

Light, from Pure Digestion Bred

by
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Digestion: *The conversion of victuals into virtues. When the process is imperfect, vices are evolved instead.*

- Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

The demon mark between her shoulder blades fluttered. Heart thumping, Assumpta Mary-Margaret O'Connor looked up from the chemistry book she'd been studying and surveyed the small, Baltimore coffee shop. But no one had entered, and she'd been here for quite a while, which meant a demon powerful enough to stir her mark to life—from a distance—was headed in her direction.

What were the chances it wasn't coming for her? *Practically nil*, she thought. The mark alerted her when the demons drew close, but it also acted like a beacon, exposing *her* to them. She had to get out of here—and *fast*.

Assumpta gathered her notes, willing her study partner to get back from the bathroom so she could tell her she was leaving, and swallowed the last dregs of her coffee. She grimaced. It was cold and bitter, and the signature flavor of the house blend had been *off* today—the worst coffee she'd had in a while.

The flutter on her back turned to an itch—the demon was getting closer.

And the low-grade headache she'd been nursing all morning hit her full bore. Sweat broke on her brow, and a wave of dizziness washed over her, then cleared. Was she coming down with something? No—probably just final exam jitters.

Maybe I should cheat, she thought.

Ashamed, she slammed her chemistry book shut and closed her eyes, exhaling slowly and deeply. Where the devil had that idea come from? She'd never cheated on anything in her life.

She'd just leave a quick note for her partner, and head home to her warded apartment where she would be safe.

But then the demon arrived. And she knew this one.

"Don't eat that," Pournelle said, materializing across the booth from her and reaching for the shrimp salad on wheat toast sitting in the center of the table. Assumpta's demon-mark went haywire, fluttering and itching, the muscles in her back tensing tight to alleviate the torture. She wriggled her shoulders, trying to control it. It was annoying, but understandable: Pournelle was a demon, and her mark had always seemed extra sensitive to him. It. *Whatever*.

Her hands slid to her purse, reaching for the squeeze bottle of holy water she kept there for just such emergencies. She had blessed salt, too—just in case.

"Don't be hasty," Pournelle said. "I'm not here to harm you."

He was dressed as dapper as always in his human form. The paper plate looked at odds with his navy pin-stripe suit, the paper bright against the smooth, dark brown of his skin. He flashed her his trademark grin, teeth as white as Chicklets, and snapped his fingers. The sandwich disappeared, plate and all...

Continues in Occult Detective Quarterly #2

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