



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Pomegranate seeds

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Mother Ceres loved her daughter Proserpina very much, but she had to leave her one day because the plants on earth were not doing well. Mother Ceres was responsible for growing the crops.

"Be careful not to walk too far into the fields," Ceres warned her daughter Proserpina. "You must promise me that." She would never leave her daughter alone if the earth didn't need her so much.

"Don't worry, Mother," said Proserpina, "I know the fields are dangerous. But is it all right if I play with the water nymphs while waiting for your return?" Ceres was fine with that. "But remember, Proserpina," Ceres warned her. "The water nymphs are not always reliable either. Don't let them be tempted to lure you into the sea to drown you."

Then Ceres flew off in her carriage and Proserpina hurried to the shore where she was met by a group of water nymphs. They had made a beautiful necklace of shells for Proserpina. To thank the water nymphs, she went into the field to pick flowers for them.

Now she knew she shouldn't go too far out into the field...but the flowers ahead seemed more beautiful than those she saw up close. So she went on and on into the field until she came to a bush with brilliant flowers: they looked like diamonds! Proserpina had never seen such beautiful flowers before. "I'm pulling the bush out, root and all, so I can plant it in front of our house. That would be a great surprise for my mom when she gets home," Proserpina thought, and started pulling at the roots.

With the roots, Proserpina pulled a piece of earth out of the ground and a huge hole opened up. Proserpina was transfixed in fear. A black carriage emerged from the ground, drawn by six black horses. There was a man in the carriage. He was dressed in dark clothes, and although he had a gruff, he was a handsome man. He leaned over to Proserpina and said, "Do not be afraid, Proserpina. I would like to invite you to ride with me for a bit."

Proserpina screamed. "No, I certainly won't go. I have to go back to my mother." And as she was about to run away, the man grabbed her and pulled her into the carriage.

"Help me, mother!" cried Proserpina. But her mother was so far away that she couldn't hear Proserpina.

"I am King Pluto," said the man. "I am the king of diamonds and precious stones. You will like my palace. It is made of gold, diamonds and the most beautiful gemstones you have ever seen. You can have my crown as a toy. We'll be very good friends, because you'll like me a lot more when we don't suffer from that nasty sunshine anymore."



And so they rode on and on until the earth was no longer green, but rocky and the sun no longer shone but it grew darker. In the rock stood the castle of King Pluto. It was lit by torches. This created a brilliant color palette due to the reflection of the beautiful gemstones. The gate was guarded by a three-headed dog. "This is my dog," said King Pluto. "He makes sure that no one enters the castle unless I have invited them, nor does anyone leave the castle that I do not want to let go."

In the castle, the king ordered his servants to prepare the most delicious food. Eating something in the underworld, where this castle was located, will make you forget everything from your past and you will always stay in the underworld. The king hoped that Proserpina would soon forget her mother after eating delicious sweets. But Proserpina was not used to eating sweets at all. Her mother always gave her homemade bread and fruit. So Proserpina ate none of it.

In the meantime, Ceres found out that her daughter was not at home, so she went straight to the water nymphs. "Did you drown Proserpina?" she asked with wide, frightened eyes.

"No, we would never do that," said the water nymphs. "She went to pick flowers for us in the field."

Ceres knew immediately that something terrible must have happened. She picked up a torch. She used a spell to keep the torch burning day and night. The search for her daughter took months and months. In the meantime, she encountered several creatures, but no one could tell her where her daughter was.

One day she came to a woman named Hecate, and she told Ceres that she had heard that her daughter had been taken by a monster. Ceres followed the road where Hecate had heard the sound of the monster. After a long journey, she ran into Phoebus, a young man who liked to sit in the sun and play his harp. "I know

where your daughter Proserpina is," he said. "Don't worry, she's safe and in great hands."

"Oh, where is my dear child?" cried Ceres, throwing himself at his feet.

"Well, while she was collecting beautiful flowers, she was suddenly seized by King Pluto and he has taken her to his realm in the underworld. I've personally never been there, but it seems to be studded with gems. Your child will have a great time there. Proserpina will have the realm, and she will lack nothing," replied Phoebus.

"What good are all those riches if it is unloving?" cried Ceres. "I need her back! Will you come with me to claim my daughter from this evil Pluto?"

"Sorry," said Phoebus, "but I'm too busy for that. Plus, I don't get along very well with his dog guarding the gate. I'm afraid I can't offer help."

"Ah, Phoebus," said Ceres, with a biting tone in her voice. "You have a harp instead of a heart. Farewell."

Now that Ceres knew what had happened to her daughter, it didn't make her one bit happier than before. She made her way to the realm of King Pluto alone with her torch. In a short time, all the grief had made her not only old, but also bitter. In her desperation, she decided that the earth would no longer turn green, that no more crops would grow, and that no more fruit could be picked.

"If the earth ever sees green grass again," she said, "it must first grow along the path my daughter will walk to come back to me."

Something had to be done, otherwise the earth would have been lost. An important man named Quicksilver decided to visit King Pluto with a request to give Proserpina her freedom back to save the Earth.

In the meantime, Proserpina had been staying in Pluto's palace for more than half a year. She had miraculously made it all this time without anything. Pluto had gone to great lengths to please her all along, and that had changed Proserpina's thoughts about Pluto.

"I've actually grown to love you a bit," she had told the king one day. "But I still want to go home."

"I wish you would eat something," said the king, hoping it would make her forget her past.

"Ah, dear king," said Proserpina. "I would love to eat my mother's homemade bread, or the fresh fruit from our garden."

"Ah! That's the solution!" thought the king, and made his servants hasten to pick fresh fruit. But there was no more fresh fruit, because no more fruit grew. All the

servants found was a dry pomegranate with some dried seeds in it. They put the pomegranate on a tray and took it to Proserpina.

She hadn't eaten anything for so long, and now there was the fruit, which looked a bit shabby, but tempted her enormously. She took a seed from the pomegranate and put it in her mouth. Just then, Quicksilver stormed into the palace of King Pluto who had given his approval to the visit. "Gives Proserpina back her freedom!" cried Quicksilver, "or the earth will not survive."

The king walked over to Proserpina, who quickly tucked the pomegranate plate under the table. "My dear Proserpina," he said, "I wish you would like me a little more. We gloomy people usually have as warm hearts as people of cheerful disposition. If you decided on your own to stay with me, it would make me happier than owning a hundred palaces."

"You should have gotten to know me before you took me. The best thing you can do right now is let me go. Maybe one day I could come back and visit you" Proserpina said.

"My little Proserpina," said the king, "Quicksilver is here to tell me that many misfortunes have befallen innocent people because I have held you in my realm. It wasn't a good deed on my part and I'm sorry. I can see clearly enough now that you consider my palace a dark prison and I its iron keeper. And I sure would have an iron heart if I didn't let you go. I give you the freedom, now go with Quicksilver back to your house, back to your mother."

Saying goodbye was difficult for Proserpina. She had become very attached to the king. But she couldn't wait to go back to her mother. It was beautiful to watch the grass turn green on either side of her path. Wherever she set her foot, flowers began to grow. Mother Ceres had returned to her home and sat desolately on the sidewalk with her burning torch in her hand. She had been watching the flame for a while when it suddenly flickered and went out.

"What does this mean?" she thought. "It was an enchanted torch and should have stayed lit until my child came back."

She raised her eyes and was surprised to see everything around her turn green.

"Is the earth disobeying me?" exclaimed Ceres. "The earth should remain barren until I have my daughter in my arms!"

"Then open your arms," said a familiar voice, and there Proserpina came running to throw herself into her mother's arms. When they both calmed down, Ceres looked at her daughter with concern. "Did you eat anything while you were in King Pluto's palace?"

And then Proserpina told the truth. "I didn't eat anything until this morning until

they brought me a pomegranate today. I was so unbelievably hungry that I ate six seeds."

"Oh no!" cried Ceres. "For each of those pomegranate seeds, you have to spend one month of the year in King Pluto's palace. So you're only home with your mother for half the year and half with that wretched king of darkness!"

"Don't judge that poor King Pluto so hard," Proserpina said, kissing her mother. "He has some very good qualities and I really think I can handle spending six months in his palace as long as he lets me spend the other six with you. On the whole, dear mother, let us be thankful that he will not keep me all year round."

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