



Persephone

Persephone stood and looked at the meadow, rolling away from her like a scented blanket. The flowers were in full bloom, and the sun was warming the air. Her maids were happily strolling through the grasses, picking blooms. Something caught Persephone's attention - a strange flower - and she meandered away from the group to investigate. As she reached out to stroke the petals, the ground before her opened up and a golden chariot, drawn by four horses, emerged.

"I will marry you," said the dark, powerful god that stood tall in the carriage.

There was no mistaking who it was. Persephone recognised her uncle Hades at once. He was the ruler of the Underworld. Persephone's mother, Demeter, had often told her that Hades was in love with her, but that she would protect her at all costs. Hades had found a way through.

News soon reached Demeter that her daughter had been abducted and dragged into the Underworld. She was so distraught that she wept endlessly and neglected her duties as a goddess. Without a goddess of agriculture, the ground became barren, and famine took hold of Greece.

Meanwhile, Hades was trying his hardest to persuade Persephone to marry him. He presented her with endless tables of food and drink and ordered the best musicians in the Underworld to play for her. But none of it mattered; Persephone was adamant that she could never love a captor.

There is an ancient law that says a body can never leave the Underworld carrying anything that they find there. Unfortunately, this meant that eating any food in the Underworld sealed a person's fate. Persephone was unaware of this law and, one day, her hunger became too much for her. It was the matter of a few seconds to grab a handful of pomegranate seeds and eat them, but it was a few seconds that changed Persephone's life.

While Persephone was sealing her fate, her father Zeus was arranging her rescue. He instructed Hermes (the messenger of the gods) to head down into the Underworld and speak to Hades. He wasn't to return until he had rescued Persephone. It didn't take the messenger long. He soon returned to Mount Olympus with Persephone and presented her to Zeus.

Hades was furious. He knew that Persephone had eaten the seeds, and he believed that she should

remain in the Underworld forever. Zeus was deeply unhappy at this and proposed a compromise.

“Persephone prefers to live with her mother and doesn’t wish to marry you. However, the ancient law is very clear. Allow her to live with her mother for half of the year, and the other half she shall spend with you.”

At first, Hades considered arguing. He knew deep down that this was the best offer he was going to get. Even though she was allowed to see Persephone for half of the year, Demeter still mourned her each time she left for the Underworld. During this time of grief, the world is dark and cold, and plants stay buried underground. We call these times autumn and winter. As Persephone returns and Demeter lights up with delight, the world blooms like a meadow.



VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find and copy a simile from the first paragraph.
2. What does the word “meandered” tell you about how Persephone moved?
3. Find a word that is a synonym for kidnapped.
4. What does proposed mean in “proposed a compromise”?
5. Find a word that tells you that Demeter was sad about Persephone’s deal.

VIPERS QUESTIONS

- I** Which seasons happen when Persephone returns to Earth?
- S** Why was Persephone bound to spend time in the Underworld?
- R** Who did Zeus send to rescue Persephone?
- I** Why wouldn’t Persephone fall in love with Hades?
- E** There is a link between the beginning and the end of the text. Explain what it is and why the author may have included it.

Answers:

1. Like a scented blanket
2. She wandered aimlessly
3. Abducted
4. Suggested
5. Mourned

I: Spring and summer

S: She ate the pomegranate seeds, and you cannot leave the Underworld with anything that you found there

R: Hermes

I: He had captured her - she said she could never love a captor

E: In the beginning, Persephone is walking through a meadow. At the end, it describes the world as blooming like a meadow. This takes the story a full circle back to the beginning. It uses the imagery to link the before and after.