

UNDERWORLD

SANDY FALLS

Instructions:

Keep track of points you earn throughout the game. You can only pick one option in each scenario per play-through.

In the garden clouds of Olympus, the gods celebrated Persephone. It was her one-hundred and eighteenth birthday and every deity made it a point to attend from Triton to Zeus. Harps and lutes led by Apollo accompanied the occasion with sweet music, Dionysus provided the best wine, his satyrs danced all about, talk and laughter filled the air. An entire stage of gifts awaited her.

Persephone would be thrilled with all the attention if it weren't for Narcissus and the growing pressure of her mother's gaze. Narcissus made it his mission to trail Persephone from the wine fountains to every end of every golden refreshment table. When he trapped her into a conversation he would hold up his mirror behind her shoulder so that he could watch himself talk.

Persephone searched for an escape, pleading silently with the shimmering gods about her. Instead of aid, she found a first sight. Under the willows away from the throngs of gods celebrating her was Hades, a spot of black amidst the brilliance. And there she saw her opportunity.

"I happen to be quite the hunter, too. Why, just last season..." Narcissus was saying.

Persephone nodded fake interest and strolled over to a pool where Poseidon was soaking. Narcissus followed with his stories.

"That's wonderful," said Persephone. "Look at this lovely water, Narcissus." Narcissus did look and he found in the waters a much larger reflection than his mirror could provide. "Oh, yes, lovely," he said, transfixed.

Persephone slipped away to the shadow of the willow trees. She went around the hanging branches to appear behind Hades, who scowled over the gods and goddesses. Atop his long silver hair, the sharp crown adorning his brow suited his expression. "The party not to your liking, Hades?"

"I have better places to be," he said. When he turned to face her his dark eyes glinted. "You must be Persephone, for whom all this fuss is about."

"The very same. Tell me, if you have better places to be than my blessed birthday party, why are you here? You've never graced the occasion before."

"Zeus insisted," he said.

"There you are, Persephone!" Narcissus had tracked her down. Persephone was almost flattered he had turned away from his reflection so soon for her sake. Narcissus gave an uneasy nod to Hades as greeting. "As I was saying about my hunt, dearest..." He held up his mirror, continuing his story.

Persephone sagged in helpless defeat. Hades watched her a time before reaching out and touching the back of Narcissus' mirror with a finger. Narcissus' reflection thereon decayed in seconds to one gangly and dead without eyes. Narcissus screamed in absolute horror. He tossed the mirror and fled.

Persephone laughed and laughed. She looked to Hades in surprise. “You are my cruel savior.” His answering smile was a stranger against the regal planes of his ageless pale face. “Tell me of this better place you have to be, savior.”

“I have no doubt you know. There is a kingdom of the dead to rule, that was my lot.”

“Could the Underworld truly be better than here?” Persephone waved a hand over the clouds and gardens.

“I have responsibilities there,” he said.

“Could responsibilities be better than fun?”

Take him to dance: *
Take him to the wine: **

*

She took his hand and brought him to dance with her amongst the satyrs. All scattered from his path like leaves before a cold wind. They cleared before Persephone, too, for Hades was her captive. The rigid discomfort of his frame was her amusement as she danced and he stood.

“Have you never danced before, Hades?” she said. His jaw tightened. He took her in his arms and led her in a dance graceful and near to him in time with the music. Her teasing was silenced. Persephone was locked by dark eyes, lost to passing time.

“The Underworld is not unequal to this place,” said Hades at last. “It is different. It is unlike anything you are bound to have seen. Should you ever deem to visit, it might surprise you.”

“Me, visit the Underworld?” said Persephone.

“Is the thought so beneath you?”

“I wouldn’t phrase it that way.”

Hades released her from the cold soothing of his touch, Persephone’s mother was coming.

“Persephone!” said Demeter. “It is time for you to accept your gifts.” She peered over Hades.

“Yes, mother.” Persephone rolled her eyes. She turned to bid Hades farewell but he was already walking away.

**

Persephone dragged Hades along before grabbing up two goblets from a table and arriving to a fountain of wine. Satyrs surrounding it cleared way for Hades and therefore Persephone. “Try this with me,” She said. She filled both goblets from the wine-fall and handed him one. She tried it first. “Mmmm. I wager no wine in the Underworld is better than this.”

Hades sniffed his goblet with a scowl before taking the tiniest sip. His scowl lost its severity, he drank a long swig. And then he stood there in silence.

Persephone could not stop her giggle. “Go on, you can say it.”

More silence from Hades before he relented. “It is delicious.”

Gleaming, Persephone poked his chin. The small contact cause him to stiffen. “Glad you came yet?”

After a pause, Hades downed his wine and filled his goblet once more. “The Underworld—like its wine—is not unequal to this place,” he said. “It is different. It is unlike anything you are bound to have seen. Should you ever deem to visit, it might surprise you.”

“Me, visit the Underworld?” said Persephone.

“Is the thought so beneath you?”

“I wouldn’t phrase it that way.”

Hades set down his goblet on the fountain side, Persephone’s mother was coming.

“Persephone!” said Demeter. “It is time for you to accept your gifts.” She peered over Hades.

“Yes, mother.” Persephone rolled her eyes. She turned to bid Hades farewell but he was already walking away.

The gifts were splendid, as they were every year and the party was a success, as it was every year. Narcissus was so preoccupied with ensuring his proper reflection in the pools that he left Persephone alone. The gods parted as evening fell. Demeter and Persephone returned to the wheat fields and cornucopia of home.

“What were you doing dancing with Hades?” said Demeter. “You had every chance to dance with Narcissus, he was giving you all his attention!”

Her mother followed her into her room. It was a room lined with silver, shades of red, and flowers.

Persephone sat at her gilded vanity and began brushing her hair with her gilded brush. “Narcissus never gives anyone *all* his attention other than himself, mother.”

“You would do well to marry him,” said Demeter.

“What!?”

“Think of the children you two would have.”

“Mother! I am not some hound for breeding!”

“It is past time you did breed. Since you neglected Narcissus at your party, I am inviting him over tomorrow. He will spend the day with you.”

“I’d rather be mortal and die!”

“Oh, hush. It is done.” She walked out of the room. Persephone tossed her brush after her in a fit of rage, it only hit the door.

Persephone tossed and turned in her bed, fuming late into the night. She was too old to be controlled by her mother, she was a goddess in her own right! She might not be able to escape a day with Narcissus by dying, but she could escape it by going to the realm of the dead. Hades *had* more or less invited her, he *had* saved her from Narcissus once already. It was decided. She tore

from bed and out her window. She ran through wheat fields turned silver in the moonlight. Birds, bees, and butterflies flocked about her in her flight.

Any great hole in Olympus could become an entrance to the Underworld, should its king allow it, so it was to the nearest well she dashed. "Hades!" Her voice echoed down the well. "I'm coming to visit you!" She jumped in. She never hit the water, it vanished. Persephone fell and fell into darkness.

She landed on her feet, green grass and white flowers grew up under her from the dead ground. She was in front of Hades' throne. It was made sharp with stone and metal. Hades was not upon it, he walked up behind her in a silk and fur night robe. There were tired circles under his eyes. "What brings you at this hour?" he demanded.

Persephone righted herself. "I could not help but notice you did not leave me a gift."

"I came, that was your gift."

"Was that all? I thought perhaps your gift had been your invitation. So here I am. I will stay a few days." She began to look around but could see little for the darkness.

"So you just decided to impose in the middle of the night, did you?" Hades observed how she did not budge. "I thought my realm was far beneath you."

"That is a conclusion you would have had to form on your own. Now show me to the room I am to use while I am here." She yawned, the length of the day was reaching her now. Hades glared over her, without a word he turned and led the way down the many steps that led to his throne. Grass and flowers sprouted and died in Persephone's wake. At the bottom of the stairs was a large landing, then a narrow walkway. To the left was another stair that led up to a lesser throne.

"What's that?" Persephone pointed.

"My chair of forgetfulness. Stay away from it. And don't eat anything while you are here, not a single crumb."

"But I'll get hungry!"

"You'll survive, you are a goddess."

A series of doors appeared from the gloom alongside the walkway, there was only an abyss they might open to. Hades opened a door and it opened into a room, not an abyss. Persephone was impressed. "Is your realm so full of tricks?"

"Good. Night," said Hades through bared teeth.

When Persephone entered and the door closed behind her, lamps and candles came alive to provide plentiful light. The décor of the room was black and gray with powdered cotton wallpaper and lace. The bed looked more than comfortable. She lay down her head, the lights dimmed, she was fast asleep in the warmth of the silken sheets.

The best part of the next morning was Narcissus was no part of it. Persephone pranced from her room to explore. She was met by two minions. They were twisted, dark, short things with horns and tails. "Pretty!" one shrieked. A plate of food appeared between them. "Breakfast?"

"Hades said not to eat anything while I'm here," said Persephone, puzzled. The minions sagged into a depression and the plate of food disappeared. Persephone left them to their disappointment and looked out at what she had perceived as an empty abyss around the walkway the night prior. Ethereal light turned the Underworld to day. That perceived abyss was an endless chasm of stalactites, stalagmites, rivers, and waterfalls. The greatest river was the center of it all, it flowed up the falls of the cave glowing with blue-green light. Mortal souls churned within. The river Styx.

"Give you tour, we will," said one minion. "Master bid, master bid." They led her down the pathway of floating doors into a cave within the endless chasm. The mouth of the entrance opened into a massive hall. Some of the rough stone therein was carved smooth and engraved with patterns. Chandeliers floated above a long table spanning the length of the chamber. Food of delicious assortment was displayed on its surface. Minions not at work pranced about, ate and drank food and wine ever replenishing. On the other end of the opening, the hovering pathway continued, spiraling upward to a grand door at its head. Another path spiraled downward to where the rivers flowed. She was taken to the precipice of the river Styx down that way. The souls inside were gnashing and wailing within the phantom waters. Minions patrolled its shores on strange beasts. When souls reached out their arms, the minions would jab them away with spears.

"How sad," said Persephone. She was led for hours up narrow stairs to the pinnacle of the river Styx. It dropped off into a whirlpool of souls extending down to black oblivion.

"Spinning dead, spinning dead!" Her guides jumped and cackled. Persephone frowned.

"You do not approve?" Hades appeared behind her, causing her to jump.

Persephone looked back to the whirlpool. "All mortals meet this fate? Shouldn't the good be rewarded in some way? This fate is wicked, fit for only the wicked."

"Mortals are mortals, death is death," said Hades.

A roar sounded giving them both a start. "Hades!" A voice cried. Persephone knew that voice. It was Narcissus. Dread filled her. "Hades, have you seen Persephone!?" Narcissus' voice said.

Hades strained against an invisible force. There was a great crack and a flash of light above them. Narcissus broke through against the king's will, falling from the miles-high roof of the cave above. He hit the ground hard, face first, then lurched to his feet. "Persephone! I have found you, the great hunter that I am! Hades, you villain! You kidnapped her?" He drew a sword from nothing and made it strike like a viper.

Hades touched his blade, it turned to rust and crumbled. "I have done no such thing," he said. Narcissus pondered his gone blade.

"I am here of my own free will, Narcissus," said Persephone. "Go away."

“Why on Olympus would you come here of your own free will?” Narcissus looked about in disgust. “It’s so dark and wet and infested with mortal souls. Do not shelter the Lord of the dead. Return with me!” He stretched out his hand.

“I would sooner be mortal and die! Go away!”

“Your beauty is second only to my own, Persephone. There is no one else for me if not you!”

Persephone sounded her disgust. Narcissus turned his ire to Hades. “You have bewitched her, Hades!” Narcissus drew another blade from nothing. “Take away your dark spell, Persephone is returning with me!”

Hades noted Persephone’s fuming. “Begone from my kingdom,” he said. “You are not welcome.” With a flash of Hades’ eyes, Narcissus launched near through the ceiling. He stopped himself in mid-air with a godly will, glowing like the golden sun.

“I will not leave without Persephone!” He began to step through the air with great effort, returning to the ground against the invisible force of Hades, the king.

Do nothing: 1

Do little: 2

Handle Narcissus: 3

1

Persephone watched the battle of wills. With sweat on his brow, Hades made Narcissus launch back towards the roof of the chasm and vanish. A lock sounded in the air. “He may never return here,” said Hades.

“My savior again.” Persephone stepped to his side and held his arm.

Hades peered at her. “So you did not come here simply to visit, you came to hide. Did you not consider such trouble you would bring me?”

“I came to be sheltered by you, it’s true. Do you wish me to leave?” When Hades did not answer she released him and made for the dining chamber. “Tell me you have some form of music here, I want to dance.”

Hades’ dark minions proved useful in this, providing music such as Persephone had never heard from strange instruments.

2

“Go away, Narcissus!” said Persephone. “I speak for myself when I say I want nothing to do with you!”

Narcissus gaped in devastation and disbelief. His distraction defeated his effort to remain. Hades sent him away without further effort. A lock sounded in the air. “He may never return here,” said Hades.

“My savior again.” Persephone stepped to his side and held his arm.

Hades peered at her. “So you did not come here simply to visit, you came to hide. Did you not consider such trouble you would bring me?”

“I came to be sheltered by you, it’s true. Do you wish me to leave?”

Hades’ mouth formed a thin line, a glance strayed to her hand on his arm. When he did not answer she released him and made for the dining chamber. “Tell me you have some form of music here, I want to dance.”

Hades’ dark minions proved useful in this, providing music such as Persephone had never heard from strange instruments.

Gain 3 points

3

“Let him come to me Hades,” said Persephone into his ear. Hades peered at her, then released Narcissus from his invisible grip. Narcissus launched to the ground at the sudden release, catching himself in a godly aura. He landed smoothly in front of them, suspicious of his success.

Persephone smiled. “Come, Narcissus. This is all just a misunderstanding.” She held out her hand to him, he took it with relish. “I am visiting my friend, Hades. I am here by choice.” She led him to the chair of forgetfulness, gesturing to this and that along the way as a guide. Hades followed far behind them.

“Well, you’ve visited,” said Narcissus. “Let us be quick from this cold and dreary place, Persephone,”

“First have a seat, you must be tired.”

He nodded in agreement and sat. His expression went blank, he let go of her hand. He looked at Persephone dumbly. “Who are you? Who am I?” He blinked.

“Never you worry, Narcissus.” Persephone nodded to Hades, prompting him. Hades sent Narcissus away with not an ounce of trouble.

“A little extreme, perhaps.” The set of his brow said he was impressed nonetheless.

“Are you mad? I did him great kindness. Now he gets to discover his reflection all over again.”

Hades laughed. His laughter was a stranger in his throat. He had to concede to her the point.

“Still, I am sorry for the disturbance. Now do tell me you have some form of music down here, I wish to dance.” She brushed past him down the stair.

Hades’ dark minions proved useful in this, providing music such as Persephone had never heard from strange instruments.

Gain 5 points

The next morning Persephone was starved. When she exited her room to do she knew not what, the same minions from the previous morning presented her with a plate full of fruits, cheeses, and bread.

“Breakfast?” they said.

Her mouth watered. She did not know why Hades had told her to not eat anything. Perhaps he was trying to be inhospitable for some reason she knew not. “I will partake, thank you.” She took a pomegranate seed and ate, the taste more taunted than stated her. The minions bounced about as if she had granted them a great boon, shrieking and cackling they were. Still hungry, Persephone plucked bread and cheese from the plate. “Where is Hades?”

They were too taken up in their celebration to answer when Hades himself appeared before her with a thunderous crack. He caught her in the very act of sticking cheese in her mouth. Whatever had brought him before was forgotten. “I told you not to eat anything!”

“I was hungry!”

Power emanated from him, seething and quiet. “Do you have any idea what you have done?”

“No, I have no idea why you would be so unkind as to forbid me to eat!”

“You do not have to know. You do not have to understand why. This is my kingdom, my word is to be obeyed without question!”

Persephone turned up her chin and took another bite.

The act of defiance softened him. “You have doomed yourself, Persephone. Any god who eats a single morsel in this realm is cursed to return every year for all time.”

Persephone considered a moment. “Is that all? It’s just as well. I doubt you’ll be visiting me in my realm ever again.”

Hades was silent. His gaze turned slowly to the minions still holding up the plate of breakfast. They smiled forced innocence. “Breakfast, king?”

His eyes flashed. “Did I tell you to offer her food?” The minions were set upon with dark flames. The plate vanished in their anguish, they writhed and crawled on the ground.

“Stop!” Persephone cried. “They were only being hospitable, which is more than can be said of you!”

“They tempted and tricked you, that is all.” They were launched off the walkway and burst.

Persephone gasped, covering her mouth.

“And you are more than imposing upon me.” Hades drew a letter from his robe. “Your mother did not know you were coming? Did you flee away in the night without a word? Do you have any idea what she’s accused me of!? Nothing less than Narcissus, that I will tell you.”

“I do not need my mother’s permission to go wherever I please, whenever I please.”

“This childish rebellion of yours is not my concern. You are leaving.”

Before Persephone could retort there was a roar like the first she heard. “What is that?” she asked.

“Another problem.” He disappeared in a mist of black smoke. Abandoned, Persephone huffed and stomped her foot. She called for a minion, one came scampering from the dining hall. “Take me to Hades!”

Hades was at the physical entrance of the Underworld. The great cave narrowed like a neck before the head. It opened to a gaping mouth of stalactite teeth. Nothing but the ocean spread out

beyond. The river Styx began as a trickle of seawater here. Lurking in the shadows was a giant three-headed dog. By the time Persephone arrived, it had been lured to sleep by an enchanted harp that played without hands. The human who left it there and got past the beast now faced the king of the Underworld himself. The poor thing was trembling. His clothes were ragged, he was covered in filth. His sunken cheeks bespoke a starving man. He hadn't had a proper bath or bed in months.

"Leave now or join the dead." Hades' voice was a cloak of calm, sending shivers down Persephone's spine.

"That's just it, your great Lordship," said the human. "My wife was taken in an accident—it was just a foolish accident, nothing more. It wasn't her time, it couldn't be. Please. Let me bring her back. I beg you." He got on his knees.

Do nothing: 4

Help a little: 5

Take care of the Human: 6

4

"Are you the king of the dead?" said Hades.

The human wept. "No, my lord. But—"

Hades leaned in. "Then it is not you who gets to decide if it was or was not her time. This realm is forbidden to mortals yet you trespassed here thinking to cheat death. Thinking to cheat *me*."

"I had to."

"Did you?" Hades straightened. The human's soul was sucked from his body and drawn to the river. His remaining husk collapsed.

Overcoming her shock, Persephone stepped to Hades' side. "That was very cruel."

"Was it? He wished to be with his wife." He turned to Persephone. "And your mother wishes to be with you. Leave here."

Persephone placed her hand on his cheek, he froze under her touch. "Do you wish me to leave?" she asked.

He hesitated, his eyes stilling on hers. He hissed in a breath through his teeth and pulled away. "That is irrelevant." He lumbered over to the harp, it turned to dust under his touch, returning the mouth of the cave to silence.

Persephone giggled at his back. "I'll stay longer, I think." She pranced down the neck of the cave. Hades didn't try to stop her.

5

"He's in love, he's grieving. Forgive him, Hades," said Persephone.

"Mortals cannot go unpunished for entering here. Do you have some solution?"

"It's not my kingdom."

Hades peered at her wryly. In a puff of smoke, the three of them appeared before the chair of forgetfulness, the man now holding his still-playing harp. He glanced at it and all about in surprise.

“Have a seat.” Hades beckoned to the chair.

“My wife—”

“Sit. Down.”

The man scurried up the stairs and sat. His face went blank, his fearful trembling subsided. The next moment black smoke took him and he was gone.

“Where did you send him?” said Persephone, quiet.

“Home.”

“Now he’s lost his wife completely...”

Hades nodded. “He cannot miss what he never knew.”

Persephone bit her lip. “Not a terrible solution, Hades.”

“And what should my solution for you be? Your mother will not forget about you.”

“How about,” Persephone linked arms with Hades, he jerked, “I worry about my mother. And you don’t worry about a thing.”

Hades scowled. But he did not protest.

Gain 3 points

6

Persephone placed a hand on Hades’ shoulder, stilling him. She knelt before the weeping man. Touching the ground between them, a rose grew and bloomed. The man watched in awe.

“What’s dead is dead,” said Persephone. “That cannot change. But would you like to say a final goodbye?”

The man wept and surrendered a nod.

“Then take the rose.” She stood. The man plucked the rose and stood humbly with her.

Persephone turned to Hades. “Summon her soul, could you?”

Hades’ fists clenched. “It is forbidden.”

“Surely nothing is forbidden the king.”

Hades gave her a wry look. A moment later a soul of a woman appeared above the stream. The man cried out. “Amara!” The two spoke novels without words. Husband approached wife and held out the rose. She took it and held it close to her. She kissed his cheek, a whisper of a touch, before vanishing back to the water. The man no longer cried. He smiled. “Thank you,” he said to both Persephone and Hades.

Persephone bowed her head in welcome. Hades’ attempt at a glower was too soft. “Yes, now back where you came from, then.”

Wispy black smoke took the man home. “You didn’t exactly punish him,” said Hades.

Persephone took his hand. “I didn’t have to.”

Hades almost smiled, glancing at their entwined hands. With a snap of his free fingers, the harp crumbled to ash. He returned with her into the bowls of the cave.

Persephone smiled to herself, for Hades made no more mention of her leaving.

Gain 5 points

Persephone led Hades into the dining hall. "You will join me for a meal, like it or not!"

"I have work to do," he said. "You have no idea how much."

"The mortal souls or whatever else you are doing can wait," Persephone said with high chin. She brought him to the table and sat down. Minions off duty were here, ever feasting and dancing to their strange music. Hades sat beside her. Before they could begin to eat, another roar sounded louder than the rest. This one shook the Underworld. Beating tremors continued.

"What in great Olympus?" Persephone breathed.

"It's Cerberus." Hades stood with a sigh. "Twice now intruders have gotten past his guard. Of course, he's angry."

Rock and dust from overhead began to fall. The music stopped, the minions screeched alarm, covering their heads. Hades' black robes billowed behind him as he exited the dining hall.

Do nothing: 7

help a little: 8

Deal with Cerberus: 9

7

Persephone pouted over the meal she gathered on her plate. She ate alone in the sad company of panicking minions under a crumbling roof. It was an hour before the thundering rampage ceased. Still, Hades did not return. Persephone's meal long since finished, she stormed into her room. There she remained for the rest of the day.

8

Persephone hurried after him, making it through the black smoke that transported him just in time. A mile in from the physical entrance to the Underworld, the great three-headed hound rampaged. He slashed his claws against the walls and stomped and bounded all over, the roof of the cave threatened to fall on top of them all. Persephone clutched the back of Hades' robes as a form of sheltering shield. He glanced back at her with a raised brow. "Cerberus, enough," he called.

The beast bounded past them, unheeding. Hades hissed frustration and hurried after him and Persephone went after him. Now Cerberus was in the river sticks, slashing at glowing souls, destroying them. Persephone covered her mouth. "Oh, no."

“Cerberus...” Hades teleported on top of the beast, clutching its fur to hold on. “There boy. Calm down.”

Cerberus wined. He jumped out of the river and thrashed his heads to shake Hades. Hades held fast. “Cerberus.” the king of the dead patted Cerberus’ neck. With one last miserable woof, the beast stilled. “Good boy,” said Hades. With a squeeze of his knees, Hades steered the dog to Persephone.

“You’re awfully sweet with your dog,” she said.

“He is not a dog. He is a demonic beast.”

“Sure.” Cerberus sniffed her curiously. Persephone patted him on the nose. “He’s sweet.”

“He is not sweet.” He put on his upmost glower as he held down a hand to her. “Would you like to ride him?” He glanced off.

Persephone beamed like the rising sun. In answer, she took his hand. He hoisted her up and Cerberus bounded through the vast rivers and waterfalls of the Underworld with them. The ground shook under his great weight though his bounding was no longer done in rage. Persephone held fast around Hades’ waist, grinning and laughing with glee. “This is such fun!” she said.

Hades turned his face away before Persephone could fully catch his smile.

Gain 3 points

9

Persephone chased after Hades, making it just in time to be transported in his black smoke. A mile from the mortal entrance the beast rampaged. He clawed the walls, beat against the roof of the cave with his back, and roared as he bounded. He was making his way to the glowing river Styx.

“Oh, my,” said Persephone.

Hades glanced at her from over his shoulder. “Cerberus, enough!”

The beast did not heed him.

“The poor thing.” Swallowing her fear, Persephone approached the beast careful of its swinging claws. She ducked under another swinging arm and set her hand on his side with her life-filled palm. “Calm down, it’s not your fault.” Cerberus no longer thrashed but he snapped at her, causing Persephone to flinch. “It’s alright. There was nothing you could have done about those last intruders. You’re still a very good and frightening guard.”

Hades watched on stunned as Cerberus wined and sat down, hanging his three heads.

“Oh, there, there,” said Persephone. She went to his center head, pet, and kissed it. The beast cheered and licked her with its too great tongue. Hades walked to the left head at her side, he stroked the maw. That head nuzzled him. Hades fought a smile.

“He’s such a sweet boy,” said Persephone, finding a sweet spot behind one of Cerberus’ ears.

“He is not sweet.” A pause. “Would you like to ride him?”

Persephone's face shined like the rising sun. In answer, she started climbing the beast. She slipped. Hades laughed in his throat. He placed his hand to the center of Cerberus' left head, Cerberus laid down in obedience. Hades climbed up and helped Persephone behind him.

Cerberus bounded off this time in a spirit of fun, not anger. The world shook underneath him as he rode them through the vast rivers and waterfalls of the Underworld. Persephone laughed and shrieked with joy. "This is such fun!"

Hades fought his answering smile in vain.

Gain 5 points

Persephone woke the next day with a stretch and a sure determination she would get Hades to sit down and enjoy a meal with her. When she left her room she was almost run over by shrieking minions. They were hauling wailing souls between them, cackling as they went.

Persephone placed her hands on her hips. "What is going on here?" The minions paid her no mind.

Do nothing: 10

Help a little: 11

Try to help the souls: 12

10

Confused and concerned, Persephone shouted at the top of her lungs for Hades. A moment later he appeared before her in his night robes, bleary-eyed. About to ask her what it was she wanted, he noticed the minions. His eyes flared in fury. "Who started this!?" He clenched his fists.

Minions went up in dust left and right as he stomped for his throne. Once the minions were dead, the souls they had carried hovered back toward the river Styx. Minions started shrieking in fear instead of mischief.

With eyes wide, Persephone slowly closed the door, shutting herself off from the trouble.

11

"Hades!" Persephone called. She closed her door behind her and drew up vines from the ground to grip five minions in closest proximity by the legs. They lashed against their bonds in alarm. "Let those poor souls go!"

"Nooo!! Fuuuun!!!" They shrieked.

Hades appeared before her, all drowsy confusion. Then he saw what was going on. He flared in fury. "Who started this!?" All five minions burst into dust. The souls were released to hover back to the river Styx.

"Has this happened before?" asked Persephone.

“Oh, yes. The wretched things get restless and do unfathomable things.” He stormed for the throne. Persephone followed after him. Hades plopped himself down on his throne and banged his fist on its arm. “Minions!” All became silent when the minions appeared against their will in front of the throne, there were hundreds of them still holding souls. “Which one of you started this?”

The minions pointed as one to a scrawny minion.

“I see,” said Hades. “And what have I told you about playing with souls?” The scrawny minion began to wither like drying wood. Then like decaying wood. He screamed in horror and agony until his voice, too, withered away. Persephone watched with wide eyes.

“Release the souls. Do not defy me again.”

Moved by the display, the minions released the souls immediately; they hovered back down, down to the river Styx.

Gain 3 points

12

“Hades!” Persephone called. She closed her door behind her and drew up vines from the ground to grip five minions in closest proximity by the legs. They lashed against their bonds in alarm. “Let those poor souls go!” she said.

“Nooo!! Fuuuun!!!” They shrieked.

“Hmmm.” Persephone knelt to their level. “You want fun? Then play a game with me.”

Somehow, all minions on the walkway heard and turned to her. “A game?”

“You’ll have to let the souls go before we can play.” Persephone released those bound by her vines.

Hades appeared before her in drowsy confusion. Then he looked around to see the minions releasing their souls. “Were they running amok, again?”

“I suppose so. But they’ve calmed down now. They agreed to play a game with me.”

“A *game*?” Hades uttered the word as though he had never heard it before. “They do not have time to play, they must return and watch the river to ensure no souls get out.”

“If they have time to run amok, they have time to play a game. Besides, I said I would.” She rose. “We shall race,” she proclaimed. “First to the river, Styx wins!” Without further warning, she dashed down the walkway for the river. The minions chased after her at her heels, shrieking and laughing.

Hades did not try to stop them.

Gain 5 points

Persephone had done it! That day Hades sat down to a meal, he cleared everything else from his schedule to appease her. And Persephone was well pleased. She was sure to sit next to

him and Hades made sure not to show any reaction. The perpetually stalked table was as finely adorned as ever.

With a glare, Hades banished the lingering Minions on break apart from those playing the music. The pair of them began to eat. Roast pairs and apples with cinnamon, meat pies, Roast pork, and chicken ripe off the bone. It was delicious.

“Why do you insist on staying here, Persephone?” asked Hades without looking at her.

“Because it’s interesting. Far more interesting than watching my mother bless or curse crops.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes. Why?” said Persephone.

“It seems to me you’re avoiding your mother. My kingdom just so happens to be a convenient place for you to do that.”

Persephone pursed her lips and set down her fork. “You would avoid her too if she was trying to marry you off for breeding.”

Hades looked at her then. “What?”

“To Narcissus, no less.”

“What?”

“It’s true. She supported his infatuation with me. I know she doesn’t see her actions as demeaning, it’s simply the way she thinks. My mother is consumed by the idea of healthy stalk.” Persephone took a bite of tender steak to emphasize her point. “Her idea of what’s best for me is healthy, beautiful ‘calves’. She’s beyond listening and I’m too old to be bothered trying to make her. It is time I be on my own, anyway.”

I understand, said the look he gave her. “But you cannot think to stay here forever.”

“Can’t I?” Persephone smirked. She was pleased by the baffled expression that became Hades.

Cerberus roared. A Crack echoed outside the dining hall that shook the whole of the Underworld. Minions screamed.

“What in the Underworld!?” said Persephone.

Hades’ brow was furrowed in concentration. “It’s your mother.” He stood with a grunt of frustration. “I cannot keep her out.” He stormed out the hall towards his throne.

“Oh, no...” said Persephone.

Do Nothing: 13

Do little: 14

Help Hades: 15

Persephone ran to her room and hid under her blankets. Being old enough to be on her own didn’t mean she was too old to cower. The Shaking and rumble of the Underworld grew.

Screeching and wailing became a deafening cacophony. It went on for hours. Then all fell still and silent.

14

Persephone chased after Hades. Just as she exited the dining hall there was a blinding flash of light above, as if the sun had decided to visit. Her mother flew down from that light atop a white pegasus clad in golden armor. She wielded a sickle. All around her flocked eagles, sparrows, and crows. They formed a dark cloud, so great were their numbers. They hovered there, above Hades' throne.

"Hades!" said Demeter. "You have stolen my daughter!"

"I have done no such thing," said Hades.

"Of course the miserable king of the dead would resort to lying. I warned you what would happen if you did not return my daughter."

Persephone rushed to Hades' side. "It's true mother, I am here of my own free will! Hades told me you wanted me to return but *I* refused."

Demeter searched her daughter's face for understanding. "He's controlling you. He's tricked you somehow. Have you eaten anything while you have been here?"

"Mother, can you not listen? I'm too old to be told what to do anymore. I don't want to stay with you. Leave us alone!"

Her mother's eyes flashed pain. That pain morphed to resolve and was turned against Hades cold as steel. "What have you done to my daughter?"

"Nothing," said Hades, his jaw clenched in repressed rage.

"Mother! Listen!"

She would not. She flew towards Hades, sickle held high to harvest the crop of his head.

Persephone screamed. She kissed Hades on the cheek for good luck before dodging behind his throne for cover. She was just curious enough to peek out from behind her place of hiding.

Hades dodged to the side of Mother's thrust. He touched the blade of her sickle and turned it to rust. Demeter screamed in frustration. Her pegasus kicked out as it recovered to the air, striking Hades in the chest with a crushing blow. Hades grunted. The attack cost the pegasus. It shriveled and died before it could make rise away from the platform.

"No!" Mother cried. She leaped from the creature to safely land in front of Hades with hard focus. The flocks were summoned, they swarmed the god of the dead. They got in cuts with beaks and talons, but they died for touching him. Hades' jaw was tight as he stared down Demeter, he didn't even flinch as the birds attacked. Minions came from all corners of the Underworld. They speared and hacked away at the birds and surrounded Demeter.

With a wave of Demeter's hand, stalks of wheat grew inside those minions surrounding her. They choked and killed over. Persephone covered her gasp.

The last of the birds withered and fell dead around Hades. The earth shook and Cerberus leaped onto the platform. Demeter was faced with three sets of massive jaws. She gaped. In that

moment of distracted alarm, she was tossed by Hades' power to the roof of the cave by some invisible gust of wind. In a flash, she was banished from the realm.

15

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Persephone screamed frustration. She held up her hands, Demeter's birds turned into pedals and great vines rose in front of Hades, creating a living green shield.

Demeter skirted the vine-wall. "Persephone!"

Her sickle was gone. Where did it go? Hades grunted in pain and Persephone found her answer. Her mother had tossed it around the vine-wall, it embedded in his shoulder. "Hades!"

He plucked the weapon out, from the wound green vines grew under his skin. He dealt with that growth as Persephone dealt with her mother who flew above on the pegasus.

"Mother. I am not marrying who you say. I am not doing what you say. I am speaking of my own volition, Hades has done nothing. It is me, *me* who wants you to leave."

"Daughter..."

In her moment of distraction, Hades' power overcame her and tossed her like a leaf on the wind out of his realm.

Minions tried to keep her from Hades' chamber but Persephone marched right past them. Hades lay in his bed recovering from his wounds from the battle with her mother. He ground his

teeth in pain, sweat beaded his brow. For the first time Persephone had seen, he wasn't wearing his crown.

Hades' room was luxurious black and silver. Lamps and candelabras adorned it, granting much light. His bed of black velvet was huge, the curtain canopy surrounding it was drawn. The curtains, the wallpaper, they were decorated with patterns of swirling thorns and leaves.

Hades opened his eyes when she approached. Persephone went straight to his bedside and held his hand in hers. "I have brought you much trouble, Hades."

"I will be fine," he said.

"I know you will. You would prefer sooner than later though, wouldn't you?" She reached with her other hand to touch the side of his face.

Hades stiffened. "What are you doing?"

Persephone answered by healing him. His wounds were gone without a trace in moments. Hades eased and loosed a long breath. "Thank you," he said.

"It's the least I could do. Hades, I am so sorry."

"It is not you who cast me a villain."

"The gods don't think you're a villain."

The stare Hades gave her made Persephone's ears burn. She pursed her lips.

"Safe for Zeus, they all fear me. They would never come here to visit," said Hades. He clenched his jaw a moment. Then he held her hand back. His touch was cold and tentative. "The only reason you stayed was to avoid your mother's matchmaking?" The question was almost rhetorical.

"No, Hades." She smoothed back his silver hair. "You must know the other reasons why I've stayed. You must."

His lost expression told her he did not.

"You are different. You are unlike anything I have ever seen and unlike anyone I am bound to ever meet. You surprise me."

Hades warmed in recognition of her phrasing. He searched her face untrusting of the truths written there. Before he could accept them, a crow appeared in the air baring a letter. Hades released Persephone's hand and sat up to pluck it from the crow's beak, it disappeared. Hades opened and scanned the letter. "Well, it seems your mother has come to accept I didn't kidnap you, at least. She wants your reassurances and a decision. Otherwise, she will come back tomorrow morn to claim you."

"She'll accept my decision?"

"So it seems," said Hades.

Add up the points you have earned

0-6 points earned: 16

9-10 points earned: 17

13-20 points earned: 18

“But the decision is not yours alone. This is my realm. Persephone, I would not have you...I have cherished your company. But your mother loves you, she needs you. And the mortals need her. Because you have eaten food here, you must return to the Underworld or cease to be. So return a few days in the year. The rest of the time, you should be on earth. I’m not saying you have to live with your mother, just...be where she knows she can always reach you.”

“You’re saying you want me to leave?” Persephone’s heart was still.

“No, I am no liar.” He rose and strode for his door. “Follow me.”

Behind his throne was a new set of stone stairs that rose to nothing. Or so Persephone perceived. Following Hades up those steps, the Underworld vanished to a realm of endless blue skies and fields of green. Hills and groves of trees stretched on past the horizon. There were lakes and rivers, streams, and all manner of living things. Deer bounded, birds chirped, horses raced.

“It is Elysium,” said Hades. “I made it for those good mortal souls you were so concerned about.” Hades’ full attention fell on her. “I’ll begin sorting them soon.”

Persephone’s heart burst with wonder and Hades missed no second of it. She jumped into his arms and held him tight. “Thank you,” she whispered. “You’re not just my cruel savior now.”

Hades chuckled in his throat, holding her back with a firm embrace. “I do not want you to go. But you must, for the sake of the mortals.”

“Only if I can visit more than a few times a year! Twelve times, at least!”

“I’ll hold you to that,” he said.

When Persephone returned to her mother, her mother wept. Persephone did not tarry long, however. She made her place in Olympus where she could bless and protect the flowers and creatures of the wild. Demeter visited her daughter often and never again told her what to do or who to marry. They healed and their love grew. The world was left in the near-perpetual heat of summer. Rain and snow visited only once a month when Persephone visited the king of the dead in the Underworld and the goddess Demeter feared her daughter would not return. But Hades held Persephone to her word, she always returned.

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“It is Elysium,” said Hades. “I made it for those good mortal souls you were so concerned about.” Hades’ full attention fell on her. “I will begin sorting out the good tomorrow.”

Persephone’s heart burst with light and Hades missed no second of it. She jumped into his arms and held him tight. “Thank you,” she whispered. “You’re not just my cruel savior now.”

Hades chuckled in his throat, holding her back with a firm embrace. “I do not want you to go. But you must, for the sake of the mortals.” He released her and looked over Elysium. Persephone joined him, waiting. The tightness of his jaw told her he had more to say.

“You could come here a few months if you like,” said Hades.

Persephone took his hand, drawing his gaze back to her. “I would.”

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18

“Whatever you decide, I, too, will support you.”

Persephone smiled wide and rewarded him with a kiss on the cheek. Hades fought his smile in vain. “Before you make any decision, I would like to show you something.” He rose, straightened his robe, and led her out the door.

Behind his throne was a new set of stone stairs that rose to nothing. Or so Persephone perceived. Following Hades up those steps, the Underworld vanished to a realm of endless blue skies and fields of green. hills and groves of trees stretched on past the horizon. There were lakes and rivers, streams, and all manner of living things. Deer bounded, birds chirped, horses raced.

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Hades chuckled in his throat. He pulled away to see her. “Thank you for visiting me. Thank you for staying. You are welcome to stay as long as you like.”

Stay a full half of the year: 20

19

“Then I choose to stay forever,” said Persephone. Hades’ shocked expression was her reward. She cupped his face and drew him into her reaching kiss.

In the vast caverns of the Underworld, minions and good mortal souls celebrated Persephone. The god and goddess were wed. Persephone ruled alongside her king as queen of the Underworld. They ruled in fairness and charity. Her mother was allowed to visit one day of every month. For the rest of the days of every year, Demeter mourned the world into winter.

The mortals lived a hard, cold life. But if they bore it well, they came to rest eternally in the paradise fields of Elysium under the reign of the just king and merciful queen of the dead.

20

Persephone rested her hand on the side of Hades’ face. “I wish to be with you always. But that would be selfish of me, wouldn’t it?” She looked over Elysium a moment before returning her gaze to Hades. “Half of the year with you. My mother will have to be content with the other half.”

Hades smiled unhindered. “Very well.”

Persephone returned home to a mother weeping with joy. Half the year Demeter feared her daughter would not return and mourned her absence in Olympus. Her fear and dread became the winter. But Persephone always returned bringing with her the warmth of hope and life. She made her own place in Olympus watching over the wild things of the forest. The seasons were kept in balance.

In the vast caverns of the Underworld, minions and good mortal souls celebrated Persephone. The god and goddess were wed. They ruled as king and queen together in perpetual love.

The End