

Daddy in Distress



Trapped in a Teen Girl Fantasy II
T.G. Cooper

The following material is rated

X

Mature Readers

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Trapped in a Teen Fantasy 2: Daddy in Distress

Written by T.G. Cooper. Edited by Selkie

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‘I’m not a child!’ Celia said.

‘Yes, you are,’ Carmine, her dad, answered. His eyes never left the television as he took a drink from his sweaty can of Milwaukee’s Best. Connor McGregor and T.J. Dillashaw were in the octagon, exchanging blows.

Celia looked at him with his scruffy, unshaven face and bulging beer belly, sprawled in his easy chair wearing a pair of ragged blue sweatpants and a wife beater. She felt hate at the sight of him, and that made her feel both powerful and guilty at the same time. ‘You’re so disgusting,’ she said.

‘Show some respect,’ Carmine snapped back. ‘You sound just like your mother. Complain, complain, complain.’

‘She works while you sit around drinking beer.’

‘Just shut your trap.’

‘Dad! Take me and my friends to see Bloody Bloody Christmas! I’m almost 17!’

‘No. You got, like, 2000 movies on Netflix. Watch one of them.’

‘All the kids at school are talking about Bloody! I just want to be a normal kid.’

‘Normal? Like hell you’re normal. Freaky kid.’

The words stung. Celia’s face flushed. A lot of the kids at school made fun of her and hearing it from her disgusting dad was like getting knifed in the heart. ‘Don’t call me a freak!’ She screamed.

Carmine slammed his beer down on the TV table he’d set up next to his easy chair. ‘Go to your room! NOW!’ He yelled so loud, the walls shook.

Celia stopped, froze. When he shouted like that, he was one step away from going nuts, grabbing his belt. She turned and ran up the stairs, her eyes filling with tears. Hurrying into her room, she threw herself on her bed and buried her face in her pillow. It hurt. She felt so empty and ugly, and she just wanted to win for once, to be the hero, the girl who got her friends—if they were really her friends- into the movie, and people would like her then and think she was cool and maybe she could finally get a boyfriend!

But her dad was mean, a drunk and an—asshole! And her life sucked, and she didn't know what to do anymore or if she could ever be happy.

Happy. The word brought back a memory. She was standing on her dad's feet, holding his hands, and they were dancing together. She was little, and he was different- clean shaven, thin, tall, and happy. That was before he got laid off, started drinking. He'd been so good, and now... she loved him, she hated him. Sometimes she wished he would die, but not really. No. What do I really want? she thought. I wish he could understand me. Could understand what it's like to be a teenage girl!

Downstairs, Carmine had gotten up and grabbed another beer from the fridge, popped it open. He was sweating- he was always sweating now—and he felt fat and disgusting, guilty for blowing up on Celia. It was happening more and more, and he couldn't seem to stop it, control it. He hated the way she looked at him now he had been laid off, wasn't working. She looked at him with pity and disgust—like he was a hobo or something, and it hurt him to think that he'd failed her, failed her mother. He took another swig of beer. I should probably stop drinking, he thought. But he didn't know if he could face himself sober. Things had been better once. With he, his wife and Celia. He felt so alone, but he didn't know how to talk to his daughter anymore, didn't know how to reach her.

I wish I did, he thought. I wish I could understand her, so I could be there for her...

The lights flickered. A rumble like thunder shook the house.

Carmine staggered. He felt so tired. He stumbled and fell into the easy chair. Reaching out with a shaking arm, he tried to put his beer on the TV table, but it toppled over and fell to the ground, spilling beer across the wood floor. Shit, Carmine thought, his eyelids growing heavy, closing, and the world went dark as he thought... Am I dying?

He found himself drifting, felt like he was passing through a cloud of cotton, and the air smelled of.... Sugar? Spice?

Everything nice?

He heard girls giggling, felt himself spinning, spinning, his skin tingling like he was being gently tickled with a thousand feathers. Everything was dark, and then he heard a woman's voice say, "Open your eyes."

Carmine opened his eyes and found himself bombarded with both sights and sounds. The room was lit with flickering torch light and a great, roaring fire. People shouted and yelled, a fiddler jiggled in the corner, and Carmine found himself staring into the face of an old man with runny yellow eyes, a bulbous red nose, and blotchy sallow skin. The man was grinning, revealing a gap-toothed jack o'lantern mouth of black and rotting teeth. He did not look at Carmine's face, however, but down at Carmine's....

Breasts?

Following the man's gaze, Carmine had looked down to find two large, firm breasts on his chest, the nipples hard and pink, the skin white as milk. He was holding open his vest, showing them to the man, who was clearly enjoying the view.

Daddy! He heard Celia say. *Cover your boobs!*

Carmine looked around, confused. *Where am I? Who am I?*

"Them's some glorious tits, for certain. You are a comely wench if I do say," the man growled, raising his hands and reaching toward Carmine's breasts.

At the sight of the creepy guy reaching for his boobs, Carmine shrieked, his breasts bouncing, and pulled his vest closed over them, keeping his arms wrapped girlishly over them. "Where am I?" He asked, his eyes going wide at the high-pitched, squeaky sound of his voice. Glancing around, he saw thick oaken beams supporting a thatch ceiling, large, wooden tables and benches, and people dressed in old fashioned clothes like at a renaissance fair or something. But he was barely able to process the strangeness of his surroundings as he fixated on the strangeness of his body. He definitely had breasts, and long hair he could feel swishing over his shoulders, and which was also falling into his eyes. He heard his small, pretty voice, and looking down he saw he was wearing a skirt. "I'm not a girl," he said out loud, though he was speaking to himself.

"You're no girl. No. Not with them tits. You're a woman, sure," the man said, licking his lips. He reached into a purse tied to his belt and fished out a dull coin, which he flipped onto Carmine's lap. Then he leaned in and said, "There's more where that came from if you let me stick my fingers in ya."

"What the hell?" Carmine said. The suggestion terrified and unnerved him, and he mentally began trying to sense whether he had a... well, he didn't even want to think the word.... But it was.... Um..."

Girl part, he heard Celia say. *Don't think about it. Gross as hell.*

He glanced around again, his long hair tossing about his head. "A ... don't use that kind of language. Celia? Where are you?"

"Who are you talking to?" The lecherous man said, still moving closer to Carmine.

Dad. I'm in your head or something. I am seeing you like I was in a movie, but I can hear your thoughts as well. It's weird to explain. Anyway, you need to get out of this place right now!

Did I have a stroke? Carmine wondered, looking around what he slowly started to realize was a bar of some sort, but all old-fashioned like at Disney World. This wasn't real. There was no way he had just found himself in a bar, and turned into a....

He felt a hand on his leg, and the stink of the sleazy guy was so strong.

"Get your hand off me," Carmine said, his arms still folded across his breasts.

“How much to let me fuck you, missy?” the man said, licking his lips, still squeezing Carmine’s thigh like he was inspecting a ham.

“Fuck me?” Carmine said, his little voice cracking. The man disgusted and... scared him. He was so confused about what had happened, was still happening, it was all too much, and he lurched to his feet, wobbling as he found himself standing perched forward on his toes. He stumbled as he tried to hurry away from the gross man, but felt the man’s arm snake around his waist, and then he was pulled backwards and felt the man pressing his groin against Carmine’s behind.

“Let go of me!” Carmine screamed, terrified, trying to squirm free.

Dad! Celia shrieked.

The man laughed, as did all the men around the room, and Carmine felt himself being lifted, off his feet, kicking his little feet furiously in the air. Finally, he let his arms fall from his bare breasts, and jammed his elbow back into the creepy man’s nose. He heard a crunch as the man howled and dropped Carmine to the floor, where he landed with an “oomph.”

Go. Run! Celia said. The Bobbies will be there any second!

Who? Carmine said, struggling to his feet, his breasts swaying.

“I’m gonna smash that pretty face of yours,” the creepy guy said, a hand to his bleeding nose, sitting on his butt on the floor.

Carmine had never backed down from a fight in his life, so ignoring the feeling of the air against his naked, swaying breasts, he clenched his little fists and said, “Come at me, bro!” But hearing the words in his squeaky, girlish voice, he cringed.

The man stood, grinning, towering over Carmine by over a foot, and seeming twice as wide. Tilting his head back to look up at the man, Carmine realized how tiny he’d become, and his heart fluttered with fear, but he set his jaw and kept his fists raised, moving around awkwardly in his skirt and heels. “I’ll kick your ass.”

“I’ll spank your ass,” the man said, lecherously ogling Carmine’s breasts, and then he added, “And I’ll fuck you for free, you crazy whore.”

Carmine found himself backing away.

Back and to your right. The back door. Run! Now! The Bobbies!

Carmine still didn’t understand who the hell the Bobbies were, or why they were coming or what the hell Celia was talking about, but he had hadn’t been this tiny in a long time, and he had never had a man look at him the way this creepy dude was looking at him threatening to... fuck him.. and the look and the threat sent new terrors and chills through his slender little body, so he turned and ran, his skirt swirling, his hair and breasts bouncing.

The man started after, but another girl tripped him, sending him stumbling to his knees, and she called out, “Run, Cherie! Run!” And then there was loud slamming, and whistles

blowing, and the room erupted into chaos as Carmine slammed through the back, then down and out into the dark, narrow alley. He stopped, looked left and right.

Left! Celia said. Left! Run!

Carmine started running, now once more grabbing the vest he wore and pulling it over his boobs. He hurried down the alley, and stumbled and struggled as everything was wrong... his legs felt too long and too wide apart, and his heels were higher than he was used to, and his skirt was clinging to his legs, and not to mention his hair, and the jiggling of his boobs.... Others were pouring out into the alley now, running into the night, and glancing up he saw a bright, full yellow moon above the buildings to either side of him.

Whistles. "Stop! Stop in the name of Queen!"

Turn! Turn! Celia said.

Carmine ducked down another, even more narrow alley.

There! Celia said as he ran toward a cart full of hay. You're supposed to hide in the hay!

What do you mean supposed to?

Just do it!

Carmine was panting, exhausted, and he could hear the whistles behind him, so he just decided to do it and, climbing into the cart, he pulled the hay over himself and then lay there, still, trying to control his breathing.

Good girl, Celia said.

I'm not a girl, Carmine answered.

Oh, sorry. Woman. She giggled.

What the hell is going on? Carmine asked, huddling there under the straw.

Then he heard them. Footsteps on the cobblestones.

Hold your breath, Celia said. Or the Bobby will hear you.

Bobby? What...?

"DO IT! SHHHSSSH!"

Carmine took a deep breath and held it. The footsteps slowly approached. Stopped. Seemed to move in a circle. Carmine's lungs started to ache.

Hold it!

Okay. Okay, he thought.

The footsteps stopped. He felt the cart shake, and closed his eyes, keeping the air in his now burning lungs. I'm not sure how much longer I can hold it, Carmine thought. The straw

was itching his nose, and now he was fighting not just his body's need for air, but the need to sneeze.

Just a little longer. He'll sneeze, then move on.

How do you know he'll...?

Carmine heard a sneeze. Then a shout from somewhere down the alley. His vision was turning black, and it felt like his lungs were about to explode...

Not yet.... Celia said.

My God, I am going to die!

The footsteps were racing away, and then finally there was silence.

Now! Celia said.

Carmine sat up, hay clinging to his long black hair, his face and clothes, and he gasped in the air in huge, deep breaths, feeling his breasts bounce with each breath. Once he'd gotten some good breaths in, he finally pulled his vest closed and buttoned it up, though it was so small it barely fit, and now pushed his breasts up and together, giving him a mass of cotton-white cleavage. A small silver crucifix lay gently between the mounds of female flesh, glinting in the moonlight. Staring down at his cleavage, he shook his head, the whole world seeming to spin.

What the hell is going on?

Your voice is so sexy, Celia said, amused. *And you're, like, super pretty, daddy. I mean, like, Victoria's Secret Pretty. I can't even believe that's you in there.*

Is it me? What's happening? How did you know about... the sneeze and everything? Carmine climbed down off the cart, brushing the hay from his body, taking in his wide, round hips.

You're in my book, Celia said. *You're the main character.*

In your book? What the hell does that even mean?

Somehow, you're inside my book. I mean, like part of the story. I am reading along, and it's all changed, so that you are Cherie Marchant now.

Cherie? Marchant? I don't understand. You're saying I'm a character in your book? And, where are you? He looked around the alley. The cart. The stucco walls of the buildings. 'It smells like horse crap here.'

I'm in my room. On my bed. Reading the book.

I must have had a stroke, Carmine said, now to himself. This is some kind of dream or something.

No. It isn't. And, daddy, one more thing. My book. It changed. On the back, it says, When Carmine Infantino finds himself in his daughter's teen romance novel, he must complete the mission or remain trapped forever as Cherie Marchant."

You mean I'll be stuck like... this?

That's what the book says.

Crap. Carmine pulled his long hair back from his shoulders and brushed it from his face. He could feel his big, firm breasts shifting and jiggling with every motion. These boobs are annoying, he thought.

You'll get used to them, Celia answered, giggling. I can't believe my dad is a girl!

You can hear everything I think? Carmine said.

Yes.

How is this happening? What is happening?

I don't know! It's like—wait. Omigod!

What is it?

I just read ahead a little. You've got to save your best friend.

From what?

Jack the Ripper.

Jack? The Ripper? Carmine was tugging at his vest and skirt, trying to get comfortable in his new shape and clothes.

Yes. Hurry. Head down the alley toward the... moon!

How am I supposed to stop Jack the Ripper like... this? Carmine said, holding up his slender arms, looking down at his boobs.

Just do what I tell you. Omigod. I have to tell my friend Taylor about this!

No! Don't tell anyone!

Toward the moon, Daddy. Hurry, or you'll be stuck like *that* forever!

Carmine looked up and spotted the full moon; it was huge, hovering in the sky like a giant eye, and a wisp of cloud was crawling across its surface. He started down the alley, a chill breeze blowing up the narrow, crooked length, giving him goosebumps as it washed over his bare, slender little shoulders. "I'm cold," he murmured, crossing his arms over his breasts and cupping his shoulders with his small, soft hands.

Unh hunh.

As Carmine headed down the alley, he saw that a thick, murky fog was starting to roll along the cobblestones toward him, and in the distance a bell started ringing. He felt scared but tried not to think about it or show it. He didn't want his daughter to know he was feeling like a frightened little girl. I am her dad, he thought, his heels clicking on the pavement. A man. He reached the end of the alley and came to a small courtyard that stood in front of a stone church with a large rosette window, brightly lit from the inside—red and blue—and even across the courtyard Carmine could see it portrayed a man slaying a dragon. He looked around, biting his lip uncertainly. He didn't like the feeling of asking his daughter what to do all the time, so with his arms still crossed over his breasts and trembling slightly from the cold, he walked tentatively out into the open courtyard, ignoring the strand of long hair that fell across his face. The fog was rising now, getting thicker, and it came up past his waist and was making it hard to see the church. Carmine felt a sharp pain in his shoulders and jumped, only to realize the pain came from him digging his long fingernails into his own soft skin. He chuckled, looking around in the fog, and then suddenly the light began to dim, and looking up he saw the moon was getting covered with thick clouds, and in a moment all would be dark. He froze, unsure what to do but still hating the idea of asking his daughter for help, and then he heard it.

Scrape. Scrape. Scrape. A sound like steel being dragged across stone.

Carmine put his hands to his cheeks and sank to his knees, wanting to make himself small, looking around frantically with wide, frightened eyes. His fear got the best of him, and he thought, A little help, here?

Right. Right, he heard Celia mumble.

Right, right? Carmine could imagine her on her phone, texting away, and his blood boiled. Celia! Get off your phone!

He heard a chuckle, and saw a tall, broad-shouldered shape with a top hat moving through the fog along the wall near the church, small sparks trailing him as he dragged something heavy, sharp and metal across the stones.

A strange thought came to Carmine's mind; I need to scream! I have to scream! It was like a pressure building up within him, and as he watched the shadowy figure move toward the church, terrified the man might see him, his whole body tensed, the scream building up within him, and he put his hand over his mouth, no no! If you scream, he'll see you! And yet, he just had to scream...

NO! Celia shouted in his head so loud he actually fell back onto his butt. *If you scream, he'll kill you!*

Carmine was on his butt now, looking over his skirted knees. The shadowy figure had stopped, seemed to be looking toward him.

He sees me! Carmine thought. He started to scurry back, sliding on his butt away. His heart was racing now. I have to run!

No! Celia shouted again. Don't move! Just sit still!

But he sees me, and...

Sit still! Celia repeated, then, softening her tone, she added, I need you to be a brave girl for me. Don't move a muscle. Can you do that, sweetie?

No, Carmine thought. No, he's going to hurt me!

Just sit still. Stay still. Like a cat. He can't see you in the fog, and anyway...

The shadow turned, yanked open the door of the church, and vanished inside, his topcoat swirling around him as he vanished.

Oh. My. God, Celia thought. *You are such a little scaredy cat.*

Carmine's breasts were heaving, he was breathing so hard. Stop it, he thought. He was going to kill me!

Hahaha. You like to act so tough but look at you about to cry!

Knock it off! Carmine said, struggling to his feet, straightening his skirt. I'm still your father.

Barely. 'He's going to kill me!' Celia said, *imitating Carmine's squeaky little girl's voice. 'I have to run!'*

Enough of this crap, Carmine said, turning and heading back toward the alley. I'm out.

But then you'll be stuck like that.

Good. You can pay your own bills, he spat back. Get a job.

Daddy, I was just teasing you.

It wasn't funny, and-

Suddenly, a scream ripped through the quiet night. It was muted by the fog, and seemed to come from everywhere, but the terror and fear in it sent a chill through Carmine and his hair stood on end. Who? What? He looked back at the church. There were dark shadows now moving against the stained glass, two large, exaggerated shapes struggling.

Agnes! Your friend!

Carmine felt afraid again, a cold, new female fear, but there was no way he would embarrass himself in front of his daughter again, so he started running, tripping on the hem of his skirt and falling forward to land on his hands and knees.

Hurry, Daddy! She needs you!

Carmine got to his feet, pushed his long hair out of his face.

Lift your skirt! Run!

Carmine grabbed the front of his skirt and pulled it up so his feet were free, and then raced up the steps of the church. Keeping one hand pulling up his skirts he grabbed the door to the church and pulled... and “umph!” He pulled again, but the door wouldn’t budge. He didn’t have enough strength in his skinny little arm to pull open the big, iron shod wooden door, but he tried again, making a small, girlish grunt as he tugged on the cold, metal handle. It’s too heavy!

Use your whole body!

Wrapping both his little hands around the handle, he leaned back and let all his body weight fall toward the ground. The door creaked open, slowly, slowly, and Carmine strained with all his might to keep his little hands from slipping off the handle—his grip was so weak!

Finally, the door was open enough, and he ran into the church, his arms waving at his sides, his hips swiveling. Inside, he saw the man—Jack the Ripper. Agnes seemed to have fainted, and he was cradling her in one arm, a straight razor raised above his head, flashing in the candlelight. Now, a scream did escape Carmine’s lips, a loud, piercing, girlish scream.

The Ripper looked up, his eyes gleaming with madness, his features hidden by the shadows created by his top hat. He hesitated.

Carmine put his hands to his soft cheeks and screamed again, a full-bodied scream that echoed through the church.

The Ripper made a strange sound, almost a growl, and he stood there, staring at Carmine, the razor trembling in his hands, Agnes supine in his arms. He took a step toward Carmine, and then another.

Carmine backed away. And again. His eyes were locked on that razor, that sharp, glittering, piercing razor. “L- let go of my.... her,” Carmine said, his little voice soft and trembling.

“No,” the man said, his voice sounding scratchy and bestial, like the voice of a bear that had learned to speak.

Carmine looked around for something to use as a weapon, and grabbed a candlestick, though as soon as he waved it at the man the fire went out. He clutched it awkwardly in his little hands, brandishing it.

Scream, Celia said. Scream!

I’m... I’m going to fight him! Carmine said.

You’re just a helpless girl!

I’m not a girl!

The Ripper was creeping forward now, getting closer. His eyes dropped to Carmine’s breasts, and he chuckled. “Feisty little thing,” he murmured.

Omigod, Mr. Infantino! You have to scream!

What? Who's that?

Taylor.

It's Taylor! I'm one of Celia's friends.

I didn't text her. She just came over...

Yeah, I was just stopping by and...

Stop! Carmine said, his back now to the door. I'm in a situation!

Scream! Celia said.

Yeah. Like, totally scream.

Loud as your little lungs will let you!

Carmine sighed, dropped the candlestick, clenched his fists and screamed again, as loud as he could, his shrill, high-pitched voice sounding like a little girl yelling in terror at seeing a spider, and it echoed around the church walls again, bounded back to his ears, sounding so impossible to Carmine even as he knew that screaming girl was him.

The Ripper chuckled with pleasure.

He likes it, Carmine thought, frozen now in The Ripper's eyes. He put his palms against the door, and stood there, his knees together, feet splayed apart.

And then... a whistle from out in the courtyard. And another!

The Ripper's eyes went wide! "Damn you!" He hissed. "You will pay for this!"

He dropped Agnes to the ground, turned and ran off toward the back of the church.

Carmine sank to his knees, shocked, and as the relief washed over him, he felt warm tears fill his eyes and pool down over his cheeks. He covered his face, ashamed.

Oh, your dad is crying.

I know. Isn't he so adorable?

I can't even believe this, Taylor said. *But he is really cute.*

Carmine heard them, but he was too stunned and overcome with emotion to even care. Instinctively, he crawled over to Agnes, who was starting to stir. She had porcelain skin, smooth and completely free of any blemishes, and her hair was gold, with white highlights, and as he looked down at her face, he noticed her long, thick lashes and thought, Wow. She is really pretty.

He even talks like a girl, Taylor said.

More and more since he's been in the book.

Should we call him a she now since he's a girl?

No, Carmine said, wiping the tears from his face, that comment at least being too much to ignore. "I'm still Celia's dad."

Agnes opened her eyes and looked up at Carmine, and her face spread into the most perfect, beautiful smile. "Cherie," she said. "You saved me?"

"Yes," Carmine said.

Agnes reached up and slipped a hand around Carmine's neck, and, pulling him to her, she kissed him right on the lips, a long, sensuous kiss. When it ended, Carmine found himself staring into her pretty eyes, a warm feeling spreading through his body. "I love you so much," Agnes whispered. "My pretty little flower."

Taylor and Celia burst into giggles.

What's going on?" Carmine thought as Agnes held him.

Oh, Daddy. Sorry. I should explain. You're Agnes' girlfriend.

Girlfriend? You mean?

Yes. You're gay.

I'm what?

Just then, the door to the church flew open, and three uniformed policemen rushed in. "What happened here?" One shouted at Carmine and Agnes. "What's going on?"

"The Ripper!" Agnes said. "He attacked me!"

"The Bloody Ripper! Where did go?"

"Oh, um, that way!" Carmine said, pointing toward the back of the church. Hearing his own girl's voice now in contrast to the voices of men made him wince. Two of the Bobbies ran off toward the back of the church, blasting their whistles as they ran.

Carmine felt a hand grab his arm, and he squealed in fear and winced, trying to pull his arm free. "Let go of me!" he squeaked.

"It's okay," the man said. "I'm McGregor. I won't hurt you."

Carmine looked up nervously at the man—he had a full head of curly red hair and a handlebar mustache, a jaw like a hunk of granite and pretty, soft blue eyes. He's cute, Carmine thought, letting the man help him to his feet.

"Here," McGregor said, draping a coat over Carmine's bare shoulders. "This will warm you up." And then he put a hand to the small of Carmine's back and led him toward a pew.

Carmine felt... bubbly... and glanced up gratefully at the – oh! He’s so tall!-- man. He smiled and said, “You’re so kind,” and his voice seemed to have slipped into an even higher, softer register.

Taylor and Celia burst into giggles once more.

What?” Carmine thought, following McGregor with his eyes as the man went to look after Agnes.

Oh, nothing. It’s just weird to see my dad crushing on a guy is all.

I’m not crushing on him! Carmine said, his eyes still lingering on the man’s broad shoulders, his firm fanny.

You’re so totally crushing, Taylor said.

You two are being ridiculous, Carmine thought, crossing his arms under his breasts and turning away with a huff.

Then why are your nipples hard, Dad?

Carmine’s pretty mouth fell open. ‘Cause I’m cold!

Okay. Well, just for your information, ‘pretty eyes’ is going to be the second part of your love triangle with Agnes.

Oh, they all fall in love? Celia asked.

Yeah. Your dad is a total slut in this story.

Wow. Do they ever do it?

Guys? Guys? Carmine said. I’m right here!

Oh. Sorry, Cherie. Taylor said.

Carmine ignored it. I thought you guys said I was gay.

You’re bi. Taylor said. *You like guys and girls.*

No, I don’t!

Well, Cherie does, and now you do, too.

I don’t like boys!

Daddy, it’s okay. I think it’s kind of cute!

But I don’t!

It was quiet for a moment, and then finally Celia said. *Okay. My dad doesn’t like boys, right Taylor?*

Of course, Taylor said. *He’s your dad, after all.*

So, there, Daddy. If you say you don't like boys, you don't.

Good. So, what happens now? Carmine thought, trying to get focused on getting out of this girl's skin, her life and her... feelings. What do I do next?

You two head back to the brothel. You and Agnes.

Brothel? But, why would we be looking to.... What kind of books are you reading, anyway, Celia? This all seems very filthy for a girl your age.

It's just teen literature these days. They don't hide from real world themes.

Well, I don't want you reading this smut anymore. Once you get me out of it.

It's really no worse than what's on the Internet, Taylor said.

Then you shouldn't be on the Internet, either!

Anyway, you two need to go back there.

Back there? You mean we go to sleep with prostitutes all the time?

In the book, they call you Dollymops, Celia said.

Dollymops? Us? Wait, you mean?

Cherie and Agnes are night flowers, Taylor said, snickering. Working girls. Dollymops.

The words for prostitute back then were so funny, Celia said.

Right? I mean—Dollymop! Hahaha!

Girls? Girls! Carmine thought, cutting them off. Are you telling me that I'm a.... I mean, that we are... that I'm....?

A whore, daddy, Celia said.

A gay whore, Taylor corrected.

Stop it, Carmine said, feeling humiliated.

I guess you won't be voting for Trump after all, Celia snickered.

But he might be servicing him! Taylor added.

Stop it! Carmine felt himself getting angry even as his humiliation grew, and he almost screamed, but then felt a familiar hand on his shoulder again and looked up into those kind, pretty blue eyes, and had to smile, feeling calm and safe.

“Let me escort you two back to your... quarters,” McGregor said. “I want to make sure you get home safe.”

He took Carmine by the elbow and helped him up, and Carmine had to use all his will to resist the urge to give the man's bicep a squeeze-- it looked so big and firm!—but the girls were

watching, and anyway he felt like he needed to fight these urges. Just because he was stuck as Cherie for the moment didn't mean he needed to start acting like her! No. He was still Carmine! And then he realized that despite himself he had put his little hand on McGregor's bicep and given it a squeeze, which in turn had sent a thrill of pleasure through his whole soft little body. The girls watched but didn't make a sound. He couldn't see them, but he guessed they were both covering their mouths, struggling not to laugh.

He and Agnes soon found themselves standing in front of a ramshackle one-story building with sagging walls and a crooked roof. "Well," McGregor said, smiling and giving both the two women a nod. "Goodnight."

Carmine felt an emptiness growing in him as he watched the officer walk away, but Agnes grabbed his arm and pulled him along with her through the door and into a cramped room, where he saw a bunch of empty cots and a couple of girls sleeping. "You sure do let your eyes wander, don't you girlie?" Agnes hissed.

"What are you talking about?"

"Don't play innocent with me."

"I'm not..."

Carmine saw a flash, felt a stinging pain in his cheek, reeled back and realized that Agnes had slapped him. "What the hell?" He raised his fist and swung at Agnes, who blocked his swing, then hooked a foot behind his ankle and shoved him, making him fall onto his back. "Ow!"

Agnes climbed onto him, grinning, straddling his ribs with her thighs.

"Get off me," Carmine said, his voice cracking, but when he put his hands on her shoulders, she grabbed his wrists and pinned his arms over his head. He felt his breasts pressing into hers, and stared furiously into her eyes, struggling against her, shocked that he was so small and weak that a girl could overpower him. "Let me go," he said, disgusted at the pleading whine that had crept into his girl's voice.

Agnes laughed, slid her legs up his body, then pushed his arms even further back.

Carmine was furious and tried to buck her off, pushing his feet against the cot. "Get off me you crazy.... mmmmpfff!"

Agnes had smothered his objections in a kiss. Carmine's eyes went wide, struggling with all the might in his little body, and then.... It was like something suddenly broke inside him, something hard and cold as steel, and his whole body sighed and released, and he found himself kissing Agnes back, desperate for her soft lips against his, loving the feeling of being under her control, completely and totally under her power. When the kiss ended, Carmine lay passively on his back, staring up at Agnes with dreamy, far away eyes. He was vaguely aware of his breasts-his nipples so hard and struggling against his vest... the growing heat and wetness, but mostly he was just looking at her... at her perfect skin, her bright eyes and shoulders... her power. He kept

his arms over his head, just as unable to move them as if she were still holding them there, crushing his slender little wrists in her powerful grip. Agnes for her part looked down at him, her eyes bright and hungry, her cheeks hot with triumph. She cupped his smooth cheek, ran her finger along his delicate jawline. “Undo your top,” she said in a flat, husky voice. A voice like a man. “Show me your tits.”

Carmine, given permission, reached down and began unbuttoning his vest, slowly, sensuously, then pulled it open to let his full, firm, soft breasts spill out. He watched Agnes’s face, saw her smile as she looked him over, and he felt a surge of pride in his perfect breasts, how big and firm and pretty they were, how much his woman liked them... Agnes reached down and took his breasts in her hands, squeezing them and rubbing her thumbs across his nipples. Carmine gasped, arching his back and throwing his head back as the pleasure surged through his body, and...

He heard giggling. Someone whispered *oh my god....*

Suddenly, he remembered. His daughter. Her friend. Watching. “No,” he said, struggling against his body’s hunger to be touched, admired, caressed. He tried to push Agnes’s arms away, to get her hands off his breasts. She ignored him, squeezed harder.

“Stop! Please!” Carmine said, terrified at what his daughter was seeing.

Instead, Agnes pinched his nipples. Hard. Really hard. Carmine shrieked even as the pain mixed with pleasure... some strange new pleasure he’d never experienced, and his whole body spasmed and sighed, and he felt himself being lost in the pleasure, in his womanhood. Even as he shook his head and cried “No!” he desperately wanted her to continue, to force him to continue, to drag him kicking and screaming all the way down this path to.... To something he needed and wanted but which terrified him more than anything because there was no part of this journey that was of man, and he wanted so badly now... his body wanted so badly to be every single bit a woman.... But Agnes wanted what she wanted, and the more he fought her and begged her for it and to stop it and the more she saw the hunger and fear on his pretty face the more excited she became. She kissed him again and let one hand slide down his bare belly and to the wet, hot space between his thighs and Carmine shrieked again and he couldn’t even hear the giggles and omigods anymore as everything seemed to fade to black.

He found himself on his side, naked, hugging his knees to his breasts. Agnes was spooning him, one hand possessively on his hip. His body felt... fuzzy and relaxed and his nipples ached. What happened? he thought.

You guys had sex, Celia said.

We did? I can’t remember anything, Carmine said, even as the memories of everything prior to the blackout began to come back to him. Oh. No. He thought. Celia. I can’t believe you had to see... I mean, I had no choice, it was all.... The book! The book made me do it.

Sure. Blame the book. And yet, how many times did you lecture me about how we always have a choice?

I thought it was really hot, Taylor said.

Get out of here! Carmine thought. Celia, do you really want your friends to see this?

It's kind of cute to see a guy getting all crazy when someone plays with his boobs, Taylor chattered on. *I just wish I could Snapchat it.*

You're actually going to let your friend talk about my boobs? Carmine said. I mean, make fun of my boobs, or Cherie's boobs? Not mine. I don't have boobs—you know what I mean!

Celia's answer was to giggle. *You made fun of me in front of my friends all the time.*

That was different. I'm your father!

Well, Celia said. *Now you have bigger boobs than mom, and you just got dominated by a 19-year-old girl. What isn't funny about that?*

Taylor giggled.

I didn't get dominated.

Both girls giggled.

What happened, anyway? I blacked out.

Fade to black. They only go so far in these books.

Fade to black. So, they left out the--- whatever happened next?

“Yes. Sadly. But what was in there was pretty hot. You could be like a porn star,” Taylor said.

Carmine flushed as he remembered the events—even felt his nipples getting a little hard again at the memories.

Who's that? Taylor said.

Probably Kate. Go get it. Celia answered.

What are you talking about? Carmine thought. You didn't?

Just one more friend. She's really into these books.

Do you want everyone at your school to know your dad is... this?

Kind of.

Carmine sighed. Closed his eyes. Look, he thought, struggling to find the words. I guess I haven't been the best dad or whatever. I mean, I know there were times when I could have, well, you know, right?

What are you trying to say, Dad? Celia answered.

Carmine cringed. He could hear the bitter anger in her voice. I'm trying to say, you know right? You know what I'm trying to say?

No. Tell me.

Carmine took a deep breath, felt his breasts rise and fall, reminding him of his predicament. You know.

Omigod! It's, like, totally for real!" He heard Kate say. *"Hey, Cherie Carmine! You look so cute!"*

The girls burst into a giggly chat fest as they talked about how amazing it was, how weird, how psycho and insane and cool and awesome. He knew it would go on for a time, so he slipped from Agnes' arms and, pulling a coarse sheet around his body, he made his way through the murky darkness, looking for the door to the bathroom. There was only one door other than the front door, so he carefully made his way through the now crowded room—girls and women sprawled everywhere— I'm prettier than any of them, he thought, offhandedly—and then pushed open the door to find a stinky, dark little alleyway. No toilet?

It's right there, he heard Celia say as the girls all grew quiet.

Where?

To your right.

He saw a bucket, buzzing with flies. That?

Just squat and let nature take its course.

Gross, he thought, regretting it immediately.

He is starting to talk like a girl, he heard Kate say.

No, I-- he started, but then figured, why bother? He stared at the disgusting bucket, equally revolted by the idea of squatting and doing it like a girl while Celia and her friends watched. You girls close your eyes or something.

Okay, Taylor said.

Not a problem, Kate said.

Carmine walked over to the bucket. The smell was so disgusting. He held his breath, planted his feet on either side of the bucket, and squatted. The girls all laughed. Once in the position, he couldn't stop. The pressure was so great. So, blushing with shame, he closed his eyes and...

Found himself sitting on the edge of the cot while Agnes brushed her fingers through his hair, carefully pulling out the knots. What? Carmine thought.

Fade to Black! Celia said, laughing.

Oh. Thank God, Carmine said.

“Your hair was such a mess from last night,” Agnes said, then pulled it back over his shoulders and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “My turn!”

Carmine felt his heart leap with excitement as they switched positions. Agnes sat on the edge of the cot, and he tucked his legs under himself and started working on her hair, running his fingers through the long, silken strands, gently unteasing the tangles. “Your hair is so pretty,” he whispered, giggling.

“Braid it for me when the tangles are all out,” Agnes said.

Carmine’s heart skipped a beat. His fingers and toes tingled. “I would love to!” he gushed, and of course heard his daughter and her friends giggle. What the hell? Now he loved braiding hair?

Yup, Celia said. Don’t fight it. But listen because she is going to tell you something important while you play with her pretty hair.

Wait, Carmine thought. I don’t know how to braid hair.

On it, Kate said, her voice bubbling with excitement. Omigod. I love braiding hair, too, Mr. Infantino.

I don’t love braiding hair. Cherie does!

Okay, then. Do you want me to tell you how to do it or what?

Yes, Carmine sighed. Please tell me how to braid hair.

Great. This is going to be so fun! First...

As Carmine began to work his tiny little hands through Agnes’s hair, Agnes began to talk, and Carmine found himself able to both listen to Kate and braid while another part of his brain focused on Agnes’s story. Maybe we really do multi-task better than boys, he thought, before becoming totally lost in his gentle tasks.

Agnes’s Story

The streets and homes of Spitafields teemed with unhappy dead. So many graves dating back even to ancient times. I was born there, and from the time I was a small child I could see and speak with the spirits. The first I remember was dear Nona, a little Roman girl. She liked to sing and dance with me in the little empty lot down the street from my house—a place where the Romans had buried their dead just outside the city Nona called Londinium. My mother thought I had an imaginary friend, and when I tried to explain that she was a ghost, she would just laugh at

me and say—such an imagination! Nona had been killed by a man. He'd done something bad to her, something terrible. She wouldn't tell me, but he'd been afraid she would tell on him, so he had strangled her, and I could still see the bruises on her little, ghostly neck. It's always been this way, you see. Men hurting girls. The Ripper is just another one.

But I was happy to have Nona as a friend, and we were happy, and shared secrets! I saw other spirits and sometimes spoke with them. Spirits from all the years, all buried right in Spitafields. French and English, some from Poland, Ireland. Most of them were lost, distracted. They would only speak briefly, and often times as if they were speaking to someone else. A lover, a child they missed, and searched for. Many of them sang. Did you know ghosts like to sing? They sing to themselves, of their loneliness, of the cold and shimmering world of the dead. Their songs are scary; they gave me chills as they shambled about, singing, their eyes empty of all but the deepest sorrow.

Lost, lost the one I loved
The world I once knew fades
Cold, dark, the days drag on
At night no rest for shades
Here! Here! Answer me!
Touch me! Feel Me! I crave
The warmth of the living
Yet I know only the chill of the grave

Sometimes they sang of their lives, the lives they had, and these were the saddest songs of all, like the songs of children in their simplicity:

Scraps and gruel
Tummy full
wipe my chin
Lick my hand
Skin and bones
Life was grand!

As I got older and started to become a woman, my mother got very sick and died, so suddenly. So, so suddenly. I cried and cried, and then her spirit came to me, and she held me and told me to be strong, to go on, that she was happy and would see me in the other world. I hadn't seen my father in years. I'm not sure if I would even recognize him, but before my mother's spirit left me, she warned me to stay away from him, that if ever he came to me, I should get away from him because he was a terrible man, worse than the rest.

Oh! I should have listened! He came around. He'd heard of my mother's death. I don't know how. He told me he wanted to take care of me. Asked me to come with him. He had a place for me to live where I'd be taken care of. I didn't know what else to do. I wanted to believe him, and I was alone in the world.

He sold me to Mother Grannerly, and I've been whoring ever since.

"You shouldn't use that word," Carmine said as he put the finishing touches on the braid he'd been weaving.

"Whore?"

"Yes."

"That's what we are."

"No." Carmine said, tying a little scrap of cloth at the end of the braid, and then kissing Agnes on the shoulder.

"Then what are we if not whores?"

"We're... I don't know," Carmine said. "But not *that*."

"I was ashamed of it at first," Agnes said. "At first. I begged my father not to sell me. I threw myself at his feet, hugged his legs, and tearfully pleaded with him. 'I'm your daughter!' I said. 'Please!'"

"He looked down at me, his eyes cold and pitiless, and said, 'It's the least you can do for me then, isn't it?'"

"I begged Mother, too. I told her about my power, my ability to see ghosts. I had never told anyone other than my real mother. But Grannerly didn't care. She said 'you've a lot better chance of eating if you keep that mouth shut or else use it to please a man.'"

This book is horrible! Carmine thought.

You did a great job on the braid, Celia answered.

Carmine looked at the length of shining, perfectly braided hair and smiled. "I did, didn't I?" He felt so proud of himself!

A bell rang. Carmine looked up to see a large, round woman push her way through the door and into the room. The other girls were all up and about, getting themselves ready. "Right," Mother Grannerly shouted. "Get your asses out in the street and make some fucking money you lazy bitches! I have bills to pay!"

The girls all headed toward the door. Agnes stood and Carmine followed along behind. "Hold it," Mother Grannerly said, grabbing Carmine by the ear.

"Ow!" Carmine shrieked.

"I got a special request for you, tonight. Slut. Wants you dressed like a lady, he does. That will be a laugh!"

“Please,” Carmine said, annoyed at the whine in his voice. “Let go! It hurts!”

“I can help her get dressed if you like,” Agnes said.

“Get your ass out of here,” Mother answered. “As if you have any sense of what a lady looks like.”

“Bye,” Agnes said, giving Carmine a wave.

“Bye,” Carmine answered.

“Come on!” Mother said, grabbing his arm and dragging Carmine along.

“Ouch!” Carmine squeaked, Mother’s hand having closed down on his soft, slender arm like a vice.

Your dad is such a girly-girl! Taylor said, as all the girls giggled.

I know, right?

I’m not! Carmine thought, but also said out loud.

“Not? Mother bellowed, yanking him almost off his feet. “Yes, you are!”

“Ow!”

The girls giggled.

Mother led Carmine through the back down, down the alley and into a large, clean and brightly lit room with a tile floor, mirrors, lamps and candles that flickered. The air smelled of perfume and incense. There was a dressing dummy, and hanging from it was a pink silk dress, with a full skirt.

No, Carmine thought, looking on the pink dress with horror.

Yes! Celia said.

You can’t be serious!

Tell mother you don’t want to wear it, then. I’m sure she’ll understand.

Har. Har, Carmine thought.

Strip. Get out of those nasty clothes.

“Strip?”

Mother batted him on the head. “You heard me!”

Carmine bit his lip and looked around nervously for someplace private. “Is there someplace I can do it—someplace private?”

Mother raised her hand.

“Okay! Okay!” Carmine said, flinching. He reached down, his hands shaking, and started to undo the buttons on his vest. Looking down, he saw his big, firm breasts, and realized absently that he hadn’t even been paying attention to their bouncing and swaying. But seeing them now, remembering he had a girl’s body, and big, firm young breasts, he frowned. Close your eyes, he thought. Don’t watch me do this. It isn’t right!

“Quit your dawdling, girl! We haven’t the time!”

Carmine hurried, while still thinking. You’re not looking, right?

You don’t have anything we haven’t seen, Taylor said.

We’re all girls here, Kate added.

Don’t. Look! Carmine said.

Mother was hovering, ready to strike, so he undid the last button and slipped out of his tight, little leather vest, his breasts swaying free in the cool air, his nipples immediately stiffening. Mother looked down at his skirt, and so he immediately reached down and started to undo his belt.

Your dad has such an amazing rack! Kate said.

I’m, like, so jealous. Taylor said.

I know, right? I can’t believe my dad has bigger boobs than Kate Upton.

Guys! Stop!

His hands on his skirt, Carmine looked ruefully at Mother. This is too weird and gross and wrong, Carmine thought. Please! Don’t look! I’m your father!

Back in the real world, Celia, Kate and Taylor all looked at each other. It was weird. Super weird. But it was also—sort of not real? And more, they were all fascinated with the idea of seeing Cherie, of seeing Carmine, of watching him strip as a woman.

Let’s really fake it this time, Celia wrote on the inside cover of her book. The other girls nodded. It did feel wrong. Weird. And yet at the same time necessary.

Carmine slipped his skirt over his wide hips and let it fall to the floor to pool around his feet. He put one slender arm across his breasts, and with the other he reached down and covered his vagina.

Mother rolled her eyes. “You’d think you never let a man fuck you, silly girl.” Then, she grabbed a corset—pink and white, lacy and with little feminine bows. Carmine quailed again, horrified to have to wear something so girly, and to have his daughter see him do it.

This is going to hurt, Daddy, Celia said. *Just so you know.*

It looks... stupid, Carmine thought.

“Raise your arms.”

You’re not looking, right? Carmine thought.

No, Celia whispered, though she was watching, wide eyed. Her father stood there, his dark, curly hair tumbling over his slender little shoulders. His eyes were wide, scared, and his plush lips were damp. He was breathing hard—scared—and his breasts were heaving. He had such a long, slender neck, such a perfect collarbone, and his skin was flawless, radiant—the kind of skin a poor working girl would never have, but this was a story and his soft skin glowed with feminine promise. His slender little arm covered his full, firm breasts, and his other covered his slit, his womanhood. His legs were long and lithe—pretty and rounded like a girl’s should be, and he was standing with one foot raised to his toes, his knee caving in prettily, a pensive, perfectly feminine pose, and it thrilled her to see her father like this—a pretty young girl, passive and scared and sweetly obedient.

He raised his little arms, instinctively putting them on his head, lifting his impressive breasts, which swayed slightly as he lifted those pretty little arms, and they all saw him now—a vision of idealized feminine beauty, right down to the triangular patch between his legs, the smooth, flat evidence of his womanhood.

The girls all looked at each other, their eyes wide. O. My. God. Taylor mouthed. I. Know. Celia mouthed back. Then they “looked” back into the book. Carmine didn’t respond, didn’t seem to have heard them. They looked back at each other. Weird, Celia mouthed. Cool. All three girls looked at Carmine’s gorgeous female shape, fascinated to see a man, a dad, so perfectly pretty, and all eager to see him draped in even more feminine clothes.

Carmine felt the corset being wrapped around his body. The corset was lined with silk, and it felt cool against his soft skin, giving him goosebumps. Mother pulled it closed, and he felt it lifting his breasts, pulling in around his ribs and waist. It’s not that bad, Carmine thought. You said it would... “ow!

Mother yanked and pulled the corset tight. Then again. “Oh!” Carmine chirped, lifted off his feet.

“Hold still!” Mother bellowed, yanking it tighter still.

This is killing me! Carmine wailed in his head.

The girls all laughed again. Told you! Celia said.

Finally, Mother stopped, stepping in to tie the stays. Carmine wobbled unsteadily, his hands out to his sides now, wrists raised, knees together. He saw stars flashing in his vision, and with each tiny little breath, his breasts heaved. I’m dying, Carmine thought. I can’t breathe!

You’ll get used to it, Celia said.

And you look so hot! Taylor said.

Like a model! Kate said.

I don't want to look like a model, Carmine thought. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, and his mouth dropped open. He was... stunning... and he did look like a Playboy Centerfold squeezed into the corset. It made his waist even smaller, his hips seem wider, his breasts bigger... but it also emphasized something else, something that he'd always loved as a man. Looking at himself trapped in that corset, all pink and lace, he looked....

Submissive, Celia said. It's all designed to celebrate your submissiveness as a desirable young female.

Your status as a sex-object for men to enjoy, Taylor said.

And do you ever pull it off! Kate said.

That's not what I was thinking, Carmine thought. Submissive? Sex-object? Where do you get this stuff?

Ms. Steinem, our English teacher.

Meanwhile, Carmine was stepping into the shameful pink dress, which Mother then shimmied up his body, tugging it over his wide hips and then pulling the sleeves up his slender arms and his bare, soft shoulders. It had puffy little sleeves—short, so as to celebrate his girly little arms, and a low-cut neckline that framed and displayed his breasts to the world. The corset fit him like a second skin, and the dress did, too, hugging every curve, and then Mother cinched the waist, letting the whole world marvel at his impossibly tiny waist. The dress had an ample bustle, which given Carmine's plump and impressive posterior, further exaggerated his feminine profile. Draped now in the shimmering pink and white gown, Carmine looked at himself, stunned not only at how gushingly feminine he now looked, but at how he suddenly felt himself feeling a bubbly girlishness he'd never experienced. Before, even in his vest and skirt, he'd felt a little bit butch—certainly less a man than he'd been—but now he felt himself flush with a feeling of all consuming femininity, and putting a hand to his cheek he shook his head and... giggled. “Is that really me?”

“Amazing what a fancy frock can do for a common slut, isn't it?” Mother said.

The girls answered Carmine's little giggle with laughter of their own, and it shocked Carmine into remembering—again—what was happening to him, and who was watching! Oh my god, he thought, flushing with shame. I can't believe... I mean, I'm sorry you had to see this!

I'm not, Taylor said.

Daddy.

You'll... never respect me again, Carmine thought, turning away from the mirror, his skirt swirling. Not after seeing me like... this... He plucked at his dress, looking down at the swell of his perfect cleavage.

It's okay, Celia said, thought she didn't understand her own feelings as she watched her pretty little father blushing with shame in his pink, silk gown. Part of her did love seeing him...

humiliated. But part of her also felt... like maybe... she was starting to respect him more. *It's okay.*

"Girl," Mother said, looking at Carmine, hiding his pretty face. "Turn around now. I need to paint your face."

"Paint my face?" Carmine said.

"At the gentleman's request."

Does she mean....?

Yes. Daddy. You're going to put on your makeup.

Carmine just sighed.

"Your John wants you fancy and is spending a great deal of money. So, you make sure to make him happy, girl." First, she plucked his eyebrows, bringing forth gushing chatter from the girls as Carmine flinched and hissed at the pain. Then, she coated his face with what she called Crème Celeste, before darkening his eyelashes and eyebrows, painting his lips with red stained beeswax, and then using a touch of Carmine dye to give his cheeks a virginal blush.

Celia and her friends chatted amiably the whole time, talking about Victorian make-up and comparing it to modern times, teasing Carmine, who, for his part, sank into a sullen shame as his daughter watched him being so completely and totally feminized. Finally, Mother slipped some costume bracelets over his slender wrists and put dangling, chandelier earrings into his ears. They tugged on his earlobes and brushed against his cheeks. Finally, she dabbed his neck and collar with an oil that smelled of roses.

"Well, you clean up nicely. I will say that much," Mother said as she made some final arrangements to his hair. "Go ahead. Take one last look at yourself and see what you would have been had you been born a lady."

Carmine had not seen himself since he'd been put into his gown, and he shook his head, barely able to lift his eyes for the weight of shame he felt. "Th—that's okay," he answered, not even aware he'd begun to speak in an even higher register.

Look, Celia said. Look, Daddy.

You have to see how pretty you are, Mr. Infantino, Kate said, her voice full of awe at the sight of his gorgeous face.

So pretty, Taylor said.

"Take a look, darling. You may never get to do this again," Mother said, putting her hands on Carmine's wide, soft hips and turning him to face the mirror.

Carmine allowed himself to be turned, and then he looked at himself and felt his stomach turn with shame. Just as his corset and dress had enhanced his already shapely female body, the paints on his face had enhanced the feminine perfection of his face. His eyes looked bigger and

brighter. His plucked brows more feminine—raised to give the impression he was permanently surprised. His full lips now glistened, begging to be kissed, and promising Pleasure. And with his flushed cheeks, flashing earrings and the soft pink of his dress, he looked like a doll, a pretty, weak, vulnerable little doll of a woman—helpless, needing and wanting protection.

He looked like the kind of woman who turned him on when he saw her in a magazine, or on a website—the virgin whore, a fantasy girl who lived only to serve men. I *am* so pretty, he thought, staring at himself. I... this is terrible. I'm so sorry. I am... ashamed of what I am now.

No. It's okay. Really. Daddy.

Carmine felt a rush of relief as he was led away from the mirror. “Your coach is here,” Mother said. “You must hurry!”

Carmine, with his full skirt and corset, found it hard to hurry. He lifted his skirts and moved along as fast as he could, trying to ignore the new array of strange and disturbing sensations—the rustling of his skirt, the earrings brushing against his neck, the feeling of his corset. What's happening now? He finally asked, no longer distracted.

The adventure continues! Celia said.

This part is really.... Taylor started, then stopped.

Wait. What's next? What's about to happen?

I can't remember, Taylor said. *I was saying this part I forgot.*

You forgot? Carmine felt himself getting nervous, panicky. At the carriage, he couldn't even get in on his own. The driver had to take him by the elbow and help him up the little steps. Carmine rewarded the man with a pretty smile. I feel so helpless! What's about to happen? How am I supposed to do anything like... this? He looked down at his pink dress.

Taylor started. Stopped In the real world, Celia had written the word “DON'T.”

We'll try to remember, Daddy.

Please hurry, Carmine thought, sitting daintily down on the carriage seat and arranging his skirt.

Okay. For now, just try to calm down and be a good, brave girl. Okay?

Okay. Okay, Carmine thought, his breasts heaving as he tried to calm his racing heart and shallow, desperate breathing.

Taylor and I are going to go look for another copy of the book, Celia said. *We'll be right back.*

Okay. Okay, Carmine said, calming himself. What should I do in the meantime?

Just sit there and look pretty, Kate said. *I'll be here to keep you company.*

Fine. Good. Carmine thought, crossing his legs at the ankle and smoothing his skirt, then reaching up and tugging nervously on an earring. Sit and look pretty. Sit and look pretty. I can do that!

Kate smiled to herself. You bet you can, Cherie, she thought, watching how feminine his gestures had become. But that might be all you can do now.

Night was beginning to fall, and the fog rolled into the city streets. By the time the carriage pulled up to a brownstone and the driver helped Carmine to the street, it was murky and thick, so he could barely see more than ten feet in front of him. Carmine, nervous and uncomfortable being out in public as a woman and wearing a pretty, pink dress, looked up nervously at the driver—everyone seemed so tall! It made him feel like a child again! He looked up at the driver and said, “I’m afraid I don’t know what to do?”

The driver gestured to the door of the brownstone. It was inky black, and glancing at the windows Carmine saw they all seemed dark. “This is your destination. You are to let yourself in,” the man said in a deep, gravelly voice that reminded Carmine of just how high and soft his had become.

“Let myself in? Then what?”

“Let yourself in. I don’t know anything else.” The driver turned and climbed back up onto the driver’s seat.

“Can you wait? I mean... in case something happens? I’m nervous?”

“Goodnight,” the man intoned, and the horses snorted, and the carriage pulled away, vanishing into the swirling fog.

Carmine looked up at the dark house, and a chill went through his little body.

Go in, Daddy.

What’s going to happen in there?

We can’t remember.

I don’t want to go in there, Carmine thought, shivering. He felt so small, so vulnerable. He was terrified of that dark door, but he couldn’t admit that to his daughter. Would not admit that to her, especially not standing here, smelling of lavender, painted and gowned. I’m a man, he thought. I’m a man.

He heard the girls giggle.

You have to go in there, Celia said. That’s what happens in the book. You’ll be stuck as a girl forever.

Okay, Carmine said, taking the first step. Then the second. I can do this.

That's my brave girl.

Don't call me that, Carmine thought, but the words seemed more like a habit, and lacked conviction. He reached the top of the stairs and reached out for the handle with trembling fingers, the bracelets on his wrist sparkling in the moonlight. The handle was cold... so cold... and he turned it, leaning against the door and pushing with his whole little body, thinking doesn't anyone make doors with women in mind?

The door opened with a wrenching creeaaaaaakkkkkk and as Carmine stepped into the room, he felt a gossamer cobweb brush against his face and get into his mouth. "Gross," he whispered, plucking the string away from his face. He found himself in a marble foyer. A grandfather clock stood next to an opening to the left, ticking mechanically... tick... tick... tick... A stair— wide—of dark wood, led up into the darkness. In fact, the whole house seemed dark and cold.... But not empty. No. Carmine felt eyes on his soft, rounded body, hungry eyes. "Hello?" he called out in his soft, little voice, "Hello?"

The fog was swirling into the room now, pouring in off the street and floating a foot above the marble floor. Carmine pushed the door closed, glancing prettily over his shoulder, terrified to turn his back to the room, certain someone would grab him, tear the pretty dress of his body....

No. No. Stop thinking like that. You're a man.

The girls giggled.

He ignored it. With one hand raised pensively to his cheek, he stepped uncertainly forward, looked from the stair to the dark, yawning opening the left. Tick. Tick. Tick.

What am I supposed to do? He thought, reaching out for Celia, her friends.

No answer.

He heard a whisper, though he couldn't make out the words. From the left, and he hissed and scurried away until he was standing with his back to the wall on the right, edging his way toward the stairs.

He started to hyperventilate, again, his breasts rising and falling, his body straining against the corset's crushing grip.

The whisper... again... this time he thought he heard.... Hunnnnnngrrryyyyy..... The voice was dry and scratchy... like the voice of the dead...

Carmine froze, terrified, a scream building up in him. He looked to the stairs. The front door. Run! Run! He thought. This is no place for a girl like you.

No, Celia said. *No*.

Carmine was trembling now, and he nervously lifted his skirt, looking at the door, then back at the dark, yawning archway where the voice seemed to come from. Tell me what to do! He called out in his mind. Please!

Wait, Celia answered. *Wait....*

Carmine's eyes were wide, glinting with light from the street... his earrings flashed, swaying as he trembled in terror.... He heard a grinding noise, behind him... and he froze... terrified as a cool draft blew out from what he had thought was a solid wall, flowing up under his skirt and swirling around his legs....

He felt... breath.... On his neck... and finally, summoning all his courage, he spun around, his skirt swirling and saw.... Nothing. No one. Just a dusty brick walled stairwell, leading down into the darkness. Omigod, he thought, sighing. I thought someone...

A hand circled around his tiny waist, and he once more felt the warm breath against his cheek as the voice whispered.... hungry.....

Carmine screamed.... A full bodied shrieked that tore from his tiny frame and defied the crushing grip of his corset. Twisting away from the arm around his waist he raced in blind terror toward the stairs, stumbled and fell. One hip in the air, he twisted his body, his hair falling over his left ear prettily, and looked up to see a man. A tall man with a thick, black beard, a man who looked down at Carmine and... giggled, slapping his thigh. "If you could only see your face!" the man said.

"What?" Carmine said, brushing the hair back from his eyes. His terror was rapidly vanishing, replaced by anger.

"You screamed like you'd seen the devil. Hahahaha! I really had you going!"

"This was some kind of prank?" Carmine said, struggling to get to his feet, but finding it impossible in his corset and dress.

"And a hilarious one at that!"

"It's not... you shouldn't terrorize girls for your pleasure!" Carmine squeaked, growing frustrated not only at the ridiculous man but at his own hobbling garments.

The man offered Carmine his hand, "You can call me George," the man said.

Carmine glowered at the man. "I can get up on my own."

The man watched in amusement as Carmine rolled around and tried to push himself up, each time finding it impossible. He couldn't bend his waist due to the corset. George started to laugh. "It isn't funny!" Carmine shrieked, annoyed at how silly he felt his voice sounded compared to the man's deep, bass. "You should be ashamed to treat a girl so rudely!"

"Be that as it may," the man said. "I am offering to help you up, Cherie."

"Fine," Carmine said, raising his small, white hand.

George took Carmine's soft little hand in his and easily pulled the pretty little man to his feet, using the momentum to pull Carmine in for a hug, one powerful arm around Carmine's waist while the other wrapped around his shoulders. Carmine squirmed in the big man's arms,

shocked to find his breasts pressing against the man's ribs, to find himself so small and powerless, his little body pressing against another man's. "Stop!" Carmine said, tilting his head back to look the man in the eyes.

"How about a kiss, Cherie?"

"No!" Carmine squealed, pressing his hands against the man, trying to free himself. The feeling of being so helpless in another man's arms—and so female in another man's arms—terrified and embarrassed him.

"I like it when they're feisty," the man boomed. He lifted Carmine off his feet and carried him to the secret door, the dark brick stair.

"No," Carmine begged, the terror of an unwanted kiss replaced entirely with a new, unspeakable horror of the things a man might do to a girl like him down in some dark dungeon. "Please!" He struggled helplessly.

The man set Carmine down on his feet but pushed him back now until he was pinned against the cold brick. "Hey. Missy. I like to play and all, but don't you forget that I am paying for this, and a pretty penny, too."

"Paying?" Carmine said.

Daddy, Celia broke in. Remember?

You're a dollymop, Kate said, snickering at the word.

"Now, how's about that kiss? I long to taste those sweet lips of yours."

Carmine shook his head, though he was staring up into the man's eyes, transfixed.

You have to do it, Daddy. It's part of the story.

No.

You really do.

We won't watch, Taylor said.

No, Carmine thought. No. But the need to do so was growing in him, the desire to please this client, to get his money. Carmine shook his head. "No," he whispered. "No!" But even as he whispered no and shook his head, his earrings flashing, he tilted his head back, draped his slender arms around the man's neck, and parted his soft painted lips, pressing his breasts against the man Carmine's body and crying out, Yes. Yes!

"You are the prettiest little thing I have ever laid eyes on," the man said, leaning down to accept what the gorgeous girl in his arms was offering him. Carmine felt the man's beard tickling his soft skin, smelt the earthy musk of the man's cologne, and then tasted the man's lips as they met, felt the powerful muscles of his shoulders, and Carmine sighed as the man slipped one hand down along his soft hip and pulled him in, their bodies entwining even as their mouths

met, and the man pushed his tongue into Carmine's mouth., Carmine accepted it, sucking on it, pulling the man's fluids into his mouth, and then down his throat, the kiss lingering until Carmine's lungs were about to burst, and when it ended he gasped prettily and tossed his hair, licked his lips and stared into the man's hard, hungry eyes.

First kiss!

Wow! Mr. Infantino is a sluuuuutttt!

Daddy!

Shut up, Carmine thought, lingering in a haze of female need and confusion, but mostly just lost in the presence of this *man*. Carmine waited there, staring at the man, his pretty eyes wide, the question obvious on his pretty features: what do you want me to do next? He was there to serve this man, and he couldn't even think without the man's permission.

The girls all glanced at each other, eyebrows raised.

"Come," the man said, breaking off their eye contact. He put a hand on the small of Carmine's and led him down the stairs. Carmine looked up at the man—his man—and smiled. It felt good to be this man's girl. It felt right. Carmine nestled against the man, enjoying the feeling of his warm, masculine power. They descended into the cool dark, and Carmine's lust melted into his fear, and the combination shook him; it was so delicious.

Um, Dad? Getting a little too into this.

He's so tall, Carmine answered. And he smells so **good!**

Kate giggled.

Just don't ever make fun of me for crushing on a boy again, then.

Crushing? Me? No, Carmine said, shaking his head, feeling his earrings sway. Don't be silly.

They came to a heavy wooden door at the bottom of the stairs. Soft candlelight flickered at the base of the door. The man pulled it open, and then gestured for Carmine to enter. "Ladies first."

"Thank you," Carmine said, smiling up at the man. Once again, he felt the man's hand on the small of his back, guiding him, and he shivered with excitement as he saw a large, old-fashioned camera. "Oh!" Carmine said, bending his knees. He twirled and put his hands on George's hard chest. "Take my picture! Please? Please?"

Good. Good, Celia said. You're supposed to do that.

"That's the idea, my little doll." George took Carmine's chin in his hand, tilted his head to the side. "Cherie. Your eyes are such things of perfect beauty I would gladly drown in them for all eternity."

Carmine sighed. “Oh, George.”

George led Carmine to a sofa upholstered in golden wheat, with a pattern of swans glittering on the rich fabric. “Here,” George said. “Lay back, like this.” He positioned Carmine on the sofa. “Put one hand up, as if you are fending off some terrible beast in the air... bend your wrist... yes... like that... and now put your other hand to your cheek... no, just your fingertips... good, good... and let me tease your hair so it covers your face a little... okay... good... good.... Now, stay still, just like that... and look right into this... the lens....”

“Do I look pretty?” Carmine asked in a small voice.

“Ravishing,” George answered.

Carmine blushed.

“Stay still. Remember. Do not move until I say.” There was a flash and a “whomp.” Carmine stayed still, barely breathing, and finally George said, “Okay! Perfect! Perfect!”

George turned and hurried to the back of the room, returning a moment later with two glasses of bubbling champagne. He helped Carmine sit up, then handed one of the glasses to the pretty little man before sliding onto the couch next to him. “To your beauty,” George said.

“Oh, you’re such a... I don’t know!” Carmine said. He took a sip of the champagne.

George smiled, drinking his entire glass down in a single gulp.

Carmine followed suit, coughing for a moment as the bubbly wine got caught in his throat.

“You’re such a sweet little fawn,” George said, leaning in and kissing Carmine again, pushing him onto his back.

“George...”

“Call me Daddy.”

“What?”

“Daddy,” George said, putting a hand on one of Carmine’s breasts and giving it a squeeze. “Call me Daddy.”

Carmine felt... well, his women’s intuition was tingling, and the incredible surge of pleasure he felt as the man fondled his breast scared him. “I don’t...”

“Call me Daddy!” George shouted.

“Daddy,” Carmine said in a small, frightened voice.

“And who’s my little girl?”

“I am?” Carmine whispered, squirming as George kissed him on the neck, one hand still on Carmine’s firm, round breast.

“That’s right. And you’ve been a bad little girl, Cherie. Very bad. And you know what bad girls get, right my little lamb?”

What the hell is happening? Carmine thought.

He’s perverting on you, Dad.

Perving? What am I supposed to do?

“What do bad little girls get, Cherie?”

Spanking. Tell him bad girls get a spanking.

No. No way.

“Tell me, Cherie,” and now an undertone of menace had crept into George’s voice, and his grip on Carmine’s breasts was tightening painfully.

“I don’t know, George. I mean—Daddy. You’re hurting me!”

Carmine felt George’s free hand close on his slender throat and start to squeeze, even as the other crushed his soft breast. “Tell me, little girl. Tell me what happens to bad girls!”

Carmine struggled, but George was too big, too strong. George’s fingers dug into the soft flesh of his throat, it was hard to breathe, and Carmine squirmed helplessly.

Omigod! Daddy! Tell him you want to be spanked!

No!

Mr. Infantino, you have to!

Tell him! Tell him!

Please, Daddy! He’ll kill you!

It was the fear in his daughter’s voice, the terror, more than his own fear, that finally forced Carmine to whisper, “Spank me, Daddy.”

George’s hand came off Carmine’s throat. He smiled. “Why, darling? Why should daddy spank his little princess?”

“I’ve been a very bad girl,” Carmine said.

George pulled Carmine to his feet. “Bend over.”

Carmine obeyed.

George pulled up the skirt on Carmine’s dress, yanked it and his petticoats up, exposing his bare legs and round, plump behind, covered only in thin, lace panties. He made Carmine reach back with both hands and grab his skirts. Carmine burned with shame to be in such a humiliating position, all while his daughter and her friends watched, but more: his woman’s heart

felt so betrayed. George had seemed so... sweet. So lovely. How could he turn out to be such a gross pervert? It was so unfair to him as a girl, to play with his emotions!

“Look what Daddy has for you,” George said, holding a thick wooden paddle where Carmine could see it. “What do you think of this you bad little girl?”

Beg him not to spank you, Dad.

But, he wanted me to beg him to spank me.

He wants you to beg him not to now.

That doesn't make sense.

Guys don't make sense.

Welcome to life as a girl, Mr. Infantino, Taylor said.

“Please,” Carmine said softly. “Please don't spank me!”

“Too late for that! You shouldn't have eaten Daddy's plum pudding!”

What the hell? Plum pudding? Carmine thought.

Whack! He felt the paddle slap against his butt. “Ow!”

“You want more, don't ya?”

“No! Please, Daddy!”

Whack! Whack! Whack!

The paddle stung, and combined with his shame, confusion and sense of betrayal and humiliation, Carmine's eyes filled with tears. “No! Stop!” He cried through the tears. “I'll be good, Daddy! I promise!”

The paddle clattered to the floor. Carmine, still holding his skirts up, glanced back over his shoulder and saw that George was crying too, now, but he was also unbuttoning his pants. Carmine saw the man had a hard bulge in his pants, and the breath caught in Carmine's throat. A new and very female terror filled him at the sight of that bulge and what it suggested.

But he just stood there, crying, looking back over his shoulder, bent over, his skirts up, presenting his ass to this gross man. He wanted to run. Fight. Do something. But he was frozen, crying, trembling, watching.

Help! He called to Celia. Help! What am I supposed to do?

George grabbed Carmine's panties and tugged them down over his hips to his knees, and Carmine felt his ass... his sex... exposed to the air.

Just wait, Celia said. Just wait.

I'm not going to just let him fuck me!

Celia and her friends were watching, horrified and fascinated, thrilled and repulsed, enjoying the sight of a man being forced to endure what men loved so much to inflict, while also feeling bad for what Carmine was now going through as a young woman.

You knew this was going to happen, Carmine spat mentally. You knew!

I thought it was better not to tell you in case you were too afraid.

So, you're going to let your own father get... oh!! George spit on Carmine's back, and then rubbed the spittle into his skin. Gross!

Wait. It'll be okay!

I hate you! Carmine thought. I hate you! I hate you!

George put his hands on Carmine's hips, and Carmine felt the man's hard rod rub against the inside of his thigh. Oh, please, God. Please save me! Carmine thought in desperation, closing his tear-filled eyes, preparing for the ultimate unmaning.

There was a sudden gust of wind... and the energy in the room... shifted... "This one is mine," a cold, deep voice said.

"Who the devil..." George said, and then his voice became thick and drowned in fluid...

Carmine felt something hot and sticky splash against his legs, at the same time George's hands dropped from his hips, and Carmine, suddenly free of the feeling of utter passivity that had overcome him, looked down to see hot, wet blood on his legs. He dropped his skirts and raced toward the door to the room, the stairs, freedom. The door was closed. Carmine grabbed it and yanked. It was too heavy. Again! No, he thought. No! Why do I have to be such a weak, helpless girl?

"Do not be afraid," the deep, cold voice said.

Carmine turned and screamed!

The Ripper stood calmly in the center of the room, a bloody knife in his hand. George lay twitching at his feet, blood spurting from his neck.

Carmine looked around the room, terrified, his breasts heaving. There was no way out. Nowhere to run. He turned and tugged weakly at the door, pulling on it with all his body weight. It didn't budge. He looked back over his shoulder. The Ripper was walking towards him, slowly. His face was hidden in the shadow from his top hat, pulled down low on his head, and he had a scarf wrapped around his mouth.

"No," Carmine said, sinking to the ground. "No." He hugged his knees to his chest and looked up through his tears at The Ripper.

The Ripper chuckled. "It is not your time yet, Cherie. And, the door opens out."

He took the handle and pushed the door open. Carmine fell over onto his side, and The Ripper stepped over him, seeming to glide silently up the stairs.

That was so exciting, Taylor said.

I thought I was going to have a heart attack! Kate said.

Daddy. You okay?

I don't know. I think so. Is he gone?

Not yet.

What? Carmine pushed himself up, his legs still curled under him. His heart had leapt right back up to terrified as he looked up the stairs.

"I am off the see your friend Agnes," The Ripper said, his voice drifting down from atop the dark stairs. "Shall I send her your love?" And with that, he chuckled, and Carmine heard the front door slam.

Carmine pushed the hair out of his eyes, wiped the tears from his cheeks with the back of his hand. I don't know what the hell just happened, Carmine thought. I don't even know who I am or what's happening or.... I think I almost just got... I feel sick. And just with the thought, he leaned over and a stream of champagne and bile poured from his throat.

Hurry, Daddy. You've got to save Agnes.

What? No. I'm done with this. I'm just going to sleep.

You can't. Agnes is in trouble.

She's not a real person. We aren't friends. None of this is real.

Dad. You can't give up! You'll be stuck as a girl forever.

I don't even know if any of this is real. If you're real. This has to be a dream.

It isn't. Dad, we are all here watching you.

The book changed, Mr. Infantino. It says you will be stuck living the life of Cherie forever! You have to keep fighting, said Taylor.

Come on, dad. Didn't you always tell me never to quit?

Carmine was struggling to get to his feet, but hobbled by his dress and corset, he was finding it impossible. He just wanted to find a bed, lay down, sleep. Maybe when he woke up he'd be a man again, a man in the real world. "I was wrong," he said. "Always quit. Always. Now, just leave me alone! Ugh! I can't even stand up on my own! I'm helpless!"

But you're not. You just have to keep trying.

“I can’t. I don’t want to.” The tears started flowing again, and he put his face in his hands. Sitting there on the floor, his dress pooled around him, he just wept, ashamed at what he had become or seemed to have become. Why would he dream this? Something so horrible? And if it wasn’t a dream, then why had it happened to him? It wasn’t fair. Just like losing his job had been so unfair. Do wrong.

Get up, dad. Go. Save Agnes. Or you will be stuck as a girl. Are you listening, Dad?

“You know what?” Carmine said out loud. “Just call me Cherie, then.” He held his slender little arms to the sky. “Because she is what I am now.”

Mr. Infantino...

“Dad!”

“Cherie,” Carmine said. “Call me by my real name!” The decision seemed to give him strength, and he crawled to the stairs, and then, using them for leverage, he pushed with his little arms and strong legs, and managed to get himself into an upright position. “I’m thirsty,” Carmine said, climbing the stairs. “Let me find some fella to buy me a drink!” He giggled. If I’m stuck as a whore, he thought, I might as well make the most of it! He didn’t even notice that the voice in his head—his internal voice—had changed, and now had the soft, high-pitched sound of Cherie.

The girls all started chattering amongst themselves, nervous and anxious over what was happening. Carmine smiled. He liked that they were the ones panicking now, and the feeling of being able to create so much drama made him happy. But then he started to tune them out, barely hearing them as he made his way upstairs. When he reached the front door, he paused, a little smile coming onto his face. He had no money. But surely George did? He’d seen a Jack the Ripper Movie once—the girls had been hot, and he’d always loved to see horror movies where girls were chased by some crazy killer. Ironic now, he thought, lifting his skirts. There was always a... yes. He saw it, and going over to the wall he turned an iron key in the wall, and the gas lamps around the house heated up and glowed, giving him light.

Daddy! The book is rewriting itself! Everything is changing! The words are all swirling around!

Carmine shrugged, his breasts rising with his shoulders, but he didn’t answer. He’d decided to give his daughter the silent treatment.

The silent treatment? Mr. Infantino!

I’m not listening! I’m not listening! Carmine made his way upstairs, found the bedroom. In a drawer of the nightstand, found a coin purse. Carmine opened it and saw the glittering metal. It felt pretty heavy. He had no idea how much the coins were worth, but he tucked the purse down between his breasts and sauntered out of the house, feeling as rich as the queen. Out on the street he hailed a coach, waving his arm and arching his back to let his breasts show better. When the driver stopped, Carmine said, “Um, take me to the nearest bar, please.”

“Bar?”

“Yes, um, a place to drink beer?”

“Beer?” The man said, eyeing Carmine. The girl’s dress was fine, but a bit lurid, and as pretty as she was, she had a strange accent and was clearly not a member of better society. “What are ya doing on the West End, missy?”

Carmine hooked his hair behind his ear and tilted his head to the side. “Working?”

“I bet you were. Get in, then.”

“I... can’t,” Carmine said. “My dress?”

The driver grunted, jumped down and helped little Carmine into the cab. “This is what happens when ’hores put on airs.” He gave Carmine a slap on the ass, which he felt even through his bustle, and which sent him tumbling into the cab to gracelessly fall down on his side.

“Asshole!” Carmine spat, brushing his hair back from his eyes.

The driver just laughed.

You sure you want to stay like this, Cherie? Kate said.

It’s a hard life, Cherie. Very hard, Taylor said.

You could be sitting in your chair, drinking beer right now, Cherie. Wouldn’t that be better?” Celia said. *Better to be a man than a little slut.*

New tactics, Carmine thought. *I’m not falling for it, girls.*

Men using you, threatening you, Taylor said.

Fucking you, Celia said.

Hey! Watch that mouth, Carmine thought, his fatherly instincts kicking in.

My mouth? How can I when my dad is a fucking whore?

Knock it off!

Or what? You’ll beg me to spank you?

I said, knock it off! But Carmine could hear his voice now, the pretty voice of Cherie, even in his mind, and his words sounded ridiculous.

Spank me, Daddy. Spank me! Celia chanted. *You loved it, too.*

You’re going to be spending a lot of time in that position, bent over servicing a man. And you looked so sexy like that, Taylor said. *You are such a nasty little girl, Cherie!*

Carmine folded his arms under his breasts and huffed. No. He was not going to be bullied by these teen girls. I am not listening! I am not listening! I am NOT LISTENING!

Arrrgghgghhh! Celia yelled in desperation. *You can't just go to the pub and... be a Dollymop!*

Watch me! I can do anything I want to do. I am a free... girl!

Listen to yourself!

You listen to yourself!

Celia. Come over here. I have an idea, Taylor said.

Watch her, Celia said to Kate.

On it.

Carmine listened, but he couldn't hear what they were saying. Well, what did it matter? They couldn't make him do anything! He was Cherie Marchant, and he was a free woman!

Girl power, Kate said, sarcastically. *Right on, missy!*

The carriage rumbled along to Whitechapel, and the driver helped Carmine down. Carmine fished the purse out from his cleavage, earning a slobbering leer from the driver. He fished out a couple coins and handed them to the man, and the smirk on the man's face told him that he'd overpaid, but Carmine didn't care. He just lifted his skirts and headed toward the door beneath a sign that read "Consider the Children. Spirits and tobacco."

A man stood at the door, and he gave Carmine the once over, undressing him with his eyes. Carmine felt a chill as the man's eyes crept over his body, like a pair of fingers tracing themselves along his flesh, but the grin on the man's face told the story; he wanted to fuck Carmine.

Just like all the rest of them, Carmine thought sourly.

"One shilling, missy."

Carmine fished the coin purse back out. Smiled prettily and said, in his softest, most helpless voice, "Which one is a shilling?"

The man looked in the purse, scooped one out. "And how did a little sauce pot like you get her hands on so much coin seeing that you can't even count it?"

"A man... dropped it in the street," Carmine said.

The doorman was staring at Carmine's breasts—big and firm, pushed up and together by his corset. "I bet it did. How's about a kiss, love?"

"That will be one shilling, love," Carmine responded, raising an eyebrow.

"Nah. I'll steal one in a couple hours when you stumble out of here drunk and fucked." He held open the door. Carmine walked in, cringing in case the man decided to slap him on his still tender ass, but thankfully he escaped without another unwanted ass pat.

Inside, the pub was crowded, packed with loud, boisterous men. The air was thick with tobacco smoke, and Carmine squinted in the dim light, glad to see at least a few other women about, talking loudly, surrounded by groups of men, their eyes glassy with lust.

Carmine was pushing his way through the crowds, trying to find a place to sit or at least stand, when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He jumped and made a pretty little squeaking noise.

“Didn’t mean to scare ya darlin!” A man said. “Thought you might want a drink and a stool.”

Carmine looked up at the man, who had blonde hair and a great, thick, mustache. His eyes were blue, and seemed kind enough, and Carmine smiled, nodded and said, “yes, thanks!” His voice rising to an even higher, softer place, as it seemed to when he spoke to handsome men.

The man helped Carmine onto a stool. Got a wooden mug of some sort of ale—it tasted bitter to Carmine and burned going down, but it was strong. He felt the warmth and loosening effects of the alcohol immediately lighting up his slender little body. “What’s your name?” Carmine said with a giggle.

The man was leaning in, one arm slung across Carmine’s shoulders. Their faces were very close.

“People call me Hank or mostly the Hammer,” he answered. “You?”

“Cherie,” Carmine said. “Why do they call you Hammer?”

“Oh, a few different reasons, but have another beer or two and I’ll show you why the ladies call me The Hammer.”

Carmine felt nervous, this strange man so close, so clearly hungry for Carmine’s sweet, soft little body, but he was also overwhelmed by the thick air of testosterone in the place, the din of all those manly voices, and he felt safe and small and pretty-- there with Hank, and he was determined to be his own woman and do what he wanted, and show all of those silly girls they couldn’t push him around, so he took another drink of the ale, smiled and put a hand on Hank’s chest. “Tell me all about yourself,” he said with a smile. “And in a little while, I’ll show you why they call me ... um... they call me...”

“A really good fuck?” Hank said, laughing.

Carmine laughed, glad to have been rescued by this dashing—and delightfully vulgar man—from his awkward attempt at flirting. “You’re so funny!” he squealed, just as he had heard his daughter do when talking to boys.

“Well,” Hank said, pulling one of Carmine’s puffy sleeves down to fully reveal his soft little shoulder. “Have you heard the one about the dancing bear?”

“No,” Carmine said, shaking his head. Hank caressed Carmine’s his bare shoulder now, running his finger-tips over the soft skin, and Carmine’s body was reacting—he could feel his nipples getting hard, feel a wetness and a heat building between his legs. “Tell me.”

Joke led to joke. Hank expertly teased and pleased Carmine with deft, gentle touches, caresses and compliments. Kisses on the neck. Breath in the ear. Carmine giggled and purred and squeezed Hank's biceps, his shoulders, and beer led to beer, and Carmine was dizzy and giggly and only half aware of what was happening as he was led from the public room out to a small room somewhere at the back of the building. His body was aflame with desire, and he was totally under Hank's control and liking it.

"Show me your tits," Hank said.

Guys always want to see my tits, Carmine thought, grabbing the top of his corset and yanking it down, so his boobs popped out and rested on top of it, jutting out from his narrow chest, the nipples rock hard.

"Jesus, but you do have glorious teats."

Carmine giggled, the comment seemed so dumb, but he also grabbed one of his breasts with a small, soft hand and started squeezing and lifting it. "They're so soft," he said. "Want a taste?"

Hank grabbed one breast, took the nipple in his mouth and sucked. It was all a blur for Carmine, his head swimming with booze and smoke, with the fuzzy needs of his new sex, and with one clear all-consuming need to have this man inside him. Hank helped him out of his dress. They left the corset on—it was too hard to mess with, took too much time, but just as the girls had predicted Carmine found himself with his hands against the wall, bending over, lifting his sweet, round ass in the air, making his slit available to Hank.

I guess it's time for a fade to black, Carmine thought, then spitefully toward Celia—I hope you're happy!

She's not here, Kate said. You should stop this.

Carmine sniffed at the idea and got ready for the world to dissolve.

But it... didn't! Hank got right to work, sliding into Carmine from behind, mounting the soft little man, and then Hank began to find his rhythm, thrusting in and out, in and out, grunting like a rutting boar.

I'm really doing this, Carmine thought, terrified and excited, as his breasts swayed in rhythm to Hank's thrusting. There is no turning back now. He was making small, chirping sounds, his whole body tingling as he accepted his prize, feeling the man inside him, and Hank was thrusting faster, and faster... Carmine's body had taken over, the hunger to be filled, the be taken by this man was so powerful.

"Harder," Carmine heard himself plead. "Harder!"

Hank obliged, reaching around to grab Carmine's breasts and squeeze as he hammered himself into Carmine's soft little body, and Carmine screamed in pleasure, every inch of him

now fully a woman, reveling in her win, in her ability to lure this man into her web and make him give her what she wanted. “Fuck me!” Carmine said. “Harder! Harder!”

And then he felt Hank explode into him, shooting his hot, sticky load right. Carmine gasped, tears in his eyes, and he pushed back, clamping down hard around Hank’s shaft...

Carmine! What the hell are you doing?

The voice of Carmine’s wife broke through his feminine ecstasy. He looked up, as if he expected to see her floating in the air above him, his pretty eyes wide with shock, his hair in his eyes. Laura?

Yes. Laura. My god. You’re fucking a man?

No. It’s not like that, Carmine answered, despite the fact that he was still impaled on Hank’s penis, and there was now cum dripping down the inside of his thigh.

You still have his dick inside you!

Oh my god, Carmine thought, pulling away from Hank, draping an arm over his breasts, covering his vagina. Stop! Don’t look!

Don’t look! Don’t make out like I am the one in the wrong here!

Carmine was standing there with his knees together, covering himself, talking to himself while also looking at Hank, who stood there sweaty and naked, letting his eyes scan across Carmine’s perfect little body. Carmine was scared Hank would be mad he’d pulled off, but Hank had a slack look on his face, the look of a man well-satisfied.

“You certainly were a great fuck,” Hank said, pulling on his pants. “And a sweet piece of ass besides.” He gave Carmine a pat on the cheek and walked out without looking back.

I’m so sorry, Carmine thought. I don’t know what got into me. I thought it would fade to black and I just—Celia? Did you tell your mother about me?

Yes, because you-

Leave her out of it, Laura said. Now, get dressed. You need to go rescue your friend, missy.

I had too much to drink, Carmine said, struggling to push his breasts down into his corset. I was confused...

Later. Right now, you need to dressed and hurry that pretty little ass of your over to save your friend so we can get you back.

But—

Now, Cherie! Do as you are told!

Carmine nodded, glumly. He was in enough trouble. Better to just be a good girl, do what his wife said and not dig the hole any deeper. Carmine dressed as quickly as he could, but his dress was now in disarray, as was his hair and make-up. I wish I had a mirror, he thought, fussing with his hair.

Go! his wife demanded.

Carmine jumped and hurried from the fun room and back out into the commons. He could feel the eyes of the men on him- see the condescending smirks on their faces as he did his walk of shame. Meanwhile, Hank was getting patted on the back and toasted for his victory. Why should I be ashamed when he's so full of himself? Carmine thought, bitterly.

Because you are a girl. Laura said. *Now, hurry up and stop being such a silly little one!*

I'm a.... He had started to say man, but the feeling of sticky cum drying on his leg stopped him. Well, I am not a child!

I think Hank just proved that for us all, didn't he, missy?

Carmine heard the girls laughing, and he felt himself rotting with shame. What the hell had he been thinking?

Finally, he pushed his way out of the pub. The doorman took one good look at him and laughed. "Looks like you made a few pennies tonight, eh?"

"Shut! up!" Carmine said. He looked up and down the foggy street. Felt the chill of the evening as it swirled around him. What am I supposed to do now? He asked.

Go... right, Celia called. *You'll take the second right after that.*

And then what's going to happen?

We're reading ahead now, Cherie.

Don't lie to me! Carmine shrieked, remembering George and the last time they had hidden the story from him.

We're not! Celia said. *The book changed, keeps changing! That's why there was no fade to black! You changed the story.*

So, am I stuck like this, then?" Carmine thought.

We don't know. Just focus! You need to be a brave little girl now and—be the heroine of this story!

But, how can I? I can barely open a door without help!

Just trust us, sweetie, okay? Laura cut in.

I'm... scared, Carmine admitted, fighting back the tears.

It's okay. Just keep doing the next right thing, and everything will be fine, Laura said, using a soothing voice, trying to calm her anxious, pretty little husband.

Okay. Okay, Carmine said, feeling better.

Just do what we tell you, okay? Be a good girl, listen, and all will be fine.

Okay. I can do that!

Good girl. Now-- this is the turn! Go right!

Okay! Carmine had to pause for a second to let a group pass. He was too petite to push his way through a crowd. It was a group of wealthy looking young men – likely slummers out having a good time, and they all took the time to let their eyes undress Carmine as he stood there, his eyes downcast as their hard, manly gazes made him revisit his recent shame.

The sign at the head of the narrow street read Green Dragon Yard. He lifted his skirts and hurried along as best he could, feeling the men's eyes as they settled on his wiggling rear. Green Dragon Yard was a dark, narrow road, swirling with thick fog, and Carmine's heart started to race as he hurried down the street. It reeked of shit and piss.

Okay, Laura said. The next door. On the left. Agnes is in there. And The Ripper!

Carmine paused, staring at the door, remembering The Ripper's terrible voice, the sight of his bloody knife. I can't, Carmine thought, taking a step back.

I know you're scared, Daddy, Celia said. And that's okay. It's normal for a girl like you. But you're also a brave girl, a stubborn girl, and I will tell you just what to do!

There must be another way!

No. You have very little time. Here's what to do!

Listen to your daughter, Laura said in her soothing, mothering voice.

Okay! Carmine said with a little nod. I'll do as you say!

Good girl! Laura, Celia, Taylor and Kate said in unison. Carmine flushed with pride and started to do as Celia said.

Inside the dirty little basement room, Agnes lay spread-eagled on a filthy little bed, her arms and legs tied to the corner posts. Her mouth was gagged, and The Ripper was carefully laying out his surgical tools while she watched. A kind of calm had settled over her after the initial panic, and when The Ripper finally chose his first instrument of death and turned to her, the blade flashing cold and blue in the candlelight, she looked to her left and saw the smiling face of her old friend, Nona.

Hello, Nona said. You must be very scared.

Agnes shook her head. Smiled and raised her eyebrows apologetically thinking, I can't talk!

Nona looked at Agnes sadly. I wish you were coming to play with me now. Forever.

A small stone clunked off the wall above Agnes, and she looked up, seeing Cherie on the narrow stair throw another one with an awkward, girl's unpracticed hand, but it knocked the hat off The Ripper's head. He howled and covered his face, and Cherie disappeared up the stairs in a flash. Agnes looked at Nona, who was clapping her little ghostly hands.

The Ripper retrieved his hat, pulled it down on his head and bounded up the stairs, only to stumble over a tripwire at the top of the stair that had been strung between two slop buckets. As the Ripper's legs slammed into the wire, he fell onto his hands and knees, and the buckets flipped over on their sides, splashing him with shit and piss.

Celia and all the girls cheered!

Carmine was running as fast as he could down Green Dragon Yard, which was still deserted and thick with fog. He could hear his shoes clicking against the pavement, feel his breasts bouncing free of the corset.

Don't! Look! Back! Just keep running! Celia shouted.

Carmine fought against his need to look back, his desire to throw himself behind a barrel, to curl up and try to hide. He just ran and ran, his breath heaving, restrained by the infernal corset, and despite his young, healthy body he was tiring quickly, his long, lithe legs starved for oxygen.

The Ripper saw Carmine's little shape hurrying off into the fog, running down toward White Chapel Road, the heart of the district and sure to be teeming with people. But the girl was small, and she was just a girl, and so he bolted after her, determined to grab the little thing and slice her throat. She'd maybe seen his face, and though he had planned such exquisite things for her later in the cycle of the moon, the impudent little bitch had to die now for daring to cross him. No woman should ever dare make a mockery of a man, he thought, getting to his feet, revolted by the stink that now dripped from his coat.

Boiling with rage, The Ripper hurtled down the street on his great, long legs, closing ground, but Carmine, with his wife and daughter cheering him on, found new strength, and despite his burning lungs and swimming head, he ran and ran, faster and faster, lifting his skirts higher, and he could see the end of the alleyway getting closer, could see gas light glowing ahead in the murk, could even see the shapes of people! He wanted to scream, to call for help, but he had no breath, and so he ran and ran... one shoe flew off, but he just kicked off the second and ran harder, his little bare feet against the cold, wet cobblestones.

And yet he could feel The Ripper getting closer, could hear the clumping of the man's feet as he bounded after Carmine. Could smell him!

Faster, Daddy. Faster!

I can't!

You must!

Summoning all the strength in his slender little woman's body, Carmine found another gear, somehow, and as he reached the end of the alley he lunged, like a runner leaning in to cross the finish line, The Ripper's claw-like hand sweeping through the air just above his bouncing hair and then Carmine hurtled out into the street, stumbling, losing his balance and landing right in the arms of a tall, strong man. Looking up, he saw the square jaw, copper hair and pretty, caring blue eyes of "Officer McGregor!" Carmine managed to gasp out, clinging to the strong man, his breasts heaving as he gasped for breath.

"Cherie! What is it?" McGregor said, thought he was already reaching for his whistle.

"Him!" Carmine managed, pointing back down Green Dragon Yard. "The Ripper!"

McGregor blew his whistle, then placed Carmine against a wall with a pat on the head. "Stay right here! Understand!"

Carmine nodded, his hands on his aching ribs, gulping in deep breaths, watching the tall, brave Bobby race down the alley after The Ripper.

McGregor? Here? Carmine thought. Just as I ran out of the alley? Pretty unlikely.

What do you expect? Celia said. *It's a teen novel.*

He's so handsome, Carmine thought absently, thinking about those blue eyes!

Yes, he is, Laura said. *Very cute.*

Oh. Sorry.

I don't think you can help it, Cherie.

Agnes! Is she....?

Yes. She's fine. You saved her!

Still breathing hard, one hand to his side, Carmine made his way back down the alley. When he got to the basement room, he found another Bobby inside. He had untied Agnes' hands and given her his coat. As soon as she saw Carmine, she leapt to her feet, ran over and threw her arms around him, pulling him in and kissing him right on the mouth. Carmine welcomed the kiss, though it felt awkward with his wife watching.

Um.... What? Laura said.

That's his girlfriend, Taylor said.

Dad likes boys and girls now, Celia added.

And he's a prostitute, Kate added.

I don't even, Laura said, perturbed. *I don't even.*

The Bobby cleared his throat, and the two women separated. Sapphic love was yet to be fully acceptable in London, though what the lower classes did was often ignored or overlooked.

Still, they knew better than to test the mores of a random cop. More than a few women had gone to jail for as little as a kiss.

Once they'd taken her statement, the fine men of Scotland Yard let Agnes go. Carmine had waited around for her, looking around for McGregor, but there didn't seem to be any sign of the man. He and Agnes held hands as they made their weary way back to their home—such as it was.

"I'm so glad you're okay," Carmine said softly, looking up at his tall girlfriend. "I don't know what I would have done if I'd lost you."

"You were so brave!" Agnes said. "My little tigress!"

Carmine giggled prettily.

Laura, in the real world, rolled her eyes. *Is he...?*

Yeah. He's the femme, Celia said.

Shut up! Carmine thought, basking in the adoration of his girlfriend. And knowing that he *was* the femme, as much as it embarrassed him for his wife and daughter to see it. Still, after all he'd been through, it seemed a very small thing indeed.

They reached Mother's Whorehouse, and Carmine's eyes started to droop at even the proximity of a bed. The two girls walked into the room, filled with sleeping women, arm in arm, and then they sank down onto their bed together. As Carmine drifted off to sleep, Agnes kissed him and whispered, "I love you."

"I love you, too," Carmine murmured. "Sorry." The sorry had been meant for Laura, but Agnes heard it and a tear came to her eye. Would sweet little Cherie ever realize that loving her was not a burden or a curse?

Fade to Black.

Carmine was dressed—now back in his regular whore's clothes. He looked around for Agnes but saw nothing. He was standing on a street corner as the evening grew dark, obviously looking to turn some tricks. What's happening? Carmine asked, reaching out to his girl posse in the real world. Tell me what to do!

Listen to Agnes, Laura said, and just then Agnes came hurrying around the corner, her cheeks flush with excitement. "I know where he is!" Agnes said.

"Who?"

"The Ripper!"

"What? How?"

"My ghost friend, Nona, followed him. She came back just now and told me!"

"That's... great"? Carmine said. "I think?"

“We can finish this! You and I!”

Carmine was taken aback—and a little turned on by Agnes’ ferocity. “But, shouldn’t we get help?” He asked sweetly, putting a hand to Agnes’ cheek. I mean, he’s a”

“Man? So, what? He’ll bleed just like a girl if I shoot him with this!” She drew a small, chrome plated pistol from the pocket of her skirt and showed it to Carmine.

“Where did you get that?”

“I bought it with the money you had hidden in your boobs! Now, let’s go!”

“I don’t know! Shouldn’t we at least tell the Bobbies?”

“Like they’ll listen to a couple whores. No. I say we take this pig out ourselves!”

“Maybe we should...”

Agnes took his face in her hands and kissed Carmine silent. Then, still holding his pretty little face, she looked into his eyes and said, “Cherie, I love you, but sometimes you need to stop acting like a girl and be a woman! Now, shut up and come with me!” She grabbed Carmine’s little hand and started to drag him along.

Um, girls? Carmine thought as he found himself being helplessly dragged along by his girl.

Go. This is what you were supposed to do! Celia said.

*And, I really like your **boyfriend**,* Laura said, snickering. *She’s such a badass!*

They are really cute together, right? Kate said.

It would be so sweet to see them get married. Your dad would make such a pretty bride! Taylor added.

Carmine bit his tongue. He knew there was no point arguing with them, so he decided to just let them have their fun. Confrontations made him uncomfortable! He just preferred everyone to get along and be happy.

They found themselves on a shabby street in a slightly better part of town. It was the worst house on the row, with missing roof tiles, a boarded over window, and a shutter hanging crookedly from a broken hinge. The moon was a shrinking sliver, but it still tossed plenty of cool, bone white light down on the scene. Agnes led Carmine down a narrow space between the two houses. Even he, as small as he was, felt it a tight fit, and they both had to turn sideways at the end of the space, Carmine’s breasts rubbing against the brick wall.

Around back, there was a crooked little wooden stair leading up to a wooden door with red, peeling paint. “It doesn’t look like he’s home,” Carmine whispered, hopefully.

“He is. Nona told me.”

There was sound behind them, like a twig breaking under foot, and both girls turned, looking back anxiously. “Someone’s back there!” Carmine whispered, taking Agnes’ hand and huddling close, like a duckling taking shelter beneath a mother’s wing.

They waited. Nothing.

“Can Nona go and see?”

“She’s not here,” Agnes said. “She’s inside.”

“Someone’s back there!”

Agnes ignored Carmine’s feminine jitters and keeping a tight grip on his little hand, led him up the stairs. She pulled open the door—which she knew was unlocked—and they stepped into a dark, dank house. There were tumultuous piles of refuse everywhere—stacks of books and papers, odds and ends—making the place into a garbage maze. It smelled of rot and filth, flies buzzing in the air. Carmine covered his nose and followed along as Nona led Agnes unerringly through the maze, up a narrow, creaky stair—they flinched with each creak, with each groan from the old wooden boards—but all remained quiet above, and so they continued on, up and up and up until they came to the third floor, and there they could see a dim candle light flickering.

Agnes paused. “He sleeps in there,” she whispered to Carmine. “Nona just confirmed it.”

The two women crept forward, and Agnes, finally feeling some small measure of nervousness, pushed the door open, gasping! Looking inside, she saw the ghosts of prostitutes—all of them—smiling wickedly at her.

Carmine felt an arm encircle his waist, even as a cloth soaked in some strange chemical was placed over his nose. There was a flash and a bang, and wooden splinters rained down from the ceiling. Carmine watched as Agnes backed away into the room, the smoking gun in her hand, mumbling *Why? Why?*

She was looking at Nona, who smiled and danced, singing, and now Carmine could see her, too:

Now you’ll be with me forever

And ever and ever and ever

And now the little girl pointed her finger at Carmine, and when she smiled the flesh melted away revealing a jeering skull--

And *she* will not be in the way!!!!

Carmine woke to find himself chained to the wall. Agnes was tied down as before, once again spread-eagled, and once again The Ripper was sharpening his knives. Tears came to Carmine’s eyes. He was a stupid, helpless little girl! He’d failed! And now they would both die at the hands of this vile man!

No, he heard his wife, Laura say in her calm, soothing voice. *You can still save the day, my sweet, pretty, little husband.*

“How?” Carmine said out loud. “How?” He tugged on his chains. “I’m just a stupid girl!”

“That you are,” The Ripper chuckled. “And now you will watch your lover die!”

Nona was still dancing around the room, now singing nonsense words, and the ghosts of all Jack’s victims watched, their eyes glassy and full of anticipation.

“Scream,” Laura said. “scream for help with all the strength your little lungs can muster!”

No one will hear me!

Do it, Daddy!

And so, Carmine took a deep breath and unleashed an ear-piercing scream, the loudest scream he’d ever unleashed.

“Hahaha!” The Ripper bellowed. “Just like a pathetic woman! No one can hear you! No one can save you!”

Don’t listen to him. Scream!

Scream! Scream! His posse was all chanting it, and so Carmine unleashed another full-bodied scream and another, his throat shredding with the effort, and he was crying as he screamed, watching The Ripper lumbering toward Agnes, the blade flashing, and he was shaking his head, crying, defeated when he heard it.

A whistle! And another!

“Here!” He screamed in his high-pitched voice. “Up here!”

The Ripper had turned now at the sounds of the whistle, and now the clomping of a set of feet on the stairs. His eyes shone with something new, something Carmine had never seen there before—fear! And Carmine felt a thrill of hope as he screamed again, “Here!”

The Ripper started toward the door, his coat swirling around him, but then he stopped and backed up, back into the room. McGregor stepped forward, his billy club in hand. His eyes were cold and hard, and he stared at The Ripper. “I do hope you’re meaning to put up a struggle,” McGregor said. “Cause it will give me cause to kill ya.”

The Ripper swung his knife through the air in a great arc, but he was still backing away. He’s scared of men, Carmine realized, a wave of disgust passing through him at the realization. Even more than he’s scared of us!

McGregor stepped boldly forward. The Ripper was backing away, backing right toward Carmine, waving his knife around in the air. Suddenly, The Ripper turned and put his knife to Carmine's throat. Carmine felt the cold steel against his soft neck, and he gasped.

"Take another step forward and the little bitch gets her throat cut!"

Carmine froze, his eyes wide with terror, and he stared at McGregor, his hero, and the pleading was clear in his eyes. Save me!

"Your life for hers!" The Ripper said.

"Agreed," McGregor said.

"No!" Carmine called out prettily. "No!"

"Shut up!" The Ripper said, backhanding Carmine.

McGregor stepped forward, his fists clenched, but the blade was still there, right at Carmine's pretty throat.

Um, is this supposed to be happening? Carmine asked.

Yes. Just do what you're told for now. Everything will be fine, Daddy!

Cherie, Carmine corrected.

The Ripper undid one of Carmine's manacles, and McGregor allowed his wrist to be chained. Then, the second manacle was undone, and The Ripper shoved Carmine toward the door. He fell to the floor and looked up to watch as The Ripper closed the second manacle around McGregor's free wrist, leaving him chained to the wall.

Carmine was kneeling, watching, tears in his eyes.

"Go," McGregor said. "Run, little Cherie! Run!"

"No," Carmine said, rising to his feet. He clenched his little fists and tossed his head back defiantly. "I'm done running!"

Laura, Celia and the girls cheered.

"Then you are done living," The Ripper answered, but his voice was uncertain, wavering ever so slightly. He feared women, and to have one stand up to him like this brought forth a quavering, terror-based rage. He stepped toward Carmine. Carmine stepped towards him. The Ripper raised his blade and it flashed, cutting great silvery slashes of steel through the air.

Carmine laughed. He was done living in fear. The Ripper took a step back, looking around, suddenly feeling some strange sense of danger. And then, the ghosts of his victims began to laugh at him. To laugh in the joyful voices of women and girls, and he spun around. "No! No!" He bellowed.

McGregor had been pulling on his chains, meanwhile, with all his strength, and as the phantoms laughed, and the candles flickered, and a small sliver of moonlight cut across the room, the flies buzzing in the air, the anchors ripped loose from the old, rotting boards, and he wrapped the chain around Jack's neck and pulled it tight.

Jack grabbed the chain, yanking, pulling, trying to free himself. And Carmine, seeing his opportunity, lifted his skirt, pulled his leg back and then kicked Jack right in the balls. Jack cried out and sank to his knees, and McGregor choked the life out of him, tossing his dead body to the floor with a THUNK.

Carmine threw himself tearfully into McGregor's arms. McGregor lifted him off his feet, twirling him around and kissing him, then they untied Agnes, and the three of them hugged and kissed and then it all faded to black until...

Carmine looked down through his veil to see he clutching a bouquet of flowers. He heard the sound of organ music playing, and looked up to see he was inside White Chapel, and McGregor was standing at the altar, and Agnes was there, too. The pews were filled mostly with girls from Momma's on one side, and Bobbies on the other. Carmine smiled as he started to walk down the aisle, toward his future husband, and their shared lover. I have two husbands? he thought, and for some reason the idea made him feel so proud. What an amazing woman I am to keep two husbands happy!

The girls all giggled. You are so super pretty! Celia said.

I'm jealous! Laura said. *And super pissed at you!*

Carmine was lost in a cloud of pure joy, and when his husband lifted his veil, tilted his head back and kissed him for the first time as wife, he heard them all sniffing prettily, crying tears of joy. And he wished he could just stay there, being kissed like that forever!

Epilogue

"Dinner's ready!" Carmine called out.

He heard the clumping of feet throughout the house as Celia and her friends, Taylor and Kate came downstairs, while Laura came in from her study, where she'd been going over their budget. The table was perfectly set, with steaming tureens of beans and potatoes, a loaf of freshly baked bread in a basket, and a perfectly cooked roast on a serving tray, right in front of his wife's seat at the head of the table.

"This looks so great, Mr. Infantino," Taylor said.

"I wish my mom cooked like this," Kate said.

"Oh, stop it," Carmine said, though he was blushing with pride.

“Doesn’t my dad look great?” Celia said. “He’s lost, like, 30 pounds!”

“How did you do it?” Taylor said, looking at his rail thin body and glowing skin.

“Spin class and salad,” Carmine said. “Now let’s say grace and get to eating.”

Laura came in, gave Carmine a kiss, and then said grace before slicing and serving the roast. Carmine sat back and sighed, looking at his happy family, and feeling proud of what a good house husband and stay at home dad he’d become. So much better than the beer swilling couch potato. He didn’t miss work anymore, didn’t really want to work. His wife made plenty of money, and he had lots to do with cooking and cleaning, PTA meetings and all the running around! He’d even gotten used to the fact that his internal voice was still the sweet, pretty voice of Cherie Marchant. He kind of liked it better than his flat, boring boy voice.

It had taken awhile to adjust, for all of them to adjust, and he was so grateful that Laura had been able to forgive him for what he’d done in the book. His transgressions as a young girl were so – well, he needn’t dwell on it. She was very special, and he knew he was a lucky girl to have such an understanding husband. And as for Celia? They’d become friends! He understood now what a girl goes through, how she feels. He was still the parent and had to set the limits, but he was sensitive to her in ways he never had been before, and he knew how to talk to her. It was such a blessing to have a close, loving relationship with his daughter. Every time he looked at her he had to fight back the tears!

Yes, he re-read the books now and again, popping back into Cherie’s life to spend some time with his imaginary husband. Was that so bad? What housewife didn’t have her romance novels or soap operas? You couldn’t deny him his fantasy life, now could you? And besides, he’d picked up more than a few new tricks that he’d used to please his husband/wife in ways she’d never been pleased before he’d become Cherie.

Carmine sighed, looking at his family, and his daughter’s friends. Thank God I got to be a girl, he thought in his high, soft mental voice. It made me such a better man.

The End