

Greg Wagner

A Cold Day In Hades

This book is a work of fiction. Aside from Greek Mythology, the characters, situations, and dialogue are drawn exclusively from the author's imagination and are not to be considered real. Any resemblance is purely coincidental and unintended.

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I would like to thank (in this order) My Wife Roberta, Wikipedia, Duck Duck Go, and Amazon.com, because without any of the above, this novel would not have happened.

Also By Greg Wagner:

At End Of Forever – An Action Novel

The Adventures of Esme The Wonder Dog – A Children's
Picture Book

Dragons Don't Grow On Trees

Author's Note

In writing this book, I have to admit that I exercised quite a bit of artistic license. Greek mythology sources in my opinion are spotty at best, consisting mainly of poems and stories told centuries after the fact, not to mention that quite a few of the texts contradict each other.

That being said, many of the “facts” as they exist are debatable, hence the term Mythology. Some examples are, the sex of Cerberus, the parental lineage of Dionysus, and the locations of many of the places in the underworld etc.

This book is a work of fiction, and as far as I know there are no Halls of Air, a muse named Media, or any modernization movement in the underworld. It is just my attempt to make a dark and vague subject, into something funny and entertaining. If I have offended anyone's sensibilities in the process, I apologize and hope that you would have figured out the nature of this book from the title and sales blurb before purchasing it.

If not, then I am sorry, *but I'm still keeping the money.*

Good luck, and keep on reading!

Greg

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Pronunciation Guide

People and other beings

Charon - care on
Tiresias - tire e see us
Styx - sticks
Hades - hay deez
Persephone - per se fo neee
Dionysus - die oh nice us
Zeus - zoos
Poseidon - po-sigh-don
Tisiphone - ti si fo nee
Lethe - lee thee
Nike - ny kee
Calliope - kuh LIE oh pee
Clio - KLEE oh
Erato - e RA to
Euterpe - yoo TER pee
Melpomene - mel POH meh nee
Polyhymnia - polly HIM nee ah
Terpsichore - terp SI kor ee
Thalia - THAY lee ah
Campe - camp
Thanatos - than a tos
Cerberus - sur bur us
Phlegyas - ph leg yas

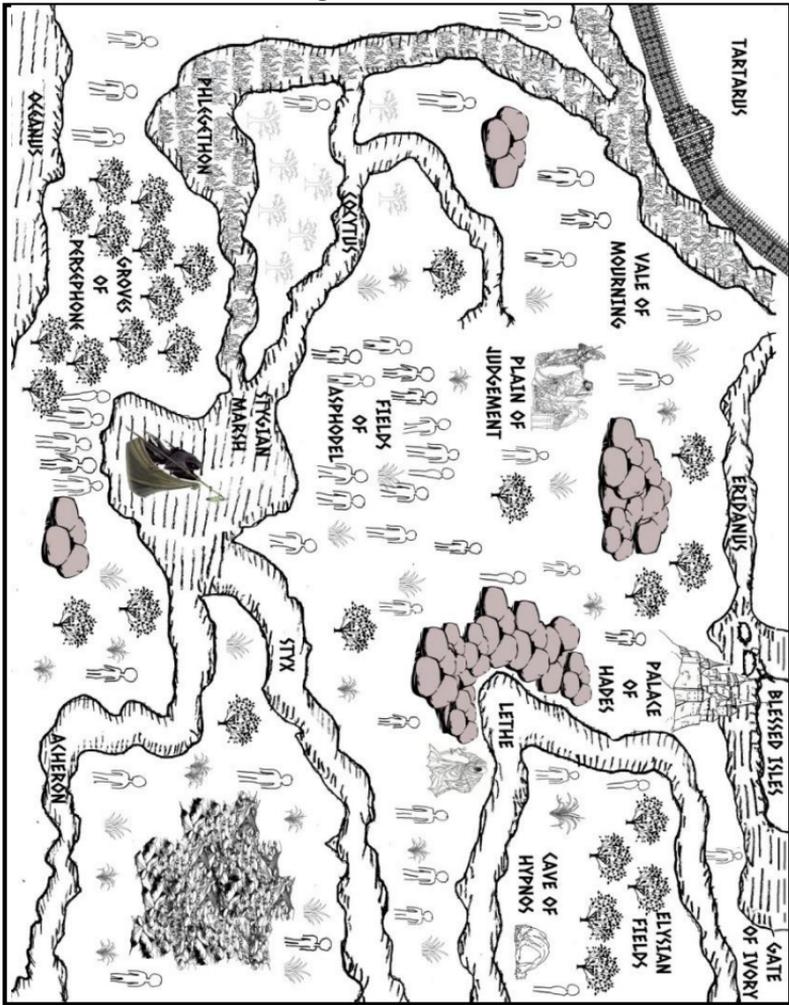
Places

Acheron - ack er ron
Phlegethon - fle ge thon
Elysium - ee lee see um
Tartarus - tar ta rus
Lethe - lee thee
Styx - sticks
Cocytus - koe ky tus

Things

Obolus - obol us
Asphodel - ass fo del
Frieze - freeze

Map of the Underworld



Chapter 1

A large black and white spotted dog walks down a moss covered and lichen hung tunnel, his massive paws making soft scuffing sounds on the floor as he unerringly passes each turning. He comes to a major intersection in the underground passage.

He stops, turns his head from side to side, and then sniffs at the air, following the olfactory colors of scents that only canines can see, then his ears prick up and he starts out again. His pace is more urgent now and there is a determined look in his eye.

Suddenly the tunnel ends and he is standing in an open field. A soft breeze is blowing, wind sculpting the green surface briefly with each gust, making the tall grass ripple and wave back and forth.

Off in the distance, a castle sits surrounded by water on all sides, white mortared stone walls precariously straddling the mouth of two river valleys at their confluence. The castle is the center of the scenery, and imposing to all, with its vaulted battlements and grand parapets blocking out the sky for all who pass near.

The big dog reaches the river's edge, and jumps in without even slowing down, barely making a splash as he enters and swims effortlessly against the current, until he reaches the far shore. Shaking off, he picks up the pace again and starts running now, as if anxious to reach his destination.

A large ornate gateway rises out of the hillside. Rows of tall, sharpened spikes line the top of a palisade fence in either

direction as far as the eye can see. The dog approaches and stops a few yards before the gate. He sniffs at the air again then stands up tall, hackles raised all the way up and down his back, like a great fuzzy black and white Mohawk. His tail whips back and forth, in quick, short snaps.

Another dog comes out of the shadow of the gate; this one is snow white, and almost as big. It is making the same motions as the new dog. To the casual observer it might appear as if there was going to be a showdown over territorial issues and possibly a fight to the end, but then the dog at the gate lies down at the feet of the newcomer and rolls over, exposing her belly in supplication, and whining softly.

High up on the snow covered slopes of Mount Helicon, where the source of the Aganippe and the Hippocrene waters spring forth from the very rock itself. There sits a cavern carved out of solid white marble. Nine robed sisters are gathered around a shimmering pool in the center. They are watching the pool intently, each with their talismans of power held closely, as if afraid that they might drop into the glistening water and be lost forever.

The scene on the surface of the pool is of the two dogs at the towering gate. They are sniffing at each other and circling around, tails wagging. The sisters nod and point, laughing and talking amongst themselves in small groups.

As one, the nine of them stand up and bring their hands together and suddenly the scene on the water's surface changes, at first showing only darkness, but then slowly focusing, to

display a worn forest path. As the view travels down the path, a strange sound can just barely be heard coming from everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

At first, it is a steady thumping sound, like that of a heartbeat, but soon it is joined by a fast, chunky, counter rhythm to the already catchy rhythm. Now singing can be heard ringing out through the other sounds. “*Oooo, baby, baby, it’s a wild world,*” which is followed shortly by a quick, higher pitched progression of notes from what sounds like a stringed instrument then more singing, “*it’s hard to get by just upon a smile girl.*”

The strange music is swirling about like a tempest, spinning around and around, fast and furious, yet orderly in its own form of organized chaos.

A view from just outside of a small wooden building appears in the pool and then travels in through the front window. When the picture finally clears again, it is focused on four teenagers playing music. They appear to be exerting themselves heavily, straining in order to keep up with the extremely fast-paced beat of the song, and yet they seem to be enjoying every second of it.

Three of the musicians are playing stringed instruments and singing together, harmonizing like a choir of angels while a fourth is seated in front of an elaborate array of drums and cymbals, banging with sticks and pumping at pedals with both feet, he creates a beat that makes even the watchers at the pool nod in time to the tempo.

Harry David finished singing the last chorus of the

band's "punked out" version of the classic 1970's Cat Stevens song. At the end, they all held the final note for a few beats, before jumping up in the air in unison and then slamming it out together to complete silence...except for a slight buzzing noise coming from the speaker of Phillip's amplifier. He shrugged and wiggled the guitar chord in the socket, holding it in place until it stopped, only to have it start buzzing again as soon as he let go.

Harry looked around at the others, "Well, what do you think?"

Pepsi, the band's bass player spoke up first, nodding and smiling at the same time. "I like it, it has good harmony potential," she said, repositioning the strap of her guitar and brushing back a lock of bright curly red hair that had fallen down into her eyes while she was playing.

"Too slow," was all Pepsi's little brother RC and the current drummer of the band had to say, but that was all he usually had to say. Being the "energizer bunny" of the group at the ripe old age of thirteen, he rarely got tired of the fast pace of the heavy music.

Phillip had his volume down, and was still practicing the melody line of the last song, when he noticed, that they had all turned to face him.

"Hunh? Oh yeah, I like it, I'm just having trouble getting that lick down as fast as we were playing it." He shook his head and quietly went through the fingering again on the neck of his guitar.

The name of their band is "The Pop Tops." They are for the most part, a "cover" band that rearranges classic and soft

rock songs, to a punk rock style beat, *fast and groovy*. Harry got the idea from his dad, who had played rhythm guitar in a few bands over the years, but was now, as he put it, “too old to do any of that kind of stuff anymore.”

The Pop Tops have been doing quite well so far, getting paying gigs every month, and earning a reputation for being professional musicians. Most of the shows that the band plays are pool parties and fire hall dances, but they each make \$100 every time they get their instruments out. The band only started playing together last summer, when Harry met Pepsi and her brother RC, at the Brogue Community Center’s “Open Mic” Night. An event held every other Saturday evening during the warmer months.

Harry and Phillip are good friends from school and close to the same age. They have been playing music together off and on together for the last couple of years.

The teens practiced a few more songs from their set list, and then made plans to get together again tomorrow at the same time.

Harry had just turned sixteen a few months ago and was currently the only one in the band old enough to drive, so that made him the designated chauffeur

When they were ready to go they all piled into the old Jeep Cherokee that Harry bought with the money that he made from selling firewood over the summer. They went to Phillip’s house first, which was only a couple of miles down the road. After they dropped Phillip off, they went on to Brogue.

RC and Pepsi live across the street from the Old Brogue

Store on Route 74; the state road that goes straight through the middle of the small town. Harry pulled into their driveway and got out to help Pepsi get her bass out of the back.

The two stood there for a few seconds looking into each other eyes. RC grabbed his sticks out from in between them, smirking as he went past, “Yo, maybe you two should get a room or something.” Pepsi took a swat at him, connecting with his shoulder just before he was out of reach.

“Owww hey,” he whined, putting his hands up and backing away. “I was just kidding.”

Pepsi rolled her eyes and turned back to Harry who was getting ready to leave. She looked up at him and smiled. Not having much experience with members of the opposite sex, Harry blushed at being the main focus of her attention and then fumbled with his keys.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you tomorrow,” he offered, still looking at the ground.

Pepsi searched his downcast eyes and then allowed her shoulders to sag visibly, “Um, yeah sure, I’ll see you tomorrow Harry.”

She looked at her watch and suddenly the spell was broken. “Oh my god, I have to get to work,” she cried and with that she ran off into the house, leaving Harry standing alone.

He watched after her for a little while, then shook his head and climbed back into the Jeep.

Chapter 2

Pepsi Ferrell ran into the house and grabbed her uniform off the sofa where she left it last night. She works part-time at the Dairy Bar in Collinsville, where she takes care of the drive-in window. Most of her job is serving ice cream during the summer months to people coming and going from Lake Aldred, a seven-mile manmade recreational lake created by damming up part of the Susquehanna River for the Holtwood Hydroelectric Power Company.

Pepsi had been working in the evenings and weekends after school for the last year and almost every day since school let out, with the hopes of having enough money saved up to get a car and pay for her insurance next February, when she turns sixteen.

She really enjoys playing with the band, but seriously doubts their chances of ever “making it big” as an act. Even so, they have been making money doing it. The last show at Holiday Inn Holidome in York, netted them each \$150 just for playing two forty-five minute sets of songs.

Everybody in the band works hard at practicing and learning new songs and they each take the whole thing seriously enough that the band now has a good sound and a very unique stage presence.

The “punking out” of classic rock songs isn’t anything new, Pepsi’s favorite band “Me First and The Gimme Gimmes” has been doing it very well for a number of years since the late nineties. Taking songs such as the Kenny Rogers classic “She Believes In Me,” and totally rocking them out, but doing it in a

harmonious and upbeat way that's really contagious, especially in a live environment. Everyone in the band is great, even her crappy brother RC, who actually is turning out to be a quite good drummer.

Pepsi finds herself flustered every time she's alone with Harry. She likes him and gets the impression that he feels the same way, but she can't tell though, as they've only known each other for less than a year and even then only getting together as a group.

She walked her bike out of the garage and hopped onto the one pedal, pushing off the ground with the other foot and then swinging her leg up over the seat on her way out the driveway. The Dairy Bar was just over the hill and it only took her five or ten minutes to ride there; depending on how tired she was and whether she was coming or going. It was downhill the whole way going there, so for now all she had to do is coast, *coming home is a different story entirely.*

The warm summer breeze made her curly hair bounce around back and forth in front of her face.

Sometimes Pepsi hates her hair, and of course, she hears it from her friends all the time. *"Do you realize what I have to go through, just to get my hair to do anything other than lay flat?"*

Pepsi kept her hair short for the opposite reasons. *When it's long, it poofs out like crazy and there isn't anything I can do with it, most times making me look like "Medusa" having a bad snake day.* At least when she keeps it short, she doesn't feel *too much* like a redheaded throwback from the seventies.

The color is another story. *Fire engine red is ok*, if you don't mind standing out, but Pepsi really has no desire to get "noticed," *except as the accomplished musician that I strive to be.*

Actually more the opposite, *and to think some people actually dye their hair to get this shade*, she thought, reaching up and tugging a red forelock away that had blown over her eyes again.

All in all, she figures there's really no point in complaining about her looks, or all of the other things in life that are out of her control for that matter.

How's that old adage go?

"Change what you can, accept what you can't, and kick butt everywhere in between," or something like that. She giggled to herself as she coasted into the drive-in parking lot, letting the nearly spent momentum, carry her around to the back of the building to glide to a stop at the old walnut tree, where she usually kept her bicycle locked up.

Gazing intently into the black pool of the abyss, Hades, the awesome ruler and dark overlord of the underworld, surveyed his vast domain with a critical eye.

River of fire, *check*, queuing lost souls, *check*, impassable moat, *check*, poison spitting hellhound, *check...a, hey wait a minute, where's the poison spitting hellhound?*

He focused in on the little room that's just inside of the main gate, where Cerberus likes to lay when not out harassing

the souls of the dead on their way to the River Of Woes.

While Cerberus enjoyed that part of the job the most, the dog's main responsibility is actually to guard the gates to Hades, to keep the dead from leaving, as well as making sure that no "living" souls sneak past.

There was no sign of the dog in her room, so he shifted the view of his pool to the Fields of Asphodel, thinking that maybe she got a little carried away in her playing. After a cursory search of the area, he still hadn't located his trusty servant.

Hades stood up and waved his hand theatrically.

In an instant, he stood before the gates to the underworld. He held his hand to his ear, closed his eyes and listened carefully, just barely making out a soft whimpering sound coming from down near the riverbank. He followed that sound to find Cerberus lying beside a very large harlequin spotted Great Dane. The two dogs were licking and sniffing each other, as if they were old and dear friends and were surprised by his sudden appearance.

Hades snapped his fingers, and a large gilded cage appeared with the big dog inside of it. Cerberus stood just outside the cage whining and scratching at the bars and giving her master a betrayed look that he ignored, instead he circled the cage thoughtfully rubbing his chin.

"What have we here?" he said, stroking the little pointy beard that he prided himself so much on. He stood back and frowned, looking the black and white dog over and muttering to himself, "My, but you are a big one aren't you?"

The dog bowed his head down and whined, then looked up and barked at him playfully, pawing at the cage and growling softly.

“Oh no my friend,” Hades chuckled and shook his head, “I’m sorry to say that you are in big trouble this time, and being cute isn’t going to get you off the hook.”

Another shimmering pool not so far away displayed the same scene happening at the gates.

Calliope looked at her sisters and shrugged. No one said anything. Melpomene the muse of tragedy stepped up to the pool and looked around the room for a few seconds, before dipping her hand in and stirring the water up a little bit.

Clouds filled the surface, swirling with the current, and then slowly spinning to a halt, focusing on the little shed where the members of the “Pop Tops” practiced.

Chapter 3

Harry David held the dump lever back on his father's truck and watched as the last of the firewood dropped out onto the ground beside Mr. Senft's outdoor wood furnace. When Mr. Senft handed Harry his payment, he patted his hand and said quietly, "There's a little extra in there, for you bringing it all the way back here. I really do appreciate it; most people just wanna dump it out at the road." The older man rubbed his back and shook his head, "I just can't carry it that far anymore."

The only concern was getting hung up. Usually the weight of the wood alone gave Harry all the traction he needed, *unless it's muddy, then it just gets stuck*. Fortunately, for Harry, his father's truck has four-wheel-drive.

Harry walked back and climbed into the cab, sliding the invoice into his workbook in the process. He'd gotten in the habit of making sure that he kept receipts for everything and tried to keep it all in one place. With all the business that he had been doing lately though, the book was getting full. Soon he was going to have to offload some of the paperwork somewhere else, for fear of the seams splitting on the old three ring binder.

Harry started his own business as soon as he turned sixteen. His father regularly had the woods around the farm that they owned "select cut" to manage the trees so that they could grow properly. His father would then make some money on the side by selling that wood for lumber.

Usually the lumber company's weren't interested in wood that was small in diameter, which also included the tree tops and side branches. When his father had time, he used to cut

some of this wood up and stack it out at the end of the driveway with a “for sale” sign on it, in most cases selling just enough to keep him cutting up more.

When Harry turned sixteen, he got the idea of a firewood delivery service as a way for him to help the family *and* make some extra money too. All he had to do was pay for the gas and upkeep on the saws and his father’s old one-ton dump truck that usually sat out in the barn more often than it was driven.

Harry never realized how successful of a venture that delivering firewood could be, *until now*.

He considered himself lucky; his parents were good honest hard working people. They treated him fairly and were for the most part stable, except for their habit of trying to come up with *the next new idea* to make extra money on the side. Some people called it resourceful, some called it crazy.

Harry found it contagious.

When he was growing up, whenever there was work to be done around the farm, the whole family would pitch in and get it done without ever complaining; with the exception of his older sister Heather, who was usually excused from duties, for the gorier parts of the animal butchering process.

When Harry decided he wanted to play music, his father helped him learn and even bought him his first real guitar, *after he proved that he was serious about it of course*.

Harry learned to play for the first two years on a cheap Hondo copy of a Fender “Stratocaster,” before his parents gave him a new, black, Les Paul “Custom” guitar for his fourteenth

birthday.

I played that guitar until my fingers bled. I ate with it. I even slept with it. He stopped and thought with a smirk, maybe that's why I couldn't sleep at night.

When Phillip started to coming over to jam, Harry's mother almost immediately chased them out of the house because of the noise; again his father came to the rescue, letting them fix up the old chicken house, that was back in the woods by the creek.

Working during the summer that year, Phillip, Harry and his father rewired the old place, replaced a couple broken windowpanes, and then insulated the walls, before putting up new drywall and some carpet that they found for cheap at the discount store.

Harry downshifted the old dump truck into a lower gear, as he came to the top of the half-a-mile hill that led down into the hollow. Once at the bottom, Harry drove it bumping and bouncing across the iron bridge and into the lean-to garage that his father had built onto the side of the barn.

Harry's family lives in what used be the town of "Lucky, Pennsylvania."

During the 1800's the town thrived and consisted of a working slaughterhouse, a four-story cannery that straddled Otter Creek, and a hotel/general store that is now his family's residence. The post office was just across the street and there used to be a baseball diamond out back, where the main pasture is located now. The town of Lucky ceased to exist decades ago. Most of the buildings and the people are gone, but a lot of the

stories and pictures still remain.

Quite a few times over the years, complete strangers have stopped by and told his family stories of what they remember of the hollow and the people who used to live there.

The town was actually named “Lucky,” by the local postmaster at the time; as he was quoted as saying, “You were lucky if you could get out of there when it snowed in the winter time.”

When his family first moved into the big house, it was in pretty bad shape and it continued to look that way for many years, as Harry’s parents were slowly fixing it up from the inside out. The kids on the bus used to tease him, calling the house a haunted old dump, and telling everyone that there was an evil clown living in the attic that ate little children.

Harry never really cared what they said, he figured that if they were going to tease him about it, then they really weren’t the type people he wanted to be friends with anyway and their opinion didn’t count.

The old house cleaned up well, even after sitting vacant for a number of years. On the steps going up to the attic, they found writing that had been etched in the still drying plaster by the people who built it. The writing said that the house was completed on May 16, 1862, which was funny, because May 16th was the day that Harry’s family moved in, *over 130 years later.*

The roof joists in the attic are actual trees; some still have the bark on them. The great main support beams down in the basement, are even bigger trees, with only the tops and

bottoms of the logs shaved flat, leaving the sides rounded and raw.

In the hallway on the second floor, there used to be a strange mural painted on the wall. Harry's parents left it up for many years, until they got to fixing up that part of the house.

They were told that the mural was supposedly painted by somebody who once lived there called "the professor." He incorporated stencils and freehand painting on a dark green background, of what looked like a horned fertility god, holding court with a beautiful maiden, who was in turn concealing an arrow behind her back, with tiny birds flying through the air all around them.

Now it's underneath three coats of beige paint, Harry thought, because it clashed with the new blood red carpet that they put in the hallway.

They never did meet the artist.

Glancing up at the clock, Harry knew that he had just enough time to wash and eat before he had to pick up everyone for band practice.

No one was home, but he had at least expected to be met by his dog and best friend Zeus, who usually knocks him over as he's trying to get in the door.

He went to where Zeus's "bed" sits, (actually a double mattress, located in the hallway between the living room and the kitchen.)

When he couldn't find his dog in the house, he went outside and whistled a few times. Usually Zeus came running if

he was anywhere around.

When Zeus still didn't appear, he shrugged, and went back in the house to finish getting ready. After he locked up, he walked out to his Jeep, looked around, and whistled one more time. When Zeus didn't come, he got in and headed to Phillip's house.

He's probably just out running around, Harry thought worriedly as he drove up the steep hill, I just hope that he's here when I get back.

The nine sisters gazed into the pool again.

Calliope leaned in close to the surface and stirred it with one delicate hand. The water swirled again, changing to show the little shack in the woods.

Thalia the muse of comedy stepped up to the pool. She smiled sweetly, then held a hand up to her mouth and imitated barking like a dog with such perfection, that it could have been a direct recording. The other sisters laughed and nodded and then they joined hands again.

Just then, another woman entered the grotto.

The newcomer appeared to be very young and pretty in a flashy sort of way, looking more like a pop diva than a Grecian goddess. Her rainbow colored hair sparkled and shimmered about her face, casting dancing shadows in the cave.

“Watcha doin?” she asked of the nine sisters.

The other muses just turned away, while Calliope looked

down her nose at the uninvited guest and hissed. “I thought I told you, that you weren’t welcome here?”

Media dropped her shoulders and frowned, “But we’re sisters,” she spread her arms out to include all of the ladies. “As all of you represent the arts as they are, I represent a new age of art to come.”

“A new age?” Calliope scoffed, “After how many millennia?” She furrowed her perfectly shaped eyebrows and growled, “I don’t think so.”

The newcomer shook her head. “What do you know? All you care about is how things have been.” She stuck her chest out and thumped it with her hand, “I embody what is to be.”

Calliope shook her head and frowned, “You know nothing, *you with your upstart*,” she waved her hand glibly, “*what do you call it...technology?*”

“I have more followers than you hags ever dreamed of.” Media fumed, and her image froze in place for a fraction of a second, but then resumed movement again with a burst of electric static that traveled across her form. She continued just like nothing had happened. “Every minute of every day, millions of mortals are paying homage to me.” She passed her arm dramatically around the room. “Who here can say that?”

The other women started muttering.

“Even you,” she pointed at Calliope, “Epic poetry? I mean really, who does that anymore?”

“*You don’t belong here!*” Calliope shouted, her nostrils flaring to the size of marbles. “Be gone before I lose my

temper!”

The other woman stood up in Calliope’s face, electric blue arcs of electricity tracing their way across her figure and striking out at the edges like tiny bolts of lightning.

“Temper?” Media sneered, “*You don’t know the meaning of the word!*” With that, she stepped back and snapped her fingers, disappearing instantly in a spectacular kaleidoscopic flash, leaving behind a shower of fading sparkles that slowly fell to the floor before fizzling out completely.

Calliope allowed a sigh to escape, as Clio, the muse of history, stepped up beside her and put a hand lightly on her arm. “Don’t let her bother you,” she said haughtily and looked at the fading spot on the floor, “she’s just jealous.”

Calliope looked at her sister, then shook her head sadly and turned back to the pool again.