



Perfectly Matching Again

Author: *Milena McKay*

Category: Romance, Lesbian Romance

Description: The life of a Muse is hard.
There are so many rules.

Rule Number 1: Don't get tipsy in Vegas and have a one night stand with the Goddess of Harvest.

Rule Number 2: Whatever happens in Vegas, don't let Hera interfere.

Rule Number 3: When Hera inevitably interferes and ties you to Demeter for all eternity (or until she restarts spring on Earth), try not to fall in love.

When the most popular (and devastatingly beautiful, everybody says so) Muse breaks the centuries old rule and gets entangled with the Goddess of Harvest, the entire Olympus is in upheaval.

What happens when Hera steps in to resolve the conundrum only to bring about the most adored trope of them all, forced proximity? Will Demeter surrender to the irresistible Muse? And will Erato finally see herself as more than Aphrodite's sidekick?

Total Pages (Source): 35

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

PROLOGUE

WHERE A CUPID TAKES A CHANCE ON AN UNLIKELY MATCH (AFTER FROLICKING IN ELEVATORS)

Cupids Convention... Vegas... 2 months ago...

Abby Angellini-Goddard discreetly wiped her mouth, got to her feet and slumped against the mirror, covering the elevator wall from floor to ceiling. Next to her, thoroughly debauched, panted her wife.

Sabine Goddard's eyes all but rolled back in her head and the state of her was one to behold. Glasses askew, skirt hunched up, blouse wrinkled. Yeah, there was no mistaking what had just happened in this elevator.

But then, Abby mused sagely, why should anyone be mistaking anything and who could fault her? Sabine was a Queen for a reason and years had only made her more attractive in every possible and impossible way. And Abby was a mere Cupid, worshiping her Queen. As one does.

She lifted a hand to brush the hair out of her face and the scent of her wife, still clinging to her fingertips, made Abby slightly dizzy. She cast a sidelong glance in Sabine's direction, only to be immediately rebuffed.

"I am too old to frolic in elevators, Abigail!"

But there was not enough conviction in said rebuffing. Abby could hear the "maybe,

possibly, probably” in the tone of the beloved voice. She turned fully to face the now shallowly breathing Sabine, all anticipation and hunger. Suddenly the elevator suddenly dinged, announcing their arrival to a floor that neither of them pressed. In fact, Abby was fairly certain they had blocked it from moving a few seconds after getting on.

“Someone out there is in a hurry.” Abby mused.

“Someone out there has power.” Sabine replied with a huff, all the while speedily and efficiently setting her clothing to rights.

She almost made it. Almost. In fact, when the door fully opened in front of two impatient guests of the hotel, Abby was certain only one of them noticed anything amiss with the Queen of the Perfect Match.

Erato’s smirk was knowing, even if it came and went quickly. Like an afterthought. Like she had been in a hurry. Like gossip, her favorite thing ever, after a mind shattering orgasm, was no longer of importance... Sabine clearly agreed with Abby’s train of thought because she dismissed the leering muse with an eye roll before focusing on the person pressing the elevator call button with so much impatience, the dings were becoming deafening.

There was a peculiar scent in the air, one Abby herself adored, one that she had always associated with earth and soil and rain. With fertility.

Petrichor.

And so it could only be a certain immortal. The Goddess of Harvest, all a mass of dark curls and moody golden eyes, pushed past them into the elevator and scrunched her nose.

Yeah, no petrichor there, Demeter, just sex... Abby thought with an almost eye roll of her own. However, Demeter, aloof as she was, wasn't someone you sassed freely. Especially not when there was a literal storm cloud hanging over her head. Erato's face was somber as she followed the Goddess after allowing Sabine and Abby to exit. No, they didn't need this particular floor, but they knew when to step aside. It was one of those times.

As the doors closed, to Abby's immense surprise, the Muse reached out and carefully clasped Demeter's fingers in her own. The notoriously moody Goddess did not flinch, nor did she pull away. Abby's mouth fell open.

Sabine's "hmmm," was prolonged and thoughtful. Too prolonged and too thoughtful.

Before Abby knew what was happening, the telltale sound of the quiver being pulled and let loose sounded next to her ear and her Cupid eye watched as a silver arrow sailed in the tiny gap between the elevator doors.

"That's quite a shot." Abby was impressed. Abby was also immensely curious. What had Sabine seen? She was once a fair to middling Cupid in her own right. Obviously never achieving the heights her spouse had, but still. "I have to confess I saw nothing there, Sabine."

Sabine was quiet for a moment—magicking her quiver and arrows away with a wave of her graceful hand—before taking Abby's and leading her towards the bar in the far corner of the floor they had ended up on.

When they settled down and their order was taken, Sabine looked back to the elevator doors, now shut, her expression still thoughtful.

"I must confess, I was not going to go along with Dite's charade. Nor was I about to do Zeus' bidding..." She took a sip of her Old Fashioned and made a face. Abby

tapped her fingers on the smooth marble surface and tried to wait patiently. When that failed, she prompted.

“So you weren’t going to shoot at all?”

Sabine smiled and nodded, the second sip of her drink clearly much more to her liking.

“Yes, darling. I was keeping my quiver to myself?—”

“Now you’re just talking dirty.” They dissolved in giggles and Abby reached out and caressed Sabine’s forearm.

“It was a damn spectacular shot, my love. One try, though the barest of openings? Or should I say closings?”

Sabine’s smile was not even a little arrogant. Abby’s abdomen muscles clenched. Blessed Aphrodite, she was so lucky! And she was about to drag this Cupid up to their room and devour her the second she was finished with the cocktail.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

“The shot itself wasn’t easy, but I hope it’s a match.” Sabine licked the tiny droplet of alcohol off her lip and almost sent Abby into a tailspin.

“Yes, that is quite a question there. Demeter and Erato? Why?”

Sabine played with her fingers, splayed on the bar top, and sighed before answering.

“I can’t say. In fact, I’m not certain of this one at all, Abby.”

“Then why?—”

“Because there was something there, something that is not logical, nor immediately obvious, not even reasonable. The Goddess of Harvest, the notorious recluse, temperamental, and finicky as hell, forgive me Hades, and the Muse of Erotica? The Muse who made it her career to bed as many mortals and immortals as possible? Demeter has been so discerning she might as well have been off limits for any and all cupids. And Erato? She has more arrow holes in her than a target sheet.”

Abby reached over and stole a sip from Sabine’s tumbler. No, she still couldn’t understand why her wife so often ordered it. And she couldn’t understand why her wife made the earlier choice she did either.

“So my question stands. Why?”

Sabine’s face was thoughtful as she spoke, a tiny furrow marring her impeccable brow.

“Because the best things make little sense, Abigail Angellini-Goddard. Because on paper, you and I made no sense at all. And yet you believed in us, even when I didn’t. You had faith in me. That I would reach for the courage and for the clarity to see what was right in front of me, darling. Because that is a precious gift, the trust to find oneself and not to lose that which made the connection special.”

Abby looked at Sabine’s beautiful face, the chiseled cheekbones and the full lips, the dark lashes framing perceptive, intelligent eyes. Yes, lucky indeed, so very very lucky... But the soul of this Cupid? Unmatched.

“See?” Sabine placed a kiss on the palm of Abby’s hand, making her shiver. “Even now, when this decision makes no sense to you, I can feel you trusting me.”

“I know you, Sabine. You are, above all, mine. That is fated. That is a given. And you, for some reason, believe that those two who looked like they had never been in the same room before, are fated as well. So it doesn’t matter what I see.”

Sabine polished off her drink and stood up, extending a hand to Abby.

“I don’t know, but they have a curious spark. I can’t explain it. More than sex, though they are probably burning the sheets right now and their chemistry is definitely off the charts. That was obvious, darling. But there was something else there. Something I can’t quite figure out. It’s in the way Erato, a total horn dog, held Demeter’s hand with no expectation of a quickie in the elevator. And the way Demeter, who has likely been untouched by her own design for centuries if not longer, leaned into that touch, not just accepting it but reveling in it.”

They walked hand in hand, nodding to an occasional Cupid mingling about.

“I’m not disagreeing with you, Sabine. I just can’t?—”

“See it.” Sabine finished her thought as they came back to the now fateful elevator doors. “I can’t say I saw much, either. Still, sometimes being a Queen means I can take chances. And in love? Everything is a chance.” Sabine sighed. “There was something so bright, so earnest there. I had to push it along, so to speak. And if I was wrong, well, Maddison St. James will be crowned Queen of the Perfect Match tomorrow and I’ll have my first ever season when all the arrows I shot missed their mark.”

Abby shook her head. She’d have to believe that one when she saw it, even if she spotted nothing at all in Erato and Demeter. But Sabine never missed. Sabine noticed what was under a millennia of hurt, oblivion and pretenses and if anyone could identify a Perfect Match between two of the most unlikely beings, it would be her.

The next morning, as Abby cheered for Sabine, crowned yet again the Queen of the Perfect Match, she felt the weight of a look on herself. She turned slowly. In the very back of the immense convention room—among angry, outwitted Gods, ecstatic cupids, still drunk on Aphrodite’s speech—stood Demeter, her face devoid of any discernible expression. The Goddess’ golden eyes drifted away from Abby to where Erato was clapping steadily for Aphrodite and then to the massive score board where Sabine’s perfect match shone brightly. As Abby watched, Demeter narrowed her gaze at the blinking light before quietly leaving the room.

1

WHERE A MUSE (WHO IS DEVASTATINGLY GOOD LOOKING) IS FORCED INTO A CONFESSION

She was devastatingly good looking. Proof of her good looks were the veritable hordes of cupids, mortals and an occasional goddess left, well, devastated. Wrecked by her very own looks. By how good said looks were.

Erato flicked her golden hair out of her eyes, tugged on the lapels of the buttery smooth leather jacket and winked at herself in the mirror.

Even her reflection swooned.

She stopped just short of throwing finger guns at the poor mirror-Erato. She had her limits. And that would be the absolute overkill in attractiveness.

Somewhere to her left, a long-suffering sigh sounded particularly put off. Ah, Erato had quite forgotten that her best friend, former lover (in true queer tradition), and—for all intents and purposes—boss was still in the room.

Actually, come to think of it, it was Erato who was the one doing the lingering. After all, this was Aphrodite's office. Good thing she had not shot those finger guns at the mirror. She'd have to do something drastic like throw herself headlong out of whatever floor this was.

“Dramatic. Way too dramatic even for you. Hell, Melpomene, the actual muse of Drama, would roll her eyes at you.”

Aphrodite's voice was full of mockery. Erato huffed out a breath.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

“It looks good on her. The eye rolling. As someone who has made her beautiful eyes roll back in her equally beautiful face, I’d know.”

Aphrodite raised her own brows to the heavens.

“Is there a reason you’re being crass in my office?”

Erato dismissed the possible innuendo in the tone of her friend’s voice.

“Are you suggesting I go be crass somewhere else, Dite?”

This time, the Goddess of Love just let out a no-longer-covertly-suffering groan.

“Erato, you have been hounding me for days since my return to Paris. You’ve done nothing but follow me around. You oscillate between moping, pouting and faking the most bizarre cheerfulness and boastfulness that for the life of me—lives, perhaps, as there have been so many, being immortal has its perks—I cannot understand.”

Erato threw a final gaze at the still mesmerized and devastated mirror-muse and plonked herself in the chair in front of Aphrodite’s desk. One piled up with new correspondence and probably dozens of tasks that the Goddess of Love should be focusing on after her sojourn in the godawful New England frigidness. Erato made a face, then mentally corrected herself. It was cold, yes, but Aphrodite glowed with the power of several suns and Helios wasn’t even in Europe with them. The reunification with Athena had obviously gone amazing.

Still, Dite was making an effort. Now, she was regarding Erato with her most patient

gaze. Or maybe it was just one of supreme sexual satisfaction. Erato would know. But somehow, after everything, thinking about Aphrodite that way was suddenly inappropriate. Not that it had ever stopped Erato before... And yet. It felt so now. Erato pouted. Aphrodite raised a perfectly manicured eyebrow.

Erato sank lower in the chair. Crossed her booted feet. Tugged on the lapels of the leather jacket. Flipped her hair. Then decided that she might as well spill it.

“I might’ve fucked Demeter at the Con... And she isn’t speaking to me anymore.”

The second eyebrow joined the first one and pushed Aphrodite’s hairline up.

“I heard exactly what you just said, but I refuse to believe it, so could you please repeat that mumbo-jumbo, now with pauses and perhaps punctuation?”

Erato sighed again. She didn’t think she’d ever sighed as many times in her life as she had in the past few months.

“I might’ve fucked Demeter?—”

Aphrodite closed her ears with her red-tipped fingers and stood up, putting as much distance between herself and Erato.

“No, no, no. Stop. Stop! You did not say any of this. I do not want to know any of this. We had a deal.”

Ah, yes. The deal. The one longstanding, unspoken deal that all gods, cupids and muses were aware of.

“Nobody fucks with Demeter.”

Aphrodite said it like an oath. And when you thought about it, as the Goddess of Love, this would have been one of her responsibilities. To take care of Demeter's love life. To make certain that?—

“Absolutely nobody fucks with that woman, Erato!”

And here came the raised voice. Erato winced and lifted her hands, palms up.

“Technically I fucked her, not with her, though the linguistics of this are rather ambig?—”

“Enough! Do not joke about this! And do not tell me you have no idea how that even happened. Do not shrug off the one thing we have all agreed on. That woman has suffered. Hence the damn deal we adhere to. Demeter has always been off limits. What the hell were you thinking?”

Erato opened her mouth, looked at Aphrodite, ran headlong into one of those dagger stares and decided that her friend knew very well the answer to that question.

“But you weren't thinking!”

Well, she really did know that answer. Except?—

“And do not tell me Demeter started it, because NPW. No possible way.”

Again, Aphrodite knew her all too well if she was able to maintain this one sided conversation. Asking questions, answering them herself, since Erato was just that predictable. Except for this one detail, Erato would've given Aphrodite her due. Being right looked good on her. But there still was that one small, tiny, almost blink-and-you'll-miss it detail. And Erato couldn't help but think it mattered. Just that teeny bit.

“It’s complicated, but she did. Start it.”

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Erato breathed. Aphrodite stared. The clock on the desk measured their heartbeats. Aphrodite gulped, closed her eyes, hummed something that sounded suspiciously like a curse, and sat back down in her chair.

“Do you know what is at stake when matters concerning Demeter become ‘complicated’, as you call them?”

Erato blinked, then nodded. Her devastatingly gorgeous hair flowed prettily around her face. In the dark window, her reflection looked chiseled from marble, all sharp angles and cutting glass cheekbones. Her jaw alone was a work of art. But as she opened her mouth, plump lips and all, to say that yes, she was very much familiar with the ruin that upsetting Demeter usually resulted in, Aphrodite waved her away and reached for the calendar. Then she massaged her temples.

“Do you know what month it is, Erato?”

Well, that was one question Erato could answer.

“April. Late April.”

Aphrodite did not praise her. Erato wilted a bit.

“And do you know what the temperature outside is?”

Erato looked back at the mirror, almost fixed an errant strand of hair that nervously raking her fingers through it had dislodged, and settled on, “Freeze your tits off temperature?”

Aphrodite's gaze hardened. But as rain, which was undoubtedly ice cold, started pelting the windowpane, Erato's eyes went suddenly wide with realization.

Aphrodite's expression mellowed somewhat.

"And there goes the lightbulb."

Yes, there it went. Erato didn't consider herself the brightest one on the porch, but nobody had ever accused her of being slow on the uptake. Vain? Often. Gorgeous? Oh, yeah. Sexy? Sure thing, hon. But not stupid. Maybe a touch indolent when matters of the vagina were involved, which admittedly was often with her, but still?—

"The Goddess of Harvest is clearly miffed, since we are getting a fifth month of winter and nothing is blooming, Erato."

The phone rang. In the room's silence, it sounded like a fire alarm. Aphrodite swiped to answer and then winced at the chill audibly coming through the receiver. Only one Goddess was this cold and this bitchy when needed. Fates, even when not needed. Hera could pretty much freeze Hades' domain over with her attitude. And there she was, calling Aphrodite, and Erato could venture an educated guess about what.

Aphrodite for her part said nothing, occasionally shivered at the onslaught of vitriol coming her way, but listened silently. Then she simply hung up. And gave Erato a telling look from underneath those ridiculously long lashes, rivaled only by Erato's own. A look that screamed volumes and managed to transmit Hera's message, perhaps better than any words.

Still, Aphrodite spoke.

"Erato..."

Her name sounded like an accusation. But what was she supposed to do?

“No need to tell you what Hera said. Because it wasn’t nice or helpful. Just... fix it, Muse. Or we are all in deep trouble. Remember last time?”

Oh, Erato remembered. Every immortal did. Demeter going all scorched earth when Hades and Persephone had shacked up. Nothing bloomed for years. Famine, pestilence, locusts... Well, not the locusts, but yeah, many had suffered.

“So... I guess I better fix it, then?” Erato’s voice was a mumble. Aphrodite reached for her phone again, already dismissing Erato from her sight. Well, that was only fair. Erato had some fast thinking and fast acting to do and, by the sound of it, Aphrodite didn’t like where all of this was going. Erato could sympathize, mainly because her own gut told her it was all about to get worse.

2

WHERE EVERYONE GANGS UP ON THE DEVASTATINGLY BEAUTIFUL MUSE (IT’S NOT HER FAULT SHE IS GORGEOUS)

“Purgatory” basked in a positively wonderful abundance of sunshine and blue skies this time of year. After the freeze-your-tits-off temperatures of Paris, Erato unzipped her jacket and immediately felt better. So did her tits.

The yacht, so large as to have its own helicopter pad, was resplendent in the Indian Ocean’s water. It had only taken Erato a week to find it and she had had to ask Hera, of all people, for help. Hera had been rude—which was par for the course—but overall helpful enough. She pointed out that if Persephone didn’t come to Demeter—with no sight of spring on the horizon, she had not been spotted either—then surely, Demeter had gone to see her daughter.

Erato fought off a somewhat unpleasant premonition that had plagued her since the night she lost her mind in Vegas and braved Purgatory. She never did like boats.

Charon waved her on board, and, having seen much in his long long life, asked no questions, merely pointed to the front of the immense walkway from where laughter and conversation could be heard.

Erato's twinge of premonition became a permanent background noise once she rounded the corner and came face to face with the party.

A hodge-podge of immortals were dancing around, mingling and sipping on cocktails. This was exactly her scene. Except Erato felt overdressed in her kneehigh boots and the leather was making her uncomfortably sweaty. Taking it off right now would probably just reveal moist armpits. Erato had more class than that. Usually. So she decided to keep the jacket on, no matter how ridiculous she looked when everyone was cavorting in bikinis and sarongs.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Speaking of sarongs... Demeter was wearing one. Along with the most beautiful ivory top that left very little to the imagination, the generous curves, accentuated by thin straps, revealing gorgeous gleaming skin. She must've just returned from a dip in the ocean. The ocean Erato did not like but felt immensely better about all of a sudden.

"You look... hot under the collar."

The voice in her ear was low, sly, and could belong to only one individual.

Erato turned slowly to behold the Mistress of Hell. Hades, in flowing linen pants and barely held together white shirt, grinned, showing a row of perfect teeth. Her eyes, however, were dead serious. Erato wanted to laugh at her own pun.

Still, she checked her mirth and offered a smile, but even to her own self-deluded conscience, it was fake. She knew it, Hades knew it. Amongst all this grinning, Erato could see from a mile away, Hades knew something was afoot and was determining what to do about the wayward muse. Playing games with the Goddess of the Underworld was never wise, but then Erato had never been accused of being anything of the sort.

"I am not just hot, but also very good looking. Even Cerby here acknowledges it." She reached out and gave the twohundred pound hound at Hades' feet a nose boop. The black beast plopped down and showed his belly. Hades looked down and rolled her eyes in disgust. Cerberus gave Erato the biggest, goofiest doggy grin.

"Ha, see, I know I still got it." She flicked her hair away from her face. Hades' look

was anything but impressed.

“He’s a dumbass. I am not. You’re sweating.”

Erato stood straighter and almost reached Hades’ height. In all her years, she never thought she’d have to face two guard dogs when trying to speak with this particular Goddess, and yet here Hades stood, all but impeding her access to Demeter.

“What can I say, H, I’ve grown unaccustomed to the warmth.”

The moment she said it, both she and Hades realized it was the absolutely wrong thing to say. Without a backward look, her arm was seized and Erato was pulled into the cabin closest to the upper deck. When the door shut, Hades leaned back against it and gave her a long, appraising look. Erato knew better than to speak. After what seemed like forever, Hades tsked, then took a step towards her. Then another. Then another. When they were almost face to face, a crimson tipped finger drilled into Erato’s chest.

“I don’t know what you did. I don’t even want to imagine it. But I got calls from Hera, something about the cold and my mother-in-law, from Poseidon, his seas are not entirely right, from Helios, he cannot figure out the length of the days anymore since they are all the same, and from Zeus. What he wanted is anyone’s guess, because I think he called to appease Hera.”

Hades narrowed her eyes and continued.

“However, imagine my surprise when on top of all the nuisance calls from nuisance gods, I get a very nonchalant call from my darling Aphrodite. She doesn’t complain, doesn’t demand anything, just casually asks if you have stopped by. And if you and Demeter talked.”

Damn Aphrodite and her lack of faith in her. So what if Erato took a little detour to Rome on her way to “Purgatory”? So what? She did need some courage and maybe a plan to tackle this problem. Granted, she got no courage in Italy and fighting off advances from Nike was probably what kept her from developing any semblance of said plan.

Still, she thought her friend and boss would’ve had more faith in her. Clearly Aphrodite did not.

Before she opened her mouth to say—what exactly, only Fates knew—Hades poked her with the finger again. She’d probably have a bruise the size of Acropolis on her sternum.

“My mother-in-law has been through literal hell. And yet here you are, Erato, the Muse of Hoery, trying to do what, may I ask?”

It could’ve been the fingertip drilling a hole in her. It could’ve been the more than derogatory appellation towards her profession. But Erato suspected it was the look of veiled contempt in Hades’ eyes that tore through her patience.

She slowly batted the finger away and took a step sideways. Hades raised an eyebrow. The gesture was perhaps as effective as Aphrodite’s. But something inside Erato had gotten its dander up and while she did not want to examine exactly why—no, she was absolutely not hurt by the implication that she was not good enough to even seek Demeter out, that absolutely wasn’t it—it gave her a boost to grant the Goddess of the Underworld a glare of her own. She had been told it was highly potent. And highly—devastatingly so—beautiful. If Hades was affected, she said nothing, but her face lost that veil of contempt and was now sporting a curious expression of wonder.

“What do you want, Erato?”

“To fix this?”

Hades shook her head.

“Do you even know what you are fixing?”

Erato tried very hard not to blink, but Hades’ exhalation spoke volumes.

“I thought so. Listen... Hoery aside, you being promiscuous for millennia aside... Demeter is tender. And precious and she has been hurt enough?—”

“By you, you mean to say.”

You could hear the sound of the waves outside the cabin in the ensuing silence. Hades’s stare got hard and Erato almost flinched. Almost. She’d never considered herself particularly prideful. One really wasn’t much for pride when leading her kind of lifestyle for an eternity. But that above mentioned something, settled dead center of Erato’s chest and wouldn’t allow her to show weakness, or how utterly inferior she felt... Or how that inferiority stung. So she gathered herself and spoke quietly, enunciating every word, knowing that Hades could smite her down to the Underworld at any moment.

“I don’t mean to hurt her. But she is an adult. So am I. And maybe you need to not be here?—”

“That much, I agree with, Hades.”

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Demeter glided into the cabin, all gorgeous curls and golden eyes, and Erato damn near swallowed her tongue. Fates, she was breathtaking. Realizing her jaw was hanging somewhere in the vicinity of her belt, Erato once again tried to school her features. It was harder this time.

Hades crossed her arms over her chest.

“Mother, you’ve only just arrived on board this morning. Maybe some rest?”

“Maybe you leave me and the muse alone... Run along, Hades and take that mut with you. Sepphie has been feeding him too much ambrosia.”

Hades looked sheepishly—as sheepish as the Goddess of the Underworld could muster to look—out the open door where her dog was basking in the sun, clearly zonked out on the food of the gods before giving Demeter a half bow and Erato a “I’m warning you” glare and disappearing.

Erato raked her fingers through her hair and desperately searched for something to say. After all, she had taken an entire week to think things through in Rome. When nothing came to mind, she went for her most winsome smile. Demeter’s words were cutting.

“Whoever told you it’s some kind of lethal weapon, lied to you, Muse.”

But Demeter’s voice, rich and low, caressed her like velvet. Erato’s smile widened. She knew the intonations in this voice. She knew the tone and the expressions. The notes that ran from ecstasy to restless calm before the storm. And she always knew

when a woman was faking it. She might be a lowly muse, but this particular knowledge was her stock in trade, no matter how much Hades sneered in her direction.

So she took a step closer and licked her lips. When Demeter took a deep breath and visibly braced herself, Erato leaned closer.

“Hello, lover.”

Just outside of the cabin door, Erato heard someone fall and Persephone call for someone to help revive her passed out wife.

3

WHERE FORCED PROXIMITY TROPE IS ENACTED AND BONDS ARE TIED
(THE MUSE IS INTO IT, MOSTLY)

As Hades was dragged away, presumably to be revived by either Persephone or one of the multitude of Olympians on hand, Erato gave Demeter a long once over. She made it a leer. Still, from under her—longest and lushest on Olympus, thank you very much—lashes, she carefully catalogued the small changes the glamour applied couldn't hide.

Tired eyes, a chipped nail, a slight tremor in the hands hanging tense at the Goddess of Harvest's sides. And a visible weight loss. Erato knew every single curve on this wonder of a body and the thinning of the cheeks was telling. She didn't know yet of what, but something wasn't quite right.

Demeter allowed her the leisurely exploration of herself for a moment longer before she pushed past Erato and made a beeline for the liquor cabinet. The generous splash of what looked like brandy in one of those fancy ass tumblers Hades probably

stocked in every corner of this place, was another tell. Again, Erato had no clue of what exactly. She was getting tired of playing catch-up.

Demeter continued to ignore her, but Erato was determined.

“Not even a hello?”

She sauntered—as one intent on fixing things did, hips swaying and all that—closer. Demeter ignored her and sipped her brandy. Erato smirked. Demeter frowned. Erato lifted an eyebrow. Demeter tsked. Then, just as Erato was about to say something unquestionably foolish, Demeter narrowed her eyes and broke the silence.

“Whatever you’re here for, you aren’t going to get it, Muse.”

Well, strike one, Erato supposed. But then she was still at bat and she rarely stroke out. Striked? Stroked? Struck? The grammar eluded her and none of the words sounded right anyway. So she tried again. Erato cocked a hip, watched Demeter’s gaze follow her move and employed her best drawl.

“What if I am not here for anything in particular?”

The roll of those golden eyes was so profound Erato was afraid Demeter would sprain something.

Then Demeter sighed and said, “I cannot believe... I just cannot believe it’s you!”

Erato stared uncomprehendingly.

“Me what?”

Demeter threw back the tumbler and poured herself another.

“You! And your blue eyes and your absence of morals and your mouth and your horrid sense of humor and your eyes and all of this...” Demeter gestured vaguely about Erato’s still hip-cocked stance before taking a gulp and proceeding with her enumeration. “Out of a thousand cupids and gods and fucking muses, it had to be you and your mouth.”

Erato furrowed her brow.

“Well, for one, I am the actual Muse of Fucking, if you will?—”

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Demeter slammed the now newly empty glass on the cabinet.

“Not happening, so what’s two?”

Erato grinned.

“You mentioned my mouth twice. I take it that I left a mark, so to speak?”

Demeter growled. Erato’s stomach clenched with anticipation.

“Why. Are. You. Here. Muse?”

This time, her exasperation was no longer tinted with anything except exhaustion.

Erato uncocked her hip and took a tiny step back. Knowing when to retreat was a useful skill and Demeter did not look good. Erato’s heart did the unpleasant thing it had never done until Vegas two months ago. Back then Demeter had looked lonely and sad and, well, Erato was so very good at making women less sad and more satisfied.

“Aphrodite sent me to fix this.”

Honesty was always the best policy, except Demeter’s eyes flashed and Erato reconsidered the wisdom of age old adages.

“Aphrodite can go fuck herself.”

Hades's earlier contempt for Erato had nothing on the level of dismissal and disparagement Demeter's voice suddenly took on.

"The Goddess of Love should stick to her own business, having narrowly escaped Zeus's wrath, despite making a complete mess?—"

"Pardon resorting to numbers again, but for one, Athena is taking care of the fucking. Two?—"

Demeter lifted her hand and effectively shut Erato up.

"Stop with the enumeration. Since you seem intent on being an errand girl, be so very kind and tell your mistress that there is nothing to fix, to mind her own affairs, and to leave me alone. There. This should be simple enough for you to accomplish, right?"

Hades had dismissed her, Aphrodite pretty much made decisions for her. She was used to the Gods being superior to her and behaving accordingly, so why did this particular one hurt? Why did Demeter's dismissal feel especially acute?

Yes, they had shared a night for the ages, for the books, and Erato was sure she'd write some amazing poetry and stories once the disappointment faded, but it seemed like this one should've ended differently. Why? She couldn't say. It's not like anything ever ended differently for the Muse of Erotic Poetry.

And so she lowered her eyes, mindful of not letting Demeter see the flash of hurt she couldn't conceal. However, Demeter did see it and despite her cutting words, she took a step forward and her warm fingertips lifted Erato's chin.

The sensation was electric, earth shattering. Erato half expected Poseidon to rise from the depths and complain about the unscheduled tsunami that was sure to follow such an earthquake in the middle of the sea.

But Poseidon did not rise. And Demeter continued to look at her with those deep, soulful eyes, full of secrets and pain.

It was Demeter's pain that made Erato gulp and try to free herself from the barely there hold of the warm fingertips. Fingertips that turned into a steel grip and refused to allow her to escape the penetrating gaze.

Erato peered into the ageless ache of disrespect.

Well, Erato knew what it meant to be alone. Shunned occasionally. But not to the level of "we will take your daughter and give her to the Goddess of the Underworld and there will be nothing you will be allowed to do about it and if you try to rebel, we shall pacify you with empty platitudes and useless promises."

No, Erato was just a muse, an often forgotten one, despite how deep her influence and authority went.

"And isn't that a kick in the teeth?"

She said it out loud and watched Demeter's eyes darken with confusion, followed by regret. Then, with something sharper that edged the sorrowful veil to the side and replaced it with hunger, one that Erato had felt firsthand months ago.

A pause, another, a breath, two, and their lips met with enough force to dunk Poseidon back into the sea had he had the unfortunate curiosity to come up earlier.

The kiss was everything it had been in Vegas. Ravenous and deep, all-consuming, unrelenting. Erato drank like a woman possessed, giving Demeter no quarter. But the Goddess wanted none of those quarters. If this had been anyone else, and if the last two months had gone any other way, Erato would say that Demeter desired her. But then again, it had already been established that she wasn't the sharpest trident, so this

couldn't possibly be the explanation for the undeniability of the kiss. Nope. That wasn't it. Something else was and just as Erato lifted a hand and caressed her gorgeous cheekbone, so soft she wanted to lay her own next to it, to feel it, the door banged open.

Erato half-expected her earlier invocations of Poseidon to actually bring him in, curious putz that he was, but as both she and Demeter whirled towards the noise, she began to wish it had been the God of the Sea. He'd mope and be a nuisance along with his mermaids and in the end leave them with some second-hand wisdom borrowed from the thousands of self-help books he secretly devoured to overcome his inferiority complex when it came to his thundering brother.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Because this particular Olympus dweller would not impart useless wisdom. And she had zero inferiority complexes.

“I see you have relinquished your duties to cavort with unsuitable creatures, sister.”

Hera stepped into the cabin with the power of twenty suns. Helios only knew how she did it, but she radiated, all vicious light and villainous smirks. No, this goddess had no complexes at all. Beautiful in a decidedly evil-and-reveling-in-it way, powerful in an absolute fashion and an inconvenience in every universe, Hera reigned even after Zeus divorced her. Even after all her schemes had failed. The aura of her presence, the fear she struck by simply standing tall and proud, blocking the entrance and hence Erato's hasty exit, were very much overwhelming.

Erato didn't resent her for calling her a creature. Staying out of Hera's path had been her goal for centuries and she had managed to do so admirably. She'd not be surprised if the Goddess of Matrimony had no idea who she was. Erato preferred it that way.

Judging by Demeter's reaction, it would no longer be possible. Erato sighed, and stepped forward. She hoped that Hera would spare her face. She was so very proud of it, after all.

“Ah, I believe Aphrodite spoke to you earlier and everything is being taken care of.”

The reactions of the Goddesses in front of her could not have been more different. Hera lifted an eyebrow in that stupidly attractive fashion Olympians always had and finally gave Erato a full appraisal. And Demeter? She stared, her hands now clutched

at her breast. Was she surprised? Maybe astounded by her foolishness to dare to speak to Hera? Erato didn't know. And she didn't care. Hera being here, narrowing her eyes, giving the two of them her full attention was never good.

"I see the creature speaks..." Oh yeah, the low growly drawl bordered on a crime. Erato shivered but stood her ground.

"Ma'am—"

"So polite." Hera glided closer, now a mere breath away from Erato. Cold eyes pierced and held her gaze. "Tell me sister, was it her politeness that made you bed her? What was it exactly that forced you forsake your duty, delay spring and threaten famine on half the world?"

Demeter straightened and opened her mouth but no sound came. Erato was on her own.

"With all due respect?—"

"Save it, Muse." Hera's tone brook for no dissent and Erato snapped her jaw shut.

"I thought this would be a pro forma visit. I'd come in, impress upon Demeter that she was being reckless in whatever sordid one night stand she allowed herself to get into. But from the looks of it, it isn't that simple, is it, little sister?"

Erato did not appreciate the way Hera ground out the word sister. There was coldness in it, calculation. But then Hera was always calculating. Erato gulped—she'd been doing it a lot lately—and held the chilly gaze.

Hera smirked.

“Your muse has gumption, Demeter. I like that. In fact, I like that so much, I will not do what I felt was necessary to ensure my sister’s full attention is back on her duty. I will allow your muse to live.”

Yes, she was immortal and thus all of this was entirely ridiculous, but Erato still felt relief so unexpected, she swayed on her feet. Was Hera really here because she planned to throw Erato off Mount Olympus? Another gulp was in order. She was too beautiful, devastatingly so, to die this young. Several millennia were not enough for all this gorgeous devastation.

“I think you’ve mistaken your place, Hera. She has nothing to do with anything, and I know very well what I’m doing.” Demeter’s tone did not sound all that strong, nor did it hold any of its usual calmness or authority but Erato felt it in the very center of her being. Demeter was standing up for herself. And maybe even for Erato.

“And what pray tell is my place, little sister?” Hera turned to face Demeter fully and Erato could swear somewhere above them thunder rolled. Hera glowed with a vicious kind of hue, sucking all the light from the room.

“It’s not to instruct me what to do.” Demeter’s voice shook and Erato, on pure instinct, reached out a hand and touched her elbow. Hera’s eyes followed the movement, gleaming with malice. Surely it was malice?

“I can tell you what to do, little sister, and I will. Or have you forgotten who fixed everything the last time you were “in your feelings”?”

“She is my daughter and you allowed your husband to bargain with her like she was nothing!” Demeter’s cry was sorrow itself.

“That is the life of a woman, Demeter. The life of an Olympus Goddess. We all know what it entails. You, of all of us, know better...”

Silence reigned. Demeter's arm grew cold under Erato's touch. Something was coming. Something was about to be thrown their way.

Hera turned from them and moved towards the still open door. Outside, a storm was wrecking its way across the sea. The deck was empty. Just as Erato was about to breathe a sigh of relief, Hera spun around and gave her one last look.

“You will fix this, little sister. And to ensure that you do, I am binding you to the muse. Until spring arrives, you two shall never be away from each other. If, as you say, she has nothing to do with anything, and if you are in control, prove it. Spring needs to arrive. Crops must flourish like no other season, and then both of you shall be free.”

A golden ribbon latched itself to Erato and Demeter's hands, the binding soft yet surprisingly powerful. Before she could tug and test it, Hera's smile widened.

“And don't make me come back and find you, Demeter. Resolve your issues, or you'll regret it. Your little temper tantrum is interfering with my plans, and you know how I am. I never share center stage.”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

WHERE A GODDESS ASSERTS HER WILL (AND THE MUSE IS DEFINITELY INTO THAT)

The door behind Hera closed with another loud bang.

“Well, she has always been too dramatic for her own good.” If she was concerned about anything that had just happened, Demeter’s voice gave nothing away. She didn’t even tug at the now invisible thread, the ghost hold of which Erato still felt around her wrist and fingers. She stood there, shoulders thrown back, her face a mask of unperturbed calm, eyes emptied of emotion.

Erato hated seeing the usually serene features like this. But then, what did she know outside of sex? How often had she and the Goddess of Harvest really crossed paths?

Some random cabal here and there. Or a gathering Aphrodite dragged Erato to, since she never actually went to any of the events the Olympian’s organized on her own accord.

For someone whose job it was to ensure that sexy was back, Erato was never one to be recognized. And with Hades, and even Hera in her own fashion, showing her that she meant less than nothing, Erato could not fault her own impeccable decision making.

Still, for a brief moment in Vegas, Demeter’s face had not held the bareness that lived there now. Granted, Erato hadbeen knuckle deep in her, and very busy sucking bruises on her flawless shoulders, but such a sight sure did etch itself in a muse’s mind.

For some reason, Erato wanted to bring that blissed out look back, even if the tearing off of clothes would clearly no longer be involved, judging by the way Demeter was looking at her now.

As if she regretted her. As if she regretted Vegas and as if she regretted getting caught in a lip lock like a teenager by her older, meaner sister.

Erato stepped back, her own regrets suddenly too much for her pretty little head, and the moment she found herself six feet away from Demeter, her arm was pulled back. It wasn't painful, not even truly uncomfortable, but it was undeniable.

“Ahem, I'd say this qualifies as over the top dramatic.” She ran the fingers of her free hand through the carefully mussed blonde strands and looked at Demeter for help. She even gave it her best puppy dog eyes. Which had the most unfortunate effect of making Demeter laugh. It was so unexpected, especially after the open regret a few moments ago, so out of place and yet so beautiful, Erato just stared. She immediately wanted to make Demeter laugh again. And again. She wanted to make it her mission in life to be the one who got Demeter to let out this carefree, joyful sound.

Then the dizziness of the realization passed, and Erato nearly smacked herself. Fates, what was going on in her head?

Meanwhile, Demeter, clearly oblivious to the totally uncharacteristic emotions she was eliciting, stepped closer and lifted her hand up, inspecting the charmed wrist. There was nothing there and yet Erato craved to place her lips where the pulse beat strong and steady?—

“I fear we shall have to go along with her charade for a bit, before Hera either reconsiders, or...” Suddenly, the previous carefree expression was gone.

“Or?” Erato prompted, but wasn't entirely certain she wanted to know the answer.

Demeter was silent for far too long before looking over her shoulder where the sea was foaming and waves were crashing against the ginormous yacht.

“Or I start spring.” Erato couldn’t for the life of her understand that now familiar emptiness in the tone of the low voice.

“So start it. I mean, do the abracadabra thing, the blahditti, bloopitti... and voilà! Blooms, leaves, cats in heat, me running naked with the nymphs in the woods?—”

“Enough. There will be no nymphs or naiads or any other naked women. I shall start spring when I’m good and ready, Muse.”

Erato tucked a tuft of hair behind her ear and stared.

“I mean, okay, no nymphs and since I am afraid of the water, I have mostly steered clear of the naiads my entire life, but what do you mean when you’re good and ready? When will you be ready? In case this,” Erato tugged on the invisible thread and pulled Demeter ever so slightly towards herself, “is not inconvenient enough, can you imagine explaining to Hades, Persephone, fucking Zeus if he shows up, why you are literally attached to a muse? And to one who is so obviously beneath them?”

Demeter was about to interrupt her, of which Erato was certain, except the moment the final words landed between them, she closed her mouth and gave Erato one of those long looks through narrowed, calculating eyes.

Then, after apparently coming to some sort of decision, Demeter nodded to herself before speaking.

“It is inconvenient. But I am not ready for spring. Nor am I much for joining the damn orgies Zeus and his ilk will be starting any minute now to keep warm. I do have business to tend to though, and if you’re so intent on ‘fixing this’ as you have assured

Hades and myself since you arrived, maybe we could find a way to attend to said business of mine, while also making the appropriate pretenses at attempting to actually fix whatever this is. If you can spare some time away from your nymphs, that is...”

Demeter lifted her chin just a tad in clear challenge. Erato knew that look. The challenge in it. Was she up for it? And what was that “it” anyway? She wasn’t even entirely certain what it was she was meant to fix. And there was definitely something under the breezy—too breezy, if you asked Erato—dismissal of Hera and her demands for spring. “I’m not ready for it” was not a very subtle way of avoiding the whole truth.

But then nobody asked Erato. And she was just a muse. And so she extended her hand and clasped Demeter’s soft, warm palm.

“I’m in. With one condition.”

Demeter raised an eyebrow. What a cliché. All these Goddesses were so damn good at it. Surely they practiced, because it was the sexiest move a woman could pull and it was also in absolutely all the romance novels. Erato knew that much.

“Earlier silliness aside, there will be no repeat of Vegas, Muse, if that’s what you’re about to demand.”

The weariness in Demeter’s voice was loud and clear. Erato rolled her eyes at the assertion that kissing her was silliness and at the implication that she’d force anything. Like she’d ever blackmail a woman into sex. Yes, her stock on Olympus was pretty low, but out there? In the big wide world? Fates, all she had to do was whistle. Erato smirked and watched Demeter’s eyes narrow with something... Could it be? Did the gold in them for one tiny moment become tinged with acid green? Just to test herself and the seemingly unwelcoming water, Erato pulled on the hand still

clasped in hers and saw Demeter visibly shiver. Her eyelids lowered, her lips trembled, and a shy tongue peeked out to moisten them. Oh, yeah... Silliness, of course.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

“You insult me, since I already forgot all about Vegas, Demeter.”

Her words were met with a frown and a huff.

“I think you are the one who just insulted me.”

If it had been only arrogance in the tone, Erato would’ve made another joke, but that little something, that whisper, that shadow of some sort of doubt, of indistinct vulnerability was back on Demeter’s face. Erato, never one to hurt, gave the fingers in hers a last squeeze before placing a gentle kiss on the knuckles and letting go.

“I just did what you wanted me to do. What you, in fact, instructed me to. ‘Forget this ever happened,’ weren’t those your words right before you slammed the door in my face in Vegas?”

Demeter furrowed her brow, but Erato merely shrugged.

“You set the parameters of this. Hera is on the tear and I assume you’d want to pacify her. Hence, here I am. At your service. As for the rest? The sooner we get this spring business of yours done and over with, the sooner you will be free of me. And by the way, where are we even off to?”

Demeter sighed and then pulled out her phone, opening the calendar app. It was chock-full of appointments, all color coded to the extent that Erato’s eyes crossed.

“Well, we missed Nowruz and Holi. Baba Marta has come and gone in Bulgaria. And you can’t pay me to attend whatever eggs they are rolling this Easter.” Demeter

actually shuddered and Erato nodded in wholehearted agreement. “This late in the season, we have a few options left, even if it will mean crisscrossing the planet.”

Erato chewed on her lip. She did not watch whether Demeter’s eyes followed the gesture. They did, but Erato didn’t want to focus on that. Well, she did but maybe later.

“Nowruz, Holi, Easter, Baba Marta... Are you actually attending spring festivals and celebrations?”

Demeter’s smile was cagey.

“Not bad, Muse.” Then she shook her head and pointed at the door. “Shall we? And please no shenanigans.”

Erato gasped, all theatrics now.

“Me? Shenanigans? Not that that is my middle name or anything... But again, I would never!”

The dripping sarcasm and tomfoolery managed to draw a smile—a tiny one, but a smile nonetheless—out of the Goddess of Harvest, and Erato felt that utterly wrong and surely foolish feeling of lightness in her chest.

“You don’t have a middle name, Muse.” Demeter was all business now, moving purposefully towards the front of the cabin.

“See, you call me Muse, but you sure called me something else two months ago. I’m fairly certain the entire floor of the hotel knew my name and how amazing my tongue was as it swirled around your cli?—”

“Would you be so kind and get on with it!”

Erato laughed and lifted her hands, palms open.

“Just making conversation. I hear traveling with a companion is much more interesting if you engage in stimulating, ahem, discussion.”

Demeter threw her the most vicious side-eye.

“I bet you know all about those stimulating—” Before Erato could confirm, Demeter simply waved her away. “I do not wish for any sordid details of your proclivities.”

Erato knew her smile was forced and judging by the way Demeter was eyeing her, she hadn’t exactly managed to fool the Goddess, either. Still, a jester had a role to play, and so she did.

“A lady doesn’t kiss and tell, Demeter. I wasn’t going to regale you with my innumerable adventures. I do, however, object to the word “whoring” since none of the women I’ve been with deserve such an appellation.”

She said the last part almost as an afterthought, but it felt like drawing a line and Demeter nodded, her eyes going just a touch wide. Was it respect Erato saw in them? The mercurial gold was so expressive, so full of secrets, Erato would gladly drown in it, if this had been anyone but this particular off limits Goddess. In that moment, with Demeter giving her yet another long assessing look, under the light of those golden eyes, Erato felt her millennia worth of luck with women finally run out.

5

WHERE A GOD IS DRUNK, A LAP DANCE IS PERFORMED AND A GODDESS GETS JEALOUS (THE MUSE IS JUST ALONG FOR THE RIDE)

Hades fainted yet again upon being informed that her mother-in-law was off to “deal with business” in the company of the lowly muse. Persephone, always the more perceptive of the two, hugged Demeter and winked at Erato. The other attendees of the Purgatory cabal did not care, too busy being self-involved prats to give a flying fuck about anything around them.

As soon as the thought crossed her mind, Erato marvelled at it. Hadn't that been her just a few months ago? Partying with Aphrodite and the Cupids, teaching at the Academy when it suited, disappearing to do some freelance work on the side as it pleased her and above all enjoying as many women as possible, guzzling nectar off their navels?

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Why did all of that feel so completely wrong in the light streaming through the windows of Demeter's plane cruising at a high altitude on their way to Greece?

But wrong it seemed anyway.

She opened her computer, the empty page of unfinished work glaring at her, and then skimmed her calendar. Freelance or not, some obligations she'd not be able to forgo, even if Aphrodite had freed her from most duties and the Academy was not in session.

Five minutes later, distracted and unable to focus, Erato sneaked a glance at Demeter over the lid of the laptop. The Goddess was deep in some spreadsheets, her pencil marking notes on the margins and her fingers flying over the tablet where more spreadsheets were opened.

When Erato had looked at the paperwork questioningly the first time, Demeter simply murmured "grain stocks" and went back to her paperwork.

Erato could respect that. Not that she had been aware that Demeter didn't just wave a magic wand and whisper some trite incantation to begin and end spring and thus the agricultural cycle. Watching the Goddess work now, jot notes, call brokers and vendors, warn some guy at some UN Food organisation or other about the drought in Eastern Europe, Erato was forced to reevaluate her opinion about both Demeter and Goddesses.

As if reading her thoughts, Demeter lowered her horn-rimmed glasses and reached for her surely now cold coffee, previously forgotten in favor of the aforementioned spreadsheets.

“Aphrodite works hard, Muse. Is it surprising someone else would too?”

“I didn’t mean to doubt?—”

“I’ve been doubted my entire life.”

Well, that sure stopped Erato in her tracks. Demeter, one of the Twelve Olympians, daughter of Chronos, doubted?

“You’re one of the most important Goddesses. Hearth and Marriage aside, who else is literally responsible for billions of lives?”

Demeter’s smile was fleeting.

“You did not just disrespect Hestia and Hera, Muse.”

Erato huffed out a breath.

“Oh, screw Hestia and Hera.”

Demeter’s smile bloomed wider.

“I’d rather you didn’t, especially with me not six feet away from said screwing.”

Erato leaned back against the luxurious cream leather of her seat. Demeter’s eyes went impossibly wide with something akin to horror at Erato’s possible liaisons with her sisters.

“You DID not!”

This time, Erato couldn’t keep a straight face and burst into laughter. It felt good.

Goaded Demeter into these kinds of outbursts was proving to be a new secret pleasure of hers.

“I can’t even begin to imagine what you think of me. It’s actually very flattering, and my ego is growing exponentially.” Erato let her voice drop to a lower octave. Then she flipped her hair back theatrically and Demeter shook her head.

“Your ego can barely fit on the plane, Muse.”

But there was no malice in the tone, and Erato shrugged good-naturedly.

“What can I say? Women love me. Not Hera and Hestia though, so you can rest assured that I have not defiled your sisters. Now, if we could go back to all this UN Food Program and World Trade whatever, stocks and bonds and whatsits?”

Demeter glanced at the spreadsheets on the table in front of her.

“The world doesn’t run itself, Muse. And while it’s not spring yet, there are other ways to ensure life goes on, crops are planted and trade continues.”

Erato chewed on her lower lip. Demeter’s eyes definitely followed the movement. Erato chewed harder. Demeter rolled her eyes. Busted.

“Okay, but all of this begs a question, several actually, but mostly why is spring not here yet?”

Demeter got up and splashed some of that fancy brandy Hades must’ve been stocking just for her at Purgatory.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

“Because I am not ready. And because I am accountable to no one. They can all go hang, for all I care. And I don’t care at all.”

Erato tapped her fingers on the armrest.

“All those big brain spreadsheets and acronymy organizations, and the aforementioned whatsists tell a different story.”

Demeter actually growled.

“I don’t care, Muse. Nobody gives a damn. They all come to me when they need something. My powers to make sure their cronies get olive oil, or cotton, or beef. My absence when they need a piece of property to be devalued because one of them wants to build some gaudy monstrosity for cheap. My resources when they go to war. My daughter on a plate to appease the Goddess of Underworld, who felt slighted for centuries. Well, how about me? How about when I get slighted, Muse?”

Erato watched in silence—she was so stunned she couldn’t even breathe—as the ordinarily taciturn and unapproachable Demeter stood in front of her, chest heaving, gorgeous cheekbones splashed with the scarlet of anger. Of insult. Of humiliation. Well, Erato knew how some of that tasted.

But before she could say anything as stupid as “me too,” Demeter put the tumbler down and took her seat next to Erato. Without lifting her eyes to meet the muse’s, she picked up her papers again. When she spoke, her voice was so soft, Erato thought she imagined it.

“And then when I do what I want once, just once, they all remember that I exist, and get very upset that I do so on my own terms.”

Erato’s hand, seemingly of its accord, found Demeter’s.

“I take it this spring thing is you being a rebel? And so am I, part of said rebellion?”

Demeter said nothing but she did intertwine their fingers and for the rest of the flight, Erato felt that, for once, she had been allowed to step on Olympus without being confused with the help.

Dionysus met them tipsy. The fact that the man wasn’t entirely smashed was something to celebrate, surely.

“Welcome to the Great Dionisya!”

He kissed Demeter’s cheeks somewhat sloppily and ignored Erato completely. For once, she was glad of it. He looked sauced, but not really sauced enough to pass out. The kind of sauced that gets grabby. Erato subtly tugged on the invisible thread, pulling Demeter further away from the drunkard.

Dionysus did not seem to notice.

“By Zeus, I was shocked when you texted that you were coming to my Spring Festival! I haven’t seen you in ages!”

He furrowed his brow, seemingly trying to remember when was the last time he and Demeter crossed paths. Erato was beginning to understand some of what Demeter was talking about earlier. And while normally she’d have kept her mouth shut, the jackass being an Olympian and all that, for some reason, words escaped.

“You just saw her in Vegas, dude.”

That got her two entirely different reactions. Dionysus finally turned her way and Demeter... Well, Erato had no idea what the look of calm calculation that so often crossed those features in her presence signified.

“And who might you be?” Dionysus, drunk as he was, swayed closer to Erato. Since he was a man, Erato, who’d normally stand her ground on principle, had to keep her gag reflex in check and take a step back.

“You saw her in Vegas as well, fool. And have met her thousands of times during these two millennia and the countless previous ones.”

Demeter’s voice held the entirety of winter’s deep freeze. Erato wanted to preen just a little. Since they were in public, she refrained.

Dionysus gave her a long, still-swaying look, clearly trying to figure out who she was. He checked out her face. Devastating. Her hair. Perfection in debonair locks. Her boobs. Perky as fuck, thank you very much. And finally he lifted watery eyes to meet hers.

“You’re Dite’s girl?”

Demeter gritted her teeth, but Erato just shrugged. Pleased with finding a shred of recognition in his alcohol soaked brain, the God of Wine and Feasts made a sweeping gesture, knocking over half of the bottles off the table.

“Welcome, Demeter and Dite’s girl to my Feast!”

The urge to roll her eyes was overwhelming. Erato was very skeptical of this entire Spring Fest to begin with, and this particular one reeked of booze. Nothing

springtimey about it. But Demeter chose it, and so here they were, observing the vast amphitheater under open skies where thousands of people were drinking, eating and seemingly getting ready for some performance.

“Melpomene herself staged this show in my honor.” Dionysus made his way closer to the stage where several muses were busy setting up. Erato saw Thalia and Urania hanging some tapestry up. To her greater pleasure—not that she wasn’t happy to see her fellow muses—a cupid was helping them. A very cherished cupid. And that meant only one thing.

“I see you chose to attend the festivities.” Oh, this drawl was so familiar. Sabine Goddard, in a flowing ivory suit, gave Erato a brief hug.

“I go where I’m told, and you know it. Much like you do these days.” Erato quipped, but Sabine took the joke in stride and simply smiled.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

“My wife is chief decorator at Dionysia this year and New York is very cold, for obvious reasons. I chose to accompany her. Not that Greece feels any less chilly. But at least the wine is better.”

Sabine took a very long sip from her glass and assiduously avoided Demeter’s glare. Erato sensed she might be missing something. She didn’t have a chance to give it a thought though, because the aforementioned cherished cupid noticed them and sauntered down from the stage.

“Erato! I’ve missed you!”

The hug was warm and welcoming and after the inhospitable last few weeks, Erato leaned a little closer and held a little tighter.

“Now this is a welcome. Unlike some people,” Erato nodded towards the now-dancing-to-the-tune-of-a-satyr-tuning-his-flute Dionysus.

Once they parted, Abby patted her on the shoulder.

“I don’t know why you’re surprised. He’s been drunk for what? Four? Five thousand years? He clearly never needed your help or inspiration for anything and... Blessed Aphrodite, I did not just mention Dionysus and sex in the same sentence. Now I need bleach for my thoughts.”

Abby waved a dainty hand in front of her face, and Sabine laughed.

“You did this to yourself, darling. Out of all of the immortals present here, you had to

imagine this guy's sex life instead of any other deities?"

Erato had the absolutely amazing comeback right on the tip of her tongue but was beaten to the punch by Demeter, whose scowl had been deepening with every minute they spent here.

"Please exclude me from this narrative, and as for the Muse and her far and wide flinging proclivities?—"

Erato gave her hand a little twist, and Demeter yelped.

"Okay now, Taylor Swift. We all know I am trouble and I don't even have to walk in. I live up to my reputation."

"And what reputation is that?" Abby, ever the amazing wing woman, played along.

"Devastating, seductive and always delivering on her promises." Erato did make finger guns this time and then flung back her long fringe. Smolder abounded and around the amphitheater, a few nymphs swooned.

"I think we should all take our seats for the show to commence. Melpomene is amazing in this and we don't want to miss it. Plus, I am quite certain Dionysus is half asleep and will be snoring soon, so the sooner we begin, the better."

Sabine, the voice of reason, shoved them towards the front row. She and Demeter did an entire Ring Around the Rosie to avoid sitting next to each other. The feeling that Erato was missing something intensified.

They snacked on stuffed olives and sipped wine as the muses and nymphs amused them with their array of comedy sketches. By the time Melpomene and her troupe of tragic actors came out, Dionysus was indeed snoring. Shame too, cause Mel had

range.

Still, Erato was not prepared for the sensuality of the piece. In no time, half of the troupe were among the spectators, gyrating and grinding, the satyrs playing their most horny renditions of hymns. Erato shifted uncomfortably in her chair. Next to her, Abby clapped enthusiastically and then leaned to kiss her wife. A deep, way too deep and long kiss to be on display in public. And since when did these kinds of things bother Erato? What was happening to her?

Before she could ponder about that, Melpomene in her all but naked-save-a-sheer-long-veil glory prostrated herself on Erato's lap. To her left, Abby and Sabine continued to snog. Melpomene was now performing something that felt suspiciously like a lap dance, as if this hadn't been a staging of an ancient tragedy, and to her right, Demeter was all but frozen in place, her eyes wide and furious.

Melpomene chanted and lamented. Between tears, generously running down her cheeks, her ass ground quite nicely into Erato's thighs.

Dionysus chose that moment to open his eyes and, after a few bleary blinks, swayed to his feet and loudly proclaimed, "The orgy part of Dionysia has begun!" before passing out again. The nymphs, as if unleashed, jumped each other. The braver ones made a beeline for some of the muses.

"For Olympus' sake!" Demeter's exclamation was followed by her bodily dislodging Melpomene off Erato's lap and storming down the aisle, scattering the approaching nymphs like bowling pins and dragging the now freed yet slightly rumpled Erato behind. The last thing Erato saw as they exited the amphitheater was the look of triumph Sabine Goddard gave them as they moved around the swooning creatures.

WHERE FORCED PROXIMITY TROPE MORPHS INTO ONLY ONE BED TROPE (AND THE MUSE MAKES LISTS)

Erato considered herself a worldly woman. She had been everywhere, seen most of it—what hadn't been obscured by a woman's legs or breasts, that is—and overall had been thoroughly unimpressed by that very world. Unless the world in question contained the above mentioned legs or breasts. And now she had a third element to add to her “gobsmacked by” list. Demeter applying a layer of lotion to her graceful neck.

That was it. The whole list.

Legs,

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Bosoms,

The Goddess of Harvest running a hand down the long expanse of her neck, casually dipping it lower to her collarbones and then up again.

Then Demeter lifted the rather dowdy checkered robe and took care of her calves.

Erato actually gulped. Then died. She didn't know if muses went to heaven, or if there was even a heaven in the entire concept of Olympus and Greek mythology—because no fucking way sharing an eternity with the likes of Zeus and Ares and the rest of the useless louts was anything resembling heavenly—but Erato was officially there.

Demeter raised a questioning eyebrow, as if inquiring about the gulping. Erato, however, was deceased and in the most sensual of heavens, placidly and probably dumbfoundedly and hopefully not overtly lasciviously following every movement of long fingers, slick with lotion over the olive skin of shapely calves. And being deceased, Erato was not able to answer the questioning eyebrow. There were the breaks, but she knew she had died very happily.

Still, all jokes aside—though joking about this particular set of calves should be some kind of blasphemy—this evening Erato was facing a real test of her immortality.

It wasn't that she had never shared a room with a woman. She had shared plenty. Rooms, shacks, closets, palaces. It wasn't even that she hadn't shared a room with a Goddess. Her years with Aphrodite were divine, pun intended. However?—

“I assume you don’t much care about which side of the bed you take, Muse?”

Yeah, however... In fact, quite a number of howevers. Erato had never shared a room—A BED—withthisparticular Goddess. Fates, they hadn’t made it to bed during their one night in Vegas. And the second “however” among the many “howevers,” Demeter’s tone, with just that little touch of disapproval, that “I know whom you did, and not just last summer, but every summer” was decidedly working for Erato.

It shouldn’t be working. She really wasn’t into being put down. And yet... It did something to her. Maybe because underneath all that prideful disapproval lay a woman who came like molten lava on her fingers, on her lips, on her face.

Moreover, something—probably her eternity of experience, which she rarely boasted about—told her this tone of Demeter’s ran much deeper than mere disapproval.

Because while Demeter was her cool, calm, collected self, her hands shook ever so slightly when she moved the mountain of pillows around the California king bed.

“I’ll take a quick shower before we turn in, if that’s okay?” Erato watched carefully as Demeter’s eyes darted towards the immense expanse of the penthouse suite and the largess of the bathroom. A plump lip was sucked in, breathing turned a touch shallow, and then Demeter’s cheeks caught fire.

Oh, yeah, with them being bonded to never be more than a few feet away from each other, she’d have to be present as Erato showered. In the confines of the rather small private plane, they’d so far managed bathroom breaks just fine. But here? Here, Demeter would have to observe. Erato did so love an audience.

She smirked and the crimson tinge of Demeter’s cheekbones made its way down her ample décolletage. The Goddess took a deep breath, visibly collecting herself, and haughtily motioned with her chin towards the bathroom.

Once they were both there, she turned away from Erato and tapped her foot impatiently. Erato followed instructions very well, so well it had gotten her compliments and sonnets and love declarations. But she only followed them well when they were uttered by mostly naked women who had designs on her person. Women who had other motives to issue instruction were usually less successful.

Demeter's shower had been quick and efficient and Erato barely had a moment to consider what had been happening. But now it was her turn, and Erato took her time. Her leather jacket hit the floor first, buckles making as much noise as possible and she watched Demeter jump about a foot in the air. Her boots followed and this time the Goddess of Harvest was more prepared. But these articles of clothing were just the beginning in Erato's quest to unravel the true intentions beneath Demeter's myriad of mixed signals.

She very slowly, with as little noise as possible, took off her jeans and watched as Demeter's entire body went rigid. When she gently lifted her tank top, she could have sworn there were goosebumps running up Demeter's nape. And when Erato's boxers hit the floor with the faintest of sounds, Demeter's fingers curled into fists.

Well, now... This was an entirely different game.

Erato hurried through her ablutions. She knew better than to torture. She was in the business of satisfying, so she didn't drag it out. In fact, she went through her usual routine much quicker than she normally would. After all, everything about Demeter spoke—nay, screamed—that she was absolutely ready for a repeat of their Vegas performance, except when she stepped out of the shower and wrapped herself in one of the fluffiest robes, Demeter's face was a picture of torn torment. There was desire, sure. But there was something else, something so sad and pained that caused Erato's chest to nearly cave.

She did not like this feeling. She had an entire list of why she positively despised said

feeling.

Erato—the charming and debonair Muse of Erotic Poetry and everything else involving sex and smut—did not do feelings.

Erato—the in demand and highly pursued prized lover—had no time for feelings, especially not of the pained and tormented variety,

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Erato—the devastatingly gorgeous deity—for the life of her had no idea what to do about these feelings, her own—which she decidedly did not have, thank you very much—or Demeter’s, who surely must simply have indigestion of something.

Settling for the latter, Erato nipped out of the bathroom, leaving the clearly distressed Goddess to herself. They had indulged at Dionysus’s, and who the Hell—sorry, Hades—knew what that fool put in his food. Definitely no quality control in his house.

But Demeter did not settle for number three of Erato’s above enumerated points and followed her out of the bathroom, turning the lights low and laying down silently on the left side of the bed.

Technically, that was Erato’s side. She said nothing and since she normally slept in the nude, tightened the robe around herself before lying down on the covers.

Her heart hammered in her ears. In the deafening silence of the room, in the immensity that was the California king, Erato felt alone with her thoughts. And with her hammering heart. Neither was pleasant company at the moment. Erato had assiduously avoided them both whenever she could.

Because in the dark and stillness, she had to confront that wretched list again. And add a number four to it.

Erato—the almighty seductress—would (probably, possibly, absolutely not certainly, thank you very much) give a lot to reach out and clasp Demeter’s still trembling hand lying just inches away from hers.

What that meant, Erato didn't know. See point 1 on this list. Also see points 2 and 3 on this list. She desperately tried to cling to them, to no avail. The tremble of the graceful limb was barely there, yet the surface of the bed shook ever so slightly.

The possible and probable happened and Erato didn't yet know what she'd have to give, but slowly scooted over and intertwined her fingers with the soft, for once cold ones of the Goddess of Harvest.

Demeter did not gasp, but Erato sensed it was a close call. She was beginning to learn that her bed fellow did not allow herself much expressionism. In fact, the way their Vegas encounter had proceeded, everything about Demeter signaled that it went against what she had established as her standard of behavior. And yes, she screamed in ecstasy—Erato smiled at the memory—but Erato also suspected it was a one off. An exception. She, the lowly muse, had been an exception.

The thought did not scare her as much as it should have. Plenty of mortals and immortals made an exception out of her. After all, she was gorgeous and sexy and outrageously good at what she did. And she did women of all ages, inclinations and creeds. So they made said exceptions for her all the time. But this one? This Goddess who was all about duty and order and diligence? Who was graceful and lovely and whose tentative smile lit something in Erato's heart. This one was special.

Well, if being an exception did not scare Erato, the absolute idiocy of this last thought almost made her bolt out of bed. Only Demeter, anchoring her, fingers warming slowly in hers, managed to keep her still.

Lit something in Erato's heart? What on Gaia's green Earth was she thinking? She had a list. She had several amazing lists! Points 1, 2 and 3 were unimpeachable!

Then Demeter sighed and scooted a bit closer to her, their shoulders brushing now, their fingers intertwined, the luscious curls tickling Erato's cheek and she forgot the

lists, and the thoughts and Gaia's green earth. Who cared?

She was holding the hand of the most beautiful woman. A woman who despite being rather mean to her—as an Ice Queen would be—trembled in her arms and got possessive when others gyrated in her lap and scolded foolish drunkards who didn't know who she was. Really, none of that was particularly healthy, but then Erato didn't do healthy either, not to mention hearts and feelings and loveliness.

That something that had been lit in her heart, burned just a touch brighter.

When Demeter's breathing evened out and her hand relaxed, Erato smiled like a completely smitten fool and turned on her side to watch the gorgeous features of the woman sleeping next to her. She was a total sap. But it was okay, since she had a list, and didn't do feelings, plus Demeter would totally smite her if she ever found out, and if Demeter didn't, then Hades or Hera surely would. So it was okay. She was off limits. In her sleep, Demeter squeezed Erato's fingers and scooted even closer. Erato's smile didn't leave her face till morning.

7

WHERE TINY RUNNING SHORTS ARE DECLARED THE GREATEST HUMAN INVENTION (AND THE MUSE SWEATS)

Erato woke up covered by some sort of cloud. It smelled like earth after the rain, and also cherry blossoms. It felt like silk under her fingertips, and so she ran her hands up and down the soft expanse of said cloud and inhaled deeper.

The cloud sighed and burrowed into Erato's shoulder, dark hair splaying over Erato's face and chest?—

Whoa! Not a cloud.

“Demeter?”

The Goddess laying almost on top of Erato simply hugged her closer and made herself more comfortable on the muse. Not that Erato minded. Not at all. In fact, she didn't even mind the warm knee that was fully pressing into her boxer clad crotch. As Demeter burrowed deeper, the knee made snuggler contact. Erato tried to shift subtly, slowly, just far enough to breathe without her clit getting even more friction. Not that she needed much friction at this point. Having an armful of this particular Goddess was stimulating in and of itself, but the knee? She was both in heaven and hell simultaneously. An errant thought crossed her mind about Hades probably fainting again at this entire situation.

She stifled a giggle, but the action only brought Demeter's leg closer to her center. This was getting out of hand. Erm, out of knee?

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Erato reached out and brushed the silky strands out of Demeter's face. A gorgeous, peaceful face. It was always gorgeous, but such peace, such total beatitude, found it rarely, Erato assumed. No, Demeter was always preoccupied, always busy. Worrying, hurrying, doing the labor of seemingly all ten Olympians—Erato excluded Aphrodite and Athena—if those lazy asses knew what work actually was.

As her fingertips caressed a sleep-warmed cheekbone, Demeter stirred. Her smile woke up first, eyes still closed, it bloomed on her full lips, delighting Erato.

The delight was, however, short-lived, as the rest of Demeter awoke too. The eyes opened and immediately turned wide and horrified, and then the knee, so snug between Erato's legs, rammed upward and the muse fell off the bed with a yelp, gripping her crotch.

"Hades, Goddess of the Underworld, I am sorry for every single wayward thing I've done on this side of Styx, take me now!" Erato could barely push the words out, but even as she writhed on the floor, Demeter was next to her in a blink of an eye.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Erato, please, let me see?—"

Since Erato was still clutching her privates, the request sounded extremely confusing. But it was perhaps the pain. No way Demeter was trying to see her... Judging by the hand that flew to her mouth and the smile Demeter was clearly attempting to hide behind it, she had also realized the error in her words.

"Oh, sure, laugh at my misfortune. Maybe even send Hermes around with this news to ensure everyone else laughs."

Erato finally sat up, elbows on knees, and looked at Demeter from under her lashes. The longest on Olympus, thank you very much.

Demeter was still smiling, but she let her hand fall down and reached for Erato's. She waited for a nod before she allowed her fingers to touch and then, as Erato watched dumbfoundedly, warmth spread from the fingertips touching her forearm. She felt like singing. The pain was gone, the scent of petrichor intensified.

“Why am I about to burst into song?”

This time, Demeter's smile was smug.

“You might have the longest lashes on Olympus, but I still have the nurturing touch, Muse.”

Erato covered Demeter's hand with her own.

“You called me by my name earlier.”

Demeter, clearly done with the sentimental stuff and satisfied that she had repaired the damage she had caused, wiped an errant tear from Erato's cheek and got up.

“You must've been dreaming.”

With that she turned into the direction of the bathroom, all but dragging Erato behind herself.

Once they were back on the plane, Erato pulled out her laptop, but did not open it. The Goddess next to her was elbow deep in spreadsheets again. Erato was beginning to recognize the logos. World Trade Something, UN Food Something Else, and about a dozen others. As Demeter signed a few papers, a realization suddenly dawned on

Erato.

“How many of these do you run? And I know they have directors and such, but you’re behind everything?”

Demeter lifted her head and blinked like an owl, busted. She recovered quickly and waved Erato away.

“That isn’t any of your business, Muse.”

Erato stretched out in her seat and fingered the corner of a spreadsheet.

“See, that would have been true, except here I am getting dragged halfway around the world, by someone who seems to be in charge of half a dozen of the world’s biggest organizations dedicated to eradicating hunger and yet we are attending... what is it this time around?”

Demeter slapped Erato’s hand away from her precious spreadsheet, but the gesture had no malice in it and no sting. She set her pen aside and gave the muse a sideways glance.

“The world is huge, Muse.”

“Well, yeah, I mean...” Erato trailed off as Demeter rolled her eyes.

“I am but one Goddess. I used to help a few hundred of thousands Greeks back a few eternities ago, give or take. Now? Eight billion. And I am failing. There aren’t enough hours in the day. Plus, there are other factors that interfere more than assist...”

“You mean like the wars that Ares starts? Or the corruption and climate change that

Zeus's enterprises instigate and propagate? Seems like you're alone in the face of not just billions of souls, but also a half dozen louts and co-conspirators, hellbent—forgive me, Hades—on undoing your work.”

The moment her words were out of her mouth, Erato wished them back. This was why she had been making herself scarce for centuries and rarely showed her face on Olympus. Her big mouth. And her penchant for seeing everything. You had to be very observant and very direct to be good at sex. And she was the one deity directly responsible for it. She started to change the subject, but Demeter's hand on hers effectively cut her off.

“How very perspicacious of you, Muse. Did any of the nymphs share that with you?”

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

The hurt was sharp this time around, much worse than the knee to her crotch, and Erato allowed it to wash over her, to remind her why even the idea of enjoying an Olympian's company was decidedly foolish.

She opened her laptop silently and watched the screen come to life. Next to her, Demeter sat very, very still. When she spoke, her voice was low and full of contrition.

"I'm sorry. That was uncalled for."

Erato huffed out a breath.

"Hades thinks I am something stuck to the bottom of her shoe. Hera considers me expendable and you've inferred I'm either promiscuous or stupid seven different ways in a matter of a few days. That's okay though, since I am just a muse."

She had no idea why she was saying half the things she was. Those were simply truths, truths that had been such for years, decades, centuries?—

"You believe it. You act like it. And ultimately everyone around you does the same." Demeter set the paperwork aside and gave Erato her full attention. "But I am sorry. You may be many things, and Fates know you are. Some of them are your actual job, but dim isn't one of them. Aphrodite has kept you around all this time, not just because you once dated. I kind of wish I had a wing muse myself. Do you know if Clio is available these days?"

Erato turned to her so quickly her neck cracked. The Muse of History? What the...

“Clio? Busy. Unmitigatingly, irrevocably, permanently busy. Occupied. All the history that’s being made daily. All the unprecedented times, blah blah, she’s constantly coming up with new ways to remind people that we have been through most of this shit and maybe it’s time they learn something from her, the Muse of History.”

Demeter’s smile was sly, clearly failing at hiding her pleasure at getting a rise out of Erato.

“I see,” she looked at her nails, all nonchalance, “Perhaps I need to look around for muses closer to me.”

Erato reached out her hand and covered Demeter’s.

“Perhaps you do.”

For the rest of the flight to Washington, DC, they left their respective work unattended to. The silence was sweet and in that sweetness Erato breathed deeply the scent of the Goddess next to her, trying to memorize the high and low notes of the flowery perfume, tears stinging the back of her eyes. Demeter was so out of her league, they might as well not even be playing the same sport.

“Remindme why are we here again?”

Erato looked around at the thousands of people crammed into the rather bare banks of the Tidal Basin. Jefferson’s Memorial stood to her side, the man himself, now a statue, probably wanting to rip himself off whatever was holding him in place and walk away. In the distance Lincoln stared—surely with disdain, if she was to judge his expression—at the masses in front of him. All around them people murmured, cheered, jeered and did what crowds did best. Created chaos.

In the chaos, Demeter in a pair of tiny running shorts and pink sneakers bent over to stretch.

“Forget I asked. I really am not at all interested in why we are here, just grateful that we are. Hallelujah, praise baby Jesus or whatever I am supposed to say in this country before a sporting event?” Erato turned towards Demeter fully and whistled. She was largely ignored by the Goddess of Harvest and cheered on by the two pretty lesbians stretching next to them. Erato winked at them. Demeter was leaning downwards and touching her toes and the world—despite its bleakness due to the bareness of the cherry branches—was a bright and beautiful place.

Breathing hard, Demeter finally lifted her head and scowled at Erato’s leering.

“We are here, Muse, because this is where the Cherry Blossom Festival takes place every year. It’s more than just the blossoms, obviously. Hence, most of the activities are still going ahead. The 10k run, the Pink Reception etcetera, etcetera. I tend to make an appearance every so often, as it’s a celebration I actually enjoy. The cherry trees are gorgeous when in bloom, the people are suddenly kinder, gentler, perhaps inspired by the tenderness of the blossoms...”

Erato crossed her arms at her chest.

“So why not have them bloom?” She watched carefully as annoyance flittered over Demeter’s face.

“When I’m good and ready. And speaking of ready, are you?” As soon as she spoke, some dude fired a starter gun, made all the louder by the wretched microphone that amplified it, and the barbaric horde of thousands of people began running all around Erato.

She tried standing her ground, because no, absolutely not, Erato did not run. She was

too gorgeous to run. Devastatingly so. And running implied sweating and there were only one or two distinct circumstances under which—or on top of which—Erato sweated. Still, with Demeter taking off in a slow trot, clearly giving her time to catch up, the thread around her wrist tightened, and she was propelled forward, almost losing her footing in the blasted crowd.

The first mile flew by. Erato did her best to keep up, as Demeter set their pace. The second mile was challenging, particularly because she kept falling behind. Not that she was getting tired, but Demeter in running shorts gave her somewhat of an incentive to do so.

Mainly, the butt. It was glorious. And Erato was but a feeble sinner of a muse who damn near sprained her wrist trying and failing to run, not get dragged and still marvel at the godly creation that was Demeter's behind in what was surely the greatest human invention since strap-ons. Glory, glory to running shorts.

By mile three, Demeter started to tire and Erato's view of the glorious behind was no longer possible without her falling back on purpose and she didn't think she'd get away with it. Moreover, all sorts of people who had no business being ahead of them were doing just that and when a particularly lecherous dude with a weird hairdo and a ridiculous blue suit sprinted past, all the while ogling Demeter, Erato's competitive spirit took over.

It was Demeter's turn to be dragged after the sprinting Erato.

"Are you suddenly determined to win the damn race, Muse?"

"No, but that guy over there full on drooled over you."

Page 18

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Breathing heavily and distracting Erato to no end with her heaving bosom, Demeter raised an eyebrow, managing to look both outraged and incredulous. A true fit of godly perfection in Erato's book, since those features were indeed perfect. And divine. And gorgeous?—

“Your inside thoughts are on the outside, dearest.”

The dulcet tone wrenched Erato out of her absolutely delusional musings. They had to be delusional. Maybe she had eaten something? Or drunk? Because this was some kind of sorcery. And what in the hounds of hell was Aphrodite doing here? Running?

“Jesus, Dite!”

“Wrong religion, dearest. And do not invoke baby Cerberus. I am told he has not recovered from whatever ruckus you caused on his mommy's boat recently.”

Erato huffed, more indignant than tired, and looked back to see Demeter fixing her earphones and determinately ignoring the entire world around her. Well, at least she had some privacy to talk.

“It was Hera who caused that ruckus.”

Aphrodite adjusted her headband, once again ensuring she looked ridiculously beautiful even halfway into a grueling race. Erato blinked and subtly pinched herself. Was she dreaming?

“You aren't. And yes, I know it was Hera. But the sheer fact that she left whatever

palatial dwelling she currently occupies in New York and deigned to travel to Hades's boat, exert herself to insult and humiliate and do that?" Aphrodite pointed to the barely visible golden thread, stretched to its maximum six feet in length between Erato and Demeter's wrists.

Erato rolled her eyes. "She enjoys the insults and the humiliation."

"Be that as it may. She never cared about her sister. Nobody really did and this entire kerfuffle with Hades, Hera, Poseidon, and even Zeus suddenly getting all bothered about Demeter is strange. Hence I am here."

Aphrodite flicked a speck of dust off her running top. Erato goggled.

"Poseidon? Zeus?"

"What ass hat did you think you were chasing in the aquamarine bodysuit?"

Erato narrowed her eyes.

"No wonder he looked familiar."

The finish line was drawing closer and, peering ahead, Erato recognized the God of the Seas. Preening and congratulating himself on finishing the race. Next to her, Demeter seemed oblivious to the hulking figure. Aphrodite kept her silence. Something about what she had said earlier burned an acid hole in Erato's chest.

"Maybe if they paid attention to her when she is overworking herself, and falling asleep over her damn spreadsheets. As well as making sure the Earth doesn't immediately roll over and die, pun intended, from their misuse, maybe he or any of those gods would have a claim on her. Or the right to interfere in her business. But they don't."

Aphrodite gave her a long sideways look as they approached the finishing line, staying just a touch behind Demeter to allow her to finish first and to make sure they weren't overheard. When she spoke, it was low and the hair on Erato's neck stood on end.

“And suddenly it's your business, Muse of Erotic Poetry and Writing? You wish to tell me that the Goddess of Harvest, one of the most important deities walking this world, is your business to mind?”

As ominous went, Aphrodite had Hera beat, Erato decided before she crossed the line. If her heart jumping out of her chest was any indication, she had crossed more than one line at that very moment. And the palpitations had nothing to do with the exertion and everything with the glorious creature running in front of her.

8

WHERE A BALL IS HELD AND THE MUSE IS BRAVE (AND SARCASTIC AND THUS EVEN MORE DEVASTATINGLY ATTRACTIVE)

There was a ball. Of course, there was a ball. Demeter, to her credit, had warned her about it. Pink Reception or something. As if Erato needed to see Demeter swan around in a skin tight gown that showed off very little, yet left exactly nothing to the imagination.

Not that Erato needed her imagination. She had had her hands, mouth and tongue on every single one of those curves. Yes, they had only spent a few blessed hours together—and she hadn't even removed all of Demeter's clothing—but nobody ever said Erato was an underachiever.

She was and had always been quite the opposite, thank you very much, and seeing all those people swoon and drool over such gorgeous breasts and swaying hips and those

to die for thighs?—

“You are only making yourself blush, Erato.”

Aphrodite, in her mind reading mood, interrupted Erato’s uncharacteristic train of thought. It wasn’t like she had been spending her days reminiscing about the ample attributes of the Goddess of Harvest. Absolutely not.

“You have. And it’s all over your now crimson face. Hence, I don’t need my powers of mindreading. I just use deductive reasoning.”

“Listen, Sherlock Holmes, maybe you shouldn’t use either, since she is standing not six feet away?”

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Erato extended her arm a little, ensuring Demeter could go as far as possible from her and whatever lecture she was about to get from Aphrodite.

Except the universe and whichever god was currently running the show had decided Erato didn't have enough trouble on her hands. So they sent some more.

"If you think she is paying any attention, you are mistaken. Poseidon has been bending her ear and boring her out of her mind for the past half an hour. Must be the whales again."

Sabine Goddard in all her cupid resplendence swanned closer to Erato and Aphrodite. Air kisses were exchanged. Erato had to smile at the almost comical way all three of them turned to observe the scene in front of them. Demeter all but arching backwards from Poseidon's hulking over her, him totally ignorant of her reaction.

"He is drooling. Dite, can you send the orcas to cause more justified trouble and distract him?" Erato could feel her mood sinking like those ships those majestic creatures took their anger at. She could completely understand their actions. Men were infuriating. Oblivious, entitled men even more so.

"I don't control the orcas." Aphrodite's smile was one of a cat watching the National Geographic Birder show.

"Pity." Erato bit off the word. Sabine and Aphrodite exchanged a look of pure enjoyment, which only annoyed Erato, thus making her brave. "I am glad, however, that I serve as your entertainment."

Dite shrugged.

“Not a few months ago, I served as amusement for you.”

Erato bristled.

“You were finding your Perfect Match! I am being punished by a vengeful goddess.”

“Speaking of the vengeful goddess.”

A stunning redhead, tall and muscular, with arms that could probably break Erato in half, was bowing over Demeter's hand, effectively boxing Poseidon out of her view. Erato strained to listen, but the chatter of the hundreds of guests around them was making it rather difficult, even at six feet tall. Sabine bit her lip. Aphrodite's eyes narrowed. And then Demeter was embracing the newcomer and slowly shaking her head while nodding towards Erato and her posse.

Well. Erato knew this woman. The one who made Hades tremble. The one nobody ever messed with.

“Nemesis.” Aphrodite extended her hand, her voice so cold she could've frozen the surrounding air, and welcomed the Goddess of Vengeance into the middle of their circle.

Demeter stepped up as well and Erato watched as she laid a hand on the muscled forearm, peeking out from under the almost sheer white silk blouse. Vengeance was wearing knee-high boots over skin-tight trousers, the whole outfit was completed by suspenders. Honest to Zeus suspenders. Though that old dolt could never pull off wearing them. But this woman? As if trying to piss off Erato further, Nemesis flicked back her long mane of copper curls and smirked, patting Demeter's fingers.

“Down, tiger.” Sabine’s whisper fell on deaf ears. Erato saw red as Nemesis ignored Aphrodite’s hand for almost twenty seconds.

Nobody made the Goddess of Love wait. Except apparently this one. The cheek. The rudeness. The disrespect. Full head of steam, Erato was ready to?—

“Aphrodite. Seeing you is always such a pleasure.”

Okay, so now Erato officially hated this woman. Because this voice should be illegal. It was criminal. It was something out of tales and myths. Greek, probably.

Everyone in their immediate and not so immediate vicinity of the voice trembled. Sabine wrapped her arms around herself. Even Demeter visibly shivered. Erato dug her fingers into her palm to hide the sudden dread that ran down her spine. It raced through the crowd like liquid ice.

Aphrodite alone remained unperturbed.

“It’s rare to bestow any pleasure upon you, Goddess of Vengeance. Since you almost never bless us with your company.”

“Some blessing...”

Erato realized too late that she had spoken the words out loud. The attention of all the goddesses and Sabine’s were on her in a second. Nemesis’s ice-chips scored her skin with their penetrative gaze. And then, as suddenly as they hurt her, the eyes softened.

Belatedly, Erato noticed Demeter’s hand wrapped around Nemesis’ wrist, squeezing tightly. Before she could draw any conclusions on whether the Goddess of Harvest had spared her the pain, Nemesis spoke up.

“The Mighty Muse of Smut... I would have thought you’d be somewhere seducing the dryads. I’m glad you’re allowed to mingle with the grownups these days and that Aphrodite has untied you from her bed.”

Now the silence was absolute. Pin, mouse, nothing moved. The entire ballroom was petrified. A beat, two and then Erato realized that she had exactly zero fucks to give. What was the worst that could happen? Immortal as she was being a muse, Nemesis was a worthy threat even to her, but her own insignificance in the big landscape of Olympus politics gave Erato an advantage.

“I’m surprised you not only know my name, but are so familiar with my proclivities, Nemesis.”

Aphrodite’s unsuccessful attempt at concealing a peal of laughter resulted in an escaped guffaw, one that Nemesis surprisingly joined.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

“Touché, Muse.” She smacked Erato on the shoulder, the slap almost sending Erato sprawling on the floor. “And I really enjoyed your latest book, so my earlier words weren’t mockery. Romance novels deserve all the respect.”

With a nod to Aphrodite, Nemesis was gone in a cloud of sharp citrusy perfume and a long red curtain of hair.

“Well, she’s a trip.” Erato recovered first.

“At least she acknowledged you.” Sabine said almost at the same time.

“I rather wished she’d never acknowledge me.” Aphrodite shook her head, still watching for the retreating figure of the Goddess of Vengeance.

“Book, Erato?” Demeter’s voice managed to sound so shrill, her question ended up being louder than the rest of the conversation.

Everyone froze again. Erato could feel her eyebrows heading towards her hairline. Sabine coughed, hiding either a gasp or a laugh. Aphrodite sighed dramatically and reached for a glass of water from a server’s tray. Demeter kept looking at Erato.

“Did it get hot in here, all of a sudden?” Sabine’s words were immediately interrupted. At any other time, Erato would’ve been angry all over again by the person undertaking said interruption, but she could’ve given Poseidon a kiss for his bumbling butting in.

“Did someone say hot? Because I am the Big Daddy of Hot! Cold too, since I have

both the Antarctic Circumpolar current and the Gulf Stream.”

He grinned at Demeter, engaging her again in conversation and taking her out of earshot. Erato immediately reconsidered her earlier intention to kiss this man. Why had that thought even crossed her mind, she had never kissed any man to begin with?

“Because you were so happy to keep hiding your dirty secret?”

Sabine wiggled her eyebrows. Aphrodite pursed her lips. Both were giving Erato decidedly judgy looks.

“We aren’t judging you. And if your secret isn’t dirty, why are you even keeping it?” Aphrodite, as always, had a point.

“I wasn’t... Actually... Keeping it, I mean.” Erato lifted a hand to the back of her neck. “It just never came up.”

Sabine simply stared.

“You’ve been literally chained together and your day job never came up?”

Erato shrugged.

“She believes she has already benefited from my day job. Along with half the Goddesses and Muses and the occasional nymph.”

“You’re forgetting the naiads.”

Aphrodite’s words were said in a deceptively mild tone. Erato immediately shrunk. She didn’t like being interrogated like this. The Goddess of Love, of course, didn’t care one jot about Erato’s likes just then.

“You mean to say that the person you are tied to thinks you are basically a what? A courtesan? A play girl for the Olympians? And not only does she think so, you have not discouraged her from such a way of thinking and have not disabused her of these notions?”

The air around them suddenly felt just as cold as if Nemesis had returned. Erato turned around just to make sure. Nope, the chill was a decidedly rare phenomenon of the Goddess of Love being enraged. Usually something impressive was warranted to set it off. Erato didn't think a mere misunderstanding between her and Demeter justified such a reaction?—

“You are hiding who you are, allowing all these deities and creatures to belittle and humiliate you, all the while pining like a schoolgirl for someone who doesn't know you at all. So no, Muse, this isn't remotely a misunderstanding.”

With those words, it was Aphrodite's turn to stalk away, in the same direction Nemesis had disappeared, taking the chill and the anger out of the air along with her.

Erato watched her go and exhaled. The bands around her chest had a mind of their own and did not loosen. Talk about romance novel clichés.

“I am not pining. Exactly.”

Sabine gave her a look full of pity. Then shook her head.

“Maybe I have misjudged you after all.”

Leaving Erato even more puzzled than before, Sabine moved between Demeter and Poseidon, cutting him off yet again.

He shrugged good-naturedly and allowed them to talk, looking curiously around

himself, until his gaze fell on Erato. And then it narrowed.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:07 pm

Erato knew the man. Occasionally, she even liked the man. More often than not, she laughed at the man who was a walking cliché of the younger brother completely overshadowed by an egomaniac older one. Zeus did tend to take over every single room he ever entered. So Poseidon, for all his oceans and seas and currents, was neither hot nor cold. He was utterly forgettable. So were his tepid jokes. Him looking at her with too much curiosity wasn't something Erato enjoyed.

“What?”

She might've feared Nemesis. Or Aphrodite, despite their enthusiastic bedroom activities once upon a time. Hera made her tremble and absolutely not in a good way. Poseidon did none of those things. When he continued to stare at her, she asked again.

“What are you looking at? And if you expect me to call you whatever Daddy it was you mentioned earlier, you are about to wait till Hell freezes over and I somehow doubt Hades would approve.”

If she expected him to get huffy with her, she was wrong. Instead, he leaned closer, too close if you asked her, and whispered.

“Are you and Demeter together, Muse?”

Erato worked very hard to school her features. The question was not entirely outlandish. They were tied by a bond bestowed by the Goddess of Matrimony. Still, together? Well, yes, they were together day and night, every single second and Erato would've maybe, possibly, perhaps, if pressed, want this punishment bond of theirs to translate into a real one. Maybe. Perhaps. But together?

“Why do you ask?”

Poseidon’s wide face widened even more in what could’ve been a smile.

“Because a woman like Demeter should not be alone. And I think I’ve let her pass me by for far too long. She’s gorgeous and so smart and takes care of everything and everyone and I could use some of that loving...”

He kept droning on and on about Demeter, who, not six feet away, was deep in conversation with an uncharacteristically subdued Sabine. Erato was once again mesmerized by golden eyes, by their focus, their care, and attention. How expressive they were, how intelligent.

As she was staring, half-listening to the mumbling Poseidon, Demeter raised those very eyes and Erato was caught. More than caught, she was gone.

“We are. Yes, very much so. Together.” Dropping her last word like a stick of dynamite for Poseidon to either pick up or run away from, Erato took the few steps that separated her from Demeter and intertwined their fingers. The golden eyes kept watching her with warmth and curiosity.

“May I have this dance?” Erato barely recognized her own voice.

“Well, if you’re going to lie to only the second most powerful god on the mountain, you’ll need an exit strategy, Muse. I might as well save you, from him and from yourself.” Hands clasped, the golden bond between them sparkling twice as strongly, they stepped on the dance floor.

As she twirled Demeter into position, Erato could see Sabine watching them with a rather pleased smirk on her face.

WHERE THE SHEETS ARE SET ON FIRE (AFTER A DOOR ENCOUNTERS SIMILAR FATE BECAUSE APPARENTLY DOING IT STANDING UP IS A THING)

Was Erato comfortable being the center of attention of an entire ballroom? No. But was she happy having been taken to task by both Sabine and Aphrodite? Also no.

Still, she had one thing going for her and it was Demeter holding on to her shoulders tightly, her palms warm and soft on Erato's linen covered skin.

And then there was, of course, the dancing part. Which meant their thighs brushed against each other, their breasts rubbed deliciously and Erato could say that perhaps all that above mentioned discomfort might be worth it?

If only this feeling of euphoria and invincibility would last.

Demeter leaned closer, her hot breath on Erato's cheek, her lips tenderly brushing her earlobe. On the edges of the ballroom, Poseidon was joined by Hera to watch them dance, their expressions a study of jealousy from the former and irritability from the latter. But none of that mattered, none of them mattered. Erato was holding Demeter. They were swaying to some obscure snooty composer's masterpiece, and everything was right in the world.

"I think you overestimate how much privacy the six feet that separate us gives you and underestimate how good my hearing is, Muse."

Yeah, the said feeling of euphoria and invincibility did not last.

As Erato played back the conversations she had with Dite and Sabine, the scolding,

the innuendos, she cringed. Inwardly at first. Then at seeing Demeter watching her closely, outwardly.

“Aphrodite is very fond of you, Erato.”

The way her name fell off Demeter’s lips made Erato bite her lip. The sound, the cadence... She’d give everything for this to become a regular occurrence. She’d also give everything for this line of conversation to stop.

“Aphrodite has always been fond of her minions. Sabine there is proof enough.”

She infused her voice with as much nonchalance as she could, but Demeter just kept looking at her, amber eyes inscrutable.

Page 22

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“You can play that card, but the Goddess of Love is rarely wrong in her assessments, unless it’s about the men in her life. Then she tends to reach for the lowest hanging fruit, forgetting that it’s always the one to rot first as well.”

Erato tried unsuccessfully to cover her laughter, then let it go, throwing her head back and enjoying this moment of quiet, shared intimacy and the spice of humor between them.

Of course, then she had to go and say something stupid. Par for the course for her lately.

“Poseidon is very fond of you, though, so that makes us even in the affection from the Olympians department.”

The smile was whipped clean off Demeter’s face.

“Poseidon wants a wife who will indulge his every whim, fix his mistakes and cater to his weaponized incompetence, all the while believing that he is the greatest gift the titans have given Earth. And while I realize that everyone sees me as somewhat motherly and matronly because I take care of them all?—”

Erato simply laid a finger on Demeter’s lips, effectively stopping the flow of angry words.

“I do not.”

Under her fingertip, the lips moved with a question.

“What?”

Erato trailed her fingertip back and forth, caressing the soft mouth.

“I don’t think you are motherly or matronly.”

Demeter’s eyes, the ones just a second ago consumed by rage, softened and the ballroom fell away. Poseidon, Hera, Sabine and Dite and everyone around them vanished under the light of the gentle eyes that watched her with something akin to awe. With something that had never been directed her way.

Erato thought Hermes might’ve lent her his wings.

Her fingers dipped lower, grasping Demeter’s chin, opening the tender mouth, and then she covered it with her own. Right there, in front of the Gods and people. In front of enemies and friends. A gasp was her answer, she could’ve sworn Demeter froze in her arms. As Erato was about to lift her face and let go, start apologizing, start explaining where her foolhardy bravery came from, Demeter’s fingers dove into the short hair at the base of her neck and pulled her closer, gripped hard and slanted her mouth just so, deepening the kiss.

And now the gasps were coming from all around them, except Erato didn’t care. The most beautiful woman in the world was kissing her, nay, devouring her in front of the whole world and wasn’t that a reason to...

“Muse, endeavour to take your hands off my sister?”

Hera’s voice was low but the note of anger within it was signaled loud and clear even as Erato and Demeter separated under the icy silver gaze.

“Muse, I thought you joked when you were together...”

Poseidon's train of conversation got derailed by the sheer steel in Demeter's eyes as she rounded on him and her sister.

"How dare you?"

Hera closed her mouth. Poseidon opened his. Big mistake.

"Shut up. How dare either of you make a laughingstock out of me?"

"You were doing so well on your own, little sister, just then, trying to swallow the muse whole. Unless she needed resuscitation and you were offering a mouth to mouth, I see no need to have made such a spectacle of yourself."

Erato could see smoke coming out of Demeter's ears. The gaskets were officially blown and any second now?—

"I don't know... I rather enjoyed the show..." The unmistakable drawl, accompanied by the immediate drop in temperature, signaled that a certain Goddess was back. Indeed, Nemesis leaned against a column, possibly even a Corinthian one, giving the entire scene in front of her what could only be described as an improper look. "The muse is hot and Demeter? Well, I think I am discovering a decidedly voyeuristic predilection within myself."

Hera's glare turned deadly. Erato licked her dry lips and grabbed a glass of something fizzy off a poor server's tray. The man disappeared with such haste, Erato found it truly wise. Commendable even. Men were rarely this smart. As if to prove it, Poseidon spoke up.

"But Demeter, you said you will never date again, because sure if you are to do so, I am the first and last on your dance card?—"

“Oh, do shut up!”

Hera and Demeter’s outburst ensured silence reigned. Nemesis smirked. Sabine smiled. Erato sipped her drink and pretended like not only she wasn’t there, she also wasn’t soimpossibly turned on by Demeter’s show of her godly prowess. She was getting decidedly uncomfortable in her underwear.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

As if to push her further, Demeter spoke up again. This time her own voice was clear as crystal and not a note over the necessary level of decibels to be heard by the meddling gods and goddesses.

“You all have interfered enough. And don’t you forget that I still wear this ridiculous bond you’ve thrust on me, big sister.” The mocking tone did decidedly sexual things to Erato’s insides. “Enjoy your evening.”

Demeter turned away, pulling Erato slowly after her. Not that she would have stayed, because no way Erato would’ve allowed Demeter anywhere out of her sight after their dance and their kiss and whatever it was that the Goddess of Harvest just did, that made everyone in the room look at her in awe.

Erato cleared her throat as she walked backwards.

“And with that, I have to leave you, immortals. Thank you for the dinner and the show. Please do not call or write. Grand things await your faithful muse. Oh and Hera, would you take care of this for me? There’s a dear.” Just before the thread snapped at her wrist, she handed Hera—really only because she was the closest—her empty flute and was gone, pulled behind the unstoppable force that was Demeter, determined to exit the ballroom and leave the Olympians far behind.

She was on Demeter the second the door to their hotel suite closed behind them, only to be stopped by a firm hand to her sternum.

“Ah-ah-ah!” The hand might’ve been firm, but the voice was honey itself. Soft, enticing.

“Wha...” Erato’s question was cut off by a bruising kiss. A kiss that ended her train of thought. A kiss that took her breath away and rendered her helpless, hanging on every touch of those lips that took and took and took from her, and she was ready to give till she dropped.

Dropping, however, was not an option because a knee insinuated itself between her legs and was more than enough leverage to keep Erato upright. Every time she slid down the mahogany oak of the door, the knee pressed up against her already sensitive flesh, not helped by her very tight leather pants—yes, of course Erato wore leather pants to an official function, why would she not, when her ass looked like that—and she lost another little piece of her already far gone mind.

She had been with goddesses, muses, mortals. She even got seduced by a Fate once. Though Erato preferred not to speak of that incident. But absolutely nobody on Earth, Olympus, or the Underworld had power over her like Demeter did.

One look, one touch, one kiss and Erato melted, lost her mind, forgot her concerns about even attempting to dream about the one Goddess who was so off limits she might as well not exist at all.

But when Demeter’s lips nipped at hers, when Demeter’s teeth none too gently tugged at her lower lip, when Demeter murmured words that Erato was too distracted to pay attention too... When all of that combined Erato forgot why the Goddess of Harvest was off limits for a lowly muse.

Although the words... Maybe she should pay more, because the words...

“I think you have already touched enough, Erato. I think during our first night together you touched and kissed and licked and fucked and while I was left so satisfied, so thoroughly debauched... I was also left bereft of my chance to ravish you.”

Yeah, the words robbed Erato of the last vestiges of intelligence. She nodded, mutely, her mouth hanging open and Demeter's finger traced the lower lip before her teeth bit it again, sending shock waves down Erato's body.

"Do you know how difficult it has been for me all these days?" Demeter pulled on the tails of Erato's shirt and slid her hands under it, as her voice continued to mesmerise, to entice, to bewitch. "Do you know? Seeing all this skin, day after day, and not having any memories of touching it? Or tasting it?"

Erato nodded, then realized she should be shaking her head and then simply lost herself in the intensity in Demeter's eyes. Eyes that smiled at her gaucheness. Eyes that held her captive and yet, eyes that were filled with nothing but, dare she say, affection? Sure not. This was just sex. Lust. And lust was something safe, something Erato knew, something she had been good at all her life. After all, everyone said so. Everyone used her for it and she found it her safe space. Affection wasn't something she felt safe in. Affection was not something that was for Erato.

Oblivious of Erato's dilemma, Demeter kept kissing, kept caressing, and kept speaking.

"What do you say, darling? How about I do the touching tonight?"

Erato blinked, her doubts giving place to curiosity.

"You are touching?" She phrased it as a question, because the hands on her abdomen were decidedly there and decidedly touching and so Demeter's question was strange.

"That isn't what I envisioned when I said I would like to be the one doing all the touching, darling."

Okay, the darling together with the wandering fingertip edging closer and closer to

her breasts wasn't helping Erato's mind grasp the full scope of the question. Until Demeter took a step back, then another, and then reached into her open suitcase and produced a pair of silk scarves.

Yeah, Erato clearly did not grasp the gravity of the situation. She was instantly wet. Instantly on fire and possibly dying. Her heart had surely stopped.

“Yes!”

She was aware she was shouting. She was also aware she was dropping her pants, cursing their tightness and throwing herself on the bed all in the span of the next few seconds.

Demeter watched her with amusement and again, something that Erato did not necessarily recognize since it had never been directed at her, but it looked too painfully close to affection.

Demeter's hands on her wrist and the feeling of silk securing her to the headboard took care of her thoughts and in no time, all coherent thinking was forgotten.

All she had left was the sensation of Demeter's skin on hers as the binds were tightened. Of Demeter's hair trailing down her body, of Demeter's voice murmuring how beautiful she was, how hot.

“So hot, you have gotten me in a state, Erato. A state of wanting to take all my clothes off. And wanting you to watch. You have such expressive eyes, I can feel you watching me, you know...”

“You do?”

Erato asked rather idiotically, since she was doing just that at that very moment. Watching Demeter step away from the bed and slowly undo the ties that held her gown, one then the other and finally allowing the dress to fall to her feet, standing in front of Erato in nothing except the cloud of her perfume.

“I had a feeling tonight would go this way. My way...” Demeter kept their gazes locked and reached down her chest, squeezing her own nipples, Erato moaned, unable to hold back her reaction. Titans, she would not survive this night.

“You will survive, darling. You will survive this and more. And yes, I can feel you watching me. What is it that you think about when you do? Do you imagine touching me like this?”

Demeter flicked her one nipple and Erato had to bring her thighs together, desperate for friction, for anything, because this show was going to be her undoing.

“Do you remember how you tasted me? Did you like it?”

Demeter slowly allowed a hand to drift down and disappear between her thighs, only to emerge wet. Erato’s vision grayed at the corners. No way...

Except way, because Demeter was sitting on the bed once again and bringing that very hand to Erato’s mouth.

“Yes, lick me.” Erato did not have to be told twice, sucking two fingers into her

mouth, letting her tongue swirl around them, remembering every single note of taste. She didn't think she'd ever forget. She had been addicted since their night in Vegas. Demeter's eyes grew hooded and darker at Erato's slow sucking on her fingertips and so she removed them, bit her lip and then very purposefully drew the now wet fingers down Erato's neck, collarbone and then without preamble pinched her nipple. Hard. Erato actually screamed. Goddess, please, oh please...

"I will, Muse, I will please. Patience..."

Patience? The word was not in Erato's dictionary. Not when Demeter's mouth replaced her fingertips and Erato realized she was slowly licking her own taste off Erato's hard nipple, not when Demeter moved lower, kissing and licking every inch of Erato's body as she went. Not when that mouth, that was already driving her insane, finally reached its destination and fingers gently spread her open, finding her wet and desperately wanting.

"You are so ready for me. So wet and ready for me, darling. Is this what I do to you?"

Erato was far too gone for words. She nodded and thankfully Demeter took pity on her, licking the very tip of her clit, once, twice, before suddenly sucking it in her mouth and Erato simply lost all reason then. She was taken apart piece by piece, slow and gentle and then fast and purposeful and with each new orgasm—and she had lost count after the third one and might've blacked out after the fourth—a simple truth had become very clear in Erato's febrile mind.

This was the one.

Minutes, hours, days or years later, Demeter lifted her face from between Erato's thighs and looked at her handiwork. Or mouthwork? Either way, she smirked, clearly satisfied with the results and before Erato could quip or say something undoubtedly foolish, the Goddess stood and moved up Erato's still tied up body and simply

lowered herself on the mouth that had become hoarse from so much screaming pleasure.

“I think I might’ve had my fill for tonight, darling. And I think it’s your turn. Make me come, lover. I want to come for you.”

The last thought Erato had before diving in was that she had been right. She might not survive this night. And if her body did, her heart stood no chance.

10

WHERE THE 80% ISSUE IS THE MUSE BEING DEVASTATINGLY OBTUSE
(AND IN NEED OF THERAPY)

“You just had to sass Hera back in DC. Now who in the Hell knows when she will remove the bond?”

Demeter huffed out a breath and looked away from Erato, seated as far from her on the plane as the golden thread allowed.

“Did I upset you?” Even to her own ears, her voice sounded small, tentative and rather pitiful, all things considered. But Demeter merely shrugged and turned back to her laptop. A few seconds later, the familiar clacking of fingertips on the keyboard resumed. Somewhere in the world, some land was fitted for an irrigation system or something, courtesy of this particular set of rapid keystrokes.

As for the freeze radiating from the Goddess of Harvest? Erato’s guess was as good as anyone’s.

Their morning after what had been the most amazing night in Erato’s life was subdued. Well, it was almost non-existent as those very mornings went, if she was

perfectly truthful. She had not slept, opting to watch the exhausted Demeter slumber and then once the Goddess woke up, Erato was so embarrassed at getting caught acting like a total creep and by the fact that she really couldn't tear her eyes away from the gorgeous perfectbreasts fully on display in front of her... It was only logical that she hurried out of bed, into the shower, almost dragging Demeter down the hallways only to lock the door in her face and then proceeded to hide there for thirty minutes.

When she emerged, Demeter was seething... Somber. Monosyllabic. Now the clipped words told Erato she'd probably made some mistake in the process of trying to hide how deeply in trouble she was, and how completely fucked—and not just literally. Something had happened during the night, something that had never happened in her entire history of prowling the Earth as the Lothario-in-Chief.

Erato had fallen in love. Erato, the Muse of Erotic Poetry, or Smut, as it was generously called, the most skillful lover of all times, the one who had women begging for her touch and the one who never refused a single one of them... was in love.

And if that wasn't a career-ending situation, which was heartbreaking in itself... Because how could she... You know... Complete her "skillful lover" duty to the world if all she wanted was to look at this one goddess who was resolutely not looking at her?

And there lay the bigger issue. Though she should've perhaps figured out that she was in much deeper trouble, since Demeter not looking at her was a bigger issue than her losing her job, her calling. Her purpose.

The problem with wanting nothing but to be under the light of those golden eyes was that Erato had zero right to do so. To want. To be. Demeter was off limits. And not just because Hera and Hades and every other Olympian thought so. Screw the

Olympians. No, Erato wasn't worthy of her. The Muse of Smut was not deserving of the Goddess whom everyone used and dismissed despite her being the most important Olympian, who tried her best to keep the world fed, against the contrary efforts of pretty much every other asshole god.

And so all Erato could do was to go about this business of theirs, to visit the spring festivals and hope Hera's bond would end soon, because she was certain a few more days of this and she'd be on her knees begging to be released, to be spared the torment of being so close to someone she could never have.

Page 25

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

When she finally lifted her eyes from her own laptop, the pages were full of words and she was surprised how perfectly her thoughts translated to prose. She could use this?—

“I still don’t understand where we are going. And almost on Beltane.”

Erato sighed. Then sighed some more. Demeter drummed her fingers on the armrest, waiting by all accounts not very patiently.

“I have an engagement, a professional one.” Erato hurried to add. “And we will make it to Edinburgh in time for Beltane. It’s something I’ve made a previous commitment to and couldn’t get out of on short notice.”

Demeter gave her a curious look before reaching out for her laptop and cursing. Then cursing some more. It was Erato’s turn to wait for answers.

“Floods off the coast of Australia. I guess your little display did anger Poseidon, after all.”

When Demeter finally lifted her eyes, Erato simply raised an eyebrow. Demeter held her gaze for a second, then gave in and tsked.

“Fine, our little display. Not that it mattered to you.”

Erato’s jaw dropped. Not that it mattered? Of course it did?—

“Well, you really could have fooled me this morning, Muse.”

Erato watched her, thoughts chasing each other in her tired, sleepless brain. What did she mean? This morning? All Erato had done was try to get out of the situation with her heart more or less intact and before Demeter realized that she had been slumming it with the Muse of Smut, as Nemesis put it. And that said Muse was head over heels in love with her. Demeter would probably have been nice about it. Kind. Let her down gently... Erato closed her eyes, staving away the pain.

Before she could open her mouth to say exactly that—although how was she to word it in such a way as to not point out that Demeter would surely be ridiculed by everyone on Olympus and regret the public humiliation and the fact that to have bestowed her time and her body on someone as lowly as Erato—the pilot announced their descent into New York.

“A romance convention?”

Demeter’s eyes were huge as they made their way down the labyrinth of hallways and rooms full of women of all ages. Cute dresses and colorful shirts, heavy boots, armfuls of books. Erato knew the sights, the scents and the sounds, and she loved all of them. These were her people, her crowd. A community she rarely indulged or truly reveled in. Readers.

As they finally turned the corner towards the main ballroom where, according to the schedule, the majority of the action was to take place, including Erato’s own speaking engagement, she quickly realized that she should’ve prepared Demeter better for what was to come.

Because there were many things. To come.

First, there was the billboard. You couldn’t even claim it was a poster. It was an immense movie style billboard occupying an entire wall with Erato’s face and her latest book plastered all over it.

Demeter's step faltered and then she stopped all together, her mouth open, eyes taking in every inch of the image in front of her.

"The book..." Her voice came out strained.

Oh, yeah. There was that second. The book. Erato loved the cover. She had worked very hard with her publisher to ensure it fit the novel, and she thought it was one of her best yet. Cover and book, that was. Clearly the labels of "Instant New York Times Bestseller" along with all the other lists it topped upon release agreed. She took a deep breath and turned towards her companion, her smile sheepish, ready to finally bite the bullet and confess?—

"The woman of the hour! No, scratch that! The woman of the year! Maybe even of the decade! The romance novelist who conquered the world!"

A waif of a creature wrapped herself around Erato and, despite her slight frame, gave her a powerful hug. Said hug lingered and pink lips slanted over hers in a kiss Erato had no interest in participating in.

Demeter's cough and a sharp pull on the bond liberated her from the willowy clutches.

"Clio." Erato tried to inconspicuously wipe her mouth. She was a lady. Occasionally. Plus, she liked Clio and embarrassing a fellow muse was not in her habit.

The Muse of History smirked, clearly not the least bit embarrassed, then nodded towards the thread now strung tautly between Erato and Demeter.

"I heard about this. What a delightful occurrence."

"Only you would consider being tied up to be delightful." Before Erato could realize

what she had said, Clio's smirk widened.

"See, it is even more delightful that you of all immortals would say this, Erato, and after only a few days of being in this predicament."

Erato bit the inside of her cheek to stop herself from saying something that would surely play into the hands of the wily muse.

Demeter was the one to break the silence.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“This is quite a list of accomplishments.” She clearly chose to ignore the muses’ bickering and homed in on the more pressing matters, matters Erato really should’ve done a better job at preparing her for.

“This is just the latest of her many books. You should read her reviews. See her awards. Where do you even keep all those, Erato?”

Clio, whose smile looked increasingly like the cat who got the canary, clearly knew what she was doing. Erato gulped and felt the dread rise up her spine.

Demeter’s face was pale now and her eyes sought Erato’s.

“Why did you not tell me? This is such an amazing achievement.”

The Muse of History was hitting her stride with the commentary and continued relentlessly.

“Erato tends to minimize her accomplishments, unless they are of the bedroom variety.”

Clio looked at Erato fondly. Demeter’s brow furrowed.

“I can see that.”

“It’s a feature and not a bug with this one.” Clio whispered conspiratorially and Erato bristled.

“I’m standing right here. I can hear everything you’re saying about me.”

Demeter gave her another long look.

“Except you might as well not even be, since so much of you is never acknowledged. Chiefly, by yourself. All of this and more, accomplishments so many, you’d need Hermes to keep a tally. And yet you worry about what someone might say? About what Hera might think? Hades? Zeus? What do you think of yourself is the question that is much more important to me. But I guess this morning has been answer enough. And then there is all this...”

Demeter gestured around to the billboard and the immense ballroom. She didn’t even touch her, but Erato felt the blow to her solar plexus, the words hard as a fist.

Clio, oblivious to the storm hitting the maximum hurricane category, chatted on.

“She is rather prolific and at one point had five of the ten top books on the Fiction chart. It was quite spectacular.”

Demeter finally looked away from Erato and met Clio’s eyes with a smile that held no joy, the corners lifting momentarily before drooping.

“Yes, I can only imagine. Well, I guess I will have to pick up a copy and find out for myself.”

Was it disappointment in the amber depths? Or was it aching that flashed for a brief moment and then disappeared? Erato couldn’t fathom why Demeter would be hurt by her keeping something like this a secret. After all, Demeter didn’t care all that much about her. Well, she cared about what Erato did to her, but she was a Goddess, one of the most important ones, and Erato was just a muse...

Still, Demeter's words about asking herself the question of 'what did she think of herself' echoed some things Aphrodite had been right about. She both detested her reputation as the slutty muse and chose so often to hide behind it. Why had she told Demeter nothing about her writing career? She was proud of it. So why show only her bedroom persona?

Perhaps therapy was something she should look into? But then she could only imagine how that would go. 'Hi, I am an immortal being who for centuries put forward her Sluts'R'Us persona because I'm not good enough for either my former lover or my current one, who is also the love of my immortal life, but is too amazing for me.'

The therapist would probably call the cops on her.

Erato shook her head and started speaking, desperate for words to come, except none did, and she closed it again, looking pitifully around herself for help.

It came swiftly in the form of a large crowd of giggling and shouting women, who surrounded her and their voices were a cacophony of sound, of compliments, of gushing and of requests of selfies and signatures. Erato grinned, in her element now, relaxed a bit, and reached for the first book being shoved into her face. The process was familiar, safe, comforting and she let time pass, allowing herself to enjoy her fans and her readers, their questions and their attention.

And somewhere amidst autographs and selfies, amidst compliments and platitudes, she felt it... A small tug on her wrist and then nothing. An emptiness she had not sensed for days, Hades, for the entire week. She looked down on her arm and saw the golden thread dangling off of it, its corresponding loop empty, the cord undone and on the floor, where boots and heels and sandals trampled on it in their rush to reach Erato.

Demeter was gone, undoing the bond and abandoning Erato alone in the crowd. How long ago had she left? How could she have gotten out of the binding? Did this mean she'd always had the ability to set them free of each other all along?

Erato couldn't keep up with her own thoughts.

She turned in circles, desperate to catch a glimpse of Demeter, only to be met with the steel gaze of a pair of steely cold pair of eyes belonging to the goddess who perhaps was responsible for all this.

Hera clapped her hands, and the crowds parted like the Red Sea. Before Erato knew what was happening, she was being led by the golden bond still around her wrist down the hallway towards the convention center's exit, Clio's face now showing none of her earlier merriment. Whatever she saw on Hera's face clearly wiped even the memory of smirking off of her features.

As if confirming Erato's suspicions, as they rounded the corner and found themselves alone, Hera whirled on her with the determination of a shark sensing blood in the water.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“What have you done to my little sister, Muse?”

Erato gulped and let herself sink against the wall. Her empty wrist felt like an open wound. One that was perhaps self-inflicted.

11

WHERE A PEP TALK IS GIVEN AND A CHORUS OF BEARS IS INTRODUCED (THEY ARE A FEATURE NOT A BUG)

“What have you done to my little sister, Muse?”

Hera’s words echoed in Erato’s mind as she was almost dragged to some dingy bar on a side street that had miraculously materialized right next to the convention center.

Dark, sticky and smelling suspiciously like something died there ages ago, the place made Erato’s insides roil.

“Of all the places to conjure, Hera...”

The Goddess lifted her fingers, and a drink was immediately placed in front of her, the scruffy-looking bartender not blinking an eye at her pristine ivory attire. Erato narrowed her eyes at the man who knew the exact order without saying a word.

“Unless you didn’t have to conjure anything at all, and this is your regular haunt.”

Hera threw back the vodka and set the glass carefully down, the move so smooth

Erato thought she might have imagined it.

“The places I frequent, my drinking preferences and the company I keep are none of your business, Muse. My sister, however...” Hera trailed off, her long slim fingers latching onto the discarded golden thread and tugging none too gently on Erato’s wrist. “What have you done?”

Erato shrugged, biding her time. For what exact purpose, she couldn’t say. Surely, if Hera intended to dispose of her, she wouldn’t do it before so many witnesses. When the second shot of vodka appeared in front of the Goddess of Matrimony without her signaling for it, Erato reconsidered her opinion about the people surrounding them. These were not witnesses. These would be accomplices.

“I don’t know?—”

Hera simply tugged harder and Erato nearly tumbled off the bar stool. She could swear the pool game next to them stopped for a second, the bikers on alert, their cues like baseball bats in their beefy hands. Hera waved them away and several sets of muscular shoulders relaxed. The sound of pool balls being racked up overtook the low rock on the jukebox yet again.

Erato rolled her eyes.

“I may be the Muse of Erotic poetry, but my boots have stomped more than their share of these asshats into the ground, Hera. You’d be wise to call off your dogs.”

Hera smirked and pushed her glass towards Erato.

“I don’t have to resort to dogs to deal with you, Muse. Though I assume these are what queer mortals call bears?” She flicked her fingers dismissively. “Men will always be men, mortal or otherwise. They think we need them for protection when

they are more often than not, the only predator in the room.”

Erato drank to that.

“Now,” Hera graciously waited for the drink to burn a path all the way down to Erato’s stomach. “I will ask you again, what did you do to my sister, and please spare me the sordid details. I read some of your books, and I’ve heard about your exploits. I surmise Demeter had a good time.”

Erato winced. “Can I say that I resent this entire conversation?”

Hera drummed her fingers on the bar.

“You can. And I can say that I would respect you more for such an answer.”

Erato flicked a few crumbs from the polished surface.

“You don’t respect me at all, Hera.”

Hera was silent for a long moment before she spoke, a note of tentativeness in her voice.

“I confess I hadn’t thought much about you, Muse, for the previous Fates know how many epochs.”

The bears winced collectively.

“Ouch.” Erato rubbed at her sternum, ignoring the men. Hera smirked, then sobered.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“And yet, there was my little sister, pining like a fool for a muse. A muse who seemed entirely indifferent to her. A muse who fucked her, cut her losses and ran. Leaving Demeter to pick up the pieces?—”

“I didn’t run— She’s the one who ran— How could she pine for me? She barely knew my name?”

Hera huffed out a breath.

“Dear Hestia, help me not smite this muse, for she is for some reason the chosen one for my fool of a sister.”

“I am?” Erato gaped.

Several bears theatrically smacked themselves on the foreheads. One of them grumbled. “I don’t get that either. You are kinda slow.”

Hera threw him a decidedly warm look and Erato felt herself turn crimson.

“Do not encourage the bears.” She turned back to the bar and downed her drink in one gulp. Where Hera hadn’t even winced, Erato’s entire body caught fire. She gagged and heard tutting from her left.

“The bear is right, though. Because I don’t get it either, Muse. And honestly, I was just ready to see what in Hades’s Hell she was doing delaying spring and thus setting off all those lazy godsto Olympus and to bother me, since I am the only one tending to the damn business. I had no peace. And believe me, I really need that peace at this

exact moment in time.”

“You’re plotting something?” Erato perked up. Maybe if the conversation moved away from her?—

“Now, who’s not minding her affairs? What does concern you, however, is when I walked on that accursed boat, I saw my sister, who has not taken a lover in centuries, wrapped around a muse. The Muse of Smut of all things.”

Erato put her face into her palms.

“I hate what I do.”

“You do not. Not only are you good at the writing part, and believe me, as I’ve mentioned, I read and tried hating it. Then I could’ve called Aphrodite and mocked her mercilessly for the company she keeps. But I enjoyed it. And myself...” Hera’s smirk was sly and slow. Erato groaned.

“What were you saying about that smiting? Because I think I am ready. Take me now.”

Hera tsked again.

“I have no idea what she sees in you, to be honest. But I thought okay, writing good sex, giving good sex, if all the nymphs and dryads were to be believed. So maybe Demeter deserved some fun.”

Erato lifted her face.

“You bonded us together so that Demeter could get laid?”

Hera flicked a piece of lint off her dress.

“I have done more for less, Muse. But I figured a few days and the entire spring situation would be resolved. Imagine my surprise when I see her all enraptured by you, dancing with you for Hades’s sake and, miracle of miracles, rejecting Poseidon.”

Erato narrowed her eyes.

“Why miracle of miracles? Did he and Demeter date or something? You cannot be serious about that last assertion. Poseidon?”

“Yeah, he’s a douche and a tool and he owes us money. He’s not good enough for Demeter. We don’t know what you ever thought when you suggested he court her, Hera.” The bear’s gruff droll was somewhat muffled by him laying his face almost on the pool table to try and hit a difficult shot. It was Erato’s turn to smirk. Hera rolled her eyes.

“So he wasn’t my best idea. I do have it in me to acknowledge when I am wrong. I told that Cupid as much.”

Something tingled at the corners of Erato’s conscience.

“Which Cupid?”

Hera waved her away.

“Sabine. But that isn’t important.” She’d said it a bit too quickly and Erato was ready to latch onto the obvious lie, but Hera powered forward. “It isn’t. What is important is that spring is still not here. And it is entirely your fault.”

Erato furrowed her brow.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. Demeter doesn’t care about me. She couldn’t even say my name for days?—”

“Yes, yes, she couldn’t say your name. I bet she screamed it loud enough?”

The bears groaned collectively again and moved to a table further away from them. Erato considered joining them.

“You seem to think very little of yourself, Muse. I can’t say I understand.” Hera patted her perfect hair. It occurred to Erato that she had not thought of herself as perfect in quite a while. In fact, she had thought of herself as anything but... especially for Demeter.

“And why is that, Muse? Where is your swagger? Sure you won’t allow some mild disdain to stop you from getting what you, of all the immortals, want? Unless my sister is not what you want.”

Hera was looking at her expectantly. Erato gulped.

“You are goading me.”

“I am trying to figure out why you’re here, moping, feeling miserable?—”

“You dragged me here!” Erato threw her arms up.

“Only because my sacred bond was severed, and I didn’t even know Demeter could do it all along!” Hera sounded exasperated, and Erato suddenly felt like all the

oxygen was sucked out of the room.

“She severed the bond?”

Hera looked at her with utter disbelief before repeating slowly, enunciating every word, as if Erato were indeed slow.

“She. Severed. The. Bond.”

Behind her, the chorus of bears sang out “She severed the boooooond!”

Erato’s heart was beating double time. Demeter could’ve ripped the thread twenty thousand times during their predicament. She could’ve cut it the second Hera placed it. She could’ve undone it at any given second, and yet...

“Yes, there, voilà, the light bulb moment. I swear, I don’t get what she sees in you at all.”

Erato threw a ‘don’t even think about it’ look in the general direction of the bears, preempting any commentary or, Hades forbid, singing. They stayed silent. Balls were re-racked rather quickly.

“I think I have made a terrible mistake.” Erato gestured to the bartender, and he placed the second vodka in front of her.

“Gasp!” Hera clutched her chest dramatically. The bears mimicked her gesture. Erato rolled her eyes. Hera went on with her mockery. “The bulbs just keep lighting up, Muse.”

“I am not at all certain this is how you should be speaking to your future sister-in-law, Hera.” Erato sipped her vodka slowly this time and grinned widely at the

Goddess next to her.

“Oh Zeus, you will be insufferable about this, won’t you?”

Erato shrugged and elbowed Hera gently.

“I mean, if she’ll have me, and if you bless the union.” Hera stared daggers at her but her heart was so light, Erato just kept grinning. “And how could you not? I will tell everyone this match was entirely your doing. Well, yours and the bears. Are they actual bears, by the way? Did Artemis have a hand?—”

The men’s laughter boomed and Hera narrowed her eyes, snapping her fingers for silence.

“Enough about the bears!” Then she blew out a breath and lowered her tone. “And don’t bring me into this, either. The Cupid started it, and I am nobody to oppose the Fates. Even they know the brouhaha with the arrows is not to be taken lightly.”

Erato’s eyes grew large and Hera bit her lip, shaking her head.

“I should not have said that.”

“Was Sabine involved?” Erato’s heart, which had just risen all the way to the Olympus, plummeted down.

Hera plucked the vodka out of her limp grasp. She downed it without as much as blinking, and Erato wondered about what exactly did this woman do all day up in her fancy club in Manhattan. Then Hera did something so striking, so out of character, Erato nearly fell off the stool. She reached and grasped Erato’s hand with her own cold fingers.

“It may seem that I care for very little, Muse. My children, dumbasses as they are. My club, my Olympus. My revenge against Zeus. I am well known for those things. But I have to tell you that my sister is the one who stood by me, despite all my schemes, my plotting. Generations passed and she has not abandoned me. All of the gods and goddesses demand things of me and then leave. They fear me. They think me unstable. The jilted wife of a philandering husband. And that might be true.” Hera’s fingers trembled slightly on Erato’s as she went on.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“But Demeter never left me. Never wavered in her support of me. Never once welcomed any of Zeus’s mistresses, never once picked him or anyone else over me. And so you better believe it, Muse, I love my sister. I am not always kind to her. Hades knows, none of us are kind to her, the true workhorse of the family. But I love her. And hence I am here telling you that hell, damnation and all those other things are nothing like my wrath. You are my sister’s Perfect Match, and I helped it along as best as I could. But if you hurt her...”

Hera slowly lifted her hand and gave Erato a long, hard look.

“You better fix this, Muse. Spring better come. And not just because I need it so I can be left to my own devices. Spring needs to come because Demeter is happy and love blooms inside her.”

Erato smiled and stood up. The bears behind her cheered.

“I promise to do what I can. My best, in fact.”

Hera’s eye roll was all disappointment. Erato lifted a finger, stopping more threats.

“However, since you reminded me that I am nothing short of perfection, Hera, and so my very best is very, very good. Demeter knows that well.”

The bears cringed, and Hera pointed to the door.

“Go! And if you ever say a word of this to anyone, especially to Demeter?—”

“Yes, yes, you will turn me into a toad.” Erato closed the distance between them and gave Hera a fast and hard kiss. The bears gasped collectively again, then sang in perfect harmony, “A toad! She will turn you into a toad!”

Erato thought she could use them in her life. It was fun to have such an instant soundtrack on occasion.

Before Hera could indeed hex her into oblivion, she scampered out the door. She had work to do, mistakes to fix and the most beautiful woman in the world to confess her love to. Toads—and bears—would have to wait. Though maybe this particular group could come along, she needed all the help she could get.

12

WHERE A GRAND GESTURE IS MADE AND SPRING BLOOMS (AND THE BEARS ARE BACK)

She was devastatingly handsome. Hair slicked back, leather pants and a white linen shirt, Erato gave herself one last look and tugged on the undone tie hanging loosely over her collar.

Yes, definitely handsome. And definitely devastatingly so. She’d need every single part of that handsomeness and devastation. She had messed up. Badly. She, the Muse of Erotic Poetry, of all things sex and romance, had missed all the signs and all the indicators that true love had found her, while she was wallowing in her own insecurity. In her own estimation of being never enough, not quite a goddess and not mortal, but thoroughly insignificant by her own standards.

“You were always enough, you know?” Aphrodite laid her hands on Erato’s shoulders and their eyes met in the mirror.

“You didn’t choose me, Dite.” Erato knew her voice was thready, the lump in her throat at her friend’s confession making it difficult to breathe.

Aphrodite’s hands gave her a squeeze before falling off.

“Some things don’t work out, not because we are not enough, or too much. Some things don’t work out because others are on their way.” Her palms lifted instinctively to her abdomen, and Erato’s eyes widened. Before she could start squealing, Aphrodite gently placed a finger on her lips.

“Hush now, it’s still very early and we are not saying anything. But I knew the very moment it happened, of course.”

Erato smiled against her friend’s finger.

“Being the Goddess of this kind of thing, you’d know.” Aphrodite smirked, and Erato continued. “I bet Athena is doing cartwheels.”

Aphrodite laughed. “She is absolutely insufferable. I can’t even get my own cup of tea, not to mention she has all these apps about how big the baby is supposed to be every week. A pea, a bean. Ridiculous.”

“Aw, that is so adorable. You love it. Quit your whining. A wife and a baby in just a few months. You’re amazing. And you really lucked into this marriage, Dite.”

Aphrodite gave her a hug, their gazes still holding each other in the mirror.

“Yes, I did. And so have you. Or at least once you make it a marriage.”

The lump in Erato’s throat was back.

“I fucked up, Dite. I was so far up my you-know-what, wallowing in self-pity, indulging my trauma that I didn’t see her. I didn’t notice...”

Aphrodite took a step to the side and shrugged.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“First of all, are you seeing a therapist or something? Because, yes, girl. To all of that spiel about you being an a-s-s,” Aphrodite spelled the word and covered her belly, as if the baby could hear her. Erato, who knew nothing about babies, imagined Demeter with a child, her child and nearly fainted.

Then Aphrodite spoke again. “As for seeing Demeter... You know, nobody does. So what’s one more?”

Erato sobered instantly and hackles went up.

“Don’t say that! She’s amazing, a miracle, an angel?—”

Aphrodite smirked, clearly getting the exact reaction she wanted.

“And that is what you should say. Emphatically. Just like that.”

Erato’s shoulders drooped. Nothing like pre-gaming the big speeches with her dear friend the Goddess of Love, one hopped up on pregnancy hormones and yet manipulative enough to get Erato exactly where she wanted her.

With a last look in the mirror, Aphrodite gave Erato a kiss, then took an extra second to wipe the lipstick from her cheek. Erato felt tears threaten.

“Wish me luck, Dite.”

“You don’t need it, Erato, you are the sexiest muse. The most talented romance writer of our time. You’re smart and gorgeous. And you have such a wonderful heart. Luck

has nothing to do with it. All you have to do is be and the women?—”

Erato rolled her eyes and exited the room before Aphrodite finished her pep talk.

“No women, Dite. Just one. Just one Goddess, please.”

The Beltane Festival on Calton Hill in Edinburgh was a sight to behold. The dark night was illuminated by thousands of fires, people dancing and drinking, chanting, praying. Several stages were set up with performances happening all at once. The participants were wandering from one to the other, drinking, eating and being merry. Any other time, Erato would have joined the most rambunctious of the groups and gotten lost in the dancing and the celebrations of spring.

But that was any other time. This time she immediately homed in on the rather large group of Olympians, watching a performance that could only have been directed by Melpomene, the Muse of Tragedy, outdoing herself in yet another production. From the side stage, Erato caught a glimpse of her favorite Cupid fleeing between the performers, fixing their clothes.

Abby Angellini really had that knack for tailoring and originality in her costumes.

“Should I be offended that it’s my wife who is your favorite?”

Sabine’s voice near her ear almost made Erato jump. Sheer force of will held her in place. That and the unwillingness to make any moves that could ruin her hair.

“I highly doubt anything can ruin that devastatingly handsome hair.” Sabine snarked and Erato had to roll her eyes.

“Did Aphrodite narc on me? When could she even have done so? I literally just walked away from her. And quit reading my mind, Sabine. It’s annoying.”

Sabine's expression turned smug.

"It's not. It's enlightening. Illuminating. All this devastation unleashed on unsuspecting women. How do you do it?" The theatrics did not pacify Erato, but, as Sabine went on, she suspected they were not meant to. "Plus, everything you're thinking is written on your face. And as for Dite narcing. We have a group chat, darling. It's called "Devastatingly Handsome and Totally Clueless". Needless to say, it's entirely dedicated to you."

Sabine's hand lifted and fixed Erato's collar, taking the sting out of her words somewhat. Erato sighed.

"You don't have to tell me I messed up. Dite already did. Hera did, believe it or not. Even her bears did." At Sabine's uncomprehending eyebrow raise, Erato shrugged. "You don't want to know."

"Probably for the best." Sabine tugged the collar once again, expression slightly pouty. "As for the clueless part, my dear, I did everything that was in my power. I even came out of retirement just for you. And you can imagine what that cost me. Zeus has been on my case for weeks now, since he thinks I am back in business." Sabine made gagging noises. Erato could sympathise. Still, this was one aspect of the entire ordeal that she simply could not comprehend, nor like, no matter how much she tried.

"So you forced a Perfect Match on me and Demeter?"

Sabine's groan was nothing short of exasperated.

"Don't growl at me or whatever." Erato stood her ground valiantly. "You didn't have to shoot an arrow at Aphrodite, and everyone knows your own wasn't a Perfect Match, so why me?"

Sabine took a deep breath, then another. Erato was certain she was counting to ten on the inside. When she finally looked more composed, she spoke.

“Because of you and because of Demeter. Some matches don’t need help. Don’t need arrows or circumstances or pushing. People just fall. But this match? The two of you fought it tooth and nail and needed to see that you were not just perfect, but perfect for each other. Granted, turns out only Demeter realized I had a hand and an arrow in this.” Sabine rolled her eyes and Erato felt it was at her being as clueless as she was.

Sabine fiddled with her collar some more.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“Imagine my surprise at finding out that you actually fell without ever knowing there was an arrow in the midst of it all. You managed that all by yourself. And, well, then you managed to fuck this all up, also all by your lonesome.”

Sabine finally let go of her collar and Erato breathed deeper.

“But Demeter?”

“Well, you will have to ask her how she feels. About the arrow, about you.”

“Hence the hair, Sabine. I need all the help I can get for those questions and to fix it.”

Sabine’s laughter was loud and honest.

“That you do, Erato, that you do, though Fates know that nobody can resist perfection such as yourself.” Sabine pushed her in the direction of the group of revelers, who were squabbling over something. As Erato approached, she saw that Zeus—and what in the ambrosia was he even doing here—and Poseidon were crowding Demeter, who was valiantly holding her own against the two brawny giants.

She looked cornered, troubled, and so beautiful, Erato felt the electric current of their connection run down her spine. Yeah, she was a fool. They never needed the golden bond. They didn’t even need the damn Perfect Match arrow.

They had each other, and they were perfect. Though, it was probably a good idea that both the bond and the arrow were employed, since she had been completely oblivious. She’d have to send flowers to both Hera and Sabine later.

“This spring business has gone on for far too long, Demeter! And you can’t tell me you can’t fix that small issue of the water crisis in the—” Zeus boomed even as Demeter balled her fists.

“It isn’t my responsibility! Poseidon is right here?—”

“D, you know as well as I that drinking water ain’t my thing and if only you did what you always do instead of going MIA for the past few months—” Poseidon almost fell over himself to escape Demeter’s steely gaze.

But Erato had had enough. She’d heard enough and seen enough and, honestly, these pricks had said and done enough as well.

She coughed, then coughed again, but the gods and goddesses around her were so captivated by the fight brewing that a random muse did not have the power to distract them.

Erato cursed, threw another look at Demeter, now looking harried and trapped, and did what any star-crossed lover would.

The grand gesture.

As those went, Erato knew that she had only one chance to nail it. She climbed the weirdly built stage where Melpomene was in the middle of a tragic monologue. Well, Erato would have to make up to her for the interruption, but desperate times and all that. More flowers. At this rate, she might as well buy the flower shop next to her apartment, instead of just paying for the bouquets.

Erato grabbed the mic. The static nearly deafened everyone. At least she now had their attention.

“Ah...”

“What is this?”

“Who is this?”

“What is she doing here?”

The chorus of questions grew louder. Was she making a mistake? Demeter’s eyes finally met hers and something behind them, something that had been taking Erato’s breath away since Vegas, and maybe millennia ago, told her to soldier on.

“Get off the stage, Muse!”

Poseidon clambered after her, only to grab some curtain and fall on his ass, dragging the entire set with him. Melpomene wailed. Abby threw her hand over her mouth. Whether in shock or mirth, Erato couldn’t tell. Zeus tried to free Poseidon from the knots of the curtain, only to swaddle him further. Somewhere to their left, Hera’s laughter rang clear. Hades was trying to get to her brothers and Cerberus, thinking it was a game, nipped at the tangled heels of the God of the Seas.

In the cacophony of sounds and pandemonium, Demeter stood tall and now alone, watching Erato expectantly.

Yeah, back to the grand gesture. Erato tapped the microphone again.

“Dear Olympians...”

The abovementioned pandemonium continued. She tried again, to no avail. Demeter started to turn away. Erato, heart in her throat, threw caution and the gods’ eardrums to the wind and whistled. Silence reigned as most everyone on Calton Hill was

temporarily incapacitated.

“Well, that did the trick.” Erato’s smile was met by hundreds of boos. It didn’t matter, Demeter was still half turned and Erato had to make her stay. Stay with her. Love her. Marry her.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“My name is Erato. And I am the Muse of Smut.” The boos quieted and the silence that reigned had a curious feel to it. Erato powered on. “Erotica. Sex. You name it. If it’s done naked and panting, that’s my domain. And you know? I am proud of it. I can write like no other here. And I sure as hell—no offence, Hades—can fuck like no other amongst you all.”

Mouths collectively dropped open. Poseidon was asking nobody in particular if that was a proven fact. Behind Erato, a choir of bears sang out, “You better fucking believe it, Mermaid Boy!” Erato smiled. Maybe Hera wasn’t all bad since the backup singers were certainly her doing.

“So, yeah, I am Erato, and I am proud of what I am and what I do. Because while you all engage in sex, or try to, since I am fairly certain some of y’all’s appendages fell off centuries ago from lack of use?”

“We are looking at you, Mermaid Boy!” The bears sang in perfect unison, while Poseidon, still in his curtain cocoon, tried in vain to crawl away.

Erato didn’t take her eyes off Demeter.

“You all do it. And yet, since the beginning of time, you’ve shamed me. For sex, for enjoying it. For loving it. And you’ve made me lesser. You’ve made me dirty. You don’t say my name in polite company, as if what I do is sin itself. Well, no more. I love sex. And I am sex. Deal with it.”

Erato stood a bit taller, just as murmurs started to take over the crowd. Aphrodite joined Sabine on the sidelines and both of them looked at her with, dare she say,

pride.

“You can no longer make me ashamed and I refuse to be belittled by you all. And I refuse to hide myself or my feelings.”

The bears sang a perfect “Ooooooh yeeeeeeaaaah” behind her.

“Demeter, Goddess of Harvest, the most important deity on Earth, will you forgive me for allowing my wobble in self-confidence to not see how much you mean to me? Will you forgive me for being less than you deserved? Will you overlook that I should’ve told you every single moment of every day since Vegas that you are everything to me? And will you take me, the Muse of Erotic Poetry and so many other things, to be your wife?”

Zeus—in the process of lifting Poseidon to his feet—dropped him again and bellowed.

“What? Nonsense. She is damn indispensable, and she deserves so much better. You’re of no consequence.”

Erato just smiled.

“She does deserve better. Better than any of you.” Erato swallowed around the lump in her throat, her protectiveness getting the better of her. “You say she is indispensable, yet you treat her like she is your employee. You make her job so difficult, the obstacles you throw at her insurmountable. And still you demand she do more, fix more of your fuck ups.”

Demeter’s eyes were unreadable and Erato felt like the one chance was slipping from her grip.

“No, nobody is worthy of her. Nobody. And yet here I am, begging.” Erato met the amber gaze head on for the first time since climbing the stage. “When they clamor for your attention and your skill, for what you can do for them... I am here to tell you that my life is for you. I’ll give you my every day. I’ll spend all of them worshiping you. Cherishing you.” Erato got on one knee. The bears behind her intoned a solemn note. Artemis and Apollo were wiping away tears. Hermes was writing down every word. The whole scene would no doubt be all over the gossip pages in a Greek minute. Zeus looked like he was about to summon thunder. Poseidon was turning green, though he always had that tinge to him.

“I was wallowing too deep in my own insecurity to see your perfection. Because you are that. Perfect. I’d know.” Sabine and Aphrodite laughed, and most of the muses and nymphs joined in on the inside joke. Poseidon was decidedly verdant now. Erato gave no fucks, because the corners of Demeter’s mouth twitched and she bit her lip. Erato pressed on.

“Return to me. And I will work every day to earn your forgiveness.”

“Every night too!” The bear chorus sang loudly. Poseidon fainted. Zeus had that iridescent quality to him now. A quality he only mustered before unleashing a hurricane on some unsuspecting mortals. Erato braced herself.

And then the scent of petrichor overtook everyone, and the skies opened up, wide ribbons of rain falling freely. The air took on a magical feel that could only mean one thing. Demeter stepped forward and laid a hand on Zeus. The sparks around him immediately drowned under her touch.

Erato’s knee was numb. Her white shirt clung to her skin. None of that was important. All she could do was look at the woman in front of her and drink her in. And then she realized that no matter what happened next, she had to say one more thing and then she’d let the Fates decide.

“I love you. And I am yours. Only yours.”

Well, two more things. But math didn't matter because Demeter lost her battle with the smile, which bloomed freely on her lips, and the rain turned warm, falling gently now.

Behind her, cheers and shouts of “It's a Beltane miracle! Spring! Spring!” rang loudly and Erato scooped her wet hair out of her eyes to see the trees and the bushes around Calton Hill fully covered in blossoms.

Somewhere nearby, a voice that sounded remarkably like Hera proclaimed “fucking finally!” before the Goddess of Matrimony suddenly started clapping. Once, twice, and then the entire crowd was shouting and applauding and lifting Demeter up on their shoulders. It was Erato's turn to smile, to laugh. Demeter deserved everything, all this love and adulation. More of it, in fact. If she was allowed, Erato would spend the next several eternities, showing her exactly how much.

“That is quite a commitment, Muse.” She hadn't realized the crowd had deposited Demeter on the stage, and now the Goddess—her Goddess—was looking at her as if Erato might bolt at any moment. No, she'd made that mistake once.

“I'll give you everything and more. For as long as you'll have me.”

Demeter laughed and stepped closer, her dress drenched and her hair clinging to her forehead. She'd never looked more beautiful. Erato realized that she needed to say that. She needed to say so many more things.

“You are everything that is gorgeous and pure. You are?—”

She was interrupted by a kiss. The rain pelted down, warm and steady, and Erato felt complete.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“You talk too much, Muse.”

“Yes, she does!” The bears, in different stages of undress, sang on.

“Why are they taking their clothes off?” Demeter wondered, even as it was Erato’s turn to kiss her.

“I stopped trying to make sense of them. You will need to ask your sister.”

Demeter traced Erato’s jaw with a tender fingertip before tucking a strand of hair behind her ear and kissing her again.

“I’d rather ask you to repeat what you said earlier. The part about having you.”

Erato’s heart lifted. She could swear it had left her rib cage and was now levitating above the ground. So this was what happiness felt like.

“Will you have me? As your lover? As your muse?”

Demeter smiled and linked their hands.

“I will have you as my wife.”

Erato looked down at their hands only to see a golden thread bind them, so familiar, so precious. She looked over to where Hera stood, aloof, eyes narrowed. Erato mouthed, “I won’t fuck it up.”

Before the bears could sing again, Hera replied, “see that you don’t” and disappeared.

Rain kept falling all around them and Erato lifted Demeter off her feet, twirling her over and over. The crowd erupted in applause.

“Is this what life will be with you?”

“Happiness? Yes. Spectacle? Maybe. But you deserve the center stage, my love.” Erato said, finally putting her future wife back down.

Demeter laughed and the fires of Beltane burned brighter, illuminating the flowers of a spring long overdue.

EPILOGUE

WHERE A CUPID DECIDES TO TAKE ONE FINAL SHOT (AND THE HOTTEST THING HAPPENS)

As targets went, Sabine Goddard rarely, if ever, missed a certain one. And looking from her position to the side of the adoring, enraptured crowd that applauded and sang Demeter’s name, she knew this target was worthy of coming out of her retirement yet again.

The Goddess of Vengeance stood far from the swarm, muscular arms bunching under a white silk shirt Demeter’s rain had thoroughly drenched. Her face was expressionless, and she watched only one person in the crowd, ice-blue eyes focused and inscrutable.

Sabine reached for her quiver. Next to her, Aphrodite followed her gaze and shuddered.

“You cannot be serious.”

Sabine ran her fingers over the arrow’s feathers.

“Think she will annihilate me before I take aim?”

Aphrodite covered her abdomen protectively.

“I’m not sure I want to know. And I’m not sure you want to mess with her, of all goddesses. Can’t you find someone else?”

Sabine shook her head.

“This is my last shot, Dite. Ever. And it’s the surest I’ve ever made.”

She was met with a suspicious look.

“No, I mean it this time. This is my last arrow ever. It’s time to really hang the quiver. And I’m dead serious that this is the most Perfect Match I have ever attained.”

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 12:08 pm

“I wouldn’t use the word “dead” when it comes to this particular one.” But Aphrodite looked in Nemesis’ direction speculatively. “If you miss, Sabine, you’re on your own.”

Sabine smirked and let the arrow go.

“I never miss.”

They both watched the silver fly on a curved trajectory, sailing through the rain soaked air, its target half turned away, seemingly oblivious of everything except the one person in the crowd Nemesis was so intent on.

Sabine’s chest tightened, the rush of hitting the Perfect Match overtaking her. She held her breath?—

Nemesis extended an arm and snatched the arrow out of thin air. Sabine choked on nothing at all. Nemesis looked her right in the eye and, without a word, broke the silver shaft in two, letting the pieces fall out of her hands to the ground.

“I had no idea that was even remotely a possibility.” Aphrodite sounded both shocked and... dare she say it, aroused? Sabine turned to catch the Goddess of Love fanning herself.

“You’re pregnant, woman. Get a hold of yourself. Athena is back in New England.”

“I’m pregnant, not blind, and you have to admit that was quite possibly the hottest thing that either of us has ever witnessed. And Athena will be getting a conjugal visit

in that wilderness of hers today.”

Sabine would’ve made a joke, except she was completely flabbergasted. She gritted her teeth. And no, she hadn’t known it was possible either.

In the distance, Nemesis smirked and threw a salute her way. Aphrodite whimpered. Sabine groaned. Nemesis took a step, then two, and vanished in a cloud of red hair and arrogance. When the smoke of her theatrical exit dispersed, there stood Abby, her quiver lowering slowly, a triumphant expression on her face.

Aphrodite gasped, and Sabine leaned closer.

“Well, I have to disagree, Dite. Because that is the hottest thing I have ever seen.” Sabine sent her wife an air kiss, and Aphrodite laughed.

“This may be your surest shot yet, even if you missed, Sabine. But also the most unhinged one.”

Sabine’s smile did not waver.

“I didn’t miss. I was, shall we say, waylaid? Aren’t the unhinged ones the most fun matches to witness though?”

Dite laid a hand on her friend’s forearm, watching Erato and Demeter kiss on stage.

“They really are, and if that right there is any indication, then Nemesis’s match will be quite a story.”

Sabine gave Aphrodite’s fingers a squeeze as Abby started walking in their direction.

“Well, we watched several of those unfold. So what’s one more?”