

## The Demon

**Victory Witherkeigh**

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*An associate of Death takes over a college student's body and navigates the ethical complications of her young adulthood in the moralizing horror novel The Demon.*

In Victory Witherkeigh's paranormal novel *The Demon*, a Filipino girl is possessed at her family's request.

The demon, upon entering the unnamed girl's body, loses her power and memory. Death, her master and inferred lover, helps her figure out why she crossed over and how she can get her power back. She discovers that the girl's family requested that she cross over to increase their wealth.

As she attends college in her host's body and siphons power from various lovers, the demon receives flashes of her former life as a islander two thousand years before. Death, hurt by the demon's actions, stops helping her. When the demon's "family members" begin to die and love with a human seems unreachable, she resolves to end her own life and learns that Death has been using her since her time as a human.

The demon, in her role as an antihero, is at first apathetic to human beings and proud of serving as Death's general. But as the book continues, she changes, becoming more concerned with her everyday love affairs than her standing with Death. Beyond her, the cast is large and unwieldy. People's behaviors are often stand-ins for commentary on morality: the demon's "family" loses their wealth due to their spending habits; a high school acquaintance uses sex and drugs as coping mechanisms for unrequited love. Meanwhile, the demon enables men to cheat on their partners and women to have abortions. Not all of the commentary is clear or convincing, though, as when the demon criticizes the Filipino Students Association for their cultural pride, asserting that the Filipino government allows their people to be imprisoned, colonized, and treated as second-rate citizens in other Asian countries.

Indeed, the book is heavy on its messaging, and its conversations are laden with exposition to the point that people's personalities and relationships blur within them. Still, the prose is quite straightforward. Some of its images are predictable, as when the demon's anger is conveyed via "glowing red eyes" and sadness results in "black tears." Elsewhere, a terminated fetus is depicted as "the mangled, leftover feastings of one of her mangoloks [lesser demon]."

Hypocrisy is one of the novel's major themes. The demon professes to be above men yet stoops to their whims. Both Death and the demon's lovers, who are men, treat women as either vehicles to gain power or objects on which they can enact power, leading to bitter endings for many of the book's women. And with the demon herself, some sex scenes are explicit, while others are implied; both become repetitive, though, resulting in an air of aimlessness through the demon's four years of college as she tries to prove Death wrong via her affairs.

In the coming-of-age paranormal novel *The Demon*, a possessed girl's college years are a warning about the temptations of lust, power, and wealth.

STERLING HOOKER (August 29, 2024)

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