

# PLUTO



## THE POWER OF SHAPE-SHIFTING

*For a peaceful meditation, we need not to go to the  
mountains and streams;  
When thoughts are quieted down, fire itself is cool and  
refreshing.*

ABBOTT KWAISEN

April 1582, as he was about to be burned alive  
by the soldiers of Oda Nobunaga<sup>2</sup>

Pluto burns away the conditioned voice of family and society that limits our vision of what is possible for us and for the world. We are all so hypnotized by this voice that we initially experience its absence as a void and a cause for grief. The requiem we sing, however, is for the part of ourselves that needed to be released. “My last chance at normalcy has died,” the conditioned self laments. But the grace is that we did not sign up for sociological, statistical normalcy—we signed up to be fully alive. The opening line of a poem by Romanian poet Nina Cass says, “I promise to make you more alive than you’ve ever been.” The poem’s title, “Ordeal,” is both a promise and a threat.

PLANET: PLUTO

SIGN: SCORPIO

Glyph: ♀

**Key words and qualities:** Death; rebirth; transformation. The alchemy of desire. All initiations of descent into the Underworld. All things that are unseen: death, sex, spirits, ancestors. All that was sacred in the ancient world and that has become taboo in the modern.

**Color:** Intense blue-green

**Metal:** Plutonium

**Physical body affinity:** Sexual organs

**Day:** Every day that the ground opens up before us as we are strolling through a field.

**Way of honoring:** Being brought to our knees. Saying to the invisible, "Not my will, but thine." Releasing control. Feeling comfortable with not knowing, like Zen students after twenty years of practice. Remembering that anyone who was anyone in the ancient, mythological world had to make an initiatory descent to the Underworld. Restoring to sacredness that which was sacred and has now become taboo.

**Shadow, when not honored:** Exploring the taboo, but forgetting to restore it to sacredness. Forgetting that mere intensity does not necessarily make something or someone interesting. Obsession.

We draw Pluto's glyph as the circle of spirit being cooked in the crucible or transformed in the grail. Once, when I was describing the nature of Pluto transits to a client who was in the midst of one, she said, "Ah, like the chickpea!" Chickpea? "Rumi's poem," she explained. A few days later it arrived in the mail.

*A chickpea leaps almost over the rim of the pot where it's being boiled.*

*"Why are you doing this to me?"*

*The cook knocks him down with the ladle.*

*"Don't you try to jump out.  
You think I'm torturing you,  
I'm giving you flavor,  
so you can mix with spices and rice  
and be the lovely vitality of a human being.*

*Remember when you drank rain in the garden.*

*That was for this."*

*Grace first. Sexual pleasure,  
then a boiling new life begins,  
and the Friend has something good to eat.*

*Eventually the chickpea*

*will say to the cook,*

*"Boil me some more.*

*Hit me with the skimming spoon.*

*I can't do this by myself.*

*I'm like an elephant that dreams of gardens  
back in Hindustan and doesn't pay attention  
to his driver. You're my cook, my driver,  
my way into existence. I love your cooking."*

*The cook says,  
"I was once like you,  
fresh from the ground. Then I boiled in time,  
and boiled in the body, two fierce boilings.*

*My animal soul grew powerful.  
I controlled it with practices,  
And boiled some more, and boiled  
Once beyond that,  
and became your teacher."<sup>3</sup>*

Pluto transits knock us back down into the pot. We feel as if we are being tortured, but in fact we are being flavored with spices to become more vital. The initial encounter with Pluto's overwhelming intensity is often suffused with erotic pleasure; the boiling begins so that God, the divine part of us, has something good to eat.

Pluto works in three phases. Phase one is disruption of the outer world, which catalyzes descent into the Underworld. Phase two is not-knowing, the state that Zen students sit twenty years to attain. Phase three is the surge of authenticity that occurs as the soul rededicates itself to its remembered mission. One's original self rises to the surface as an answer to the Zen koan, "What is your face before you were born?" Although the three phases tend to overlap, the predominant movement will be from disruption-descent to not-knowing to authentic rebirth. The more we cooperate with the process, the faster we move through the sequence.

If you are boarding a train that is pulling out of the station, you can hold on to the platform if you want, but you won't stop the train from leaving. Your experience of the journey will be greatly enhanced if you let go of the station platform, turn around in your seat, and enjoy the ride. Pluto reminds me of a time when my sister and I rented a car in Ireland and the sticker on the inside said, "To better enjoy your vacation in Ireland, please drive on the left."

## THE INITIATORY DESCENT

A colleague likens the first phase of Plutonic initiation to a ramjet, the simplest of jet engines, which gathers force from what it expels. Pluto eats and destroys the familiar and the ordinary. You are nonchalantly living your life when suddenly the ceiling crashes down, the walls cave in, and the floor gives way. You are in free fall. (Remember to dive!) The ground opens up before you and a hand reaches up and tugs you down. Pluto is the ruthless Zen master part of us that says, "Whatever you think you need for a secure sense of identity, let's take it away."

A client related the following story about his own Pluto transit. Attempting to cooperate with Pluto by editing his closet—"keep this, throw this out, this is me, this is no longer me"—he was interrupted in his labors by a call about a death in the family. On his way out the door to the funeral, he decided to take all of his fall and winter clothes to the dry cleaner's: twenty-three shirts, seven pairs of pants, three sweaters, a tuxedo, and a blazer. Upon returning from the funeral he drove by the dry cleaner's and noticed that it had burned down. Pluto had apparently not found his "self-editing" sufficiently rigorous and had taken him, literally, to the cleaners.

Pluto says, "The order you are clinging to is inhibiting your life. You may think you need it, but in fact, letting go will give you more life." Are there certain habits, relationships, or material objects you've always believed to be obligatory, that you've held on to without question? Do they serve or inhibit full expression?

Pluto looks up at us mortals as we trudge along, trying to pretend everything's okay when chaos swirls around us, and says, "How poignant. Let's crank it up." People with a high pain threshold or with a particularly strong investment in a prestigious "career" or high-upkeep lifestyle do not do well with Pluto transits, because in attempting to maintain normalcy, they resist pressure. This just invites greater pressure—Pluto citing them for failure to cooperate.

In Pluto's realm, there is no safety in the fiction of a fixed identity we create out of external stage props: career, clothes, house, even mate. When these seemingly dependable resources come tumbling down around us—as at some point they invariably do—the experience can be harrowing. When the worst of it is over, the emerging psyche realizes, “I thought I needed those things, but even though I lost them, I survived. I will never again be snookered into complacency by fearing loss, because what I most feared has already happened.”

Because our culture overvalues this illusion of a fixed sense of identity, it offers little useful advice on dancing with the god of disruption. From the time we reach adulthood, we're expected to have a snappy sense of self, usually based on a grown-up career: “This is what I do, therefore this is who I am.” But psychic reality says that periods of bleakness, introversion, and self-doubt are crucial to growth. Saturn-Gurdjieff's theory of the levels of consciousness reminds us that often descent is a form of ascent. A creative society would reverence and honor the descent into not knowing.

The dark side of class culture says, “Everyone stays where they're born. You have a chair, you sit in it. You may not like it, but it's your chair.” However, when Pluto pipes the music, we feel as if we are in a game of musical chairs and our chair has just been taken away. We're orbiting outside the system; we don't belong anymore.

In ancient Greece, when you left the confines of your safe, cozy community, there were signs posted that said, if you go beyond this sign then you are *sacer*—you are on your own, without the protection of the community. *Sacred*, which derives from the word *sacer*, subsequently came to mean autonomous journeying beyond conventional boundaries. To journey into the sacred is a solo act of defiance.

To find your own authentic path, you must leave the coziness of the “known” that Pluto has disrupted and head out beyond the *sacer* signs. Stepping out into the wilderness is terrifying—evolution is

high-stress. Pluto transits can be misdiagnosed as breakdowns. But there are others who have done this, there are maps and guidelines. Astrology is one; mythology is another.

Anyone who was anyone in the ancient mythological world had to do a tour of duty in the Underworld. Inanna is the Sumerian queen of heaven who tricked her father into giving her the Tablets of Destiny, which contained the arts of astrology and other systems of divine navigation. Out of compassion, she gave them to humanity. ("Take two tablets, and call me after the millennium.")

Some versions of her story say that, compelled by her own intrepid curiosity, she decided to descend from the sky to the Underworld. Other versions say that she was tricked by an invitation from Eriskegal, Queen of the Underworld. Either way, before leaving she tells her friends that if she does not return within sixty days, they should first mourn her, then come rescue her.

As Inanna descends, at each of the seven gates of the Underworld she is stripped of one of her attributes: her crown, her jewelry, her robes, her pride, her self-esteem—everything but her sense of humor. Finally she stands naked before Eriskegal, who fixes her with a stone-cold stare. Under this frigid gaze, all life leaves Inanna's body and she is hung as a corpse in the land of the dead.

Sixty days pass. In the above-world, all of creation goes into mourning except for Inanna's consort, Dumuzi, the god of vegetation, who really whoops it up. Her concerned friends and father descend and negotiate a hostage release with Eriskegal. They finally broker a deal in which Inanna can return to the upper world as long as she sends down a replacement. Inanna says, "HMMMM . . . I wonder who that will be? How about my charming husband who didn't shed a tear for me?"

Dumuzi the vegetative god had become a vegetable, a party vegetable, a veritable couch potato in need of an initiatory descent. So he is sent down as her replacement. In turn, Inanna negotiates his release for half the year, during which time the desert blooms.

In a similar tale from Greek mythology, Persephone descends to the Plutonian Underworld a young girl but ascends a queen and a woman. The most well-known version of her myth has her abducted by Pluto as she wanders through a field of flowers, pausing to gaze at a narcissus. But this is a later creation. In the former tale, her descent is catalyzed not by a criminal act of kidnapping by a male god but by a conscious decision to unite with her potent Underworld self. Indeed, in even earlier versions of the myth, Persephone is known as Proserpina, Queen of the Underworld, the great snake goddess, and one of her identities is Pluto.

After Persephone's initial descent, Demeter, her mother, wanders the world stricken by the grief of losing her daughter to the Underworld. She disguises herself as a wet nurse and goes to live in a mortal household. Each night she takes the babe entrusted to her care and dips him into fire to make him immortal. One night the child's mother spies her doing this and flips out, whereupon Demeter reveals herself as a goddess. "You silly woman," she rails at the quaking woman before her. "One more session and your child would have been immortal!" And she leaves in a huff.

Baptism by fire is a classically Plutonic initiatory rite of purification whereby all that is temporal and conditioned is burnt away. Just as we are all the characters in our dreams, in myth we are all the players. We are the concerned mom, the baby, and the goddess. We can all recall times when the protective, rational, consensus mind part of ourselves showed up and was horrified to catch the divine part of us up to some wild shenanigans. A moment's doubt and we plummeted down to the realm where three thousand laws were limiting our creativity, causing us to balk one session shy of immortality.

When Pluto is our travel agent, our ticket to heaven includes a stopover in hell. And because the journey is arduous, we don't usually book in advance. Mark Twain reminds us that a real journey is one where, "halfway through, you wish you were home." Only by

diving into unfamiliar depths can we tap inner resources that are connected to a larger Will. We glean Pluto's wisdom from those experiences for which we would never in our right minds volunteer.

Whenever we say, "I am willing to experience anything, but not that," Pluto responds, "Thanks for the tip—you've just made my job so much easier. Here's that!"

"Okay, okay," we plead. "I'm willing to experience anything, but not more of that." To which Pluto responds, "Great, here's more of that."

"All right," we moan. "Now I am truly willing to experience anything." We acquiesce.

### THE WISDOM OF NOT-KNOWING

Wherever we are resistant to life, the encounter with Pluto provides the opportunity to become more open. When truly tragic events befall us, we initially feel that we will never experience anything as strongly. One of Pluto's gifts is that the very opposite becomes true. This god tears open our hearts, and once our hearts have been broken, we actually experience *everything* more deeply. At a certain keening intensity, there is no hierarchy of pain. We are granted empathic kinship with all creatures who have suffered profound loss.

Pluto brings us to our knees, forcing us to surrender to full feeling. Jung said that we gain access to Big Mystery through the "inferior function," those areas that are not conscious or richly cultivated. In our mainstream modern culture the least cultivated area would be the feeling function. Through feeling we are all mixed up with original chaos.

We are often intimidated when we encounter people who have undergone breathtaking tragedy. This arises partly out of superstitious fear of tragic contagion, but mostly because we lack Plutonian etiquette. Once we have been to the Underworld, the pain of others no longer separates us from them. Fear is transformed into a feeling

of poignancy, which is the heart's recognition of kinship. We have earned the right to enter the sphere of another's grief. "Hi, I see that your passport is also stamped with a visa to the Underworld."

#### THE ART OF GRIEF

In seeking his lost Eurydice, Orpheus was granted safe passage through the Underworld because of the artful magic of his music. His devotion to his music had already stripped him of superfluous pretensions, so the Underworld had very little to munch on.

Art provides a round-trip ticket to the Underworld. A few years ago I visited an artist friend's house after the death of his baby daughter. The house was blooming with grief—altars, drawings, and paintings honoring her were everywhere. He said that only in this way could he journey in the Underworld of his grief without dying himself. I remembered my own journey nine months earlier, when I also had a baby who died. The abyss had opened up before me, and I could feel the wind between the worlds. Crazy with grief, I felt that I too would die, from reckless inattention and despair, until I began honoring that child through writing and altars.

The Japanese have a custom of honoring not only children who have died, but also those unborn children who have been aborted. The whole family gathers at a shrine to the child and offers it songs, paintings, poems, and loving prayers reverencing their acknowledged grief. "Not bringing you into the world was the most loving act we could perform now. We bless you with our art and wish you well."

The Mexican Day of the Dead is one culture's fabulous collective ritual of artfully celebrating death and the Underworld. Witty skeleton figures are crafted out of every conceivable material, and picnics are held on the graves of loved ones. The Day of the Dead falls on November 1, halfway through Pluto's sign of Scorpio. It reminds us that one of the true functions of Halloween and All

Souls' Day is to simultaneously honor the dead and gather the force to keep on living.

The Underworld has its own code of etiquette. (Don't eat anything when you're there; don't look back; don't litter or loiter.) You can go there seeking loved ones as long as you do not set up house-keeping in the land of the dead. The dead can live through us by our artful invitation for them to do so, but we are instructed not to live through them. Every transformation brings about death, and we must struggle not to become bitter. Art grants us safe passage by transforming grief into a rededication to life and a more deeply loving heart.

When I was in Cape Town, South Africa, my friend and guide, Ishmael, strongly urged me to visit Robbin Island, the prison where Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years. He said that even though so much suffering had taken place there, it was a place of enormous spiritual power. "You'll feel the great art of spiritual self-cultivation that allowed them to survive. They became magicians."

While I was there, I saw the tiny cell where Nelson Mandela spent those twenty-seven years, and the vine in the prison yard under which he hid the completed manuscript of his book. The manuscript was discovered and destroyed, and Mandela was punished for having "abused his study privileges" by being denied books, pen, and paper for the next two and a half years. After that time, undaunted, he secretly wrote the book again, and this time it was successfully smuggled out. The devotional art of writing (and rewriting) his book granted him safe passage through his long Underworld journey and allowed the miracle of his emergence: not bitter, but loving and tolerant.

When I returned from my tour, Ishmael queried me. "Did you feel it? I can see it in your face. What did you feel?" I replied that it would take a long time for the experience to percolate down into understanding. During the boat ride, I had tried to imagine what it

might have felt like to have journeyed to that bleak, cold, windswept island with a life sentence hanging over my head. "But you know," said Ishmael, "when Mandela was on the boat to Robbin Island with his comrades, they all sang. They sang as though it were nothing."

#### SHAPE-SHIFTING AND THE ART OF HAVING A MISSION

From earliest childhood, many of us feel that we have a mission. We may not always be clear as to what that mission is, but the feeling that we have one is a constant companion. The degree to which Pluto is conscious in our lives or in our charts corresponds to the strength of that force or feeling.

The mission of the Pluto god within all of us is to be used for the greater good. George Bernard Shaw writes, "This is the true joy in life. The being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one. The being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap. The being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

Our mission says, "Whatever I'm doing in the world, whatever my profession, that is my cover. I'm really an undercover agent for Pluto, for transformation of my own life, the lives of other people, and of the larger social world."

The undercover self is the shape-shifting part of us that assumes whatever guises are necessary to best serve our mission. Pluto's initiation causes us to remember our assignment and the unimportant, temporal nature of identity. Outer identity is a fiction that we can shed or change when it is no longer useful. The Pluto encounter allows us to rededicate ourselves to all creation, and that rededication leads us to stage three: the ascent out of the Underworld.

#### ACQUIESCENCE CATALYZES THE ASCENT

When the darkness grows denser, I would penetrate to its very core and ground, and would not rest until amid the pain

a light appeared to me, for in "excessu affectus" Nature reverses herself. I would turn in rage against myself and with the heat of my rage I would melt my lead. I would renounce everything and engage in the lowest activities should my depression drive me to violence. I would wrestle with the dark angel until he dislocated my hip. For he is also the light and the blue sky which he withholds from me.

Anyway that is what I would do. What others do is another question, which I cannot answer. But for you too there is an instinct either to back out of it or to go down to the depths. But no half-measures or halfheartedness.

With Cordial Wishes,  
As Ever, C. G. Jung<sup>4</sup>

After disruption and not-knowing, acquiescence ushers in the third stage of Pluto's initiation, during which you begin to journey back up from the Underworld. Of course, the ascent takes much longer than the rapid plummet down. In acquiescing, we learn to say to Pluto, "Whatever best serves the divine, let it work through me."

This last stage often occurs right after the transit is technically over, when Pluto has moved off a sensitive part of the chart, when the Sturm und Drang have been calmed by surrender. Outer chaos has catalyzed inner calm. The intensity of shamanism has given birth to the compassionate detachment of Buddhism.

Only the experience of having been intensely cooked develops the wry humor, worldly perspective, and witty compassion needed to keep enjoying life's pleasures even when surrounded by incomprehensible pain. Take Beirut, for instance, where people ran five-star restaurants in the midst of ruins; or a photograph taken during World War II that depicts a couple dancing beautifully, sur-

rounded by rubble. The caption underneath says, "In spite of everything—Yes!"

The Plutonian near-death experience kills our ambivalence to life. Pluto says, "If you want to get out, leave now. If you stay, admit that you love life with no halfheartedness." We have to abandon the luxury of nonchalance expressed in the bored teenage bravado, "I don't care whether I live or die." Pluto says, "Care now, or forever rest in peace."

Pluto both bestows and teaches the power of shape-shifting. Energy takes and discards forms as the cycles of death and rebirth play out. Buddhists call what is underneath this roiling phantasmagoria *sunyata*, emptiness. Pluto resides in the creative void, the fountain of antimatter, the black hole. Matter is so compressed in a black hole that it becomes unpredictable, no longer following the laws of physics that govern the rest of the universe. Indeed, science itself seems to be undergoing a Pluto transit, no longer leading us to reassuring certainty, but back to mystery.

Hindus have venerated this mysterious force in the form of the black goddess Kali-Ma, the great mother, lover, and devourer. She consumes all the foibles of the egotistical, small-willed self: pride, selfishness, and any sense of being "important" or "special." Self-importance is a trick of the Reality Police to render ineffective, isolated, and possibly harmful those who are on the brink of giving a useful gift to the world. People so afflicted separate themselves from the team, rather than contributing to the general good.

Pluto/Kali has an affinity for both the intensity of shamanism and the detachment of Buddhism, the void and the whole big show. Shape-shifting is the Pluto/Kali dancer's art—stepping in and out of form.

The question Pluto perpetually poses within us is, "Out of all of life's shimmering possibilities, why have I chosen to be this particular way?" If you deem some manifestation—your private self or

your public self—to be less than wonderful, throw it back into Pluto's cauldron and try out another.

When the inappropriate forms with which the soul was previously identified are annihilated, a tremendous amount of energy is made available that we can then use to consciously choose our next, more creative manifestation. We throw the old identity back into Pluto's crucible, then enlist the genius of Uranus/Neptune—the infinitely rich inventive imagination—to give it fresh incarnational garb.

For instance, “perkiness” is a portable prison supplied by the Reality Police, usually to women, who insist on affirming that “Everything is just great,” when in fact it is not. After perkiness has been consumed (the bad marriage has collapsed; you've been downsized from the job you secretly hated), there is a surge of energy. Honest misery is far more energizing than perky dishonesty born of defending something that wants to die.

In any powerful encounter with a Change God, forget about protesting that “everything is just great, nothing needs changing.” Whenever I hear people say, “I've completely dealt with my shadow now,” my impulse is to quote Groucho Marx's song, “Hello, I must be going,” because I know that the ground is about to open and a hand reach up and snatch them into the yawning chasm.

### EATEN BY SHADOW: REDEFINING POWER

Pluto's function is to destroy small will, allowing us to align with larger Will. When we state our intentions and desires, we must always accompany them with the prayerful proviso, “Whatever is best for all creatures in all realms—*thy* Will be done.” This is the only form of magic acceptable to Pluto. Lesser magic, black magic, is always “my will” juju. It takes forms such as “I want this boy.” Salesman–Wall Street–Hinayana honky magic says, “I want it, I get it.” In addition, degraded shamanism's petty turf wars have no con-

sideration for the larger good. Pluto annihilates small intrigue to free up our energy for the larger Intrigue of Conscious Evolution.

Because Pluto's teaching requires that we willingly give up control, it is a challenging transit for powerful people. The descent is always about the disruption of dominance and the redefinition of power. "Pay proper reverence to the gods and the Buddha," said the Zen sage Shingen. "When your thoughts are in accord with the Buddha's, you will gain more power. If your domination over others issues from your evil thoughts, you will be exposed, you are doomed."<sup>5</sup>

When we enter the Underworld through a Pluto transit, any tendency we have to abuse power is simmered away, distilling an entirely new definition of power. Power no longer means "power over" but rather "power to transform." Perceiving the latter grants us an expanded understanding of both power's source and its availability: power does not flow from us, but through us. "Relax, the *ch'i* is unlimited," says the *ch'i gong* master.

When we are frightened and do not know what is going on, the ego's strategy is often to say, "The only way I'll feel secure is if I'm running things." Fear justifies itself by pretending that no one else is competent. The Pluto encounter forcefully reminds us to let go, that there is a larger control zone in the universe. We have no choice but to trust that it exists.

Scientists were experimenting with monkeys, as is their habit. *The New York Times* reported that their subjects were an alpha male-dominant breed. When the scientists introduced new dominant males into the tribe, the monkeys jockeyed for hierarchical dominance until, at a critical juncture, half of the monkeys basically became Jamaican. "Hey mon, who cares? We're outta this. We're gonna go over here and have a life." The other half of the monkeys (who insisted on still being aggressive and vying with each other for the dominant role) died. They either succumbed to autoimmune diseases and cancer or they killed each other.

Dominance is an evolutionary dead end. It will kill us. We must die to it if we are not to die of it. Pluto transits are about giving up dominance. In contrast to the unhappy monkeys above, the bonobo, a cousin of the chimpanzee, has recently been shown to have developed co-dominance between the sexes, even on matters of food and sexuality. In *Bonobo: The Forgotten Ape*, Dr. Frans deWaal notes that humans are as closely related to bonobos as to chimpanzees. As an inspiration to all of us, deWaal writes, "The chimpanzee resolves sexual issues with power; the bonobo resolves power issues with sex."<sup>6</sup> The bonobos defuse a tense situation by everyone making love—girls with boys, boys with boys, girls with girls—then they all settle down to a peaceful meal.

### STRICTLY PLUTONIC RELATIONSHIPS

Pluto energy is too powerful for private concerns, just as plutonium is too hot to cook dinner with. Pluto's intensity is too much for an ordinary relationship container to hold. Two people in a relationship must be devoted to something larger than themselves, larger even than the relationship, so that intense energy has a large enough venue in which to express itself.

Pluto governs all taboo and intense emotions like compulsion and obsession (and the resulting cheap perfumes named after them; note to marketers—"Tabu" and "Obsession" are taken, but "Compulsion" is still available). The myth of Psyche and Amor reminds us that intimacy and Eros are gateways into obsession, and that the portal of relationships is also an entrance to the Underworld.

Psyche is the most beautiful young girl, lovely of form as well as of spirit. When everyone begins to worship her, Venus grows very jealous. "How dare humans worship a mere mortal?" she seethes, then commands the community to sacrifice Psyche by binding her to a rock where a monster will come and devour her. In accordance with the wrathful goddess's edict, yet with great mourning, Psyche is left on the sacrificial rock.

Venus tells her son, Amor (also known as Eros or Cupid), to kill Psyche. He flies overhead, but when he sees her lying unconscious he immediately falls in love with her (how typical). He snatches her up and takes her to his pleasure palace, where each night he comes to her in the dark and they feast and make love. "Ah, Psyche, my beloved," he says, "here are my terms: we can continue like this—you will live as a queen during the day, and at night I will come to you and we will have great passion and feasting—so long as you never, ever look at me."

Psyche is happy with this for a time, but then begs to be allowed to tell her family that she is not dead, in order to free them from their grief. Amor relents and says, "All right. But I warn you, this will disrupt our happy life." Psyche journeys back and tells her sisters, "Not only am I not dead, but I live in a palace, come see!" They visit and are consumed with envy at the riches with which Psyche lives. They plant a dark thought in her heart: "The reason he doesn't want you to look at him at night is that he's probably a monster and is planning to kill you. You must hide a knife. One night after you've made love, light a lamp, take the knife, and plunge it into his heart."

Psyche believes them. They're her sisters, after all.

Late that night after lovemaking, she brings out the lamp and lights it. She sees that her lover is Amor, the god of love, the most handsome man she has ever seen, and she is ashamed of her dark thoughts. Just then she is betrayed by a drop of oil that sputters from the lamp, burning Amor and awakening him. Enraged at the violation of his edict, he roars, "You have disobeyed me! Now I must leave you." And he leaves.

The myth of Psyche and Amor is the story of unconscious obsessive love transformed into conscious partnership and marriage. The Psyche part of each of us, regardless of our sex, has got to turn on the light, and Psyche's sisters are always urging us to do so. Although their motives are funky, their role is nonetheless necessary. Through their jealous whispers, the suspicion they instill in us ("Maybe it's a monster I'm actually in bed with, and not my beloved!") is the nec-

essary catalyst to turning on the light. Loss ensues, but it is loss of the pretense of intimacy. Erotic obsession is a great way to meet people, but a terrible way to get to know someone.

In the next part of the myth, Psyche is transformed from an obsessed, shallow, pretty girl, showing off her boyfriend and her wealth, into a powerful woman. After Amor leaves, she undergoes many ordeals and accomplishes seemingly impossible initiation tasks (set by Venus, who in this myth is in her raging, devouring mother manifestation), often aided and encouraged by animals.

Her final, most arduous task is to descend into the Underworld, obtain a gift of beauty ointment from Persephone, and bring it back for Venus. Psyche successfully obtains the ointment from Persephone, who gives her the emphatic instruction, "Do not open the jar!" as Psyche begins her ascent. When Psyche is only two steps away from the world of the living, she thinks to herself, "Why shouldn't I adorn myself with this beauty ointment and be even more irresistible to Amor? In that way I will surely win back his love." So she opens the jar and falls into a deep, deathlike swoon. Just at that moment, Amor is flying overhead. He sees Psyche faint. Disobeying his mother, he sweeps her up, brings her to heaven, and proclaims his love. They are truly married and are made immortal by the assembled gods.

This mythic journey transforms the erotic encounter of unconscious love (lights off), or private and isolating obsession, to conscious union. The true wedding is between the matured soul (Psyche after her solo journey) and the matured loving heart (Amor having defied his mother).

## BECOMING EXTREMOPHILES

A newspaper headline of April 6, 1997, read EXTREMOPHILES TRANSFORMING SCIENCE. Extremophiles, meaning "lovers of extremes," are microbial life-forms found in environments so arduous it was previously thought that no life could survive there. Extremophiles

thrive above boiling hot vents on the deep sea floor and thousands of feet below polar ice. They swim in acid, eat sulfur, and draw energy from rock.

The word "extremophile" charmingly implies the Plutonian teaching of deriving sustenance from seemingly inhospitable environments literal or emotional. We aspire, with the aid of our actualized Plutos, to become "extremophiles."

In Tantric Buddhism, the Dakinis are fierce, witty, sexy, defiant extremophile goddesses who enjoy intensity. Their experience teaches us how to dance with Pluto. "The wrathful Dakinis laugh and dance as they feast on the painful raw negativity that the unenlightened take to be demons."<sup>7</sup>

"If something's a problem, make it bigger," Visionary Activist Pluto says. Obsessed? Get more obsessed—but ritualistically. This is best exemplified by the obsessive-redemptive story of a wonderful ritualistic friend of mine.

She was madly in love with a man and he with her, but there were others involved. He left her to return to the old girlfriend, and my friend was bereft. Understanding the astrological language of the psyche, she recognized the resulting agony of obsessive torture to be Plutonian. She was also well aware of Visionary Activist Principle Number Six: "We only possess the power of an insight when we give it expression." There is a world of difference between having a fascinating insight about one's father or one's lover, and building an altar to that insight. Knowledge is converted to power through artful, ritualistic expression.

So my friend decided to dive fully into her obsessive feelings within a ritualized container. She prepared her room and lit a candle. While that candle burned she resolved to surrender completely to all of her tragic, romantic, obsessive-compulsive feelings by playing old music and reading old love letters. She then symbolically addressed her beloved: "If you do not care for me as I care for you and if we are not meant to be together, then nothing will happen.

But if you do care for me as I care for you and we are meant to be together, then you will think about me night and day." The purity of the intention is crucial to its not backfiring.

As the candle burned down, she rolled around, thrashed crazily, wept, and moaned. By the time the candle had burned out, she was free. She felt lighthearted and complete. She still loved this person, but she was no longer in the grip of the obsessive feeling.

Two weeks later, the man she loved came to her store and said, "Whatever I do, whether I'm waking or sleeping, I cannot get you out of my mind." Just as Inanna had sent Dimuzi to the Underworld in her stead, my friend had transferred her obsession.

At this point, as she tells it, she knew she had to be completely clean, because Pluto's magic has to be used for the good of everyone involved, not for "power over" or manipulation. So she said to him, "You now know what it's like without me. Go back into your other relationship and fully imagine what it would be like without her. And when you're clear, let me know."

When he returned to my friend the next time, he was capable of commitment. They have been happily married, with the usual hard work, for twelve years.

This story contains important Pluto principles. There is no guaranteed result except burning through the obsession itself. You do not necessarily get the guy, but you do get yourself back. As another friend says, "Kiss the bride, for you are she, re-wedded to your destiny."

Always use Pluto to free yourself of Pluto. You can only kill the dragon with a knife made from the dragon; you can only cure obsession with obsession.

### TRY THIS AT HOME

If you are having difficulty in any relationship, and there need to be conversations that seem to be impossible to conduct in a grown-up fashion, Pluto says, "Try working in a deeper domain. Do a ritual."

Go to your room, light a candle, and imaginatively summon the other person's spiritual supervisor. In your mind, have the conversation you wish you could have face to face. Experiment with an open heart. Upon next encountering that person, entertain the possibility that the invisible conversation has truly happened at an absolutely authentic energetic level.

The head of a Jesuit monastery once came to me for a reading. It was a gift that someone had given to him, and he was initially most reluctant, arms folded in front of him. But after we dove in, he uncrossed his arms and was delighted. "I had no idea astrology was such an accurate, elegant, specific language of spiritual practice," he said. When I suggested this practice of summoning people's spiritual supervisors and having the energetically desirable conversation take place in the realm of the spiritual invisible, he was wildly enthusiastic. "Monasteries are places of such profound political intrigue—this is perfect! I'm going to begin this practice right away. In fact, I might end up spending most of my time in meetings of this sort." "Always happy to bring a little positive witchcraft back to the Church," I quipped.

Pluto, lord of all things beneath the surface, says, "Try the imaginative invisible, it always works." Indeed, when Pluto brings us to our knees, we have no choice but to supplicate the invisible. At this point, we certainly hope there is a larger metaphysical order, because that is all we have.

Through honoring the invisible, we gain a strategic power: we need never be daunted by the limited logic of the visible again. Whenever there is a blockage of any sort, we appeal to the invisible presiding deity. When I wanted to move into a particular building but was frustrated in my attempts by obfuscating humans, I talked to the invisible spirit, or energetic force field, of that building: "O beautiful old building, open the path so that we can be good to each other." And I left some offerings of tobacco, chocolate, flowers, and bird seed that I thought the building (or at least the rats) would like.

The next day, I received an apologetic call saying that the new manager was just starting and that, unlike the previous manager, he thought a self-employed astrologer was *exactly* the sort of tenant they were looking for.

### WORKING FOR THE GOD, BEING WORKED BY THE GOD

A playful way of working with demons or negative forces is provided by alchemy. We remember that Pluto's glyph is an image of the circle of spirit being cooked in the alchemical cauldron. As the alchemist holds the vessel, it seethes, becomes violently dark and disturbed (this darkening is called the *nigredo*), and finally polarizes completely into white and black. As the vapors pour forth, they fill the world with the moral ambiguity of the dream state. The ensuing storms are so terrifying that the alchemist might drop the vessel and have to start all over again with the experiment.

The instructions in alchemy and in astrology are that the alchemist in each one of us must reach up and connect with (pick one) the Crown Chakra, the Holy Spirit, the lightning of illumination, whatever we want to imagine that is larger than ourselves. Bringing lightning down into the vessel creates gold. Only then, when we become ourselves, do we become coherent people capable of a mature culture.

We now prepare to become intimate with Pluto. We say, "Okay, Pluto, laser away any obstacle to divine will. I release my desire to be controlled by, or to control, anyone or anything. Purge me of the dominator virus. I have an experimental faith in the larger order that will step in if I'm not controlling everything."

In our own private angst, we belittle our capacity to affect our own lives, let alone the world. Pluto values hidden, small, sincere endeavor. That which is hidden has infinite influence. As the old Chinese saying goes, "The right man sitting in his house and thinking the right thought will be heard even a thousand miles away." If

Pluto is embraced, even in only one place, it affects the whole, simultaneously and everywhere. An old alchemist gave the following consolation to one of his disciples: "No matter how isolated you are and how lonely you feel, if you do your work truly and conscientiously, unknown friends will come and find you."

When we work alone, Pluto comes to visit to remind us that we are all public dreamers. When we offer ourselves to the greater good, Pluto is encouraging, for he is also the god of hidden wealth who supports us when we do his work. All precious stones and metals that lie beneath the surface are under his province. If we work for him, he works for us.