

A Cold Day In Hades

Gloria Stern

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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A Cold Day In Hades

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A Moderne Guide to Witchcraft - A Magical Comedy

The Sisterhood of the Rubber Ducky – A Crime Comedy

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What Lies Beneath - An Urban Fantasy

Author's Note

In writing this book, 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. 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 somewhat 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 you can't have your money back.

Good luck and keep on reading!

Gloria

Table of Contents

Pronunciation Guide	7
Map of The Underworld	8
Prelude	9
Chapter 1	13
Chapter 2	16
Chapter 3	21
Chapter 4	26
Chapter 5	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 6	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 7	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 8	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 9	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 10	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 11	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 12	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 13	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 14	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 15	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 16	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 17	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 18	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 19	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 20	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 21	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 22	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Pronunciation Guide

People and other beings

Charon - care on
Tiresias - tire e see us
Styx - sticks
Hades - hay deez
Persephone - per se fo nee
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

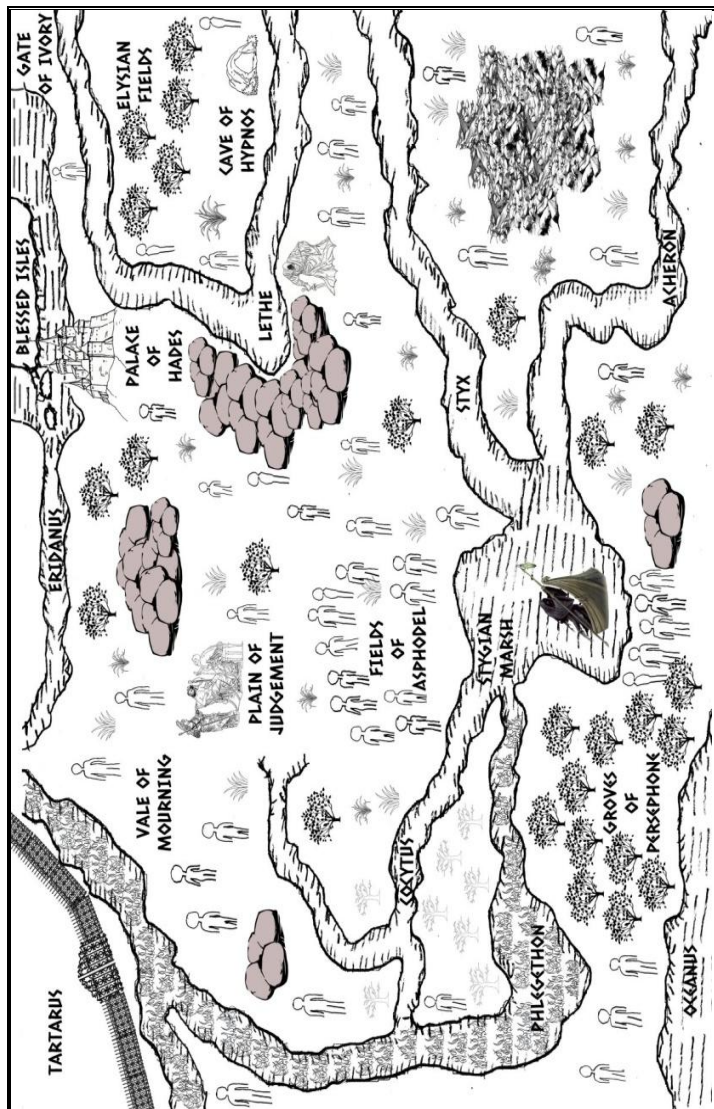
Places

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



Prelude

A large spotted dog pranced down a moss and lichen hung tunnel. His massive paws made soft scuffing sounds on the floor as he unerringly passed each turning. When he came to a major intersection in the underground passage, he stopped, turned his head from side to side and sniffed at the air, following the olfactory colors of scents that only canines can see. His ears pricked up and he started out again, his pace suddenly more urgent.

The tunnel ended and he found himself in an open field. A soft breeze caressed his fur. The wind sculpted the field's surface with its gusts as the tall grass rippled and waved in reply.

Off in the distance sat an enormous castle surrounded by water on all sides. White mortared stone walls precariously straddled the mouth of two river valleys at their confluence. The castle was the center of the scenery for miles, imposing with its vaulted battlements and grand parapets blocking out the sun to all who passed near.

The big dog reached the river's edge and jumped in without even slowing down, barely making a splash as he swam effortlessly against the current until he reached the far shore. He shook off and picked up the pace again,

running, as if anxious to reach his destination.

A large ornate gateway grew out of the hillside. Endless rows of tall, sharpened spikes lined the top of a towering palisade fence on either side. The dog stopped a few yards before the gate. He sniffed at the air again then stood up tall, hackles raised all the way down his back like a great fuzzy harlequin Mohawk. His tail whipped back and forth in quick short snaps.

Another dog came out of the shadow of the gate; this one was snow white and almost as large. It was 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 lay down at the feet of the newcomer and rolled over, exposing her belly in supplication and whining softly.



High up on the snow covered peaks of Mount Helicon, where the source of the Aganippe and the Hippocrene waters spring forth from the very rock itself, there sat a cavern carved out of solid marble. Nine white robed sisters gathered around a great shimmering pool. They watched 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.

A Cold Day In Hades

The scene on the surface of the pool was of the two dogs at a towering gate. They were sniffing each other and circling around, tails wagging.

As one, all nine of the sisters stood and brought their hands together. The scene on the water's surface changed, at first showing only darkness, but then slowly it focused to display a worn forest path. As the view traveled down the path, a strange sound could be heard.

It was a steady thumping sound, like that of a heartbeat, but soon it was joined by a fast, chunky, counter rhythm. Singing rang out through the other sounds. *"Oooo, baby, baby, it's a wild world,"* which was followed shortly by a quick, higher pitched progression of notes and then, *"it's hard to get by just upon a smile girl."*

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

A view in the pool traveled through the front window of a tiny building. When the picture finally cleared, it focused on four teenagers playing music, exerting themselves heavily, straining in order to keep up with the extremely fast-paced beat and yet enjoying every second of it.

Three of the musicians played stringed

instruments, harmonizing like a choir of angels while a fourth sat behind an elaborate array of drums and cymbals. Banging with sticks and pumping at pedals with both feet, he created a rhythm that made even the watchers at the pool nod in time.

Chapter 1

Harry David

Harry finished singing the band's punked out version of the classic seventies Cat Stevens song Wild World. At the end, they all held the final note for a few beats, before jumping up in the air and slamming it out together to complete silence, except for a slight buzzing noise coming from Phillip's amplifier. He shrugged and wiggled the guitar chord in the socket, holding it in place until the noise 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 spoke up first, nodding and smiling at the same time. "I like it, it has good harmony potential," she repositioned the strap of her bass guitar and brushed 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 had to say, but that was all he usually had to say. Being the Energizer Bunny drummer of the group at the ripe old age of thirteen, he rarely got tired of the fast pace.

Phillip had his volume down and was still practicing the melody line of the last song. "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 Pop Tops are 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 played rhythm guitar in a few bands around the Central Pennsylvania area. They practiced a couple more songs then made plans to get together again. Since Harry just turned sixteen a few months ago, that made him the designated chauffeur.

When they were ready to go they all piled into the old Jeep Cherokee that he bought with the money he made selling firewood off the farm. They went to Phillip's house first, which was only a couple of miles down the road. After they dropped him off, they went on to Brogue. Harry pulled into the driveway and climbed out to help Pepsi get her bass.

The two stood there for a few seconds looking into each other's 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.

A Cold Day In Hades

"Owww hey," he whined, backing away to the house. "I was only kidding."

Pepsi rolled her eyes and turned to Harry again. She smiled up at him. Not having much experience with members of the opposite sex, Harry blushed and fumbled with his keys.

"Well, I guess I'll a, see you tomorrow," he offered, looking at the ground.

Pepsi searched his downcast eyes before allowing her shoulders to sag, "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 ran off into the house, leaving Harry standing alone in the driveway.

He stood there for a little while, then shook his head and climbed back into the Jeep.

Chapter 2

Pepsi Ferrell

Pepsi ran into the house and grabbed her uniform off the sofa where she left it the night before.

Pepsi turns sixteen next February. She has been working part-time at the Dairy Bar in Collinsville for the last year. Her plan is to have enough money saved up to buy a car and pay for her insurance.

She really enjoys playing with The Pop Tops, but she seriously doubted their chances of ever making it big. Even so, they have been earning money playing out. The last show at Holiday Inn Holidome in York, netted them each a hundred and fifty dollars just for playing two forty-five minute sets.

Punking out classic rock songs wasn't anything new, Pepsi's favorite band Me First and The Gimme Gimmes has been doing it successfully 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 annoying little brother RC, who is turning out to be an exceptional drummer.

Pepsi gets flustered every time she's alone with

A Cold Day In Hades

Harry. She likes him and it seems like he feels the same way, but she can't tell as they've only known each other since last summer and even then only getting together as a band.

She walked her bike out of the garage and hopped onto one pedal, pushed off with the other foot and swung her leg up over the seat as she rolled out the driveway. The Dairy Bar was just over the hill. 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 an entirely different story*, she thought.

The warm summer breeze made her curly red hair bounce around back and forth in front of her face. Pepsi hated her hair, even though 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 and I can't do anything 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 clown. The color is another story. *Fire engine red is ok, if you don't mind standing out*, but Pepsi really had no desire to get noticed, *except as the*

accomplished musician that I strive to be. To think some people actually dye their hair to get this shade, she thought flipping a forelock that had blown over her eyes.

Pepsi figured there was really no point in complaining about her looks.

How's that old adage go?

"Change what you can, accept what you can't, and then kick butt everywhere in between," or something like that. She giggled to herself as she coasted into the Dairy Bar's 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 kept her bicycle locked up.



Hades

Gazing intently into the Black Pool of the Abyss, Hades, the fearsome 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 on the little room located just inside of the main gate. Cerberus likes to lay there when not out harassing the souls of the dead on their way to the River

A Cold Day In Hades

Of Woes. While Cerberus enjoyed that part of the job, her main responsibility was to guard the gates to Hades, to keep the dead from leaving, as well as making sure that no living souls snuck past.

There was no sign of the dog in her room so he shifted the view of his scrying pool to the Asphodel Meadows, 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 colored Great Dane. The two dogs were licking and sniffing each other as if they were old 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, giving her master a betrayed look that he ignored; instead, he circled the cage thoughtfully.

"Hmm, what have we here?" he said, stroking his

pointy little beard. He frowned, checking the black and white dog out, "My, but you are a big one aren't you?"

The dog bowed his head and pawed at the cage, growling playfully.

"Oh no my friend," Hades chuckled, "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."



Calliope

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

Calliope glanced at her sisters and shrugged. No one said anything. Melpomene the Muse of Tragedy stepped up to the pool and scanned the surface for a few seconds, before dipping her hand in and stirring the water up a little bit.

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

Chapter 3

Harry David

Harry learned to play guitar on a cheap Hondo copy of a Fender Stratocaster. For his fourteenth birthday after he proved that he was serious, his parents bought him a new black Les Paul Custom guitar.

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 had trouble sleeping back then.

When Phillip started coming over to jam, Harry's mother almost immediately chased them out of the house because of the noise. His father came to the rescue, letting them fix up the old chicken shack that was out in the woods. Working through the summer, Phillip, Harry and his father rewired the old building, replaced 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 lives in what used to be the town of Lucky, Pennsylvania. During the 1800s, the town consisted of a working slaughterhouse, a four-story cannery that straddled Otter Creek and the 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. The town of Lucky ceased to exist decades ago, but a lot of the pictures and stories still remain. Quite a few times over the years, complete strangers have stopped by the farm and told Harry's family stories of the hollow and the people who once lived there.

Glancing up at the clock, Harry figured he had just enough time to wash and eat before he had to pick everyone up for band practice. No one was home, but he at least expected to be met by his dog Zeus, who usually knocks him over as he's trying to get in the door.

He went to where Zeus' 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, Harry 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 the house up, he walked out to his Jeep, looked around and whistled one more time. When Zeus didn't come, he headed to Phillip's house.

He's probably just out running around, Harry thought worriedly as he drove up the steep hill going out of the hollow, *I just hope he's here by the time I get back.*



Calliope

The nine sisters gazed into the pool again.

Calliope leaned close to the surface and stirred it with one delicate hand. The water swirled, 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. The sound echoed, repeating itself so realistically that it could have been a direct recording. The other sisters nodded and they all joined hands again.

Just then, another woman entered the grotto.

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

"Watcha doin guys?" she asked.

The other muses turned away while Calliope glowered down her nose at the uninvited guest and hissed. "You are not welcome here."

Media frowned, "But we're sisters," she spread her

arms out to include all the Muses. "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 all this time?" 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 fist, "I embody what is to be."

Calliope frowned, "You know nothing. You with your upstart," she waved her hand glibly, "what do you call it, technology?"

"I am an online influencer. I have more followers than you hags ever dreamed of," Media fumed. 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 went on as if nothing happened. "Every minute of every day, millions of mortals pay homage to me." She passed her arm dramatically around the room. "Who here can say that?"

The other muses muttered.

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

A Cold Day In Hades

"You don't belong here!" Calliope shouted, her nostrils flaring to the size of marbles. "Be gone before I lose my temper!"

Media stood up in her face; electric blue arcs of electricity traced their way around her figure and struck out at the edges like tiny bolts of lightning.

"Temper?" She sneered, "You don't know the meaning of the word!" With that, she stepped back and snapped her fingers, disappearing in a spectacular kaleidoscopic flash.

Calliope allowed a sigh to escape as Clio, the Muse of History, stepped up and put a hand lightly on her arm. "Don't let her bother you," she offered haughtily, "she's just jealous."

Calliope looked at her sister and shook her head sadly before turning her attention to the pool again.

Chapter 4

Harry David

The whole time during band practice, Harry's thoughts kept drifting off to his dog.

His parents got Zeus when Harry was eleven. He remembered his father climbing out of the old truck with the little puppy in his arms. Zeus was so tiny, but even back then, his ears and feet betrayed the size that he would later become. Large even for a Great Dane, Zeus now weighs in at just under two hundred pounds and is well over four feet tall, with his ears down, *and not a mean bone in his body*, Harry smiled at the thought.

The band had just finished practicing and they were all sitting around talking. Phillip still had his guitar plugged in and was showing them the lead riff that he wanted to try. When he stopped playing, there was the same buzzing sound coming from the speaker of his amp. He wiggled the cord to get it to stop, but this time instead of buzzing again when he let go, they heard a dog barking.

Harry walked over to the amplifier, "That sounds like Zeus." He leaned down in front of the speaker, then looked up and moved over to the window.

"It isn't coming from the amp it's coming from outside," he turned around and headed for the door.

A Cold Day In Hades

Everyone followed as he started across the clearing. The barking became louder as he went, but it still sounded far off. When he came to the outcropping of rocks where Otter Creek marked the end of his parent's property, he turned to follow the narrow path that led down to the swimming hole, but then stopped quickly in front of one of the larger boulders. The barking appeared to be coming from the rock.

When RC stuck his hand out to lean against it, he fell right through, disappearing with a squeak for just a second before jumping back out, visibly shaken and scared. He clung to Pepsi's arm for a second, until he realized what he was doing and let go, wagging his fingers like she just gave him cooties.

Harry waved his hand through the rock and listened intently. *There's no doubt about it*, he thought, *that's where the barking is coming from.*

He turned to face his band mates. "You all don't have to come with me, but I need to find out what's going on."

Phillip laughed easily and shook his head, "Like you could keep us from coming?"

Harry looked at Pepsi and she just nodded in unison with her now brave little brother.

"Ok, but let me lead," he tried to sound confident, "that way we won't all die at the same time, right?"

They joined hands and slowly walked through the cliff and into a cave. A greenish glow was coming from everywhere at once, giving the whole room an ethereal radiance that reminded Harry of a great dragon's lair from the movies. Upon closer inspection, the light was coming from some sort of green luminescent moss growing down from the ceiling. As they walked along the path, they passed several places where the main tunnel intersected with smaller ones that led off in different directions.

They kept going straight.

After an hour or so of walking, they stopped. Harry was tired, thirsty and starting to think that they were lost. The barking was gone and the glowing moss on the walls was getting thinner, its sparse glow casted heavy shadows the further along they went. RC hung on tightly to Pepsi's arm, apparently no longer concerned about whether his sister was cootie contagious or not.

They stopped and she passed around the one bottle of water that she had the foresight to bring.

"I don't think we're lost," Harry shook his head, "all we have to do is turn around and we'll end up back where we started right?" Even though he had his doubts,

he tried not to let them show.

"Maybe we just missed a turn or something." Pepsi nodded in agreement, "If we go back, we should be able to find it."

After they had all rested, they started in the direction they came from. As they walked along Harry kept seeing a woman's face in the patterns of the moss growing on the walls, but every time he focused, there wasn't anything there.

They had only traveled a little ways before the light disappeared completely and they were left standing in the pitch dark.

There was a scrabbling sound in the tunnel up ahead and they all instinctually huddled closer together. Phillip chose that moment to pull out a small LED flashlight and shine it in the direction of the sound. There was a brief blur of brown fur and then it was gone.

"Probably just a rabbit." When he noticed the looks, Phillip shrugged, "I forgot I had it. I should probably save the batteries."



Calliope

The nine sisters sat around the shimmering pool.

The surface swirled around and the view was cloudy to the point of obscurity.

This has never happened before, Calliope frowned, creasing her near perfect visage for just a second. *What is going on?* She shook her head, still searching for the teens. She concentrated hard on the pool again and for just a second she could make them out huddled together in the dark tunnel.

They looked scared.

Euterpe, the Muse of Song and Music stepped up to the pool. She waved her hand in the air then stuck it right into the water. The surface stilled for a second and turned a bright blue. A musical chime sounded somewhere in the distance. She nodded and smiled as she stepped back to her place among the assembled.

Calliope focused on the teens again.



Pepsi Ferrell

A strange light appeared in the tunnel. It was coming from little glowing clouds of blue fog that had just started forming around each of them.

Terrified, RC tried to get away from the one that was hovering in front of him. Unfortunately, he only succeeded in running into the wall as the huge translucent

A Cold Day In Hades

blue ghost matched his every move, becoming denser with each passing moment. When the clouds had taken on more defined shapes, Pepsi thought she recognized the semblance of her bass guitar floating beside her. In another minute, it could have been a near perfect duplicate except it was a weird shade of blue.

Glowing spirits of the band's musical instruments hovered close by. RC was the first to reach out and grab his sticks. He hit one of the mysterious crash cymbals and it "tssshhhh'd" just like the original and continued to vibrate for another few seconds. The teens instinctually reached for their respective instruments.

The appearance of Pepsi's bass guitar was reassuring and she was glad to see that her little brother suddenly forgot how scared he was. "Why don't we try the new song?" she offered.

They had been working on adapting the sixties song Born To Be Wild to their music style and had it down for the most part. She figured that playing it might help them all feel better.

RC clicked off the first measure with his sticks and then he and Harry started playing the rhythm. Pepsi and Phillip came in on the next measure with Phillip picking a strange singing; almost Asian counter rhythm lead to

match Harry's now thrashing and furious guitar strokes.

Harry started singing in a low growling voice.

"Get your motor runnin, head out on the highway, lookin for adventure and whatever comes our way. Yeah god I'm gonna make it happen, take the world in a love embrace, fire all of..." Pepsi stopped when she realized that the drums weren't playing any more.

She looked over to see RC staring open mouthed, pointing frantically behind her. Pepsi spun around. There in the middle of the tunnel sat four shiny new motorcycles parked neatly in a row.

"How did they get here?" she asked walking cautiously toward them.

RC ran over to the closest one and hopped up on the seat. His feet barely touched the ground. Phillip and Harry joined him, staring at the bikes in wonder. They weren't little mini bikes either, they were full sized road machines straight out of the movies, all decked out in chrome, with old school tall ape-hanger handlebars and long leather tassels that dangled from the ends.

RC was hopping up and down on the seat of one when the kickstand popped out and the bike fell over, pinning his leg to the ground.

A Cold Day In Hades

"Oww," he squealed, "get it off, get it off!"

They all ran over and helped to lift the motorcycle up, sitting it carefully back onto its stand.

Harry sat down on one of bikes. "That's crazy," he frowned at Phillip, "it's almost like we made them appear."

Phillip nodded, "Well, when ghost musical instruments materialize out of thin air, I'd say just about anything is possible."

Harry checked to see if there was gas in the tank, then turned the key and hit the starter switch. The motorcycle roared to life. Little blue flames popped and crackled out of the exhaust pipes. When he let off the throttle, the engine resumed a low rumbling idle.

Phillip started another one up and Harry waved to Pepsi, "Why don't you ride with me and RC can ride with Phillip? We can cover a lot more territory that way."

"I want my own," RC whined, but when Pepsi pointed at his leg, he reluctantly climbed on the seat behind Phillip. They roared off down the tunnel, headlights illuminating the walls as they went.

Gloria Stern

End of free preview