

PLUTO

from the unpublished novel (57,000 words)

by Mark Katzman

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He came out of his father's belly. Cronus, foul bastard, they plucked your son from your dark, stinking stomach. Pluto was not the only one. Vesta, Ceres, Juno, your fine daughters were there, along with Neptune, another strong son. Zeus managed to escape because of the love of Rhea, your good wife, who could not take any more of your barbaric, paranoid shit, and substituted a stone in his place. It was he who grew strong on the island of Crete, fed on the milk of the goat Amalthea, tended lovingly by the nymphs Ida and Adrastea.

Zeus became strong and vowed to overthrow his father. Thanks to Gaea, his sweet grandmother, he succeeded in making him disgorge his children, his blood, his deities. And then he waged war on you, Cronus, you old fuck.

And what a war it was.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. The world needs to begin before the coming of the Gods.

In the beginning there was Chaos. In the absolute, dark, seething, confusion, there were no limits, no bounds in the world. It was an immense disorder. Everything that exists was hidden within it.

All was brought forth from the Source.

Many ages past.

Chaos gradually transformed itself into two majestic beings, Gaea and Uranus. Mother Earth and the Overhanging Heavens.

There was light. Bright shining light!

But the memory of Chaos remains in Night. Dark. Mysterious. The memory of Chaos. The memory of dreams and deceits and desires.

And so there was a world.

Gaea and Uranus had many children. They liked to make love. They worshipped making love. They made love all the time. They were the world and they could make love as much as they pleased.

The children were either very beautiful or very terrifying monsters.

Let's start with the monsters. Three strange dudes, the Hecatoncheires, with a hundred hands each.

The three Cyclopes just had that one big bloodshot eye. Disgusting. If you checked them out, really close, I mean, their eye was too much to take. That relentless eye. Unblinking. Red. Swollen. Absolute creepsville.

Basically, Uranus didn't give a damn about his children. He hated them all from day one but he hated the monsters most of all. He sent their asses packing to Tartarus, deep, deep in the Earth.

Now for the beautiful ones. The Titans.

Oceanus and Tethys ruled the sea. Hyperion and Thea were the deities of the Sun and Moon. Rhea, the Great Mother. Themis was guardian of the Law. Mnemosyne was the Goddess of memory. And, finally, Cronus, youngest and most powerful of all.

These kids were big. Rhea was the shortest and she was thirty feet tall. Cronus was a whopping fifty feet, five and one-half inches.

Now Mother Earth loved all of her children and was quite ticked off about the ones imprisoned in Tartarus. She was especially fond of Briareus. He was the Cyclopes with the most charm and grace, and had a green eye with fabulously long eyelashes.

She called upon the Titans to help them escape.

Uranus was an asshole, face it. What a shitty way to start the world.

Only Cronus would help her. Everybody else was scared to death of their father. He did the sickle number on Uranus. Leaped at him in the dark and started chopping. It wasn't a pretty sight. From his blood sprang the Furies, whose hair was writhing serpents. Tisiphone, Alecto, Megaera.

Now that he had overthrown his father, Cronus seized the rule of the world. He took his own sister, Rhea, to be his wife, and divided the world among his fellow Titans.

This is where paranoia strikes deep. He ate each child as they were born, fearing a similar fate for himself. Rhea was a wreck. Thank god she saved Zeus' little ass or the story would be a different one, indeed.

Fathers and sons, fathers and sons.

It was time for a war. And what a war it was!

Most of the Titans sided with Cronus. He was just so big and brutal and intimidating. Zeus has his brothers and sisters behind him, along with the Hecatoncheires and Cyclopes, whom Cronus, like Uranus, had confined in Tartarus.

In gratitude for releasing them, the Cyclopes forged Zeus the thunderbolt and the lightning. The Hecatoncheires backed him up with earthquakes, pounding the Earth relentlessly with their hands.

The old Gods held up on Mount Ossa. Zeus and his bunch chose Mount Olympus.

The war lasted for ages. Ages and ages. The whole Earth shook with their battles and cries.

Zeus hurled thunderbolts. Rivers were on fire, forests burst into flames!

Finally, Cronus couldn't take it anymore. Mount Ossa was torched. Zeus was too powerful. They had to abandon their mountain stronghold. And what to do with them? Ship them to Tartarus, of course.

It was time to divide the world again.

Zeus remained on Mount Olympus, Overlord of Gods and humankind. He chose Hera to be his Queen. Neptune was assigned the rulership of the Oceans. Hestia became the Goddess of Hearth and Home. Demeter, the Goddess of Agriculture. And to Pluto the realm of Hades was given, the realm of the Underworld.

Far below, on Earth, the races of humankind had come into being. It was the Golden Age. Life was an eternal springtime. The crops brought forth themselves. Everyone loved each other. Everyone lived to be hundreds of years old. There was no strife, no poverty. Death was like a peaceful sleep.

Then Zeus created the seasons. It was a whole other ballgame. It was the Silver Age. Shelters had to be built, crops had to be tended. There was hunger. There was cold.

Next came the Age of Bronze. Men created weapons and made war upon one another. Death and destruction were everywhere.

Finally we come to the Age of Iron. The end of the line. Greed and envy and fragmentation. Humankind in utter degradation.

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Another night in Pluto's den.

The walls are made of skulls, thousands of them. There are four doors. Black tile floors. It's quite spacious, quite divine.

The god is alone, pacing back and forth, pacing, pacing.

Persephone had left a little note on the fridge: BATS AGAIN, SORRY LOVE, P.

"That little bitch," he says. "That's three nights this week. Ah, listen to me. She's been so happy. She adores her bats. Adores the caves. The hidden chambers and vaults. Got to love the old girl."

Perhaps he will make a sandwich, conjure some stew, bake a toad. He doesn't know that to do with himself. He can't keep his mind on anything.

There have been so many new arrivals: Sara Vaughn, Keith Haring, Dexter Gordon, Ava Gardner, Walker Percy, Halston, Jim Henson, Sammy Davis, Jr., Garbo, Beckett. Pluto is death-soaked, distracted.

Pluto, the inexhaustible, the maximally descended. The dark one. The dense and devouring one.

He feels, oh, well, lackadaisical.

His beard needs trimming. His hair is all over the place.

He remembers the collagen skin cream Daphne had given him as a present. Maybe it was time to finally break it out.

Now he's thinking about a mud mask. A god has to pamper himself, too. Or he could try on a few of Persephone's things and parade around the den. It could happen.

He kills a little time polishing his blue topaz earring. Another gift, this one from the great Tibetan Master, Padmasambhava. He lives in a cave, way the fuck away, near Tartarus. The cave is high up on a steep cliff. There are a lot of yaks. A special gift from Pluto. The Master loves them. He also loves his newest, female practitioner, a twenty-two year old blonde named Muffin.

Wow, his mud mask has hardened. The warm water feels good, washing it off. Pluto is refreshed, renewed. Even the skulls are glowing.

Is that Persephone he hears, or perhaps Daphne looking for a quickie?

No, it was nothing.

He feels quieter, calmer, subdued. He settles onto his god-size futon to relax.

Last night, he and Persephone made love. It was so beautiful. Pluto adores her.

She's still sore at him for abducting her like he did. But now she is a queen. Persephone, Queen of the Underworld. At least for a few months. In the spring she returns to her mother, Demeter, and her friends.

Here's how it went down.

It was a sunny day in the fields of Sicily. Persephone was gathering narcissus with her maidens. They were all so happy, chatting of the joyous days to come.

Pluto arose from the trembling Earth, suddenly, in this black, 1970 Mustang. He wasn't wearing the helmet of invisibility. This was a big occasion, and he wanted to be up front, revealed. Of all his many journeys to the day world, only twice before had he done this. He preferred the invisible life. But this was special, very special. It's not everyday a god takes a bride.

Perhaps you think he is crude and just a bully. Another dick with a mind of its own. No, he's just plum loco in love. Oh, he's a bit rough around the edges, he knows, he knows. He was nervous as hell. Love struck. He simply whisked her away back into the Earth. Persephone was screaming like a banshee (what in the hell must that sound like?). This was not the courtship she had always imagined. She held on to the bucket seat for dear life as they swiftly descended.

Demeter was pissed off big time. She searched all the Earth for her beloved daughter. She was frantic. She unleashed mayhem upon the planet, destroying the crops with terrible storms, frost, floods. There was a famine. The people cried out to Zeus to help them.

Zeus tried to make amends, apologizing for his brother's behavior, to appease her, for the harvests were needed to sustain the race, but Demeter wasn't budging until Persephone was returned.

Well, what finally happened was this. Zeus dispatched Hermes (or Mercury if you like) to the Underworld. He relayed the dictate of the Olympian: RETURN PERSEPHONE AT ONCE DO NOT FUCK WITH ME, Z.

Pluto obeyed. You didn't mess with Zeus. You didn't want a thunderbolt up the butt.

In the beginning, when he was assigned the Underworld, Pluto wasn't happy at all. He's not into gloom. Really. You see, nobody was there. Nobody. And it was so dark you couldn't see a goddamn thing. Where's that at?

Zeus said, "Be content, in time your kingdom shall be well peopled. And the vast wealth hidden in the Earth shall be yours for the keeping. Pluto, you are the Rich One."

So, he kind of got into it. Soon, people were dying right and left and the Underworld became the place to be. A non-stop happening.

But Pluto was lonely. The god needed a wife. You understand. A woman to love above all the others. A lioness in his den.

At first he was mellow, he waited, he wanted to do the right thing. And, after all, Zeus promised Persephone would be his. The god had loved her from afar since she was a little girl. Now that she was a young woman, the time seemed right for a definitive move. Besides, she wouldn't remain a virgin forever.

Aw, let's face it. He knew better. Demeter would never let her Proserpina go with him willingly. Not even if he begged her. Not even if he swore his eternal love and devotion before all the Gods and Goddesses of All Space and All Time.

So he decided to take matters into his own hands.

Persephone clutched the bucket seat with all her might. Pluto looked at her and smiled.

"My fair one," he said, "my love."

Down, down, down, swiftly descending, down, down, down into the deepest depths, the depths of the depths, the deepest depths and deeper still.

Deeper, deeper.

Still more. Still deeper. Deeper than deep, the ever-most deep, the deep beyond deep.

Anyway, they finally reached the Underworld. It took Persephone a while to adjust to the gloom. But in no time she realized it was not gloomy there at all. Actually, it was quite lovely. Quite dim and quite lovely.

There she was. There she was in front of him. Her. It was her. Her only. Only her. Her and, yes, her only. Her and her only.

Persephone would not let a morsel of food or drink pass her lips. This was her vow. She didn't want to be under Pluto's power. She had heard things about him. Not bad things, mind you, just things, things. Actually, she thought he was very handsome. She liked his graying beard, his wild hair, his earring. And he was funny. He served her poppy tea. He did a little dance for her. He juggled. He gave her a wonderful foot massage. He told her stories of the Underworld and declared his love for her. On his knees, yet. He couldn't believe it himself. A god on his knees is not something one sees every day.

Queen of the Underworld, she said to herself, Queen of the Dead. Hmm.

She ate six pomegranate seeds from Pluto as a token of his love.

About this time Hermes showed up to take her back.

Their myth was sealed.

Persephone was reunited with her mom. Demeter chilled and the planet was restored. Everybody gave thanks. But the deal was, since Persephone ate the seeds, she had to return to Hades for six months a year, one for each seed.

His little winter wife, his beautiful Underworld Queen.

In the Spring Pluto sends her back to rejoin her mother and bring forth the flowers and crops. He always takes a lock of her hair as a remembrance.

While his love is away he's got all the action he can handle if he wants it. Pluto is not the god of sex for nothing. Really, he's not one to fool around, though he's done his share of fooling around. It just doesn't have the same meaning it does with his Queen, his true, true love.

At Eleusis, near Athens, they held mystery rites for the loss and return of Persephone. Initiates had to purify themselves for a whole year before they could attend the ceremonies. To go into it would be breaking occult rules. At the end of the ceremony the high priest would pronounce again the immortality of the soul, and, with his cryptic, closing words, end the rites until next year.

"Konx Ompax! Konx Ompax!"

And if you think the meaning of that little phrase is going to be revealed, you've got another think coming.