

Possessed by Ghost Peppers

A Short Story by Michael G. Lortz

Several years ago my kitchen sink was possessed by an evil spirit. I am not sure if it was Beelzebub or Lucifer or even a lesser ghoul, but I am sure one summer afternoon, there was definitely something haunting my apartment.

That this story has taken me years to write should tell you all need about the profound trauma this incident left on my subconscious.

This is a tale that needs to be told.

The nasty black bile spewed from the garbage disposal and covered the kitchen. Freshly cleaned pots, pans, and plates were splattered with sticky goo. Puddles of the awful alien substance formed near the base of the steel sink. The structure shook and made regurgitating noises unlike any I have ever heard – even on my sickest day.

In a panic, I turned off the garbage disposal.

“Holy shit,” I said aloud to no one. Luckily, the apartment was empty and my roommates were gone. They might have moved out if they saw our kitchen covered in the mysterious disposal discharge.

Whatever it was, it looked like shit. Or vomit. Putrid black vomit from the lower levels of my kitchen plumbing. It not only splattered and projected across the counter, but several inches of the goo sat inside the basin, clogging the sink. And of course, it stunk. It stunk bad. Like a baby’s dirty diaper wrapped in a baby’s dirty diaper fermenting in a rotting elephant carcass baking in the savannah sun.

I didn’t know whether to call Liquid Plumber or an exorcist.

The demonic possession of my sink began a few days earlier with an order of chicken wings. Of course, the sink didn't order the chicken wings, nor did a demon. I did. I will absolutely attest to ordering the wings. It was my fault entirely. At least that part was my fault.

"Oh cool, new wings," I said to my friend Kev as we took our seats at a high top table at the local sports bar. A flyer displayed the wings in full color:

MANGO – PINEAPPLE

BOURBON BBQ

GHOST PEPPER

A few seconds after we sat down, a petite blond server named Stephanie arrived at our table. The sports bar wasn't overly crowded, but there were a few people scattered about. Truth be told, it was probably slow for a Saturday night. The lack of crowd meant Stephanie was only a step behind us as we picked our table. She needed to make her money and I can appreciate that.

"How hot are the ghost pepper wings?" I asked after we exchanged pleasantries.

"They're not that hot," she replied. "I had a few for lunch." She smiled.

Taking her word for it, I ordered.

"I'll have a small basket of the ghost pepper wings," I said. "And a jerk cheeseburger. And an iced tea."

Kev then told Stephanie his order, which I don't remember, but it didn't include ghost pepper wings. Stephanie smiled and walked away, promising us that our drinks would arrive quickly.

She kept her promise.

Kev and I sipped our drinks, watched sports, and conversed while we waited for our food.

Ten minutes later, Stephanie returned with our orders. She handed Kev his food first (whatever it was he ordered), then passed me my jerk cheeseburger and a small basket of boneless ghost pepper wings.

I looked at the small basket containing the six boneless chicken wings available for a limited time only at my local sports bar. They emanated a unique odor that could only be described as “hot”, if hot could have a smell or if one could in fact smell a feeling. I guess one could smell a feeling if a pepper could have ghosts.

I picked up my knife and fork and cut the boneless ghost pepper chicken wing on the top of the pile. Beneath its reddish-brown exterior was the innocent off-white inside of a well-cooked chicken product. I stabbed one half of the boneless chicken wing as Kev looked on.

The first moments eating half of the first ghost pepper boneless chicken wing was no different than any other boneless chicken wing eating experience anywhere. Teeth and saliva worked their inner machinations to prepare the food for digestion. Most parts of the wing exited the mouth and headed towards my stomach.

But other parts of the wing – little microscopic particles of ghost pepper, I believe science calls them capsaicin – attached themselves to my taste buds. There began a chain reaction from the taste bud, circulating through the nervous system, coursing through the sweat glands, and resulting with beads of perspiration cascading down my forehead.

“Oh my god, that’s hot,” I said somewhat to Kev, but mostly as a general statement to the world.

“You ok, dude?” Kev asked. I was sure he was enjoy watching me suffer.

I took a giant swig of iced tea, wiped the sweat from my brow, and changed focus to my cheeseburger. The burger meat was slightly flavored with a Jamaican rub, which on most days would not be a problem, but that night, with the ghastly remnants of the ghost pepper clinging to my taste buds, the burger provided little relief from the chicken wing’s lingering flavor. Only the iced tea and a handful of French fries could defend me from this spicy assault.

I took another swig of iced tea, which barely helped sedate the burn.

After two more burger bites, I decided to try the second half of my first wing in the little boneless wing basket. Again I bit into the chicken wing. Again the chicken wing tasted fine, was chewed, and headed towards digestion. And again

the spicy sauce that covered the chicken's outer breading caused havoc on my nervous system. Inner bells and whistles again sounded off and my body again took immediate action to cool itself down. More sweat beaded down my forehead.

I finished the iced tea and took another few bites of my burger. Anything to ameliorate the heat and relieve the suffering happening in my mouth.

A few minutes later, our friendly server reappeared at our table.

"So how are the wings?" she asked.

"Jeez," I said. "I thought you said they weren't that hot."

"You think they are hot?" she replied.

Kev let out a chuckle. The whole incident was funny to him.

"Yes," I said. "Look at my forehead. I've had one and I'm sweating like a pig. They might be the hottest wings I have ever had."

Stephanie smiled. "I was raised eating habaneros. My mother used to give me hot peppers when I was sick. I forgot to mention that, didn't I?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, you did."

"Well, I can bring you another tea if you want," she said, smiling again. I didn't see the humor but I accepted the tea.

The next time I ask how hot the hot wings are, I will also ask for a family history.

Before we left, I finished my burger, drank two more glasses of iced tea, and finished one more boneless chicken wing. I paid my bill and asked for a box to bring home the remaining four wings.

"Are you sure you want to bring those home, dude?" Kev asked.

"Yes," I said. "I am going to finish these wings."

I thought it would be a good idea to bring home the remaining blazing hot ghost pepper boneless chicken wings. I thought I could take my time, maybe eat one a day, and finish them. Little did I know the ghost pepper wings would not only torment me, but also possess my apartment.

The next day I decided to eat a boneless chicken wing with my lunch. I took the boneless wing out of the takeout box and placed it on the plate with my chicken wrap.

Not surprisingly, the ghost pepper boneless chicken wing was still hot. My forehead again glistened with sweat and I needed to drink a large glass of water and eat my entire chicken wrap to alleviate another capsicum-caused calamity.

Eating the ghost pepper wings wasn't getting easier.

Monday I tried again. This time, with dinner. On the third day, not only was the wing again too hot for my taste buds, but the chicken meat was drying out. After two days in the refrigerator, the entire experience of wing eating lost its luster. I needed to dispose of the wings. But instead of doing so that night, I decided to wait until the next day.

I returned from work the next evening and opened the fridge, looking for a drink. I grabbed a beer and the ghost pepper boneless chicken wings, finally planning to avail myself of the caustic culinary creations.

Instead of throwing the wings away and having the hot wing smell linger until I took out the trash, I put the boneless wings in the garbage disposal. I cleaned out the disposal side of the sink, washing the pots and dishes and moving the plates, glasses, and silverware of previous meals to the other basin.

I dropped the remaining two ghost pepper boneless chicken wings into the disposal, turned on the faucet, and flipped the switch on the disposal. The disposal churned as it attempted to grind through the meat of the boneless wings. I expected a bit of difficulty as the device's teeth chewed through the dried poultry morsel. But I did not expect what happened next.

Black bile bubbled from the bowels of the disposal. A loud hum replaced the sound of gears. The sink spasmed as the disposal convulsed. Water continued to pour atop the bile, combining to fill the sink with sludge. There was no sign of the chicken wings in the mess. There were no unground chunks, no brownish red skin, there was nothing but putrid black goop spewing on the counter, the dishes, and the kitchen floor.

“Holy shit,” I said aloud to no one. Luckily, the apartment was empty and my roommates were gone. They might have moved out if they saw our kitchen covered in culinary upchuck.

I turned off the disposal and the faucet and examined the mess. Two boneless chicken wings should not have caused this. I thought about calling maintenance, but I knew they were already gone for the day. I thought about calling an exorcist, but I wasn't sure if they repossessed appliances.

So I settled for Liquid Plumber.

After a quick trip to Wal-Mart for three bottles of Liquid Plumber Professional Drain Unclogger, I returned to re-examine the kitchen mess. The black spew had not gone down, nor had it increased, which was a good thing. I turned on the faucet and the disposal to test if I needed Liquid Plumber at all. More black bile bubbled from the bowels of the disposal.

Letting the bile drain down on its own was not an option. This meant war.

I moved all the pots, plates, and silverware to the other side of the kitchen to clear way for my upcoming kitchen chemistry conflict. I opened the first bottle of Liquid Plumber and poured half of its contents into the disposal sink. The acidic solution needed time to work its way through the pungent goop. The label on the bottle said to wait 15 to 30 minutes, observe the clog, then run water, and then add more Liquid Plumber if needed.

I wasn't sure one bottle of Liquid Plumber was up to the challenge. I was glad I bought three.

After 30 minutes of watching TV and perusing social media, I returned to the scene of the mess. Nothing changed. I wasn't sure if any of the Liquid Plumber found its way into the belly of the bile or if the demon possessing my disposal drank the Liquid Plumber like a summertime margarita.

I poured what was left of the first bottle into the sink. Two bottles remained. If I couldn't defeat the black bile beast in the three bottles, I told myself, I would accept defeat and attest to the possession of my sink by the ghost of the ghost pepper boneless chicken wings. And I would call maintenance first thing in the morning.

Thirty minutes later, the level of the black goop had still not receded. I opened the second bottle of Liquid Plumber. I poured half of the second bottle in the disposal sink and returned to the mindless meditation of television and social media.

Ten minutes into the second bottle of Liquid Plumber, I heard a loud “BLURP” from the sink. It was followed by a second loud “BLURP”. I ran to the sink to see if the situation was better or worse.

Most of the black bile in the sink receded down the drain. The smell still lingered, but the clog was gone. I won the battle, but had I won the war?

I turned on the faucet. The water went down the drain with no hesitation. Cautiously, I turned on the disposal. It whirred as if it was brand new.

On the safe side, I poured what remained of the second bottle of Liquid Plumber down the drain and ran hot water for two minutes as the instructions said. After the duration, I turned off the water. I cleaned the kitchen, returned the pots, pans, and dishes to their rightful spot, sprayed some air freshener, and stored the remaining bottle of Liquid Plumber under the sink, both in case of an emergency and as a warning to the adjacent pipes that clogs and demonic discharge would no longer be tolerated.

The ghost pepper boneless chicken wings might have kicked my ass for a weekend and the black bile bubbling from the garbage disposal may have conquered my kitchen for a day, but from the ghostly, grinding jaws of disposal defeat, I snatched the sweet succulent taste of victory and repossessed my kitchen.