

## Persephone



Persephone was the daughter of Zeus, ruler of the gods, and Demeter, the goddess of harvest and fertility. She was also called Kore, which means "maiden," and grew up to be a lovely girl attracting the attention of many gods. However, Demeter had an obsessed love for her only daughter and kept all men away from her. The most persisting suitor of Persephone was Hades, the god of the Underworld. He was a stern, middle-aged man, living in the dark, among the shadows of the Dead. But his heart softened when he saw Persephone and was amazed by her youth, beauty and freshness. When he asked Demeter to marry her daughter, Demeter got furious and said there wasn't the slightest chance for that to happen. Hades was heart-broken and decided to get Persephone no matter what. One day, while the young girl was playing and picking flowers along with her friends in a valley, she beheld the most enchanting narcissus she had ever seen. As she stooped down to pick the flower, the earth

beneath her feet suddenly cleaved open and through the gap Hades himself came out on his chariot with black horses. Hades grabbed the lovely maiden before she could scream for help and descended into his underworld kingdom while the gap in the earth closed after them.

The other girls had not seen anything because everything happened very quickly. They didn't have a clue for the sudden disappearance of Persephone. The whole incident, however, had been witnessed by Zeus, father of the maiden and brother of the abductor, as well as by Helios, god of the Sun. Zeus decided to keep silent about the whole thing to prevent a fight with his brother while Helios wisely thought it better not to get involved in anything that didn't concern him. A distraught and heartbroken Demeter wandered the earth looking for her daughter until her good friend Hecate, goddess of wilderness and childbirth, advised her to seek for the help of Helios, the all-seeing Sun god, in order to find her daughter. Helios felt sorry for Demeter, who was crying and pleading him to help her. Thus she revealed her that Persephone had been kidnapped by Hades. When she heard that, Demeter got angry and wanted to take revenge but Helios suggested that it was not such a bad thing for Persephone to be the wife of Hades and queen of the dead. Trying to find a solution Demeter, however, could not let it go. She was furious at this insult and deeply believed that Hades, who after all had only dead people for company, was not the right husband for her sweet daughter. She also got angry at Zeus for not having revealed this to her. To punish gods and to grief, Demeter decided to take a long and indefinite leave from her duties as the goddess of harvest and fertility, with devastating consequences. The earth began to dry up, harvests failed, plants lost their fruitfulness, animals were dying for lack of food and famine spread to the whole earth, resulting in untold misery. The cries of the people who were suffering reached Olympus and the divine ears of Zeus. The mighty god finally realized that if he wouldn't do something about his wife's wrath, all humanity would disappear. Thus he tried to find another solution to both calm Demeter and please Hades. He promised Demeter to restore Persephone to her if it can be proved that the maiden stays with Hades against her will. Otherwise, Persephone belongs to her husband.

The crafty Hades learned this agreement and tricked his reluctant bride, who was crying all day and night from despair, to eat a few seeds of the pomegranate fruit. This was the food of the Underworld and

every time someone ate even a few seeds of this, then, after a while, he would miss life in the Underworld. When the gathering in front of Zeus took place and Persephone was asked where she would like to live, she answered she wanted to live with her husband. When Demeter heard that, she got infuriated and accused Hades that somehow he had tricked her daughter. A great fight followed and Demeter threatened that she would never again make the earth fertile and everyone on Earth would die. To put an end on this quarrel, Zeus decided that Persephone would spend half months with her husband in Hades and half months with her mother on Olympus. This alternative pleased none of the two opponents, nevertheless that had no other option but accept it.

Thus the lovely maiden Persephone became the rightful wife of Hades and Queen of the Underworld. During the six months that Persephone spent in the Underworld, her mother was sad and not in the mood to deal with harvest. Thus she would leave the Earth to decline. According to the ancient Greeks, these were the months of Autumn and Winter, when the land is not fertile and does not give crops. Whenever Persephone went to Olympus to live with her mother, Demeter would shine from happiness and the land would become fertile again and fruitful. These were the months of Spring and Summer. Therefore, this myth was created to explain the change of the seasons, the eternal cycle of the Nature's death and rebirth.

*Adapted from Greeka.com ; image from Perseus Digital Library*

## Artemis



Artemis was the Olympian goddess of hunting, the wilderness and wild animals. She was also a goddess of childbirth, and the protector of girls up to the age of marriage. Her twin brother Apollo was similarly the protector of boys. Together the two gods were also bringers of sudden death and disease--Artemis targeted women and girls, Apollo men and boys. While he is associated with the sun, she is with the moon. She is known as a great hunter, almost always pictured with her bow, and oftentimes her hunting dogs.

Artemis was born with difficulty. Offspring of a union between Zeus and Leto, her birth was shadowed by the jealousy of Hera (wife of Zeus). Leto eventually found refuge on the floating island of Delos. There she gave birth to Artemis who assisted her mother as midwife with the birth of her younger twin-brother Apollo.

Like her brother, Artemis remained unmarried; she is a maiden divinity never conquered by love. The priests and priestesses devoted to her service were bound to live pure and chaste, and transgressions of their vows of chastity were severely punished. She was worshipped in several places together with her brother and wished to spend her days exploring woods and hunting with the fine arrows made of pure silver for her by the Cyclops and her hounds, a gift from Pan.

Artemis had a quick temper. When she once found herself being spied on by a young man named Actaeon, she hurled a handful of water at him, and as the droplets touched his skin, he was transformed into a mighty stag. Then Artemis whistled for her hounds, and they raced toward her. Unaware this stag had once been young Actaeon, they tore him apart.

One day a great hunter, Orion, was hunting near Artemis with his dogs, Canis Major and Canis Minor. They began hunting together, challenging each other to races and archery contests. At night they sat by a fire and told each other stories, and their laughter filled the forest. Soon they were fast friends. Apollo loved his sister dearly, but he was vain, and he grew jealous of this friendship.

Apollo sent a giant scorpion to kill Orion. A great battle ensued, with the scorpion backing Orion toward the sea. Orion turned and plunged into the water, and as fast as he could, he swam far from shore.

Meanwhile, Apollo went to see his sister. He told her that an evil man had attacked one of the forest priestesses and was trying to escape by swimming across the sea, hoping to escape Artemis' fury. The goddess was enraged. She raced to the sea, Apollo close behind. When they reached the shore, Apollo pointed in the distance at a tiny speck upon the water. "That is him," he said, though in truth the head he pointed to was Artemis' beloved Orion.

Artemis loosed her arrow with unerring accuracy, and that arrow made its mark. Apollo's relief alarmed his sister. "Who have I killed?" she asked, and when she learned she had killed her true friend, she frantically swam out to sea to retrieve his body. But she was too late. Orion's spirit had already departed.

With great sadness, the Moon Goddess took Orion's body in her silver moon chariot and placed him in the sky as a tribute to their friendship. To this day there he remains, his faithful hounds, Canis Major and Canis Minor, beside him.

*Adapted from theoi.com and uexpress.com; image from theoi.com*