

Chapter 12

Aunt May placed a steaming crock pot of Mac and Cheese Casserole onto the middle of the table. Peter's stomach growled, but he resisted the urge to just plunge in. Aunt May hadn't even sat down yet.

"I'm so glad you're home for dinner," Aunt May said. "You've been so busy lately. Maybe we can watch a show together after dinner? Oh, listen to me going on and on. I'm sure you're too busy to be bothered spending time with your boring old aunt."

The last comment caught Peter's attention. "Aunt May! Don't say that."

"Well," Aunt May said as she sat down and put her napkin in her lap, then gave Peter a look. He immediately unfolded the napkin next to his plate and lay it across his lap, though he was a lot more likely to spill food onto his boobs these days than his lap. "You're never home. Let's say grace."

They held hands across the table, and as the prayer ended Aunt May gave Peter's hands a squeeze. He looked in her eyes and realized she'd been lonely, was feeling neglected. He almost started to explain how he'd been busy, but he knew it would just sound like he was making excuses. Hadn't Uncle Ben always told him to put family first? He'd also said love is best expressed in actions. "I would love to watch TV tonight after dinner," Peter said, spooning a heaping mass of gooey cheesy pasta onto Aunt May's plate. "I love spending time with you."

"Oh, you don't have to."

"Remember when we went crazy and watched all three seasons of Daredevil on one weekend?" Peter said, laughing.

“My eyes ached for days,” Aunt May said, chuckling at the memory. “So, what’s going on in your life? It feels like forever since we talked.”

Like most teen-agers, Peter had developed an instinct to keep his life largely secret from his parental figures, usually offering just sketchy, vague details and grunts. He felt an urge now to share some things with her. Was it because he was a female now? Because he knew it would make her feel less lonely?

He thought about he and Black Cat, but that was probably not something to share. Was it? No, he decided, selecting something equally weird and exciting instead. “I’m trying out for cheerleading.”

Aunt May’s fork stopped halfway to her mouth. “Cheerleading?”

“Yeah,” Peter said. “You know. I think it might be fun?”

Aunt May put her fork down. “Didn’t you tell me once that cheerleaders were, what was the word, vacuous? Plastic air-heads? Retrograde patriarchal constructs?”

Peter, in his reality, had never said such things, but they all sounded like things Penny probably said. In fact, they sounded like the things the girls in the Science Club had always said. “You know how teen-agers are,” he said with a shrug. “Always changing our minds.”

Aunt May saw right through him. She got a wicked smile on her face and said, “What’s his name?”

“Him?”

“The boy whose attention you’re trying to get by becoming a cheerleader?”

Peter decided to open up, take a chance. He was really scared to say it. He didn’t know how Aunt May would take it, and as sweet as she was, he still worried she would reject him, or start looking at him like he was some

sort of weird, fallen girl. Some kind of pervert. He looked around the neat, tidy kitchen, thought about Aunt May telling him he needed to be a proper young lady. Looked at her conservative, suburban outfit and hair. Yet, she wanted in, and he wanted to let her in. “The boy?” He whispered, dropping his eyes. “Um, I don’t even know how to tell you this.”

Aunt May waited, sensing it would be better to let her niece take her time with whatever she was struggling with.



“The, um, boy is Mary Jane.” Peter’s eyes flicked up to Aunt May’s face. There was a flicker of surprise, and then a smile, a warm, loving smile. “I like girls?” Hearing himself say it out loud, Peter felt like a huge weight had been removed from his shoulders, like he’d leapt into the air and was

swinging, web to web, weightless, free. He hadn't even realized how stressed and uptight and just crazy he'd been feeling about being a girl who liked girls now.

Aunt May reached across the table and covered Peter's hand with her own. "I thought so."

"You did? But, then, why all the who's the boy stuff?"

"I wasn't sure, but I also felt like it was best for me to let you tell me when you were ready. And that Mary Jane? Peter, she is quite a looker!"

The conversation opened up, with Peter gushing on about how MJ had invite him to join her girl posse, how he was friends with all the popular kids now, and how MJ wanted him to be a cheerleader. After dinner Peter helped Aunt May clean up, and then they retreated to the living room.

"What're we watching?" Peter said.

"I want to try that new The She's Hulk show," Aunt May said.

"Cool." Peter resisted the urge to correct her as to the title of the show. They curled up on the couch together. Peter leaned against Aunt May, and she scratched his head as they watched. When the show ended, Aunt My clicked on "Watch Credits." She was a credits freak. "I'm really glad you came out to me," Aunt May said. "I want you to know I'm proud of you."

"I know."

"Two things, though, Penelope. Don't let anyone change you. You need to be your own girl."

"I know," Peter said, though the comment felt a little like a stab to the heart. He thought about letting Black Cat dress him up as her, and then Kitten. And he was letting MJ change him, turn him into a cheerleader. He was letting everyone change him, and though part of him felt it was wrong, he couldn't fight the fact it felt soooo good. "What's the second thing?"

“If you’re going to be one of the popular girls, you’re going to need new clothes.”

Peter’s heart fluttered. “Shopping?”

“Shopping.”

Penny went off to study, and Aunt May grabbed her smart pad and did some pre-shopping while *Murder She Wrote* played in the background. It worried her that Penny was letting other people tell her who to be.

Cheerleader? That was as far from who she felt Penny was as it was possible for her to be. Her niece had always been shy, smart, an egghead who’d been much more comfortable in what Aunt May considered boy clothes. Getting her into her first communion dress had been a nightmare. Aunt May was also not sure she trusted this MJ. She didn’t want Penny to get hurt.

Yet, she felt she needed to let Penny make her own choices, live her life, and hopefully learn from every experience. Besides, she’d spent years trying to get the girl out of her hoodies, and Aunt May couldn’t miss out on this chance to guide her niece into some pretty clothes.

Up in his room, Peter knew he should study, but he had to check in on social media, liking and sharing posts from the Seven. No one had to tell him. He knew it was expected, and he was excited to see a whole bunch of kids had followed him. He took a selfie and posted it, heart racing. He’d never been one of them, one of the cool kids, and as he eagerly waited for any responses, he had this sudden fear growing within him: Carrie. They were going to Carrie him. The whole thing had been a cruel prank and—

Bloop. Bloop. Bloop. The hearts and likes and comments came pouring in. Word had gotten around; he was friends with MJ. He existed. He was a real person.



Going through all the social media posts, Peter was also doing research,

looking at the outfits the other girls wore, the way they did their makeup, their hair. He ran a hand over his short, bristly hair, which suddenly embarrassed him. He'd have to grow it out. As for his nails? Ditto. The girls in The Seven all had long, sculpted nails, pretty nails and his were, well, chewed. He'd always been a nail biter.

There was so much to do! So much to worry about if he wanted to be a popular girl! It was almost too much, and he might well have retreated back into the safe, comfortable world of the nerd girl, but for MJ. Mary Jane was so amazing and pretty, and Peter wanted to be near her, needed her approval. He imagined her naked, remembered his dream where the two of them had been making out. Am I a lesbian now? He wondered. He wasn't sure. He was a cis guy in a woman's body, so didn't that mean he was still cis? Or, did his body dictate his identity?

Peter had been so busy with social media and worrying about his nails he hadn't even taken the time to process his coming out. He didn't know what he was, and for better or worse, he decided the labels didn't matter. He just knew he really liked girls.

Peter had never found shopping the least bit exciting, interesting or stressful. It was now all of those things. It wasn't just that he was shopping for girl stuff as a girl, but he was about to transform himself via the power of cute outfits into a popular girl. He felt like his life was just beginning. Finally, he would be a real person.

Peter felt giddy as he and Aunt May walked into the mall together, his eyes roaming lovingly over the display windows of the women's fashion stores. He now understood the term "to die for" as he found himself

drooling over an especially cute sweater, or an adorable pair of shoes. He and Aunt May hit Teen Queen, grabbed a bunch of things, and Peter found himself in a fashion montage, modeling skirts and dresses, twirling, giggling, checking himself out in the mirror, Aunt May always at his side.



Each time Peter looked at himself in a new outfit, there were two all-powerful considerations in his mind: Do I look cute? Will Mary Jane like it?

“Oh, look at the time,” Aunt May said, breaking Peter from his fashion trance. “We better get home.”

“Maybe just a little longer?” Peter said. “I saw this really cute Sabrina dress at Hot Topic.”

“Who are you and what have you done with my niece?” Aunt May said. “I thought you hated shopping.”

Peter grinned. “I guess I thought I hated it, too, but, well, it’s actually awesome. Just one more store? Please? They’re having a sale.”

“There will always be another day to shop,” Aunt May said. “And another sale. Now, come on. We are already way over budget. Don’t forget—”

“I know. It’s coming out of my allowance,” Peter said, wondering if maybe he could get Cassandra to agree to turn his internship into a

paid position. Being a popular girl was not cheap.

Dmitri Smyrdakov, aka The Chameleon, nodded to Ana as she opened the door and let him into her house. “How do you live like this?” He asked, looking scornfully around the pleasant but utterly American and suburban home.

“It’s only temporary,” Ana said. “We’re undercover, which is why I called for you.”

Chameleon sat on a couch in the living room. “Yes, the Director was most vague as to the nature of the mission. Where is Kraven, anyway?”

“She is at ballet,” Ana said with a smirk, holding her phone out toward Chameleon.

He instantly recognized his half brother behind the pretty eyes of the young woman. “So, Kraven is now a teen-age girl?” He chuckled. “I will tell you now that if the mission is to help him regain his manhood, I am not interested. Did you say ballet?”

“Ballet. I have no interest in daddy getting his balls back. I am sculpting him into a perfect young lady. He’s becoming quite the ballerina.”

“I bet he is,” Chameleon laughed. “Kraven the ballerina. I love it. It suits him to be such a girl. I very much would like to see him dance.”

Ana hid her smile. “I wish for him to remain a female.”

“So, what then do you require of me?”

“I need to know what’s going on with Daddy. She’s up to something, vanishes for hours, keeps failing her missions, and has become a defiant little bitch.”

Ana then explained her plan.

“You want me to become a teen-age girl, befriend Kraven, find out what’s going on and help you tame the little minx?” Chameleon shook his head. “I cannot live as a girl. This would be a total humiliation for me.”

“I know,” Ana said.

“I won’t do it.”

“Should I call the director?” Ana and Chameleon stared at one another, a test of wills.

Chameleon looked away first.

Ana grinned. She was finding she positively adored feminizing men. “You go to private school. Your name is Brooklyn, and you’re a perky, cute blonde who loves kittens.” She showed him a picture of the fresh faced, pretty blonde he was about to become.

“Do I have to love kittens?” He asked, cringing at the thought of facing the world as that sweet, beautiful female.

“Of course you do,” Ana said, showing Chameleon the social media account she’d made for Angela, which, of course, was drowning in kittens. “Oh, and by the way, you’re also going to be taking ballet. You get to be a pretty little ballerina just like Daddy. Isn’t that fun?”

