

Constable Pulce and the Sunny Dystopia

by strannikov

A curious knot of nine- and eight-year-olds was incinerating ants with a huge magnifying glass one bright hot afternoon as Constable Pulce began his rounds. A youngster not operating the lens elbowed right and left to alert the others crowded over the crack on the sidewalk. The Constable's reputation preceded him: even from half a block away, the boys and girls could spy the drool hanging between his gappy teeth that was just about to roll over his purplish lips, just as he licked them. "Gross!" the nine-year-olds shouted in unison (the social sensitivities of the eight-year-olds lagging a bit), and the whole lot of them tore away and fled into the depths of the drugstore to escape the viscous spectacle.

The urchins' evasive tactics only inflamed Constable Pulce. He raced after the kids into the drugstore, to their enduring horror. For all his constabulary zeal, Pulce could not raise his sleeve in time, and a spoonful of drool splattered generously on the gritty tile floor as he entered. Once inside, the kids had split into two groups: the larger, including the urchin with his great aunt's magnifying glass and all the eight-year-old tagalongs, zoomed all the way through and out the back door, a valiant group of five nine-year-olds huddled in the musty silence of the forgotten comic book racks in the darkest corner. Constable Pulce eyed the tail-end of the group scurrying out the back and, taking no note of the mighty five huddling in the corner, kicked over the closest comic book rack. It wasn't so bad that Reggie got it, but Betty and Veronica, too (and both in swimsuits, at that), were both ground to a smeared pulp under the Constable's scuffed black boots.

Ben Baskin and Jerry Robbins, the only inspired third-graders in this squad of five, spotted a demon on the cover of a nearby "Tales from the Crypt" issue: spontaneously and simultaneously, the pair begged for revenge. And as Pulce turned dejected on his worn heels and loped out the front of the store, the demon put a plan to the kids which they thought sounded adequate to their purpose.

This was no ordinary demon (what demon is?), insofar as he had Constable Pulce's number. In demonly fashion he had Pulce's number in a way Pulce himself did not. This demon, Alessandro, conjured ages ago in an alchemist's studio in Calabria, knew Pulce quite well, even from so great a distance. "Pulce fools everyone, ever so clever," Alessandro had bragged on him one afternoon two or three centuries earlier when he'd strayed no farther afield than Andalusia, "what a feast he'll be!" By the time Pulce came along two or three centuries later, Alessandro finally had his chance to begin gnawing on the Constable's fairly meagre metaphysical substance, a gustatory delight nonetheless which, beginning the afternoon of Pulce's drugstore raid, continued for the next decade or so.

By the dawn of the twenty-first century CE, Alessandro had frankly become a bit jaded and had taken to dismissing most of the souls he was in position to wreak havoc upon, especially all those born after about 1960 CE. Now with well over six billion souls on the planet at one time, the demonic nutritive value of each enfleshed soul was positively diluted, and news had spread throughout the widespread community of demons. Alessandro well knew that demons from some other worlds would no longer visit Earth, it was hardly worth their energy to traipse across the galaxy for the scant morsels available: Alessandro had been conjured on this planet, though, and in spite of the diminished nutritional value of his fare overall, he maintained a sentimental regard for the suffering souls inhabiting this hurtling planet.

It may come as no genuine surprise to learn, then, that, unbeknownst to Ben and Jerry and their friends, it had been Alessandro's idea that led Pulce to kick over the comic book rack. (Even the demons, pft!) Well, and so, Pulce then continued to be hounded and haunted by this demon Alessandro day and night for the duration of his final ten years or so on this hurtling globe. This demonic attention did nothing to cure or alleviate Pulce's readiness to drool, of course: in fact, just as you'd expect, Pulce's propensity for drooling was only exacerbated.

Even before Alessandro took to gnawing on his marrow, the Constable had long been positively stupefied from any and all exposure to feminine beauty. The sight, and in due course the memory, of most every woman he'd ever met or seen or viewed photographs or films of, incited him to drool, for most of his waking hours and even a good part of his hours asleep. By the final decade or so of his life, Pulce was drooling practically non-stop, owing to his long acquaintance with or observation of comely women. Alessandro hoped perversely that this trait would enhance Pulce's nutritive value, demonically speaking: in keeping with the dynamics of perversity, in fact, the disgust with which most people beheld the Constable did in fact make his evaporating metaphysical substance rather more tasty.

Alessandro didn't get to gnaw on the core of Pulce's marrow until almost the very end, he was surprised to find that old Pulce was kind of tough in the center. Undismayed, the demon continued to escort Pulce on his rounds through the city, drawing especially close whenever Pulce was passing the fruit stands. With less and less provocation from Alessandro, Pulce would lift pears and apples and oranges. Then Pulce would slowly stroll the crowded avenues, licking and nibbling his stolen fruit while ogling all the women he could (scrupulously careful to the last, it almost need not be said, never to discard cores, peels, or rinds on the sidewalks).

Pulce was most fond of pears, which to his eyes so aptly exhibited the shapes of the women he so admired. The Constable was no total slob, though, despite Alessandro's prowess for making him appear objectionable: on the job, Pulce always carried a spare handkerchief for the worst of his slobber and drool, only he sometimes couldn't lay a hand on it fast enough.

Alessandro ever remained one of the most sentimental demons of human instigation. Centuries and millennia later, he would still recall Constable Pulce. He could plainly see Pulce lurking in the shadows of a bank building at midday, biting and sucking a lush pear he'd lifted from one of his favorite fruit vendors. The drool falling from Pulce's eyes flowed most spectacularly, Alessandro would smile to recall. And in fact, Pulce's cumulative nutritive value for Alessandro technically outlived him, since each of the five nine-year-olds who had evaded the Constable that fateful summer afternoon personally witnessed his filching and lifting of fruit many, many times over the course of their formative years.

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