

It was one hell of a wakeup call for Allison to realize that she had never stepped into a convenience store, let alone gone shopping for food.

It was OK. She had this.

She only had to... figure out the difference between brands.

*Useless child.*

Two bottles of cooking oil, one about 5 dollars more expensive. Surely that meant it was better.

Right?

*What do you know about the world?*

Not many options for salt and spices. The canned food stumped her. Could she even find good meat here?

*You are an ignorant, spoiled brat who has had everything handed to her in a silver platter.*

“Shut up,” Allison growled. The mocking voice faded away.

Allison sighed, lightly thumping her head against one of the fridge doors.

“I have no idea what I’m doing.”

Her train of thought derailed when glass *shattered*.

Allison screamed, ducking, mind racing. What the *hell*?

The clerk was shouting something, words lost in the panic. She turned to him.

A massive grey hand sent the clerk flying against a wall.

Allison covered her mouth to keep herself from screaming, eyes widening. A second hand grabbed onto the shelves of the aisle she was at. She scrambled back, falling to all fours, trying to hide in the far end of the store.

Only then was she able to see it, towering over the shelves. Slate grey, with multiple arms it used to pull itself inside further, and a misshapen, bulbous head that emerged from the rest of the body.

She couldn’t stay there.

Allison crawled down the back as quietly as she could. The thing’s head vibrated, and she froze, but it seemed focused on the counter. She took a deep breath to steel her nerves, and tried to move past the next aisle.

She felt a pull, followed by a crash.

She turned, stunned. Her jacket had snagged onto the metal shelf besides her, and pulled down several cans.

The creature screeched, and crawled towards her, shoving things away from its path.

Allison tried to get to her feet, to run, but her jacket was still caught. She stumbled, yanking on her jacket until it snapped free. She screamed, tumbling back and crashing against the refrigerators behind her.

Her vision swimming, her legs like gelatin, Allison could only watch the monster approach.

It had to be a dream, right? A horrible nightmare. She was going to wake up safely in her bed.

*What bed? You left it all behind when you spat on my face.*

Her voice again.

*You ran away because you couldn't get your way.*

"Shut up..." Allison mumbled, a familiar anger stirring inside. She left because she couldn't stand it anymore.

*And look where it got you; about to be mauled.*

"Shut up."

The monster crawled closer. It's every movement made her anger boil with repulsion.

*I told you, didn't I? I only ever wished to protect you.*

"Shut up!"

The monster reached towards her. Her chest tightened, fear replaced by rage.

*You should have listened to your mother.*

"SHUT! UP!"

Fire.

Fire everywhere.

When had Allison stood up?

Why was the creature burning?

No. Allison closed her eyes, and took a deep breath.

She remembered.

She had punched the monster, her fist exploding in blazing flame. It fell, but she hadn't been satisfied, jumping at the monster and continuing to hit, over and over, lost in a red haze, until the damned thing crumpled.

She had done that.

It was probably dead, and it was burning, and...

Allison looked at her hands. Fire licked at them like an old friend. She opened her hand, and the flames danced her way up to each fingertip.

*Her flames.*

A small burst of laughter escaped her lips. It was her! It was all her.

It was amazing! All the aches from earlier had faded into nothing. She felt *strong*, powerful! She could take on the *world!* She was... she was...

... She was standing in the middle of a rapidly burning down convenience store.

Allison nearly tripped over her two feet as she ran to the entrance, to get out before the fire could consume the—

--*THE CLERK!*

Seconds later, Allison stumbled outside, carrying the man over her shoulders. She set him down next to a wall, slumping down against it, running a hand down her face, adrenaline finally crashing down.

God...

She was ready for her birthday to be over now.