**The End of Eternal Spring**  
The Story of Demeter and Persephone  
Retold by Reg Harris

**In Search of a Wife**

Hades, dark god of the Underworld, heard the sound of laughter from a nearby meadow. He reigned in the two black horses that pulled his chariot, dismounted, and crept through the trees to the edge of the glade. There he saw a group of maidens playing and picking flowers.

His eyes were drawn to the edge of the trees where a girl gathered flowers alone. Though he had not seen her for years, he knew that this was Persephone, daughter of his sister Demeter. Her hair was corn gold, like her mother’s, and she was tall and proud, a true child of gods. It was then that Hades, the lord of death, fell in love with the daughter of life.

“Brother Zeus,” he said later that day on Mount Olympus, “I come to ask permission to make Persephone my queen.”

“Were my consent all that you needed,” Zeus said, “you would have it. However, our sister would never agree. Her daughter is her joy, a child of light.”

“I am too shy and humble to approach the girl,” Hades said, “yet I know that I cannot remain without her.”

“I can neither hinder nor aid,” Zeus said, with a shrug.

Hades knew Zeus well enough to understand that he had given his approval. But Hades was unschooled in the arts of love. In the end he fell upon a plan that was brutish but effective. He convinced Gaea, his grandmother, to create a beautiful narcissus plant, which he placed in Persephone’s favorite meadow. Then he waited.

**A Kidnapping**

Persephone was a child of life. She and her mother lived in Earth’s eternal spring, where grain grew lush and full, and where trees bore sweet fruit without end. But it was in flowers that the girl found her greatest joy. She loved to create new ones, paint them in dazzling colors, and then weave them into beautiful bouquets. It was a golden time for her, yet as she grew older, she felt a stirring within her. She began to sense that she was experiencing only one side of life, that there was more to discover and experience.

One afternoon, with her mother and a group of friends, Persephone returned to the isle of Sicily, to her favorite spot for gathering flowers. As the other maidens played in the eternal bloom, Persephone and Demeter talked quietly.

“Will I ever leave you, mother?” the girl asked.

“Leave?” Demeter was puzzled.

“Our life is beautiful,” Persephone said, “and I love you very much, but each day I feel a growing discontent.”

“Persephone, what better life could you want?” Demeter asked, “We have sweet fruits, soft grasses, and bright flowers. Trees give us shade and gentle breezes cool our skin. Life is complete.”

“I’m not sure that it is,” Persephone said, “I sense that there is more for me to know and understand. I can’t explain.”

“Stop worrying,” Demeter said. “Run now to your meadow and bring back some of those wonderful red flowers you painted on our last visit.”

Persephone hugged her mother and then jumped to her feet and disappeared into the trees.

Her meadow was not far, and when she reached it she began to gather her flowers. Then she paused. Growing at the far edge of the meadow was a mysterious flower, one she had never seen. Its long leaves and radiant gold and white blossoms
beckoned her. Persephone ran to it, wondering how it had come into her meadow.

Enchanted, she knelt and began to pick its blossoms. As she did, the ground beneath her trembled, and a great chasm opened in the earth. Out of the darkness thundered a golden chariot drawn by two fiery black horses. The driver was Hades, wrapped in his cloak of invisibility. He seized Persephone and carried her screaming into his underworld kingdom.

Demeter’s Quest
Demeter heard her daughter’s cries and rushed to the meadow, but she was too late. The chasm had already closed, leaving no clue to the girl’s whereabouts.

“I must find my daughter,” said the goddess. “I won’t rest until I do.”

Demeter began her search. For nine days and nights, with no food or rest, she wandered the Earth, a torch in each hand, searching for Persephone.

On the tenth day, exhausted and discouraged, she remembered Helios, god of the sun, who sees everything. He would know what had happened. Demeter traveled east, to the land of the rising sun, and there she found Helios preparing for his daily journey across the sky.

“I saw nothing,” he told her.

“I know better than that,” Demeter said. “You see all. Tell me what you know.”

Helios hesitated, thinking of the anger he would incur from Zeus, but when he saw the wrath growing in Demeter’s eyes, he feared the powerful goddess even more.

“It was Hades,” he said finally, “and probably with Zeus’ consent. He took your daughter to the Underworld.”

Demeter Goes on Strike
Demeter was furious. In a rage, she returned to Olympus to confront her brother.

“Why are you so upset, sister?” Zeus said. “Hades will make a fine husband for our daughter.”

“I want her returned,” Demeter said. “She cannot live in a world without sun.”

“I can do nothing,” Zeus shrugged. “Take some time, dear sister. I’m sure that, once you reflect, you will realize that this is a fine match for our daughter.”

Demeter left, refusing to return to Olympus. Instead, she wandered the earth, forbidding it to grow anything. Slowly the fields of grain withered and died. Fruit trees became dry and bare. The earth was dying. Drought and famine followed, and the human race was on the edge of death.

Zeus faced a dilemma. He was reluctant to confront his powerful brother, but he was too ashamed to face his sister. He decided, finally, to try to persuade Demeter to do as he wished by sending a contingent of gods with conciliatory gifts, begging her to return.

Demeter Stands Firm
Demeter considered her brother’s wishes, but despite the risks of angering the most powerful god, she refused to yield. The earth would remain barren until her daughter was returned.

Faced with the earth’s ruin and the death of humanity, Zeus knew that he must return Persephone to his sister. He sent for his messenger, Hermes.

“Go to the Underworld,” he told Hermes. “Tell Hades that Persephone has eaten nothing in the land of the dead, she must return to her mother.”
Persephone is Released

Hades was heartbroken. He had offered Persephone every delicacy, but he had been unable to persuade her to eat while in his kingdom. Though she had resisted his every overture, she had brought the spark of love and life to his dark world. He felt the pain of losing one who is loved, and he realized what his sister must be feeling at the loss of her daughter. Reluctantly he called Persephone to him.

“Your mother is sick over your loss,” he began. “She has challenged Zeus himself and has abandoned her duties until you are returned. The world is near death. Zeus has commanded that you return.”

Persephone looked up. She was to be released, but the news did not bring the joy she would have expected. She was still angry at being abducted, but she had come to find Hades strangely appealing. She looked at him and saw the deep sadness in his eyes. For the first time she saw him as he was, without his fearsome cloak of night and his mask of death. She saw a shy, gentle Hades, whose years of isolation had left him unrefined and awkward.

“When do I return?” she asked.

“Zeus and your mother will be here soon,” Hades replied. He hesitated, looking at her gently. “I was wrong to have taken you as I did, but I saw no alternative. I knew that neither you nor your mother would consider a marriage with me and a life in the Underworld, away from the flowers and sunlight that are your life.”

Persephone said nothing.

“Now you will be leaving,” Hades continued slowly. “You are the light which balances darkness, the life which countervails death. You are in all ways the melody to my harmony, and though you have hated me, I will miss you as much as your mother misses you now.”

“I have not found my stay here unpleasant,” Persephone said, “I have enjoyed your generous gifts, but I have also found peace here. With my mother I rejoiced in life alone, in the unfading beauty of the flowers and trees. Now I see that life was unbalanced. I think I sensed that, even before you brought me here.”

The Pomegranate Seeds

Hades looked up, a sudden spark of hope in his eyes. “This may be a place of darkness and death,” he said, “but darkness and death are only different aspects of light and life. They cannot be separated. Perhaps Demeter and I have lived apart too long. You living here has restored a balance. It has brought the naturalness of death to her world and the promise of life to mine. Is that such a loathsome existence?”

No, it wasn’t, Persephone thought to herself. While in the underworld she had come to love the dark peace, illuminated only by the flickering torch light. Suddenly, she sensed a flow in life much deeper than the bright colors of her flowers or the dark shadows of Hades’ kingdom. He was right. There was a harmony in her being here.

“MARRY ME,” Hades urged, as he sensed her changing feelings. “YOU SHALL HAVE THE POWER OF THE QUEEN OF THE UNDERWORLD. TOGETHER WE SHALL RESTORE TO THE WORLD A BALANCE OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT.”

He paused, watching the girl. Then he reached to a cornucopia at the side of his throne, selected a pomegranate and broke it open, exposing its bright red seeds.

“You have not eaten here,” he said, offering the pomegranate to Persephone. “You must be very hungry.”
Persephone looked at the fruit. To eat food in the Underworld would force her to remain there, but not to eat it would leave a deeper hunger unsatisfied. She looked into Hades’ eyes, saw the darkness, saw the seed of life in death, and saw her own image reflected there as if in a mirror.

Slowly she extended her hand. Hades held it gently in his own and placed the pomegranate in her upturned palm. There was strength in his grasp, a power which both terrified and delighted her.

“Will you eat the fruit of the Underworld?” he asked again. “Its seeds bring knowledge and insight. Be my queen, Persephone, and gain understanding beyond life and death.”

Persephone grasped the fruit in one hand and with the other plucked out four blood-red seeds. As she looked into Hades’ eyes, she placed the seeds in her mouth and bit into them. The rich, sweet juice filled her mouth with flavor.

“My queen,” Hades said, pressing her hand to his lips.

Demeter’s Pain

“But why?” Demeter cried, clinging to Persephone. “Why did you eat the fruit here? Hades must have tricked you.”

Mother and daughter stood in Hades’ garden. From a distance inside the palace, Hades and Zeus watched.

“Mother,” Persephone said, her voice no longer the voice of a young girl, “Hades did not trick me. I chose to eat the seeds. Yes, this is a world of darkness and death, just as yours is a world only of light and life. One cannot exist without the other. They are aspects of one experience, each incomplete without the other, just as I was incomplete until now. I belong here, Mother. I am a child of the sun and the flowers, but that is only half of my life. Here I find harmony and peace.”

Demeter looked at her daughter and saw not the child she had lost, but a young woman who had tasted the fruit of both life and death. She knew that Persephone was right, but she grieved for the loss of the daughter who was a part of her.

“I understand your sorrow,” said Hades as he joined them. “I have lived most of my life without love, and now that I have known it, I cannot let it go. But, sister, I feel your grief and offer you a compromise. Persephone shall spend four months of the year with me, one for each pomegranate seed she ate. During that time she will give me light and joy to carry me through her absence. The other eight months she will spend with you.”

Demeter looked at her brother, her hatred turning to a grudging respect. “I accept your compromise,” she said, “but I will always grieve for my daughter when she is away from me.”

“I understand,” Hades nodded. He turned to Persephone. “Go now. The world needs your light to restore its balance and life. When you return to me, you shall restore life to my world.” He kissed her gently and then watched as the two women left the kingdom of darkness.

So it was that the child of spring brought balance to life and the seasons to the earth. When Persephone is with her mother, Demeter rejoices and the earth rejoices with her in the symphony of spring and warmth of summer. But while she is in the underworld, Demeter grieves and the world grieves with her, bringing fall and winter, when the sun loses its warmth and snow covers the land.
Notes on *Demeter and Persephone* and this version of the myth

Our “Demeter and Persephone” myth doesn’t follow the tradition Greek version. In the traditional version, Persephone is a victim and then, through her own foolishness, must remain in the underworld. Our version incorporates a perception of the goddess which is older than this patriarchal Greek version.

Demeter was called “Mother of the Great Triangle of Life” (from de, delta, the triangle shaped letter). The triangle represented the three sides of existence: birth, life, and death. She represents the mystery behind life and death, simultaneously the creator, preserver, and destroyer. (This theme is similar to the Hindu Trimurti: Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer. It is an example of the ubiquitous nature of the “Earth Mother” and the three faces of life.)

At one time, Persephone, Demeter and Hecate (the old goddess of magic) were probably considered one goddess, the Great “Goddess of Many Names,” whose cults spread from Europe through Asia centuries before the patriarchal hunting tribes arrived. Persephone (then known as “Kore”) was the virgin (birth) aspect of the goddess, Demeter the mature aspect (fertility), and Hecate the old crone (death). (The Great goddess is still seen as the Triple Goddess or the Goddess in Three Aspects in the modern wicca movement.)

Our story is more consistent with the original nature of the Goddess as the three aspects of existence. In it Persephone, the virgin aspect, is still kidnapped, though this happens because of her own fascination with a strange, new flower, a narcissus (which is associated mythologically with self-absorption). Her fascination with the flower could symbolize the self-absorption and desire for self-discovery common to all seekers. For Persephone, her fascination leads to an awakening to new harmony in herself while in the underworld. There, contrary to the traditional telling of the myth, she senses the imbalance in both her own life and in the life of eternal spring, and she chooses to stay of her own accord.

This approach restores the Great goddess to some of her original power and is consistent with the metaphorical implications of the Goddess’ three aspects. It also fits with the concept of balance and harmony in life, which is so much a part of some Greek and Eastern philosophies which were developing around the Eastern Mediterranean during the Hellenistic period.

**For Further Study...**

Compare this version to the traditional myth of Hades and Persephone. Think about how the two versions vary in their depiction of women and, perhaps, why the Goddess was weakened in the Greek myth.

*He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery.*
Harold Wilson
Former British prime Minister
Origin of the Image of Satan, the Devil

“The satan” becomes “Satan”

Most of us have grown up with an image that depicts Satan as a demon with horns like a bull, cloven hooves, a tail, and carrying a pronged fork. We assume this image first comes from the Bible. However, this is not the case.

The image of Satan evolved over many centuries. In the oldest portions of the Hebrew Bible (about 800-1000 BC), the devil is not mentioned. Later, when the word “satan” is used, it refers to anyone who was considered an accuser, prosecutor, or enemy. In some places in the Bible, “the satan” actually appears to be a member of God’s own council.

The concept of Satan as the archenemy of God originated two or three centuries before Jesus. This image was probably influenced by Persian mythology, which portrayed good and evil as fundamental, opposing powers. Finally, in the New Testament, by about A.D. 70-100, Satan is depicted as being the major power opposed to god and who holds all kingdoms under his control.

Nature condemned

Our physical image of the devil began to evolve even later, probably sometime between A.D. 300 and 400. At that time, Christianity had just become the state religion of Rome, and Christians were trying to convert pagans to the church.

Most pagans believed that the divine presence (god) existed in all things natural: the trees, the animals and birds, the mountains, the seas. Because the early Christians were competing with these pantheistic beliefs, they proclaimed that anything the pagan world regarded as evidence of this divine presence in nature was the work of the devil. Soon symbols which had represented the natural forces of the universe became symbols of sin and evil.

For example, Pan, the Greek god of nature, was a goat-like creature with short horns and cloven hooves. He played a flute and lured people into music, dance and love. Pagans considered these activities natural and good. Church officials, however, condemned them as evil and turned the impish, playful Pan-with his horns, tail and hooves – into an incarnation of Satan.

Nature symbols corrupted

Over the years, the orthodox Christian church added other elements of pagan nature gods to the devil image. Poseidon, Greek god of the sea, carried a trident. That trident became the devil’s pitchfork. Poseidon also had a great bull, which (along with Pan) gave Satan his horns and cloven hooves.

Hades, Poseidon’s brother, was another nature god, the god of the underworld. His wife, Persephone, was often pictured carrying a torch, which represented the creative fire of the underworld, a symbol of the cyclic nature of existence. But Hades and Persephone suffered the same fate as the other pagan nature gods. The flame of life on Persephone’s torch life became the eternal flames of hell. Hades, the name of the god of the underworld, was applied to the underworld in general. The underworld – which in the early Bible (Ecclesiastes) had been the final home for all of the dead, not just sinners – became a place of punishment and damnation.

Distortion and superstition

These early distortions of pagan images were reinforced and embellished over the centuries by writers, artists and the church. Now this image of Satan is widely accepted as “the way it’s always been” rather than as the product of corrupted mythology and centuries of superstition and mythological evolution.
I tell you, I was about to explode, I was so excited when I heard my big brother Junior was coming home. Junior spent eighteen months in the house. He took out a long stretch, cause somebody shot off a gun in the day Junior and his corner boys held up the Kravitz’s ice-cream store. Nobody got hurt, but Mrs. Kravitz hollered like somebody had killed her. The others got away, and Junior caught the whole blame. It was enough to put him away for a long, long time.

My corner boys were real impressed when I told them. Course they acted like it wasn’t nothing, like any one of them could do eighteen months standing on his head. But they were impressed right on, and jealous besides, not having a brother like Junior or anybody else famous in the family.

I remember the headline—“Aging Couple Robbed”—and Junior’s picture in the paper. I cut it out and saved it. It’s still in my snapshot album that I never did put any other pictures in cause I never got the camera. My brother was big stuff. Front-page stuff. And now he was coming home.

Josh he acted like it weren’t nothing. “Eighteen months?” he said. “What’s that? I hear you get you own TV in the House, and your own room.”

No ghetto kid has his own room, except me after Junior went away. And now he was coming home, and me glad to share it with him again.

“Yeah,” said Marquis, “I hear tell they have ice cream every night up there. Double scoops on Sundays. And people come around and give them cigarettes, things like that.”

We only used to get ice cream when we found enough soda bottles to return to the store. And now they got those No Deposit No Return bottles, we don’t hardly ever get none unless somebody’s mom gives him a dime. If she does, you got to run all the way home and eat it by yourself, else fight some bigger kids for it. And even if you get pass the big guys, there’s your boys, Josh and Duke and Leroy, and Marquis, all wanting to take turns licking off your ice-cream cone.

“Man, I ain’t studying no ice cream,” said Leroy. He acts like he’s the baddest thing on McCarter street just ’cause he’s thirteen and the rest of us is only twelve. “I could use some cigarettes, though.”

This was the one time I was with Leroy. I don’t think about ice cream much no more cause I don’t like to go in Kravitz’s store since it happened. I favor my brother in the face, and old Mrs. Kravitz might start yelling her head off again. You can get cigarettes anywhere.

But we don’t ever have enough money, unless King or one of the other big-time hustlers on the corner gives us some to run an errand. The other hustlers only give us fifty cents, but sometimes King gives a whole dollar. I seen him take a roll of money thick as my fist out of his pocket plenty times.

We were standing around that July morning, waiting for King to show up, hoping he would give us something to do. We all want to be hustlers when we grow up. A hustler is somebody who lives by his wits, you might say, and King was the king of them all.

It was hot enough to boil water on the sidewalk that morning, and my foot was blistered from a hole in my sneakers. I was thinking, Maybe when Junior gets home he’ll pull off another job and get me a new pair, when King glides up to the curb in his white air-conditioned Hog. The Cadillac was about half a block long, and a sharp fox in a blonde wig was sitting beside King. He looked cool as an ice cube in there, his wavy hair shining and diamonds flashing on his hands.

“Hey, you boy. Come here!” He flicked a little button in the Hog, and the window slid down easy as greased silk. Josh and Duke and Leroy and Marquis all hit the sidewalk, but I had a head start in my sneakers, hole and all. I got to the car a full three feet ahead of them.

Then—man!—King shoved the girl out of the car and held open the door for me. I hopped in and closed the door, and we eased away from the curb. Leroy and Josh and Duke and Marquis were left standin’ there with their mouths hangin’ open.

“Have a cigarette, kid,” King said, and handed me a pack of Marlboros with the top flipped up. But what was inside didn’t look like no Marlboros. The paper was pink and it had been rolled by hand. King handed me the dashboard lighter. I lit up and held the smoke in.

King lit a real Marlboro and leaned back, steering the Hog through tight traffic with one hand. “Kid,” he said, “you got to the car first, so you must be the most ambitious one on the corner. You want to get ahead in this world?”

I nodded. I couldn’t speak cause the smoke had me all choked up inside.
“Well,” King said, “how’d you like to be my right-hand man?”

“Yes!” I cried.

“All you got to do,” King said, “is pass this stuff out among the kids.” And he pulled a plastic bag out from under the seat. “When they want more, you come back to me. I’ll tell you what to charge ‘em.”

And then King pulled that big old wad out of his pocket and plucked off a crisp new five and handed it to me. My eyes popped. But I didn’t lose my cool. Just sat back and inhaled that pink cigarette like a man. It was making me feel like a man too. Like I could do anything. I put the five in the pocket of my jeans and sucked in the smoke and held it in like I seen Leroy do one time. I felt ten feet tall, higher than high. Way above the funky scuffling people we were cruising on by Madison.

“Man,” I said to King, “this is some good stuff.”

“Oughta be. It came all the way from Panama,” Kind said. “Listen, kid. The cops don’t exactly dig this action, you understand?”

“I’m hip,” I said.

“Don’t let any of ‘em catch you with it. And don’t smoke it all yourself, neither.”


“Good.” King said and grinned. The wrinkles in his handsome face sank in and made it look like a skull.

“You were the one I wanted, kid, you know that? I just didn’t know your name.”

That made me feel good, but at the same time I got a funny feeling in the stomach. Like when I’ve had some corn chips and a cherry soda and Mom puts a big platter on the table and I can’t eat.

King was waving at people and honking his horn. Everybody stopped what they were doing and waved back. King’s the biggest man in town. Everybody wants to know him. And there I was, riding right beside him.

Then we turned sharp into McCarter, and there on the corner was Junior. Thinner than when I saw him last, and with dark smudges under his eyes. But he was home.

“I got to get out now, King,” I said. “That’s my brother over there.” Junior looked up and saw me.

“Jody!” he cried and took a step toward me. I had meant to shake hands, the way men do, but instead I flew at him and we hugged right there on the street. My head used to just hit the middle of his chest, but now it touched his chin. We stepped back, kind of embarrassed, and shook hands like I had meant to do in the first place.

“Boy,” he said, “you must’ve grown a foot. Keep it up, you be tall as me.” And he laughed and rubbed my head. But his eyes were all squinched up like he was trying to keep tears back. I didn’t like to see him looking like that, so I started talking fast.

“Did they treat you all right at the House, Junior? I bet you made ‘em respect you. I bet they knew you weren’t no one to mess with. Didn’t they, Junior?”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” he said. “What were you doing in that car?”

The big Hog with the special-made front license plate, KING, was still parked at the corner. “Tell you later,” I said, though I was busting to tell him then. “I want to hear how you made out in the slammer.”

“Let’s get home,” he said. But before we could, Duke and Leroy and Josh, and Marquis came running up. They surrounded us and pelted Junior with questions.

“Did they give you a TV, man?”

“How was the food? Good?”

“Who’d you meet in there? Any of the big cats?”

“Yeah, I bet you got connections now. I bet you ready for the big time.”

Them guys. Sometimes I wish they would leave a guy alone. But they my boys, and they was as excited to see him as I was. Junior just kept steady walkin’, his mouth set in a tight line, saying nothing to the guys unt later,” I said, though I was busting to tell him then. “I want to hear how you made out in the slammer.”

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Junior stood and stared at the sign for a minute. Then he stepped over the kids that are always hanging around out front and yanked the sign down. He ripped it up, you be tall as me.” And he laughed and rubbed my head. But his eyes were all squinched up like he was trying to keep tears back. I didn’t like to see him looking like that, so I started talking fast.

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“Who’d you meet in there? Any of the big cats?”

“Yeah, I bet you got connections now. I bet you ready for the big time.”

Them guys. Sometimes I wish they would leave a guy alone. But they my boys, and they was as excited to see him as I was. Junior just kept steady walkin’, his mouth set in a tight line, saying nothing to the guys until they gave up and fell back. We got to our building. And there over the door was a big cardboard sign Mom had lettered in crayon: WELCOME HOME SON. Just like they do for the heroes that come back from Vietnam.
“I spoke to you, didn’t I?” he said. “Which door is it?”

Our building has so many apartments in it I lost count. Still, it was kind of a shock that Junior didn’t remember his own apartment door. Made me realize how long he’d been away. And how far, even though you can reach the House by the number 14 bus.

“One more flight up,” I told him. When we got there I didn’t have to give him any more directions.

Mom was standing in the door with her arms held out in welcome. Junior tried to push past her and get inside, but she had to give him a hug and have her a cry right there. People from the other apartments were watching. I was embarrassed, so I pushed between Mom and Junior and got through the door. That separated them.

Mom stepped back into the apartment. Junior followed her and shut the door real quick behind him. He locked all the locks, the bolt and the chain lock and the police lock that goes right down into the floor. Like he didn’t want to ever let anybody in again.

“Lord, child, let me look at you,” Mom said when she had dried her eyes on her apron. “Looks like you didn’t hardly get enough to eat in that place.” That bothered me some, to tell you the truth. It wasn’t at all like what Leroy and them had been saying. But maybe it was just that Junior had lost all his baby fat and was getting lean. He stood there in the middle of the floor like he hadn’t really come to stay and was planning to leave any second. It kept Mom from fussing over him anymore. She started fussing over the stove instead, measuring rice and stirring the chicken and okra. Man! It sure smelled delicious. Suddenly I was real hungry.

“Stewed chicken and okra tonight, honey,” she said to Junior. “Your favorite supper. And later I got some people coming in who want to see my son.”

“I don’t want to see any people,” Junior said. “I’m kind of tired. I’m going to take me a little rest.” And without another word he went into our room and shut the door.

“Anything you say, son,” Mom said. But he didn’t hear her. He had already slammed the bedroom door. Pretty soon she started crying again. I couldn’t stand that, so I took a beer out of the ice box and went to the room and knocked.

“Is that you, Jody?”

“Yes.”

“Come in.”

“I thought you might like a beer,” I said, shutting the door behind me.

“Thanks,” he said and took it. He didn’t say any more, just lay on his back on his bed, staring at the ceiling. I sat on the edge of my bed and watched him for a while. The room was getting tenser by the minute.

“Planning a job, huh?” I finally said.

“I can’t get a job. I’ve got a record.”

“I mean a big-time job,” I said. “Like you pulled of at Kravitz’s, only bigger.”

He rolled over and looked at me for the first time.

“You think I’m a hero, don’t you?” he said. “A big-shot crook. Like in the movies.”

“Sure, Junior,” I said eagerly. “All the guys do. They expect you to do great things. You got the connections and the smarts now. You must know a lot more than when you went in the House. You was only seventeen then. Now you’re a man.”

“Yeah, I’m a man,” Junior said disgustedly, “and ain’t a thing in this town I can do. Nobody’s going to hire a jailbird.”

“It’s all right,” I said. “I can take care of us for a while, till you get yourself together.”

I pulled out the five and showed it to him.

He was up on his feet, standing over me. “Where’d you get that?”

Something in his manner scared me, but I went on.

“King gave it to me. And I’m going to make a lot more. Selling this. ” I pulled the plastic bag out of my pocket.

“It’s –”

“I know what it is,” Junior said and took off his belt.

“Go flush it down the toilet.”

“But, Junior – ” He gave me a whack with the back of his hand. It caught me by surprise and sent me sprawling on the floor.

“Flush it, I said. And come right back here when you finished.”

I trembled, ’cause I knew what was coming. He had the belt in his hand, folded over double. My face was stinging from the whack, and I was beginning to cry, more from surprise than anything else. But on my way to the bathroom and back I didn’t let Mom see me.

Junior was waiting for me when I got back. “So you want to go to jail, huh? All right, I’ll show you what jail is like.”

He locked the door from the inside and gave me the worst whipping I ever had in my life. The only one, in
fact. Pop left home before I was born, and Mom was always too kindhearted to beat us. She had heard me yelling and was at the door, banging on it to be let in.

“Junior, what’s going on in there? What you doing to my baby?”

“Saving him, that’s what,” Junior yelled back through the door. “If he ain’t already ruined.”

He didn’t open the door, either. He went right on whipping me. When he was through, he said, “You going to stay away from that slick hustler, huh? You going to stay off that corner and leave those pint-size hoods alone?”

I didn’t answer, I was so mad.

“All right. You got a week to think about it.” He shut the door behind him and locked me in.

“What you doing to my baby?” Mom cried again.

Junior said, “He wants to go to jail. So let him try it for a few days. Let him live on bread and water and stay in solitary and get knocked around every time he opens his mouth.”

Mom let out a wail that sounded like a police siren, but it didn’t change Junior’s mind. He brought me bread and water for supper and took out the mattresses so he could sleep on them in the front room. I would sleep on the box springs and get a taste of what a prison bed was like.

He explained it all to me patiently, like he wasn’t angry anymore. “The small-time crooks, they get to talk to each other. But the real big-time criminals like you get solitary. And if they real bad actors, the guards take the springs out of the cell too. Then they sleep on the floor. I’m your guard. And if you a bad actor, I get to knock you around. Understand?”

But that was all he would say. Once or twice he knocked me around a little, just to show me it wasn’t a game. The rest of the time, he didn’t say or do nothing. Just brought me the bread and water and took me to the bathroom. I got so lonesome in there I wished he would come in, even to beat me. The old bedsprings struck me no matter which way I turned, so I lay on the floor, thinking about stewed chicken and okra and having cramps in my belly. All I had to listen to was their arguments.

“You gonna kill him,” Mom said.

“No,” Junior told her. “He might get killed in jail. That happens to lots of guys. But this way he’s gonna live.”

“He’s only a baby,” she wailed.

“He’s big enough to get in big trouble. I got home just in time.”

The first night wasn’t so bad. I expected Mom to come to my rescue any minute. But he wouldn’t let her. In the morning I heard her going off to work. They would fire her if she took off two days in a row, so she had to go. The second and third days, I lay there trying to remember boss things I’d done with the guys, like chasing girls in the park and stealing fruit and sneaking rides on the back of trucks. But pretty soon those things bored me too. On the fourth day, I got some of my school books down from the closet and began reading. I even got interested in history.

Junior came in while I was lying on my stomach with the book open on the floor in front of me. For a scary moment I thought he was going to take it away. But he just looked at me. And then he smiled.

“Gonna be a big-time criminal like me?”

“No.”

“Gonna drop out of school like I did?”

“No.” I paused and thought very carefully, then surprised myself by what I thought. “I think I might go to that tutoring place at Mom’s church and make up math. I think I could pass it this time.”

“What I think,” Junior said, “is you’re ready to come out now. I’m gonna parole you. But you got to watch your step, you hear? No associating with known criminal. No messing up. A single slip, and back you go.”

Then he fixed me a big breakfast. He explained that since we didn’t have a father anymore, he had to be the man of the house. It made him feel good, he said, knowing at least part of what he had to do.

Then he let me go out on the street.

It looked different, like a place I hadn’t seen in years and years. With all the slick people and crooks and hustlers, it looked like a place where I didn’t want to stay very long.

“Hey, man,” Leroy hollered at me, “where you been?”

I was still weak and wobbly in spite of the breakfast. But I felt stronger and older than Leroy and the others. I knew things they still had to learn. One thing I knew was if I ever made it off that corner, I would have to make it alone.

“I been,” I said, “in jail.”

Then I left them and went on my way, knowing where I was going and walking like a man.
You have, no doubt, heard of The Hero's Journey. In this article, we will explore the lesser-known ANTI-hero's journey and the uncharted dark side of the passage -- the place where the dark forces live and hatch their nefarious schemes. In real life, it's people like Hitler, Jack the Ripper and Saddam Hussein who personify these dark forces. In story, it's great villains like Voldemort, Hannibal Lecter, and Darth Vader that embody the dark side.

Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones, Jodie Foster in “The Silence of the Lambs” and Sigourney Weaver in “Alien” are heroes. Their actions are motivated and influenced by a higher nature. Macbeth, Scarlett O'Hara and Michael Douglas in “Wall Street” are anti-heroes. Their actions are motivated by a lower, primordial nature.

The higher nature links the hero to the creative energies that seek to overcome negative states and reach higher states of being. It inspires him/her to seize the day, to be creative and virtuous, courageous and just. It is a source of great power, and it motivates the hero to make sacrifices and to do great things.

The lower nature links the anti-hero to the physical, animal side of his nature. It is an earthbound self that pursues earthly things. Hidden in the matrix of its seductive energies is the id -- the source of our most basic instincts, appetites and drives, the ones that control hunger and aggression. They compete with the higher nature for influence over the hero and the anti-hero, and they are the principal resisters of all positive change.

The hallmark of heroes is personal sacrifice. They personify the positive unselfish side of the ego, and their journey reveals the upside of the passage. The m.o. of antiheroes is the antisocial act. They personify the negative selfish side of the ego, the side that has given the word “ego” a bad name, and their journey reveals the dark or downside of the cycle.

Villains become anti-heroes when the story is about them; when we see the process they undergo to become villains. That's the only difference. They are both motivated by the same lower-self impulses. Darth Vadar is a villain in part IV of “Star Wars,” and is the central character and an anti-hero in Part III, when he is being drawn into the dark side.

On the upside of the passage, the hero resists temptation and goes up the ladder.

On the downside, the anti-hero gives in to temptation and goes down the ladder.

Whereas the hero represents that part of us that recognizes problems and accepts responsibility, the anti-hero is the will to power and insatiable greed, the materialistic, power hungry, tyrannical side of our natures; the side that wants to possess everything it desires, without limit, and control everything it needs. In real life, this is Hitler, Stalin and Mao Tse-tung. In story, it is Little Caesar, Michael Corleone and Commodus in “Gladiator.”

The stages on the upside of the passage are: separation, initiation, integration and rebirth. The actions of the heroes in stories like “Schindler's List,” “Armageddon,” “Braveheart,” “The Fugitive” and “Mulan” help to illuminate these steps.

The stages on the downside are: attachment, regression, alienation and death. The anti-heroes in such stories as “Oedipus,” “Faust,” “Dracula,” “Gone with the Wind,” “Citizen Kane,” “Jurassic Park,” “Ocean's Eleven,” and “The Score” help to outline this side of the path.

Stories focused on the upside focus on the character of the hero and revolve around getting the hero to join or return to the fight. These stories are about the transformation of the hero's character and show the hero being brought back to a heroic frame of mind and returning to the fight.
Stories focused on the downside focus on the corruption rather than the rehabilitation of some anti-hero. *Othello, Macbeth*, and *The Godfather* are all focused on the downside. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is all about Satan's efforts to corrupt Adam and Eve. *Macbeth*, which begins on the upside after the climactic battle, is focused on the downside and is all about Macbeth's corruption and guilt. *Othello* is focused on jealousy and is all about the destruction of the Moor by his servant, Iago.

The goal of the hero is to liberate an entity like a family, a country or a galaxy from the tyranny and corruption that caused a state of misfortune and to create a new unified whole. The goal of the anti-hero is to take possession of an entity and redirect it toward goals that fulfill its own desires and needs, which is to accumulate, control and enjoy everything it needs to satisfy its insatiable cravings for sense objects, security, wealth and territory. In modern terms, we're talking about money, sex, and power. Psychologically, these are the appetites and desires of the lower self taking possession of the conscious self and redirecting its goals.

After the hero completes the upside of the passage, he may, like Adam and Eve, King David or Robert DeNiro in “Raging Bull,” be transformed into a new anti-hero and be drawn into the downside. When this happens, new dark forces are awakened, and the hero's progress is reversed. And where there was initiation, there is now regression; where there was integration, there is now alienation; where there was strength, there is now weakness; where there was love, there is now lust; where there was unity, there is now polarity; where there was a super hero, there is now a tyrant; and where the hero's humanity was being awakened, the antihero's humanity is being shut down. His generosity has become uncontrolled greed; his compassion has become hatred and loathing. Where there was a paradise, there is now a living hell.

Sometimes the cycles are continuous. In the “Star Wars” saga, Darth Vadar starts out on the upside as a Jedi, a young hero aligned with the Force, but then he defects to the Dark Side, becomes an anti-hero and helps bring about the state of tyranny. Later, with the dawning of a new upside, a new hero, Luke Skywalker, guided by the Force, emerges to oppose him. These alternating change-of-fortune cycles are the engines that drive this whole process.

You can tell which side of the cycle your main character is on by who is initiating the action. On the downside, evil is aggressive, and good is on the defensive. On the upside, it's the reverse -- good is aggressive and evil is on the defensive. Stories that end on the upside end happily. Stories that end on the downside invariably end tragically. The demise of the anti-hero is more often than not connected to his overreach, his uncontrolled passions. The misery the anti-hero creates finally becomes unbearable, and he/she has to be destroyed. A new hero with a vision has to take up the cause and go after them.

In truth, we owe a great debt to fictional villains and antiheroes. They create the problems the heroes have to solve and that creates the need for a story that reveals the inner workings of the dark side of our selves. Without Darth Vadar and the Evil Emperor, there would be no Evil Empire, and there would be no need to save the galaxy. Without Hannibal Lecter and Buffalo Bill, there would be no problem for Clarice and the FBI to solve. And without those problems, there would be no revelations concerning the basic struggle between good and evil, and nothing to report in story. Without the actions of these negative forces, there would be very few stories to tell, and the forces that motivated Hitler and Jack the Ripper would remain forever a mystery to us. Coming to terms with the dark side in story helps us to come to terms with the dark side in ourselves.

James Bonnet was elected twice to the Board of Directors of the Writer's Guild of America and has written or acted in more than 40 television shows and features. The radical new ideas about story in his book 'Stealing Fire from the Gods: A Dynamic New Story Model For Writers And Filmmakers' are having a major impact on writers in all media.