

Hell Spring

Isaac Thorne

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Hell Spring is a surrealistic horror novel in which traumas wreak havoc on people's minds.

In Isaac Thorne's horror novel *Hell Spring*, people are trapped overnight in a general store.

On a quiet night in 1955, a sudden, torrential rainstorm washes out a small town's bridge and floods its streets. In the aftermath, eight people are stranded in the general store. Each of them harbors a shameful secret: two teenagers have hidden semipornographic images; the local pastor skims off the top of his congregation's meager tithing; and a man keeps the love he has for another person hidden deep within himself. Then, a naked woman who bears a remarkable resemblance to Marilyn Monroe washes up outside the store and is rushed inside.

Indeed, the new interloper begins to refer to herself as Marilyn after she reads the mind of a lust-filled man. In fact, she is an entity from a different, hellish reality; she feeds on shame and guilt. Within the store, she has a singular purpose: to gorge herself on others' ill feelings. Time seems to stop as the eight people she's with attempt to survive the night and the floodwaters continue to rise.

Though the book includes gruesome depictions of Marilyn's realm and of torture on Earth, these are not the primary sources of the story's horror. Marilyn feeds on shame and eschews physical interactions, often pulling the eight people around her into spirals of self-doubt and self-inflicted mental trauma. The small town and the store are compelling, claustrophobic backdrops to this drama, and the book's tension mounts at an exponential rate. Marilyn bewitches one of the men; she attempts to nudge the others into the depths of their shameful feelings. Still, the stakes are low: Marilyn harbors no intentions beyond the realm of the store; she thinks only in terms of this one meal, after which she will be dragged back to the realm that she calls home.

Faith, shame, sexuality, and morality are covered in turn as Marilyn feasts on the eight. Intense descriptors flood the tale, as do poetic and minute accounts of people's movements and actions, impeding the story's progression. There are instances of repetition in such passages as well. Still, the book's resolution contains some rewarding surprises.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (September 1, 2022)

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