

Title (up to 20 words) - Circus Ripper

Strapline (up to 40 words) - Jess, Tina and Jack cross paths with a notorious killer.

Copy (between 900 and 1000 words) -

I wiped the sweat off my brow with my hand, out of breath and sullen. I'd just finished my first performance in whitechapel, and it was a lot worse than I thought it would be. For a start, the rowdy crowds were just...overwhelming- nothing like the happy families and couples I was used to. No. This was a world of drunk, violent men spending their earnings on entertainment that only lasted 2 hours.

I met up with my friends near the clothing rack. Aaron's eyes were glinting feverishly-the mark of a prank gone right. Tina was equally excited. I frowned, wrinkling up my nose. Ara was usually pretty quiet, and disapproved of Jack's pranks. What could make them so excited?

Turns out I didn't need to ask..Tina told me all about it. There was a serial killer roaming the streets of whitechapel.

"At least we're not on the streets" I joked nervously, shaking slightly.

"No joke" Tina said, her face alight with excitement, "A real killer! This place actually has the potential to become interesting!"

I rolled my eyes. Tina never found sweets or presents exciting, but now she was excited about a killer?!

"Hey" Jack suggested, "Let's go tell Ayden about it! I bet she'll be really interested- she's really likes murder mysteries and stuff!"

"Hello little ladies, sir" we were interrupted. I looked up to see Franco towering over us, like a creeping shadow. He did spook me at times, if i'm honest. It wasn't his looks, for he was a fair-haired man with rosy cheeks and smiling eyes. No, what really creeped me out was that he could change moods as quickly as the tides change. One moment he could be kind, the next he could be cold and calculating.

"Hi" I replied shortly and we walked out the side of the tent.

We headed for a group of ratty old caravans with peeling paint whose days of glory were centuries ago. In particular, the one at the end, this one less tatty than the others, with lettering boasting of 'Marvels and Mystiques'.

Tina and Jack walked calmly up the stairs, but I jumped up the stairs, two at a time. This turned out to be a bad idea. At the last step, I missed and I tumbled back down the steps. At least there were only five steps I thought to myself, as I landed on the grass with a distinctively audible- and painful thump.

We all burst out laughing, the tension of the day flooding out of us in waves.

Until a scream shocked the air.. Time seemed to stop for a second before going twice as fast.

We all rushed for the town where it had come from. All of us held our breath as we entered the dank alleys of the dreaded town. It smelled like a combination of rotten eggs, sewers and rats. Although rats probably smelled the same as sewers, I thought to myself as we sprinted in the general direction of the shout. When we reached the place- a grimy square with a fountain that had stopped working a decade ago-moss and something staining the marble. The whole place just looked abandoned. Tina ran past me. But she stopped short and let out a scream.. I ran to her side, and she started shaking uncontrollably. when i caught sight of what she had seen, i couldn't say i blamed her

"What's your problem?" Aaron shouted. I pointed wordlessly to the gruesome sight in front of us. A girl lay on the ground, stained with the dark stuff I had seen on the fountain.

*Blood.*

She had been mauled to death, her sightless eyes wide in terror. . As twisted in death it was, *I recognised it somehow.*

"A'ayden" Jack stuttered.

That couldn't be Ayden.

*So why was she here?*

What was far worse was the figure standing over the body, a mask covering their face. In their hand was a kitchen knife. Blood dripped from the handle. it stared at us emotionlessly. We turned and ran back the way we came. We all stayed together. Perhaps it would have been better to split up, but we were too freaked to do anything about it. We could hear the heavy footsteps of our pursuer, followed by laboured breaths. I stumbled slightly on the slippery stones, my breath catching in the back of my throat- *would this be the end for me? For us?* Tina had stopped, looking back with a worried glance.

"Tina? go on without me-you don't have to wait" i reassured her quietly, knowing it would be better for one of us to get out alive.

Jack shook his head. That was when I noticed the very real dead end. We slowly turned to face the killer that we had been talking about a mere hour ago-in person.

We could see them properly now, a ghastly white mask with black, black eye holes cut into it. And the knife, the bloodied knife that had just killed Ayden, was grasped tightly in their hand. A figure moved in the darkness behind it. I felt a flare of hope, just for a second, as the figure moved in. I could faintly make out a club, raised high and ready to strike. I couldn't tell if Jack and Tina had seen it too. All I knew was that person was our one chance of making it out alive...

A quick turn and the masked ripper was on the figure, and I turned my head away-i couldn't watch. A sickening crack announced the end of a life, or maybe both. I didn't want to know, but curiosity led me to approach the tangle of bodies, and check for a pulse. I cautiously lifted the hood from our helper, our helper who was now dead because of us. What I saw gave me chills. Because the person I disliked the most in the whole circus, had given his life to save mine.

*Franco*