

DARK FURY

BY NICOLA R. WHITE

In the year since Rachel Underwood was blessed—or cursed—with legendary powers, her life has changed more than she could ever have imagined. Being transformed into a badass, crime fighting, femme fatale should be a dream come true for a bookworm like her...if it wasn't such a nightmare. At odds with the ancient Greek Fury who shares her body, Rachel struggles to stay sane and avoid losing her identity.

To make matters worse, just when her lifelong goal of obtaining an Ivy League education is finally within reach, fate brings Rachel face-to-face with a major distraction in the form of Ethan Graves. The former director of the FBI's Extrabiological Investigations unit is the one man she hoped never to see again, and battling her attraction for the man who betrayed her is hard enough. Too bad she also has to fight the forces of evil that are hell-bent on starting a war of mythological proportions.

With time running out and no way to tell new friends from ancient enemies, Rachel soon discovers that sometimes the only way to beat the enemy...is to join them.

CHAPTER ONE

I gripped the strap of my trendy new book bag and stared up at the imposing brick building in front of me. *This was it.* I swallowed hard. After years of dreaming about this moment, it was finally happening.

I was about to attend my first class at Harvard University.

I took a deep breath and walked briskly toward the heavy double doors leading into the Arts building, sneaking a glance at the other students streaming past, and wiped one sweaty palm down the side of my jeans. None of the other first-year undergraduates looked as nervous as I felt. Most of them were fresh out of high school, while I was what the admissions office called a *mature student*.

One corner of my mouth twitched at the thought—they didn't know the half of it. I was twenty-three, only five years older than most of these kids, but I'd seen and done things in the past year that made it hard to remember being so young. And so...unaware of

what went on in the world around me.

Stop dawdling, Tisiphone snapped inside my head. The Fury's voice invading my thoughts was a perfect example of the craziness that had become my normal over the past year. *You will be late for your first class if you do not keep moving.*

I sighed, more convinced than ever that the Fates had favored my best friends, Tara Walker and Alex Hughes, over me. The Furies *they* had bonded with actually liked them. Even tried to help them understand their powers.

I have helped you, Tisiphone grumbled. *You are ungrateful.*

I rolled my eyes. *Yeah, sure.* She'd helped, all right—if the definition of help was whispering murderous impulses in my ear and driving me half crazy. I was grateful for the super strength and healing ability that came with being hostess to a Fury's spirit, but sometimes—most of the time—it didn't seem quite worth it. Having Tisiphone in my head, in all her wrathful glory, made me feel like I was on the brink of going insane.

I ignored her and pushed through the throng of students milling about until I found the room where my first class was scheduled to start. I consulted my schedule for the hundredth time that morning just to be sure. Yep, there it was—a sociology course called Culture and Belief, starting in ten minutes.

I suppressed a squeal of excitement as I chose a seat in the front row. *It was finally real!*

As the clock at the front of the room counted down

the minutes to the start of my very first university class, I carefully arranged everything I might need on top of my desk.

Laptop? *Check.*

Highlighter? *Check.*

Brand new textbook, purchased that morning from the University store and still giving off that new-book smell? I ducked my head to hide my eager grin. *Check!* I was ready to start my academic career as soon as humanly possible.

I looked up from my school supplies to watch the last few students straggle in. Most avoided the front row like the plague, filling up the seats behind me without even glancing at the empty desks on either side of me. Those who already knew each other sat in small clusters to gossip and catch up, while others struck up conversation with the strangers around them.

I bit my lip. *Maybe I should have chosen a seat farther back?* I was already nervous about interacting with the other students, and now I'd set myself apart as the dorky keener who sat alone in the front row.

I looked at the clock again. Was there time to get up and find another seat? But what if that made me seem even more desperate and pathetic?

You are over-thinking the seating arrangements, Tisiphone spoke up. As usual, your indecision is not befitting a Fury. What if we were in the heat of battle? Would you stop to second-guess yourself then?

I sat back in my chair and folded my arms. As always, she found a way to turn everything I did into a character flaw.

Harvard is kind of a big deal, I snapped at her. *Could you try not to ruin it for me?*

I scowled. I resented her accusation that I was weak as a warrior. She knew as well as I did that I had become the most ferocious fighter of the newly reborn Furies. Since we'd driven a biker gang backed by the goddesses of deceit and vengeance out of Boston last winter, I had been at the forefront of every skirmish since.

The door flew open with a dramatic bang, distracting Tisiphone from whatever retort she might have made, and a hot mess of a girl burst into the classroom. She was a whirlwind of bright blue hair and gauzy scarves. All eyes in the room followed her progress as she rushed toward me like a runaway train. She flung herself into an empty seat next to me. Her book bag, textbooks, and coat seemed to multiply, until somehow they occupied another two seats of their own.

She rummaged noisily in her bag and pulled out a purple notebook and a handful of glitter pens in assorted colors. She set them on her desk, then finally paused to take a breath, blowing her bangs out of her eyes. Around us, the rest of the class erupted once more into a dull roar of conversation.

I felt like Dorothy trapped in the eye of the storm. I definitely wasn't in Hawthorne, Massachusetts, anymore.

The girl turned to me and stuck out her hand. "Hi! I'm Anna." Earrings in the shape of tiny crescent moons swayed as she spoke.

I smiled back and reached out to shake her hand. “Rachel Underwood.” Maybe I would make a friend today, after all.

But as our palms met, the familiar scent of magic rose to perfume the air. It was faint, but unmistakable to my heightened senses. I jerked my gaze from our clasped hands to meet Anna’s eyes—where a reflection of her true self danced in their dark blue depths.

“Who are you?” I pulled away. I’d never seen anything like this girl’s eyes before, and that was saying something. In the past year I had come face-to-face with gods, oracles, and a witch. Outwardly, Anna was an undergrad with a Manic Panic hair dye fetish, but inside?

Inside, Anna was something much different.

Do you recognize her? I asked Tisiphone. Maybe the Fury had seen her kind before, in a previous life with another hostess. Since bonding with her, I had developed the ability look into a person’s eyes and see who they really were, regardless of what mask they showed the rest of the world.

In her heart, blue-haired Anna saw herself as a maiden clothed in the flowing garments of ancient Greece. Instead of a leather backpack, she carried a brass globe and compass.

For once, Tisiphone made herself useful and answered my question. *I believe the girl is a Muse. Though why she is attending classes at a mortal university, I cannot fathom.* She transmitted her disdain as a swirl of maroon.

Meanwhile, the other young woman gripped the edge of her desk tightly enough to turn her knuckles

white. She stared at me with wide eyes. “What...what do you mean? Like I said, my name is Anna.” She swallowed nervously. “Anna Lawrence.”

“And you just happened to be taking the same class as me? Where you just happened to sit down right next to me?” I raised my eyebrows. *Puh-lease*. I’d been stalked by creatures connected to Greek mythology before. Anna Lawrence, for all her wide-eyed, stammering innocence, was not who she appeared.

You couldn’t let me have this one day without throwing something weird at me? I thought at the Fates as I waited for Anna to answer. But the truth was, I’d kind of expected something like this to happen. Pandora and her hell-spawn children had made no major attempts to kill me or my friends since the past winter, and I was getting antsy waiting for something to happen. Playing vigilante on the streets of Boston had been a thrill at first, but it had quickly become routine. Even boring.

I was spoiling for a good fight.

“I...don’t know what you’re talking about,” Anna finally managed. The sharp scent of fear joined the aroma of magic in the air.

I sighed. *That’s what they all say*. I pitched my voice low so no one would overhear. “I know you’re a Muse. I can see it in your eyes and I smell the magic on you. So come on, out with it. What do you want from me?” I glanced at the clock again. “And make it quick. Class is about to start.”

I had been dreaming of my first day at Harvard for too long to let anyone ruin it—and that included a

blue-haired Muse. I planned to do some serious learning in the next hour, even if I had to kill somebody to make it happen.

Tisiphone let out a screech of wrathful delight at the idea. She was always up for the prospect of violence and mayhem.

Anna let out a squeak of fear and I followed her gaze to where my hands lay in my lap. *Damn it.* I sucked in a deep, calming breath and sat on my hands, hoping no one else had seen them. The surge of anger I'd felt at the thought of class being disrupted had manifested itself physically. My fingernails were now the wickedly sharp talons I used to fight when I was in full-on Furious mode.

I ducked my head to hide my eyes, shielding my face with my long auburn hair. Without a mirror, I couldn't be sure they were blazing orange behind my tortoiseshell glasses, but there was a good chance. I gritted my teeth. *Make it stop,* I hissed at Tisiphone. *Before anyone else sees.*

Unlike Tara and Alex, I hadn't befriended the Fury in my head. In fact, we tolerated each other only because we had no choice. Before she came along, I was mild-mannered—even mousy. But now?

Now I struggled constantly not to snap and lash out at everyone around me.

“Sweet Asteria, goddess of stars!” Anna breathed, watching me. “What are *you*?”

I finally got myself under control and slanted a sideways frown at her. “Shouldn't you be running away right about now?”

She frowned back. “Probably. But do you know the worst thing about being a Muse?”

“Do tell.”

A smile tugged at one corner of her mouth. “It’s that damned, insatiable curiosity. I couldn’t leave without knowing what you are. It would be torture.”

I tentatively smiled back. “I know the feeling.” I had been teased about my bookish tendencies my whole life.

I eased back in my chair. Maybe I *had* made a friend.

She may not be what she seems, Tisiphone warned. People seldom are.

I hated to admit it, but she had a point. Putting too much trust in a stranger was how Alex had walked into a trap set by Apaté and Nemesis, the goddesses of deceit and vengeance, last winter. The resulting showdown had left Nemesis dead, a top-secret branch of the FBI in shambles, and Apaté and the rest of Pandora’s children determined to kill us.

And that was just the overview.

I stole another glance into Anna’s eyes. She might not be what she seemed, but I wanted her to be telling the truth badly—I needed a friend. Alex and I had moved to Boston just a few weeks before, while Tara stayed in Hawthorne with her fiancé and business partner to run their thriving Cape Cod restaurant. The three of us had never been separated by so much time or distance, and while Alex was trying her best to be there for me, she was often busy. Between her boyfriend, Ty, and her new job as a choreographer for

the Boston Ballet's Corps de Ballet, she had little time for my anxieties.

Anna waited expectantly.

I looked around to make sure no one was eavesdropping, but empty desks separated us from the other students, all of whom were absorbed in conversation or tapped busily at their phones. I leaned closer to Anna. "I'm a Fury," I whispered.

"*Shut up!*" She clapped her hands. "I'll have to check with Chloe—she's the Muse of history, I'm astronomy—but I don't think a Fury has been spotted for, like, hundreds of years."

"Try thousands."

She squealed excitedly. "You *have* to meet the rest of the girls. They'll be so jealous I met you first." She grabbed my forearm. "You aren't planning to rush any of the other sororities, are you? When my Kappa Kappa Sigma sisters find out about you, they'll be dying for you to join us!"

Suddenly, I couldn't breathe. "When the rest of the girls...find out?" I pressed a hand to my throat, which threatened to close completely. "You can't tell anyone about me!"

People learning about the Furies only led to pain and disappointment. Like when I'd learned that Special Agent Ethan Graves had betrayed us by keeping another Fury, Melissa Bailey, imprisoned at a top-secret FBI facility.

So...yeah. Having an entire sorority know about us?
No freaking way.

I told you so, Tisiphone said smugly. *She will reveal*

your secret to others and exploit you if you let her.

I wished she was corporeal so I could kick her ass.

“It’s totally not a big deal,” Anna reassured me, studying my look of horror. She leaned in conspiratorially. “The rest of the Kappa Kappa Sigs are like me.”

Like her? “You mean...”

She nodded. “We’re all Muses.”

I dug my fingernails into the palm of my hand to be sure I wasn’t dreaming. “How is that...I mean...”

But before I could find out more, the classroom door opened and our professor strode into the room. The din of conversation in the room lowered to a murmur and pages ruffled as students opened fresh notebooks. Still dazed by Anna’s revelations—not to mention her unbridled enthusiasm—I didn’t look up in time to catch a glimpse of the professor’s face before he turned to unpack his briefcase. But his build and coloring caused my stomach to knot up tightly. His dark hair and strong, athletic build reminded me of Ethan Graves.

The betrayer, Tisiphone muttered. Like me, she would never forgive Graves for what he’d done to us and Melissa.

Unlike me, she didn’t wrestle with conflicting feelings of hatred and attraction for the man. Even now, months since I’d last seen him, I still dreamed about him at night.

“I thought some old guy was teaching this class,” Anna whispered.

I nodded. “The online course description said

Archibald Greenwald was the instructor.” The man was a Harvard legend, a pioneer in the field of sociology, and one of the main reasons I’d chosen Folklore and Mythology as one of my two main concentrations of study—Harvard’s equivalent to a double major. “I hope nothing happened to him.”

The professor faced the class to introduce himself and all thoughts of Professor Greenwald fled my mind. “*Shut up,*” I breathed, echoing Anna. Our instructor met my eyes and I blushed hotly.

It was the betrayer himself, live and in the flesh. I swallowed hard as he raised an eyebrow.

Ethan Graves was my professor.