

# The Origin of the Seasons

Based on the myth retold by Olivia Coolidge

## Notes

Demeter was the great earth mother. She stood tall. Her hair was the color of wheat. She was the goddess of the harvest and taught the farmers everything they knew. Demeter's daughter was named Persephone.

Persephone was the young girl of spring. She lived in a land where the spring is long and lovely. There she played and laughed with other girls. One day Hades heard Persephone's laughter. Hades was the god of the dead, but even he was touched by Persephone's beauty. He wanted to marry her. So, Hades went up to Olympus to get permission from Zeus, the chief god. Zeus agreed that Hades could take Persephone as his wife.

One day Persephone was gathering flowers with her friends. Persephone wandered away from the other girls. As she looked a little ahead, she noticed the most beautiful flower. She stretched out her hand to reach for the flower. Suddenly, the earth opened in front of her. Then, she found herself caught in a stranger's arms. Persephone screamed and tried to get free. Her armful of flowers fell to earth. However, Hades was far stronger than she. He swept her into his golden chariot, took the reins of his coal-black horses, and was gone. The earth made a rumbling sound as it closed behind them. The other girls ran to find Persephone. They went to the place where they had seen her last, but they couldn't find her anywhere. All they saw were roses and lilies scattered over the grass.

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**Notes**

When Demeter heard the news of her daughter's disappearance, she was overcome with sadness. She searched everywhere. She asked everyone she met if they had seen her daughter. Neither gods nor men had seen Persephone. Demeter finally asked the god Phoebus Apollo. He sees all things from his chariot in the heavens.

"Yes, I have seen your daughter," said the god. "Hades has taken her, and Zeus agreed to it."

When she heard this, Demeter became very upset. With Zeus on Hades' side, she knew that she would never be able to rescue Persephone. Demeter decided to disguise herself as an old woman and wander the earth.

While she wandered, Demeter forgot all about her duties as the harvest goddess. No fruit, vegetables, or wheat grew anymore. The gods looked down on the earth. They realized that people might starve to death unless Demeter helped things grow again.

At last Zeus sent Iris, the rainbow, to seek out Demeter. He wanted Iris to ask Demeter to save the people on earth. Dazzling Iris swept down from Olympus. She offered Demeter beautiful gifts from the other gods. But Demeter would not listen. She said that she would not let fruit grow on the earth until Persephone was returned to her.

At last Zeus saw that he must send a messenger to bring back Persephone to her mother. The messenger went to the land of the dead. He found Hades sitting upon his throne. Persephone sat pale and sad beside him. She hadn't had anything to eat or drink since she'd been in the land of the dead. She sprang up with joy when she saw Zeus's messenger. Hades looked gloomy because he really loved Persephone. He knew he couldn't disobey Zeus, though. So,

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he came up with a trick. He pressed Persephone to eat with him before she left. Persephone really wanted to get out of there, but Hades begged her to take a pomegranate. Persephone didn't want to delay her trip by arguing. She thought it would be easier to say Yes. So, she ate seven of the seeds. Then, Zeus's messenger took her with him. Persephone finally came back to earth.

When Demeter saw Zeus's messenger with her daughter, she rushed forward. Persephone, too, rushed forward. She threw her arms around her mother's neck. For a long time, they held each other. But then Demeter asked the girl, "Did you eat or drink anything with Hades?" The girl replied, "I took a pomegranate and ate seven of its seeds."

"Oh, no!" said the goddess. "My daughter, what have you done? The Fates have said that if you ate anything in the land of the dead, you must return to Hades. However, you didn't eat the whole pomegranate. You ate only seven of its seeds. Therefore, you must live in the land of the dead for seven months of the year. For the other five months, you may live with me."

And that's what the Fates decided. Even Zeus could not change their minds. For seven months every year, Persephone lives in the land of the dead. At this time, Demeter is sad and misses her daughter. The trees lose their leaves. The cold comes. The earth lies still and dead. After seven months, Persephone returns. Her mother is glad, and the earth is happy. The wheat springs up. It is bright, fresh, and green in the fields. Flowers bloom, birds sing, and young animals are born. The heavens smile for joy.