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A Year Full of Stories: 52 Classic Stories from All Around the World

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AUGUST
HARVEST



PERSEPHONE
AN ANCIENT GREEK STORY

AUGUST

Mighty Zeus was the King of the Gods. He lived at the top of a mountain called Olympus, where he watched over all the gods and goddesses and the lives of the people below.

His brother, Hades, was the King of the Underworld, god of the deep, dark earth and everything in it.

Zeus and Hades had a sister named Demeter, who walked the surface of the earth giving life to plants and trees. She was the Goddess of the Harvest, producing fruit and vegetables and grain to feed the people of the world.

One day, Hades felt lonely, living by himself in his silent kingdom. He went to ask his brother, Zeus, how to find a wife.

"Demeter has a beautiful daughter, called Persephone," said Zeus. "She would brighten your dark days, but you'll have to steal her away from her mother."

Hades secretly watched Persephone and fell in love with her sparkling eyes and cheerful laughter. But he also saw that she was happiest dancing through the meadows with Demeter.

So, he waited until she was picking flowers alone one morning and commanded the earth to split open in a great chasm. Then he leapt into his chariot and up, out of the chasm he rode. Before Persephone realised what was happening, Hades swept her into his arms and carried her back down to the Underworld. At once, the chasm closed behind them and all that was left were Persephone's flowers, lying in the grass.

Demeter searched for her daughter, calling her name over and over, but she was nowhere to be found. Days passed and Persephone didn't return. Demeter grew desperately sad. Nothing thrived, nothing blossomed or bore fruit while she wandered the world, looking for her beloved daughter.

Meanwhile, down in the Underworld, Hades tried to win Persephone's heart. He decorated a chamber with glistening

DECEMBER

CHRISTMAS



THE LEGEND OF THE POINSETTIAS

A MEXICAN STORY

It was Christmas Eve, but Pepita was sad. There were no decorations in the house where she lived with her grandmother, and there was no money to buy her a present.

"Don't be sad, Pepita," said Grandmother. "Come, give me a kiss. Even the smallest gift from someone who loves you makes you happy."

Pepita kissed her grandmother and hugged her tight.

"Now," said Grandmother, "my old legs won't walk me to Church anymore, but you can go to see the manger where the baby Jesus will lay."

So Pepita took her shawl and set off for the village. On the way she met many people, bringing presents to lay before the manger.

Pepita felt bad that she had nothing to give. When she reached the church she held back, ashamed of going in empty handed.

Then Pepita remembered her grandmother's words. "Even the smallest gift from someone who loves you makes you happy." She looked around but all she could see were weeds growing by the path. Could such a humble gift make Jesus happy? As there was nothing else, she picked a bunch and made a little bouquet and followed the others inside.

When people saw Pepita carrying a little bunch of weeds through the church they stared and whispered, some even laughed.

"That's not a gift to bring to Jesus," they said.

But Pepita walked bravely on.

To her astonishment, as she came near to the manger, the green leaves started to turn red. Everyone fell silent and watched in wonder. Step by step, the weeds blossomed until Pepita's arms were filled with beautiful scarlet star-shaped flowers. Pepita smiled with joy. She laid the flowers between the ox and the ass, making a bright garland around the manger.

Then everyone came forward to light a candle, for they felt they had seen a miracle.

When she left the church that Christmas night, Pepita's heart was singing. Beside the path lay one red poinsettia flower that must have fallen from her arms. Pepita picked it up and hurried home to give it to Grandmother.

DECEMBER

KWANZAA



THE FEAST

AN AFRICAN STORY

A chief decided to have a great gathering of his people. He sent a messenger to spread the word in every village.

"You are all invited to a great gathering at the Chief's house," said the messenger. "The Chief will provide a splendid feast for everyone and he asks that each man brings a gourd of palm wine to add to the pot."

When they heard this, all the people were excited. There was much talk in the villages about what delicious food would be served at the feast.

On the morning of the great gathering, everyone dressed in their best clothes.

"You look very fine!" said one woman to her husband. "Now, fill a gourd with palm wine to take with us."

"But we don't have any," said her husband.

"Then you must hurry and buy some," replied the woman.

The man frowned. "Why should I have to spend money when the feast is free?" he complained.

"We must make a contribution, like everyone else," said his wife.

Her husband smiled. "If everyone is making a contribution, a gourd of water won't be noticed in a big pot of wine!"

And so, despite his wife's protest, he filled his gourd with water.

When they arrived at the feast, the man tipped his contribution into the pot and smiled at his clever trick.

The Chief welcomed everyone and took the first drink.

"My friends," he said solemnly, "I see from the quality of the wine you have brought, how much you value my hospitality."

Then all the guests took a drink – and there was nothing but water in every cup!