied results and varied reactions from mom (or the mother figure).

In the last chapter we looked at the need of Ceres in many of us to learn to accept that all relationships change, and to appreciate them as they are while they are. Persephone can learn that while mom's shadow can be a convenient place to remain safe, we might use it to keep ourselves from seeking our own ways of living. At some point the pressure to find our own way in the world will take us far enough away that mom's shadow can no longer cover us, even if we wish it.

Betrayal by the Father

This happens when dad (or a dad figure) arranges for something to happen to us that is not what we would plan for ourselves, and we are in some way hurt. Such betrayals don't have to be as terrible and dramatic and traumatic as possible, but they of course can be. This can also be experienced as a greater scheme by trusted others to usher you into a new way of being, perhaps against your will.

Abduction

The realities of adult life await all even close to what we consider the age of adulthood. Eventually, one of a couple of competing, simple truths that can argue within us prior to our abduction gives way to the other. First, via our parents or those serving as parents, we may live in a state of protection from the harshness of the world. Second, we need to learn how to navigate the world of adult reality at some point. We usually do not learn about most aspects of adult life from the people who are terrified we might grow up and ruin our lives by making mistakes. But we have to make our own decisions and learn our own lessons, don't we?

Note One: What Are You Available For?

There's a thread in all this about what we make ourselves available for. Our abductions have much to do with the unfolding journey of our lives as souls-in-human bodies. Said another way, they have much to do with our karma. I work with karma as accumulated beliefs that are so ingrained in us, rooted so deep inside us, that we attract experiences to make them manifest in the day-to-day world until we change our beliefs. There's no grey-bearded, marble-enthroned figure handing out gold stars and demerits for our behavior, and so even if we experience our abductions as negative and painful, they are in no way punishments.

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Note Two: On Violent Abductions

Many abductions into adult realms of life and sexuality are far from positive. The prevailing cultures we live in have all but forgotten how to relate to sexuality in healthy ways, and as a result we do not initiate our young people into a healthy understanding of sexuality. Confusion results as we attempt to find our way into mature embodiment and expression of ourselves as sexual beings, and this is often acted out as sexual violence, and a number of Persephone-like abductions do involve rape.

While not relieving individuals of responsibility for their behavior, we must open to see the prevalence of sexual violence as a symptom of a cultural sickness. It's rooted in frustration from not being initiated into healthy modes of sexuality, from having healthy models of self-acceptance and self-love. As long as we continue to deny the importance our sexuality has in our overall natures (and therefore health of our whole beings), many Persephone-related abductions can involve sexual violence.

Whatever the nature of the realm into which we're going to be abducted, we can spend years waiting for it to happen. Persephone was essentially an adult at the time of hers, and as we live it, the new way of being we're waiting for someone else to come along and sweep us into isn't necessarily premature.

What Happens if You're Not Abducted

Tension builds because you know you're missing something. You know something's off, you don't feel right. You're going about your business feeling less than whole, and you're consciously or unconsciously on the lookout for a person, group, cause or ideal that seems an embodiment of what life should be like. From the outside, it might look like a dreaminess/fantasy world existence, a youthful indulgence. But on the inside, it's a craving to grow up and be initiated into the greatest sense of wholeness we can imagine, in fact can sense in our bones long before we have it or come close.

Any of us can remain in this state for a long time, until maintaining our foothold in our particular version of innocence can simply no longer be done.

What Happens if You're Abducted

Life changes. You're ushered into a new way of being, and whether your personality likes it or not, your soul is experiencing exactly what it needs to.

What We're Learning When We Play Persephone

We-as-Persephone are learning about maturity, both in what is perceived to be mature and how one goes about being mature. Other people's opinions, hopes and dreams about the development of the courses of our lives should cease to matter when we begin identifying as adult agents in charge of ourselves. Living a Persephone story means at times finding out that what others opine, hope and

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dream about for us that just won't cut it, and we have to figure out how to strike out on our own and learn self-determination.

What you want for yourself is very likely at least moderately more exciting and interesting to you than what a protector figure could dream up for you. But the real point is that your idea of yourself and your life, and what you'd like to do with each, *is yours*. We can persist in doing what the protector figures would for whatever reasons prefer we do, and yet we're not then living our own lives.

To Persephone's Aid

So, then, with the Persephone chapters in our lives, we're talking about becoming self-determining adults, or self-reliant in a new way or to a greater degree. It's harder for some than others, and when we see the harder kind of story being lived by someone, it's important to let go of judgments we might have about where they should be and what they should be doing. Part of assisting anyone to reach new levels of maturity is in becoming grounded in a healthy understanding that sometimes the best help we can give others is to limit the assistance we offer either in type, range or availability.

Since Persephone stories are about self-determination and embracing new attitudes of self-responsibility and self-reliance, we can sometimes wonder how to help someone get through a sticky Persephone story. We can watch people linger a few inches before taking much-needed steps into self-reliance and maturity, with that foot into the future hovering...hovering...hovering...and it can drive us nuts to watch them do what we think is waste time and energy by not moving into the kind of future they clearly would rather be living.

As friends of Persephone, we have to leave her to her quandary and hesitation. The best thing we can do is to listen to her recount her internal argument, and yet it's true that there comes a time when we'll need to stop doing that, too. In cases where you can see a grand windup to a posthumous dead horse-beating in/for/by/of a friend, you can let him or her know you're not available to hear it if you're not. But the most important thing by far, whether you listen or not, is that you approach him or her with love, that you hold a space of love for this process of becoming he or she is engaged in. Because what we're really talking about is self-responsibility and maturity, what Persephone can be hesitant to step into fully, is self-love: Taking responsibility for loving and caring for herself. Having an example of self-loving friends and family members goes further than anything to support a Persephone in your life who's hemming and hawing about taking his or her leap into a new way of being.

If the Persephone in your life is in your family, and is your child or child-figure, understand that the example that you can offer of self-responsibility and maturity is the best you can do. Remember that Persephone's mother's model of love and responsibility is to worry about what everyone else is doing, and that our Ceres placement indicates where in our lives we could use the prioritization of self-care over care for others. When any of us lives a Persephone story, the best help we can get is in finding a model of mature relation to self that has appropriate boundaries, priorities and, care.

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Persephone Astrologically

Houses

Where your Persephone (asteroid 399) falls is where this dialogue plays itself out. In what arena of life will (should) your abduction occur? What are you hoping to be initiated into so you can feel more real, alive and fulfilled? Where could you use a self-love kick in the pants into maturity? Check yours out by house, sign and aspect. The house will indicate the arena of life one part of you may tend to remain perpetually puerile, the part of life you may perceive you need someone else to abduct you into a rich, full and more relevant experience.

- 1 Physicality, taking yourself out into public, asserting & presenting yourself
- 2 Value-based living, sensuality, self-esteem
- 3 Curiosity, openness, freely sharing via communication
- 4 Being in touch with your roots, your true feelings, building a personal foundation
- 5 Creative self-expression, playfulness, spontaneity, fun
- 6 Responsibility, duty, service, analytical awareness and related action
- 7 Learning to create harmony, fairness and balance in relationship
- 8 Deep honesty, trust, intimacy, intense bonding/sexuality with another
- 9 Developing a guiding principle for life, use of intuition, risking making life better
- 10 Ambition, achievement, reputation, social status
- 11 Goals for the future, working with like-minded others
- 12 Surrender to something greater, connectedness to all of life

Signs

Your Persephone sign shows the method and motivation of this part of you. It's the mode of being into which you might be waiting to be abducted and, if no one shows up, you'll eventually see that you have to take responsibility for on your own.

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Aries | Directness, assertiveness, protective, boldness, bravery |
| Taurus | Conscientiousness, stability, self-confidence |
| Gemini | Openness, flexibility, curiosity |
| Cancer | Rootedness, emotive, connectedness |
| Leo | Creatively expressive, performing, proud of yourself for what you can do |
| Virgo | Analytical, committed, responsible, |
| Libra | Fair, balanced, exploring give-and-take, a good listener |
| Scorpio | Intense, powerful, absolutely honest, transforming/transformational |
| Sagittarius | Hopeful, risk-taking, expansive, believing |
| Capricorn | Constructive, sacrificing, mature, physically productive |
| Aquarius | Forward-looking, different, original, objective |
| Pisces | Going with the flow, opening, absorbing, surrendering |

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Piece together your Persephone house and sign to get some words for what you're hoping to be abducted into, have been abducted into or need to abduct yourself into. While the house and sign keywords above are limited, inserting each of the house and sign keywords will give you something to go on. In other words, while we are marvelously complex as individuals, when the themes of our lives are boiled down to house and sign keywords, there's always a lot to begin working with. Again, this is to stimulate you to begin your dialogue with yourself.

Here's a handful of examples:

Libra in the 2nd: Achieving balance in your self-esteem.

Gemini in the 1st: New and different ways to use your body and show yourself.

Scorpio in the 4th: An absolute honesty about where you come from and your deepest identity and needs.

Virgo in the 7th: Taking responsibility for your relationships, both in choice of relationship and how they work.

Aries in the 5th: Boldly showing others your creative side.

Pisces in the 9th: Surrendering to a belief or guiding principle.

The last birth chart bit is aspects. Aspects to your Persephone tell of the dialogues in your psyche she's engaged in with other energies in your consciousness. Conjunctions indicate merging, sextiles trigger and stimulate, squares apply friction and pressure needing release, trines support and boost, and oppositions confront and challenge to face-offs.

The Ceres-Persephone Dialogue

For kicks: Understanding the dialogue between your Ceres (asteroid 1) and Persephone will also shed light on how your internal wiring related to this story is configured. The statement that Ceres makes is one of protection of others, sometimes at the expense of risking living a rich, full life. The statement that Persephone makes is of wanting to be launched into new ways of being, those that provide her with opportunities to function as her own agent and thereby live with and from a greater feeling of wholeness, but not knowing how to make it happen. Look at the symbolism of each asteroid in your natal chart to uncover a new level of dialogue between these two parts of you, even if they're not in aspecting each other. Hint: Your Ceres is where you might look after others before yourself, and your Persephone is where you might hope someone else might show you how to become self-determined.

Persephone's Ransom

What will it take for Ceres to get her Persephone back? What does her freedom from Hades cost? Ceres doesn't stop until she gets Persephone back for two-thirds of the year, while her daughter is to

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spend only a third of the year with her husband. Ceres perceives she feels satisfaction from having Persephone back in her fold (she allows the crops and plants of the earth to bloom again), yet Persephone will never again be the perfect daughter. The young one has been initiated into an adult way of living and can never go back, can never retreat to the innocent time when she did not know herself as an adult and had no idea how to take responsibility for herself.

Because she can never recapture the sense of not knowing how important to a healthy sense of individuality are self-responsibility, self-determine and self-care, it turns out there's no ransom. She's moved on. Persephone's already grown up.