

## 1066

Every so often, in the barren wasteland of nothing but rock and stone, they found a bush. Withered, defiant against its surroundings, and on fire. Burning bushes. Another thing to ask about. And of course the burning sky, clouds of literal fire, that lit up the dark mountains. No sun, no moon, just fire.

A shape around a large rock froze him still, and Jeskura chuckled before giving him a shove. It wasn't a demon, just a statue of one. A big one, something male, not wearing armor. It didn't have any spikes on its body unlike the two women with him. No horns or tail or wings either, or genitalia for that matter; might not have even been male, really. Nine feet tall, extremely muscular, skull-like demon face, big claws. He was standing tall and proud, arms up and out, and each of them had a skull in hand, human skulls. Real skulls. Did someone put them there, in the statue's hands?

The deeper the two demons took him into the mountains, and eventually up them along another harsh, winding path, the more things he found. Every so often they found vines along the ground or walls of rock, covered in red thorns that might as well have been spikes, and his curiosity quickly earned him a bleeding finger.

He had so many questions, and he wanted to ask them, but he couldn't stop staring at things. The breaking point was when they came across a metal pillar in the ground, made of a dark stone bordering on pure metal, like the statue, and it was topped with a burning bush. And the burning bush was burning inside a giant black metal demon skull, on top of the ten-foot pillar.

"The bush, is on fire," he said, gesturing to the pillar, "and it doesn't burn away. And it's a bush, growing out of metal, and--"

Daoka let out a clicking chuckle, and flicked him in the shoulder before she jumped ahead, scaling the upward path way too easily.

"Hell grew it," Jeskura said.[x@W.\(n\)OveIl\(w\)d\(r\)m\).Com](#)

"Grew it?"

"She did."

"She?" Right, the angel had described Heaven and Hell with 'she'. Maybe there was something to that?

With another hearty laugh, the demon slipped her arm around his shoulders again, and walked beside him. She didn't mind physical contact in the slightest, which seemed kind of weird to him, considering he was basically just a meal to her, or a tool to be sacrificed to this Diogo demon.

"Hell grows a lot of things. You can tell a lot by what she's growing."

"Oh." Hell was alive?

"So, tell me pipsqueak, you really aren't some vile shitlord asshole?"

"What?"

The satyr ahead of them clicked enthusiastically.

"Dao, he wouldn't be here if he wasn't a sack of shit. That's kind of the point of Hell."

She clicked some more.

Jeskura rolled her eyes, but shrugged and looked back down at David.

"I don't believe you're innocent, but Dao does. You really weren't a shitty person? A scumbag?"

"I... don't think so? I mean, I did spy on some naked people for a while there, when I was a ghost, but--"

Jeskura burst into laughter, and Dao's dolphin clicks rapid fired as she sat down. It was a strangely soothing sound, a dolphin laugh.

"That is fucking adorable," the gargyle said. "That the worst thing you did?"

"I... think so? That isn't enough?"

"Fuck no. Being a pervert and spying on people isn't enough to get you sent to Hell. I mean, unless you were dripping with hate and loathing when you did it?"

"I don't think I was."

"Then this is fucking weird, because I've killed hundreds of souls, fresh meat. Me, and every other demon who's been around for a while, and every so often we ask questions to learn about who we're killing. Curiosity, right? And every time it's the same shit." She poked him in his chest with her other hand, almost hard enough to draw blood. "Every human who comes down here is a giant shit stain. A pile of maggots. The fucking worst. Hateful fucking rats, you know? They either did the worst shit, or they planned on it, and you can't even talk to them without feeling the resentment and hate they had for people on the surface."

"You though, I don't get that at all. You're just a... fucking pussy nerd. No wonder you're not marked."

He frowned up at the gargyle, which of course made her laugh more.[WVW.NOvelw.Rm.com](#)

"I'm..." His frown broke, and he slowly looked down. "Maybe it was a mistake? Maybe... someone will come rescue me? Maybe Mia, too?"

"Ha, maybe? The fuck do I know? All I know is, you're unmarked, which means Zel will want you, which means Diogo will want to give you to her. Which will be our way in." Nodding, she gave him a gentle push forward. "Not my problem."

The satyr clicked, and it sounded harsher and louder than her other clicks.

"No angel is going to trade with us, Dao," Jeskura said. "Besides, the fuck would they trade with?"

Daoka sighed but nodded, and hopped ahead some more.

"Demons talk to angels?" he asked.

"Not usually, but angels have been seen a lot lately. They started showing up more a few years ago, and now every demon in this whole corner of Hell has seen at least one angel at some point, flying overhead." She tapped one of her horns as she looked up. "Angels start showing up, then the first unmarked I've ever heard of shows up? Coincidence?"

Daoka chirped.

"Exactly."

"How can you understand her?" he asked.[WVW.NoVelwOrM.com](#)

"Demons can understand Hellian."

"Hellian? I... what?"

"Ha. Most humans just call it Clicker. Not Estian, like we're speaking.[@wW.NoVefwOrM.com](#)

"We're... speaking English?"

She rolled her eyes, and gave him a gentle shove again. "We're speaking Estian, fresh meat. You--" He fell, right onto his knees and palms, and bit down the urge to groan. She raised a brow as she looked down at his feet, before sighing and shaking her head. "Fresh meat is always so soft. Damn it, I hadn't planned on this."

He gulped down the urge to yell as he rolled over and looked down at his feet. They were bleeding, pretty badly, and not because he'd stepped on anything sharp. Hiking for a few hours on bare feet, when he'd been wearing socks and sneakers since he could remember, meant baby soft feet getting torn up by the ground. He almost hadn't noticed.

"Sorry..."

Jeskura stared at him like he'd just exploded randomly.

"Seriously? Sorry? Fuck, what the..." Jeskura sighed and shrugged, but before she could say more, someone scooped David up.

Daoka. He froze as he stared up at her, and she smiled down at him; a strangely nice, gentle smile, even without eyes. The small mouth and sharp jawline gave her an almost sinister look, let alone the four huge black horns and bone-plate-visor thing where eyes should have been. But the smile was anything but sinister. It was kind.

"Dao! Don't get attached."

Daoka chirped at Jeskura, loudly at that, and hugged David to her armored chest tightly as she hopped up along the path.

"Dao, get back here! He's not a pet! We're taking him to Diogo, remember? It was your idea!"

Dao clicked louder, but didn't stop. David held on, thankful for any opportunity to get off his feet. Now that he was off them and someone was carrying him, the pain he'd been ignoring flooded him again, and he clenched his teeth and forced down the groans. Everything ached. His feet burned. His skin burned, and the blemishes he was covered in apparently weren't all dirt, but some burn marks too. His shoulder felt awful.

But he was being carried by a badass pretty satyr, so he had that going for him.

The gargyle flapped her bat wings and caught up to them with a big leap as they continued up a winding path, up the mountainside.

"Yes, I know he's unmarked. Yes I know he's--"