

The Glass Witch

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THREE HOURS UNTIL ABANDONMENT

The problem with revenge is the good kind costs more than \$3.67.

Coins jingle in my hand as I peruse each greasy aisle of the gas station, hunting for the perfect poison. I pass a spit of bloated hot dogs marked \$3.99 each, grimace at a browning fruit tray for \$7.50, and sidestep a mountain of five-dollar nachos with cheese so artificial, it gives off a faint radioactive glow.

And then I find it. Nestled between a six-pack of fizzy orange sodas and a crumbling sausage-and-cheese biscuit, it lurks. Waiting.

The crème de la crème of comeuppance. The reigning rajah of retribution. The Baked Alaska of just deserts.

My friends and—more importantly—*enemies*, I give you: gas station sushi.

I peek down at the money in my palm and my stomach sinks. Nowhere near the \$10.99 price tag.

Squeezing my eyes and fist shut, I wish really, *really* hard for more cash to appear. In fact, I do more than wish. I find the cherry pit of my heart and, with an imaginary knife, crack it open. My powers are always weaker outside Cranberry Hollow, but there's still a tug and a warmth like sunshine that glides over my skin. My palm tingles and, hopeful, I slide open an eye.

The same measly three bills and six coins glare up at me. But, like, *literally* glare. Somehow, I've animated the presidents. Washington primps his bushy wig, Lincoln picks his nose, and there's a mocking twinkle in Jefferson's eye I don't like. Almost as if he knows I failed. Again.

I stick out my tongue and shove him, and the other dead guys, back into my pocket. The illusion will fade soon enough. It always does.

Two minutes later, feeling more defeated than ever, I slap a jumbo bag of Skittles on the checkout counter, startling the elderly cashier. He clutches the newspaper to his heart—*The Daily Cranberry*—and under the crumpled print I can just make out the headline.

Locals Prepare for Cranberry Hollow's Un-BOO-lievable Annual Halloween Events!

My insides wriggle like an overfilled Jell-O mold.

“Oh—you scared me!” the cashier says, rubbing his chest. He’s got gray hair, wrinkles, and a large gap between his front teeth. A name badge on his shirt reads WE’VE GOT GAS MANAGER: HOWELL.

“Sorry,” I say. And I truly mean it. I may be out for revenge, but I’m not trying to give an old man a heart attack before I’m even unpacked. That’s, like, *major* villain vibes. I’m going for more of a henchman level today.

Howell grabs the pack of Skittles and runs it past the scanner. “Ah, it’s all right. My hearing isn’t what it used to be. Say, that’s an interesting fellow,” he says, nodding to the chef’s face ironed on my sweatshirt, beet red and mouth open in a silent roar. He squints and reads the type. “Are—you—an—idiot—sandwich?’ My!”

I tug at the fabric, uncomfortable. I hate when people look at my body, even if it’s just to read the graphics. “It’s Gordon Ramsay. He’s my favorite chef.”

Howell gums his lip in obvious disapproval, but then his eyes travel up to my face and go wide. “Hey, you look familiar. You wouldn’t be related to—”

“Bee Goode. Yeah, she’s my grandma.”

According to Grandma, all Goode women look alike. *Wide cheeks, wide hips, wide smiles*, she’d say with a wink, then shove an oatmeal cookie, fresh from the oven, in my mouth. I don’t know about smiles—we don’t do much of that—but our cheeks and hips are wide as ever.

Howell’s grin pulls at his wrinkles. “Adelaide Goode! You’ve grown since the last time you were in town! Your mother in for a visit too? I’m sure they’d love to have her as a guest judge for the pageant tonight. The original Miss Preteen Scary Cranberry herself.”

My hands knot in my sweatshirt. “She’s just dropping me off. She has a plane to catch at three.”

“So soon? You two haven’t been for a visit in what? Five years?”

I push my glasses up my nose and shrug, trying to radiate big I-don’t-care energy. “She’s got a new job in Seattle. I’m staying with Grandma until she gets back.”

“Oh. Now that you mention it, I think I remember something your grandma said about one of her daughters taking a traveling nurse job.”

“That’s her.”

Howell hands me the Skittles. “Go on and take these. On the house.”

A grin tugs at my lips. “Thanks.”

“Anything for Bee’s granddaughter.” His face wiggles into a toothy, sympathetic smile. “Good old Bee Goode. She takes in strays of all kinds, doesn’t she?”

My stomach deflates like an underwhipped meringue. Grumbling, I pull up my hood, jam the candy in my pocket, and head out the door.

Right next to the rickety self-serve gas pump sits Legs. And by Legs I mean my mom’s forest-green clunker of a station wagon and honorary first child. Mom really christened him Last Legs, which is probably because he breaks down constantly, although he doesn’t have legs at all. I guess it’s supposed to be “ironic funny.”

Anyway, he’s the same car she drove out of Cranberry Hollow with me in her belly twelve years ago. *He’s the only man that’s never let me down*, Mom always said. Although she quit saying that when I got old enough to ask questions about my dad. None of which ever got answers.

I’m a pretty understanding person—villainy aside—but in the realm of normal mother-daughter relationships, keeping secrets

is *not cool*. Especially when it's the one secret I'd really like the answer to.

I yank open the sticky handle and flop on the carpet seats, slamming the door shut a little too hard behind me. My glasses fog as the heater sputters, blowing the smell of melted lipstick and cheap air fresheners up my nose. Mom sits behind the wheel, applying a thick coat of lipstick—unmelted—in the pull-down mirror.

Mom looks like me but better. Her hair is red and curly, her nails buffed and polished, and her clothes bright and fashionable. But it's not her hair or clothes that make her pretty. It's how she *defies* them. Like "Yes, I'm fat, but I'm also beautiful and don't need to hide behind spandex or manicures to be allowed to exist." With that confidence, it's no wonder she won the Miss Preteen Scary Cranberry title.

I glare down at my muddy sneakers and blow frizzy orange hair out of my eyes.

"What'd you end up getting?" Mom asks. She works the magenta lipstick—Very Berry Delight—between her lips and pops it with a wet plunging sound. The noise is so dismissive, so infuriating, it boils the feelings I've been simmering all week red hot.

Here's the thing. I know she gave me candy money to bait me