



# HADES

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FEIWEL AND FRIENDS  
NEW YORK

FOR EVERYONE WHO'S BEEN TO HELL  
AND BACK



A FEIWEL AND FRIENDS BOOK  
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*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer,  
Son of the morning!*

—Isaiah 14:12–15



*The Devil went down to Georgia, he was  
lookin' for a soul to steal.  
He was in a bind, 'cos he was way behind;  
he was willin' to make a deal.*

—Charlie Daniels,  
“Devil Went Down to Georgia”

## *Welcome to My World*



I looked around, disoriented, and shivered in my flimsy satin shift. I remembered nothing about how I'd come to be here. My hair was damp with sweat and the fluffy costume wings I'd been wearing were gone. I figured they must have come loose and been wrenched off during the turbulent ride.

There wasn't anything about this place that was even vaguely familiar. I was standing alone in a dark and cobbled laneway. Fog swirled around my feet and the air was pungent with a strange odor. It smelled like decay as if the very air itself were dead. It looked like the derelict part of some urban landscape because I could see the smoky outline of skyscrapers and spires in the distance. But they didn't look real—more like buildings in a faded old photograph—blurry and lacking in detail. Where I stood there were only brick walls covered in crude graffiti. The mortar had fallen out in places, leaving openings that someone had stuffed with newspaper. I heard (or imagined I heard) the scuttling of rats coming from behind them. Overloaded Dumpsters were scattered around and the walls were windowless apart from a couple that had been boarded up. When I looked up, I found that there was no sky,

only a strange expanse of darkness, dim and watery in some places and thick as tar in others. This darkness breathed like a living thing and was much more than the mere absence of light.

An old-fashioned lamppost shedding a milky light allowed me to identify a black motorcycle propped just a few meters away. Its rider was nowhere in sight. Seeing the bike made my mind reel and forced me back to my current predicament. I fought to make sense of what had just happened but memory failed me. Random images flashed through my mind in no apparent sequence. I remembered a rambling house off a highway, a grinning jack-o'-lantern, and the laughter and banter of teenagers. Then the harsh sound of an engine being revved and someone calling my name. But these images were like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that I'd only just begun to assemble. It was as though my mind were denying me access to the memories for fear I wouldn't be able to deal with them. It was dishing them out in fragments that made little to no sense. Suddenly one vivid image crashed through the barrier and the recollection caused me to gasp aloud. I was back aboveground, immobilized by fear, as a motorbike driven by a raven-haired boy recklessly pitched itself through a slash in the highway. How was that even possible?

I had the feeling I'd been standing in the deserted alley for a while and yet had no sense of how much time had passed. My thoughts felt thick and sluggish, and trying to navigate my way through them was arduous. I massaged my throbbing temples and groaned. Whatever happened had also taken its toll physically and my limbs felt shaky as if I'd just run a marathon.

“It takes a day or two to adjust,” said a honey-smooth voice. Jake Thorn materialized out of the shadows to stand by my side. He spoke to me with such lilting familiarity, as if he and I had known each other long enough to dispense with formalities. His sudden appearance put my senses on high alert. “Until then you may experience some disorientation or a dry throat,” he added. His nonchalant tone was astounding. Despite my confusion I felt like screaming at him, and if my throat hadn’t felt as parched as a desert, I would have.

“What have you done?” I croaked instead. “Where am I?”

“There’s no need for alarm,” he replied. I wondered if he might be trying to reassure me, but he wasn’t able to pull it off and only ended up sounding condescending. I looked at him not even trying to conceal my skepticism. “Relax, Beth, you’re in no danger.”

“What am I doing here, Jake?” It was more a demand than a question.

“Isn’t that rather obvious? You’re here as my guest, Beth, and I’ve taken care of everything to ensure your stay is a pleasant one.” There was such an uncharacteristically expectant look on his face that for a moment I didn’t know how to reply. I looked at him wide-eyed.

“Don’t worry, Beth, this place can be a lot of fun when you’re with the right people.”

Almost to illustrate his point the ground beneath us began to vibrate. A song I recalled from last summer blared so loudly it ricocheted off the walls. It appeared to be coming from behind solid steel doors at the far end of the lane. They looked how you might imagine the entrance to a maximum-security

prison. Only it wasn't a prison but rather a venue of some sort, indicated by a neon sign flashing above the doors. PRIDE. I saw the tail end of the letter *P* trail off across the roofline in what was meant to represent peacock plumes.

"Pride is one of our most popular clubs," Jake explained. "And it's the only way in. Shall we?" He indicated via a courtly flourish that I should walk ahead of him, but my legs seemed rooted to the spot and refused to cooperate. Jake was forced to take my arm and escort me. The fog cleared to reveal a young man and woman standing outside the doors. The woman was insect thin, pale, and dressed in nothing but sequined black shorts, a leather bra, and the highest platform shoes I'd ever seen. Fine silver chains hung via silver hooks from her bra down to her navel, creating a mesh curtain in front of her torso. Her platinum blond hair was cropped short, and a cigarette hung from black painted lips. I was surprised to see the young man was even more heavily made up than his female counterpart. His eyes were boldly outlined and there was black polish on his nails. He wore a leather vest over a bare chest and checkered pants that tapered at his ankles. Piercings were visible on every body part exposed. The woman traced the outline of her lips suggestively with the tip of her tongue on which I could see a silver stud. Her eyes had a hungry look as they traveled over my body.

"Well, well," she purred as we approached the entrance. "Look what the cat dragged in. It's a glow-in-the-dark doll."

"Good evening, Larissa . . . Elliott." Jake's greeting was acknowledged by a silent and simultaneous inclination of heads.

Elliott smirked and cast an approving glance in Jake's direction. "Seems someone took something that didn't belong to them."

Jake's face broke into a gloating smile. "Oh, I think she belongs to me."

"Well, she certainly does now." Larissa's laugh was low and guttural. She'd outlined her eyes so the liner curved upward, giving her a feline look.

The way they talked about me as if I weren't there was unsettling. It made me feel like some kind of trophy. If I had been less disoriented, I might have expressed my disapproval. Instead, I asked the only question that sprang to mind and my voice came out sounding childish and waif-like.

"Who are you?"

Elliott clicked his tongue disapprovingly. "She obviously don't get out much." That made me angry.

"It's really none of your business!" I retorted, causing the pair to break into peals of laughter.

"She's entertaining, as well," commented Larissa. They cocked their heads and continued to study me with an unsettling intensity. "What else can she do?"

"Oh, just the usual," I snapped back angrily. "Backflips, knife throwing, that sort of thing."

Jake sighed with sudden boredom. "Can we move this along, please?"

Larissa shrugged obligingly and bent down to look me directly in the eye. "You wanna know who we are, doll face?" she asked. "We're the door bitches."

"Excuse me?" I was taken aback.

“We man the entrance. Nobody gets in or out without our say-so.”

“But seeing as you’re a VIP,” Elliott jibed, “you can go right on in or should I say *down*?” The pair shared a conspiratorial chuckle.

“And what if I don’t want to?” I said defiantly.

Elliott raised a quizzical eyebrow and waved his hand vaguely behind me. “Honey, can you see any place else to go?”

I had to admit he was right. Surrounding the alleyway was nothing but an oppressive swirling blackness, the kind that looked capable of devouring you. There was only one path with one door at the end of it. Only one direction any of us could take. As much as the idea of going through those doors made me feel queasy, I knew it couldn’t be as dangerous as wandering through the blackness alone. I didn’t know who or what was out there. I still didn’t even know where I was. I felt Jake’s warm breath behind my ear.

“You’ll be fine,” he murmured. “I’ll look after you.” It was strange how they all waited to see what my decision would be. As if I actually had a choice.

I squared my shoulders and stepped forward with bravado I didn’t feel.

Larissa bared her teeth in a smile before grabbing a tight hold of my wrist and turning it upward. Her grip was cold and claw-like, but I tried not to flinch. She held my wrist faceup as Elliott pressed something down on the inside. I braced myself to feel pain, but when I looked, he’d only left an inky

imprint behind. It was a stamp of admittance in the form of a smiley face.

Larissa pressed a buzzer and the heavy doors slid open. Jake ushered me into a vast carpeted foyer where flights of narrow corkscrew steps veered like a labyrinth in several directions. There was no time for closer inspection as he steered me swiftly toward the central steps. The pumping music grew louder once we started our descent underground. The sound was so overpowering that I looked hesitantly back toward the open door. Larissa appeared to read my mind.

“Too late to change your mind, sweetheart,” she said. “Welcome to our world.”

Then she slid the heavy doors shut behind us.

I followed Jake down the narrow stairwell until it led to an open dance floor, where a throng of bodies was pressed together, fists pumping the air and heads thrashing to the beat. The dance floor was a checkerboard of colored lights flashing on and off. I was surprised to see people of all ages on it. The sinewy, leather-clad limbs of the elderly contrasted sharply with the firm, exposed flesh of youth. I was startled to see a few children there too. They had the designated task of clearing the tables and refilling drinks. The one thing that united them all—young and old alike—was the vacant expression they shared. It was as if they were only physically present and some vital part of them had been erased. They were like sleepwalkers, consumed by mechanical movements that were only interrupted long enough to down another shot of liquor.

Occasionally under the masklike faces I detected a darting eye or nervous flicker, as if something dire were coming. The track playing was a computerized dance number made up of a single line that was repeated continually: "I'm in Miami, bitch." Light flashed across the polished concrete floor, casting shadows across the bodies moving in sync with the rhythmic beat. The mingled scent of cigarettes, spirits, and perfume was overwhelming.

I'd never stepped inside a club before so I had no point of comparison, but it looked surreal to me. The ceiling was illuminated by a myriad of tiny lights and the walls were lined with red velvet so they looked like upright couches. Scattered around the perimeters of the room were white cubes that served as tables, as well as low velvet couches that looked battered and well used. The tables had glowing, cone-shaped lamps on them and the bar that wound around one side of the club had been crafted to simulate the appearance of molten lava. Around the bar loitered black-suited security guards stonily nursing their drinks. A striking-looking woman behind the bar juggled shot glasses and threw bottles with the dexterity of a circus performer. Her woolly ringlets, flecked with gold, surrounded her face like a mane and she wore a figure-hugging red bandage dress with brass armbands. An asp tattoo wound its way up the burnished dark skin of her throat. She watched us distractedly and didn't avert her gaze even when someone ordered a drink.

As Jake and I inched our way through the press of bodies, the crowd parted to make way for us. They never stopped

dancing, but their eyes followed our every move. When someone reached out a tentative hand to touch me, Jake made a low, hissing sound and threw a lethal look. The onlooker's curiosity shriveled instantly. Jake acknowledged the barmaid with a formal nod that she doubtfully returned.

"What can I get you to drink?" he asked. He had to shout over the music to be heard.

"I don't want a drink. I just want to know where I am."

"You're not in Kansas anymore." Jake chuckled at his own joke. I had a sudden urge to make him listen—to see how frightened I was.

"Jake," I insisted, grabbing his arm. "I don't like it here. I want to leave. Please take me home." Jake looked so taken aback by my touch he didn't answer right away.

"You must be very tired," he said finally. "How insensitive of me not to notice. Of course I'll take you home." He signaled to two bearlike men who were standing at the bar in black suits and sunglasses, which looked absurd given we were in a dimly lit club underground.

"This young lady is my guest. Take her to Hotel Ambrosia," Jake instructed. "Make sure she's safely delivered to the executive wing on the top floor. They're expecting her."

"Wait, where are you going?" I called out.

Jake directed his smoldering gaze at me and smirked, seeming to enjoy my dependence on him.

"I have some business to attend to," he said. "But don't worry, they'll take care you." He glanced at the bodyguards. "Their lives depend on it."

The guards' vacant expressions didn't alter, but they nodded almost imperceptibly. Then I found myself enveloped by rock-hard muscle as they shepherded me out of the club, roughly shoving aside dancers that got in our way.

Back in the underground lobby I peered past my escorts to see that Pride was only one of several clubs that wove their way underground like catacombs. From the murky depths of one stairwell I could hear muffled moans and soon two men in suits emerged dragging a disheveled-looking girl with a tear-stained face. She wore a lacy corset and a denim skirt that barely covered the tops of her thighs. Her struggle to free herself from their vise-like grip was futile. When her eyes met mine, I saw terror in her face. Instinctively I took a step forward, but my move was intercepted by one of the guards.

I brushed them off and tried to sound casual, doing my best rendition of the way the girls at school spoke. "What's up with her?" I figured the more alarmed I appeared, the less information I'd be given.

"By the look of it she just ran out of luck," replied one guard while the other punched numbers into his cell phone and muttered our location to the person on the receiving end.

"Luck?" I parroted.

"In the gaming room?" he replied as if the answer to my question was patently obvious.

"Where are they taking her?" This time he merely shook his head in disbelief at my ignorance and walked me toward a long car with tinted windows that had pulled up outside the club. It was strange to see a car indoors, but the underground tunnels, I realized, were wide enough to fit two cars

side by side and were meant to serve as roads. The rear door was opened for me and the guards slid in on either side so I was ensconced between their bulky forms. The smell of cigar smoke clung to them.

We drove for a while through the winding tunnel that seemed to spiral into nowhere. Wandering partygoers shuffled out of the way when they saw us coming. Once we moved away from the club district I noticed that these people didn't seem to be celebrating. They drifted aimlessly around with staring eyes and vacant faces like the living dead. Looking at them closer, I saw their skin had a grayish tinge to it.

Finally at the end of a steep tunnel we came to a towering building that had perhaps been white, but had now faded to the color of yellowed parchment. It must have been at least twenty stories high and classical in style with plaster scrolls above the windows.

Revolving doors led us into a vast and opulent lobby. The hotel was designed so the rooms on every floor overlooked the lobby, giving the effect of looking up into a maze. The showpiece of the lobby was a curtain of tiny fairy lights. It hung from ceiling to floor illuminating a central marble fountain in which stone nymphs frolicked. Adjacent to the reception desk rose an ornate glass elevator in the shape of a giant capsule. Here the hotel staff were dressed in crisp uniforms and the mood was business-like compared to the seediness of the clubs. When I walked in, they all froze for a moment and fixed me with the eyes of vultures before resuming their duties. Despite their seemingly ordinary appearances, I could see something untamed in their gazes, something that made

me squirm inside. I was grateful to be flanked by the two burly security guards, as I would not have liked to be left alone with them.

“Welcome to the Ambrosia,” said the woman behind the reception desk in a light and airy voice. With her tailored suit and blond hair wound in a smooth bun, she was the picture of efficiency. Except for her unblinking, shark-eyed gaze. “We’ve been expecting you. Your rooms are ready.” Her cheerfulness belied the sharp look in her eyes. Her long manicured nails made a soft, clacking sound as they moved fleetingly over the keyboard. “The penthouse has been reserved for you.”

“Thank you,” I said. “It’s a beautiful hotel, but would you mind telling me where I am?”

The woman stopped short, dropping her professional demeanor for a moment.

“He hasn’t told her?” She looked incredulously at my escorts, who exchanged looks as if to say *Don’t ask us*. I was having trouble containing the feeling of dread growing in the pit of my stomach. It was spreading upward like a fungus. “Well, my dear”—the receptionist’s eyes glinted darkly—“you’re in Hades. Make yourself at home.” She slid a key card in a plastic pouch across the polished counter.

“Excuse me?” I said. “By Hades you don’t mean . . . you can’t mean . . .” I faltered. Of course I knew instantly what she meant. I knew from my studies that the literal translation of the place meant “the unseen.” But my mind refused to acknowledge it as true. Until I heard it spoken aloud I didn’t have to believe it.

“Otherwise known as Hell,” the receptionist said breezily. “But don’t let Mr. Thorn catch you calling it that. He prefers the more classical name. And you know how pedantic demon princes can be.”

I only caught part of what she said because I’d stopped listening. My knees began to tremble. The last thing I saw were the bodyguards lunging forward as the black marble floor came up to meet my face.