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DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE

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DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE

written by

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Synopsis

Ancient people imagined stories to explain what was, for them, unexplainable. The Greek myth, Demeter and Persephone, explains the change of the seasons. More than that, it is a story about the power of a mother’s love.

Cast of Characters

ZEUS (zoose)	god of thunder
HADES (hay-deez)	god of the Underworld
Demeter (Dem-EET-er)	goddess of the harvest, mother of Persephone
PERSEPHONE (per-seh-fon-ee)	Demeter's daughter
NYMPH (Nimf)	Persephone's friend
SWINEHERD #1	herder of pigs
SWINEHERD #2	his companion
HERMES (her-meez)	messenger god

ACT I

Scene 1

Setting: a poppy field, Earth

At Rise: At opening ZEUS, HADES, DEMETER are standing center stage.

ZEUS

Picture, if you will, three worlds, stacked one on top of the other. I, Zeus, the all-powerful, rule the highest and most perfect of the three. From my throne on Mount Olympus, I look down and watch the worlds below.

HADES

And from my world at the bottom of the stack, I, Hades, look up from my dark and joyless throne in the Land of the Dead. I rule a world of silence, of mists, of cold. Sometimes I long for a bright spark to brighten the dark as deep as a grave, and so I watch, and I wait.

DEMETER

Below the brightness of Olympus, but above the darkness that lies below, is my realm, the green Earth. The world that I, Demeter, rule is bursting with life, with growth. Bright flowers grow and sway in the breeze. The air is heavy with their scent and with the song of the birds who sing in celebration. And my daughter, Persephone, walks among the flowers and lifts her head to listen. A thing of beauty she is, and I try to always keep her by my side, but alas, one day I was away.

(ZEUS, HADES, DEMETER exit stage right, PERSEPHONE & NYMPH enter stage left, laughing.)

PERSEPHONE

Oh, look, poppies. Have you ever seen such beautiful flowers?

NYMPH

Never. And the scent is divine, like something from Olympus.

PERSEPHONE

I don't know which to smell first. This one, or this one, or that one.

(She playfully goes about smelling the flowers.)

NYMPH

Wait, Persephone, look. A new flower springs from the ground in every spot you step.

PERSEPHONE

Well, that is surprising.

(runs to experiment and then stops suddenly)

Perhaps I should stand still, or we'll be buried in flowers.

NYMPH

If you consider all the ways to die, being drowned in flowers isn't the worst. These poppies are truly as beautiful as you are Persephone.

PERSEPHONE

Why thank you dear friend. But today is too lovely to talk about dying, and though I may be beautiful, I KNOW I never smelled as sweet as this field.

NYMPH

Especially, not after chasing your mother about while she looks after her trees and harvests.

PERSEPHONE

You speak the truth. But today mother is taking care of business on Olympus so we can do whatever we want for a change.

(The earth rumbles. HADES enters stage left. They don't notice him.)

PERSEPHONE

What was that?

NYMPH

Probably just Zeus, making thunder.

PERSEPHONE

No, but the ground shook. I have a terrible feeling about this.

(looks over her shoulder)

HADES

And well you should my dear. Your bright spark is just the thing the Land of the Dead needs.

NYMPH

Run, Persephone! Run!

PERSEPHONE

(shouts to the sky)

Mother! Demeter! Help me!

(PERSEPHONE runs, but is intercepted by HADES. The NYMPH grabs for her friend, but tears her cloak from her. HADES and PERSEPHONE exit. The NYMPH collapses to her knees, clutching the cloak.)

PERSEPHONE

(from offstage)

Mother! Demeter!

NYMPH

Too late. When Hades came the ground cracked open, releasing bitter air that masked the odor of the poppies that we'd picked only minutes before. He pulled her into the underworld, and as she entered that land of darkness, the gash in the earth closed. All I have left of her is this cloak.

(exits)

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Scene 4

Setting: the poppy field, Earth

At Rise: The scene opens on DEMETER and ZEUS. DEMETER is pacing.

DEMETER

When will she get here?

ZEUS

Soon. Be patient. I trust Hermes, even if he is a bit full of himself. Silver-tongued? Ha.

(HERMES and PERSEPHONE enter stage left, followed by HADES. DEMETER rushes to her daughter.)

DEMETER

Dear daughter. I've been so worried. We'll never be parted again. We'll make nature bloom again. Let me look at you.

(DEMETER steps back to look and PERSEPHONE spins around with outstretched hands.)

DEMETER

Wait. What's that red stain on your hands? Did Hades hurt you?

PERSEPHONE

No, mother. He's dismal and gloomy, but he never hurt me. This stain is only pomegranate juice. Believe it or not, the only fruit that grows near Hades' palace is pomegranate.

DEMETER *(shocked)*

Did you eat?

PERSEPHONE

Only six seeds of a pomegranate, hardly anything at all.

HADES

Bwa-ha-ha! She's mine.

DEMETER

I've been tricked.

(turns to ZEUS)

Imagine, Zeus! Imagine the earth as desolate and dark as Hades. Is that what you want? Because if you don't figure something out, that's exactly what you'll get.

ZEUS

Demeter, you know that's not what I want. Hades, we need to talk.

(ZEUS and HADES huddle together stage right to negotiate. DEMETER and PERSEPHONE hug each other stage left. HERMES steps forward, center stage.)

HERMES

And talk they did. They needed a little help from my silver tongue, but Zeus and Hades reached a compromise.

(Actors line up across the stage.)

HADES

For six months of the year…

PERSEPHONE

One month for each of the pomegranate seeds I ate…

HADES

Persephone lived with me in the Underworld and served as its rightful queen.

ZEUS

During those months, the sadness of Demeter, caused the earth to fall into winter; silent and desolate.

DEMETER

Until the day each year when I heard my Persephone's light footsteps returning to earth. Then my sadness turned to joy…

PERSEPHONE

And the whole earth sprung into bloom, and I basked in its warmth by my mother's side.

ALL

The End!



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