

# Tequila Spike

By Anonymous

I prayed for help, but help never came. By the time you read this, I'll be dead. I'm going to kill her first...and once the kid is safely on the bus...I'm going to finish me. I'm writing this to prove that if you were in my place, and saw what I saw, and knew what I knew, for sure, for sure...you'd kill her too.

*Thweeeet...*

The door sensor goes off as a woman enters the store towing a little kid. It's my first week as a clerk, and I still pay attention to faces. Anyway, she's pretty in a messy kind of way, wearing sweats that've been around too long, and smoking a super-long menthol. Her makeup looks fresh, even though it's pretty thick for ten in the morning. She says hi in a raspy voice, not loud. The kid, a girl about five years old, doesn't look at me and goes straight for the donut case.

"She's going to pick out what she wants to eat," the woman says. Her name is Chloe."

She sticks out her hand. Like I said, I was still pretty new, so I stretch my hand across the counter and shake. I catch the kid's name but not hers.

They come in every morning for donuts and soda. Chloe's always quiet; no acting up. They never try to steal anything, but I figure something's off when the mom starts a story and never finishes before beginning another, like she's topped up with secrets, but holding back. Says she's on disability, but not what for. Something about 'the social worker doesn't know she has Chloe' and 'it's better that way because she doesn't want interference'.

If she stays too long - talking at me in that crackly, rapid-fire whisper of hers, it makes me dizzy.

I sort of notice she's dragging the kid around at all hours. Says Chloe has insomnia, just like her. I don't know, the kid sure looks sleepy to me. I feel worry take root inside my gut, which bothers me because it's pointless. What can I do?

She starts asking me to baby-sit. Chloe and I go to the park and play sand castles with empty ice-cream containers. We glue popsicle sticks together and make picture frames. I have a room at the back of the store. Everything is calm back there and daytime-quiet. Sometimes I leave the back door open so Sacramento sunshine throws a big yellow square on the floor. Chloe lays inside it and puts puzzles together. Finished, she turns her little face up and says, "Did I do good, Bebbie?" My name is Bebbie, like Debbie only with a B.

I tell her, "Yes, Chloe, you did good. You did very, very good." We kick back and float on the day, suspended in time and sunbeams.

Was I lonely before Chloe? I never thought so. But now, when she's not with me, the time just seems so...empty.

*Thweeeet...*

A boyfriend starts showing up with the mom. A white guy with a black eye, fading. He fondles the mom's ass right in front of everybody. I pretend I'm straightening packs of cigarettes, so my face doesn't show my disgust.

I'm glad men don't notice me. Mousey brown hair, tied back. Bangs always flipping the wrong way, no matter how hard I fight them. My store apron doesn't help my figure much. It bunches up and cuts me in two, like a bed pillow tied in the middle. But I have to wear it; and they didn't hire me for looks. I make the cash work out, end of every day.

The next time they come in, Chloe has strips of a sheet tied around her feet. I don't hide my face this time.

The mom declares, "She got burnt on the pavement. It was hot."

"How did it happen?"

"We were hitchin' a ride and got into a fight with the driver, so we had to get out. I didn't know the pavement was hot. And Chloe was in bare feet. Got the hotfoot, didn'cha Clo?"

"Has she seen a doctor?"

"She never needs a doctor. She's a good girl."

I look for the kid's reaction, but her face is set like cement. That kid knows how not to make trouble. She's been trained, for sure.

I find a tube of ointment and hand it to the mom with her donut and soda. "Put this on her feet. It'll help." The mom says thank you and they leave. I feel the worry root grow another inch inside my gut.

A week later, the white guy is replaced by a gangbanger with tattoos on his neck and hands. Up close at the cash, his jacket flops open, and I see a holster under his arm. He lets Chloe skip out the door without taking her hand, and dammit it if she doesn't scoot right into the parking lot. A van squeals its brakes and stops an inch away from her. The mom and him act soooo surprised and snotty - like cars aren't supposed to be driving in the parking lot. I imagine Chloe lying under the wheels of the van, with dirty bandages on her feet.

The banger stays around for a while, but after a couple months he stops showing up and I stop keeping track. There's a passing parade with the mom - the kind of people circling the drain who haven't made the final flush yet. One time, a bleach blonde comes in with them and buys an apple. I'm happy cause it's probably the first time Chloe's ever seen a person eat a piece of fruit. Bleach-Blo pulls out a stiletto blade and starts slicing bits of apple and eating them right off the blade. Four or five slices in, the stiletto slips and cuts her deep between the thumb and forefinger. Blood shoots clear across the aisle and sprays a shelf of spaghetti sauce. You should've heard the hooting and howling. Chloe doesn't cry or say anything at all. But her little face is white, shock white.

I pray at night, even though I don't really believe in it. Please help me come up with something. Please, please don't let the kid get hurt. You have to understand; I never had a kid in my life before. I hear prayers get answered sometimes, and I figure it's probably like playing the lottery. If you don't buy a ticket you can't win. So I pray anyway, for Chloe.

The mom wants an afternoon alone with one of the drain-riders. It's my day off, and I agree to come by. They live at the El Morada Motor Hotel, a squat row of units with parking strips painted outside. You can rent by the week. The minute I step inside, my sinuses fill up. The room hasn't been cleaned since Saddam got pulled out of the rabbit hole. Heck, the place looks like Saddam's rabbit hole. Junk, garbage and crumbs everywhere. It stinks. The room explains everything. It explains too much.

The mom hands Chloe over to me, babbling how good it is to go out on a date and have some time to herself, blah, blah... We go to feed pigeons. A couple loaves of bread from the store are precious to Chloe. She can sit and feed birds forever. When her stash gets halfway down, she starts tearing pieces smaller, so they'll last longer. I love watching her take care of birds.

"Did I do good, Bebbie?"

"Yes, honey, you did real good."

I call Child Protection, and here's how it goes down. They respond right away - but because there's no immediate danger, *translation: no blood and bruises*, they can't act. Instead, they tell the mom they'll be back in a week to "check out the environment." That's the law, right to privacy. Guess what happens...can you guess? The day the social worker comes, the mom rents a kitchenette with a bedroom nook, so it looks like Chloe has her own bed. The mini-fridge has bologna and ranch dressing inside, so it looks like there's food. The worker reports it as "a low income, but satisfactory environment." And that's that. Next day, Chloe's back in the hellhole.

I try to accept the verdict. I tell myself that I've done the most anyone can do. The law has intervened and the law says it's okay. But that worry plant is so tall inside my guts, it's pushing up my throat. When whatever is bound to happen finally happens, I won't be able to live with myself. Did you catch that? I won't be able to live.

My next thought is about killing.

I go around and around on how to do it. I'm pretty sure I can get the job done and get away with it, but Chloe is the problem. How do I just show up with a kid? Even if we move away, I'll get asked for a birth certificate, and questioned about medical records and all that. Without ID, they'll peg me for one of those child molester-kidnappers. I have to let go of wanting Chloe, or anything for myself, and just concentrate on what's best for her. Once I get my head wrapped around that, the rest is easy.

I make a few calls and discover that in the state of California, orphans hit the jackpot. With no family standing in the way, the good life rolls up on wheels and takes the kid in, day or night. She gets new clothes, food, toys, and a temporary home - somewhere clean, safe, and the caretakers all checked out. The state starts an immediate search for a family to permanently adopt. The good-life-on-wheels has money for everything you can imagine - medical, dental, and special help with school. The way things are going, I don't think Chloe is ever going to get to school, so this sounds like a dream come true.

There's just one thing standing in the way of the jackpot and Chloe...and you know who that is by now, don't you?

I decide to poison her.

Low-key, no trauma, no drama...no violence for Chloe to witness. Chloral hydrate. Spiked in a bottle of liquor. I've had it forever and remembered it when that blonde, billionaire widow, may she rest in peace beside her son, made it famous. I'll tell Chloe that Mommy's sleeping - I won't say forever - and put her in front of the TV with a donut while I quietly call 911. When emergency crews arrive at a situation, the first thing they do is remove the children. As soon as Chloe goes outside with a rescue worker, there will be a minute while they check the mom for vital signs. In that little space, I'll step into the bathroom and put a bullet in my head. Okay, let me bring you up to speed here 'cause you're surprised. I have to go down the same time as the mom. The law will nail me sooner or later, and Chloe needs all the bad stuff in her life to be over in one day...so she can get on the bus to a new life with no loose ends pulling her any way but forward.

I'm not afraid to die. I'm not dying for nothing.

It's evening, and I invited myself over to the El Morada. The mom's latest lowlife took off and she's alone, so now's the time. I already put the Anna Ni-chloral hydrate in a bottle of tequila. I got Mr. Bubble for Chloe, and a big new bath towel. The towel is wrapped around a gun - a handgun from the store that the owner leaves behind the counter just in case. I'm going to ask the mom if I can give Chloe a bath before bed, and while I'm in there, hide the gun under the bathroom sink for when I need it in the morning...

*Knock knock.*

Chloe knows I'm coming, and throws herself into my arms. The mom is right there, all smiley when she sees the tequila. I give it to her, and she starts rummaging for a couple plastic cups, while Chloe and I go into the bathroom and get the Mr. Bubble going in the rusty old tub.

Chloe gets in and lathers up, playing with the foam, and I know it's the right moment to get that gun shoved way back under the sink. So far so good...and all of a sudden the outside door busts open like somebody put a boot through it, and a voice hollers, "You whore," and stuff about acting like a *taconera* while I been away, and there's a little *zhzhzhoot* sound, like a shot. Somebody hits the wall right next to the bathroom door and makes a soft, sliding sound all the way down.

I meet Chloe's eyes - wide and shiny with fear. My fingers go to my lips, a silent *shhhh*, and I inch the shower curtain across to hide her. Steps come up to the bathroom door - the impact sprung it open a few inches. I'm glued to the sound of those feet and I'm too freaked to even think about reaching for the gun under the sink. A drip from the tap hits the bathwater. It sounds like a firecracker going off. My eyes focus beyond the crack in the door and I see the mom's torso - and a man's hand reach out to touch her. I recognize tattoos on that hand. And then his face draws near, until his eye appears in the door crack. "Come out," he says. The barrel of a gun rises to point at me, underneath his eye.

My legs won't move; knees rubbery, not responding. "Out," he says again.

If it wasn't for all the blood, the mom could just be taking a nap, sitting all relaxed like that. Except for the bullet through her heart. She has an empty plastic cup in one hand and my tequila in the other. The banger recognizes me, smirks, and crosses to a cheap boom box. A gangsta starts growling about guns and hos - murder music. Banger takes the bottle out of corpse-mom's hand and drinks from it long and hard. "Where's the kid?" he says.

I stutter something about gone with a babysitter while he swigs away. "Tastes like shit," he says, holding the bottle up. It explodes in a thousand sparkling shards. Behind the dazzling spray of tequila, a rose opens in his throat, scattering bloody petals. He staggers back, leaving a red swerve on the grimy shag, hits the screen door, and crashes through. Shouts and commotion outside as I look behind me and there is Chloe, little Chloe, naked and dripping, holding a smoking gun. Her small voice sounds innocent and clear, like bird song after a bomb blast.

"Did I do good, Bebbie? Did I do good?"

*Bio: It SAYS Anonymous for a reason, jackass...*