The Myth of Persephone

Persephone was the only daughter of Demeter, and the goddess of grain, **agriculture** and growth.

Most unfortunately, and it was unfortunate, as she was filled with kindness and love, Hades, the ruler and god of the Underworld, had **abhorrent**, dreadful plans for her. He planned to steal her innocence and turn her into his dreaded queen of the Underworld. Hades, as with many of the Gods on Mount Olympus, was used to getting exactly what he wanted, because his strength and power meant that when people did not love him, they feared him. This commanded him a certain amount of respect amongst the gods themselves.

Indeed, Hades had, in his mind, fallen in love with Persephone and wanted her as his bride. He asked his brother Zeus for approval, but in an unprecedented turn of events, Zeus did not approve. He said no. Zeus was concerned about the reaction of her mother Demeter, who would certainly not consent to the idea of her beloved daughter becoming queen of the Underworld.

Zeus was the only God in Greece more feared than Hades. He was the God of the sky, lightening and thunder, but he was also King of the Gods on Mount Olympus, and he had the final say on just about everything.

Despite this minor setback, Hades could see one way to still achieve his goal. Plans began to form in the cogs of his mind, as he laid out his wicked plan, to kidnap his love without permission.

Persephone was gathering flowers beneath the candyfloss clouds of Sicily, when Hades suddenly appeared several days later, thundering across the ground in his four-horse chariot. Before any of the girl's companions realized what was happening, the god swooped down swiftly and snatched the poor girl up. Despite her screaming and pleas, no one else could hear her. The earth opened before Hades' chariot and the powerful horses drove down into the **chasm**. As they disappeared into the dark depths, the hole closed behind them. Shocks rippled throughout Sicily.

Later that day, on her usual way home, Demeter came to collect her daughter Persephone, but she soon realized that no trace of her could be found.

**Distraught** and desperate, she searched high and low for her daughter. She travelled to the farthest corners of the earth, searching for nine full days and nights without ever stopping to eat, drink, bathe, or rest. As she was roaming the lands, she destroyed crops and livestock, threatening to make nothing grow ever again and thus destroy all of humankind, if she did not find her daughter. Too afraid to tell her and endure the **wrath** of Demeter, the witnesses to the crime could not bring themselves to tell her what had happened.

Finally, on the tenth day, the goddess Hecate, the goddess of magic and witchcraft, told the grief stricken mother that Persephone had been carried away, but she did not know the identity of her abductor. To find the culprit, Demeter went to the Sun god Helios, who saw everything that happened on the face of the earth. Helios indeed told her what happened, but he also tried to convince her that Hades would not be a totally unsuitable husband for her daughter.

Enraged at the truth, Demeter was determined to rescue her daughter, horrified at the thought of Hades taking Persephone away from her. Realising that her brother Zeus was a possible accomplice in the abduction, she refused to return to Olympus. Instead, she roamed the earth disguised as a mortal, forbidding the trees to bear fruit and stopping the earth from producing vegetables and fruit.

A full year passed by with no growth, and Zeus became restless. He worried that if he let Demeter continue in her pursuit, all humankind would starve to death. So, he decided to send all the gods and goddesses of Olympus to beg her to change her mind. After he realized that all his efforts were useless, the almighty ruler of Olympus promised Demeter that he himself would make sure that Persephone would return to her.

The God Hermes, God of the Underworld, summoned by Zeus, raced down to find Hades and fetch Persephone. Hades agreed, and suspiciously quickly. He laughed **maniacally** as he handed her over. Attempting to return to the Earth’s surface, Hermes found Persephone began to scream in agony, great boils appearing beneath her skin. She could not pass into the world above.

Hades revealed that she had eaten a pomegranate seeds from the garden of Hades. This meant that she must return to him, because she had tasted the food of the dead; anyone who tastes the food of Hades must remain in the Underworld for life. Enraged and defeated, Hermes returned the girl to her **betrothed**.

The deed having been done, Rhea, the mother of Zeus, Demeter and Hades, proposed a **compromise** which her children accepted: Persephone would have to stay with Hades in the Underworld for six months each year because of the seeds she ate. The rest of the year, she would be allowed to ascend to earth to stay with her mother. After agreeing to the deal, Demeter restored earth's fertility and returned to Olympus with her daughter. However, when the time came that mother and daughter would part, the earth became colder, darker, and less fertile, until the maiden's re-emergence six months later, when light and growth would return, much like the seasons we are accustomed to.

Although she spent only half of her life in the Underworld, little is known about Persephone's life above ground after her abduction. Below ground, however, she was dreaded forever afterwards as the goddess of the Underworld.

**Glossary:
Abhorrent –** evil, disgusting, repulsive  **Ascension -** rise **Agriculture** - the science or practice of farming, including cultivation of the soil for the growing of crops and the rearing of animals to provide food, wool, and other products.
**Betrothed** – a person to whom another person is engaged
**Chasm** - a deep fissure in the earth's surface.
**Fissure** - a long, narrow opening or line of breakage made by cracking or splitting, especially in rock or earth.
**Distraught** – Very worried or upset.
**Compromise** - an agreement or settlement of an argument that is reached by each side making concessions.
**Maniacally –** like a madman
**Nymph** - a mythological spirit of nature imagined as a beautiful maiden inhabiting rivers, woods, or other locations.
**Wrath -** anger