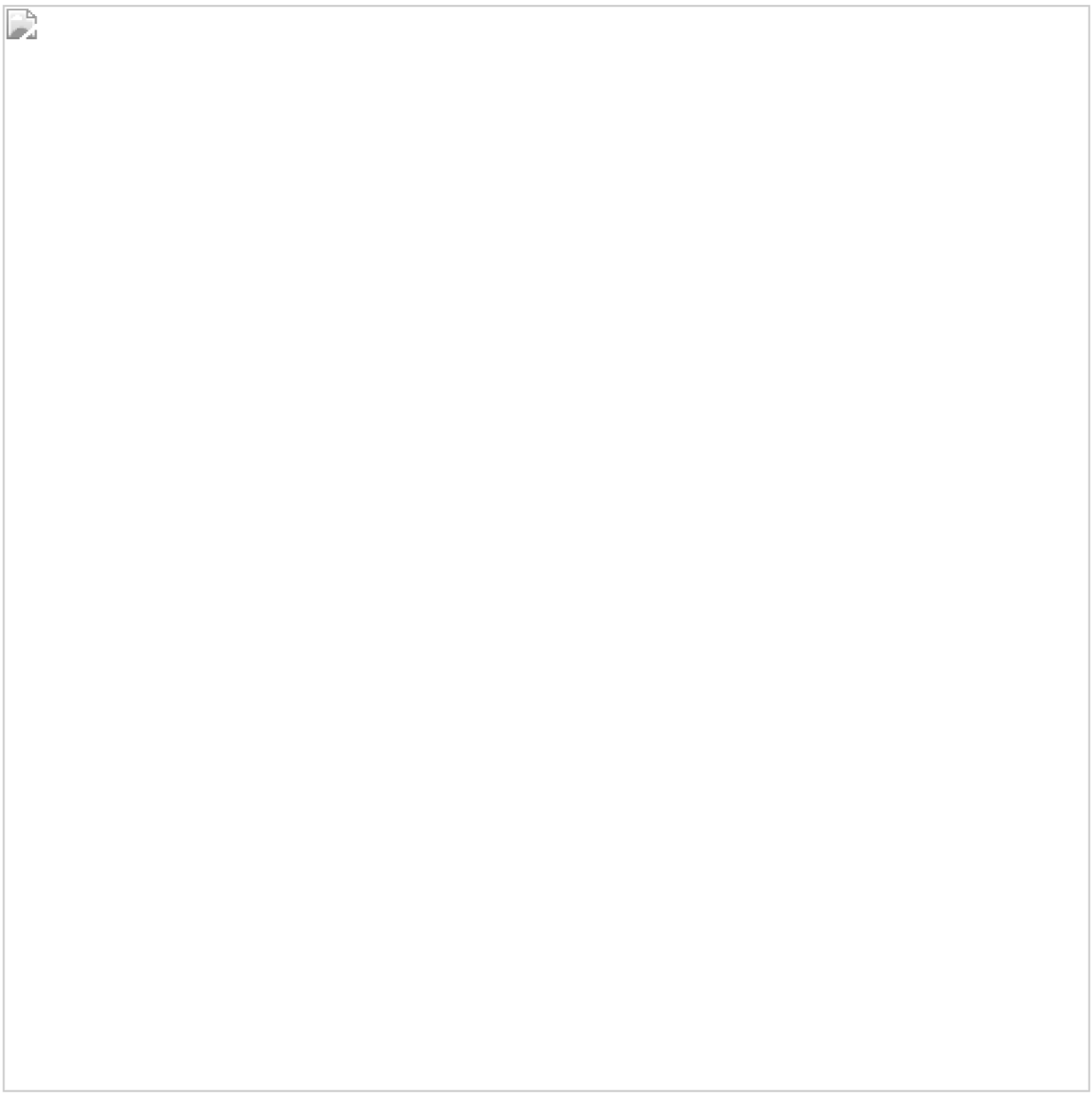
COLORING THE CLASSICS

Proserpina

A Myth of Greece and Rome



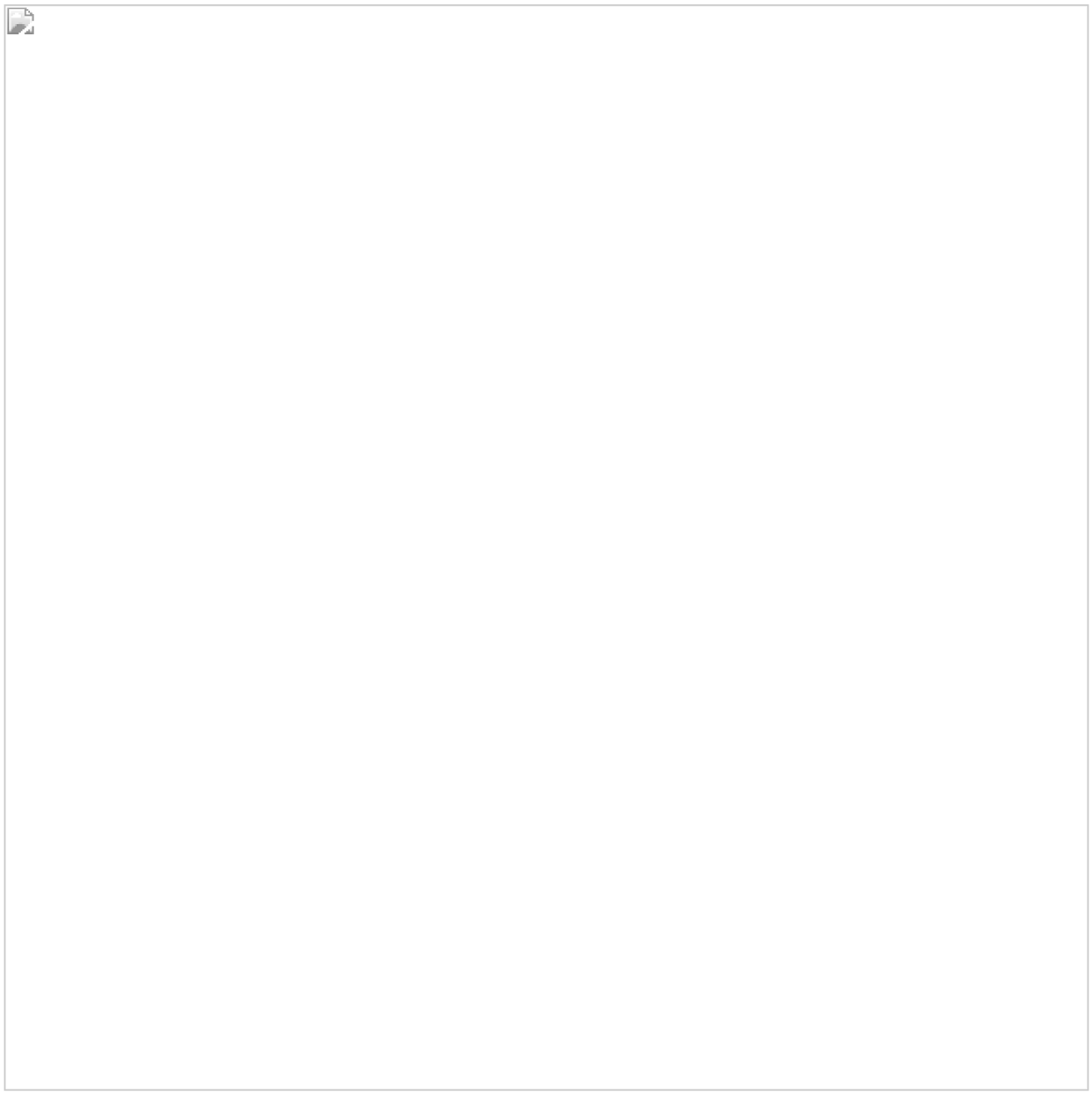
Mother Ceres was very fond of her little daughter Proserpina. She took care of the wheat and the corn and the apples and the pears all over the world. One morning she put on her turban of scarlet poppies and climbed into her car, which was drawn by a pair of winged dragons.

TALK ABOUT IT

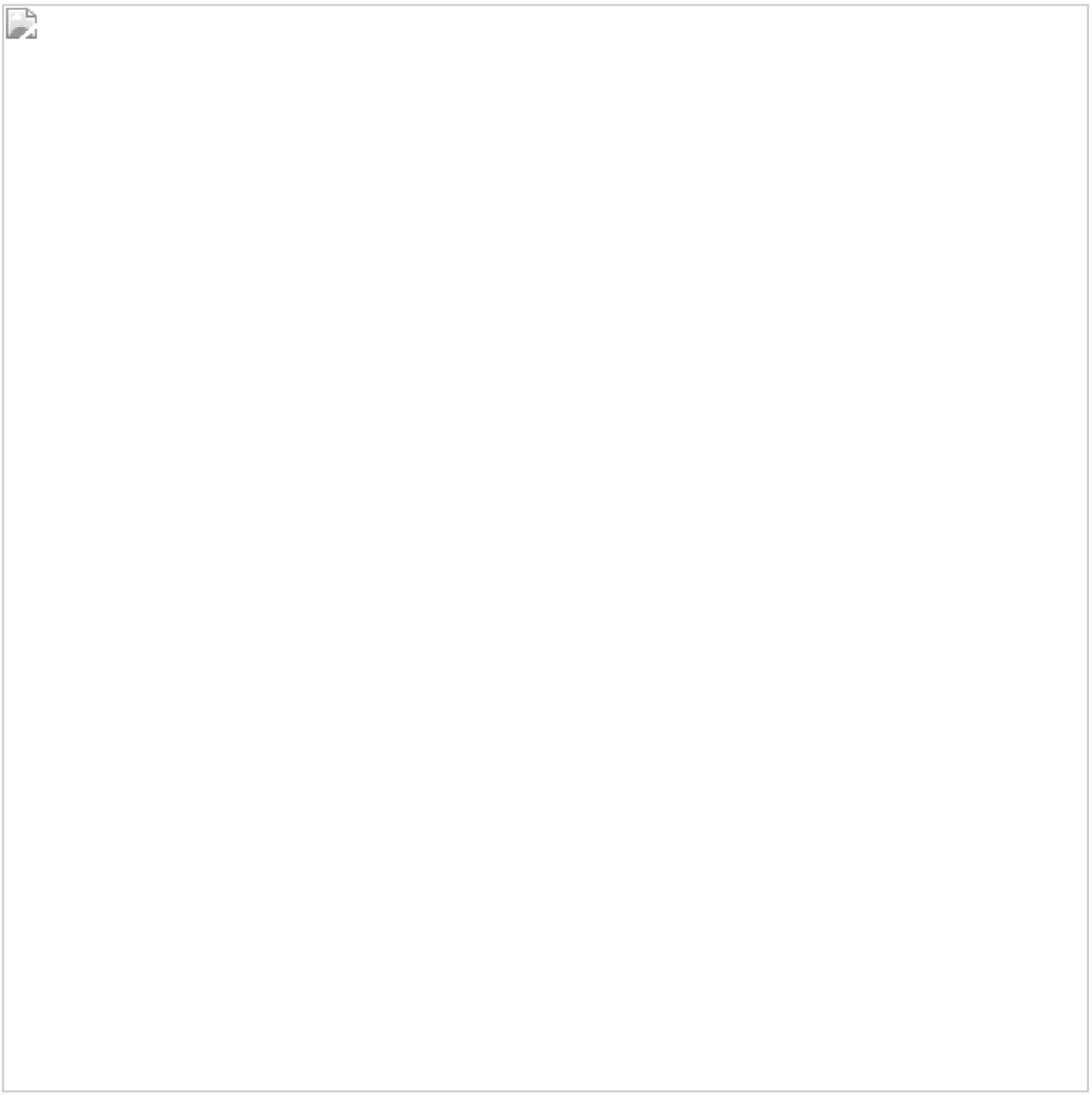
Ceres looks after all the growing things, and she loves her daughter most. What do you think it is like to have a mother with such a big job?

This book belongs to _____

Proserpina · another picture



The Sea-Children



“Dear mother, I shall be very lonely while you are away,” said Proserpina. May she go down to the sands and ask the sea-children to come out and play?

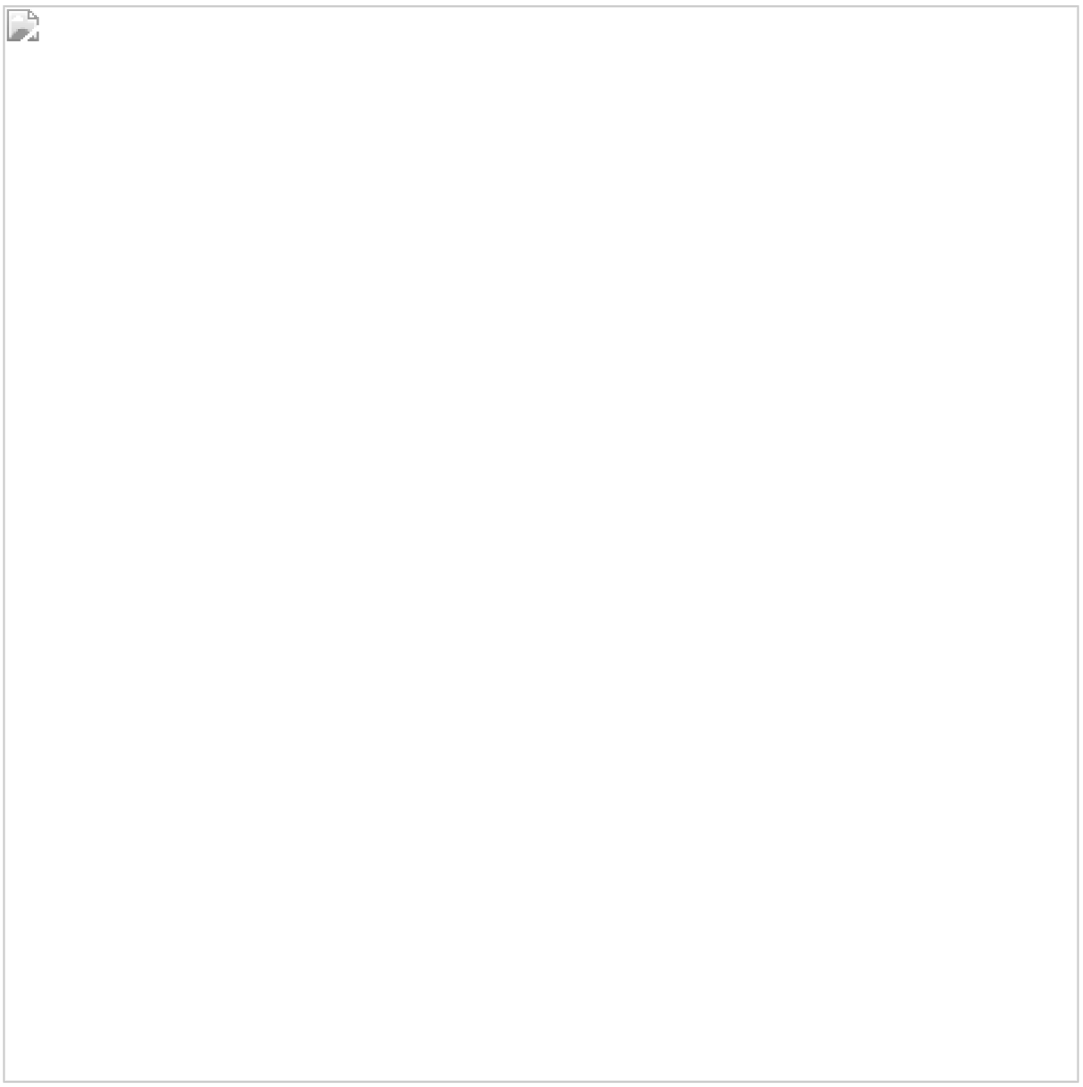
“Yes, child, you may,” said Mother Ceres. “But you must take care not to stray away from them.” She was not to play in the fields by herself.

Proserpina promised. By the time the dragons had whirled the car out of sight, she was on the shore, calling.

The sea-children came at once, with wavy sea-green hair and shining faces. They sat on the wet sand and made her a necklace of shells from the bottom of the sea.

TALK ABOUT IT

Proserpina promised her mother she would stay near the sea-children. Why do you think mothers ask us to stay close?

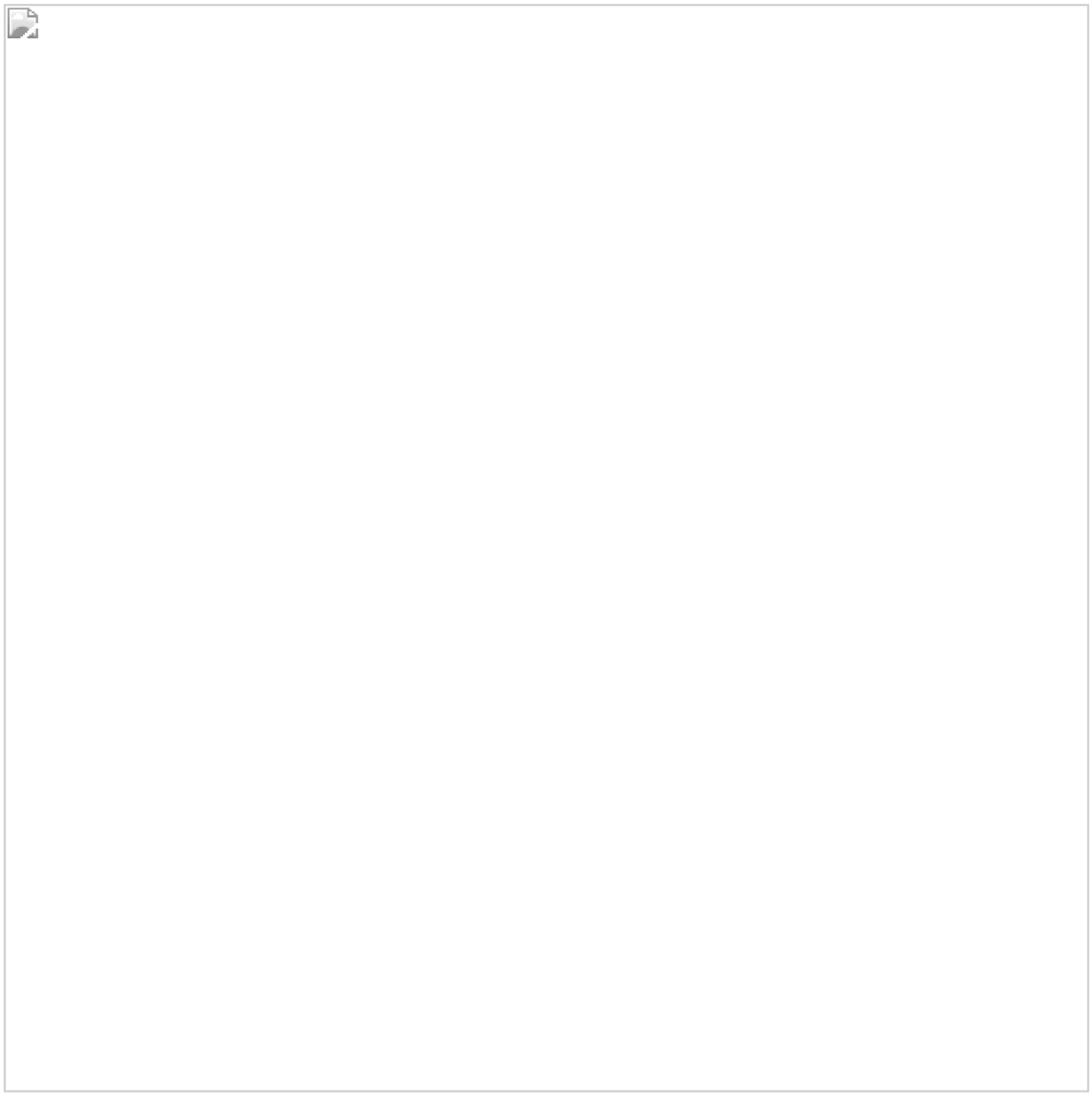


Think about it

1. What did the sea-children make for Proserpina?

- ○ A crown of seaweed
- ○ A necklace of shells
- ○ A sand castle

A Bush of Wonderful Flowers



The sea-children could not leave the water, or they would dry up like seaweed. “If you wait for me here,” she said, “I will run to the fields and be back again with my apron full of flowers.”

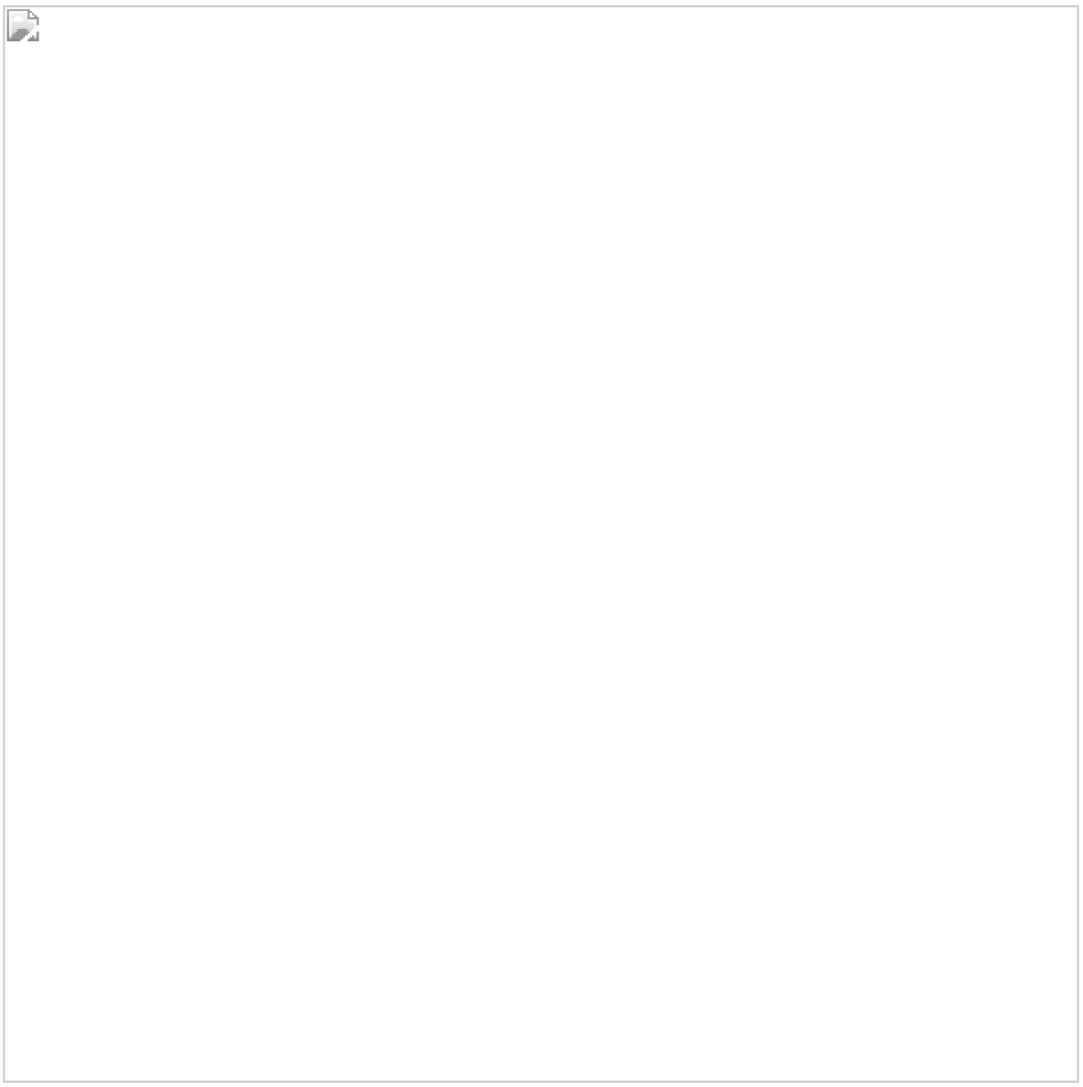
The first flowers she saw were faded, and forgetting what her mother had said, she strayed a little farther. Soon her apron was full.

Then she saw a bush with more than a hundred kinds of flowers. They had a shiny look she did not quite like. But she took courage, and began to pull the bush up by the roots to plant in her mother's garden.

TALK ABOUT IT

Proserpina felt a little unsure about the bush, and she pulled it anyway. What do you do when you are not sure about something?

A Bush of Wonderful Flowers · another picture

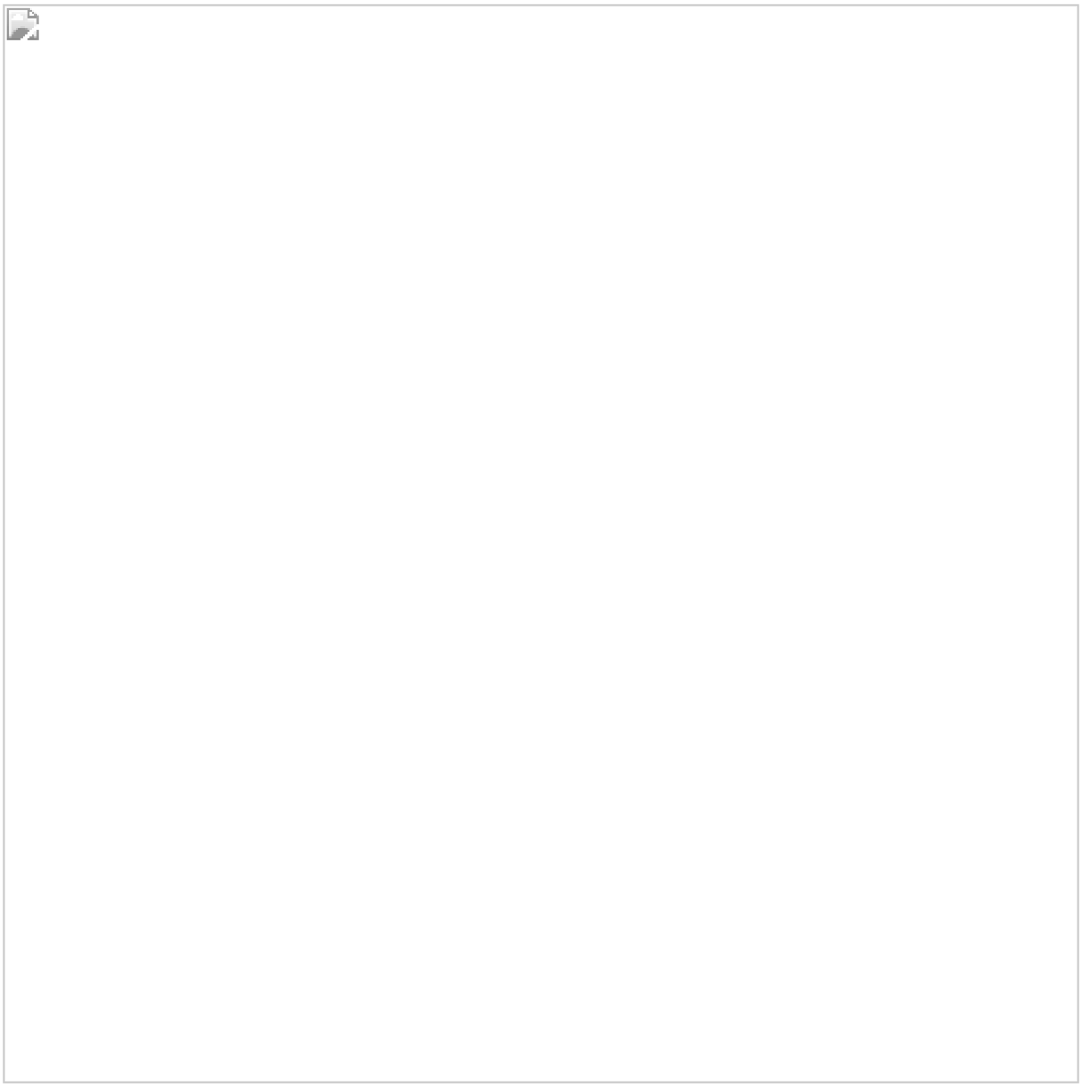


Think about it

1. Why did Proserpina wander farther into the fields?

- ○ To find her mother
- ○ To go to sleep
- ○ To find flowers for wreaths for the sea-children

The Hole in the Ground



She pulled with all her might, and up came the bush. A hole opened where it had been, with a rumble like horses' hooves and rattling wheels.

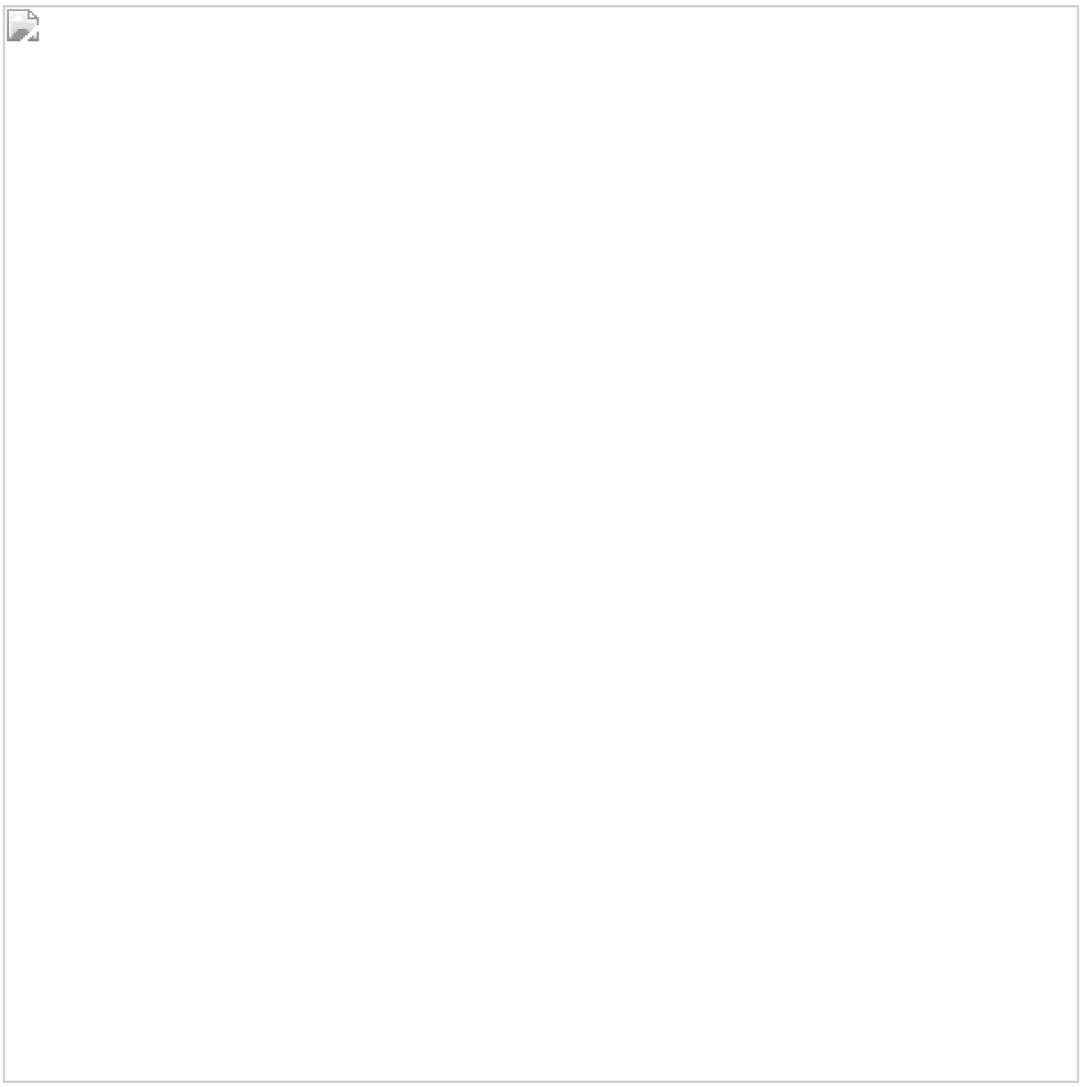
Out came two black horses and a golden chariot. In it sat a cross-looking man with a crown of diamonds, covering his eyes from the sunshine.

“Do not be afraid,” he said. But his voice was gruff, and Proserpina cried, “Mother, mother! O Mother Ceres, come quickly and save me!”

Ceres was thousands of miles away. The man caught Proserpina up and sprang into the chariot, and the horses galloped off. Her flowers fell from her apron to the ground.

TALK ABOUT IT

Proserpina called out for her mother, but Ceres was far away. Who do you call when you need help?

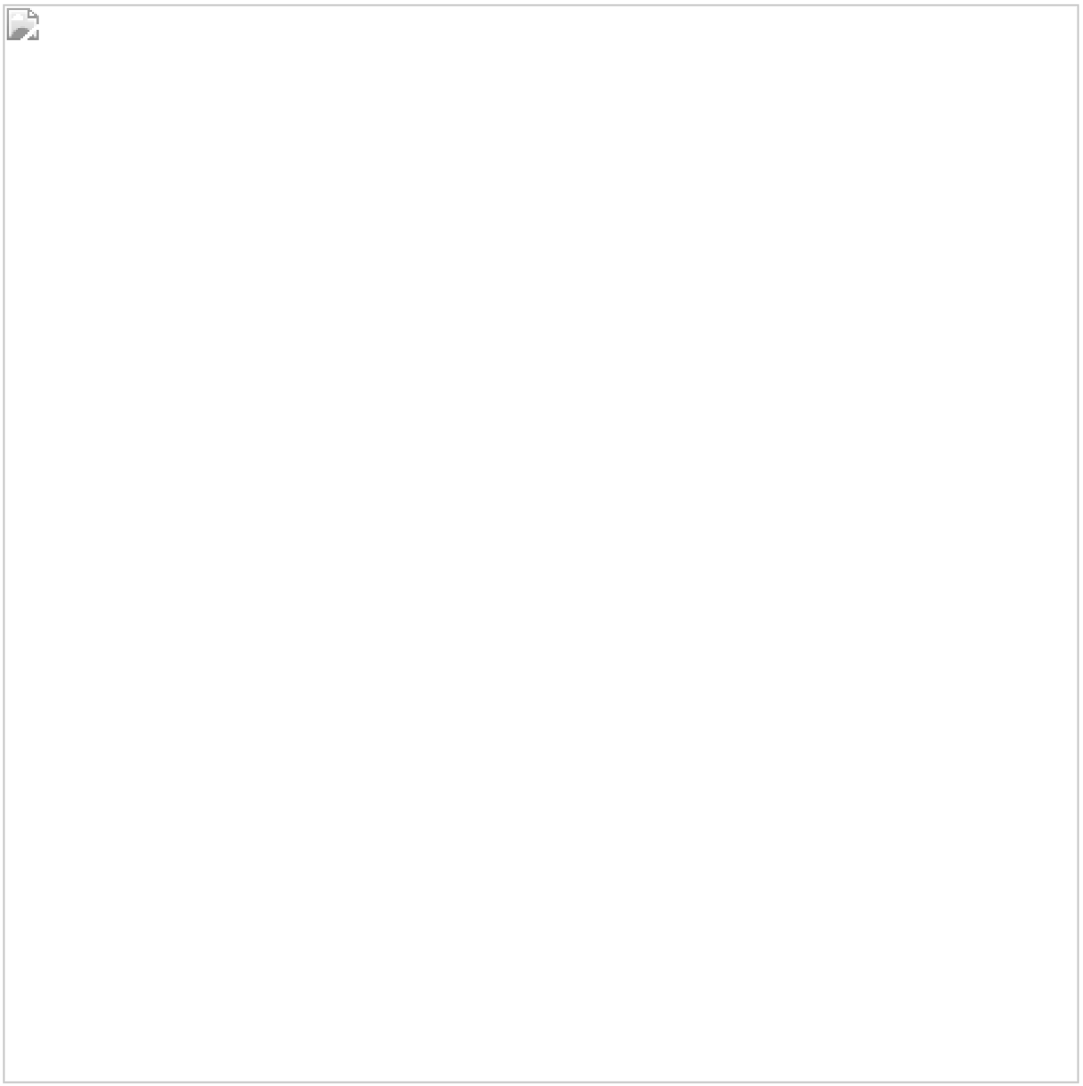


Think about it

1. Who did Proserpina cry out to?

- ○ Her mother, Ceres
- ○ The sea-children
- ○ The man in the chariot

The Dark Road



The man said his name was Pluto, the King of the mines,. He promised a palace with a throne, and a garden of jewels.

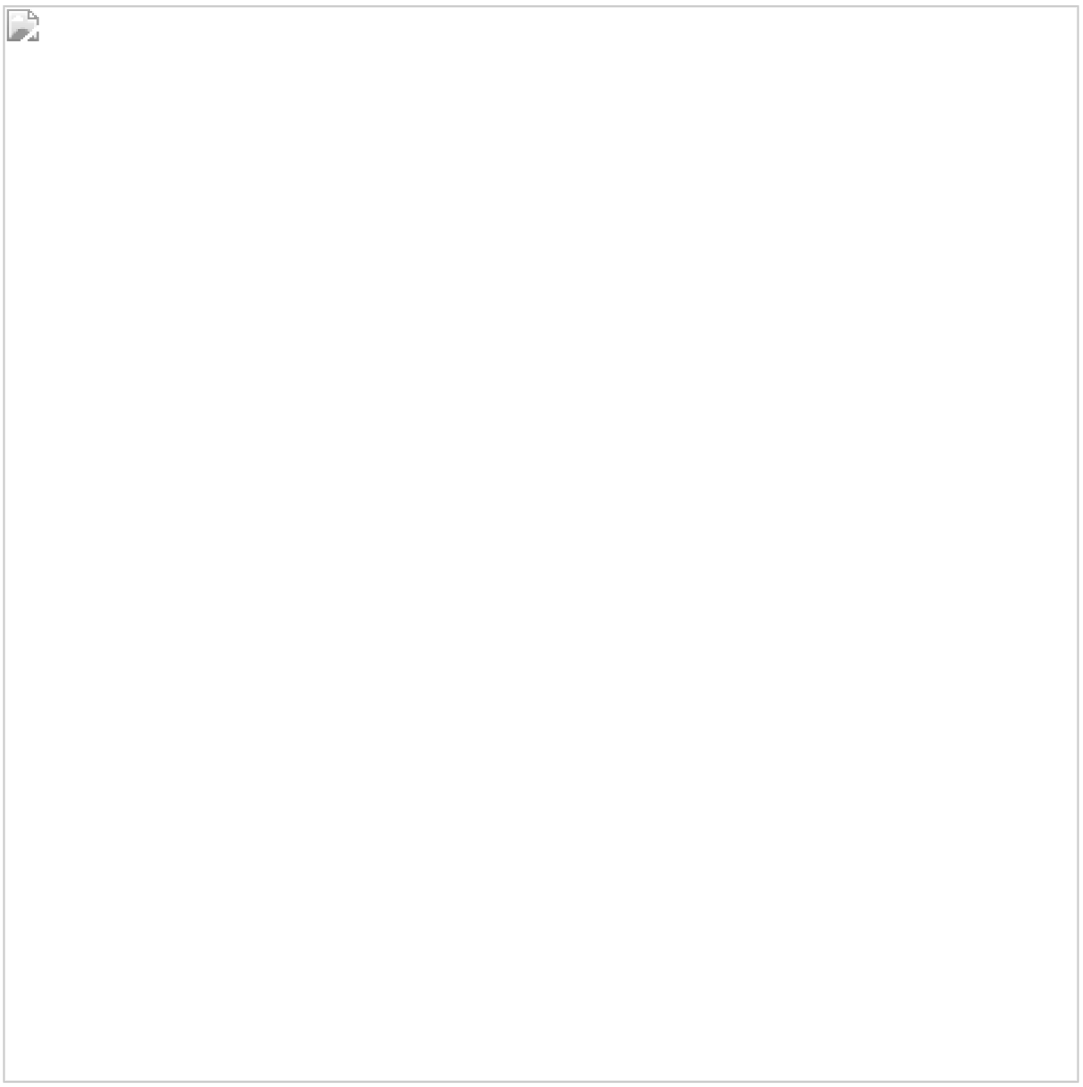
“Let me go home,” sobbed Proserpina. She did not care for palaces. She only wanted her mother. But Pluto shouted to his horses to go faster.

“I shall never laugh again,” she said, “till you take me back to my mother's cottage.”

The road grew dark, with black rocks and thick trees. At the great gates stood his dog, Cerberus, with three heads. “He never bites people,” said Pluto, “unless they try to come in here when I do not want them.”

TALK ABOUT IT

Pluto promised Proserpina jewels and a palace, but she only wanted her mother. Why do you think that was?

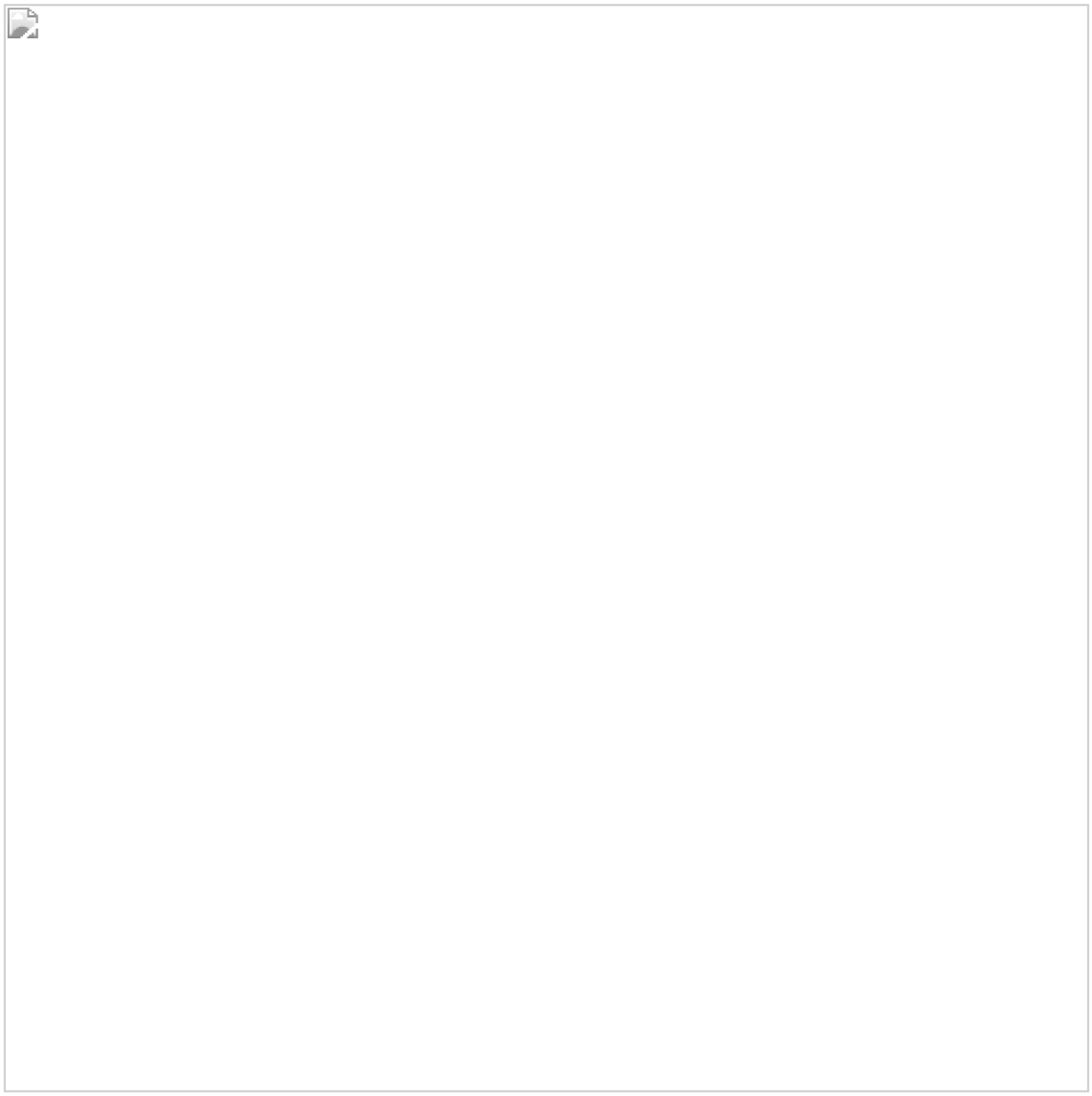


Think about it

1. What did Proserpina want most?

- ○ A palace
- ○ To go home to her mother
- ○ A crown of diamonds

The River of Forgetting



Inside the gates was a slow black river. “This is the river Lethe,” said Pluto. “If you drink only a little sip of the water, you will at once forget all your care and sorrow.” Then she would not cry for her mother any more.

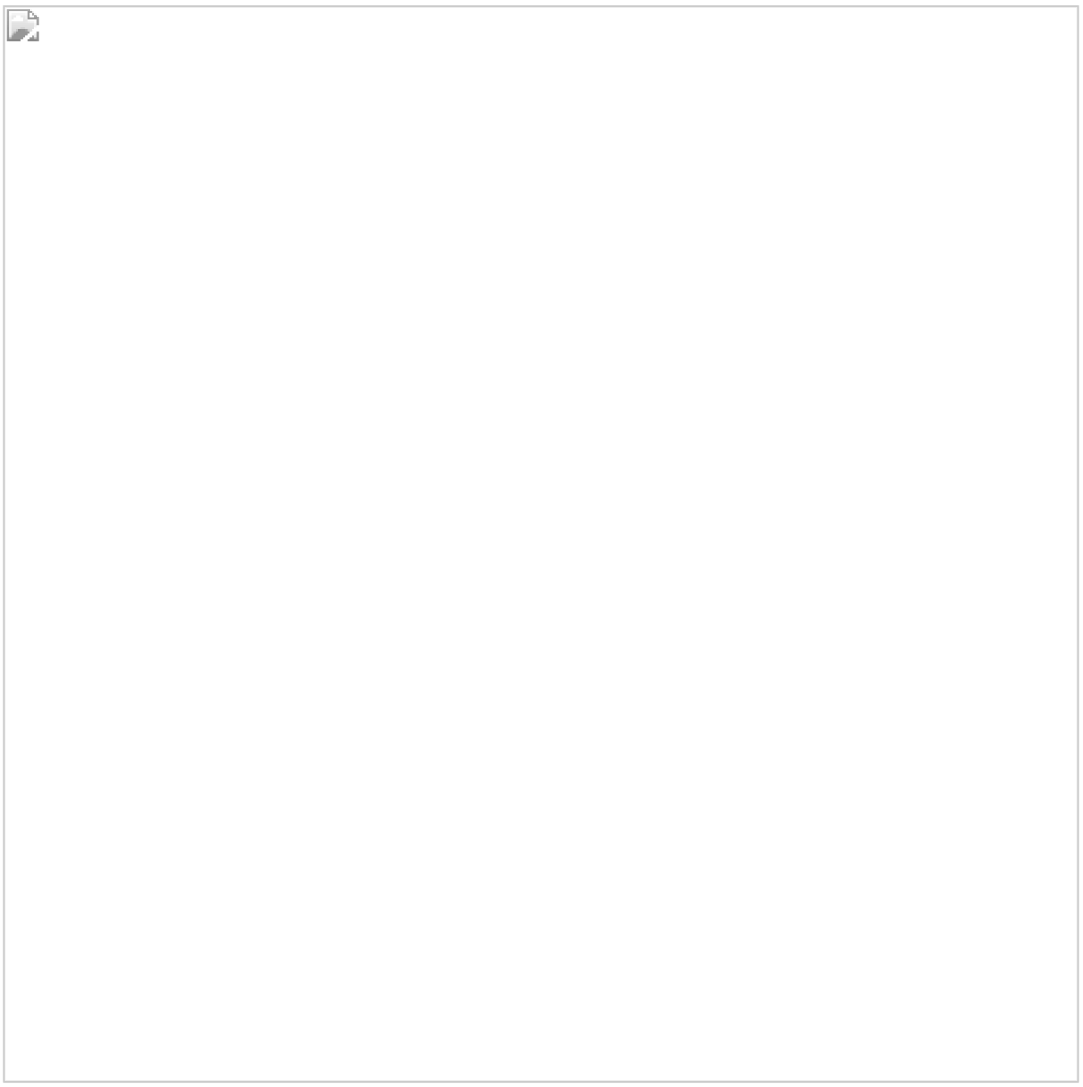
“Oh no, oh no!” sobbed Proserpina. “O mother, mother, I will never forget you; I do not want to be happy by forgetting all about you.”

Pluto carried her into a great hall lit by hundreds of diamonds, rich and splendid, but cold and lonely. He ordered a grand supper. “I will not eat anything,” said Proserpina.

TALK ABOUT IT

Proserpina would rather feel sad and remember her mother than forget her. Why do you think that was?

The River of Forgetting · another picture



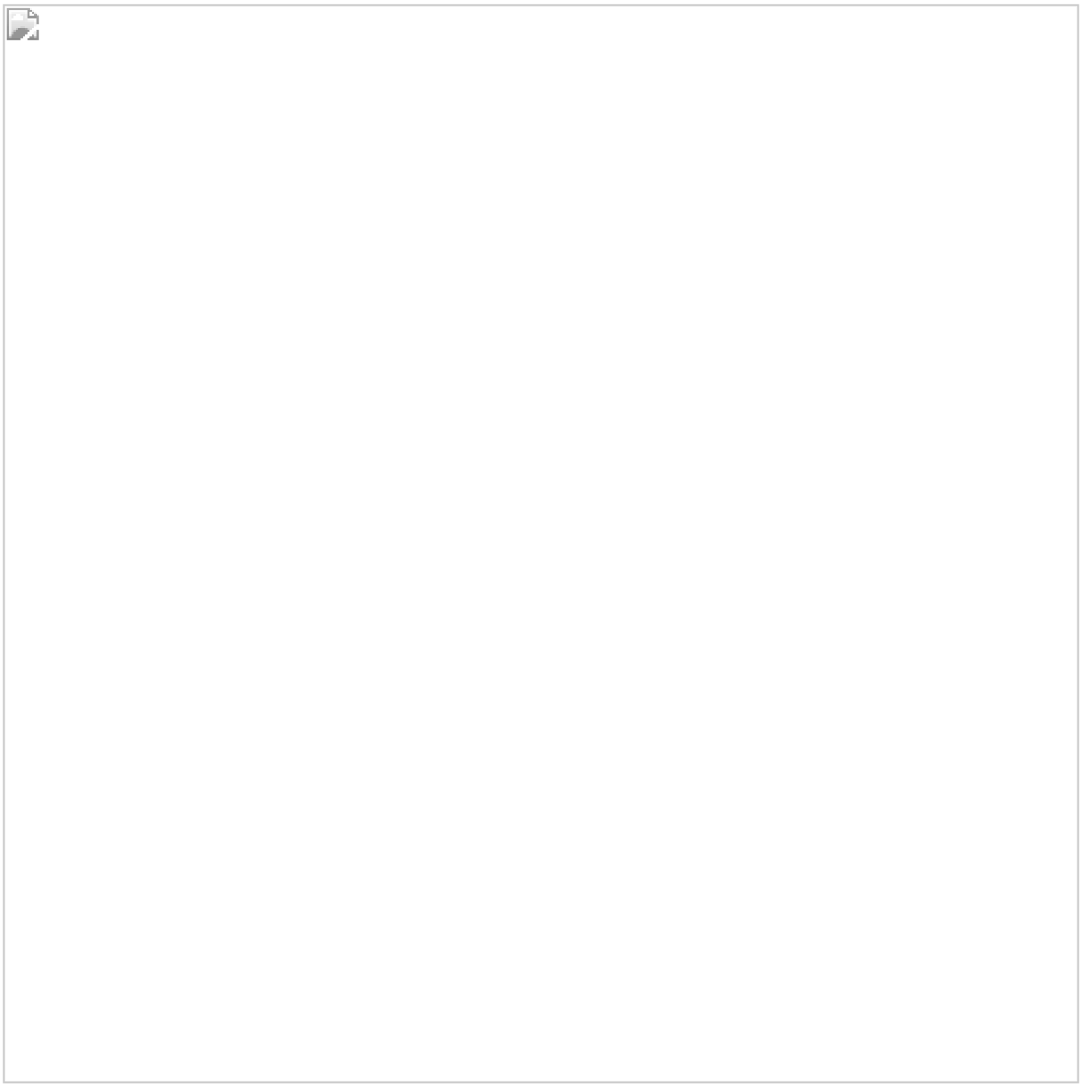
Think about it

1. What did the water of Lethe do?

- ○ Made you forget your sorrow
- ○ Made you sleepy
- ○ Made you tall

2. A very old book says, "Can a woman forget her sucking child … yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isaiah 49:15). Who never forgets you?

An Empty Cottage



In the other country, Ceres heard a voice calling her. She left her work half done and drove home.

The cottage was empty. She went down to the shore. “Where is Proserpina?” she asked the sea-children. They said she had gone to gather flowers for a wreath, and they had not seen her since.

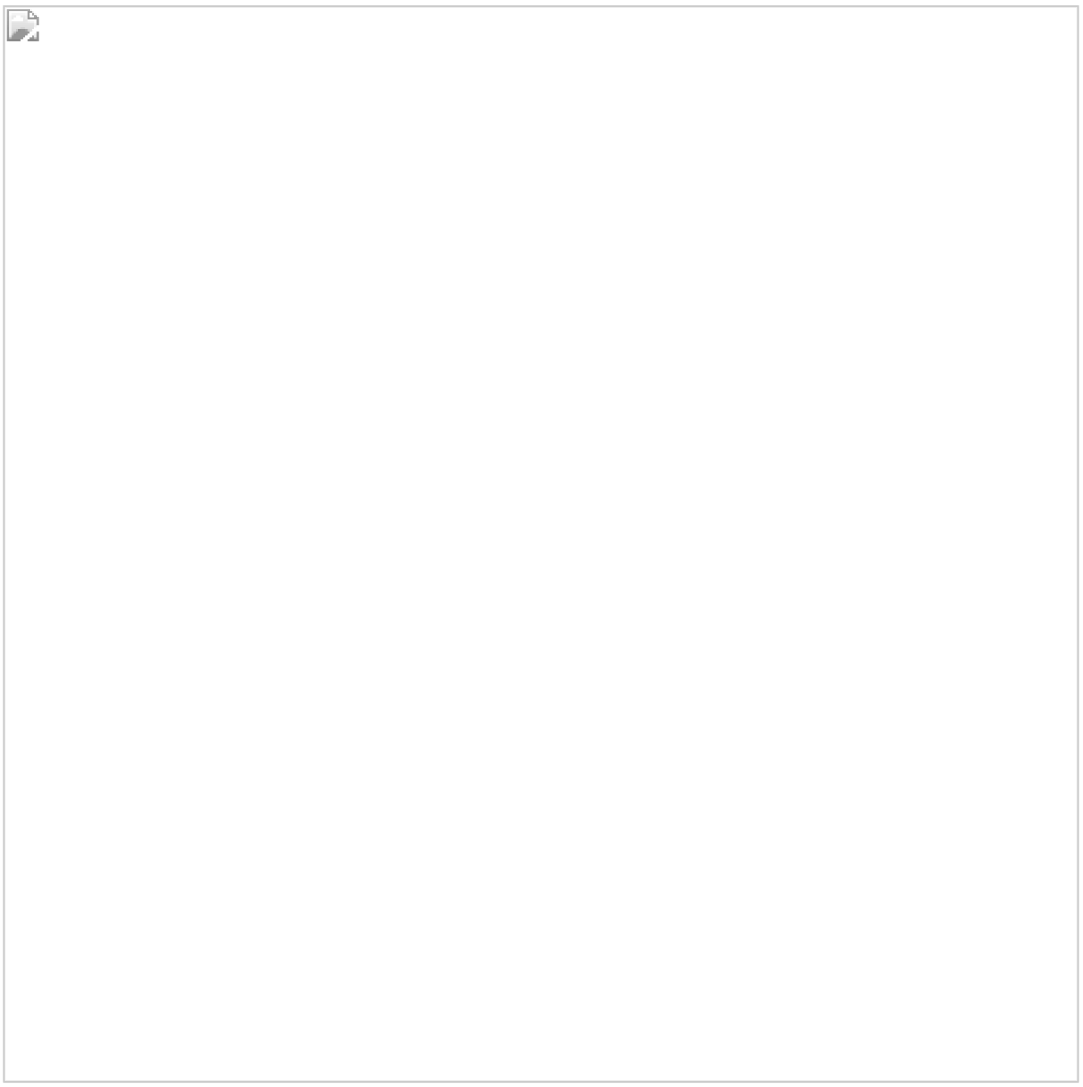
She asked all the neighbors. A fisherman had seen her footprints in the sand. One old woman had heard a scream, but had thought it was only laughter.

Night had come. Ceres lit a torch and set out. She said she would never come back until Proserpina was found.

TALK ABOUT IT

Ceres left her own work and went looking right away. What does that tell you about how she felt about Proserpina?

An Empty Cottage · another picture

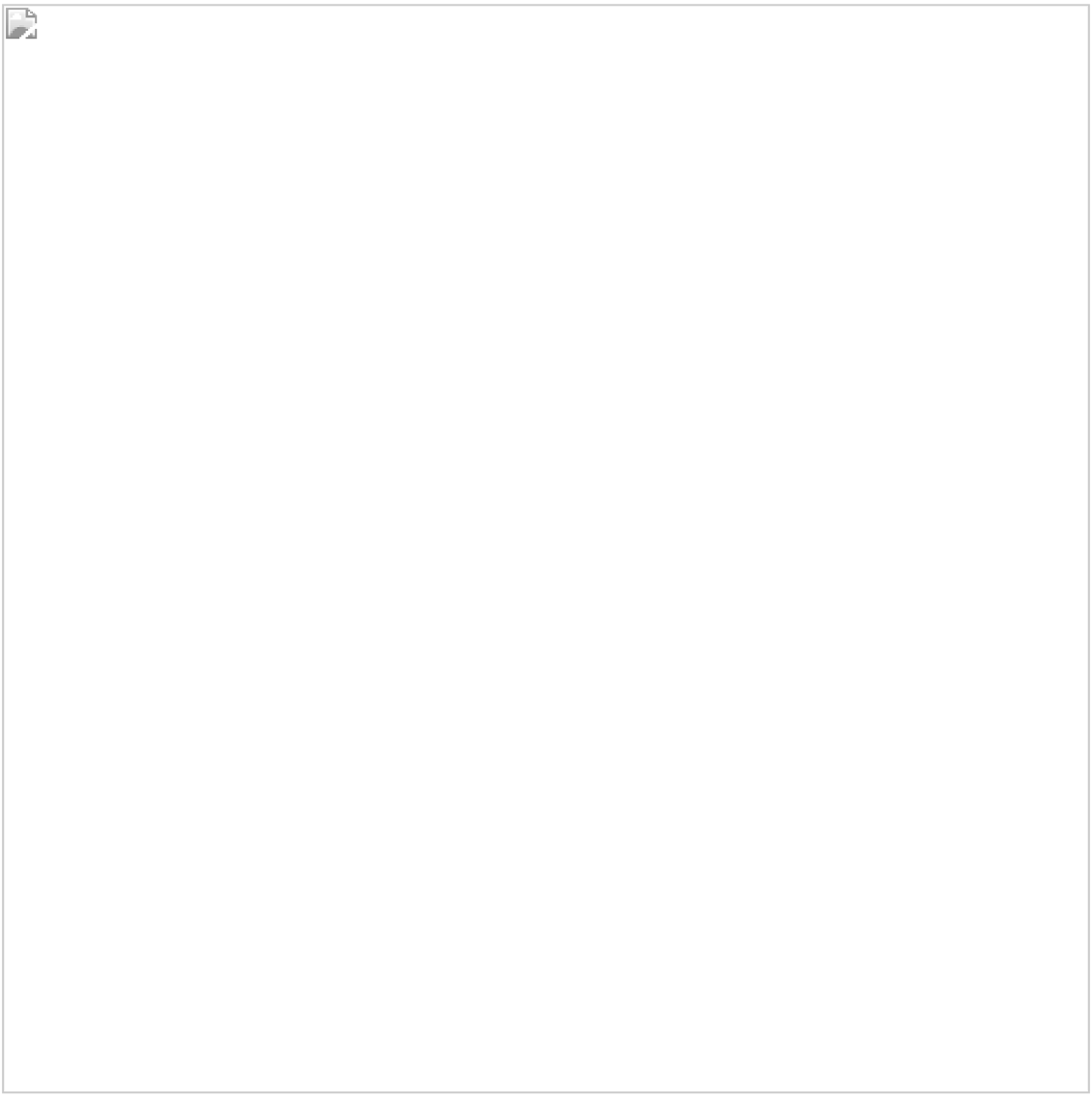


Think about it

1. What did Ceres carry as she set out to search?

- ○ A lantern
- ○ A walking stick
- ○ A lit torch

Nine Days and Nights



All night Ceres searched. At farm-house doors the sleepy people were sorry for her but knew nothing. At palace doors the servants drove her away.

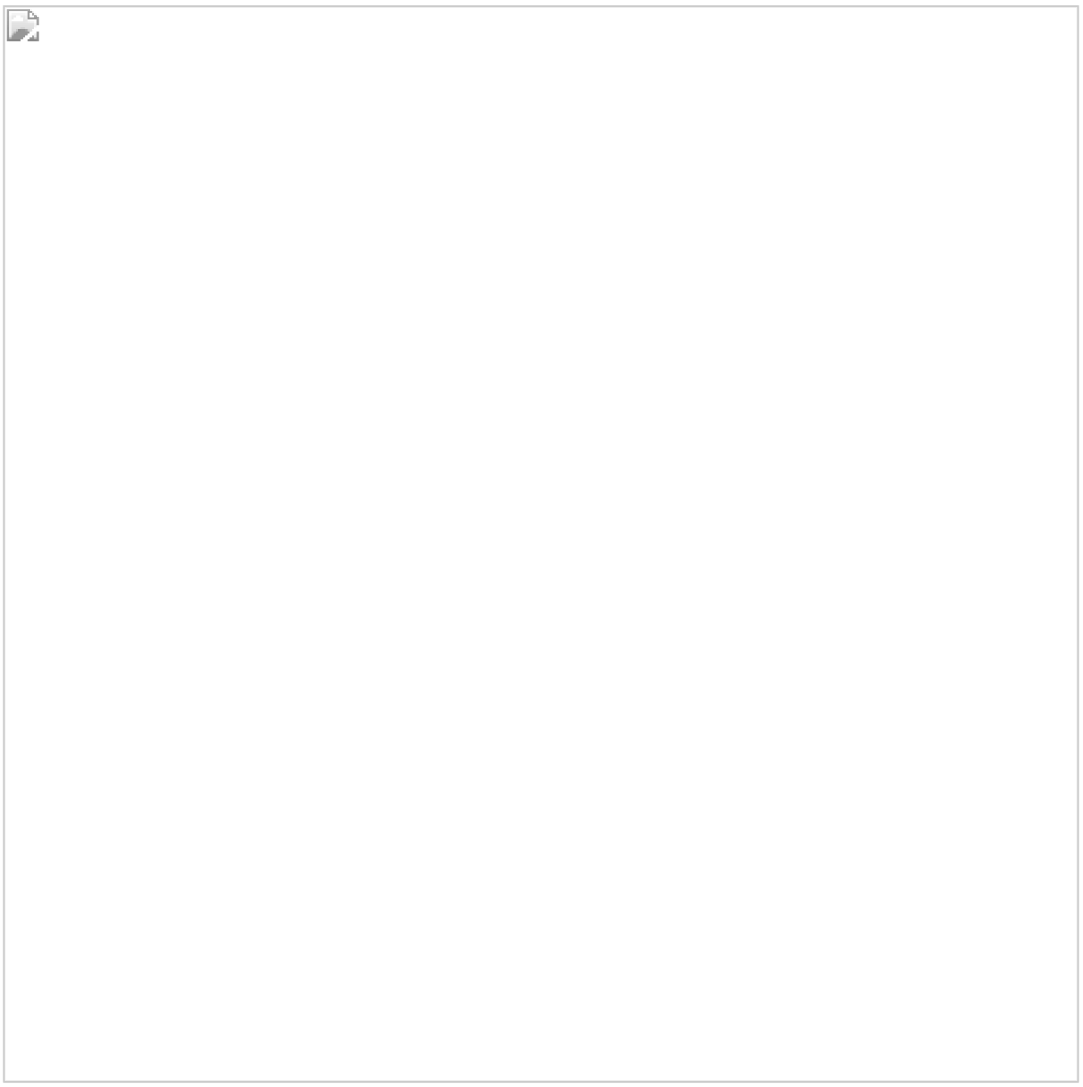
She asked the creatures of the woods too. She tapped an oak tree and a maiden stepped out. A nymph rose out of a spring. They had not seen Proserpina.

The god Pan, playing his flute on a hillside, answered her kindly and gave her milk and honey in a wooden bowl. But he knew nothing.

Nine days and nights she wandered, tucking any withered flower she found into her dress, in case her daughter had dropped it.

TALK ABOUT IT

Some people drove Ceres away, and Pan gave her milk and honey. What is a kind thing you could do for a tired stranger?

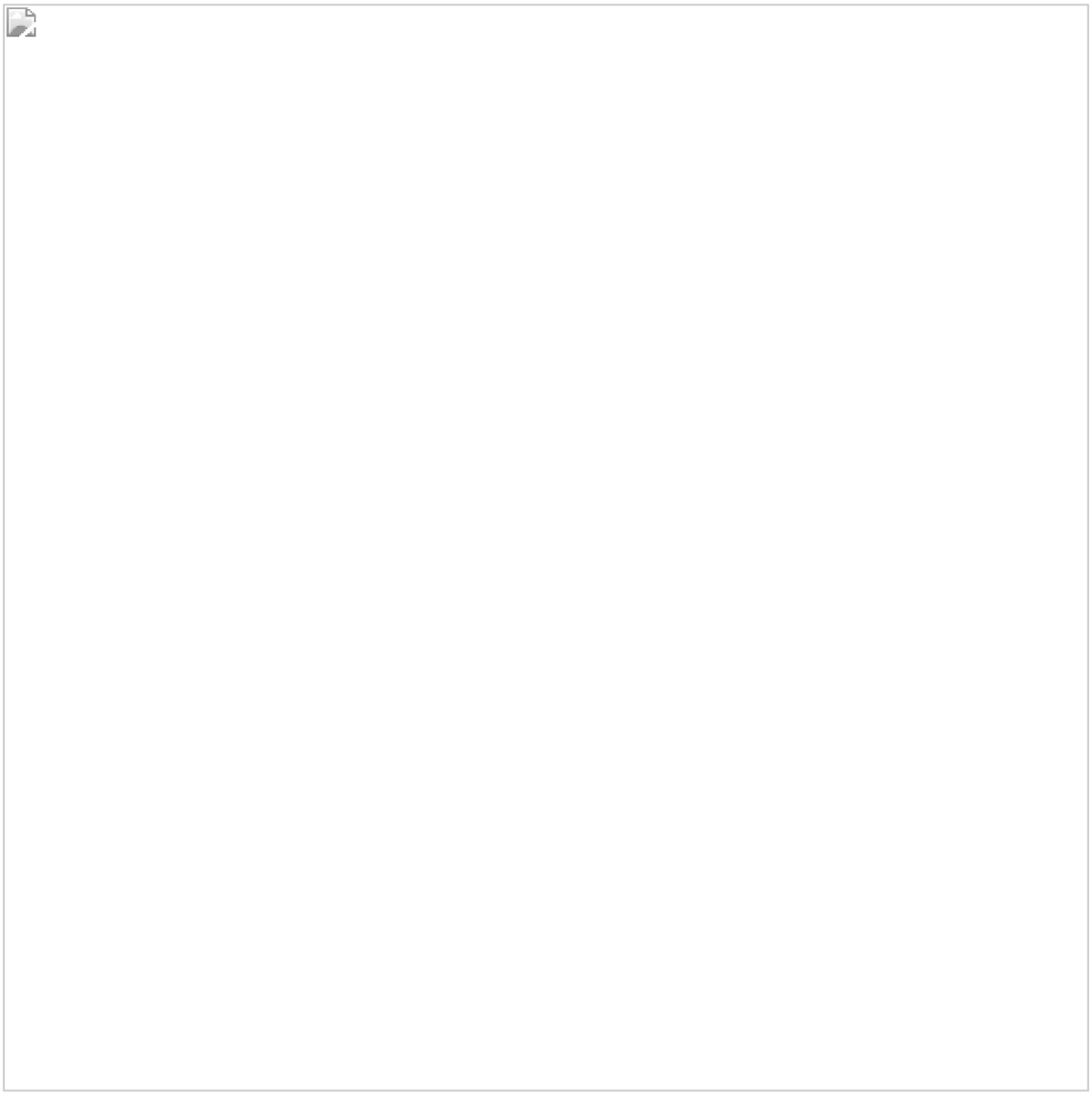


Think about it

1. What did the god Pan give Ceres?

- ○ A map
- ○ A horse
- ○ Milk and honey

The Man in the Sunshine



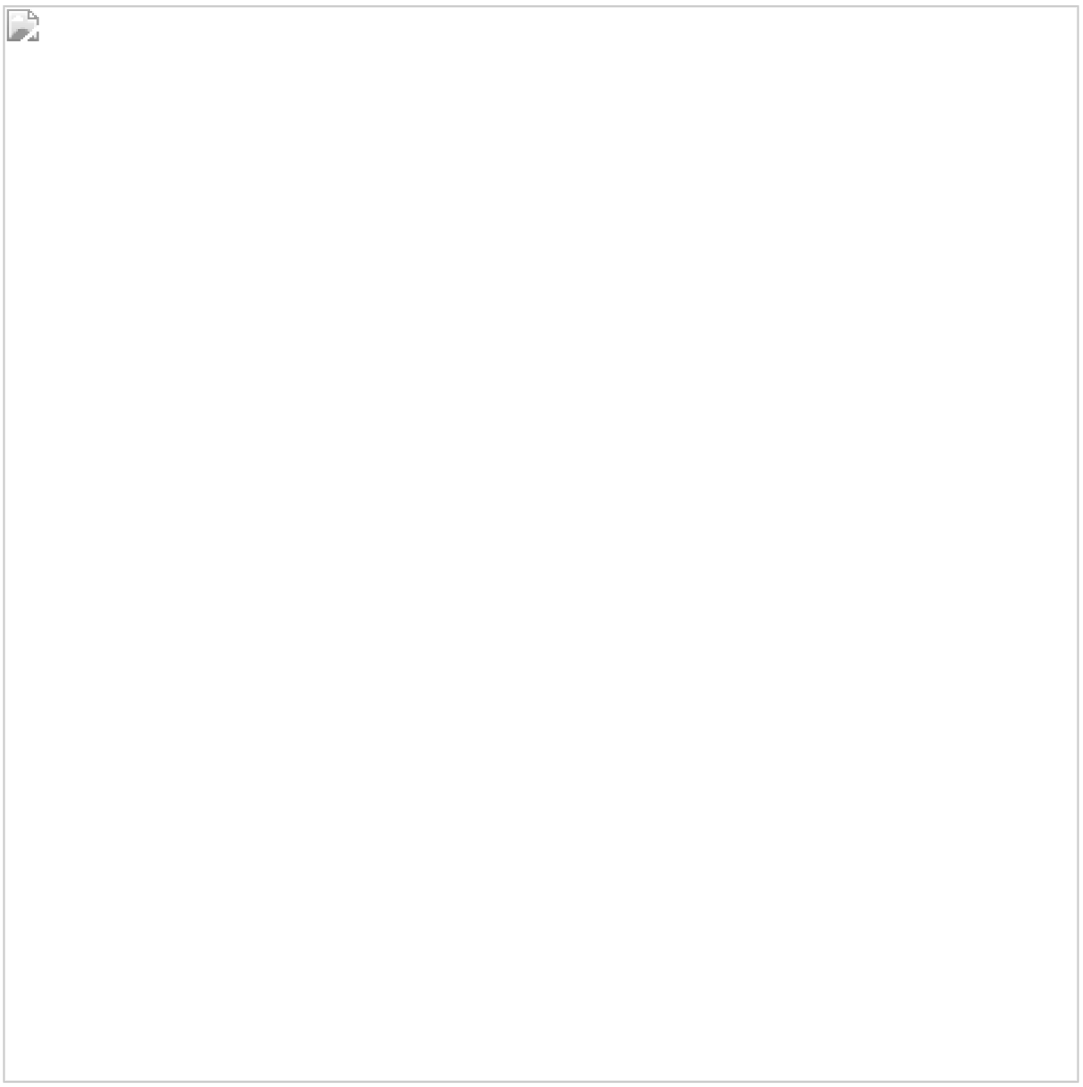
At last Ceres thought of Phoebus, who sits always in the sunshine. He must have seen where Proserpina went. She found him with his lyre, singing a merry song.

“I did see Proserpina not many days ago,” he said. “She is safe and in good hands.” She had been carried off by King Pluto to his kingdom.

“What has she got to love?” said Ceres. “What are all these splendors if she has no one to care for? I must have her back.” But Phoebus would not go with her, for the three-headed dog would never let him pass.

TALK ABOUT IT

Phoebus told Ceres the news, but he would not go with her. How do you think that sounded to a worried mother?

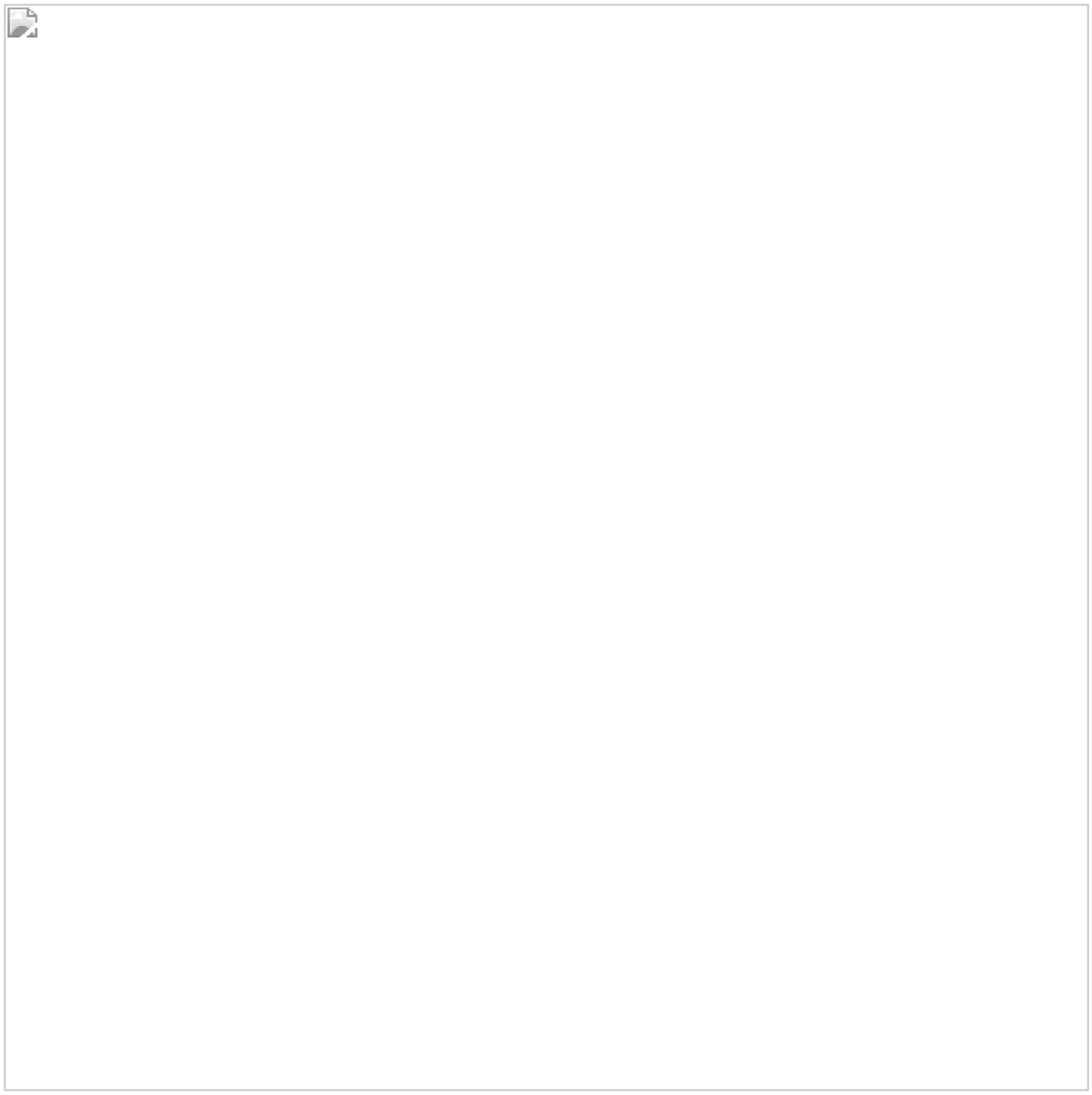


Think about it

1. Who finally told Ceres where Proserpina was?

- ○ The oak maiden
- ○ Phoebus, the man in the sunshine
- ○ The fisherman

A Bare, Brown World



Proserpina was behind iron gates, with a three-headed dog on guard.

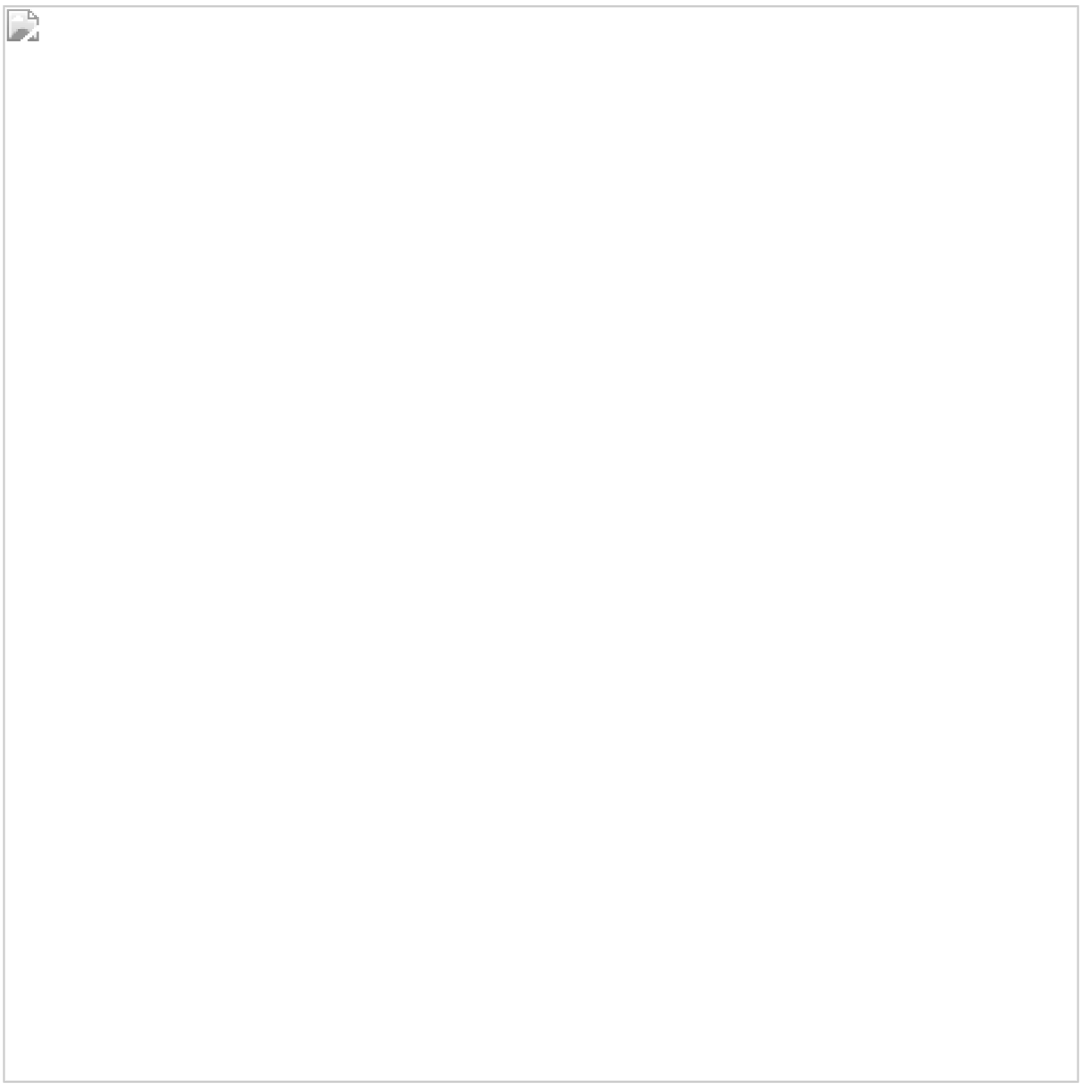
Ceres wandered the world with her never-dying torch, so sad that she looked old. When she saw children playing, she looked at them with tears in her eyes.

At last she made up her mind that not a blade of grass should grow until her daughter was sent back. Even the flowers were forbidden to bloom.

The farmers planted and nothing came up. “Never,” she said. “If the earth is ever to be green again, it must grow along the path by which my daughter comes back to me.”

TALK ABOUT IT

Ceres was so sad that the whole world went hungry. Who else was hurt by her sadness?



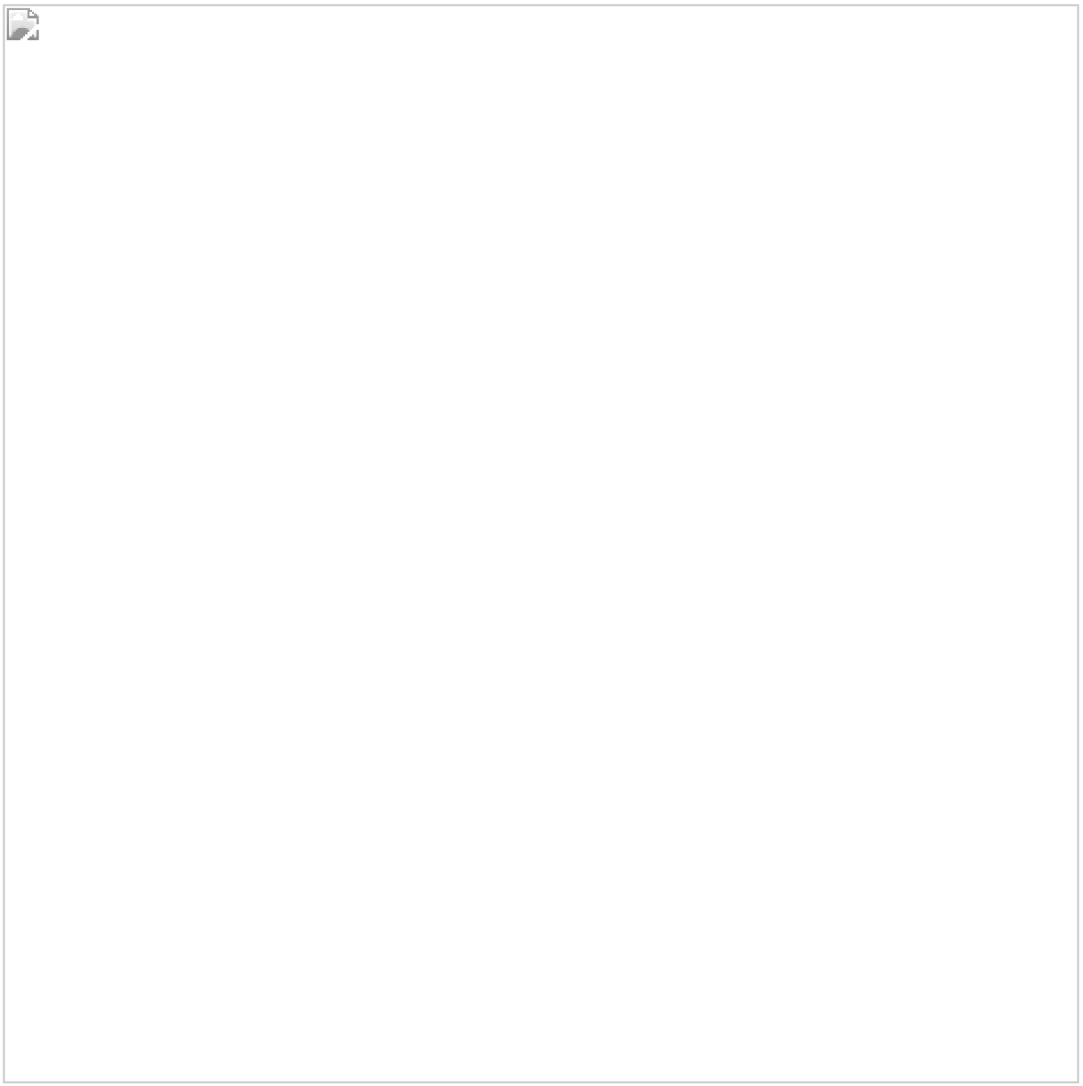
Think about it

1. What happened to the plants when Ceres was sad?

- ○ Nothing would grow
- ○ They grew taller
- ○ They turned red

2. When you are very sad, what helps you most? Who could help you?

Six Months Below



At last Mercury, the swift messenger of the gods, was sent to King Pluto. On winged shoes he leaped over Cerberus.

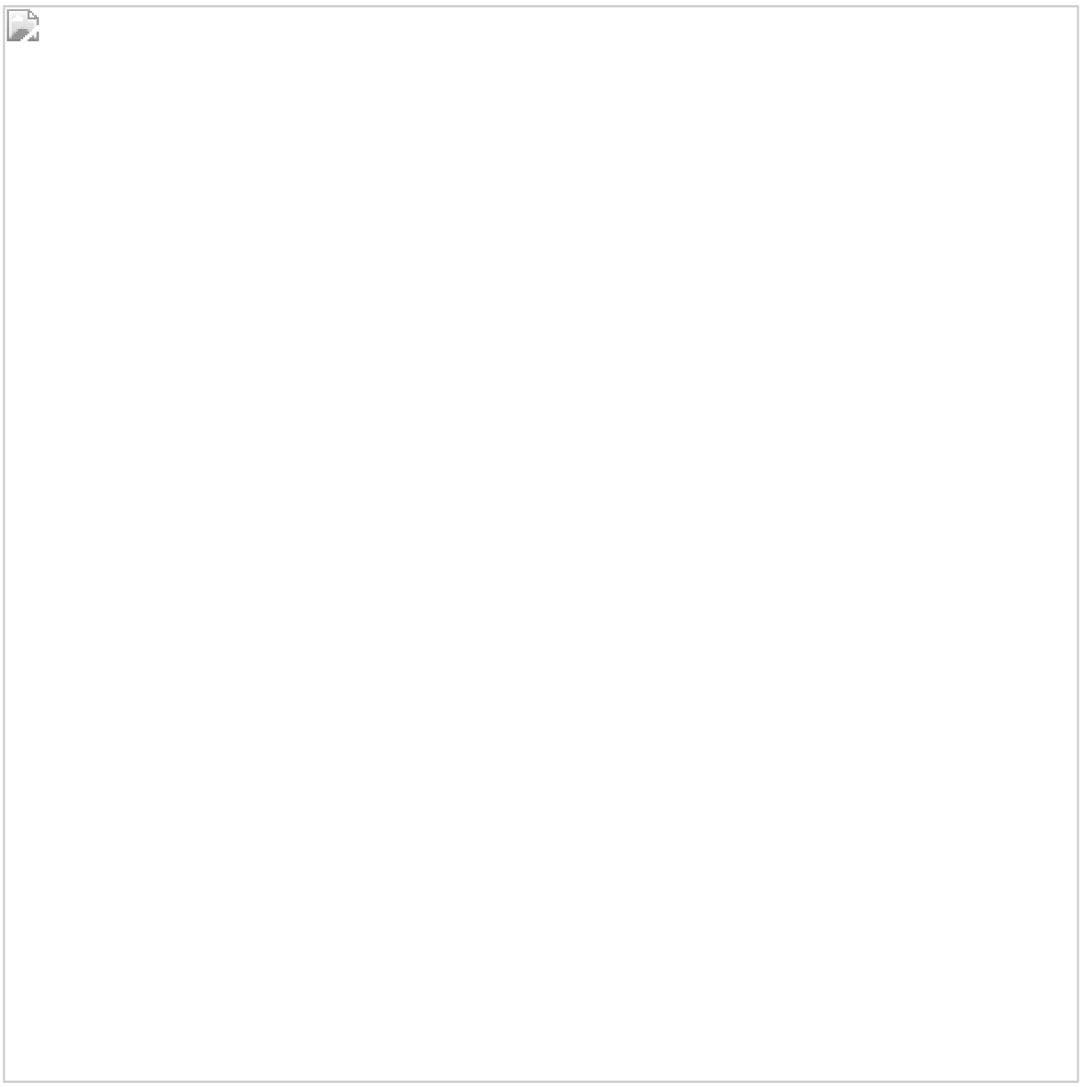
Proserpina had been in the palace six months, and she had not tasted a single bite. She was a bright, merry little girl, but all the jewels were not worth a single sunbeam to her.

One day she saw the king standing alone, with no one to love him, and she felt sorry for him. She put her small hand in his. “I love you a little,” she whispered.

“Do you really, dear child?” said Pluto. But he looked so dark and stern that she shrank back a little.

TALK ABOUT IT

Proserpina felt sorry for King Pluto, even though he had taken her away. What do you think about that?

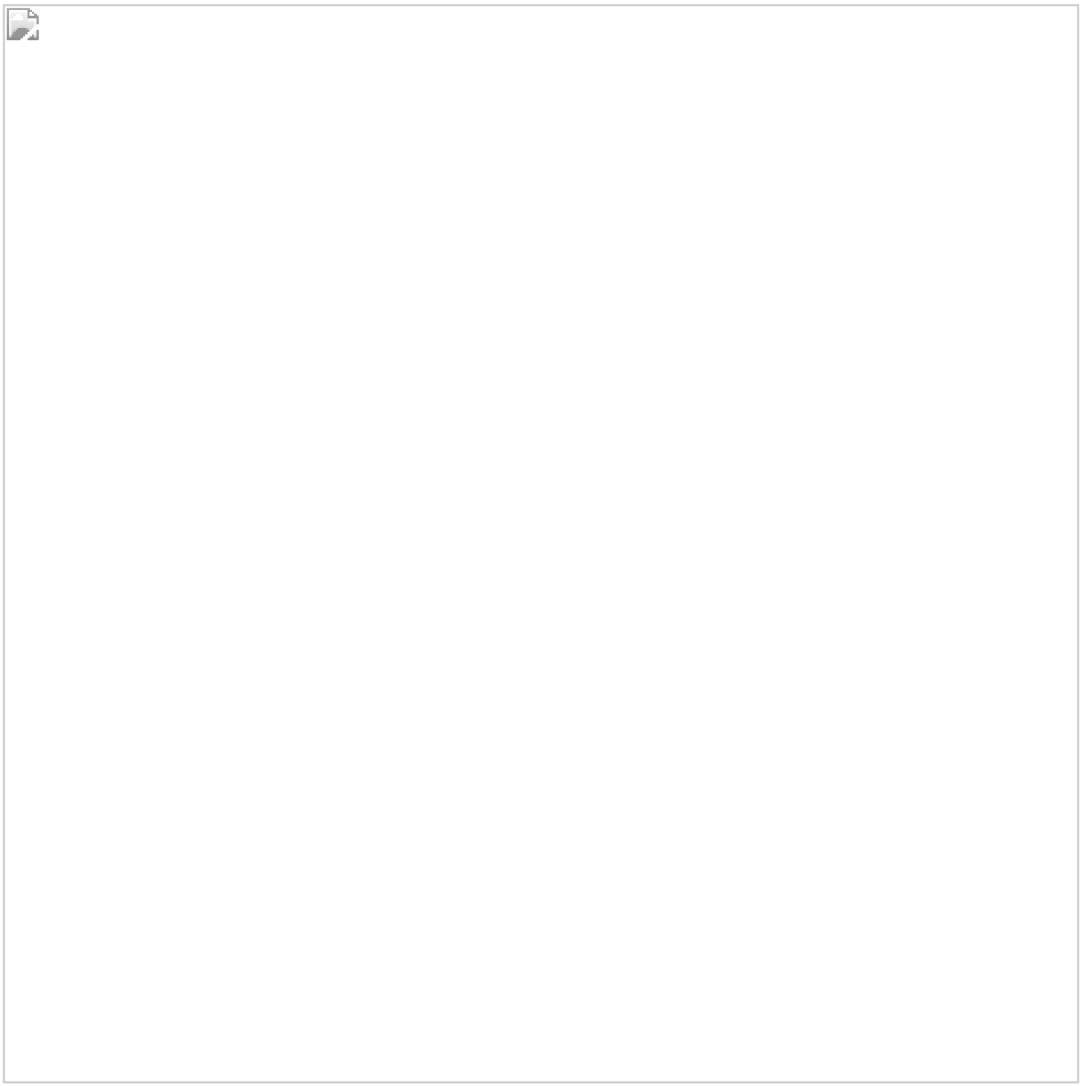


Think about it

1. Who was sent to speak to King Pluto?

- ○ Phoebus
- ○ Mercury
- ○ Pan

The Pomegranate



Pluto asked if there was nothing she would eat. “The one thing I should like,” said Proserpina, “would be a slice of bread baked by my own mother, and a pear out of her garden.”

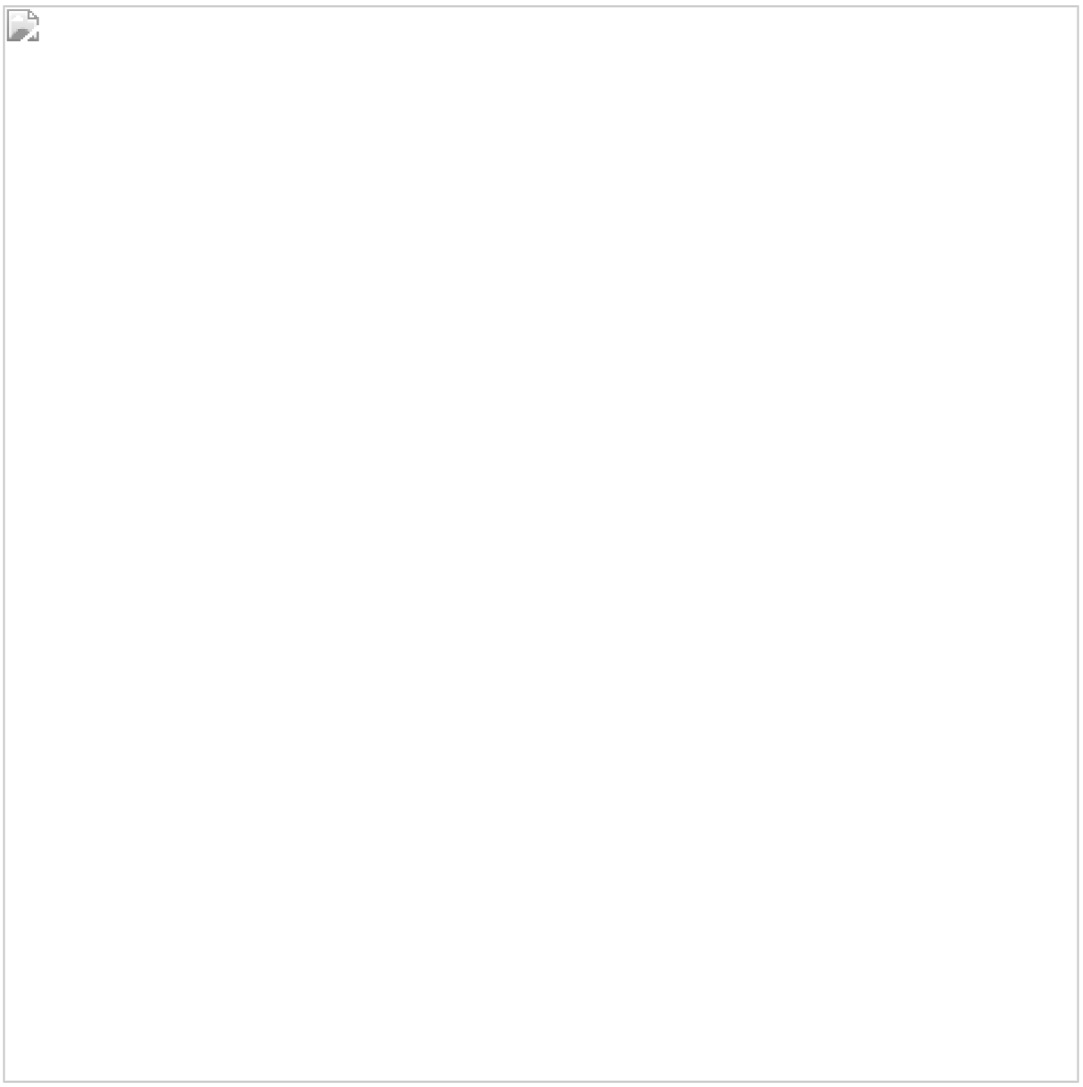
But with nothing growing on the earth, his servant found only one dried-up pomegranate. He brought it to her on a gold plate.

She told him to take it away. But when he had gone, she came close and looked at it. She was so hungry. “At least I may smell it,” she thought.

And somehow her teeth bit into it. Just then the door opened, and King Pluto came in with Mercury.

TALK ABOUT IT

Proserpina had been so strong for six months. What do you think made it so hard to resist the pomegranate?

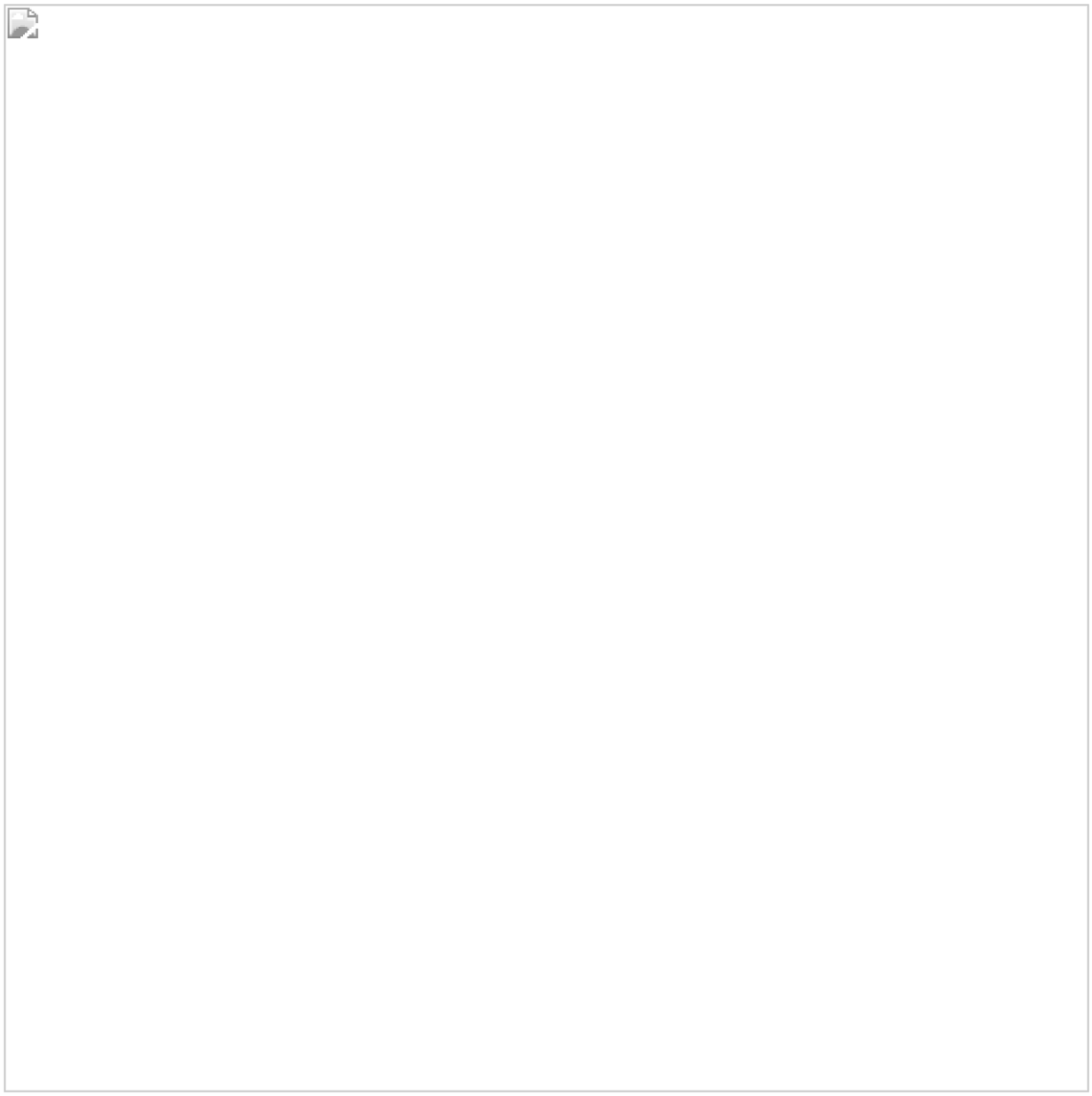


Think about it

1. What did Proserpina bite?

- ○ An apple
- ○ A pear
- ○ A pomegranate

Back Up to the Sunshine



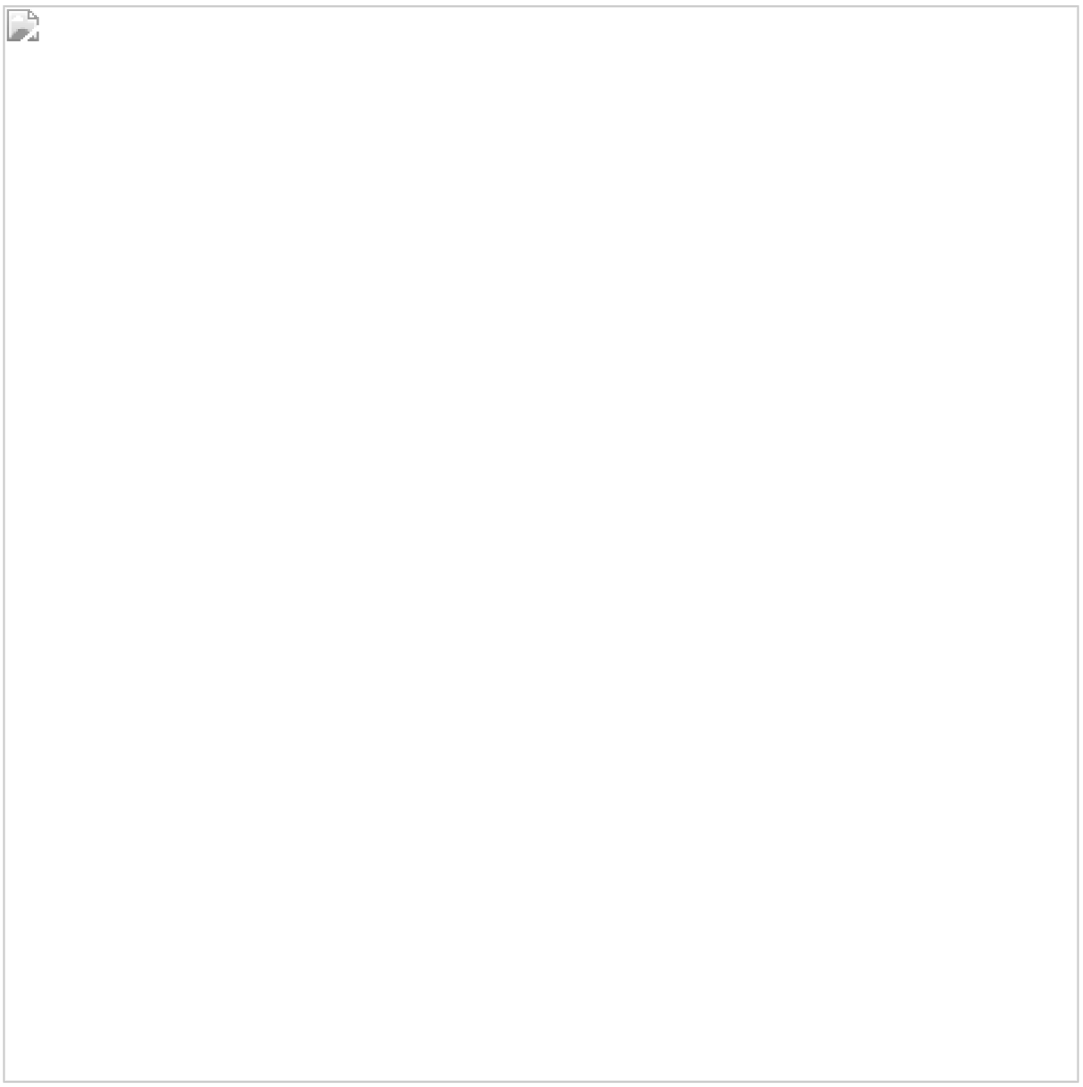
King Pluto drew her gently to him. Mercury had told him that many sad things had happened to innocent people. “I have been thinking myself,” he said, “that I really had no right to take you away from your mother. Go back, dear, with Mercury, to your mother.”

Proserpina cried a little at the thought of the lonely palace. But Mercury hurried her away, past Cerberus, up into the sunshine.

Wherever she set her foot, a flower rose. Violets and roses bloomed. The grass and corn grew ten times as fast, and the birds sang for joy.

TALK ABOUT IT

King Pluto said he had no right to take her. How hard do you think that was to say? Is it easy to say sorry?

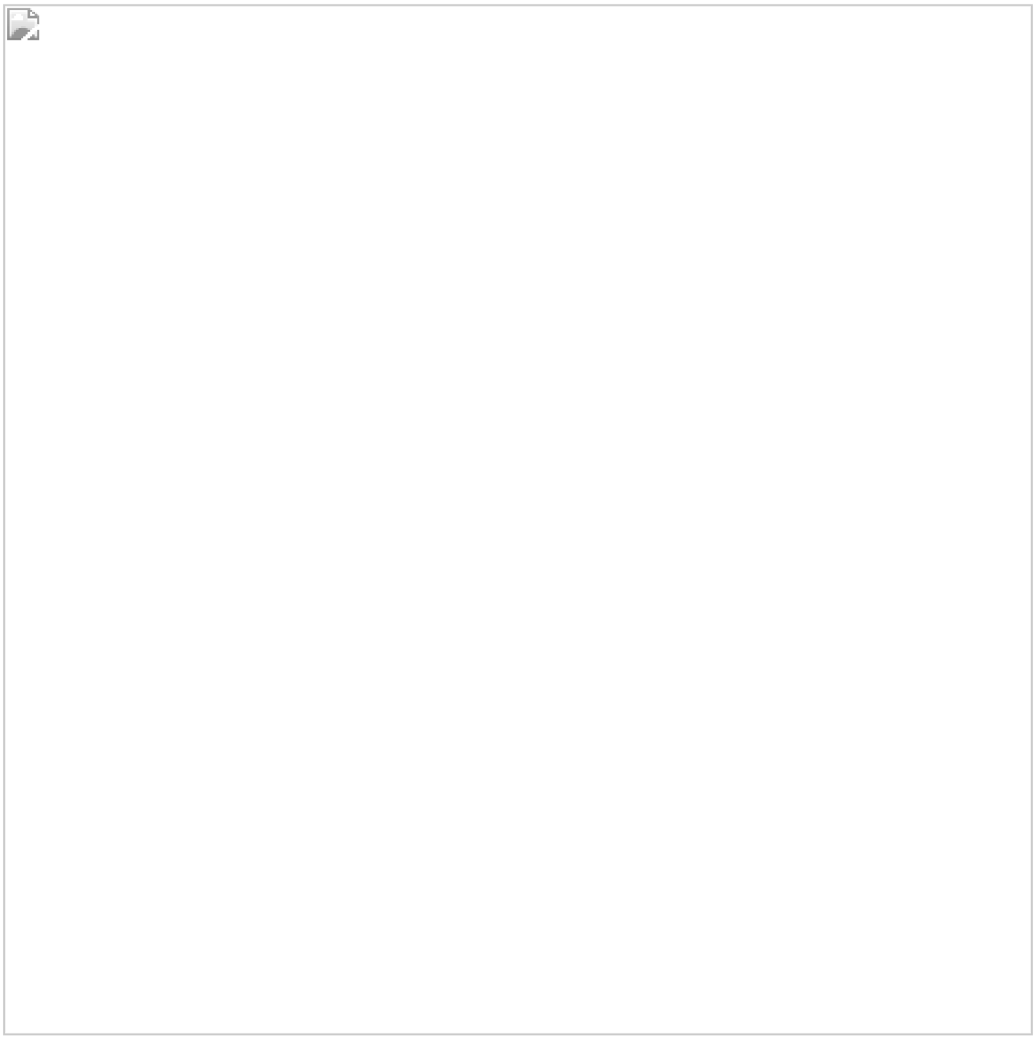


Think about it

1. What happened when Proserpina walked in the upper world?

- ○ Flowers grew where she stepped
- ○ It started to snow
- ○ The sun went dark

Six Seeds



Ceres was sitting on the doorstep of her empty cottage when her torch went out. The brown fields were turning green.

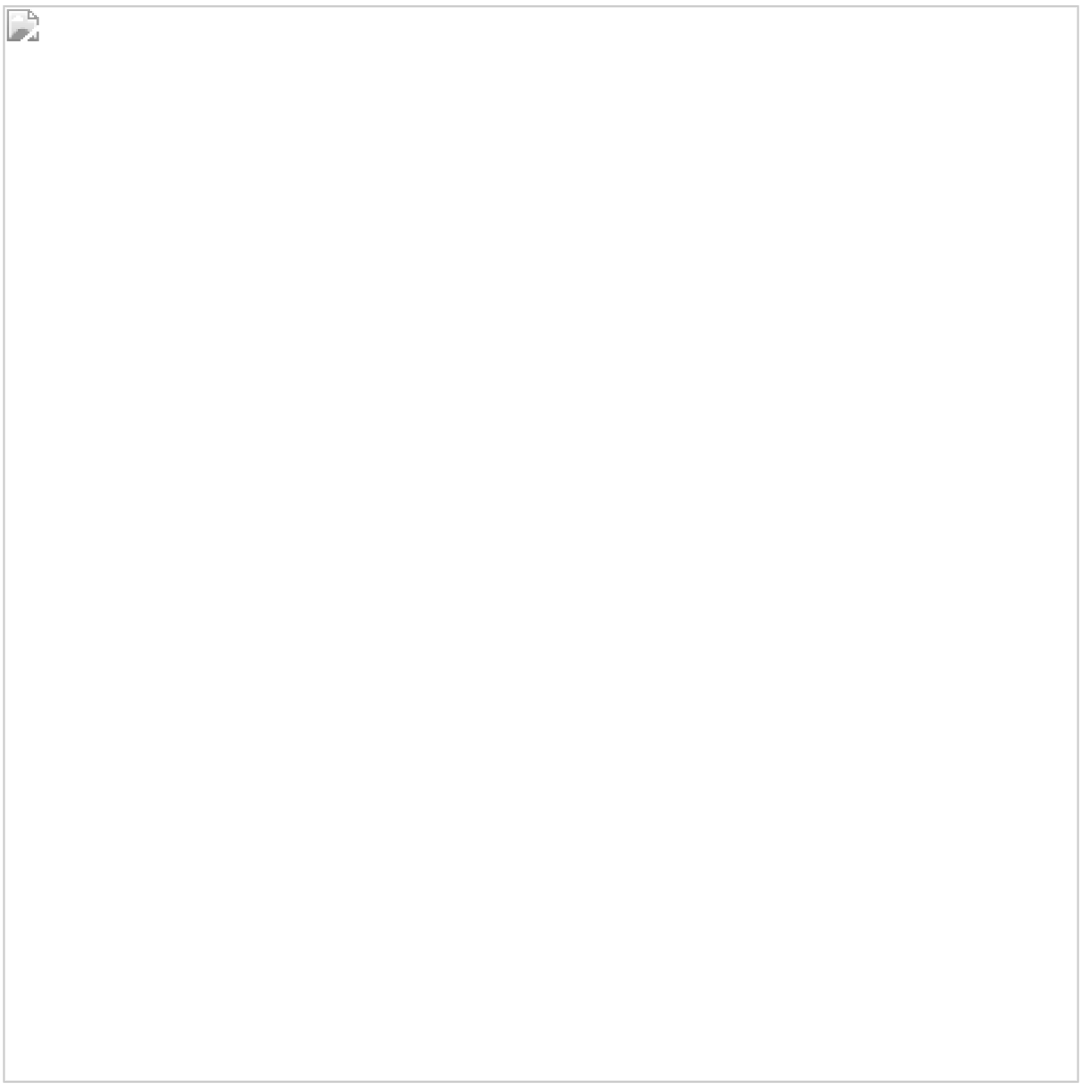
“Then open your arms, mother dear,” cried a well-known voice, “and take me back again.” Proserpina ran into her arms.

Ceres asked, “did you taste any food while you were in King Pluto's palace?” Proserpina told her the whole truth. Six pomegranate seeds had stayed in her mouth, and she had swallowed them.

“For each of these six pomegranate seeds you must spend a month every year in King Pluto's palace,” said Ceres sadly. “After all,” said Proserpina, “he was as kind as he knew how to be.”

TALK ABOUT IT

Proserpina told her mother the whole truth, even though it was hard. Why is telling the truth to someone who loves you so important?



Think about it

1. How many seeds did Proserpina swallow?

- ○ Two
- ○ Six
- ○ Twelve

2. What do you think Ceres and Proserpina did on the day she came home?

“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

— Yeshua HaMashiach

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