

#1: The Abduction of Persephone

Persephone was the daughter of Demeter and Zeus. Persephone was picking flowers one day when Hades saw her. He was so captivated by her beauty that he took her by force to the underworld.

Demeter, goddess of the harvest and fertility searched for her daughter when Persephone went missing. Once she realized Persephone was taken to the underworld, she protested the abduction by stopping her work with the crops. Before this time, food in Greece was always plentiful, but now crops failed and food was scarce. Zeus and the other gods tried to convince Demeter to lift her curse on the land, but she would not until her daughter was released.

Zeus then sent Hermes to Hades urging him to release Persephone. Hades understood this as a demand that he needed to follow. Before releasing her, Hades had her eat seeds of the pomegranate. Because she ate fruit from the underworld she was now tied to the underworld and to Hades.

Zeus was forced to make a compromise between Demeter and Hades in their claims to Persephone. He arranged a plan for Persephone to spend four months with Hades as his queen, one for every seed of the pomegranate she had eaten. The other eight months she would return to her mother. Demeter continued to allow the crops to fail when Persephone was with Hades. This myth of Persephone was used by the Greeks to explain the cycle of fertility in nature.

As the story goes

Zeus had three sisters. Hera, his wife and sister, was the goddess of marriage and the queen of all the gods. Hestia, another of his sisters, was a much loved goddess by the women of Greece - Hestia was the goddess of home and hearth.

His third sister, Demeter, was in charge of the harvest. All the gods' jobs were important. Demeter's job was very important. If she was upset, the crops could die. Everyone, gods and mortals, worked hard to keep Demeter happy. What made her happy was enjoying the company of her daughter, Persephone.

Persephone had grown into a beautiful young woman, with a smile for everyone. One day, while picking flowers in the fields, Hades, her uncle, the god of the underworld, noticed her. Hades was normally a gloomy fellow. But Persephone's beauty had dazzled him. He fell in love instantly. Quickly, before anyone could

interfere, he kidnapped Persephone and hurled his chariot down into the darkest depths of the underworld, taking Persephone with him.

Locked in a room in the Hall of Hades, Persephone cried and cried. She refused to speak to Hades. And she *refused* to eat. Legend said if you ate anything in Hades, you could never leave. She did not know if the legend was true, but she did not want to risk it in case someone came to rescue her.

Nearly a week went by. Finally, unable to bear her hunger, Persephone ate six pomegranate seeds. It seemed her fate was sealed. She would have to live in the Underworld forever.

Meanwhile, back on earth, Zeus was worried about the crops. The people would die if the crops failed. If that happened, who would worship Zeus? He had to do something. Zeus did what he often did. He sent Hermes, his youngest son, the messenger, to crack a deal, this time with Hades.

Even as a baby, Hermes was great at making deals. Everyone knew that. But this deal might be the challenge of his life. His uncle Hades, king of the underworld, was really in love. This was no passing fancy.

When Hermes heard that Persephone had eaten six pomegranate seeds, he had to think quickly. The deal he made with Hades was that if Persephone would marry Hades, she would live as queen of the underworld for six months out of the year. However, each spring, Persephone would return and live on earth for the other six months of the year. Hades agreed. Zeus agreed. Persephone agreed. And finally, Demeter agreed.

Each spring, Demeter makes sure all the flowers bloom in welcome when her daughter, Queen of the Underworld, returns to her. Each fall, when Persephone returns to Hades, Demeter cries, and lets all the crops die until spring, when the cycle starts again.