

The Seasons



Ceres, the sister of Jupiter, was the goddess of the Earth and all the plants and crops that grew there. She was kind to the families who farmed the Earth and helped them care for the land.

Ceres loved her daughter, the beautiful Proserpina, more than anything else. While Ceres went about her work, Proserpina gathered bouquets of flowers. Everywhere Proserpina walked, flowers bloomed. Her laugh brought joy to everyone.

One day Pluto, the god of the Underworld, saw Proserpina dancing in the meadow. He fell in love with her and wished to marry her. Even though his realm was large and filled with gold and precious stones, he knew Ceres would never allow Proserpina to journey to his faraway kingdom.

Pluto decided to kidnap Proserpina and carry her off to the Underworld. Surely, he reasoned, when she saw how kind he could be, she would fall in love with him and agree to marry him. Then she could rule happily as Queen of the Dead and brighten his dreary days.

Pluto used his magic powers to create a beautiful flower that was like no other. He set the flower in the earth at the edge of the woods. Hidden by the trees, Pluto waited with his horses and golden chariot.

Proserpina ran toward the flower, intending to add it to her basket. When she knelt to look at the flower, Pluto raced by. He gathered her up in his arms, and his chariot sped off, circling the Earth.

Proserpina's screams echoed through the woods. The nymphs hurried to see what was wrong. Pluto opened a chasm in the earth and drove his chariot underground. The ground closed overhead, leaving no trace of Proserpina. Pluto's chariot was gone by the time the nymphs reached the clearing.

When the sun was setting, Ceres came to find her daughter. She searched for her, frantically calling her name. The wood nymphs told her they heard Proserpina's screams but they didn't see what happened.

Night and day, Ceres searched the Earth, calling for her daughter. She forgot to care for the Earth. The ground

dried and all the plants turned brown. Farmers begged Ceres to care for the Earth again, but she didn't hear them. Weeping, she continued to search for her daughter.

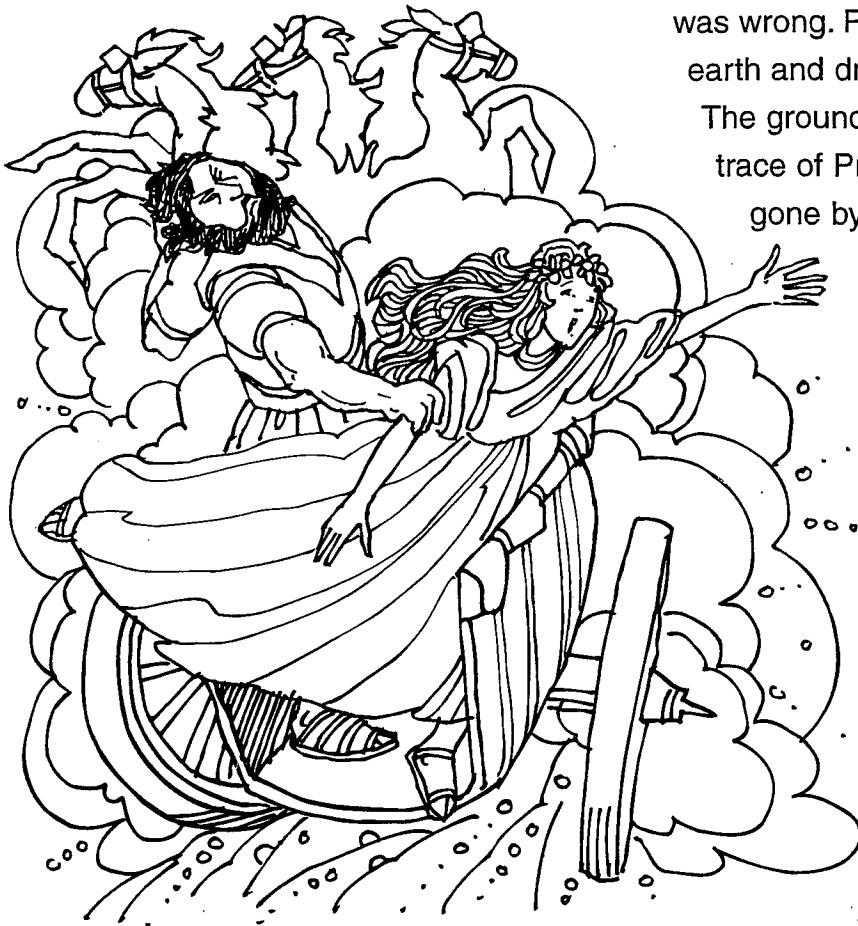
Ceres returned to the place where her daughter was last seen. A water nymph gave Ceres a jeweled belt that had been left by a stream.

"I found Proserpina's belt," she said. "Perhaps the sun saw what happened."

Ceres went to the sun and asked for help. The sun told her that Pluto had taken Proserpina to the Underworld.

Ceres hurried to see Jupiter in the Hall of the Gods. He told her that she must stop mourning for Proserpina. "Tend to the Earth," he said. "All mortals suffer because you no longer care for the plants and crops. When nothing grows, people can't leave food offerings in our temples. They will forget about us."

"I can't do my work when I think of my poor Proserpina hidden away under the ground," said Ceres. "My child, who loves the sun and flowers, will be miserable in Pluto's dark caverns."



"Pluto rules over a large kingdom," said Jupiter. "His storerooms are filled with gold and jewels. He will be a good husband. Proserpina is fortunate."

"I can't be so far away from my beautiful Proserpina," Ceres answered. "If I am to care for the Earth again, I must have her back."

"Very well," said Jupiter. "I will send the messenger Mercury to fetch her. I warn you, if she has eaten any food in the World of the Dead, she will not be able to stay with you."

Mercury took the message to Pluto. The Underworld king knew that Proserpina cried for the sun and flowers. She would not eat, laugh, or sing. Sadly, Pluto allowed Proserpina to return to her mother. Before she left, he offered her the juice from sweet pomegranate seeds. Happy to be on her way back to Earth, Proserpina took the juice.

As Ceres greeted Proserpina with open arms, the flowers and plants began to grow around them.

"I feared you had eaten food in the Kingdom of the Dead and couldn't be returned to me," Ceres said. "Those who eat there must stay."

Proserpina cried out, "Mother, I didn't eat until I was certain I would be free to return to you, and it was no more than the juice from a few pomegranate seeds!"

Ceres rushed Proserpina to Jupiter and told him what she had done. "If she is sent back to the Underworld, I will not care for the Earth," she said.

Jupiter said, "Proserpina cannot remain on Earth all year because she took the juice. She will spend half the year with you and return to Pluto for the rest of the year."

Thus it is that when spring comes, Proserpina visits her mother. Then Ceres blesses the Earth. Flowers bloom and the crops are abundant. During the long, dark winter months, Ceres grieves and forgets to care for the Earth.

