

A Groundhog Day Story

Natan Zamansky

“You come with me right now, young lady!”

“Mom!” complained the young lady in question. “I’m not due home until March!”

“That’s not what your Uncle Phil says.”

“Phil isn’t my real uncle, Mom.”

“Persephone Ann--”

“Don’t use my middle name! I hate it. Who names their kid Ann?”

“Ann?” exclaimed Persephone’s mother, Demeter. “That’s the name you’re complaining about? Who names their kid Persephone?”

“Kind of making my point for me, Mom.”

Demeter sniffed. “Well, you should respect your uncle anyway.”

“He’s a groundhog. How are we supposed to be related?”

“Are you questioning the family trees of Greek gods?”

“Touché.”

“I don’t see why you’re making such a big deal about this. Every year, Phil checks for his shadow, and says every year whether the winter weather will weather or not.”

“What does Phil know about weather... whether... wea-- He lives in a hole in the ground!”

“So do you!”

“Touché.”

“And will you stop speaking French? We’re Greek for gods’ sake!”

“Will you stop speaking English?”

“Touché.”

“That’s what I thought.”

“If you don’t get back up to Earth right now, young lady--”

“What? You’ll tell my mother? Oh, wait. You are my mother.”

“No. I’ll tell your father.”

Persephone’s face darkened. “You wouldn’t!”

“If spring doesn’t come on schedule, the humans are going to get really angry, and you know what a headache that is, all those people praying in their complaints.”

“Who cares? They’ll be coming to you, not Dad.”

“Oh honey, you know how humans are. They don’t care who’s actually in charge. They’ll just complain to whoever has the most impressive title. And that’s Zeus.”

“Did someone call?” asked Zeus.

“Jesus Christ...” muttered Persephone.

“What was that?”

“Nevermind.”

Zeus nodded as if he wanted her to think he understood. "I was thinking of creating a new season."

Demeter smirked. "A season for ungrateful daughters who won't come home when they're supposed to?"

"No, a new season of Firefly. That show got cancelled too soon. What's this about ungrateful daughters?"

"Your daughter Persephone Ann--"

"Don't use my middle name."

"-- doesn't want to come home even though Phil clearly said that winter was to be over today."

"He looked around and didn't see a shadow, mother. How is that clear?"

"It's tradition!"

"It's overcast!"

"So?"

"The two things have no correlation!"

"What has that got to do with anything?"

"Can I step in here?" said Zeus, stepping in. "It was overcast, and that was my fault. Sorry. It's been a while since we had a good thunderstorm."

"We had one last week!"

"Okay, so I wanted to try out my new thunderbolt. The cyclops said they finally fixed the lag issue between the light and the sound. Said they should go off simultaneously now."

"That's nice dear, but what are we going to do about Persephone?"

"Pardon?"

"Your daughter! She wants to stay in the underworld!"

"So?"

"So what?"

"So let her."

"What?"

"If she wants to stay in the underworld, let her. It's one less thing for me to worry about."

"But she's our daughter!"

"So?"

"So don't you want to see her?"

"We're seeing her right now. No one said you can't visit -- and you, young lady," he turned to Persephone, "you could call more often."

"Yes dad."

"That's not the point!" complained Demeter.

"So what is the point?"

Demeter was stuck on this point, and not being able to provide a satisfactory answer, she decided to change the subject. "But what about the humans?"

“The humans?”

“Won’t they think something is up if winter doesn’t end when Phil said it would? And then the complaints department will have a field day!”

“Humans schmunans!”

“Moomins?”

“What?”

“I think those are copyrighted.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Nevermind.”

Zeus nodded again. “Anyway. Humans will come up with some justification for it. The groundhog’s wrong more than half the time anyway, and they still have a whole holiday about it! They’ll come up with some explanation for how it’s an unusually cold spring, or how Phil’s shadow was just too faint for human eyes to see, or some other nonsense like that. Making things up is what humans do best.”

“But what about the complaints department?”

“I was wrong. Making things up is what they do second-best. Complaining is what they do best.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you think complaints go down when everything goes right as planned? No! I got a thousand complaints on my desk this morning after Phil made his prediction. Half of them want spring to come right now, and half of them want winter to never end. And then when spring does come, the same half who wanted it in the first place are going to be wishing for winter back again! There’s no pleasing them!”

“I think you’re oversimplifying the varied and nuanced reasons any individual person might want a particular season at a particular time, and falsely assuming that every person should want the same season all of the time. Even if it’s the same people who want spring now who want winter later could have perfectly logical reasons based on the present circumstances. People can change their minds based on circumstances and new information, and it’s disingenuous to lump people into too-large groups with simplistic one-word labels.”

Zeus frowned. “I’m not doing this.”

“What?”

“Thinly-veiled social commentary. It’s not happening, so shut it down right here.”

“What social commentary? I’m just talking about the weather.”

“Good.”

Demeter, Zeus, and Persephone stood, wondering what to do next, or who had the next line.

“So, are we going to bring this to a satisfactory conclusion or...”