

BLUE

by Adriana Renescu

She walked up the four steps and looked up, past the crudely carved stone gargoyle perched atop the arch of the door of the old downtown church. The wind slapped the hem of her coat and twirled the urban detritus around her. A subway train rumbled through the underground and she actually felt it slither under her feet. Her gaze lingered for a moment on the desiccated leaves and the small rectangle of blue cardboard the blustery wind had wedged between the gargoyle's talons. That bit of paper was a startling brilliant spot of blue against the blackened and pitted stone.

She pushed the heavy door into the dark interior of stone, wood and plaster saints. She walked down the side aisle, the rumble of the subway underneath distant and deep, muffled by the sullen bulk of the church. She sat in her favorite pew directly in sight of the chapel where the sanctuary candle flickered over the gold tabernacle. She put down her briefcase against the back of the pew in front of her and took a deep, preparatory sigh. But first she cast her gaze around the interior empty of any living breath. The flames of the red votive candles in the far corner were still and the flowers in urns around the altar drooped. All hymnals were neatly stacked and stashed away at the end of the pews.

Her gaze shifted and stopped—three rows down, tossed on the seat of the pew, was a rectangle of blue paper, the size of a prayer card. The same as the one she had seen outside, wedged between the gargoyle's talons.

Why did people leave litter in the pews? It irritated her with its casual carelessness.

She started to recite the Angelus but only got to the 'behold the handmaiden.' She stood up, walked around and picked up the offending piece of blue paper. She turned it in her hands. On one side was a cross, on the other side words, written by hand, all in capital letters:

*DO NOT REMOVE THIS CARD.
READ IT AND REMEMBER IT.
MAKE SEVEN CARDS LIKE THIS ON BLUE PAPER,
THEN GO TO SEVEN CHURCHES AND PUT ONE IN EACH
CHURCH,
IF YOU DO THIS YOUR DEAREST PRAYER WILL BE ANSWERED.
BUT IF YOU DO NOT DO THIS
A TERRIBLE THING WILL HAPPEN TO YOU.
GOD BLESS YOU.*

Superstitious dribble! Someone always left trash like this in the pews to catch the weak minded. What angered her was that little twitch that always wormed itself in her mind that if she did not do what the card said, something terrible would happen indeed.

Nonsense! Just someone messing with people!

She folded the card and clutched her fist around it, aggravated that her one moment of quiet at the beginning of her long day of defending useless human beings in front of a judge had been disturbed by a stupid blue piece of paper. She marched down the aisle to the exit, her high heels clicking on the stone floor. The subway rumbled underneath, more forcefully this time. She walked out of the church, stopped at the top of the steps and demonstratively tossed the blue card into the wind.

For a few seconds she watched it pirouette and tumble to the pavement. She felt the steps under her feet rumble, another subway train passing deep below the surface of the street. A lot of subways moving underneath today, the thought crossed her mind.

She took the steps down and walked to the corner of the street.

The briefcase! She had left it in the church.

She hesitated. Never turn back on your path. Her mother's words of long ago. Another superstitious piece of nonsense...

She turned around and retraced her steps back to the church portals. As she reached for the carved, round knob of bronze to push open the door, a noise--or maybe just a feeling--made her look up at the sky and roiling clouds. She caught sight of the gargoyle staring

down on her at an odd angle. She watched with strange fascination as the blue card in its talons got loose and fluttered away, twirling in the wind over her head. The beast of stone kept bowing down to her, lower and lower, sneering.

The evening news reported on the freak accident that morning on the steps of the old, downtown church—the gargoyle atop the church door had toppled and killed a woman on her way to work. Patricia Colmes. Attorney.

As the woman reporter finished speaking from the scene of the accident, the camera caught her bending down to pick up a blue piece of paper of the size of a prayer card. She read it, let out a snort and tossed it away.

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