

The Glass Witch



Can she break
the curse before
the curse breaks her?

LINDSAY PUCKETT

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To Mamaw

In every page

Every line

Every word



**Evil devours.
You've nowhere to flee.
When the Goode witch numbers
err over three.**



I

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

into a better mood about the whole “staying with Grandma thing.” But the truth is, ditching me while she flits off to work her dream job in her dream city feels a whole lot like the plot in one of those sad dog movies. The ones they play on planes that no one wants to watch, but you end up watching anyway because there’s nothing else to do, and the next thing you know, Fido’s owners leave him and you’re blubbing on the way to Disney World.

For reference—I’m the abandoned dog in this situation.

And the worst part is, I know there’s a small part of Mom that’s excited about dumping me. Three months kid free. She can do everything she missed out on when she became a teen mom. She could live her life free of the burden of *me*. Of how I tore the family apart.

Of how I’m cursed.

I rip open the pack of candy and pour a few pieces straight into my mouth.

“Skittles, yum,” Mom says. “Can I have one?”

I glare at her. Her smile is so big, so placating. It hurts my heart.

I bet this is how those owners looked at their dog before ditching him at the pound.

I shrug and pour a handful into my palm. Inspecting the colors,

I delicately place each one back in the bag until only one is left, bleeding sticky dye on my skin. I offer it to her.

Orange. Her least favorite.

Mom's cheery demeanor slips. Her nostrils flare and her lips press into a thin line. "Really, Adelaide?"

I raise an eyebrow and hoist my hand higher. She glares back but eventually sighs. With an exhausted wave of her hand, the Skittle floats out of my palm and into her open mouth. Power tugs from my skin, but it's so small Mom probably doesn't notice she tapped into my source. That can happen when you're close to a relative.

A low current of power runs through all witches' veins—enough for small tasks like levitating Skittles into your mouth or hoisting the suitcase of an unwanted daughter into the back of a legless station wagon—but bigger enchantments require more. Spells. Potions. *Kindred*.

To the shock of absolutely no one—my Kindred is weak. And for a bit of background, Goode witches aren't *supposed* to be weak. Historically, we were the strongest witches in all thirteen colonies. Just my luck.

Mother-daughter Kindred is supposed to be the easiest kind, since I lived inside her for a while and she's my oldest family. I always thought it's so hard for us because she never really wanted me to begin with, and the ancestors can tell. And now that I'm being "abandoned at the pound," things are a little worse.

The truth stings like a bee, but I've learned that if I have a stinger too, it's not so bad. I close my eyes and pretend my body is a tornado of malicious, buzzing hornets swirling under my skin. Because anger I can handle.

Mom rolls her eyes and knocks the car in gear. With a jolt and a huff, Legs rumbles out of the gas station. I stare moodily out the window, rolling a grape candy on my tongue, as trees blur by.

"I brought you something," Mom says flatly, floating her purse up from the back seat. "I was hoping to give it to you when you were being less bratty, but I guess that's not happening."

She plops the leather bag in my lap a little harder than necessary. I shoot her what I hope is an adequate *excuse me* face, but I slide the zipper open anyway.

Even lying on a pile of crumpled receipts, the delicate purple

and turquoise petals flutter around the wooden circlet like butterfly wings. Crystal buds center each daisy, catching the afternoon sun and showering the car with orbs of light.

The crown Mom wore the night she won the Miss Preteen Scary Cranberry costume pageant.

Angry as I am, I can't help but run a finger over the velvety flowers. I know the story well—it's basically legend. Grandma and Aunt Jodie had stayed up all night before the pageant gluing, sewing, and bedazzling Mom into the finest fairy princess Cranberry Hollow had ever seen. People say she shone like the night sky. No, like, literally. Skin and hair coated in a thousand tiny crystals, she outshone the competition and won the crown.

Despite everything, warmth spreads in my belly. I can't believe she's letting me have this. I spread a protective hand over the flowers to keep the bumpy ride from snapping them.

"I thought you could wear it for the costume contest. Of course, you don't have to be anything scary—I was a fairy." I roll my eyes. Like I don't know. "But Jodie's great with crafts, and I'm sure she can make it fit whatever you want."

The warmth evaporates.

Here's a list of things I'd rather do than walk out on a pageant stage:

1. Eat stewed peas
2. Puke up the stewed peas and eat them again
3. Be cursed to eat and puke stewed peas for all eternity, without the reprieve of death

I pop another candy in my mouth and crunch hard.

"You should do the pageant, Addie. It's a great way to make friends. Plus, it'll make the time go faster."

My bees buzz, and I shove the crown in my hoodie pocket. Sequins snap off and sprinkle my lap. "Fat girls don't win pageants. Not even stupid Halloween ones."

"Who told you that?"

"Mom, I'm twelve. I go to school. I watch TV." I cross my arms and settle deep in my seat. "Everyone knows that."

It's quiet for a moment, then Mom's breath comes out in a long stream. "It's not always fair for us curvy girls, but I won when I was your age. And I was bigger than you."

“Yeah, well, that was the nineties.”

“Right, *the nineties*. When the trend was to look like Mary-Kate and Ashley, and I *still* went home with a crown.”

My brow lifts. “Who’s Mary Kadenashley?”

Mom mumbles something that sounds like *Jesus, take the wheel*. Her eyes flit from the road to me, then something changes in her face. Softens. “You know I’m doing this for us, right?”

I don’t say anything. Just offer her another orange Skittle.

Mom growls, and I stare back out the window. The trees are thicker here, with puffs of orange and yellow leaves swaying in the breeze. Most people think they’re pretty, but I’m not fooled. Changing leaf color means cellular *death*. I learned that in fifth-grade science, thank you very much. And really, I’m not one for poetics, but driving into a forest of death can’t be a good sign for this “new start.”

Around the next bend, a wooden sign appears, falsely cheery for the dour mood.

WELCOME TO CRANBERRY HOLLOW!

Five years. That’s how long it’s been since I’ve seen that sign. Since Aunt Jodie got to glare at me. Since Mom and Grandma got in their last shouting match over nothing. Since I got to feel—

Legs clunks past the sign and something *moves* over me. It dribbles like a hot shower, sending tingles over my skin and fingers down my spine. The sensation is so strong, so wonderful, even my bees melt into a pool of honey. The cherry pit of my heart throbs. It's delicious and soft and sweet as confetti cake batter, something I can only encounter in Cranberry Hollow.

It's the feel of wild magic.

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