fiction, 498 words

# Glassware

"Oh I always wrap my glassware," said the dumpy and drab lass behind the cash register, still tormented by traces of incorrigible acne from brow to chin. I'd just asked her if she could wrap up the four glasses I was buying. The very same style of glasses had been incredibly over-priced a specialty store in tourist-mecca Orlando some months earlier and so had remained unbought, albeit duly noted, until today.

They were for my brother and nephew, who, I was sure, would get a big kick out of their design. Two 24-ounce jobs in clear stucco (i.e., textured for a better grip), reminiscent of the classic soda fountain model, widened at their tops to accommodate cubes of ice or scoops of ice cream. Two retro 16-ouncers, after the Raymond Loewy soda-pop bottle in green, seduced with their subtle ridges and sinuous curves. Maybe I would use them as stocking-stuffers this Christmas, maybe I would find boxes and bows for under the tree. Either way, my family, who'd been through a rough patch of late, would know they were pretty special, at least to Santa Claus. And four bucks instead of sixteen? Today's deal would not take no for an answer.

It was a lazy September Sunday at a Dollar Tree in \_\_\_\_\_\_town, [U-NAME the STATE], a small, weary but friendly once-industrial city in [U-NAME the COUNTY}. It was the kind of place that had one of every sort of dollar store, and two of some. A beaten-down burg where my cashier might have even looked good, if you get the idea.

To my surprise, a perfectly cubed pile of last week's store circulars sat in anticipation at the bagging end of her check-out counter. My cashier was ready for customers like me—me, in particular. And after she rang up my purchases and bagged the other items, she rolled each of my four glasses—on the diagonal—as carefully as any engineer or artist might, tucking the other two diagonals of paper into the mouth or around the bottom of each glass to achieve a tight fit. It was the first time anyone at any dollar store anywhere in the country ever wrapped anything breakable for me—and was prepared to do so, to boot.

She was only 17 or 18 and already a master or mistress at her trade, but certainly didn't look like any sort of mistress or master. So I am afraid I said something very improper to her, whom I knew I would never see again. The proper thing to say would have been "Thank you" or "Thank you very much" or even "Thank you soooo much" if I felt I really had to express my appreciation with consummate clarity. But I could not help myself and instead said "I love you."

And when she smiled, as if in response, and then turned her attention to the next customer, it looked as though she was going to have a real nice day.

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