

## *Mother*

*By Alina B*

Mr. and Mrs. Nort were very normal but critical people. They lived in a small and luxurious apartment. Mr. Nort was a man with greasy hair, mainly because he never showered. He worked at the sewer works. Mrs. Nort was a hideous woman and very bossy. She worked at a grocery store. They were very unhappy because they had to care for a child. Me. Mrs. Nort's cousin, my father, had left for business and was away for a few months. Unfortunately, I'm stuck with my aunt and uncle now. At 11 years old I'm still there. Every morning I wake up to their squabbles. I will not be surprised if they get divorced. I wish my mother could stay with me. But she never shows up. I never saw her before, but I know who she is. The Greek goddess of harvest. Demeter.

A few years ago I found out about this. My father and I were camping in the forest. Night had fallen and we lay on our bellies, our glum faces lit golden in the fire light. My father looked at me and said, "I'm very sorry my girl, but I have to leave on an important business trip in a couple of weeks." I stared at him in shock. "How long are you going to be gone?" "A few months," he said quietly. "You'll be staying with your aunt and uncle while I'm gone." I looked at him in horror. "A few months? Staying with my aunt and uncle!?" "Look, darling, I know the Norts are a little unpleasant but it's only for a few months," he said briskly and brightly. That was a surprise, father usually said the Norts were very foul and idiotic. "What about mother?" I demanded. "Why can't she take me?" Father's head drooped. "I guess you should know the truth." Then he hesitated. "I'm not sure if you're ready to take this in." "Why?" I said curiously. "I mean-she's not dead, is she?" "No." My father told me. "She's alive. But after you were born she left. She is a very important woman because she -- she's the Greek goddess of the harvest. Demeter." "Demeter?" Why had nobody told me? Why had father decided to tell me now? "I'm sorry I never told you," he said gruffly as if reading my mind. "But this is not usual for a child." He added, his voice clearer, "Don't be upset that she was never there. Like I said, she is a very important woman, being a goddess and all." A cold feeling like ice formed in my stomach. He gazed at me understandingly. "Don't forget though, how much we love you." That was the last thing he said to me before he left.

Now, every day at my relative's home I let his words sink in. Demeter is your mother. Demeter is your mother. I tried to push them away. This morning I woke up to shouts of anger from the kitchen. My aunt and uncle were fighting again. I sighed heavily. Life with the Norts had been very nasty. For one thing they were meatatarians which meant zero greens in their gross diet. The problem was that I was a vegetarian. You can probably figure out how that ended. I hung my head soberly and stared out the window moodily. Perhaps I should go to the forest today and sulk, which was what I mostly did these days. "These days" is a phrase that means, "living with the Norts". I moaned in self-pity all the way down the stairs. Mrs. Nort seemed to swell with fury at her husband who bellowed in rage like an angry hippopotamus. "Good morning everyone," I grumbled. Of course, my manners were wasted on the revolting people who stood in front of me. "Shut up, you," My uncle snapped. I began to say, "People, can I please, please go to the forest today?" "You cheeky-," my uncle started to roar. "I interrupted, "It

would be a shame to sit out on a fine morning like this." Mr. Nort opened his big red mouth but Mrs. Nort beat him to it. "Go then," she snarled. "And leave us in peace." They turned back to continue screaming as I made my out of the room.

A storm began to brew as soon as I reached the woods. Wind made leaves flutter and trees twist. Rain splashed and soaked the earth. I shivered with delight and fear as I reached the forest. I stood for a moment, savoring the excitement as I looked up at the spooky towering trees. I finally made it to a mud-pooled pond. I waded waist deep into the muck just to get upset. "Unique work, dear," a voice rasped from behind. A wispy, petite, old woman stood hunched over a wooden cane, her knees wobbling. Her face was wrinkled, her flesh sagging. Stringy gray hair was piled on top of her head in a bun. Her bulging eyes were closest to a murky greenish-brown color and she wore dirty rags. She was very thin. I asked in a trembling voice, "Who are you?" She gave a toothless grin. "Girl! Would you mind carrying me across this wretched pond? I don't want to get filth on my clothes." You already have, I thought to myself, but it would be impolite to refuse. "Of course," I muttered, heaving her on my shoulders and crossing the pond in a few strides, ignoring the mud that oozed over my chin. I clambered onto the bank covered head to foot in slimy gunk. The old woman glanced at me and simpered, her ragged clothing untouched. "You have passed my test for being gracious. You are truly my daughter." "What-," but the old woman's body began to glow, and when the light faded a beautiful young woman stood in her place. She had flawless white skin with freckles dotting her face. Her jaw jutted out and long, curly auburn hair flowed down her back. She had enormous, violet eyes and wore green and gold robes. I instantly fell to my knees. I stared at her, stunned. "Are you-," I began. "If you were about to say "Demeter" then you're right," the woman in robes said sarcastically. "Why did you come?" I demanded. "Why now?" Demeter's thin lips were curved in a stern frown. "Be more polite!" She sniffed. "I didn't come all the way down from Olympus to listen to an 11-year old's complaints." I opened my mouth and closed it, no sound came out. My mother sounded very Nortish. Then Demeter's expression softened. "Dear me, I'm sorry if I sound irritated. I had a very shameful afternoon yesterday." I managed to mumble something, but I didn't hear myself. I was too engrossed in Demeter's chatter. "I hope you know my embarrassing relatives," Demeter coughed. I said happily, "You know, my relatives are very horrible." "Oh!" Demeter perked up. "Do you have a potted plant?" "Many," I said eagerly and began to talk about all the things I've been growing. Demeter also loved plants and was quite fond of grain. We soon found ourselves on the topic of the Nort's. "Meatatarians, you say?" Demeter looked faintly amused. "Leave it to me." We parted most reluctantly. Demeter dissolved in pure light and I wandered back to the Nort's home. My heart felt achy and very different than before.

Years have passed since I met had Demeter. I now live my father again but decided not to tell him about my meeting with mother. The Nort's have been acting very strangely and have become vegetarians. I've got a feeling it was Demeter's work.