

A Young Girl's Passage

by C.M. Harris

Tammi leapt into the dark hallway between the gym and cafeteria. When she saw us, she screamed, "There's a dead mouse in the toilet!" The freshman's upper lip quivered over her braces. Her nostrils flared and forehead wrinkled as if some foreign personality were trying to escape her face.

My best friend Rachel turned to me. "Wha?"

Tammi nodded with a murmur. "I think somebody tortured him." She started back toward the girls' locker room and picked up speed.

Rachel and I chased her there to witness the carnage.

What kind of heinous cretin would torture a mouse? There were hard girls in our school—smokers, loose girls, tanning bed girls—who just might. Probably Sherry and Beth Voorhees who Rachel and I had fended off in the water balloon skirmish of '92. They could pull the ears off a bunny rabbit, those two.

Tammi halted at the bank of doorless stalls. Rachel and I slid to a stop on the tile floor.

"In there." Tammi pointed into the middle stall and turned away.

Rachel and I gazed in, hearts pounding—the sickening sweetness of the toilet freshener stinging our eyes.

My shoulders slouched.

Before Rachel could complete her burst of giggles, I elbowed her into the wall. A little harder than I'd wanted, but it shut her up.

Framed by the horseshoe of the toilet seat, a blood-engorged tampon had lodged in the hole of the basin. Its string waved lazily in the ambient current.

I turned to Tammi but couldn't make words.

"Poor little guy," she whispered.

Hadn't she listened in health class? Hadn't she had her period yet? Doesn't her family have a freaking TV?

What the kid needed was a real heart-to-heart. A couple of older girls who would take her out to the baseball diamond, sit her down in the spring grass and give it to her like an *After School Special*. That's what I would have liked.

Rachel's leg kicked out and the rubber sole of her sneaker stamped the toilet handle. A jet of water shot the tampon into oblivion and drowned out Tammi's whimper.

I lay my hand on her shoulder, my gaze drifting up to the basement windows.

"He's in mouse heaven now."

