

# The Myth of Demeter & Persephone

Retold by Anne Terry White

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| 1 | Deep under Mt. Etna, the gods had buried alive a number of fearful, fire-breathing giants. The monsters heaved and struggled to get free. And so mightily did they shake the earth that Hades, the king of the underworld, was alarmed.   | Vocabulary Definitions<br>Asunder – |
| 2 | “They may tear the rocks <b>asunder</b> and leave the <b>realm</b> of the dead open to the light of day,” he thought. And mounting his golden chariot, he went up to see what damage had been done.   | Realm –                             |
| 3 | Now the goddess of love and beauty, fair Aphrodite was sitting on a mountainside playing with her son, Eros. She saw Hades as he drove around with his coal-black horses and she said:  | Defies –                            |
| 4 | “My son, there is one who <b>defies</b> your power and mine. Quick! Take up your darts! Send an arrow into the breast of that dark <b>monarch</b> . Let him, too, feel the <b>pangs</b> of love. Why should he alone escape them?”  | Monarch –                           |
| 5 | At his mother's words, Eros leaped lightly to his feet. He chose from his <b>quiver</b> his sharpest and truest arrow, fitted it to his bow, the string, and shot straight into Hades' heart.   | Pangs –                             |
| 6 | The grim King had seen fair maids enough in the gloomy underworld over which he ruled. But never had his heart been touched. Now an unaccustomed warmth stole through his veins. His stern eyes softened. Before him was a blossoming valley, and along its edge a charming girl was gathering flowers. She was Persephone, daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest. She had strayed from her companions, and now that her basket overflowed with blossoms, she was filling her apron with lilies and violets. The god looked at Persephone and loved her at once. With one sweep of his arm he caught her up and drove swiftly away. | Quiver –<br>Strewed –               |
| 7 | “Mother!” she screamed, while the flowers fell from her apron and <b>strewed</b> the ground. “Mother!”  | Girdle –                            |
| 8 | And she called on her companions by name. But already there were out of sight, so fast did Hades urge the horses on. Persephone struggled, her loosened <b>girdle</b> fell to the ground, but the god held her tight. Soon they reach the River Cyane.  |                                     |

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| 8  | Hades struck the bank with his <b>trident</b> . The earth opened and darkness swallowed them all—horses, chariot, Hades, and weeping Persephone.   | Trident –               |
| 9  | Demeter searched all over the earth, but no one could tell her where Persephone was. Worn out and filled with despair, Demeter returned to Sicily. There, near the River Cyane, where Hades has gone down to the underworld, a river <b>nymph</b> had seen him carry off his prize. She wanted to tell Demeter where her daughter was, but fear of Hades kept her silent. Yet she picked up the girdle Persephone had dropped, and this the nymph <b>wafted</b> on the waves to the feet of Demeter. | Nymph –<br><br>Wafted – |
| 10 | The goddess knew then that her daughter was gone indeed, but she did not suspect Hades of carrying her off. She laid the blame on the innocent land.   |                         |
| 11 | “Ungrateful soil!” she said. “I made you fertile. I clothed you in grass and nourishing grain, and this is how you reward me. No more shall you enjoy my favors!”  | Prospered –             |
| 12 | That year was the most cruel mankind had ever known. Nothing <b>prospered</b> , nothing grew. The cattle died, the seed would not come up, men and oxen <b>toiled</b> in vain. There was too much sun. There was too much rain. Thistles and weeds were the only things that grew. It seemed that all mankind would die of hunger.   | Toiled –                |
| 13 | “This cannot go on,” said mighty Zeus. “I see that I must <b>intervene</b> .” And one by one he sent the gods and goddesses to plead with Demeter.   | Intervene –             |
| 14 | But she had the same answer for all: “Not till I see my daughter shall the earth bear fruit again.”  |                         |
| 15 | Zeus, of course, knew where Persephone was. He is sorry to take from his brother the one thing that brings joy to his life. But he must if mankind is to be saved. So he called Hermes to him and said:  | Descend –               |
| 16 | “ <b>Descend</b> to the underworld, my son. Bid Hades release his bride. Provided she has not tasted food in the realm of the dead, she may return to her mother forever.”   |                         |
| 17 | Down sped Hermes on his winged feet, and there in the dim palace of the king, he found Persephone by Hades’ side. She was pale and joyless. Not all the glittering treasures of the underworld could bring a smile to her lips.  |                         |

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| 18<br>19<br>20<br>21<br>22 | <p>“You have no flowers here,” she would say to her husband when he pressed gems upon her. “Jewels have no fragrance. I do not want them.”</p> <p>When Persephone saw Hermes and heard his message, she was filled with joy. She gets ready to leave at once. But one thing troubled her—she cannot leave the underworld forever. For she accepted a <b>pomegranate</b> from Hades and had sucked the sweet pulp from four of the seeds.</p> <p>Hades helped Persephone into his chariot and Hermes took the reins. “Dear wife,” said Hades, “think kindly of me, for I love you truly. It will be lonely here these eight months you are away. So fare you well—and get your fill of flowers!”</p> <p>Hermes drove the chariot straight to the temple of Demeter. Persephone flew to her mother’s arms. The sad tale of each turns into joy in the telling.</p> <p>So it is to this day. One third of the year Persephone spends in the gloomy abode of Hades—one month for each seed that she tasted. Then Nature dies, the leaves fall, the earth stops bringing forth. In spring Persephone returns, and with her come the flowers, followed by summer’s fruitfulness and the rich harvest of fall.</p> | Pomegranate - |
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Identify the characters from the myth:

1. Aphrodite
2. Eros
3. Hades
4. Persephone
5. Demeter
6. Zeus
7. Hermes

Identify the settings/locations for the myth:

1. Underworld
2. Near Mt. Etna
3. River Cyane