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Readers Theatre

Persephone and the Pomegranate

Characters: Narrators Demeter Persephone Hades Zeus Hecate Helios Hermes

Prologue:

Narrator 1: This is the story of Persephone, Queen of the Underworld.

Narrator 2: It is also the story of the seasons, and how they came to be.

Narrator 3: Persephone had not always been the queen of the dead. She used to spend her time helping her mother Demeter look after the plants and crops so that people on earth would not starve.

Narrator 4: Demeter was the goddess of fruit and grain. It was her job to make sure that the crops grew and the trees produced fruit.

Narrator 5: Demeter was the sister of Zeus, the god of heaven and king of all the gods. She had two more brothers besides Zeus: Poseidon, god of the sea, and Hades, god of the underworld.

Narrator 6: Poseidon was quite happy stirring up storms and frolicking with the sea nymphs. But Hades was sad and lonely. His kingdom was a gloomy place; only the spirits of the dead lived there.



Scene 1:

Narrator 1: Zeus has come to pay a visit to his brother Hades in the Underworld.

Hades: It's so dark down here. Dark, dreary, dull. The only thing that might brighten it up a bit is a beautiful queen.

Zeus: Yes, certainly. But, no offense, what woman would marry you?

Hades: Hey, listen here, brother. I have my own place, my own chariot, and I'm a king. What more could any woman want?

Zeus: Hmm, you have a point there. Still, I don't know. Do you have anyone in mind?

Hades: As a matter of fact, I do—Persephone, Demeter's daughter.

Zeus: Persephone? Are you crazy? Demeter will never agree.

Hades: I know. That's why I need your help. Can't you do something?

Zeus: Listen, Hades, I'll never convince Demeter to part with Persephone. Why don't you just steal the girl?

Hades: Great idea! I knew I could count on you, Zeus.

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Narrator 1: It's a perfect summer morning, and Persephone is singing as she fills a basket with flowers.

Persephone: I just need a lily, and perhaps some roses. Then I'll take the flowers home to mother. Ooooh! Look at that lovely orchid; I must pick it. But wait—what's that noise?

Narrator 2: With a deafening roar, the earth splits open. And out of the chasm springs a gold chariot with black wheels, black horses, and a black-cloaked driver.

Persephone: Mama, Help!

Narrator 3: Hades sweeps up Persephone, and vanishes back into the underworld. Above him, the earth seals shut with a thunderous crash.

Scene 3:

Narrator 1: Demeter has been frantically searching for her daughter for nine days and nights.

Demeter: Has anyone seen my daughter, Persephone? Where can she be? Persephone, where are you?

Narrator 2: On the tenth day, Demeter meets up Hecate goddess of magic and witchcraft.

Hecate: There you are, Demeter. I have something to tell you: Someone has kidnapped your daughter.

Demeter: Someone kidnapped Persephone? Who was it, Hecate? Tell me who it was?

Hecate: That I don't know. I heard her screams for help, but I saw nothing. Perhaps Helios, the all-seeing Sun, can tell you who it was.

Narrator 3: Demeter cried out to Helios, the sun-god, as he traveled slowly across the sky in his golden chariot.

Demeter: Helios, I beg of you, tell me who has stolen my daughter.

Helios: Stop your weeping, goddess. There is nothing you can do. Hades has taken your daughter to the Underworld to be his queen.

Demeter: What? My daughter's with Hades in the Underworld? Certainly, Zeus, king of us all, can take Persephone away from him and give her back to me.

Helios: You won't get any help from Zeus, Demeter. He was in on the plot. In fact, the whole thing was his idea.

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Scene 4:

Narrator 1: A terrible sadness and despair filled Demeter's heart. In her grief, she neglected her duties. She could do nothing but mourn for her lost daughter.

Narrator 2: There were no more rain showers for the plants and crops, and no morning dew.

Narrator 3: The trees withered, the land grew parched, and the wheat in the fields was dry and shriveled.

Narrator 4: The animals were dying, and the people on earth grew thin and weak from hunger.

Narrator 5: It looked like the race of mortal men might die out altogether. If that happened, there would be no one left to honor the gods with gifts and praise. This worried Zeus.

Zeus: No one to glorify the name of Zeus?! I can't have that! I must do something!

Narrator 6: So, Zeus called Demeter to his palace on Mount Olympus...

Zeus: You should be happy, Demeter! Persephone is going to be a queen and married to a god! Stop this mopping around, and get back to work.

Demeter: No, brother, I want my daughter! Until she returns from the land of the dead, the earth will be a wasteland, and the people will starve.

Narrator 7: Zeus knew when he was beaten. As much as he hated to do it, Zeus summoned Hermes, the messenger of the gods.

Zeus: Hermes, go explain the situation to Hades. Tell him I'm sorry, but he'll just have to return Persephone to her mother.

Hermes: He certainly isn't going to be happy about it.

Zeus: I'm not happy about it either, but what else can I do? Let's just hope the girl hasn't had anything to eat down there. Be quick, Hermes! If she's eaten the food of the dead, it's all over. She'll have to stay in the Underworld forever.

Scene 5:

Narrator 1: As it turns out, Persephone has been so worried about her mother—and has missed Demeter so much—that she's eaten nothing the whole time she's been in the underworld.

Narrator 2: So when Hermes arrives with his message, Hades reluctantly agrees to send Persephone back to Demeter.

Hades: I must do as my brother asks. Go back to your mother, Persephone. She's grieving for you. But before your journey, wouldn't you like something to drink?

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Narrator 3: He offered her a bright red, juicy pomegranate.

Hades: Here, just suck the juice; it's rich and sweet. Drinking is not forbidden here—only eating.

Narrator 4: Pomegranates are juicy, all right—but they're full of seeds, thousands of them. No fruit on earth has so many. And seeds *do* count as eating.

Persephone: The pomegranate certainly looks delicious, and I'm so thirsty. Mmmm! It's so, so sweet! But oh! Oh! Oh! The seeds! I've swallowed the seeds!

Scene 6:

Narrator 1: When Zeus learned what had happened, he was deeply troubled.

Zeus: I can't force Hades to return Persephone to her mother now that she's eaten the food of the dead. But if she stays with Hades, Demeter will continue to mourn. The crops won't grow and people will starve. Life on earth will end.

Hermes: I've got an idea. Why don't they share her?

Zeus: Share her? What do you mean?

Hermes: I mean can't you work out a deal where she spends part of the year with each of them. Persephone only ate part of the pomegranate, so it seems only fair that Hades gets her for only part of the year. The rest of the year she can be with her mother in the upper-world. That way, things will continue to live on earth.

Zeus: Very clever! Go to my brother and see if you can get him to agree. Hurry!

Narrator 2: Hades spent a long time thinking over what Hermes had to say.

Hermes: Well, how about it, Hades? Do we have a deal? What do I tell Zeus?

Hades: Tell my brother that I'll let Persephone spend half the year on earth helping her mother. But Demeter has to promise to give her back at the end of six months.

Narrator 3: So, it was arranged that Persephone would spend half the year with the Demeter and half with Hades. And this is the reason for the different seasons.

Narrator 4: As long as Persephone is with her mother, Demeter is happy, and the earth is full of joy. The flowers bloom, the trees bear fruit, and the fields are filled with golden grain.

Narrator 5: But every year, after the harvest is brought in, Persephone returns to Hades. Then Demeter grieves and brings on winter. The earth turns cold and the fields are empty and dead.

Narrator 6: Six months later, Persephone reappears from the underworld; Demeter rejoices, and the earth comes alive once more.