

Persephone: A Greek Myth
Retold by Karen Mockler, RAZ-Kids

It was a bright spring day as Persephone walked in the fields with her friends. She wandered far, gathering armloads of beautiful flowers and leaving her friends behind her.

Without warning, a golden chariot with four black horses appeared. Hades, king of the underworld, held the reins. Hades ruled over the dead, and his underground realm was a dark barren place. No goddess wanted to live there. Lonely, Hades wandered the earth in search of a queen.

Hades thought Persephone was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen. Yet he knew she would never agree to join him in the dark underworld. She would never willingly leave behind the sunlight and fresh air. So he didn't ask her. Instead, he reached out with one strong arm and swept her into his chariot.

Immediately, the ground began to shake and rumble, and a dark crack in the earth opened up in front of them. The black horses leapt into the crack, plunging into the underworld as the earth closed over them. Only Persephone's flowers were left behind.

Deep in the underworld, Hades led Persephone to a gleaming golden throne. He placed a crown that sparkled with gems upon her head. "All of this is yours now," he said. Persephone didn't care about crowns or thrones. She could only cry for what she had lost.

In the world above, Persephone's friends found her flowers on the ground. They went to her mother Demeter, and told her Persephone was missing. Demeter wandered the earth for days, searching in fear for her only daughter. Demeter was goddess of the earth and all growing things. She made the crops grow each year, but now, that all changed.

A cold wind blew. The leaves fell from the trees. The earth froze, and grains, fruits and flowers all died. Months passed, but the dark winter remained as Demeter grieved. Zeus, the king of the gods, pleaded with Demeter. He asked her to bring back the sunlight and let the plants grow again. Demeter only cared about her daughter.

So, Zeus ordered Hades to return Persephone to the world above. Hades obeyed, but he begged Persephone to eat something before she left his world forever. Nothing tempted her but a small plate of pomegranate seeds. They seemed to glow as bright and red as tiny suns. Persephone tried one juicy seed. It was so delicious. She ate three more.

Hades smiled and waved as Persephone left him. He had tricked her, but she didn't know yet. No one had ever told her that the living should never eat food in the underworld.

When Demeter and Persephone finally met again, they flung their arms around each other. Hand in hand, they walked through the barren winter fields. With each step, the grass turned greener and the air warmer. Spring had returned.

"You didn't eat anything in the underworld, did you?" Demeter asked her daughter.

"Nothing but four little seeds," Persephone said. Demeter burst into tears. Persephone's fate was sealed.

Now, because of her mistake, Persephone must return to the underworld for part of each year. She must spend four of the twelve months there--one for each seed she ate. While she is hidden from the sun, the air turns cold and the plants die. Winter covers the earth as Demeter waits for Persephone.

After four months, Persephone returns to join her mother in the world above. The air warms, the ice melts, and the flowers bloom again. Spring returns.