

## How the Seasons Came

Far away from the bright world of the Olympians was the gloomy realm of the Underworld. Here everything was dim and misty.

It was a strange, eerie land of underground lakes, black rocks, and dripping water which, mixing with rusty lime, formed strange crystal shapes on the roofs and walls of the caverns. To drive away the damp, Hades [HAY-deez], king of the Underworld, lit many fires, which caused the dark waters to shine in a spooky way but did not snap or crackle as fires on earth do.

However, beauty is "in the eye of the beholder," and Hades thought his dim, dank world far more beautiful than the upper earth with its grass, trees, and flowers.

Yet he fell in love with a daughter of the upper earth—the lovely Persephone [per-SEF-uh-nee]—the favorite daughter of Demeter [dee-MEET-er], the grain goddess.

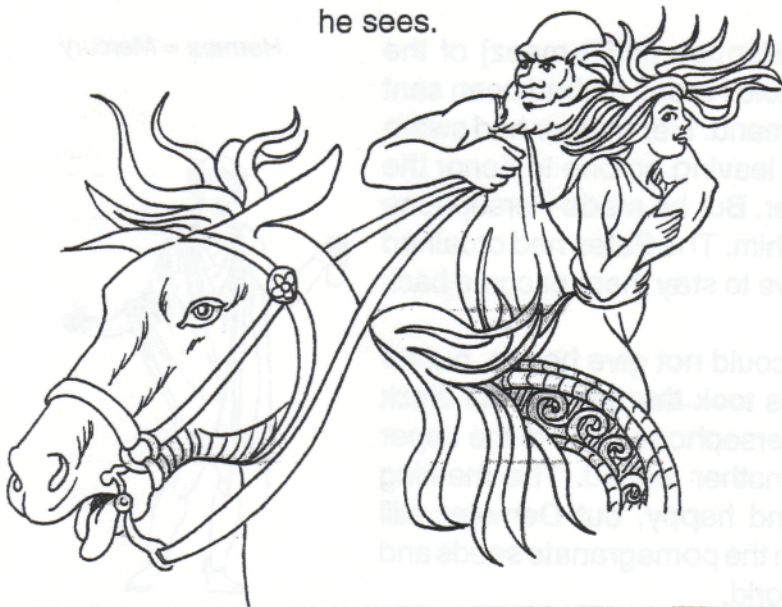
Hades made occasional visits to the upper zone to inspect his temples, though the daylight hurt his eyes, and the smell of flowers made him dizzy. One day he was driving his chariot and four black horses through a part of Sicily where there had been an earthquake. He was relieved to find that none of the cracks in the soil were deep enough to reach his realm. He was about to go home to the Underworld when Eros [AIR-ohss], the mischievous archer-god of love, upset his plans, wounding him with one of those arrows that make the wounded one fall in love with the first person he sees.

Hades had just loosened the reins to urge his horses on home when Persephone, her flame-colored hair streaming red-gold behind her, came dancing along across the flowery valley with half a dozen other nymphs. As she stooped to pick roses and irises, Hades, smitten by love's dart, swooped her up into his chariot. Persephone cried out in surprise and confusion, but the other nymphs had fled and no one else heard, except Mother Demeter, who was far off and had seen nothing. Hades, in a frenzy, struck the ground with his spear; the earth opened, and the chariot

Hades = Pluto

Persephone =  
Proserpina  
Demeter = Ceres

Eros = Cupid



Hades took Persephone to the Underworld with him.



disappeared into the Underworld.

The echo of Persephone's cry still sounding in her heart, Demeter moved swiftly over mountains, rivers, and plains, seeking her child. She wore a long black cloak to conceal her brightness and true identity and would neither eat nor drink. After many days she came to Eleusis, a town not far from Athens. Hungry, thirsty, and exhausted, she sat down by a well. Here came the four fair daughters of Celeus [SEE-lee-uhs], lord of that place, running and jumping like young deer, to fill their pitchers. They took pity on the poor old woman, as they thought her to be, and led her to their home, where everyone treated her kindly.

Demeter continued to grieve for her lost Persephone. But when the little son of the house fell sick, she nursed him and restored him to health. The grateful family wanted her to stay with them always. Now she thought it time to reveal who she really was. Announcing herself as the grain goddess, mother of life, she commanded the people to build her a temple at Eleusis, and she would teach them religious rites that would give them hope and happiness forever.

The good people of Eleusis built the temple, and Demeter sat there as a priestess and gave them good counsel. But her grief was great, and she determined that she would allow nothing on earth to grow until she had her daughter back. It was a dreadful year. The weather was terrible; crops would not grow. The ox teams pulled the plows through parched, frozen soil in vain. Winter went on and on. It looked as though famine would destroy all of mankind.

Zeus [ZOOS] saw that the situation was very bad, so he sent one of his messengers, Iris [I-ris], down to the temple at Eleusis to request Demeter's presence at a meeting of the gods. But Demeter would not hear of it—she would never consent to revisit Olympus or let earth bear crops again until her daughter was returned to her.

So Zeus sent his chief messenger, Hermes [HER-meez] of the winged sandals, to the Underworld. Hermes told Hades he had been sent to bring Persephone up again by Zeus's command. Her mother had sworn to destroy the whole human race by famine, leaving no one to honor the gods. Hades knew he must obey Zeus's order. But he made Persephone eat some pomegranate seeds before she left him. The Fates had ordained that whoever ate in the Underworld would have to stay there or come back soon.

Hades loved Persephone deeply; he could not give her up, but for the time he let her go to her mother. Hermes took the reins of the black horses that drew Hades' chariot and drove Persephone back to the upper world to the temple at Eleusis where her mother waited. The meeting between mother and daughter was glad and happy, but Demeter still grieved that Persephone had innocently eaten the pomegranate seeds and that this would draw her back to the Underworld.

So patient Zeus sent a third messenger, the greatest yet, Rhea

*Zeus = Jupiter, Jove*

*Hermes = Mercury*



**Hermes**



[REE-uh], his revered mother and Demeter's too, oldest of the gods. Rhea pleaded with Demeter to show pity and mercy to mankind, to restore the earth and give life to men, which came only from her bounty. Demeter finally agreed to compromise. For a third of the year—four months—Persephone would go down to the Underworld to live with her husband, Hades. But for the rest of the year—spring, summer, and early autumn—she would live with her mother on the upper earth.

So it was decided. Rhea led her daughter, Demeter, and her granddaughter, Persephone, into the presence of Zeus, who honored Demeter and promised her all her rights. Demeter at last was satisfied.

In a flash the earth was transformed—the cold winds hurried away, trees blossomed, flowers of lovely hue burst from the ground, and the time of the singing birds returned.

Demeter, in her kindness and generous bounty, gave seed-wheat to the son of Celeus, whose life she had saved. She sent him over the earth to teach the best ways of plowing and planting. She did not neglect her temple at Eleusis. There she established a cult and a feast, and there the people celebrated with joy and hope. Demeter was always kind; they called her the "Good Goddess." She became the "divine mother of sorrows" and her daughter the "bright lady of the bright seasons," spring and summer, a goddess who went to live for a few dark months in the realm of the dead, but then returned to light and life again.



Demeter

### ***Beyond the Myth***

1. "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." What does this mean? Do you think it is true? Can a dark cave in its way be as beautiful as a forest, river, meadow, or mountain?
2. What is your favorite season—and why? Do all seasons have their special beauties?
3. You may sometimes eat a popular breakfast food named for the goddess in this story. What is it?

### **Identify:**

Hades  
Persephone

Hermes  
Iris

Rhea  
"The Good Goddess"

### **Define:**

chariot

pomegranate

### **Locate on a map:**

Sicily

Eleusis

Athens