

Anthony DiPietro

Possession Diary

after Marie Howe

The first devil was my craving for salty snacks.

Second, a habit of dashing off emails in anger. A twenty-four-hour cool-down period is always advisable.

Third, I could see the future.

Fourth place, I could never decide how I felt about procreation.

Fifth was not a specific song, but the fact that melody never left my mind. I was always hearing music, even when I wasn't listening to it. Whistling something or other. Or sometimes holding my lips in the shape of a whistle but sucking in air, a shrill imitation of wind. And in my head, fat brass, soaring strings, chiming bells, the whole bit.

OK the first was I would eat anything put in front of me, just because it was there.

The second was how I always believe I'm right. Not simply in matters of fact, but emotionally right. Right to love this person or hate that one, even when compelling evidence says I should not, and that belief in my rightness leads to righteous anger, that skin-burn from a hot stove.

Third was I thought I had reversed the aging process.

Fourth was my fear that the worm which fed on my father's brain for twenty-seven years also lives in me. That a loud enough POP, as from a balloon, might waken it and make it hungry.

Fifth was I too much enjoyed the smells of my own body. The smells of my body had their own melody.

Sixth was I could not love men, only wolves.

Seventh, severe halitosis. No doctor, chemical, prayer, or spell could cure me. As a child, I went to school with dead fish breath and my hair always sticking up, even if I had combed it and brushed my teeth. Finally, I learned to cut all my hair off.

There was no comparable solution for my tongue.

Maybe that was my first and original devil.

The second was that patience eluded me. Children try to chase the moon, but it never gets any closer. I wished for patience like the ocean wishes to be less restless.

The third was that I knew things, like: that it took eight minutes to walk to the train stop, which meant I needed to leave my bed at seven-fifty, which meant the latest I should ever go to sleep was one-oh-five.

OK. The first was I ate so quickly I bit the inside of my mouth. And when the soft scar was still healing, I'd bite there again. That happened so many times.

The second was I blatantly disregarded stop signs inside parking lots.

Third was that I believed nothing ever happened, nothing could, exactly the way I imagined it. In this way, I prevented many disasters, and a few happy outcomes.

Fourth was I was a chronic masturbator.

Fifth was that I could have been a great actor, but I got stage fright as a five-year-old playing The Wizard in The Wizard of Oz. I spent all the rest of my days trying to be invisible.

Sixth was martyr syndrome, also known as doormat disease, which I inherited from my mother. People who make themselves doormats, especially for their mates, I considered angels. Also I believed in the virtue of living in poverty. Stupid, stupid.

Seventh was indulgence. I never masturbated in my grandparents' house, until one day I felt it would kill me to wait. And that day forward I let myself do it there, but only in the basement bathroom.

Everything in my life was like this. A want that became a need. A bad thing that became a habit, until I couldn't distinguish right from wrong.

The truth is there were many more than seven devils. The truth is I ordered them a car. I cleaned my body while they drove to meet me. I placed a mirror by my bed, hid my wallet, unlocked the door, and let them do whatever, whatever, whatever they wanted to me.

Anthony DiPietro, a RI native, earned his MFA from Stony Brook University and now serves as associate director of the Rose Art Museum in Boston. His poems and essays have appeared in *Notre Dame Review* and numerous other journals, and won fellowships and residencies. His website is AnthonyWriter.com.