

The Demon and the Human

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For some Hell is a place where the sins of life manifest in the form of oily tendrils that lock around the once-living to choke out any remaining hope. Demons dominate the role of torturer. Torture. Hell is torture.



The demon Illspur awakes at 8 in the morning to the sound of a severed head screaming rhythmically on his bedside table. Illspur's huge hand lugs over and smashes the head to a crunchy red mush of bone and brain--as is routine, the head will be fully regenerated and ready to scream again by the next morning-- Illspur sits on the edge of his bed contemplating his choices for about ten minutes. Nine months ago he quit his job as a torturer of the damned souls of Hell to start working on Earth for a human job where he 'sells large machines to people who already have large machines but maybe need more large machines'... or at least, that's how he explains it to his roommate.

He stares at his carpet. Stained. Dirty. Ill tempt. He will need to clean it before Saturday. Illspur picks up a dress shirt from the floor and puts it on, the human world does not care for the fashion trends of Hell so he dresses the part. He steps into his bathroom and avoids himself in the mirror. His face is round. His mouth long. His horns are that

of a ram with two deer ears on top his head in between the horns. Illspur puts on a smile and points two figure guns in the mirror as he tries to catch his reflection off guard. "Heyy Katie!" Illspur's voice is like a handsaw grinding and gnawing at your ears as he rehearses today's interaction with the pretty human from his office. He has a date with her on Saturday. *Talk human talk human* "This weather is crazy!" *that's good.* "I mean, does it want to be summer or winter? Amiright?" *yeah, keep it vague... now hit her with it!* "You look bangin' today!" *don't you dare say that.* Illspur's confidence blurs as he looks at himself in the mirror. He is not human and he never will be. He puts his N95 on in a futile attempt to cover as much of his face as possible. Illspur hates his face, and masks are a serendipitous way to hide it. He the rubber straps behind his horns, and begins to head out. *Human masks are far smaller than I am used to.*



The finely dressed demon steps out of his small two-bedroom house in Hell. A deep breath fills his insides. Hell reeks of wet playdough and the ram-parts of sprinkles. The skies are dark and there is a maroon mist hanging in the air that reaches into your nostrils in vain attempts to invert them. Illspur walks a few steps from his home and begins

his commute to the surface world. *Be cool.*

Illspur's work commute consists of three parts;

1. Standing in his front yard in hell.
2. A deafening boom.
3. Appearing in the parking lot of the office building he works at.

Illspur walks into the office to see the hustle of the workplace. He towers over his earthly coworkers. Illspur is a large creature of ten feet in height and five feet in width. He is a monster and it shows. Doors bend and creak as he walks through them. *Energize yourself, Illspur! C'mon c'mon. She won't like you if you don't like yourself.* Illspur sits down at his desk in his comically too-small for him roly chair and begins to type out a sales report. The demon has the best sales out of anyone in the company and his boss wants him to head a conference in two weeks to discuss his "tactics"... his tactics are... well... he makes a call, "Hello, is this Mr. Connors of Soil Construction?... excellent! YOU WANT TO BUY LARGE MACHINES FROM THE GEOGRINDER CORPORATION..." the pits that are Illspur's eyes fill with flame as he awaits a reply, "very good, and what would you like to put in that order?--" as he closes the deal with Soil Construction, Katie McMan fumbles into the office-- late and chaotic. Katie lays her bag on the ground and stamps herself at the desk next to Illspur in a huff. She looks up at Illspur and smiles gently at him, "hey there fella." *oh shit she's pretty.*



"Weather!" Illspur states very matter of factly-- like a rock would.

Katie waits a moment trying to process the statement, "You got that right!" she agrees.

"Is it summer? Or winter?" *you're blowing it.*

"It's November. 'You doing okay Illspur?"

"I just closed another sale."

"Ooh right. Jordan wants you to give a big talk in a few weeks about your..." Katie puts up figure quotes "...sales tactics. Are you nervous?"



"I have many things that make me nervous. Telling a group of my superiors that I sell large machines very well because of my innate temptation is well up on the list.-- yes I am nervous."



Illspur's coworkers have long since gotten over the fact that they work alongside a Hellspawn and their feelings have now switched over to the mundane frustrations one would have with every other coworker. Illspur engages in pointless pleasantries. Illspur's lunch smells bad. Illspur wants to start a company bowling league.



Illspur and Katie get back to work not speaking to one another for an hour and a half until Katie looks over at him. Illspur's eyes are large holes in his face that if one were to reach their hand into, they would not feel any boundaries, and once their hand was taken it would be covered in a thick layer of black ash. It is an apt statement to say one could literally get lost in Illspur's eyes, but, Katie McMan seems to get lost in them in a much more figurative and romantic sense. "So... Are you excited for Saturday?" Katie asks, lifting her eyebrows and smiling. Illspur's mind goes haywire, *play it cool. Be cool. Talk human. Don't seem overly excited. Be cool. Not too cool. Act like you care. You do care.* "Yes." Illspur says nonchalantly, Katie does a full stop on her paperwork and turns toward Illspur, "Oh yeah? What's on the itinerary?"

THE DIAMOND LINE

“I was thinking we could go to Hell and get dinner.”

“Hell? Like Hell Hell?”

“Yes, I live there. I am a demon... didn't you know that?”

“Is it safe?”

Illspur pauses a moment and thinks about how to respond, “You live in Chicago.”

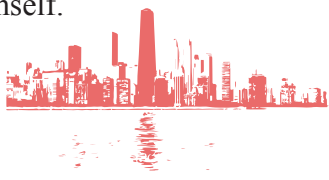
“Yeah, but you're talking about actual, capital H, Hell.” Katie's tone is more joking and concerned.

“I will ensure your safety. I just figured Hell would be easier as there are more demons that look like humans than there are humans that look like demons.”

“You don't need to explain yourself. As long as it's safe, I would love to go to Hell with you.”



On Saturday Illspur booms onto the sidewalk in front of Katie's apartment building at 7:55 pm and waits outside for 15 mins. A child begins to cry nearby and Illspur looks over to see a mother consoling her baby as they walk into the building. The mother glares at Illspur. *You make children cry*, he thinks to himself.



Katie walks out of the apartment 15 minutes late, in a blue flannel and jeans under a large navy winter coat. “Hey, you ready to go?” she asks.

“...Yes, I am.” Illspur is not very good at hiding his interior monologue, “you look ba--” *don't* “beautiful... you look beautiful.”

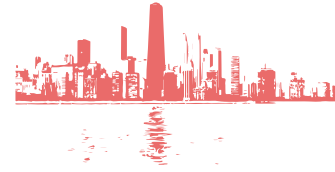
Katie McMan smiles, “Thank you. You look very nice too.” Illspur looms in front of her with no clear motive or direction. Katie looks around the area and asks, “so how do we get to Hell?” she adds a little figure wiggle on the word “Hell” to lighten the reality for herself.

Illspur holds out his hand and Katie places hers in it. In an instant, there is a loud BOOM, and the chilly city of Chicago is replaced by the burning stone floors of Hell just outside of Illspur's home. Illspur moves his mouth but all Katie can hear is a ringing noise in her ears. After Illspur gets out a few more sentences with no reply from his date, he understands what has happened and places his hands in ornate positions on Katie's head and speaks one word with power and intent, and suddenly Katie's hearing returns to her. Katie looks around at the new landscape she is in. There are houses lining a street. There is grass in yards-- albeit red grass. Each house with its own shrubbery and flavor. it's a suburb she thinks to herself, it's really hot here. Katie takes off her coat and looks around more “Illspur...” Katie starts, “... this is just like Stranger Things.” Illspur stares concernedly at Katie Mcman, “I don't think that's right,” he replies.

Illspur tenses his body and his earthly button-down and dress pants erupt in embers and gives way to more traditional hellish attire. From the waist down the demon is dawned in the hide of a beast that a young man dreamed of once during a night terror. His torso is covered by nothing, however, when Katie stares for too long at it she sees constantly morphing images over top of his skin. The images are strange dreams. Warped whispers. Distorted. Unnatural pictures. Like the art of Dave Mckean.

“Forgive me, I must go into my house to retrieve my mask--my demon mask, I mean...Covid isn't in Hell yet-- You are welcome to come inside so that you aren't standing out here alone.” *What are you doing?! Inviting her into your house? You*

should have brought the mask with you. Illspur begins to walk into his home. Katie follows.



Katie is blown away by how almost normal the house is. The walls a ceiling are all slightly off-kilter and the decor is not gothic or macabre-- it is downright gory. A painting of a woman whose mouth and hands are covered in blood hangs by the front door, and across from that a series of pictures of a human leviathan desolating a town are framed on the wall sequentially, like a morbid slide show. At the end of the leviathan pictures, there is a picture of a human in a beautiful red dress. A familiar human... "Who is this a picture of?" Katie asks.

"Oh, that? That's a pi--" Illspur is cut off by a new voice calling out, "IS SHE HERE?!" the voice is of Illspur's roommate, Trose, who busts out from his bedroom down the hall. Trose is a gaunt fish of a man. "I didn't think you would get her back here so soon, you dog you!" Trose slaps Illspur's belly with the back of his hand lightly. Illspur, who at this moment wants to drop dead, says, "it's nothing like that. We are just here to get my mask." *I am exploding you with my mind I am exploding you with my mind I am exploding you with my mind I am exploding you with my mind.*

"Oh sure..." Trose says through a shit-eating grin. "oh, hey..." Trose directs his attention to Katie, "if you break my friend's heart, I will erase you from existence." Katie's eyes widen as Illspur interrupts the exchange, "he's kidding!"

"No, I'm not. "

"Yes, he is."

"Your family will not remember you." Katie squeaks out a quick, "is this a joke? Can he do that?"

"N-no, it's not. Yes, he can. but he won't." after this remark, Illspur pushes Trose aside and he leads Katie to his bedroom, "let's go".

Illspur's room is only a mess because the "things owned" to "spots to put things" ratio is wildly off. Katie looks around the room and is taken aback by some of the things that she sees, "what is this?" she asks while pointing at the severed head on the bedside table. The head is still putting itself back together from this morning's alarms. "Oh, that's my Prometheus alarm," Illspur says while opening his closet. "Is it alive?" Katie asks. "That is a deeply complicated question. Short answer... no?" Illspur shrugs his massive shoulders, he is unsure if this is the proper response. The demon grabs his Hellish mask. The mask is the skull of a creature that is a stranger to human eyes. He places the skull upon his face. The skull is long like a bull's but the eyes are far larger and perfectly match the shape of Illspur's own.

"Is it custom to wear a mask like that in Hell?" Katie asks.

"No... it's a personal choice."

"Is there a reason?"

"None that I wish to say out loud" *You are scaring the hoes dude.*

Katie looks past Illspur at the clothes hung up in his closet and she spots a red dress. The same red dress that the person in the photo in the hall was wearing... Katie looks around the room for another thing to ask about. *There!* Katie's eyes make their way over to a rock sitting on a shelf. "What's that rock about?"

"That's my Rock That Makes You Explode," Illspur says as if it were something that everyone has. Katie stares at her date in utter bafflement for five seconds. Katie breaks the silence by asking "what? Why do you have that? Y'know what, never mind. Where are we going to eat?"

THE DIAMOND LINE

The demon and the human walk for twenty minutes to a restaurant called “Excessively Long Horns”-- legally distinct from its earthly counterpart. Illspur goes up and requests a table for two and the couple is seated shortly.

“Alright, everyone at work is dying to know...” Katie starts, “why do you work at a forklift distributor?”

“Forklift?”

“Yeah, that’s what we sell...”

“I thought we sold large machines.” Illspur contorts his face, but no one can see because he has a mask on.

A voice interrupts the short revelation, “Can I get you all anything to drink?” the waiter places two menus on the table. “I’ll take an HCI,” Illspur says without a second thought. “...just a water for me thanks,” Katie states.



“Well, back to your question, I work for Geogrinder because I needed a change in scenery. I worked as a torturer in Hell for hundreds of years, but I was... bored. I wanted to be where people are. I shined as a torturer-- excelled-- I got promotions, I rose up the ranks, but I was not who I wanted to be. I wanted to feel the sun. I wanted to breathe air that wasn’t made of fiberglass. I wanted to be a person. I will never be a person. I’m 1,034, I am in my prime, and I couldn’t stay there. I went to the Hell Exchange Labor Program and Geogrinder hired me so now I get a little taste of normal life.”

“Illspur... thank you for sharing that with me.”

“Geogrinder also provides dental... so that is certainly a plus,” Illspur jokes as the waiter brings about the drinks. The two glasses placed in front

of the couple are identical. “I’ll be back shortly to take your guy’s orders,” the waiter quickly slips away.

“How old did you say you were?” Katie sips her water.

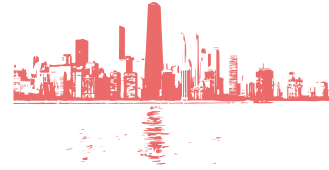
“I am 1034 years old.”

“Damn,” Katie smiles, “kinda robbing the cradle here aren’t you?”

“... uh I don’t-- I don’t know. There is no way for me to answer that and come out on top.”



The two of them enjoy a nice meal together. Katie does not recognize any of the dishes on the menu but Illspur gives recommendations. Illspur and Katie tell each other stories from their wildly different childhood. Illspur tells Katie what his favorite movies are and Katie tells him what a Bechdel test is.



Later in the night, after dinner, the pair goes out and walks to the viewing pavilion of the punishment of Sisyphus. There is a crowd of demons gathered around with them also viewing the mythic man. A goliath of a human shakes and quivers a mile away under the weight of a bolder twice his size. Sisyphus grits his teeth to the point of them bending under the stress of his jaw as he pushes the rock halfway up a hill. “He is doing very well today, making good time,” Illspur states in admiration, “this is one of the great punishments, the gold standard that all torturers strive to reach.”

“It’s really something...” Katie says, not really knowing how to react.

“I used to design and execute punishments. Did I

mention that before?”

“You did. I can’t imagine that there’s a lot of enjoyment to be had in a job like that.”

“There were some good parts...” Illspur leans on the railing of the pavilion, “when I got my first big promotion-- well, that was probably the happiest I have ever been.”

“What was the promotion?”

“It was about 100 years ago, I was tasked with torturing H.P. Lovecraft when he died. I had never gotten a case like his before, it needed to be big. Of course back then Lovecraft was a nobody.”

“What was the punishment?”

“Oh, I would put him in a dress and force him to confront his sexuality and gender identity in front of his abusive mother.”

“A red dress?”

“Yeah. that’s who the photo was in my house, that you were asking about.”



There is a gnarly scream followed by the grinding of rubble and stone as Sisyphus drops the boulder and it rolls back down the hill. Katie and Illspur look on in astonishment. “People on Earth like to imagine that he’s happy,” Katie says lightly.

Illspur does not care for this hypothetical, “If he is, we aren’t doing our jobs... *they*-- they aren’t doing their jobs.”

“No offense, but, Hell is a bummer,” Katie says joining Illspur in leaning on the rail.

Without the bolder obscuring the view of Sisyphus, Katie can see him more clearly. Sisyphus is

a man of 15 feet tall. His hair is long, wet, black strands of inky curls. His muscles are far more developed than anyone Katie has seen on earth, his muscles have grown so far that they have ripped the skin leaving tears and scars along his body. Every inch of him is calloused, bruised, and dirty. The hill has distinct marks on the ground where the giant has walked for thousands of years, pushing the ever-looming stone to the crest of the hill only for it to fall once more to the start.

Illspur stares longingly out at the hill, you blew it, man. *You blew it big time. You need to change your name and skip town.* “This place is a bummer,” Illspur starts, “Hell was made to punish those who stayed from God’s path. Those first angels who fell here tell us how Hell is just as much a punishment for the demons as is it for the humans because we will never feel Heaven’s grace. *They* disobeyed God and *they* were punished for it. *I* never disobeyed anyone, I was born here. Forged here. I never knew that Holy place. For a long time, I thought that Hell was no more a punishment to me than our office job is to you. Existence was a minor annoyance-- an itch. I thought that Earth would be an escape from the monotony, but having you here with me today has made me see that the place that raised me has made me far too different. I am a monster to your people. I do not belong on Earth. I am not human. I will never be human. Our worlds may look similar at times but they are fundamentally different. I might not like it but, I am a de--” Katie stops his words, “Oh, shut the fuck up. Don’t go monologuing just because I don’t like Hell. IT’S HELL. how about for our second date I take you around Chicago and exposition dump on *you*. I like you, I think you’re the coolest guy I’ve met, but god damn you haven’t asked me a single question all night.”

“You want to go on another date?”

“If you can put up with Earth a bit longer.”