



*Haunted Hell*

Copyright © 2022 by Slush Pile Productions

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, including electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior express written permission of the author. Unauthorized reproduction of this material, electronic or otherwise, will result in legal action.

Please report the unauthorized distribution of this publication by contacting the author at [theoriginalheathergraham.com](http://theoriginalheathergraham.com), via email at [connie@perryco.biz](mailto:connie@perryco.biz), or at Heather Graham 103 Estainville Ave., Lafayette, LA 70508. Please help stop internet piracy by alerting the author with the name and web address of any questionable or unauthorized distributor.

*Haunted Hell* is a work of fiction. The people and events in *Haunted Hell* are entirely fictional. The story is not a reflection of historical or current fact, nor is the story an accurate representation of past or current events. Any resemblance between the characters in this novel and any or all persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

Haunted Hell!

Yes, it's the season, and haunted attractions abound!

For Kelly, Jake, and their group of high school friends, the calling to a seasonal themed attraction with haunted houses, thrill rides, fast food and more is naturally a top priority.

But there's a legend that goes with the area. The legend of a witch.

While they're all aware that stories are just stories and that the truth can be twisted as time goes by, they find the tale of the witch both amusing and— a little frightening.

And as the night goes on, midnight nears and a bizarre danger seeps into the mist of Haunted Hell, they'll learn that there's a very fine line between truth, monsters of the imagination, and monsters that might be all too real.

Haunted Hell

Kelly

“She was horrible, a true monster, using her witchcraft against anyone who came against her, or just because it amused her. She lived on the outskirts of the Everglades, in an area mostly forsaken at that time, and she created her brews to live forever, tying her victims to the old oak, using her knife to create narrow rivulets of blood she would drink, loving the screams of those victims as she drained their life’s essence, taking unto herself every moment of life they might have had. Some said she was simply born a demon and she could change herself at will, appearing as a beautiful siren or even an old man!”

Kelly Langley tried to smile—but Brent Morton, doing the driving, told his story with an eerie relish that sent shivers down her spine, though she wanted to laugh. Legends. They’d all heard many of the Florida stories through the years. Even near her home, an old woman supposedly kept the decaying body of her son set up at the dinner table.

Brent was a good storyteller, glancing quickly at Kelly to his side and checking out the reaction of his passengers in the backseats through the rearview mirror. They were in his car, an SUV, because it was the only one with three rows of seats that fit them all—Brent and Kelly in the front, Jake Delaney, Brenda Barrett behind them, and Hank Jacobs and Holly Garcia in the third seat.

“Goblin, demon, witch? She feeds each year, and lives on and on for another Halloween!” Brent said.

“So . . . supposedly, she’s still alive?” Kelly asked.

“It’s a legend—a Halloween story to scare us, great for people who want to create haunted attractions,” Jake said.

“Alive, ever seeking new blood, haunting the shadows, dark corners, waiting for the moon to rise on Halloween!”

He made his voice so low and creepy. And Kelly felt a real smile tease her lips. Yes, Brent, was, of course, a great storyteller. In truth, he was pretty great at everything. He was a new edition to the small crowd of close friends she’d had since they’d all started high school together. He’d just arrived that year, a transfer student from a small town in Ohio. She figured like many people suddenly uprooted and thrown into a new place, he’d learned all that he could about the state of Florida. He was excelling in their history classes, that was for sure.

“Well,” he said, his voice deep and ominous, “here’s the rest of the story. Hey, Florida is weird, and full of weird tales, but this one took place right where we’re going. Her name was Sabina. The Seminole Wars ended around 1858, but Sabina had forged out her home while they were ongoing—she just kept surviving on the blood of any soldier or warrior who wandered too close to her realm. The Civil War started up soon after and she enjoyed both Confederate and Yankee blood as the blockade runners stumbled upon her or Union or Confederate soldiers alike searched for contraband in the South Florida waters and glades. Remember, she could appear to be anything, usually someone young, lovely, and fragile, and she could lure people to her! She preyed on youth and beauty, just as she preyed on life. So, there were the wars. Then—peace! And people began to homestead, communities were born. But only the desperate dared to live off the coast, for those who wandered in to hunt or fish often disappeared and were never seen again. But, finally! A sheriff arrived who was fierce, and he moved in after her with a posse, taking her by surprise, and he saw to it that she was hanged from the very oak where she had tortured and killed so many men and women. And it happened to be Halloween night, just as it is now!”

“Whatever the date. Yeah, she was real. Real flesh and blood murders and thanks to the sheriff, she got good Justice,” Jake said flatly. Kelly glanced back at Jake. She loved Jake. He was good at just about everything he touched, too. He wasn’t quite as imposing as Brent, but who was? He’d had her

back, always, and they were a duo, but he seemed to think it had been forever, and, well, that wasn't quite true.

"I grew up here. I've heard all the crazy legends, too—and what really happened and what people concocted to go along with history," Jake said.

"Yeah, but bad things did follow" Brent said, not to be deterred. "That's not where the story ends! In 1878, a young woman disappeared while on a fishing trip with her father, never to be found again. In 1921, another young woman disappeared, only to be discovered tied to a tree—that same great old oak—where Sabina had tortured and killed others. Another disappearance occurred in 1954, and by then, of course, all the stories were out there, and, the way that time and the years go by, no one was sure which oak had been the hanging and torture tree. However! This was the western wild area of the south of the state—farms, horses, you know, that's about all—until the 1960s when they built the mall."

"And this tree is supposedly near the mall?" Brenda Barrett, sitting next to Jake in the back, asked Brent.

"Near the mall, in the mall—they built around a lot of trees for their patio areas. They just kept building further and further west, encroaching on the Everglades a little bit more every year. Or, hey—that tree could be right in the parking lot where Halloween Hell theme park has been set up! And we are here! Three haunted houses! Hey, one is based on the 'witch of the woods.' It's going to be great!" He looked at Kelly and grinned. "Don't worry! I'll protect you!"

Jake

Jake Delaney had to admit—"Haunted Hell" park was living up to its name.

The fabricators had created some of the most ghoulish picture spots he'd ever seen. Life-sized skeletons with blood still dripping from jagged teeth stood near animatronic werewolves that moved so realistically they might have been . . . the real thing.

There were vampires, ghosts, ghouls, zombies, banshees, and more—and that was just the display pieces. Smaller versions of the ‘pose with me’ creatures adorned the counters at the food trucks and bars.

“I told you it would be fun!” Kelly whispered, nudging him in the ribs.

“Right. It’s fun, it’s great. I thought we were going to do the bumper cars?”

Along with the photo ops, food, and haunted houses, the Halloween attraction had advertised rides, and they had done well in that department, too. There was a section for smaller children, but the majority of the place was filled with gigantic Ferris wheels and tilt-a-whirls and every kind of thrill ride imaginable. Their group tended to like the bumper cars—going after one another with good-natured determination—true dedication to the ‘bump’ in the description of the ride.

“Bumper cars! There are three haunted houses and cooler stuff that we don’t find unless it is Halloween!” Brent protested.

Jake tried to smile. He never wanted to give the power of knowing he was truly frightened—not of any haunted house, but frightened he might lose Kelly to Brent.

Brent was new to their group—new to their high school during this, their senior, year. But being the new guy hadn’t slowed Brent down in the least. He’d burst in like the coming of a god. Of course, to be fair, at seventeen, Brent stood at six-three, had a shock of blond hair to rival that of the Mighty Thor, and in truth, had taken their football team by storm.

Okay, so, Jake was fairly new himself, joining the crowd when he’d moved to the city just about a year ago. But he hadn’t blazed in on everyone like Brent. He’d just appreciated the friendship.

Football. Well, it was good to have a winning season. Jake still wasn’t sure it was worth having Brent burst onto the scene.

“Bumper cars! They’re for kids. For chickens. For chicken kids!” Brent said. But he smiled, as if teasing Jake like a good old boy, like a friend.

Except he wasn't teasing. He was trying to appear to be the better man. To take Kelly away.

Jake and Kelly had been together a long time now; they were 'a thing,' Something known by all their friends.

But Brent had made it clear in a few devious ways he'd like to be the one with Kelly. And if Kelly fell to his charm and his lies . . .

Jake wasn't a slouch himself. He was over six-one, leanly muscled, and he'd been popular and respected on the football team—he was a hell of a wide receiver and he'd received attention from many scouts. Until Brent's arrival, of course.

But he didn't care. He really didn't. He just cared about Kelly. He *needed* Kelly.

"We've got to do the haunted houses!" Kelly said, grinning. She was so excited. Dressed up as the Little Mermaid because it was Halloween, she was stunning. Her hair was naturally long and red, her eyes were a brilliant green, and her smile was contagious.

"Haunted houses, yeah!" Brenda Barrett, another of their friends chimed in. "The one they call 'The Morgue' is supposed to be the best. Oh!" She had her map of the attraction. "Brent is right! One is called 'The Witch of the Woods.!"

"Haven't you guys looked this all up or seen the news?" Jake asked. "Yeah, there's 'The Witch of the Woods.' According to the news, a kid went into that one, a teenager. He went in and he never came out."

"Oh, brother, Jake! Yes, I watch the news. The kid ran away from home—didn't you see the article that was written up? It wasn't a kid; it was some guy who had turned eighteen and had a horrible home life. He used the house to disappear and run away. The police investigated. They had it closed. Ruining everyone's fun for several nights because the kid had to escape abusive parents. Don't be an idiot party-pooper, Jake!" Hank said, making a face and looking at Jake with disgust.

Jake shrugged, looking away. It hadn't been his idea to come here. So, the kid had come from an abusive home, a really bad life. But he had still disappeared. The police had found no trace of him. Every "scare actor" had been questioned and the park security had been questioned and everyone had said that he'd come in, and most probably slipped out through one of the canvas openings that allowed for emergency exits if ever needed.

He made a face, shaking his head. "Come on guys, the haunted houses—"

"Chicken—cluck, cluck, cluck!" Brent teased. Lightly, of course.

"I got it!" Holly said. "One haunted house, and then the bumper cars. I say we start with 'The Morgue!' Then . . . there's 'Hyde's House,' and for the last of the evening, we'll finish Halloween with the old witch!"

"Haunted house, bumper cars!" Hank said.

Brent started clucking again. Jake arched a brow to him. Okay, he already looked like Thor. Naturally, he'd worn a Thor superhero costume.

Hank had come as Spiderman and Holly had opted for a villainess—she was a great evil queen. Brenda hadn't wanted to spring for a costume—she'd come in her cheerleading costume.

Jake hadn't felt like getting too carried away. Since Kelly was Ariel, he'd decided on being Prince Eric—easy enough to get a white puffy shirt, a pair of breeches and tall boots. He had a good thatch of dark hair already, so, it had been easy enough.

He just . . .

He just wasn't into this Halloween. He didn't know why. He'd just had the strange sense of foreboding, maybe because he'd read about the kid who had disappeared.

They were all staring at him. Kelly was grinning. They were all grinning. And, as if it had been rehearsed, they all folded their arms in imitation of wings and began to softly cluck.

“Sorry, okay, whatever. I’m not a chicken, just not that into a bunch of actors running around in the dark with electronic creatures. I like rides! But, hey, fine. Let’s go. ‘The Morgue’ it is!”

They ran into the line, listening to the laughter of others waiting with them, much of it nervous laughter. They chatted amongst themselves, and as they neared the front of the line, Jake pointed out one of the animatronics at the entrance.

“Florida skunk ape. Pretty cool creature. Heck, I just heard we have three-hundred thousand pythons in the Everglades, alligators, and crocodiles. We don’t need monsters,” Jake said lightly.

Holly shuddered. “Don’t forget coral snakes, the eastern diamondback rattlers, pygmy rattlers, timber rattlers, cottonmouth, and the copperhead!” She laughed. “I’m not a darkness in the Everglades girl—but I was a Girl Scout!”

“Ah!” Jake said and looked dryly at Brent, “There you go. Monsters are real. They can be certain animals—and they can be human beings.

“But! We call a gator a monster—when it’s just a creature trying to survive,” Brent said.

“And most monsters don’t know they’re monsters,” Kelly said. “Seriously—do you think any of the gators or snakes out there thinks of itself as a monster?”

“Do they think?” Hank asked teasingly.

“Human monsters think,” Brenda offered.

“Hey!” Holly said. “Humans, animals--we all recognize a good ‘monster’—since we have lots of real ones.”

“Right, so, hm, mummies, werewolves, vampires, and ghouls should have no effect on us!” Hank said.

“But what zombies?” Brent demanded, eyes widening with pretend fear.

“Zombies—they walk too slow,” Jake said. “Our turn. Let’s go.”

Kelly clutched his arm. He smiled. But Brent was at her other side. Why wasn't the ass with Holly who was on her own? Worried and annoyed, he glanced back. Hank was between Brenda and Holly.

*Whatever.*

The haunted house was good. The first room was run by an Igor-like character who was sorting stretchers with bodies on them, all in various stages of decomposition. They followed him into a second room where a mad doctor gave a speech about embalming techniques, how to decide who to keep and who to send six-feet-under. The next rooms were mirror mazes with zombies running around insanely. Kelly screamed when she ran into a mirror—with a 'zombie' in damn good make-up behind it. Doing the same thing, he almost screamed himself.

But he kept his hand on Kelly's arm, forcing Brent to break-off at one point.

Then they were out—and as agreed, they headed, laughing, to the bumper cars.

Since he'd been a kid, Jake had loved bumper cars. Once they were on them, it looked like everyone else did too. Even Brent joined in on trying to outrun and out-bump everyone.

They bought popcorn and sodas and did the second haunted house.

*'Hyde's House.'*

Jake had to admit, like the first haunted house, this one was good. The scare actors kept their distance—they weren't to touch any of the guests. But they were dramatic and again, the make-up artist who was on the job was darned good. The place was filled with the 'dark and shadowy streets' where the monster Hyde was known to be seen. A central room had the mad doctor drinking his potion, walking around the room offering it to others.

They moved on into an area with animatronic bats, they had to make it through the 'chamber of wolves' and at the end, of course, 'Hyde' jumped out right before the exit, eliciting all kinds of screams from most of the girls and many of the men.

Exiting that haunted house, Kelly caught his arm and looked up at him with her brilliant green eyes. “See, the haunted houses are fun!”

He forced a smile. Twice—in the main theater room and along the path with the animatronic bats—Brent had tried to slip Kelly away with him.

At the beginning, he had succeeded. But Kelly had reached for him while screaming at the Hyde who had popped out at the last minute.

This time, Jake didn’t have to call for a ride. Holly pointed at the ‘Serpent’ rollercoaster.

“We’ve got to do that!”

“And so we shall!” Hank said.

They slid into line again. And when it was their turn, Jake almost snapped. Brent somehow managed to be right with Kelly as they were told only two to a car.

He and Holly rode together, and Brenda and Hank, naturally, rode together.

*It was just a ride! He told himself. Just a ride.*

The ride car went up and up and up.

“Wow! Look at the moon, at the sky and . . . you can see the swamp or marsh or forest—or whatever it is with the mist rising all around!” Holly said, shivering. She looked at Jake and grimaced.

“Sorry, I am a chicken. But . . . the houses don’t scare me. Seeing that we’re surrounded by mist down there and the darkness in all the green around us . . .” She broke off, shuddering dramatically.

“Everglades, river of grass,” Jake murmured. “Yeah, well, I’m glad we live in the city and only come out south and west for special occasions!” He glanced at his watch. “Almost midnight. The park will close for the season right after!”

Holly started to reply, but they had gone up, up, up—and they were suddenly rocketing down. And Holly was half laughing and half screaming and they both held the safety bar tight as they twisted and turned, up and down and around.

They met up with the others on the ground. He looked at Kelly and she grinned. “Good ride!” she said.

“Yeah, and it’s almost the witching hour!” Hank said.

“Almost! We have to get to the last haunted house! Then we can look at the cool eerie fog on the ground and the way the moon is peeping out. Let’s do it!” Brent said.

They headed to the line for the last haunted house.

Jake kept close to Kelly. It was time to enter the realm of the ‘witch of the woods.’

And the strange sense of foreboding that had been with him seemed to grow like something dark and hot in his soul. He couldn’t help but look at Brent and wonder about his rival.

\*

Maybe Jake had been right, Kelly thought. Haunted houses were . . . okay, fun, sure. But sometimes . . .

They had just made it—they were, in fact, the last group to be let through. Once they were out, come the morning, break-down would occur.

And Halloween would be a year away again.

She was suddenly grateful. The other haunted houses had been fun. Maybe because the scare actors had been good, because they’d heard others laughing and screaming around them.

But this one . . .

Except for them and the haunted house’s soundtrack, there was nothing. No laughter—not even screams—from others.

She’d listened to Brent’s stories about the witch, Sabina, in the woods. And as they started out into the haunted attraction with mist machines creating a silver-gray haze over everything, she felt—scared.

Well, it was a scare house. And people loved being scared. When it was pretend, make-believe, of course.

But this . . .

The first room was an entry to a graveyard. Spiders and webs seemed to be attached to everything. Fabricated bats clung to the wall.

A tall, grated fence held a sign in twisted metal—"All ye who enter here, prepare for darkness. Swift and sure, for death awaits, and we know this fear."

The gates led into a burial ground supposedly filled with original settlers to the area. Old, crooked tombstones scattered about had epitaphs with sayings like, "Here lies Ted, his neighbor hit him on the head," and "What remains of Mistress Meg, a gator bit off most her leg."

She and the others laughed as they read them, but as they did so, she realized that Brent had been right about the possibility of *the* tree being right there, in the parking lot. This "house" had been created from an old maintenance building, a small bank building that had gone out of business, and canvas siding and trails that led through the areas where no buildings had stood—parking areas with little islands where the planners had managed to leave a few ancient oaks and others.

And sometimes, while the mist whirled around, especially in the old graveyard, they *were* outside. Usually, this would just be part of the mall's parking lot.

With the moon rising high overhead. And, of course, a soundtrack that featured werewolves howling seemed to wrap around them and make the mist real.

Memorials rose high. Funerary angels had been created with gold searing eyes and evil grins. Along with the mist . . .

It did seem like the woods from hell.

"Hey! This could be it!" Brent, ahead of them, suddenly stopped dead still. "Look, look, it's supposed to be the witch's tree, where she tortured people, where she was hanged!" he said.

“Oh, come on, this is all fabricated!” Holly said. “There, it’s like a tombstone . . . wait, like a tree grew right around a tombstone.”

Hank hunkered down by the stone and looked up at them. “This couldn’t have been fabricated! The tree has grown around the stone. This . . . wow. I’ve never seen this before or even heard about it, but . . . well, I’ve seen stuff like this in some of the old cemeteries up north. I guess people have been dying down here for a couple of hundred years, so . . . yuch!”

“Well, people did live and die out here a long, long time ago,” Brenda said matter-of-factly.

The she jumped and let out a scream and like a ricochet, Kelly heard herself scream and then Holly do the same. And even Brent let out a grunt of fear.

The witch had just flown above them.

Kelly winced. “Hey, now that is cool. They have a witch—right on a broomstick—flying overhead. The wires connect to both buildings!”

“Too creepy for me!” Holly cried suddenly. “Hey, something touched me, something . . . someone . . . hey, did one of you do that? Stop it!”

“I’m with her!” Brenda said, and she, too, hurried off screaming, “Hey, wait, wait for me, I don’t want to be back there and I don’t want to be alone!”

“Okay, well, guess I’ll follow those girls!” Hank said, rolling his eyes. “Hey, guys, don’t screw around too long. It is midnight. It’s closing and we’ve got school tomorrow and swore to our folks that we’d be home by twelve-thirty.”

“Hank!” Kelly said. “Wait, Hank!”

But Hank was gone, too. Kelly shrugged, looking from Brent to Jake.

“Okay, so I’m out of here, too.”

She turned to leave but felt a hand on her arm. Turning back, she saw that it was Brent. And he had a grip on her that was strong.

“Kelly! I’m here. I’m with you.” He smiled. “And I’m all that you will ever need. Ever.”

\*

“Hey, asshole, let her go!” Jake said. Kelly looked scared. Really scared.

And he . . .

The mist was growing darker, swirling more fiercely. An eerie chanting had begun in his head, and something hot seemed to burn in him.

“Let her go!” he insisted, striding to Brent, staring at him with fury.

“Hey, no, we need to head out of here, too,” Brent said. “It’s time . . . Kelly stays with me.”

The way he held her, so possessively! Jake felt red tear into his system. Brent. Brent had come to ruin everything that might have been simple and beautiful. He thought he was the Mighty Thor, Mr. Perfect, Mr. Beautiful.

*He was young. He had tremendous strength. But Jake would be damned if Brent was going to get the best of him.*

“Jake, what the hell? Let’s go.” He pulled Kelly fully into his arms. “Let’s go! Or, hell. You stay here. Kelly and I will go. I have her now. I have her.”

Jake wasn’t at all sure what seized him but he found himself flying at Brent. It was his rage, he thought, that gave him the power.

He slammed Brent back against the tree. And when Brent tried to take a swing at him, he found a long cord of ‘spider web’ that had been hung around the tree.

He tied Brent fast.

“Kelly!” Brent screamed. “Kelly, run!”

“Kelly!” Jake cried her name, spinning around.

And then, he knew. He knew because the pulse beating at Brent’s throat beckoned to him irresistibly.

## Haunted Hell/Heather Graham

He knew . . .

Because Brent would do. But he wanted Kelly.

He knew . . . because he was burning inside. Because he felt the transformation. Because he saw the look on Kelly's face.

The horror.

The foreboding, the heat . . .

Suddenly, all changed. And he was smiling.

He walked to the boy he'd tied to the tree, leaning against the tree with one hand, catching Kelly in the other with a death grip.

"You and your legends, Brent. You had it right from the beginning. Sabina was created by the demon Bal, not a witch, until witchcraft was learned, but a ghoul, cast from the flesh and blood of many. And now . . . hey!"

Kelly was beating against him, screaming at the top of her lungs.

He had to hurry.

"You're a monster!" she screeched. "A human monster!"

"Not human, but . . ." He paused and shrugged. "As we noted earlier, monsters don't know that they're monsters. They are just creatures longing to survive! And that is me. And through you, I will survive! Brent first—I'll get him out of the way. And Kelly . . . I have lived for you, I have dreamed of you, I have needed you, needed you to become one with me, truly one, for . . ."

He'd been looking at Kelly, holding her so tightly.

He'd thought he'd had Brent tied securely with the "spiderweb."

But Brent was suddenly bursting free, tearing himself from the tree, heedless that the "web" ripped his skin.

“Jake, stop! Stop now! There is humanity in you! Recognize that you are a human monster! See that you’re a monster. You love Kelly. Stop!”

He was burning. He was frozen. He hungered so desperately for blood. He had imagined this time and time again. Being alone with just Kelly. Holding her against the tree, feeling her warmth, and then . . .

Tasting her blood. Drinking deeply. Feeling her fall into his arms, becoming part of him . . .

He’d played the part. He’d gone to school. He played football. Different times had called for—different measures.

Brent had come, and the foreboding had slipped over him *because he had known*.

He had known that somehow, Brent would ruin it all.

“Kelly, run, Kelly run!” Brent cried again.

She couldn’t run. Jake still held her. And while Brent was free, taking advantage of the fact that Jake held Kelly and striking him over, and over, again.

“Stop!” Jake shrieked, and leaning forward, he bit into Brent’s neck.

The blood.

Ah, the blood.

The life-giving blood.

“Stop!” Kelly shrieked.

She didn’t rip free from him; she couldn’t. No one had that kind of strength.

But she reached down and then up and slammed the piece of mermaid tail she had ripped from her costume into his eye.

He shrieked, falling back, Brent’s blood dripping down his cheek.

He still held Kelly . . .

But he was half blinded and Brent managed to pick up a piece of the old gravestone.

Haunted Hell/Heather Graham

*His gravestone! It had been his when the bastard sheriff had managed to kill him when he'd been living as the beautiful witch Sabina!*

The gravestone slammed into his good eye.

But he still held Kelly.

Held her beauty. Held her youth. Held the years of life that she could give him, by giving up her own . . .

"Let her go! Jake, let her go! Let the goodness in humanity enter your soul!" Brent cried.

"Remember that you love her, know that you're a monster, a human monster, but that you have that goodness that can be found in the heart within you! Let her go, let her go, I beg of you!"

Kelly.

High school.

Playing football.

Falling in love.

It had all been wonderful. It had been . . .

"Jake!" Kelly whispered.

He was blinded, but he could see her. See the fall of her beautiful hair, the emerald sparkle in her eyes. He had seen how she had been kind to others who weren't so popular. He has seen her gentleness with little children, and always that smile, mischievous and gentle, and so filled with life . . .

Life.

Blood.

He needed blood for life, a life for more years . . .

"Jake!" she whispered his name again.

And he let her go.

\*

The days that followed were beyond bizarre. Kelly realized she should have thought it strange that she'd never met Jake's parents.

And the school was equally baffled. The registrar swore a man had come in to set Jake up in the school in early November of the previous year.

But as it turned out, the address he had given was a vacant lot.

The police had come quickly after Brent and Kelly made it out and tried, incoherently, to explain what had happened.

But what the police had found couldn't be explained. There was blood on the tree—Brent's blood. Jake's clothing had been shed and lay on the ground.

But there was no sign of Jake.

Kelly didn't argue the fact when her parents sent her to therapy. She was going to need therapy for a long, long time.

In the days to come, it was Brent who, with her, became a 'thing.'

And it was ten years later when they'd finished college, gotten married, taken on good jobs, and had children of their own that they decided they had to go back.

In broad daylight, of course. And in June—when there were no hellish horror houses setup.

On a bright, sunny day it was finally right, and they returned to the parking lot—and the tree--at the mall.

The tree had kept growing. Its branches were broad, green, and beautiful.

"Brent," she murmured.

"Kelly?"

"Look. Look at the trunk of the tree. There."

Brent did. And when he glanced at her, Kelly knew that she had seen what she had seen.

## Haunted Hell/Heather Graham

Jake's face. Jake's face, grown naturally into the tree, just as the tree had grown naturally around the tombstone.

They'd never know the truth.

Had he been a monster? A ghoul.

Or just a human monster who had moved on.

Life had taught them that one thing was certain.

The worst monsters came in human form.

Yet even in human monsters, humanity just might exist.

## Heather Graham

New York Times and USA Today bestselling author, Heather Graham, majored in theater arts at the University of South Florida. After a stint of several years in dinner theater, back-up vocals, and bartending, she stayed home after the birth of her third child and began to write. Her first book was with Dell, and since then, she has written over two hundred novels and novellas including category, suspense, historical romance, vampire fiction, time travel, occult, sci-fi, young adult, and Christmas family fare.

She is pleased to have been published in approximately twenty-five languages. She has written over 200 novels and has 60 million books in print. Heather has been honored with awards from booksellers and writers' organizations for excellence in her work, and she is the proud to be a recipient of the Silver Bullet from Thriller Writers and was awarded the prestigious Thriller Master Award in 2016. She is also a recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from RWA. Heather has had books selected for the Doubleday Book Club and the Literary Guild, and has been quoted, interviewed, or featured in such publications as The Nation, Redbook, Mystery Book Club, People and USA Today and appeared on many newscasts including Today, Entertainment Tonight and local television.

Heather loves travel and anything that has to do with the water and is a certified scuba diver. She also loves ballroom dancing. In 2006 she hosted the first Writers for New Orleans Workshop to benefit the stricken Gulf Region. She is also the founder of "The Slush Pile Players," presenting something that's "almost like entertainment" for various conferences and benefits. Married since high school graduation and the mother of five, her greatest love in life remains her family, but she also believes her career has been an incredible gift, and she is grateful every day to be doing something that she loves so very much for a living.

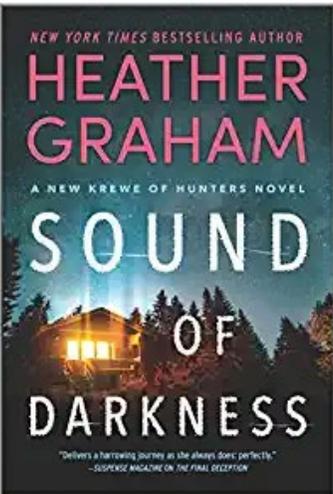
Recently Released Novels

They're not going down without a fight.



When FDLE special agent Amy Larson discovers a small horse figurine amid the bloody aftermath of a gang massacre in the Everglades, she recognizes it immediately. The toy is the calling card of the apocalypse cult that Amy and her partner, FBI special agent Hunter Forrest, have been investigating, and it can only mean one thing: this wasn't an isolated skirmish—it was the beginning of a war.

As tensions between rival gangs rise, so does the body count, and Amy and Hunter's investigation leads them to a violent, far-right extremist group who are in no hurry to quell the civil unrest. With a deadly puppet master working to silence their every lead, it's a race against the clock to figure out who's been pulling the strings and put a stop to the escalating cartel turf war before the Everglades run red.

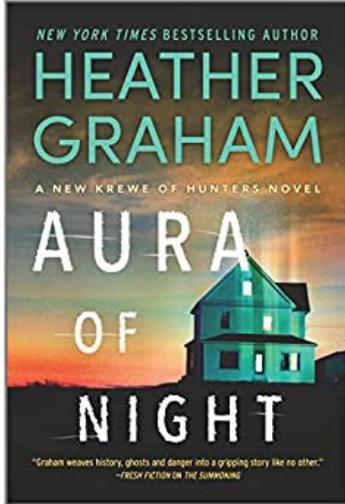


The cries of the dead are deafening

Women are being taken in Virginia, and FBI agent Mark Gallagher is determined to put a stop to it. Certain he's closing in on the killer known as The Embracer, Mark is less than thrilled when he's partnered with rookie agent Colleen Law, worried she's a liability when there's so much at stake.

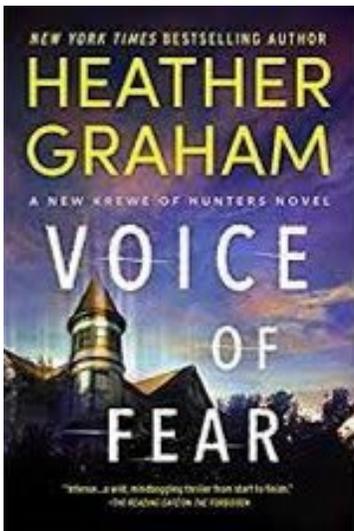
But like everyone in the Krewe of Hunters, Colleen has talents that extend beyond the usual investigative toolbox. She can hear the voices of the victims in her head, and they're telling her she and Mark are near to uncovering the truth.

When Mark's prime suspect takes a liking to Colleen, he's surprisingly protective of his new partner, even as he admits her connection to the victims is key. But tense interrogations turn dangerously personal when someone close to Colleen goes missing, luring the agents deep into the shadows of wooded rural Virginia, where nobody can hear them scream.



All book editor Megan Law wants is to bury the memory of her brutal her hellish experience into the next bestseller, Megan agrees only because it might help keep other women safe. Then a mysterious, gruesome package arrives in the mail—a reminder that the nightmare isn't over just yet.

FBI investigator Ragnar Johnson is running out of time. He knows in his gut there's more to the recent Embracer killings, and he needs Megan's help. Even with their rocky past behind them, working together now isn't going to be easy. But when things take a deadly turn, Megan and Ragnar discover a deep connection that they'll have to use, because something is trying to tear them apart...forever.



A killer is looking to silence them, once and for all.

FBI agent Jordan Wallace is close to cracking the human trafficking case she's been working, when she does the one thing she should never do: let her guard down. The botched undercover mission is semisalvaged by the last-minute appearance of criminal psychologist Patrick Law, but Jordan can't imagine making a worse first impression. Especially when she's partnered with Patrick moving forward.

Patrick's innate ability to get inside a criminal's head is an asset for the Krewe of Hunters. But Jordan wishes she could protect her own thoughts from her new partner. Patrick assures her that both she and her thoughts are safe with him, but Jordan's less sure about her heart. Letting someone have her back has never been her strong suit, but with a dangerous killer still at large, trusting in Patrick might be the only thing keeping them alive.

Krewe of Hunters in order

- Book 1: Phantom Evil
- Book 2: Heart of Evil
- Book 3: Sacred Evil
- Book 4: The Evil Inside
- Book 5: The Unseen
- Book 6: The Unholy
- Book 7: The Unspoken
- Book 8: The Uninvited
- Book 9: THE NIGHT IS WATCHING
- Book 10: The Night Is Alive
- Book 11: THE NIGHT IS FOREVER
- Book 12: The Cursed
- Book 13: The Hexed
- Book 14: The Betrayed
- Book 15: The Silenced
- Book 16: The Forgotten
- Book 17: The Hidden
- Book 18: Haunted Destiny
- Book 19: Deadly Fate
- Book 20: Darkest Journey
- Book 21: Dying Breath
- Book 22: Dark Rites
- Book 23: Wicked Deeds
- Book 24: Fade to Black
- Book 25: Pale as Death
- Book 26: Echoes of Evil
- Book 27: The Summoning
- Book 28: The Seekers
- Book 29: The Stalking
- Book 30: Seeing Darkness
- Book 31: Deadly Touch
- Book 32: Dreaming Death
- Book 33: The Unforgiven
- Book 34: The Forbidden
- Book 35: The Unknown
- Book 36: Sound of Darkness
- Book 37: Aura of Night
- Book 38: Voice of Fear