

Green Witch

“Sweetheart, do you have a candle for Madeleine?” Barbara, a woman in her mid-40s wearing a cream-colored sequin dress, gently placed her hand on her daughter’s shoulder, turning and smiling at Madeleine as she spoke.

“Who the fuck is Madeleine, mom?” Barbara’s daughter Charlotte, clad in a bright yellow gown with her brown hair piled in a high bun sitting upon the top of her head, responded. Charlotte never made eye contact with her mom, instead focusing on her cuticles.

Madeleine cringed as she beared witness to the transaction. Charlotte and Barbara were greeting their guests at every table of the *Beauty and the Beast*-themed party. A chore Barbara took up with glee, much to her daughter’s chagrin, as Charlotte rolled her eyes at everyone who wasn’t part of her inner circle of friends while Barbara made painful small talk and gave it her best effort to display some gratitude towards the guests in attendance.

Still, an important question was presented: really, who the fuck WAS Madeleine, and why was she allowed to be in the presence of such... *teen royalty*? Madeleine looked down at her own purple, sparkly nails. Not her best work, but not bad for being done in five minutes. Her whole ensemble—hair and makeup included—wasn’t too shabby for being put together in such haste, she thought as she fussed with the hem of her velvet floral dress. It was unfortunate, though, that she was looking the best she had in months and it was wasted on... *this*. Madeleine took a sip of her non-alcoholic champagne and surveyed the room around her. What was the proper etiquette for meeting a guy at the Sweet Sixteen of a girl you barely know? Is that in and of itself a social faux pas? Even if it was, an outfit this good was worth getting a little slack for.

“Psst..” A finger jabbed at Madeleine’s arm.

“Ow! What the—” Madeleine spun around to meet her bony-fingered poking assailant. It was a middle-aged woman with big, black hair with grey frosted tips and even bigger shoulder pads affixed to her shimmery black pantsuit.

“You’re not supposed to drink that until *after* the candle ceremony,” the woman instructed.

Madeleine choked back the small sip she took and carefully placed the champagne flute on the table, looking around cautiously to make sure no one witnessed her guffaw. She mouthed a silent “thank you” to her unknown party decorum fairy godmother—no doubt an uncool aunt not deemed important enough to sit with the rest of the family, doomed instead to take a seat at a far corner table along with miscellaneous townies, exactly where Madeleine found herself.

“Darling, Madeleine is your manicurist, remember? You said you wanted her here to give her a candle.” Barbara said apologetically.

“No, mom. I said to invite her to make sure the wax from the candles doesn’t fuck up my manicure. Holy shit, mom, do you even listen?” Charlotte responded brusquely, walking away from the pitiful table of miscreants.

Sweetheart. Darling. “Daddy’s Little Princess,” read the sign over a mural of pictures with her father by the gift table. Charlotte was her actual name, and Madeleine *was* just her manicurist, unfortunate enough to get caught in this little debutant-from-Hell’s web.

Madeleine was good at doing people’s nails. Like, really, really good. She had a way of treating nails as a canvas, using the tiny brush to create masterpieces with unparalleled precision. It was probably her least favorite of the arts she practiced, but it was the only one that made her money. At very least, the only one she could *tell* people she made money from. Madeleine had been working at Beauty Nails in the rich city of Greenwich, Connecticut for about six months when Charlotte barged in, hysterically crying because Lovely Nails “totally butchered” her manicure, and demanded that someone fix it. Madeleine happened to be the lucky son-of-a-bitch that was available to take care of the ticking time bomb that was the tiny teenager. Lovely Nails opened right across the street from Beauty Nails’ operation and quickly became fierce competition for

scooping up all of the well-to-do white women and their spoiled children on what was considered to be the Rodeo Drive of the East Coast.

“Ugh, preferably someone, ANYONE, who speaks English,” Charlotte clarified. Lucky Madeleine again.

“I want something that screams... *Princess*.” Charlotte said with a coy smile, plopping herself into the seat in front of Madeleine.

Madeleine kept her head down and made little to no conversation as she “operated,” transforming Charlotte’s elegant pink nails with diamond decals to a light peach shade with dainty sparkled strokes. It was a long, arduous process and they didn’t speak to each other the entire time, Charlotte too preoccupied with instead talking to her friends over the phone.

“I told that bitch ten times my dress is PEACH, not fucking pink. If they can’t get my nails right for this dumbass dance, can you imagine how they’d screw my nails up for my Sweet Sixteen? Ugh, I literally cannot even deal with the thought of that.” Charlotte proclaimed into her iPhone, using her speakerphone so the entire salon could be in on her conversation, glancing angrily at anyone who showed any sort of ire at her loud outbursts.

When Madeleine was finally putting the final touches on Charlotte’s nails, she could feel Charlotte shooting daggers at her with her eyes.

“Finished,” Madeleine gently announced, handing Charlotte’s delicate and pastel appendages back to her, “Just set them under the dryer for about ten minutes and you should be good to go.” Charlotte studied her nails as Madeleine silently prayed to her Lord and Lady.

“Ho-LY Shit” Madeleine winced at Charlotte’s reaction, “These are PERFECT! OH-EM-GEE, YOU ARE A GODDESS!” Charlotte squealed.

Madeleine hated herself in that moment. Not because she had to smile and say “thank you,” but because for that split second she actually felt good... and felt... *accepted*. Gross. For as long as she could remember Madeleine found herself in situations just like this one. It comes with the territory when you’re the only pale-faced,

dark-haired, goddess-adoring and nature-loving witch in a rich town filled with spoiled, trust fund children of lawyers, doctors and professional recreational tennis players. Her life in Greenwich wasn't a choice, it was a sentence.

Charlotte paid with her father's credit card and left a \$.50 tip on a \$38.50 bill. Madeleine supposed she didn't want to take advantage of daddy's plastic too much. Then the call came in two weeks later, "Yes, my daughter would like to make an appointment with the, uum, *white* woman who works there," Barbara whispered carefully on the other line. Madeleine held back tears as she awaited Charlotte's arrival so she could paint her nails to match the *Beauty and the Beast* theme of Charlotte's Sweet Sixteen.

Was this really the life her mother and mother's mother before her wanted for Madeleine?

Madeleine was the only daughter of a single mother, Elaine, who worked three jobs to make sure she and Madeleine lived comfortably. They inherited a small apartment from Elaine's mother Evelyn—a single mother herself—who passed just a few months after Madeleine was born. Evelyn moved there with Elaine in the early 1970s in an attempt to establish some normalcy in their lives after her drug-dealing, gang-leader father was killed in a shootout.

Evelyn did everything she could to keep her small family safe. She wasn't keen on the inhabitants of the rich city, but she knew it was far from anywhere her dead husband's goons might ever venture. She kept their apartment minimalist and dark, the only light that ever came through was from the candles of patron female saints that surrounded the walls of every room in the apartment. Evelyn spent her days in solitude, weeping and saying prayers of protection, blessing everything she touched with holy water.

It was torture for young Elaine, watching her mother's descent into madness. Evelyn's tears grew louder and louder, her body seizing as she wept, occasionally experiencing bouts of fainting. Slowly Elaine started also praying, but to different

women. She created her own saintly candles of the women who inspired her: Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Dorothy Pitman Hughes, Wonder Woman and Mary Tyler Moore. Of Evelyn's protective rituals, there was one in particular Elaine enjoyed: listening to her mother recite the story of Joan of Arc. This nightly ritual became a meditation chant for Evelyn but served as a bedtime story for Elaine, even when she was well into her pre-teen years. Elaine wished she had a strong mother, someone who would persevere despite the odds. She wanted Joan of Arc. She got Margery Kempe.

When Elaine turned sixteen she knew she had to escape the unhealthy situation she grew up in. As each year passed, Evelyn grew more and more apprehensive of what the outside world held for her and her daughter. The two lived like a bad *Grey Gardens* knock-off, without any of the agoraphobic glamor. A doctor that made house calls would handle Elaine's regular checkups. Clothes shopping was minimal and only by mail order catalogue. Food shopping was done by paying the doorman's teenage son to go to the corner store and pick them up TV dinners. Even when Elaine needed materials of a *feminine* matter, she still had to hand the list over to Roy, their personal delivery man, along with a blank check. Upon his return, Evelyn would carefully calculate every expense so there was never any funny business.

Evelyn also wouldn't let Elaine attend school, instead teaching her at home for fear that her name appearing on any class rosters would give way to their whereabouts. Evelyn's lessons were often religious in nature, though her grasp of science and literature were impeccable. The unintentional best gift she could have ever given to her daughter was a knowledge of the literary arts, which led Elaine to escape to new realms within poetry and short stories. In a pile of books Evelyn had saved from her younger days, Elaine favored one in particular: a peculiar looking worn-out blue hardcover titled *The Sea Priestess*. This quickly became a favorite of Elaine's, reading it until the cover completely fell off and the stitches holding the pages together were wearing thin. While her mother would say her nightly prayers Elaine developed a mantra she'd say to herself before night carried her away to sleep,

“I am the star that rises from the sea—
The twilight sea.
I bring men dreams that rule their destiny.
I bring the dream-tides to the souls of men;
The tides that ebb and flow and ebb again—
These are my secret, these belong to me—”

As Evelyn’s grip on reality started to slip, Elaine found it easier and easier to sneak extra items onto their shopping list: at first it was a bag of chips, then it was a can of whipped cream, eventually the list was populated with fresh herbs and spices, flowers and various elixirs she could mix together. She’d also give Roy lists of books every other week. While he got to do the fun part of visiting the library, Elaine would retire to her room, where she’d imagine his hands running over the spines of the titles, his fingers gently caressing each book until they landed on the exact title she needed. No matter how obscure the book, Roy always found it for her. It was only a matter of time before Roy grew fond of Elaine’s smell of lilacs and rosemary and, despite being never having left her apartment in over fifteen years, managed to land herself a love interest.

Soon enough, just *reading* about faraway lands didn’t satisfy Elaine’s very *real* lust for adventure. As much as she knew it would be akin to attempting the impossible, and though she felt doing so may sever her ties with her mother indefinitely, she knew she needed to explore what was beyond the walls of their saintly two bedroom apartment. While her mother was taking her nightly three-hour nap after dinner, Elaine carefully slung her bag full of essential goods—a few of her candles, her notebooks, her clumsily bound together copy of *The Sea Priestess*, a copy of *Drawing Down the Moon* stolen from the library and a bar of homemade lavender soap—over her shoulder and met Roy downstairs. The feel of the fresh air upon Elaine’s face almost brought her to her knees. Without a plan of action or a care in the world, Elaine was ready to find the great beyond. She was ready to see the twilight sea.

Witchcraft was a part of Madeleine's life from the moment she learned how to speak. Incantations took precedence over nursery rhymes, recipes for love and prosperity potions were memorized before she even knew how to microwave a bag of popcorn, and she was guided towards an immense love and appreciation for nature. Evelyn didn't last much longer after Elaine left. Despite her many cries and prayers for protection, her withdrawal from society caught up to her. She was found dead in her apartment hallway, the farthest she had traveled in twenty years. It was a silent heart attack brought on by Long QT syndrome, but Elaine knew the real truth: Evelyn died of a broken heart.

Not long after Elaine left and found herself pregnant, Roy skipped town as well. While she knew Evelyn wouldn't survive no matter if she stayed or not, she couldn't help but feel as though the men in their lives had caused them nothing but pain, so she made a point to only create positive female influences for her own daughter. Moving back into her mother's old apartment in Greenwich, she kept all of Evelyn's patron saints intact, adding her own to the mix as well. Growing up, Madeleine was encouraged to spend as much time outside and with nature as possible, and she split her education in two: at her public school during the day and in the coven at night.

Even attending public school in the rich city felt like a private school anywhere else. It wasn't easy growing up with such an alternative lifestyle in a city that so desperately championed normalcy and wealth. No matter how badly Madeleine tried to fit in, she'd always be the weird girl with the even weirder mom—but that was better than the feeling she experienced most in her later years—being invisible. She couldn't hide who she truly was and despite her best efforts, her powers were far, far stronger than her mother's. All she could do was hide amongst the shadows so no one could get too close, lest they find out her secret.

It wasn't until high school that she met a kindred spirit in a young woman named Janet Burke. Their auras intertwined and it was as if fate had brought them together. Janet hung on Madeleine's every word, asking her for help with potions and incantations and the two would spend hours getting lost in the greenery around their

neighborhood. Janet was the only person Madeline felt truly comfortable around for the first time in her life. Until they turned sixteen.

All Janet wanted for her birthday was a spell that would get Bobby Sampson, the hottest boy in the junior class, to notice her. She had her mom throw her an elaborate Sweet Sixteen just so she could invite all of the most popular kids in her class to get Bobby's attention. Madeleine was taken aback by this revelation: since when did Janet care about petty stuff like that? She felt hurt, betrayed. On the day of Janet's Sweet Sixteen, Madeleine went to her party, handed her a bottle and left. It was a love potion, just like Janet wanted. Not long after that night Bobby and Janet ran away together and Madeleine never saw her best friend again. Elaine insisted that men were forever the scourge on the women in her family, and Madeleine returned to slinking amongst the shadows, hoping to achieve the normalcy that constantly eluded her once and for all.

"She made your nails look *sooo* pretty, Cher-bear, are you sure you don't want to give her Aunt Mary's candle?" Barbara pleaded, badly trying to get herself out of the awkward situation she found herself in. Aunt Mary, the name placed to the face of the padded shouldered-pantsuit woman glared at Madeleine.

"MOM! I told you Aunt Mary's candle is going to my new best friend Trisha, why the hell would I give it to some weirdo lady that works in a nail salon?" Aunt Mary smirked at Madeleine, her insult turning into some kind of smug justice.

But Charlotte did raise a good point that Madeleine couldn't argue; Trisha probably couldn't paint the Paris skyline across Charlotte's rounded-top nails, but at least she wasn't a weirdo. Who the fuck *was* Madeleine, and what was she doing there? Who did she need to impress by getting gussied up and going to this awful event—for what? A measly \$.50 cents every couple of weeks? Or was it for the one thing Madeleine constantly strove for even if she didn't want to admit it—*acceptance*? Charlotte might have been a privileged, horrible specimen, but she was right, Madeleine *WAS* a weirdo. Far beyond what the little prissy brat even knew. And in that moment, Madeleine was

finally able to accept that—and that was better than trying to be a part of this horrid culture.

SCREEECH. The music came to a halt as Charlotte's father's voice boomed over the microphone and everyone scrambled to their assigned tables.

"Excuse me, everyone, but let's please take a moment wish a very happy birthday to the "Belle" of tonight's ball, the kind, giving, beautiful soul known as my darling Charlotte. May you, on your sixteenth birthday, continue to grow into the sweet, strong, independent woman I know you will be. May tonight be filled with much happiness and celebration—because no one deserves it more than you do, baby." Barbara embraced Charlotte in a hug as her father spoke, as Charlotte quickly pushed her mom away, making sure her dress didn't get wrinkled in the process.

Madeleine gulped down the rest of the fake champagne, ignoring the glare from the loser Aunt Mary, as the crowd roared with applause. She surveyed the room as the birthday girl took the stage to hand out candles to the sixteen most important people in her life. The crowd formed into one giant huddle of pastels, neons and orange-tanned skin with bleached, blonde hair. Madeleine couldn't be more out of place if she had a pentagram tattooed right on her forehead. She looked for the exit when she spotted a young girl sitting at a table all by herself near the exit. The girl looked lonely, like she didn't want to be there. A kindred spirit in a sea of phonies. Madeleine couldn't help but gravitate toward the young woman. Sure, this wouldn't help bring down her "weirdo" factor much, but good conversation was going to be hard to come by at this joint.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Mary, but she and Trish have cheerleading practice together every Tuesday, and you see, they've just gotten so close this past week..." Madeleine overheard Barbara explain softly to Aunt Mary as she walked away.

"Hey, anyone sitting here?" Madeleine said to the girl. She met Madeleine's gaze with a confused yet trusting smile.

"No, of course not." She replied.

"So, you a friend of Charlotte's?" Madeleine hated making small talk. The girl snorted and gave her an incredulous look in response.

“Are you?” She sneered.

“Touche.” Madeleine replied, feeling an immediate kinship with the young woman, “So, then what are you doing here?”

The girl shifted in her seat and responded. “I ‘helped’ her with her Trig homework—a.k.a. let her copy my answers so she wouldn’t fail. That way she gets to stay captain of the cheerleading team. Her mom begged me to come—said she’d have a candle for me, but I think she was lying just to get another gift. Whatever, like I can afford to get her anything she doesn’t already have. I decided to *make* her something instead. Anyway, my mom’s waiting in the lobby for when this is over so I can just leave and pretend I was never even here.”

“Do you like her?” Madeleine asked.

“Fuck no!” The girl quickly exclaimed. “Sorry, pardon my French. But absolutely not. She’s tortured me every single day since the Seventh grade. Little does she know that perfume I made her is actually a potion. She sprays herself and bad luck will come her way for the next seven years!”

A huge smile crept across Madeleine’s face. She knew she was here for a reason.

“I don’t think spells work like that,” she replied.

The girl shrugged.

“Yeah, I figured that. But anyway, who are you and why are you here?”

Who the fuck *was* Madeleine and why was she at this God-forsaken shindig? Truth was, Madeleine was a 36-year-old nail artist by day and a witch by—well, also by day, because she couldn’t just turn off the magic she possessed. She came to a 16-year-old’s birthday party to cast a revenge spell for a \$.50 tip. Or maybe it was to get revenge for all the 16-year-old brats who treated her like an outcast when she was their age. Or maybe it was to see how the other half lived—she really wasn’t sure anymore. But for the first time in the night she actually felt a purpose, and that was in the form of the brooding dark-haired girl sitting next to her.

“I did the birthday girl’s nails,” Madeleine smiled.

“Oh, they look nice,” the girl replied sheepishly. “I really like that you incorporated the rose from *Beauty and the Beast* in there too. God, I’m so pissed that’s the theme of this stupid party. Like she would ever be Belle, or even *get* the whole point of the story.”

“If it makes you feel any better, her mom begged me to come and bribed me with a candle, too.” Madeleine winked at the young girl.

“Well, then I hope the candle wax doesn’t ruin her nails.” She replied coyly, studying Charlotte’s every move.

“I hope it does,” Madeleine responded and the two shared a quiet laugh, “I’m Madeleine,” she said with an outstretched hand.

“I’m Luna,” she smiled and shook her hand in return.

“Luna. That’s a good name. Whaddya say we cut out of here? I know a place nearby that makes great veggie burgers.” Madeleine proposed.

“Deal! My mom would probably be down with that too,” Luna said, grabbing her purse and standing up. The two left and walked into the lobby, where a blonde woman in a Fleetwood Mac t-shirt and jeans was sitting in a chair, playing a word game on her phone, sticking out like a sore thumb in the lush hotel lobby that surrounded her.

“Mom! This is my new friend—” Luna began.

“Madeleine,” her mom replied, standing to greet the two.

“J-Janet? Janet Burke?” Madeleine stammered.

“You two know each other?” Luna responded, confused.

“We went to high school together,” Janet abruptly answered, offering little room for explanation.

“Gosh, Janet, I think the last time we spoke was in this very lobby after your own Sweet Sixteen,” Madeleine replied.

“Mom, *you* had a Sweet Sixteen at the VIP Room?!” Luna said in dismay.

“Oh, it wasn’t as swanky back then,” Janet answered quickly. “Sweetheart, here’s the valet slip and a \$5. Give it to the man outside so we can get our car,” she pulled the blue slip from her worn-out purse and handed it to her daughter. Luna raised her

eyebrows at her mom as she looked back and forth from Janet to Madeleine. She shrugged and exited the lobby.

“How have you been?” Madeleine asked. The uncomfortable vibe was palpable.

“Busy. Divorced, But—happy.”

“I’m glad to hear that. I didn’t even know...”

“It was why I had to drop out of Middleton Prep.” Janet responded sharply.

“Oh well, um, I should be going...” Madeleine couldn’t bear to take any more of the awkward conversation. Things were only going to spiral downward from here, it was better to just walk away and leave on a somewhat high note.

“You know your spell backfired,” Janet proclaimed as Madeleine began to walk away. “It seemed like the end of the world at the time, but look at us. I love my daughter more than anything. I’m happy. We’re happy.”

“No, I think it actually worked,” Madeleine turned and responded. “Luna seems like a wonderful girl. And it looks like her art has some potential, she just might need a little guidance. Maybe you—*we*—can help her”

Janet smirked at Madeleine as she walked over to her and met her with a warm embrace, taking Madeleine by surprise.

“You know, I hear there’s a place that makes great veggie burgers around here,” Janet proposed, “My treat.”

“I’m two steps ahead of you.” Madeleine responded in kind.

“Car’s here,” Luna walked in and informed them, noticing the girlish smiles that crept across Janet and Madeleine’s faces. The three began to walk out the door, as Madeleine disposed of the perfume bottle she was going to leave for Charlotte in the trash.

“This last candle,” Charlotte said with a grimace, “is for someone who helped me be here tonight. Luna Lo—something or other.”

Luna, Madeleine and Janet turned when they heard Luna’s name, they all shot glances at each other, deciding what to do next. They crept back up to the door of the party room and opened it ever so slightly, peeking in at the spectacle.

“Luna?” Charlotte announced again to silence, as the crowd began to snicker and giggle. “Are you kidding me Luna? Come up and get your fucking candle!” Charlotte proclaimed, “YOU DON’T EVEN DESERVE TO BE INVITED AND YOU’RE SERIOUSLY GOING TO EMBARRASS ME LIKE THIS, YOU GODDAMN WEIRDO?!”

“How dare you take the Lord’s name in vein!” Barbara jumped up to detain her daughter, as the guests erupted into uproarious laughter.

Luna, Janet and Madeleine covered their mouths to stop themselves from laughing too hard and garnering any extra attention. They snuck off to leave, but Madeleine looked back one more time, focusing her attention on Charlotte and—more importantly—her fingernails.

“MY PARTY’S RUINED!” Charlotte exclaimed as Barbara grabbed the microphone out of her hands.

“Aunt Mary, would you like to come up and accept this candle instead?” Barbara inquired.

“MOM NO!” Charlotted screamed as Aunt Mary stormed the dance floor and wrestled the candle out of Charlotte’s iron grip, the heat burning down the Eiffel Tower etched carefully on her middle finger.

“MY NAILS! WHERE THE *FUCK* IS Madeleine?!”

THE END.