Summary

“In Archie, why are you doing this to me?”

There's a girl, in a black Saint Laurent dress and her face crumpled in hurt.

“I'm not doing this Veronica, I just need you to tell me”

“Tell you what?” She demands

“If you love me” He says. Even hearing it makes her throat tremble. But not because Archie said it, no, Archie has said that if not hundreds of times by now. It's because she can't.

// When Archie's waited four years for a girl to say the L word but she can't, and when Veronica's always battled inner issues Archie had been her beacon in the night for three years. He always got her, until one day, he didn't.

A whole lot more will blow up for the kids at Raffles Arts Institution when their power couple breaks apart for real this time - but nobody anticipated for everyone in the Los Angeles Elite community's lives to get messy now too.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
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“Why is this such a big deal to you now? You’ve never stressed it before!”

“Maybe it's not enough anymore”

“What?” She’s not sure she’s heard herself right. The music playing isn't that loud, because there's a karaoke machine but no one is singing at the moment. Instead, laughter and calibrated talk is what fills their ears.

“Maybe we need to break up” he says finally. Archie doesn't know why he can't face to look at her, he stares were their feet are inches apart instead.
“Don’t do this” she grits her teeth. Veronica Lodge would be damned if she’s being broken up with at the Fusion Fiesta party that happens right before school starts, where more people are here than even attend their school. Because this is the combined get-together between the Arts freaks and Academic geeks of Los Angeles Elite. Going back to Raffles Arts Institution in a newly boyfriendless state would be drama for days, but especially when you're Veronica Cecilia Lodge. He cannot be serious.

“I think it's for the best. We’ve been the same entity for almost four years Veronica but you still can't--” he stops himself, running a hand over his frustrated face ineffectually. Veronica raises a perfectly arched brow, arms crossed. He knows so well she’s trying to be strong and haughty but this will break her heart so much he has to be careful what he says.

“I, we need to find who we are without each other. I think it's for the best”

Archie walked away then, his shoulder brushing against hers as he left. She almost didn't want to look, but did anyway. Her person just walked out the door with a completely blank face. He wasn't happy. And for the fifth time so far, they were broken up. Again. But something about this felt very final.

_You know she’ll drive you crazy, yeah she's coming for ya, no she don't mess around._

_no, she don't mess around_

“Josie baby! There you are my girl!” Cheryl Blossom wraps her arms, toned like the rest of her body from hours of pilates and ballet beautiful a week, around the hot bare skin of Josie’s waist exposed by her crop top.

“You know I like to be fashionably late, I’ve just been killing time” she winks back in response.

“Oh MY GOD! You did not” Their giggles erupted but it was just between them, like most things were. Dangling between the fingers of two very powerful, very entitled Raffles Institution select circle girls. Cheryl Marjorie Blossom, the hot headed (and not just because of her fiery red curls) vixen who more than often likes to play the part of a hothouse flower when she’s really tough as nails. Her cheeks are red with the life of tonight’s party getting to her, and she works all the eyes on her with that sultry cool glow she can turn on like a switch.

Next to her, bumping to the music is the - oh sorry, cameras flash repeatedly of both girls in their element. “Gorgeous!” An understudy with glasses shouts over the song

That's Josephine McCoy, but she’s known as Josie McCoy. Call her by her first name, and she
just might cut you. Josie’s not as pretentious as Cheryl is in fact she stands her own completely without an image. She uses music as the outlet to her emotions, instead of trepidation. She’s undoubtedly the most talented singer at Raffles Arts Institution. Billboard Records is already waiting to sign her on their label. It probably helps that the label belongs to her dearest parents the famous Sierra and Miles McCoy - but really, no one would accuse them of nepotism. Her talent is unarguable.

“Woah woah hey you going to sing or what?”

“I’d rather not make a fool out of myself Reggie”

“Jones, always so self conscious. Live a little would ya?” A jock with big bulging muscles shoves his self deemed odd ball friend as light as possible. It still sent him off his footing. “Words are my thing, but singing them into a crowd would only sabotage any chance of people hearing the quality of said words. I’m the definition of tone deaf”

Reggie doesn't hear him and walks on the stage mindlessly. The pretty jock isn't one made of a stereotype, he’s made it exceptionally clear to everybody when he got on the JV football team. Something about still being a drama kid at heart, the one whom everyone adored for his childish, happy go lucky demeanour. That might be true, but it's gotten hard to believe after Reggie basically gained sixty pounds of muscle and smugness and became part of Jason Blossom and Chuck Clayton’s power group.

Jughead Jones makes his way through the tropes of dancing and mingling bodies to find his best friend and partner in crime, Toni Topaz. A lot of the kids here he’s seen for now are from Raffles, which means the Costal High Prep student body are either hiding in their introvert closets or just haven't cared to make an appearance yet. “Hey Toni, I missed you all summer” he bent down to hug the girl at a much shorter height, even more so when she's sitting down.

“You’re the one who decided to take the trip to Ohio, Jug. I’ve been in LA this whole time”

Jughead Jones. His hair falls messier, longer than it did the last time Toni saw him. It's all over his forehead already almost covering his blue eyes. Blue eyes. Black hair. The skin all over him that's gotten porcelain pale since not being here for four weeks. But he looks older than he did too - like his eyes had aged a lot since the Ohio trip. Really, from an outsider’s perspective, Jughead Jones is just that bad boy that you dream will change all for you. Though he might be a broken soul doom and gloom all around, what makes Jughead special is the fact that he still always dreams for things so sweet and simple. Innocent.

“Didn't go on that Tahiti cruise with Cheryl and The Blossoms then?”

“Oh boy” Toni shakes out her newly died pink curls with a telling look in his direction “that's a story for another time. Lets go find Fangs and Sweet Pea, wanna play some beer pong?”

“You on, Topaz” Jughead grins.
Hundreds of people dance now. The club in which the Costal Prep students had rented out is one of the biggest in LA, and it only took someone’s parents to make a call and convince the owners that renting this place out to a bunch of minors for a night is a good idea. Really it should have been one of the highlights of every kid here’s summer. And it usually was for Veronica, except this time.

“Cheryl? Cheryl!” Veronica storms as fast as she can in her strapped heels to where Cheryl and Josie are just admiring the view of some shirtless boys dancing in the crowd.

“Little V! Where’s Arch?” Cheryl coos, patting the spot next to her. Their faces already lit up at Veronica’s presence.

When she got close enough, holding it in any longer seemed impossible. They share everything, after all. “I think we just broke up” Veronica reveals. It feels like a bullet just shot through her chest. Cheryl and Josie both looked at each other. Than back to Veronica.

“Well - what are you gonna do? Do you want us to do something?” Josie sat up straighter immediately.

“No” Veronica held her hand up at them. “Don’t. I just -” tears pricked her eyes. They burned, literally. Everything he said just sunk in very very deep. Cheryl and Josie watched in quiet horror. Is Veronica really about to cry in the middle of this party?

“Come here” Josie pulled her close, only getting so far as the younger girl pulled back strongly. She sniffed and used the back of her hand to halt the tears but it looked like she just violently hit her own face. Again, the two girls were shocked at her behaviour.

Something about being in front of Cheryl and Josie always made Veronica feel like she had to match up and not disappoint, because she’s their little doll in the making to take their place as de faco queen of Raffles Institution once they graduate. And being in that position for a year has made her more than accustomed to it, so much so that Veronica never even shows her true self to anyone these days. Maybe that’s why Archie said they need to find themselves. Maybe he’s right. No, no he can't be right.

“I have to go. I need to forget this” she turned her back on them and headed for the same door Archie left in ignoring Cheryl’s yell of her name to talk about it together and every familiar face that may or may not notice her leaving. It’s only when the cool air of summer hits her face and she’s out of the club that Veronica fully breathes again. Her eyes still water and she’s definitely disoriented despite not having a single drink yet tonight. She clicked the speed dial that was her driver and soon enough he came up, she opened the door and slammed it shut herself before he could.

The whole way home, Veronica feels lost. She looks out at the familiar buildings and roads and every place brings a memory of them together even this limo for gods sake - but she keeps from
crying in case there’s any pesky paparazzi outside The Pembrooke.

On the late summer night, August 20th to be exact. Veronica Lodge runs steadily into the confines of the hotel and sticks her card into the Penthouse slot in the elevator immediately. She’s fled from one of those teenage version of socialite parties. She wraps her arms around herself, and asks how she’s getting her heart broken by the boy who always does good.

(x.x.x.x.)

“Good morning Daddy. I was anticipating your arrival since the Twelfth” Cheryl sat down. Her pale gold robe was loosely tied around the waist, skin glowing beautifully.

“So that’s why you went to a party and got raging drunk with your friends last night? It's disreputable” Clifford Blossom replies. He didn't even put down his utensils or properly swallow his food to talk to her. Penelope scowled. Cheryl froze, and Jason stifled a big laugh.

“That was .. the Fusion Fiesta party daddy. You know how crazy it gets” Cheryl brushed a lock of hair out of her face. “May I have some steel cut oats with raspberries mummy?”

“My private reporter sent me the photos. Exactly why I expect you not to go to these things Cheryl. But oh well, I know my daughter’s the untameable wild child. Jason’s much more exemplary”

“I agree” Penelope sips her tea.

“Speaking of, Jason come join me in the study. I have some new proposals I need your opinion on”

“Whatever for Daddy?” Jason widened his eyes. Cheryl could not help grit her teeth at how obvious the constant favouritism is. If Jason weren’t legit the best brother ever, she’d hate him more than imaginable. “You are the owner of the Blossom empire. An apprentice doesn't have any say”

“Ah but this is standard procedure Jason. You're going to make the Blossom empire greater then it is aren't you? Has to start somewhere”

Jason nodded, standing up and excusing himself from the breakfast table. Clifford wiped his mouth with a cloth napkin, following suit. Both Blossom men left Cheryl and Penelope in a rigid state of stone cold silentness.

“What is it Dad? Did the Toronto investors call back? Or the North Carolina?”

“No son this is much more grave than that” Suddenly his father’s voice went lower and he turned to Jason angrily.
“Wh - what ?”

“The Costal High Prep deal . Hiram Lodge is getting into it”

“What ?” Jason asked again . His father’s quiet rage had him almost sweating . “He’s winning against us you idiot ! Everyone loves him . They’re one step closer to handing over the key and then Costal High Prep will be in his hands . What we want he will have . God knows what he even wants to do with the land . But it's ours Jason . Nothing I do seems to be getting the people on my side instead”

“Well - isn’t Hiram Lodge a criminal ? You said so didn't you ? People should know that” Jason fisted and stretched his hands repeatedly .

“Yes but that cannot be proven .” Clifford snaps “if we find some - proof that he is corrupt and expose it , it’ll only appear as we’re just trying to get him down”

“What if we do it anonymously ?” Jason suggests .

“All the investors know I’m trying my best to get the land over him . No one would care enough to expose Hiram except us . Although .” the older Blossom came to a realisation , stopping his frenzied pacing .

“You have an idea ?”

“Jason” Clifford turned around calmly . His son stood with a black face . “Your twin sister has been putting dirt on our hands since she discovered party drugs and bad publicity all but three years ago . The Lodge daughter , Veronica . What's she like ?”

“Pretty much the same” Jason remembers . “I know her well , she’s part of Cheryl’s squad .”

“Details . Specifications” Clifford sat down on the desk edge .

“She .. likes to surf and shop , she’s very bossy and demanding . More so than Cheryl . And she parties vastly more , but everyone knows that . She also has the best grades at Raffles Institution . And everybody likes her , but they're afraid of her . But she’s the perfect girl , she has no blood on her hands”

“Well then . The picture perfect daughter Veronica Lodge” Clifford had google searched her , and turned the tab to show Jason a photo of them at a gala with her parents . “Is about to be revealed all her dirty little secrets . Girl like that has much more to her than meets the eye” he grinned evilly . “You are going to dig deeper into her life . Do anything you can , except sleep with her . I forbid anything Lodge being a part of any one of you”

“Dad !”

“But find out what it is her angel face holds . Even the smallest sin just to put off those sure investors”

“But wait ! I can't do this - she is Cheryl's best friend . It’ll crush her . And - and she’s my friend too I couldn't do that to her ! She hasn't done anything wrong dad”

“Say you can’t do something for this business again and I swear to god Jason” he stood up and took a fistful of Jason’s shirt in his hand . The material tightened around his back , almost hurting . “I will not drop another penny towards your dream of the Mississippi State Bulldogs . And freeze whatever savings you have , and make sure none of the Blossom inheritance will reach your name.
I guess you’ll have to start actually working, then Jason” he whispered.

“I’ll find something” Jason assures quickly. He breathed a sigh of relief when his father released him.

“Good. What are you doing tonight?”

“A sleepover. With the boys. Archie is dating Veronica, I’ll try to dig and if I can’t I’ll rethink anything that Veronica’s done in the past that could cause suspicion. Okay?”

“This is your mission son. Get me Costal Prep, and I’ll get you into the Bulldogs”

(x.x.x.x)

Thump. Thump. Thump.

The floor makes this sound as Chuck repeatedly bounces a basketball against it. “Drop the basketball Clayton, football season is coming up” Reggie sounds.

“I don’t need to worry” Chuck Clayton shifted on his back comfortably, leaning back into the pillows on Archie Andrews’ bed. “You juniors do. I’m already on lock down”

“Because you’re the coach’s son?” Reggie smirks at him.

“Because I’m just that good”

“Ah guys I don't know why Netflix is crashing” Archie slammed his fist on his MacBook keyboard. “Maybe we’ll try in a while more” he took a pillow and tossed it violently, so hard his arm might have twisted and fell his head back on the pillows in a huff.

“Dude, relax. It's Netflix” Reggie didn't take his eyes off the flat inch TV, his thumbs moving on the controller. Archie didn't reply. His eyes were close, like he was tuning them out.

“Lets talk about the real reason Archie’s so wound up suddenly” Jason said. “His break up with Veronica”

“What? How do you know that?” Archie shot his eyes open.

“Veronica confided in Cheryl. Who told me” he would've said ‘everyone knows’ but Chuck’s confused face looking at Archie would have contradicted that. “And she told Josie. Josie told me” Reggie added in.

“Josie told you huh?” Chuck raised a brow with a smile. “Anyway, what the hell Andrews! You broke up with Lolita Lodge? You two were supposed to be the senior power couple next year!”
He scolded

“Don’t call her that.” Archie glared. “And - I don’t really know. This is just us talking right?”

“Bro, of course” Reggie spared one glance into Archie’s eyes meaningfully before focusing his sight back on the game.

“I don’t want you all to think she doesn’t have any emotional depth, she does. But Veronica’s never said I love you. Not once. To anybody”

“Are you serious?” Jason leaned forward in intrigue. “Why do you think that is?”

Archie shrugged with a tired sigh. “That’s what I can’t figure out. I never wanted to pressure her, but after we’re coming up on four years I honestly thought she’d trust me enough by now. I know she loves me but - why won’t she tell me? Is it not enough? Are we not enough?” He looked to his two older friends for guidance.

“The issue’s probably with her. I thought you guys were perfect enough. Then again, I don’t really know Veronica personally like you do. Other than the time I went down on her of course” he added, smirking.

“Sh*t Chuck that’s not helping at all” Archie groaned “seriously, can you all stop reminding me of the sexual encounters you’ve had with my ex girlfriend?” Veronica and Archie had dated pretty regularly with other people during their breakups, and her being with one of his friends was sorta inevitable. They’re the hottest boys in school and the type that Veronica likes, but they’ve never been weird about it as a group of friends. Just a one off drunk hookup or something - then it was over.

“She’s never done anything with me” Jason shrugged.

“Yeah, Archie looks too much like you. It’d be weird” Chuck tosses the basketball at the wall again.

“Don’t stress it Archie” Jason says, seeing his friend’s morose face. “You two are like soulmates. You’ll find your way back to each other. For right now, you need to start Junior year with your head in the game and keep pursuing Veronica like you have since day one. She’ll like that”

“Come on man, Imma get you some cheese fries and onion rings for consolation” Chuck hopped up from the bed and patted Archie’s back.

“Actually I think I’ll come with. The chef’s weird about you ordered ten tequila shots that one time” Archie followed along.

“Me too!” Reggie called “I do love my cheese fries”

“And I’ll sit here and check Twitter” Jason pulled out his phone, but as soon as the three boys left the room he sat up straighter on the bed and looked around. Okay. What in this room could lead him to a secret of Veronica’s, something scandalous? Probably many of her things are scattered in this room and stuffed in the closet. He worked fast, opening it. Shocked to find there was in fact an entire cupboard of all her clothes and some heels in his shoe lineup. The only scandalous thing there was her barely covering lingerie.

He walked out the closet and sighed, thinking of anything else. Archie didn’t keep a journal or diary. He just about gave up when suddenly he saw Archie’s laptop. On the bed, opened on the home page. Oh shit. His hard thudded.
Would there be anything in there? Maybe he has a Google Docs with a bunch of secrets or something. Jason checked back out the door but the long hallway outside Archie’s room was still silent as ever. He hurried back to the laptop. This is the one chance.

He clicked through, finding any documents but there was just old schoolwork. He clicked into Photos, and there were many. Archie on family trips, random funny videos, dozens with Veronica. Some were much more intimate than others. Like the one of them with Veronica’s head on Archie’s chest, she was taking the photo herself in some limo. He almost felt bad for doing this. She is her friend after all, and exposing her would effect Archie for sure.

He clicked through more random photos, until one popped up that made him widen his eyes. Oh shit.

The photo of Veronica wearing a white thong and nothing else was definitely scandalous. She had her chest covered with her arms and she was posing at a side angle, her body arched so her raven hair was hitting the curve of her butt. It looked like it was taken on some tropical island they went on a trip together. He froze for a second, admiring her gorgeous figure and then wondering what to do.

Honestly this looked like one of those photos she’d have deep in her Instagram that’s just a little too racy that when you came across you’d be a little shocked. Sure it was provocative but not that bad. Not enough.

Jason bit his lip. He kept going. The next photos were the same, but her top was always covered and it seemed as though Archie had taken all of them. Her playing around, sitting on a tree trunk. this session of photos was too safe. He couldn't do anything.

But the next photos that came up legit had his heart stop. Veronica was laying in what looked like a hotel bed and everything on her top half was bared. Completely. There were only four photos and in all of them everything showed, just in different angles and poses. She clearly took them herself.

Bingo. Jason thought. It even looked bad, her eyes seemed red rimmed like she was high. It was dated from about six months ago. His heart thudded wildly while he sent the photos to his phone. But Jason wasn’t some dummy. He sent it to the phone Clifford gave him specifically to contact business partners, so if someone traced back the photos he’d be covered.

Jason couldn't believe he was doing this. As soon as the pictures were sent he backed out of everything and back the homepage. He uploaded each photo, sending it to the school drama Instagram dms. It was run by the low lives who didn't have anything to do than obsess over the other kids, and sending these in anonymously - they put it up almost instantly.

(x.x.x.x)
“Ding dong!” A pitter patter of Flame Louboutins creep up Veronica’s ears. She sits completely unmoving, legs over the arm of the chair she’s sitting in and groans at hearing that voice.

“You know that annoying pest who keeps texting you until you block their number, then when you finally unblock it they immediately start texting you again? That's you”

“Sounds like a very dedicated, very loyal friend to me”

Veronica crossed her arms waiting for Cheryl to appear. She could run away and hide, but there's barely any time left so she just braces herself. Cheryl’s reaction does not disappoint.

“God help you Little V what is this?” Her jaw dropped in mortification.

“An I don't want to be bothered in my own personal confines of housing look, what is this?”

Cheryl grimaced at Veronica’s flat hair and silk pyjamas at eleven am. “A getting you an epic comeback after a break up intervention” she took a seat carefully. They were in The Lodges living room, the one that could be overlooked from Veronica’s bedroom above. The other two were for show and family gatherings. “After all, your relationship with the ginger judas is about as toxic and riveting as my parents’. All the break ups, the make ups. I know you say make up sex is the best” she winks “but how amazing can one high be to endure all the terrible lows?”

“Cheryl, don't talk about that” she glared her dead in the eye.

“How could I not? And I get your hiding after those terrible photos of you got out there - which is the other thing I came to grill you about. Seriously for someone so smart that is a fucking stupid move”

“What? Photos?”

Cheryl froze. Her eyes morphed into started brows orbs. “You don't know?”

“What? What don't I know? What photos I have been off social media for a weekend now what photos?”

“Oh god, V..” Cheryl trailed off sympathetically.

“Cheryl show me NOW!” Veronica stood up in a rage. The red head’s face remained emotionless. Blank. She clicked a few things on her phone and turned it to Veronica, who immediately came apart like she fell in boiling water.

“What the fuck?!”

“Veronica where the hell did those photos come from? I have never seen them”

“Damn straight you haven't because they're private! They're not even on my phone I deleted them! Cheryl what was this on?” Veronica rambled. Her mind felt like a tangled mess.

“Instagram at first. It got taken down of course for nudity. But then.. every website has it. It's practically a viral sensation. Most of the drama sites have it censored but the school kids have it. I had to freaking threaten Dilton Dooley with his life before he got it off our fucking school site”

“Cheryl..” Veronica started to visibly crumble. “Stop. It's bad but it's over. Sure people are shook, but hasn't every celebrity had nudes leaked before?”

“Cheryl.. the only person I ever sent those photos to..” Veronica trailed off.
“What? Who? You sent them to someone?”

Her voice wavered for a moment. It finally cleared and she couldn't believe she was saying it. “Archie”

“Oh my god!” Cheryl jumped to a stand “I will cut all the precious ginger hair off his head and then cut his head for this Ronnie”

“No. I will deal with him. Please don't take this from me Cheryl, he’s completely obliterated a line and screwed me over but this is my battle to fight” she seethed. It’s as though the raven haired princess was on a quest for revenge. “For once, do not fight me on this Cheryl” she glared.

Cheryl, immune to Veronica’s powers in the daylight just plastered on the perfect smile. “You’re completely right. But as your mentor, please take my advice?”

Veronica’s chest was heaving. How in the hell could he do this? What happens when her parents find out? They will legit murder her.

“What?” She snapped. Taking advice from both Cheryl and Josie has helped her get to this position in the school hierarchy, so she accepted it with a pinch of salt.

“This has got to stop. You’re a) going to get depressed by suppressing your social butterfly side, b) get cirrhosis with all the alcohol I can smell from your lips sweetie and c) make Archie Andrews think he’s officially hurt you”

“You drink just as much alcohol as I do” Veronica deadpans.

“Not quite, we might be the same size more or less but girl your tolerance is that of a six foot seven man”

“Then don't worry about me!”

“Veronica” Cheryl leans in closer so her face is inches from hers, and she’s making the face that got Amanda Carson to stick her hand in the toilet to get Cheryl’s fallen bracelet in fourth grade. “School is starting. Your Junior year. That means lead roles in plays and co directing with teachers and organising shows and getting elected for captain of the vixens. Do you really wanna sit here and slump or get out there and show people who you’re gonna be in the entertainment industry one day? Or anybody at all?”

“Okay I admit those things sound nice -“

“Exactly why you need to listen to me. Remember, you’ve been dying to be a junior since freshman year?”

Veronica bites her lips and contemplate it. “What do you want me to do?”

Cheryl’s face twisted in a wicked grin. “First off this hiding, it needs to stop”

“I’m not hiding”

“You told the security to not let anyone up to see you”

Veronica rolled her eyes. “Okay what else?”

“Take this” she reached in her black bag and handed a hangover juice shot to Veronica. It made
her shudder remembering the awful taste. “Then get showered, I’ll pick the outfit. We’re going shopping at Barney’s”


Cheryl waved a hand dismissively. “She had a meeting with one of the producers to work on her first album. We’re getting outfits. Multiple, and checking every new article of clothing at Hollywood & Highland because, this year baby girl” Cheryl tapped Veronica’s nose adoringly “you are going to be projecting and rejecting with us”

The red head had gotten what she wanted, already humming while strutting up to Veronica’s closet and yelling for Carrie to start running Miss Lodge’s bath. Veronica on the other hand, threw herself back in the arm chair seat and cursed herself for being in this position. She seriously wanted to kill Archie.
“Oh wow Mom, this looks incredible” Betty Cooper awes. She’s looking at three storeys of a Hidden Hills home, all white with Parisian doorways and a glossy wooden brown stairwell. She could barely take it in.

“That’s because Fred Andrews designed it dear” Alice rests her head on her daughter's shoulder, a warm smile on her face. Both women look almost exactly identical, except one more aged than the other. Alice saw herself immensely in the fair hair and ocean eyes of both Betty and Polly.

Betty sighed. She couldn't believe she was here, standing in Los Angeles where the entertainment industry is as thriving as it gets. There'd been years of dreaming to get here, and she finally was. She finally started paving her dream into real life. “Mom .. thank you so much” Betty leaned into her mother’s hug. They looked up at the house like it was made of gold. “Thank you so much for leaving everything behind and moving here”

“Oh Elizabeth, it was your sister and yourself who got accepted into Raffles Arts.” Alice kisses. “Besides, after your brother pulled his stunt and finally got his act back together and went to college there's nothing else holding us back in Riverdale”

Betty nodded. She could feel the tears in her eyes. "Phew! This place is definitely one I could get used to” Polly came up behind them with her hand on her hips. “Where's your dad ? We’re gonna start barbecuing on our special grill outside” Alice’s blue eyes sparkled.

“Maybe tomorrow Mom ?” Polly asked. Betty nodded in agreement. “I need to make sure I have the perfect outfit to look insanely sophisticated for our first day on Monday”

“I was gonna say I need to mentally prepare myself and make sure I have all my things!” Betty scolded. “But we do need to hit the mall”

Polly laughed in return. "This is going to be the best year ever” she promised.

(x.x.x.x)

It had been a magnificent day of shopping in Barney’s with Cheryl. Largely because they’d closed the doors to other customers for both their beloved regulars to shop in peace and quiet - since the amount of people circulating them; reporters and paparazzi asking her about the photos, it all became much too bothersome.

Cheryl had finally chosen the perfect red skirt and Veronica had her backless black dress that fit her like a glove. Cheryl hyperventilated, she couldn't believe how perfect Veronica looked and joined the two attendees in finding her the perfect accessories, purse and heels to match it.

She had to admit it felt nice. To be admired, it was like air to her. Being worshipped like this felt nice when everything outside was falling apart. She’s still waiting for the news of those photos to
reach Québec. So far no call from her parents, so she still had that to wait for.

“Thank you again!” Cheryl waved her long slim fingers as both girls walked out the store in a flash of lights following them. Veronica adjusted her sunglasses and took Cheryl’s hand for comfort. Being the daughter of a famous architectural engineer and one very giving social humanitarian, her life has been public for years. And Cheryl’s parents, they were more into business but recently tried venturing into real estate as well.

“To the Pembrooke, Andre” Cheryl pulled her gloves off in the car.

“Actually, can you stop by the AGM?” Veronica piped up. Cheryl looked at her. “I have to do this, Cher. I know what to do” she insists.

“Your parents will be home, Miss Lodge. They’re to be expecting you at dinner tonight at home, seven pm. They said they have an important discussion to have with you” Andre relayed the message.

Both girls rolled their eyes and pursed their lips. “Of course. I’ll only be a minute”

She didn't need an invitation in, Archie hadn't stopped the guards to let her car pass through right away. The engraved Andrews Grand Mansion on stone made her bite the inside of her mouth. This bastard really has some nerve to mess with me.

She flew out the car and up a long stairwell leading to Archie’s room, where he’ll be playing guitar by the window sill during this sunset moment.

“Archie” she stopped in the doorway and crossed her arms. Archie whipped around faster than lightning, his guitar dropping in a loud thump.

“Veronica? Oh my god! I-“

“Save it Archie. Why don't you start by telling me every country you’ve ever wanted to secretly run away to? Because I will make sure none of them accept you at the customs. And NYU is out of the picture, you’re scummy backup dream of the Mississippi Bulldogs can kiss my ass, oh should I go tell you daddy you have no desire to take over his god forsaken business? You ruined my life and I will -“

“Veronica stop! Just stop! I broke up with you, if that's hurting your heart so much I am sorry”

“Break up, Archie?” Veronica starts stalking towards him. His eyes hold an ounce of fear but also desire, she looked beautiful like she always did. But even more so now that he couldn't have her. “This isn't about some stupid break up. I’m talking about those trashy pictures you leaked to everybody! What fucking drugs are you on?!”

Archie’s jaw dropped. He’d seen the pictures first thing in the morning and was mortified - who could do this to her? Hacking phones has really become a torrent huh? And nobody could shut up to him about the pictures either. He had wanted to call her at the very least, but it didn't feel right anymore.

“You think .. you think I did that?” He couldn't believe it.

Veronica wanted to murder this boy right about now. “Who the hell else did I send those to Archie? You know I always knew you were a heartbreaker, I never took you for a scumbag too”

“Ronnie those pictures were leaked from your phone” he said steadily
“I deleted it right after I sent them Archie! Because I’m smart!” She yelled.

“Okay - you are so fucking narcissistic Veronica even when you’re clearly in a downfall you still won't shut up about how perfect you are. Get this - I didn't leak the goddamn photos. Why the hell would I?” He raged.

She couldn't believe he just yelled at her after doing this. “And on top of everything you're not even going to admit it. Tell me Archie, did you delete the photos after getting off to it or what?” She asked precisely.

Archie clenched his jaw. “Yes, no. I don't know probably!”

“I knew it” she shook her head “give me your phone Archie”

“This is ridiculous”

“Give me the phone Archie -“

“I didn't do it!”

“Give me the phone!”

“What the hell do you want Veronica?!” He shouted as loud as he could. Her arms fell. She let out a breath. Silence.

“We can talk this over if you want - everything. Please just sit down if that's what you want” he rubbed his eyes tiredly.

“I have to leave. Cheryl’s in the car and-“

“Cheryl’s here too? Oh god, should I just kill myself?” He threw his hands up

“I told her I’d take care of it. Suit yourself, Archie. I asked you to own up and you wouldn't - now I really don't know who you are anymore”

“Veronica I swear!” He reaches out to touch her shoulder, but she recoiled and pushed it off. She couldn't believe what they had would really end in turmoil and vengeance. She could still see the friendly in his eyes, the charming in his smile and her whole life with him planned out together. She was too late. He could see tears forming in her eyes and almost wanted to hit himself for it.

She turned around and walked away faster, trying to hold herself together. “Ronnie please talk to me!”

“Go fuck yourself Archie!” She yelled one last time, already out the door and slamming it loud for dramatic effect.

Archie watches her leave like a tornado out of this world, he slid down the wall in exhaustion. Just one fight with Veronica could already be the most tiring, draining and hurtful thing ever. How could she actually think he’d posted those pictures? Does she ever listen? I love her.

“Hey son, are you okay?” Archie glances up, not realising his dad had come home and found him in complete sorrow.

“Not in the slightest” he grumbled back.

“Was that Veronica?” He asked
“Yes”

“What’s it about this time?” Fred smiles, but he looks a little wary. He takes a seat on Archie’s bed.

“I just don't know what to do anymore!” He admitted

“What?”

“I don't know, I can't figure out what I did wrong and nothing I do can make her-“ he stops short

“Why don't you explain to me son, in proper sentences and words?” Archie looked at his dad. He sure sounded a lot like mom right then. Fred and Mary Andrews have their many ups and downs, and Archie wouldn't exactly call it an idealistic marriage now- they worked more than not to keep busy from each other. It's hard seeing his parents like that, and Archie always promised himself whatever was less in their relationship would never be repeated in his and Veronica’s. What the hell now.

“We broke up” his eyes were red, not holding back the tears very well “it was already bad enough then , she went into complete hiding . But then, you know those photos-“

“One of the clients shoved in my face at work today. Was being a real jerk about it, remembering that's my son’s girlfriend. What happened Arch?”

Archie looked at his dad helplessly “I’m sorry dad” he breathed “but Veronica thinks I did it. She thinks I leaked them as, I don't know, revenge? To spite her? I don't know what she’s thinking dad but I swear I didn't and I’m so sorry”

“Archie, stop. Stop stop come here” Fred opened his arms to cradle them around Archie, who’d been rocking back and forth sobbing in a way that made him scared.

“Tell me dad. Tell me why she won’t admit to herself. Does she even.. does she even feel it? That's why she can't say the words?”

“Son stop that. Veronica loves you, everyone knows that. I’m sorry but I can't tell you why she's not admitting it. She needs to figure that out for herself, you need to give her the time son. Which you can't expect to be soon because she’s still going through this whole drama now”

Archie clenched his jaw. *Four years. Three years and ten months, eight months if you minus their breakups. Who the hell cares? All the time I've given her. It's still not enough?*

Time .

How much more time, exactly?

(x.x.x.x)

“Wear that sweater over the dress. No, it's too stuffy for summer. I'll get a cardigan. Is it seven yet?” Veronica whirls in and out of her closet to get more clothes so fast it makes Cheryl roll her eyes. Her friend had burst in the limo door crying and then cursed her ex boo out the whole ride home, but the minute they got outside she's pretending like nothing happened. Clearly Veronica’s plan to shove Archie back didn't go quite as Cheryl hoped.

“We’ve been dressed perfectly since the first outfit you put together, V. I know your parents are catholic but they aren't exactly conservative”
“This is about making a good impression” Veronica combed her hair

“On your parents?” Cheryl raised a brow

“Yes! They are going to disown me for those photos and I need to try my very best and convince them not to. Which already is hard since I don't have a good reasoning for it happening”

A knock at Veronica’s’s bedroom door made them both jump. They shared wide glances at each other and Veronica swallowed before calling in her high, perfect voice “Come in!”

A middle aged lady with wispy blonde hair tied back into a bun came into view. She wore a graceful smile and the uniform that all the Pembrooke’s maid staff were to be in. “Mr and Mrs Lodge are waiting for you, Miss Lodge”

“Shit!” Veronica dropped her hair brush. “They're here! Oh my god, they're early? This is already off to a bad start” she rushed to smooth herself out and walked hurriedly out her bedroom down to the formal dining area they used when Veronica got in trouble and needed to have a talk.

Her mind was racing, as was her pulse, but stopped in front of the doorway and took one deep breath. Cheryl’s hand intertwined with hers from behind. The soft warmness sent a wave of comfort and assurance, though not enough to combat the fear in her heart.

“You got this, Little V. That's why I’m here, to be a third party that’ll prevent any blow ups. Remember all the times we’ve been through this before?” Cheryl raised a brow. It’s true, all The Blossoms, McCoys and Lodges have had this ‘you’re in trouble’ meeting with their daughters and the three girls had stuck through it together over the years. Veronica nodded.

The door opened, and she wasn't in the least bit surprised to see Hiram and Hermione both not even speaking to each other. They were on their phones and wore cold as stone expressions.

“Mija” Hiram looked up. His eyes averted to Cheryl then, who's arm was linked into Veronica’s.

“You’re late”

You're early, Veronica wants to say. Instead she goes with “Apologies daddy. I was going through our already full schedule for school tomorrow and completely lost myself in it”

Hiram nods. “Cheryl’s joining us?” Hermione asked now “I don't remember inviting her” she pretended it was genuine, when all of them knew what she really meant was : why the hell is this girl here?

“She’s training me early for Vixen tryouts. I’m aiming for her spot as captain, is that a problem?” Cheryl bit her lip in a smile. They weren't even seated yet but Veronica’s already throwing her best lies.

“No, not at all. Take a seat dears. But you do know we need to talk about what's going around, right?” Hermione’s voice went full mean-girl, not so suiting for a mother talking to her daughter. Hiram raised a hand, telling her he will handle this.

“The obvious” he starts, as both teens take their seat on the opposite end of the table. “You have disgusted us”

“I wouldn't put it so outrightly” Hermione interjects

“I will talk, Hermione” he said coldly. “Somebody leaked the photos. I’m assuming for my own sanity it wasn't your own doing”
“You’re right daddy, I would never do that.” Veronica quips

“How stupid were you to take those?”

The harsh choice of words cut straight to her chest. She was at a loss for words, all of a sudden. “I have worked so hard to build our name here in Los Angeles, if not all of America! Only to have you crush it - with your constant carelessness and promiscuity!”

He’s completely lost it, so much for being the rational parent. “It wasn't my fault!” She burst out, the only thing that came to mind “I didn't do anything I - it was somebody trying to screw with me dad you said so yourself”

“Well none of this would have happened if you hadn't been so keen to take them in the first place! And I assume the only person you sent them to is Archie so god forgive me Veronica if he-”

“He didn’t” Veronica says. She looks strong fighting with them, even after the multiple insults thrown her way that made Cheryl cringe. Usually, with either her or Josie’s presence it would ease things out Mr and Mrs Lodge wouldn't go so full throttle. This must be the breaking point. “It was my mistake. You’re right, I was stupid and I didn't.. delete them from my phone after but it wasn't him dad, I promise”

Hiram’s features stretched in anger and fury. He couldn't meet his daughter’s eyes, with what she just said. “I have put up with it Veronica. For far too long. Don't you know how bad this looks for us?”

Veronica was agape. “We have an image that has been ruined because of you!” He slammed his hand loudly on the dinner table and everyone jumped back startled. He got up from his seat and for a second Veronica was way too sure he was coming over to her and started to tense up. “You’re ungrateful. Our hard work is what gets you everything you have , so now - your car, your credit card is off limits. And don't think you’l get away with it with the car service. I’ll make sure Andre only drives you to school and back, not a minute late” he went straight for the door then, but stopped one second and added “oh, and no Cheryl or Josie or Archie under this roof at all. Understand?”

Veronica and Cheryl gasped. He slammed the door too much like Veronica did earlier, leaving them in his wake of everything. Veronica didn't know what to do. That went just as she expected, or maybe worse, she's not quite sure. She looked to Hermione who had her head in her hands, chanting something under her breath.

“Mom?” Her voice came out like a scared child

“Your father is shaken up because this is a primal time for our business, Ronnie” her eyes were glossed with tears. “You chose the worst possible time to start a scandal”

“Mom I didn't choose this!” She doesn't even care if it sounds childish anymore. Cheryl put her hand on hers to calm Veronica down.

“Right when we were about to get the deal with Costal High Prep” Hermione sniffed. “You threw us right off, Ronnie-”

“Wait, what?” Cheryl and Veronica both leaned forward.

“Costal High Preparatory” Hermione repeats. She's never been secretive about their projects, for anything they do would only benefit to Veronica's life, she’s always been in the know (as far as she knows). “We were going to buy the land” her voice broke as she closed her eyes for a second “put
something better in its place. The owners were hesitant, but we had them-"

“Where would all CHP’s above average GPA Einstein level IQ students go?” Cheryl asked. Her face was dressed in worry

Veronica leaned back, wondering the same thing. “Well, who knows? Maybe transfer out of state or..”

“There's no school that is cut out for them! Costal Prep is the best school academic wise in like the entire world- you can't do this” Cheryl said

“Yeah mom I mean you’d basically be turning all those kids lives upside down I mean Jughead? Can you imagine how crushed Mr Jones would be? They're our friends for the most part!”

“Forget Jughead. Toni!” Cheryl was suddenly standing and very not chill anymore “Mrs Lodge, my parents already distance us enough. Her moving away would be practically death. Please don't do this”

“Cheryl” Hermione said softly “I sympathise deeply for you. But Mr Lodge and I can't just back out of something we’ve been working towards and asking for for so long”

“Mrs Lodge, I am begging you” Cheryl came closer, right next to Hermione looking more upset than she had ever. “Don’t you think maybe this whole - thing would be a good time for you to back out if they're already not agreeing to sell? I am begging you don't do this”

“Mom, Cheryl’s right. This is insane even for you guys” Veronica furrowed her brows. How could parents really think this is a good idea? “Take away all my privileges if that's what’ll appease you and daddy but this will make it up to me, please mom”

“You would be my saviour Mrs Lodge” Cheryl looked devastated.

Hermione looked at both the girls, Veronica with her arms crossed and a frown and Cheryl practically on her knees begging. “Of course girls. You’re both right. Maybe this - incident could be a blessing in disguise, we’ll distance ourselves from this deal” Cheryl breathed a huge sigh of relief. “Oh, I feel light headed now. Can we take this feast to your room, V?”

“Great idea” Hermione replied “get going tomorrow's your first day”

Veronica was ready to storm out of there, more mad than when she initially walked in the room, but then Hermione stopped her. Cheryl was already halfway up the flight of stairs.

“Oh and Veronica?”

“Hm?” She stopped by the door

“Everything your father said was right. About your punishments, yes. But the other things too”

Veronica almost scoffed. How fucking unbelievable. She's on his side! For once her mother can't even stand with her, she’s constantly siding with Hiram and why should there even be a side? “Mom? What car was daddy even talking about?” She’d only been practice driving with Andre or her parents in her dad’s extra Audi so far while waiting for her actual license after turning sixteen.

“Your black Aston Martin of course. We’ve had it kept in storage for your sixteenth birthday. But now, I guess you’ll have to wait a little longer”
Now she did scoff. Unbelievable.

“Where were you? This pudding is heavenly” Cheryl says with a spoon in her mouth. She’s been waiting upstairs in the waiting area outside Ronnie’s room.

“Did you know my parents are keeping my car from me after my sweet sixteenth? I can't believe they think this is my fault” Veronica pushed her hair behind her ears

“I can't believe they thought buying Costal Prep would be a good idea. Thank god we talked her out of that one. Btw, wanna start surfing through the girls’ Instas now to see who had a boring ass summer? It’ll help with our PRs tomorrow. Oh and I called Josie but she’s with her parents she’ll be a little late”

“Actually Cheryl” Veronica stopped her friend. She was already heading towards the bedroom.

“Maybe you guys could take it to Thornhill instead”

“Oh my god” Cheryl held her hand to her chest in mock concern “are you planning on bailing on the first day Veronica Lodge?”

“No! No way, my reputation’s already drowning enough, not at all”

“If Josie was here you’d let us stay, wouldn’t you?” The older girl looked down sullenly

“Cheryl what? No. I love you guys just the same, with all my heart. And I can't thank you enough for being here with me all day, any interaction I had with anyone other than you has blown up like a bomb. It shows how good of a friend you are” Veronica brushed the back of her hand on Cheryl’s cheek soothingly. She always struggled like this, which made Veronica sad. Not many people could see how amazing Cheryl is, not even her parents. “I just need this night to myself”

“Okay. I get that” Cheryl gave in “but you better be there tomorrow alright?”

“I swear on my mother’s pearls” the two girls wrapped each other in a tight hug.

(x.x.x.x)

“Jason, this is good work. They’re already thinking twice about signing the papers with Hiram Lodge” Clifford praised his son, in a hushed tone voice.

“Who’s they?” Jason asked. His face was one too innocent, always pure and wondering. The good thing about Jason is that he’d never do a ‘bad’ thing, unlike Cheryl. This made him Raffles Institution’s resident golden boy and King for being a clean pure soul amongst the many rebellious wild children. At the same time though, he always hesitated when it came to the Blossom business. Clifford could see his son wasn't completely agreeing with everything he did, because it he was way too morally good. And that's something that needed to change.

“The owners of the school of course” he grunted

“Daddy, does this mean you’re paying for my dream college and all its’ tuition again?”

“We’ll see Jason. But for now, you're on the right track. We’ll keep tabs on this until the deal is sealed”

The door closed behind Jason and he went to the kitchen to get a drink. It's the night before first
day of senior year, a very important time in his life. Cheryl got her head out of the fridge as soon as Jason walked in.

“What were you and daddy talking about in his study?” She started putting together her oats and chocolate whey protein powder in a bowl for breakfast tomorrow.

“Nothing, just random business talk” he drank a long gulp of cold water, straight from the bottle. “How come you aren't having your sleepover?”

“Josie’s upstairs” she kept her eyes down while she worked, not too happy at the subject “Veronica wanted to have a night alone. She had a huge meltdown after her parents barked at her about those photos - can you imagine? Which monster would dare do that to someone”

“Yeah .. poor girl. Chuck wouldn't shut up about it either” he leaned against the sink, watching his twin sister. Looking at Cheryl is the closest thing to looking in a mirror for Jason, they’re practically identical if they weren't different genders.

“Figures” Cheryl snorted “he’s been lusting over her since she hit puberty. Did you know she and Archie broke up?”

“What?” Jason turned around, washing his hands so he didn't need to face her. “No I didn't. They’ll be back soon enough”

“Yeah” Cheryl added a handful of Goji berries in her oats and put it in the fridge “hopefully. See you tomorrow Jay Jay, ready for Projects & Rejects?” She raised a brow evilly

“Senior year Cherry. We’ve made it this far together” he smiled “and oh god, I already know you’ll be cruel”

Cheryl grinned. “That's how we made it this far together Jay Jay. You make all the good decisions and I’ll bite anybody’s head off who gets in our way” she winked “it's what I’m best at after all”

“Goodnight twin sister” Jason shook his head at her, but his lips were in a smile

“Goodnight twin brother”

(x.x.x.x)

On Monday morning , at seven twenty am Veronica stared at her reflection in the mirror . She hasn't eaten bread since freshman year , Josie and Cheryl got her to do it since they haven't since they were eleven . It's an easy way to maintain everything . Since summer , she’d gotten a pretty intense waist line from spending hours swimming and surfing and hiking up LA mountains . Just being active in general. But at the same time, over the summer she’d noticed her old body blossoming into something… different. Her bikinis barely fit without spilling over and the bottoms riding up. She’d had to make an impromptu trip to the mall with Josie to get new ones, the whole time secretly awed at herself. Veronica looked more beautiful than she ever had, from her eyes to her gorgeous skin and luscious black hair, falling effortlessly in its natural waves. Now she brushes her fingers on the reflection of herself , until she catches something in the background that makes her want to scream and hurl .

The picture on her desk .

Right away she does turn at it , and grabs the frame to crush it to pieces but when she sees the photo she just can't help herself . Oh my god , what have I done ? What did I do wrong ? What did I do that could make him hate me so much, that he would do that to me! Her tears streamed out
smoothly down her skin, knees giving in to the ground. Veronica could try and pretend all she wants that her and Archie breaking up is just another three week time frame breather from each other, but it's not.

His social media is radio silence just like hers. He hasn't deleted any of their photos, but he also hasn't missed called or texted anything. Even can we talk? or are we good? It's so stupid of her to let him make her a shattered piece of glass, but she can't help it. When she's looking at the photo of them together on her birthday last year. His hand is around her waist and he's very clearly getting as close to her as possible. Her arms wrapped around his neck, one hand lost in his red hair.

She'd never realised how precious they were together until what they had is gone, for what feels like the final time. And maybe it's a bad move, but the one way Veronica Lodge knows how to channel her emotions is by getting revenge. If he thought yesterday was all he was gonna get, sorry Archie. But you're sadly mistaken.

And all the feeble minded lowlives at school who'll be waiting for her to show up and start whispering while looking at her - you all are in for a surprise. Cheryl was right. I need an epic comeback. And, I have a plan.

(x.x.x.x)

“How do I look Jug? Is it too much? Too little?” Jellybean Jones did a spin in front of the mirror in their living room, looking to her brother for approval.

Jughead snorted. He was wolfing down three pancakes bathed in maple syrup and a glass of OJ, trying to get his stomach satisfied. “If you ask me, anything’s too much” he said truthfully.

“Hey don't you think that skirt's a little too short, JB?” FP Jones leaned against the counter. He had taken duty to send his little girl off to her first day of freshman year.

“Dad” Jellybean scowled “A high school Jellybean Jones is not middle school Jellybean”

“And what's she like now?” FP asked

“She dresses exactly like Veronica Lodge does”

Jughead spat his OJ out in an instant when he heard that. It spattered all over the table, in a loud noise. Both his father and sister looked at him, thanking god they weren't standing anywhere near him. “What? Why? Would you want to be like her?”

“What's wrong with it?” Jellybean crossed her arms defensively “She’s your friend after all”

“Well yeah - but she's a bad girl JB. You don't wanna be like that”

“Oh my god! Seriously? You're the one who smokes weed like it's just inhaling air! Hypocrite!”

Jughead rolled his eyes “fine but have you seen the scandal that follows her everywhere? You’d hate that”

“If you're talking about the fact that somebody invaded her privacy by posting personal photos of her on the internet which 1) is completely her right to take and 2) she doesn't need to apologise for then that's not valid Juggy”

“Okay okay kids cut it out” FP lifted a hand warningly “Jug, Bean can dress however she wants.
Although I do admit this outfit is a little too grown up. What are you even wearing?"

“A dress!” She straightened the little white dress, with a cropped black jacket over it and fishnet stockings. She’s proud of it, if she’d say so herself.

FP widened his eyes “says who?”

“Calvin Klein!”

“Okay, I’m gonna be late. You too Bean” Jughead wiped his mouth with a napkin, holding back a laugh.

“You sure you’ll be good taking the motor Jug?” FP checked

“Yes. Like every other single day” he muttered

“You know, I really thought when this day came you’d be wearing the uniform your mum used to wear Bean. And I thought I’d be sending you two together”

“Yeah, well she wants to go to Raffles so” Jug looked down. He wasn't so keen on his little sister joining the crowd at Raffles, but even more than that, he didn't understand why she wanted to pursue arts when she’s been a straight A student her whole life.

“And she's talented enough for it, that's what matters” FP reminded.

“It's my dream come true”

“Alright kids, family hug. I love you guys”

Jughead put his arms around FP and Jellybean, burying his nose in the crook of his dad’s shoulder. It felt bittersweet. Mom should be here.

(x.x.x.x)

“She should be here any second” Cheryl tapped her foot. They looked out into the main road for the twentieth time but still, no LODGE limo or Audi in sight. It was seven fifty five and the California sun was starting to hit them in an unattractive way.

“Are you sure you got her to understand well enough ? Cheryl ?” Josie crosses her arms. “Of course I did” her friend snapped in reply .

“Then what are we waiting here for?” Reggie whined

“Guys, we’re gonna be late. They’ll be up the steps anytime now” Chuck squinted in the bright sunlight at his friends

“She said she’ll be here” Cheryl said.

“Accept it, Cher. She’s probably gonna blow the first day off”

“Jason’s right, Queen B. Isn't that a Veronica move? She’ll come on the second day and surprise everyone, they’ll be talking about her the whole day” Josie rubs Cheryl’s arm. At this point Archie is the only one not contributing to conversation, he just stands there a little awkwardly in his Supreme shirt and brand new jeans. He's wondering too, where Veronica is. It's so like her to do this.. he tells himself maybe he should stop always thinking about her.
“Fine” Cheryl agrees “Let’s go to the steps”
They take a seat at the top of the school’s very large, very tall stairs and Jason and Josie pull out their clipboards. The boys sit about five feet away from Cheryl and Josie. The first trope of kids already start lining up, and they begin the games.

After three instant rejects, all of them based on the fact that both Cheryl and Josie hated the colour of each girls’ shoes alone - one lucky project finally made the cut. “There you go, Lauren Leighton. Welcome to Raffles Institution” Cheryl ties a blue and gold chiffon scarf around the blonde girl’s neck, and she squeals excitedly.

“Andrews, what do you think?” Chuck pulled his Junior friend’s shoulder back to ask him

“Didn’t uh.. didn’t you transfer from Baxton Arts in Senoma County?” Archie tries to remember. The boy before them nods carefully. He has a long sleeved red and white striped shirt on and it’s already pissing all of them off. His eyes looked away from Archie’s gaze for one second, before meeting his again.

“Wait. You didn’t transfer. You got expelled” he realises, then squinted his eyes in a way that made the boy start fearing his life “for what?”

“It.. it doesn't matter!” The striped shirt boy shook his head, getting caught in the lie

“We don't take sloppy seconds. And definitely not from Baxton Arts” Archie spits the name in disgust. The boy walks away slumping before he could even say ‘reject’.

“Good job Andrews” Chuck gave him a pat on the back. Cheryl watched the boy walk away between them. “Where’s Waldo going?” She joked. They all laughed

Josie just wrapped another blue and gold scarf around another fresh faced freshman, when the next girl who came up the steps caught everyone’s attention. She had long golden hair falling in loose curls down her back, she was quite tall and had on a TopShop dress that cinched at the waist and skirted out in a girlish style. It was blue, and brought out the piercing blue of her eyes. Even from a distance, you could see the structure of her jaw and her very obvious entrance.

She was beautiful.

“Polly Cooper” she said her name elegantly.

Josie raised a brow “formerly from some boring old regular high school but her parents are huge reporters and she modelled for Gap Kids and Ralph Lauren, she sent in a video audition of a Julia Stiles’ 10 Things I Hate About You monologue that apparently blew.. Mrs Atkins.. away..” Josie read off her board.

Polly, standing there like an actual angel smiled charmingly at the boys. They in return were completely for it, under her spell.

“Reject” Cheryl glares. She crosses her exposed legs in a polite manner and smiled sweetly “move along, small town hick. We have the good girls to get to”

“Cheryl, give it a break. She’s cute” Jason said to his sister. He was still looking completely smitten by this Polly. “Excuse me?” Cheryl scoffed

“You’re a senior right?” Josie asks “we could use a new senior to spice up the circle” She whispers to Cheryl
“No” Cheryl whispers back “I just don't like her” she threw the tall blonde another glare

“Come on Cher, don't be so cruel. Polly, can you work with lights?” You would've thought the boys would be back to their own PRs by now but Jason wouldn't let it go.

“I’ve been in all sorts of tech classes since I was twelve” Polly informed, putting a hand on her hip.

“Well there! Cheryl’s putting together the Homecoming play this year and she needs that spot filled”

Cheryl was fuming in her seat. “That’s actually not a bad idea, I’m for it” Josie nodded

“Since when do we ever let boys’ opinions haze our precious projects? I’m not about to succumb to it now.”

“Cheryl, how about a deal? You can choose one of our projects” Jason gave his best puppy dog face, which of course she couldn't turn down. Wether she’d admit it or not, Jason was one of the four people in her life she’d do anything to make them happy - her soft spot. “If you give her a scarf”

“Tell me this, Polly Pocket. How many types of lightings are there for film ? And name them” she leaned back on the hard step and stared the girl down hard. At this point, Chuck and Archie were the only ones running the boys’ PRs as Jason and Reggie were too pulled into the scene. Josie awaited her answer with a challenging brow.

Polly curled her lips in a small smirk, before tossing her blonde hair over her shoulder. “Hm.. sixteen. And that's key light, fill, back, kicker and rims, eye light, topper -” she glanced around her like she wasn't even thinking. Cheryl clenched her jaw. She didn't know why her twin brother was suddenly so enamoured by this flippant blonde who came out of nowhere and immediately - bothered Cheryl.

“The hard and soft light, ambiance, practicals, upstage downstage, high key low key, bounce and motivated” she finished with a full smirk. It wasn't necessarily arrogant, just confident. Josie smiled. Jason hooted and clapped his hands loudly, that stupid look still on his face. “Yeah!” He laughed

“Fine” Cheryl spat. She grabbed the clipboard from Josie’s hands and gave Polly the dirtiest of dirty looks, already calling next while Josie did the honours of wrapping the scarf around Polly. She felt proud of herself, and she was already liking this place. It's much more of a challenge than Riverdale High. And the gorgeous red headed boy who winked at her while she pranced up the steps - he left a warm fuzzy feeling in her stomach.

(x.x.x.x)

“Polly and Betty.. Cooper?”

“That's me” a sparkly eyed girl in a collared tank top and skinny jeans shook his hand in greeting. She had a backpack over her shoulder, like an actual school backpack, quite the sight to see in this school. Every other girl wore purses or tote bags - some just ask their caretakers to carry their school bags. “Polly’s my sister.. but she wondered off somewhere. Don't even worry - she’s probably running with a clique by now. You’re my peer mentor right?”

He nods “that's right. Kevin Keller, welcome to Raffles Arts Institution” he had a warm smile and very handsome in a classical way. From his slick brown hair to the vintage watch on his wrist, and
proper Louis Vuitton loafers on his feet. He’s rich, and it's obvious to Betty.

“So, come with me. Your schedule says your locker is 118 which is right by the fountains. Great spot for a locker - it's in the middle of the school so you can get to all your classes relatively quick” Kevin starts leading Betty down a hallway from the school office.

“Cool” she notices how different Raffles is compared to Riverdale High. Where everybody looked like they were heading to a hip party instead of high school. The building itself was three times larger and had two separate buildings - one for class and one they called the ‘theatre house’. That's where all the school plays, concerts, recitals and so on take place as Kevin tells her. There’s a balcony on the third floor and each division has two common rooms, one for the boys and one for the girls. The courtyard is huge, it stretches out from a more shaded area where it's cooler out to the sunny grounds that overlooks Los Angeles from a hilltop. That's where everyone has lunch, or at least most people. They have the garden where the Juniors and Seniors take Science class, but from what Betty sees the garden is really a gigantic green house, as big as the school building with gorgeous glass designs.

“It's beautiful” Betty looks at the pamphlet in Kevin’s hand in awe

“It is. Wait till you see it in real life. We have a track field and a football field, and we have our own water reservoir.”

“What's this?” Betty stopped where the hallway cut in half and you could escape outside. The grass looked so tempting to be on, but there was a stone gazebo that was catching Betty’s attention. Everything built on this schools’ grounds is one of a kind, extremely intricate and confusing. Betty could barely remember the last three steps she took and how to get to where she is now from the office.

“The gazebo” Kevin nods “that's one of the senior spots though. I bet it's amazing inside”

“Senior spot?” Betty raises a brow. Kevin has already pushed open another big door and the sound of water fills her ears. The waterfalls.

“There’s a few designated locations only seniors are allowed in. Seriously, being a senior here is practically heaven. It's the only year you get to be a prefect - which means power - they get their own private washing house and locker room, only seniors can win Homecoming or Prom King or Queen. And they just have many cool ups. Being a junior is cool too, we can be leads in plays and start organising, pitching, writing and or directing shows. Here here Betty Cooper, locker 118”

“Wow, thanks. I almost didn't pick up on all of that” Kevin talked really fast

“Get used to it new girl, we live the fast paced life here” he leaned against the lockers next to hers. Betty laughed at that. She’d only just met Kevin, but he did seem nice and chill.

“Oh, wow. The lockers are huge. And cool” she clicked the metal pockets that were used to store little things like keys or jewellery during gym, and the built in safe next to it.

“Your code for that is in here” Kevin handed her her schedule “and take my advice? Don't ever forget your code. You can't get in without it. You’re new, but today Miss Gyver will give you yours and you’ll need it to check in at the front security every morning. Prevents from intruders getting into this school - all the best security for the offspring of Los Angeles’ elites”

“Wow. Okay” Betty’s blue eyes widened

“You said that three times already” Kevin squints at her playfully
“Sorry” Betty laughed “its just. wow. This place is really one of a kind”

“You’re absolutely correct. There’s nothing else like it” He said that as three girls in very high heels ran fast across the little hallway to outside where the fountains were, taking a shortcut to the steps. They almost knocked into Betty unnoticeably.

“Freshmen” Kevin waved his hand “they’re always crazy”

“Well. they’re already more adapted to this place then me” Betty looked at her classes for the day

“That's because of freshmen orientation and those are Silver Lake kids, they’ve most likely been here multiple times for shows and stuff”

“Oh” Betty nodded “well my first class of the day is .. a foundation of acting course at the Lecture Hall” she read out “where’s that?”

“Not so fast new girl” Kevin grinned “first class doesn't begin until eight thirty”

“Oh”

“Usually only freshmen do this, but since you’re new here it's mandatory for you as well”

“What?” Betty raises her blonde brows adorably. She’s already following him out the same short cut the freshmen used earlier.

“Come along, for the PRs” Kevin read Betty’s look of total confusion “Projects, and Rejects. Should see your place in this school”

(x.x.x.x)

“Jellybean Jones” Josie read the name off.

“That's me!” The spastic fourteen year old said enthusiastically. Cheryl chuckled, and pushed her hair behind her shoulders “obviously. The blue eyes, black hair, cutting jaw line is one give away trait you are a Jones” she smiled

“Yeah” Jellybean felt happy at being recognised “So? What do you think?” She’d straightened her long hair specifically for this and it looked sleek and shiny. All of them had seen Jellybean once at least, probably around the Pendleton Pavillion or out somewhere with Jughead. They’d always thought she was cute kid, but now Jellybean looked like she was ready to take on the world. She still looked very innocent despite her look, but being tall made up for it. She also had a certain maturity in her piercing eyes that was breathtaking. The borderline risqué outfit she wore also contributed to impressing Cheryl and Josie.

“You’re all grown up” Josie smiled earnestly

“That's what I keep telling my brother, but he won't believe me”

The senior girls laughed. “Okay, so I actually have a special position for you if you’d like”

“What's that?” Jellybean’s blue eyes glittered

“A social hand maiden. Specifically, to our girl Veronica Lodge. But the favour extends to us too as her other besties. Look at it as an apprenticeship - hanging out with us, getting special privileges, we’d even convince your big brother to let you go to some parties. So are you up to it?”
The word apprenticeship was enough to buy Jellybean. Did that mean she literally had a chance at being one of them one day? Me, Jellybean Jones?!

“I’d love it!”

“Excellent. Welcome to Raffles Institution, what lunch period do you have?” Cheryl patted the blue and gold scarf down expertly

“Uh, B”

“Perfect. You’ll meet us at the courtyard and have lunch with us”

“But wait, which table will you be at?”

“You won't miss it” Josie winked

“Fuck my life, it's another Cooper” Cheryl’s brown eyes shot daggers into another blonde girl standing before her. Pretty much everyone looked at her when Cheryl said that. She had the same complexion and looks as her sister, but Betty lacked that oozing confidence. She stood still, kind of unsure of all the pairs of eyes on her.

The first thing that came to her mind was how bizarre it is that they literally have some kind of acceptance on the first day of school that’ll determine your ‘position’ whatever that meant. Both girls, despite sitting down were bigger than life. They intimidated her with one glance - all shiny skin and flawless.

The second thing she noticed was - how gorgeous that boy is. He barely spent a glance in her direction, only to see what Cheryl had cursed about. But then he went back to talking to the young looking boys in front of him. His eyes were kind, a shade of golden brown illuminated by the sun. From the side, he had the perfect profile and his hair was spiked up that messy way all boys strive to achieve. All she wanted to do was run her fingers through them, already.. he had the appearance of a red headed adonis.

“What are you in Raffles Institution for?”

“Oh, uh -” Betty looked back to the other red head, a girl, the one who had just cursed at her for some reason “I do acting”

“That's all?” She raised a brow. Betty gulped “uh, I can sing.. I'd just choose not to”

“Rule number one of being here, Little Coop. Is never say ‘um’ again. Ever.” Josie waved her finger at the wavering girl before her

“Oh, okay”

“I’m Cheryl Blossom. Queen B for Blossom of Raffles Institution. Maybe like the talent gene that runs in your family, we’ve run out of scarves for you”

“Josie McCoy. The other half who runs this drab hive. And sorry new girl, there’s about a million and one reasons you don't make the cut”

“Okay”

“That's it?” Cheryl leaned forward. An idea sparked in her head. “You’re not gonna beg for our approval? Do you even want to be in this school? Because let me tell you - talent is one thing, but connections are the other. If you can't get past us, how do you suppose you’ll break your way into
“What do you want me to do?” Betty shrugged. She didn’t really need the validation of these obviously stuck up spoiled mean girls who thought they owned the entire city.

“Give me a reason to accept you. To make you a project. Tell me that you're better than anyone anticipated, show me what you're made of. Show me the fire, tell me what a bitch I’m being, say what a spoiled big city snob I am.”

Betty had her hands balled in fists. She didn't know what to do, but everything Cheryl was saying made her pulse race. She didn't like to be messed with, especially when she did have the right to be in this school. Her blood pumped and her nails dug into the skin of her palms so hard she swore she felt something wet and hot beneath her nails.

“Prove to me you're not so vanilla”

“Project” a clear voice knocked them all out of the little bubble that was Cheryl tormenting the new girl “Isn't it time for me to make a decision now?”

Everyone's jaw dropped. Especially Chuck.

Josie’s face broke into a shocked but amazed smile, not believing her eyes

“Holy shit” Reggie and Archie said together. But Archie’s eyes were much more fixated than Reggie’s who were turning to see everyone’s reaction.

Kevin, who was standing by to watch Betty, gasped “yes”

“Talk about a comeback” Cheryl smirked proudly

Jellybean Jones perked up like a kid in a candy store. She squealed “Veronica Lodge!”

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! Thanks so much for the love on the first chapter, I got super excited so here's chapter two.. things are about to go down.

I hope you like the characters introduced this chapter that weren't here during chapter 1, so tell me what you think

xoxo
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter #3 Triggered

- once I pull this trigger off, you’ll be begging me to stop

... Tarantino killing love, I couldn't really give a fuck

Telling you I won't slow down, won't slow down

Yeah I won't slow down -

“Oh my god V, not saying this isn't epic. But what are you wearing?” Cheryl’s red lips are wide in
a smile, as she glances around the entirety of school who has stopped whatever they’re doing to
look at Veronica Lodge - who just walked in like a seductress on the first day of school.

“Is it really important? A girl’s choice of clothing is just a form of expression so” Veronica winked
at the boys, not missing their gawking eyes and the way Archie’s throat bobbed a little when she
did that. Veronica was relishing in the attention on her. Yes, there were phones out and people not
so subtly trying to move on their life while still watching her.

“You must be feeling something today” Cheryl laughed at her own joke, while Veronica elbowed
her and sat down next to the red head.

“So? Hand over the scarf Josie” she raised a brow

“Veronica, she's not getting one” Josie said it like it's obvious. They pretended this wasn't the most
bizarre thing in the world and just continued their PRs.

“Veronica Lodge! I’m Jellybean Jones, your elected social hand maiden for this year. On a
professional note - it's an honour and I don't mind staying out late, but my curfew is midnight. And
on a personal note, you have no idea how excited I am!” Her inner child really came out when she
wasn't acting cool and suave.

“Hey, Jellybean. Yeah that's awesome” Veronica turned away from the young girl to Josie and
Cheryl, clearly upset at them “I love her, and that's cool I mean I would have no problem with it
but why are you making decisions for me? That was my choice to make, not yours”

Cheryl and Josie blink at her. “Why are we making decisions for you? Since you weren't here to
make them yourself” Josie says blatantly. “Step up and actually get to school on time. Don't slack,
Veronica”

“It was part of my plan! I wasn't actually late for not being punctual, I -“

“Uh - uh. It's done, now we have just ten more minutes so scoot along Betty Draper”

Betty watched the exchange between three girls. She could tell the brunette that just showed up
was younger than Cheryl and Josie, from the way they looked and spoke to her. She also couldn't
take her eyes of this girl who, in all reality had just walked into school in lingerie. The black lace
glued on her skin, it haltered around her neck but there was a huge cut out on the chest area showing off much more than anybody bargained for but nobody's complaining - and part of Betty is telling herself she can't look away because she’s never seen anyone dress like this before and it's pretty weird to see it on the first day of school while the other yells is there no dress code?! She has the sheer lacy-ness on with a black velvet mini skirt and a silky sheer black cardigan.

Her hair is also black, as dark as her clothes. And it frames her seductive face just perfectly.

“Wait - I declared project. So she's a project” Veronica stood up in a flash and put her hand on Betty’s shoulder, turning to the girls who looked like the couldn't believe her. If Cheryl and Josie think they're going to boss her, Veronica Lodge around they're in for a wake up call. Everyone needs a wake up call. She is being made up to take over their position, not forever be their little doll. She feels the urge to get back at them after they deliberately chose her social hand maiden and everything else for the past year.

“Are you serious? Veronica think about the decision you’re making - all she does is act, she's wearing washed out jeans on the first day of school - she’s from some town called Riverdale, she can't even look us in the eye without shrinking back. She's obviously not one of us and you know that!” Josie rambled off

“And she might be.. too fat” Cheryl adds snidely.

“Okay that is beyond irrelevant Cheryl. You're making this a personal vendetta now”

“Well of course I am” Cheryl Blossom stood up then, getting eye to eye with Veronica. She looked at her seriously “If I don't accept someone, no one does. That's how it works”

“Well too bad Queen B, you’re not the only one who pulls the strings. Should I repeat myself? Project” Cheryl’s cocoa eyes shot daggers into Veronica’s scarily darker ones, but Ronnie didn't seem to be bothered. Her lip twitched in a smile.

“A scarf, Jellybean?” Veronica held out her hand. Jellybean quickly handed one to her, and she turned around to wrap it around Betty.

“Congratulations, welcome to Raffles Institution” Only now, up close could Betty see the details of this girl Veronica. She had pouty bee stung lips and perfect high cheekbones and fiercely arched eyebrows. Those were the three distinct features on her face, and Betty saw she was beautiful. Insanely so. Even more up close.

She also noticed how Veronica was maybe an inch taller than her, and when Betty looked down she noticed the incredibly tall high heels on her feet. Betty’s inner girllishness came alive when she saw how gorgeous they were, silver and strappy. The fact that she had on black stockings made it even more impeccable, this girl seriously has an eye for style.

It took her a moment to register the drop dead gorgeous and total opposite of herself talking to her and wrapping a scarf around her neck, but when she did all she could say was a grateful “thank you”.

“Girls! Come on, let's get inside” Jason called. He stood up and swung his Varsity football jacket over his shoulder, already moving ahead. It was weird. Cheryl let her hair purposely hit both Veronica and Betty in the face when she whipped around and caught up to Jason, then Josie gathered her things and was soon chased after by Reggie who had a dopey smile on his face as he tried to talk to her.
Veronica, Archie and Chuck stood unmoving. They watched they're friends walk along before the bell rang but they had no idea how to follow suit. Any other day Veronica and Archie would've strode along hand in hand making everyone jealous, but not today. Archie made it a point to look at her standing next to Betty and grumble some curses, his shoe kicking at the ground like some kid.

Veronica was also stumped, she felt more comfortable walking in here flaunting everything than not being able to reach out and run along with Archie through the school. She missed that suddenly.

Chuck Clayton sighed, shaking his head at both of the stupid exes and walked over to Veronica. He put an arm around her shoulders and got her walking, leaving the new blonde behind. She had a blank face on as the memories and dreams of her and Archie ran its course through her mind. “Come on, Little V” Chuck sighed.

Archie was left standing there with Betty and Jellybean, but then Kevin motioned his head to Betty and she followed him to get directed to the first class of the day.

Archie looked at Jellybean. Her big blue eyes shined like a cute little puppy, when she came over to him and they started walking together. Jellybean could only giggle to herself that Archie looked as if he’d already kill himself for not walking with his ex - girlfriend, she's walking the halls with Archie Andrews!

(x.x.x.x)

It turns out all of them had the same first class. Veronica sat with her hands folded in her lap listening to the foundation of acting course. She was next to Josie, who sat between her and Cheryl as a silent peace holder. Cheryl was still fuming that her year hadn't gone according to plan - her brother put a hand in her projects for gods sakes and then Veronica had the audacity to turn the tables on her. Okay, even Cheryl knows her ego’s been a little hurt but being a spoiled brat feels pretty good right now.

Especially because Jason keeps turning around to look at the new girl Polly Cooper, albeit playfully.

Betty can't really hear anything from where she sits in the top row even though the speakers here are one of a kind quality, because everyone around her is whisper yelling or full on chatting about something. Apparently Kevin didn't choose the best seat in the house because they were surrounded by drama ridden sophomores and some juniors who couldn't be focused enough on their dream of acting because of their much more important topic of conversation.

After pinching herself repeatedly thinking she’s in a dream because this Lecture Hall is bigger and more polished than Riverdale’s school auditorium (it’s fully air conditioned and has more than enough seats for the entire student body), admiring the head of red hair that doesn't move once. He’s so focused on the woman talking upfront with her slide show and he has his arms crossed, so Betty doesn't get a chance to look at his face, wanting to know his name and completely giving up on listening to her talk that she can't hear - Betty finally gives in and turns to the first girl on her right who has bangs and brown hair.

“What are you guys talking about?”

“Who the hell are you?” The girl looks up. Betty is taken aback by her abrasiveness and furrows her brows.

“I’m new. Betty Cooper”
“Well I’m a pioneer. Madelyn Morgan. And call me that, nothing else. Oh my god -“ her face breaks into shock and she clasps her hand over her mouth “you’re the girl Veronica Lodge used to spite Cheryl at Projects & Rejects this morning!”

“What?”

“Please don't tell me you believe she actually would've projected you if it weren't for the fact that she’s trying to test Cheryl for making Jellybean Jones her social hand maiden without her permission or maybe she's in an iffy mood because of what happened to her or maybe she’s just done being a third party princess and is ready to take over once this years’ seniors graduate and it's the beginning of her revolution but-“

“Oh my god, how do you know all this stuff?” Betty shook her head

“How could you not?” A boy with floppy curls in his eyes leans against his seat. “She is trending number one this year”

“True” another girl added in. At this point they'd all turned in their seats so they're facing each other in one big circle. “Everyone is obsessed” Betty found it ironic how by ‘everyone’ they literally mean themselves.

“But, what happened to her?” Betty asked

Kevin shook his head “ohh boy. Betty, get ready to be bombarded with all the scandalous details”

“First things first” Madelyn lifted her finger “Veronica Lodge is one of the celebrities at school. She is the hottest of hot, Her dad created those Pembrooke hotels and he owns like half of Laguna Beach and Rhode Island but that's not even the half of it. She and Archie Andrews? They've been a couple for three years and eight months”

“They met at Serene Sights Middle School and started dating there” the boy adds in.

“Actual Brad Pitt slash Angelina Jolie style actor and actress made for each other type dream come true love story” another girls says

Okay, so Veronica is a rich girl who’s been in a perfect relationship and apparently has some power in her palms. She didn't seem that gossip worthy.

“But everyone’s suspecting they broke up because neither of them have posted anything about each other on social media since the ending of summer. And! They were walking with wtf partners today in the halls - they're totally broken up”

“Again” Kevin deadpans

“I heard he's the one who broke up with her”

“No, she definitely broke up with him”

“Oh please. Lodge is enough of a controlling bitch to everybody else, can you imagine getting in bed with a maniac like that?”

“Yeah, Alyssa. I can actually… and it doesn't seem bad at all”

Betty couldn't believe the crazy gossip surrounding a girl who for all intends and purposes just saved her from being a loser in this school. Kevin had pointed out that every freshman without a
scarf on their neck or a cap on their head is being side stepped and not spoken to. She's glad that's not her. “Is that what you mean when you said ‘what happened to her’ she and Archie broke up?” She’s also wondering who this Archie is.

The looks they all shared when she said that made her slightly infuriated. It was like woah, she has no idea. Kevin pinched the bridge of his nose and shut his eyes.

“All that you need to know about Veronica Lodge right now is this” Madelyn held up her phone after doing a few clicks on it. And she completely took Betty off guard, she definitely wasn't expecting to see that.

Her eyes bugged out of her head when she saw the as - it - was - leaked, no censorship version of the photos. To see someone she just barely knew in that light was beyond shocking. So shocking, Betty literally fell out of her chair and landed on the floor in a thump. If that sound wasn't loud enough, the group of kids watching her erupted into giggles and laughter instantly.

Everyone else in the hall turned around and looked at her. Including Cheryl and Josie, who wore little smirks and Veronica who was just a little surprised to see her on her butt on the floor. And Archie, he finally turned around and she could see his face, but he open mouth laughed with the sparks reaching his eyes.

Could this be any more embarrassing?

“Miss.. Cooper. Is there a problem?” Mrs Atkins asked

(x.x.x.x)

At lunch, Betty sat far away from everybody else with Kevin who dove straight into his burger at the courtyard. Her classes so far have been amazing, after the first one they had regular English and Maths. It visibly showed when they were in an Arts/Music class versus regular subjects. All the students came to life and showed their best, I guess that's why they're in this art school.

“Mini Jones, I need you to start sectioning off all the projects that can sing, so I can decided who’ll work best for backup for my performance Friday night. And no boys, also preferably ones that aren't annoying. I need it by tonight, I hope you can do that” Veronica pops a fry in her mouth

“I can do that” Jellybean nods, and she opened her MacBook Air to start the list.

“Great!” Veronica smiles. She thinks, you'd better.

“Today is a full schedule ladies - there's Vixens tryouts at three and then my auditions at five. It's gonna be a real long day”

“Oh yeah, is that in the Shadowbox Theatre?”

“Yes” Cheryl puts way too much salt on her salad and grimaces.

“What play are you doing?”

Cheryl controlled an eye roll because Veronica seriously didn't even know what her homecoming play is. She’d told Josie at their sleepover last night, all the nitty gritty details. Veronica should already know them too. “What do you think I should do?” Cheryl pushes the salad aside and picks at Josie’s instead

“Hmm… remember we saw the Cruel Intentions musical in New York this summer? That was
“Ugh, god. Are you a walking Cruel Intentions advert?” Josie stifles a laugh. She’s singing some song, probably one of her own under her breath. It’s completely normal for Josie to be singing at all times in any situation - and people have grown accustomed to it.

“You loved the musical Cheryl. You even went and saw it again with Toni after”

“Whatever. Its Emma the novel by Jane Austen. Are you familiar?”

Veronica couldn’t understand what was up with Cheryl right now. She’d been extra testy and getting that bitch face on, just because Veronica missed one sleepover and came to school late?

“Of course I am Cheryl. And I’ll be there, don’t worry”

She looked at Jellybean. “Oh, and we’ll see you at Vixen auditions right?”

“Actually I wasn't thinking -“

“Mandatory requirement, Little J. See you when before the clock strikes three”

She turned back to Cheryl and Josie. “I know you guys are mad about me not falling in line like usual, so I’m not going to pick a fight like usual either - instead I’ll ask, what dripping gossip did you two have at the sleepover?”

Cheryl glanced at Josie, her whole body tense. It was obvious to her friends how rigid and testy she was today. Finally she sighed and took a deep breath. “You will not believe what happened before you came rolling up to us in tears at the Fusion Fiesta party”

“What?” Veronica’s eyes sparkled at them while taking a spoonful of coconut jelly the school sold. Josie hid her face in her hands and both the girls laughed, making Veronica laugh too. “Tell me! Come on!” She prodded

“Okay, so I might… have had a little rendezvous with Reggie Mantle” Josie said slyly. To which Cheryl slapped her on the thigh, “you totally had sex with him!”

“Oh my god!” Veronica squealed. She stomped her heels excitedly underneath the table

“Shut up!”

“Okay wait details. When, what, how did it happen?”

“We were kind of flirting the whole summer and he basically hit on me at The Moffet’s party and I’ve seen him watching me other times too” Josie played with her locket absently

“So how did it feel?”

Cheryl made a laugh - caught - in - throat sound that made even Jellybean look up from her laptop, seeing the senior girl find Veronica’s question so funny. “You freaking tell us! We know you slept together at the lake house”

“Correction. We fooled around together, but we were the only two drunk fifteen year olds in the house and needed an escape so” Veronica reiterated the events of what went down during their ‘royalties of Raffles’ trip to Lake Tahoe during Spring Break. “I also didn't mean that, I mean if you wanna tell me sure but I meant how do you feel about him now? You know like, romantically?”
Cheryl took a sip of her long island iced tea “Josie McCoy and romance? Please”

“I don't know” Josie was still not meeting their eyes, staring off into a far away space “it feels different. Like - it's been building up to something and I assumed when we did it it'd be over, but the tension’s still there and it's starting to shift into something.. more”

Cheryl and Veronica both followed her eyes to where they were focused, and landed on the boys’ table not too far from them. Reggie was talking animatedly and shoving Chuck playfully. They had magnanimously decided to not have lunch together today based on the fact that it was ‘too weird’ with Archie and Veronica broken up. No one except them knew the real story of the break up and how it went down, so they knew this was heavier than their previous child’s play fights.

Veronica sighed. “I never saw her perfect this is until it's happening before my eyes. Rosie!” She clapped her hands

Cheryl and Josie laughed “yeah, well we’ll see how it goes. It is my senior year, I don't want to get attached to something that might be empty and waste myself on it”

Veronica nodded, always approving of her friend’s wise decisions. “Listen to that Jellybean, words of a wise woman”

Jellybean smiled a little

“I mean I’m not saying being in a relationship isn't awesome, it is. But it's also crazy tiring - but I never realised it until it's over and it's like I’m just catching my breath”

“So that's it? For you and Archie? You think it's over?”

“I don't know, Cher. One of the things that set him aside from everyone else was that he always understood me, he never pressured me, he didn't mind loving me wholeheartedly even if I couldn't say it back. But then … I lost that” her eyes looked down sullenly

“He betrayed me. And he lied about it to my face. I can't - believe everything I think about us anymore.”

“No, V that's not true” Josie put her hand on Veronica’s “yes, he did something terrible and horrendous, but it's not right for you two to end things like this. A three year relationship that on its own was fire alive, now its just going to burn out so abruptly? You need to work things out. That's why you're feeling so drained and cut off, because you can't even speak a word to him today!”

“I did speak a word, I said ‘thanks’ when he held the door for me after acting foundation course”

“Yeah, that don't count” Josie rolled her eyes “you wore this outfit to torture him. Is it some you’ve touched me in this before but you can't now tactic?”

“What? No! This is Victoria Secret’s new Sexy Illusions collection” Veronica looked down at the lace complimenting her newly accentuated figure. “And it might be part of the revenge plot, but trust me I’ll find something better coming”

Cheryl had her elbows on the table much like a unmannered child, but her face was in a pout at all the melancholy drama until an entourage of crisp white collar shirts and black blazers and ties came gliding into the courtyard gates. Her eyes immediately perked up like a million light bulbs came alive.
“Toni! I’m here!” She waved a hand frantically and the petite girl with her long pink curls came over. Cheryl leaned up to kiss her from the seat and moved over so Toni could sit down.

“Hey, girls” she greeted Josie and Veronica, after her classic special way of greeting to Cheryl. “New recruit, huh?”

Jellybean looked up and waved “looking good JB” Toni teased

The rest of the Costal Prep students clambered around and found their own table, but most of them went to find their circle of Raffles Institution friends.

Betty watched in awe as the group of somehow very chic in their uniforms students came in. She couldn’t believe how good looking everyone here looked. Is this an LA thing?? Her mouth hung open slightly as they walked past, all debonair riding their high horse. They gave off a different vibe that Betty’s Raffles schoolmates did, that they were all in their own head and untouchable. But they also had that same vibe to them that was literally flawless, and they had that same certain confidence not many teenagers rolled with. They were like the same, but different.

Betty noticed the apt difference between this school’s bright colours and everybody donning not much clothing versus these entrance makers who were clad in black blazers and checks on the girls’ skirts. Despite having whats assumably a uniform the girls did dress differently. Some had on dress overalls and some just skirts, some wore bow ties versus regular ties. The boys looked absolutely dashing in their slacks and blazers or vests, even in this hot LA weather. Needless to say, Betty couldn't peel her eyes away from the finery.

“That's the speeding to study Costal High Preparatory kids. Or less formally known, as the prissy posh asses” Kevin noticed her sudden quietness

“What?” Betty snapped out of it. She saw one boy with hair as dark as Veronica’s walk over to their table and sit between Jellybean and Veronica. He looked very similar to Jellybean, even from just a side view. And had a certain gal in his walk that set him apart.

“They're the best academic school in all of Los Angeles. Meaning, crazy smart with Math and Geometry and all that gross shit. But, they're in the same school district as us so our schools have an interconnected program for students who want to excel in the arts or in a standard school subject for us. That's why we hang out together, like for example. Last year, I got put in a higher English class so they sent me to Costal Prep to attend class there, as it's like - the best thing you can get on a college application. Seriously though, it's unbelievable how smart every single one of them are”

“Oh wow, that's a situation I do not want to get in” Betty decides.

Kevin laughs “yeah. And don't worry Betts, they call us the dramatic little bitches all the time so it's our running joke to call them prissy posh asses”

“Oookay” Betty blinked “reminds me, I’m gonna audition for that play that's happening this evening. I saw a poster on the bulletin board, it's a book I’ve read before”

“Go for it” Kevin bites into his burger. “But be ready for the competition. If there’s a play, Cheryl and Veronica will fight to the death for the lead now that Veronica’s a junior”

“Okay, every time anyone talks about them - and trust me, it's every class Kev - it's like they're some ferocious hyenas. I mean, at least Veronica seems pretty normal”

“No” Kevin leans forward in his seat. “Believe all the warnings you’ve gotten new girl. The Raffles Royalties are Class A brutal bitches”
“Royalties?”

“Yes, that's what we call them. Often the richest, prettiest, most talented of the lot. See, the Projects & Rejects isn't some amateur validity Cheryl and Josie made up. It's literally tradition going back generations - every four years there's a group of students who pretty much own it, and it's always a pair of juniors then seniors together. They'll choose two freshmen who they'll groom to become like them too - and it's a vicious cycle. Check this out”

Kevin pulled up his laptop to the school website, and a picture of some girls and boys on the school steps. Betty looked closer and realised a very young and not quite intimidating looking Cheryl and Josie. “Corrine Seymour and Lucille Tropez recruited the two co queens we know today, and that's Ian Jensen and Lucas Van der Bilt who recruited Jason and Chuck. Before them it was Fallon and Ramona and the list goes on and on, but this is a legitimate almost cultish group you do not wanna step in with”

“So.. if they’re always in pairs then how come Veronica is the only junior?” Betty was slowly putting it together

“That's the thing. Cheryl and Josie are hyper protective of her, they never had anybody else in the group as her ‘partner’. It's probably why she’s suffocating at their tight leash. But - you are right, Veronica is maybe an iota nicer Cheryl and Josie are”

Betty nodded, slowly looking back to where they all sat. There was something so interesting about them, she could feel this unexplainable pull.

“Well well, I’m pleasantly surprised. Jellybean made the cut. Hell, you made it to the lunch table!” Jughead reached the girls table and plopped himself in the seat next to his sister’s. Cheryl and Toni were giggling about something with Josie who raised her turned and said “hey!” cheerfully to him.

“Of course I did, Jughead. I was born to be here” Jellybean didn't bother looking at her brother. She had her eyes focused on the MacBook screen.

“She’s got a tongue of sugar and a wolf’s heart, perfect” Veronica rests her head on her palm

“Is that your rendition of the snake behind an angel’s face simile, Lodge?”

“Why of course Jones, don't think us Rafflesias don't have a talent with words just because we aren't throwing out ten thousand letter essays and writing articles for the school newspaper”

“Speaking of the Red and Black” Jughead pulled out his pen and journal from the book bag he had “Can I have a quote, on the cover story I’m doing of Veronica Lodge’s epic scandal and possible break up of Raffles’ sweethearts?”

“Oh god” the young socialite hid her face in her hands and groaned “are you really writing an article on that?”

Jughead hummed a reply. “Why do you have to? Every other trashy drama site has already reported on it!”

“Uh - uh Princess, the Red and Black is an official report on what us as the student body believes is legitimate. After all, it sells to both Raffles and Costal. And you already know it's necessary, this is my job!”

“Okay well, I’m not giving a quote” she decided
“Very well, that is now your quote. Prepare to appear shady and vague as hell”

Veronica groaned again, almost like a whine this time. “Can I see it? What you have so far?”

“You really want to?”

She shrugged. “Okay” Jughead clears his throat exaggeratedly and makes Jellybean giggle.

“well it starts off with ‘it’s no doubt in anybody’s mind that Hiram and Hermione Lodge created the hottest, smartest and funnest girl you will ever come across’”

“Oh no!! Stop, already I hate it” Veronica slapped her hands at him to stop. Jughead laughs heartily. “Junior year and you still won't admit how much you love hearing other people sing your praises, huh Lodge?”

Veronica rolled her eyes. Jughead stole a handful of her fries and they both turned to Jellybean, Josie and Cheryl who were explaining how terrible Amanda Carson’s blouse is today.

“Is that boy related to Jellybean? They look similar”

“Oh yeah” Kevin answers as Betty watches Jughead interact and laugh with Veronica. Out of all the newbies, she sure had an eye for the in crowd already. “Her older brother”

“And they're all friends?”

“Pretty much” he shrugs while they get up together, seeing only five minutes left of lunch “the cliques of Costal Prep are always friendly with the royalties of Raffles”

“Oh. So he’s like them but at the brainy school?”

“That boy has people kissing the ground he walks on. He’s the son of a former president at Costal Prep, so he’s practically royalty. This place is heritable like that”

Betty nods. The bell rings right then, and the raven haired boy kissed his sister on the cheek and jumped up from the chair to get back to school. All of the boys looked dashing, but he was a poster child for it. And when Jughead strode past Betty and greeted Kevin casually, she caught the scent of his expensive cologne.

(x.x.x.x)

In the lockers in between voice training and jazz dance Veronica stopped by Josie’s locker quickly. She really needed to run away from Archie who’s locker is only adjacent to hers but now that she’s here it seems perfect timing.

“Hey, did Cheryl seem weird to you? I mean before Toni showed up, she was acting off all day like something burbling beneath the surface is about to explode”

Josie eyes her younger friend leaning against the locker next to hers and gets her books out. “Full disclosure? She's jealous”

“Of what?”

“Firstly, her brother chose the side of some new girl over hers and even though I’m okay with you coming in full force, Cheryl’s a little shaken that you not only put her in her place but you’re changing up the game. It's normal I guess, since we're gonna graduate this year”
“Seriously? It's not like you guys didn't do the same thing once”

“Relax” Josie fixed her lipstick in the mirror “you know Queen B can get riled up over nothing. And don't be scared, Toni agreed to be there at tryouts and auditions and I made Jason promise to stick next to Cheryl after he’s done with football tryouts. So with her two favourite people besides us around, she won't bite. Just keep doing you”

“Alright” Veronica sighed “see you at tryouts. Can't wait to be elected captain for next year”

“Don't get too cocky or you’ll jinx it” Josie winked

“Whatever. I’m gonna get to class”

“Still haven't got called to the office for that outfit?”

“Not yet” they said in passing. Veronica felt powerful while she walked down the hallway, even alone. All eyes came up to look at her. It wasn't obnoxious or obvious, but magical the way they admire and envy in silence. Veronica looks down and smiles to herself, her heels pattering over the blue and gold logo of Raffles Arts Institution.

Maybe too caught up in the moment, Veronica completely knocked into Betty Cooper who also had trouble finding her way and ended up running late. “Oh - I’m sorry!” Veronica pulled her cardigan closer around her body.

“It's okay. Can you just show me where Miss Annie’s classroom is? This schedule isn't helping much”

“The third door just down this hall” Veronica directed

“Thank you. Oh and, Principal Weatherbee suggested I find the list of sports teams and try out for one. Do you know where that is?”

“Oh” Veronica’s eyes lit up. The hallway was empty now but she didn't really mind being late to one class she’s already excelled in. “Cheerleading. You must! Tryouts are at three pm today, and the gymnasium isn't hard to find”

Veronica was so enthusiastic yet cool at the same time, Betty couldn't really say no. She just nodded and agreed. “I’ll be there”

She smiles to herself when Betty walks away. The wide eyed transfer from god knows where is exactly the kind of girl Veronica likes to stir and mess with - because it's fun how she’s easily believing and even if it doesn't amount to anything, she’ll at least get to see how the Raffles Vixens do tryouts.

(x.x.x.x)

Tryouts aren't as big a deal as Betty anticipated they’d be. There's about half the freshmen girls and some sophomores but most of them are JVs trying out to be in Varsity. They all dress in full get up workout clothes, big name brands like Adidas or Puma adorning their headbands and booty shorts and sports bras. The Raffles girls also go all out or nothing style wise. Maybe it's because they have more money than they know what to do with, but Betty has seen each student wearing elaborate outfits with designer purses and heels. So when it came to tryouts ensemble? They certainly did not disappoint.

Betty stood by the bleachers warming up. She didn't really know anybody else except the Madelyn
girl who was off with her friends in a group. No one was super interested in talking to somebody new who didn't really sell herself the same way they did, and Betty looked around absently until Veronica came up to her.

“Hey! You came Mini Cooper! I saw your sister somewhere here too”

“Polly’s here?” She hadn't even told Betty she’d be trying out when she mentioned it to her. “Uh uh. Are you confident? Nervous? Terrified you’re gonna pee yourself?”

“What? No” Betty watched as Veronica stretched out into an over split on the floor with her foot against the wall, and arched her back behind her. The girl is extremely flexible. “I took gymnastics when until I was like thirteen but then I still did it for fun”

“I am so going to kill this tryout” Veronica ignores her answer. “And don't tell anyone, but half of these girls are gonna get cut before the first warmup ends. Just watch, like they even have a chance” she whispers

It's true. When Cheryl and Josie and the other Varsity Vixens have given out numbers to everyone, they begin the warmup routine and almost instantly at least twenty people are cut. Veronica smirks to Betty from next to her then. Betty smiles back, because even if these girls are dressed like an experienced athlete she still has more stamina and talent than many of them did.

It feels good to sweat and prove themselves with each movement. On Betty’s part, she has an excellent memory that helps pick up the choreography easily. Veronica is confident with herself, all summer she’s been training and keeping in shape and it's really paying off now. She feels strong, and the routine they use is one she’s already memorised from the JV squad last year. Watching her own reflection in the tainted glass windows - she knows she looks good and is performing amazingly.

Unlike Jellybean, who struggles to keep up with the fast paced music and counts but she pulls through until the end where her long black hair is falling pieces out of it's ponytail and her face is flushed red. “Good job JB!” Veronica turns around and high fives her. Her high ponytail swings as she does so.

At the end, Betty Veronica and Jellybean are still standing in the middle. They fall to the ground and take big gulps of water trying to catch their breath while the decisions are being made. It's clear to everyone then that Veronica isn't playing around, she's really serious about this whole thing. But she’s also effortlessly good at it, something Betty couldn't help frustratedly envy while she was doing her layout and landed perfectly.

“So we’ve gone over the names, and rehashed each of your tryouts in our minds. Now, we have our complete 2017 Varsity and Junior Varsity squads. The decision was quite obvious and one all my girls and I heavily agreed on” Coach Casey says into the megaphone. When she said the last part though, you could just feel Cheryl’s eye roll radiating from across the gym. She clearly wasn't 100% agreeing with all of it.

Coach Casey called all the Junior Varsity names, and Jellybean breathed a gigantic sigh of relief when she said her name. Everybody could see how shaky her bare legs were when she walked to join the JV team across the floor, but no one could hear how fast her heart was beating or the frustration she felt with herself the entire time for not being as perfect as she should be. Thank god she got on the squad, because she'd surely be removed the position of social hand maiden if it weren't the case.

“And now for our Varsity squad..”
Betty curled her fingers into her palms and clenched her eyes shut. Please, please say my name. To Veronica’s surprise Polly Cooper was one of the first ones called, making her realise why Cheryl was so bothered. And then more names, with only five more slots left in a team of fifteen. The remaining girls felt their heart palpate. Finally, “and glad to have more family on this team, Miss Betty Cooper!”

“Woah!” Veronica led the holler of girls who cheered the new girl on. Betty felt both ecstatic at making the squad but also because Veronica is being so weirdly nice to her. She looked back at her, still sitting with the rest of them and smiled broadly at her.

“Last but most certainly not least, we have Miss Veronica Lodge!”

Veronica stood up and jumped before Coach Casey even called her name. Eyes followed her as she walked, admiring her figure even in the simple black booty shorts and sports bra. All the Vixens who swarmed Veronica and hugged her immediately, something they didn't do to welcome the others. Because she's the precious diamond amidst everything else. In the huddle of people who adored her, who loved her, Veronica felt something she’d lost since the night Archie broke her heart and the day she found out somebody had leaked her private photos. Something she’d missed feeling, that had been present in her life for as long as she could remember. She felt like she had the world in her palm again.

(x.x.x.x)

Unsurprisingly, the corridor outside the Shadowbox theatre (nicknamed by the students as ‘Shadow lane’) is much more buzzing and noisy than tryouts were. Anybody who'd been moody about the first day is already smiling and practicing lines with their friends. This is one of the moments Archie and Veronica and all the other students can vow they live for. Being in the element, with people who love acting and art as much as you do - there’s nothing they wouldn't do for it.

When Veronica pushes the door open her hair blows with the wind. It's not as voluminous as it was this morning after being tied in a ponytail and combed back out, and she’s changed back into her lacy getup but her makeup is less dramatic, just simple eyeliner after tryouts. Archie can't even help himself from turning around when someone says her name. She looks ardently beautiful and it's unfair how she can get him riled up and locked down by just walking into the room. She doesn't even have to look at him. That's just the power Veronica Lodge has, and Archie realises it's not just him who’s affected when all the other boys also turn and stare at her.

He finally knocks out of it when Reggie puts a hand on his shoulder, sympathising for Archie who looked like he was pining after her in silent desperation. He saw her take a seat next to Scarlett Moffet and the younger Barbara twin, picked up a script from the counter Midge Klump is running for the characters she’s choosing to audition for and starts talking to the girls. Archie wonders what part she's auditioning for, and thinks she’ll definitely suit Emma Woodhouse. Clever, tough and able to talk her way out of anything.

Cheryl opened the doors to the Shadowbox Theatre at 5 pm sharp, a sly smile on her lips. Everyone looks up.

“Welcome, Rafflesias. To your first play of the school year. I’m your assistant casting director and the producer and director of this play, Cheryl Blossom” she announces proudly “I’ll be calling names of each person auditioning, starting from the part of Emma Woodhouse ending with John Knightley. When I call your name, step inside and you’ll perform your part with one of the other actors auditioning for the part of that character you’re doing a scene with. And by tomorrow morning the full cast will be on the Bulletin board in the main hall, and all social media platforms”
There was a collective nod from everyone.

“Thank you, Cheryl” a shorter woman, in a dress much too granny like for any of these kids’ liking and box style glasses appeared from inside the theatre. She had caramel brown hair and was probably late twenties at best. Immediately, Shadow lane wafted with whispers of the new teacher no one had met yet.

“We’d she get that dress? A Hallowe'en store?” Veronica whispered to Scarlett and Stella, sitting on either side of her. They laughed

“No be harsh Ronnie, it's probably the only thing her great grandmother left behind in her name” Scarlett Moffet said with a fake pout. Veronica didn't try hiding her giggle.

“I’m Miss Geraldine Grundy. I’ll be co casting directing with Miss Blossom here, and just generally supervising for the production of this play”

Even more whispers. Everyone loved the old supervising teacher Mrs Berzukova because she was chill and funny and adorable, and she never minded if they brought alcohol or started getting rowdy at late night practices.

“What happened to Mrs Berzukova?” Veronica asked loudly from the back. She didn't mind if this new replacement was offended by it, that's all anyone really wants to know.

“She had her baby” Miss Grundy nodded

“Alright then” Cheryl stole the show back “Natalie Amerson”

When the list of names begin getting closer to L, Veronica feels her palms start sweating. This always happens when she’s nervous, and her breath starts to shake and she just has to get inside her own head to get control of herself.

Stop it. Stop if. You can do this, you’re smart and talented and no one deserves this role as much as you do. You’re going to go there and kill it, because that's what you do. There is no other way.

The reason she’s stressing so much is because Cheryl has chosen the most uncomfortable scene for Veronica to perform, Mr Knightley’s declaration of love in Chapter 13.

Archie feels like his heart is beating out of his chest. They’re calling in the auditions for Emma Woodhouse and George Knightley at the same time and they're well past A by now. But his name still hasn't been called. He considers going to Midge’s counter and asking to make sure they have his name on there, but he doesn't. And he should’ve known better.

Because when Cheryl appears at the door for the the umpteenth time it's the name she calls that makes everyone stop in their seat. “Up next, Veronica Lodge. And… Archie Andrews!”

Veronica wants to kill Cheryl. She exchanges a look with Stella and gets up dreadfully, heading to the door. Is this some crazy scheme of Cheryl’s? Archie should’ve known she had something planned to get back at him for breaking her best friend’s heart, and this is pure torture..

When she hears that name Betty looks up immediately, mostly because she remembered Madelyn saying Veronica broke up with a boy named Archie Andrews. And don't you know, her heart stopped - when seeing the red headed adonis she's been eyeing that walks into the theatre with Veronica. Oh, no.

They don't even know how to preface the already awkward audition, but both Archie and Veronica are professional enough that they dive straight into character and become it instead of dwelling on
their demise. Miss Grundy sits behind a desk, her glasses propped on her nose while she takes notes of their performance.

Archie has his script in his left hand, but Veronica with her impeccable memory has stuffed it in her bag and is playing the part one hundred percent.

“I cannot make speeches, Emma” Archie’s voice is lower to play an older man than he is, but it's tender and genuine in tone. He’s standing two inches away from Veronica, looking down at her with a very Archie Andrews emotional sincerity in his eyes. “If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more. But you know what I am. You hear nothing but truth from me”

Veronica’s face switched from the hard defiance of a young sixteen year old to one more aware, hearing the world for once and actually listening to it. Her doing this is perfect, Cheryl clasps her hands together excitedly from her place on the edge of the director’s table.

“I have blamed you, and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it. Bear with the truths I would tell you now, dearest Emma, as well as you have borne with them. The manner, perhaps may have as little to recommend them. God knows, I have been a very indifferent lover. But you understand me. Yes, you see, you understand my feelings. And will return them, if you can. At present, I ask only to hear, once to hear your voice”

Veronica melts completely into her character, a slow tear dripping down her left cheek. She searches Archie’s eyes for every sign of truth and it's there.

“But - I feel so errored, so mistaken of my makeup to deserve you!”

“What of my flaws?” Archie’s hand comes up to caress away her tears softly. It's feather light, and Veronica almost feels like leaning into it. She can feel the heat from his body that's barely an inch away, they're so wrapped up in each other. “Maybe it is our imperfections which make us so perfect for each other”

Right then it's the closing line, Veronica reaches up and cups both sides of Archie’s face with her hands. She looks into his eyes meaningfully.

“I find, I do not know what to think” she leans her forehead into his, slowly. And Archie leans back. The peaceful smile that plays on her lips, his hands on her waist and theirs faces so close together. It feels so strong, and flourishing.

“And scene!” Cheryl snaps them back to reality “the characters will actually have to kiss, at the end of that scene during the actual performance. Just as a note”

Veronica and Archie break apart and they stand awkwardly, like they didn't just confess feelings and were about to kiss a second ago. “Great performance you two, I’ll see you later” she whispers to Veronica. As soon as they're dismissed Archie bolts out of the theatre, his face unreadable.

Veronica really doesn't want to go back out there and face everyone who would ask her how it was to audition with her rumoured ex boyfriend, and have to look at him from across the hall. So as privilege of being a Raffles golden child, she sits in the theatre with Cheryl and watches the rest of auditions.

It's an insane process to say the least. some performance are so heartfelt you just keep wanting the scene to go on. Some people are awkward and second guessing themselves, even though they have potential. That's frustrating. And it's hilarious to see Cheryl’s infuriation with the kids who have no idea what the book’s about and just showed up to hopefully make it.
“Did you read the book?”

The dark haired boy shook his head.

“Watched the movie?”

He shook his head again.

“Have you at least seen Clueless?”

Another shake.

Cheryl sighed, “Just leave”

Aside from those few uncultured airheads, Veronica picked up on how to handle auditions for when she’d be in that position next year. Among the good ones, Betty as Harriet Smith and Jellybean as Jane Fairfax were actually completely convincing in their roles. Even Cheryl awed, but continued the mean streak by telling Betty “considering all you do is act, of course I expect you to be good at it”

But the blonde doesn't waver from her proud stance. Veronica also jumped back in to read lines during Nikki Michelson’s audition as Miss Bates, and the girl for sure had an A List acting career ahead of her. It was so exciting to play the tormenter but Nikki made Veronica feel for Miss Bates instantly.

Auditions ran until about six thirty, when the sky began darkening outside. Another thing about this school is that it never seems to sleep. The students there stayed back after their auditions either to cheer on friends or merely to enjoy the exciting ora. It's a tradition kind of thing.

When the last boy walked out of the theatre, Cheryl let a huge sigh of relief out. Jason and Toni who as promised had showed up were sitting right next to her. “Oh gosh, the tiredness of being Cheryl Blossom is never lost on me”

“Your narcissism never takes a break though, doesn't it dear sister?” Jason teases

“Of course not, anybody wanting to take my spot should be ready to fill some very big shoes”

“And you're referring to yourself in the third person, you must've gone completely mad” Veronica popped a raspberry into her mouth, smiling cheekily. Cheryl gave a playful shove before opening the doors again. As she thanked everyone profusely for coming, and to keep their hopes up - a loud crash came from the back of the theatre that made them turn their head.

“What was that?”

“Must be one of the paintings. They're all piled together in there” Jason looks to the room behind the curtains, where the school stored many old paintings of students and such. “I’ll go see if everything’s fine”

“I’ll come with” Veronica and Jason made it to the back room, seeing two paintings collapsed on each other creating an avalanche.

“I’ll get this one. You pick that out of the way” Jason directs

“Okay” Veronica lifted the canvas carefully and arranged it back into the shelve, bending down to pick another one. Just then they heard doors closing and Cheryl calling their name. “You go ahead,
I’ve got this. I have a ride anyway”

“You sure?”

“Yeah, its fine. Go ahead, Cheryl’s ready to bite her own head off”

Jason laughed. “Okay, thanks”

The light in this room, like many others, sparkled onto the canvases magically. It made the already beautiful paintings shine even brighter, and Veronica reminded herself just how lucky she is to be surrounded by such talented young people everyday. Everyone of these were masterpieces, she admired each one as she went on.

It’d gone silent outside. People had probably left. There on the ground, the very last art piece to be picked up was one with big black cursive letters painted into the corner. AA. She didn’t need to see it to know, for she remembers the day Archie painted this like it was yesterday.

They were fourteen, in the art room together. Veronica had her hair in a bun and there were splatters of blue paint on Archie's white shirt. She teased him for being stupid enough to wear a white t shirt to paint, and he retaliated by grabbing her and pressing their bodies together so the paint was on her too.

She laughed, uncontrollably. And they both ended up on the bench with Veronica on top of him, making out with the door still unlocked. He eventually did finish the painting later though.

Holding it in her hands, Veronica feels the anger and sadness rise at easier times. Before he had to do something that ended the utter perfectness she could live forever with, if it weren't for the fact that he broke it all. How did they become like this? How could they go and act as lovers and have once been that, but then he threw away the thing most private between them right out into the big dirty world. Her nails dug into the back of the canvas. Her jaw clenched, and she told herself she needed to get out of there before she either tore the painting apart or something worse.

She dropped it back on the ground and left, realising now more than ever she wanted to make him feel exactly what she did and worse. The humiliation, the anger, the betrayal.

And it more than surprised her when she was greeted back to a room of empty darkness. Veronica huffed. Everyone must have left and forgotten she was still here. She snapped her bag up from the bench and searched for her phone, turning the flashlight on and getting out of there.

Only when Veronica got to the doors, with their little windows that offered more than enough of the view of Shadow lane that she stopped dead in her tracks. The hall was empty sure, except two lone figures very close to one another.

Archie, and Miss Grundy.

Veronica’s heart stopped. She couldn't even fathom would the hell was going on but the cougar had her fingers trailing down his chest and he looked down at her strangely. Every possible emotion ran through her. Confusion. Anger. Jealousy? Shock. Disgust.

But then, recollecting her thoughts - Power.

This is the most perfect opportunity to get both of them in the head. And her fingers were so shaky she had to prop them against the door, from how surprised and mind boggled she was. What the hell is happening? Is the new teacher literally seducing an underage student on her first day? Right when she clicked the white button and her phone began recording, Miss Grundy caught
Archie’s lips with a kiss.

Her hands gave in, but she luckily caught them to still get the kiss on camera. Oh my freaking god.

It's blatantly clear on screen too, the way she’s trying to come on to him. Veronica watches intently, Archie is obviously shocked by the kiss. He hesitates for one second but then pulls away. Veronica can't believe what she’s doing. She can't believe what they're doing.

He took Miss Grundy’s hands and took them off, a look of something between disgust and hurt on his face. Veronica quickly hit stop on the video then, and moved her phone away. She watched as Archie said something to her and then turned around, walking out of the hallway.

Miss Grundy turned to face the doors and Veronica quickly ducked out of view, scooting to the left wall and leaning against it. She doesn't really care if Miss Grundy, who she now knows is a complete screwed up psycho, catches her. Veronica moves the hair out of her face and smiles to herself, searching the Raffles’ lowlives Instagram page that posted trashy drama on all of them.

She knew these people had not much else to do, so they posted fast. And without a second thought she sent that snarky video into their dms. “Oh Archie” she watched the video go from sending.. to sent. “You made it too easy”

There was only one thing to do now that would complete this ad hoc social destruction. Her blood pumped so fast, and the smile on her face illuminated only by her phone was way too sardonic. She scrolled through contacts, thanking god for having almost everybody’s number - but there would be only one person that mattered now.

“Hello?”

Veronica turned her voice down as growly teenage boy as she could get, and cleared her throat. “Is this Principal Weatherbee?” Uh, why she has some kind of accent she’s not really sure.

“Yes, this is him speaking. And this is?”

“A student at Raffles Institution. I’m really shaken up, I just saw the hoooot new teacher trying to get physical with the football star Archie Andrews! Sorry, I really had to get that off my chest. I’m still recovering from trauma I think”

“Who is this?” Principal Weatherbee’s voice became sharper.

“I.. can't tell you! The royalties would doom me if they know I tattled on one of them - but I’m begging you to help Archie Andrews. Please, if you don't believe me - then”

“Young man, I believe you. The school website has just gone up with an interesting video”

“Ah! Well, thank you Principal. And I beg you again, don't tell anyone somebody called for the sake of my social status in the fierce hierarchy!”

She hung up then, swinging her purse up fast to move on to the next step. Perfect, Grundy still stood motionless in the hallway.

Her face upon seeing Veronica walk out of the theatre was priceless. She might be almost twice her age, but Veronica clearly held the authority and reigned in it. She smirked deviously. “In case you haven't heard, I’m the Queen Bitch around here. It should teach you to not mess with somebody I care about - oh but wait! You won't even get a chance to because right about now..”
“Miss Geraldine Grundy, call to Principal Weatherbee’s office immediately” the loud speakers in the theatre house came alive.

Grundy looked straight up terrified now. Veronica crossed her arms “Don't you even think about escaping, old crow”

When she made it back to the main building as fast as she could, after watching Grundy flee for her life and make it to the Principal’s office, there had to be a hundred students waiting outside his office. They all were from auditions or tryouts and made it here after seeing what was online, assumably.

“Ronnie!” A head of golden blonde hair detached herself from the crowd and made it over to Veronica who just arrived.

“Scar! What's going on?” Veronica held her friend’s outstretched hand.

“You don't know?” Scarlett asked “Did you see online? That creep Miss Grundy and Archie were kissing in Shadow lane!”

“What?” Veronica feigned innocence. Scarlett looked sympathetically at her friend who just found out about her ex and a teacher.

Just then, the doors of Principal Weatherbee’s office opened and got everyone’s attention. The crowd separated, phones out. Two of the school security officers were holding on each arm of a crying, embarrassed Geraldine Grundy.

Archie’s eyes followed the scene, not believing what was happening. He’s completely dumbfounded. Who saw them? Who sent the tip? Is she going to jail? But he sees Veronica standing next to Scarlett looking right at him then. Veronica. She has that signature mischievous face on, but it’s mixed with smugness and pride. He furrows his brows in confusion. What the hell is happening?

There’s too many flashes and people following the scene to stop them by now, so Principal Weatherbee remained standing at his doorway. Hands behind his back like he just did the right thing.

“Mr Andrews? I’d like to have a word with you, in private” he notions inside.

Archie can't even move. He looks at Principal Weatherbee, then sees the last of Miss Grundy being led away. He looks to where Veronica stood and she’s still looking at him the same way, but now she’s walking towards him like a predator stalking it’s prey. Only, she’s already won.

Veronica knows he needs to get inside the office, so she leans close to whisper in his ear something that’ll be enough. For him to know, for the salt to rub in his wound.

“Oh Archiekins, you of all people should know better. Never cross a Lodge”

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! Woahh this is long. Sorry it took forever, life got in the way ugh. But just to note, I'm not abandoning Extended Riverdale either - I'm just really confused on the direction to go because I really need to know exactly everything with Ronnie and her
parents which I'll know at the end of season 2 comes. So for now, I'll keep writing this. Okay - hope you enjoy!
Moments

Hey guys... so fair warning. There’s a lot of use of drugs in this and I just want to make that clear. It might be pretty uncomfortable so just saying. Also, I already know you’re not gonna like this chapter because I didn’t either, but I wanted to make this part of the storyline that they make big mistakes that they’ll regret and have to come back from.

But don’t worry guys, Veronica and Archie will find their way back to each other! They’re meant to be

Chapter #4 Moments

-I grew up with a lot of things, nice things round me. I was safe, I was fine

Grew up with a lot of dreams, plans who to be, none of them were mine

I love freaks, I don’t care if you’re a wild one

And me, I can get a little drunk. I get into all the drugs

But on good days I am charming as fuck

I can be the perfect one, but I’ll make you come and I’m locked on your mind-

"I don’t know how this happen, Mr Andrews"

“I told you” Archie rubbed his eyes and blinked at the man “it wasn't anything serious. She kissed me, suddenly - yes. But I was shocked so I froze but then I pulled away, I swear it”

“That's not what this video shows” Principal Weatherbee had the video repeating itself on his desk computer. It continually bothered Archie to no end, seeing something he just did that he couldn't be more vexed with.

“It was.. I don't know, this person got a bad shot” he sighed. You could see the distress in his body language “You have to believe me, Principal Weatherbee it's not as bad as it looks”

The older man leaned back in his seat. His lips were in a thin line, the cold disappointment written all over his face. “Geraldine Grundy is being taken in to Director Tom Keller of the Los Angeles Federal Bureau of Investigation as we speak. I made a call, you see. She’s taken care of - but you Mr Andrews?”
Archie’s heart fell. The FBI? Seriously? They're blowing this way out of proportion. He’s not even sure why he's thinking like this when he doesn't know or care about Grundy at all, but he still can't imagine what’s happening to her right now.

“I expect more from you, as one of our best students Archie - Varsity football, you participated in six of the school’s productions last year and you’re performance at the Cordial Charity Showcase earned almost a hundred thousand dollars to the children's hospital here. You’ve also kept perfect behaviour up to now, Archie. Then I get a call from some - traumatised student telling me they saw you with a teacher? And then I had to face the burning truth of it plastered all over our school website! Mr Andrews, the humiliation defeats me”

“Wait - somebody called you?” Veronica?

“Don't try and change the subject from what is important here” he said sternly

“Do you - do you know who called?”

“Lord forgive me” Weatherbee took his glasses off and rubbed his temples, stoping a moment before continuing “I don't know. It was probably one of the sneaky ghouls in this school like the one who posted that video!”

“I know who called. Veronica Lodge” Archie couldn't even believe himself for giving up her name so easily, but what she did was to mess with him for her exposure she still believes he had everything to do with.

Weatherbee didn’t look the least bit amused. “Keep the couple’s feud between you and Miss Lodge, Mr Andrews. Not that it's any of your business, but the student who called me was very clearly a teenage boy with a sore throat.”

Wait, what?

“Now back to your disappointing actions! You do know something like this isn’t exemplary?”

“Of course, I would never purposely jeopardise my own good record”

“Mr Andrews” Principal Weatherbee laughed, much to Archie’s confusion and frustration. “Your own good record? This is about our school's reputation - and disrespecting your family’s respected name, as the information has already gone public we can't shield you from the consequences. But this is the most prestigious private arts school in this country Mr Andrews, and while the people out there might forgive you eventually, if I don't make you pay for your careless mistake and it tarnishes our great name I’d never forgive myself”

Archie gritted his teeth. Always, the stupid image of his family and school and what other people think. He knows how bad it looks, short of Principal Weatherbee telling him that nobody wants to get their business involved with someone who’s son is the centre of a scandal and single handedly sending a woman to jail - as if it's fault to begin with. But they're all familiar with the unsaid saying, our parents pay for the kids mistakes and our kids pay for the parents sins.

“What do you mean?” Archie pulled the hair on the back of his head hard, feeling the pain in his roots. “Are you expelling me?”

“No, not expulsion” he almost breathed a sigh of relief “a week’s suspension from school, Mr Andrews. On the first day no doubt, for involvement with a teacher? That's something that happens in sleazy small town schools. Not here. And you’ll be out of any productions we’re doing, including that homecoming play of Miss Blossom’s you’ve auditioned for until further notice.”
He started writing down the suspension note to Archie’s parents when he said that, and Archie shot up in his seat eyes wide as saucers. “Wait? The play? No!”

The principal raised an eyebrow at him. “Either that or the football team. Make your pick”

Archie swallowed and considered the option. Of course football meant a lot to him, but being part of this play and any other school production is what’d get him up the steps to his dream career. And he loved acting, to be withheld from that while everyone else goes to rehearsals and costume fittings and post show outings would be devastating.

“Football. I can withdraw from football”

The door swung open at almost six pm with Archie Andrews looking very pissed off and more than relieved to be out of that office. The halls are less crowded, thank god, but there's still some hangers on who can't seem to get a life but spreading gossip and giving him knowing looks when he comes out. He’s about to wither the storm and just make it to his car and take off, but a hand on his shoulder rather forcefully pulls him back.

“Dude” Reggie is standing there, has been waiting for him while talking to another boy in their year and football player, Moose Mason. “Are you freaking insane? You’ve completely lost it Andrews. Only a dumbass would get involved with a teacher no matter how heartbroken you are about losing Veronica”

“No in the mood to talk right now Reggie, I have to go” Archie sighed. “Hey Moose”

“Hey”

“Dude I’ll catch you later” Reggie says to Moose before catching up to Archie who wasn't slowing down for anything.

“Hey, what happened in there?”

“I’m off football” Archie says bitterly. There's no point trying to hide, it’ll probably get out just like everything else in this freaking school. “And I’m suspended, for a week. I’ll only come after hours for rehearsals if I get cast in the play - otherwise my code is invalid and won't be accessible to school property” he decided to leave out the part of him choosing the mere possibility of getting cast over his already locked down position of the football team.

“Well..” Reggie slid in the passenger seat of Archie’s car. He was silent, revving the engine. “Was it about Veronica?”

“Reggie, no” Archie scrunched his brows but kept his eyes on the road. Why is everybody misconstruing what happened with Ms Grundy?

“It's okay, Archie” Reggie patted his shoulder. “You don't have to admit it to me. But my parents aren't home, let's go back to my place instead tonight. When your best friend gets broken hearted over a girl, you get your best friend drunk”

(x.x.x.x)

A knock came at Veronica’s bedroom door right as she was about to change into some relaxation clothes. On the off chance it might be her mother, she grabbed a small grey knit sweater and put it on over the lace bodice.
“Come in” she called while pulling her hair out of the sweater

“Hello, Ronnie” It was a voice she didn't expect.

“Daddy?” Him standing there in a dark blue suit anytime before eight pm is one rarity, but even more that he’s calling her by her baby nick name. He hasn't called her that for ages, unless he’s trying to talk her into something. “You’re home early”

“And you were late. Andre told me”

“I just got caught up in some school things daddy, I promise. There were auditions and then some. It won't happen again”

“I certainly hope so” Veronica laid down sideways on her elbow on the bed, high heels still on her feet. “So I have something to talk to you about, Ronnie. Firstly, I’m sorry for the way I acted the other day. I just couldn't believe what I saw and then - the reaction of everyone around me was clouding me from what was actually important. How to handle it properly”

He took a seat at the edge of her bed. Veronica was wary. She couldn't figure if he was being sincere or something else. “I hope you can forgive me, mija”

Veronica doesn't say anything, she’s silent and a little bit unsure.

“And I wanted to give you something. I know you must be so stressed right now, it can't be easy going to school after what happened”

“It isn't” she says softly. He has a black velvet box in his hands and puts it on the bed in the space between them.

“I just need you to understand.. it's only because what you did is having effects on the business. People don't like to be involved when obscene things like that are associated with us, they talk and they taunt Veronica.. it's only because of the loss and backlash from important people that I got so mad”

She tries to breathe, to relax her shoulders and not blink too obviously to hold back the tears. “You're important to me, Veronica. I only want what's best for you. So something like that is treacherous for somebody so young with so, much potential. I won't let you get ruined.”

Her heart feels so heavy and with everything hazing in she just can't hold up anymore. He’s my dad, and I know like hell he only wants the best for me. He wants the best for the business, for him. But she wants to believe something, she wants to choose to believe that what he's saying isn't another lie. Like the gratitude of her messed up life and the lost boy that used to promise forever sunk in all at once Veronica let her tears dribble down her cheeks.

She couldn't bear him seeing her cry, *I’m Hiram Lodge’s daughter, I should be tougher than this.* So she faces away from him and puts her head on his lap. The tears are still coming, he might be the one causing them but yet he strokes her silky hair softly for comfort.

“There there, do not cry” he holds her face tenderly in both hands and she sits back up to look at him after a minute. “I’m so sorry. Here, I got you something to cheer you up. Open it”

Veronica picked up the jeweller’s box on her bed and leaned into her dad’s hand wiping away her tears while she opened it. It felt good to be close to him, not being yelled at and thrown insults to. The box opened and it was two sparkling pearl earrings. She gasped.
“Daddy, they're beautiful!” The pearls had a pink tinge to it, shining in the golden light. Veronica had many pearls in her life, but these looked exquisite and heartfelt considering he just apologised. It obviously cost a fortune too, since the Lodges never play cheap and the jewellers stamp inside the box proved it was more than the designer heels on her feet.

“I knew you’d like them” his eyes glinted with happiness “put them on”

Veronica uses her dainty fingers and hooks them on her ears expertly, already feeling a little brighter with some bling on. They look at each other and laugh a little, Hiram pulls her into a hug and kisses the top of her head. “What's that thing your mother used to tell you?” He asks

Veronica laughs at the ridiculous quote but sniffs from her crying. “The world is your oyster, and you’re the pearl”

“Thank you daddy”

“So, on the subject. There's the other thing I wanted to talk to you about”

“What's that?” She met his serious eyes again.

“I’m thinking of pushing our Pearl Ball a little earlier this year. This Friday at sundown” he says

“Really, why? That usually doesn't happen until October” the month when sixteen years ago, Hiram and Hermione Lodge felt they had made it in their lives.

“Well, after certain incidents. I felt it best we have it earlier, and all our business clienteles even from far away will be flown in, and the influential townsmen will be here - right in the ballroom of this Pembrooke. So what do you say, put on those pearls and help me get back on the right footing?”

She stiffens then. Her heart breaks but she can't go crying into daddy’s arms again, no, because it's all too clear now why he even came in here to begin with. The Pearl Ball will be nothing but a cover up to proof to whoever he’s trying to impress that they’re still a perfect family, and the precious daughter branded with her stupid pearls isn't that girl in the photos. She feels like throwing up even, but then remembers something that would make it worse.

“Wait - will the Andrews be there?” Veronica couldn't have Archie attending one of her family’s balls after what she did to him.

“Of course. Fred Andrews is a respected commercial architect. He even worked with us in the past to design the malls in SoCal”

“No - daddy he can't come. Please. Archie and I, we broke up and I can't face him especially not at our Pearl Ball. I don't want him there” she doesn't say that he leaked her pictures, because as far as Hiram’s concerned that was her fault.

“Mija..”

“Please daddy. You said you were sorry, so this will make it up to me. I can't face him, not so soon..”

“Alright then” he agrees.

“All the prominent townsmen will be there, so the Blossoms too?” She asks hopefully

“Absolutely not” Hiram’s cold tone weirds her out.
“Why not? They're just as important as The Andrews here”

“I said no Cheryl under this roof, so I’m sticking to my word”

“But.. you don't need to invite Cheryl it could just be Mr and Mrs Blossom -“

“Enough, Veronica” Hiram stops her. “We’ll take you out of school early on Thursday to go for a dress fitting with your mother and then a full massage and spa trip Friday afternoon. Are you excited?”

“Not really” she usually wouldn't have been so truthful, but after his show of vulnerability to her it felt easier to do so. She wasn't in the mood to be used again, to be a doll again. In fact she felt growing anger that he could just waltz in here and butter her up for his own benefit again. It stung, being cut in the same wound twice.

As expected, Hiram didn't say anything for a moment. He just looked at her. “Come on Veronica, you know better than to say that to me”

Any other parent would have been understandable when she said ‘no’ politely, but Veronica knew her father better. Veronica met her reflection in the mirror, seeing the pearls on her ears reflect in the light. She closed her eyes to not see it anymore and took a deep breath to blow out the burning fire inside her.

“Yes, I’m excited”

(x.x.x.x)

The next morning nobody could hold in their anticipation any longer. They all played it cool by hanging by their lockers longer than necessary to not appear desperate, but then walked a lot faster than usual before the bell rang for first period to the Main Hall.

Veronica met Betty halfway to the bulletin board, seeing her put a light smile on both their faces.

“Hey”

“Hi” Betty said back. For a moment she wondered what Veronica thought or thinks about her ex boyfriend and the new teacher, she’d seen it on the school site Polly had shown her. Veronica looks fine though, fine enough. After all, who is Betty to ask?

She wasn't really sure if she and Veronica were friends, probably not since they haven't actually had a solid conversation with each other. The only friends Betty had right now were Kevin and the sweet girl who willingly paired with the new girl in Biology class Ethel Muggs. Even then, that's the only class they had together and that's the only time they met.

Today Veronica has on a less intimidating outfit, a cropped cream coloured tank top that didn't show as much cleavage as yesterday but still an eyeful - and a ruffly white mini skirt. Her hair had a velvet headband in it that's the same colour as her top, and a beige sweater cardigan for the LA fall weather.

“Wanna go see it together?” She asks.

Betty says yes and they start walking together “You didn't check it online either?”

“No” Veronica shakes her head “I advice you never do that. It takes away from the reveal”

“I almost threw up this morning, I can't take the uncertainty” Betty admits.
“Oh, gross” Veronica smiles “relax, I’m sure you got it”

She doesn’t know how she’s sure, there’s many other talented girls auditioning the same character as Betty - but she is. And when they get to the board there’s already a small crowd in front of it they can’t even see the paper.

They move apart when Veronica gets there to give her access, but she doesn’t even need to see it to see if she’s cast. Josie hugs her and tells her excitedly that “we’re in!” . But she does however have to see the paper stapled there for the entire cast, and when she does her heart almost stops at the first two names.

Raffles Arts Institution Production

EMMA : Play based on the novel by Jane Austen

Cast List

Please initial by your name and stop by the Victoria Theatre today to pick up your scripts

First Rehearsal will commence after school hours today, Tuesday September 5th in the Shadowbox Theatre

Thank you to everyone who auditioned. If you have not been cast but would like to be part of the production, please see Assistant Director Midge Klump for information about joining the crew.

Sincerely,

Your Director

Cheryl Blossom

Cheryl Blossom

The Players

Veronica Lodge…………..Emma Woodhouse

Archie Andrews.........George Knightley
Jordan Lush..............Mr Frank Churchill
Jellybean Jones..............Jane Fairfax
Betty Cooper..............Harriet Smith
Joey Ronsman..............Robert Martin
Reggie Mantle..............Phillip Elton
Josie McCoy..............Augusta Elton
Ethel Muggs..............Mrs Weston
Steven Angelou..............Mr Weston
Nikki Michelson..............Miss Bates
James Rumfallo..............Mr Henry Woodhouse
Nikole King..............Isabella Knightley
Mark Shawn..............John Knightley

Oh, Cheryl. Why did you have to do this? But she turns to Betty and hugs her and Josie tighter and group jumps a little. She is excited, despite having to play a lover to somebody she’s already drawn a border with. Almost everyone who’s cast is there with random pens and markers that’ve been handed out to initial next to their name. They’re all so happy it doesn’t even occur who’s friends with who or whatever - they just hug whoever’s closest to them and cheer.

Betty feels like she’s finally made it, the first play of the year and she’s cast! So far everything in LA has been a crazy dream come true.

Veronica leans forward and is initialling next to her name when Cheryl comes up and leans against the wall casually. “Congrats girl, the lead is yours. And one well deserved” she says with a satisfied smile on her face. And before she can glare her dead in the eye and ring her ear off for casting Archie, Cheryl turned to the crowd and congratulated the rest of the cast.

This is going to be draining, Veronica can feel it already.

(x.x.x.x)

“Veronica Lodge, get off your phone now”

“Mhm” she doesn’t really say anything back, instead she’s just bent her body in a sitting position position over her purse and typing away at her phone inside it.

“Veronica, now! Come on”

*yes, I gtg. x*

She locked it and clasp her purse shut, standing and flipping her hair up in one swift motion. The
little smile is still on her lips from whatever she and Cheryl have been texting about - and when she looks Hermione standing there with the tailor and a handsome young man about six feet tall of pure charm. She’s a little shocked.

They’re at her dress fitting for the Pearl Ball this Friday, and Veronica had just been taken out early of school. It was a whole thing for Hermione to explain to the tailors - she’s a busy kid, with rehearsals from three thirty to seven thirty every day and school all morning but she got an exception to her last classes today.

“This is my son Matthew, he’s been helping out before going to college next semester” the seamstress explains when Veronica stares at the boy a little surprised that he’s here. He isn’t bad looking, not by a long shot, but he has that mopey puppy dog grin like an idiot that all boys get around her and she’s already feeling a flattered, but annoyed.

“Pleasure to meet you Miss Lodge” his eyes glaze all over her from top to bottom when he greets her, and Veronica doesn’t even suppress an eye roll.

“Better be a good college” she challenges. They’ve known this tailor for years and years, but Veronica’s never even met Matthew until now.

“NYU, it’s my dream school” he flares with a confidence that for a second makes her wants to giggle.

“Oh, dreams. And sometimes that’s all they are, just dreams” she shrugs and smirks at him, happy to see the shock register on his face when she said that. “Alright, shouldn’t we get going to my fitting mother dearest?”

“Yes, right away” Hermione agrees. Anna the tailor leads them into the fitting room and Veronica swings her hips a little more when she passes him, it’s so obvious that he’s staring. Oh, boys are so easy.

There’s about six different dresses that they have to narrow down on. Hermione would’ve preferred her daughter to wear a custom made dress but they only had so much time on such short notice. The first one on was way too puffy at the skirt, and Veronica rolled her eyes dramatically.

“No to that” she pushes it to the end of the rack without a second thought. They dress her in the second one which is silky and one shouldered, it has a little train on the back and sticks to her figure beautifully. “What do you think?” Anna asks

“It’s too repetitive. The Pearl Ball is grand like, this dress needs to be as striking as can be without being over the top and making me look over dressed. You know, like not too much skin or too many jewels”

Anna nods. They switch the dress out and it’s just for the in between moments of standing there in her silk slip and bare feet with her lace stockings that she feels like a little kid again. They did this every year for the ball, and countless times in between for whatever event they had to attend as a family. She relishes in the light feeling of being in this pale pink powder room with just her mom and some gorgeous dresses and making funny faces at herself in the mirror when no one’s looking.

“This one looks perfect for the description Mr Lodge requested, Mrs Lodge” Veronica’s eyebrows knit together when she says that. Why did daddy give a request about her dress? Instead of her mother? And why did he request for a dress that looks like this? This has to be the plainest and least eye catching one by far. In fact, it completely paled in comparison to the others. It’s full creamy white and even full skirted. Veronica feels kind of dumb to not have realised that he
probably asked Anna for ‘anything that’ll make her look as virginal as possible’ just to make everyone forget about the photos. Doesn’t he know? This image of the obedient little daddy’s girl isn’t who I am?

Hermione cleared her throat. “Let’s try this one, I think it would probably suit best. You know how clueless men can be about women’s style” she immediately dismissed the purity ball - esque gown and held up another one. Veronica couldn’t even say anything right now. She just stood still and moved as told while her mother and Anna got her into this, supposedly perfect dress.

This one Hermione chose was definitely not what Hiram would’ve wanted, but Veronica liked it a whole lot more than the one he requested. This dress is sleeveless and falls to her mid thigh, and has a ribbon around her waist that looks good undone or tied. It isn’t tight that is shows off too much of her figure but definitely doesn’t cover much. The choice isn’t conventionally one a mother would choose for her almost sixteen year old daughter, but Hermione’s always been like this.

Veronica likes it, she figures for a plain white dress this is probably the best she’s going to get with her parents. She also watches unamused while her mother adjusts the front of her dress so it falls as low as possible without looking too obvious, then smiling at her daughter.

“Isn’t it perfect Ronnie? I adore it” Hermione move her hands to Veronica’s shoulders, looking at her fondly. She just wants to push her off and breathe.

“I actually liked the one with the lace and the boned bodice better” she pouts

“This one it is, Anna. Thank you again for helping us on such short notice”

“Of course Mrs Lodge! It’s never an issue, Veronica’s always been a lovely dress up doll. The dresses look stunning on her”

It’s sickeningly obvious how her mother has chosen the more provocative dress for this massively important event, where so many young wealthy suitors would be attending. Even when Veronica had been dating Archie for almost four years, her parents never seemed to stop the shameless and borderline embarrassing not to mention disgusting plug of how perfect and smart and beautiful they’re daughter is every time a prestigious family with a single son walks in their office.

Veronica shook her head and pulled the dress back off. No point in arguing there. She reached back into her purse to get her phone. you owe me a spa day for getting you that lead role Cheryl had texted as if! I earned it fair and square. There isn’t a better actress in the whole of Raffles Institution Veronica typed back. She waited a while until Cheryl’s reply came.

you don’t even bother hiding how full of yourself you are, don’t you? Veronica chuckled

“What is it with you kids being on your phones twenty four seven? I mean it isn’t like you see each other at school everyday, and are about to see each other in exactly an hour now”

“Relax mom” Veronica didn’t look up from her phone “hey, can I invite Cheryl and Josie for that spa day and massage I’m having tomorrow?”

“No Veronica, that’s a gift for you. Not a bachelorette party trip” Hermione shook her head

“Please mom? Daddy’s already not inviting the Blossoms to the Pearl Ball for whatever reason I
can’t seem to understand”

“You don’t need to understand everything Veronica”

“Oh come on mom, I won’t tell dad you used his black card for the Sapphire Martini I saw you drowning in this morning” she winked “Why does a middle aged wife of the wealthiest businessman in town day drink again?” The way she batted her eyelashes innocently was enough to make Hermione enraged with her.

“Fine” she sighed, not believing how easy it was for Veronica to get whatever she wanted. She’s definitely inherited the cunning disguised manipulation of her father. “You are insufferable”

She watched her daughter smile at her phone for another moment while waiting for the dress to be packaged.

**group meni pedi and massage tomorrow! Facials too** Veronica sent.

“Is that Archie?” Hermione asked absently

“What?” Veronica looked up at her mom. The mention of his name put an unsettling wave in her stomach. Everyone’s buzzing about the mini golden boy getting suspended from school, and while spending rehearsals with him aren’t too bad so far because they haven’t gotten to any romantic scenes, she knows how much he hates her now and it’s not a good feeling. “Mom.. we broke up, actually. Before school started”

Hermione’s face looked more sad than she’d expected. Yes, her mother always liked Archie, but she never would’ve thought she’d care if he never showed up at their house for a secret sleepover again. “Oh, sweetie I’m so sorry. I had no idea”

“It’s fine mom” Veronica put her phone away and busied herself with lipstick, which would be a telltale sign to anybody who knew her that it wasn’t okay. A nervous tick of hers. The pity look in her mother’s eyes behind her in the mirror doesn’t fade though. Hermione knows how much that boy really meant to her daughter, despite young love and all their breakups. “Don’t you keep up with the hottest gossip in Los Angeles, mother?” Veronica joked to lighten the mood.

“Not as much as you’d think” she raised a brow

Veronica rolled her eyes. She’d get out of here and say some stupid flirty thing to the goo goo eyed son of Anna’s probably just for the kick of it, and then get back to school for rehearsals. With Archie. A blessing and a curse really.

(x.x.x.x)

“Hey Kev, Veronica said she’d go over our lines together today during lunch but she isn’t here. Do you know where she is?”

“Gosh, Betty. I’m not a GPS” Kevin shook his head. But Betty looked so lost when he’s having lunch with the Costal Prep boys that he feels bad “But Queen V is probably with her mom doing some crazy preparations for their Pearl Ball this Friday”

“They’re having a ball?” Her green eyes widened

“Yes, Veronica’s dad owns The Pembroke hotels and they have an annual ball on the day the very first hotel opened. But it’s early this year - anyway, see you in Improv!” Kevin waves off, getting back to his friends.
Betty pouts. She’s only been at school less than a week but the slow dribble of friends aren’t getting any faster. She doesn’t really care though, it’s not like she needs other people’s assurance or something. She headed to the Shadowbox theatre to see if Midge was working on props with the rest of the crew and maybe she could help, but instead found it completely empty.

The thought of a ball at a Pembrooke hotel seems very Gatsby esque, especially if it’s hosted by Veronica’s parents who, if they’re anything like Veronica must go all out for everything. “As per tradition, I’ll throw the homecoming after party after party” Veronica had said one day after rehearsal. And she made it clear that it’s the Emma cast and crew only because apparently all Veronica Lodge’s parties are exclusive according to Kevin.

“There’s an after party after party?” Betty had spoken up. They looked at her that endearingly yet patronising way again.

“After parties are for everyone at school and we still have to dress up. The other after party is select circle only, and things come off” she had said with people laughing and hooting when she did.

Back in Riverdale, The Coopers were considered the rich kids but here in Raffles Institution the families are high profile first class elitists. Betty definitely feels more comfortable here than she did around people who didn’t understand how her family worked, but she still couldn’t quite relate to their level of unlimited wealth. She also could never fathom how they came to school dressed the way they do, or driving the cars they do when most of them are barely older than Betty herself.

“Hey, new girl right?”

Betty turned around. Oh my god. Her heart started beating faster. It’s Archie Andrews, the beautiful actor who played Mr Knightley and is also Veronica’s rumoured ex boyfriend. “Me?” She asked

Archie chuckled. “Well, you’re the only one here”

She wasn’t sure what to say, what she should say - but what came out of her mouth had to be the last thing he wanted to hear “I thought you weren’t allowed in school before evening”

Archie recovered from his initial shock by chuckling a little. “Yeah, well I left my phone here yesterday so the guard let me in”

He started walking towards her. The phone was perfectly right on the seat next to hers, and when he bent down to pick it up Betty could feel the warmth of his body and the strong cologne on his neck, which probably shouldn’t be as intoxicating as it was. She didn’t move. Neither did he. She just sat there stupidly waiting for something.

To her own little excitement and a reason she can’t seem to think of, Archie sits down next to her instead of just getting up and leaving. He puts his arm on the arm rests and she moves hers down to her sides. They’re facing the big stage up front, that’s used for all their practices before the actual play will take place in the Esplanade Theatre.

“When I was little my parents would take me to watch shows at the Esplanade. I loved it, but then when I started school here I found this place is much more fun to be in. Maybe because we spend the most time here”

Betty nods. He’s not sure why he’s talking to her. Every memory of this place is bittersweet. It used to just be sweet, but the most painful thing about having all day to himself is getting the time
to realise that every one of his favourite memories are filled with Veronica. Looking into the light, he could just see her up there dancing on stage and shining with all her presence or sitting in the audience on his lap and they’re fingers intertwined on her leg. How is it possible that’s all gone? She made his life a million times more colourful albeit challenging and when she came in to his world, it’s like he could never forget her again. And he never wanted to, even if they brought him a special kind of pain that could make him cry every time. How can you stop loving someone just because it’s hard? Just because it feels impossible?

There isn’t anyone or anything that could fill the void in his life when Veronica isn’t there. And the very last memory, the very last thing she said to him wasn’t too sweet. He never wanted that to be the way they ended their relationship. Well too bad, maybe you shouldn’t have been such an idiot to break up with her in the first place. The reason this place is his favourite, because he and Veronica and all of his friends had made the best memories here.

Getting to kiss her in front of thousands of people on the Esplanade stage might make it his new favourite though.

When you get so close to someone and they become the biggest part of your life, losing them - it’s like losing a limb. She overpowered everything else in his senses and left him empty and hallow when she’s gone. He thinks, I miss her so much. I miss her too much to fight anymore, I just want her back.

But his mom had once said it’s okay to miss someone or something that was toxic, but never let it in again.

Was she toxic? Were we toxic? I can’t imagine never having her back, that would be like never seeing light again.

“I’m sure the Esplanade is beautiful. I can’t wait to see it during stage rehearsals” Betty smiled at him. She finally had the guts to look at him. But when he’s eyes met hers it made everything inside her flush and fold, like his perfect brown eyes and his jaw moving when he smiles is a timeless gift.

“You’ll love it. There’s ten times more seating space than here, when you’re on stage you can barely see everyone”

“The theatre back home was even smaller than this one, our school plays were not a fraction the production it is here”

Archie laughs. “Where are you from again?”

“Riverdale. The tiniest town with simplest pleasures” she feels warm and fuzzy inside remembering the home town.

“I’ve never heard of that” he says in confusion “tell me more”

(x.x.x.x.)

“Ahhh, my brain feels melted. In a good way”

Josie and Veronica giggle when Cheryl said that. She has her head back with her long red hair soaked in suds and being thoroughly massaged by the worker behind her.

“The comforts of Capello and daddy’s credit card paying for it never disappoints” Veronica says over her shoulder
“Ohh god, after this strenuous week? Being here feels better than an orgasm”

“Cheryl!” Josie squeals. They laugh but can’t disagree. There’s no other customers to hear them either, Veronica asked for the spa to be closed for their little pampering fest.

“Speaking of this week - a detailed post mortem has to be done” Josie says “starting with Queen V making her grand entrance all the way to Moose and Kevin getting caught making out in the boys locker room yesterday!”

“Oh my god, seriously?” Veronica’s eyes bugged

“I had to remind Reggie that they’re his friends repeatedly before he could go and run his mouth to everyone in school”

“All I’m hearing out of this is ‘Reggie and I are having intimate conversations - he comes to me first for everything’ huh Josie?” Cheryl smiled with her eyes close

Josie told her friend to shut up while Veronica’s whole body vibrated on the seat with laughter. “Okay, but for real though” she straightened up “what was with you purposely pairing Archie and I’s audition Cheryl? That was a mean move”

“Veronica, I might think he’s dumb as rocks for dumping and messing with you, but after what you said during lunch that day - I know you’re still in love with him Little V”

Veronica’s body became visibly stiff at her words. Love. In love. Why does everyone say that? What does it even mean? “Cher -“

“I know, okay, you still have strong feelings for him” she reiterates “but I thought, if something like that ever happened to me. I’d want a chance, any chance to get us back together. So I made that chance for you!”

“Well, I don’t need your fairy godmother wishes. Archie and I are done. He hurt me” she says defiantly

“V, don’t say that” Josie put her hand on hers

“What?”

“You don’t mean that” she says softly

“Ugh. It seems to me like you guys are the one who want us together so much”

“Not at all if you don’t want to” Cheryl sighs “After all, I enjoyed myself playing matchmaker to my two best friends” she grinned at Josie

“Will you guys shut up about it already? Yes, I auditioned for that part -“

“The part of his wife” Veronica watched carefully as the young lady pushed back the cuticles on her new french manicures. It stung just a little bit.

“I admit it’s not an idealistic role, Augusta Elton is much too shallow and one dimensional compared to the other roles I’ve played -“

“But you just wanted to be his lover on stage, we get it Josie” the girls enjoyed themselves as they chatted on about the progress of the play and how amazing it’s been having the freedom of Cheryl as their director, they get so much more space and input in their characters and everything’s going
They laughed on and on at the little freshmen and sophomores who come around and try to get a peek while they’re rehearsing, and Midge yelling at them for messing up her backdrop painting. She went full throttle on them. “Ugh, Midge is hilarious” Josie waves her hand “I feel terrible though, when she finds out about Moose and Kevin it’s gonna crush her.”

“Yeah, speaking of. What happened with Grinch face and Archie? It’s scandalous.”

“Who cares? Her teaching career was more short lived than Kim Kardashian’s acting one” Veronica said quickly. She didn’t need her friends knowing anything about what she did to tread the waters, and for now they remained oblivious. “She can burn in hell for all I care”

“At least we know he’s making terrible decisions since losing you V, and this is a recipe for disaster if he keeps up” Josie went on

Veronica felt something like guilt and sympathy in her gut. Why should she feel like that? He hurt you, she tries to remind herself. Only now seeing his miserable face at rehearsals made her think twice about everything. “Good to know I’m not the only one then” she said

“Oh Little V, don’t despair. We’re right here when you need us. Except tonight, it’s a bummer I won’t be there to keep you sane” Cheryl reached her hand out to Veronica’s. Josie leaned out and put her hand on theirs too.

“Good luck tonight V” she said

Veronica took a deep breath and shook her head nervously “I’ll need as much luck as I can get, and some green magic to help me tonight”

(x.x.x.x)

It was almost six thirty and Cheryl still hadn’t return to Thornhill from the spa with Veronica and Josie. She probably would any minute though, so Clifford quickly headed to his son’s bedroom before she could come home and start questioning where he’s going.

“Dad? Hey, is there.. anything you need?”

He had on a Raffles football sweatshirt and his hair looked wet and messy, like he’d just taken a shower. Jason appeared to be staying in for the night - which was pretty unusual for a Friday evening. He’s not exactly very into partying, but there’s usually something all his friends want to do on Friday and he has a sister who will most likely drag him to all of it. But with school just reopening and most of them wrapped up in the play, everyone had decided to take a breather tonight and just relax.

Other than those who’s families were attending the Lodge’s annual Pearl Ball of course. Which any other year The Blossoms would be getting dolled up to go as well.

“I do, actually Jason. I need you to go to the Pearl Ball tonight”

Jason looked defeated “We’re not invited. We’re practically banned”

“And I’m guessing for a reason, right?” Clifford raised his brow. The older man had set his mind on the idea, therefore it wasn’t going to go away at any cost.

“The Lodges may have fallen back after you pushed them, but this pretentious ball they’ve decided
to have early is just a scarce attempt to impress the owners and share holders of Costal Prep. All of them will be there, even the St Clairs”

“How would I even get in? What do you want me to do? It’s not like I can outrightly tell Mr and Mrs St Clair to not sell they’re private school to the Lodges” Jason reasons

“Of course not but what you can be is my inside man. I have a guard out the back who’ll sneak you inside. What you need to do is keep your head low and keep an eye on whatever Hiram Lodge and the St Clairs do tonight”

“What if I get caught?” He looks too much like a scared seventeen year old boy when he asks that, which is something about to change.

“You don’t” Clifford says simply “Remember son, you’ve made a vow to this family business. To me”

Jason sighs. His father already planned this out. And there isn’t a way out. God help him, Jason just can’t rid himself of the mess he doesn’t know he’s venturing much too far into.

“Fine. I’ll go”

(x.x.x.x)  

“Are my two girls done getting ready yet? The guests are beginning to arrive downstairs” Hiram Lodge entered the living room of the penthouse in his brand new suit and calling out to the rest of the family. This room has the best view in the house, the skyline of Los Angeles lit up in all its glory - looking like a piece of heaven in the light of the golden hour. The setting sun shone into their living room illuminating every surface to a shiny brown tinge.

“Oh - Veronica” Hiram spotted his daughter sitting on the sofa with her legs crossed, lost in her phone “What are you wearing?”

She glared into his eyes, already feeling the suffocation of tonight seep into her skin. “My dress. What else?” The white dress barely covered her thighs with how she was sitting, but this is exactly what mom had bought and fitted her for.

Hiram stared at her curiously. “Why are you wearing that? This is a formal evening party Veronica not one of your usual nights out at the club”

“Wha - daddy I’m just being put in the outfit mom bought me! I didn’t choose anything” she stood up to meet his height. At a full body view, Hiram was even more pressed. What exactly was Hermione thinking? She had on white heels that accentuated the shape of her legs even more, the white looked striking against her smooth tanned skin.

“What is all this fuss about?” Hermione came walking down the stairs. Her high heels made tapping sounds against the marble floors.

Hiram turned to her “It appears our daughter’s dressed for the wrong occasion tonight, dear. But she tells me you chose this?”

Hermione looked between Veronica and Hiram with her lips pressed in a thin line. This is exactly what she’d feared, Hiram getting mad over something so mundane. “It’s just a dress, and I’m telling you this is the right choice” she whispered to her husband. Veronica rolled her eyes, hating to be the centre of this.
“We’re trying to set an image, this is just going to embarrass us again in front of our very important guests”

“What?” Veronica crossed her arms

“Hush Veronica” Hermione raised a finger “I know what we’re doing. And I have faith Hiram, she won’t make a fool of us tonight.”

“Well I know better!” He recoiled “I’m still reeling from the last time, Veronica. We’re trying to repair this and you looking like that isn’t going to help!”

“Will you stop making me sound like some deviant? I didn’t even want to wear this to begin with” She replied.

“Do you understand” Hiram looked at both of them “how bad it looks that my teenage daughter has already made a reputation out of herself, and she can’t even attend her own family’s event dressing appropriately like everybody else. It would only prove what the press already thinks of you, Veronica! I look like a fool, because your petulance is ruining our family’s good name”

“That’s all you care about right? What everybody thinks of the terrible thing that happened to me - just fuck how I even feel about any of it! You never took a second to care and you still don’t” She yelled.

“Veronica please!” Hermione interrupted “Tonight is important for all of us. let’s just go downstairs. The dress looks fine, so long as you listen to your father tonight for once in you life”

“No this is only important for you and daddy, the only reason you put me in this stupid dress to begin with is to subtly pimp me out to those rich families like you have been for years!” Veronica said harshly

“I know where my priorities lie” Hermione replies without a beat “so does your father. So should you, if you had any wisdom in that thick skull of yours. All you know is how to bring shame to us. Now stop behaving like a child just for one night”

She took Hiram’s arm and led him to the elevator. Veronica felt tears start to well in her eyes. She felt like the string of pearls around her neck was tightening on her throat, like she wanted to rip it off and watch all the beads fall. Free herself from the feeling of throwing up, like it did now. Her father is still furious at her, which showed when he had his back turned on her the entire ride down. But she wouldn’t let them break her, she wouldn’t give them the satisfaction.

Shame? All I’ve done for sixteen years is be perfect. The perfect daughter. I keep perfect grades and win everything, I make friends with all the important people’s children like they want me to. All while being the strikingly pretty daughter with a social affinity to pull people in. I do everything they want me to. To be perfect. All they want is perfect.

So she took a deep breath and plastered the dazzling smile on her face, decked in pearls and the damned dress she felt dirtier than she ever did in. I’ll play perfect, like I always do.

When the family finally walked into the ballroom, all eyes turned to them. Veronica had prepared herself for the bright flash of the selected press, which didn’t disappoint. Her mother’s fingers held onto her arm lovingly, but only she could feel the way they dug into her skin ever so slightly. Hiram stood next to them with a broad smile on his face.

That same rush, of coming down the steps to see people who were enamoured by you - everyone
admiring you, envying you - it flowed through her and to her own horror she couldn’t deny herself that she enjoyed it. She felt like a princess, the most important and precious one that people adored. How can I hate my parents for being so fake for all of these, but yet I love it all the same? She bit the inside of her mouth as they smiled for a photo.

Of course, Veronica couldn’t forget that all these people were secretly whispering about her scandal and her job tonight was to make them just as befitted with her as before. All the women tonight were dressed to the nines, wearing their best pearls with their hair coifed to perfection. It looked like something straight out of the Fitzgerald times.

“Congratulations on another successful year, Hiram!” One of her father’s associates shook his hand firmly with a big grin.

She stood behind the podium which her father stood at, the ballroom quieting down for his speech. While he talked, a distant sound in her ears, she just focused in on each and every person’s face to stop herself from crying. Their submitted, devoted, believing expressions. They bought us. They bought them.

Why doesn’t anyone see what’s really happening? Are they blind? She’s starting to think a Stepford wife curse had been cast upon this group of robotic philanthropists. She’s trying not to blink too, because she knows if she closes her eyes even for a second the tears will betray her.

“And thank you again to everybody here tonight, who has supported Lodge Industries as we will continue to thrive - to the years to come! Enjoy your night everybody!” Hiram raised a glass of wine and everyone in response clapped and drank too. Oh, how she wished she could down an entire bottle tonight.

Her parents had gone off to mingle. They worked a crowd effortlessly, with all the charms and charisma needed. The first dance of the night would begin shortly so Veronica scanned the crowd and saw some kids from school amongst them. For the first time she realised it sucked that Cheryl and Archie weren’t here this year.

“Aren’t you going to go up to your high and mighty queen tonight?” Jughead turned to his little sister playfully.

“Shut up Jughead” she resisted the urge to punch him in front of all these people. They stood in a line behind FP Jones to greet the rest of their dad’s clients and friends. “I’m gonna go talk to Hayley and Kaycee if that’s okay” she spotted her two friends giggling while partaking in the winery.

“Will you be okay Juggy?” She knows just how much Jughead isn’t a fan of this balls and fundraisers and galas all alike, he thinks it’s so pretentious and a waste of all the money on jewels and extravagant decorations.

“Go ahead JB, I’ll survive”

“Why don’t you go hang out with Veronica?” She suggests. They paused their conversation for a woman who commented on how much the Jones kids have grown! And how gorgeous Jellybean is in her Ralph Lauren and Jughead in his classic fit suit. Frankly, it would be hard to pretend the two aren’t siblings. They look too much alike.

“Nah” he says once they’ve escaped. He looks over to where the princess has started conversing with the elder St Clair son “she’s way too busy tonight anyway. I’ll just be by the bar, brooding by myself. Don’t worry about me”
“Well, okay” she eyes her brother one last time. He does look relatively happy tonight “Just don’t drink too much”

“Good evening, Veronica. You look absolutely stunning tonight”
“Same to you, Evan. It’s been a while since our last meeting hasn’t it?”

“Most certainly” he smiled earnestly. The first person Veronica talked to tonight. “Would you care to dance with me?” He held out his hand

“I’d be honoured” the sparkle reached her eyes in a grin. She took his hand and they began swaying to the slow music, formally like you do at a ball.

“How has school been Veronica?” He asks while they dance

“Very eventful, it’s a tad tiring. I just started my junior year at Raffles”

“Ah, I’d never forget. The girl who was obsessed with old Hollywood since you were five” his dimples deepen in a grin, and Veronica giggled while he twirls her around.

“I’m starring in a play that’s happening next week! You should absolutely come and see it at the Esplanade”

“I’ll have business in Denver all week, but I’ll definitely try and make it” Veronica appreciates that he hasn’t said anything even inadvertently about the recent news of hers, it makes it easier for her to be in the middle of everything. When the song halts to a stop he pulls her in just enough that it surprises her and she holds tighter on his arms while laughing.

The older son of the St Clair family is one of the people her parents probably want her to find the affection of, and usually she wouldn’t go near any of them. But Evan is actually nice and funny and handsome enough that he makes a wholesome friend, and he’s never once tried to make the moves on her. They walk over to the bar where he would be allowed to drink, but even Veronica wouldn’t be denied one as her father literally owns the place.

“How has working for your father been? Is it a lot of travel?”

“Here and there. You know I planned on taking over the business one day anyway. I mostly do the outside work now, father is getting old so he prefers to stay in LA. Oh, and Nicholas and Rebecca at the bar as usual.. up to their antics” he says just a tad bitterly.

Veronica chuckles, seeing the back of their heads as they down a shot together. Just then Nicholas, the second son and middle child of Xander and Simone St Clair turned around in his seat at his brother’s voice. He looked startled to be caught by his brother but just stared at Veronica for a second. Rebecca, their blonde and younger sister giggled at nothing in particular and wiped a drop of alcohol from her lips.

“Do you two ever enjoy being on two stable feet, rather than in a drunken haze?” Evan said condescendingly

“Do you ever get tired of being such a stuck up boring ass, brother?” Nicholas stood up and stumbled slightly, laughing as he did so. Veronica couldn’t help but laugh too. While Evan was a wholesome and ideal person to affiliate with, Nick could be much more fun and free which is just what she needed.

“You two birds been dancing? I’m sure mommy and daddy will love that” he joked
“I’m sure they will” Veronica responded “just as much as they’ll be vexed when you trip a curtain or punch your sister’s boyfriend like you did the last few parties they held”

“And will you be flashing the world again tonight to give us another taste of those lovely photos dear princess?” He replied swiftly

Veronica couldn’t say she wasn’t shocked. But she’d cooled down enough to know that she could be grateful it was just an old friend and not some business partner who had brought it up. Veronica bit her tongue, but Evan looked like he was ready to throw hands. “Nicholas -“

“Relax Evan!” Both Veronica and Nick said at the same time. “No need to get protective over me, I’ve known this girl my whole life. We’re just playing around, right?” He winked at her

Veronica could feel a hot substance rise in her throat. She suddenly remembered why she hated this place. And it isn’t just because of a stupid boy like Nick St Clair, but every reminder that she was here for the sole purpose to recreate a fake image of herself. She locked eyes with Nick for one moment, and then nodded.

“Right. Well, I’m just going to go powder my nose for a second, if you’ll excuse me” Evan looked like he wanted to go after her, but she turned on her heel fast enough for him to know she did not want to be followed right now. Whatever it is with Nick that he said was rude, she still had to credit him for being honest. Honest. That’s what her parents can’t ever be, what every person in this room struggles to have. They’re all just pretending, and maybe she is too.

To make them want you, fabricate the truth

She didn’t actually go to powder her nose, she just headed to the other side of the ballroom and watched everybody for a second. Her mother just took another glass of wine, her father seemed to be talking closely with Xander and Simone St Clair. Her mother caught her eyes then, and started walking over to her.

“Veronica, get that look of your face”

“What look?” She scowled deeper, and Hermione stood in front of her so nobody could see this. “I always tell you I say I hate that face Veronica, get it off now”

She stared blankly into the sea of people.

“Why aren’t you out there dancing and talking?”

“I was” She stuck her nose in the air “someone crossed a line with me”

“Veronica” Hermione sighed “Susan Fleisher is coming here now. Please get that look of your face right now”

“You know what mom? I don’t know how you survive when you have zero emotional depth. You’re always trying to be presentable and you never even acknowledge your feelings! Or mine”

“Veronica do not argue with me right now. Will you stop this behaviour?”

Veronica shook her head and left, just as she heard Mrs Fleisher’s chirpy voice greeting them. She didn’t care if it was rude or her mother would kill her, she just needed to get out of there before she threw up.
On the balcony outside, she leant her body over the railing and took three deep open mouthed breaths. Her face felt hot, her head was dizzy and she could feel the stability in her feet lose its tact. Everything was blurring.

“Veronica? Veronica!” A familiar voice came wafting through, but she couldn’t really bother to listen. Her grip on the railing tightened, palms getting sweaty over it.

“Oh my god, you are out of bounds” he pulled her of the railing by her waist and onto two feet on the ground, which shot Veronica out of whatever panic attack stupor she’d been having. Her eyes struggled to focus, but when they did she looked up and saw Nick standing next to her. She let out a breath of relief.

“Are you insane? Were you about to jump or something?” He asked her

“Yeah” Veronica turned meekly back to the open balcony before them “Maybe I was” she didn’t really know what she was doing.

“Well, maybe you need this then” she looked down at the glass of something he had offered her and paused. She looked into his eyes. Oh, you know what? Fuck it. She grabbed the glass out of his hands and took a big gulp. Vodka.

“Why are you even out here?” Her voice sounded breathless from the heavy alcohol in her throat.

“Well” Nick raised his brows “its quite simple. I hate this god forsaken place, and all the people in it. No offence”

“None taken” she mumbled. Veronica suddenly remembered and retrieved her vaporiser nestled in the buckle of her stockings. She took a quick wiff and exhaled.

“Ooh, okay. We’re moving to the harder stuff now huh bad girl?”

“Shut up Nick, it’s just weed” she tried to ignore him “and I’ve had a terrible night already”

“Well in that case, I’ll partake” not much to her surprise, he retrieved one of his own and they stood there together smoking. It wasn’t always she did this, in fact the only reason she brought it tonight was in case she needed release, and low and behold she did.

“Why don’t you.. like the party?” She managed to slur out, taking another sip of Vodka in between. “My father spent five million dollars on it”

He laughed. “It’s suffocating. And pointless. Just trying to impress each other, who even cares?”

“So you like the gifts your family’s job produces, but not part of the process to get it”

He didn’t say anything for a moment, just looking at her. Then “I can only assume you feel the same way”

Now it was her turn to stay quiet. He chuckled. “You’re not the perfect daughter Veronica Lodge, I wonder how nobody has seen through it yet. I’ve seen you at our school parties. You’re more bad girl than even your parents know”

“Well not all our parents are accepting to our wild child streaks, huh? It takes one to know one”

“Accepting? My parents?” He looked at her incredulously “they’d pull me off the road dead and
paint the colour back in my face to attend one of these stupid events”

“Well then” she placed the empty glass on the floor and stood back up gracefully “we’re both bad kids wanting to run away from this. We’re both damned”

“If we’re both so bad” his body turned closer to her, something she could barely feel considering her body was starting to leave earth by now. She felt just cold and wavy. “How about we leave this dollhouse party and actually get into some trouble?”

She tried to give him a look that was questioning, but she’s not too sure it worked. “Do you want to?” He asked, getting closer to her face.

Something felt intoxicating, she’s not sure what but it was overpowering. Her breathing became shallow and heavier, in the cold night air. “I was about to jump off the balcony Nick, what makes you think I’d say no to any chance of leaving this place?”

He grinned at her. They pulled each other through the kitchen of the Pembrooke all drunk and high, but Veronica found herself more stable in the bright light than out there hiding in the shadows. Nobody stopped or questioned them, they were both recognisable children of the influential townsmen that got a free pass everywhere they went.

Nick’s family lived nearby, just off the campus of Costal Prep which both Nicholas and Rebecca attended. The two teenagers laughed and swung around their way to his bedroom, which was far enough that when Veronica threw herself on the only soft surface - his bed - her ankles were sore from her high heels.

“Ugh, Nick my feet hurt so bad. Everything hurts” she whined while pulling at them. She’d been to the St Clair home but never in Nick’s bedroom. It was surprisingly neat and clean, not that she could see much in the darkness. But her semi conscious was wondering why she’s even here, what she’s doing, what a bad idea this is.

“I’ll help you” he got out something from his drawer, which she quickly recognised and rolled her eyes. “I’m not taking your fucking sniff kit Nicholas” she spat

“Fine” he said “you don’t have to, but I sure need it”

She looked around while he did it, and she felt the comforter for her vaporiser again. She coughed loudly, her throat feeling trapped from it. Veronica sat up quickly to stop the block in her throat but she was dizzy and her head throbbed terribly, so much so that she only succeeded in rolling over closer on top of him.

“You are fucked up” he laughs at her

“So are you” she takes a breath. It felt a little better. Suddenly her wide brown eyes focused on his face and the obvious close space between them, that she couldn’t remember why or how she got into this position. It just smelt of smoke and something on his lips and the strong push in her brain that blocked everything else out except now.

He looked at her. She couldn’t move, or maybe she isn’t trying. Like a bullet taken to her by surprise he leaned his lips down on hers and she was suddenly delved into the warmth and softness of him. His mouth didn’t move away, feeling greedy on her dextrous lips.

“Mmph Nick what are you -“ she pulled away and stopped. His eyes were bloodshot. She could only imagine hers were too. Something stopped her and then she remembered she isn’t in a relationship anymore. Archie. The boy she...
His lips caught with hers again, this time flipping them over so she was beneath him.

“Wait- how do you know I’m still not with Archie? Are you seriously getting me to cheat?” The hot air mixed between them and his hips pressed onto hers was too distracting but she couldn’t help ask.

What the hell am I doing?

“That red headed pea brained dope? I heard the rumours Veronica” he whispers in her ear “and I can only assume you doing this confirms them to be true”

She shivered from his hand running up her bare leg, reaching the top underneath the short skirt of her dress. She felt angry. And dumb. And damned just like she said they are.

Yes, I’m making bad decisions. Where is Archie? Would he be mad if I did this? A big part of her said, I want him to be.

He’s the one who wanted to break up with me. He doesn’t want me and he said so! Why can’t you get that through your thick skull! *He doesn’t love you anymore*

Veronica finally stopped fighting the tension in her body and let it take over, she crashed her lips to his so hard it was almost bruising. Nick smiled, but she wasn’t sure why. Her body felt tired already from putting way too much energy in that kiss. And their hands moving hastily to get rid of their clothes, the slick sweat on her skin making it shine in the moonlight.

But her eyes were watering too, she doesn’t know why. But it’s obviously not sweat.
Scary Love

Chapter #5 Scary Love

- Didn’t know we’d get so far, and it’s only the start

baby you got me worried

Your love is scaring me, no one has ever cared for me as much as you do -

Veronica opened her eyes to a white wall above her and sunny rays shining in. She blinked twice, before her bearings returned and her mind finally caught up to her body. This is a foreign place, and she has a throbbing headache enveloping her. She felt a soreness at the nape of her neck that spread to the rest of her jaw, and when she sat up it quickly registered where she was.

Nick’s room.

She remembered slowly what happened last night, flashes of images in her mind. And when the combination of her ear ringing headache and looking down at herself to find it completely nude, the brown sheets barely covering the apex of her legs - she put two and two together.

“Nick? Did we..?”

To her right he sat there still laying in the afterglow, watching her wake up and realise where she is amusedly. “What do you think, darling?”

She watched him watching her - my hair probably looks as bad as his does - and oh my god what did I do? “Oh my god.. what time is it?”

Veronica, horrified with herself for not thinking this through last night, jumped right out of bed and searched frantically for her clothes. “Just a quarter past twelve” he says casually while she clips her blush bra back on.

“Are you serious? I am so dead” Literally her parents must’ve just accepted the fact that she’ll never return to them otherwise they would’ve had a search party after her by now. He chuckles when she’s trying desperately to smooth her hair down while still not having found her dress from last night. “I’m not joking, they’re going to kill me”

“Yeah, don’t worry about it. My sister showed up she almost fainted when she saw you in my bed”

“Rebecca saw me?!” She shrieked.

“Relax, I put the blankets over you. Anyway if your parents had been wondering they would’ve called mine and Rebecca must’ve told them what I was up to. Okay - what are you even doing? You’re making my hangover a million times worse”

“Just trying to get home before my parents track me down and throw me in a boarding school in Switzerland” she finally found her dress, but her heels were way too painful to put back on.

“Really?” Nick sat up the side of the bed and she glared at his state of undress. Wow, Veronica. You really know how to scope out the worst trouble. Nick is understandably hot, with his dark curls and even darker eyes. But no matter how hot and irresistible the boy, she shouldn’t have put
herself in this position. Slept with one of the respected family’s infamous rebellious sons and her old friend? Bad news. “Cause it seems to me like you’re trying to run away from our rendezvous and pretend it never happened”

“You’re delusional. It meant nothing” she looked at herself and him too in the mirror, seeing how satisfied he looked and the slight snugness there.

“Hey, you’re the one who came running here with me last night”

“You suggested it” she turns around and glares at him

“And you knew exactly what I was suggesting” his shit eating grin made Veronica wish even more that she had never done this. It’s not completely out of nature for her to sleep with someone in an unstable state, but something about last night different. She would’ve never done it in the mind frame of still being heartbroken...

“After all” Nick went on “you must’ve planned on laying someone last night to begin with. Putting on slinky lingerie underneath the pure chastity gown”

“Like I said, you’re delusional. I wear slinky lingerie because I like feeling slinky” Veronica flipped her hair over her shoulder meaningfully as she said so. “And why are you studying my outfits? Please don’t start obsessing over me. In fact, never breath a single word about this to anybody ever. It was a spur of the moment, one time only mistake”

“Really?” His disbelieving tone made her face harden. She stared up at him, practically demanding him not to say it. “Cause it seems to me like you have a lot more going on underneath the surface...” Nick’s voice dropped lower to a mysterious drawl, tucking a piece of hair behind her ear softly. “Don’t think I didn’t see you last night, Veronica”

“Nick” she took his wrist firmly and held it away from her “what happened when we were, you know.. I don’t normally do that. Ever. I don’t want you thinking I’m some hot fragile mess because I’m not”

He didn’t say anything. But his lips quirked to the side in a smirk and pulled his hand out of her grip. “My lips are sealed as long as you stay for round two”

Veronica rolled her eyes and pushed him in the chest just as he was about to slant his lips over hers. “Where the hell’s my phone?”

“On the couch” he held his hand to his chest in fake pain “I threw it there when it wouldn’t stop ringing and buzzing”

She took it from the end of the couch and opened his bedroom door, barely hearing Nick’s half assed goodbye while he threw himself back on the bed. Veronica took a deep breath outside. She was embarrassed, for the memories of her salty cheeked and more tears still coming while they had sex started coming back to her. She clenched her eyes shut and balled her fists together. How could I have been such a little crybaby? Now Nick knows I have some fucking issues even I don’t know about.

She prayed repeatedly that he wouldn’t run his mouth about it, and told herself she didn’t even want to try for a second to figure out why it happened. Thankfully, the St Clair home was empty as she slipped out the front door and pressed speed dial on chauffeur. When she opened her phone though, Nick wasn’t lying. There were six calls from her mom and an uncountable from both Cheryl and Josie, and strangely - Jughead.
She ignored all her mother’s while waiting for the car to show up but she contemplated between Josie and Cheryl’s contacts. She knew for a fact that Cheryl would bite her head off for going awol like that and while her protective nature is endearing, Veronica decided the safer and smarter decision was to call Josie back.

“Veronica? Oh my god! What the hell happened to you?” The line picked up just as she slid into the backseat of her car.

“Hey, Josie”

“Please tell me you’re okay”

“I’m perfect, I just got fed up with the ball and left with somebody” she doesn’t say who

“Your mom called Cheryl practically screaming asking if you had run to Thornhill, and Cheryl was so upset she hung up. So she called me! Right as I was about to sleep, and trust me when I couldn’t close my eyes the entire night wondering sick where you were!”

“Gosh, I am so sorry Josie” Veronica felt so bad. This mistake was starting to feel bigger and bigger, as her headache was “but I’m fine, for real”

A huge breath of relief came from the other side of the phone. “I’m guessing I have to call Cher because you’re too scared to?”

Veronica bit her lip “Pretty much”

“I’m only doing this because you’re about to get the biggest ass whooping of your life by your parents, Veronica Lodge” Josie said as the car pulled into the Pembrooke’s drop off outside the lobby. She gripped her phone tighter and looked out the window of her car to see if there were any guests she knew personally, and dashed out with her head down - basically inventing the walk of shame.

“Are you okay, I mean inside? Do you need someone there with you?”

Now Veronica didn’t really know what to say. Yes, Veronica Lodge at a loss for words. It must be a cold day in hell. So she didn’t say anything, so tired and not caring about anything, the cold floor freezing her bare legs up. “Veronica?” Josie called her name

“It’s fine, Josie. Thank you. But my parents would murder me even more brutally if you guys came over after my dad said you couldn’t”

“Well - true. Do you want me to send Reggie or Jellybean or something? V -“

“You’re the best friend in the whole world and I don’t deserve you, bye” Veronica hung up as soon as the elevator dinged at Penthouse and she scrambled to get up. Looking back into this home,
marble floors and their family portrait in a hallway which is lit marvellously by the crystal chandelier above greets her. It’s the hallway which the elevator goes up to, a hallway that then leads into their home.

And when Veronica sees it she weirdly feels like she’s looking back at something perfect before it got tarnished, or porcelain before it gets marred. After what happened last night being back in this home feels like trying to fit a voodoo doll in an American Girl dollhouse. It can’t fit, it doesn’t fit, it never did.

She walks the hallway into their ‘show’ living room, the one where she got violently torn down in last night. The place is spotless and silent, not a glass on the bar counter or the television left on a Sports channel, she can even see the tassels on the carpet has been straightened and no one’s walked on them yet.

It’s almost like no one’s home.

Veronica steps carefully up the stairwell and into the upstairs where their actual living space is on one end and her parents’ quarters are at the other. Just like downstairs everything has been cleaned and untouched. That’s when she went to open the balcony doors and lets the air in like she usually did before school.

Assuming they were still in bed after last night’s hurrah, she ran up the third floor to her bedroom before they could wake and catch her. Delaying the punishment sounds pretty good. But when Veronica finally opened the door to her domain (and it was of course spotless just like the rest of the house, not the way she left it the night before) the first thing she spots is a piece of paper in the middle of her bed.

Veronica,

Whenever you decide to turn up you will see this. Your mother and I our saving ourselves the possibility of falling sick if we spend another second dealing with you by taking a weekend’s trip to the lakehouse. The Ball is still being cleaned downstairs, please stay home and don’t run into any guests who have stayed over. The guards upfront are aware of your grounding, be good and they will too. Debit cards and cash are in the safe.

Dad and Mom.

She rolled her eyes, crumpled the paper and threw it across the room. Throwing herself down on the bed she realised what Josie said was right - I do need someone here right now. I’m hungover and locked at the top of this tower like Rapunzel. She considered Josie’s offer.

No, they’re people who are apart of this part of my life. And right now all she wants to do is forget everything, be with people who aren’t part of her entourage and just have simple human comfort. Not someone who’ll know about this and ask a million questions, or exhaust her.

She knows just the people.

(x.x.x.x)
“What do you think he’s doing?”

“Just stalling time I’m sure, relax he’ll be down”

“I don’t know how to relax after what I heard? I like to believe my son is a good kid, you know that Fred”

Archie leaned his cheek against the wall of the white stairwell. He wanted to see her, because of course he does. He’s supposed to miss her, right? But now it didn’t take much effort for Archie to keep his head behind the wall and listen to them instead of just running right to her.

“You think I don’t? I think you’re forgetting he’s my son too. Our son.”

“I could never forget” he knows she’s shaking her head without even seeing her, and just like always, they’re fighting but their voices never get loud. They never even show anger, it’s just words that look and feel terrible and in Archie’s mind the calmer they get the scarier it is. And he isn’t even aware of the scary glare that’s crossed his dark eyes. He feels like exploding.

“And I know he’s staying with you, but I never expected this to happen even”

“What was I supposed to do? Tell him to keep the bedroom door open and read his phone and tell him to come back before seven? Because you know that won’t work”

“I’m saying-“ Archie thinks it’s better to present himself now and cut this short before they can get into a big argument again. He jumps out of the stairwell, he does it on instinct, without thinking. Like most of the things he does these days.

“Hey mom”

“Archie!” Mary stops what she’s saying to turn around and look at him, her distressed face is immediately replaced with a happy one. “Hi honey”

“What are you... doing here?” He asked awkwardly

“Archie” Fred warned

“It’s okay, Fred. Son, I was just helping a West Coast client since I’d be flying in you know - to see your show next week! And spend some time with my boys”

Archie raised a brow disbelievingly. He’d learned well enough over the years that his mom never ‘just wants to spend time’ with them. But he’s also learned that just going along with it is the path of least resistance.

“Archie” Fred said again.

“What dad?” Archie snapped, suddenly losing his usual cool. Both parents looked at each other. They’d never seen him so pissed and testy before. He looked between them suspiciously.

“Can we have a family dinner tonight? As a whole family?” Fred left for the dining room right away leaving no room for either of them to answer.

Archie sighed. Here we go again. “So, when I was going through Vermont to Connecticut and stopped for a fortnight in New York for the shopping. Archie, I saw the most beautiful music lights festival in Sherman. You would’ve loved it”

“That sounds incredible. What kind of music was it?” Fred started helping himself to the well
cooked steak which is a meal they never have, in fact Fred and Archie rarely have meals together on a weekend as they’re both too busy.

“All sorts” Mary waved her hand “I only stopped by, but the next time it comes around in the Spring? We should go together Archie” she leaned towards him excitedly

“Spring Break at a music festival in New York. Sounds nice” Archie smiled simply. He avoided anything else by taking a big sip of water. Last Spring Break, he and Veronica had broken up at the lake house the McCoys owned and he’d never gotten more drunk at a club the entire group (excluding Veronica and Reggie) had gone to. The idea of Spring Break left a bitter taste in his mouth.

“You’re still writing music right honey? Will you perform anything at homecoming other than the play?”

“Yeah, and no. Not exactly in the performing mood. But I’ve been writing a lot” he looks around

“I already know the play will be another show stopping one. You’ll be taking off that night right Fred?”

“Of course” Fred answers without a beat “It’ll be like old times, only watching our son up front and centre instead” he smiled

Archie felt his chest tighten. He’s waiting for the part of this conversation that’ll lead to why his mother is actually here, and he doesn’t want to get happy or nostalgic before they get there. His feet almost feel frozen, he’s not sure how exactly to get them to cut the bullshit and stop skirting around.

“Mom, dad. You guys don’t need to do this”

“Do what Archie?” Mary asked as she put more salad on her plate.

“Pretend to be together and go to my play on Friday” He said forwardly

“We’re not pretending anything, Archie” Fred sighed

The food was delicious, but right then Archie wished he was anywhere than at this dinner table. The air outside was cool and it would be the perfect time to go walking on Venice Beach watching the sunset. Whenever the weather got like this, he’d rightly expect an adorably excited call from Veronica asking if he wanted to go on a walk. And now? The sound of their pool outside made him wish he was on Venice Beach even if it is just alone.

“I’m excited to see it!” His mom says enthusiastically “who’s playing the lead?”

“Veronica” he says bitterly. The way her name slips off his tongue is enough for Mary to know something’s up so she looks at him in surprise. Her eyes move to Fred’s in silent questioning, he raised a hand to tell her not to say anything about it.

“It must be exciting, doing this with her”

“No, it isn’t” he stares into his food.

“The last time we went to the Esplanade there was that hilarious sketch you loved so much Archie!” Mary laughed it off. “Do you remember, what was it called again?”
“No, I don’t”

Fred was holding his breath. He didn’t know how to contribute to a conversation with a son who’d much rather be anywhere else and a wife who he used to share everything with. The table fell to silence again.

Archie can feel his grip on the utensils tighten so much they start to hurt. “So who’s directing it?”

“Cheryl” he says simply. There isn’t anything else to say so he just starts cutting the meat and eating normally as if the unbearable tension at this table wasn’t practically visible to all of them. After a long moment of silence Mary asked, threading on dangerous ground

“And the supervising.. teacher?”

Then Archie dropped his fork. His eyes locked on hers. “Mom, just say it already”

“What?”

“What you’re here for! Because let’s face it, the only time I see you is when I’m in trouble. And it might mean something to you, these - once in a blue moon dinners with your boys to come in ask a recap of what’s been happening in my life the past three months to make yourself feel better about not knowing anything - but it doesn’t mean anything to me!”

“Archie, please” Fred pleaded

“If you want to talk to me about why I know you’re here which is that you heard from a gossip strip that my teacher kissed me in the hallway then just say it. Or maybe, maybe a phone call would’ve sufficed right? Or maybe you’ll just pay someone else to deal with me in therapy - all of that seems easier and far more bearable than sitting at this stupid meal being lied to that you actually care about anything!”

“Okay that is enough young man” Fred turned to his son once and for all. His face was a last warning and Archie just barely resisted getting up and taking his car keys off the hook and leaving.

He took deep breaths while Mary contemplated what to say. He could see her disappointed in him, her hands clasped together on her lap. “I’m sorry you feel that way” she says finally.

That stupid sorry again. “I admit I wanted to speak to you about her. Could you blame me? You’re getting suspensions on the first day of school and you are - connected to someone who’s currently sitting in jail. So yes, you are in trouble. But there’s time for that later, because I will be staying here for the play, and until further notice. So for now Archie, I’ll be under this roof for no reason other than to be here. Right Fred?” She put her hand over his from across the table.

From the way his father’s face turned mildly confused and his hand stiffened Archie took a pretty good guess that she had no intention of staying here right until that very moment. Archie leaned back in the seat and bit his lip. Professional at persuasion, huh mom?

He used to crave seeing her when she came, and he’d tell her everything from the funny stuff his friends said and all about Veronica, his classes and studies and dreams. They’d spill it all out over ice cream at Serendipity’s in the dark night until the morning came she’d say goodbye again.

It always felt good to fill mom in. Until he’s just now realising he can’t trust her anymore - not when the ice cream and dinner dates narrowed to his birthday and whenever he’d get into trouble. It was all a fake truth. A way to ease her guilt.
And now they have to just suddenly go back to the way it was before? He can’t even fathom it

(x.x.x.x)

The Lodges NYC office is one of the high rise buildings, a prison from the bustling streets and loud noises, gun shots, poverty and trafficking. Everybody inside is zapped into oblivion of just business and professionalism, immersing themselves completely into their tasks. It’s a place that an outsider would call complicated, although neat and sickeningly organised. Every time Veronica walks in here though, she finds it comforting to be in that element. She secretly thrives on the never ending energy, she thinks if she weren’t determined to pursue her prodigious talents she’d consider taking over this place one day. Maybe she’s more ignorant than she thought.

Everyone who sees behind the scenes, the exclusive few, would see this as the main headquarters of where all their magic happens. Hiram deemed that the LA office is way too close to where most of the action is, where his outside life and his daughter’s world is draped with music and artistic social scenes and all her favourite restaurants and beaches she and her friends have made their stomping grounds. He can’t let her, and all the people who know and respect him get distracted by one of his less famous business endeavours that wouldn’t do well to his name.

Los Angeles is home, but New York is a hideout to plan and plot. Which is where Hiram and Hermione both sit right now. At the top of the tower amongst their closest associates. Hermione keeps her voice down because two of the men still haven’t arrived and phone calls are being made.

“Do you think she’s home by now?” She whispers.

Hiram looks down at her, the traces of concern in her eyes. They haven’t talked about Veronica since they got in this building, they never do. “Why are you still worrying, Hermione?” He asks after a moment “Like I told you last night, if she were kidnapped or hurt we would’ve heard from the hospital or whoever’s holding her captive for ransom”

“Do you have to be so cold?” Her voice harshened “She is our daughter you know”

“Yes, and I’m doing everything I should for her. Nothing could happen between going from the St Clairs home back to the Pembrooke, of course”

“Do you think it might be a positive thing that they’re getting close together? Our daughter being involved with their son? It could get us closer” Hermione wonders

“Probably not. In fact, the two of them together could be a trouble bomb waiting to explode on all of us. Who knows what mess they’re well capable of getting into. It’s not good, - oh Jay Marchant is here” he stands up quickly as the seats are filled and begins their meeting. Everybody quickly falls into place, the door closing and locking behind the last man who walked in.

“So after my ball last night, we’ve come to two new conclusions” Hiram puts his hand on the table. One of the men start writing this all in a notebook.

“One, that the St Clairs aren’t looking at all to sell off their precious property. Xander St Clair is now fighting for his place in Senator Brooks’ soon to be vacant seat. And they don’t want any distraction”

“Why did they consider it before then? Did your daughter’s careless impropriety change their mind” one investor asked

“His sudden interest in politics is quite questionable is it not?” Another one voiced
“Most likely just a mere coincidence. If not, it is not our place or the time to be suspicious of the St Clairs. We stay on their good side and cover any sin that’s theirs, is ours too”

Hiram pressed his lips together. “And Michael, I’m not sure. But I know our time plan can’t be slowed down. So to number two, I did have a close conversation with him last night. One of the other politicians who is Xander’s biggest competitor at the moment? Manfred Muggs”

There was a board of every one involved in the strings of Lodge Industries behind them, which Hiram went up to. He pointed to the photo of Manfred Muggs out. “I made a deal with them. That if we let Muggs go, most of his connections would be lost therefore throwing him much off the high power he holds now in the political realm. With that the St Clairs would rise to fruition especially with a little support we’ll throw their way in repayment. For the ownership of Costal Preparatory”

Everyone considered this. The plan looked simple and safe enough on their end, they wouldn’t be in a risk to lose much other than one of their long time entrepreneurs and a little cash. “Are you ready to put Manfred in that position? He hasn’t been out of line with us since day one”

“I’m positive, Daniel” Hiram nodded “he’s the only one the St Clairs could lose something from. We’ll save them from that”

“And it does have to happen as discreetly as possible” Hermione spoke up “we must be reasonable. There are any old contracts or receipts that could make him appear deserving to be removed. That way we’ll have a solid reason”

“Absolutely” Hiram agreed. Their idea was pitched, and now Senator Brooks stepping down soon provides the perfect timing for the idea to turn into action. “Does everybody agree?”

There was a collective agreement and writing of notes from everyone. “I believe in this” Jay Marchant stands up and nods “and we’ll get to it immediately.”

(x.x.x.x)

“Mom! can I call an Uber? Or can Dad drive me somewhere right now?” Betty asked into the hallway of her house kitchen which she was sure her mother was in right then.

“You haven’t even asked me permission yet Elizabeth!” Alice Cooper turned around from the stove to face her younger daughter. Betty arrived in the kitchen where she heard Polly squeal and some laughter from the laptop.

“Betts! Look Chic got a puppy! It’s so adorable” Polly turned around in the 50s style spinning wheel chair that was at their counters. The unmistakable sound of a puppy barking and someone cooing at it came from the laptop.

Betty sighed. “My friend invited me for a sleepover. Can I go?”

“Which friend?” Alice tilted her head to Polly, mouthing to Betty to ‘Say hi to your brother! She just stared at her blankly. “Kevin and another girl”

“Goodness Betty, does your friend have a name?”

“Veronica Lodge!” Betty sighed exasperatedly. “Can I please go? I haven’t been to anywhere since we moved here”
“Hi Betty!” Chic waved. She glanced at the FaceTime for one second but didn’t say anything, waiting for her mom’s reply.

“I think Betty and I both like red heads. Is that weird?” Polly asked curiously.

“Dear god” Chic shook his head and Alice laughed.

“You’re so nonsensical!” Betty told her.

“What? You must have a crush on that junior boy Archie right?”

“Mom, back to my question?”

“Oh, no! You’re going to the Pembrooke to have a sleepover with the Lodge’s daughter?” She suddenly sounded so mortified.

“You know them?” Betty scrunched her blonde brows together.

“Doesn’t everyone? They’re at the top of the social ladder screaming ruthless business family and high stake scandals all around them, I do my research Betty!”

Betty rolled her eyes. “Mom, You don’t need to go all Spy Reporter crazy on them okay? She’s nice, and it’s just a sleepover.”

“You’re not spending a night in the Pembrooke with their daughter!”

“Mom” Betty glared “Will you please loosen the leash for one second?”

“Woah, good one Betts” Chic commented.

Hal walked in the kitchen just then to join the rest of his family hearing all this commotion. “Dad please? Can I have a sleepover at my friend’s house? Please?” Betty widened her already big blue eyes at him.

“Fine - I’ll drive her.”

“Hal!” Alice protests “You’re seriously going to let her spend her Saturday night with that girl?”

“Alice, she’s just a kid trying to make friends. Chill out. I’ll take you, okay?”

“Thank you so much!” Betty tip toed and kissed him on the cheek. “I’ll go get my bag!”

She’s not even sure why Veronica did invite her, because technically She didn’t. All Betty knows is that she got a phone call from Kevin asking if she was down for a soiree at a Pembrooke Penthouse. And anybody with a sane mind, like Betty would’ve said yes.

She explains via text to Kevin in the car ride there (which her mother ended up following) why her parents are driving her and he doesn’t need to call a car for her - which he takes more than a minute to understand. When they pull up to the five star hotel alive right in the middle of Los Angeles County, it feels like a movie scene.

The drop off gives a peek of how glamorous it is inside, in all its golden glory, while the black walls outside with the hotel name on it is classic and sleek. Betty feels more excited than she ever has since learning she’d got accepted into Raffles Institution and it shows on her face when she climbs out of her parents’ station wagon beaming up at the luxurious building before them.

Hal stops the car not too long because a security guard isn’t going to let them park for more than a
while, and Alice crosses her arms at Betty. “What time should I see you tomorrow, Miss?” She shook Betty out of her reverie.

“I’ll call you” Betty’s smile is still on her face when she turns around and hugs her mother, waving her dad off while she walks aimlessly inside. Not before Hal could give her a clear warning though. “Be good, make sure you’re pleasant company”

“And don’t do anything you don’t want to!” Alice shouts after her.

Given her lost expression like just marveling at every big and little thing, the doorman was about to approach this out of place teenager to ask her what she’s doing here all alone before Kevin saw her first and told the doorman she’s with him.

“Betty Coop! I was waiting for you upfront!” He comes walking into her view. Kevin has his glasses on and headphones around his neck, not carrying anything other than his iPhone. He looked totally relaxed and ready for some hangout time.

“Oh sorry, I didn’t see you!” They hug each other in greeting.

“I could tell. You looked like you just got on the moon”

“Yeah, well this is...” she left a space and shrugged wordlessly. The hotel is even more lavish on the inside, adorned with all gold and crystal chandeliers.

“It is” Kevin smiled at her awestruck face “ready to go?”

“Oh by the way, why did Veronica even invite me? Are there going to be other girls too?” She asked while Kevin led the way to the front desk.

“Nope, just us. And she really invited me at first - but then she said I should bring the blonde one along if you want”

Betty raised her brows. Okay, the blonde one.

“Hi, we’re gonna go to the private elevator to see Veronica Lodge in Penthouse. I’m Kevin Keller”

The man behind the desk nods before he even says his name. “And you are, Miss?” He turns to Betty

“We’re both here to see Veronica. She’s with me” Kevin explains

“I need some form of identification and confirmation from Miss Lodge”

Betty starts searching her purse from her iD while the man rings up what she assumes is Veronica on the other end and makes sure she’s expecting her. After recording her details and the visit, he leads them to another part of the lobby which is secluded. You would’ve never noticed it if you didn’t know what is was, but it’s apparently a private elevator. The man scans a key card before the elevator rides up in total silence.

Betty suddenly feels nervous for no apparent reason. It’s something about the fact that this elevator has no buttons or music or that the other two men with her are completely chill about it - one who’s scrolling on his phone and the other carrying her and Kevin’s overnight bags - but she definitely feels a sense of nerves in her stomach.

When it finally dinged and the doors opened, the concierge walked straight on out with their bags
before Betty or Kevin could. “Come on” Kevin tilts his head.

Okay, this place is so much more than she ever thought. She’s literally never seen anything like it, it’s almost too much to take in at once. First, there’s a clear family portrait of The Lodges that greet them when they step out but to a left and through one doorway with a mahogany wood and gold designed arch, they step into what seems to be the coolest hangout pad in the world.

There’s couches and a TV, nearby a bar and the walls on one side are completely glass giving the perfect view of the heart of Los Angeles. The place is spacious and cold, but also silent. Concierge guy sets her bag down on one of the couches and leaves, not that Betty notices.

“Wow” she breaths

“There are my guests! So sorry about the security downstairs Betty, I forget they do that with new comers” Veronica comes gliding into the room in an off white lacy slip and shorts, despite the fact that it’s almost four pm. She looks fresh faced but a little tired.

“It’s fine. Veronica, this place is seriously incredible. Did your dad design all of it?”

“That he did” she grins after pulling Kevin into a hug “one of the many Lodge charms. Come on let’s go upstairs! You’ll like it even more”

And she sure did. They did a little tour for Betty’s sake but Kevin and Veronica were both more interested in sitting in her bedroom and talking so they moved pretty fast. She explained that the first floor is kind of a lounge area and where they sit if there’s important guests over, it also leads out to where the other floors have a balcony - this one has an outdoor dining area that doubles as some floral plantation which Veronica says her parents use whenever she’s in trouble or her abuelita is over.

The second floor is really their home, it’s a lot bigger and has a dining room and living room except this one is more personal and relax. The one’s downstairs are formal enough for a king. This floor also has a huge kitchen instead of the bar like the first floor, and they don’t go to the other end of this level because she claims that’s her parents’ space shortly.

On the third level, is her acclaimed favourite. You can see down into the second level from it, and Veronica says it used to be her playroom before they redesigned it into a study room, with her computer and desk but also a TV, mini fridge and some hanging rattan chairs. It’s every teenager’s dream come true.

Veronica’s bedroom is exactly what Betty expected it to look like, except more girly. The walls have a purple design on them and there’s silver rugs all over the floor. Her bed is also a white king sized one, with a ton of light purple and white throw pillows. That must be her colour. Every room in this house has looked too neat, almost. Like a showroom. Completely perfect.

But Veronica’s room has her taste and touch all over it. There’s a mannequin’s body with some crazy dress on it and her bookshelves have a ton of books, there’s also pictures of her everywhere with her friends. Betty doesn’t look too closely after she sees one on her nightstand of Veronica kissing Archie on the cheek in a golden frame. She doesn’t want to make anything awkward.

“So” they’ve all finally settled down, Veronica sitting Indian style on her bed and Kevin laying on his stomach “we haven’t gotten to talk since school started. I feel like I’m so busy”

“That makes two of us, Ronnie. I can’t even begin to tell you how exhaustingly fun it is to be the president of the drama club. But then I have two calc classes and AP English and it’s like I barely
Kevin takes one of the chocolate candies he got from Veronica’s bowl outside and starts unwrapping it.

Veronica laughs “that’s what you get for being spending every lunch period last year writing Costal Prep worthy shorts about your tragic love story when Joaqin’s family sabbatical - ed their way to the city of lights”

“Okay, he will be back. And that was a perfectly good and smart way of coping with heartbreak”

The girl raised her brows “are you implying something Mister Keller?”

“Nope. Nada” his face scrunched up then “your family has the worst chocolate. Can I order something?”

“It’s dark Belgian! Use the wall phone” Kevin gets up and asks the two girls if they want anything before ordering

“So Betty, how are you liking RI?” Veronica inquired

Betty was still relishing in the comforts here when she sighed “I definitely like it. It’s hard, nobody seems to be interested in making friends with me other than a few people but I like it way more than my old school for sure”

“Don’t sweat it newbie. Raffles is small so it thrives on gossip and everyone is so strung into their cliques it’s ludicrous. Which yes, is rich coming from me after all since I’m -“ she stopped and touched her hair. Not sure how to continue the sentence

“I’m part of it too”

“True” Betty can’t deny that “but thank you anyway, for literally saving me from Cheryl and Josie that first day. You didn’t know me but yet... you were so nice to me”

Veronica stops for a second. She does remember and it doesn’t feel good for Betty to imply that Cheryl and Josie were basically ruining her to a point of needing to be saved even if she’s fully aware that is what they were doing. “You’re welcome. Like I said, people can be hard to accept someone new in our world”

“Ordered cookie dough! Will be delivered to your bed” Kevin impersonates the woman taking orders on the other end of the line.

“So! Betty, you really haven’t gotten to know any of the student body other than Kevs here? You should come sit with us at lunch then”

“Oh, that’s - not necessary. There’s Ethel Muggs and I kind of know Madelyn Morgan. But she only ever does this thing where she’ll scream at her phone and then show me something that’s gotten her so excited for whatever reason. Like it’ll literally be the most random thing ever”

“Yikes!” Veronica held her hand to her chest “that’s shallow water to be swimming in, little Coop. How’d you even acquaint with that blonde child model?”

Kevin’s lips spread in a wide grin when Betty struggled to say anything. She leaned back on the bed, pink bottom lip between her teeth for a second. Veronica noticed their odd exchange “What?!” Her face was amused and curious to know more.

“Okay so you remember in the foundation of acting course?”
“When Betty depressingly fell to the ground harder than DWTS season 19 ratings” Kevin inputted

“Y-yeah. Why?”

She took a breath “Madelyn and some of the others were telling me a bunch of stuff about you that was just really overwhelming and I didn’t even ask them, it just -“

“What did they say?” Veronica leaned in closer

“Uh hello? Who cares what the kids on the out say?”

“I need to know what news they’re delivering to our new friends if I want to control them” she said pointedly

“Just who you were and who your parents are, and some - stuff that was online” Betty bit her lip again. Thank god for the knock on the door and a waitress coming in with Kevin’s large bowl of cookie dough that helped ease the awkward ache.

“Oh” Veronica looked down sullenly. She didn’t know why she hadn’t expected Betty to know about those darn photos yet when it’s all anybody could buzz about the first few days back. She guessed a part of her was holding onto someone that still didn’t care and know about her embarrassing stitch and it made her not have to worry about that. But she should’ve known better. “What did they say about it?”

“Honestly I don’t think you’d want to know” Betty helped herself to a spoonful of Kevin’s cookie dough which Veronica was starting to think looked appetising as well

“Must be some terrible stuff huh?” She mumbled. Clear as day, Veronica Lodge’s whole face turned into a gloomy cloud when that was said. Like someone had just turned her whole world around and everything fell out of place, which technically did happen. It felt so strange to see her turn off like that, she’s never acted anything other than sophisticated and suave or passionate at school.

“Okay it really wasn’t” Betty side eyed Kevin. She felt bad for making Veronica upset after she’d invited her to her home for a sleepover on her own will. “A little, but they just told me stuff like you met Archie in middle school and they think you guys broke up”

Betty almost thinks she succeeds when Veronica’s lips have an upturn to them. “That’s not true” she says “people get the story all wrong. We knew each other or I guess of each other since forever. Our dads worked together and we met at whatever event they had. But yeah, I only really got to know him in Middle School”

“That’s cute” she says uneasily. Not really knowing what to talk to Veronica about, but she seemed to be okay with the subject they were on and Kevin knew well enough she liked to talk about herself to an extent so he kept quiet.

“It’s weird you know... knowing someone for so long and then having them be such a big part of your life.. when they’re gone it’s like losing a limb or something”

“I can attest to that” Kevin chimes “not even touching on Joaquin, but when my parents split up I almost never saw my mom again. It really felt like I’d lost her, but then I realised how unhappy all of us were when they were together and it really put things in perspective”

“What if she came back?” Veronica leans her chin on her hand “do you think it’d be a downfall?”
“Right now? I could never see them getting back together. But not every two relationships is the same”

They were quiet for a moment. “What about you Betty?” The brunette suddenly turned to her “have you ever felt something like that before? Losing someone?”

Her mind instantly had a loop of flashbacks that she never wanted to remember. Things she never intended to think about tonight, or ever again. “Kind of.. right before my brother Chic left for college he did something - bad. My entire family fell apart, we couldn’t work anything out together. Honestly? Us moving here has been a saving grace. To try and start fresh and be better versions of ourselves I guess”

“That’s a lot of pressure” Veronica says thoughtfully

Betty’s not sure how to continue, because both her friends look like they’re lost in deep thought during their sudden heartfelt conversation. Always the optimist, she tries to steer their conversation away from something before either of the California kids break into their dark emotional trepidation. “Did you.. know Cheryl and Josie all your life too?” Her long fingers played with the edge of Veronica’s bedspread

“No. They said they were excited to meet The Lodges infamous prodigal daughter, their words not mine, on my first day of freshman orientation. We became friends right away, they took me under their wing and have always had my back since day one. But we didn’t really get close until my sophomore year because that’s when their older friends Corrine and Lucille became seniors so we started spending a lot more time together”

Betty nods. She can all imagine the lioness girls she knew today as pint sized versions of themselves, and she would frankly not want to be around those kids. “And I met this fellow” She bumped her shoulder with Kevin’s “at his parents’ anniversary dinner banquet when we were five”

“Oh my god!” The colour drained on his face “I remember that day specifically. Veronica really talked me into trying the sliced lemon with rock salt on it! I almost fainted”

They all giggled “you looked hilarious all red though. It was worth it. Hey are you guys getting hungry?”

Both Betty and Kevin nodded with wide eyes. They ended up having two big bowls of creamy pasta which Veronica hadn’t tasted in forever, she couldn’t describe how delicious it was - while watching One Tree Hill on box set in Veronica’s study slash tv room.

After a night of giggles and facials, the epitome of a perfectly simple soirée that didn’t involve flashing the hotel guests or sneaking into one of the exclusive clubs and having a good time, Veronica pulled the covers up to her chest and exhaled the cold air of her bedroom. She’d offered to have a temporary bed set up next to hers but Betty and Kevin told her not to make a big fuss which is how they ended up all sleeping on her bed. Betty in the middle with Veronica on her preferred side.

It was comforting though, and big enough for all of them. While she hears Betty’s soft drawl of evident sleep and Kevin has long stuck ear pods in his ears Veronica suddenly misses him very much. She could say she doesn’t know why, only she does. Being with someone else last night has been disturbing her in a way she’s never felt before, and she might’ve distracted herself with some fun company but now it’s all coming back to her. She almost always wants to call him. Out of habit, the dark clouds tonight even reminded her of their Venice Beach dates and what they believed they never had to say goodbye to.
Maybe it’s telling the tale of how they met to Betty, that makes her miss all the breathtaking memories of them in such a painful crush of waves. Nothing compares to the jarring pain of telling herself it’s over. It hurts her all over again, missing him. Every part of him. She’s memorised him like the back of her hand but even after all this time she’ll never get enough. Not ever, and that’s what scares her.

Veronica keeps her eyes on the picture of them on her nightstand. Technically she can’t see any of it because the room is pitch black, but she imagines it perfectly. Why, why does this have to hurt so much? Oh Archie... no matter what happened, I still can never stop thinking of you.

(x.x.x.x)

“The carpets are rolled and seats are being filled on this lovely Friday evening. A bit of a drizzle but it’s no rain on the parade of the - thirty five students! Who are glamming up behind the curtains as we speak, the ones who were part of the production. No, they’re going full force no matter the weather. The dramatic tale being portrayed on stage tonight is directed by one of Raffles Institution’s finest herself, Cheryl Blossom who is only seventeen. We spoke to her earlier and she couldn’t be more over the moon about her directing debut. There seems to be quite the star studded audience tonight as well, Mr Cassavetti has just flown in from his hometown and has spoken out very excitedly for tonight. We’ll get a look at the arriving guests by the entrance right now, at the Los Angeles Esplanade Theatre. To you Michelle”

“Oh my god” Jellybean’s head peeked out of the backstage curtains just getting a good glimpse of the scene before her “it’s happening! It’s happening! People are coming!”

She ran screaming like a banshee through the crowds of students at the sound system and finalising their props, Polly and the tech team doing a last test run of spotlights. Her white tunic dress blew when she ran, with the Ugg boots she still hadn’t changed out of. She ran straight back to the makeup room where the rest of the actors were getting their face done up.

“You guys - there has to be like a thousand people out there. I can’t believe it’s almost show time!” She relayed the amazing information to specifically to Veronica and Josie who were sitting side by side.

“Ohmygod!!” Veronica grabbed their hands and squealed along. Betty came into the makeup room then wearing her green floral dress and her blonde curls pinned up in her head for the first scene. “Guys this is serious. I just heard someone say Gwyneth Paltro is going to be in the audience and I think I’m going to seriously start hyperventilating”

“I heard that too” Cheryl walked into the room with her face weirdly relaxed. “And it’s true. I asked Tina to ask one of the teachers outside. She’s totally on the seating chart!”

“Fuck, you guys... what the actual hell is happening?!” Reggie looked like he just saw an alien. He couldn’t believe it. The curtains were just twenty minutes to going up and none of them have left the backstage since four hours ago, they were practically bouncing with anticipation to see what was happening outside.

Judging from the news channel reporters and how loud and busy everyone was though, they had to guess it was getting crazy. Veronica had been checking her social media meticulously to firstly keep her mind off the nerves but secondly to see the tweets and stories of people coming tonight.
She felt like she was refreshing every minute.

“Guys I’m directing a show! Like for real - it’s going to happen!” Cheryl bursted into an enthusiastic jump and pulled both Josie and Veronica into a group hug. They smelled the lavender scent on the costumes and the hair product sprayed into each other’s hair as close as they were.

Soon Veronica felt a strong hand across her neck and found it to be Reggie joining in on the group hug. She squealed to stop herself from crying in happiness. “And Gwyneth Paltro is going to see it!”

“Yes!”

Cheryl was crying, she suddenly felt overwhelmed with the gratitude of everything. This wasn’t just a school play, but every seat in that theatre should be filled with people who are going to see her talent and abilities for the first time tonight. Veronica broke free from their hug and grabbed Betty to squeeze her tight, smiling brighter than the sun. She hears Cheryl say “I go to the gym with Bella Thorne I don’t know why I’m so excited” and they all laugh unanimously.

“Okay look at this” Veronica clicks into the online ticket website and checks the count. She lets out a deep breath “it’s sold out. All three thousand seats are filled”

“Dude that’s insane” Reggie tells Archie when he hears that they’ll be performing to a full house tonight. “How freaking long have we been waiting for this moment? And my dad’s going to be there, I just hope he’ll enjoy it”

“Both my parents are in, I don’t know how they’ll react either” Archie closes his eyes briefly imagining everything while his mic is being put on. When he opens his eyes, they’re about to turn all the lights out for the opening scene of Veronica in her house set. From where he’s standing backstage, what he can see is the back of her black hair and Cheryl standing in front of her giving her what looked like a pep talk.

The very first scene was just her on her own, until James joined her. She could feel her heart beating out of her chest, and Archie knows it already. He imagines that she’s trying to find something to focus on that’ll take her mind off it, like maybe Cheryl’s voice or counting to a hundred. But she can’t find anything.

When Veronica doesn’t know what else to do she looks behind her to where her friends stand backstage. There are a people on both ends watching closely waiting for the curtains to go up, but the first person Veronica’s eyes set on is Archie.

They haven’t even talked, outside of character, no matter how many after rehearsal dinners and practices they have. It’s like they’re playing a game of both end silent treatment, neither is going to break first.

But when she turns right before all the lights go out, right when Cheryl finishes her pep talk and leaves the stage, when she’s all alone up there. He can see the underlying fear in her eyes that - are looking right into his - shouldn’t be there because she doesn’t have anything to worry about. Veronica blinks. Oh, he’s still looking at her.

And Archie can practically hear the million and one what ifs running through her mind. He nods at her, telling her you got this. She doesn’t know how, when they haven’t uttered a word to each other all week but when he nods at her.. she’s found the perfect focus that drowns everything out. Her heart softens, every overlapping thought dying into the background.

She turns back around to face the curtains and Archie watches her silky auburn hair until the lights
go out. She’s still there. In the dark. All alone, but Veronica has all the strength she needs when her mind keeps replaying the image of him looking at her.

The curtains go up.

Second last scene to the end and Midge has every actor needed for the closing lined up. It’s a little hard with some of them like Betty had come running off the last scene in her puffy wedding dress to get changed in time for the closing. The short period costume changes give them barely enough time to look back on the last scene before they’re heading out to the next one, which makes it feel like the entire experience is zooming all at once and they can’t catch their breath.

It’s fun though, Betty thinks. She’s finally got her blue dress with the period corset and does her best attempt at running in the painful heels back to the curtains.

“Okay, Betty’s here. I have all the girls six of six. What about you?” Midge says into her walkie talkie. The tiny girl has no problem controlling the line of girls before her, pulling Betty behind Veronica instead of Jellybean so they’re in order to go on stage. “Remember guys, as soon as the lights go out after they kiss you all need to get in line for the closing. Remember the order so nobody gets confused - who’s on your left, your right”

“I have Archie. We’re good to go” Cheryl’s voice sounds off from the device in Midge’s hand.

Midge nodded. “Okay, go Veronica go!”

In her place Veronica’s heart feels full of life and energy that she’s had ever since it started. She cherishes this very last scene, turning on her character face and that accent they’ve all had the best time practicing and perfecting. As the play had gone on, and seeing the front seat faces and their reactions had become a familiarity Veronica felt any of nervousness fade away.

She felt at home on the stage, until this very last scene. Pretty sure everyone can feel it too, although no one will acknowledge or outrightly say it.

They have to kiss in this scene.

She knows it’s just one kiss, one long, passionate kiss. And she’d had many arguments with Cheryl over the last four days about just leaving it to happen on stage, to not practice it. Cheryl insisted that they might get awkward on stage if they don’t try it first, but Veronica tells her they’ve had a lot of practices over the years.

So yes, maybe Archie is a little afraid. That she’ll freeze or he’ll second guess himself or - or what if they both just stop short and it ruins everything? What if he can’t remember his lines because he’s anticipating the kiss and what if they lose character?

The first thing he remembers when he steps on stage and starts telling her there is something that he envies, and she interrupts him by saying they’re getting a new drain installed, is the look she gave him before the curtains went up.

Just like that very first scene in her bedroom set now she’s just as tangibly nervous, if not more so. Whatever familiarity she’d gotten to the stage before is all gone now, she’s completely and totally racked up and maybe it’s good because she doesn’t have to act it out in the scene.

Why am I so scared right now? Am I really that scared to kiss him? Am I scared of what I’ll feel?

And now she doesn’t have anything to focus on that’ll help her forget. He tells her he loves her again, right there on stage. No, it’s their characters. She turns her back on him and he pulls her
back to look into his eyes, the emotions suddenly too much to handle when they’re practically an inch away from each other.

*It’s our imperfections that make us so perfect for each other.*

Her breath is getting shaky, like Cheryl had told her to play it that way. Only she’s not acting. She’s not acting when the first teardrop hits her cheek and Archie wipes them away. Seeing her cry like this is bringing back too many memories, after a football game in the pouring rain, a thousand miles apart falling asleep with her on the line, standing before her in a bar in the late summer saying we need to break up.

When their foreheads touch and the theatre is silent enough to hear a pin drop, it makes what they’re feeling even more real. Like there’s nobody else in the room. Archie looks at her illuminating with the spotlight above them, her hair pinned up making her beautiful face stand out and he can see the angle of her jaw and the length of her neck. It’s all so tempting, so far in between, like he’s reaching for something but he’s not sure what.

Veronica’s eyes close and she braces herself for the moment to come, doing a silent count in her head. one, two, three.

It happens perfectly. They’re lips land on each other’s and there’s the unmistakable sound of some not allowed cheering but nobody really cares. Especially them. Oh, this is what she was afraid of.

Can she tell him everything that’s happened and all the highs and lows ever since they broke up? Can she look into his brain and see if he’s felt the same utter torture being away from each other? Maybe not, but he can feel everything when they’re lips are on each other. Veronica has never felt more safe and strong then when his arms circle around her and the softness of his lips takes over hers. *I shouldn’t feel this. I shouldn’t feel like this. But oh god... no matter what happens, I know he’ll do everything to save me from slipping away. No matter what he’s always been there to chase me back... no matter what, it’s always been you. It has to be you.*

He knows then he shouldn’t have been afraid. Kissing Veronica will always come as naturally to him as breathing, and so will her ability to make him want more and more every time they do. The crazy erratic sound in his ears is the beating of their hearts, the butterflies taking flight in his stomach... *miss her. miss this. miss you... love you. love you. I love you*

That’s all Archie can think until they break apart and he has to remind himself that they’re still acting, and he can’t hold her close for another kiss like he wants to. He sees it in her eyes too, the new found sincerity. They keep holding each other until the lights go out and people start joining them on stage.

In the darkness, he lost her hand. They should be standing next to each other right in the middle for the bow, but he felt the harshness of Veronica’s tugging her hand out of his. Why is she doing that? He swore she felt something when they kissed, he could see it her eyes. Why would she be mad?

Suddenly the lights came on and Archie was still as perplexed by Veronica’s action that he couldn’t even get the confused look off his face. Instead of being next to each other, Veronica had pulled what she could see to be Betty’s hand between them. And that’s what made him look at her like she’d just done something seriously offensive.

But then everyone bowed and the crowd burst into claps and cheers, there was flashes going off that forced Archie to put a smile on his face. Despite all the legends of the industry being in the room, every kid on stage was still seeking out the face of their parents, to smile and beam at. Except Veronica. She looked anywhere than where they sat, and as soon as the bow was over
everyone headed backstage to change while people mingled and the doors of the theatre opened.

“Veronica! Veronica wait! Can we talk?” Archie was being overtly loud and it was causing a lot of the student body to look their way, it was the first conversation since forever after all.

She only walked faster. What could he possibly want? That tightening feeling in her stomach was still happening where she couldn’t believe she just completely turned into putty in his hands, yet again. God why do I make it so easy! He hurt me. He betrayed me. And I’m still being some idiot to fall for him all over again!

“Ronnie!” She stopped in her heels. “Can we talk?”

Her face looked absorbed in cryptic rage, he doesn’t know why. “Archie, if you think you can just waltz back into my life after you chose to break up with me” she stuck her finger in his chest hard “then you are sadly mistaken”

“Ronnie, can we talk about this please finally? Can we talk about us?” He ignored the fact that her sharp glare was making some parts of him more turned on than he should be. Seriously, why does my body react like this?

“Archie. You said it yourself. You made it obvious. We’re over. You don’t get to just throw me away and then take me back after having a taste!”

“Veronica that’s not what this is about”

“Forget it Archie. You don’t even care that you’re hurt me” she walked away to the girls’ changing room to get her purse and clothes, and the five other people there was all that stopped her from bursting into tears. She just can’t let herself get hurt again, not when this is how bad it feels. She’s given him too much power to break her and that shouldn’t be how it is. He shouldn’t just get to destroy her and leave her torn apart all alone. And after what she felt during that kiss? It’s clear that she’s still completely deep in with him, deep enough that she knows it can happen again. She just can’t let him.

There’s a bunch of reporters and interviewers waiting for them outside, who ask pretty much the same questions over and over. None of them mind answering though, enjoying how star-like it is to go from microphone to microphone and their pictures taken in between. It never hit any of them how big of a deal this would be until they’re literally floating on cloud nine at the carpet outside the Esplanade.

Archie and Veronica get constant reminders of each other when people keep commenting on what amazing chemistry they both have together. Veronica thinks it’s so stupid because at least half these people know they used to date, but she smiles and gives half answers about it anyway.

“V! People are getting in you LODGE limos, how am I gonna go to your after party if your dad finds me under the Pembrooke roof?”

“Woah, hey Cher” she narrowly caught herself from a trip reaching the end of the red carpet. “I said I’m throwing the after party, doesn’t mean the Pembrooke” she winked “those party vessels are going to my dad’s house in Sherman Oaks so not to worry”

“Archie! Congratulations, we brought you flowers like always” Mary produced a giant bouquet of flowers that made Archie laugh

“Sorry son, she insisted. But you were spectacular up there, really I forgot how much I enjoy watching you act” Fred gave him a pat on the shoulder
“Thanks guys” Archie half grinned. “Oh! Is that Reggie? We sat next to Ross and Melinda. Look how big you are!”

“That’s better than all the compliments I’ve gotten tonight Mrs Andrews” Reggie joked

“Oh you boys! Come on, we need to get a picture of you”

“Hey, you know dad is more than happy to take us out for an el cedro celebratory dinner right?” Jughead reassures his sister. FP had just been out to make a phone call, but Jellybean didn’t want to let even their dad’s endless work schedule get her mood down.

“Juggy” she leaned on his chest still looking around at the dispersing crowd she couldn’t tear her eyes away from “I want to go to Veronica’s after party anyway”

“No way in hell are you going to one of those parties. Cheryl already made a weird proposition on me to let you go, the answer’s no”

Jellybean smirked. So Cheryl had stuck to her word to help her go. “Come on... please? You’re gonna have to accept someday that I’m growing up”

“It’s not that Bean. You don’t know them like I do, things could get dangerous and I don’t want you involved. And you’re barely fourteen!”

“Okay” she looked up into his blue eyes. In the hot pink heels Veronica and Josie had advised her to buy on their shopping trip, she was almost at his height. “Stop being such a debby downer. You can be my chaperone! Come on Jug you love parties”

He sighed. It was one thing to attend the Raffles play but going to their after party - Veronica Lodge’s after party - he had to prepare himself for it. “Fine. Only if you stick by me the whole time.”

“Yes!” She kissed him lightly on the cheek “You’re the best. Come on, we’ll miss the last party vessel!”

“Be back by midnight sharp Polly and Elizabeth” Alice Cooper warned

“1.30?” Polly bit her lip

“Midnight” Alice snapped again. “Not a minute late”

“Alright mom, thank you for coming tonight” Betty hugged her mother closely

“I wouldn’t have missed it for the world girlies. And oh, is that the boy Polly said you have a crush on?” She whispered softer. Betty followed her eyes. Archie and Reggie stood there getting their picture taken by who she assumed was they’re parents. They were making goofy poses together.

“No” she shakes the burning picture of Veronica and Archie kissing on stage out of her head “no, he’s in love with someone else”

“Come on Betts!” Polly tugs on her arm

“Okay, go and be teenagers!”

(x.x.x.x)

Jason, Chuck, Reggie and Archie have their own limo that sends them to the bungalow in Sherman Oaks. It’s finally quiet, after a long hectic night. The older boys have popped a bottle of champagne
and are gingerly drinking out of the flutes.

There’s a certain hard expression on Archie’s face that his best friends know should not be there, especially not on this dream come true night. He’s been like that since they got in the limo, staring out the window watching trees and building pass by. All they could think is he might not be in the best of moods to attend his ex girlfriend’s party, after kissing her on stage.

“Hey Archie” Chuck is uncharacteristically the first to bring it up since they got inside. It’s almost like he’s been brooding to ignore they’re pre party. “You still not talking to Veronica?”

His brown eyes flickered to them in a beat. Great, was it that obvious what he’d been thinking about? Archie grabbed the bottle of champagne they were pouring from and took a big long gulp.

“She’s not talking to me” He said

Reggie watched carefully, knowing Archie Andrews rage - drunk is never a good person to be around.

“Something’s happening. I don’t know if I can trust her anymore”

“Hm” Chuck looked to the side surreptitiously. He took another sip of the champagne.

Veronica’s party is, like always, a complete masterpiece. The house in Sherman Oaks is one of the newer ones that has little to no neighbours around, and the music and dance floor is actually on the outside of the house. There’s colourful lights shading the white walls of the house, people already bouncing and bumping by the time they arrived.

Veronica has kept the guest list specifically to the cast and crew and their plus ones only, which consists of maybe sixty people at tops. He’s feeling reckless and ready to go full force tonight, maybe it’s the alcohol doing the work in his veins or just being in the dark dancing rager of Veronica Lodge.

Her dark eyes are playing games with him from across the room, standing in a black dress that’s ravaging and he knows she’s never worn it before. He’s never taken it off before. They’re hanging out by the huge porch and Reggie is shamelessly handing out bumps to everybody but Archie is used to ignoring it.

It’s so stupid, when it’s her party but Cheryl still insists on adding her touch into it. Touch, meaning the trouble starting games that she loves inventing. Veronica rolls her eyes.

“Relax V, next year you can do it all on your own” Betty giggles into the cup she’s drinking from.

“You drinking tonight sweet Stepford blonde?” Veronica sneers “careful, I purposely put things into those drinks”

“Veronica!” She scolded. This party is definitely one powder keg about to blow up, because there’s more than enough fuel to carry them the whole night long.

“Anyway” Betty continues “I think she’s a little bothered about something” she raises her brows pointedly at Jason who just leaned over his chair to kiss Polly deeply on the lips, his body covering the front of hers.

Cheryl noticed it just at the same time as them. “Ugh!” She scoffed “can you believe it? This is like being in an alternate universe of a Black Mirror episode. Jason stop!”

“Cheryl, put your energy into some more useful employment please? You’re giving me a bigger headache” Veronica takes another drink. She hates feeling like she’s running from her parents,
from Nick, from Archie. Running from herself.

“Fine then. I will. Who here is up for the next round of truth?” She manoeuvred her body to the whole room, seeing only a couple eyes who look up at her offer. There’s all their close friends, including Jellybean who happens to be standing close by to Jughead and they both have drinks in their hands. Nobody really pays attention to it, no one thinks it’s a big deal, until Archie speaks up.

“We’re on. Me, and Lodge.”

Her eyes dart around the entire room. Is he insane? Calling me by my last name and putting me in some stupid redundant game? What the fuck, Archie? Haven’t you made me angry enough tonight?

“Are you going to back out Veronica?” Cheryl purses her red lips in a smile at her.

Veronica grits her teeth at him. Fine, he wants to play? Then he’d better be ready to lose. “Of course not Queen B, Veronica Lodge never says no to a party game”

Then she looked back at Archie “you are so on”

They position themselves on the couches that previously, two silly question asking juniors were occupying. They faced each other unintentionally creating two sides to a civil war. Veronica sat between Cheryl who was holding the timer and Betty, Josie and Jellybean on the arms of the couch with Jughead and a few others standing behind. Archie had Reggie on his right and Chuck to his left, the gang unfortunately incomplete by Jason who had stumbled down the halls with Polly a few minutes prior.

He wasn’t lacking much though, since even some partiers outside had joined his side in the quiet living room of trivia.

Archie and Veronica glared into each other’s eyes. There wasn’t much else to do for Veronica but take a big gulp of her tequila to sizzle her system for the game. Cheryl took a breath and clicked the timer on her phone for a fresh new session. “Go”

“When was the first time you met your jail chained momentary object of affection?” Veronica starts right off the bat

“The same time you did” he answers smoothly “did you ever partake in filming and sending videos to the the gossip pot to sabotage somebody?”

“No, have you?”

“The game is called truth Veronica” he leans forward with a wide smile that shows all his teeth

“Exactly, so answer the damn question”

He leans back into the seat, eyeing her carefully. Archie knows for a fact she’s lying off her face, she did send the video, but no one would’ve known that from the way she’s calmly sitting with her arms crossed over her chest.

“No” he says slowly. “Do you happen to know how said person landed in jail? Someone was behind it”

“Looked like you were behind it” she said insinuatingly. People around made a general awed sound. “Have you ever had sex with your teacher?” Her smirk deepened
“No I never had sex with my teacher”

“No! Veronica and Cheryl are halfway to giggles

“It’s my turn. Where were you when Miss Grundy got called to Weatherbee’s? Can anyone even vouch they were with you when it happened?”

“Seriously? That’s an empty question. I could’ve been peeing in the bathroom”

“She was with me” Betty suddenly spoke up. She didn’t know why but the need to jump in on this or maybe protect Veronica, because maybe she did it. What if she did? “We were in the east wing bathrooms together”

“Thank you Betty dear” Veronica held out her hand for Betty to bump without her eyes leaving Archie’s. “Why don’t you tell us all why your mother is supposedly all the way back in town to lessen Grundy’s sentence? Kind of an odd side to pick isn’t it?”

“Odd is also you feeding into mindless rumours. But she doesn’t want somebody’s life to be ruined forever”

“You don’t think it’s because they just can’t have their son involved in such a scandal? How un perfect that would be, huh?” She knows it’s a hypocritical line but she’s really hitting low.

“I think you’ll have to wait your turn. Speaking of a scandal, how much did daddy pay for the LA Daily to not speak a word about your atrocious photos?”

She bit her lip. “Nothing that made a dent in his wallet. But I was more busy wondering who the hell leaked them because it sure wasn’t me. Who were you with the night that happened?”

“It’s funny. That depends on how many people you ever sent them to to begin with”

“Just answer the question”

“We were all together, okay?” Reggie spoke up from beside Archie. He looked almost as drained as Betty did from their game “I told Andrews about it the next day, he didn’t even know”

“Oh so you weren’t all together when you found out then?”

“Wait your turn Lodge. You looked high off your ass, you get that way recently?”

“No, have you?” She really wanted to know, has he been even close to the brink of blanking out as she has since they broke apart.

“No. So what exactly did you and Nick St Clair get up to when you fled the party your parents so desperately tried to cover their own ass with?”

The room just became even more pressed. Everybody felt very sober all of a sudden, and kind of wishing they weren’t here to begin with. Archie gripped his cup harder when the colour on Veronica’s face drained away. So it’s true. They left together. What else did they do?

Veronica popped one of the brownies on the table between them into her mouth. “Woah relax, V. You should’ve eaten like an eighteenth of that” Cheryl’s eyes grew wide as saucers. Veronica paid it no mind.

“I left to run away from the sickeningly fake party. Isn’t that why your mother left you behind in this city too? Don’t worry, that’s not your question to answer. This is, I wanna know who sent my
pictures to the gossip pot the night after we broke up”

“Which break up? We’ve had more than one”

“You know which fucking one. Who sent it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t. Lie”

“I want you to admit you filmed the video of me in the hallway with Miss Grundy to everyone because we both know you damn. well. did.”

A beeping went off. Everybody in the room except Archie and Veronica breathed a sigh of relief. Cheryl nodded “Time’s up.”
Empire Of Our Own

Chapter Notes

Guys!! I am so sorry for waiting this long to update, I’m the worst I know.

WARNING: Again, you might not be a fan of this chapter. It deals with a lot of dark stuff, not wanting to spoil too much.

Also, I kind of hated the way this formatted and came out so please tell me what you think.. super insecure about this chap

It also isn’t just some plot that’s gonna be gone next chapter, it throws everything with the current plot into an even messier state that will put all the kids’ stakes high.

Again, so so sorry for the long wait. And please tell me what you think? Cos I’m not super proud of my writing this chapter

Thank you guys x

Chapter #6 Empire Of Our Own

- our minds are full of freedom

we’re in a world where we all come alive

and when love becomes the reason,

we fly with kings tonight and come down with an empire of our own -

Archie was eventually the first person to get up and leave, because all Veronica found interest in doing was sitting there nursing her drink. Virtually none of the tension had dissipated from the moment Cheryl hit the timer to now, even the red headed hbic couldn’t make the first move away. She merely sat there staring. First, at Veronica, then at nothing in particular. You could tell the cold disappointment in her features from a mile away.

“Uh, that was riveting.. I could barely breathe” Betty becomes the first to acknowledge it. She looked around at the rest of her ‘friends’, Veronica seemed particularly interested in her cup and Cheryl was staring into blank space. Josie and Reggie had gotten up and opened the door to the outside where, loud music filled the room back into it’s purposeful party vibe.

“That was intense. How many different rumour mills are going to be overworked by Monday morning?” Jellybean scratched the bone of her brow with the edge of her nail, feigning a critical headache.

Jughead just smirked. He could play the part of nonchalant all he wants, but Jughead knows that isn’t Archie and Veronica. I mean, to get drunk and be reckless? That’s just classic V and A, but to berate each other like they just did was something else. He guessed they must’ve really broken up for a bad reason this time, and now everyone is pretty sure why. Since the second half of summer,
when Jughead took a trip back to Ohio to be with his mom he and Archie had practically fallen out of touch, and with a recent break up, being involved in a scandal and getting cast in the homecoming play Archie had shot up the ranks of busy and craziness that Jughead didn’t really want to get close to.

“I told you these things get messy” he said into his cup. Jellybean rolled her eyes “Whatever. I’m gonna go dance”

He stood in the corner of the living room smoking out the wall window, watching his sister in the crowd but trying his best to distance himself from the party. Not only does he actively try to avoid being in a party setting starring the Raffles Royalties crowd ( which he never succeeded much in considering two of his best friends is a part of them ) but Jughead found himself thinking hard into why Archie and Veronica had become so cold towards each other. Maybe he just doesn’t want to admit the sadness in him, that they used to be in love - so he shakes it off reminding himself of all the times he’s gotten a headache trying to figure out those two.

“Cheryl... why aren’t you dancing? Come on!” Josie had just come back to the couches with Reggie by her side and their faces tainted with slight sweat from dancing.

Her red headed friend pulled her arm back in a tuff, trying her best to keep her face from scowling. “Not tonight”

“Aww, okay then! We’ll sit here and keep your little miserable self company” Josie and Reggie both threw themselves on the couch opposite from Cheryl, a buzzed Veronica and one wide eyed Betty. The couch Archie had been in to face off Veronica in truth. “Oh! These brownies are good”

“Hey, I gotta say new girl. You were brave for sticking up for V here”

Betty suddenly froze. She wasn’t sure if it was really true, Reggie Mantle just talked to her. No, like literally looked her straight in the eye and said a pointed sentence specifically to her. He looked more ruffed up than when he first got here, the black hair on his head was messed and the top three buttons on his white shirt unbuttoned.

Despite being a junior like her, Betty always felt that Reggie was a senior by the way he carried himself and the crowd her hung with. Also the fact that he’s possibly the biggest sixteen year old kid in the entire country, his borderline intimidating muscles suggest he must’ve been working out since he was like eight.

With blue eyes just gone bigger than they were before, Betty turned to Veronica for some kind of direction or answer like she usually did when she got speechless. But the party animal’s eyes were somewhere between closed and opened, her head tipped back over the head of the couch.

Cheryl smirked. “Don’t expect her to answer. She can’t hear anything, she’s ten notches past wasted.”

She gulped.

“So why did you do it? Why did you lie?”

“Huh?” Betty blinked more like a twitch “I didn’t lie” she could barely hear her own voice. But the way Cheryl pressed her red lips into a straight smile, it was like she totally knew she was lying. “Why would you think that?”

“Because I just do, Betty. So enlighten me, why did you lie in a game of truths for someone who you didn’t know just three weeks ago?”
She really should learn to start lying. An amazing actress? Definitely. But Betty felt her throat clam up when she was trying to come up with some reasoning, which the easiest answer for that would he that she didn’t have an answer. Why did she lie for Veronica? Maybe she just wanted to help her back for the ‘acceptance’ but even she knows that’s not true.

All she can remember is a bunch of high strung teenagers in a room that’s way too packed with tension, and Veronica’s scared brown eyes staring at her opponent. Betty hadn’t even stopped to consider that maybe Veronica did film that video, that’s way too crazy.

“Because she’s my friend” Betty finally found the words to say. She watched the astonished expression on all three of their faces. And it pissed her off more than it should. “How do we know you didn’t lie for Archie too?”

“Because I didn’t” Reggie says openly

“Your statement is just as invalid as mine so I guess we’re even, right?”

“Are you trying to test an opposition?” Reggie’s tone wasn’t nearly as challenging as his words were

“I don’t find pleasure in wrestling with pigs, actually”

“Woah, okay” Cheryl suddenly sat up straighter on her side as Betty’s back hit the couch with purpose. An excited glint came over her eyes. “See I knew you had some fire in you”

“What the hell are you talking about, Cheryl” Betty looked at her tiredly. She heard Reggie and Josie scoff lightheartedly at her words before. Glancing down at her phone, she saw that it was almost twelve twenty and a part of her was so tired already she considered finding her sister and just leaving the party.

“I get it. We get. Really, we do” Cheryl motioned to herself and Josie, who was grinning slyly

“Get what?”

“You’re trying to break into Veronica Lodge’s world. Be one of her friends, be our friend, be one of us. And I think it’s cute, honestly I do”

Betty bit the inside of her mouth. How narcissistic can one girl be?

“And hey, it’s not like I have to stay another year to see anymore of you - so I’d say go ahead. Try and make the cut sweetie”

“I’m not trying anything” she grits her teeth.

“Put those fangs away kitten! I’d love to help you. If you want to be one of us there’s a lot that needs to change” her eyes ran over her whole body “for starters, go ahead Betty. Make your first kill” Cheryl looked at her challengingly through hooded eyes, red lips around the cup she took a sip from.

“I wouldn’t mind battling for the next game with blondie” Reggie shrugged

Her mind ticked and ticked. Could she really turn down this game that Cheryl and Reggie are so effortlessly ‘offering’ her? Not being the outsider new girl at school anymore does sound nice, and she can’t lie and say she hasn’t been trying to be friends with Veronica. But given what she just saw went down between two people during this game before? Betty decided it’d be smarter to risk
being iced out for a few days than to have her name plastered all over social media about anything that could happen if she participated. Then her reputation really would be gone before she even had one.

“You guys are ridiculous” she looked away from them while she said it though, finally “I’m not playing a stupid game with a drunk, egoistical high school boy. It’s a recipe for disaster”

Surprisingly, her words actually earned a round of laughter from the troubled trio, and one that was genuine rather than teasing. She paused for a moment, her rigid shoulders calming when she noticed they weren’t making fun of her.

Soon enough Chuck brought Archie stumbling drunk back to the couch where they crammed next to Reggie and Josie. They started talking about how the freshman Trev Brown who’s on the JV football team did the best play they’ve ever seen in so long at one practice, their conversation excluding Betty but also Veronica who had been quiet and spaced out for a seriously long time.

“Trev Brown? Oh yeah I know him! He’s in my vocals class and he’s show stopping” Jellybean came through the doors and planted herself on the arm of the couch next to Cheryl, popping a little piece of the infamous brownie in her mouth. “Kaycee told me he put a letter in her locker too, and while poetry holds a power in driving away love, I have to admit it was really romantic and sweet”

Jellybean looked redder in her face than the rest of her skin, having just come inside from the dance floor. Her expressions are so animated and it gives away how young and vivacious she is, which you would’ve never guessed from how she and the girls had chosen her dress tonight. Jellybean had long black hair in a half up-do and piercing blue eyes that had gotten greyer and darker. She seemed to fit in comfortably with them by now.

“They’re good right?” Reggie asked referring to the brownies

She gave him a weird look. “Yeah, whatever”

“Oh, you freshmen never cease to amuse me. Remember when letters in lockers were such a big deal Josie?” Cheryl sighed. Josie laughed, leaning comfortably into Reggie’s side, his arm coming up to hold her closer.

Cheryl smiled at the sight of them together until it wiped off her face in one moment. Betty felt Veronica’s hand fall into her lap and the other one that was holding her almost empty cup had let it loose, and the dark liquid was dripping down from the couch by the second. Cheryl made a grotesque face and moved her heeled foot away from the dripping substance.

“Gosh she is a mess..” Cheryl mutters. “JB? Would you help her go lay down?”

“Of course!” The younger girl stood up and she used as little force as possible to get Veronica up from the chair and they disappeared down the hallway with one of her arms around her neck and stumbling all the way through. Betty watched them go, wondering deeply how bad of a hangover Veronica was going to have tomorrow.

“Is she gonna be okay?” She asked, still facing the two brunettes just getting to the end of the hallway

“She’ll be fine” Josie reassures “It’s nothing none of us haven’t experienced before”

Okay, she thinks. It doesn’t look okay.
“Want some, blondie?” Betty turns back around to face them when she hears Chuck talking to who she best assumes is herself. He’s holding up more of the stupid snacks that are all over this place, and everyone has been picking at them all night long.

“Uh, no thanks”

It’s not too long afterward that Jellybean comes back and they all fall into some pretty comfortable but still boisterous banter and it becomes apparent that more and more people have started making their way into the house. As the music got louder, and the time ticked away on Betty’s phone - she watched each minute pass by - it started to feel like there were colourful rays surrounding the edges of the house and the music playing reminded her faintly of the spell song in Hocus Pocus.

She was starting to feel more restless, as more and more partiers crammed in and there’s somebody doing a keg stand outside and everyone around her is laughing and dancing and there’s too many faces, too many smells, nothing feels familiar anymore - where’s Veronica? Where’s my sister?! Right now all Betty wants to do is leave this place and go hide under the blankets in her room at home..

But she can’t. Not without Polly who hasn’t showed up and she’s way too scared to get in an Uber all alone this late at night... she doesn’t even know where this place is.

“You know it is so strange that we’re all just sitting here - like every party at least most of us are killing the dance floor!” Josie exclaims

“This is fun though. Ugh, I’m getting old” Cheryl grimaces. Reggie, Archie and Jellybean laugh. Betty feels way more uncomfortable and out of place here with them than she ever has.

“Yeah, about that. I think I might just go right now” Chuck stood up with an odd look in his dark eyes, staring off somewhere into the crowd.

“Have fun rager” Cheryl calls to him. But as he gets up to leave, Betty can sense a not so honest meaning to his words. She already felt like she was analysing everything way too much, so maybe her mind is just playing tricks on her when she watched Chuck disappear into the crowd with not much intention to stop.

He went in the same direction as that hallway, and for some reason - probably her paranoia, the worst thought she can’t even piece together comes into her mind. Chuck isn’t the tallest head in the crowd, but Betty’s focused eyes follow his figure even through the tropes of other bodies. It’s not like she can tear her eyes away. He just went down the same hallway.

Okay, he went down the same hallway. For gods sake, she starts to feel like her mother for being so suspicious. He’s probably just going to the bathroom. But her suspicion got the best of her (like it usually does) when Betty excused herself from the little tea party and started heading in the same direction.

Her breath hitches. Have I always hated crowds this much before? She can’t even help it but her arms shake when two people almost totally slam into her, the mental picture of air is knocked out of her brain. Betty sure feels like she’s facing some kind of challenge, like the bottom of her stomach is uneasy but she just has to see where Chuck is going. With the deepest breath, she puts both hands into tights fists and makes her way through the crowd.

She almost forgets about all the sweaty bodies and how scary it all feels when her eyes are focused on the dark hallway before her. It isn’t so crowded in there. There’s about three doors and she assumes one of them is the one Veronica is occupying, but they’re all closed. She considers
opening one before realising that with these kids, there’s most likely at least one couple getting it on and that would really be her breaking point for the night to walk in on.

She looks back into the living room. From her quick gloss over Chuck is no where to be found. Shit. This feels like one of those thriller movies when she’s walking down the hallway in her heels and just wishing desperately for nothing bad to happen.

*How do I make sure Veronica is okay? Am I overthinking? Am I being paranoid for no reason? It’s better to be safe than sorry, right?*

She settles on a plan and luckily finds the doll faced girl with the silly name getting more drinks at the refreshments table. “Jellybean” she calls out to her, probably one of the few times they’ve ever talked.

“Betty, hey” she turns around “you okay? You look all wound up”

“Yeah well I am feeling pretty suffocated right now. But listen it’s not about me, do you remember which room you helped Veronica lay down in just now?”

Her straight brows scrunch together “yeah, I do. Why?”

“Please don’t tell anyone, but I just saw Chuck leave the couches and he isn’t anywhere here.. I have a really bad feeling and I don’t want to tell anyone because it’s crazy and I feel terrible for even thinking it but -“

“Betty, Betty calm down. What are you even implying..” she made a confused face that spelled out the unspoken.

“Please I just have to know which room it is”

“Of course, anything for V” she takes Betty’s hand so easily it feels safer to walk back through the crowd with somebody holding her “But I know who he is, and you have nothing to worry about. Here”

They twisted the brass knob of said door, but it immediately jammed. Betty looked up at Jellybean in synchronisation to find her blue eyes just as cautious. “It’s locked”

“No, how could it be locked from the inside? There’s no way Veronica could do that. And I’m sure this is the room because that one’s occupied and the other doesn’t have a bed”

“Jellybean. Where are the keys?”

“What? What keys? I don’t know where they keep the keys! This is Veronica’s dad’s house she’s the only one that would know that!”

“We need to open the door” Betty told her.

“I know! I - I know. I know. I know, just follow me” she took Betty’s hand again.

“What? Where are we going we don’t have time to look for it! We have to just find another way to open the door do you have a bobby pin?”

“No Betty!” Jellybean’s voice became clearly laced with fear and panic when it goes lower like a loud whisper “do you think a bobby pin would work on these freaking doors? The answer’s no! Trust me I’ve tried before now please just follow me”
They had to go to a few different corners of the house to get to whatever Jellybean was finding, which Betty didn’t want to question when the little girl was strictly determined to do it her way. She eventually found out though, expecting something more like a disguised box of keys or some special flower pot they kept in instead of a blank faced boy staring into the night sky.

Jellybean let go of her hand then, kneeling down next to Jughead who had his legs hanging off the balcony of the porch. “Jug?” She looked into his eyes “you’re okay right?”

“Bean? What’s going on? Yes I’m fine”

“I need your help. We need your help. No questions asked but it’s Veronica - she might be in danger so you have to help us with something right now”

Betty shivered standing out on the cold porch, watching Jellybean talk to who she didn’t remember Kevin telling her is her brother. She watched the shock register on his face, but not before wondering what exactly he was doing out her sitting in the cold moping when people were all inside having a good time. Well - except her.

“Okay, come on this way”

He got up to follow his sister, then noticing a wavering blonde standing there by the door. She must be the ‘we’ Jellybean was talking about. Betty didn’t really know what Jughead’s purpose was in all of this but she trusted Jellybean to know how to handle this.

“Jughead Jones” he said firmly, right hand held out for her to shake. She nods at him, the most rushed of meetings

“Betty Cooper”

His eyes linger on her.

“Come on guys!”

When the three of them have finally gotten all the way back inside it’s pretty obvious now but they don’t even care, at this point Betty just has to get that door open and make sure Veronica’s safe. Her heart is beating so fast when Jughead tries the knob again, and she can practically hear her headache if that’s even possible - it all happens so fast but the three of them are equally suspicious and scared all the same.

“What do we do? Get the door open Jug!”

“What am I supposed to do?” He runs a hand through his hair exasperatedly “you sure she’s in here?”

“Yes! Jug just do something do anything!” When she screams in pure terror he knows that even if the worst isn’t to be true, he’d rather pay for this consequence than not making sure she’s alright. Jughead looked back and forth from Betty to Jellybean who was looking around for anything - any sign of anything - Chuck, some keys, anything.

“Okay you guys. Step back. Just watch out alright?!” Both girls move far behind as possible when Jughead clenched his teeth and felt to see where the hinges were and the keyhole.

“Okay. I can do this”
With a thud loud enough to alert the entire of Los Angeles, Jughead used all force possible in his leg to kick down right by where the keyhole was. They don’t know what happened first - seeing a door literally fall down, hearing it crash or the collective gasp and scream from people in the living room. But Betty and Jellybean wait for not a second longer to react when they can’t even believe it happened so fast, but their first instinct is to jump into the doorway and look inside.

“Ohmygod! Get the hell off her you creep!” Betty is the first to run in and without thinking heads straight for Chuck, he’s backing off the bed and the sight of him so close to Veronica who is sleeping soundly makes her want to tear the world apart.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?! You’re a scum!” Jellybean screamed in rage. She could feel her anger rise and it felt like hot water bubbling and boiling. Blocking out all other senses, all other sounds. “You’re sick in the head!”

“Veronica? Veronica - she’s not waking up” Betty goes to the edge of the bed and feels her friend’s skin colder than it should be. Why isn’t she waking up? Why isn’t she moving? Her head feels like it could explode. She looks to Jughead to help her but he’s barging towards Chuck with face split in fury, ready to join his sister and do something worse to Chuck.

Betty looks at them in a panic. Okay, okay what is the most important thing to do right now? Tick, tick, tick. Her mind can’t even put together an answer because it’s thinking a million things a minute, so shrouded by the state of situation she’s in. Veronica. Veronica. Make sure she’s okay.

“Jughead! Jughead help me please!” She feels like she’s screaming at the top of her lungs until she can hear him, he whips his head around at the broken plead. “Help me get her up, please I don’t know what’s happened to her”

“What the holy hell is going on in here?”

Oh great.

The first thing everybody crowding at the door sees is Jughead and Betty knelt next to Veronica’s sleeping body and Jellybean turned to them, a very frozen Chuck standing in the corner.

“Chuck?” Cheryl walks into the room, her brows eyes wide in shock and terror. “What - what”

“He was trying to touch her!” Jellybean shouted, pointing her finger at the guilty defendant.

“What?!” It’s Archie, he’s walked up next to Cheryl. But he didn’t stay there long. It only took a second to piece together everything that was happening from Chuck’s half unbuttoned shirt to Jughead and Betty getting Veronica off the bed. His vision became a tunnel and all he could feel was it snapping together. “Oh my god, Archie no!”

“Did you fucking put your hands on her huh?!” He lunged forward and grabbed a fistful of Chuck’s shirt twisting it tightly as possible and ramming him into the wall. Not waiting for a cheap answer, Archie threw the first punch right on his jaw.

A collective gasp came from everybody watching outside, including Cheryl and Josie who were struck to complete horror. “Answer me you son of a bitch!” Archie wiped the air out of his lungs again with a straight to nose punch.

“Where are you going?!” Cheryl cried, looking back and forth between them. “Veronica! Betty? Come on where are you guys going?” Josie reached her hand out to pull Betty and stop her, but the blonde girl wasn’t having another second in this house with all these people and the disgusting wretch of a human being.
“No do not try and stop me okay? We’re going, now. We’re getting out of here” the group of people clogging up the hallway moved apart as Betty walked between them, following Jughead who had scooped Veronica up and was carrying her in her arms. He didn’t say anything as they made their way straight out the house with Jellybean following close behind.

“Veronica?! Wha - Josie”

“Cheryl -“ Josie’s words were cut off but she would’ve told Cheryl that they would take care of her and not to worry, though she probably already knew that. But nobody could say anything else because Archie has just pulled Chuck off the wall and thrown him down to the floor in one swift motion.

“What did you do huh did you get what you wanted like with all those other girls? Did you think you could touch her and hurt her you piece of shit!” Archie couldn’t stop himself anymore. The implicit rage he felt was tearing everything way and all he could think was to put an end to the scumbag who tried to hurt the person he loves.

“No Andrews and we can talk about this without you attacking me?!”

His mouth covered in blood the next moment when Archie punched right where he could shut him up just right. The sound of skin colliding in the most violent manner became so loud for everyone to hear. It happened again. And again.

“Alright Andrews I wanted to do something but it never happened and Veronica isn’t hurt! If anything you’re the one that’s been hurting her!”

Archie’s grip on his neck fastened to a choke.

“You’re trying to make you coming on to Veronica my fault?!”

“You guys are broken up! You said yourself you can’t trust her!”

“That’s not the fucking point you dick!” Archie slammed his head as hard as he could much to everybody’s horror.

Chuck couldn’t see because his eyesight was starting to blur off but neither could Archie, who’s hand might even be broken from every hard bone he’d crashed it into. The primal instinct to keep going numbed whatever mundane pain his fucking hand might feel as he continued to pummel and punch the older boy beneath him.

All he could see was blood. Blood - everywhere, his mouth and his nose and everything splintering apart but it’s not enough! It won’t ever be enough.

“Dude stop it right now Archie!” Reggie shouted. He stood a foot away from where they were but right then it felt too close already to be with one enraged Archie Andrews.

“No I’m gonna fucking murder him!” He went again and this time he was sure it was some of his teeth that broke inside his mouth. Just looking down at his face torn apart and feeling how hot the liquid on his knuckles felt dazed him into an animalistic mindset telling him to never stop.

“Archie - you’re gonna go to jail if you do this, don’t give him the chance to ruin your life Archie we’ll call the cops right now! Are you listening to me? Archie!” Reggie felt like he was yelling into open air, Chuck’s body gone limp and Archie completely deaf to it all.

“Somebody call the cops!” Josie yelled after realising she didn’t have her phone.
“No way! Look at this place - it’s infested with drugs, we’ll all get arrested” Joey Ronsman answered immediately

“You think I care?” Josie stepped forward “do you see what is happening? He’s gonna bleed to death here and somebody almost got assaulted for gods sake. Call an ambulance and the police, then everybody get out!”

They did just that. As soon as Reggie had dragged Archie away from Chuck and he, Cheryl and Josie were the only ones left in the room gaping at their friend all bloody on the floor. They had no idea what to do or say once the sirens started blaring in, other than the truth. So caught in their crime but unable to find a way out. They couldn’t come up with a good lie either, not when Archie’s hand was all torn at the knuckles and it wouldn’t take a genius to figure out what happened.

Amidst the multiple cars and a gurney being pulled into the house, all the broke pieces of their amazing night scattered on the floor, the remainder of the group walked helplessly into one police’s car.

What’s happening to Archie? What’s happening to Chuck? Who is Chuck? How could he have tried to do something so monstrous? What happened to us?

It’s all things they can ponder on the ride to the station, staring out the window with a bleating fear of what’s to come.

When Jughead had eased Veronica into the backseat of his souped up black ford fiesta, Betty took the seat next to her and the Jones siblings sat up front. She doesn’t remember how long they sat trying to get out onto the main road but she eventually does see police cars, about three of them.

Oh, there’s only one reason they’d be here.

“What called the cops? They’re all gonna get busted in there” Jellybean says

“Doesn’t matter” Jughead mutters, his fingers tapping the wheel impatiently. In his heart Jughead is more than relieved to have escaped with Veronica and his sister before the cops got there, saving them much more trouble.

Betty observed slowly how the party house erupted in three stages. First, it was quiet. And then the sound of an ambulance came faintly in their hearing, not too far behind these police cars. Then, the doors flew open and everybody inside came running out into their cars with more than freaked out carved into all their faces.

Oh, god. She already hated this party before. It was a bad idea. It was all a bad idea. It’s one fifteen, mom is going to kill me. And where’s Polly? Oh my god, is she gets arrested... Betty searched everybody still pouring out to see any sign of her sister but there wasn’t, not that she could be too sure from a mile away.

Betty had to stop looking at it. The cop cars were there, and Jughead’s car moved onto the main road right as they had put a halt to everybody leaving the party. She could feel tears forming in her eyes, sitting in this car of somebody she doesn’t know next to a girl who is totally gone and it feels like the world is falling apart to look at her, the vivacious and lively Veronica Lodge. Her eyes shut and not even supporting her own weight.

Betty felt her chest tightening. Veronica. Chuck. Archie punching him, the cops showing up. Polly. All the alcohol and the past curfew and her mother must he going mad. The images of the night
replayed in her mind, from the death - brink game to panicking, Jughead breaking down a door, more panic and fear and all the danger. She shuts her eyes so tight when more of the clammy feeling in her throat climbs up and if she doesn’t shut her lips it’ll all spill out.

But then she’s trying with all her might to breathe, her pale hands fistig and her eyes shutting close then open. Suddenly even her feet feel like jello in their heels, but for one minute the view of the car seat in front goes blurry and then it vanishes before reappearing again. And again.

“Uh, Jughead? Can you do something? She’s kind of scaring me” she looked into the rear view mirror with genuine perplexity in her eyes.

“What Veronica? What’s going on with her?” He took a turn

“Not Veronica. Betty. She’s totally losing it”

Jughead looked up into the rear view mirror then, just for one second to see the blonde girl Betty Cooper with her knees to her chest and her eyes red while heaving breaths.

“Hey - wh, what’s wrong with her? Bean do you have some Valium?”

“Yes, in my purse” she starts searching frantically in the little Balenciaga stuffed with things until she finds it.

“Here take two of these. And do not panic, Betty. Everything will be alright. We’ll all be alright” Jughead assures her, while he’s still looking ahead at the road.

_Don’t panic? How could I not panic? How are they so calm right now?_

She’s still hyperventilating too much to take the pill but soon the car swerves to a stop in front of one tower looking house in the Hidden Hills. It’s a thirty minute drive from Sherman Oaks back to the Jones’ home, which had given Betty enough time to gather herself - it was too much of a nightmare when one moment she was literally fighting for breath.

In silence and at speed, Jughead picked up Veronica again while Jellybean opened the door and he climbed up one stairwell into a guest room, where he laid Veronica down gently on the soft linen comforter. It was only then that they could all take a breath.

“I’ll text her parents and say she’s at a sleepover here” Jellybean fishes Veronica’s phone out from her purse and says this pointed at Jughead.

“Yeah, thanks” he mumbles, still staring at her. “I’ve got it from here Bean, you should go get some sleep”

“Ohkay. Thank you Jug, and please take care of her” she gave him a kiss on the cheek, sighing before leaving the room with Veronica’s phone in her hand.

Betty was left sitting at the foot of the bed, asking herself how she ended up following an acquaintance and her brother into their foreign home at the early hours of the morning with no idea where her sister is. _I’m really screwed, aren’t I?_ She texted Polly and called her a million different times while Jughead moved around the dark room getting water and coffee with Aspirin and a waste basket by the bedside table.

On the tenth call, still no pick up, Betty locked her phone and threw it on the bed. “Shit, Polly” she rubbed her eyes.
“Are you trying to get hold of someone? Oh and would you rather I get my chauffeur to drive you home than to crash here? We have another guest room if you’re too tired” Jughead places a purple mug on the table and sat down next to her.

She shifted away slightly, hoping it isn’t too obvious that she’s suddenly aware how close he is in this dark room with just the moonlight shining through the window. “Uhm, yeah my sister went missing with Jason Blossom at the start of the party and she still hasn’t called me back”

Jughead scoffed lightly “Jason would make sure she’s safe whatever happens”

“Are you sure? I have no idea where she is or with who”

“Betty” he puts his hand over hers, an act of comfort but it felt more intimate than it should when her skin tingled under his. She looked at their hands then back up to his eyes, his eyes that she was just beginning to realise how blue and bright they are. “Take a breath. You’re shaking”

She nodded, surprised at herself for not pulling away from his touch “I’m - fine” she reassures shakily.

He offers a half hearted grin, that’s all he can muster up right now. But here in the white moonlight and after everything just tumbled down, it’s more than enough.

Jughead looked behind him to where Veronica’s motionless body still slept soundly without a budge. He sighed. “I feel like such an idiot. I didn’t help her, Betty. I didn’t help her”

“How would you have known such a thing?” She looks closer to him

“I should’ve known. I should have known - when she left that stupid party with St Clair, I should’ve stopped her. I knew she would’ve never done that normally and I didn’t save her when I had the chance. I mean - I called her over and over but I knew I should’ve just went after them, I can’t believe I just let her get hurt. And now it almost happened again” his words came out in a slight squeak trying to stop himself from crying.

“Happened again? You think Nick St Clair..”

“No, I don’t know. But clearly tonight Archie and Veronica are both a lot more messed up than I thought over their break up, and some people take advantage of the fact that she’s not as strong footed as she usually is”

“Look Jughead, you saved her tonight. Really, you did” Betty assures. She can’t look into his eyes because they’re staring down at the floor beneath them, dwelling on his despair.

He stayed quiet for a moment. “When we were all in middle school together, Veronica, Archie and I were all really good friends. when my mom left -“ his breath gets caught in his throat “when our moms left, Veronica became our light. She would have us over for Friday night sleepovers and we loved all the same classic movies, she even endured eating Chinese takeout and greasy pizza because Archie and I loved it so much. There were times when the only people I’d see other than Jellybean all weekend was them, spending all day and all night together. Of course I knew by that point she and Archie were becoming more than friends and it was blatantly obvious - but I didn’t mind being a third wheel. They were just - my best friends in the whole world you know? They were all I had”

Betty listened to his story attentively, learning that he used to be a lot closer to V&A than she knew. From the way his eyes started to redden in the corners and the tremble of his lip, she leaned in closer to him and squeezed this stranger’s hand back.
“Did something happen between you guys?”

He shakes his head “No, things just changed when they went to Raffles and I had my own friend group in Costal, but we were still always close. Tonight I thought Archie was such an idiot, he doesn’t even care how much he’s ruining the person who’s in love with him. But I’m just as fucking stupid. I let her leave the ball, I let her almost get hurt by him tonight, I wasn’t there for her because I was too selfish to not get involved in their drama”

“Jughead, hey” Her voice went louder from a whisper to a shaky call. His senses were clouded with Betty’s strawberry and guava shampoo in her blonde hair so close to him and the warmth of her right next to him. “Like you said, she’s going to be okay. And we’ll get him back together Jughead, I promise. We’ll do it together”

(x.x.x.x)

“Archie, I don’t even know how you’re going to explain this” Mary glances down to the wooden table across from him, her shoulders tense and making him nervous. “I was so proud of you! I saw you act brilliantly, you sold out a whole theatre, and then we let you go be a teenager for one night and now we have a lawsuit on our hands!”

“Mom! How is this any of my fault?”

“Look at yourself Archie!” She scolded “I was just in the most embarrassing assembly with your principal and ten other parents. On a Sunday morning mind you, - my son is the one responsible for putting a woman in jail and now his friend in surgery!”

“Mom. If I had told the police what happened last night -“

“What would you have told them, Archie? You had no reason to attack Chuck Clayton like that. Archie, who are you? What’s happened to you?”

Archie ran his hand over his face ineffectually. “What’s happened to me mom? He tried to hurt Veronica. If anything it’s him that should be pressed charges over by her parents!”

She crossed her arms over her chest and stared sternly up at Archie who refused to sit down. “Archie. Listen to me. The Lodges would have no merit in pressing charges over Chuck when they’re daughter hosted a party with expensive drugs and was responsible for everyone being there. There isn’t a scratch on the girl and unless you didn’t notice Archie? Not a single one of your classmates was willing to confess to even being at the party. All we know is Chuck Clayton is in the hospital and you are the one responsible for it. Next time you want to get in a fist fight I suggest you take a look at who has the credentials Archie, because as far as Director Tom Keller knows all that happened is you violently attacked Chuck Clayton for sport”

“It wasn’t for sport mom! Are you even listening to me?”

“I don’t care what happened Archie” his eyes grew wide as saucers when he heard his mom say something so ignorantly. But like the expert she is at sugar coating her harsh words, Mary’s voice went down to a gravely serious tone suggesting how afraid she is. Archie didn’t buy it. “It doesn’t matter whatever else happened. My son has a restraining order against him!” She threw her hands up

“Do you have any idea how horrible that is? I swear to god Archie, I saved your name by bailing Geraldine a lesser sentence before. Now this? You’re only sixteen and if you keep this up I don’t know how many more times I can catch you from falling into a jail cell!”
“You know what mom fuck this” Archie turned on his heel and grabbed his keys like he’s wanted to do since the first moment mom walked back into this house. He had to forget this. Yes, maybe he messed up. He’s messed up. He feels the beginning of rage tears clouding in his eyes as he sticks the key in the ignition and zooms out the gates before his mom can have it locked. Will he probably get a few speeding tickets in the next hour or so? Yes. And he shouldn’t even be driving with the shaky risk that he’s injured hand loses control of the wheel. But his head feels like it’ll crack open if he doesn’t leave, just anger and denial about everything his mother was saying.

Of course it matters. It’s Veronica. Of course it matters, and if nobody else cares than I do. Kevin’s dad, Principal Weatherbee, Mr and Mrs Clayton. Even my mom. They can do whatever they want because I don’t care what’ll happen to me, what I did that night was because it mattered to me. It still matters to me.

(x.x.x.x)

On Monday morning Veronica is fumbling by her locker trying to get books out and stall so she doesn’t have to show up to English too early, but all she’s succeeding in doing is hearing the hushed whispers of everyone around her. With a school that has a very exclusive acceptance, gossip goes around faster than you can say scandalous. Today is no different, from “the Emma cast got questioned by the FBI yesterday!” , “Veronica Lodge might get punished for hosting the party” to “Jacob and Evelyn Clayton are suing Archie and Veronica for all the damage they did!”

That last one made her shudder more than the rest. To say her weekend has been hectic would he an understatement (she can’t even keep up with half the shit that happened) and there’s still so much unfinished business that getting to come to school on Monday despite the gossip and rumours still felt like a win in normalcy.

She sighed and pulled her black cardigan tighter around her, feeling unusually exposed or something today by all the stares. Cursing herself for being in this situation until the footsteps of another minor star in the gossip Betty Cooper came down the hall. She caught sight of Veronica and immediately went to her.

“Hey Veronica. What happened after I left yesterday? Did you really go to the station?” Her fingers tapped on her binder while she whispered

“Hi, Betty. And no, all that happened was both my parents contributing to noise pollution with their lecturing until we got home and I locked myself in my room”

“Wait - were they mad at you?”

She looks up at Betty with her stone cold eyes but they’re filled with a lot more emotion when you’re this close to her. They just stare and widen a little with her bottom lip between her teeth. “What do you mean? Of course they’re mad. I committed a felony”

“But - weren’t they like... you know? More worried about you? And didn’t they fight back to Chuck’s lawyer?” Betty whips her body around and follows Veronica who starts down the hallway. The eyes are following them, so she stares blankly straight ahead of her while Betty talks.

“No” she sighed “Why would they be? I’m fine.”

“Veronica” Betty puts her hand over Veronica’s arm and stops her. The raven haired girl looks up half heartedly “Didn’t you tell them, about...?”
Right then Veronica’s eyes looked away from Betty’s concerned face too fast so she didn’t have to bear the pain. It hurts too much. When she asked that, her throat trembled and the utter memory of it made her want to lean into her pillows and cry again. She hopes her blank face is still working, because there’s too much going on inside and a question like that could just shatter her into a million pieces.

“Look, of course I did okay?” Veronica’s voice went as low as it could and she pulled Betty closer so no one could hear them “I gave them the gist of it outside the office when we got there from The Pavillion yesterday, I tried to say something to Chuck’s lawyer after you guys had left - but they shut me up before I could say too much and they told me clearly to not utter a word without my lawyer’s permission. Of course I wanted to press charges and do so much more, but I’m not in the place to do that right now okay? Not when I could get screwed both by this school and the law if I say anything about that night”

With that, she left in her heels with a heavy thud in her heart. Betty looked after her, the appalled and sympathetic feeling knitting together. Veronica looked positively pale which is unlike her, she looked sick to her stomach. “I’m fine” doesn’t hold any merit and Betty knows that.

No, that can’t be right. As powerful as Chuck’s parents are, Veronica had every right to tell the police about him.

She realises quickly that Veronica’s parents may have already told their daughter to keep their mouth shut, but that’s not how it should be. She decides I’d rather be honest than afraid, and Betty knows the perfect way to get people to listen, and just the person that could help. Her parents thought her all about it.

(x.x.x.x)

“Well well, Betty... Cooper is it? Didn’t ever think I’d see you here”

She took a step into the appointed Red and Black Office and looked around the room in amazement. Much like the rest of this school, the Red and Black was lit up marvellously so you could see everything in the clearest form. The walls were glass windows overlooking St Pauls Park and the rest of it was made out of bookshelves with neatly organised books. The desks had everything from all the stationery you could ever dream of, two MacBook Pros and two printers. It really was like creative space haven.

“Oh.. wow. Jughead! Listen, I really wanted to talk to you -“

“I can see that” he smiles

“So..” Betty laughs nervously “On Saturday night... you were our hero. And I have a huge favour to ask of you, but maybe this will help you feel better about what happened?”

“What are you talking about exactly?” He looked at her curiously

“Well.. you run the Red and Black right? And you do coverage of most of the things that happen in both our schools? I was thinking.. how come Raffles Arts doesn’t have a newspaper?”

“Because Blondie-Betts, the Rafflesias deemed that print journalism is dead way back in 2008. They think social media coverage is more up to date and instant, the only reason the Red and Black still sells to Raffles is because I have an inside scoop to the students’ lives that no one else does”

“So you’re a reporter too?” Her eyes widened excitedly
Jughead narrowed his eyes. “Yes.. where is this going?”

She took a deep breath and clasped her hands before saying “I want to do an exposé on the real reason Chuck Clayton is where he is right now. Why we’re all where we are”

“Betty” Jughead stepped forward to her waringly “You’re asking for a war if you do this. I’m not trying to silence you, but saying something like this is going to put you even deeper into the mess that is already infesting between your school, The Lodges, The Claytons and The Andrews. From what I know they already have a twisted plan to save themselves by doing something else for the other. And if you want to get involved they’re only going to pull you down with them. Like Archie, Veronica, Chuck... all the rest of them already are”

“Didn’t you say yourself you wished you hadn’t just been so selfish as to stay out of the drama? What Chuck did he could do again and this has changed Raffles forever. The people who know might not want to admit it out of fear, but it’s true. Don’t you think that needs to stop?”

“Betty” he said her name in a meaningful whisper, with his eyes boring into hers “I hate to break this to you. But, I’m pretty sure something like this has already happened. Probably worse, and I know none of our parents could deal with any of us getting into some kind of trouble like that. Didn’t you see what happened to Geraldine Grundy? Archie’s mom defended her son’s harasser because she doesn’t want his name to be tainted.”

“What, so just because you’re all rich and powerful nobody’s actions will have consequences? Jughead.. I can’t - I can’t believe that”

“It’s complicated Betty. And not good either”

“So do this with me!” She pleaded “If we speak up not only will Chuck be put in the spotlight for his terrible actions, but it’ll defuse anything The Lodges are trying to stir with The Claytons to take care of their name. They won’t be able to hide, not if we show them first. After all, think of Veronica? And the dozens of girls in our school who have been or possibly could be put in that position? We’re all at risk”

Jughead rubbed his eyes. What Betty’s saying is true, and the mere thought of anyone else.. he imagines his sister, sweet little Jellybean who might think she knows better than everybody else, if she were ever there.. he wants to punch a hole in the wall. Especially with how close she is to Chuck and his cronies.

He sighs “My friend Toni Topaz already is my co writer here, so if that’s what you we’re suggesting...”

“No. I want this to be mine, I want to prove it to my parents and the school and everybody else. People need to know Jughead, but what I do need to ask of you is to help me put this together. If you want credit I’ll put your name on it but if you don’t, I’ll make sure no one knows you had anything to do with it. If anyone falls it’ll be me”

“I’ll help you. And edit, if you want” he says slowly

“Okay great!” Betty clasps her hands together happily “Thank you so much! Okay, um where do we start?”

“It’s your story. And your voice, but it has to be legitimate. Meaning we need people at the party to fess up to seeing what happened, for starters. Which I don’t know how that’ll happen when they wouldn’t even budge to the FBI”
Betty grins manically “I’ll find a way. I guess that’s my first assignment?”

He nods, watching her back out of the door with a huge smile on her face “You just planted a ticking time bomb, Betty Cooper”

(x.x.x.x)

“Hey guys, I have something totally important I need to talk to you about’

“Oh my god Betty, this is the lunch table. Can’t we have a moment of peace in this school, or at all for that matter?” Cheryl bit off a piece of her zucchini

“Oh shit. Cher did you text everyone yet?” Veronica looked at her friend with startled brown eyes

“Great! No, I forgot during my free period. I’ll do it now. Oh and Cooper, would you mind fetching me a water and some Goji berries? I’m parched”

“What are you texting about?” Betty squinted her eyes and ignored Cheryl’s order

“Vixens practice is off today” Josie replies “Almost half of us have shit to do after school and I think everyone’s tired enough after last weekend”

“That’s what I wanted to talk to you guys about” Betty gulped

Cheryl and Veronica both looked up from their phones and food. Their eyes held a demanding expression, careful and warning “Whatever for?” They asked slowly

“Well. You guys haven’t said anything to the po po about Chuck right? What really happened?”

“Shut up you nightmare smurfette” Cheryl hissed “Weren’t you in the same assembly as us? Of course not, and it’s going to stay that way unless you want us all in trouble”

Betty shakes her head “Cheryl, I’m writing an article on what happened. It’s not a dirty secret, neither should anyone feel ashamed or scared! I want you guys to give your name as witnesses to qualify the story”

“You’re new here so you might not get it, but anytime someone gets in trouble - this is how it goes. If we want to keep floating we’ll keep our mouth shut until the story fades away or closes on its own. Trust me, it’s the path of least resistance. And the best way to save ourselves from getting our asses whooped”

“Cheryl’s right” Veronica mumbles “My parents might just send me abroad for all the trouble I’ve gotten into this year”

“You’re asking us to fight with basically the entire universe?” Josie raises a brow

“Not fight” Betty shakes her head “witness. If I do this Principal Weatherbee and the FBI will have no choice but to take action on Chuck once he’s out of the hospital. Don’t you guys want that? Don’t you all want that?”

“Of course we do. But Betty, we have no proof and not much higher ground. Besides they’re right, you’ll get ruined by all our parents and the school if I’m being completely honest. No one wants to be a part of this, they’re doing everything to hide it” Veronica says truthfully. She looks distraught and tired, not even bearing to look at her phone for anything.

“So we’re just going to back down? Veronica, you told me how you felt yesterday morning -“
“I said I wanted to press charges, but Betty look at the facts! I can’t remember any of it, my mind is like a void after the game and it’s not like anybody else would witness to it” her voice cracked at the end of the sentence much to her own horror, but right now Veronica can’t even control her own functions. She feels like a walking example of emotionally unstable and she hates it.

“You told me just how hurt you were. Veronica, I can’t just forget that”

Veronica sat in silence and took a deep breath. She stared down at her lap, recounting all the memories and everything she could remember from that night, which isn’t much at all. There’s a blank space that happened from the moment she had too much of the drugs and she’s been going out of her mind trying to remember anything else. That’s probably what she hates the most.

Feeling so helpless and held back, just waking up in one of The Joneses’ guests beds with a headache and feeling like she had to scrub off her skin in the shower. When they told her, she admitted she wanted Chuck to burn. And everything else. And a phone call from her parents saying she had to go to school right away and everyone’s waiting for her.

“It’s not going to work Betty” she whispered weakly, shaking her head.

“I have a plan, V” Betty assures and puts her hand on Veronica’s. “But I do want your permission, if you want me to do this”

She resisted the instinct of hers to turn to Cheryl or Josie for reassurance, for approval, for their opinion. She pondered it, this happened to me. And I can’t pretend it didn’t, no matter how much my parents try to convince me it did. Should I listen to my lawyer and suffer the nightmare with no one to tell, all for an image?

When have I ever not fought back?

“Well you have my word. But I’m warning you Betty, you’ll get looped into the holy war.”

“I wouldn’t do this if I didn’t think it was the right thing”

“I’m with you” Josie put her hand over theirs intertwined on the table “I’ll witness. Or do whatever for your story, it better be a good one though. Boys like Chuck aren’t going to get away with it anymore”

Betty looked up and smiled. She had the approval of at least a quarter of the student body with Josie in, but she would need more than that.

“You guys can stir the pot all you want” Cheryl folded her arms “My home life is already a Dickensian nightmare, I won’t let this stupid boy ruin the rest of it too”

“So do this, Cher” Veronica looked at her “if you want” she adds quietly

“Cheryl, you have control of this entire school. If you agree to this so will everyone else, and that proves you stronger than even the FBI. Stronger than your parents, all of it. You wanted me to make my first kill? Well this is it”

Cheryl narrowed her eyes, not wanting to give in to her point so easily. But Betty was right, and no matter what the outcome she’d like to see her parents put out of their place for once. For Veronica. “Fine then, I’m in -“

“Veronica! Can we ask you, is it really true that Archie had a huge fight with Chuck at your after party over you? Is Chuck really into you?” Two brunette girls from the Sophomore year came up to
their self appointed table and totally bust the scene.

Veronica wants to tell herself it’s ridiculous what people are saying, but the real story is even madder.

“Can you guys get me a water? And some Gojis? I’ll answer any questions after”

“Sure!” They skipped off to get the food and water, Veronica standing up promptly after them.

“Last warning. You might get yourself killed. But I’ll catch you guys later, I have to call this guy about the door Jughead broke down”

(x.x.x.x)

“Jughead. I did it, I got the girls at Raffles to confessing that they witnessed what happened to Veronica at the party on Saturday. And their signatures are all here, I admit it took a little prodding Cheryl but I did it and - oh! I’m sorry.. I - I didn’t know anyone was in here”

Betty stops short at the doorway of the freshly reopened Blue and Gold, where she had told Jughead to meet her for this meeting since she’d gotten progress. What she didn’t expect was to see Archie Andrews sitting there too in a deep conversation with Jug and his hand wrapped in gauze.

“Betty. It’s fine, come on in” Jughead felt so weird inviting Betty into what is actually her space, but even more so by the fact that Archie had just heard everything about the exposé he was hoping to ease him into. He saw his friend’s face out of the corner of his eye furrow and freeze at what he heard.

“Uhm. Hi, Archie. I... didn’t know you were back at school” Betty awkwardly placed her bag down on the desk along with the big pile of signed witnesses.

“I just got in today” Archie replied. He was supposed to be on another suspension for attacking a student, but after his parents strongly pleaded and lightly bribed he ended up not having to have another set of extra tutoring for his missed school days.

“Uh...”

“Are you guys actually writing an article on Saturday night or the daily scoop Jughead was telling me about?” Archie asked outrightly

“Arch -“

“Wait a minute, you’ve planned this all along? You two?”

“What?” Jughead stood up “What’s wrong with us?”

“Nothing, just an unusual pairing.”

“Archie, look it was my idea” Betty stepped forward closer to them. She prayed to the universe that he wouldn’t thwart their already developing plan and at least understand it. “I asked Jughead to be a part of this, you don’t need to be mad at him”

“If you publish a story saying Chuck tried to rape Veronica, her whole life will be ruined and she’ll hate you for it. My dad says The Lodges have some huge business ordeal on the rise, and they’ll banish her for causing even more trouble - at least that’s how their screwed up minds look at it”

“What about her justice? Archie?” Jughead turned to his friend, a cross look on his face.
“I got my justice that night and that’s why Chuck’s in the hospital”

“I’m talking about for her Archie! Not you!”

Betty backed down when the two friends stood face to face at almost the same height, their eyes burning a war between them. Jughead had suddenly gotten very defensive over something he, in the beginning hadn’t been very keen on either.

“What will make you stop this?” Archie gritted his teeth

“Are you insane?” Jughead blinked “You’re insane!”

“Promise me right now this story stays where it is, both of you”

“Do you even still love her?!” Jughead shouted. The room fell to a complete silence, Betty looked over her shoulder in relief that she’d shut the door.

“Of course I do!” Archie yelled back “No matter what shit happens between us recently, I’ll always love her! And that’s why I would do anything to protect her, including whatever it takes to not run your mouths”

Jughead stared back at him blankly. His passionate roar of upturned love to Veronica was not only beguiling, but riveting to see him break.

“Veronica said she wanted me to do it” Betty spoke up. Archie didn’t look at her, his eyes merely down casting before meeting Jughead’s again.

“I know her, and I know her parents. Jughead, don’t tell me you really believe this is a good idea. You know they’ll torture her for putting them in jeopardy!”

“Archie. As a seasoned journalist in our world, you have my word that this could blow up a lot of ends, yes. But it’ll also give Veronica what she needs and nobody could hide from it then. Your mother? Her parents? They won’t have another choice but to put Chuck in his place!”

Archie felt his heart tighten at the name. Yes, Chuck. Chuck who was the coolest boy he ever met as a skinny little freshman and jumped at the chance to be his friend. Chuck who ‘comforted’ him after every break up with Veronica. Chuck who taught him everything he knew about football, Friday nights with the guys, helping out with his Science homework and Sunday mornings surfing their private beach waves.

But also Chuck who immediately got a little too close to Veronica with the teasing even when she was barely a teenager, Chuck who started the nickname all the football players use for her ‘Lolita Lodge’ after he walked in on them in the locker room. Chuck who shamelessly told him what he did to Veronica when she and Archie were broken up, all drunk and proud. Chuck who tried to hurt her preciousness, in the most heartless and senseless way.

“If you guys are sure?”

The two co writers nodded

“Then I’ll go on record about what happened too. And I’ll do everything I can to help through the aftermath, if she’ll let me”

Betty and Jughead sighed. “Let’s get to work then”
“Look at your leg, it’s totally bent” Cheryl walked up to one of the girls doing a heel stretch at the centre of their routine and pointed it out.

The girl huffed. She looked defeated with herself, almost everybody was. Cheryl and Josie have been extra cold the entire practice going on about how they weren’t up to par when the first away game is coming up. To make up for their lack of prep time, Cheryl had called an early morning practice before first period that had everyone yawning and dragging their feet enough to get on even Veronica’s nerves.

Not to mention the small drab of girls who had not made it to the practice yet, who’d assumably over slept or just couldn’t bear to be sweaty and tired before eight in the morning. Betty being one of them.

“Sorry! We didn’t stretch or even have practice on Monday or Wednesday” the girl dabbed tears forming at her eyes

“I’m sorry, why can’t you stretch at home in your own gym? Am I wrong? Or are you lazy?”

The girl looked down and mumbled “you’re right”

“Exactly. So get your leg up like it’s not burning the depths of hell”

Just then the big gym door of Raffles Institution burst open and everybody woke up from their sleepy stupor to see who it was. Expecting one of the late Vixens, but surprisingly.. it was Ethel Muggs.

“This is cheerleading practice, you ghoul. Not the marching band” Cheryl put her hands on her hips

“I’m not in the marching band, Cheryl Blossom. Good one though” the younger girl said “but I’m here to see Veronica”

“Me?” She looked up, making her way through the gaggle of girls getting ready for the pyramid to get to Ethel “What’s up, Ethel?”

“For what your evil, miserable, crime - stock of a father did to my dad, for letting him lose his job over not a single misconduct. For ruining an entire family and all your other sins, Veronica. I sentence you guilty. Your punishment is this”

The entire gymnasium gasped loudly when Ethel threw her takeaway cup of what was most likely a cranberry juice from Earth Organic, Veronica could even smell the sweetness on herself right away. But the dark blush red made it look more like the gnarly image of blood.

For a moment, Veronica froze.

She had no idea what to do, what Ethel was talking about, or what just happened.

She just wiped the soaking liquid out of her eyes and stared gapingly into the eyes of the person who just put her down a million levels. She moved, and without a second thought ran straight out of the gymnasium with her sneakers squeaking against the floor. Veronica felt like her heart was breaking. Literally, shredding into a million pieces if she didn’t know any better she’d think she’s having a heart attack. Her vision is starting to blur the floors into
the walls as she runs without looking back, but luckily her muscle memory throws her into the right bathroom and she stumbles around breathlessly until she’s gripping onto one of the sinks so tightly her knuckles go white.

Look, look at your reflection. Dripping in blood. Can you even see yourself?

“Veronica? Veronica!”

She thinks she’s so out of her mind that she doesn’t even recognise herself. All Veronica can do is break down into a puddle of sobbing, heart wrenching, bone chilling tears.

“Veronica!”

The door flies open and she feels the arms of somebody around her hugging her close, keeping her from losing herself again. She doesn’t stop crying or even register who the person is behind her when her hair makes a shield of black and sticky red in front of her face. She looks terrifying, and feels terrified herself.

“Veronica, come on and get this washed off” a tender voice says to her. When she moves her hair out of her face and reaches for the tap, like she’s syphoned to the voice and will do whatever it asks.. it’s when she sees it’s Cheryl.

Her voice breaks into an understandable mess when she tries to cry “I’m alone. I’m alone. I didn’t do anything!” but all Cheryl hears is her slurring words.

In the mirror her eyes look as red as tomatoes, but not as red as the stuff still dripping down her forehead and trickling into her ears and staining her Vixens shirt. Her voice comes out in harsh sobs again.

“Hey, hey Veronica. Calm down, look at me” Cheryl lets go of her from behind to stand next to her instead, the younger girl not able to tear her eyes away from the gruesome image in the mirror.

“Wash up, don’t cry” she keeps holding her hands until they get just as red and wet as Veronica’s are, slowly disappearing down the drain in the sink.

When she’d finally gotten a hold of herself, taking strands of black hair and running it under the water, a long time after more uncontrollable sobs and ugly crying. Cheryl let go of her hands and leaned against the cool tiled wall watching her.

She’s using the washing up as something to focus on, intently so that she won’t remember anything else and Cheryl can see that. She asks after a long silence “Why did you just let her get to you? Why didn’t you fight back?”

“Because I’m tired” Veronica sniffs

“What was she talking about?”

“I don’t know! Maybe my dad did do something to hers but I have no idea and I don’t know even know how he would ruin their family by doing that, but maybe she does have a right to be upset”

“For what?” Cheryl’s forehead creased

“For me being a bitch to her for as long as I can remember? For all of us being such mean girls to her and everybody else we don’t like?”
The older girl crossed her arms defensively “Why are you suddenly saying this? And what does this have to do with the fact that you’re having a breakdown over tragic Ethel Muggs throwing some fruit juice on you?”

Veronica turned her body to face Cheryl at the speed of lightning, her wet hair splattering on her face which made Cheryl flinch. “I don’t know what went wrong, Cheryl? But I’ve been pretty distracted recently if you haven’t noticed. Okay? My parents are building a bribe case with the person who attacked me and I’m currently in a law suit which I’m not winning with all the parents including yours - blaming me for the party! I broke up with my boyfriend, who I’m terrified I’ve lost forever. He doesn’t even love me anymore after what happened? and some girl who I bullied in freshman year just lost her shit on me and a person I’ve known since I was five attempted to rape me!” Her voice broke at the end of her sentence, face crumpling up in heat again.

“I have no idea who to trust or who he is and so forgive me if I’m kind of having a breakdown, okay?”

“Of course I noticed Veronica I was there” Cheryl reached to touch her hand, but Veronica pulled back and took a step away. “And... You know you haven’t lost Archie. He still loves you, hell he almost killed Chuck for touching you!”

She stared at herself in the mirror. “I wish I could press charges, I wish he’d burn”

“I don’t think you’ll have to worry about that”

“What?” Veronica looked at Cheryl who was staring down at her phone with that terrified face. “What Cheryl?”

“I guess your project’s project came through”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

Her pale features pressed into cold concern “Ginger just texted me. The Blue and Gold’s article is out and people are ballistic. His entire social media is plastered with... holy, rapist? Villain? All these -“

“Cheryl what else did Ginger tell you?”

“PrinceCourt Hospital on the way to school is swarmed with people and reporters, oh my god it’s spread like wildfire. But - but.. the war’s just started, my mom is already calling me”

Veronica couldn’t control her shocked and awestruck expression at everything Cheryl’s saying. But her Apple watch alerted a call from her mom, and it just barely snapped her back into reality. “Mine is too”

“We should talk to them together, figure out what to do first before Chuck’s parents do something worse to you”

“W - wait! Wait, I have to find Betty first!”

Veronica took off out the bathroom door and sprinted from one end of the school’s gymnasiums to the main building where Betty would probably be. She didn’t care that her hair was wet and her shirt still had faint stains on them, everyone saw her running down the halls with following calls.

“Justice for Veronica!”

“Chuck Clayton’s a scumbag who deserves what he got!”
“Veronica, are you okay?”

She ignored it all and followed the trail of students getting their fresh print papers all to see the real story. Until she ran into Jughead, handing them out.

“Jug! Oh my god” she took one of the papers from his hands and read the front page, not believing the impact of what this all was doing. “Did she really write this? I mean - she was just asking about it two days ago! When did she have time to write it?”

“Thank Betty, she stayed up all night to get it done” Jughead grinned “and yes, we’re all on your side Veronica”

She wanted to hug him, or do something but all Veronica could think was that she had to find Betty. She looked into the cafe and the fountain lockers, but the last place she looked was the courtyard. Standing there by their usual table with a stack of newspapers being taken by every student surrounding her.

Veronica ran up to her and pushed through some of the students still lining up for their paper. It totally took the blonde girl off guard when Veronica showed up with a crushing hug, her arms wrapped around her like the warmest, safest embrace.

She couldn’t believe someone had finally defied their quota and walked head first into the fire, which is soon to come and eat both of them alive. But for now, this is the best thing she’s ever had. Veronica hugs her tightly and closes her eyes to stop the tears “You’re the best, Betty”
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter #7 Beautiful Mess

- even in the line of fire, when everything is on the wire

  even up against the wall, our love is untouchable -

“Oh Miss Veronica Lodge and Miss Elizabeth Cooper, to the principal’s office immediately”

“Oh Miss Veronica Lodge and Miss Elizabeth Cooper, to the principal’s office immediately”

She let go of Betty in her arms, the only part of them still connected is their hands intertwined. Veronica smiles with a little laugh and a bite on her bottom lip, like classic Veronica Lodge, but she’s got tears still watering her eyes. “Come on”

Veronica and Betty make it through the tropes of students in the courtyard, all of whom had stopped when Veronica ran onto the grounds. Now Cheryl watched as they trotted off the scene hand in hand, the picture of opposites.

“Deep breath, Betty. Just keep telling yourself- whatever happens in there? It’s only a little obstacle in the big war. And this exposé, was your idea”

Betty nods determinedly before Veronica pushes open the big door to meet Principal Weatherbee. This is the second time she’s in his office this week, and more times she’s spoken to him this year than ever before. He had a lot to say about using the platform of the school newspaper for debunking one of their own students, and what this will do to them forever. Betty did just like Veronica asked, and gave him short safe answers while staring calmly without fluster.

For Veronica, he had some choice things to say about how her parents had promised to not bring up anything about that night. He was in the middle of telling her she’d essentially stolen one of the components to their plan about how to wrap things up nicely without anyone getting hurt.

_ I already did get hurt. _ She wants to say or at least almost

Until Hiram and Hermione Lodge, two people Betty recognised from the pictures online only busted into the office without any warning.

“What the hell is going on in here?” The man, he had the same eery cold air to him that Veronica did, if not magnified by a tenfold. He was strong all over and carried himself that way, already telling everyone around him he’s not easy to like just by body language. You could also see some striking resemblances between him and his daughter, mostly in the jaw and unforgiving glare.

Other than that, Veronica is all the woman next to him - cunning eyes and soft feminine features. She has that look when she’s ready for anything, to fight anything. Veronica recognises it. It’s stone cold and untouchable and even more perfectly finished than usual.

“Don’t say another word, Veronica” Hermione places both hands on her arms and pulls her out of the chair with a tug, whispering it shrilly into her ear. “And what on earth happened to your hair?”
She hears something like Hiram saying something wrong about the Principal but then both Mr and Mrs Cooper come into the office just as Betty watches Veronica get pulled away by her parents.

“Elizabeth!” oh god

“Again?” Alice throws her hands up. There’s a little commotion between both parents and their daughters until Hiram and Hermione finally manage to lessen the sentence of the two avenging angels.

“Good, there you are” Hermione waves her hand not caring about the attention it pulls to Archie who had been standing around the corner pretending to he subtle. Veronica’s heart beat quickened. “What are you calling him for?”

“That’s it” Hermione pays her no mind. She’s actually made an ad hoc meeting for themselves, The Coopers and Archie right outside the principal’s office during school hours. She had direction when she spoke, that indicated who’s in charge, and nobody was even able to counter otherwise. “We are going to be meeting with Mr Clayton’s lawyer tomorrow. All of us. Try and talk things over, fix things as best as we can.”

“Mom! -“

“It wouldn’t have had to be this way, Ronnie if you hadn’t taken matters into your own hands.”

“Yes, mija” Hiram put his hand on her cheek and tucked away a strand of damp hair neatly “next time, you come to us first” The action alone made both Archie who was watching and Veronica feeling it shake in their shoes. He could be so condescending counting every scar he made. Looking at her in the daylight, in the aftermath. He knows every layer of her and maybe that’s why she feels too scared to fall back in deep with him.

He knows her when she’s being put under pressure by her parents, a completely different girl than the one who fought her own battles and called him out for everything in a burning game of truth. She was like a jaguar who couldn’t be tamed, except when they forced her to.

And maybe that’s why she locks eyes with him when her father is attempting to cruelly comfort her, because she knows he’s seeing straight into her terrified soul. How ironic that all the promises to never be like their parents, is slapping them in the face right in front of their eyes. It hurts a whole different kind of wound, not the stinging kind. The painful kind without blood that’s unable to be seen, touched. Just heaviness in your heart.

“By now what’s best to do is call the meeting which I’ve already done. Let’s hope we can get the mess as well cleaned as we did just now. Half past two pm, at Accord Offices. Early, of course.” Hermione sashayed away with Hiram bidding a silent goodbye to Mr and Mrs Cooper.

They didn’t look nearly as composed as the other couple did, for their lack of experience putting together a legal action. Instead Mrs Cooper appeared almost vexed with having to follow in Hermione’s plans, but she crossed her arms and pursed her lips anyway. Both families were like the sun and earth, completely different.

Black business formal and pastel smart casual. No major designer labels, no high heels. Veronica glanced back to Mrs Cooper standing there finding her oddly interesting. Most moms of students in this school weren’t like her, and it’s refreshing to not see something so - incompatible.

“Now Veronica, you’re leaving with us”
“Uh - wait mom!” She skipped forward and pulled Hermione back by the arm. “I was thinking Andre could drive Betty and I to her house to get some clothes and things. She’s staying at our place tonight so we go to meet the lawyer together tomorrow”

“And whatever makes you think you’re doing that? Come home with us now, Veronica”

“Mom! She’s my moral support - it’s not like I can invite Cheryl or Josie over, right?” She doesn’t mention Archie as the other part of her punishment - the boy who’s already walked away but not far, he’s lingering by one of the lockers to keep an eye on Veronica with her parents - because why would she?

Betty still feels the bullet worthy analysis of Mr and Mrs Lodge’s eyes on her, even with Veronica’s arm around her shoulders and by her side. She tries her best to look strong and unbothered like they are, but it’s not totally working. They look at her like what they think she is; an innocent blonde good girl who’s been used or warped by their daughter to take the attention away from herself while in the middle of this unfinished case selfishly.

“You know we usually let you do whatever you want, Veronica. But after you’ve already gotten into trouble with this girl, we prefer you to stay away until the meeting tomorrow” Hiram says calmly. He places a hand on his wife’s shoulder to keep her from properly lecturing Veronica on all the reasons they won’t allow it.

“I’ll put the perfect daughter face on tomorrow, I promise. Please?” Her pleading eyes were enough to believe, even if you’d just saw them lie to you.

The littlest of confusion ran over Hermione’s face, Hiram struggled to say anything, Betty just stood there awkwardly wishing she wasn’t put in this position - until Hiram’s phone rang and the two of them walked away without another word.

Just as they were walking out the front of the school to get into the car Andre drove, without much more than a smile from the raven haired girl over her shoulder to Betty’s parents - a confirmation more than permission to take their daughter away before they’d even spoke to her - Kevin came running down the steps calling Betty’s name.

She stopped and whipped her head around. “Betty! I need to talk to you”

“Uh, sure I’ll call you later?” She looked after Veronica who just climbed into the sleek black car.

“Please right now? Just school stuff that can’t wait”

Betty sighed in confusion “Just a sec V?”

“Yes”

Kevin led her a few unnecessary feet away from the Lodge’s limo, as if Veronica would be able to hear anything they’re talking about with the windows up and her door closed. “Okay, what is it you want to talk about?”

“Betty” Kevin’s lips were in a straight line like he’s seriously upset about something “As your friend, I’m going to give you some strong advice and a faint warning”

“Okay, what about?” She crossed her arms comfortably

“Getting involved with the likes of Veronica Lodge isn’t going to put you anywhere other than a place of what you don’t deserve. More and more unraveling problems, and I get it - the fancy
shoes and clothes she wears, the respect everywhere she goes, Okay you’re not the first girl to fall for Pembrooke Princess and her perfect world!”

“Kevin” she shakes her head “What are you saying?”

“You’re practically becoming one of their uppity projects now. Putting yourself on the line like that to benefit Veronica? You should know that once she smells too much blood, or she gets bored, Veronica will turn back to her royalties all over again”

“How could you say that?” Her eyes are in a fury of blue that’s uncharacteristic for her usual dreamy orbs. “You’re one of her friends too!”

“Yes. Exactly. One of her friends, but in the end she’ll always turn back to Cheryl and Josie and the rest of them. She’s just like the rest of them Betty, trust me. They’re trouble, problems and crimes for days. The queens of mean didn’t choose her for no reason, plus they already hate you for getting between her and Cheryl. Can’t you see? And if it’s about getting closer to Archie -“

“Okay, you have completely lost it”

“I see the way you look at him, like pining in silent desperation while he’s head over heels in love with somebody else? Veronica and Archie are endgame. They’ll always come back to each other, they all will. And if you -” he points his finger almost accusingly at her

“ - try and get between them, god save you. Last year, a girl named Valerie dated Archie when he and V were on one of their breaks, and let’s just say things did not end well for her.”

“Kevin” she put her hands up to emphasise the point “I would never get between Archie and Veronica, or Cheryl and Veronica or Josie or anything like that! And you know maybe the reason she turns away from her other friends is because she can’t trust when they’re holding back and backbiting every second they’ve got”

Veronica’s car rolled up right in front of where they were arguing, her window rolled down and a perfectly manicured hand tapped draped elegantly out of it. “Ready to go, B?”

She and Kevin stared hardly at each other, before Betty backed away towards the car “yup, I’m coming V”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you” he said more to himself, watching the car drive away.

Sometimes Veronica doesn’t realise how easily she’s meddled and taken charge of the situation where even people who naturally take lead have fallen behind in her wake. But it comes to light when she’s standing in the kitchen at the Coopers’ having a glass of water while Betty gets clothes from her bedroom.

She’s sure their at least trying to be quiet, but the walls are thin for all its worth and Veronica’s heart crumbles when she hears everything somebody has to say about her in such a personal manner.

“Look at all the trouble you and your sister have already gotten into, Elizabeth! How could you do something like this to us?”

“Mom, I had to! Everything I wrote was true and the things people were saying about her at school? The - the terrible rumours? That they were fighting over her and all this mean stuff about her. People had the story all mixed up and even her parents wouldn’t listen to her!”
“Betty” Alice’s voice went down to a scarier tone “What those people in school said? Slut shaming? It’s what happens when a slut gets shamed”

Veronica’s breath caught in her throat. She gripped her glass as tight as she could, wanting it to crush between her fingers. God, she knew people said awful stuff about her. But hearing it from a parent? She began to think, is this really the kind of person I am?

Two seconds later Betty came running down the stairs and Veronica had to halt her tears from spilling over, like a sudden stopper to all her emotions that might have hurt harder than even what Alice Cooper just said. She kept her back turned even as Betty called her until her face was completely composed and she’d set the glass down gently on the table.

“Let’s get out of here”

(x.x.x.x)

“Jay Jay, are you up for red bean crepes at Dips tonight? I can drive, if you’re too tired”

Cheryl puts her book down on the couch where her legs are all folded up on, in the interconnecting space between their two bedrooms. Even though Thornhill is one of the large mansions a little out of the busy part of Los Angeles, the twins always insisted to have their bedrooms nearby. They had separate hangout pads on different floors though, for extra privacy.

“I was actually thinking of going out Cherry” he shrugs his denim jacket on and mouses his blazing red hair in reflecting mirror.

“Oh. With Reggie? Are you going to visit Chuck?” She says a little upset.

“No, and I don’t think we should. You heard mummy and daddy, it’s too much at risk to be caught visiting him anyway”

She bit her lip and thought about the talk their parents had given them after school, post hearing the news of what happened that night via Betty’s blue and gold blast. She already knew what a chaos it’d start, and they’re yet to put it into motion.

“True. Nightmarish wasn’t it? Which is why I thought we could have our tradition before having to face the vultures tomorrow” she asked in reference to their parents’ plan “are mummy and daddy asleep?”

“Yeah” Jason checked his phone distractedly “Listen, I gotta go Cher so maybe next time alright?” He bent down to kiss her on the cheek and left

“Wait! Don’t you think mummy and daddy were being really weird when they suggested we go to the lawyer’s tomorrow? Like they have something planned? Do you have any idea what it is?”

He turned around in the doorway and shrugged “They just want to make sure we’re covered for being at that party and our names won’t get in the mess, probably”

Jason’s always had an affinity for acting but he couldn’t lie to anybody who knew him well, and Cheryl knows Jason better than anybody. How quick that lie slipped off his tongue wasn’t natural, he spent the immediate next moments praying Cheryl wouldn’t notice it. He hated lying to her, as deep as he’s in.

“Oh. Well, will you come home tonight?” Her cold fingers tangled together agitatedly
“No, but I’ll see you tomorrow. I promise”

“But I need my moral support! For tomorrow” she almost cried

Jason hit his hand against the doorframe loudly, sending Cheryl into a jump of shock “Just call Toni or Josie or Veronica, will you? Now I have to leave Cheryl stop stalling me”

He’s never raised his voice at her, not even when they fought about the most legitimate of things. She felt the tears threaten her eyes “You know I can’t do that! Mummy and daddy would kill me!”

Jason sighed in pure exasperation, running his hand over his face “Then go to Josie’s I don’t know!”

“Are you hanging out with Archie tonight? Or are you not at all? You’re going to meet her aren’t you? The Cooper girl who’s got you acting so weird lately!”

“Cheryl!” He steps closer to her like someone she’s never met before, so high strung and she knows he’s holding onto something so tightly, for dear life. She doesn’t known what it is but this must be it, he must have fallen in love with the girl who’s family they’re about to mix things in with tomorrow. “You don’t know anything about her so stop being so damn controlling, okay?! For once in your life, don’t get your hands in this and just stay out of it. Do not mess this up for me like you always do”

(x.x.x.x)

Veronica and Betty spend their night in the third floor of the Pembrooke Penthouse, in Veronica’s domain. She asks Betty what all her favourite snacks are and has the maid bring up healthier spins on all of them. She’s a little amused at first, a little disappointed. But then Veronica is really enjoying the food and she turns on upbeat pop music that they dance around to in her study, and then the food tastes pretty good after all. They do everything to take their minds off worrying about tomorrow, what the lawyer might say, will Veronica or Archie be charged, will anything happen to Chuck.

So they dance and eat the organic popcorn while watching Clueless, belting out the opening song Kids In America. Betty has her fuzzy bunny slippers on and her t shirt and shorts, Veronica in her cream coloured silk two piece with the black lace. They laugh and take crazy polaroids because frankly Veronica’s quite done with digitals, and they don’t realise what time it is when they’re in her bathroom with all the lights on playing around with the makeup.

“Okay, open up!” Betty’s blue eyes flutter open and she meets the gorgeous sight that is the makeup Veronica has professionally and artistically applied. Her eyebrows look sharp and fully defined, her eyes have bold black liner with cat wings and there’s minimal bronze eyeshadow on her lids.

“Wow it looks really good” she gaped

“True, but something’s gotta go. Actually, a lot of things” Veronica made her way around the chair Betty’s sitting in and tugged not so lightly on the hair tie keeping her tight ponytail in place. When she does, golden blonde hair tumbles hitting the top of her shoulders.

“Sorry. But you need to look insanely sophisticated for tomorrow”

“I actually like to pride myself that my style is pretty sophisticated” Betty pouted

“It is” Veronica agreed, fixing her own hair in the mirror “but in an innocent girl next door way.
To each their own, but you have to start being Girl Next Door in Hidden Hills, Los Angeles okay? You need to look fierce, mature, untouchable sophisticated. But still innocent - that is what we are tomorrow anyway”

The next second Veronica ran out of her bathroom and into the walk in closet, shouting for Betty to hold on while she grabs some things.

“Your bathroom is the most luxurious thing I’ve ever seen in my life. I could get lost in here!” Betty says when Veronica walks back inside holding two hangers.

“Thanks. When my parents were still designing the place, they wanted to install a claw foot for me. But I told them baths are gross and just wallowing in your own dirt, so they put this jacuzzi in the middle instead”

“That’s really smart. And fun”

“Yes! The best thing is closing my eyes after a stressful day and just letting the hot water take over everything, or when it’ll get colder soon you have to sleep over and try it too! Archie and I used to -“

She stops short the animated rant when she realises what she’s saying, Mac brush suddenly halting its movements on Betty’s upper cheek bone. They look at each other awkwardly in the mirror.

“- We used to hang out in there a lot, is all” she wants to kill herself for spilling something so stupid, feeling her cheeks heat up madly remembering all the things they would actually do taking advantage of having a jacuzzi in her giant bathroom.

Veronica sighs, sinking into a chair behind Betty who cannot help but giggle at the brunette’s distress. “Have you talked to him about tomorrow? Or... anything before that?” The only reason she asks is because Veronica seems to have a meticulous plan for everything.

“No” she sighs again and drags Betty to one of the full length mirrors. Talking about Archie, thinking about Archie just feels ten times worse than when they first broke up. It’s like she misses him but hates him and wants to talk to him, when everything feels like it’s falling apart on the outside.

*I miss talking to my closest confidant, the person who would understand everything and make me feel better. How is it I lost that one person, that one precious person I should’ve never let go, how could I have lost the single best thing that’s ever happened to me in my whole life?*

But she can’t, and that’s what frustrating. The circular gold frame with their picture in it reflects in the mirror, making her realising how fucked up she really is. Betty sees it too.

“You probably think it’s really morbid having all this stuff of him in my room still, when I can’t even talk to him huh?”

“Not really” she shrugs “He was a big part of your life for a long time. It’s hard to let go”well if that ain’t true. “Do you want to let go?”

“I don’t think I know how. I mean the chocolates he gave me for Valentines Day are still here, the pictures, the jewellery and clothes and the bear he won for me at a carnival. Even in my phone he’s everywhere, like he’s been written into my life or something”

“Wait -“ Betty backtracks “He won you a bear at a carnival? How cute!”
The raven haired girl nodded and pointed to one stuffed purple bear sitting on a chest of drawers “I named it Sugar. To be fair, we were barely fourteen”

Betty swoons over how adorable and romantic that is, a part of her feeling guilty because what Kevin said earlier is still repeating in her head. Are they adorable and romantic, or is it Archie? She feels so bad for even thinking that way of a boy her friend is clearly still in love with.

“And the worst part is seeing the stuff everyday makes me want to cry because all I can remember is how I felt when I still had him. Happiness, you know? It was still complicated and problematic at times, but I would never want anything more or less. It was perfect” we were, he was.

“Okay” Veronica snaps them both back to an easier topic. She held up the two articles of clothing for Betty to wear tomorrow. “Say Hello to The Girl Next Door of Hidden Hills”

Betty gasped “Veronica no! I could never wear that! Especially not in front of my parents and especially not at the lawyers’ tomorrow”

“Oh come on, B” she put her chin on Betty’s shoulder and gave good puppy eyes.“It’s a crop top and a skirt, I even got it in your colour scheme! Which I don’t have much of”

Says the girl who’s currently got on a body suit with some crazy cutouts in the front and a skirt that looked like someone had saran wrapped it around her shapely hips. That was just classic Veronica style though, and it more than works on her. Betty thinks, I’m not Veronica, the drop-dead gorgeous, look good in anything type and maybe it’s the itching insecurity that’s holding her back.

She eyed the outfit Veronica had put together for her, not knowing why she’d argue it when the next moment Veronica had her pulling it on and zipping the skirt up. “You look cute!” She jumped and clapped. “You look really cute”

Cute isn’t exactly the word she’d use to describe it, but seeing herself in the mirror felt like her blood was rushing through its veins. She did look fierce, and different, and hot.

“Don’t you adore it?” Veronica hugged her.

She bites her lip and stares at the mirror a minute longer, from top to bottom. Then her pink lips spread in a smile “Yeah, yeah I do”

“Woohoo! Success. We’ll be showing up in our finest tomorrow”

“You’re not making me wear pearls too, right?” Betty’s forehead creases

“No!” Veronica laughs “Even I wouldn’t want to”

The two of them may have gone overboard with the dressing up after that, Veronica had a plethora of clothes with different themes and could get lost in it all day. They tried different outfits on and took photos of all of them, Veronica pinned some on her cork board for ‘inspiration’. They could spend the next hours that way but when sleep carried them into an enjoyable slumber, piled with designer clothes all over the bed and the lights on and music still playing, but tomorrow is game day.

(x.x.x.x)

He’s nervous.

To say the least, his right leg is tapping uncontrollably to the point where even he watches it in a
kind of amused horror as to how nervous he is. The action reminds him of the first time he had dinner with The Lodges, when he couldn’t stop tapping his leg under the dinner table either. Until Veronica put her hand on his leg and slowly inched higher and higher -

he wasn’t thinking about much else after that.

“Mom, will I get into less trouble now that people know what happened? And is Chuck out of the hospital yet? Will he be there?”

It feels extremely childish sitting in the backseat of his parents’ Lexus while mom and dad talk upfront, especially with how nervous and spastic he’s being.

“Chuck is still residing in PrinceCourt, but he’s healing. And it’ll just be us, The Lodges, The Coopers and Chuck’s lawyers today. Even Jacob and Evelyn couldn’t bear to meet with us” Mary replies

“Oh - okay. Will Veronica be in trouble?”

Now both of his parents sigh, really rubbing in that childish feeling to the hilt. “I’m not sure, honey. She was responsible for a lot, but you know The Lodges have law defying powers”

That doesn’t ease his nerves when they do the whole routine - getting out of the car, awkward silence, finding the lawyer’s office and walking to it, more awkward silence - the only sound being that of their shoes and Mary’s phone going off every few minutes. Fred stands around like more of an outsider than an actual father, as Josie once said “Fred Andrews is the definition of a teen heartthrob all grown up and suddenly realises he’s a parent”

They have to wait outside on the wooden benches because the blinds are closed and the door is locked, so they can only assume Mr Knight Chuck’s lawyer isn’t here yet. They are about fifteen minutes early, Archie checks the time on his Rolex obsessively, too nervous to pull out his phone.

Fred and Mary have more quiet conversation, and then Archie wishes he did have something to do with his hands because the unmistakable sound of heels coming down the hallway made his stomach turn and twist around.

Veronica.

No, not just Veronica. The Lodges, who exude that higher than thou vibe better than anybody else. Especially when they’re all together.

Oh, it’s The Lodges and Betty. Wha - for a second Archie doesn’t even know where to look. He sees Mr and Mrs Lodge walk into the waiting area together in their best pearls and finest suits, wearing that same cold expression his parents have on since breakfast. Archie and Veronica know that look, it’s game face.

Then behind them, so uncharacteristic for her to ever walk behind anybody, is Veronica. His eyes look all over her like he doesn’t know every part of her already, naturally stealing the scene whenever she walks into a room. She’s wearing a blue and white checkered shirt, the short sleeves are flaring on her shoulders and there’s the stylish cut outs down the front of the shirt. She has a simple black skirt to go with it, but what makes her look so grandiose is the jewellery all over her.

Archie sees it now and he almost wants to vomit, no no no no.

It all feels so wrong.
He should’ve never punched Chuck, now, maybe he wouldn’t have put her in this precarious position would he?

Because not only is she wearing that signature string of pearls around her neck, but they’re on her ears too and a pearl bangle around her dainty wrist. He knows she only ever wears them when her parents want her to, plus that lip biting, eyes flickering thing she’s doing indicates just how trapped she feels.

Today is a day they can’t steer their own game, not confident teenagers playing a game of truth using every weapon they know how. Today they’re bound down to a fault, he swears to see the colour on her face drain away upon seeing the lawyer’s office. No, she’s not happy, confident Veronica. The Veronica that was made for this world, she looks sad... and helpless.

He wants to help her, but fuck if things weren’t just so difficult right now he could actually say hello to her and maybe they’ll keep their fingers intertwined and she’ll hold his leg under the table and calm all his nerves. Or he’ll hold her close to him until they’re out of this deep deep hole they’ve created for themselves.

But he can’t.

“Always good to see you, Fred. Mary” Hiram and Hermione shake hands with them oblivious to their children’s break up or anything. They were business partners before Archie and Veronica had even met, and they’ll always be cordial even after their children have broken their hearts over each other.

This is the first time any of them are officially meeting The Coopers. It suddenly feels like such a big party because Polly is with them too, apparently her and Jason were one of the last ones out of the house and they were thoroughly questioned about everything that happened.

Betty goes over to sit with her family leaving Veronica and Archie standing three feet from each other unable to say anything. She feels terrible for not talking to Mary, because she always tried to keep a good relationship with Archie’s parents despite the fact that they never liked her much. It feels disgusting to have people who at least knew you as a smart, put together girl become the subject of a legal warfare. Something to fight for. Even between the break ups and make ups, there were mornings she’d spent in pyjamas eating breakfast with Archie’s parents and playing hostess at some of their parties. Now it all went wrong and she hates feeling like she disappointed yet another set of parents.

In return Mary turns her back completely on Veronica, speaking in a hushed tone to Fred and Archie. Veronica feels cold, alone, standing in a war field without any armour. These pearls, this family, is supposed to be your armour.

“Keeping with this week’s theme, I’ve just had a wicked idea” Hiram muttered against the collar of his wife’s shirt.

“What’s that?” She turns to ask

“Letting Muggs go was a big turn up in our plan, and The St Clairs are going to hold up their end of the deal. But the rest of Costal Prep’s board is still yet to see the light in our company.” His eyes linger on The Andrews having their little family meeting. “If we have Fred Andrews on our team, a man who runs on family values and all his well earned support, they’ll be on board in no time”

“That’s a good proposal, dear. But you know Fred would never agree to what we have in store. So
I’m guessing you have something in it for them as well?” She raises her brows

“We help out Archie from any mess today. Guarantee his name untouched. Then we can ask for a favour in return. This could be good, everybody loves and trust Fred”

Hermione smiled that small cunning smile, tipping her head forward in silent agreement “so our instrument is in the room...”

“And so is our contender”

“What?”

Everybody looks up in a confused shock, some more brewing anger than the others. When yet another family made their entrance through the big glass doors, flocked with flaming red hair and strangely some kind of repressed sexuality portrayed in their gothic horror demeanours.

“Cheryl? Jason? What the hell is going on?” Veronica can’t believe her eyes, the last thing she needs today is Cheryl being here to stir more trouble or just stir her mind insane.

“Penelope Blossom - what exactly do you think you’re doing here?” Hermione stepped up to both of them with Hiram by her side, only the smallest trace of fury written on their faces. Maybe a little too much for anyone who looked closely, considering The Blossoms and Lodges never had any bad blood.

“Only making sure my dear children wouldn’t be pulled into a debacle pulled and orchestrated by your, debauched wanton daughter”

Hiram barely refrained himself from unleashing something he’d regret, but luckily Bart Knightley arrived at the perfect moment. He bustled through all of them, breaking an unilateral tension.

“Kids, Archie lets go. Remember, only answer what you’re asked” Mary Andrews led the way for them all, The Coopers walking in first with their heads bent down and then followed by Archie and his mom.

“Cheryl” Veronica whispered, her bare shoulder pressed against Cheryl’s stiff blue blazer sleeve. “How could you do this? Tell your parents we were having this meeting? No one invited fascist Barbie to the party”

“Please Veronica” she rolled her eyes “Have I ever betrayed your confidence before? This was Jason’s ungodly doing. I never wanted to be here, still don’t. So please, if you could save you smart ass remarks to yourself Eva Perón we could get this over with minimal collateral damage”

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_extract from Mr Knightley’s Notes (Unofficial Record), Saturday 22nd October, Used in a Private Report._

Cheryl Blossom remains silent. Pale. Stoic. Can’t make that one out. Even her lawyer can’t get her to talk.

Elizabeth Cooper also quiet now after her initial momentary crack under pressure (arguing with parents over mundane place seating) but she remains withdrawn. Closed in. She is an easy flake.
Veronica Lodge chooses to sit with her lawyer over both parents immediately, Leon Daniels.

Once presented with list of charges and evidence against her:

- footage from party attendees’ social media of Veronica at the party
- The debit card history for the alcohol and sound systems on her debit card
- The discovery of the drugged party snacks on location
The hefty cash transfer to Reginald Mantle on her card, which she doesn’t budge on revealing what it is. Daniels says it’s irrelevant.

and when informed that Charles Clayton had confessed to several instances of her hosting gatherings with underage drinking and substance use (and confirmed by his medical report to have been on multiple different things), her coldness doesn’t falter. All she has to say is, “my older friends do it all the time too.”

Although not specific, I believe this is an implication of the Blossom twins, Josephine McCoy, and Charles Clayton himself’s guilt in hosting similar parties before, and an attempt by Veronica to distance herself from that. Cheryl nor Jason has responded to my accusation. They refuse to speak.

Between the substances, the fact that Archibald Andrews attacked Charles to the point of damage in his skull and face, the evidence found in the clearing (the cigarette butts, cocaine bumps, brownies) and students of Raffles Institution confession of witnessing the assault of Charles against Veronica, implicating their presence at the party - we have enough to press charges on all three of them without confessions. Veronica can be charged with providing alcohol and drugs to underage individuals, Archibald with imminent and harmful and offensive contact with a person, and Charles with attempted purposely cause bodily injury to another person.

There’s no evidence to suggest Polly Cooper knew anything about the attack on Veronica Lodge or Charles Clayton or was in any way involved with the drugs beyond her relationship with Jason, the discovery of them in one of the bedrooms in Sherman Oaks together. She is clearly shocked at what happened and is distraught. She has been released from any charges and is safe in the wing.

Veronica Lodge’s family makes a preposition to take the restraining order and pay for the medical bills of Charles Clayton as well as an early acceptance into his chosen Ivy League by fall of next year in return of silence for their daughter, and surprisingly Archie Andrews’ crimes.

Neither The Blossoms nor The Coopers have an attestment, their children are in the clear - there’s nothing I can hold against Elizabeth Cooper’s exposition of my client in the school paper. Both parents of both families say they sympathise for my client. Cheryl, Jason and Archie are understandably traumatised and shocked after the discovery of what their friend did and don’t know if they are going to visit him in the hospital. Veronica Lodge is suffering from memory loss and embarrassment/shame, says she feels dirty like there is something wrong with her. Her doctor, Dr Moffet is confident, however, that the girl won’t suffer any lasting problems but the process of being put under charges and ‘blamed for her assault’ will no doubt be emotionally crushing - will probably send her into an overdrive.

I was very reluctant to hand over to Leon Daniels and The Lodges what they wanted - a signed contract to most of the legal repercussions being off the children they’re protecting in change for my client’s benefits. I hereby am covering the detailed content including evidence of drug-taking and Archie Andrews’ personal vendetta attack on Charles Clayton. Now, he is fully supported financially by The Lodges and Archie and Veronica are put under their minimal and barely tedious consequences.
All throughout our meeting when the attorneys and parents were talking, I felt my blood rising to the point where it tickled my throat. Something inside me wants to break, like cry, when my doctor’s statement so blatantly tells everyone how trapped and marred I feel. I feel so disgusted, I feel so broken, I feel so powerless.

For no doubt in my mind today that my parents would handle the situation with ease, I had no idea they were protecting Archie too. Is it because they know I’ll always hold a torch for him? If so, maybe I should be figuring us out.

Archie. He’s sitting right next to me and I do want to cry now, so messed up and so screwed over. For some reason everything we’ve ever talked about, all our dreams, plans, I want to sing Archie! I want to dance one day. I want to act. I want to do everything.

I want to be wherever you are, Ronnie.

That was where we belonged. No secrets, no hate, no revenge. But then I think my arch angel has been sent down, because Archie puts his hand on my leg like he means something. Like suddenly, I want it to mean something. The contact after weeks and weeks of not touching, it feels like the first time all over again. Loud and clear.

Our eyes meet for the briefest moment but then we have to look robotic again to not show our weakness, Mr Knightley still saying something. Betty looks like she might cry and Archie’s hand just barely moves up from my knee to the middle of my thigh. It confuses me. Any other day before I would’ve interpreted it as him trying something, but even he’s not that crazy. Still doesn’t stop how my aching body responds to his heavy fingers almost circling my leg.

Should’ve worn a short skirt, his hand would actually be on me.

Our lawyers shake hands. The deal is made. I think everyone breathes a sigh of relief and goes to hug their parents or something, but both of ours happen to be talking to each other. Relief floods through me everywhere.

“Community service, that’s not so bad huh Ronnie?” He turns to me with that boyish smile face I fell for years ago, still scared to look in his eyes cos I’ll no doubt fall for it again. But there’s a hesitation and wary there, not quite as carefree.

“I’ll be picking up trash off St Paul’s Park until my sixteenth birthday, I wouldn’t exactly call that ideal” my eyes stay plastered in front of me.

He chuckles. Leans in closer, please don’t move away. please don’t move again.

“So uh, how are you doing?”

The question makes both of our hearts break, dually questioning how we ever let ourselves stray to complete strangers from each other.

“After Chuck? Not so good. But Archie...” I boldly reach for his other hand still wrapped in the gauze and hold it tenderly in both my hands close to my heart. His eyes are focused on me. “Did you really beat up Chuck so bad after what he did to me?”

“Veronica, of course”
“You shouldn’t have. You wouldn’t be in this mess”

“It’s not like I could stop myself” he shrugs.

I smile a little small, lifting his wrist carefully to my lips and giving it a little kiss of my MAC stained lips. He looks at me like he’s astounded by me all over again. “There, all better” Our joke dies but he doesn’t pull his hand away, one of them on my leg and the other I have clasped between mine.

“Veronica, tell me how you are. I can see how distressed you are and it’s been killing me. When you said not good...”

“Things have been awful” I tell him truthfully. My eyes fall to my lap because there’s just nothing holding me back from pouring my heart and soul out to him

“My parents are being even more controlling since what happened in the summer” that you did to me, my heart breaks “you’re gone, Cheryl’s acting like I’ve done something terrible to her and this mess is all my fault - which I guess it is, and then somebody who I’ve known since I was five just tried to rape me...” my voice breaks into a mere whisper, I don’t even realise but tears are spilling on the tops of my cheeks and I reach for his hand on my leg, locking our fingers together.

“And I don’t know who I am or who to trust anymore, but I feel like my world is falling apart and the worst part is - you’re the only one who would understand.” By now my face is crumbling and he releases his one good hand from mine to brush the tears away, cupping my cheek for one second before I pull his hand into mine again.

“I miss having my anchor to keep me from slipping away, you know?”

“Veronica” His gaze on me holds an intensity so electrifying that it already gives me hope. He looks and looks at me, a picture of sadness and uncertainty, and that’s when he knows I can’t live without him, too. “No matter what troubles are between us, no matter how far you push me away, I’ll always be here to help you every step of the way, if you’ll let me”

And we sat there with our faces just inches apart, the tears drying on mine but they’re beginning to show in his eyes. It feels warm and if we can make it through this battle we’ll be stronger than we were then. That’s what I keep telling myself, that’s what he assures me and for now with the warmth of our intertwined fingers on my leg, his face and heart so close to mine, it begins to feel like we’re home.

Chapter End Notes

all I can say for this chapter is..... swooon. And some slight foreshadowing
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter #8 This Is What Makes Us Girls

- sweet sixteen and we had arrived, baby’s table dancin at the local dive, cheerin our names in the pink spotlight, drinking Cherry Schnapps in the velvet night

this is what makes us girls. We don’t look for heaven and we put our love first. Something that we’d die for, it’s a curse. Don’t cry about it, don’t cry about it -

November came faster than Archie could’ve been ready for. November, the most important month of his life. Not his birthday, because that was in January. November when the leaves turned orange and Starbucks puts out their Pumpkin Spice Lattes and stores were switching out their Hallowe’en themed things for leaves and homey decor, or straight to reds and whites forgetting Thanksgiving. When they could officially call it Fall, Veronica’s favourite season - she’s the one who gets excited about all those things and points them out to him for all the past years. Fall fashion, fall food, bronze makeup looks, fall scents... it always got her so excited. November, her birthday. And their anniversary.

He must be getting older, or life has just been getting more hectic, because he didn’t see November coming from a mile away. The last week of October began when he stared into Veronica’s teary eyes in the middle of her parents’ bribe to a legal officer, which everybody had been acutely discreet about. Neither Cheryl nor Jason, the two people he would’ve expected to run and passively start something about their parents’ doing had kept their mouths shut about the whole incident. Probably also because they would be dragged into the fold had they said anything-following that, their group and Betty Cooper spent their extra time fulfilling community service duties in St Pauls Park outside Costal Preparatory. It was humiliating and irritating at best to see pictures of them all, usually clad in the finest clothes, with forlorn expressions and red jumpsuits instead.

So between football practice and school, community service in between, and spending the rest of his time recharging battery after the exhaustion of seeing everyone’s comments and posts about their debacle - the rest of the month had flown by without notice. He did however fall into something that since the beginning of the school year had been virtually non existent, and that was routine. It was a comfortable place between being so physically worn out to put up a fight with his parents that he just became docile towards them, and looking forward to spending time teasing Veronica in the park like they were kids again.

“You are so dead for that!” She whirled around and batted ineffectually at her messy high ponytail, after he’d used the ‘garbage grabber’ tool (those things he’d gotten quite the hack at using) to toss a crumpled piece of paper lightly at her.

“You already know it’s coming, Ronnie, I don’t know why you say that every time” he smiled coyly

Veronica threw her trash bag filled with leaves on the ground and stalked towards him “because I get mad every time”
Usually she’d just toss something back, every time he did it. But today she must be in a frisky playful mood because she used her own garbage grabber, picking it up by the stick and swinging it at him.

“Woahh, hey!” Luckily he had quick reflexes and dodged the swinging stick in enough time to pick up his own and clank it with hers. She huffed, adorably with pieces of her hair flying out of her face from the exhale - and then pushed harder with more force so they were really duelling with two metal sticks instead of swords.

Archie would take good mood Veronica over bad mood Veronica any day, so without a moment of hesitation hit their sticks together repeatedly pretending to fight. She knew he was obviously holding back and could knock the grabber out of her hands easily any minute, but he chose to play along and she enjoyed it. Veronica giggled, still focusing on their little game.

Their laughter became breathless and short in between whenever Veronica would slip and almost hit Archie in the face, or he would use too much force and see she almost gets knocked down - he’ll quickly reach out to her shoulder and stable her. It’s too unusual for the two of them to be as carefree and unbothered as they are, they like to believe it’s the November weather and all. But really just being together without contention has them feeling wonderful.

Not that there isn’t tension, because there’s more than enough of that brewing between the two.

“Ugh, will you two stop acting like children and help us get this done” Cheryl rolled her eyes at the two juniors fooling around together.

“Yeah feel free to you know - help out” Reggie nodded in agreement. Betty just glanced at both of her friends whom, after one deep encounter with each other at the lawyers office had gotten weirdly closer. They weren’t together again, they never talked one on one without anyone else around, the groups didn’t even have lunch together still. But whenever Archie was around Veronica seemed to let go and she just appeared generally happier, and vice versa. She’d talked about it with Jughead one lunchtime when Archie had popped by the girls table just to give Veronica her favourite long island iced tea and headed off with a goofy smile - Jughead said they’d always been like that. Those two have no idea of personal boundaries when it comes to each other.

But just like now, they were unbothered. Veronica yelped when she slipped on the semi slippery grass beneath them, reaching out for Archie to hold her fall. But he instead grabbed her by the two hands on his chest and in one quick fluid motion they were both on the ground of St Pauls Park with Archie laying on his back and Veronica on top of him.

The other pretended not to notice, but Josie sent Cheryl those wide eyes in their direction that clearly meant something. Cheryl mumbled something in distress and kept her eyes on the ground.

Veronica, oblivious to anything around her (or at least choosing to be) laughed at how ridiculously they’d fallen into the position and before thinking anything of it leaned in closer so her hands were planted on the ground next to his face, the only thing in Archie’s view was her smiling angel face and the sunlight around illuminating it. She was so close now, but she still only saw it as part of their game.

Archie did his favourite and familiar thing and turned them around so he was on top of her, more than scared that she would lose her cheeriness once her hair hit the gross dirt. Pleasantly surprised though, Veronica didn’t fret at all. She was so ambushed by the feeling of him hard and heavy against her body, enjoying it more than she ever should have. Once again Veronica was reminded of how big he is compared to her, but she didn’t mind being pinned beneath him like she was right now all breathless and still between laughter.
She felt herself melt under his intensifying touch and gaze and everything about Archie that just makes him *perfect*... and she almost wants to close her eyes and move around under him so it’ll get him to move *something*. Like they’re both suddenly aware of how fucking long it’s been and the utter image of feeling each other without all the fabric in between even if it is right here, right now, seems scarily tempting. She craved to touch him all over and re-memorise all the beautiful parts of him from beginning to end. Her arms attempted to travel up his and feel how strong and hard they were, but she fell weak when his hot breath hit her neck and she lamely surrendered to feel him do it again, stretching her neck up to give him more access to even breathe on.

It suddenly got too much though, and the perfect heaviness of him all over her, keeping her in, keeping her together brought back way too many memories. She couldn’t be bothered by them though, not when a new memory of them is being made right now. He’s looking at her like there’s suddenly been a shift between their playful back-and-forth to something way more private, and she’s well acquainted with that hunger in his eyes that fades all the playfulness away. He’s becoming serious, and for a minute she’s pulled into it too.

Veronica does the one thing she likes more than feeling him on top of her, and that’s when she uses all the power of him already being jelly in her hands and turns them over so she’s stronger and in control again. It doesn’t shock Archie, has become a natural thing for them in fact. Granted it’s not usual that this happens in the middle of a park with all their friends around but neither can bring themselves to care when they’ve both stopped giggling and the only thing making them breathless is holding their own breath.

She’s crazy, and doesn’t think before pushing up on his chest so that both her legs are further by his neck and she’s sitting even higher up on him. Archie completely freezes then, the sensation of her really rubbing herself against him inadvertently and doing it so naturally, like she *wanted to do that*, god does she know how good that feels. And how suddenly her legs are wide open in front of his face and at her sides, perfect Veronica face smiling down at him... he swears he has to adjust himself in these fucking jumpsuits before moving again.

"God, Andrews. Does everything turn into that with you two?" Reggie shouted at them from a few feet away.

At that and a few other yells of agreement from their other friends Archie sat up reluctantly, sliding Veronica down into his lap as he did so. That didn’t help their initial predicament, now Veronica was fully sitting on him and if by any chance she even moved herself Archie would officially lose control. He was barely holding on by a thread. Luckily though, she got up fast enough and dusted herself off like it was *nothing*, still smiling to herself on the inside.

"Come on Mantle the Magnificent, aren’t we all in a cheery mood today? It’s our last day in this dumpster!” She threw her hands up and cheered.

Her happiness is infectious and, as nobody around her could bear to not be happy in the same glowing light she is, they lit up too. Out of all the whoops and cheers she mainly saw Cheryl crack a little smile too. “Who can’t be unhappy about that?” The red head agreed.

They end up finishing the park off spotless soon after so they can get out as fast as possible, bidding a pleasant goodbye to that place before they walked arms linked together before first period started. Veronica was in between Archie and Cheryl, who stood in the middle of course. Veronica tried to ignore how good it was to be able to hold his arm again without it feeling awkward, but she still hated that she couldn’t fully embrace it. However now they were much more caught up in saying goodbye to their punishments to think about that.

"Since you’re in such a good mood today, Princess. I have to ask something” Josie spoke up from
her place in between Cheryl and Reggie. The six of them were walking and Betty walked awkwardly hanging by, but none of them had consciously noticed that - they were too used to being caught up in their world to have remembered that someone else was with them.

“What is it?” Veronica met Josie’s eyes

“I can’t lie, and say I haven’t been pretty bummed about not being able to have lunch with the boys since - you know, since school started...” she rushed and left off vaguely.

Veronica raised her brows “You mean not getting to have lunch with your boyfriend?”

“Oh my god you guys, it’s just a word that starts with the letter ‘B’. And I get it, labels and all.. we live in Los Angeles liberated from the need of such things! Well, we can more than happily start having lunch together again. Kay, you two lowkey daters?”

Josie smiled a big grateful smile at her, one unseen from Reggie. “Thanks V” she said softly, then louder “Oh, the whole group’s back together again! It’s the best day ever!"

They hugged each other closer, reassuring their friendship. And it felt great, it felt amazing, Veronica didn’t realise how much she’d needed this part of her life when it wasn’t there. Jason, Cheryl, Josie, Reggie... Archie. All the people whom, without realising, she’d found her comfort and solace in. Though they were all aware of the absence of one, but they didn’t say anything in guilt and mix feelings. They missed him, and it’s almost terrifying how fast one person can go from being one of the best elements of your life to the worst. He was part of us, he was one of us.

(x.x.x.x)

Jason, Reggie and Archie joined the girls’ table today with their big trays of food and sheepish grins. Archie looked around, watching them as he walked over from afar. His seat at the cafeteria table is next to Veronica. Always has been, thought it always would be. Until Junior year and he suddenly was sitting with just the boys, and now they’re back - but he’s not sure wether or not she wants him to sit next to her.

She has her arms folded on the table and is saying something with a little smile on her face, talking to Cheryl and Josie. Today she’s wearing a meshed black one piece, with long sleeves because it’s Fall (duh) and her hair is half up half down, Archie’s just realising how much longer it is since he last lost his hands in them and wind is blowing pieces around her face beautifully. Then it’s decided, he braces himself. I’m going to sit next to her. And if she pushes him away maybe he’ll just get up, or maybe he’ll say something right then and tell her how he feels - that they belong together - he’s not sure, but he just knows he’s going to sit there.

His heart is almost palpitating by the time they’re just a few feet away, and Jellybean walks past them to sit adjacent to Veronica but the older girl quickly catches glimpse of the boys walking over, and without thinking it through pulled Jellybean down to sit next to her. She looked away and smiled as if it wasn’t on purpose.

Archie’s heart fell, but he reluctantly sat down in front of Veronica instead and started unwrapping his cheese stick with glum eyes when Josie started speaking.

“Okay, this is great! Now that we’re all here together, I have some amazing news to share” Her eyes sparkled and she looked just a tad bit nervous.

“Tell them, tell them!” Reggie wiggled his eyebrows playfully at her, causing Cheryl to throw her
leftover Balsamic salad dressing packet at him. The rest of the table, including Cheryl, looked at Josie expectantly.

“What? What is it?”

“I’m opening Harry Styles’ show in New York this weekend”

“What?!”

“Ohmygod!”

“What the fu - “

A collective gasp came from everybody there and Cheryl instantly threw her hands around Josie’s neck. “That is amazing! Oh my gosh, how the hell did that happen? I’m so proud of you! Why didn’t you tell me earlier? When did this happen?!” She squealed all in one breath.

Josie nodded and leaned into her friend’s embrace, taking in all the delight with a shining smile. “My agent - well, my mom just told me like last minute and of course I couldn’t say no. I mean it’s a bit of a rush, preparation and all, and I’ll miss the Cordial Charity Show this year - I’m so sorry”

“No, no!” All her friends shook their heads “You have to do this, it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity”

“Well when is the Show this year anyway?” Archie wondered

Jellybean pulled out one of the flyers that Kevin Keller had been handing out in the East Atrium hallway this morning, since all the rest of them were too busy servicing the community at that time. “Here. It’s Monday night. Usually a total wazz to have a show on Monday night, but it actually means we’ll get a longer weekend because the whole Monday morning will be spent in preparation” They nodded. “So who’s thinking of performing?”

“My parents already asked me to” Veronica frowned “They say it’s the least I could do to present a wholesome front, with whatever dignity I have left after months being the centre of archaic scandalous transgression”

“You’re doing it too, right?” Reggie nodded towards Archie “Like every year”

“Uhm.. yeah. I probably have to this year too since my parents are both here, so”

“Well I’ll be wishing you guys luck from New York” Josie grinned, half excited and half anxious. Her two younger friends smiled back in response.

“Wait!” Veronica remembered “Oh my gosh, when are you leaving LA?”

“Saturday morning” Josie tries to recall correctly

“Thank god! Well, this is a good time to tell all. You’re all invited to my sweet sixteenth birthday bash this Friday night. Invitations exclusive, and these are all yours” she produced a little box with black wax embossed letters, more grandiose and pretentious than any sixteen year old birthday party should be. There was her initials LV printed on the top with each guest’s name, and the writing inside is bold and exciting enough to make you immediately want to go to the party. “JB, you’ll help me hand out the rest of these later, right?”

“Sure!” Jellybean agreed, more than happy to open her own invitation right then and there. Seeing
her name engraved in glittery card felt very important and special for some reason.

“Woahh, these are wicked!” The girls laughed at Reggie’s odd wording.

“You never disappoint, V. Ostentatious really is your middle name” Cheryl comments

“You’re seriously hosting a birthday bash right after just finishing Community service for the last bomb of a party? Is that a good idea?” Josie looked at her friend conspicuously

“Well of course not. But it’s my sixteenth birthday, possibly the biggest milestone of my life so far and my parents knew that I’d want something big no matter what happened - so they took matters into their own hands and are hosting the party themselves before I planned something even crazier and wilder. It’ll be just as perfect as the others, but of course, it means no alcohol whatsoever and it will be in the Grand Ballroom of our Pembrooke” Veronica nodded proudly

“Parenting at its finest” Jason teased “But a party by your parents is one we can’t miss”

“It’s gonna be lit”

“Reggie’s right. And to see our little princess, turning sixteen! It’ll be a night we’ll never forget” the way Cheryl said something made all of them slightly suspicious, especially to Veronica. She couldn’t tell but Cheryl had been weird lately.

“Can’t wait, Ronnie” Archie finally added in. Veronica hated herself for blushing, and she did try to stop it, she really did. But it was barely controllable and she could just hear one of their remarks about to come about how easily Archie makes you blush so she looked around frantically for a distraction. Thankfully, one came in the form of Betty Cooper.

“Hey guys, can I join?”

“Sure!” Veronica started searching through her box of invites for Betty’s name too.

“Actually” Cheryl put her hand up before Betty could sit down with them all. Everyone at the table watched with wide eyes, slightly awed that this new girl is suddenly asking to sit with them “The table’s full. But it looks like the outcasts’ table could use some company”

“No, come you can sit right here next to Jellybean and I” Veronica invited Betty closer

“Even if there was room, which there isn’t.” The red head still insisted coldly “this table is for inner circle only. Shoo”

Betty stood awkwardly, unsure if she should just turn away in humiliation or what. Only Josie and Archie were really staring at her, waiting for her next move. And their eyes made her even more self conscious than ever.

“Cheryl” Veronica faced her friend angrily “She’s sat at our table for the past month”

“So I guess the free trial’s up! Sorry you can’t afford the full fledged deal, invisible woman” Cheryl shrugged, her voice dripping in cunningness and unapologetic. If it weren’t for the fact that Veronica looked furious everyone at the table would’ve laughed, but now they just froze.

“Cheryl, can I talk to you? In private?” Veronica stood up and put her hands on her hips before the other girl could respond
“Of course, Little V” Cheryl sighed.

“Okay, why’d you drag me all the way to the east wing bathrooms to talk for?” She finally leaned against the sinks and crossed her arms while Veronica barged into the door and let it slam behind her.

“Because a bathroom is a mean girl’s backdrop, since forever”

“Excuse me?”

“Yeah, Cheryl. So what gives? Why are you being such a heinous bitch, and more so than usual?” Veronica stood up closely to her friend matching her at the same height.

Cheryl only scoffed in response. “I just think that for somebody so smart, you’re going out of your way to make some really bad decisions”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Your rekindling with Archie is sweet, and although I expected the school girl crushing all over again and dry humping in public I didn’t expect for the two of you to still be keeping secrets that could easily destroy you”

Veronica opened her mouth to say something but then recoiled, thinking it through properly. Finally she decided on “That wasn’t dry humping, we were just playing around”

“Sure!” Cheryl looked awfully interested in her manicure “Playing around includes straddling each other with weird sexual tension enough to make me sick from across the park”

“Whatever” Veronica cut her short “What are you talking about? Secrets?”

Cheryl leaned forward to her and started speaking in a way you do with a five year old, slow and clearly, almost mocking “You and Archie, have so much to talk about and cover with each other, and you know it. Like for example, how he sabotaged you by ruining your reputation with the pictures and how you did it back to him in revenge! Or maybe why your shady ass parents suddenly defend him at the lawyer’s meeting? It’s not like Archie has ever been their favourite person. How about the real reason you even broke up - you still can’t even say it to him. All these things, are going to blow up in your face before you can say honeymoon phase.”

Veronica felt like her face was burning in fumes. Everything Cheryl said is right, and she did have many points, but she didn’t want to admit it. Admit that being all cozy with Archie without talking their issues through is going to be the downfall of them again, but she’s too afraid to face that. “You have no right” she gritted her teeth.

“Actually I do, V. Running away from your problems has never been your move, so why is it now?” The older girl inquired, placing her hands on the sink behind her to face Veronica fully.

“You’re the one who wanted to give us this magical fairy god mother chance, by casting us in that play. Well - in some backwards way, it kind of worked. Now can’t you just be happy for me?”

Cheryl stared at Veronica for a moment. She knew that her friend was only throwing out excuses because she missed Archie. But they’re playing a dangerous game, rehashing a fire with the same fuel that burst it before. It’s only a matter of time before all this acting perfect and normal, will result in a demise that she’s not sure they could come back from. But Cheryl just rolls her eyes,
thinking it’s Veronica’s choice to be stupid after she’s already warned her.

“I am. You’re the one who pulled me away to ask”

“Yeah because the way you’re treating everyone, especially Betty? It’s not cool”

Now Cheryl’s brown eyes focused in on Veronica’s with a calculated glare. “You think a girl like that has good intentions? Don’t answer that because even if she does, she doesn’t know anything about how to be like us. She’s not one of us. And let me tell you, she’s a train wreck waiting to happen”

They had gotten significantly closer since Cheryl started talking. This time Veronica held her stance with matching fire, her arms crossed in defence and eyebrows arched in her anger. The bathrooms stood still in silence with not a single sound other than Cheryl’s clear, menacing words.

“I’m not gonna let you self disrupt and ruin everything. The image of our group falls on your shoulders too, we all do our part and I’m not trying to tell you how to do your job - but can you get two things? Get back in line with this group, and get your shit together. Oh and I mean this, as a fucking friend”

Cheryl smirked evilly, her words slipping in off sugary sweet rather than bitter. That’s just the charm of Cheryl Blossom. Even now her lips are pinned in a sweet little smile and she turns around to fix her flawless hair before breezing past a frozen contemplating Veronica to the door. She blows the raven haired girl a mocking kiss before saying “Can’t wait for your sweet sixteenth bash! It’ll be a night you’ll never forget, I’m sure of that Princess V. Bye now!”

(x.x.x.x)

The night is already buzzing with tension and excitement. There’s three main houses where the VIPs are getting ready, one limo for ten to take them to the one big venue. 1500 guests bound to arrive. 6th day of November. 5000 diamonds, emeralds, gemstones glittering the ballroom. 10 million dollars in total. All for one, spoiled 16 year old princess.

Veronica feels increasingly anxious as she gets her hair pinned with all the hair equipment and accessories laid out before her. There’s a whiff of hairspray that she inhales for one second, while the stylist does her finishing touches on Veronica’s dark auburn locks. With that her last deep breath let go and she was now staring at the perfect finished look of the night.

She’s stunning. And she can admit that, with full confidence because right now it feels like not an inch of her is not delivering, from the strappy black heels (best for dancing) to every single glimmer on her expensive party dress. Like always, she takes one long look at herself to equally appreciate and examine every minuscule detail of herself. Being almost shamefully and very fervently glad of how pretty she is.

It’s the only thing that makes her smile big like a Cheshire cat right now, watching as her features light up like the sun when she does. It makes her so excited.

“Betty! Are you ready?”

The blonde girl in her room is just putting on her boots when she hears Veronica call her. The proposition to get ready at Betty’s house instead of just in the Penthouse, because a limo is going to pick them all up and she wants to have a grand arrival and entrance to her own party - was one delivered without much second thought. But as soon as five o’clock rolled around and the house
bell rang with Veronica and about three other people carrying makeup cases and clothes bags, a grumbling Alice Cooper and one very enthralled Polly - Betty knew the bill for tonight would be bigger than she bargained for. Asking her parents to let her go to a friend’s birthday party was hard enough but when she shows up and whirls the hurricane into their entire household too, well Betty doesn’t really care because she’s going out tonight and it’s going to be amazing because it’s Veronica Lodge, someone who she’s starting to feel strongly connected to’s birthday party.

“I’m ready!” The door interconnected to the guest room’s bathroom and the Cooper’s living room busted open with one very sparkly, very flawless Veronica. Her hair was down and loose because she didn’t want to get a headache from a tight hairdo, but it looked even fluffier and silkier than usual if that’s possible. She looks like she’s just walked off a Versace runway and she’s totally flaunting it.

“Oh my god, V! You look spectacular” Betty clasps her hands together staring at her friend totally endeared.

Veronica simpers in response. Her legs already feel like they’re itching to dance and move tonight.

“So, are you going to give Veronica her brilliant birthday present tonight?” Reggie asks casually while Archie rubs some cologne on the side of his neck. They’re standing in Reggie’s en suite with shirts still unbuttoned and shoes not yet on. Jason and Archie both came here earlier because The Mantles is closest to the Los Angeles Pembrooke hotel, which Cheryl and Josie have appointed the limo to pick them up from because that’s Veronica’s ideal birthday dream and tonight is her big night.

“What? Honestly I don’t know if I really outdid myself with the gift this year. It’s just jewellery” Archie voices

“That’s not what I meant - you know, you could make it up in other ways” Reggie grinned meaningfully.

Archie and Jason laughed out loud at his ridiculous face, but also what he was suggesting. “We’re not even back together, Reggie”

“Never stopped you guys before” Reggie quipped, making Archie roll his eyes in the mirror while fixing his fiery red hair to perfection. But his lips are crooked in a small smile.

They took one bros selfie then jumped into the waiting limo because Cheryl would cause a massacre if they’re even a second late tonight. And the next venue to pickup is Thornhill.

“You look hot too, Saint Betty. I’m impressed” Veronica says as she looks Betty up and down nodding approvingly.

“Thanks!” Betty twirled around. “Polly helped me”

The two of them took some photos in the mirror and outfit sneak peaks on their InstaStories, killing short time before the limo would come pick them up. Veronica really did feel much lighter tonight, thanks to making the decision to get ready at Betty’s instead of Cheryl’s or Josie’s because she had to at least stay away from Cheryl a little while more. Also Cheryl would never allow Betty to get ready with them and Veronica wants to, so she’s pleasantly delighted to be getting glammed in this
double storey home with the more cramped than usual bathroom space and not exactly her first choice of a full length mirror or best lighting. But she’s in for it, and nothing could dampen her mood now.

“Ooh! I think the car is here!” Betty jumps excitedly when checking her windows for the tenth time in the past minute. “Mom, we’re going!”

“Thank you so much for lending the house, Mrs Cooper” Veronica kisses the older woman on her cheeks sweetly, trying not to remember anything bad she’s said about her in the past month. It’s a little hard though when Alice not for a second lets down the frown tiring her face. She knows she isn’t Mrs Cooper’s favourite person by a long shot, and neither is she Veronica’s frankly, with her in - your - face strictness and the hard glare she throws when she sees Veronica in her risqué party dress.

“Be careful, Elizabeth” she warns her daughter. They’re dancing halfway out the doorway when Veronica hears her say something obscure and disapproving about Betty’s outfit - and the long shiny limo sitting outside the gates are awaiting them.

As soon as she sees it her insides light on fire.

“Go out there and do it, Andrews” Reggie pushes for the final time.

“Nooo” Archie hides his face in his elbows, he’s genuinely embarrassed and hoping the dimly lit limo is covering his blush.

“Come on, Archie”
“Do it, do it”
“She’s gonna love it, I swear”

Josie and Jason join in on shoving him playfully to persuade him - after Reggie’s very unnecessary and instantly liked by both suggestion for Archie to go and escort Veronica to the limo from Betty’s house. He was immediately against it, not because he didn’t want to escort her, he sure as hell did, but because he wasn’t even sure of the boundaries able to be crossed with them at such a blurry point and whether it would put off her mood for the rest of her special night and just complicate things.

But now that they’ve come on to the idea and all his friends seem to be very much into their relationship, they aren’t going to let this go.

“Oh god, fine. Here goes nothing” he wipes his face ineffectually after much jeers and yelling from all of them to get your ass out of this car.

“Wooo!” The boys hooted together watching Archie brace himself.
“Go get her, Rocky!” Josie shouts.

They’re all crazy, he thinks when he shuts the door and simultaneously shut out their loudness and music. But now he feels like a thirteen year old kid asking Veronica on the first date and his legs are shaking, all jittery inside to see the girl of his dreams and the highlight of his life for what seems like forever. He can see two dark figures coming down from the unlit pathway of The
Coopers, swallowing profusely to try and calm down, but then...

_Holy shit... Veronica looks amazing._

His completely and utterly lost in all that is her sparkling, lively, unearthly glory that just about takes his breath away and every coherent thought in his brain. He’s so stumped by how beautiful she is that he even forgets why his standing there, staring like an idiot.

Veronica smiles. All pearly white teeth and popping cheek bones, because her night must have just come to the most wonderful start - Archie is there admiring her like he’s only just got eyes. She feels only a teeny bit shy in front of his awestruck gaze and she can’t even hide how happy she is in a smile that feels like it’s miles too wide, almost hurting her jaw as she watches him watch her while looking breathtakingly handsome.

“Ronnie, you look.. ravishing” he finally finds the words at the bottom of his throat and smirks at her to match the compliment.

Veronica bites her bottom lip when he says that. She can’t lie that her heart is beating a million times a minute right now, I mean her favourite person in the whole world standing in front of a limo with all her best friends and it cannot get any better than this.

“Well, you look very handsome tonight if I say so myself” she replies after a beat, and the charming and adorable grin he gives her is almost worth everything they’ve been through.

“Ready?” He holds out his hand to her, totally oblivious to Betty standing right there and the rest of their friends who are watching with squeals and giggles from the tinted windows - he just wants to hold her.

She laughs and takes his hand, more ready for tonight than any day of her life. Especially with the warmth of his hand around hers, and his ravaging gaze on her all night long. They walk into the limo looking like the perfect couple. And truly, it does feel perfect.

As soon as he opens the door they’re zapped back into the energetic chaos inside, some upbeat music from the built in speakers and flashes of someone’s phone. “Welcome to the night you’ll never forget, V!” Cheryl greets

“There she is, birthday princess”

“Wow, you guys! Cheryl, Josie.. this is all I wanted! Oh my god!” Veronica took in all her favourite champagne while climbing into the limo.

“All the best for our Princess V” Josie says as she leans closer and nuzzles Veronica on the cheek.

Then the door shuts and everyone is having a blast inside, Veronica pops the first bottle of champagne, they’re all laughing because her expert hands are a little shaky tonight and it just about gets everywhere. Veronica is sitting between Josie and Betty, the main victims who get Jagger spilled all over them and the Blossom twins are sitting together on their left with Reggie and Archie on their right. It’s one of the many moments she’ll miss when the seniors are gone from high school, just their wild nights as children of people who practically own the city. Soon Josie jumps off when Veronica says _let me try again with another bottle!_ and she goes to squeeze
between Reggie and Archie easily.

They’re having everything they can before reaching the Pembrooke so they can still have fun in a party where Veronica’s parents are surely not providing alcohol, and it’s quite literally everything. Cheryl had some plethora of alcoholic drinks which not a single person doesn’t take advantage of. We need it! Veronica and Reggie had both reasoned.

So in just under thirty minutes they’d downed four bottles of single malt scotch and blended scotch between them, Reggie provided liquor jelly shots, two each, and that blend of sugar rush and alcohol rush burned even more. It was a dangerous game to play stuffing what’s usually the whole night’s worth in just half an hour because they could feel their tender throats already swelling and burning but it couldn’t kill their crazy insistent need to be hammered and have fun all night long.

“It’s just not as good without the liquid courage, you know Betts?” Veronica explained.

Then because she really wanted to enjoy herself with her best friend Cheryl tonight, and everyone followed along since it’s her birthday, they all had at least one of the Cherry Blossoms Cheryl loves to make which is a fusion of pink lemonade and Cherry Schnapps diluted with Vodka all over. They’re passing glasses and pouring shots down each other’s throats laughing and slipping and it all feels like such a high dream when the car finally pulls up to The Pembrooke drop off.

They come out appearing completely wasted, the girls trying their very best to use every debutante lesson of balancing in heels when their whole feet feel like they’re webbed and numb. It works though, for the most part. So there’s dozens of cameramen propped outside and they all smile dazzlingly looking just like the most well raised, wealthy, respectable people they are. The cold November air finally fades when they stride into the Pembrooke’s lobby, which the minimal people hanging around start wondering where all these pretty faced kids came from.

It’s a quiet elevator ride to the ballroom where everyone mentally prepares and pulls together their best stable face for the night with a lot of hair fixing, makeup touching. Finally when they make it into what was last a sickening ball her parents so cunningly threw to keep their reputation has turned into one of the very hip high class night clubs of Los Angeles. For an underage appropriate group, of course. She’s actually very impressed by her parents.

The whole place is packed with all her favourite people whom are mostly standing near the entrance to celebrate her entrance - Jughead and Jellybean, Kevin, Scarlett and Scott Moffet, Midge, all people she likes despite of wether or not Cheryl and the rest accept them. She feels genuinely elated when she sees their face light up enough to shine on the whole city when they see her come in, and the blinding lights flashing with significance to how important and loved she is.

“We want to wish our dearest daughter, the person who made me realise I could be a better person, the shining light of my life since she was born - Veronica Cecelia Lodge. I just want you to know darling that I’ll do everything I can to always protect you, and give you the best, and that you’ll always be my little girl. Also the largest of praises to my gorgeous wife Hermione for carrying and bringing her into this world. My love, you showed me that parenthood; something I thought could never be a part of my life, is one challenge I enjoy everyday. Thank you honey” Hiram Lodge gives his speech and Veronica quickly runs up the stage to kiss him on the cheek. He envelops her in a big hug, and this feels so nice.

“Alright now, enjoy your night kids!” He waves off to the crowd, exiting stage left after Hermione gives her last kiss on her daughter’s forehead.

The party begins then. Hiram and Hermione have granted them much needed privacy to let loose
and be wild teenagers, so the DJ turns up one of the many upbeat dance tracks that the dark collision of bodies start moving and jiving to. Veronica thinks it’s kind of a screwed up how she lives a half perfect life, one part where she holds on to all her friends and they dance around together and her parents are acting so precious... it all holds up.

So at some point she’s pulled Jughead from his nervous little head bumping to actually join her and just move, Juggy! Let the music take over you! and it might be the best fun they’ve had together all year. He’s her best friend after all, and in fact not as much of a wallpaper slash mood kill as many people think, but still a little bit.

Okay, so maybe she’s kind of lost her other main party animals in the crowd and that’s really why. Cheryl must be up to her usual evil genius game planning schemes soon to come, she doesn’t even want to think what Josie and Reggie might be doing, and Betty her little flower is probably getting a drink for an excuse or something. And it actually feels really nice to put her hands on his shoulders and move but he’s so incredibly goofy that any dancing he does just makes her crack up every little bit.

So slowly she inches away and finds herself culminating the dance floor with Scarlett and there’s Jellybean somewhere here too... and then she feels a strong hard body slightly pressing into her back and when she turns around and sees him she can’t help laugh gleefully and press them together tighter for fun.

“Okay! You can’t do that with my twin brother!” Scarlett exclaims after just a number of minor overboard grinding, and pulling the two of them apart.

Veronica rolls her eyes. “Oh whatever, bitch” Both Scarlett and her erupt into little giggles and she realises they’re probably not the only ones who had a little drink before coming here.

At the same time though, it feels almost impossible to get closer to any of the male population tonight - not because she wants to, it’s just natural and sensible party etiquette, but every time she even steps a quarter too near to one of ‘the boys’ they immediately move away like she has an OFF LIMITS sign blaring red on her forehead.

Between all this and the shivery feeling on her bare back that a certain someone’s eyes are just on her like a hawk, it’s so fucking satisfying. Not sure why, but somewhere between the emotional connection cut off and breaking up and fighting to the death, she’s almost forgotten how easily he tracks her out of a million people.

Almost.

The beat of what’s probably a Bebe Rexha song blasting through the million dollar sound system encourages her to do something daring, cos since when isn’t Veronica Lodge brave? She catches glimpse of his catching red hair and knows she has to do something to please him, or maybe torture him, but she just feels it in her bones tonight.

“Hey Betty! Come on dance with me, don’t be such a wallflower. The real fun is in the actual dance floor hello?” She pulls her new blonde bestie with her and while Betty is just bumping along nervously, Veronica starts to sway her hips boldly thrashing her head back and forth so he can see what’s just a curtain of ink black hair and her body moving so sexily.

He’s just about to start enjoying the view of Veronica doing exactly what she does best, absolutely tantalising with her level of effortless seductiveness - when a high toned voice comes over the speakers going louder than the music for one second. It’s Cheryl.
“Alright little kitties! It’s time for the games of the night! We’re going old school with spin the bottle so everyone interested can start circling around moi right.. about.. now”

They’re all so high on life and still very very drunk so it doesn’t take much encouragement for them to get circled all though Veronica does have to question her friend’s strangeness sometimes. “What is it with Cheryl and games? She’s vicariously reliving her suppressed childhood as a well gown woman”

Also, if this is some kind of twisted plan of Cheryl’s to make Archie jealous and purposely blow up their fun or something, because that’s the vibe Veronica gets when Cheryl deliberately places her on the couches with a bunch of the attendee Bulldogs and smirks knowingly from her to Archie.

But then they’re wobbling around by the couches that is in one corner of the room where the refreshments are, so it’s actually for eating. Only a limited amount of people are participating since couch space is numbered though, so the rest of interested parties stand around in a big crowd watching the game. All of Raffles’ core group is there of course, and Veronica is grinning like she has all night watching where the bottle lands because she’s going first, as the birthday princess must.

“Oh shit...”

Literally not a single person there including Veronica doesn’t burst into laughter when the spinning bottle lands right next to her, on Betty Cooper. Well, if Cheryl’s plan is to make her jealous - the red head looks positively flustered when the bottle lands - then it just thwarted in the best way possible.

“Oh, this cannot be happening”

“YES!”

“Ohh, it’s clearly pointing to the new girl. Pucker up or pathetically veto, participants?” Cheryl oozed coolness from her position speaking into the microphone. Everyone around them hollered for it to happen, and of course Veronica isn’t going to veto in a game on her night.

She turns to face Betty on her left, a little smile playing on her lips because this has got to be the most backwards thing to happen at this birthday party. And for a moment she pictures Alice Cooper sitting on her bed at home worrying about Betty, unknowing what exactly she’s about to be up to.

“Uhh..”

“No one’s gonna veto us” Veronica whispered to her. “Just so you know”

Betty nods grimly then. Her face is all red from the alcohol overdose and too much attention given to them. “Is this gonna make things weird?”

“Only if you make it that way” Veronica shrugs. She positions herself so their shoulders are almost brushing and this is literally just a dumb game but she can feel the worry radiating off of Betty’s rigid frame.

“Ready?”

Betty nods slightly, her breath shaking. Gosh, lightweight.

“Don’t freak out, just trust me” Veronica tells her one last time before colliding their lips together
so precisely and it spins all their insides because every scent coming from Betty - the sweet, strawberry vanilla mix, it’s filling her senses like a kiss does and her hand brushes Betty’s cheekbone lightly until their moment is finally over.

There’s cheering and laughing all around, but the best thing is that when Veronica watches her reaction for a second then Betty giggles too. So she knows it’s okay, a little breathless and a little more acquainted to her now. Veronica makes sure she turns to face the right person at just the right time and perfectly her eyes fall right into his - because he’s been watching her intently the whole time.

(x.x.x.x)

The insane game take some twists and turns with Reggie having to kiss Scott Moffet at one point and one of the guys being understandably creeped about having to kiss fourteen year old Jellybean, but mostly it’s just a fun excuse for many people to lock lips and even the campy ones are pretty entertaining, but it does get weird. Cheryl Blossom and Moose Mason who, as a very small number of people know is probably not that straight, got to kiss at one point.

Later though, when most people had run their turns and Cheryl scampered off to think up some other fun things to do - really, this girl has a disturbing affinity for playing games - most of the party resumes their dancing and eating all the sugary sweet delicacies provided.

Archie is blinking every few seconds to stabilise his vision when everything in sight starts to go static, helping himself to one of the Belgian chocolate truffles. Reggie comes over even more loosened up than he normally is - beating the back of Archie’s head and stealing his chocolate truffle before Archie can take a bite.

“Dude” Archie stood unamused

“You know, never thought I’d see the day that *Archie Andrews* is the most boring person to be around at a party”

“Whatever” he mumbled back, picking up another truffle.

“Look if you want to go dance with Veronica - which is the centre of why you’re usually hyped up at parties, just go dance with her!”

Archie can’t deny that sentiment, in fact he’s one hundred percent attested to it. Going out and dancing is ninety five percent fun because Veronica will dance with him, but watching her do that tonight with the pure knowledge he can’t just reach out and touch her and grab her is pouring down any party parade mood he had previously.

“It’s not so easy, Reg” he tries to smile casually

His dark haired friend stared with narrow eyes at him in that way that can only mean he’s wondering how the actual fuck something works - and in this case it’s Archie’s brain. Archie swallows a drink and looks away nervously to avoid the smoking resentment glare from his friend. Finally after an elongated moment Reggie says

“Veronica looks effing hot, if I’d say so myself -“

“Reggie” Archie turns to him with a clenched jaw in a flash.

Reggie waved his hand “ - not for me, of course. That level of perfection just holds so much power
to satisfy, don’t you think?”

“You’re off your rockers. And getting nowhere”

“All I’m saying is, Andrews. You have the chance tonight - take it” He whispers closer to Archie’s face before smirking and sauntering off, leaving a very confused but slightly more in light red headed boy. It’s not like he hasn’t been craving her all night long.

(x.x.x.x)

Veronica is easily having the best fun dancing around all her good friends, having been here for quite some time and ready to hop off for a nose - powdering just a sec. She excuses herself from her friends and is about to walk away when she feels a very strong and muscular arm wrap around her waist from behind and pressing her into a hard body and honestly she’s so shocked but it doesn’t take long to register who this is.

He’s been lurking moping around like he doesn’t have a great social life, just wallowing because they aren’t together tonight. But that’s when she’s sure it’s him because his hot breath is down on her neck but she still can’t really see him, and she wriggles to turn around but his hold is so strong that her efforts are laughable.

When she finally stops, just laying her head against his chest, he chuckles at her. “What, you don’t want to dance with me?”

She wants to say something smart ass, she really does. But oh god when he leans down and whispers his lips are just next to her ear.. shit, she really shouldn’t be so responsive to his body and all that is familiar, she knows just how fucking good it can be. And the memory of him on top of her in the park that morning is still replaying itself in her mind like she could ever forget it.

“But really, I’m actually quite enjoying myself without you” she tilts her head up to whisper near his lips.

Archie pauses for a moment. Just eyeing her, from this angle he can see just everything that’s going on from her face to her dress and the deep plunging neckline and she is pretty much pinned against him, so..

“Dance with me. Just once, I promise you’ll enjoy yourself even more”

“Fine then, Archiekins” Veronica sighed “Only because I pity your little mope fest”

She’s pretending to be coy, but in her heart Veronica knows this is more of a game they both like to play. And she knows just how to win, because that’s exactly what Veronica Lodge does and Archie Andrews is looking like pretty easy game after months of no contact. He’ll be a goner in minutes.

They start moving.

Her hips swish deliberately against him, still being held from behind but that’s not a problem. She presses her ass into him as much as possible, then feels his arm loosen around her waist like he’s ready to free her. Veronica doesn’t care now though, she actually quite likes this position. So she lifts her arms to wrap around his neck from behind, bringing his face closer to her neck every second.

His hands are starting to descend, she can feel them inch slowly from around her waist to where he just presses them into her hips and starts rubbing torturous circles that he knows is one of her weak points. He could have her panting and bothered just by rubbing there.
Veronica knows it too, the little bolts of pain mixed with soothing pleasure from his fingers is going to only one place like fuck if he didn’t know how to turn her on. Archie’s easily adapted to her body after so many nights since they were fourteen - and he’s just as much an expert at flipping the tables on her so he’s the one in control.

And damn, if she doesn’t like him to be all alpha male like and rough sometimes.

Veronica feels when he starts moving them away from the busier part of the dance floor to one more secluded, all the while her lips are parted in some twisted smile because he’s seriously good at touching her in just all the right places. He flips around a corner and she feels that toxic twisted rush creeping up her back when he presses his warm lips against her cool neck in the darkness where no one can see.

She’s forgetting everything Cheryl said and she knows about talking things through before acting like this, and she’s so drunk and excited it’s like nothing can stop the bad decisions. Veronica uses one hand to keep his head down on her neck and reaches for the other one, still pressing on her hip, to bring it down past the high hem of her party dress.

When Archie feels the cool bare skin of her legs it’s when he knows she’s clearly asking for something - and he stops for all but two seconds. “Ronnie”

“Mhm, don’t stop Archie” she says breathlessly, holding his hand in hers and inching it closer to the top of her bare thighs.

That’s all the invitation Archie needs, he hungrily kisses her after turning her around in one fluid movement and pressing her against the wall. Veronica smiles into the kiss, she’s missed just how amazing Archie’s kisses are, and she loses control even more when he’s being all rough. She makes sure to press her chest into his plainly so she can feel how hard her nipples are from all the kissing and touching.

Archie uses his other hand to slap her hand away from holding his, taking both instead and pining them above her head on the wall. His other hand does as she asks and finds its way under her dress, hiking it up and feeling her against her panties. She’s so wet already that it drives him insane, after months of not touching her. She can’t continue kissing him because she’s so distracted by his fingers slipping into the laceyness and she’s practically salivating by now, he hasn’t touched her for so long and damn it hurts aching for him.

Archie moves to kiss her neck then, biting on the sensitive skin and running his tongue over it to soothe her. His left thumb is rubbing the nub between her legs just enough while his finger is hitting just that perfect spot inside her. Veronica feels like she’s breathless, blinded, knowing she shouldn’t be letting him just do this but that’s not important right now.

What’s important is Archie can feel her wetness dripping onto the palm of his hand and if she weren’t so drunk it’d probably be embarrassing how wet she is for him.

“Fuck baby, you’re so wet for me right now” he mumbles into her sweet smelling neck that’s taunting with how tempting it smells.

“Only for you, baby” she pants back.

She can feel him smirking proudly against her neck, but he feels like she’s holding back and resisting something. “It’s okay baby, just let go. I’ve got you” he whispers huskily. Then he’s making serious hickeys on her neck and collarbone but that’s all just before she completely loses herself with a wave of ecstasy that washes over her body. She’s shaking and trembling and
cumming all over his hand and her thighs probably, Archie just keeps rubbing her to draw out the long awaited orgasm.

It’s after a few moments only that Veronica can pull herself together and she’s still panting like some horny sex crazed teen but really - that’s what they are right now.

Then she opens her eyes and sees Archie’s dark brown eyes wide and staring into her. She feels even more ready then, just wants to show him how good that fucking felt and he should feel it too. Veronica leans forward and presses her lips to his in an electrifying kiss and she wraps her arms around him so she can jump up, effectively wrapping her legs around his waist and locking them.

At this position she can feel him hard and growing even bigger in his pants, it has to be painful by this point, she can’t stop herself and rubs against him a little bit. He kisses her even deeper then.

When they pull apart Veronica wants to turn this around and blow his mind, but when their eyes open suddenly they both lean their foreheads against each other and just breathe. Their eyes are inches apart, looking into each other through hooded lashes, all her limbs wrapped around him and Archie has his hands hugging her waist close and holding her up.

It’s a minute of silent adoration, then Veronica deliberately moves one hand away from around his neck and starts grazing his abs down to where he really wants it most - her small hand is rubbing him against his jeans when suddenly a bright phone flashlight shines their way in the almost pitch darkness that makes her jump away from him.

They separate immediately, more out of surprise and blocking their eyes from the brightness than anything. “Archie - Veronica! Everyone is looking for you, specifically Cheryl. She just called the next game specially for you and you should probably get there before, you know.. other people see you” Jellybean’s blue eyes are wide and almost terrified at the sight of them together, in such a precarious position.

The two of them don’t really know how to react, they just stare at her. “Come on! Cheryl really wants you”

Veronica smiles at him then. Her eyes go down to her bulging hard on and the frustration written perfectly on his face - he can’t believe this is happening. “Whoops, sorry we couldn’t finish Archiekins” Veronica whispers teasingly. She sauntered away from him and took Jellybean’s hand, the girl looking anywhere other than at the couple. Veronica smiled over her shoulder at him while they walked away together. “The queen awaits”

(x.x.x.x)

“Veronica where were you?”

“I was dancing, Cherry Bombshell relax” the way she swayed her hair and was being extra playful seemed off to Cheryl though, especially since Veronica’s been missing for the good part of an hour. Her deep glare didn’t falter.

“Where’s Archie?”

Veronica whirled around and giggled once before spotting him, just walking up with his hair looking more tousled and his eyes slightly spaced out. Cheryl narrowed her eyes from him, to Veronica and her equally messy - but - still - hot hair and the red bruise starting to form on the base of her neck. Cheryl huffed. She really doesn’t listen to me, does she? Well in that case.
“So what game are we playing, Cher? Hurry up already” Reggie asked snapping her out of her angry reverie.

Cheryl cleared her throat “How about two teams? Each one will have their princess, or prince. And each team needs to find the opposing team’s royal highness. When they do, a prize awaits” She explained at the top of her head. “I say boys versus girls since it’s easier that way. And we’ll go boys get this area and the girls...”

“The Pembrooke Honours floors. I have the key cards and there aren’t any guests on the second and third suite floors” Veronica suggests.

They all pondered the game for a little while. It sounded like a good idea and Cheryl’s idea of a ‘prize’ must be worth a lot. “First team to find the other’s royal captive by midnight gets the prize?” Josie suggested

“Sounds good. When midnight strikes the game is over, more thrilling. Let’s play” Veronica decides

“Everyone else on the team are hunters, and each team has one that’s being hunted. So who?” Jason stepped up and started pulling the game together.

“I’ll be one princess!” Veronica jumps happily “I practically am anyway” The friends chuckled and let her be one. “Okay so, other team?”

“I’ll choose” Veronica interrupts “Kevin. He’ll be the other team’s prince”

“Okay” Kevin shrugs

Archie scoffs “Bossy” at Veronica. She raises her brows challengingly, as people started to disperse into both teams she came up closer to him and whispered subtly “If you come and find me... there’ll be an even better reward. One that’s personal and... mind blowing”

Archie just stares at her walking away with a smirk over her shoulder, knowing with full assurance that he has to find Veronica before anyone else on his team does. And he has a pretty good idea where she’ll probably hide.

When all the girls had followed trotting in their high heels behind Veronica up the elevator trying to be quiet at this time of the night, and she slid the key into the top Pembrooke Honours floors. “So I’m going to hide in the skybox. It’s entrance is really secluded if you don’t know where it is you’d miss it”

“No” Cheryl grabs her arm harshly “You hide in the executive luncheon room. It looks locked from outside and the door is heavy”

“Okay no, The Skybox is way more out of way no one would even think to go there. The Luncheon Room is just a left turn from the elevator”

“There’s a double hallway - it looks misleading” Cheryl insists

“But nobody knows where The Skybox is -“

“The signal there’s shitty, what if there’s an emergency and we had to call you?”
“Why would you need to call me?” Veronica is getting seriously pissed now.

“Okay you two stop fighting! I’ve had it enough with the two of you, Veronica go in the Luncheon Room and Cheryl back off okay? Holy fuck” Josie broke up the little spur between them and rubbed her temples exasperatedly with a big sigh.

Veronica crossed her arms, only a little bit disappointed to not hide in The Skybox but there’s no more use in arguing with Cheryl or Josie. So she shuts the door behind her and holds her phone waiting for the strike of midnight.

“Alright girls, our princess’s hidden. Jason texted me and they’re ready too. Everybody downstairs let’s find that Keller boy!” Cheryl said loudly to all the strung out and delirious girls needing a little push down the elevator. She shouted for them to keep moving along and with the perfect precision, pulls away Betty from the rest of them.

Her eyes are red rimmed and she’s already thrown up twice tonight, proving to not have the stomach for all the alcohol she had drunk in the limo with them. She’s practically stumbling on her own two feet and seems dizzy and in a state of vertigo. She’s telling herself to never drink alcohol again until she’s at least in college, and protect her own liver when Cheryl has a very tight grip on her arm and pulls her along while Josie is getting the rest of them back in the elevator.

“Cher - Cheryl, wh what -“

“Hush baby girl, you’ve had too much to drink. Just sit her and sober up, kay? We’ll get you once the game is over. You seem awfully deranged” They got to the end of one hallway and Cheryl pushes open a door, light shining from inside the room. She patted Betty on the back and pushes her lightly into the room, which looks like she’s just stepped into a version of heaven.

“Uh, I am.. actually. Thank you, Cheryl” Betty looked up at the statesque red head confused by her genuine act of kindness.

Cheryl smiled. “Well of course. I’ll see you then!” Then the door shut behind her and Betty stood unmoving inside this very scarily beautiful room.

Meanwhile the minute boys and girls have switched spaces Archie Andrews takes it upon himself to, instead of checking every stall in the girls’ bathroom of the poker game room, to head down the very secluded hallway to where he knows for a fact Veronica will be hiding herself - The Skybox.

He’s a little wobbly on his two feet as he dizzies and pushes open the door, so only ready to see Veronica there and get his reward. But inside a room that’s completely empty he instead meets the sight of Betty Cooper, his face scrunching up in confusion because this is the last person he expected or wants to be here.

“Betty?” The blonde girl whirls around from staring out at the LA night sky when she hears the door open. Her eyes are wide in surprise and she looks so small standing in this outstanding room. The glass windows all around them, illuminate everything. “Aren’t you supposed to be downstairs with the other girls looking for Kevin?”

She fumbles over her words a little bit before replying “Cheryl said I should wait it out or whatever, I’m not feeling good at all”

“Oh” Archie realises then “Are you.. sick?”
“I’m very drunk” she says seriously “and I think I’ve gone to heaven!”

Archie laughed “Yeah this room is quite the display. I know Veronica likes it here, favourite room in this whole place besides her bedroom. I thought she’d be here... but sorry I’m rambling”

“It’s okay” Betty sighed and stared at the twinkling stars above them “Are you sure this isn’t heaven?”

“Yes, you must have drank a lot just now”

“Doesn’t help that I’ve never drunk at all before”

“Are you serious?” Archie looked at her perplexed, standing by the opened door.

Betty giggles “Yeah, not everybody drinks Vodka like it’s water and long island iced teas at lunch, y’know?”

“The iced tea’s complimentary and we don’t drink that much”

She full on laughed now, getting up and scooting closer towards the glass part of the floors where you’d be able to look down and be staring into the pool downstairs right beneath your feet. “Sure, sure”

“Oh, you probably shouldn’t do that”

Betty skipped forward daringly and once stumbled when she hit the glass floors, suddenly realising how high above ground she is and the fear of height starting in her. She jumped back and gasped so loud Archie instinctively ran forward to catch her from hurting herself. She tipped back and stumbled backwards so much she knocked the both of them over, the entire time scaring herself more than ever.

She heard Archie’s head thump against the floor and sat up in mortification “Oh my god! I’m so sorry”

“Ow - no, it’s okay. Are you okay? You fell pretty badly”

“I’m fine I’m fine, just... the worst drunk person in the entire universe” she turned around and scooted nearer to him so her knees are almost touching his thighs. She sighs “I’m such a mess”

“Not the worst. Just a little clumsy honestly” Archie laughs, making Betty laugh too. She’s too out of sorts to use the sober part of her brain, if there is any left, and the dreamy eyes of Archie Andrews twinkling as he laughs at her is starting to take effect like it would on any girl. That, and the very earnest smile of his lips and the laughing lines in his cheek and forehead, all so endearing especially now she’s up close.

They’re quiet for just half a second - the briefest moment of his life where he would not he able to prepare himself for anything - and Betty suddenly feeds up all the raving hormones inside her and pulls his face into hers and kisses him. It’s engulfing, and shocking, and the shortest kiss he’s ever had in his whole life. If only it had happened even a single second earlier.

Veronica rolled her eyes and cursed once her phone showed 12.01 and no one had come to find her yet. Either these boys are really asshats at searching or the girls already won and everyone forgot to call her, but either way she scrambles up to get the hell out of this luncheon room.
Well. The halls are actually still pretty noisy, she can hear some familiar voices talking over each other from some ways away but nobody is in front of her so she walks down, trying to look out for Archie instead. He might not have found her tonight, but maybe he is in the right place and he knew why she suggested this floor.. maybe he just got there and is wondering where else she could be.

Veronica discreetly made her way to The Skybox and made just that small turn - seeing the door open and steps proudly in front of it to reveal herself to him. Only what she sees makes her heart literally stop dead.

Betty and Archie are kissing. What the hell? She looked away instantly and started walking away, not wanting to see even another second of that. A part of her wants to tear them apart. Another part of her want to scream. She’s running into the elevator and breathing so heavily and she slides her card into Penthouse faster than ever.

Every part of her is boiling. In anger, confusion and she has no idea what to think. But as soon as the doors shut and the image of them in her head hits her again all alone - she’s spiralling. Her legs give in and the tears spill out on and on and her breath feels caught in her throat like a tight knot all at once. “I trusted her” she sobs to herself, feeling the gratitude of it all hit her as the hot stream of tears do “I trusted that bitch!”

Chapter End Notes

Guys, P L E A S E D O N T H A T E M E.

I promise this is going somewhere, so tell me what you think! About the ending and the Varchie interactions ~

Again, I’m deeply sorry. Love you guys.
Chapter #9 White Blood

- said you’d always be my white blood, circulate the right love.

giving me your white blood. I need your right here with me, here with me -

It’s a quarter past one in the morning when Veronica walked down the long flight of stairs from her room into the welcoming hallway of their home, where the elevator is. In her long silky black robe and bedtime slip, face scrubbed of makeup and borne in sleepy confusion because the reception just woke her and said there’s a friend coming up to see her. She didn’t want to think about anything else after what happened, still too numb by the alcohol and in early stages of shock to actually mentally comprehend anything that she saw. So Veronica resorted to just cutting off her feelings until morning came and she’d actually be able to feel them properly, by drowning in her big bed and sleeping. But now she walked into the hallway and her eyes hurt from the gleaming chandelier, then the elevator opened flabbergasting her even more.

“Betty? What the hell are you doing here? Why aren’t you home?”

There was no answer. She furrowed her brows and stared at Betty in disbelief but the blonde girl didn’t say anything back. For one second Veronica questioned her perfect vision, or wether her life had just hit a perpetual pause button.

“V- Veronica, I. I’m” Betty walked out of the elevator, coming closer, and Veronica was unaware that she started stepping back from the girl. She still had her heeled boots on and Veronica is barefoot, making her presence seemed even more magnifying like her nightmare stalking towards her. “I’m so sorry Veronica. I did this thing and -”

She watched as Betty’s voice started to break and her face crumple into a devastated blotchy red mess, black black tears streaming down her porcelain face and her whole body shook in tremors. “I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry Veronica I - I’m so-“

She fell on her knees and crumbled right in front of her. Veronica quickly kneeled down and put her hands cautiously on Betty’s arms, trying to comfort her even though she has no idea why or what.

“Veronica I did something terrible. I did something so bad I - I cant, I shouldn’t have and -“ her words started disappearing into terrifying sobs so much so that Veronica couldn’t bear hearing them anymore.
“Hey hey Betty it’s okay - stop it, look at me”

“No. No you don’t understand, you’d never forgive me if you know what I did...”

“Betty I -“ She sighed and leaned further, completely taken off guard when Betty clung her arms around Veronica and then there they were. A tangled mess of limbs on the cold marble floors freezing their bare legs.

“You have to listen. You have to, I -“ before she could say anything her wrenching sobs overtook her, but she tried hard to fight them and failed to speak coherently “I ki -“

“Betty Betty stop. Stop, okay? Just - I know” Veronica told her.

Betty looked up then. Her blue eyes met Veronica’s brown ones and for a second all she could see was how her eyes weren’t even blue anymore, they were totally lost in red. Veronica’s heart quickened in a sudden fear. “You don’t know. If you knew you’d hate me! You’ll hate me, you’d hate me forever if you knew -“

“Betty it’s okay. It’s okay” Veronica fully hugged her then, feeling Betty’s unstoppable tears dampening her robe and her body shaking so much halfway on top of her lap. “It’s okay, just please don’t say anything. Whatever it is, it’s okay. I just can’t hear you say it, alright?”

“I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry” Betty cried even harder. The pain in which she felt was eating away at her from inside out. Unknown to her of course, all Veronica could understand was a continuing string of those words, I’m sorry slipping from her lips. For all that Betty is the Sunshine Barbie lighting up every room with her cheery smile, right now Betty looked so -

Scary. Her face was pale and blue, big black streaks going down her face. Every part of her is shaking, and her eyes are so red she looks closer and closer to passing out. Veronica couldn’t believe this girl is actually the same girl she’d grown to know and like so deeply.

“Alright, you’re sorry? Then don’t say anything. Please don’t say anything Betty I can’t - it’s okay, it’s okay”

Betty was the very definition of a train wreck. That’s all Veronica could think, that Cheryl was right. “A train wreck waiting to happen” she was right. She’s never seen somebody more torn apart than Betty is right now just keeling over almost choking out of breath.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry” she thrashed her head back and forth.

“Hey. Betty” Veronica held her chin and faced her back up so she could see her. “It’s okay”

“No. I can’t not tell you - I messed up, Veronica.. I’m a mess up” She shook her head.

“Okay. Stop”

She did stop. She stopped apologising, for a while there were no more words coming out of her mouth just more sobs and cries and her hands rubbing her eyes painfully. “You don’t know what I did” Betty whispered finally.

Veronica stared at her. She was like a different person, this must be what guilty Betty looks like. “What is it?” She tried to keep her voice calm.

Again there was silence. Complete silence. Not a single word, not a breath, not even the hiccuppy sobs anymore. She was completely silent. Just staring into Veronica’s face like trying to capture
every part of it, until her focus faltered and she just stared into space at nothing at all. Veronica is about to say her name again to nudge her back into reality, but then Betty’s face looked drained of all it’s colour.

“I killed someone”

Veronica’s brows furrowed. “What?”

Betty jerked in an ungodly manner away from Veronica like you do before you throw up, the only warning Veronica has before she releases everything in her system on the shiny marble floors.

“Oh, god” Veronica groaned. She stood up and picked the phone off the wall and pressed 4 for car service. “Hi, pick up my friend in the Penthouse hall please? I need you to drive her home. Yes I have the address. Thank you”

When she looked back down Betty had scooted all the way to the wall and was leaning against it eyes already fluttered shut. She sighed, stepping over the icky mess and heading back up the stairs. 

(Train wreck.

(x.x.x.x)

His body is in a hyper state of shock. He can’t move, or breathe properly, skin feels like its caking and building and he’s sweating and suffocating beneath. Archie stared up at the ceiling of his bedroom unable to sleep. All night long, since the most confusing kiss of his life ever happened.

“Betty? what the hell?”

“Oh my - I’m so sorry Archie, I don’t know what I was thinking”

He couldn’t believe what actually just happened. The most sickeningly sweet kiss of his life, one he couldn’t comprehend. Archie feels reminded of how much of a goof he is - not realising again that a girl, this time one that Veronica actually likes has been into him.

What about Veronica? Veronica and Betty are friends. Veronica and Archie are...

He shook his head. Getting up and stepping away from her cautiously. Her lovely face red in shame and guilt. Archie had to get out of there. He had to run. He couldn’t see Veronica, or be in her party or keep on his two feet. He started freaking out.

If anything, running all the way back home on a freezing night after Betty kissing him only shined a light on one thing - he loves Veronica more than anything or anyone in the whole wide world.

So when he’s shaking ripping his shirt off and throwing himself on the bed, Archie still can’t get it out of his head. Love her. Love her. Love her. I love her. He may have known it since they were thirteen, but he’s never felt it avalanche on him this hard breaking through too fast to catch his breath. I just, love her.

He’s scared and disgusted even though he never kissed Betty back for a second, the blonde bombshell, only image of her luscious black hair and sultry dark eyes flashing through his mind. His sexy, dark angel haunting him even when another perfectly sweet girl is kissing him. And he can’t help feel like the biggest dick, the biggest fuck up to have ever let her go when he had her. Archie couldn’t take his mind off any of it.
The girls found Kevin hiding in Veronica’s parents’ liquor sanctuary.

Nobody knows where Veronica hid.

Reggie and Josie left the party really early in the morning so they can go to the airport together when the sun comes out.

Jason snuck away when everyone was saying goodbye to Josie, something he’s weirdly been doing lately.

That’s all Archie knows from the various texts that mostly Reggie had filled him in, but it’s just past six now and Veronica probably isn’t even up - she always sleeps in after partying and doesn’t have hangovers. But he can’t stop this guilt eating away at him, or the realisation that has been growing and growing he just has to tell her.

So Archie reaches over to his nightstand and with shaky fingers scrolls through all his iMessages, sinking lower when he has to scroll so far down to find Veronica’s name. It used to always be number one, but the last text she sent him is dated to three months ago. It’s so unusual that his heart breaks.

August 20th 2017/ Ronnie Lodge ❤️: I hope your parents decide to come home tomorrow morning instead. Leaving now, can’t wait to see you there. xo

That was the last thing she ever sent before they met up at the Fusion Fiesta Party and he had to talk about something important with her.

Archie decides to type it out before he can chicken out again.

Ronnie, can I come over the penthouse tday? I hv to talk to u about something

He sends it. His eyes clench shut. And just hopes desperately that she’ll wake soon and read it.

(x.x.x.x)

Veronica kicked off her expensive sheets too violently for somebody who just opened their eyes from sleep at the very same moment, much like a brat but she couldn’t stop herself - this is the second fucking time her ringing phone wakes her today. And counting on the fact that the first time sucked, sucking all the energy out of her she can’t expect this second time to be any different.

She throws a cashmere pillow off the bed with her sheets in anger too for good measure, picking her buzzing ringing phone from the nightstand. It’s Kevin Keller. Veronica clicks answer and falls back on her pillows, hoping this isn’t a story time phone call.

“What do you want?”

“Good morning to you too birthday princess!”

“Its not my birthday anymore” Her fingers play with the edge of a pillow, already missing her sheets and wishes she could cuddle in them.

“Alright then, just Princess V like normal. Listen, I need your confirmation for the Charity Show
and if so a couple things to tell you about rehearsals and all”

“Oh shit Kev…” She really wasn’t in the mood to perform a song by the time Monday comes. “I have to. My parents”

“Okay then. I trust you enough to be a complete pro so you can just come in Sunday night for the sound rehearsal and Monday.” His voice threaded in understanding and care. Veronica sighed. This is the good part about having people everywhere who care for you. “I do have to make sure of one thing right now - Sir Jack said you’re performing an original song for extra credit in your song writing class? So I’ll type that on the program?”

Veronica blanked. Right. The song she’s been writing in class made from random scribbles of her emotions throughout the day, everything that has been accumulating recently. “Uh... I guess I need the extra credit for my college application before Ivy Reps”

“Girl, you have no need for that. You’re grades and extra curriculars could get you into an Ivy by this year, you don’t have to do an original if you’re not ready”

“No, I want it. Who else is performing at the show?” She had to challenge herself in a time of feeling helpless, the only way to show everyone she’s still her.

Kevin chuckled. “Don’t worry, I’ll be sure to put your picture on the front page of the program”

“It’s not about that”

“A handful of people. Look what’s your song called? And the name of the Charity you’re representing? I need to get these printed in an hour”

“Uh, the charity’s Acres Of Love. Development and relief services, provided for children in South Africa”

“Kay” Kevin started noting it down.

Veronica sprung up and started trashing through her table drawers quickly. She threw a bunch of things out before belatedly remembering she left the papers on the grand piano when rehearsing it yesterday. She sighed, stomping downstairs with Kevin still waiting on the line. All she could really think now is that Archie also said he’ll perform, and singing this song in front of him is something she’s just not ready for yet.

“And your song?”

Her eyes glaze over all the lyrics she’s written once, imagining herself singing them and feels powerful again. Hating herself for it, Veronica thinks well I have to face my demons someway.

“Sorry Kev. Just found it. It’s called Cold As Stone”

(x.x.x.x)

Archie still sat half undressed in his bed by early noon, paper and pencil in his hand and phone opened to Veronica’s chat. He left it there waiting on her to come online and see it, which she did. Then he waited for the typing bubble to come up. That never happened. The message left on read, he’d like to assume she’s just thinking an answer but it’s been three hours.

Truth is Veronica did read the message but had absolutely no heart to even reply to him. It’s more than fucked up, yesterday everything felt blossomy and thrilling between them and now she can’t
even text a word to him. It’s what she’s thinking when she sits back at her desk and starts changing some words on her song, I was wearing my heart on my sleeve before when I used to be down on my knees. It’s funny, how clearly I see I was trying.

She writes the words into the last verse.

So I’m cold as stone. The only way I know to keep my soul and never let it show.

The truth she couldn’t hide herself from. The truth that whispered to her, maybe I’m more messed up on the inside than even I know.

Archie took a break off his lyrics and started scrolling through Twitter when there was a knock at his door. “It’s me, honey. I just made your favourite lunch. Can I come in?”

“Yeah mom come in” he called.

Mary Andrews came inside with her bright red hair and lips, the same kind of sunshine that lifts you up but could also burn you if you got too close. Her smile is warm and genuine when she sees Archie in the messy sheets with his music papers and guitar.

“How was the party last night? I see the kitchen order has three coffees and Aspirin on it” she teases, taking a seat on his bed.

Archie pressed his lips together. “Yeah.. I needed it to start working on this song now. But It was good, any Veronica party is”

“Did she like her present?”

“I didn’t get to give it to her actually, I didn’t find the time” Archie left his mother’s eyes and stared blankly into the carpet. The present still tucked away in his shirt pocket, because he ran away last night.

“Well, I know that her birthday is important because your anniversary comes right after” Mary says softly seeing her son’s distressed face “Even though you’re broken up, I just want you to know Arch. Even though you might not think Veronica is my favourite person, and we were never very close. But I know she made you happy, and that always made me like you two together. I know how much you loved her”

Archie shot his eyes into hers then. “Mom. What do you even want to really talk about?”

She sighed. “You know I came back here to be with you. But also, we needed to finalise papers for the divorce”

“You didn’t tell me” he says plainly “You know what it’s okay. I should’ve known, a marriage could never last if you’re only together to damage control me and win mom of the year award at my shows and the Cordial Charity”

“Archie, I thought it would be better if I came back and spent time with you instead of your dad going to meet me. I want to be here. Seeing you in your perfect life that you enjoy, with all your friends and school”

He narrowed his eyes. She still didn’t deny how important her presence is to the Charity Show that’ll prove to everyone what a wholesome and amiable person she and dad are. He hates feeling like an advantage instead of their child.

“I guess we should have told you about it before hand”
“No mom it’s okay. Really, I’m fine. Everything is just as perfect as it seems. Nothing bad” other than the one of the ‘friends’ I had turned to be a total dirtbag “I like staying with dad anyways. And don’t worry, I will be singing at the charity”

Mary smiled, unsurely. She could tell Archie still obviously wanted his parents to work things out and for her to be more present, everything has not been perfect. Far from. He picks the guitar up and is flipping the music sheets though, pretending nothing is wrong because he’s too sick and tired of holding on to nothing. “Your dad tells me you’ve been songwriting too right? And this, you’ll be performing an original song?”

“Sure am” Archie quips. He hates how passive he’s being with his mom but he can’t help it. “It’ll be good enough for your donations too” because that’s all you care about.

Archie smiled not reaching his eyes even in the slightest, but he could see in hers she was upset. The veil is off, it’s not about caring anymore, it’s not about this perfect family. It’s about showing everyone a charitable image of yourself and making sure Archie doesn’t get lost in the fold of his mistakes even if maybe his consequences should have actions, legally speaking. He doesn’t want to look at her any longer though because he might cry, the utter feeling of it makes him want to bawl since there’s no more hope in their family.

“Mom, actually I think I’d like that lunch right now”

“Okay Archie” she says softly, leaving his room and closing the door behind her. Archie sighed looking at his music sheets. He may have stuck it to his mom earlier, but now the song actually has to be good enough for the charity he’s performance is representing for Raffles and Andrews Incorporate. So he’s not an embarrassment.

Shed A Light. That’s what Kevin had called demanding to know, the title and his chosen charity. The words sprawled at the top of the page with full messy, and meaningful lyrics beneath them. Archie starts to strum the first note on his guitar to try and make up for missing today’s practice.

“Why are you keeping me at a distance? All that I’m asking for, is forgiveness. Are you even listening?”

A knock at his door startled him again. “Mom?” Mary walked in shortly after “Uh, you forgot the food..”

“I was going to get it Archie. But I found someone looking for you” She motioned towards the bedroom door and opened it, he’s confused at first but then shocked to see Betty standing there.

“Thank you Mrs Andrews, I’ll only be a minute”

Mary nods, leaving them alone “Take all the time you need”

When Betty steps inside his room she feels her throat clam up again. Today hasn’t been good for her, at all. She can’t walk three steps without keeling over and her mother isn’t oblivious, she’s mad at her for coming home past curfew and Polly for sneaking out god knows where, Betty can’t talk to anyone because she feels terrible about everything that happened - the only bit she remembers that is.

Archie can see her look overwhelmed in the afternoon sunshine. Her eyes are noticeably dark underneath and hair is just down. Not pulled back in a high pony or let in loose waves like last night. She looks sick. “Betty? What are you doing here?”

“Archie.. I came here to talk to you. Just one thing. And I had to do this today, I’m not trying to
purposely come to your house or anything - Kevin told me you took a miss on rehearsals so, since I
can’t say this at school because I don’t want Veronica -“

“Woah Betty slow down” Archie puts his guitar back aside.

“Sorry” She curled her fingers into her fists tightly. “I came to tell you. Last night was, the worst,
dumbest, snakiest, disloyal, damaging, bitchy mistake I have ever made. I had no intention of
doing that, and - and I must’ve been really drunk, and I wasn’t thinking and all I can do is
apologise, a million times to you Archie”

Her face looked sorrowful, complimenting the very emotional tone of her voice. Archie couldn’t be
more torn. He had no idea what to say or do. Luckily he didn’t have to because Betty had more to
say.

“I know you must think I’m such a witchy witch and a terrible friend to Veronica - god, I don’t
ev even know what to say around her anymore” she wiped a tear from her eye “I never meant to do
any of that, or get between you and her because I know how much she loves you.. Archie. I hope
you can forgive me”

“Betty.. you know that I’m in love with Veronica. And she really thinks highly of you, honestly
I’ve never seen her willingly become such good friends with anybody before. Have you - said
anything to her?” He tries to ignore that Betty said Veronica loves him, she probably doesn’t know
about their problems and inter workings of their relationship.

“I tried to” She remembers “I went to her Penthouse this morning, but I just remember being a huge
mess and I don’t remember her getting mad at me or anything, just confused. Then one of the
Pembrooke cars sent me home so I’m assuming she just sent me home seeing what a hot mess I
was. God Archie.. I feel so terrible” she turned around so he didn’t need to see the tears forming.

“Well I haven’t talked to Veronica about it either. I texted her, and she left me on read. Also Kevin
said she’s not at rehearsals today. So I don’t know Betty, I have to tell her. I can’t keep this from
her, even though we aren’t.. together”

“Okay” She whispers softly. Truth is Betty feels terrified. Not only of mainly losing her real
friendship with Veronica, but also she’s come to terms that people around here seem to know her
better than she knows herself. Kevin said it. She’d get between Cheryl and Veronica, she’d get
between Archie and Veronica. Now both those things are true, she feels like screaming.

“But I have to ask you. If Veronica does not kill both of us, or worse. If we’re all going to be in the
same school and possibly friends.. I need to know one hundred percent honestly. Do you.. have ..
feelings? For me?”

Betty’s eyes morphed into startled green orbs immediately at that, her hands waving flustered in
front of her. “No! Oh my god, no. That’s why I was being so stupid last night and - no, just don’t
even worry about that. What makes it even worse is, I think I do have feelings for someone else..
and I don’t think he’d ever think of me the same way if he knew what I did”

Archie breathed a breath of relief. “We have to try and talk to Veronica. Not together of course, but
we can’t let her find out from anyone besides us”

Betty’s forehead creased “Who would know besides us?”

Archie shrugged “No one. But from what I’ve learned this past year, it’s that every wall has eyes
and ears especially those surrounding us.”
“Do you want to go The Pembrooke? Try calling her?”

“No. She’ll hate that. I don’t know, for some reason her ignoring my text must mean she doesn’t want to be bothered. She has so much on her plate right now, with her parents expecting the best at the show and everything, this would just add to her stress”

“So tell her after the show on Monday night? That sounds like the definition of a celebratory mood kill”

“Well I guess there isn’t any perfect time to tell her, right? Whatever, I’ll try talking to her whenever I see her”

There was a long beat of silence while Archie covered his face in his hand and Betty just stood there awkwardly staring at him. “It’s fine, you can go” he tells her.

Betty nods. “Archie, I know you’ll never forgive me. But I really am sorry. Truly”

He doesn’t say anything so she takes that as a clue to leave, still seeing a boy with his head in his hands. She wishes she didn’t mess this up, so keen to fit in by drinking every drop of alcohol offered to her in that limo, or that Cheryl hadn’t finally been so nice as to sit her down in that room. The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

(..........................................................)

“We have been doing this Charity as part of tradition going back decades, since before even all of you were born. Now I’m sure you’re all aware, of the boundaries, pleasantries and etiquette expected of you as the candidate representing each charity tonight” Archie looked among the many heads in the crowd in front of him, searching for silky black hair or a classic headband standing out. He caught it.

There’s Veronica standing at the very front of the crowd of students listening to Sir Jack’s pre show talk. Archie was barely listening to anything as he tried to make sure he kept his eye on her. “There will be no talk of things you don’t understand, nor any negative connotations about any of it. You will stand tall and be well spoken, live up to the name of a true Rafflesia - Crescam et Lucebo - and show everybody why you are worthy of being a representative”

He knows that Veronica will most likely bolt out of here once this rehearsal is over, like she did yesterday and in Biology class. There’s no way Archie, or anybody for that matter, to get to her because she seems like an ice queen with that frosty glare and even the air she puts out just demands you to leave her the hell alone.

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“Please for the love of god also, memorise the details and facts of all that is important to you - family heritage, family business, dreams and aspirations, every little fact of this school. There’ll be big important people here tonight and remember this is a practice for the upcoming Ivy Reps.”

There’s a collective groan from all the students who hate being reminded of all the pressure their school and family name has on their back, which makes Sir Jack laugh. He’s a great theatre teacher, and just one of the chilliest professors in Raffles period. But this reminder of their high status hierarchy is mandatory.

“Alright, get to lunch kids. Be back here with your minds ready to impress and your voices ready to belt your pretty faces off by 6.30 latest. Now go!” He shooed everyone out with a hand motion, and with that everyone swooped their bags up and took off. Including Veronica.

Her actions were calm and cool but she walked fast across Esplanade Theatre in her little black
heels. “Veronica! Hold up!” Archie called after her.

He ran over to catch up but she only seemed to pick up pace.

“Veronica hey -“ he reached his hand out and grabbed her arm lightly, suddenly conscious of their skin touching and burning up.

She whipped around so fast her perfect glossy hair hit him in the face, and he could see the irritation in the arch of her brows. “Archie. I need to get to lunch”

She pulled her arm out of his grasp easily. “Ronnie wait. I have to talk to you, I have to tell you something. Can you please listen just for a second?” He was walking speedily after her but Veronica didn’t show any eminent emotion on her face.

“I have a huge headache now Archie, I really don’t want to talk to you”

He pushed open the door for her before she could do it herself. Veronica tried not to react, only squinting her eyes from the bright sunlight outdoors. “You can’t lie to me Veronica, I know you’re avoiding me and I really need you to listen just for one second because whatever it is you’re mad at me for I need you to hear this from me”

“There’s nothing to be mad about or talk about. Just leave me the hell alone Andrews” she really didn’t need Archie chasing her around right now, in the middle of a mental evaluation before a very important night ahead, and her head space isn’t exactly filled with positive thoughts.

“Please Ronnie just listen to me. Can’t we talk? We used to talk about everything”

She stopped in her heels then. Looking up at him to prove a point with each biting word. “You can listen to this Archie. Keep your regretful realisations of what you had in me only after you left me, because I don’t want to hear anything. Now stay the hell away from me before I file a restraining order”

Veronica told him plainly before heading off into the school building. Sure she felt bad, but nothing about what happened on Friday night at her party could be made up for. Whether that is what he wants to talk about or not, she doesn’t want to have anything to do with it. The insatiable pain inside her has build to a point of not giving a shit for any little apologies or explanations. Just get through tonight and be a perfect little Raffles angel, then you can slip away from reality.

Unfortunately now reality is all that’s served on her plate because as Veronica walks into the courtyard with her coconut jelly and quinoa salad toss up, approaching the table she sees Cheryl, Reggie and Jason already there talking and eating. Veronica sighed. She will have to face Betty and Archie at lunch. How could I forget?

“Hey V. How was the rehearsal?” Cheryl asked taking a sip of water.

“Draining” Veronica summed it in one word “Has anyone got news from Josie?”

“She sent a bunch of pics saying how excited she is. At the stage rehearsal last night, and her and her mom outside the stadium” Reggie opened his iPhone and swiped through a couple pictures on his chat with Josie for Veronica to look at.

“They’re getting full spa treatments and face fillers today to celebrate - also I threatened her to get me Bean&Belugas. Don’t worry we can share” Cheryl touched her shoulder and smiled affectionately.

Veronica flinched. “That’s so great. I hope Mrs McCoy takes a bunch of videos while she
performs"

“Oh she will - can you say stage mum? It’s practically everything she lives for”

“Hey! JB, you should - invite a friend to come sit with us” Veronica stopped the newly arrived freshman, coming up with an idea to fill the table on the spot. “Mm, that King girl you’re friends with?”

“Kaycee?” Jellybean raised her brows. Nothing less than shocked at the suggestion.

“Right. I always forget Nicole and Fitz’s little sister. Yeah invite her to sit with us!”

“Veronica, why?” Cheryl looked at her all confused

“I’m just trying to lay in the new prospects, you know - kind of like you did with me? I know Jellybean needs a best friend and partner to be in the group with, so let’s just invite this girl over” Veronica said nonchalantly.

Jellybean’s lips curled in a little smile. “Okay” Cheryl shrugged.

They had the table mostly full halfway through lunch time with only one seat left, but neither Archie nor Betty showed up and the thought of it made Veronica’s stomach stir and spin and downright sickly. She had to stop eating before there’d be a big mess to clean up. How fucking dare they. Can’t get enough so they have to hide together at lunch?

“Hey guys! Sorry I’m late, Mrs Rosenthall wouldn’t leave me alone about the seating charts.” Speak of the devil, Veronica thinks grimly. Her face darkens more if that’s even possible.

“Don’t worry Betty we weren’t waiting for you or anything” Cheryl doesn’t even bother looking in her direction to speak to her, instead starts separating pieces of her red hair distractedly.

Kaycee and Jellybean giggle like they’re not supposed to. Betty slides in the seat next to Reggie, because all the girls’ are taken up. Veronica tries not to look at her unnaturally cheerful face.

“So V, I was thinking we should go to this cafe called Millets that’s right on Hollywood Boulevard. They sell the best crepes, we should try it this Saturday! Do you want to?”

“Actually” Cheryl interjected before Veronica could come up with an answer “Veronica doesn’t eat Millets. All vegan crepes at Dips is where it’s at. Double choc is my girl’s fav, but red bean is my personal preference. Right V?”

“Yeah, it is actually” Veronica tipped her head closer to Cheryl, watching the disappointment on Betty’s face. “And we have an away football game this Saturday, so”

“Oh right. Okay! Well since the show’s going to be exhausting and catching up for Ivy Reps all this week - we should go on Friday!” Betty’s face lit up again. All she really wanted to do was get Veronica alone so she can tell her about the awful thing, and even though Saturday is a really long time to wait it’s the best shot she has.

“We have cheer on Friday” Veronica reminded Her unenthusiastically, forking at her salad.

“Right. Thursday!”

“I have dance on Thursday” Veronica responded without a beat. Her voice calm and dull.

The helpless look on Betty’s face is enough to upset her, but she’s so tired from everything and
really wants to avoid Betty telling her anything so if being a little bitchy will push her away then so be it. Cheryl on the other hand looked between both friends and smirked devilishly. She put her head on Veronica’s shoulder and smiled more angelically to Betty, something that made the blonde girl curious and put off.

Betty huffed. This is going to be a lot harder than she thought.

Just then, to make situations worse, Archie showed up at the table with his food tray. Cheryl’s smile brightened while Betty shrunk in her seat. “Hey there Teen Outlander” the red head called.

“Uh, I’m gonna excuse myself for a minute” Veronica announces to everyone at the table “I think this quinoa’s bad honestly”

Then she turned around and headed off, heart beating faster than ever. She can’t even deny why, all of this is bothering her so much (suffocating her) on this specific day because almost everybody knows it. Seeing Archie and Betty everywhere, even when she doesn’t see them it’s haunting her - and she gets agitated over every little thing that happens so quickly from her singing queue to how turned up the microphone was and taking it out on all the backstage crew because it all wraps around to one thing. Pretend all she wants, but nobody can forget this day and why both Archie and Veronica seems slightly on edge -

today is their anniversary.

Yes, all those years ago finally wrapping up all the sweet dates and flirtatious glances and meaningful conversations into an official seal of the deal kiss. Remembering that alone makes her want to throw up, at how perfect and innocent it was, before all the monsters caught up to them.

Her eyes feel heavy like they’re about to burst into tears, but no. I can’t cry over him. I will not let myself cry over him. It takes everything - literally everything to not fall apart and just embrace how utterly heartbreaking it is that all the promises they made are gone and maybe there’s no more hope left, maybe there’s nothing left in them except her pining reeling heart, Veronica thinks. She crosses the street from Raffles to Costal and searches that same spot she hopes she can find him in, thanking god she still knows this boy so well when she sees him sitting there.

“Veronica? What did it take for the Raffles Princess to venture over this side of kingdom lands?” Jughead grins boyishly, that way that makes him adorable sometimes.

Veronica focuses on him sitting half cross legged on the bench overlooking the duck pond of St Pauls Park, just high enough to let his long legs swing a little. She hopped on up beside him and smoothed her skirt out, taking a deep breath.

“Veronica? What’s wrong? You look really depressed for what should be a happy day”

“Jughead, I came here to talk to you because I have to tell you something no one else can hear. It’s eating me away, I just have to tell someone. So please understand why I’m having a bad day and do me this favour”

His eyes turned confused and cross looking at the raven haired girl, who in turn looked as if she might just fall and go limp with how pale her face is. He squeezed her hand in his to reassure her.

“Of course. What is it?”

Her eyes blinked twice into his wondering blue ones, then decided to look out at the long stream of water and ducks ahead of them. She just can’t look at him and say it, that’s too close to actually facing it. Veronica exhales a deep breath and pulls her hand out so she can link their fingers, staring
blankly ahead.
“I have to let this out. Betty and Archie were kissing at my party”

“What?” Jughead isn’t sure he heard the lifeless words leave his old friend’s mouth but he might actually have. “Betty - and Archie..”

“I saw them in the Skybox when we were all playing that game. They were kissing”

Jughead’s mouth hung open. Veronica didn’t meet his eyes. Eventually, she closed her eyes in defeat and whispered a curse, leaning her head down so it nestled in Jughead’s shoulder. He didn’t move a bit.

“Betty and Archie kissed?”

“Mhm” Veronica moved around a bit to make herself comfortable. She felt the swelling in her heart take its toll completely, but she did feel better getting it off her chest and she knows Jughead is the only person that wouldn’t dramatise this. She feels the comfort of his protection, his strange disconnect from the rest of her friend group.

“Did they.. tell you? About it?”

Veronica furrowed her brows. She isn’t sure if them telling her makes the situation any better, it doesn’t make sense. In fact what it’d result in is just them making it sound very official or something, which she does not want to hear at all. Making her push them away anytime they’ve been trying to say something. She sighed. “I don’t know. Betty showed up at my place Saturday morning, a total hot mess. Scared and devastated. She told me something totally outlandish that was just to make fun and hide from what she really did. Then she threw up, so I sent her home”

“What did she say?” Jughead inquired

“It doesn’t matter she was deranged. What matters is she was too afraid to tell me why she was there in the first place, and clammed up”

“Betty and Archie.. kissed?” There’s something about his voice or the way he says it that makes it seem as though he was betrayed more than surprised, hurt himself more than for her. Veronica couldn’t understand it though, so caught up in her own heartstrings pulling at maximum force.

“Yes, Juggy and you repeating it every seven seconds isn’t helping me cope” she glanced up at him briefly. The weather is brisk and her head feels warm on his shoulder, as does their hands linked together like that time Jughead wouldn’t admit he’s afraid of Basic Instinct when they watched it together. There’s two kids who aren’t exactly the same, too many worlds apart yet too much alike. The most fucking perfect example of a sad pairing.

“I’m sorry” Jughead chokes out. He’s still baffled by the news and Ronnie’s blank eyes are starting to worry him. “What should I do to help?”

Veronica nestled her head closer, the ends of her soft hair tickling his right cheek and neck a little. “Just be here for me. That’ll help”

(x.x.x.x)

Like dejavu, to a night past weeks ago - Veronica stares at her reflection in the same seat of the Esplanade theatre dressing room. Only tonight feels so different, if not completely. There aren’t any makeup artists flown in to style the stars tonight, since everything is based around the charity and simplicity. Not many of her friends even perform at these things, which makes pre show antics
less packed and rather dull. But most of all she misses how much has changed since then, she misses Jellybean running in and the entire cast getting hyped about the star studded audience, rather than the less well known investors, businessmen and college deans who are out there looking for a charity to sponsor tonight. She misses squealing and hugging Cheryl and Josie, she misses the elaborate outfits and hairstyles they had that night.

But most of all she misses one thing.

9th November. Means one thing. Thirteen and kissing under the gazebo of his house, fourteen wrapped up in his arms with roses and candles and her favourite dinner. Fifteen and dancing, singing, drinking cold alcohol all alone together in Poland on the sweetest, most precious, extravagant trip of their lives. Sixteen, and she’s sitting here alone in a white dress wishing she could have it all back.

“Veronica?” There’s a knock at the door she’d closed for privacy before. She rolled her eyes at the voice, starting to apply her eyeliner so she’d be forced to keep composure.

“Come in”

The door opened to reveal Betty, wearing a solid blue dress and holding tonight’s program. “Hey, thought you might want to see this” she held up the invitation/program card, and Veronica couldn’t stop herself from breaking in a smile. Kevin had stuck to his word. There’s a photo of her from one of those glamour shoots her dance team did last year, looking fabulous yet ridiculous and stellar.

“It’s me” She held the pamphlet and smiled at it for a second.

“Thought it’d cheer you up” Betty said quietly. The entire room is too quiet, void of any childishness because no one can behave tonight. Veronica cast her eyes up into Betty’s not believing what she’d just said.

“And why would I need that?” Veronica glared warningly

Betty breathed nervously and put her hands up, “Nothing! Just, you know cos you don’t seem so happy about going out there to perform”

She did it again. She chickened out of just telling her, for gods sake the words already simmered on her tongue. Betty just couldn’t bear to see Veronica fall apart hearing it especially on her anniversary.

“Whatever” Veronica turned away from her and stood up, ready to join everybody else to greet some of the potential sponsors.

“Wait - Veronica. I have to tell you something”

“Betty please” She glanced at Betty’s hand on her shoulder, pulling it off harshly. “I’m going to go out there and try to impress rich old people who, yes are going to be donating to a good cause but what they really want is for everybody else to see what wholesome and exemplary people they are. I’m going out there to help them play into the fame game. I’m going to help old rich people get even older and richer!” Veronica finally yelled.

Betty shook her head, confused and trying to get Veronica to calm down.

“And you said it yourself so please just let me get this night over with and stop trying to suffocate me would you?”
They stared at each other mourning what’s lost. They can see it in each other’s eyes that one wants to say something so desperately and the other just needs to cry. Betty sat there kicking herself, hating herself for causing Veronica so much pain and she could see that evident in her face about to crumble like her shattered heart. She pushed Betty away by the shoulder, not caring if it hurt or if she’s overreacting. She just feels like pushing Betty back now, hoping she’s hurt as much as she has.

“V” Betty whispered. Her eyes glistened with tears that Veronica didn’t know how to react to.

“Go. Please” She turned around and faced the vanity again, breathing hard. The silence has never been so loud, it echoed in her ears. “Go away, Betty. I’m a perfectionist, I don’t like to be bothered when I’m doing my makeup and hair”

She announced in a strangled voice before Betty fled the room, leaving her even more pained than she was before.

“Thank you so much for making it, Mr Sparks. I hope you can enjoy the night’s performances and hopefully your heart finds the charity of choice for your yearly donations?” Veronica smiled charmingly. The old man before her held her delicate hand in a hand shake that was way too firm for a high school student. It’s good, she realises. He’s treating her like an adult.

“Miss Veronica Lodge always a pleasure seeing you perform, tonight must be no different. You look gorgeous. Are your parents here?”

“Thank you, Mr Sparks. Oh yes, they’re sitting in the second row. I just spoke to them a second ago, perhaps they’ve already taken their seats”

“I actually have been looking through the lists. This one particular charity interests me. Do you happen to know who represents it?” He unfolded the program and pointed, Veronica taking a closer look.

She smiled tightly and cleared her throat. Almost everyone has seated but Tyson Sparks is one of the oldest living alumni of Raffles Institution and while he’s retired from movies, he has a multi billion dollar making agency. And he’s too old to follow procedure apparently, Veronica thinks. He’s so important the school lets him do whatever pretty much.

“The After School All Stars? That’s, Archie Andrews. He’ll be taking the stage in a minute actually”

“Well that’s splendid!” The shiny headed bald old man started backing to his seat. “An acting summer program for underserved youth? Sounds like a great idea! I hope this boy has some pipes. Thank you Veronica”

Veronica just grinned in return. She turned around and gracefully walked back stage, brushing off the many eyes of parents and high profiles following her. She knows she looks extra angelic tonight, in a long flowing white dress and her hair pinned up into a french twist with elegant face makeup. Another one of her parents’ ordeals, but this time she doesn’t mind it. Even though these sponsors might be bargaining a lot for themselves, they’re still doing something good and that makes it worth it. Backstage Veronica had a different kind of audience staring at her, all kids whispering about their anniversary and are they back together or not.

She wants to laugh because it’s so ridiculous that they care when she or Archie have probably never spoken to any of them, but she wants to cry because he looks so... perfect walking out onto
the stage. If it’s even possible, her heart feels heavier seeing him with his guitar and the spotlight shining all the features that she used to trace everyday.

Veronica can’t help it, she doesn’t mind the gossip. She stops right next to the wings, getting close as possible to the stage without anyone in the audience seeing her. She has to hear him sing.

Archie took one deep breath and got the queue from stage director for him to start, which kicked off as naturally as possible. His eyes wide open, searching the audience for Veronica, any sign of her.

He knows that even though he won’t ever get to give her another amazing anniversary, or even another day together to make her happy, at least there’ll be the song. The last thing he could ever give her, hoping with all his heart that she hears it and maybe, just maybe will change her mind.

The smiles in the audience encourage him and he starts singing.  
“Why are you keeping me at a distance? All that I’m asking for is forgiveness. Are you even listening? Am I talking to myself again? I keep on staring up at the ceiling, waiting for you to give me some kind of reason”

Veronica furrows her brows. She can tell the wordings of the song must have something to do with her, especially with how emotional and concentrated he seems. This only makes her want to listen more intently.  
“And I know you don’t owe me your love” Archie sings “And I know you don’t owe me nothing at all. Ain’t no way I’m giving up on you”

She feels like the tears are threatening her eyes. How dare he. Of course not, of course he deserves everything and more than her love. Of course he does. And the only part of her she could never give is what matters most to him, yet again she feels how much it’s her who doesn’t deserve him. She knows it, I’m such a failure and I’m way too messed up to hurt him like this.

“Don’t leave me here in the dark where it’s hard to see. Show me your heart, shed a light on me. If you love me, say so. If you love me, say so”  
Now she feels the hot tears trickling down her cheeks. Oh my god, I miss him and I just wish I could hug him to show him of course! Of course I want you. For all that it’s worth Veronica can’t even explain her own feelings towards him, maybe because she can’t even figure it out himself. Do I.. love him?

“Show me your heart, shed a light on me. If you love me, say so. If you love me, say so. You know I can’t live without you I’m on my knees. Where are you know? Shed a light on me. If you love me, say so If you love me say so”

It’s heartbreaking in the most special way.

I’m sorry Archie... I’m so sorry.

She just wants to do anything that could keep him up there on stage singing, practically speaking to her, so melodic like a nightingale and all the pure honesty that is Archie Andrews. She wishes she could be like that.

“Don’t leave me here in the dark where it’s hard to see. Show me your heart, shed a light on me. If you love me, say so, if you love me say so”

The crowd erupted into many claps and cheers and a full out standing ovation, Archie’s handsome
face breaking from the melancholic stupor to a happy grin. People are quite impressed with the heart and soul poured into his lyrics, and many look at her because they know it has to be about her. He’s always so happy after performing, feeling free and full at the same time and Veronica knows how elated he is right now.

He stands up and slings his guitar over his shoulder and bows to the crowd and Veronica can’t stop herself from clapping. With tears drying on her skin she claps for him because she admires him, even after everything that happened. Archie turned to look at her applauding him that very moment, an angel in his dark, his heart stops.

(x.x.x.x)

“All... hey. Still working the lights?” Veronica stepped towards the tall blonde girl awkwardly. She had to go on after this performance, the last act of the night. Of course she’d earned that advantage.

“Yep” Polly smiled in return. There was an awkward beat of silence where Veronica isn’t sure to continue pleasantries or cut to the point, deciding on the latter. “Hey listen. When I go out there, I need you to turn the stage light as bright as you possibly can without blinding me. Okay? And you can place a price for the favour if you want”

“It’s alright, Veronica but too bright and you won’t even be able to see the audience” she tipped her head sideways like a lost puppy.

“Exactly. That’s the point. Bright as you can go, okay?” She smoothened out her dress nervously watching the freshman boy stride off stage and the audience’s applause slowly dying out there.

Here it is again. The nervous jitters. The crawling sensation on her feet and up her legs, tangling in her stomach almost painfully. She has this no matter how many times she performs, but this time is a lot worse and a lot different. That’s because this time, Veronica will do something she never has before.

Sing an original song into a crowd of people, yes, but also for the first time really singing a truthful ballot from her heart that’s one she’s kind of scared what people think of. It’s so terrifying to let people in, but at least the stage lights will block everybody out.

She has to thank Polly because walking out on stage with one nervous stomach, seeing only a bright void ahead of her helps it all. She’ll most likely see stars after this performance, but it doesn’t matter. Veronica got up close to the microphone and held her breath until the music track starts, one she and Josie enjoyed putting together over the summer. She’d had this track for a while but only recently put the lyrics together. Her throat feels like it’s closing in before she starts singing, and when she does everything else fades away.

“I see it in your eyes you’re seconds from destroying me. I’ve said my last goodbye now someone get me out of here, can’t take another lie stop telling me who I should be”

Archie makes his way past the many people congratulating him and the few, “I want to speak to you about the charity afterwards”, sitting in a front seat that Kevin’s reserved for finished participants. His eyes focus on her shining up there like an angel - but confusedly wonders what or who she’s singing about.

“Cause I don’t wanna go where you’re going, you’re telling me I can’t change my mind. So I’m cold as stone, the only way I know to keep my soul and never let it show that I don’t really know
what I’m doing. All I know is I’m crashing down”

Everyone focuses intently on her chillingly beautiful voice, the words she’s singing making them even more immersed. Veronica can’t see anything else. She closes her eyes and lets herself go with the music.

“So let me, let me out. I can’t love you anymore. Let me, let me out. I don’t love you like before. You can’t even hear me when I’m screaming, trying to say you’re way out of line. So I’m cold as stone, the only way I know to keep my soul and never let it show that I don’t really know what I’m doing. All I know is I’m crashing down.”

She ends the song almost faintly hearing some outbursts from the audience, but she can’t see what it is and keeps on singing until the the song is over.

“Let me, let me. I don’t love you like before. Let me, let me. I don’t love you. Let me, let me. I don’t love you like before”

Veronica can finally breathe when the music ends. She smiles the biggest she has in a while, feeling proud and happy for herself. It’s only after the standing O and walking backstage waving to the audience that Cheryl approaches her right in the wings.

“Cheryl, what?” The red head is looking at her like she just threatened her Nana or something. Completely frozen. “What?”

“V, it’s Archie”

“What about him?”

“Didn’t you see?” Cheryl looked behind her at students trying to peer into the audience “He took off right when you were in the middle of your chorus. I think he’s upset”

“What? Why - where did he go?”

“I don’t know. I’m guessing outside? Veronica you have to look for him, he looked like he was barely holding it together”

Cheryl didn’t need to tell her twice. Veronica picked up the long skirt of her dress and started running as fast as she could, dodging wires and kids and going as fast as her heels could take her. She pushed open the side exit door and the wind hit her with a crackling cold blow.

God, this dress has to be the thinnest material on earth.

She looked right and left but all there was was empty fields and the front entrance security guard. Lookout behind the theatre, she remembers. Veronica continues running again, her hair effectively coming apart in little pieces but the sticky hairspray mostly did its job.

She stopped when she saw him, the back of a white dress shirt sitting on the edge of the lookout point and wild red hair. He could hear her heels the moment she arrived, but didn’t bother turning around. She walked slowly, carefully coming up to him with nervous heart beats.

“Archie? Are you okay?” Her voice sounded so small and soft she almost hated it. Not as much as seeing the shudder in his back though, when Veronica appeared in his vision and all she could see is his eyes pouring with tears.

“Is that really how you feel? About us? About me? Why didn’t you just tell me, Ronnie? Could’ve saved us a lot of trouble” he bit his lip hard and wiped away the tears, not bearing to face her.
“Archie no, of course not” Veronica sat herself down next to him, making sure to not rip her thin dress. “I mean yes, I wrote it as a romance song but what I said - about the destroying and lies and telling me who to be, that wasn’t you. There’ve been a lot of forces in my life recently that do that to me my parents, Cheryl, just a lot of stuff. And I swear I mixed a lot of my emotions into one big masterpiece but I never meant to hurt you”

He closed his eyes and looked away, when she reached out to touch his arm. See, this is why Veronica thinks she doesn’t deserve him. “I just wanted to give you something special on our special day and I hear that and -”

“I know. I know how bad it hurts.” She cut him off. “Please look at me Archie, I’m so sorry”

He slowly does turn to face her then, teary eyes staring into her magnificent brown ones. She looks so much like an angel with the pieces of hair blowing in the wind and her crystal earrings and white dress, it makes him kick himself for falling in love with such a girl.

”Not a lot of people can say Veronica Lodge is their light” her voice is so soft she almost sounds afraid to say it.

“Yeah, well” Archie shrugs. “I wish it wasn’t this hard” he admitted. “I wish we didn’t have to be so hard, god why does it feel like I can’t stop getting hurt and trying not to hurt you Veronica? Why does this feel like I’m fighting a war and I don’t know what winning will look like?”

“We need to talk about a lot of things” she says truthfully. “I never want to talk because I’m afraid, and I’m sorry Archie because I know that’s what’s ruined our relationship so many times”

“Veronica -“

“Wait, Archie. I have to say this before I get too scared again. I know what you’ve been trying to tell me since my party”
His eyes became even more filled with emotion if that’s even possible. Confusion at how she knows, still feeling the fresh blood of heartache deep in his chest.

“I know you and Betty kissed”

“Wait Veronica you don’t understand -“

“No Archie please don’t say anything. Just -“

“Veronica, I -“

“It’s okay, even if you really like her”

He stares at her in disbelief then. Eyes so wide she’s almost scared they’re frozen on her. He wants to scream it out so loud, frustration and his whole body just wants to scream it.

“I love you”

She doesn’t know what to say anymore. Other than that her heart feels like it just flew out of her body and the same happiness she gets since the first time is there again. Only this time mixed deeply with his sad eyes and their too broken world.

“Only a masochist could ever love such a narcissist” she says quietly. They stare into each other’s eyes, moon shining like a spotlight in them.
“I don’t care” he shrugs.

It’s then that Veronica knows she can never let go of this boy, her whole heart already his and he feels the same way too. Difficult is a word they understand too elaborately, problems are too many yet to be spoken of. The way his eyes bore into hers make her know he can never let her go, either. Not now, not ever.

“Happy anniversary Archie” she leaned on his shoulder and snuggled close, the strong familiar feeling capturing both of them. It takes everything in Archie not to cry right now all over again next to her. He wonders, is she trying to break my heart?

“Happy anniversary, Veronica”
Chapter Notes

Yo.. pretty short chapter, sorry guys but I couldn’t fit a bunch of things in between the storyline. Promise next chapter will be a lot bigger though. And you guys....

How the HELL are we gonna survive without Riverdale till Fall?!

Chapter #10 Young

- don’t worry my love, we’re learning to love

  but it’s hard when you’re young -

The most successful relationships, are the kind where when one makes mistakes the other can still see the bigger picture enough to take a step back. Everyone makes mistakes. It’s that simple. And yes, we sign up for a love life where this one person is supposed to idealistically be the one we fall back on, depend on, understands us best, loves us at our worst, and keeps chasing us back when we push away. Unfortunately this world isn’t made of fairy dust and all our wishes can’t come true, at least the perfect romance isn’t something that can be bought by any amount of money. Sometimes, you do have to step back and forgive despite all that is making you want to scream and yell and argue.

I’m sure every old couple has been through that, Veronica thinks as she rolled over in bed at the early hours of morning. She couldn’t keep sleeping after barely falling asleep. A night of thought, if you will.

2 am wondering do I love him? She doesn’t know, but what she does know is that her life has been full of bad and wrong. Everything I’ve done, she realises, is either outrightly bad or good with a grain of bad. It’s getting dark and loud and she can’t really trust anyone anymore, but sitting there so close to him all alone, just the two of them, without meddling parents and dramatic betraying friends and problematic expectations, that felt good. Unequivocally good.

She also realises now when I have nothing, Archie is all I ever wanted.

God, and just like that she’s back to this exhausting complications of a relationship. But really, did she ever leave?

Veronica feels her body start to itch uncomfortably under the covers so she flips over yet again and stares out at the shining moonlight. The hotel is extra quiet tonight and she feels a sense of aloneness having left the party early, after scoring one sponsor for her charity. A retired professor from Yale, one of her choice schools, so it’s perfect enough and she claimed a headache to head home. Of course Veronica’s parents have to spend the whole night out socialising with the pivotal high rise elitists.

Since nothing can drowse her into sleep and she’s not jaded enough to smoke any weed right now, Veronica gets up and heads to her downstairs kitchen for a glass of water and maybe a little
running will tire her out. She slips out of her silk pyjamas and puts on a sports bra and shorts, zipping up her black Adidas jacket because it’s a little chilly after pulling all her hair back into a ponytail headed downstairs for the water.

The sound of their water fountain outside fills her ears in the eery silence as she sits on the counter and drinks, thinking deeply how strange it feels to be alone at home when everyone else is having fun together. Usually she’d hate it but tonight Veronica feels quite at ease with herself. So she hops off the counter and is about to head into their souped up home gym when she sees the mail slot their trusted guard Smithers will drop off all their mail at has a parcel in it, Veronica stops.

That’s weird, mom and dad would’ve picked up any mail for them earlier and she hadn’t ordered anything online.

She walked over and snatched up the beige parcel, feeling it’s light weight. Veronica ripped it open not seeing any official stamp, all it said is Lodge in bold black marker. Daddy says to never carelessly open something in caution of anything explosive, because that’s just the family they live in... but seeing her last name on it seemed invitation enough.

It confused her when the only thing inside was a piece of cardboard attached to a black box. Brows knitted together, she turned it over and read to a heart stopping revelation.

*The photographic price of your daughter’s dignity we controlled in just one click. Drop the deal, or the next slaughter will take place in a concrete jungle.*

Veronica froze, unable to believe -

then she opened the brown box and it flew out of her hand across the room in a split second.

(x.x.x.x)

“Mom, daddy, I’m going to kill someone”

“Mija, why are you shouting at this hour of the morning?” Hiram raised his hand at her just as he and his wife walked out of the elevator to meet a very enraged Veronica.

“Ronnie you’re supposed to be in bed! I thought you had a headache” Hermione sighed. This is the epitome of being a mother, coming home after long days only for the work to be continued by having to deal with your teenager’s antics. She pulled the heels off of her feet tiredly.

Veronica waited to meet her mother’s eyes. Part of her wanted to scream again but she didn’t know how to put this right. And pacing the elevator landing for the past twenty minutes after lying down for god knows how many hours on their couch hadn’t helped anything.

Veronica’s parents stared at their frozen daughter, looking quite crazy right about now. Hiram shook his head.

“And why aren’t you wearing sleeping clothes?”

“I was trying to fall asleep by cramming in an early morning workout sesh but then I found this -“

She took the note crumpled in her hand and planted it in her father’s palm, belatedly remembering she’s still just wearing a sports bra and shorts.
“Tell me what this is dad, and tell me this isn’t what I think this is”

Hermione peeked over her husband’s shoulder, reading the note with slow suspicion. After seeing what was said Veronica could tell her parents’ faces had paled but they feigned composure, swallowing and standing taller. But the way her father’s eyes trained too long on the piece of paper, and the vein in his neck started to show more than noticeably, it isn’t hard to tell he to is just as freaked out as she was.

“Well Veronica” Hiram cleared his throat after a long moment “You know that we have enemies and enviers. You shouldn’t have bothered opening this”

Veronica gaped, her mouth hung open and her hands thrown up at how ridiculous and fake her parents still insist on being. She spun around like the wind knocked out of her, worrying them slightly.

“Fuck, dad.” She wiped a hand over her lips

“Language Veronica”

“Mom” Veronica glared in response

“This isn’t just some jealous assailant. This isn’t just an empty threat. This person - whoever it is, has obvious motive on you guys and.. and they’re the ones who leaked my photos!”

“Okay” Hiram raised his hand “That’s besides the point. If you need to so badly, can we sit and talk like civilised people?”

“Besides the point, daddy?!” She screams. It sends a jolt of awakening through both Hiram and Hermione, her wild crazy eyes taunting them. “This is proof!”

“Of what?”

Veronica blinked furiously. She couldn’t believe it, she had to start believing it. It’s like things are starting to come to light and everything is beginning to look very very different. “For one, it’s legitimate proof. That Archie had nothing to do with leaking the photos! I did this. I ruined good record by sabotaging with that stupid video, and I held it against him I made things a million times worse. I practically got someone thrown in jail! Because I thought he hurt me. Do you have any idea how terrible this is?”

She isn’t sure who she’s asking, herself or her parents. And if she thought she looked pale from terror earlier, she’s at least three shades lighter now.

“It says a concrete jungle. Maybe that sounds like something to dismiss daddy but what if something bad happens again? I mean concrete jungle isn’t that like.. New York?” Her eyes widen when she finally realises it and dreadfully, remembers who is in New York right this minute.

“You’re jumping to conclusions Veronica” Hermione scolded “No one could ever harm you, not on our watch”

Well I hope that’s true, I hope I AM just thinking too far.

“Who the hell is this? What deal are they talking about? Huh?”

Veronica narrowed her eyes and stepped forward a little daringly, not able to control her fury any longer. Especially when her parents visibly froze contemplating an answer. Getting even closer, so
mindless and hot headed right now, she realises something that puts two and two together.

“Is it Manfred Muggs?”

“What?” Hermione raised a hand to her chest in shock. Even Hiram looked a little shaken. And Veronica can’t seem to figure them out. “Why on earth would you think that?”

“Because mumsy dearest, his daughter went full on Carrie on me with cranberry juice as a substitute thank god. And all she said was about what my father did to her so - tell me. Right now, no lies or crap. Did you do something to Manfred Muggs?”

Hiram opens his mouth to speak before Hermione can tell her daughter to tone down the cursing again. “Veronica, we let Manfred go as an inevitable choice, he was stealing profits and portions not earned to him. After all the person who did this has long been vengeful with us before we let Muggs go”

“Wait -” Veronica backtracked. “You knew? You freaking knew all this time and you never told me? You let me assume that my boyfriend betrayed me when really this is a price for your scorned sins!”

“Of course we didn’t know mija but after reading this note it’s clear who had to do with this” Hermione interjected calmly.

Veronica looked away, breathing heavily. She could feel an air block forming in her throat.

“Was there anything else with the letter?”

She turned to look back at them. “Yeah. Yeah there was, a fucking pig’s heart mom!” She doesn’t know why but she’s crying, fingers wiping under her eyes to keep them at bay. “Which luckily I got rid of the second I saw it. How could you guys do this? How could you not have told me?”

“It’s not your business, Veronica that’s just it. Your mother and I will handle this at our own terms, and next time no more opening packages without your name on it”

“Well the last time I checked I’m still a Lodge. And that was written on the package so tell me dad, tell me right now because I have a right to know - who sent it and who is threatening you?”

She waits the longest minute of her life when the both of them can’t say anything. It’s more than fucking infuriating because she just knows its on the tip of their tongue and yet they can’t say it, they won’t say it. All the while she’s feeling helpless because like an idiot, she’s been putting the hot blame on somebody who’s done nothing but love her. Oh how completely clueless she realises she was.

They won’t tell her anything, and that’s protocol. That’s secret. That’s business. It should be my business when I’m the one getting stomped on by it!

“Mom come on” she pleaded. “You two deserve each other”

“That’s quite enough Veronica. Don’t you understand why we keep things from you? You think it’s to purposely be secretive? This isn’t high school or child’s play, this is dangerous business that could already get you infiltrated with the wrong things when you’re privy to all this information”

“Then tell me this.” She walked up as closely as possible, looking her father straight in the eye. “Are you afraid of me getting tied in ruthless business, or are you deliberately hiding your own vicious evil? Because if you’re worried about me? I’m already being targeted. But you? You won’t
exist once all your dirty laundry is exposed”

Hiram’s face read all stone cold. His lips pressed in a thin line, jaw clenched and his eyes never faltering its unforgiving glare. If Veronica didn’t know any better she’d think he looked pretty threatened. What she did know though, is to not let him see her break and keep standing tall.

Hermione looked crippled, she pulled Veronica away by the arm before Hiram could do anything more painful and regretful later. Veronica never took her eyes off her father’s though, not seeing how scared and distressed her mother looked right now. Rather the only thing she heard is the cool metal of something hitting the inside of her palm when Hermione grabbed it. It’s what pulls her attention for a split second and when she glances down, audibly gasps.

“What the hell is that?”

“Dear lord, Ronnie” Hermione sighed tiredly “Your father and I were going to come home and give you this, we were so proud of you at the Charity Show and we wanted to finally give you the reward to practice driving on. But now...” she threw her hands up gesturing to the cryptic anger from both Hiram and herself, and Veronica.

Veronica darts her eyes back up to her father’s, not believing it. Her heart feels like it’s beating a thousand times a minute. He was going to finally forgive me?

“Your disrespect will no longer be tolerated, especially not under this roof. Now I think it’s time for you to get ready for school young lady, like it or not”

Her mind starts racing, thinking she has to get out of her and run and tell Archie everything because she’s been totally wrong about everything and it feels like a fleeting rush to snatch the only opportunity of escaping.

“No” she moves fast and swipes the shiny keys out of her mother’s hand before she can second guess herself. “I’m calling in sick, I have to talk to Archie and tell him and I’m going right now”

“Veronica!” Both her parents shouted at the same time, but she has fast reflexes and steps into the elevator before either of them can block her, Hermione unsuccessfully trying to reach for the keys back.

“Veronica Lodge do not step in that elevator. Veronica!”

They’re only answered with the swift sound of the doors closing.

(x.x.x.x)

“Archie?”

“Ronnie? Hey, is everything okay?”

“Not really” she admitted, gripping the phone to her ear while fumbling with the foreign keys in her head, watching as the numbers go down on the elevator. “You’re skipping school today. Remember how I said we need to talk about a lot of stuff I wasn’t ready for? Well how does now sound?”

He became quiet for one moment, wondering why or what’s got her on edge that prompted this sudden wanting to meet.

“Of course” he finally says. Veronica sighed in silent relief “Should I come to the penthouse?”
“No” she replies quickly, stepping out of the elevator and to the private parking she knows daddy keeps all his cars and where hers must be now too. “I’ll drive there”

Hanging up before he can ask her about it, Veronica spots the shiny jet black Aston Martin vanquish sitting there parked and it takes her breath away. She’s never been a car person, but pretty much all her friends, especially Cheryl, Archie and Reggie are and ever since Cheryl and Jason got their first cars from Mr Mantle Veronica had been introduced to the idea of her dream car. And here it is now, too early but still perfect.

She takes a deep breath and feels it under her fingers so softly, just one longing moment before she has to leave because her parents must be coming after her. It’s so smooth and perfect, it would’ve made her smile if she weren’t just so ready to drive out of here and never come back. Then suddenly the big expensive gift from her parents doesn’t seem so special anymore.

Veronica opened the door and slid right in, she smells brand new leather and gas from the parking lot. It takes her a moment to look herself in the eye before sticking the key in the ignition and her memory comes to life.

“Baby, are you so ready for this? I am SO ready” Veronica bounces excitedly as Archie the door to hee father’s Nissan Nismo that he let her practice on.

“I think you established that already Ronnie” Archie smiles at her, loving the way her eyes lit up and an unwavering smile on her lips as she took in everything - feeling the wheel under her hands and buckling her seatbelt in so fast and squealed. He couldn’t help adore her, and it’s easy to stare at her when there’s nobody around to comment on how much of a lovesick puppy he looks like with her.

She took a deep breath and turned the key “Oh my god. It’s alive!”

“Okay babe, you need to be calm and relaxed okay? We’re going to be on the actual road this time, not just driving in my compound with minimal crash possibilities”

“I know, I know” she rolls her eyes. “And don’t act like such an expert! You barely got your license four months ago”

“Four months more experience already” he grinned teasingly

“Whatever doofus” she shoved his shoulder “Let’s get this thing going already”

Now that Veronica officially has her provisional permit and can practice going around, Hiram had her allowed her to. She’s only been doing little rounds around the grounds of Archie’s home, which is much more safe and not busy than the Pembrooke. But now that she’s gotten the go ahead to start testing on actual roads, Archie agreed to helping her because she told him she needs to be perfect and ready by the time she officially turns sixteen.

“You know, even driving here you crashed into my parents’ conservatory. Not too sure driving is going to be on top of your many talents lists”

“It wasn’t my fault the car wouldn’t stop when I wanted it to”

“You didn’t pull the break” Archie deadpans
“I thought the car’s automatic” she says pointedly at him, starting to move out of the parking space.

“That doesn’t mean - oh, you know what never mind. Let’s just go” he shook his head and blinked, accepting the defeat with Veronica’s little victory grin. He didn’t want to push her elated mood either

“Yay! Come teach me babe”

“Alright take this left turn, we’ll go down by Zuma Beach and it’s hopefully quite quiet there.”

“Kay”

“Signal!”

“Sorry!”

Veronica looked at Archie and batted her eyelashes flirtatiously at him, top lip catching between her teeth. This car made her feel something so freeing and powerful like she never knew she had. Like flying, like moving and never stopping. Constant. Magic. Escape. Thrill.

Archie couldn’t help but smirk right back at her, looking so beautiful with the sun setting behind her. Spotless skin shining and her eyes twinkling just as much as the pearls wrapped tightly around her throat. She’s a glory, a magnificent arch angel and there’s not a single thing in this world that could compare to his girl, no amount of riches and finery she wears will ever amount to her beauty.

“Oh my god! You just ran a red!”

Archie suddenly sat up straighter seeing the faint shade of a blaring red surrounding his Veronica and turned behind to be sure of it, her car still moving ahead of all the others that have stopped.

Veronica laughed, really laughed. She sat up straighter too, almost hugging the wheel while thinking how ridiculous it is to have run a red light because she was way too caught up in staring at Archie. He finally calmed down, hand resting on his chest and collapsing back into the seat with Veronica still in fits of laughter beside him. Finally Archie couldn’t help but laugh too, making sure to keep his eyes on the road this time and not get distracted.

“Oh sorry babe, there’s actually a lot more cars here than I thought” Archie frowned once they turned into the road facing Zuma Beach now.

“Not to worry Archiekins, I can handle it” she gave him a purposeful look over her shoulder before totally booking it, her wedged heel pressing hard on the gas and letting the car speed up to a 70. Her mouth parted in an excited silent scream, while Archie’s eyes widened in horror.

“Ronnie - Ronnie the speed limit is like a 50! Ronnie slow down!”

“Woahh!” She put the window down and felt the cold breeze blowing her hair, not slowing down
in the slightest. There’s that adrenaline rush in her veins again, not even noticing the cars and palm trees she’s zooming past but the flying feeling in her belly and the tight grip on the wheel.

Archie held on so tightly to his seat praying and repeating his girlfriend’s name like a cry for help, but she’s not listening when a car honks at them for swerving into the other lane, Veronica saying a slew of good natured curses while going back into her own lane without checking first.

“There’s a freaking car behind us! This is the SLOW lane! Veronica -“

“Relax babe I just got spassy!”

“Slow the hell down”

She couldn’t stop even if she wanted to, so addicted to the feeling like a roller coaster round and round.

“You’re going into a construction zone! Fines are doubled in those areas! So are accident rates!” Archie tried to yell over the outdoor noise and music playing on her iPod shuffling.

It’s finally the last straw when Veronica almost crashes straight into the curb and does the craziest sharp turn he’s ever seen someone do while keeping totally cool and giggling. “Okay that’s it! Pull over Ronnie, listen to me seriously pull over here”

She rolls her eyes and sighs, but despite it all pulls over. Her heart is still beating so fast when she halts to a stop and the whole car jerks forward - looking over only to see Archie way more pale and freaked out than ever.

”That wasn’t so bad now was it?” Her eyes fluttered and glimmered in hope at him, clasping her hands for how proud she is of herself. Archie has to take many deep breaths because shit, he swore he saw his life flash before his eyes a couple times there. But every time it did she’s in it, and now he’s so relieved the car is stopped and he has her and... she is absolutely happy so he is too.

”You’re crazy and I love you” he shakes his head at her.

Veronica already wants to kiss him, her bones tinglin in excitement. She unbuckles her seatbelt and climbs over the console into his lap, giving him the biggest kiss to calm all his little nerves.

She instantly feels him with the skirt she’s wearing flaring around her, and the excitement there is so much more than anything she felt just moments before. He can feel her tighten her thighs around his, pressing harder in so hot and familiarly. Bright red hair and bright eyes, every trace of his jaw, she wants to memorise it all and never let him go.

And when she pulls back and he doesn’t hesitate to follow her lips and capture them, hands cupping her face preciously, she giggles against his lips and they’re in perfect bliss.

Veronica sighed. If only things were so much different right now.
Archie paced around nervously, running through his hair for the umpteenth time. He’s not sure why, Veronica has seen him in every state and she always said she loved his ‘messy look’ but he’s just so nervous. Listening to her words in the song, breaking down and crying in front of her, then now she really wants to talk about everything. His heart is beating against the material of his sleepy t shirt when there’s those distinctive heels pattering, and Veronica is standing at his door.

Stepping in here really feels so foreign and it’s like a tornado of memories and emotions, the bitter ugliness of their breakup showing itself through all her Chanel perfumes and bracelets on his dresser, the painting she did on his wall and their love lost on every last piece of furniture.

“Um.. hi” she stands awkwardly in the doorframe

“Hey” Archie is a little surprised by her presence, only because he thought he’d have to open the door for her but it wouldn’t take a detective to figure out that Veronica Lodge doesn’t need an invitation to anywhere she wants to go. Especially his place.

“Your dad let me in on his way out to work, so” it’s not like I walked in or anything.... “the guard kind of called him cos it’s not a familiar car anyway so”

“Wait, Andre didn’t drive you here?”

“Nope. I drove my dream wheels, and I’ve gotten better than the last time”

“You don’t even have your license yet” to which Veronica only shrugs at.

“And your parents finally gave you your Aston?” Archie’s eyes widen kind of excitedly

“Not exactly” she stepped inside and tipped her head sideways “I lowkey hijacked it but whatever”

“That’s really cool Ronnie, you’ve wanted it forever”

She stopped and looked at him seriously. This is a now or never moment. “Right. Well, they were going to give it to me until.. I showed them that I found this”

Her voice is soft and meek as she hands over the letter to Archie and he’s confused, brows furrowed together while reading the very short message and processing it.

“I’m so sorry Archie” she whispers shakily, her throat quivering and begging to not fall apart “I’m sorry I didn’t believe you when you said you didn’t do it. I’m sorry for not trusting you, I’m sorry for letting everyone think you did do it when we played the game at that party. But most of all... I’m sorry for not believing in what we had was strong enough that you would never hurt me like that”

She sinks down closely next to him on the bed, he looks her straight in the eye and swears he’s never seen her so honest and broken. It makes him cry too, the unwelcome tears dripping like waterworks.

His breath shakes for another moment, capturing her left hand with his right hand and holding it.
“It’s okay Ronnie, I just wished you’d believed me. But now you know, and it doesn’t matter what other people think”

“But I did take the video of you, Archie. I did use that to purposely try and ruin you because I was mad and hurting and I just had no idea what I even wanted to believe and... I’m sorry for that too”

He sees her look into her lap and wipe away the first tear in her eyes, he knows she hates to cry at all. There’s been so many fights and rage that could’ve been saved had she not done that, and he will have something nasty on him forever. Is it worth all that? Does she deserve this? And why is pain the main recipe in every fight they cook? Maybe he just misses her in his life or maybe she is his one true love, soulmate, and that’s why he can’t seem to let her go. Take a step back, look at her...

“It’s okay” Archie finally says after a long time.
Veronica looks up to meet his eyes, confused and shocked. Nothing could ever make up for the game she played when Archie had never done anything to do with hurting her. Their eyes lock in a strong gaze, she’s shaking her head.

“How is it okay?”

He held his breath, eyes never off her. Never doubt it for even a moment.

“Because I love you”

“We can be together again” Veronica tells him instead, fighting the tears harder than anything else. God how hard does it have to be for me to freaking say it? God why does if feel like I can never understand anything and I’m supposed to be the smart one, the perfect one. Why can’t I get this right and it’s so freaking frustrating!

“Veronica.. it can’t just work like that”

“Why not?” Her silky hair moves when she shakes her head and Archie notices how shiny it still is from last night.

“Because like you said yourself, we didn’t talk about so many things - we still aren’t. It’s like we can’t, like we’re scared or we don’t want to and I don’t want our relationship to be that way” he explained to her plainly.

“Are you talking about Betty?” Veronica pulled her hand away from his a little harshly not seeing how his fingers curled. “About you and her kissing? It doesn’t matter to me Archie, not if you still want me. We’re broken up and I wasn’t exactly celibate either”

Archie has to look away. He can’t believe they’re back to this fucking misunderstanding over and over and how long it’ll take for them to just agree. How does he explain it? There’s really no way to express something she should already know.

“Yeah well it matters to me”

He got up from the bed and walked, nowhere in particular but just away from this. Veronica watched him with her brows knitted together, following his movement across the room wondering... does he mean this is it? Are we broken up forever? That’s supposed to change, we’re supposed to get back together forever and -

“So do you know who sent the letter at least?” Archie changed the subject, his back facing her while looking out the window. Veronica sunk into the bed because they’re still not done talking
about them.

“No. That’s why Mummy and Daddy got so mad and when I demanded answers they - well they yelled at me. And right as they were going to give me the keys, that’s basically why they didn’t”

“So somebody is threatening them. And used you”

“Yes, that’s the other reason I needed to talk to you. Who could this be? I don’t really know much about my parents’ enemies but who would even have access to my photos like that?”

“Any.. guesses?” He throws out helplessly “This person wants to strike again - who knows how much worse it could get? From social destruction to actual destruction?”

His words made Veronica worry further, knowing how completely right he is and they needed to act quick figuring this but so she kept thinking hard and had just one minuscule idea.

“The other day at Vixen’s practice Ethel Muggs threw a goddamn cranberry juice on me. She kept saying my parents did all these bad things and especially to her dad and, maybe my dad ruined something for him and this is his revenge?”

Archie rubbed his chin between his fingers. “Seriously? Fucking Ethel, my god. But she would’ve done that a long time ago since the pictures were leaked in the Summer”

“True” she leaned her head on her hands and thought some more. “It’s the biggest possibility I can think of though. Nothing has been really suspicious with my parents other than that. And ...”

“You’re thinking it too?”

“You are too?”

“Why they defended us at Chuck’s lawyer’s office” Both of them said in unison. Finally Archie looked at her.

“Specifically you” Veronica realises “That’s weird”

“And didn’t they have like an oddly long conversation with my parents after? And -“

“Wait, why do you have a women’s jewellery brand box?” Veronica cut him off when she noticed the black and white box with a ribbon tied on it, perched on his nightstand.

Archie cursed to himself mentally, knowing now is the only time to give it up since she’s already seen it.

“That’s uh..” he scratched the back of his head “Your birthday present”

Her eyes darted to his in a flash, blinking a few times in confirmation. She never even thought he’d get anything for her birthday. Which is why she felt like such an idiot when they’re personalised anniversary gifts she’d ordered months ago showed up to her doorstep the day before.

“For me? You got it for me?”

Archie steps towards her and pulls the ribbon on the box open. She watched as it unravelled fluidly. Lifting the box though, Veronica was more than awed to see the shining thing inside - held in Archie’s hand like a delicate diamond. It’s a little jade gemstone framed by many ultra tiny diamonds, hanging on a chain and is instantly her most favourite piece of jewellery ever.

“Oh it’s beautiful!” She gasped, her hand flying up to her lips. It really did look brilliant.
“Want me to put it on?” Archie offered.

“Yes, yes!” Veronica quickly unclasped the pearls that had been around her neck since the night before and let them drop on Archie’s nightstand. She turned around so he could hook it on her, carefully watching the little gemstone set right in the little cleft between her collarbones. It fits absolutely perfect, Archie thinks it looks even more so when she turns around to face him and he kind of just smiles at her proudly.

“This is amazing Archie, thank you. So much” her cheeks feel like they’re bursting with the delight and there isn’t anything that could make her happier, that is until Archie’s phone started ringing with Reggie’s specified ringtone.

Archie grabbed his phone and looked confusedly at it before answering.

“Hello? Reggie? What? What happened?” His voice went higher. Veronica could hear Reggie on the other end from where she sat inches from the phone, his voice loud but unclear.

“Reggie slow down I can’t hear you”

Veronica felt the vibration in her jacket pocket.

“He’s freaking out, I don’t know why” Archie said to Veronica in concern.

“Oh my god, Cheryl just texted me.”

“What?”

“It’s Josie. She’s - she was hit by a car”

“What?”

Then her mind is recollecting all the pieces she should have picked up on earlier, it’s right in front of her and her breath stops because she can admit she’s officially terrified.

* a concrete jungle. a concrete jungle.

“We have to go” she tells Archie, without any hesitation “we have to get to New York”
Chapter #11 California Dreamin’

- I’ve been on a walk on a winter’s day, I’d be safe and warm if I was in LA

California dreamin’ on such a winter’s day -

Veronica turned her work-well-under pressure dial up to an eleven by swiping up every important document and piece of identification of both hers and Archie’s, bursting into his closet and getting his warmest coat and the smallest one she can find for herself too (anticipating the winter weather in New York), tosses Archie his keys and is booking them the earliest flight out of LA on her phone and web - checking them in, under the span of twenty minutes.

By the time they’re sitting down with huge exhales on the Delta airbus she tosses her phone into Archie’s lap and her wrists are visibly shaking in effort to buckle the seatbelt.

He’s always been amazed of her, really. How she manages to be so put together and organised when in a state of shock and panic, all while he could barely focus on the airport procedure they’ve both been through a thousand times because he’s so distracted. But he’s watched her, since expertly picking out both their clothes and swiping one of Fred’s credit cards that he keeps in the home safe for Archie to buy dinner with on days when Fred’s busy working, until driving to LAX and he never ceased to notice how agitated she really was. Fingers tapping, eyes blinking a little more rapidly, and her face turning a compartmentalised version of Veronica.

Archie let her go on and be in the zone for Josie’s sake, but now that they’re on the flight he cannot forgive himself for not breaking her cold case.

“Ronnie. Hey, look at me. You’re shaking”

She dropped the seatbelt buckle, a little too harsh, and rolled her eyes with a sigh. Archie placed a hand on her wrist lightly.

“I’m fine. I just didn’t get sleep last night, I’m tired -“

“Hey. Hey stop it, don’t try and hide this from yourself. It’s okay” It’s okay to be upset he means, it’s okay to let herself go and not act so strong all the time. Of course, that’s a Veronica Lodge trait, but right now she looks into his eyes and tries to find that place deep down inside of her that can handle this, facing the emotion with him. He doesn’t move away from her even when her eyes strain too long and the stewardesses are demonstrating safety precautions, he just keeps his eyes on hers.

And now he holds both her hands, a little daringly, feeling the warmth in them he’s missed for so long. He can see everyone of her features etched in it, fear, distress, worry.

“Okay?”

Veronica nods, numbly and unsure, looking back ahead because she can’t deal with it anymore.
She does feel Archie’s hands slip out of hers though, then buckling the seatbelt around her like she’s a little kid.

“I’m scared” she breathes in a whisper. Never facing him. Archie leans back, he expected as much, but it’s never like Veronica to ever say that and she looks like she’s on the verge of slipping which would really become his breaking point too.

“Don’t be scared. She has broken limbs, but she’ll make it. We just focus on getting there first, alright.”

“I’m just horrified. None of this, would have happened if my parents had done whatever they were supposed to do. And on top of that? I am supposed to be this smart ass who figures shit out beforehand but yet I couldn’t get the clue from that letter, that stupid letter, I could have told her and told her mom - and, and she’s just.. she’s my best friend Archie, she’s not even eighteen and she’s like the most talented person ever. It’s so fucking unfair for that to go to waste if she had -“

“Ronnie, stop” Archie moved full familiarly this time and pulled her waist so she’s leaning against him, closer in body and heart. “Stop it, she’s not. She is going to be perfect. And it has nothing to do with you alright? This wasn’t your fault”

“How can you be so sure?” She turned up to look at him, and right then her eyes are so wide and watering that it just about breaks his heart. For once, Archie has to try and be the stronger one, be there for her. He swallowed hard and nodded.

“Because you are not your parents. You’re Veronica. You’re strong, and nothing that happened to Josie is even a little bit your fault? You understand me?”

He struggles to keep from freaking out because Veronica is now crying pretty heavily in his arms, facing away from him, her small back shaking as she tries to choke everything in. It hurts. It hurts so bad.

“Ronne look at me, this isn’t your fault. Do you believe me?” His voice had to go up a sterner tone for Veronica to fully pay attention to him and she looks, sadly into his eyes like she doesn’t really want to believe. He isn’t going to let her though, making sure to hold her tear stained cheeks and not let her look away again until she finally nods.

“Yeah”

He takes it as a good enough assurance and lets her turn back around, once the seatbelt lights are off the both of them surprisingly fell right back into routine - he pushed the arm rest up and she kicks off her shoes, folding her legs on the seat and laying her head against his chest to listen to his heartbeat. They don’t talk, nor make any movement, his hand just resting on one of her arms like they’re together again and then they spend a long flight in silence staring out the window until they fall asleep inevitably.

(x.x.x.x)

“Cher said they’re at Mount Sinai Hospital and she’s just been transferred to a regular ward, but she’s still not woken up and I’ve booked us a car from the airport so we have to get to the pickups, let’s go”

“Why didn’t you just get an Uber?” Archie asks, struggling to keep up with Veronica who’s holding their tickets in her hand underneath her iPhone, opened to their Raffles Royalties group
chat in case one of them texts anything else. They’re flying through JFK and it takes half the time for them to reach the pickup point, since they don’t have any luggage. But people around them - old couples trudging along, families with little drabs of kids dropping things and skipping along, studious businessmen and women with sleek suits and briefcases.

“Uber doesn’t even exist anymore, Archie”

He tells her thoroughly on the car ride to Mount Sinai Hospital that whatever happens she shouldn’t feel alone, he’s right there, speaking more like a friend and mentor than somebody who used to hold her body all night long and go skinny dipping in private lakes together. That’s what he has to be right now though, someone to remind Veronica, who’s not as void of emotion as everyone thinks she is, to keep on her two feet. Whatever problems and unfinished business has to take a backseat because right now, there’s more traumatic matters and her sanity comes first.

Archie also knows that the vortex opening friendship that is Cheryl and Veronica hasn’t been on the up and up, from the red head’s underlying bitterness he’s learned to spot and Veronica mentioning Cheryl as one of the ‘forces in her life’ last night. He thinks about how far away last night feels, barely even sleeping from it and now they’re in New York City together. Last night feels like a million nights ago.

Upon arrival, Veronica nods at him promptly and they step out of the already paid for car to take whatever it is on. The first real blow of cold air hits them, like a sucker punch, proving too fast what West Coast babies they are even huddled in sweaters and coats, jeans hugging their shivering legs.

“Hi, I’m Veronica Lodge and I’m here to see my friend Josie McCoy. She just got in today, she had a pretty bad accident earlier this morning” Veronica announces at the receptionist desk. She stands tall as she can, still wearing the sneakers she was going to workout in from before. It actually ended up working out for her in comfort terms.

“Just a second miss”

“She’s in 6A and Cheryl said they’re waiting for us in the lounge room near there” she whispered to Archie quickly.

“And are both of you going up to visit her?”

“Uh yes, I’m Archibald Andrews” he cleared his throat and Veronica’s eyebrows got lost in her hairline at hearing that ostentatious first name. It’s the only time she remotely smiled today.

They hand over their iDs and after waiting for a visitors’ badge, Archie sticks his square on his jacket chest pocket and Veronica pastes hers on the back of her hand and they go up. It’s that same burbling drum of nerves underneath your feet every time you step in a hospital, like you’re nervous even if you’re not sure for what. Neither Archie nor Veronica had bad experiences with hospitals before, but still just being in it kind of made her uneasy - she supposes the fact that it kind of reeks of disease and pain kind of lets that on.

This time though, she does have a reason to worry, she has every single reason to be terrified. Mount Sinai is huge and has wings for every type of hospitalisation and there’s all these glass doors with metal detectors and hand sanitiser they have to pass through just to get to that sixth floor lounge. Kind of reminds them of home. Veronica also knows Cheryl will probably make some fuss about them showing up together, but her heart coils soften when she sees three distant figures - a huge one with unkempt black hair, head in his hands, sitting alone. A tall lankier red head and another red head, a girl, the two of them with creases in their forehead.
She makes their presence known by picking up her pace and both Cheryl and Jason look up, standing to greet them.

“Hey, you made it” Cheryl opens her arms to Veronica first, she leans in and闻 the cherry shampoo in her hair mixed with a grossness that must he in her own too - public transportation and airport/hospital together. She still closes her eyes and hopes Cheryl can put their issues aside, whatever they are.

“Of course” Veronica whispered, holding Cheryl closer “How is she?”

“She’s not woken up yet. Mrs McCoy is out with the pd trying to catch whoever the fucker is, so it’s just us here for now. They’re running blood tests now though so we had to step out - Reggie could barely muster up the strength to leave her, V”

Veronica broke away and looked at him, then. Reggie Mantle is usually the poster child for kids like them, caring way too much about his appearance, black hair always slicked and gelled, spending meticulous hours in the gym, and he’s like Veronica in the sense that power translates into an unforgiving stance, so they never let their guard down.

Now though, Reggie is wearing a maroon sweater of some college football team and his eyes and nose were red alike. She’d also never seen him with hair this messy, frankly it looked a little disconcerting. Veronica frowned, watching Archie wrap his arms around Reggie’s shoulders. The brunet didn’t meet Archie’s eyes once, they’re teary and exhausted staring into space.

“Are you guys hungry? Maybe we should pick up food from downstairs or the bakery down the street” Jason stood up, his tall flanking body hovering over Cheryl and Veronica alike. His voice was quiet and muted, the three of them still stealing glances towards a crumbling Reggie.

“You’re right. Some food would do us good. Uh, I don’t really feel anything in particular though” The last time Veronica had eaten was before the charity show last night, and she can’t imagine Archie isn’t starving either. “You know what I don’t eat though right?”

“Yeah, yeah don’t worry” Cheryl waved her hand at her “I’ll get what looks good for us. Will you and Archie be okay here for a while?”

“Don’t worry Cherry. We’ll be fine” Veronica held onto both of Cheryl’s hands in assurance and for that moment, realised how grown up they’re all acting. Getting food in pairs and staying behind to help console their grieving friend, they practically travelled here all by themselves, and without a hassle. It makes her proud of them for being able to handle so much without any help from their parents, or any adults for that matter.

As soon as Cheryl and Jason left Veronica takes a seat gingerly across the table from Archie and Reggie, still silent and unmoving. Then a buzz on her phone called her attention.

Raffles Royalties
Jellybean Jones : i’m here. You guys where?

Veronica sent a look to Archie so he didn’t need to check his own phone, before typing back.

Its just me, Archie and Reg here in the lounge outside 6A. Come up

Not many minutes later, the sound of footsteps in the huge private hospital alerting them. Veronica stands up, Archie turns around but it’s the people they see that stops both of them in their tracks and Veronica swears she felt her heart twist gravelly.
“Betty? Jughead? Why are you guys even here?”

She looks like something mixed between fury and hurt, but also just fear of the chaos she knows is about to be brewed.

“Veronica, calm down. She’s my - plus one” Jughead says cautiously. He can see that look in her eyes like she’s about to tear something apart if anybody steps on her.

Veronica’s eyes dart from Jughead to the morose looking blonde next to him, her appearance already visibly frail but something in Veronica feels like it wants to snap at her and make her sorry for ever thinking she could cross her like that, betray her, the catty not - thinking - straight side that is. She’s a little too tired and delirious to be thinking rationally and calmly and that’s never good.

“Why are you even here then?” She shoved Jughead in the chest. She’s suddenly so angry about everything, and Jughead knows just how betrayed she felt. Yet he has the utter nerve to show up here with her and invade their company. Wow, suddenly she sounds like Cheryl being all ultra cliquish.

“In case you forgot, my little sister happens to be the ‘hand maiden’ on your beck and call, and I don’t think any of you, her great friends are making a huge effort to get her here safely so check yourself Veronica. I wouldn’t wish to be wallowing with the wild bunch if I had the freaking choice”

He stuck it right back to her, with that classic Jughead Jones retort and his dark brows crossing at her. Honestly, it’s enough having to be dragged here by his relentless sister but arriving at the hospital after one long ass flight and even longer traffic only to be disrespected and told to leave is more than he can take on Monday morning for gods sakes.

Veronica’s face softens then, from what he said or his quick jump to defence. She glances at Jellybean and back to Jughead but she never bothers to look at Betty. She sighed, admitting defeat.

“I’m sorry Jug, I’m just -“

“I’m going to let this go because I know you’re terrified and tired. It’s okay” He cuts in, making Veronica more relieved she didn’t need to apologise any more.

She wants to thank him, and he wants to ask her how she is but they both just lean forward and hug each other. Her arms locked around his neck and his around her waist, Jughead sighs, upset for his friend. They’re the only ones in the lounge room and all eyes, Archie’s, Betty’s and Jellybean’s watch their embrace carefully. Archie doesn’t feel some way about it, Jug and Veronica have been friends for what feels like forever - they connect on a certain level of crime fiction and doom and gloomness that even Archie can’t compete with. They’re so similar, just on opposite ends of the totem pole. Betty though, she can’t help but feel the jump in her throat which she knows she has no right to feel, no right for it to even be there.

Archie talks to Jughead and Veronica sits in between Reggie and Jellybean so no one can bother her, Betty is across from them. She has no idea why Jughead even brought her along and why, following their meeting yesterday he seemed almost as torn as she was - so why is she here now? Who even is Betty to him? Since when are they friends? What? And worst of all, Cheryl is going to be livid when she and Jason come back...

Her stomach feels queasy just thinking about it, she shifts in her seat uncomfortably and resumes the brainstorming.
“I’m sorry you know, I just - Juggy hates to be bothered and I didn’t even know you and Betty were legitly fighting, I figured he would be cooler if she was with us. And she is worried for you guys too”

“It’s legitimately” Veronica corrects her, watching her blue eyes grow a little “and it’s not your fault. Also.. why exactly did you think Betty -“

“Ohh my god” the unmistakable sound of Blossom voice startled everyone “What the hell is she doing here?”

Cheryl who’s hands are occupied by food bags and without her killer heels, hair not as usually perfect, is only slightly less intimidating with the fire she’s emitting. She stalked straight towards Betty and everyone stood up like they can do something -

“Can’t you ever get a clue? Or are you stuck on following us around like a freaking groupie! How much clearer do I have to be that you aren’t our friend. Can’t you stay away for one second in our whole lives? Ugh!”

“Cheryl” All of them said at the same time.

She looked at everyone, more ferocity etched on her face like she’s about to burst. “Are you guys all insane?!”

A throat cleared that brought them back. “Mhm. Miss McCoy’s room is open for you to visit. She still hasn’t woken though”

(x.x.x.x)

This has to be the most damned awkward situation some of them have ever been in. Josie’s hospital room is large, of course, so a couple (those who can stand sitting close to one another) are sprawled on the couch and armchair. Reggie sits next to the bed, he still hasn’t spoken a word since they all got here. Veronica stands on the other side, humming softly while she caresses her friend’s face feather lightly.

Josie broke her leg, and she fractured her ribs pretty bad from the fall. There’s also a pretty scary sized gauze on the top of her head that hit the road and started bleeding. Veronica wants to cry, she is shattered to see her Josie the way she doesn’t belong - but a part of her tells herself to suck it up and stay calm, or things could get a lot messier.

“Can I see her?” Jellybean asks quietly. She and Veronica switch places and her bottom lip trembles like a kid. It’s all too quiet and almost every person is pissed off with someone else, or more than one person, or regretful and remorseful and they’re staring very coldly at any surface in particular - jaw clenched and just trying to avoid making eye contact with the other person.

It’s only a matter of time before Cheryl steps away from Josie’s bedside and stands right in front of them, a collected smile on her face.

“Guys, I’ve been thinking”

“That’s not going to end well” Veronica snarks. Cheryl glared back.

“Since you all are so keen on us all being friends, and Queen V here is about to take the throne I might as well admit defeat. So I’d love if we all got to know each other, hm, a lot better. Starting with how wonderful it is that Archie and Veronica are back together again. Aren’t you happy for
them Betty?” Cheryl clasped her hands together and smiled

“I am, actually” Betty replied quietly.

“Ohh what was that look V? Is it not true? Are you and Andrews not back together?”

“Just shut up Cheryl” Veronica said simply. She knew what Cheryl was trying to do, and right then she wasn’t going to have any of it. She’s not in the mood for another one of the chaos cases that she just knows will happen, because Cheryl will always find something when she’s looking for it.

“I do admit it’s a little odd. Considering the whole meltdown that happened at the show yesterday. And, the fact that Veronica was obviously trying to blow off little Betty Coop ever since... her birthday party?”

“Shut up Cheryl” Archie shot daggers into the other redhead’s chocolate brown eyes. It isn’t very often that Archie stands up to Cheryl, either too weirded out or intimidated to do so.

“And I on the other hand, found myself quite lonely after Jason snuck off to meet Betty’s crazy tweaked out sister” Jason looked up at his twin when she said that. “Reggie and Josie were gone, to the airport of course. But - Archie and Veronica magically vanished too! If I put the pieces together it sounds like something went down that wasn’t supposed to.”

Maybe they’re all a little too good at this already, because all three of them don’t falter when staring at her back even though Betty looks like she just might break while Veronica and Archie look like they’re ready to fight back.

“Have anything to say about it V?”

“Only that you are awfully invested in something that has nothing to do with you”

“What about you Betty? Where were you? And why are you and Veronica on the outs?”

Betty froze, she had no idea what to say and perfectly neither did Veronica. Not that she would care, it’s Betty’s battle to fight and adding responding to Cheryl would only fuel the already brewing fire.

“Oh come on, aren’t we all supposed to be friends?”

That’s it. Veronica couldn’t take it anymore. “Cheryl, you better shut the hell up before I let everyone know how fucking psycho you are and can’t even handle your own brother finding a girl he likes. Are you seriously that messed up Cher?”

“It’s not like you would know anything about having love for a sibling” Cheryl replied nonchalantly

“Oh yeah, like a little too much love? Like maybe the way a sister shouldn’t love a brother? You know you should’ve figured it out by now why nobody actually likes you, because you’re screwed in the head. Unnatural.”

“Veronica” Jason warned her but she never took her eyes off Cheryl

“I mean how do you think The Blossoms have red headed twins every single generation? It’s because of the sick incestuous inbreeding that you clearly passed on. The only thing that mattered to your parents, I mean we all know they don’t actually get any - your dad has a stick up his ass all time. And you’re the same way, Cheryl. You’re just as sick as everyone thinks you are. I mean you
spent all year bullying your beloved twin’s girlfriend’s sister! How pathetic are you really?”

“I kissed Archie” Betty piped up, out of nowhere, distracting everyone to look back at her. She was shaken but it seemed like the only way to stop them from fighting. “I kissed him, okay? I betrayed my best friend in the worst way possible and Cheryl? You’re right. I’m evil, I’m stupid and I don’t deserve to be her friend.”

The room fell to complete silence, even Reggie had been awakened on the inside for the first time, taking note of the feud happening. Jughead covered his face with his right hand, the other crossed tightly against his stomach. Archie looked even more perplexed at everything Betty was saying, and all the resentment towards Cheryl in that moment.

Speaking of Cheryl, the girl put on her best jaw - dropping - shocked face that a well taught actress like herself has down easily, appearing totally buyable to everyone in the room that she was actually shocked by the news of Betty and Archie kissing.

“Colour me shocked!” She held a delicate hand to her chest “The best friend and the boyfriend, that sounds a lot more like us than anything else you’ve ever done”

Veronica couldn’t believe this. She knew, the only reason Cheryl is tampering with their relationships is because she hates being defied, hates being denied, hates being disobeyed. When she can’t have her way she spins the world until it’s right where she wants it, not caring how ugly things turn for the others.

“So, do you plan on dating any of the boys in school? Or is it just your bestie’s boyfie that gets you off?” Her tone played on sugary sweet and the clear level of her enjoyment.

“Cheryl. Outside, now”

Veronica didn’t stop and wait for an answer, pulling Cheryl along with her swiftly out of the combusting hospital room.

(x.x.x.x)

“This is the second time you pulled me into a bathroom to talk, what’s your fucking deal?”

“I should ask you the same question” Veronica said patiently. Her chest was fuming but for the sake of not joining the long list of losers who used impulsive actions against smart well thought out plays, she bit her tongue. “I admit, that what I said to you in there was fucking horrible. And untrue. Hell, I’ll even apologise to you! But not until you cut the shit and tell me what it is you’re so cheesed about otherwise I don’t know what we’re fighting for!”

Cheryl squinted her eyes, taking focus on every one of Veronica’s words. “Are you even the same girl I knew? Betty and Archie proved what sneaky snakes they are and you’re still forgiving them? How many times are you going to let them hurt you? What - what happened to my best friend?”

“Oh, come on Cheryl. Did you even buy that faux friend concern? Cos I don’t”

“What do you mean?” Cheryl suddenly felt a little smaller, following Veronica’s change of demeanour. Her voice came out smaller and too fragile for her liking.

Veronica stood up taller, standing closer determinedly “I mean, you don’t think I’ve noticed how fucking jealous you are of me?”

“Me? Jealous of you?”
“Yes Cheryl. You can’t stand that somebody else makes you feel insecure, and I have every single thing you wish you did. Because try and act all high and mighty as much as you want, I know ever crippling thing inside that makes you so scared - so insecure. So threatened”

“You mean like how Betty makes you feel?” Cheryl said hastily, her chest tightening when Veronica glowered with the truth about her. “I mean she walks in here with no money, no designer labels... and then she steals your ex boyfriend at your own birthday party? But you’re scared of losing him too, so you choose to forgive her just because. The first time in your life someone makes you feel the slightest bit.. she’s making you feel.. inferior”

Veronica thinks Cheryl might have won the upper hand, Veronica’s never won a match against Cheryl anyway. Because Cheryl’s so crazy she’ll never stop trying to win.

“You know what? Screw you. It’s not Betty who’s making me feel inferior, it’s you. With your constant digs and jabs and never ending qualms - I’ve done everything as you asked, and you have made me, this class A contemptuous, snobby label whoring brutal bitch monster! Now why can’t you just let me live my life?”

She pushed past the stunned red head and darted out of the bathroom, not even in a room that most likely meets many tears can she let herself go because Cheryl is there... and everything about her, about what she said, Betty, Archie, is it true? Is it all true? It feels like every part of her is royally screwed, now she can’t even believe anything that Cheryl said is a lie. The only thing that she knows Cheryl isn’t right about, is that Betty makes her unsure of herself. Veronica’s never felt, not in the slightest bit, unsure of herself when Betty is there.

The kiss, burned worse at the fact that they were into each other. But not because she thinks Betty has something she doesn’t, that’s ridiculous.

Veronica stormed into the lounge expecting it to be empty like before, her tears already threatening to spill over. What a surprise when all of her friends were sitting there, all of them looking up at her arrival. She stops and looks at them, all of them. With semi red eyes and obviously not okay, she doesn’t really know where to go.

“Ronnie, are you okay?” Archie was the first to stand up and move across the room to her, but Veronica couldn’t be touched right now so she backed away.

She noticed then that Betty and Jughead were missing, before Jason stepped up and pulled Archie back. “Dude, let her be. She doesn’t want to be bothered right now”

Veronica spared one last look at Archie with his worried eyes and she hates herself again, so much for never being able to be brave and just embrace whatever it is she’s feeling with him. Instead she’s always running away from it, covering it up and distracting herself with money and fun. She locks eyes with him, totally sorry, but she can’t deal with it... not right now.

Veronica books it to Josie’s room that she knows is empty now, the door swinging when she stepped in. Finally, like a weight crushed inside her chest she’s able to let it all go and just cry. She sits down in the chair that Reggie was in previously, her sobs breaking out instantly. Her shoulders are shaking when she cries into her hands and she just wants everything to black out, just disappear and not feel anything anymore.

“Josie, I’m so sorry” she reached her hand out to trace the line of her delicate jaw, completely still and her eyes shut. “I’m so sorry. It’s all my fault, I should’ve done something - maybe right now things would be different”
There’s a momentary lapse in her words when she stops because her throat can’t deliver the words, jammed together tightly. “I never meant for anything like this to happen and, and my lack of acting up is what landed you in this hospital. I’m so, so sorry Josie. I don’t think I could ever forgive myself if you never woke up, so please... please just wake up.”

She paused and stared at her friend’s face, knowing that all those injuries will leave scars that people as vain as herself and Josie wouldn’t know how to deal with. It makes her even more sick. Veronica looked down, gripping the edge of the bed and speaking at the floor beneath her.

“Yes everything I’ve done recently has totally blew up in my face. I sabotaged Archie and I keep fighting with Cheryl and I slept with fucking Nick St Clair as a means for distraction and none of it has gotten me anywhere. I keep wrecking things, Josie. But not this. Not you. You can’t be one of the things I wreck too, you just can’t. I’m so sorry, Josie.. please come back to me”

“What are you apologising for?” The weak and strained voice alerted Veronica and she immediately looked up, not believing her ears might be playing tricks on her. She blinks a few times to be sure, and it is. Josie’s eyes are just barely fluttered open and her lips parted like she just spoke.

“Oh my god” Veronica’s tear stained eyes grew wide and she stood up, heading to the door “Guys she’s awake!”

(x.x.x.x)

All the remaining people piled into Josie’s hospital room faster than the speed of lightning, crowding around her bed and kind of talking at once. Veronica noticed how grateful Reggie was, and for the first time, that he’s crying. Reggie Mantle never cries. She finds it weird so she looks away and realises she should get out of here before Cheryl saunters back.

Mrs McCoy arrives somewhere between five and fifteen minutes after Veronica called her saying Josie has woken up. She thanks the kids for sticking by, they tell her it’s no problem, and then all of them leave the room so Sierra can be alone with her daughter. The truth is Josie is still too strung on the drugs to properly say anything, she’s pretty much unstable at best.

The doctor and nurses come in again and Sierra never leaves the bedside, Jason tells them all that Myles should be here soon and the vibe around them has switched so incredibly fast. “Are you kids heading back home? You should, you do have school remember?” Mrs McCoy approaches them.

“We couldn’t leave Josie’s side” Veronica spoke for all of them. “Is there any leads on which monster did this?”

Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Jason shrinking back like he didn’t want any part of the conversation. He also seemed weirdly quiet, like Jason is usually quiet anyway, but either he’s pissed at Veronica for the shit she spewed at Cheryl earlier or something else - but he’s not acting very much like his usual self right now; cool, calm and caring.

“I’m afraid not, dear. Of course I won’t stop you from staying here, I know how close you all are. She’s... she’s lucky to have such wonderful friends” they could already hear the crack in her voice “but in the very least you should eat and reconvene, not just hold up at this hospital”

“I guess we could use some air” Veronica agrees “but will you be okay? Should we wait until Mr McCoy gets here?”

“Nonsense, you kids get some rest. Get a hotel or go home, we’ll be okay here. I don’t think
Josie’s in a very chirpy mood anyway. The morphine might not wear off for hours”

Veronica nods, she gives Mrs McCoy a fiercely tight hug and assures her Josie will be okay before leaving the lounge. She isn’t expecting anyone to follow her, Reggie insists on staying back but Mrs McCoy says she’ll make sure he doesn’t overtire himself, so Veronica heads towards the elevator and twirls a strand of hair nervously.

“Hey Ron, where are you going?” She stopped and turned to him, a cold breeze taking place in her heart that he still cared to come after her.

“I don’t know, definitely not home. Maybe get some clothes then rest at a hotel? I haven’t slept for twenty four hours”

“Same. Hey I’m with you alright? Jason said he’ll wait on Cheryl but I’m not leaving you alone, not after what happened to Josie”

“Okay” she agrees, not minding to have someone with her since nobody knows what else could happen right now. Especially if that someone is Archie, and he offers her the smallest of smiles for letting him tag along on that she tries to ignore on the elevator ride down.

They’re scrolling through hotel options closest to the hospital when Veronica looks up and spots them, it isn’t easy to miss by any chance with bright blonde hair and the stupid beanie Jughead still wears all the time. They’re sitting at a row of those metal chairs, facing each other with their knees almost touching and she can tell both of them look really upset.

“We don’t need to talk to them unless you want to” Archie tells her, following her eyes to their friends.

“No” she says steadily “I want to” I can’t keep running away and hoping things will fall back into place.

They head towards them just as Betty stands up to go to the bathroom and Veronica slowly stops her. “Hey. You uh.. you didn’t leave”

Betty looked a little surprised, more that Veronica is speaking to her than anything “No, I just had to get away for a while. She just really knows how to push my buttons”

“Well that’s what Cheryl does best” Veronica said slyly.

“Listen, V. I am really sorry about what happened. I’m guessing Archie told you, and there isn’t a fibre in my being that isn’t insanely regretful for what I did. What happened, it was a drunken prompted stupid moment and it was completely on me, not Archie. You should hate me, if I were you I’d totally punch me in the face”

Veronica smiled “I highly doubt that. But... I’m sorry too. For not listening when you wanted to tell me and for shutting you out. Hopefully we can move on from this and try put it behind us?”

“Are you kidding? Absolutely. I’ll take the second chance, and you won’t regret it. But how could you still forgive me V? I mean - What I did it’s, it’s unspeakable”

“I don’t really know” Veronica sighed “I don’t know why there’s just a part of me that wants to turn a blind eye”

“Maybe because you’re the best friend in the world”
“Not true, but thanks”

“It is true” She wrapped her arms around Veronica and it felt good to at least have something right in her life, whatever it is, but Betty was the one who fought for her when no one else did. And that, that outshines most of what happened. She has to hold onto that person. Mistakes are a part of growing up, Veronica knows it better than anyone else.

“Hey Jug. Uh, are you and Betty leaving or something?” Archie isn’t sure how to approach his friend for some reason. He knows just how much Jughead hates the drama that follows around his and Veronica’s life, hates that side of them, and for him to have witnessed all that went down with Cheryl and Veronica earlier - even Archie feels off about it so he can’t imagine how Jughead feels.

“Jellybean wants to stay” he nods, a little grimly “You guys sure do know loyalty like no other”

“What happened in there was messed up, that was not loyalty. I don’t know what’s gotten into Cheryl it’s like - she’s been ten times nastier or something”

“I don’t know what’s gotten into all of you”

“What?” Archie raised his brows

“Sorry. Just.. was that, a revenge kiss or something? You and Betty? Like to compensate for Veronica doing stuff with Reggie a thousand years ago?”

“Jughead no it’s not like that, at all. And Betty was the one who kissed me, so if anything you should be mad at her. Wait, why are you even mad at me?”

The look his friend gave him made Archie think there’s more to the story than he’s letting on. Yes, Jughead has been a solid friend of theirs for ages and he always supported their relationship, but when was it ever his business what went down between Archie and Veronica? Almost like a quick stab of jealousy, or perhaps disappointment.

“Wait - “ the wheels are visibly turning in his head “Do you like, like Betty?”

Jughead blanked, his mouth opening then closing like he wanted to deny it but didn’t know how. Then all of a sudden, it all made sense to Archie and he shoved Jughead with a huge grin on his face. Jughead helped Betty with the Blue and Gold, they were the ones who brought Veronica away that night at the party to help her, and the minor crimson shade appearing on the skin of his neck made situations a lot clearer. “You totally do!”

“Oh, no need to shout about it. I don’t really even know, it’s just like these weird - fluttering feelings in my stomach sometimes”

“Buttersflies” Archie says seriously. But his eyes are more than delighted “This is amazing. I thought you’d never have a crush on anybody. You always seemed so uninterested in girls!”

“Shut up, man. And don’t tell Betty or Veronica. Seriously”

“Deal. Wow, now that I know this... I can tell you that the kiss meant nothing, and she even told me that the next day. She said she had feelings for someone else so -“

“Your excitement is showing. It’s weird”

Archie looked away with a smile on his face, seeing the two girls hugging each other from across the room and something inside his heart swelled. Betty and Jughead, me and Veronica. It fits. It’s a
dream come true. If only now were a time when they could focus on that.

“Let’s go to the girls then”

“Hey, are we interrupting?” Archie poked playfully at Veronica’s arm, before she let Betty go and she rolled her eyes at him.

“Nope” Betty giggled. Archie exchanged a weird look with Jughead, and the girls didn’t miss it.

“So what’s the plan?”

“Get a hotel, stay the night and hopefully by tomorrow we’ll know Josie’s condition better and decide if we should stay. The nearest one is the Four Seasons Hotel so I’ll try and get a check in there, you guys down?”

“Sure” Jughead and Archie agreed easily. Betty was about to ask what the price is like, but then she realised they probably don’t have to think about that so she stopped herself.

“But I think we should eat and get some clothes before passing out in the hotel, right?”

“Oh yeah, I could use a good meal right now” Jughead rubbed his stomach dramatically “That vegan crap Cheryl and Jason brought wasn’t nearly enough to tempt me”

“Hey! Don’t hate on the veggie burgers, I was dying to eat one if it weren’t for the commotion” Veronica rolled her eyes.

They laughed and Archie threw his arm around Veronica, like everything is okay, while Betty took Veronica’s side in defending the burgers and the boys vocally objected. Eventually they were so caught up in the debate that they almost forgot they were standing in a hospital with people all moving around them.

Until Jellybean came downstairs finally, seeing them all joking around and rolled her eyes half annoyed but not really bothered. “Are you kids ready to go yet?”

(x.x.x.x)

By the time all five of them had sat down in a restaurant after more time in traffic and booking the hotel room first, it was 6 pm and they were in a booth at CUT Steakhouse because the boys desperately raved for heavy food even though all Veronica wanted was to have a quiet meal at The Garden. The Steakhouse is busy enough, but definitely not beneath the uppity class kids’ standards, just across from The Four Seasons and the food was more than delicious on their empty stomachs.

The seating was confusing to everyone. By right, the girls should’ve just sat together and Archie and Jughead take the other side. But without thinking Veronica sat down right next to Archie after he slid in the booth. Or maybe she was thinking, thinking that life is too complicated right now to be bent about stupid rules of being exes and how close they can get. His surprise shows, heartbeat racing a little bit when she sat down so close to him.

Veronica raises her brow a little teasingly, and Archie didn’t bother smiling like he’s the luckiest man in the whole world. Both of them missing their friends’ uncomfortableness at having to sit together in the other side of the booth.
“You want to figure this out, right?” Archie whispered to her, mouth tantalisingly close to her neck and his breath hitting her shoulder torturously.
“What?” Her hand moving to twirl more spaghetti on the fork stopped, she looked down at him wondering why he’s suddenly whispering to her.

“Who’s behind this. Your parents’ ‘deal’ with them. You want to figure it out, don’t you? Or just leave it to the PD?”

“No of course I do” Veronica sighed, dropping the fork and leaning back. She resisted the urge to hold his hand underneath the table or brush the red hair out of his forehead, with his face so close to hers it’s causing some major dreamy eyes “Like we can trust the police with anything. However, it’s not gonna be so easy”

“I know, which is why I think we need to tell Jughead”

“Really? Why?”

“What do you mean? We tell him everything and he’s kind of the best detective and journalist around. You know, he lurks and he notices background stuff about our life”

It’s true. Most of the time, since they were kids Jughead would be the only one at a high profile family dinner who wasn’t socialising. Sure he talked to some of the kids he knew and entertained the small number of adults, friends of his father’s, who struck up a conversation with him. But for as long as they can remember whenever the three of them would have post mortem about whatever event they were at the night before, back when the three of them were a tight knit group, Jughead would go on and on about how this guy did something strange and exchanged a shady encounter with another man or how one of the politicians’ wives left the same hallway three minutes before one of her husband’s clients and theorising whatever sinful activity they were up to. While Archie and Veronica found it a bit much, they understood how much Juggy loves conspiracies and theorising and ‘the dark underlying truth’ but the point is, he was always an observer. A very aware, very sharp eyed observer with an over active mind.

“You’re right. But telling Jughead would mean telling Betty, and honestly? I don’t think that’s a bad idea. She runs the school newspaper too so she might be privy to some information we wouldn’t be able to get our hands on, you know like office stuff? I don’t know”

“No you’re totally right” Archie looked back at Betty and the two siblings who were happily indulging in the lava cake while chatting to make sure they didn’t notice he and Veronica’s private conversation “So we tell them. And we can all figure this out. Isn’t JB harmless too? Plus she is Jughead’s sister, she might notice stuff too”

Veronica bit her bottom lip, thinking it through. Telling them would help take stress of her mind. “I’m confident they won’t divulge any information to anyone else. Which is important, because I cannot in my right mind handle anybody knowing my parents had something to do with Josie’s accident. God that would be horrendous”

“The sooner we tell them the sooner we can stop worrying, Ronnie”

Archie was about to turn around back to their friends when she suddenly stopped him, her hand not hesitating this time to grab his. Her fingers are cold, mostly from the ring she’s wearing on her pinky finger that’s an heirloom ring, they wrap around his and she immediately feels the safe heat of his skin pressed on hers.

“Wait” She looks into his eyes. A little scared, a little lost.
She turns her body closer to his and they’re almost nose to nose, eyes never leaving each others. He automatically turns his hand around so they can lock their fingers into each other and the steakhouse around them is fading into splashes of colours.

“This isn’t just a mystery to solve, this is a dire situation. If we bring them in, we can’t get them our or save them when it gets too dangerous”

“So are you sure?” He stares even more intently at her, Veronica tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. She can hear his breathing, so close to her.

“Yeah. They’re our friends, and I trust them”

“Is everything okay guys? Should we ask for the bill?” Jughead’s voice knocks them out of their little world and they see three sets of eyes looking at them like aliens, probably because they saw the whole embrace.

“No. We.. we actually have something to tell you” Archie takes the lead, both of them face forward again to the rest “But you need to promise absolute secrecy over it”

“With your life” Veronica adds in, totally serious where Betty thought she might be joking.

“Sure, you can tell us anything”

“Josie’s accident.. it wasn’t a coincidence that happened by chance. It was planned, strategically. And we know who did it”

“And you’re just saying this now?” Jughead laid his hands on the table, suddenly raising his voice. All three pairs of blue eyes that stared back at them were disgruntled.

“No, we don’t know who the people are. We know who’s behind it, but we don’t know who these people are” Veronica explains, glancing at Archie before slipping her hand into his under the table. When Jughead didn’t look convinced, Betty and Jellybean still hadn’t said anything, she had to explain further. “Just - I got a package this morning. It was for my parents, but inside was a note that basically said three things : one, that this person was responsible for leaking my photos back in the summer. Two, telling my parents to ‘take the deal’ whatever that meant and lastly that if they didn’t, the next attack would happen in a concrete jungle. Here”

Veronica breaks it down and all of them can’t believe it. The wheels are already turning in Juggy’s head, while Betty and Jellybean seem to be in denial.

“Really? That’s - that’s insane! Are you completely sure it was connected though?” The blonde was drowning in her own fluster

“I went to Archie’s and like an hour later Josie’s accident happened. Also... there was something else in the package”

Jughead raised his brows so high they got lost in his hairline, waiting for her to proceed very impatiently. “Well what was it?!” Jellybean finally caved.

“A pig’s heart”

“This person wasn’t playing around” Archie shook his head. He looked scared, both arms laid out on the table and trying to inspect everybody’s reaction carefully. Veronica put her arm on his and clasped their hands together, this small gesture not going unnoticed by the rest.
Jughead looked back up from their connected hands and his lips flattened in a line. “Veronica, you need to ask your parents about it”

“You think I didn’t? They practically dragged my ass over even opening the damn thing, so I kind of fled. I went to Archie’s”

“Who would even do something so barbaric?” Betty dramatically had tears in her eyes, then Jellybean bumped their shoulders together to comfort her.

“Screams ruthless businessman and that doesn’t really narrow down anyone we know” the younger girl pointed out.
There was silence at the table for a while, nobody really knew what to say or what to follow that up with. She’s right, any one of the people Hiram Lodge worked with would go to such lengths to satisfy their greed; including himself.

“Archie didn’t you say your dad talked about The Lodges were in the middle of a huge deal?” Jughead spewed out, recalling the very quick and cutting fight they shared in the Blue and Gold headquarters.

His eyes drew together, trying to remember. “Well yeah. Maybe my dad is working with or for Mr Lodge again? He might know who his business rivals are. But surely something this high stakes would be sealed tight with a law suit my dad can’t divulge any information about, the only way is to ask your parents again Ronnie”

“It’s not so easy! It’s not like I can waltz in and ask him what he’s working on or if I can help, he used to when I was younger... they can’t obfuscate it from me forever though. Wait - my dad did say something - he doesn’t want me getting infiltrated with this ‘dangerous business’ -“

The restaurant remained noisy enough that they didn’t care to quiet down the conversation, but even from afar you could see the discomfort written on their pretty faces - especially Betty. She seemed the most glitched out by even the thought of someone purposely hurting Josie.

“What? Why did you stop?” Jughead looked at her, his blue eyes screaming.

Veronica knitted her brows together, looking down at her lap and holding Archie’s hand tighter. dangerous business. infiltration. business. business and...

“Hello? Earth to Ronnie?” The whole table stared at her.

“Business and politics go hand in hand” she breathed. It was barely a sound on her lips.

“What?”

“It’s what my parents always say. A little controversial, but they always said that. Business and politics go hand in hand. It must be ...”

“Senator Brooks is stepping down soon and his vacant seat will be open, also the state legislature Marquees Sawyer is holding a debate for the changes in corruption and juvenile delinquency. That’s all that’s happening this month”

“Arch how do you even know that?” Betty asked following his robotic like delivery.

“My dad is really into politics” Archie shrugged.

“And Xander St Clair is running for the vacant seat” Jughead realised.
“Okay, this doesn’t feel connected at all” It was almost like grasping at straws, but Veronica also knew Jughead was usually right whenever his inclinations were on to something. “And I’m getting a serious headache”

Archie reached behind her and started rubbing slow circles on the low of her back, Veronica becoming more than hyper aware to his touch. She hoped he doesn’t notice how she stiffened.

“You’re right. It’s been a long day, we’ll look into it and meet up tomorrow at breakfast?” Jughead gestured to himself and Betty.

“Hm. Yeah” Veronica touched her neck awkwardly, still aware about how close Archie’s getting and it makes her all squirmy and frustrated.

“We still have to shop” Jellybean reminds them.

“Okay, cards in” the four teenagers dropped their credit cards into the steak napkin turned into a makeshift bag, as per tradition every time they dined in a group. Veronica held it close tightly and shakes it a bit. She reached in, picking out the card randomly and read the name with a little smile.

“Jugs, the bill’s on you tonight”

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(x.x.x.x)

“So, I have to ask it. Are you and Archie back together again?”

There was a glint of excitement in the brunette’s bright blue eyes that should be worrying, but you could tell she’s the kind of girl who gets excited about everything anyway. She does have her shopping cart full with ‘options’ and is lost in the racks of clothing after all. If it weren’t for her endearing spark Veronica would’ve found the question annoying.

“No, of course not” she said nimbly “Also, did you guys notice how weird it was that the doctor was dressed like and extra on South Pacific?”

“Huh?” Both of them asked confused. Veronica retracted.

“Okay, back to subject. Of course not? Everyone saw you guys all over each other at dinner”

“Okay, everyone is literally three people. And I don’t know. It was just instinct I guess, basic intuition after being a couple for so long” she shrugged.

They didn’t bother looking at each other to talk, absorbed in the different clothes in this outlet of Barneys versus the one in LA. The store was quiet, as luxury department store usually is, but more so when it’s getting dark and freezing outside on a Tuesday night. The only sound a humming pop song on low volume.

“Fine, but everyone does know that you both still want to be together. So what’s the big deal?”

“The big deal is... we’re not exactly on the same page anymore” Veronica held up a red leather dress to herself, observing it in the full body mirror. “Shut up. I know you’re gonna say that sounds like the most mundane thing in the world, but really... it feels like we’ve been growing up and apart and there’s different things we value, different ways we look at certain situations.. ugh I don’t even know when it all got so hard and complicated”

Out of the three girls, Betty remained quiet and busied herself with the mega ultimatum between matching silk pyjama sets that looked more girly and her style, or the black cotton ones that looked
cool and sexy. Really, all she was trying to do was find an excuse to exclude herself from the conversation that for every reason she should have no say in. It’s awkward enough that she had to blurt out that she kissed Archie in the middle of a hospital room, and it’s great that Veronica has chosen to forgive her, but the incident is still fresh - which warrants awkwardness. How funky would it be if she starts discussing Veronica and Archie’s relationship when she was literally the one who kissed him all but less than a week ago?

“So find a middle ground” Jellybean cocked one perfectly arched dark brow at Veronica.

“I’m trying JB, there’s been other distractions if you haven’t noticed”

“Well try harder” she twirled around “You sit there and you’re all confused about this thing but really you have it, and you already have him.”

“When did you become so wise?” Veronica said amidst a little giggle, but really Jellybean’s words were sinking a little deep into her skin... and it made her feel some type of way.

“Always have been” she shrugged. Both girls stopped their conversation for a bit while separating in the store, and after doing last rounds they finally came back to each other. All three of them were holding shopping carts, but Veronica and Jellybean’s were significantly fuller than Betty’s. They’re supposed to just clothes to tide them over until going home.

“Got everything girls?”

“Yep” both of them nodded. “Ooh, look at this! Betty come here try this!”

A display of silk headbands caught Veronica’s eye and she picked one up delicately. A headband is typically a Veronica Lodge accessory, but she can’t help and imagine how pretty Betty would look with it on. So she called her over, and it feels like she’s always doing this - pulling her ponytail out so her blonde hair falls beautifully around her. Then she tucks the silky accessory aptly into place and grins at her.

“You look like a total high class socialite” Veronica complimented her “I’ll try it on too, here you too JB!”

Betty giggled, they looked ridiculous all together but really, she liked how she looked whenever Veronica put something on her. And right now felt no different. All three girls wore it a different way, Veronica looked sophisticated and brazenly beautiful. Betty looked sweet and pretty, Jellybean looked like she walked off a runway with her stylish long hair and chic outfit. “You should wear this to the Ivy Reps next week! It’s the perfect occasion - impressing all those college deans? Oh we could match” Veronica suggests.

They look at their reflections in the mirror and Veronica hugged both of them, on either side of her, closer with a warm smile. She knew then how completely content she feels with them.

“So, you and Veronica?” Jughead said it mindlessly, sneaking one of the leftover fries in his mouth in case a store attendant caught him.

“Yeah...” Archie didn’t look at his friend either, just continued through the racks as if he didn’t already know what size he is in Ralph Lauren. “But it’s not - we’re not together”

“Oh come on!” He turned around, mouth in a wide grin with fried potatoes still half chewed. Archie grimaced. “What is the big deal with you guys?”
“It’s complicated Jug”

He gave Archie a look that screamed how much of an idiot he’s being, even though Archie can’t really figure out why. Jughead always held that high and mighty vibe about him, being the prince of that big prep school, FP Jones’ son, never giving girls the time of day and almost never acknowledging the other students in school unless they were worth his time. Even his past time has to be spent doing something productive. It could be seen as a bad trait but he is sardonically funnier because of it.

“Alright, let me break it down for you. I may have almost zero experience in women -“

“It’s zero”

“Okay, zero. But I have watched you and Veronica skirt around each other like idiots since the freaking sixth grade. You’ve always been extra handsy and flirty with each other and that’s probably just the way you two communicate with each other, but right now I do think she needs you there for her. You love her, so just ask for her back!”

They walked to the cashier and paid for items separately all while Jughead ranted something actually very true. “And if I don’t? Ronnie and I, I don’t even know if she still wants that. The way it feels is kind of like just falling back into familiarity. Don’t you think? Like what if we leave high school and she meets some big shot in Yale and she forgets all about me? What if... we don’t even know who we are without each other anymore?”

“You’re glitching out, man. You and Veronica? It’s meant to be. Whatever shit keeps coming between you guys is just avoiding destiny” The night is pitch black if it weren’t for streetlights and New York City’s lively vigour, the pavements are wet when their boots step out of the store.

“We’ll see” Archie and Jughead still expected to wait forever on the girls before heading back to the hotel, so they stood outside and flicked the familiar vaporiser alive. A puff of smoke blurred the road and all the bright yellow taxis passing by, just standing there trying to hold onto any semblance of comfort.

After drabbles of words between huffs of smoke were exchanged, the girls finally came out from Barneys with their hands full of shopping bags. “Let’s go boys!”

“Hey you” Veronica automatically found herself walking next to Archie. She isn’t even sure how she got there but he smells like a little rain and weed and he looks so cute in that red sweater, she can’t even question herself. “How’d the shopping trip go?”

“Not as well as you guys” he nodded towards the bags, before stooping down and taking them from her arms. Veronica smiled to herself, trying to ignore the butterflies taking flight inside her.

“Well it wouldn’t have gone well for me with Jughead as a shopping partner either” she teased

“He’s boring to shop with... but you’d be able to max out a credit card even with the worst shopper ever”

Veronica laughed, her eyes twinkling as she did. “I take that as a compliment. Hey, did you think it was strange that the doctor at the hospital was dressed like an extra on South Pacific?”

“I know right” he chuckled “It was full Rossano Brazzi”

Again, a part of her softened inside. That same part that has fallen for him everyday for the past
years, the same part that couldn’t resist him and had her running back to him even after all this time. All he had to do was be unequivocally himself, and the girlish daydreamer in her came alive just like that. Veronica bit her lip and smiled, leaning her shoulder into his warm body a little bit. “See, I knew you’d understand. I told JB and Betty and they didn’t get it at all”

“I like seeing you smile” he tells her earnestly. Looking down at every perfect feature of hers light up when she’s happy “You’ve been too sad today”

Veronica sighed, swinging one of the little bags he let her carry “Can I help it? I’m pretty sure my dad had something to do with my best friend getting hurt, and honestly - I miss home!”

She covered her mouth and looked up at him like it’s such a scandalous big secret, making Archie toss his head back in laughter. “I know how you feel. I mean I love New York, but home is just…”

“Safe. And warm, Cali will always be safe and warm for us. It’s our home”

“Don’t worry Ron, we’re a far way from home now, but we’ll be back soon”

They walk in silence and she glances up at him, only to see he hasn’t ever taken his eyes off her. Safe, and warm. She realises that’s two things that she’s always needed, only knowing it now that it’s gone. Crazy though, when she’s with Archie it’s like those two things have never left her. So she holds his hand again, they don’t talk about it, all the way back to the Four Seasons. When they get there, Archie stops outside instead of diving into the warm lobby. It confuses her, when he looks behind them to make sure their friends have gone inside and never letting go of her hand.

“Archie?” She checks him “What’s -”

“Don’t say anything, it’ll ruin it”

Before she can open her mouth again and ask what the hell he’s talking about, Archie has let go of her hand and puts them on her cheeks, bringing her in to kiss her. It’s warm, and smells perfect, and her lips are so soft he’s forgotten how supple they are. She can’t believe this is happening, they’re actually kissing in the rain for gods sakes, but she is holding onto every fleeting part of it before it ends. He’s got this look on his face before he does it too, like he’s taking a big leap of faith. And when she doesn’t push back... melts into it, Archie knows he made the right choice. *Best risk ever.*

(x.x.x.x)

That night, Veronica has ordered a cup of green tea and had a long hot shower before slipping into her brand new silk PJs. But ultimately, when the lights were out and her hotel room felt much too quiet and cold, she couldn’t sleep. It wasn’t even about the change of location, more like her brain cannot seem to shut off with all its racing thoughts. Tossing and turning she squeezed her eyes shut trying to fall into sleep.

Home feels like so far away, so does her peace and tranquillity.

Archie doesn’t know how but he realises he has been waiting for it when a ding sounds from his hotel door at two in the morning. He scrambles out of bed faster than ever, not bothering to put a shirt on or look in the peep hole before swinging the door open. He’s only expecting one person. And sure enough, there she is.

Looking small and young with her makeup off and without the fierce high heels. “I couldn’t sleep” she tells him simply.

Archie moved away from the door, inviting her into the room. “Come in” he says. They don’t even
say anything, not a single word. It scares the hell out of her that they do this so easily, a routine
known by heart even when they have been apart. Climb into bed, they know which side is theirs,
turn the lights out, and she puts her head on his chest to listen to his heartbeat. Like the old times.

They still haven’t said a word but Archie feels significantly more comfortable, until he can feel the
wetness of her tears hitting his skin. He looks at her and moves the hair out of her face, lit by the
moonlight “Hey, why are you crying?”

She doesn’t answer. It was like slow motion, laying there in the bed sheets, and she’s crying a little
bit and he only needs her.. that’s the moment he knows she only needs him too. All he has to do is
hold her, like before, and she would feel better.

Only it’s not like before anymore, they’re older and made terrible mistakes, said unforgivable
things, broken apart. He wants to tell her how many sleepless nights he’s had since they broke up,
and ask her if she cried herself to sleep as many times as he did. But instead he keeps a hand on her
back and the other on the arm thrown across his chest, feeling her skin on his.

“Oh nothing is gonna be the same again, is it?” She asks out of nowhere.

“Probably” Archie frowns, not that she can see. “But some things won’t. Like... going to Ivy Reps
and saying how passionate we are about going to the same college our parents and grandparents
did” he joked.

That makes her laugh, lightly. It’s the best feeling when she runs her fingers along his chest and
then sits her chin on it, looking up into his eyes. He can still the smile on her lips. “Do you still
wanna go to Yale?” He asks her, in his heart only scared about what she will answer. It’s not his
right to tell her she can’t go where she wants, but he is still worried.

“Do you still wanna go to Julliard?” She counters, eyes a little playful on him. Truth is, she might
be a little scared too.

“Hm.. I don’t know Ronnie”

“Right now I just want to get through high school, first” she sighs, laying her cheek back on his
chest and revelling in it. Everything about laying with Archie, perfect Archie skin, his smell, how
lovingly he holds her.

“You’re right. And we’ll figure out the rest together”

Then they fall into the best sleep both of them have had for months, one very needed on this hectic
day.

(x.x.x.x)

The next morning all five of them meet for hotel breakfast as soon as sunlight seeped into their
windows. They’d gotten four separate rooms just because they could, and it would’ve been more
enjoyable if it weren’t for the fact that half of breakfast was spent on the phone with their parents
and telling them it’s okay if they miss school, this is a valid reason. Veronica doesn’t call her
parents - she texts her caretaker to contact Mr Weatherbee about why she’s absent yet again. Fred
already knows, so Archie doesn’t call him either. Jughead and Jellybean sit next to each other with
the speaker phone on the table between them, talking to their father. Only Betty really has to take it
outside so she can thoroughly break down to Alice Cooper why the hell and what the hell she’s
still doing in a whole different state all alone with her friends during a school week. Veronica
thinks it’s ridiculous that they even have to do this, considering everybody back home already knows about Josie’s accident and them being her close friends would get a free pass to absence anyways.

No one says anything about The Lodges involvement with the accident or business and politics, which is for the best honestly. Right now what they had to worry about is still being kids and covering their absences.

“My mom is so hyped about the Ivy Reps next week and how me missing school for two days is going to blow my chance way down the rails” Betty huffed as she threw herself back into her seat and crunched some fancy muesli very angrily.

“Of course not, you’re like the second best and most of our classes” Veronica reached out and touched her shoulder before adding “After me of course”

Betty scoffed, still worked up. “Try telling my mom that. And it’s not like I’m not stressing about which college I want enough! She’s acting as if I don’t want those same things she wants for me”

As Betty went on about the different options she has and her mother’s preference and toxically calculating her average based on how her grades have looked so far this year, Archie and Veronica exchanged looks of knowing. Their sleep induced little talk last night still burned into her head, and she’s pretty sure Archie hasn’t forgotten either.

Once visiting hours have begun they take two cabs to Mount Sinai still wondering what to do about their journey home. Would they be going home today? How bad is Josie’s condition? And how long could they even stay out here when there are things back home that need to be sorted through and dealt with?

“Jose! Hey there girl, oh my gosh you have no idea how excited I am to see you awake!” Veronica squealed and ran to her hospital bed, a bright eyed Josie sitting up looking much more conscious than yesterday but hardly rested.

“V! Oh boy, there’s that bear hug”

“Sorry, am I hurting you?” Veronica pulled her arms away from Josie as if it burned, mentally telling herself how stupid she is for forgetting the girl literally fractured ribs.

“Nah, it only hurts when I try and move. Hey JB! Oh - and Betty”

“I got you a butterfly pendant from Barneys yesterday. Think of it as a symbol to recovery” Jellybean produced one of the white jewellery boxes and revealed the shining thing, engraved with diamonds that cost just as much as the hospital bill would.

“Awh.. you shouldn’t have” there was something close to tears in the older girl’s eyes. “I totally should have” she insisted, reaching to clasp it around Josie’s neck. “It looks beautiful”

Veronica felt like her heart was bursting, so much relief flooding through her. “Don’t ever do that to me again, you scared me so bad.” They held hands tightly against the white bedsheets, knuckles almost turning white. After a bit more catching up, Veronica suddenly remembered “So where is Cheryl?”

“Ever the petty queen, she literally left after you guys’ supposed showdown yesterday?” Josie raised an eyebrow at her almost scoldingly.

Her jaw dropped. “Are you serious?”
“Yes, my mom says Jason really wanted to go home for some reason... weird isn’t it? and Cheryl agreed too”

(x.x.x.x)

When the girls came out, Veronica saw Reggie for the first time since yesterday. He had on new clothes and his hair looked almost as stylish as it usually does, so that must count for something. He has some dark circles under his eyes though and Veronica can’t help but wonder if he slept here the whole night.

“Hey, you doing alright?” She swung up to put her hands around his neck, eyes wide and serious. He leaned forward and hugged her back closely.

“No more crying today” he shook his head. She isn’t sure about that, but it’s a good start to stay on two emotionally stable feet. So she squeezes his arms and assures him without words that it’ll be okay, realising how good somebody like Reggie Mantle is with bedside vigils and comforting sick girlfriends - which is not in the least expected.

It makes her slightly self conscious that Reggie, who is the closest to her in terms of being strong willed and collected, has shown his vulnerable side without hesitation when tragedy struck. She can’t help but wonder if maybe she isn’t normal, and this constant push away to embrace her broken feelings is a real issue. How long will it take for me to be just like everybody else? She’s tapping her foot insistently for the longest time until Betty puts a hand on her knee and brings her back to reality.

“Hey. You okay?”

“I’m just um.. I’m just wondering wether we’re gonna home or not. We have to - we have to talk about it”

“I think we might right now” Betty notions to the door of 6A swinging open and, much to all their dismay Reggie hadn’t exactly followed his ‘no tears’ rule. He wasn’t full on crying, but you could see the traces in his eyes and how red his nose and ears were. All of them stood up.

“What happened?”

Unanimously they moved to crowd around the seat Reggie had slumped in, Veronica and Archie on either side of him. He had his face covered, arms crossed tightly over his chest. She didn’t know how to coax him into talking or if she even should, but of course, Archie already knew the answer to that.

“Reg, are you okay? What happened?”

It felt like an eternity and then some waiting for his reply. Sitting so close, Veronica can see all the details of his despair on him. His throat bobbing slightly like he’s holding back sobs gave it away. And the little bead of sweat on the side of his forehead, body stiff as ever.

“She thinks we should go back home” he finally whispered. None of them knew that all their hearts stopped at the same time. He really is in love with her. “She told me.. she told me to go back home and win that game on Saturday, and she said she’ll be back before we know it”

So it was settled. Archie grinned and assured Reggie again that what she said is true, and she will be back. She will. “We’re definitely not gonna lose this game then, not with your mind set on winning it”
Veronica breaths a sigh of relief. So they’ll have to check out, fly back home, and take things from there. Another approximate six hour flight and god knows how many more on the road to and from airports, they’ll probably have to miss another day of school and - the only thing on her mind is going back home to figure out this whole debacle. That is until Archie looks at her when after they’ve bid see you later to Josie and walking to the elevator. “We’re going home Ronnie” he smiles. The most perfect thing she’ll ever see.

(x.x.x.x)

“Fred, thanks so much for agreeing to meet with me today”

“Of course. You know I can’t thank you enough for helping my son out with the lawyer’s the other day. And we haven’t done business together in so long!” Fred takes a seat in the leather chair right in front of Hiram Lodge’s desk, facing a large portrait of Veronica that he tries to not look at. There’s sparkling water on the table because Hiram wouldn’t serve his signature rum at twelve pm on a Wednesday.

Both men have always been pleasant with each other - going way back to just beginning entrepreneurs and teaming together at points to bring together some of the city’s finest attraction buildings.

“Speaking of that, I was actually inviting you here to pitch an idea of mine and see how you would like to participate. I’m asking you, of course”

“What exactly did you have in mind?”

Hiram unrolled one of his design rolls that had the layout plan for the new building he’s going to put in place of Costal Preparatory, once he gets in. The breath Fred takes in awe is a good sign.

“A new means for living, and it’s first class luxury. I already have people bargaining to buy once we are done building it. Of course, I need your opinion first”

“This looks fantastic Hiram but, where did you say this is going to be?”

The other man swallowed and told himself, this is the part where he has go in as a businessman and not one looking for a partner. He’ll get what he needs out of this deal and Fred’s involvement will be a benefit to his means.

“On the outskirts of Holmes Hills. The owners of said property still haven’t sold, but it will be ours soon” he says confidently, despite the risk. Getting Fred Andrews in with him is what will most likely convince all shareholders of Costal Prep to let go its’ precious ground, but Fred doesn’t need to know that. He doesn’t need to know exactly what the property is right now, either. “The money is good, and we’re hoping to get this project done as a celebration for our twenty year anniversary of Lodge Industries - it would be an honour, really, if you were to agree”

Fred nodded, taking in that this is obviously a big special deal. “The housing.. will Andrews Incorporate get a share on that as well?” He needs to make sure this is as beneficial as possible.

Hiram stopped, biting the inside of his mouth. We can get him out of this once they sell us the school anyway, it doesn’t matter. “Of course. You’ll share a third of all the profits. And Fred, after our little favour to Archie, I was really hoping you would lend a helping hand”

He nodded, slowly realising what that was all about. Still, nothing about what Hiram was
suggesting seemed even remotely uninviting, he would be crazy to let go of a deal this big. “Very well then. From here on out, Andrews Incorporate is with you in this deal”

Hiram and Fred shook hands from across the table. Just like that, Hiram knew he’d won. The Blossoms could try their worst, even after taking a hit on one of his daughter’s friends, this would be the battle they ultimately lose in.

“Cheers, my friend”

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys... so thoughts? How did you think this chapter went? Also just to clear up, Cheryl is with Toni. And that will be brought up next chap.

What did you think of CherylxVeronica crazy drama? And Varchie? Tell me your opinions ♥
Chapter #12 Back To You

- whoa, you stress me out, you kill me. you drag me down, you fuck me up. we’re on the ground, we’re screaming. I don’t know how to make it stop.

I love it, I hate it and I can’t take it. but I keep on coming back to you -

Veronica knew she couldn’t avoid Cheryl for that much longer, just like she can’t avoid a lot of things. Her parents being one of them. The night she made it home at three in the morning, fresh off a flight and very very exhausted, Hermione had been up waiting for her in the second floor living room.

“Ronnie. Finally you’re home”

“Mom what the hell!” Veronica shrieked, clutching her chest that was beating uncontrollably wild. The utter terror written on her face was lit only by the lamp that Hermione just turned on, revealing herself.

“Keep your voice down Veronica”

“What in the world are you doing sitting here in the dark?! No one sits in their own home in darkness unless they’re freaking insane” her voice was still much too loud that it filled the huge room clearly, but she couldn’t be bothered to quiet down.

“I was waiting for you to come home without your father getting suspicious. Do you know how angry he is? You leaving this building for more than a whole day and flying off to a completely different state without telling us! You should be appreciative that I’m still up waiting for you - I’ve been worried sick Ronnie”

“Oh please, mom” she crossed her arms. Much too tired to argue, but this is a matter she can’t avoid. “How wonderful is that? You can’t even be concerned for your own daughter with daddy knowing, because you’re so afraid of him! And what about daddy? Does he only worry that I’ll be out there doing something that’ll effect his precious reputation again?”

“Ronnie please, stop” Hermione’s eyes were pleading and tearful, she could see that much. But Veronica knew better than to expect any genuine concern from her. “You’re my baby girl, of course I would be worried. And your father, please understand him mija. He might be harsh but he does care for you, if you were to only look at him from a different perspective you would see that”

Veronica could feel her face burning in fumes. She’s tired, and mad, and this cheap ass excuse her mother is giving including bringing up her father is pushing her over the edge. Why her mom is even staying up waiting, she doesn’t know. “Well I’m fine. I’m tired, I’m sure you are too. Shouldn’t have wasted your energy waiting on me”

She headed up the stairs to her bedroom with long strides, making sure to stand tall and keep her nose in the air at it. She forgot how exhausting it is to be at home, but when she sees her purple and white room and the coordinated decor and she loves it to bits and pieces, everything feels a little bit
better. Veronica doesn’t know it but she does break Hermione’s heart, standing there alone in the cold dark room after Veronica breezed past her. In the morning, Veronica slips into the elevator swiftly and silently without her father noticing; handbag perched on her arm and heels in hand because walking in them’d make too much noise. She breathed a sigh of relief, going to school actually feels like an escape.

(x.x.x.x)

Another one of the things Veronica can’t avoid is Cheryl Blossom. She’s practically a blaring red sign all around school, but being a junior while Cheryl is a senior, Veronica doesn’t have to endure tip toeing classes with the self acclaimed Queen Bee. Veronica has a quiet day, many people are asking her about Josie as expected, but other than that she focused in classes and lays low in between, just having lunch with Betty and Jellybean while trying not to attract any attention.

The plan to stay out of drama all day is successful, but alas, cheerleading practice never fails to deliver. Practice hasn’t even begun yet and here they are. In the locker rooms, about a quarter minute from Coach Casey blowing the whistle for lineup. Some girls are shimmying into the blue shorts, others are busy chatting against lockers and smoothening out high ponytails. Veronica is tying her laces on the bench when Cheryl comes waltzing up to her, loyal minions stuck behind her.

She stops shortly and folded her toned arms across her chest, Veronica sighed knowing this was coming.

“Word has comeuppance that your quasi boyfriend Archie Andrews is playing in the QB position jersey for our big game against Cupertino’s demimonde of unsurpassable ballers so I must ask, what exploits did he commit to earn it?”

Veronica stood up, facing off Cheryl who had a hand on her hip cockily. The entire locker room is starting to hush down because everyone wants to watch the two of them, in some sort of hassle. Both girls have their silky locks in high ponytails that Coach demanded to do a ‘dress rehearsal’ if you will, and they look more similar in matching outfits and hairstyles than they like to admit. But Veronica can’t care for anyone else looking at them other than the bitchy gaze Cheryl’s giving her.

“Well, since our original quarterback Chuck ever so graciously dipped from life, Archie’s rightfully and well - deservedly filling his spot”

“Why wouldn’t Jason get Chuck’s number? I can’t believe Coach Clayton would want to give anything to Archie after...” she pursed her lips insinuatingly, all the girls gasping softly.

Veronica took one step closer to Cheryl. “Perhaps you considered Jason isn’t qualified enough for the position? Oh, and Coach Clayton isn’t coaching anymore, he’s subbed by Coach Raco after Chuck’s self inflicted accident. Maybe you need to update your source of comeuppances”

She tipped her head cunningly and the snickers were audible now, so Veronica left after making her mark. She pulled Betty along with her into the gym just as Coach Casey blew the whistle, feeling adrenaline run through her veins like she always does after putting Cheryl in her place. They ran their full routine and perfected all the little stunts, cleaning up the tosses and pyramids. It feels good to be back home, cheering, Veronica never thought about it before but she’s going to miss cheerleading so much when high school is over.
“Hey Archie, need any help getting into that Quarterback jersey tomorrow?” Ginger Lopez says all flirtatiously, in passing where Archie and Reggie are standing outside the boys’ locker room.

Archie grinned and grew a bright red. It’s not that he isn’t used to this, girls hit on him openly all the time even when he was with Veronica, though she never got mad because he never gave her a reason to be jealous. But there’s a certain amount of reputation you get as the Bulldogs’ quarterback, maybe the student body is just wired weirdly like that - Chuck went through the same thing and now Archie is. It’s like since news went around that Coach Raco handed Archie the number 50 jersey with QB on it the female population has just been ready to sink their claws into him.

Ginger is one of those hangers on who thinks she’s in the in crowd but really isn’t, she’s tolerated enough to attend some of their parties and has the guts to flirt with one of them but it’s all just mindless playing. Another group of girls who they couldn’t recall any of their names passed Reggie and Archie by, giving him all these gooey eyed looks and giggling.

“Damn, the girls are in heat aren’t they?” Reggie breathed through his nose. He tried to remain unamused but Archie had a little inkling he might be kind of upset for not being chosen instead.

“Hey, it doesn’t matter. Come on let’s get to practice”

The Bulldogs didn’t play around on the field. They all know Cupertino is notorious for being unbeatable, and it’s the first away game of the season. They have to bring everything and win. Archie feels a ringing feeling in his feet as he warmed up, knowing all eyes and all hope will be on him for the win. It’s not like the other boys can’t guarantee them anything, but he’s the main position player. It’s also such short notice but he’ll have to suck it up anyway.

He weaved with ease through defence line, dodging and dipping as he went. The goal was in sight and Archie took a shot with all his might. But the ball missed by a long shot, flying off the field and plateaued the rest of the team’s anticipation. Archie cursed, pulling off his helmet and running off the field with the rest of the team in tow as Coach Raco blew his whistle. Just as they were approaching him though, he blew the whistle again; it sounded much more strangled and pitched this time if that’s possible. Like he blew a really hard breath.

“Why are you leaving the field? It’s a penalty!” He yelled angrily.

The boys looked surprised between them, running back onto field with a newfound dwindling of hope in them. There’s sweat dripping down all of them, burning calves and restraining biceps. The offence raced back to the pitch and decided on something so quickly it said a lot about their players. “Let Mantle take it!” They yelled in unison.

Archie scrunched his brows, not exactly shocked but more confused that the team clearly put Reggie’s skill above his own. It doesn’t desensitise him if only sets a wonder as to why Coach even chose him to play quarterback instead of Reggie who’s more passionate, and apparently more advanced.

Everyone stood frozen in slow motion as Reggie made the important shot as time stirs to an end. The birds chirped louder, their eyes focused intently, and the air felt colder suddenly. Everything slowed to a halt as the ball then flew past the goalies frame and into the back of the net.
“Score!” A collective shout all around the field circulated.

Once again Coach blew his whistle, so they raced to the training room, to hear the decision on who’ll be playing based on today’s final practice. Reggie was feeling a magnificent stage of accomplishment, not trying to hide his proud smirk. Coach Raco slowly said with confidence “Andrews will remain quarterback tomorrow, Mantle will be in first, Blossom will go second, Mason third, Brown fourth and Richie fifth”

Archie remained extremely nervous, more than aware that people will be watching him even closer now.

“Andrews! A word” Coach called. “The rest of you, get a good night’s rest tonight. No girlfriends sleeping over, no macking with the Vixens. Tell your parents tonight no if they ask you to go out with them. Tomorrow is a serious day, I want you at school by 7.30 am sharp. Remember to keep in your headspace -“

“Sacrifice everything else, fight against the odds, succeed” all the boys chanted in unison. Coach nodded, giving them a stern look and dismissing all except Archie.

The two of them walked a little ways away and Archie could already feel his stomach boil with nerves. Apparently getting this shiny new position isn’t just beneficial to his social life, it reigns many pressures.

“Listen here boy. I put you in this position to make you better, because everything you’ve shown the team in the past proves you qualified. But now what’s changed?” He put a hand on Archie’s shoulder, levelling their eyes for the much taller man. “Are you distracted? I know a lot has been going on with you, but this will get you back on track” he shook him firmly.

“You can’t be shackled by fear, insecurity, or self doubt”

“I feel like I’m not the only one doubting me, coach” Archie breathes with wisps of anger.

“Then feel those emotions - all the judgement, drink it in and fuel it for your fire. I chose you to make you better, because I can see it in you. You don’t get motivated by pride, but by your accomplishments. Pride consumes the weak - now this is your one shot to get your life back on the right track. Give it your all, boy”

Archie stood left shaken, in the wake of Coach’s pep talk and a very perspective practice. Is Coach Raco talking about Reggie, the pride? That’s not fair. But he is right. With everything that’s been circling around him this year. Scandals and arrests and lawsuits, so suddenly all his dreams and hard work from years before became second in mind. Now though, he has to focus back on what’s important for his future.

(x.x.x.x)

Cheer practice isn’t over until seven pm, doubling usual duration to make up for lost time. They’ll be getting on the bus to Cupertino tomorrow morning after a final run through, with all the Bulldogs as well. Everyone is spent and sweaty, leaving the gym while Coach wraps up her pep talk. Only Varsity cheerleaders will be cheering tomorrow, to bring a more tight and skilled performance. For the seniors, it’s something they can enjoy. One of the last times getting out there with the squad and giving it their all; but the juniors are feeling some pretty heavy pressure on their
shoulders. Their performance will not only be verdict for their position the rest of the year, but it also plays a big part in the Ivy Representatives next week.

Veronica takes a long drink of water from her bottle, salivating practically for the coldness soothing her burning throat. All the girls are dispersing, but Betty is taking a seriously long time to get her stuff together and you could tell from her face that she’s thinking deeply.

“Betty? Are you okay?” It’s not just now, all of practice the blonde girl had seemed preoccupied with her thoughts.

“Hm? Oh, yeah” she turned around to face Veronica who’s standing with her hip cocked and black water bottle in hand. There’s pieces of stray hair from her tight ponytail that’s sticking to her neck.

Veronica slung her cheer bag over her shoulder and sat there watching Betty for another moment. “You seem off. Wait.. you’re not still freaking out about what we told you in New York are you? Because I promise, it’s not as bad as it sounds. I mean it is bad, it’s horrible, but we will figure it out. I’ve just been too busy and mad at my parents to sneak a question to them about it -“

“No, no. It’s not that” Betty reassures her, finally zipping her bag and picking it up. They start walking across the gym together. “It’s just.. I am really worried about what happens next week. I mean look at the stats. I’m a new student here, I’ve already done community service - no offence. I did a huge exposé on one of the golden kids here and to top it all off I missed like four whole days of school this week. There’s no way any of the deans are going to take a mere interest in me”

“We all missed school this week” Veronica reminds her “Rely on the game tomorrow and skills of impressing to do the job. It shouldn’t be that hard”

“Easy for you to say. You could talk your way into any school you want! I mean seriously, I don’t even know how to impress somebody like that”

Veronica laughed through her nose and grinned, knowing that is one of her charms. “Fear not my little innocent, I can totally help you get prepped for the event. I’ll teach you everything you need to know, and those old intellectuals would be crazy to not choose you. If you want, of course”

“Really? You could do that?” Betty asked hopefully. The sky around them had turned dusty grey and the air was cold against the bare skin of their arms and legs, exposed from their cheer uniforms. Neither of them wanted to shower at school since it’s already so late, so they left right away.

“Absolutely. Do you want to?”

“Yes yes! I’ll take any help I can get. After all you are the only person who knows exactly what she wants and won’t stop until you get it, it’s pretty freaking admirable honestly.”

“Thank you! So tell me, which college do you have your eye on? And when do you wanna do this thing?”

Betty took a deep breath. After many years of dreaming, “NYU Tisch. Oh, how about now?”

Veronica pondered it for a moment. “Sure. Anything to avoid my parents right now sounds about perfect”

Betty couldn’t be more excited, or grateful. She isn’t exactly sure what Veronica had in mind but she must have a pretty good idea of what she’s doing. “Yay! Okay, I’ll just text Polly and tell her
I’m going to your place”

They walked the short distance passing the football field to where Andre should be waiting for her, and it isn’t lost on either of them that all the Bulldogs are practicing out here. They’re doing suicide runs but it’s warming down time so they’re all joking around, shoving each other playfully and rolling in the grass. They look so hot, every girl would stop and stare. Just as Veronica and Betty walk past though there’s only one boy in Veronica’s eyes.

“Looking good there Quarterback” she teases, as Archie slowed to a stop. His red hair is falling on his forehead and he looks irresistible in that evening light.

He’s a little stumped at first, cos Veronica looks even more beautiful with her hair all tied up showing her swan like neck and he’s missed touching her with her hair like that after football games and cheer competitions.

“You too, head cheerleader”

She rolls her eyes but he can see her lips twitch, and a faint blush on her cheeks. “Not head cheerleader yet. That’s still Cheryl”

“Oh well - you will be”

She’s about to walk away and just leave their interactions for today at innocent flirtation but then suddenly she remembers how big of a deal this actually is and it’s crazy how both of them - had been dreaming about getting the positions they are right now - have finally made it.

“Hey, congratulations. Seriously”

Archie smirks, that innocent boyish way but she can also tell he’s surprised at her seriousness. And the blush isn’t lost on him either. “Thanks, Ronnie”

(x.x.x.x)

“Allright. Project turn Betty Cooper into an official Raffles Royalty is about to take place, but we need food first” Veronica announces once Betty walks out of the bathroom in a fluffy white bathrobe that’s probably the hotel’s, into Veronica’s bedroom. She’s sitting on her bed and picks up the phone to order their dinners.

“You’re going to turn me into - one of you guys?” She sits on the edge of the bed hesitantly.

“Don’t worry, you’re still the same you. It’s nice to be different anyways, a good different. But just a little polishing up, I suppose.”

She thinks this may be a bad idea, kneading her bottom lip with her teeth. But then she remembers everything from Riverdale, the girl she once was, and she doesn’t like that girl anymore. No, now is the time to start fresh and bury that scared fragile part of herself with a dark past and hopefully move on from it. After all, be like Veronica? Now that sounds like an idea.

“Ohay. Sure, let’s get this started”

“Excellent” The raven haired girl grinned mischievously “Step one. Carry yourself like you know you’re better than everyone around you. You don’t have to believe that, but a confident energy will
pull in more people than you realise”

“That sounds kind of cocky”

Veronica rolled her eyes. “Most of the time people judge you as impressionable, something to step on. If you stand tall and don’t let anybody get to you, just pretend like nobody else matters in the whole world other than the people you care about. Don’t be icy, but be sure of yourself. Let people know you’re a force to be reckoned with just by walking into the room”

“How in the world do I do that?” This is already harder than she thought.

“Okay. Think about it this way. When you walk into a room, just keep telling yourself you belong there and nobody can tell you what to do. Try it”

Betty thinks this is ridiculous, but Veronica gets one of her shorter heels and makes her put them on to start practice walking around. “Don’t slouch, not even a little bit. Don’t look lost. Keep your head tall”

She keeps doing it over and over with Veronica’s criticisms while digging into the seafood paella delivered to them. When she can make it across the floor without tripping and enough to apeace Veronica, they move on to the next thing.

“Number two, when they ask you what you do at Raffles. You can’t say just act. You have to be a triple threat.” She says firmly

“But I don’t know how to sing or dance”

“There’s that insecurity again! You can sing Betty, I’ve heard you go full out and you’re pretty amazing”

“You heard me singing Kids in America with the actual song playing in the background. Anyone sounds good singing that”

Sighing dramatically, she still remained persistent “Just have something prepared that you’re familiar with the lyrics and is easy enough. Not that they’ll ask you to whip out into song or anything, but just in case”

“Okay, fine” Betty sighed. There is that one Wicked number she knows pretty well. “But I know like nothing about dancing”

“Didn’t you say you did gymnastics as a kid? I’m assuming your one of the people who learned ballet too” Veronica narrowed her eyes.

“Okay, yes but I was literally three! It didn’t last long!”

“If they ask you what your favourite style of dance is” she said slowly, the way you speak to a child, looking into her friend’s eyes carefully “Say ballet because it’s the foundation of all dance”

The other girl nodded. Her damp blonde hair looking paler and wispier than usual.

“Also, I’ve heard you refer to the school as Raffles Arts - just no. It’s Raffles Institution. If you say the former, they will probably assume you’re an outsider. I’ll send you a link of Raffles’ historical timeline too that you should read up”
“Triple threat, major confidence, know the school story. I got it”

Veronica raised a brow, silently asking if Betty’s ready for it yet. She popped a piece of shrimp into her mouth “Ready to try the interviews?”

“Go ahead. Give me your worst”

“What is your purpose of being here today? Did mommy and daddy force you to make them proud?” She puts on the best professional voice, contradicting the very out of bounds question. It’s just a starting point to get Betty’s grill going.

“I know I’d be eligible to attend Tisch School of Arts at New York University” she sat up taller, straighter, speaking in a very assured and confident tone. Veronica would give her points for that, she sounds convincing.

“And why should you be chosen amongst the exclusive acceptance?”

“Why should I be chosen? Well I’m Elizabeth Cooper and, I know I’m cut out for it” Veronica’s face fell. “Nice work on confidence. But you can’t just keep repeating ‘I know I can get this’ you have to tell them how you can prove yourself and why you want it”

“Oh - also, heels are a must”

Betty frowned. “I hate heels. I can’t wear them at this big event, I’ll be too nervous to stay balanced! After all it’s not like I have nice new ones suitable enough and I don’t have time to go out and buy some -“

“You’re so dramatic” she teased lovingly.

After what Veronica deemed a successful interview portion, she sat Betty down for some keynotes of things to say and spark conversation with the deans to make things more interesting. The two of them sat crossed legged on the big white bed, door shut and the curtains open to a dark starry night out there.

“Presentation is key as well. You don’t have to get big name brands, of course, if you can’t afford them. Just make sure it looks chic or vintage enough to be timeless and work it well. Oh - also, heels are a must”

“Chill Betty. You can borrow one of mine. Showing up at Ivy Reps in a pair of flats? That’s barbaric”
“That’s what you have to be. Now remember - don’t take yourself too seriously, have fun and be friendly. For every three things you say about yourself, ask them one about themselves so you appear interested in them. Don’t mention politics or religion because it’s the most controversial subject and anything you say might turn them off. Oh, and don’t be so well - spoken like a robot. Real people don’t do that”

She nodded anxiously, taking it all in. All of this seems very heavy to seep into her skin and remember, but she has to make sure she secures herself at the college she’s dreamt of for years. And turn away every old part of herself, to become as magnificent and poise a woman as Veronica is, as Cheryl Blossom is, even Jellybean who is two years younger than her.

They went over her outfit for the day - really Betty asked Veronica to help her choose because she’d probably end up looking way too business formal. The dress Veronica produces from her closet is a white tunic top and flowy black skirt falling mid thigh - it’s ‘collegiate chic’ as Veronica puts it. They try on their dresses, Betty’s actually fits her like a glove and she does like how important and grown up it makes her feel.

Veronica on the other hand has a blue velvet dress with long sleeves that fits her snug, cut out neckline that she adores, and it too falls right in the middle of her thighs. She has these gorgeous electric blue strappy heels to match the outfit, and Betty has to take a few seconds to take in how stunning Veronica looks.

“Remember the thing I told you about walking in a room and owning it? I mean it. You can’t let yourself go unnoticed by the people around you. It makes a huge difference”

“But how do I do that if I feel so - intimidated? All you guys have this down, you’ve probably been ready since middle school. I have no idea how to be confident and collected and fierce like you are. I can’t pretend to be”

Veronica stops smoothing out the back of her dress, turning fully so she’s facing Betty in the mirror’s reflection. Her expression is serious and gone a little cold.

“You don’t think I feel insecure too? And unsure of myself? Of course I do, all the time. But you can’t afford to let people see you crack, be weak. I have to go out there and pretend I never second guess myself, never doubt myself. Fake it until you make it, you know? It will come naturally after a long time of practice, trust me”

Betty nodded firmly. She isn’t going to let herself or anybody else down. That’s when Veronica picked up the soft silk headband they’d bought at Barneys and placed it perfectly into her hair, completing the look with elegance and class.

“We can do this Betty Cooper. I believe in you. Got it?”

“Got it”

(x.x.x.x)

Veronica thought she had seen the last of Betty when she watched the blonde girl ride down the elevator, proceeding to keep her fancy dress and slip under her white sheets to fall into a much needed sleep. Tomorrow is an early day, and a strenuous one at that, wherein all her energy would be needed. But when her phone starts buzzing uncontrollably she sits up so fast it might’ve caused
whiplash. Her eyes hurt from the bright screen, but it confuses her more to see Betty’s caller id glaring back at her.

What the hell?

A part of her considered just throwing the phone to the floor, really. It’s two in the freaking morning and she has to be up in like four hours! But after what happened to Josie, and just the fact that Betty calling her at two am carries some seldom importance, she decides against herself to pick the phone up.

“Hey Betty what is it?” Veronica said when she answered the phone, sinking into the heavy pillows behind her tiredly.

“Are your parents home? I really need to talk to you” Betty said softly through the phone. Veronica could hear her sniffing so she knew something must have happened.

“What’s going on Betty? Why are you crying?” She sat more uprightly this time. This wasn’t the mood she left Betty in just five hours before, giddy and happy.

“Can Polly and I come over right now? Just for a while I swear I just - my mom, and I need a place to go just for a moment. Would your parents mind?”

“Of course you can Betty and my parents aren’t home. But you’re starting to scare me, what the hell happened? Do you need me to send a car to pick you up somewhere?”

“No, Polly can drive” she gulped “I’ll explain everything to you when I get there” Betty responded before hanging up.

About thirty minutes later they arrived at the Pembrooke Penthouse. Veronica had sent them up immediately, not wanting them waiting in the lobby with unnecessary security precautions at this hour.

She took in the sisters’ less than good appearance. Polly looked like she had bruised blue shadows under her eyes, not the cheerful girl she sees at school. And Betty just looks downright shattered, duffel bag hauled over left shoulder. Veronica isn’t sure if Betty forgot she had put mascara on her before but it’s now all run down her pale skin and she looks to much like she did another time she showed up here late at night it makes Veronica’s heart shake.

“Polly? Betty? Did something happen, did someone hurt you guys? You look terrible” she asked them as they sat down on the first floor lounge sofa.

“No that’s not it... gosh I have no idea how to say this” Betty croaked out. It’s usually vice versa, the older sister talks for both of them, but now Polly doesn’t look like she could string a sentence together. She’s motionless, detached from the world.

“Tell me what’s going on so I can.. so I can help you” she ends softly. Veronica realises she isn’t used to comforting people exactly, and maybe Betty is the one teaching her some kind of lesson tonight.

The younger girl looked at her older sister expectantly, Polly groaned in return. She couldn’t bare to meet either of their eyes. “I... I... oh god it’s making me sick just thinking about the words” she said as she buried her face in her hands.

The air around them became colder, sending goosebumps up Veronica’s bare arms in a little fear.
“Come on guys you came to my house at two in the morning so stop being so damn cryptic and just say it, you’re scaring me honestly” Veronica said agitated.

It took a moment, a long slow moment where Betty stared at the carpeting and Polly became delved into a shower of tears, her throat choking up the words.

“I’m pregnant” Polly whispered, just as a tear ran down her cheek.

Veronica’s eyes grew wide awake. She didn’t know what she was expecting but it wasn’t this. This was the last thing she expected and the last thing she’s ready to hear. After her initial shock she looked at a clearly distraught Polly and reached out to put her hand on hers.

“Well are you completely sure?”

“Yes” Betty sat up suddenly, breaking apart the connected hands. “Mom must have had some kind of maternal instinct and she went on a crazy rampage, tearing apart her room and found the pregnancy tests. It was like a nightmare seriously, she threw Polly out of the house like her heart meant it”

“Oh my god” she gasped “Wait how long have you known?”

“Just three days” Polly croaked painfully.

“With... with Jason?” Veronica’s mind started turning for the worst.

“Yes, of course”

Shit. This is bad, and not just as bad as it was before. Veronica couldn’t hide her distress in body language. The Blossoms - have a grand baby from their teenage son out of wedlock? And with a girl from less fortunate status than themselves? What it is is a disaster waiting to rain down on them.

“You have to tell him” she says quickly

“No. Not yet, he’ll freak out and god knows what else will happen I just can’t handle it”

“Well you have to at least tell Cheryl then!”

“Cheryl? Seriously V, are you joking?” Betty eyed her all condescendingly.

Veronica shook her head. “She’s the type of person who puts all aside when her own bloodline is involved, trust me. Look I can’t have this talk about wether or not you want to keep it because I’m sure you’ll be thinking it through, but one thing’s for sure. Even if you don’t want to tell Cheryl yet, you have to pull yourself from the routine tomorrow”

“What are you kidding? That would piss Cheryl off like hellfire she’ll hate her even more”

“Not as pissed as she’ll be if you collapse in the middle of the field or puke in front of our big competitors. After all - you could get hurt. Just find a way to get out of that routine okay? So we can reblock it at final practice tomorrow”

Polly nodded, understanding that there’s no other way around it with her situation. There was a long pause when the three of them just couldn’t speak, but then Polly immediately started sobbing. Betty turned sideways and wrapped her arms around her, tightly, protectively.
“The Blossoms..” she sobbed “they’re going to rain hellfire on me”

It took everything in Veronica not to cry. She knew just like Polly knew The Blossoms would be strictly against having this child. *This complicates matters so much more.* She could only imagine how Cheryl would take it, and she also knows Jason isn’t ready to handle being a dad right now.

“It’s going to be okay Polly I promise” Betty whispered as she cradled Polly’s head in her lap.

“I’m here for you too. No matter what” Veronica reached out to her. “You can stay here for as long as you want and need. I can get a room no problem, you can even stay here with me if you need company”

“Veronica.. I couldn’t. What about your parents?” She raised her head to look in the brunette’s eyes.

“Please. I’d be able to hide a baby and keep it for six months without my parents noticing, this place is huge and they aren’t as attentive to me as they think. There’s a lot of things they don’t know. Now, you should just rest and sleep. We can figure this out after the game tomorrow.”

Polly thanked her profusely, and Veronica left to get the thickest blankets she could for them. When she finally did, she stopped at the stairwell - watching the scene of two sisters so obviously breaking down with each other.

“Listen to me” Betty said firmly “I don’t care what mom or dad tries to do, or The Blossoms. I won’t let them hurt you. You’re going to make your own decisions about this baby you’re carrying. I wasn’t agreeing about your relationship with Jason before but that doesn’t matter, I’m here now for you and the baby. I don’t care what it takes nobody is going to do anything to you. I promise”

Veronica listened tentatively, not believing that she was in this position or more so that now, all her friends were put in a precarious position. Cheryl and Jason, whom she’d known since she was child like skinny and hadn’t even started dating Archie. Jason who didn’t care about girls yet at the time, all he focused on was football and golf with his father. She imagines a fifteen year old Cheryl, she didn’t fill in her eyebrows as well back then, she strutted around in her cheerleader uniform and told stories about car rides with the other JV girls after practice to show off to Veronica. Are they ready to take this on? She knows deep inside Cheryl will be supportive, anything for Jason. But it isn’t lost on her that the world, their parents specifically, won’t be making this as easy as it could be. It’s going to turn lives into mayhem.

“Hey, can I take those?” Betty pointed towards the white blankets in Veronica’s hand.

“Oh - yeah sure.” She’d been so lost in thought sitting on the stairwell she hadn’t even realised Betty had come up to her.

In a minute, the blonde girl reappeared and Veronica turned the lights to a darker hue so it’s more comforting for Polly. They started walking towards the kitchen, silence lingering between them.

“I can’t thank you enough for this. Really, V you’re a life saver. God my head feels like it’s going to explode”

“Of course, it’s not a problem. Here, I know we shouldn’t before cheering tomorrow but I think right now we all need some comfort food” she held out a carton of Häagen-Dazs chocolate ice cream and slid it across the counter.

“Thanks. Beware, eating the whole carton in one serving is normal for me” Betty warned
“Knock yourself out.” Veronica also took a spoon and started nipping at the sides of the chocolatey creamy goodness. “How bad did you parents take it? I mean is she ever going to talk to your sister again?”

“I don’t know. But she said... horrible things. Said Polly isn’t her daughter anymore and, I hope she’d regret it if she heard herself back again. I don’t know what’s going to happen from here on out, V. But right now our lives are going to change forever.”

“I still can’t believe it” Veronica’s mind is still awash in memories of Cheryl and Jason; the student body president with his wide trustworthy eyes the kind of perfect boy every parent wants their daughter to bring home, and the firecracker friend of hers doing flips next to her just twelve hours ago. “If you need me to do anything, just ask okay? I’ll be there for you too, no matter what.”

“Thanks.” Betty put her hand on Veronica’s “I love you V”

(x.x.x.x)

They worked through a systematic morning routine with not much sleep. Both girls eating heaps of fresh fruit and eggs for energy. Veronica acquainted Polly with her personal caretaker Carrie, making sure to have her at Polly’s beck and call if she ever needed anything. They were tying the the white ribbons in their hair, spraying copious amounts of hairspray to keep the high ponytail in place and prevent any flyaways when Veronica realised she usually just does this alone. It feels nice to have somebody else checking over your appearance and making sure everything is in tact.

Andre drove both of them to school, bare legs shaking with nerves in their uniforms. The scene outside school is just as lively as it usually is before games. The football team is having a drill with Coach Raco, and the cheerleaders are running their number on the tracks outside right in front of where the big bus is parked.

“Finally you guys are here” Cheryl snapped. Her eyes switched between both girls suspiciously.

“We’re not even late, Cher” Veronica reasoned

“Well we have major reblocking to do after your sister bailed on us. I knew we should’ve never let amateurs not up for commitment on my squad” she threw in Betty’s direction.

They exchanged glances with a bite of their lips, remembering to keep cool otherwise Cheryl will figure out everything. “Fine. Let’s start, okay? Oh, also your hair looks really good” Veronica comments to Cheryl’s fiery red hair all pulled up into the same style as theirs, her white bow much bigger and jewelled with rhinestones to signify her position as the captain.

“Thanks” she pursed her lips tightly, turning around sharply to lead them forward.

When both teams are quite finished and satisfied with themselves, Coach Casey and Coach Raco have talked through the itinerary for the day between both parties they represent; its time to board the bus. The Bulldogs go in first only because Cheryl insisted The Vixens had to run their number as many times as possible, otherwise it would have been ladies first. Now that they’re all older and both coaches are pretty chill - they let the kids choose their own seating unless there’s too much commotion then they’ll have to switch.
Veronica’s adamant to choose one of the seats in the middle because she just knows all the Bulldogs will save a seat for her at the back of the bus. Specifically Archie, Reggie and Jason, but really all of them like her and Cheryl sitting close by so they can mess around together. It’s tradition of theirs, though today Veronica can’t handle sitting on a close proximity bus ride with the Blossoms twins.

Just as she’s pulling Betty up the stairs with her, a strong hand pulls her back and stops her.

“Jug - what are you doing here? It’s Saturday!” Both girls say at the same time.

“I need to talk to you” he says seriously. “Please, just a moment”

She glances back at the girls piling in and taking up all the middle space, and curses herself. “Hurry what is it?”

“Come here!” The very out of comfort zone (amongst all blue and gold sportsmen) pulls Veronica’s arm even further away. Nobody else can hear this. “Look I was working all night long and flipping through the candidates of politicians that stood up for Senator Brooks’ vacant seat. I couldn’t get it out of my head”

Oh god, Veronica is already feeling a headache bubble at the top of her head. Both her and Betty have their arms crossed, but Betty is wearing a more invested expression.

“I know I said Xander St Clair is running for the spot, because he practically sold his campaigning to us Prep students - but I was searching the dark web and guess who else had been running for the spot? Manfred Muggs. And he was pretty deep in the race too, before of a sudden Mr St Clair reigned supreme! I checked the timeline and it was exactly around the time when Ethel took her cranberry juice justice on you. You were right, Veronica. Everything you said about business and politics was right. It all makes sense”

“What makes sense?” Betty’s blonde ponytail shook expressively.

“The Muggs were the ones who put the hit on Josie as a hit to your parents Veronica - all Mr Muggs connections with Lodge Industries are lost.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes, your father must have let him go for some reason to elevate the St Clairs campaign, and now he’s vengeful!” Jughead was almost bursting at the seams. If it weren’t for a subtle soft pat on the arm from Betty that calmed him down, he’d just foam at the mouth.

Veronica took all of it in and calculated carefully. Yes, it makes sense. It all becomes clear, and tied neatly with a bow. Muggs put a hit on Josie to threaten Hiram, for some deal? It’s almost too clean and obvious. But if he were the one to publicly expose her way back in the summer, for what? That doesn’t add up. And what does her parents have going on with The St Clairs?

“Girls! Come on we’re gonna leave!” A shout from Coach Casey inside called to them. They were brought to awareness that everyone else was already seated and they were the only ones still standing outside, clean cut cheerleaders suspiciously talking to the lurky reporter from the prep school.

“Look Jug, we have to go. I can’t talk about this right now, but we will go back to this okay?”

He gave her a tired, exasperated look, and Veronica saw that he’s just as invested in her life and
safety as a great friend should be.

“We’ll see you later Jug”

Her and Betty boarded the bus, Veronica grumbling when of course the only seats left were right at
the back. She sank deep inside, ignoring all The Bulldogs jeers and thriving excitement, watching
Jughead standing on the track getting smaller and smaller with all her unanswered questions too as
the bus moved away.

(x.x.x.x)

The crowd is roaring with excitement already when we make it to the stadium. Cupertino High
School isn’t any private institution like our school, but they sure have strong sportsmanship and
fierce passion, Archie thinks. His head is a little bowed as they make their way in, surrounded by
students and parents who look at them like they’re celebrities or something. He guesses its mostly
Cheryl and Veronica and their crew, eating up the attention while knowing to work a crowd - ever
the oblivious he is to the fact that many girls are in fact looking at him for being so handsome.

“Hello! Welcome to our little public school. Look forward to a fair game” one scrawny boy greeted
them. Reggie, who for some reason is uber snobby here just shakes his hand and nods curtly. The
boy has pale skin, he’s probably an inch taller than Archie and is splattered with freckles. Archie
offers a nervous smile.

The smell of concession stand food, hot dogs and fizzy drinks fills the air while they’re getting
ready for first half. Archie is revolted by the obvious scent of stale nacho chips and molten yellow
lava they pass off as cheese, scrunching his nose when one kid passes him by with it. He blocks all
of it out and tries to jiggle his nerves, unsuccessfully.

It’s about half a minute to when the girls run out, all decked and in Bulldogs spirit; he can feel the
anticipation drumming in his toes. Just then, what seemed like the most perfect image of all time
presented itself to him. Screams obliterate their hearing, all Vixens gone full manic mode ready to
run out and steal the spectators’ hearts. There’s such a wild flurry of different hair colours and skin
tones that pass him by, all the other boys smirk appreciatively at them, but Archie only focuses
when he sees a raven haired ponytail and one tiny girl with larger than life energy and a 30 on the
back of her uniform. Before he can even stop himself, Archie reaches out and catches Veronica by
the arm.

Her face is startled. He can see the tiredness and stress on her face because he knows it’s there, but
otherwise it’s well hidden under her stage makeup and you would’ve not noticed it. All the
spinning and jumbled up emotions deep inside his stomach stop, when he looks into her wide eyes
and feels solely the burning that is coming from his bare skin against hers. It’s like that night at the
Emma show all over again, when nothing could calm her nerves except to see him in the wings.

“Ronnie.. are we good?” He asks uncertainly.

God this boy has horrible timing. He would’ve asked are you good after seeing her intense talk
with Jughead earlier, but instead this is all he can think about. She knows what it means, for them,
it means... are we.. back together? That’s just what’s expected after a fight.

Veronica stares up into his eyes and curses herself so hard for almost falling for it, almost just
willing to throw herself in his arms and kiss him senseless until all the passion inside her body is empty with his, and make this the best day of their lives.

But she knows, how complicated things would be and how much she still has to figure out. So she refrains from letting him in and it hurts, it hurts so bad. It hurts so much she wishes he never had the power over her like this, *the only one who’s got enough of me to break my heart.*

“No, Archie. We’re.. we’re not -“

“Come on girls! Time to shine - let’s show Cupertino how the Vixens open a game!” Cheryl interrupts all of their thoughts and banter before Veronica can finish. She figures it’s for the best, backing away slowly while the electric on their skin fades away too.

“Good luck Archiekins. Just look for me on the sidelines”

And he does. He suddenly realises how much of his world revolves around Veronica Lodge, this fierce woman who’s taken his heart by storm and is unforgiving with her attitude. Admittedly, Thunderhots are a more than advanced level skilled group of players. All of them have flawless technique and are well built - it’s a solid fight against Raffles’ Bulldogs.

When the first touchdown happens, Veronica can feel the bleachers above began to shake with the power of the pumped up crowd. She yelled in amazement with Scarlett and Betty on either side of her, starry eyes gazing out to their home players. In that moment you could see the crowd, the entire (small) but passionate Raffles team crowd on their feet, standing on the seats of the bleachers celebrating the first of what was sure to be many touchdowns, judging by The Bulldogs record.

Cupertino Warrior POMs is the dance equal of our Raffles Vixens, they perform first during halftime. Majority of chatter from them while both squads hung around close by is the POMs bashing them. It slowly started to dawn on the Vixens that no one on POMs likes them, snidely whispering about slutty uniforms and supposedly ‘sexy’ dance portion.

“Don’t listen to them” Veronica says loudly, making sure to draw attention to whoever’s around. “We don’t need this cattiness, let’s just go out there and show spirit alright?”

“NO TO CATTINESS!” Someone from the Bulldogs screams as they pile into the halftime locker room. All Vixens laugh, while the Cupertino Warriors seem to have just scurried off embarrassedly.

“We’re Blue! And Gold! We’re Dy - Na - Mite! We’ll take you down and fight! Whoo! Go Bulldogs!” There’s a lot of amazed screaming at the end of their routine, finishing with two tall complex pyramids joined together. Veronica knows everyone’s looking at her standing tall at the very top with her leg pined in the air behind her back, and she’s more than proud of herself.

Not many people can hold a scorpion that long and with particularly challenging balance, but she worked to get it right as surely as she is a perfectionist. Nothing can beat this adrenaline rush she’s feeling right now, and as she round off back hand springed across the field Veronica realises she doesn’t know how she’s going to live once all of this comes to an end.

Their legs are like gummy worms with unlimited jolts of energy afterwards, so incredibly
exhausted but way too pumped to watch the second half to give in to it. Now that they’re more than fifty minutes into the game, it’s a steady 2 - 3 with the Cupertino Thunderhots carrying home team power with their 3.

But Bulldogs aren’t going to give up. They’re so much more aggressive in the second half, determined to win this match it hyps everyone watching even more. Archie, Jason and Reggie ran to the pitch, receiving an occasional ‘boo’ from the home team crowd but the Vixens’ cheering was overwhelmingly loud. Almost as soon as Archie felt the ball leave his hands with expertise aim, the ball made contact with the net. A goal! He didn’t want to celebrate too much because he knew that was only one step of many to come.

Right when that happened Veronica burst into firecracker squeals and jumps, her whole body coming alive after seeing Archie nail that one play like a complete pro.

“Go Andrews!” She screamed as loud as possible into the field, stopping only to clap even harder and shake her pom poms like life depended on it.

Suddenly, the red head of hair turned around and he looked up to look right into her eyes - goofy smile all proud of her enthusiasm. Oh shit, that wasn’t for him to hear! She wanted to coward away all embarrassed but she couldn’t really wipe this uncontrollable smile off her face, not when Archie is smiling up at her like he’s her white knight come to take his princess and live their happily ever after.

The other cheerleaders are clapping too, but Veronica’s the only one so wildly enthralled about it - and when Archie dead freezes on the field, his eyes trained on Veronica and her bouncing off with joy, his chest heaving, jaw agape slightly, everybody notices.

Even all the other Vixens giggle and shove her playfully for it. One lady from the crowd taps her on the shoulder, leaning forward to ask. “Is that your boyfriend?”

If it were any other moment, she’d clam up and act cool. But not right now, not with her dream boy still gazing at her awestruck and their connection clear across the field. “He’s something” she just replies honestly.

Eventually Moose has to hit Archie hard enough to get back into playing, the last twenty minutes on the clock with just one more shot that’ll beat them out of their current tie with the Cupertino Thunderhots.

As the clock wined down, all Archie could see is tunnel vision and how to get this ball into his hands before it all disappears right before him.

Thunderhots had it - but the ball blocked by Bulldogs’ goalie Taylor at the last minute. All this that and between, swapping out players and communicating with eye contact, making sure to never stay too close as to lose sight of the bigger picture.

“You boys brought the fire from back home over here and conquered them so far in their own stomping grounds. Even if we lose you’ve proved how well you work as a team, and maybe that is how we’ll leave it. But with ten minutes left on the clock, like hell am I going to give up now. I’m putting my best bets forward. All that I said yesterday, first line, go!” Coach Raco slammed his hand hard and encouragingly on their backs with meaning, sending each and every player back out to win this game.

“1,2,3, Bulldogs!” They hanced in before spreading out together.
Archie blinked way too many times, losing focus and coming back in.

“Okay V just breathe. Archie can still win this thing and save it” Betty nudged Veronica with her elbow, a sure snap in her pressed lips.

Veronica already knows this, but she’s praying and praying that he’ll look up at her one more time so she can give him one more shout of support that she just knows he’ll need.

“Come on Archie, come on” she tapped her feet impatiently, eyes on the boy looking straight ahead.

Reggie got the ball between two Thunderhots, snapping everything back into proper focus as it should be. If they win this later on, they’ll have to thank Reggie for getting the ball back in their hands. He passes it to Trev, looking frantic as minutes fade away.

“Come on, come on” Archie muttered quietly, needing Reggie to pass to him.

“Ball! Ball!” Reggie shouted. Loud, over the screams and cheers, over the deafening whistles in their own heads. Trev moved like a pro, throwing the ball back at Reggie who, now in perfect position, sends it straight two feet into Archie’s hands.

“Mantle passes off to Archibald Andrews!” The sports commentator announces. For a brief moment Veronica thinks this school must make fun of all their fancy first class names.

Then, Archie moves - he hustles through like a jaguar not giving up and right when the timing strikes perfectly he knows he has to find courage to make the goal.

His eyes flicker left side, every single pair of eyeballs looking at him but his attention is on her; angel with two pom poms held above her head and a distinct nod of approval - it’s all he needs. 5,4,3,2,1 . The countdown only spurring him on, Archie chances all his luck and looks away from her just to score this goal.

Success.

“TIME!! Archibald Andrews made final strike breaking all ties loose - I can’t believe it! Raffles Bulldogs are champions at last!!”

The whole stadium bursts like it’s confines have finally been released, every person standing up and roaring with exuberance even if it isn’t their hometeam that won the game. Pure anticipation and how close that last goal became made everyone hyped up.

Archie skidded across the grass, yelling out some expletives while all his other teammates piled on top of him like haystacks out of happiness - the hard win and tough journey pronounced in that moment.

This is a surprising win which caused a great sensation in the ground, literally shaking. The Vixens take off from their positions and run out to celebrate victory, running head first into their
champions’ league.

Veronica runs faster than almost anyone else, her speed only matched by that of head cheerleader Cheryl Blossom. She turns and looks at her, out of instinct, and right then they’re so overjoyed by the win that it shines over any beef they have between them and they just smile at each other - pearly and bright eyed.

“Archie! Oh my god! Amazing last goal!” She screeched into his ear but he didn’t mind it, much more excited that she’s just letting him this close to her and how happy she looks like nothing bothering is on her mind.

“I couldn’t make it without you” he promises, hands circling around her waist like they always do for embrace. Veronica can pretend to be all tough she wants, but a furious blush comes on her cheeks when Archie is holding her like this under all the shining lights and it feels like they just won life - nothing could be burst their bubble.

That is, until she watched Archie’s face drain from joy into a confused stare, eyes looking somewhere behind her. She has her arms wrapped around his neck but he slowly lets go of her waist and she slides down him fast enough to see Cheryl take off running, from where she was standing right next to them before.

Archie is about to ask her something, but Veronica touches his chest gently before telling him not to worry before running after the girl.

I always do this. Running after Cheryl, like chasing fire. I’m always chasing fire.

Veronica chased the girl all the way back to the girls’ bathroom, which is empty because everyone else is outside still part of the scene. She slows down from the far run with a loud exhale, stepping inside slowly now. Cheryl is leaning against one of the cold sinks, her face crumpled up with hot tears streaming endlessly.

“Cher.. what’s wrong? What happened?”

“You don’t get it” she hiccuped. Veronica took a daring step closer, Cheryl turns away the closer she gets. “You don’t understand”

“Tell me Cherry, tell me what it is I don’t understand” she says softly. This is the first time they’ve talked that isn’t snarky back and forth, now she can see all Cheryl’s walls breaking down for some reason unknown.

They stood still, only movement in Cheryl’s jerky shoulders every time she jolted with pain. Veronica looked at her so precisely. She knows something about her, that Cheryl doesn’t even know yet. An Aunty, Cher. You’re going to be and Aunt.

“I’m alone” She whispered darkly “I’m alone.”

Veronica moved right next to her this time. She put her arm around Cheryl’s shoulders and rubbed them down, fingers stranding through her hair for comfort. “I am here. You’re not alone, I’m here.”
The older girl couldn’t handle it. She was too pent up with emotion. Especially with Veronica being so kind to run after her, after all she’s done is be a bitch to the girl, she still always sticks by. It’s like the light that keeps chasing down every dark path in a tunnel, and Cheryl shivers when she realises Veronica is so much more of a light than anybody would ever believe.

“You were right. You were completely right, Little V. When you said I was jealous of you; I couldn’t stand to see you and Archie so happy together. Even if you were broken up, you could still be together. I’m spiteful and horrible and I was a jealous bitch Veronica, I’m sorry.”

“Hey it’s okay” Veronica held Cheryl’s head as she cried even harder. It’s weird seeing her so puffy eyed and red nosed. “Why would you be jealous of us, though? You found your one and bright”

“It’s part of the reason why I’ve been so... bitter lately. My parents they - they’ve been trying to keep Toni and I apart. We haven’t seen each other in weeks”

“Oh my god, Cher” Veronica couldn’t believe the audacity of Mr and Mrs Blossom, the lengths they’d go to tear apart two lovers.

“It’s not an excuse. But I don’t understand it!”

“Understand what?” Veronica asked softly. The red head seemed more frustrated than sad now.

“Me. I don’t understand why my life has to be so cruel - what did I do to deserve this? While everybody else is enjoying their love life and just .. just whatever they want. I feel so trapped. Tell me why it has to be this way?!” She cried desperately.

This is when Archie finally caught up with his slow walk to where the girls had disappeared, stopping before the open door where he could see and hear Cheryl and Veronica leaning against the sinks.

“Cheryl, I don’t know what to say. I can’t explain why your life is the way it is but I’m sorry. And it’s not hopeless”

Cheryl turned back around, fast enough to startle her, fast enough for Archie to gasp when she wrapped her arms around Veronica like a yearning child long separated from its guardian. It’s when Archie’s heart catches with the tenderness of Veronica’s care and lovingness, that she rarely shows to anyone.

“About everything before... I am so sorry Veronica. Sincerely. I was so mean, and you’re a great enough friend I can’t lose.” She held onto the younger girl’s hand tightly, the other still slung over her shoulder.

Veronica blinked up into her tear stained eyes at a lost for words. “Well, I had it coming with all the shit I said to you too. I should’ve known something was going on, or at least figured it out”

“I hate that I destructed you like that. From now on, I promise to be as supportive to you as you’ve always been to me, V. Like I should have been a long time ago”

Veronica smiled, twinkling and meaningful before wiping away the rest of Cheryl’s left over tears with the back of her hand. “Weird huh? Two fights in a bathroom and one make up? It’s like bathrooms are our thing or something” she questioned while Cheryl splashed cold water on the burning skin of her face.
The other girl laughed, throat tender from crying and all the screaming she did before as well. “You said it’s a mean girl’s background, so you were right”

“As I usually am” Veronica prompted

“Come on, let’s get out of here” they linked their arms together and were about to leave feeling more than accomplished, shocked to find Archie standing there with a fond expression at both of them.

“Storm rained over?” He more specifically means on speaking terms again?

Cheryl and Veronica look at each other, nodding. “We are” Veronica grins back at Archie playfully

“Course we are”

(x.x.x.x)

The bus ride home is far from a humbling one, too much madness from hyper excited students who just won a big game. Practically nobody is sitting down, though Coaches don’t mind because they’re both chatting at ease in the front seat. It feels good to finally be able to celebrate and dance in between Cheryl and Betty, losing herself to the music somebody’s playing now that amends have finally been made. This will also be some of the final moments of peace in their life before news of the offspring Polly Cooper’s carrying will inevitably take its toll.

For now everybody stays moving and grooving, Archie and some of the other jocks are piled in the back seat because they’re so tired but still shouting about nothing in particular.

Veronica eventually left the little strew of madness happening up front, to head over to where Archie is. After so long she’s felt a lot of fear, an emotion she doesn’t enjoy. It’s leaving her burning and coiling and she has to feel something else.

“Move over boys!” She announces to Reggie and some other guy. They scramble up and cheer stupidly to let her slide in next to Archie, who’s worn out and happy to see her.

“Hey you” he says softly at her

Instead, Veronica lifts herself onto his lap facing him, legs on either side of his thighs with a little innocent giggle.

“Woah hey - thought you said we aren’t back together?” He’s grinning as their noses touch and nuzzle against one another, his hand taking some time to find her waist.

“We aren’t” she breathed “but winners deserve to be rewarded, right?”

He’s so lost in all of her, from the pretty little jewels embedded on her eyelids for the game and the precise shape of her sharp brows. Her gorgeous smile, the one anchoring him all through the game, and he’s stupidly in love with her.

“You are such a star, Archie Andrews. Out there today, and everyday” she tells him with their lips just slightly apart.
“You are too” Archie is stroking the soft exposed skin between her cheer top and skirt, inching the top higher “You look so good in this”

Veronica laughed lightly, her fingers grazing his jaw and just admiring how beautiful he is. It isn’t until she lifts herself a little higher and sits directly on top of his zipper that Archie felt himself twitch shamelessly.

He smells so good. Like pure boy smell, after a fresh shower although she didn’t get one. Veronica doesn’t hide the obviousness as she wafts down to his neck and inhales the smell. Archie tensed, so worked up that he couldn’t figure out what to do with his hands next and fumbled with her hem.

“You’re moving your hands like you don’t know where to put them” she moves from his neck briefly to tease him.

“Yeah. I’m trying not to put them anywhere you don’t want them” he joked. They’d cross all physical lines with each other of course, but since breaking up he just didn’t know what Veronica wanted.

“Don’t worry” she grabbed his wrists and put them on the top of her thighs, long finger just barely underneath the skirt “You can do this”

Her breathy voice effortlessly seducing him, Archie could already feel himself giving a push upwards at that one. He recognised the look in her eyes too, she wants to get off. “Are you sure we should do this in the bus? People could see”

“No one’s looking” Veronica said a little more pitched. He looked forward, all their friends still preoccupied with the karaoke going on up front.

He only began to realise his fingers were slowly and delicately rubbing her thighs. Some newfound recklessness - or desperation to be with Veronica, moved him to gently ease his finger under the hem of her skirt, crawling up and inching up her thigh. Every thought of her is making him harder, and there’s no hiding that it’s poking straight up into her and she can feel it. The craving he’s had for her took over completely.

Archie’s fingers kept on massaging up the inside of her thigh, well under her skirt by now. They don’t have much time with this though so he gently pulled on both of her thighs to softly but forcibly pulling her thighs even further apart. Veronica let out a very quiet and gentle moan and opened up her legs for him, arms locked behind his head.

Enamoured by her, Archie moved his right hand past the spandex dance shorts they wear underneath cheer uniforms and rubbed his fingers up and down the material, feeling her dampness. He rubbed her through it, tracing her wet slit and feeling the edge of the shorts where they meet the curve of the inside of her thigh. Veronica moved her head closer to his ear, breathing loudly to indicate how turned on she is but also providing hot breath on Archie’s neck that spurred him.

Softly, and breathily, she whispered to him “You’re making me want you”

“Me too baby” he whispered back. Still looking out for anybody who might notice them, luckily seeing none.

She felt his fingers slip inside her dance shorts and found her pussy and she knew she couldn’t stop. She was so wet, he could feel how slick her labia is. He pushed his fingers between her lips and felt her opening. Her legs spread even wider for him and he pushed a finger into her. Veronica jolted forward, not bearing the overwhelming pleasure that came over her just then. Still, his smell in the
close proximity is so intoxicating and with his finger deep indie her, she’s driven over the edge with pleasure.

Veronica felt amazing, so tight and wet and Archie let out a deep moan at how amazing she felt. He pushed his finger slowly into her and started a steady rhythm inside her. Archie added a second finger, causing her to squirm and gasp again. He worked his fingers inside her while his thumb rubbed her clit, his lips trailing soft kisses up and down her bare neck.

Veronica’s breathing got even more intense and she was bucking her hips in order to get more friction. Her hands hugged him closer to him, and Archie lifted one hand up to ghost at the front of her cheer top. He started to grab and squeeze her breast through the dress, smiling against her skin.

“You know your chest is all red and blushing? You’re pretty cute when you’re flustered” he jokes quietly.

Veronica all but sinks her fingers into him, hating how easily he can still make her blush after all these years. Archie rubbed the skin of her chest that isn’t covered by the top, travelling up to her shoulder. He’s so glad for the cover of darkness and all their friends ignorant as Veronica gets carried away with her pleasure.

“Fuck.. oh fuck.. fuck” Veronica whispered into Archie’s ear “I’m going to cum..”

Archie thrusted his fingers harder into her, feeling her walls clench around him. She full on kissed him now, their lips colliding in a sloppy but passionate kiss that’s so heartfelt it breaks him. Veronica’s breath hitched in her throat for a few seconds, pulling apart from the kiss as her orgasm rocked through her body.

Eventually when her body calmed down, Archie pulled his finger out and licked them clean quite mischievously. Veronica smirked, holding his face in her hands and kissing him one more time to feel the fruitful fullness of his lips. She felt giddy and relaxed after the orgasm.

“What about you?” Veronica asked, ruffling her favourite shade of red hair between her fingers. Their faces were so close it’s almost hilarious.

“Not now” Archie bumped his nose with hers. “We’re reaching school already” and with that Veronica slid off Archie and cuddled up close next to him. His hand on her back, her hands on his chest, looking out the window and talking to each other as scenery passes by. They don’t care if any of their friends in here see that they’ve rekindled - what’s important is she feels safe and light and happy and Archie knows he never wants to lose the fun only Veronica can bring into his life.

Chapter End Notes

Hello people! Sorry about the longer wait, but well it’s here now.

Aren’t Varchie such rebels in that last scene?

I know many of you will be surprised by the events in this chapter ~ polly’s pregnancy ~ but this was planned all along and is an intergal part of the storyline. Tell me what
you thought of that, and anything else in this chapter?

Feel free to hit me up on tumblr too @ff16xo

Feeling uninspired so show me some love :)
Chapter #13 Wild Things

- I lose my balance on these eggshells you tell me to tread, I’d rather be a wild one instead -

Archie says goodbye to Veronica for a while once they get off the bus, she leaves with Betty but they’ll all meet back up - either Reggie’s or a club in Silver Lake if his parents are home - for a celebration. Archie is idly swiping things on his phone while sitting behind the wheel of his car. Feed is flooding with photos from the game; his teammates and the Vixens but mostly it’s random kids he doesn’t know that just happened to be on his explore page. Archie is quite amused that there’s so much buzz about this game, but it’s expected. He tosses his phone in the passenger’s seat and clicks the seatbelt before driving.

Bringing a trophy home feels widely rewarding, like his whole chest is opening up with relief and hardwork - payed - off and a new perspective on satisfaction. But while all of that is very empowering another part of him is still turned off by all that’s going on with Veronica’s parents. Hell, he knew they were ruthless, but even in the close proximity to them he spent for years dating their daughter; spending nights in their home, did he ever guess they were that shady. It all comes back to the conversation he saw Jughead having with Veronica and Betty before they got on the bus - he’d spend all day thinking about it, but with everything happening it kind of took a backseat.

Now though, as the cool air on Sunset Boulevard makes itself known on his skin, the windows down, he replays it in his mind over and over again. Jughead looked really engrossed; then again he always does. All Archie could see was the two girls’ backs so he can’t really make an assumption, but he guesses it has to be something important. It’s not like Jughead to show up anywhere with the Bulldogs around for no reason, after all.

Archie shuts the door of his car and beeps it to lock while telling himself to quit bugging about it, making a mental note to just ask Ronnie about it later. The mansion Fred designed which is Archie’s home is just jaw dropping. It’s enormous, all stone and steel and glass. But what sets it apart from many of the Calabasas estates is that this one actually looks like a place people live, not too much like an architectural experiment. You can also always hear water in the Andrews home, from the many water features they own. It adds a very relaxing touch of ambiance. Overall, Archie’s house is definitely the one all his friends would like to grow up in. It’s utterly beautiful.

“Arch you’re home! How was the game?” Fred appeared from behind his French office doors, coffee mug in one hand and his alma mater sweatshirt on.

“It was good” the red head boy nodded “we won”

“There’s my boy!” Fred gave one of the proudest looks Archie had seen in a while, his face looked almost glowing with satisfaction and fondness. It brought a grin to his own lips.

“Thanks dad” Archie muttered against the neck of his dad’s sweatshirt, bending down slightly to hug him.
Fred gave a good natured pat on his back before letting go. “You know this is great, it’ll look great on your college applications. You’re going to be the shining star at the Ivys next week for sure son!”

Archie laughed wearily and thanked him again, a minor blush creeping up when he realised it’s true, all eyes will probably be on the quarterback who just won the big game. “Should we go out for dinner? You want me to cook something? I can make your favourite”

“Oh it’s okay dad - I was actually going to go out. A celebration thing, with all the guys and uh, the cheerleaders”

“Oh” Fred nodded, his eyes widening a little in concern.

“Don’t worry dad, it’s just a little thing Reggie put together. He’s really pumped too, couldn’t stop rambling to Josie on the bus home. I think everyone wants him to be happy tonight”

“Of course. Tell them all congratulations for me. Just be careful okay?”

“I will dad” Archie insisted, backing up the stairwell to the second floor. He stopped short “Hey, I thought you said you were working today?”

Fred’s eyes darted somewhere near his office for a second. “I was. I just signed a contract working on a new project with Mr Lodge, so I’m doing some work from home. I would’ve come to the game if I was free, son, but -“

“No it’s okay. Dad, what.. what are you working with Mr Lodge on?” He hoped his expression wasn’t too desperate.

“It’s disclosed for now” he nodded.

Archie gulped, his fingers circling around the banister nervously. “Right. Well I’m just gonna go get ready. Love you dad”

“Love you too Arch”

Archie’s heart was beating fast as he ran into his room. Dad is working with Ronnie’s dad? He’s involved in this too? He’s part of the whole ‘deal’ that caused Josie’s accident? What if.. what if it’s dangerous?

He shook his head. Of course it’s dangerous. People already got hurt. He’s effectively sweating again while thinking it all through, the worry of what might happen to his dad seeping deep. He didn’t shower again, just changed into a dark shirt and some jeans for the night. He’s over doing his hair game tonight mostly just because he’s nervous, staring into the reflection repeating the same thing in his head over and over. Just calm down. Relax. You’ll ask Ronnie and Betty about it later, and until then don’t worry. Dad is fine. He’s fine.

Of course none of it is actually helping him calm down, the insistent stop worrying in his head actually spurring on more and more scenarios of how bad this could all go down for his dad. But it didn’t help at all when the door to Archie’s bedroom flew open, officially stopping the young boy’s heart and shocking the living daylights out of him before realising it’s just -

“Jughead?”
“No time for pleasantries. I let myself in” The beanie wearing boy stocked into the room with hands on his hips sternly.

Archie stood fazed, not surprised that Jughead let himself. More about why he’s suddenly here, but not at all surprised he let himself in.

(x.x.x.x)

Veronica ran straight upstairs upon arriving at the penthouse, having to rush because she dropped Betty off at The Coopers’ residence so she only had limited time to shower and get ready. Her body still feels tingly and light after what she did with Archie, and she wants to relish in the feeling for longer - but there’s no time. She has to make sure Polly is still upstairs and not under her parents radar, safe from exposure to all that will he their downfall.

“Uh uh. Young lady, come here right now”

Veronica stopped midway up the stairs. She sighed, sliding a hand back down the banister and turning around. There stood both her parents with raised eyebrows and a very expectant face. They were both clad in business formal attire despite it being a Saturday evening and she knows they must have been up to some nefarious schemes.

“I need to speak with you, mija. Come downstairs” Hiram motioned with a hand.

Veronica already knew he’d be biting her ear off about storming off the other day then leaving to New York without their permission, and is anticipating the lecture as she steps down each step in her sports sneakers.

“It’s about the car you swindled from us” he surprised her “Where is it?”

“At the Andrews’.” She crossed her arms “You want me to drive it back?”

“I’ll have someone take it. Need I remind you don’t have a license yet?”

“I know that” she accentuated slowly, eyes glowering dark.

“That is a 57 thousand dollar car, you can’t just go around town recklessly and then leave it at your friend’s house. You could’ve gotten it damaged, or worse - yourself killed. Seriously, Veronica. What were you even thinking? This careless teenage behaviour has got to stop, you’re starting to become very insufferable. Also I know you didn’t pay for the flight tickets to New York since there’s no record on your debit card so where, may I ask did you get the money to pay for it?”

“I used Mr Andrews card”

For the first time Hermione spoke, voicing her displeasure in the most motherly way possible. “Veronica!” She screeched “You must pay it back immediately. Your father and I most certainly won’t, so find your own means do you understand?”

She picked at her manicure absently, realising she needs to get a fresh one before the Ivy Reps. “Whatever. Is that all you wanted to ask me?”

They seemed to be done and she was about to turn and head back up, but Hermione asked a
question quickly much to both Hiram and Veronica’s surprise.

“How was the game honey?”

“It was good. We won.” She said tightly. Turning back around, Veronica braced herself. She sure felt like a weak little girl in her bright blue and gold uniform and bows in her hair, but now she has to be brave to stand up to her parents. Her fingers twirled the end of her ponytail nervously. “Mom, dad. I know that you’re helping Mr St Clair with his campaign to become state senate, and I know you kicked Mr Muggs out of the company because of it. So why are you helping the St Clairs? And why is it so important to you?”

The words felt like they were dripping out in elongated spaces, her throat clamming up while she watched her parents faces grow pale.

“How did you know all this?”

“Daddy don’t avoid my question! It’s true, isn’t it? You’re working with them? This is all part of the deal and that person who threatened you?”

“Yes, mija it is. But this is all just business management and you have absolutely nothing to worry about. You’re safe. Now no more poking around in matters that don’t concern you, understand?”

She breathed heavily, turning and running upstairs before she could fall apart. He still won’t tell me. Her face feels like its burning red with rage, mad at her parents for being so secretive and mad at herself for feeling like such a weak little girl who can’t stand up to them.

Why is it always like this? How come he says it doesn’t concern me, but I’m the one getting the shit? Me, and my friends? Gosh why won’t they just let me in?!

(x.x.x.x)

“Is something going on?”

“Yes Archie something is going on. Hasn’t Veronica told you already?”

Archie looked down at his toes, jaw twitching slightly. They didn’t exactly have very serious conversations just now. Jughead sighed, hands resuming its place on his hips.

“I figured. Look, -“

“Jughead can we rain check this? I really have to get ready and leave” Archie added in quickly.

Jughead blinked furiously. “You seriously have to go out now? Like right this second? You just got back”

“Who are you my dad? Even my dad’s cool with it”

“Just - this is urgent so make sure you catch it all” he had the feeling Archie wouldn’t, or at least would have trouble grasping it. “The St Clairs are winning the senator seat only because The Lodges basically fired Manfred Muggs from their company which in turn makes him lose all his connections, so my guess is that Veronica’s parents have some kind of ‘exchange deal’ with the St Clairs and maybe Manfred Muggs is the one who’s threatening them for retaliation.”
He breathed a deep exhale, skin coming up to a peachy red colour as he reached up and tugged his grey beanie perfectly into place. *Got it?* He wants to ask Archie, but something’s telling him the red headed boy didn’t. Perhaps it’s the look of utter confusion on his face that would be infuriating if Jughead didn’t know it’s genuine.

“I...” Archie had a hard time searching for his words “I don’t really get what you’re latching onto but you should know this; my dad is working for The Lodges too. Apparently he just signed a contract with them but he won’t tell me what it’s about”

“Oh shit seriously?” Jughead’s blue eyes grew even more wide and manic like. “Well we have to find out!”

“How the hell are we gonna do that?”

*Keep your voice down!* They both know this house is big and Archie’s room far beyond hearing point to his dad’s ears, but it still made sense for the sake of sneaking around. Archie could see the calculated look in his best friend’s eyes and it worried him, leaning back gently against the window seat. “We’re gonna search his home office.”

“Well I have to leave for the party right now! Can’t we do this tomorrow? Cheryl and Jason are gonna pick me up any minute”

“You’re going to a *party* in the middle of an investigation that you got me in on?” His eyebrows knitted together.

“It isn’t about the party - it’s about trying to help a friend through grieving about his injured girlfriend. And trust me I want to figure this out just as much as you do, possibly even more”

At the look of his friend’s disposal, Archie sighed and peeked out the glass windows one more time in search of a red Chevrolet or a 50s muscle car. “Look, why don’t we put this thing on hold for the night? Shouldn’t we wait for Ronnie before making a move anyway?”

Jughead sighed in defeat. “Fine. Just talk to Veronica and Betty. Tell them, what I told you. And further it with her. Make sure you tell me when you guys are ready to start digging.”

“I will” Archie promised.

“Do you think your dad is in on the plan or he’s just an instrument in whatever game Mr Lodge is playing?”

“I have to go Jug” Archie stood up as soon as the Blossom twins’ car rolled up the long driveway. Jughead saw them too, grimacing slightly. Cheryl is dressed in head to toe glitter with not much left to imagination, and Jason looks half as overdressed and twice as smug. “Just sleep on it tonight. I’ll call you”

“Have fun, I guess” he mutters while Archie moved past him, patting his back as a goodbye.

(x.x.x.x)

The party is *good*, Archie would put it. It’s very unplanned, since they weren’t sure if the Bulldogs would win or not. But Reggie is a notorious partier and underlying perfectionist so he’s quickly put together something that doesn’t disappoint - music and dancing and free drinks and good food and everyone is happy, laughing and enjoying themselves. The club on the outskirts of Silver Lake is
one he’s assuming Reggie’s dad owns, like he owns half of the strips in Vegas and Miami too. It’s
great, actually. But Archie can’t bring himself to have fun when all that’s own his mind is the shit
Jughead said about investigating and wanting to tell Veronica all about it.

There’s a variety of noise going around the place, the sound of people singing and the Bulldogs
laughing and the cocktail mixer being put to good use, and the radio blasting some top hit Archie
mindlessly taps his foot to. He’s sitting on a stool at the bar, away from others, and watches
intently as Veronica shows up looking gorgeous when she walks through the door.

She’s right in the centre of things, exactly where she wants to be. She’d changed into a one piece
with denim shorts over it and sunglasses in her hair despite it being dark out. They all know what
that’s for - to hide your eyes when paparazzi start snapping photos of them leaving this place.
Right when she entered the place Archie wanted to head over and be with her, but unfortunately all
the girls including Betty and Cheryl had bombarded the raven haired queen with much to chat
about.

“Here you go” Cheryl grinned with those big red lips. She herself had on a pair of bug like
sunglasses resting atop her head “Your elixir for the night, Little V”

“Oh thanks Cher!” Veronica accepted the glass of Strawberry daiquiri in her left hand, taking a sip
which made the girls surrounding them giggle. She was very happy to see Toni at the forefront
right next to Cheryl, realising why the red head had more light in her eyes tonight. “Hey Topaz,
long time no see”

“You too Lodge” she nodded curtly.

Cheryl started leading the group away, to the dance floor. Veronica had heard rumours there’ll be a
hot tub tonight so she’d worn a swimsuit. Right now though, everyone is still having fun talking
and dancing. She grabs Betty’s hand and keeps her by her side. “Isn’t Toni a student at the prep
school? I thought you said this is a BulldogsxVixens gathering only”

“Yeah well, she’s Cheryl Blossom’s plus one so can anyone really concur?” Veronica took another
shot from a tray and swung her head back. “By the way, how are things at home? Has your mom
come around?”

“Hardly” the blonde girl huffed “The house is pin drop silence and she doesn’t even know I left
tonight. Can I come over later to meet Polly?”

“Sure” they kept their voice hushed amidst everyone else “I’m sure you have a lot to talk about”

Veronica is aware of Archie watching her, and she let him know she did with sideways glances and
the occasional smile when their eyes met. She doesn’t know why he’s being such a buzzkill, when
he should be the one celebrating their major win tonight. Neither of them approached each other
though, but Veronica could tell this was more about him being worried about something rather
than keeping distance to let heat build between them. She would go and ask him about it, if the
other girls weren’t constantly sticking by her.

Inevitably Reggie and Cheryl suggest to get in the hot tub by the end of the night, and almost
everyone is for it. Archie really doesn’t want to, but maybe this will be the only chance to get close
to Veronica so he can talk to her. All the Vixens get in first and show off their bikinis (or bikini
bodies) proud of how toned and lean they are. Then Reggie leads all the Bulldogs inside too with
extremely obnoxious shrieking and jeering. There’s so much tidal waves happening with everyone
finding seats and drinks spilling over and the smell of cannabis stuffing their noses all a little dizzy.
Veronica is all aware of the muscular body that’s pressed against her side, Archie has chosen to sit beside her of all places. Part of her is relieved because none of those other girls will be close to him, and her face gets flushed red at how jealous she sounds. Any other day the two of them sitting next to each other would’ve caused wildfire but almost everybody is distracted by Cheryl and Toni kissing to really notice it.

“Damn, are we really doing this right now? I’m all for it” Reggie leaned back, watching both girls playfully.

“Shut your face Mantle” Cheryl rolled her eyes. But she put her head on Toni’s shoulder, the laughter and cat calls dying down.

“Shotgun! Who wants?” Scarlett Moffet shook the joint in her hand with offering. Little droplets of water hit their faces from her hair.

“Me!” Midge volunteers happily. Some people are lost in small talk as the two girls make it to the middle of the hot tub and Scarlett bent down, placing the lit portion of the joint between her teeth. Midge positioned the other end and sucked in, inhaling the smoke. Their lips are incredibly close and the tub quiets down watching them.

After a mere minute, Midge pulls away and breathes an exhale, moving back to the edge of the tub. She snatched the joint out of Scarlett’s mouth and held it between her fingers now. “Who’s next?”

“I’ll go” Cheryl nodded. The two leaned in close and repeated the same action, inhaling until Cheryl could feel it rising in her brain. They lit the joint again with just point five and kept going.

Reggie and Moose are filling glasses with absinthe and some other stuff, but they’re constantly refilled that you wouldn’t have time to take a break. Soon enough almost everyone has done the shotgun and is starting to feel a little sexual tension rise in the air.

“V! You want a go?” Scarlett swooped down on her, holding the joint in one hand and a glass of tequila in the other and beaming. She laughed as Veronica took the glass and tipped it back instead, leaning forward to each other.

“Yeah sure” Veronica agreed with a giggle.

Scarlett flips her golden brown hair back and then puts her hand on the back of Veronica’s neck. “Open up!” She sings, and then places the joint between her teeth.

Veronica leans forward and inhales, but she sucks too hard at one point that the smoke kind of clogs in her throat and she starts coughing. She tried pulling away but Scarlett’s hold is pretty strong, and she waves her hands wildly trying to breathe as Scarlett laughs gleefully and finally breaks the space between them.

Everyone else is laughing too, except Betty who’s really worried, as Veronica coughs and tries to get her breath back feeling the rush in her head. She feels a little unstable, and her eyes dart to Archie next to her to see what he’s doing. He’s smiling, looking a little lower than her eyes. Veronica had a feeling he would like the swimsuit she’s wearing tonight.

Suddenly, without much thought Veronica takes the joint from between Scarlett’s teeth and places them between her own, leans forward and holds Archie’s face in her hands like she’s going in for a kiss. He latches on fast, getting as close as possible to her lips while inhaling the smoke. His hand goes from playing with her bikini strap all the way to the edge where it covers her breasts and holds her there. Under the water, his other hand gently caresses her thigh too.
Oh fuck, that’s... Veronica can’t even think straight. Archie’s mouth is so close to hers and his hands are hot and the trail it’s left on her skin feels like it’s burning. For a moment she doesn’t even hear the laughing and wolf whistles, but then someone slides between Betty and Veronica and throws a hand over the brunette’s shoulder. It’s Scott Moffet, Scarlett’s twin and also one of Archie’s friends.

“Yo, shotgun and free feel ups with Lolita Lodge? I’ll be in that” He grins at her lasciviously and then reaches towards the joint in between her lips. “I’m next!”

Veronica leans away from him, the memory of Chuck Clayton creeping in her brain for some reason making her shiver while she feels Archie’s body curve protectively around her. “Don’t call her that, Scott” he says.

“Oh come on Lodge, this is a group activity right?” He ignores Archie and starts to twirl the end of her ponytail around his finger.

“No thanks, Scott. Here you have it” she jabbed the still lit joint between his lips just a little roughly, causing everyone to laugh. Even Archie grins smugly. The alcohol has hit hard and the weed starting to take its toll isn’t helping, she slowly feels herself start to detach from earth.

“Oh, what’s the matter? Now that you guys are broken up V can finally have her turn with whoever she wants” Scarlett says playfully from behind them, one arm around Veronica’s neck while she snatches the joint back from her brother. Looking around, everyone’s eyes are red rimmed and they have certain smiles on their faces that indicate how stoned they are.

“Oh, obviously that they’re already back together” Cheryl replied casually. Before either of them could think of an answer.

“Wait - really? When?” Kyle Richie suddenly piped up. Veronica rolled her eyes, inching away from Archie. This is the thing she hates to deal with.

“Awww.. how adorable! The quarterback and the head cheerleader together.. such a sickening Hollywood cliche” Scarlett slurs.

“Is it true?” Jason asked, his eyes peaked with interest.

Archie tried to act cool but he was glancing at Veronica to see her reaction. “Uhm.. we’re not -“

“Why even bother denying it?” Cheryl said loudly. Her face bright with a smile and eyes as red as her hair and skin. “They were getting pretty hot and heavy on the bus just now..”

“Cheryl!” Veronica is furious, with her friends for bringing this up and sick of Cheryl for always teasing her carelessly about issues that she isn’t comfortable talking about in front of everyone else. For god’s sake, her and Archie are just starting to work things out and get close again!

“Oh don’t get embarrassed V” Scarlett giggles “I’m sure none of us would be able to keep our hands off Archie Andrews, broken up or not. He has the best abs on both sides of the Mississippi”

She gives a flirtatious look at Archie that all of them know is just playful, they’re friends and it doesn’t mean anything, but Veronica can’t help glare at the girl and Archie notices this. There’s a whole ton of laughter as Archie turns a shade of pink at Scarlett’s comment. He cleared his throat, really trying to clear the awkward tension.

“Uhm Ronnie, can we talk? Outside?” Embarrassed and done with the situation Archie got out of
the hot tub, droplets of water going down his body as he hops out and leaves.

Veronica sits there contemplating whether or not to go but the amount of jokes and obscene comments being made are annoying so she grabs Betty’s hand and stands up too. “Come on B, let’s get out of here.”

“Are you okay? You seemed like you were choking earlier” Betty looks at her friend in concern once they’re heading off to the pool gabana.

“I’m fine” she insists. “Just more pissed off about them, that’s all. It’s none of their damn business”

They quickly grab towels and start rubbing briskly while Veronica aggressively throws articles of clothing around as she searches for her shorts in a pile of clothes on the bench and Betty looks at her concernedly. “Fuck them. Like you said it’s got nothing to do with anyone else”

“Woah. You can swear”

Betty laughed and picked up her dress, smoothing it out before putting it back on. Once dressed both of them walked back inside the club and started heading off when they met Archie standing by the exit.

“Hey. Are you guys leaving?”

“Yes. This damn club is starting to make its way to my list of hated locations and I’ve already called Andre, so”

“Ronnie I need to talk to you. I know right now’s not a good time but I won’t be able to sleep if I don’t tell you this”

“What?” She came off much more snappy than intended.

Archie sighed, rubbing her arm to calm her down. “Jughead told me everything that he told you guys before the game. And, I found out that my dad is working for your parents Ronnie”

“For them?” She eyed him carefully “Or with them?”

He shrugged. “I don’t really know. Just that they’re doing a job together so that means he’s a part of this, right?”

“God, Archie I am so sorry. This is a mess and now your dad’s in it too” she held the hand on her arm and looked into his eyes as sincerely as two drunk and high people can.

“It’s not your fault. He must have agreed to it, right? But anyway Jughead thinks we should all try and figure this out”

“We do too” Betty said decidedly.

Veronica looked between both of them, shaking her head. “Well my headache won’t be gone until midday. So how about we go over this at brunch? The four of us?”

“Uh, sure. My place or yours?”

“Yours is probably better. We can search your dad’s office and my parents will probably get suspicious of all of us together at my place” Veronica decided. “Can you text Juggy about it?”

“I will. Hey, your car.. it’s still in my lot?”
“Trust me my parents went ballistic on me about it. They’ll send someone to pick it up”

“Okay” Archie nodded. They could see the LODGE car pulled up front. “Do you really have to leave?” He asked a little quieter, getting close to Veronica’s face.

She hesitates, but nods. “Yes, I do. But I’ll be over for brunch tomorrow”

“Okay then” his voice is all warm and husky and it makes her dizzy craving him. “Goodnight. You girls get home safe”

“You too” she says as they get in the car, and tonight all Veronica will think about is her eventful day and what her and Archie might be getting to.

At home Veronica takes off her heels at the elevator and asks Betty to do the same, holding them in their hands as they stumble up the stairs. Hiram and Hermione probably wouldn’t care that she’s getting home just at midnight after all, but she’d rather not wake them and bring attention to the fact that a pregnant friend of hers carrying the Blossom spawn is living in their third floor all the same.

Polly wakes up when Veronica trips over the top step and crashes into the wall as she flips the light switch when they reach the third floor. Betty topples over too, grumbling some swears as she searches for her bearings and rubs her eyes.

“You guys are home” Polly smiled fondly at both younger girls, getting up from her place on the couch. “Veronica you should get to bed, Betty I missed you”

The heater is on in Veronica’s room and the lights are tuned to a dim orange and it’s warm and inviting as she falls across the bed and smiles blissfully into her pillow. She knows she’ll have to get up and take her makeup off before sleeping, but right now it feels so good to just lay there.

“I missed you too Polls. I love you” she hears Betty say. They’re on the foot bench of Veronica’s bed, a secret meeting unbeknownst to their parents.

“God, how drunk are you guys?”

“Preeety wasted. And a lil bit high” Veronica sat up on her elbows and giggles, reaching for the makeup wipes on her nightstand she keeps there specially for these occasions.

“You would’ve loved the party tonight. It was pretty fun.” Betty says certainly. Polly sure wished she could come, and distancing herself from Jason has been hard enough.

Veronica disappears into her closet to wriggle out of the one piece and shorts and into a peach
coloured negligee. “I’ve been good here, binged some shows.. booked an appointment..” she heard Polly say from the bedroom.

Veronica threw herself on the bed after washing her face. “I think things are going to be okay between Archie and I again soon. We kissed on the bus and since we’re going to have brunch tomorrow..” she says cheerfully to no one in particular, cutting the conversation of doctor appointments and life decisions short.

“That’s great that you’re happy, V” Betty looks amused, looking at Veronica with her eyebrows raised. This girl is clearly a more honest drunk.

“It is great” she giggles into a pillow “Let yourself out later, kay B? Andre’s waiting outside to drive you home anytime”

“Okay thanks V. Goodnight”

“Goodnight Betty.” she pulled the sheets up closer to her chest and fell deep into dreams, to the distant sound of doctor appointments and ‘you’re going to be a mom’.

(x.x.x.x)

The following morning Jughead and Archie were waiting at the gazebo table out in Archie’s back garden, sweet smell of flowers and breakfast foods combined. He’d ordered a full course since obviously Jughead needs food to work and the girls will probably be hungry too, considering food is essential to soak up hangovers. “When will the girls be here?” Jughead asked impatiently.

“They’ll be here Jug, relax. Hey Vegas, here get this bacon!” The fluffy golden retriever jumped excitedly at their feet.

Just as last platters of food were being served Veronica walked out with Betty in tow, looking very pleased. The last time she’s had brunch at The Andrews feels like ages ago and she still remembers how fantastic it is, sitting out here where you can’t even see where the yard ends.

“Morning Bert and Ernie! Wow this looks delicious. Oh - Vegas! Are you eating bacon? Such a good boy!” Veronica bent down and cooed at the adorable dog, much familiar with her affection.

“Wow this really looks like a feast. And your house is gorgeous Archie” Betty stood in awe of it, the long country tracks and endless rose bushes flourishing and mature, well sculpted trees.

“Thanks” he smiled a boyish smile “My dad designed it all. He had an art minor too, so I guess he has a good eye”

“An excellent eye” Veronica says as the four of them take their seats around the table. “Now, isn’t it time for work?”

“Yes, finally” the raven haired boy glared darkly.

“We should start with the simplest and most accessible option - search your dad’s home office” Veronica announced. There’s a huge platter of eggs, bacon, pancakes, waffles and every breakfast condiment you can think of. There’s also quite literally the entire supermarket cereal aisle on a trolley to their side, freshly rolled oats, granola and three types of milk. The girls both filled their plates with ample fresh fruit first, taking slow bites.
“Fine. My dad isn’t home, but what are we gonna do about the camera’s facing his office?”

“Can you rig it?” All three of them turned to Jughead in an instant.

“Me? Why me?”

“Because you know this weird hacker shit. Come on, can’t you get into the system here and let that camera go static for a couple minutes while we search?”

He sighed, clicking around on his laptop. “I can try. Your dad never checks the security anyways so this should be easy”

Veronica and Archie were walking down the familiar hallway before Fred Andrews’ office, eyeing the closed French doors very wearily. Betty had stayed back to keep an eye on things with Jughead and to call Veronica if anything happened.

“Do you really know how to hack into security systems?” She had asked, blue eyes focused in a little awe.

Jughead chuckled back, chin resting on his knuckles. “How do you think I get all the juicy behind the scenes drama at all those crummy school events?”

“Here. Is it clear?” Archie looked at her with his hand on the knob.

Veronica nodded, taking a gulp of air. “Jug’s done it. Look - I don’t really know what we’re searching for, a signed contract between our dad’s I guess.”

“We’ll look for anything” he assures. But just as Archie went and turned the knob, it was jammed.

*Figures.*

“Damn. Should’ve known, who wouldn’t lock their office doors?”

“Uh, people who have nothing to hide?” Veronica said like it’s obvious. She clicked Betty’s contact number and it rang twice. “This isn’t working guys, the door’s locked”

“Shit” they could hear Jughead mutter over the line.

“Wait!” It’s Betty now “Bobby pin. Use a bobby pin!”

Veronica and Archie exchanged weird looks, but shrugged and she took one out of her hair anyway. The lock more like threatened to break the little black pin, getting no where other than almost ruining her nails. “It’s not working. We’ll have to recruit”

“Well that didn’t work” they returned to the table unsuccessfully “Plan B?”

“We could.. try and look into St Clair’s past business dealings? Maybe we’ll get some kind of idea” Archie suggested.
“Already done it” Jughead said matter of factly. “We need a strategy, a way into this. Some kind of - ticking point that if we can knock that down, we’ll get all the answers”

Veronica’s eyes suddenly lit up with an idea. “Wait! We don’t know who it is that threatened my dad, and put the hit on Josie. But we do know that these same people must have been behind whoever hacked and leaked the ‘photos’, right?”

“Yes..” they nodded slowly.

“So, isn’t technology your specialty? Track back whoever leaked them, then.. boom we have our culprits”

There was a silence in the air. Archie smiled slowly, lips broadening and his eyes twinkling. *Smart thinking, Ronnie.*

“That’s a good idea” Jughead voiced. “Just how do we find out who did that? It’s been months and the photos have been on so many platforms it’ll be impossible to find the original source”

“Cheryl told me the gossip pot on Instagram posted it first - isn’t that like a clue?”

“Had to be a school kid?” Archie put his elbows on the table “Which adult would know much less use the school’s trashy gossip account?”

Veronica could feel goosebumps on her neck. If they’re actually going to find out who this person is, and it is someone from school - well she couldn’t be ready for whatever painful feeling will come.

“But isn’t this a legitimate business deal? Why would kids from school be part of any of it? That doesn’t make sense” Betty reasoned. She had one elbow folded to herself almost protectively.

“Parents using their kids as tools isn’t unheard of” Jughead grunted. “So what do I do? Just contact the damn ninth graders who run this piece of trash?”

“I don’t know, can they be bribed?” Veronica asked as she peeked around Jughead’s laptop. Betty and Archie were had also pulled their chairs towards him and were looking closely.

“I’ll try. Here goes nothing”

**I need exclusive information. On the nudes leaked of Veronica Lodge.** He typed

“Seriously? Nudes?” She didn’t look amused

“What?” He asked defensively “That’s what ninth graders refer to it as. We have to relate to them. That’s essentially what it is anyways -“

He stopped as soon as Veronica’s palm came in contact with the back of his head. “ - Ow!”

They replied quickly, within seconds.

**Wht 4?**

*I’m Jughead Jones, what else will I be needing information for? An article on the Red&Black.*

He glanced at Veronica for approval before sending.
They held their breaths in anticipation for the next message, focusing fiercely on every movement of the little speech bubble.

_We can’t leak the tips ppl give act so, no._

“Damn it”

“Bribery!” Veronica reminded him with a slap on the shoulder.

“Okay! Stop hitting me”

_A hundred bucks for one question. And this stays between us._

200.

“Seriously?”

“Whatever Jug, just say yes!” Archie goaded “We can pay whatever they want” it sounded stupid saying since these are literal children, but they’re desperate for answers right now.

_Fine._

_Ok, ask ur question._

_Who sent the tip, those pictures?_

_It was an iMessage act, sent to the phone numb in our bio._

“Fuck, am I the only one who feels really dumb and lame right now?” Jughead looked up at the three heads hovering above him.

“Nope. Totally in the same boat. Feels like we’re bartering with petty twelve year olds”

“We literally kind of are, V” Betty reminded her. “Just ask what number sent it, Jug”

With a sigh, he punched in the next two hundred dollar worth question.

_Can I have the number._

Surprisingly, there weren’t any qualms and they received the ten digits easily. “Wow. Okay, what
“Ask them where they bank and now let’s call the damn number!” Veronica scrambled for her
iPhone sitting on the table. Her fingers were practically shaking with nerves. All of them typed the
number out, checking to see if any of them had it in their contacts.

As she hit call and also the speaker button, they waited patiently. There wasn’t even a ring. It went
straight to voicemail.

“Okay, well this just leads us back to square one” Archie said.

“No it doesn’t. How do we track phone numbers? Google it Jug, right now” Veronica demanded.

They weren’t going to give up yet. They literally had it, just in the palm of their hands. “You guys
read up on that, and Betty and I will look for shit regarding business disguises. This could be
someone we know, just covering themselves”

So they sat on opposite ends of the table, Veronica had Archie’s laptop propped on her lap while
she and Betty read each site on undercover business tactics out there. In front of them Jughead and
Archie sat engrossed with finding every possible way to track someone down with just a phone
number. It didn’t help that they had no idea who they were looking for, or any specific location.
The sound of utensils clanking against plate as Archie and Jughead took angry bites of maple syrup
drenched pancakes every five seconds was only slightly irritating to the girls’ ears.

But it kept them in focus too, and after a solid half hour their brains were going to explode from
reading anymore.

“Alright that’s it. What have you figured out? What we know so far is.. people doing undercover
business deals can use other people as their puppets when meeting to exchange money, materials,
or send messages. So basically even if we catch this person, he or she could just be a puppet being
controlled by it’s master. And.. in many cases someone trying to not be caught will use codenames
as their disguise” Veronica put the laptop aside, taking a long drink of fresh orange juice.

“That sounds horrific” Jughead shuddered.

“And also” Betty adds on, a pen and notepad propped on her legs. “There’s a thing called a
caporegime - which is a rank in a mafia army which we know is reaching, but it seems believable.
Basically a caporegime is the third in line of rank, he does orders issues by the boss. Basically a
puppet too”

“This all is really bizarre, you know that right?” Archie looked at both the girls like he couldn’t
believe them - well because he couldn’t. Mafia, puppets, seriously?

“Bizarre, but possible Archiekins. That’s how the big boss never gets caught, because all his little
soldiers are the ones doing their fucking dirty work for them”

“Okay.” Jughead put his hands down on the table and took this in seriously “If this dirty work was
done by a freaking capo whatever, that means this phone number is theirs, right?”

“Probably, yeah”

“So none of us know this number, but surely people in the ‘business world’ would right?”
“So..?”

“So, wanna go searching Manfred Muggs’ contact list?” he suggested not so slyly.

“Are we even sure the person behind this is Mr Muggs?” Archie asked.

“Yes!” Betty screamed, exasperated. “He has every motive to!”

“No, we just naturally surmised!” Veronica stood up. “Look all I’m saying is, it could not be him. And there’s no way to get into Muggs’ contacts, but maybe my dad has this number too? Wouldn’t hurt to search his office, right?”

(x.x.x.x)

Being at the Penthouse, all four of them, is even more chaotic than you’d expect. Hiram and Hermione had left for yoga therapy supposedly, so they have access but cameras here are harder to glitch. It’s all connected to the entire hotel system, and breaking into that would be like trying to find a needle in a haystack.

“What does it matter? I’ll just go in. I’m his daughter” Veronica shrugged. Even she didn’t believe herself though, not by a long shot.

“Yeah, it does matter. He’ll know you snooped and get into major trouble, Ronnie!” Archie reached out and held both her hands. Looking down at them, Veronica had the most revolting idea that made her bite her lip. “What, what is it?”

“Just..” she trailed off and sighed, holding Archie’s fingers in hers and taking a look at the dark hallway leading to his study. Right now the four of them stood in the living room - away from cameras that could expose their presence here. We don’t have much choice, and this is the best option. “Jug and Betty stay here. Don’t move, Archie and I will go, okay?”

“Are you serious? No, V. You can’t get caught snooping by your dad and Archie isn’t even supposed to be in this building”

“I have a plan’ she says determinedly, a way neither of them can object to. Shit plan, but it’ll work. Still confused Archie followed behind Veronica with his hand still in hers.

She could see the camera now, a black thing on the corner of the wall and beeping red light. Slowly, she pushes herself back against the wall and steadies herself.

“Ronnie, what the hell are you doing?”

She took Archie’s hands and pulled his body close to hers, as he looked down at her with bleary eyes. He can see the look in her eyes, those fiery black orbs. But it’s different now, that seduction look is there but also something else.

“What..?” He mumbled “Veronica, what are you...”

“Shut up” she whispered gently, using a finger to tip his chin upwards. “Just follow my lead Archie, kiss me.” She reached up and curled her fingers in his red hair, capturing their lips together skilfully. His initial surprise abating, Archie responded, and Veronica put his hands firmly on her thighs.
Now that they’re kissing harder she turns over so they’re in the frame of the camera, she whispers for him to push her against the wall again. Still kissing her he slid his fingers further up, slipping under her short skirt and his hand curving around her ass.

“Make it look hot and desperate” she hissed into his mouth, and he obliged by using both hands to cup her ass and pick her up so she can wrap her legs around him. For a moment as he pushed against her and the zipper of his jeans against her core she felt herself respond, but then he was moving closer to the study door and she hopped off him.

“Wanna make it in daddy’s study? Come on, it’ll be fun” Veronica said loudly, not too loud, just enough for the camera to pick it up. She motioned with her finger for Archie to come closer and he did, hands circling around and lifting her swiftly just as Veronica opened the door behind her and they stumbled inside. She kept kissing him until they pushed the door back closed and Veronica pushed Archie’s arms away so she could stand.

“Done. There’s no cameras in here” she yanked her skirt back down and didn’t meet Archie’s eyes, looking around the place.

“And it worked, I think. Your dad will kill me if he sees it, but he won’t know you snooped. Good idea Ronnie”

“Yeah, whatever. Help me look for contact lists or whatever” she started opening the drawers and Archie bent down to help her.

There’s so many papers, documents, files. Admittedly the study is actually a beautiful place, in a terrifying way. Its so neat that Veronica starts to worry he might notice they moved stuff, so she reminds him to remember how it all was at first. Its so neat, Veronica starts fearing her father has some kind of twisted mess underneath all this perfection. It’s too neat and clean to be real.

His study is of course spacious, shelves of books both teens probably can’t understand a word of. There’s couches with a coffee table in between probably for meetings, and an ultra minibar that he keeps the Lodge labelled rum inside. On his desk there’s a huge Mac and lots of equipment, a large portrait of Veronica behind it that freaks both of them out. He even has a fireplace for gods sake.

“Here, Ronnie” Archie pointed to the phone on his desk, moving it only slightly to reveal a black binder “Jackpot.”

Opening it, there were names of people - some recognisable and some unfamiliar, in alphabetical order with their phone numbers in the column next to it. His fingers were feather light as he flipped the page, sun shining bright like a revelation on the words. They stood close to each other until one name appeared that indicated this to be legit.

F. Andrews. With his phone number written next to it.

“That’s it. We can’t stay here long, let’s look through it with Betty and Jughead” Veronica breathed, snatching up the book and closing it. “There doesn’t seem to be any piece of documentation that I understand - god this is harder than I thought it’d be”

“Don’t worry, we’ll figure this out” he stroked silky hair languidly. The feeling of his fingers in her hair making everything fuzzy. “But how will we get the book back in here?”

“You’re right. Let’s just snap photos of it all and leave”

They closed the study door back carefully, making sure to walk a little jumpily in front of the
cameras like they’d just done something bad.

“There you guys are! It’s been forever. What did you find?” Betty stood up.

“Only a book filled with contact numbers, we got pictures but there’s a ton so I’ll airdrop it to you guys and we search through this together.”

“Okay” Jughead agreed. “Nothing else?”

Archie shook his head “Every piece of paper looks the same, like it’s written in code”

So they sat there in the second floor living room with the phone number that sent the photos glued in their mind, scrolling carefully through each contact name to find a match. It had to be hours later, or at least felt that way, when Jughead sat up straight fast as whiplash causing the rest to flinch.

Blinking, Betty looked at him intently “Did you find it?”

“I did!” He almost screams.

“Shhh Polly doesn’t know we’re here”

“Look. 213-652-8000. There it is! But.. the contact it’s written under is... sugarman”

“Sugarman? Are you serious?” Veronica raised a very unamused brow. She didn’t get so far into this just to have it mock her. “What the fuck is a sugarman?”

“Obviously a code name!” Archie suddenly sat up straighter. “Isn’t that what you guys said, people who want to hide their identity, to not get caught, use code names?”

“Okay well we have no idea who sugarman really is therefore - this investigation is a lost cause” Betty held her head in her hands. This feels bad. Really bad.

“I’m sorry, Ronnie” Archie placed his hand over her delicate one. “We all are” she let him put it there for a moment, not until snatching her hand back and throwing one of the pillows on the couch so hard it startled them all.

“Fuck!” Veronica screamed, fully not caring now if Polly came down and saw them sleuthing for confidential information. “Fuck, fuck, fuck”

“What is it, V?”

She felt like she was reaching, grasping at something and barely losing it. Like chasing after the rainbow, it never ended, you never caught up. But you could see it. She can feel it, just there but what the hell is it?!

“I feel like I just know it.. I feel like I’ve heard that somewhere before. It sound so familiar!”

“V, it feels like we’re grasping at straws now..”

“No.” She insisted. “I’ve heard that name. I’ve heard it, I just don’t know where I’ve heard it from” She turned away from them, letting the curtain of black hair obstruct everyone else from her view so she could think.
As morning befalls of the highly anticipated and hugely stressed Ivy Representative get together, every Junior student at Raffles Institution and Costal Preparatory is up bright and early. There’s much to prepare today, perfectly planned outfits to be worn, eating a well balanced breakfast, making sure you look your absolute best. There’s no room for imperfections today, Veronica reminds herself while placing her headband on securely and spraying more hair product.

As stressful as yesterday was today none of that can be shown, and she’d tried her utter best to. Got a massage last night, last minute facial, manicure, even did yoga to relax her mind. She’s pinned into the velvet blue dress that’s been sitting on her mannequin for weeks, and she really likes the colour and cut of it.

I look perfect.

“Wow...you look gorgeous Veronica!” The voice of Polly shocked her out of a vain reverie. “I mean you always do, but - I’m sure no one will hesitate to put you on their waiting list”

“Brains, etiquette and achievements will get me into college - not looks. But you’re right, and I’m confident of today anyway. My parents went to Columbia and Yale so”

She pursed her lips in the mirror. “You ready too? What are the seniors supposed to do, anyway?”

“Just greeting guests and adding to camaraderie I suppose. I think the hardest part will be avoiding Jason today” her blue eyes turned all weary.

“You don’t have to avoid him” Veronica says, picking her phone up from the table and standing at full height. She opened the left drawer to get something, but stopped short. “That’s weird”

“What?”

“My vaporiser.. it’s not here. I must have left it somewhere, alright see you at school!”

(Betty, what happens today is critical for your chance at a good college. Grades are important, extra curriculars, athletics, maintaining a decent character - is hugely important. They do look at that.”

“Mom, I’ve already done all that. And I’ll keep doing it - today is just for us to get to know and hopefully appeal to the representatives but it’s not everything.” Betty tried to explain to her mother, blending her foundation in the mirror.

“You’ve accomplished so much!” Her voice breaks a little, sitting legs crossed on the edge of her daughter’s bed. “You have made dad and I so proud, Elizabeth. I know you’re going to get into a good college and start living your dream, and I just don’t want anything jeopardising that.”

There was a good deal of unspoken words hanging between them, ever since the night Alice
kicked Polly out of the house. She’s yet to ask where her oldest daughter is living and it all makes Betty very mad - she knows this all too well. This pretending, putting on a fake facade, it’s natural for The Cooper family. It’s what they used to do back in Riverdale. When everything blew up, and now? Mom and dad don’t even mention Chic to other people.

Betty has a lingering fear that they might do the same thing to Polly, abandon her and never bring her up again just because she fell out of line.

Two down, one to go. Of course her parents would just perish a child who didn’t conform into this perfect mold. But this is the first time her mom has spoken to her since then, other than mumbles and grunts, so she kind of doesn’t want to bring it up.

“I mean just think of your poor sister. She was such a shining star before she let that Blossom boy ruin her”

There it is.

“Mom I’m not Polly” Betty told her blatantly. She got up and went into the closet, searching for that headband Veronica and her agreed to wear today.

It’s said so quietly, yet sternly, and Betty hears it. “You missed curfew last night”

“By seven minutes. And I was with Veronica, nothing happened”

“I don’t like you associating with that girl either. Kids like the Blossoms and Veronica Lodge are what get you hauled away from all the great opportunities, Betty I’m serious.”

“Well too bad mom she’s my friend!” She felt a shock of defensiveness as she twirled around and faced her mother. She stocked across the room and started throwing things in her purse quickly, wanting to leave as fast as possible.

Her shoulders were so tense she didn’t even notice Alice walking up to her, flinching when she felt the hand on her shoulder. She gasped so loud it became embarrassing for both of them.

“That’s lovely dear” she indicated to the silk headband in Betty’s hair, complimenting the colour of her hair and eyes beautifully. “I haven’t seen you put your hair up, like you usually do, in a while”

“I bought it with Veronica in New York. And I like it better this way, mom. I’ll see you after school” she moved aside and swung her bag up, taking the fluffy bath robe off and leaving before Alice can comment on her outfit. I like it better this way.

(x.x.x.x)

“For anybody who dreams to attend an Ivy League, the Ivy Representatives get together is the most important event of your life” Jughead is tapping his knee with a book set on it, hands keep reaching up to run through his dark hair like a nervous tick. “You’ll see when you’re a junior. No pressure though”

Jellybean laughs, just as the limousine pulls up to Costal Preparatory. The school she was supposed to attend, but decided not to. This school is both her dad and Jughead’s livelihood, they’re both respected and popular. Only Juniors and Seniors are supposed to attend, but since their dad is coming to talk to some old friends as well, Jellybean put on her prettiest dress and finest jewellery and tagged along.
“NYU will love you, or Brown or whatever. You’re practically the most sickeningly melancholic, uptight, melodramatic perfectionist teenage boy in the world.”

“I’m not nervous!” His finger stops twirling a curl, and Jellybean cocks her arched eyebrows at him passively.

“Sure thing. Just remember to smile more, kay? Your face gets scary when it goes all bitch mode”

“Not helping”

“Not trying to” she grinned, straightening the Prep school badge on his breast pocket and readjusting his tie.

As soon as the car stops a doorman opens their limousine, Jughead steps out and Jellybean follows suit. The sky is a little overcast but everybody is smiling and chatting eagerly, so the energy beseeches all gloominess. FP Jones puts down the phone and joins his two kids, walking up the stone steps into his old school.

“That was just your mom, Jug. She’s proud of you. And praying everything goes well today” he gave the sixteen year old boy a pat on the back.

FP Jones II is one of those older men you could kind of consider hot, Jellybean supposes because her friends always say that and she gets so grossed out. He has twinkling eyes and dark hair, all five foot ten of masculinity and debonair.

Jughead shakes off his insecurity as soon as he sees some girls talking to who he assumes is the first drabble of college deans and ushers. “Yeah, of course dad. I have no doubts”

They walk up to the rooftop and there’s drinks and a stage and all these very serious looking people in suits and dresses. The same kids Jughead has seen drunk off their faces are prim and proper with doll face smiles. He assesses himself dives straight into it.

“Believe me son you don’t have to be embarrassed. When I was your age, I could barely speak in a room of people. You’re well skilled” Fred Andrews turned around and put a hand on his son’s knee, the city moving past them in their town car.

“I guess I’m just worried - what if they don’t like what I say?”

He leans his head back against black leather, stares out the window to see Costal Preparatory come into view. The Ivy Reps take place here, so all of them will be accumulating at the prep school instead. Archie rarely gets nervous about talking to people; he’s vivacious and sociable and usually people like talking to him just because he’s attractive, but these aren’t just anyone. They’re literally here to judge if he’s worthy of a position at their college.

“They will” Mary Andrews assures “They just haven’t met you yet. And there is nobody more qualified, more well rounded. You have excellent grades and talent, you’re the quarterback of a winning football team, and the spotlight doesn’t faze you. Above all, you’re an Andrews. You have that to fall back on”

Archie feels his stomach turning as they step out of the car and are swarmed by the Seniors greeting arriving guests, knowing this is all part of the plan.
Graduate Raffles, Get into college, start booking jobs and reaching out, soon I’ll have everything.

Everything except her, Archie thinks when he sees The Lodges walk onto the rooftop of Costal Prep. Veronica looks stunning, the picture of perfection as always, when she stands next to her equally - as - intimidating parents. The memory of them kissing to get into Hiram’s office yesterday flashes into his mind and Archie scratches his neck.

“There are The Lodges. Come, Mr and Mrs Lodge. Mr St Clair is waiting for you to join the board on stage before starting the assembly” Jenna Kirsten, one of the prep school seniors approaches them almost immediately.

Archie scrunched his nose. Since when are The Lodges on any board of Costal Prep? Is it because they’re doing business with The St Clairs?

“Well of course” Hermione turned to her side and gave Veronica a kiss on the cheek, walking closer to him. “Remember honey, be on your best behaviour. I think I just saw Marvin Alexander, oh yes, right there by the fountain. Go over there, Veronica.”

“Yes, mother” she sighed at the fretting “How many times do I have to tell you? It is my sole mission in life to impress that NYU Representative”

“NYU? I thought we always talked about Yale!” she whispered at last just before Hiram led her towards the stage.

“Oh my god, don’t tell me it started already!” Betty came up to them both before Archie could say hello to Veronica. The blonde girl looked much more polished than her average day ensemble.

“Nope, we’re just starting” Veronica reaches out to link their arms together “My parents are just up there because they’re sponsoring this.”

“Seriously?” Archie muttered closer to Veronica’s hair, their eyes locked on her parents up front “The plot thickens. As does the deal”

As soon as the little speech is over, the party starts and people are mingling. There’s gentle acoustic music playing and the Seniors are smiling while serving drinks and refreshments, taking photos. Veronica has taken the instant opportunity to speak to NYU’s Tisch representative, which is the same one Jughead and Archie had planned to talk to - but they let Veronica take her time, laughing and chatting with each other. Betty is walking around repeating to herself everything that Veronica had taught her, fingers twirling the ends of her blonde hair nervously.

Hiram Lodge bid a farewell to one of the library endorsements on Yale campus when he sees his daughter talking to an unfamiliar face. Yes, that has to be Veronica. She’s wearing an electric blue velvet dress you could spot a mile away. He frowned, realising after a moment that she indeed isn’t speaking with the Yale representative and instead, one from University of New York.

“I’ve seen that production in theatres actually. It’s beautiful, and I heard they were going to turn it into a movie as well!” Veronica smiled broadly

“That’s right, but they might be changing the ending. I don’t know, how do you feel about that? Changing something so classic and engrained in artistic culture?”

She’s about to answer the Tisch rep when Hiram comes up beside them. “Veronica? Oh hello, I’m
Hiram Lodge” he turned to the man in front of them.

He shakes Hiram’s hand, and Veronica can feel herself losing balance on two feet.

“Veronica, I didn’t know you were interested in joining the Tisch school of arts”

She looked at her dad with an angry look on her face “Well there is no other art facility like it, daddy so of course I’m very much leaning towards the option.”

“In fact I didn’t even know you were interested to study in New York. You always talked about how you loved our visits to New Haven. Well! There’s Marvin right there, let’s introduce you dear”

He gently grabbed Veronica’s arm and led her away, much to her displeasure. I knew he’d never forgive me if I didn’t introduce myself to the dean from Yale. She’s pretty sure Betty has taken her place already, and walking pass she can hear Archie talking to an older man by the fountain.

“Well you’re the ideal candidate for Harvard. I’m sure your father has told you all about it”

“He has, but I’m more inclined towards the performing arts conservatory in Manhattan, Juilliard”

Then there’s a lot of talking between everyone. Some students are taking charge, not letting the representative of their chosen college move out of their sight; while other take time to have a conversation with all of them to widen their options and chances. There are special committees and guests of honour as the morning goes on, everyone knows of each other and are comfortable together. But suddenly Veronica finds her parents in a kerfuffle with some interesting people.

“Mom? Dad? Why are you disputing with Mr and Mrs Blossom?” She walked behind a very big maple tree hiding them quite well, but not well enough for Veronica to not notice.

The red headed couple looked like they were deeply disgusted with whatever had just happened, and Hiram Lodge’s eyes blazed with a special kind of hatred. Pulling the sleeve of her blazer back into place, Penelope Blossom shot a dirty look at them.

“Right, why are you disputing with us Hiram? We came as pleasantry to The St Clairs and our kids’ school, not start cat fights”

“Ronnie get back out there. Leave us alone” Hermione warned her.

“What? Mom what the hell is going on?”

“Oh just tell her, Hiram! Quit lying to the girl’s face and using her name for your benefits” Clifford spat back. He’s so much taller than Veronica that when she sees him in this aggressive light, it sends shivers down her spine and she starts backing away anyhow.

What the fuck is he talking about? But her lips can’t move at all.

“That’s enough, Clifford! You come here and make a disgrace of this important gathering to start trouble, and you start a scene in front of my daughter. Get out of here!” Hiram has his fists balled at his sides and Veronica has never seen him so angry before.

Something might have happened if it weren’t for the high pitched voice that came screaming at them.
“Oh my goodness! What is happening? Mummy, daddy are you okay?” It’s Cheryl, with Jason hot on her heels. They’re just as shocked and twice as loud, causing more people to start looking.

“Oh, the cursed Blossom twins swooping in a mess one of them started” Hiram said swiftly.

Hermione hugged her daughter close to her, a protective gesture.

“None of this mess would’ve begun if it wasn’t for you!” Clifford shouted, pointing a finger of accusation straight at the other man’s chest.

“Dad don’t!” Jason pushed forward to stop his father from doing anything regrettable. He struggled but held him back, although Hiram wasn’t wavering in the least.

“Jason! Cheryl! Stop this both of you get back!” It was Penelope who hissed and yanked her son away as she saw many people start to watch whatever was happening. Cheryl looked mortified and Jason glared deeply at Hiram, something that sparked Veronica’s confusion.

As she watched them, Cheryl and Jason and Penelope trying to control them; the way they held each other’s hands and Clifford turned his back sharply to leave - her vision became clearer. She saw them closer, and just like that, something snapped inside her head.

*Oh my fucking god. Oh my fucking -*

Veronica pushed her mother’s hands off and escaped, running back out to the rooftop where of course so many people were looking at her. Some whispers, some buzzing, talking about the commotion. But Veronica only had one person in mind as she ran past everyone else, ignoring their questioning and judgemental stares. She took Betty by the hand and pulled her behind.

“V? What was all that commotion about? It looked like your parents were fighting with The Blossoms”

“They were. And now I know why.”

“What? What are you talking about?” Betty couldn’t quite get it and was even more distracted by Jughead and Archie who came rushing up to them with heaving breaths.

“What the hell happened?” Jughead demanded “One minute I’m actually having a good time and then the next there’s two feuding families on a live battle”

“Veronica says she knows why they’re fighting and she was just about to tell me” Betty informed them.

Archie could see her eyes losing its focus, spacing out back to where The Blossoms still stood. “Ronnie, what is it?” He asked softly

“It’s part of being a perfectionist...” she trailed off softly. Jughead and Betty exchanged freaked out looks, waiting patiently for her to continue. “I can remember every single cheer routine we’ve done, since the very first one in freshman year. When I used to do acrobatics, I can still perform every single solo in my head now. I can vividly remember every single hotel I’ve ever stayed in, and every locker combination I’ve ever had. My old phone numbers, what I wore every day for the past year. It’s all in my head.”

“That’s... impressive?” Jughead tried. He couldn’t see where this was going.
“That’s how I knew I’d eventually get it. I knew I’ve heard that name. Winter break of our freshman year, like the only sleepover we’ve ever had at Thornhill. Remember when we sat around the fire that night, Archie? Chuck started telling ghost stories. Cheryl said she knew a real ghost. When he’d come to their house, Mrs Blossom would lock them in their room. *The Sugarman.*”

“Oh my god” Archie couldn’t believe this. He sure didn’t remember, but Veronica has a flawless memory.

“My dad said - one of the Blossom twins ‘started this’ and he gave Jason the literal death stare. The start. The start when he leaked the photos, that was the beginning. It’s him. It’s *Jason.*”

(x.x.x.x)

“Cheryl!” Veronica shouted, walking so fast in her six inch heels. Even Jughead, Archie and Betty couldn’t keep up with her.

“Wait - V we can go to principal Weatherbee and tell him about exposure of a student’s private information! Jason will get suspended - or I can write about this in the Blue&Gold, yeah I can do that! Social destruction, isn’t that your favourite thing?” Betty trotted close behind the raven haired girl trying to calm the storm.

The boys eventually caught up too, but without lack of breathlessness. “We’ll do an exposé on this either way!” Jughead said, Betty nodding in agreement.

Veronica felt like her chest was bursting. Part of her felt free, let loose, broken out. Finally getting the answer after so long. But another part just wanted to stare into somebody’s eyes so deep until their soul burned.

“You two can expose him as much as you want. Social destruction isn’t going to cut it for a betrayal like this, this requires confrontation.”

Jason and Cheryl were standing in the middle of the refreshments booth, talking to each other. “V? Betty, Archie, Jughead? What are you guys doing here?” She looked up confusedly.

“I’m here to talk to you, Jason.” The boy in subject was still oblivious, his pale skin making him look beautiful in the morning light. Veronica wasn’t wasting any time, and nobody knew how to react. “I know what you did. What you’ve been doing, how dare you you backstabbing dick!”

“Wait what the hell is happening, V?” Cheryl swooped in with wide brown eyes.

“He’s the one who leaked those photos of me. He’s working with your dad, Cheryl! And he’s been doing this all along” she spat venomously.

The utter shock written on Cheryl’s face would’ve been laughable if the situation wasn’t so toe cramping. “Is.. is that true?” She turned to Jason and stammered.

He couldn’t find words, stumped for once in his life. “Veronica’s parents are planning to buy Costal Prep!” He yelled.

“WHAT?” All five of them said in unison.

“And you know this because you’re parents have been trying to get the deal as well!” Jughead put the pieces together. “The Blossoms are the ones that sent Veronica’s parents the threat. You’ve been doing your father’s dirty work!”
“And responsible for Josie’s accident...” Betty trailed off, the realisation scaring her.

“Jason? What - have you been?”

“Cheryl, Veronica knew all about this too” he held her hands in his “She’s been working with her parents as well, her name is on all those documents. She’s working with them, she’s part of Lodge Industries actively. I’ve only been trying to keep them from buying”

Cheryl turned to Veronica with a look of disbelief so strong it stung. “How are we supposed to believe a fucking word you say, which we even shouldn’t, anyway?” Archie asked bitterly

“Cheryl I didn’t! I swear - I had no idea any of this was even happening until right now! He’s the one who’s been conspiring I swear Cheryl I would never do this.”

“Who do you believe Cheryl, seriously? I would never hurt you” Jason’s voice dripped with sincerity.

“V..” there were tears in her eyes “Have you seriously been working with your parents to buy this school?”

“Cher you have to believe me.” Veronica pleaded. But the red head only moved away when she tried to touch her.

“Jason” Archie warned. He already wanted to pummel the dude’s face in, but seeing him flip over and try to make Veronica the bad guy now was a breaking point. “You’ve been double crossing this whole time and been in on your parents dirty plans, just own up to it! Stop trying to act all innocent for one second!”

“This can’t be true!” Cheryl yelled, a scream of denial and the tears dripping down her skin.

“It is.” Veronica insisted “Jason’s been lying to you”

“Do you even hear yourself right now Veronica?” Her voice broke with a sob.

“Yes, and I’m telling the truth!”

“No I don’t think you are because Jason would never lie to me! He wouldn’t dare!”

Archie was so close to Veronica’s back that he could feel the staggered breaths she was taking. His heart pounding. Like a time bomb about to explode.

“Look you guys maybe we should take this outside people are -“ Betty cut in to try and defuse the situation, unsuccessfully.

“No. There’s nothing left to discuss because she’s a liar, and you guys can all hop on back together” Jason took a step closer firmly.

A liar? Archie’s fingers curled deeply into his palm with a force so terrifyingly hard. “Say that one more time and I swear to god I’ll rip your face apart. Get the fuck out of here, right now.”

“You think you’re making orders now?” Jason asked him “This has nothing to fucking do with you”

“Cheryl you have to believe me” Veronica pleaded again. “Please just -“

“I don’t know” Cheryl whispered softly
“Cher she’s trying to cover her own tracks” The space between all of them grew smaller with each step.

“I’m not!” Veronica wailed

“Don’t pity her” Jason prompted Cheryl “So little time for her to sweep up all her sins”

That’s it. Archie was about to go full force, leaning forward to grab Jason by the coat and land a fist on him - but before anything could happen Jughead swooped in between them and threw the punch first. A loud, painful sound, skin blistering and the glasses behind Jason shattering as he knocked into them.

Everybody was stunned, Archie too surprised to even finish the job. But suddenly Jason has a bleeding nose and all the adults are coming over to ask about what’s happened, and Cheryl turns around and runs away from all of it.

“Cheryl!” Veronica yelled after her. And just like that she’s back to the place of a broken friendship, complimented with blood and the very wrong kind of audience.

Chapter End Notes

THE DRAMA. So Jason’s secret is unravelled,

Post - football game party,

Core four investigating,

Varchie moments, what did you think?
- No pain could match the emptiness of separation, no agony rivalled the unreality of not being with her -

Cheryl and Jason left. Staggering, drips of blood left in the trail of his path. Betty was crying. She didn’t know how, and ran over to Jughead’s side, holding each other close. Her hand flew to her mouth and her tears streamed like raindrops against a car window in the middle of a storm, against unmarred porcelain skin. Veronica and Archie were too astonished to even move. For the first time they were both physically stumped, but not for long. As soon as she heard the sound of her mother coming up to them asking what is going on, Veronica felt her legs move off in the direction of Cheryl.

“Shit, where is she?” She muttered to herself. She’s pretty sure they ran out here, to the front of the school where limousines and cars were parked awaiting their passengers. There was no sign of either Blossom twin. A great deal of her likes to draw attention but not right now, she can’t be bothered by all the people who were attracted by this pretty girl running through school hallway in her six inch heels.

Veronica looked out into the main street. She hesitantly took a step off school grounds. The crunchy leaves beneath her heels crackling as she did so.

“Pretty lady, need a ride?” Some sneery old guy in a cab stopped right where she stood.

“If you don’t drive off right now I’ll make sure you don’t have a job anymore” she bit precisely.

“Yes ma’am” and with that the cab drove off.

Veronica walked further, just moving as far away as she could just because she can. December air feels like silk on her skin. Thinking that this isn’t about Cheryl or Jason anymore, I could just walk away from my whole life right now and never have to deal with it.

Before she could move along with the thought, a ring on her cellphone called her back to her life and furious texts demanding she get home right now.

Back at school, the parental units are already starting to accumulate around the scene of an unlikely trio - Jughead, Archie and Betty. FP Jones is one of the first people to confront them and Jughead would have been able to hear his lecture had the noise of other adults’ quaking hadn’t been so deafening. All he hears is a distant What do you think you’re doing, boy? Punching Jason Blossom?! and his body being shook into consciousness by his dad. That’s when Jughead blinks and he starts seeing again. Betty is still next to him, gripping his fist tightly and he can only assume
looking into her blue eyes right now mirrors his own - scared, breathless, suffocated.

“Mr Jones, I can’t assume you have any good reasoning for these acts of violence! Really, here now? Do you even see all these exalted guests all in one place watching you?!” Principal Dickens of Costal Preparatory had a flame on his words that scared the colour out of all three pairs of eyes, along with some of the watchers.

Before Jughead could attempt to defend his own ass Principal Dickens turned redder in the face when all the representatives started peering in after seeing his raging anger. The old man adjusted his suit coat before pointing a very accusing finger in Jughead’s direction.

“Suspension, Mr Jones. No newspaper and you’d better not try and show your face on school property for the following week”

Jughead sighed, the first real sign of life in him as soon as the infuriated Principal that neither Betty nor Archie were very familiar with, stocked off to pull those reputable deans and representatives away from the scene with swishes of wine glasses and commentary on the live music.

Saying they’ve made a ‘scene’ would be an understatement - he could probably write an article on this alone; the ever attentive prestigious college representatives all scandalised by one student punching another - result of one big commotion starring all the offspring of the wealthy and respected.

“Hermione I don’t think you can just -“

“That’s it FP. End of discussion, all the kids need to get out of this school right now. Go home.”

FP shook his head and walked off, the action stabbing his son hard deep like a knife into his chest. It was so sudden, and sharp, that look like he had given up on him for blowing today up. The still shaking boy turned and locked eyes with Betty, who was blonde and pretty and still clutching his hand comfortingly with dried tears on the apples of her cheeks.

“Elizabeth, isn’t it?” Hermione flicked a wrist to call her “I’ll make sure you have a ride home too.”

“That’s fine, Mrs Lodge. She’ll go with me” Jughead quipped almost instantly. They turned around and left without another word. It would’ve been ‘rude’ had they not already blown the scale off for level of bad etiquette today, and maybe if they were less hauled with humiliation and embarrassment then they would have felt more satisfaction.

“What the hell was that son?” Fred looked the picture of aggravation while a tripping Archie attempted to get into the back of their car and not get photographed looking like a child in trouble - because that’s exactly what he is right now. “And where do you think you’re going?”

“Home! Didn’t you hear Mrs Lodge?”

“I don’t think so - we don’t take orders from Mrs Lodge now you should go back up there and apologise for whatever it is you started”

“You mean what Jason started” Archie whispered, louder than an actual whisper. His dad was leaning against the car door frame with both hands and his mom was still yet to come downstairs, probably talking to one of the English Lit professors she knows or trying absolute best to throw out Archie’s name on every right turf.
At the confused look on Fred’s face - one he wears well and is all too familiar with, Archie took a breath before explaining. “He’s been working with his parents to buy the land this prep school is on and The Lodges are fighting with them to buy it too. He purposely put Ronnie on a blast probably so investors would be put off by The Lodges and I don’t think you should keep working with -“

“There you two are. Now it’s time for Archie to leave, Fred we should stay here and pretend everything is fine still” Mary pulled them both out of the conversation with her clicking heels and wind-swept red hair, gold bangles shaking with her exuberant energy and reaching out to take Fred’s hand in her own.

“Mary” the older Andrews man sighed “Our son should show responsibility... just having him run off like this -“

“Will end today’s trouble short and keep all possibility of more fights starting at a minimum. Wrap it up in a bow while it’s still possible, Fred. He needs to get out of here before the vultures start pressing”

“Fine” he shook his head and started walking back up the steps. With his father’s back turned on him, and the last pitiful look his mother gave washing over him like salt water on a scraped knee, Archie fell back against the leather seats with a huff as the car started moving off.

It’s just a quarter to twelve when Archie’s phone dings with a mass text sent from Veronica to himself, Jughead and a number he assumes is Betty’s. The sound of his phone gives him a distraction from staring out the rainy windows driving down Mountain Park.

**Ronnie Lodge ♥: Why the hell did you do that? You know we never fight physically.**

Was all she said. It’s true, Cheryl liked to joke they’re too pretty and precious to get their hands dirty. Then again Archie already has, but that situation was imperative.

**Jug : The only reason I punched him was so Archie wouldn’t - which would have been infinitely worse.**

He felt the shivers on his back while typing the angry text, Betty reading over his shoulder instead of her own phone tucked in her purse.

Veronica sighed, wide eyes clenching shut after reading Jughead’s response. He was right. And she keeps playing it all in her head, *Jason is working with his parents. My parents forged my signature on a bunch of contracts, they’ve been lying to me. Jason has been double crossing and pretending to be our friend. Cheryl doesn’t believe me. Cheryl hates me.* It all makes her stomach turn and hate herself even more, she throws her head back in the moving car and thinks this city moves way too fast.

(x.x.x.x)

“Hey. This is crazy. All of this is crazy. I need coffee” Veronica showed up to the Blue Atrium lockers slightly out of breath with Givenchy on her left arm and her pupils dilated with uneasy
“Good morning, Ronnie” Archie took his head out of his locker to look at her.

“I mean I can’t even believe my life has taken this toll it’s like everything I ever thought I knew is just shattered - I mean how is it that one year ago Cheryl was my best fucking friend and I was sipping martinis at house parties my parents held dreaming that I would inherit the empire after I pursued my big screen goals one day. How did it come to this?”

“Come on, Ronnie let’s go get the coffee. Or not. You look like you’ve had enough caffeine already.” Archie stopped short before her hardcore death - glaring at him, which he’s learned is better to accept with a pinch of salt than push any further. They start walking towards the cafeteria together. “And what.. exactly is all this madness you’re raving about?”

“My parents, Archie” she said obviously. “What the paper said - it’s all true so they’re acting like suddenly it isn’t their fault that they’re planning to buy the grounds of a prestigious private school to put god knows what in its place? They totally bitched me out about the article over breakfast. And then here? I can’t even pee without girls giving me the suspicious eyes!”

Archie sighed to himself, glancing up at the exact moment to see all of Raffles’ student body staring at them. It’s more than just the fact that Veronica Lodge and Archie Andrews are walking the halls together again, but it’s that everyone here has read the freshly released Blue&Gold article regarding all that is; the machiavellian schemes of Hiram Lodge exposed.

It’s a two page story with deliberate report that Hiram Lodge and Clifford Blossom, two of Los Angeles’ most highly esteemed businessmen are fighting for the land of Costal Prep. And Jason Blossom has been an insider to manipulate, deceive and exploit the Lodge name while working in honour of his family’s business. The Blue&Gold’s words, straight off the print.

“I know. It feels like our life just bursted at the seams. Yeah, one caramel cappuccino with two splenda. decaf.”

Veronica gasped, face filled with actual rage that he could do such a thing.

“Sorry! It’s for your own good, have you looked at yourself? You’re practically twitching”

“Whatever.” She mumbled, staring out at the LA lookout point while Archie scraped some money on the counter for her coffee.

“Oh and to make matters worse your parents just invited my dad and I over for dinner tonight to reconvene or some bullshit. They’re trying to tide the storm”

“Tell me your fucking joking”

“Am not. My dad was just as shocked as everybody else when he read what your parents have been planning so he wants closure - and they’re gonna give it to him.”

“Well - why do we have to be there?”

“So that things don’t get out of hand. You know, so my dad won’t start cursing and your father won’t make death threats in front of us minors”

“So you’re telling me I have to sit through another awkward, disastrous meal but this time with you and your dad? *Fuck.*” Veronica groaned.

They started walking away with the coffee and a butterscotch croissant that Archie picked on,
sipping and chewing in silence between some strangled complaints about how everything has blown up and gone down. They were in that mid section between the East Wing and the cafeteria, where it’s still sunny and shivery when a bouncy blonde girl made her way up to them.

“Hey guys, there you are. Oh, V - have you been up all night? Your one eye looks bigger than the other” Betty showed up and hugged the other girl while voicing her concern, handbag slung over one shoulder and her Calc books in her left hand.

Veronica made a shriek of vexation, pouting her lips.

“Told ya” Archie whispered.

“You know you have no right to say that! The reason I was practically awoken at the crack of dawn by both of my parents faces looming over my bed - the worst way to start your day let me tell you - is because of the exposé that you wrote! Lord, LA Daily should watch their back, a high school newspaper is looking like the next best thing.”

Betty’s lip quivered. “I’m sorry. Did I make matters worse? Jughead’s the one who was so passionate about writing about this, I couldn’t help myself!”

“No, it’s okay” Veronica sighed. “This being public knowledge helps bring attention to all the shit they’re stewing, but if by worse you mean a mass dinner party with all the St Clairs’ associates, connections, investors and business partners then yeah - you made it infinitely worse.”

“Are you serious?” Betty’s pale face lit up like a twinkling star on top of a Christmas tree “That’s-happening? Because of... what Jug and I wrote?”

“Substantially, yes” Archie cocked his head sideways “You put a fire under everyone’s butt. It’s absolute hell, but first bell’s gonna ring so I’ll talk to you guys at lunch”

“Okay, bye. Betty and I have Calculus together” Veronica mustered up a smile, not even enough to bring out the apples of her cheekbones with how forced it is, while Betty remained surprised and unmoving.

“See ya” he planted a kiss on her cheek and walked away, not even realising he did it until sitting down in the middle of English.

Betty raised her eyebrows at the unspoken gesture and Veronica just rolled her eyes and grabbed her hand to lead her to class.

(x.x.x.x)

Veronica drowned out the nerves in her stomach throughout the day with copious amounts of coffee, having Jellybean run to the cafeteria twice between classes before lunch period even began. Right now she feels like her feet are light as clouds but her head is heavy and her neck feels swollen, like she can’t even think straight to save her life. The feeling in her stomach is a completely different story. She wouldn’t be able to process a grain of food without throwing it up with all the caffeinated goodness she’s consumed today.

But even though she can’t eat anything to save her life, and it’s pretty freaking obvious a border has drawn itself between the Royalties yet again; this time courtesy of herself and Archie standing opposite The Blossom twins, they won’t be having lunch together but Veronica slides into the lunch line behind Cheryl anyway (pushing a couple girls back to get there).
“Cheryl, look I really don’t want to be entangled in this feud that our parents are really the ones who started. I know none of this is your fault, and maybe we could put aside the differences of our last names and just be in peace?”

“Veronica” her name rolled off Cheryl’s tongue like an insult. “I’m not inconsistent so I haven’t forgotten what I told you at the game about supporting you through whatever, but this is bigger than just our differences. Or our family’s differences. This is about how I can’t trust anybody anymore so I’d appreciate it if you just left me alone”

The red headed girl slid her lunch tray across the counter and pointed wilfully at the greek salad, motioning to lunch lady that she wants that. Veronica can see her breaking apart even though she never lets their eyes meet.

“Cheryl, I told you. I was never involved in -“

“I don’t wanna hear it Veronica! Now stay away from me before I file a restraining order!”

Her profile twisted up. Lips pursing, eyebrows stringing together, the brown in her eyes fired up to a flaming mahogany and her aristocratic chin jutting out with defiance. All before grabbing her food tray and stocking off leaving all students very scared, and very much staring at Veronica.

_Ugh. This is even harder than I expected. And I expected it to be brain damaging._

“How’d it go down? Cheryl listen to anything you had to say?” Betty asked, wiping her mouth of oil and burger crumbs as Veronica came to sit down.

“She’s still furious at me” is all the deadpanned girl says while gnawing on her full bottom lip.

“How’s it go down? Cheryl listen to anything you had to say?” Betty asked, wiping her mouth of oil and burger crumbs as Veronica came to sit down.

“She’s still furious at me” is all the deadpanned girl says while gnawing on her full bottom lip.

“Here’s your coffee” Jellybean held out another white foam cup (the fourth one today) while balancing a tray of sweet potato burritos and a long island iced tea in the other hand. There’s a bead of sweat glistening her razor sharp hairline, on her otherwise perfect appearance. It’s been a day full of running back and forth and answering relentless questions from clueless and eager nobodys.

“Uh - I think you’ve had enough” Archie cut through with his arm and snatched the coffee cup before Veronica could reach it.

“Yeah why are you drinking so much coffee anyway?” Betty inquired.

“Because it’s not like I can get high in the middle of school and I need some comfort to take my mind off things, okay?” She snapped hastily. Veronica ran a hand through her hair frustratedly and let out a long sigh, the table quieting down with it. “How’s Jughead anyway?” She asked after a beat.

Jellybean’s blue eyes seemed like they were drowning in concern and confusion while she frowned, a hand coming up to rest her pointed chin on. “He’s dealing with it. Dad won’t talk to
him, not much anyway, so he’s spending the day watching old Hollywood movies and ordering Postmates every hour. The only time he’ll leave our movie room is to go to the bathroom and he hasn’t showered since yesterday. It’s honestly depressing to watch him.”

The three of them made a face at the mention of not showering, which was quickly subsided by feeling of sorry for their suspended friend.

“Is your dad going to the big dinner thing with the St Clairs?”

“Probably” Jellybean shrugged “He does business with your parents all the time and I think he’s pretty infiltrated with the St Clairs”

The rest of lunch was spent in small conversation about homework and demanding teachers, none of them wanting to bring up their current issues anymore. The bell rang and everybody started to get up to their lockers or head straight to class, respectively. They bid farewell and good luck to Jellybean, who had a test in History she’d been dreading.

“Pst. There he is” Archie’s sneaker covered foot nudged Veronica’s heeled one under the table, his head indicating in the direction of where Reggie was going to throw some trash away near the water fountain.

“Okay, let’s go” Veronica nodded. She slung her book bag over her shoulder and Archie collected their trays, putting it on the trolley nearby for both of them. “Gotta run, Betts. I’ll see you after school, right?”

“Yep. I’ll meet you at the car”

Archie didn’t question why both girls were going to have to meet up later, mindlessly assuming it was probably some fashion conquest or just a girl thing. If only he knew it was so much more. Veronica didn’t like keeping secrets from Archie, it left a perpetual bad taste in her mouth every time they were together and she couldn’t talk about it, but right now this isn’t her secret to keep.

Archie and Veronica breezed across the courtyard to where Reggie was still having a drink from the water fountain. There was a short line of students behind him, blocking them from just straight approaching him. They exchanged looks only they would understand before awkwardly leaning against the wall faux casually.

“Veronica Lodge... can I have the name of your eyebrow threader? They look spectacular” A short, sophomore girl came up to them, her words spaced out like she was either slow or extremely tired. It made Archie and Veronica glance at each other weirdly either way.

Veronica had never talked to this girl before, but getting inadvertent compliments from strangers isn’t exactly unusual. She really had no idea why this girl is talking to them though.

“Uhm.. sure. If I had one?”

Reggie was finally done and walked in his bear-like way past them, wiping his forearm across his face. Archie quickly gained composure and bumped in front of the guy pretending that it was accidental.

“Oh sorry, Reg. Didn’t see you”

Reggie didn’t say anything. He slowly looked at them, from Archie to a wavering Veronica behind him, with these wide brown eyes you would never be able to resist. He was unsure what to say and
so was Archie, of course leaving Veronica to be the bigger person and start talking.

“Look, Reggie. We just wanted to tell you we’re not playing the game Cheryl’s playing, we don’t want anyone to be picking sides so hopefully we can all just be friends. What’s in the Blue&Gold is true.. if you wanted to know”

“I’m not picking any sides either” he cleared his throat before adding “I’m done picking sides. You girls used to play that game all the time it’s exhausting, honestly. If you’re wondering about me, I’m just waiting for my friends to become friends again - and thanking my lucky stars that my dad sells cars instead of properties and he isn’t in any of this mess”

Veronica’s eyebrows flew up so fast they almost got lost in her hairline. Reggie being mature and ethical? Good to see some nice surprises nowadays. Still, he seemed far too mellow contrasting his usual boisterous self.

“Thanks Reg. But this isn’t like the fights Cheryl and I have had in the past, she thinks I’ve been working with my parents to buy the school that’ll send her girlfriend out of town and that I’m accusing her beloved brother of betraying her.”

“Don’t wanna get into it” Reggie threw his hands up. “But you should probably know - Josie’s getting released from the hospital tomorrow so I’m going out to New York. And uh.. Cheryl will be coming too. She said she needs to escape and some shit, but of course the invitation’s extended to you guys too. Jason has a youth society thing though, so he’s not coming.”

A flicker went in Veronica’s heart. She does want to see Josie. She wants to skip another day of school and fly to New York with her friends and forget all of this tiring shit back home, but that isn’t an option right now and it almost brings tears to her eyes.

“Yeah - it’s okay. I don’t think so” she said quietly

“We should be in LA anyway while our parents are having their big meeting tomorrow, it just feels better.” Archie nodded.

“Definitely. You guys should stay home and clean this mess, it seems really bad. And Cheryl’s a lot more tolerable when it’s just the two of us anyway.”

“Okay, give her our well wishes. And bring her home safely” Veronica couldn’t imagine what Josie would have to say when she gets home, but their city isn’t the same as when she left.

(x.x.x.x)

At two forty five Veronica finally made it out of the school building and Betty was already waiting for her in Andre’s car. The two girls headed straight to the Pembroke. Since Polly had made the decision to keep this baby, and book a doctor’s appointment out of state, she was also in better emotional state to live alone. Veronica had paid for a room on the Pembroke Honours level, the best service for her bestie’s sister. It actually worked out just perfectly, in time for Hiram and Hermione’s big plan to be exposed and shining a light in their house - she can’t imagine them going upstairs to wake her and finding Polly sleeping in the ensuite being a good situation. So she’d helped to settle Polly with a room for the time being, and Betty continues to come over everyday after school for visits.

Sitting in the car and watching the familiar scenery blur by, Veronica finally has time to think. She
doesn’t agree with Polly keeping this baby a secret from Jason, but now that it’s proven what a shitty guy he is - Veronica isn’t too sure either.

He still has a right to know he’ll be having a kid, doesn’t he?

Veronica can’t say she knows Jason very well now after all, but she does know how heartbroken he’ll be if he finds out he won’t be a part of his baby’s life.

The two teens stop in room 1617- Veronica hangs around so she doesn’t have to face her parents just yet.

“Polly!” Betty had shrieked as soon as they opened the door “How did the appointment go? What did you tell the school you were absent for? Is the baby healthy? Are you healthy?”

“Yes, Polly..” Veronica sat down gingerly on the edge of the white sheets. The hotel room is very neat but Veronica feels out of place and resists to play with the hem of her skirt. “How did it go?”

“Relax, Betty. Everything went fine. Doctor Dwyer was really pleasant, he gave a lot of advice about nutrition and going through these first few stages - he even gave me the card for a family advisor. I’m really thinking about going”

“What the hell would that be for?” Betty’s brows furrowed in confusion “Why do you need an advisor?”

“To talk. He knows Jason isn’t involved.. and neither are mom and dad. I don’t have any source of income either, and I’m still in high school. Betty right now I’ll be taking any help that comes my way. This advisor has a program system for teen moms to attend school while they watch the baby. But - we’ll figure it out later.”

She placed the pamphlet of what Veronica assumed to be the family advisor’s whole program thing back on the table upon seeing Betty’s unsettlement with the issue. Veronica isn’t sure why Betty is so defensive about the whole thing, but she guesses no one is really correct in how to react right now. If anything, Polly is being extremely calm and mature for someone who literally has lost everything and will continue to lose, if not treaded carefully.

Just the thought of it makes Veronica shiver. She subconsciously placed a hand on her flat toned stomach, looking elsewhere. For how much she and Archie used to have sex all the time, she thanks all the good luck stars that she’s never been in such a scary position. She can’t even imagine it. Of course having a baby one day would be... wonderful, but right now she has so many dreams and aspirations and goals she can’t imagine what it would be like to have that all halted by a beautiful cuddly baby.

“But you guys... the best thing is. Doctor Dwyer did an ultrasound. And you won’t believe this, it’s twins! I’m having twins!”

Polly’s entire face lit up with a bursting pride and joy that immediately made Veronica realise what makes her give everything up, she... she loves the baby. Babies.
Twins.

A mini Jason, a mini Polly. Two little girls or two little boys, or one of each like a replica of Cheryl and Jason. She can imagine fiery red hair or maybe streaked in blonde and twinkling blue eyes and little delicate limbs, toothless grins.

It endears her that something so small can have such an impact on somebody’s life, and how easily it was for Polly to accept that she loved them and wants them and she doesn’t mind losing everything for them.

*If only one day I could find that part in me, that loves someone like that.*

“Oh my gosh Polly!” Betty flailed her arms and enveloped her sister in a giant hug. They both laughed and cried and held onto each other. “Twins? Oh my - hi babies, this is your auntie Betty! I cannot believe you’re really there”

(x.x.x.x)

“Veronica! What a nice surprise, you’re helping set the table. I feel like you haven’t done this since you were twelve. I thought you were over all this.”

Veronica rolled her eyes and placed the last fork and spoon set into place. “You know I’m busy mom. School and cheer.”

“Mmhm.” Hermione replied. “I just like seeing you do it. So what exactly prompted you to be such a perfect little daughter this particular evening?”

Veronica followed her mother to the kitchen, hopping up onto the kitchen island and dangling her bare legs. “Well Archie told me we’re having a special dinner and I wanted to make sure everything goes as smoothly as possible and everyone’s in the best possible mood. I don’t wanna see daddy’s head explode.”

Hermione’s face darkened, glaring up at her daughter while she poked in the rotisserie chicken. “Your father’s head isn’t going to explode. Because I’ll make sure of it. Now, no more bringing this up you understand? Fred and Archie will be over to have a civilized dinner and then we’ll go to the study to discuss business, don’t try and bring yourself or Archie into it. You’ve already done enough”

Veronica felt all the anger and slight guilt creep up but she didn’t want to push it, really witnessing a fight happen would be the ultimate end of her. And a far from pretty one. So she just rolls her eyes instead. “Where is daddy?”

“In his study, taking a phone call. He gets so worked up when he’s on business calls, you know that.”

Just then, a text message from Archie saying that he and his father have arrived came to Veronica’s
phone. But she wouldn’t know, since she’d tucked it into the fruit bowl where she always hides it when she knows her parents don’t like her staring at her phone during dinner.

“Mom, can I ask you something?” Veronica could just hear her heart beating as her knuckles whitened around the marble island.

“What is it, honey?” Hermione sighed.

“Do you.. do you- do you love daddy?” She blurted out.

“What?” Hermione turned around and faced her daughter. She looked so pale in an instant and Veronica slowly realised, with her chest heaving up and down, that her mother looks more scared than she is.

“Do you love daddy?” She whispered softly. “I’ve just.. never heard you say it.”

A throat cleared near them that brought both of their attention. “Mrs Lodge, Mr Andrews and his son are waiting in the foyer to see you and Mr Lodge.” The tiny woman announced. Veronica internally sighed. terrible timing.

“Of course, thank you Catherine. We’ll be right there.” Hermione smiled her signature simper and left the rotisserie to rest in the middle of the table, all lit up to lavish perfection. Her heels clicked across the marble floors as she walked around the table.

Veronica jumped off the island and her own heels matched the sound of her mother’s. “Mom wait! You didn’t answer my question. Do you or do you not...” she shook her head. “Do you love hi-"

“Veronica enough!” Hermione raised her hand sharply. “Enough of these obscure quizzes, we have guests. Now go and call your father, please, put this to rest.” She marched off, designer dress swooshing around her knees and a very awoken Veronica left behind.

As much as Hermione had stressed for this to be a civilised dinner, Fred Andrews sure wasn’t having any of it. He perpetrated pleasantries in greeting all the way to the dinner table, but as soon as they took a seat and Veronica and Archie locked their hands under the table, all hell broke loose.

“Okay, the real deal here Hiram. Let’s not skirt around why I’m here. Tell me what’s been floating around, splashed on high school newspapers and online articles embarrassing me is all about. What has Andrews Incorporate actually agreed to do with Lodge Industries?”

Everyone at the table held a breath. Their fingers locked even tighter around each other, and Hermione frowned while Hiram took the honour to speak. “Well, I’ll have the plans brought out right here.”

“Are you serious?” Fred snarled, breeze reading the sheets of contracts and business plans Hiram had set out for him. His ears got red and his brows crossed in anger. “Costal Preparatory is going to be turned into a -“
“Private, for profit, prison” Hiram nodded. Archie could feel the nerves in his stomach fizz up his throat, bracing for whatever would happen.

“Yeah, built on the bones of a highly respected private high school that has existed for generations! What the hell are you really thinking, Hiram? Hermione?”

“We think it’s the best foot forward to extend our financial advances.”

Veronica’s jaw dropped. Money? They’re doing all this for money? She gets that money makes people do crazy things, but her parents have tons of it!

“And what about Lodge Industries? It’ll forever have the shadow of a for profit prison looming over it’s greatness.”

“We never meant for this to go public.” Hiram further explained. Hermione was so quiet it made Veronica irritated. “But after its been... combusted by our kids, now we’re trying to think what the next step will be. That’s what the St Clair dinner is going to be for tomorrow. All our investors, and The Blossoms’ investors will be present as well. To barter. Damage control. Once and for all. Ideally -“

“Ideally I’d like to no longer have any part in this deal. You can turn this historical school into a prison, that’s your call. But no way am I having any part in this. You’ve used my family and company for leverage without our consent. All the funds, and investments- my well made money-gone!”

“Fred” You could see Hiram start to worry, just a crease in his forehead that was so invisible you wouldn’t have been able to notice it if you didn’t know him, like Archie and Veronica. They knew he wasn’t so confident anymore. “Please let me tell you why and how this was the right move for us to involve you.”

“I’ll have my assistant send the departing papers over first thing tomorrow so you can sign them - and we are leaving, right now. Come on Archie” He stood up making a loud noise with his chair that startled everybody.

Archie and Veronica both swore their hearts ripped into tatters like silk prickled by a million thorns, when their fingers parted underneath the table. Archie can’t even look at her, he avoids looking at Hiram and Hermione, just keeps telling himself one leg in front of the other until they reach the elevator.

Veronica has tears in her eyes, tears she can’t let them see. She wants to scream because they’ve driven him away, and she wants to yell so loud because she’s all alone now. She leaves the table and runs up to her room instead.

(x.x.x.x)

“We are done with that family, Arch. Done. Everything they do is motivated by greed and selfishness. Damn the day I ever step in a room with those people again, I swear” Fred has been saying these same words - or along the same lines - over and over the entire car ride home. It’s embarrassing enough to have him flying out of the Pembrooke and yelling at the valet guy to get their car there, while Archie feels humiliated by the whole scene. But now that he’s gone on the record and berated that family enough for the books, he feels like he can’t breathe in the stuffy
“I can’t stand them - it’s all a whole load of bullshit, and they’re using us for their own benefit like the true fucking bastards they are.”

“Not all of them are, dad” Archie feels the collar of his dress shirt itch the skin on his neck ever so slightly.

When Fred turns and looks at him for the first time in a while, his face red, Archie has to translate it into deeper speech.

“Veronica, dad. She isn’t like that”

Fred’s eyes left his face faster than you could comprehend and looked back out to the road. “God save you, son. Since that article rings true - The Blossoms and The Lodges are just tid for tad. They fight and play games but they’re the same, for all we know Veronica has been in the know this entire time just like that Blossom boy was”

“Dad she wasn’t” Archie pressed, leaning further towards his dad while they sat on opposite ends of the car with a huge space between them.

“I know you love her Arch.” He gritted his teeth. Archie did too. “But she is a Lodge, and after what I’ve seen tonight - no more. Veronica is a shareholder of Lodge Industries, and her signature is on every document to further this deal. You can’t be involved with Veronica, not while you’re under my roof.”

“Then I’m not gonna live under your roof anymore!” Archie yelled. He couldn’t hold back now.

“Excuse me?”

“I get that you’re mad - but you can’t just tell me who I can’t be with -“

“And why exactly is that?” He snapped. Archie couldn’t believe this. He had never seen his dad so angry before. All his life, the fights with mom had to be bad; they’re getting a divorce for god’s sake! But he’s never been as rage filled as he is now.

“Because in two years I’m going to be eighteen - and I’ll be making my own choices, living on my own. You wouldn’t be able to stop me then - I’m not ten years old dad. What’s the difference now?”

The car stopped just in front of their main entrance, and Archie dashed out into the pouring rain before the driver could open the door for him. Outside, the thunder crackled, much like how blazing and gruelling his head feels right now. Fred comes straight after Archie, the two men making it into the house soaking wet. Fred slammed the door shut and a jolt of lightning happened right outside their French windows at the same time.

“Go to your room Archie. I said what I said and as long as you’re not eighteen, that’s the rule you’re going to have to follow”
Veronica?

Absolutely fucking not.

He loses all sense of control and stomps up the stairs, slamming his bedroom door shut so loud it pulled against the hinges, the entire house shaking around him with thunder and lightning.

It was almost three hours later. The sky is completely dark now, so dark that it fills her heart too. There aren’t any sparkly stars glittered, no cool air wafting. It’s rain. Pouring rain, heavy and meaningful against her bedroom windows and around the entire glass hotel. She watches each drop run down from her king sized bed and she tries to count them to calm herself down -

Every car on the road, every mile he’s away from her. Her heart hurts so bad she’s never felt this much before. Veronica suddenly feels like she’s drowning - in her thoughts and fears, in this empty room, in all her loneliness.

For the past three hours she’s sat there and contemplated it all. When she asked her mother about love, she couldn’t even answer. What does that mean? The realisation grows on her so big and large that it truly, deeply, scares her.

Why can’t I say it? FUCK, Veronica! You mess everything up. You couldn’t tell him you loved him, and now there’s absolutely no way for you to be together again. I should’ve never let him go! What is wrong with you?!

When she feels wetness in the corners of her eyes she bounces off the bed, not allowing herself to cry. She picks up the phone before it’s too late and she isn’t even sure what she’s doing, but he
picks up after two rings.

“Veronica?”

His voice is so soft and scared, and her tears spill over the second she hears it. Something about him being so far yet so near, so deep inside her that she won’t ever be able to dig him out of her heart, triggers her to cry and she places a hand over her mouth to muffle any sobs.

“Archie...” did you leave me, forever? Did you really walk out only from my parents or from me, too? Do you still want me? “I’m all alone here and I need you.”

Her voice breaks anyway.

(x.x.x.x)

Archie is careful to step over the window sill - shifting his weight from one leg to the other, not worrying about making noise because his dad’s room is all the way on the other side of the house anyway. Frankly sneaking out of this house isn’t difficult at all, it’s so large you wouldn’t know who’s missing and he could just go out the back gate and be undetected. Archie doesn’t mind if his dad sees the security footage of him sneaking out later, it’ll be too late anyway.

All that matters now is to get to Veronica.

He drives the Audi at an unreal speed, the roads blurring at the edges when all he can think about is how sad and broken Veronica sounded over the phone. The other half of him is still furious, and rebellious, he steps on the gas even harder and lets the car go off at full speed. He knows this isn’t healthy, all these negative emotions and how strongly the influence his actions. But he doesn’t care, he just doesn’t care.

Archie parks his car at the upscale mall next to the Pembrooke, running around its’ perimeter to the back entrance he’s seen a few times before. This isn’t a regular thing, but he’s not totally unfamiliar with it either - that door in the servants’ quarters she can leave unlocked for him.

For some reason Archie hides his face in his hoodie the entire elevator ride up to PH. He’s sure if there was anybody who’s authoritative enough to know he’s not supposed to be here and kick him out the fluorescent flock of red hair would be a dead giveaway - but he does it anyway.

Veronica has snuck down to the first floor and turned off the alarms, so when Archie shows up there isn’t a ding at the elevator signifying someone is here. He steps inside, slowly, carefully. The marble floor feels cold even though he’s wearing shoes. Everything feels cold. And dark. This Penthouse looks like the epitome of modern and top-notch fancy by day, but at night, it’s real colours come out. Dark, cold, and eery. There isn’t an air of homeliness or humanity, it stenches of stark hostility.
When he’s slowly stepped all the way to the third floor, he creaks the door open and sees her standing in the middle of it.

Wearing those ridiculous flimsy pieces of silk she calls sleepwear, all he could see was the back of her bare legs and the stiffness of her posture as she stared out the window. Archie cleared his throat softly, causing Veronica to turn around.

She thought she’d want to jump into his arms and cry, but now that he’s here and the sound of raindrops fill their ears together she doesn’t know if that’s the smartest thing to do anymore. Archie’s eyes connected with hers from across the room and he knew... they didn’t hold the same blankness or emptiness he’s seen a billion times when Veronica is trying to hide how sad she is. They look shaken. They look broken, down casted, dull.

Most importantly, they were watery with tears that shimmered at him.

This obviously has to do with the meeting earlier and him walking out, but Archie can’t help but think she’s sad about so much more. Maybe everything. From when they broke up. She must’ve not been able to hold it in any longer, or something happened that triggered her to remember everything. Archie felt like he should run to her and bury her head in his chest, because Veronica Lodge is about to cry.

He didn’t have to think about it. Archie slowly walked up to her and he understood every ounce of her pain, the pain that they couldn’t hold on and couldn’t let go because everything just feels so messed up beyond repair. He already knew to curve his hands around her waist and bring her closer to him, ready for her cheek to fall on his chest and embrace her.

Only this time, she didn’t budge. Veronica looked wary even though she had tears gathering in her eyes.

“When you walked out did you really want to leave?” She asked in a slightly shaken voice. Archie couldn’t believe what she was asking. After all this time, the only way he’d leave her is if he had lost his mind. But then he remembers he did leave her, and then he realises why she’s so scared and how much she needs him too. “Why aren’t you saying anything? Is it true, did you really want to leave?”

She sounded more broken the more she talked. His hands left her waist and held her face in them gently, but firmly, shocking her all of a sudden. He looks into her eyes with such a deep intensity it’s scaring her.

“I could never leave you. Do you understand that, Veronica? I would never leave you, even if everything in the whole world was telling me to. Why would you even think that?”

“But because of our parents! Because I can’t- I can’t go there with you.. and because I messed everything up. Because I wreck every single thing in my life and when I had you I couldn’t even bring myself to- and now...” she turned away from him but he caught her by the shoulder and spun her into him wrapping his arms around her tightly. As if any of that could make him leave. As if any of that was enough to drive him out of her life.

“I didn’t leave for any of that, I came back. I’m here with you”

Of course Veronica fought it though.

“Just go Archie! I shouldn’t have called you- just go..” She was struggling against his body and
squirming. But Archie kept holding on. Kept holding on until she screamed out the strangled truth.
“What is wrong with me? Why can’t I say it? What is wrong with me?!”

Then it broke. The dam that was holding everything back just broke. She went limp in his arms and she didn’t sob, but Archie could tell she was crying. She was silent. He felt the dampness through his hoodie. He just held her. In the middle of her room... he just held her.

“Shh.. it’s okay. Nothing’s wrong with you, you’re okay.. it’s okay” he kept muttering into her hair. Simply because of the moment Archie let his eyes drift close from exhaustion sat his head on top of hers as she cradled into his chest.

He didn’t know what was happening, but he knew it was needed, and he didn’t want to be anywhere but right here.

They didn’t move for a while, until Archie snapped his eyes open and squinted at the clock on her nightstand. It was something like 2.30 in the morning. Veronica hadn’t moved at all, so Archie pulled back to look at her face.

“Let’s go to bed, okay?”

“Okay” she barely opened her lips.

He led her slowly to the bed and pulled back the covers. They had both been through so much today, they’d held out for as long as they could. Archie was about to lay down next to her when something small and stuffed was blocking them, he picked it up and gazed at the thing impishly.

His brows knitted together. “Sugar? You still keep her on your bed?” Looking at Veronica a grin started to grow on his lips. This girl had actually kept the teddy bear he’d won her so long ago.

“Shut up” Veronica said tiredly, a faint smile and a roll of her eyes. But even in the dark Archie could see that flush on her skin.

“Sugar.. sugar. You still cuddle her to sleep, Ronnie?” He teased. It only lasted a moment but he made her smile and snatch the bear from his hands, placing it on the nightstand with a little grin still on her lips. She brought the covers up to her chin.

Archie reached over for her remote and turned the light to that dusky hue she best loved sleeping in, adjusting the heat so it was more comfortable, and lastly.. turning on her wall speakers so Close To You by Carpenters wafted in a low volume.

When he finally turned around, Veronica had a full real smile on her face. “Close To You? Seriously?”

“What?” He started crawling on his knees towards her “You always liked falling asleep to this song.”

She was looking up at him and he got that feeling, in the pit of his stomach it made his heart jump. Made it beat faster somehow. The lyrics of the song started playing, a lullaby for her and one he’d sung over and over as well.
Why do birds suddenly appear, every time you are near? Just like me, they long to be close to you.

Why do stars fall down from the sky, every time you walk by? Just like me, they long to be close to you.

“Veronica, my dad never wants me to see you again. He says he’s never going to allow it, and... I’m sure your parents feel the same way” he threaded his fingers through her hair and spoke softly, facing her.

“Yeah” she replied, voice muted and thick.

“But.. it’s not going to be like that. They can say anything they want, they can try to keep us apart. I won’t ever leave you, and that’s just how it’s going to be.”

Veronica didn’t know what to say. She didn’t have anything to say, and it made her hate herself even more. She nodded and laced their fingers together on the soft Egyptian cotton.

“I’m sorry.. Archie. For my parents using your dad, for me.. everything”

“Stop apologising, it’s not your fault. I don’t- I know I was being a jerk for breaking up with you because of that, but honestly I was just too worried that we weren’t ever going to get there. That I was falling way, too deeply in love with you Veronica Lodge. That maybe one day I’d wake up and you’d be over us, I don’t know, and then by then I’d be too deep with you to let you go without hurting myself. I was selfish- but now, I don’t care. I want you, right now and forever and that’s what should have mattered from the beginning.”

She almost wiped out and fainted. This had to be the worst timing, for him to give a speech about spending forever with her right as their parents were starting to hate and feud with each other. Even this very moment is stolen, if her parents were to know he’s here they’d kick him out and ruin his life, but just like Archie said... they can try to keep us apart.

“Archie, can we make a vow?” She swallowed a lump in her throat while straightening her neck against the pillow so she can look into his eyes properly. “That no matter how bad things get with our parents from here on out, whatever the result is at the meeting tomorrow. We’ll protect each other no matter what?”

Archie released his right hand from being intertwined with hers, the other still in her hair. He strokes her cheekbone gently, tenderly. Light as a feather. He nodded without any hesitation, their heartbeats so loud they could almost hear it.

“And in return, promise me.. we’ll never turn into our parents”

She took his hand on her face and wrapped their pinkies together, laughing silently at the childish gesture. She brought their hands to the pillow between them and he kissed her fingers, Veronica’s heart fluttering just seeing his face and his sweetness and all of this, these promises.

“From now on, we’re together against everything else” she let out a sigh and he kissed her
forehead, holding her close as he could. He could feel the moment fleeting.

Veronica had nuzzled into him and slept, but Archie’s eyes were fighting to stay open. He was blinking more often. Trying to stay awake. Trying to wallow in the moment, cherish her.. cherish this. Enjoy all this loveliness and peace before the storm outside could overtake them tomorrow. He tried to stay awake and just stare at her, enjoy it. But before he knew it, darkness overtook his eyes and it was gone.

Chapter End Notes

good ole’ forbidden love.

This is Varchie’s beginning to a steady sail, at least in their relationship.

- I know I made Fred kinda OOC when he was getting mad at Archie, but I think The Lodges using his business image for their own immoral intentions really effed with him so there’s that.

- blossom/cooper twins!! Btw blossoms and coopers have no relation in this fic kay

- What do you guys think of everyone’s state in this chapter? How do you feeel rn

- My tumblr is @ff16xo so feel free to interact there as well :)

_________Fallon
Archie woke up to the sound of clicks on a keypad. It was loud enough to shake him from sleep, as well as the distant sound of *Close To You* still playing at an even lower volume. It’s morning now, there’s light filling the entire room and that’s when Archie squints his eyes and realises. This isn’t his ceiling, and this definitely isn’t his bed.

He turned over slowly with his legs entangled in the purple sheets, eyes trailing up Veronica’s body next to him.

She’s sitting with her back against a couple pillows, phone in hand and her expression way too serious for the morning when he’s still woozy and uncollected. Archie takes a moment to just watch her. He’s sure she knows he has awoken, or would at least guess so since he turned his body to face her, but she’s so engrossed in her phone that she doesn’t tear her bambi eyes away.

He’s watching her for a little while, her silky black hair going past her shoulders and looking flawless even as bed head. Her bottom lip is slightly pursed in either concentration or dissatisfaction and her eyebrows furrow that little bit in the middle. Making her look cross, and fiery and untouchable. She looks so beautiful, Archie is literally entranced.

He wants to reach out and trace the curve of her jaw and watch her melt into it, and feel the softness of her hair on his skin. The morning sunlight makes her eyes look golden and he’s about to reach forward and touch her- but something stops him.

“Who are you texting?”

His voice is much deeper than he expected it to be, probably still sleepy. Veronica doesn’t even look shocked to hear him. She’s seen him staring at her with those puppy dog eyes for the past five minutes but chose to not acknowledge it, although she’s immensely enjoying the way her skin fizzles when he looks at her like that. Like she’s the only girl in the whole entire world, and she’s his.

“Cheryl” she mumbled. Eyes still focused on the screen. “I can’t stand her being mad at me right now. Not when Jason is doing all this shit and our parents are at a war with each other, when your dad is collateral damage to their feud. Not when I know she’s hurting too and not when -“

*Not when Polly’s pregnant with Jason’s babies.*
“It’s okay baby, it’s not your fault.” Archie sat up on one of his elbows and both hands touched her legs, fingers curved around her calfs and finally bringing Veronica to look at him. “You’ve tried everything you can. You know Cheryl, she’s thinking she’s right about denying Jason’s part in any of this but when she realises the truth she’ll be more sorry than ever”

“And when will that be? Tonight? In a week? After either one of our parents has already bought the damn school?”

“What is she saying?” Archie nodded calmly towards the phone in Veronica’s hands. He’s giving her that look with his eyes that makes her give in.

“The only thing I’m getting out of her is, she doesn’t care about anything I’m telling her about Jason-“

“Denying it” Archie rephrased.

“Right” she sighed “and the only way I can make it up to her is to get our parents to drop the deal. Once and for all”

Now Archie has his confused face on. “How are you gonna do that? Without damaging yourself in the process”

“That’s why I’m calling a meeting with Betty and Jughead” she said decidedly.

“Oh boy, you’ve already made up your mind”

“I’m serious, Archie. Even if it weren’t for Cheryl asking me to do this, our parents are ludicrous! That school is everything and more, and our friends are gonna be kicked out when it happens. Costal Prep is a half of Raffles Institution, we’d be losing a lot on our end too”

Archie pursed his lips and sighed internally. He could already tell this was going to be a big plan that would never just go away, despite it’s ability to change their parents mind. But Veronica is right, as she usually is...

“Betty and Jug will meet us in the lobby after school, but now I’ll meet Betty before first period to.. oh my god. School. School! I haven’t even showered!”

“Hey hey wait” Archie tightened his hold around her legs just as she started getting up. Veronica paused, feeling his hands on her legs and that calm look in his eyes. “Not so fast”

“We have to get to school. My parents might still be home. And we have to figure it out before they go to the meeting tonight.”

“You have to stop thinking.. just for a moment” he whispered. Veronica stilled as she felt Archie’s fingers crawl up her leg, eyes still penetrating hers with a deep intensifying stare that makes her only a little bit self conscious.

He pulled her legs so she moved closer to him, the thrill in her heart awakening with it. Veronica couldn’t stop herself from heaving as their faces came close to each other. Everything felt like it was moving slower. Their eyes, his hands, the only thing moving faster than ever was their beating hearts. Archie reached over and gently tucked a strand of loose hair behind her ear.
Veronica brushed their noses together, watching his eyes follow her. “They’ll be waiting for us at school”

“Jughead’s still suspended.. and Betty can wait” Archie whispered against her lips, a thousand emotions swimming around him as he did so. God, he loves this girl.

Veronica moved her head back, surveying him. Archie had taken off his shirt sometime in the middle of the night since he usually sleeps without it and she had to agree - too much thinking and working is giving her a headache. After all, with Archie here in her bed... she can never shake her hunger for him.

Veronica pulled her silk sleepwear over her head, tossing it to the floor, where it fell in one swoop. “You’re right”

Archie’s eyes lit up in response, and the next thing she knew, he pulled her tightly against his bare chest. Her heart started racing wildly the way he was looking down at her, naked body wrapped in his arms. He cupped her face in both of his hands before crashing his lips to hers, months and months of stolen moments and tension and now they’re finally together again.

Veronica moaned as they kissed for real, since getting back together, her skin lighting on fire he moved his hands up and gripped her bare waist, pulling her even tighter against him as their kisses deepened, growing more impossibly desperate with every second.

After a moment, he pulled back, panting in between them. It only lasted for so long as Archie scooped her up in one motion and got off the bed. Veronica made a sound of surprise, not sure where exactly he was taking them. She’d assumed they would’ve laid there on her bed, but Archie apparently had other ideas.

Veronica kept on kissing his neck until they made it into her bathroom, where Archie felt like he could barely make it to the shower before slamming into her. He almost didn’t, leaning her body against the glass shower door and running his fingers through her black hair to pull her back and capture her lips again. The look of want and admiration as his eyes raked over her naked form was one she’d seen many times before. Sure, he’d seen her naked plenty of times, even since they wore broken up. But it’s never been like this.

It’s never felt like this.

“You’re the most beautiful girl in the world” he breathed, sounding as though he really needed to get that off his chest.

She couldn’t help the small smile that crossed her face at the absolute awe with which he was looking at her.

He pushed the shower door open, turning on the hot water. He quickly brought them both into the shower, and Veronica grabbed onto the waistband of his shorts. Archie responded quickly, landing a searing kiss on her lips and groaning in anticipation as she played with the waistband and brushed her hand against his groin.

“Off. Now” she muttered against their kiss, feeling him smile against her lips at her urgency.

Veronica hopped off of him, as both of their hands dropped his boxer briefs to the floor. It was Veronica’s turn to look up and down at him in admiration.

Archie Andrews has pretty much always been perfect, but now he’s grown an inch taller and
gained pounds of muscle, it makes her heart flutter at how lucky she is. *This boy’s all mine.*

She was still too lost in admiring him, running soft fingertips up and down his abs with that coy little smile on his face that it totally shocked her when Archie pulled her into the shower in his arms, shutting the glass door hastily shut behind them.

The hot water cascaded over them and Veronica closed her eyes, leaning back into the spray as Archie started kissing down her neck, sucking gently at the junction of her neck and shoulder before nipping her with his teeth.

She moaned at the sensation, running her hands up and down Archie’s muscled chest. He tipped her head back to kiss her for all he was worth, fingers threading through her now wet hair. Veronica had the same idea and started pulling at the hairs on the nape of his neck to pull him even closer to him, making Archie moan into her mouth.

Veronica didn’t want to stop, but Archie had pulled away and was cupping her cheek in one hand. She groaned in frustration only to open her eyes and see him looking at her that way, which made her lean into his touch and relish it.

“You have no idea how much you mean to me” Archie said softly. He would’ve said the word love, but after last night’s debacle and how much he knows now Veronica can’t bear it, he doesn’t want to upset her. He just wants her to know. Veronica couldn’t help the way her heart skipped either, smiling even wider before landing a demanding kiss on his lips.

“I do” she replied in confirmation, because she really did know. All those things she’s felt for him are way too strong for him to not feel the same way. And she can finally see it now. She’s done shoving it away. She’s embracing it. “But why don’t you show me.”

With that, she unabashedly ran her hands over his chest again and down his stomach, appreciating the way his muscles contracted under her touch. She kept her hands moving further, lower down until she wrapped her hands around him, even more aroused by how hard he already was.

For *her.*

He groaned loudly at her touch as she moved her hand up and down his length, dropping his head on her shoulder and panting heavily. Veronica definitely wanted to hear that sound again, she continued her ministrations, enjoying the feel of him under her hands.

Regaining his composure, Archie started biting down her neck again, his hands gently caressing her body, running over her breasts and squeezing her pliant nipples between his fingers.

Veronica threw her head back again under the shower, making little sounds of pleasure as he moved his head even lower, taking one of her nipples between his teeth.

Archie hummed his approval at her reaction, mouth still burning against her skin, as his free hand moved down lower to finally reach the apex of her legs. Veronica moved her legs further apart to give him more access.

She couldn’t hold back a loud moan as he touched her, his eyes looking into hers with the same satisfaction. Archie moved two fingers inside her while simultaneously her clit with his thumb.

Veronica gasped even louder, her eyes opening wide, panting heavily as Archie moved his fingers even faster, curling up inside and making her world go sideways. He leaned up and kissed her again, moving away from her lips and down the side of her face and jaw.
“So hot” he murmured between kisses, hot breath against her skin. “So perfect.”

“Archie” she panted against his cheek, his lips, his neck “Archie...”

If she wasn’t mistaken, he let out an audible growl at the way she was saying his name.

He continued to move his fingers inside her, faster and faster, and she started to quiver at his touch, clenching down around his fingers. But she wanted to feel him fully, and she couldn’t wait anymore. She moved her hands back up his face, grasping him between her hands as she bit down on his upper lip, pulling it between her teeth.

That time he definitely growled in response to her, sucking down on her bottom lip even harder and turning Veronica on more than she had ever been before.

She had to have him. Now.

“I want you” she whispered heavily against his mouth, looking up at thin with hooded eyes. “I need you.”

Archie made an agreeing noise deep in his throat, looking at her with want and hunger, needing her just as much as she needed him. Without another word, he carefully hoisted her up in one arm as if she were weightless, while bracing himself with his other arm against the shower wall and gently leaning her back against the glass for leverage. She wrapped her legs around her waist tightly.

And then he was pushing into her, she was instantly in oblivion as he kept moving and pushing inside her. Her hands were on his back and her nails are doing some serious damage but Archie can’t bring himself to care when he’s found solitude in her. He slowly slid in and out, gaining speed and creating friction. It must have been great if her moaning and writhing was any indication, and Archie could barely hold himself there too.. he had to keep pushing though. Her face was contorted into pure bliss and one he’d want to see forever.

Archie felt the water falling all around him, stinging only so slightly in the trail of Veronica’s fingernails but he loved it. One hand was holding her up, while the other went down to play with her clit. Veronica thrashed her head side to side, almost concerning him but not caring in the slightest that the she could hit her head too hard on the glass.

“Fuck Ronnie... you’re so tight, god”

She started placing sloppy kisses on his neck and and then brought his lips to hers for a sloppy, aggressive kiss. He couldn’t keep up the kiss and needed to breathe, needed to think.

Her sharp nails were digging harder into his back but it just spurred him on. He gripped her thighs harder and harder until he swore it’d leave some nasty bruises, but she didn’t seem to care and didn’t want him to stop either.

“I’ve got you” he whispered heavily against her ear then, knowing she was about to reach her high “Ronnie.. I’ve got you..”

Veronica came down in his arms after that, clenching down hard as her orgasm took over, crying out as the waves of pleasure washed over her, body shaking from the sheer force of it. Incredible couldn’t even describe how she felt.

Archie was right behind her, she could tell from the way his breath was hitching and his hips were stuttering against her. She rode him out, biting down on his earlobe and laving it with her tongue. Archie fell apart with a loud moan as he finally came, pulsating deep inside.
When their breathing was still coming down, and her arms wrapped loosely around his neck, Veronica and Archie both broke into these relaxed grins at each other.

“Let’s just blow off school today”

(x.x.x.x)

“This isn’t the way to the lobby” Archie said just barely noticing when Veronica led him out the elevator, his arm extended and hand in hers. He hadn’t even noticed they weren’t on the ground floor mostly because he’s in such a zone and his mind isn’t exactly working all that well; honestly Archie was in the mood for a long nap. Post coital bliss you could say. But now while his head is fuzzy and warm and the feeling of Veronica holding his hand, in public, again is really distracting.

“Just follow me” she says over her shoulder, liking how his thumb is making circles around the top of her hand.

“Are you sure Betty and Jughead are meeting us here?”

“Positive, Archiekins. Just trust me alright?”

“This - this is a hotel room” he realised once they stopped. Veronica gave him a you don’t say look.

“Okay, when we go in there I want you to keep yourself one hundred percent cool. Got it?”

Archie started to nod.

“Let me rephrase that. I need you to keep your cool. More so than usual.”

“Ronnie you’re freaking me out. What are we doing here? I thought we were meeting with Jug and Betty to talk about how to end the deal?”

“We are. Just please, please don’t be mad at me.”

She said it with such certainty that his heart hurt, with those big eyes and pouting lips. She looked nervous, like something was on her mind that he didn’t know about.

“Ronnie.. never. We’re in this together, remember?”

She nodded solemnly before turning toward the door and tugging on the collar of her shirt. 1617. That’s the number on the door.

After Veronica barely brushed her fingers against the doorbell, the door flew open and there stood Betty. With her ever bouncing ponytail, nervous expression that matched Veronica’s, and tinge of relief at seeing her face. The girls immediately hugged each other, holding on a tad too long for a simple greeting hug. Something is up. Archie knows that much.

Stepping inside somewhat cautiously, nothing seemed obviously off or weird to him. Just a regular hotel room, pretty neat, Jughead slumping with his arms crossed in a chair and -

well that’s a surprise. Polly, Betty’s sister is sitting on the couch with her legs folded up and a huge
blanket thrown over her body.

“Uhm..” He isn’t sure how to start this thing. It was Veronica’s idea. “Can you tell me what this is about?”

“Wait - what are you guys doing here? Oh god.. intervention or surprise party?” Jughead spoke up, a very judgemental brow raised and you could already see those broody smoke signals coming out his ears.

“Wait you didn’t tell him?” Veronica turned to Betty.

“I’m sorry! I just had to get him here so I told him there’ll be food. I didn’t know how to follow up-but that’s all it took.”

“Okay can someone tell me what’s going on here?” Archie asked, a little louder. “And no offence.. but uh, why exactly are you here?” He motioned somewhere at Polly.

“Nice to meet you too” Polly hummed.

“Betty? Veronica?” Both boys turned to them.

Veronica moved away, standing in front of Polly to shield her from the rest. She needed to make sure Archie and Jughead were paying attention to her.

“We are here to discuss the deal that my parents are entangling themselves in - and how to combust it.” Veronica turned around and said this pointedly to Archie, keeping her tone calm and steady despite everything bubbling inside her. He remained silent, whereas Jughead made a loud sigh of disapproval.

“I’ve already gotten into enough deep shit for this, why not add more right?”

“Juggy.. please just listen” Betty took his hand and pleaded. It was starting to get worrisome because she looked scared, pale and somewhat desperate.

“But before that..” Veronica went on. “We need to show you something first.” She took a step away, slowly, and then moved completely away to reveal Polly again.

Archie didn’t get it. He knows that’s Betty’s older sister, and Jason’s kind of into her and Cheryl hates her, but what does she have to do with anything? He focused on the Betty look-alike closely. He’s never really paid attention to her before, but her cheeks do look hallow and something about her seems.. off. Like maybe she’s sick or extremely stressed and tired, maybe.

It felt like an eternity while Betty let go of Jughead’s hand, standing up and nodding at her sister slowly. She took her hand, all eyes on them, and helped her up.

When the older girl was getting up it resulted in the blanket falling off and just barely her t shirt had rode up but you could clearly see.. the pale skin of what is undoubtedly her swollen stomach.

Jughead’s eyes grew so fast they were the size of saucers in under a millisecond.

That’s what it looks like. No possibility of maybe she had a big lunch, or an unflattering angle, no. She’s pregnant.
After such a long moment of silence Archie still doesn’t know what to say or rather, what he should say. His mind is screaming a million things though. Polly’s pregnant, with Jason’s baby?! What is she doing in the Pembrooke? Did her parents kick her out? How long has Veronica known? Does Jason know? His first instinct is to look at Veronica but he can’t help his eyes are stuck on the huge surprise standing in front of them.

“I’m pregnant. If that’s what you boys are struggling to say. And I’m keeping them, I’m keeping my babies. But Betty says this was necessary and she and Veronica have a plan, and I trust them.” The mother to be states proudly.

She readjusted her t shirt so it covered her stomach fully, and Veronica could feel something rise in her throat she had to swallow down with tears.

“With- with Jason’s?”

“Yes.”

“Does he.. know? Does anyone?”

“No. Not yet. That’s why you’re all here” Veronica replied. She sat down on the bed and pulled Archie to sit next to her, keeping a hand on his arm to keep him calm. “The St Clairs are having a mass meeting at their manor this evening, for two purposes. One, for damage control on the exposé that Betty and Jughead wrote revealing everything. And two, to barter. They’re going to settle the deal once and for all, which means that all parties involved and willing to buy the ground Costal Prep stands on will be there. All the board members, my parents, The Blossoms and all of the investors that support either side. Including your parents, Archie”

“But my dad isn’t investing in Lodge Industries anymore” he pointed out.

“True, but up until last night he had put in tons of money towards the deal on behalf of my parents. Probably why he was so pissed when he found out. But he’s also a major factor in why The St Clairs were leaning towards my parents anyway, so he’ll be there.”

“My dad is too.” Jughead spoke up. He had his hands together, elbows on the top of his thighs as he leaned forward in a thinking motion. “He did business with your parents a lot, Veronica”

“Right.” She breathed. “And guys, I think we might just be able to catch Jason in the act. He supposedly isn’t going with Reggie and Cheryl to pick up Josie because he has a ‘youth society thing’ which is total bullshit and we know it. He’s gonna be at the meeting”

Her eyes immediately went to Polly after that, not realising she’d just so openly talked about Jason being a part of this with her here. But sure enough the blonde girl wasn’t the least bit surprised, same calm and cool expression adorning her face. Like she’d accepted he was. Like she couldn’t help it anymore.

“Now, I’m not going to let this deal happen. After tonight, it’s over. Costal Prep will be closed down soon and either my parents or The Blossoms will be in full ownership of whatever it is they intend to do with that place. All our legacies, our memories, our credibilities. It’ll be gone.”

“We have to come together and stop them, together.” Betty added in

“So, we need to crash the party -“

“Ronnie, I know this is a huge deal. And it’ll change everything. But getting involved is going to make you a part of this too. Do you really want that? What if it’s better if we just try talking to your
“No! Archie, this isn’t just about the damn school. Even if my father doesn’t win the vote tonight and The Blossoms do, and maybe they’ll do something less machiavellian with it. My parents will never be able to let this go. They’d lose so much, and everybody investing in them including your dad and Jughead’s will lose insane amounts of money. Plus they’ll always be known as the people who planned on buying out a big school, it’ll mess with them forever.”

“And what if they do win? What if we put our faith in them?”

“If they win? The Blossoms will lose everything, and they will be vengeful for life. Either way, no matter who wins, it’s war. And we’ll all be in danger.”

“She’s right” Betty agreed. “We have to do this. We have to convince them to not sell the school.”

“And what pray tell is your grand plan for this, Veronica?” Jughead inquired.

She smirked, a shadow of mischief and cunning charm sparkling her face. “We’re going to crash the party. I have a plan, it’s a crazy one, but if you guys are all in for the sake of saving our parents and our school - then I’ll tell you.”

Archie put his hand on hers only a second later. He didn’t need to hesitate. Without a doubt, until the end of time, he would always keep choosing her side. Jughead and Betty hesitated, they could see it in their eyes. Veronica saw right in front of her as Betty reached for Juggy’s hand, holding it in hers before pulling both of their hands forward and placing them atop Archie and Veronica’s.

Well, they’re close.

“We’re in.” Betty nodded.

“To save our parents and the prep school. No further” Jughead clarified.

“That’s all we’re doing.”

“So tell them V, the plan? How would we get in.. won’t there be like security at an event like that? And how will we make this work?”

“We sneak there as soon as the meeting commends. Word is that I’m a legal officer of Lodge Industries, though my parents never told me that. But that means that I technically have a seat at the table, don’t I?”

“So we’re depending on semantics to be our key in? Looks like I’m losing my school”

“Don’t worry, Jug we’ll make it work. Part two is the confrontation, and that’s where Polly comes in” she glances at the blonde girl in subject, another flicker of nervousness coming to her eyes.

“I know this sounds crazy -“

“Oh no” Archie shook his head.
“But the only way to get them to listen to us, is if we have a leverage. And the babies.. that’s a leverage we have against everyone in that room. If we can’t make a fortress, then maybe we can make a trap.”

“Wait - are the Blossom heirs-to-be the bait in all of this?” Jughead clarified.

Polly gasped, a painful sound to hear at the worst moment.

“When we show everybody in that room that something of The Blossoms’ is on our side, we make them drop this rubbish deal and the babies will be safe. That’s it. The Blossoms won’t say no to that, it’ll dig out their humanity.”

“I’m not sure if they have that” Jughead countered.

“Ronnie I’m sorry, but this does sound.. a tad much. I mean threatening unborn babies?”

“We’re not actually going to do anything, Archie!” Veronica screamed. “What do you think I’m some kind of monster? We are doing this to protect her”

“And now she’s the bait?” Jughead asked again.

“Am I?”

“No. No one’s bait” Betty assured. Sure, the plan made her wary, but it’s not like they can escape this any other way. “We don’t have any other choice. But we’re going to protect you”

“Them why aren’t we just telling Jason straight on? Why aren’t we doing something better than using babies as an advantage?” Archie had to know why. It all didn’t seem right, no matter how much Veronica and Betty were decided on it.

He felt Ronnie squeeze his hand tight in hers, way too tight. “Because we don’t know any other way and we don’t have anything else they would want, okay?”

“What if we confront them and it doesn’t work? What if they laugh in our faces and tell us they don’t care about the babies? What are we gonna do?” Jughead added on. He was angry, and not so much about the plan. More that he knew Veronica is right, but he’s angry because there’s no other better way to go through this.

“We don’t know” Betty frowned sullenly at Jughead’s angry tone.

“This plan sucks!” He yelled.

“You got a better one?” Veronica spat at him. “Everyone’s in danger. And she could be harmed by them either way, as soon as people find out about the babies! So, somebody has to do something. Somebody has to save everyone. So somebody has to be the bait!” She exploded.

“Can’t you see I’m backed into a corner? I don’t have any other way out of this!”

The room fell into silence. Jughead had just awoken angry Veronica, and she isn’t the best thing to deal with.

“We promise we’ll do everything to protect you. I promise.” Betty said in a soft voice, looking into her sister’s eyes.
“Fine then.” Jughead agreed. “I trust you. But this better work.”

“Me too” Said Archie, who was battling between this being the most insane idea ever for them, a group of high school kids putting ruthless adults in a predicament, or just trusting Veronica and Betty one hundred percent.

“When do we leave?”

“Meet us in the car behind this building, at six thirty. The dinner begins at seven so we should have plenty of time to get in there.”

So it was settled. They had another three hours or so until departure time, and after that exhausting discussion and surprising turn of events, everybody felt hungry. The four of them walked across the street from the Pembrooke to Shake Shack, where burgers were just as sophisticated meals as the fillet mignon and causa flor.

“So, where were you guys today? You missed school” Betty mentions casually while sliding into a booth next to Jughead.

The opposite couple exchanged brief glances at each other only a little bit guiltily.

“Oh god” Jughead groaned, his face contorted in disgust. Only he knew them well enough to read every little piece of body language and silent speech. “Will you two ever stop being bunnies?”

“Jealous much?” Archie asked, but it was good natured and he’s grinng widely from across the table. That only made Jughead grimace more and pretended to throw up. Veronica laughed, her own blush heating up and she didn’t bother controlling it.

“Oh my god - you guys?” Betty’s jaw dropped.

“Do you really want me to answer that?” Veronica squinted at Betty amidst the laughter.

“You know what, never mind” she threw her hands up and reached for a fry.
“If you don’t mind me asking.. did I just witness Jughead Jones be actually physically affectionate with someone, that someone being you?” Veronica pried when the girls walked out of the restaurant. They were a ways ahead of Jughead and Archie, drinking left over cola.

“Okay so... we kind of are- together. We’re together” Betty revealed shyly, throwing a glance behind her at the two boys talking to each other.

She has that undeniable craze in her eyes, and it’s elating for Veronica to see her friend look like that. “Oh my god! When did this even happen? When did it even start?”

“Strangely enough.. I know we haven’t exactly had time for a date of any sorts. But writing the newspaper together and these past few months have been hard, emotionally. Jughead was really there for me”

Betty watched for Veronica’s reaction which she knew is important. Jughead is Veronica’s best friend too, they’ve been friends for so long and Betty’s made her fair share of mistakes in the past that she might not be seen as worthy of the part.

“Oh, swoon!” The raven haired girl exclaimed. She put her arm around Betty and pulled her closer, bumping their heads together playfully. “That’s amazing, I’m so happy for you! Ugh, how classic. Late night work place grab ass, hmm?”

“Oh no, nothing like that. Seriously we haven’t even.. no. But you’re right, it is amazing. He’s amazing. But, is it okay to assume you and Archie are..?”

“We are” Veronica nodded in confirmation. And she never knew how good it felt to do that. Even though it’s a little chilly the sun is shining in its most beautiful state, and Veronica thinks that depicts pretty much her life right now. Despite all the mess, the chaos and the drama, her sun in shining. Archie.

“So Betty’s really committed to do this whole charade for Veronica’s sake, huh?” Archie observed. He kept his brown eyes on his shoes kicking at the dried leaves on the pavement, but he could clearly see Jughead’s head snap up to look at him.

“Well yeah. They’re really good friends”

“Is it also because you and Betty..”

“We may have had a moment. One might call it dating I suppose”
“Jug that’s great. I’m happy for you guys” Archie smiled. It’s only the first time his best friend has ever had a girlfriend, after all. Archie never knew Betty would be his type. He wasn’t sure Jughead had a type. He’s always so uninterested.

“And you and Veronica? I know that whatever rated R activities you two were up to isn’t just another random thing. I’m guessing this is the real deal.”

“It is” Archie grinned. “I mean.. wow. She’s incredible” he sighed and looked ahead, somewhere between the sky ahead of them and at Veronica and Betty walking, but his eyes were screaming their pure delight no matter what.

“Uh, spare me the dirty details. I’ve overhead enough over the years to leave me traumatised”

“I’m serious, Jug. This time it’s been different. The break up, the distance. And now that we’re back together, it feels different too. Like it’s the real deal. Veronica would kill me if she heard me say something that cheesy.”

“You just repeated the ‘real deal’ thing I said earlier” Jughead pointed out.

“I guess I did”

(x.x.x.x)

Veronica may be a little arrogant, but she isn’t ignorant. She knows how dangerous this is, to be making deals with the devil. But maybe if I’m smart enough, it won’t matter, right? This is what I do. I figure things out. I find a way out. And right now, as she stares out the window of Andre’s car, she’s sure she made the right choice. It’s not like anybody else can stop this, it's up to her. It’s always been up to her to handle things when it gets too hard.

“You okay Ronnie?” Archie’s voice brought her out of deep thought, his warm hand rested on the middle of her thigh.

“I’m here with you, so yes.” She took the hand on her leg and brought it to her lips to kiss, holding onto him tightly.

“It’ll work. I trust you”
sneak inside.

“Oh my god, I didn’t know this was such a big deal! How are we ever gonna make it inside with all these paparazzis right there?” Betty expressed in concern. She was right. They were all over the place and as paparazzis are - hungry for information and manic stalkers of people.

Even though all of tonight’s guests have presumably already arrived, the press still isn’t leaving. It dawns on them darkly that they’ll probably be waiting out here all night until the meeting is over and people start leaving to ask questions and demand statements.

“We should have expected this. The Blossoms and The Lodges are having a crisis. They’d hang around until their asses froze off if it means they’ll get some massive spill of what happens.” Veronica shrugged. They were not very proudly crouching behind a flower bush, one that well hides five teenagers, while peering in on the scene.

“Besides, like every single person who is somebody is in that house right now. God, how will we get past them?” Jughead sighed. He really is the pessimist tonight.

“Don’t fret, my darlings. Every big plan has an escape too. Listen, Andre. Drive us to the stables where the servants reside”

“I’m afraid I’ll have to ask of that with the housekeeper, Miss Veronica” the designated and well paid driver replied in a hush tone.

“The only person you’ll be answering to is me. Now drive”

“How did you know this stable even exists?” Archie wondered aloud as soon as they reached the smaller residence.

“My parents used to have dinners with the St Clairs like every other Sunday or something for a couple years up till I was in elementary school. Nick and Evan’s caretaker was really nice, so we’d hang around here and play sometimes” she explained.

Carefully, they followed Veronica’s lead into the compound of the stables, where everything stood still and it was deadly quiet. The stables aren’t exactly what you imagine given their name, it’s a modern type of bachelor pad almost with glass doors and windows displaying all of this to them.

“Oh, so you are close with this family?” Betty asked

“Kind of” At the mention of Nick’s name Archie was suddenly stiff, his face taking on a hard expression that didn’t sit well with any of them. Veronica had forgotten he’d probably still be mad about what happened months ago, that she fully admitted to him under the influence of weed and alcohol that she’d slept with Nick. She took a deep breath, grabbing Archie’s hand for good measure before leading the way again.

“The stables are an in to the rest of the house. This staircase right here leads to the trophy room which, if we pray isn’t locked, will lead to the rest of St Clair Manor. Then all we have to do is find the room they’re dining in, which shouldn’t be hard. And walla”
Polly has been exceptionally quiet the entire trip, and Veronica can only hope she isn’t having doubts about their plan.

“Wow. The St Clairs sure have a lot of.. achievements”

“Don’t touch anything Jughead! You could break something”

“Yeah, and then Mr St Clair will hang your head up like one of those deers” Archie snickered, pointing to the several deer heads hanging in the trophy room.

Veronica successfully opened the door, looking at the hallway before her like it led to all their dream come trues. Technically, that’s what it was. “Yes! It’s unlocked. Come on, don’t make noise and keep your eyes open if people are coming”

“Say that to yourself, you’re the one wearing noisy six inch heels. Isn’t it obvious to wear sensible shoes for a mission?”

“Hey - I’ll wear six inches or I’ll wear nothing”

“You guys focus. Where would the dinner be taking place? Some kind of board room?” Betty snapped.

Archie raised his brows, amused. He sure wasn’t completely focused - not when the house around them looks like something straight out of a Kennedy mansion dream and all he wants to do is stop and stare at the place. St Clairs are very old money, and he imagines this estate has been in their family’s possession for decades upon decades. Truthfully all of them were a little in awe by it, well except Veronica. Veronica has always been aloof and comfortable in the grandest of places. Maybe too comfortable, Archie thinks grimly. He shakes his head to try and forget it, but knowing that Ronnie hasn’t just spent playdates and family dinners here is making his blood boil.

After following an intricate and very confusing floor plan Veronica had somehow cooked up in her head of the St Clair Manor based on her memory, with stops and pauses and running into closets to hide themselves from the working staff, they’d finally found the room where it happens. More specifically, closed doors behind an arch protected by one big burly security guard and a barely concealed weapon.

“Are you sure that’s it? They’re all in there?”

“Betty, he has a gun. This is definitely it. Look you guys stay here until I give you a signal, and then Archie will follow me inside. Betty, Polly, Jughead you guys wait for Archie to send the text. Once I’m in the room and have their attention - that’s when you guys come in”

“Veronica wait - no way are you getting past that security guard all alone. I’m coming with you” Archie stopped her, grabbing her hand and pulling her back before she could get away. They were currently hiding behind a wall just meters away from the guard, and the colour is clearly draining from their faces. It suddenly became too real, this plan, and a scary one at that.

“No” she shook her head insistently “Archie, remember the plan. Stick to the plan, okay?”
Veronica knew Archie would never be okay with it, and she’d be lying if she said she didn’t one him by her side right now either. But with her head held high, she walked confidently over to the guard standing his ground in front of those crested doors. *I’m scared*, she whimpered in her head. *No, I’m freaking out. I’m so freaking scared.*

“Excuse me miss, can I help you?”

“Yes, actually. I’m late for this meeting and I have to get in - terrible luck today. One of the buckles on my Louboutins wouldn’t budge, I spent close to fifteen minutes trying to get it. And then when I finally got the buckle open it pulled on my stocking and tore a hole in it! I had to go and change them, of course. Do you have any idea how difficult it is to find the perfect matching stockings for this dress- I know should’ve bought more than one pair the other day. Anyway when I finally got in my car the traffic was barely moving so -“

“All due respect, Miss. But, who are you?”

“Well, I’m on the board of Lodge Industries. In fact, I own a *third* of Lodge Industries. Veronica Lodge. This deal is a hugely important matter for me”

The man, with skeptical eyes, gave her one very curious look before flipping through some papers on his desk. She assumed that was a list of attendees tonight, and for a moment she actually thought this plan wasn’t going to work. But nevertheless -

“Very well. *Veronica Lodge*, you’re quite the shareholder of your family’s company. Parents must be proud, miss. I apologise for asking”

Veronica grinned, letting out a breath she never knew she was holding. Raymond, as she read by his name tag turned around to unlock the door when Veronica looked back and spotted Archie. She mouthed *Now!* and he came walking up to them at a fast pace.

“You know when I was your age miss, I barely had enough money to -“

Before Raymond could finish his pitiful sentence and much less turn around Archie had clocked him with his powerful right hook, the sound of something cracking under his skin making Veronica wince. Her hands flew up to her mouth, astounded by how fast and perfectly it all happened.

“Come on, we better get inside before other people come looking for this dude” Archie motioned to the door.

Veronica nodded, taking a slow step forward and pushing open the door that Raymond had unlocked. At first she’s blacked out, not sure what to expect, but when she sees the sight before it all comes back. There’s at least a hundred people sitting around the magnificently long meeting table - this was never a dinner after all. They all look prim and proper, like they had their suits
tailored, like they buttered up to each other at golf games and country clubs. There aren’t any windows in the room, serving it to look kind of suffocating.

There are so many familiar faces that Archie and Veronica don’t know where to react first. Their parents, even though they knew they’d be here. Or the people who regularly attended the same events as them, people who’s kids they went to school with, faces that either stood by their side or turned their backs on them. All familiar facades.

But for both of them, their eyes immediately focus in on Mr and Mrs Blossom. Or rather, who’s fitted sitting in between them. Jason. He tenses up and fixes his tie like he’s nervous.

“Veronica? What in god’s name are you doing here?” Hiram Lodge stands up.

“Archie?” Fred almost barks.

“Hiram? Hermione? What is this?” The ever sophisticated Simone St Clair inquired. All the faces around the table turned grim. And whispered erupted into loud accusations. “I had no idea Veronica was actually joining us this evening. I thought you said you never told her”

“Get these kids out of here! At once” more than one person insisted. Most pronouncedly Mr St Clair and the others were backing him.

“I’m not on my parents side in tonight’s gamble!” She said loudly into the echoey walls around them, gathering attention of each and every person. Veronica couldn’t lie and say she didn’t feel a little bit powerful standing there. “But I do have another play for you, if you’re willing to hear it”

“What is this nonsense? How did they even make it past the security?”

“Calm down, dear” Mrs St Clair goaded “She is a legitimate voice in the Lodge company and we said we’d be taking all opinions into consideration tonight. She does have a right to be here”

“Are you kidding? Veronica enough. You need to leave, right now” Hiram went on.

“Let her talk!” Archie almost shouted in response. “Her signature is on every paper involved in Lodge Industries - that you forged. Now she has every right to be involved in what goes”

Hiram seethed, and a big number of people were glaring, but Xander St Clair had to keep his professional hand in the pond. “Fine then. We’re listening, so proceed”
She took a deep breath and glanced at Archie before speaking again. “I know my friend Jason Blossom here, is nothing but an innocent son trying to please his parents. Before they made him what he is. And now he’s way over his head. He’s done preposterous things, illegal things. But the most disdainful of all? Helping his parents buy out Costal Preparatory.” She folded her hands together, feeling all eyes on her. “So I’m going to stop him.”

There was a pause, one not so certainly embarrassing or threatening but it sure made Archie nervous. He watched their reactions closely, tight lipped and sharp browed. But then, it was Clifford Blossom who laughed first.

“This is what you came here for?”

“I have something you’d want.” Veronica said simply.

“Well I assure you little girl, there isn’t a single thing on this earth that would matter enough to us to waste another second of our time listening to you. What madness is this?”

“Just hear her out” Archie said again. Hermione was looking at them very confused, wondering what the hell her daughter could possibly be getting at. And also insanely terrified for her.

The rest of the room waited, patient and curious, while Veronica nodded at Archie and he sent the quote on quote signal to Jughead’s phone. All the while Veronica felt like her heart might explode out of her chest if she didn’t calm it down, the erratic beating loudly in her ears. This could go wrong so many ways, and it could blow up in their face.

She turned around upon hearing footsteps that belonged to Betty, Jughead and of course Polly. The room became deafening with voices again, this time more questioning as to who these people were. Jason stood up. He didn’t care anymore and was beyond shocked to see Polly walk into the room, of all people.

“Jason, you need to listen to her” she said gently.

Now Clifford Blossom did laugh. “Hiram your daughter is out of her mind! Barging in here with her gaggle of friends, thinking some low class hook up of my son’s means a thing to our family”

“You might want to rethink that, Mr Blossom” Betty speaks up. She’s clutching onto Polly’s arm and it doesn’t feel like she has a place to say anything. She can see Polly’s eyes downcast, avoiding Jason and avoiding everybody else.
“Maybe not that” Veronica agreed “but it will matter to you that she’s pregnant”

“What?” Jason gaped. A loud gasp filled the room and Polly’s almost in tears because she feels ashamed and everyone really just regrets being here.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you” she said softly to Jason, from the far distance between them.

“What are you saying?” Clifford Blossom asked, the ferocity rising in his eyes. Penelope just looked broken, they could’ve sworn she was struck frozen.

“Dad...” Jason muttered, tears pooling his champagne eyes that never tore away from Polly. “She’d pregnant with my baby”

“That’s impossible! She’s lying”

“I’ve been ostracised by my family and thrown out of my home for the past two months! Do you really think all that is worth a lie?”

“She’s not lying. It’s been almost twenty three weeks.” Betty announces.

“This girl has been with someone else and she’s leeching our money -“

“Okay, Clifford calm down. I’m sure whatever family issues are ensuing between your household can be sorted outside of our business meeting. Right now I just want to know what exactly you’re asking of us, Veronica?”

“Mrs St Clair, I need you to ruin every single thing that has to do with buying out the property. Completely. Or, who knows what’ll happen to Polly and Jason’s babies”

“Veronica what are you doing?!“ Hermione stood up. “Have you lost your mind?”

“Hardly mother. It’s simple, if you want me to believe in you then stop what you’re doing.”

“Well Clifford” Xander leaned back in his seat, taking a drink of Scotch. “Veronica’s brought quite the predicament. If you don’t give in, then we’ll continue this meeting. I for one am not keen on selling my property over the harm of some unborn baby, but if the price is good” he shrugs “What is your say?”
Veronica took a deep breath, watching the clock tick behind them with burning anticipation. Of course she’s *never* going to hurt anybody, and her parents *know* that. Even if they carry on with the deal she’ll never do anything, obviously. Mr Blossom probably knows that too which is why he isn’t very much threatened. But she’s hoping that they’ve put on a strong enough front to maybe *fake* such animosity.

But alas, she can’t.

“You have some gall, Veronica. Maybe I underestimated you. But you can kill that girl, and the child for all we care.”

Jason burst apart, pushing his father back into his seat and shoving him again for good measure. “Dad what are you doing?! This isn’t just about the stupid business anymore! This is about protecting our family, she and the baby are family!”

“Our business *is* our family, Jason. It’s the same thing. Now Xander please get these pests out of our meeting.”

“Security” Xander called, and just like that four men came barging into the room on cue. Just like that. It ended so suddenly.

“No! Get your hands OFF me!”
They were standing back where they started, far outside the meeting room where doors had slammed shut on them. Luckily Mr St Clair was far too preoccupied to properly order the guards, so they didn’t throw them all the way out of the house, just far enough. After some screaming and crying and comforting, Polly had fled the scene with red eyes and golden curls flying behind her.

“I should’ve gone with her” Betty admits, looking over the railing to where André’s car has left with Polly in it.

“She said she wanted to be alone, Betty. After all I think she needs some space” Jughead stammered, still a little shaken by the drastic turn of events.

A few feet away, Veronica was pacing and rambling and pushing away, not letting Archie see her because he’s pretty sure she’s crying. The raven haired girl could barely breathe with how much she was talking a mile a minute, panting between words, the words in her head closing in on her and the image of Clifford Blossom laughing in her face replaying on a loopy nightmare.

“I can’t believe this! Why did I ever think it would work, why didn’t I just listen to you guys? God I just keep fucking everything up!” She screamed. Her hands dug into the roots of her hair, pulling hard enough to battle with the pain of her gritting teeth.

Jughead could almost say I told you so, but he figures that isn’t exactly the best thing right now. Veronica Lodge admitting she should’ve listened to somebody else is new - but he wouldn’t gloat considering how broken she looks right now.

“No Ronnie, we all did this together. And we all thought it’d work. You made a mistake, so what okay? You’re human.” Archie tried to reason.

“No, I’m not supposed to make mistakes. This - this wasn’t supposed to happen”

He grabbed her by the shoulders and spun her around, pressing a little harder so she’d look at him. “I know you’re not gonna admit it to yourself” he says slowly “but you’re still human. You are the smartest person out of all the people in that room, you never let anyone get in your way, you’re unstoppable. So I love you way too much to watch you beat yourself up about this, okay?”

Veronica just stared at him. Archie would beg to know what was going on in her mind at the time, but all he got was a starry stare and those big brown eyes. That sure way he spoke about her just gets her every time, and it’s not like she can stop herself from leaning up and giving the most passionate, meaningful kiss.

In her lips he’s lost in their world, but outside of it Betty and Jughead are smiling at each other uncomfortably.

She let go of his lips with a loud pop, and Archie knew he’d calmed her down for the better.

Sighing, she let herself soften in his arms and started feeling around the pockets of his jeans. “I need to smoke something, do you have any?” She mumbled into his shoulder.
“I don’t” he whispered back.

“Well luckily I do” Veronica looked up into Archie’s face endearingly, she reached into her purse and retrieved a little packet of white powder. Archie’s jaw dropped.

“Ronnie! You can’t hold that out in the open, where did you even get it?”

His legs entangled with hers which one might see as uncomfortable since they were both standing up, but the two of them felt comfortable pressed as closely as possible. His hand left her waist and enclosed it around hers, also covering the packet.

“It’s an old one from Reggie’s party.” He still gave a very disapproving look, but Veronica was tired and drained, it’s the least they could do. “Come on, you don’t need to have any if you don’t want it. Just keep me company”

Archie sighed. “Jug, Betty, you guys coming? We’re gonna go back to the stables”

Twenty minutes later the four of them sat under a big window with the 12 feet pool for scenery, dark night bleeding into their hearts. The only illuminating light was that of a single lamp, since nobody wants to be seen in stark light when they’re doing what they are.

Truthfully they’re just sitting, despondently with their backs against the wall. Betty has her head on Jug’s shoulder and she’s trying to not cry again thinking what her sister might be feeling right now. Veronica has her legs folded, the powder on a napkin in front of her and her head bending down closer to it.

“Just so you know... I don’t usually do this. But I lost my lighter so this was a last resort” she clarified more to herself.

“I don’t understand how people could be so heartless.. how parents could be so heartless” was Betty’s reply. Her voice a dull tone dripping slowly.

Nobody said anything.

“I saw my father’s face when I walked in there. He looked, like some part of him had given up. Then again that’s all he’s been implying these past few months when he says I should go and live with my mom in Toledo”
“How can they not stand it when something gets too hard? Suddenly the damage they’ve caused isn’t supposed to affect our lives”

“If you continue down this path you’ll end up dead. That’s what my dad told me” Archie sighed, watching his breath come out in the cold night air.

The three of them look at him when he says that. “Maybe we will.”

Suddenly it feels like they’re all a little high, even though no one’s had a hit. And everything hurts. Everything fucking hurts from their limbs to their hearts and she can’t bear the pain another second, so she’s about to make that risky snuff in when the door to the stables flies open.

“Guess who’s - woahh what are you guys doing in here?” He stumbles at the entrance and pulls back just a little to take them all in. Betty straightens up, not exactly recognising his face but surprised enough to be caught in somebody else’s house. Veronica tries to cover the mess in front of her right away, but it’s too late. He’s seen it.


“Well I actually do know what your doing here. Oh yeah, I heard about the big crash you all made at my parents’ meeting” he smirked a little too friendlily.

“And how do you know that?” Jughead asked, sitting up straighter.

“Well it’s all the talk. They’re on a break. You know, to actually have dinner. The vultures were invading my home space so I came here to find peace, but no luck.”

“Get out of here” Archie said simply.

“This is my house”

“Arch just let it go, okay? Please just let it go” Veronica ran her hand soothingly on Archie’s arm to try and calm him. The last thing she needed was for Archie to get mad and Nick to reciprocate it, especially since she’s already regretting being here in the first place. Also, the little mountain of white powder that sat inches from her legs unable to be hidden.
Archie huffed, his hands finding Veronica’s waist and pulling her up closer to him.

“Yeah big red, just let it go. Ooh Ronnie, I didn’t know you got into the bad stuff”

“Please Nick I’m pretty sure we’ve both done worse than this. Now I’d appreciate if you stopped talking.”

“Ohh, we’ve both ‘done’ worse alright” he grinned stupidly.

Veronica deadpanned, not in the least bit amused by his reference. “I think you’re trying to use ‘done’ as a metaphor but I mean actual drugs. Come on guys, let’s get out of here”

“Oh uh wait up, you won’t let me partake in one with you?” Nick pointed towards the coke, which of course is all that boy really wanted.

“V, let’s go” Betty whined, a scared little sound that made all of them a little worried.

“Just - take it okay? Take it I don’t want any.”

“That’s what you said last time” Nick grinned again. “Come on Ronnie just stay. For one?” Don’t call her that, Archie wants to growl. And shove this kid so hard he drowns in his own self conceited ass, but that would only make matters infinitely worse.

“I said no, Nick.” Veronica snapped. The boy surrendered and held up his hands, taking the powder on his own.

Both Betty and Jughead were watching Nick like they were disturbed a human could be so vile, and Betty actually looked downright traumatised - so this night couldn’t possibly get worse. Veronica led all of them out of the stable but they had to wait around in the compound for a while since Nick mentioned the meeting was on a dinner break and people would probably start throwing rocks at them if they saw their faces again.

“How long do you think a dinner break lasts? Will we have to wait here long?”

“Not if everyone has your appetite” Veronica mused. “I have to call Andre to pick us up again.”

Maybe it’s the fact that there’s somebody snorting cocaine right inside the room they’re standing next to, or that Archie, Jughead and Veronica didn’t seem too bothered by it. But Betty had a sneaking suspicion and she couldn’t help it, kind of like how people look away at a car crash but
you just want to stop and stare. She peeked her head in the door, narrowing eyes into the little crack it was opened. Hmm, that’s... odd.

“What is?” Jughead looked at her.

“Huh?” She hadn’t realised she’d spoken aloud.

He followed her train of sight and bumped her head away a little to look. “What is odd - oh my god! Oh, my god!”

“What? What’s happening? Why are you screaming?” Veronica pushed her way between the two and effectively opening the door fully. To reveal Nick’s spazzing body keeling on the ground. “Oh my - fuck!”

She quickly hit the speed dial and held it to her ear, just as Nick jolted again and almost rolled over his own head. Before Archie could ask what was happening he saw it too, and life fleeing from his eyes faster than Betty could freak out and speak again.

“Who are you calling? What do we do, what’s happening to him?”

“911!” Veronica screamed back “You guys move! Just run right now, if they find us and the drugs something could happen. Just go guys come on”

They sure as hell ran as fast as they could, and there wasn’t a single soul in the space outside the trophy room or anywhere near it. Archie’s heart was racing. All he could hear was Veronica’s voice, *98 South of Holmes Hills. The St Clair Manor. The stables, the stables!* and they didn’t stop running until they’d made it out the front exit and had to stop.

“Paparazzi!” Jughead remembered. They had to stay there until someone came or there was another way out.

“They’re coming. Fast. He’s having seizures but they should be here fast enough to make sure he’s okay”

Maybe an eternity or one second had passed after she said that, but Archie couldn’t remember a time when this wasn’t happening. *This.* The waiting, hearts racing, peering over that little hill for any sign of anyone coming up to the stables. When the ambulance arrived at lightning speed, first class service, then a lot of noise happened. People in the house were alerted and all those in the meeting room went out, all of them heading to see what the situation was.

The paparazzi outside were running. To follow the ambulance, some spilling past the gates and
having to be wrestled away by security, all while the four friends watched and watched and prayed with every ounce inside of them that nothing was going to go too wrong. Their eyes stuck on the big commotion formed outside stable doors, waiting to see someone pull Nick out on a gurney and Nick’s pale flesh and blood putting the life support to his use. But that’s not what they saw. Instead,

“Oh my god” A body bag.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter #16 Everything Is Lost

- everything is lost and this nightmare’s closing in

everything is lost, there’s a sorrow beneath my skin

this is the end of me

this is the end of me -

“Oh my god” Veronica had breathed, sounding more like a whimper. She backed herself into Archie’s chest and felt him stumbling too, like he’s lost the ability to hold her steady as well. Their eyes are burned on the image of that gurney with the black plastic covering all of him, someone they just saw minutes ago. Someone they just killed.

They were all silent for a long time until one of Betty’s uncontrollable sobs escaped her just loud enough to be heard over the sound of ambulances and police sirens, which made them snap.

“What the hell just happened?”

“How could Nick be dead?”

Jughead and Archie both said at the same time. Veronica turned around and faced them. Betty and Jughead were more than five feet away from them, but they definitely saw exactly what they just did. She gave a condescending look to Archie and let go of his hand, walking towards the other two with meaningful steps, Archie following behind her.

“We can’t talk about this. We left straight after getting kicked out of the meeting, let’s go” Veronica put her hand on Jughead’s arm and pushed him to start walking with them, running the other through her black hair vexedly.

“We can’t just walk away!” Betty cried. They stopped and took in her teary blue eyes. “He’s dead for gods sakes and it’s our fault!”

“Well what are we supposed to do?” Veronica snapped.

“What if, I don’t know we said it was an accident?” She shook her head at her own helpless tone. Nose getting red with ever sniff and sob.

“No we are not telling anybody anything.” Veronica said insistently. She looked at Archie and Jughead but they were both silent, eyes cast towards the heaving blonde girl. “Damn it Betty. Don’t make me sorry I ever fought to get you in this group in the first place - if you keep crying and wallowing in distress like a pathetic little bitch then we’ll all get in trouble! You better keep your mouth shut. Or I’ll let everybody know what a wonderful friend you are for kissing my
boyfriend. See who’ll stand to look at your face then”

“Veronica! Stop it. Just leave her alone” Jughead hissed, the air between them silencing again since nobody really knew what to say or do. Betty looked hurt, and Archie just watched Veronica.

“Look I’m just- I’m freaking out you guys. This is bad, alright? Really bad.” Veronica tried to reason.

Betty felt the anxiety creeping up on her. This night has been long and dark in itself, but just a few minutes ago they witnessed somebody die. And now Veronica’s telling them to shut up and leave, she can’t do this. Not again.

“Everyone just take a deep breath” Archie said.

“I can’t take a deep breath! Are you crazy?”

That’s when the hyperventilating started. Betty felt her chest tighten, and she couldn’t suck in any amount of oxygen to save her life. Jughead knew Betty was getting worked up, he’d seen her before the night that Veronica almost got attacked by Chuck. So he lightly grabbed her hand and pulled her away further. “Close your eyes and try to block out everything, all the sounds all the things around us”

Betty did what she was told even though closing her eyes was a moot point. She had already seen it. Nick, covered by that plastic. The image would forever be burned in her brain.

“Just keep taking deep breaths”

Archie and Veronica turned from each other and she walked over to them.

“People at the stable could probably hear her wailing from here.” She said “Take her home and make sure you’re not seen.”

“Where are you guys going?” Jughead asked.

“Home. Andre’s here and he’ll drop Archie off first.”

Before Jughead could say anything they were on their way, meaning he’d probably have to call his own car service.

“Get her out of here asap.” Veronica hissed to Jughead one last time “We’re already royally screwed and the last thing we need is for anyone to start losing control and panicking”

Betty gaped at Veronica walking away. Why was she so upset that she was showing some emotion? How could crying in a time like this be considered losing control? And how did the rest of them not be losing their shit the same way she is? Did she have too many feelings?

Veronica and Archie had left to not put any more energy into Betty’s meltdown. And soon enough she and Jughead fled the scene too.

(x.x.x.x)
Veronica wishes she could curl up into Archie’s side all night long, just hold his hands and nuzzle against his skin enough to maybe erase her memory. But things are looking bad right now, so he has to go home. Andre’s car stops short of a mile in front of the Andrews Grand Mansion probably because he doesn’t want Fred to see the car. It’s almost eleven at night and the sky is glittered with all their mistakes, all their mishaps and misdeeds.

They’re silent while Archie shifts around entangling himself from Veronica’s embrace but before leaving the car, he turns around and looks at her.

“Don’t go hard on yourself, okay? Just go to sleep and get to school tomorrow.”

It’s more of a demand because Archie knows she will do something stupid and dangerous to drive herself over the edge, given circumstances. She might have acted the part of a cool cat earlier with Betty, but he knows it just got to her. Nick just got to her.

She doesn’t say anything and he leaves, and the tears stream down her cheeks then she knows that was the moment her life changed forever.

*I officially, have so much blood on my hands. Damn it Veronica.. how in the world did you get yourself into this.*

Regret and guilt she still feels it all as soon as she gets home, nulling over the fact that she’s stared at her high heels while riding up the elevator after a night of doom way too many times. When she steps inside the penthouse tears crack at her eyes again, always reminding that you are no longer the same girl when you left this place. you just killed somebody. you killed your friend.

“Mija, you’re just home?” Hiram’s voice caught her back into reality. He walked into the foyer, Veronica having just enough time to turn around and wipe away her tears. She fixed her posture and walked with a purpose upon seeing her mother behind him, too.

“Yeah I uh, I got caught in the backdraft” she explains lamely

“Huh. Well you should know we are extremely outraged at you, young lady. That stunt you pulled tonight might have just caused you your reputation for the rest of your life, not to mention humiliating on every level for yourself.”

“Wait-“ she backtracks “You’re not mad I ruined your deal with The St Clairs?”

Hiram and Hermione looked at each other, sharing those eyes of silent communication that always drove Veronica insane trying to figure it out.

“Well honey” Hermione started, and Hiram finished for her “We don’t have to be mad about that. Because The St Clairs signed the deal with us. We bought Costal Preparatory”

Her pupils dilate before she fully realises what they just said. It all sinks in and seeps into her skin suddenly, all of it at once. Nick’s jolting body and then later his body being covered and carried away. Running away from the St Clair Manor. Her parents buying Costal Prep. Her throat chokes
up and before she can reach her hands up to grab at it, her heart stops and she doesn’t feel that either. The last thing she feels is her mind blacking out and falling to the ground.

(x.x.x.x)

The next day, Betty really doesn’t feel like getting up and going to school. She doesn’t want to, either. As of right now she has no idea where Polly is, she tried calling her cell multiple times but she never answered. Betty’s only hoping that she actually went back to The Pembrooke last night, and didn’t go do something drastic or crazy. Her older sister always had a tendency to be dramatic and extreme, but ever since conceiving the twins she’s been more... level headed. So Betty’s holding on to that hope.

Being at home any second longer than she wants to is also painful, so she throws on some clothes without looking at them and leaves the house with her hair down and an angry huff.

The nightmares, they haunt her. She’s promised herself to do *whatever* to not think about Nick’s cold, dead body. Falling on the bed last night feeling like she’s dead herself, after Jughead dropped her off. It’s like a heist happening, stealing her sanity and grabbing her from peace. It’s creeping up her, seeping inside her, consuming her. She feels ridden with disease, that haunting guilt in her gut controlling every part of her. Too close to the heart. Consuming her really.

Even just walking to school, all alone on the wide sidewalk, she feels tired and helpless and tears pool in her eyes. She wipes them away but they keep streaming down, and just for one moment - she regrets ever being friends with Veronica and Archie and Jughead, and getting involved with any of them at all.

Now she looks back and realises she was so desperately trying to get their friendship, and Veronica’s words last night don’t help any of it either. *What a wonderful friend you are for kissing my boyfriend.* Worst of all, now she doesn’t even have Veronica. She doesn’t have anyone.

“How are you doing, Archie?” Was the first thing Veronica asked when she saw the red headed boy, leaning against his locker amidst the mess of students on a turn over about Nick’s death. She
really wished she’d said something else last night to him, let him know she’s there for him as much as he’s there for her.

“I feel like I just stole a lot of people’s happiness. Like I just stole a son from his parents. I mean look at all this, people are outraged” he left her eyes and looked back at the swarm of masses around them.

“Archie stop. This wasn’t your fault, by any means.”

“Wasn’t it, Ronnie? Why the hell did we run when we could have saved him? Why didn’t we call for more help from everyone at the meeting, we let him die. You, me, Betty and Jughead.”

Veronica looked down at the floor, silenced. She didn’t have anything to say that he wanted to hear. Since so much press was present outside the St Clair Manor last night, word spread like wildfire about his death. All students dressed in dark colours instead of their usual bright and vibrant attire, as a mark of respect for Nick. An assembly also took place at the Lecture Hall in Costal Prep, one with every student in attendance.

“The discovery of Nicholas St Clair’s body in his home stable rocked this community, and today the school his family founded will be holding a gathering, to inform its’ students formally of their loss friend.” A reporter, only one of many, said clearly into his microphone standing outside the prep school. All the Raffles’ kids were walking over into the other school, making an appropriate background for his news coverage. Archie and Veronica walked together in silence trying to avoid the cameras.

Betty walked all alone. She had no desire to be talking to anyone else, and this school’s bleeding of grief and anger. Her face is blank and drawn away, not in the least bit aware of the tears and noise around. She has no directions, but she follows the drab of people leading to the Lecture Hall.

Lecture Hall is a big assembly room where she imagines graduations and sports prize givings take place, but now there’s flowers on the doors and walls and there’s a certain air of formality seeing the prep students lined up in their matching uniforms. They’re missing first period for this, this assembly.

Betty’s not really sure where to sit. All the Costal Prep student body take up the front portion of the hall, and the Raffles at the back. She walks in the middle of the walkway with her eyes trained on Principal Dickens at the front, a large picture of the boy she killed in a standing frame next to him. Nick’s dark curls, his mischievous smile, those dreamy eyes staring back at her tauntingly. It’s just an assembly, but this feels like a funeral already.

Just when Betty’s getting lost in her somber demons, a hand reaches out from the row of seats and catches her. It startles her and she looks sideways. It’s Kevin. Betty smiles weakly and lets herself take a seat beside him.

Unbeknownst to her Archie and Veronica are sitting in the row behind them, and the raven haired girl takes a look at her and Kevin and feels the guilty stand off simmer in her stomach.

“Nicholas was the kind of student, the kind of boy, that epitomised what a student from Costal Preparatory High School should be. He was a loyal person, graceful and knew his position, he was a hard worker and always valued the future. Now he might not have that chance for a future, but I
know Nicholas would have wanted that for all of you.”

Cheryl and Jason, who, after seeing last night’s events would never be the same person, felt tears hit the very top of his cheeks. He reached for Cheryl’s hand but she pulled away, keeping it folded in her lap and her eyes and ears on Principal Dickens.

“As of right now, the FBI, lead by Director Tom Keller are investigating how exactly his death came about.” The old man continued “I know many of you and your parents must be horrified, and deeply affected by his death. But for this reason alone I must ask all of you to give as much space, and sympathy towards The St Clair family in the most appropriate way possible. While waiting on the FBI’s duties, Mr and Mrs St Clair will be preparing a proper service and memorial for their beloved son.”

As soon as Principal Dickens finishes talking a lot of people scramble up and leave, departing with a disturbing sense of uncomfortableness. Veronica passes Cheryl on the way out, suddenly remembering all the hate and anger between them. The red head is hugging Rebecca St Clair, Nick’s younger sister. She’s standing there with Evan who has long graduated but probably came to support his sister as well.

Veronica eyes the blonde girl and Evan whom she’s known forever, but walks along with Archie anyway. She can’t bear to talk to somebody’s who’s brother’s death she is responsible for.

“Are you sure you don’t wanna maybe apologise to Betty?” Archie asks slowly, watching for Veronica’s reaction. She stops forking through her salad altogether and glares up at him.

“Seriously? That’s the first thing you say to me this entire lunch period? You know if you feel so bad for her why don’t you just go and sit with her”

“Ronnie, of course not” he sighed “I’m on your side. Obviously. I just think in this really rough thing that happened we should be close together not- you know what, never mind. Let’s talk about something else”

“Let’s” Veronica agreed. She could see Archie looking somewhere over her shoulder, probably at Betty. Dreadfully, she turned around and spotted the blonde sitting all alone at a lunch table. “And where is Jellybean? God do I not have any friends anymore?” She rolled her eyes before landing on Archie’s raised ones “Other than you” she added.

“Jellybean is probably just with her other friends, or maybe she didn’t come to school to be with Jug. Don’t worry about it.”
“Ugh, whatever. Talk about something else”

“Have you spoken to your parents yet? After last night?”

Veronica gulped, folding her arms nervously. “Yeah. Um, they were there when I got back. Archie, it feels like I’m going insane. They told me our ‘stunt’ had no affect whatsoever and they bought Costal Prep”

“What?” He asked in disbelief

Veronica looked around, bringing her voice to a hushed tone. “Yeah. That’s why I’ve been extra ‘moody’. All our stupid plan and the shit we went through was for nothing, and now Nick is-”

“Hey” he put a hand over hers, bringing it over the table and folding their fingers together “What else did they say?”

“That Nick’s.. death” She shuddered “provided the perfect distraction for them, that’s literally what they said.”

Archie looked totally dejected, leaning forward and staring off into some distance. Their hands are still intertwined and his red hair is all perfectly messy blowing in the wind, it makes her heart swell and just wish they weren’t in this deep mess. How did they get themselves into this?

“Anyway, as Lodge Industries’ unofficial gift strategist, as usual I’m going to be wrapped up finding the perfect year end business presents for all our clients. So I’ll be very busy, I mean I don’t even know if I can handle it- but at least it’ll be a distraction from all this mess.” She scratched the top of Archie’s hand with one of her fingernails.

“Are you sure you want to take that on this year? It’s always such a huge thing, and you have so much going on”

“Like I said, distraction” she mustered a charming smile.

Archie grunted, his mind still far too lost in a dark space to be thinking about Christmas and presents and celebration. “Where’s your parents big Christmas party this year anyway?”

“Hmm, no clue. Why do you wanna be my date?”

Archie offered the tiniest scraps of happiness in this darkest time, his sweet smile and that kind of look he can only ever give Veronica Lodge. “If you want to take me” he smiled playfully.

She grinned in response and he moved around the table to sit right next to her, letting the sides of their bodies touch while they finish the rest of lunch.

“Well well, Betty Cooper. You should know I have an undying sense of pity for the tragically alone. So I think I’ll join you for lunch”
The despondent blonde looks up into the rays of sunshine only to see Kevin Keller, his tight smile and tall body looming over her table. He sat down and took his sunglasses off, surveying her.

“You look miserable, Betty. You have ever since the assembly. What’s wrong? It’s not like you even knew Nick”

Betty felt herself getting sick. She grabbed her long island iced tea and gnawed on the straw, making sure to never let her lips open. “What does um, your dad know so far? About the investigation”

“Well” Kevin looked up “He’s working twice as fast and double the hours on this case. It’s St Clair service. Anyway all he’s told me is that it was...” he lowered his voice, inching elbows on the table closer to Betty making her nervous. “A drug problem” he shook his head slowly “Can you believe that? I mean huh, somebody surely got their revenge in an ironic way”

“Wait what are you talking about?” Betty squinted her eyes

“Well it was ruled a murder too. Nick didn’t take the drugs himself, and all I’m saying is that he used to do like, everything and anything so his death is kinda.. ironic. I’m sorry, it’s a terrible joke. This is all so morbid”

“Yeah” Betty sank her shoulders down, biting harder on the straw. “Does he have any.. leads?”

“Nope” the green eyed boy shook his head and bit down into his burger. “So, you and Veronica fighting? Wow it’s like Cheryl and Josie all over again”

“Excuse me?”

“You and Veronica” he said slowly, innocent amusement glinting in his eyes “the fighting, then best friends, then jealousy and enemies then best friends again. It’s exactly like Cheryl and Josie”

Betty breathed out a sigh and look sideways, her hard expression not softening in the slightest. “I am nothing like them.”

Kevin was silent for a tad too long, which made her look back at him. “Really? Aren’t you?”

She could see him looking somewhere over her shoulder, and she turned around too. Archie and Veronica were sitting next to each other. All she could see were their backs but Archie whispered something in Veronica’s ear and she leaned her head on his shoulder, hand coming around to play with one of his ears. She turned her nose inwards and kissed his neck, before laying it back. The simple embrace made Betty remember everything from last night, and rethink her entire friendship with them up till it.

Suddenly all she remembers is the way Veronica spat at her in disgust and made her feel so useless, helpless while she struggled to breathe. It’s not Veronica’s fault I’m such a weakling, either she thinks it’s my fault.

When Betty finally turned back around, looking away from the couple who have each other she hears Kevin saying something distantly.

“I’ll just say that this time, I’m not picking sides. Before they were older than me and I had to
listen to them but I’ve known Ronnie forever and I value your friendship too so there’s no way I’m picking sides. The whole thing feels very Borgia and Medici anyway”

She’s picturing the dead body and blood pooled on the floor and that ugly, old stained carpet like flashes in her mind. Really scary flashes. The smell of lingering bleach, sticking to every surface of the house. The once blond hair on his head matted brown from all that blood, and how the ends of her own hair spattered with blood while she cleaned the mess up. She remembers looking disgustedly at it, and then she hears Veronica’s voice and Jughead and Archie.

No, no that was Nick. That was... she looks back at the couple, the girl who’s voice is part of her nightmare mixed with all these old memories and new ones she never wants to relive. Blood. Sirens. Bleach. We’re not telling anyone anything. Go home. It all gets mixed up in her head and suddenly that blooming sickness in her stomach grows too heavy and she can’t hold back anymore.

“Sorry Kev I- I gotta go. I’m gonna be sick”

(x.x.x.x)

“So Vixens, I have a very very big announcement to make. Firstly, our first cheer competition of 2018 will be in Vegas. Isn’t that awesome?” A loud clatter of cheers came from the fellow vixens before Cheryl continued on her speech “and second part. The best part yet, one of our alpha Vixens will be back and competing with us. Girls, welcome back Josie!”

Just as Josie walked into the gym on cue with her two legs working well as ever, a beaming smile on her beautiful face, all the cheerleaders got up and ran over to bombard her with a hug. Cheryl ran over too, and Veronica. She was the first one to wrap her arms around Josie’s neck and mush their cheeks together, missing the comfort and understanding she got from the older girl.

“God, Josie I missed you so much....” She murmured into her neck. She wanted to hold on and never let go, keep embracing and telling her everything and assuring her she’s so happy to have her back.

“I missed ya too Little V” Josie whispered back “Reggie told me a lot of the shit that went down. I’m sorry” her soft strokes on Veronica’s back were comforting and already, she felt at home to have a friend caring like this.
“Oh Jos you don’t even know the half of it, have I told you I missed you so much?”

It’s true. She missed shopping and singing together; her, Josie and Cheryl. Harmonising. Going to parties, the sleepovers, the relationship talk, the exams and studying and cheerleading. All of it. How all that whisked away and now she’s fallen in a deathly trap, she’s not sure.

“Tell me everything later, okay. Tiramisu cakes, or wine and cheese?”

“Tiramisu cakes” she grins “Wine and cheese always makes me feel like our mothers”

They both laugh and hug again, rocking side to side this time. “Hey give the rest of us a turn, V!” Scarlett and some of the other cheerleaders yelled. She sighed and let Josie go, seeing that same intensity all the Vixens gave hugging and welcoming Josie back. Being put in a dangerous position and the sweet nostalgia coming back made her sad, especially to see Cheryl standing there.

“Cher, can I talk to you for a moment? In the locker room?”

The red head takes a look at all their friends asking Josie about her experience, and how they probably won’t be starting practice any time soon. She doesn’t want to give in but it hurts not to when looking at Veronica’s face.

“Fine. Okay”

“Cheryl I know we’ve had.. a lot of misunderstandings and fights and drama and, I know you know the truth now”

“About Jason?” She sat on a bench and crossed those perfectly toned legs, as well as her arms. “Yeah, I do know”

Veronica sighed, hearing Cheryl’s voice rough and broken like she’s been crying. “I’m sorry” she said simply. “I hate fighting with you.”

“We’ve survived a lot, but my brother double crossing us both and simultaneously causing a rift between us has got to be the worst. I’m sure you know why I didn’t believe you”

That sure is Cheryl Blossom’s way of saying sorry, Veronica thought grimly. “I really don’t. Being an only child, my friends are the ones I always trust first. I trust you first, Cheryl. And you turned your back on me so many times. This has been the hardest year of our lives and I needed you, but you cut me out.” Her voice broke and muffled in her hands “and I never lied to you Cheryl. Not once.”

Cheryl closed her eyes and tried to not cry, because Veronica already sounds like she might. Life is a mess right now and them fighting doesn’t feel right at all.

“I needed you so many times and you just kept on that act of superficial bitch, and I don’t know why because you were a great friend Cheryl. To me, and to Josie.” She wiped away a stray tear and tugged on a black tendril of hair, distracting herself.

Cheryl stood up and took a step closer, Veronica’s sad little Bambi eyes and her sniffly red nose, those long lashes damp with tears she can’t bear to have caused. And her heart melts and she hugs Veronica closely, safely, taking back all those terrible moments.
“I’m sorry V” she whispered. Slowly Veronica’s hands found their way on Cheryl’s back too and she found herself clinging on closer and tighter to this glowing light. “I uhm, I heard about Jason’s babies. Can you believe it? We always imagined it but this is happening way too early”

Veronica smiled a sad one and so did Cheryl, their hands holding onto each other’s arms. “I want to see Polly, V. I have to know my nieces or nephews”

“I’ll take you” Veronica nodded assuredly. “They’re healthy” she’s not sure what else people say about babies. “And I said I never lied to you so I’m not gonna start now, Cher. You can- disown me or make me a loser if that’s what it’s worth to you but you should hear this from me before anyone else. My parents are buying the prep school. I’m sorry. I tried to stop it”

Cheryl’s fingers slowly let go of Veronica’s arms, her eyes falling and losing its’ previous light. She could tell all the life had just been drained from Cheryl’s happiness, and she let her down again but there’s nothing she can do now.

“Oh.” She just says. “I know you tried Veronica. And I’m sorry for not believing you about Jason. I didn’t want to believe the only good person in my family is just as screwed up. I miss you, V.”

“I do too” she said softly.

“Can we be friends again?” It was asked so lightly, so delicate that Veronica wasn’t even a hundred percent sure it was real. She had to stand there and stare for a few moments before recollecting.

“Okay” she said. They walked back into the gym together, and even though this means they’re back Cheryl knows and Veronica isn’t naive to the fact that they will never be the same, not as before.

Not ever.

(x.x.x.x)

“And you got sick again?” Jughead asked over the line. Betty sighed, having to explain yet again that she indeed did, get sick right before cheer practice. But I felt fine all through practice and I’m walking home now and I still feel fine, that was all hours ago.

She has the phone held tightly to her ear, swinging the other arm that’s carrying her cheer bag. It’s just a tad too cold to be walking outside at seven at night in just the short and sleeveless cheer uniform, but it’s not like she has any other option anyway. Jughead offered to pick her up, only they weren’t sure if practice would run late and she didn’t want to bother him.

“So have you.. talked to Veronica?”

“No” she sighs, checking left and right at the big road. “In fact I’ve kinda been trying to avoid her,
I just don’t want to face it. What about you, have you talked to Archie?”

“God no. Not since last night, since he’s sticking by Veronica”

“Gosh what is that even about? We had a fight, but that was it” Betty didn’t know why this had to be such a big deal. Okay, considering the consequences she does kind of understand why they’re not talking, they’re all in a really weird place, but still. They committed a life changing crime together, shouldn’t that count for something.

“If you’re talking about what Veronica said I wouldn’t take it to heart. She breaks down when she feels threatened, or scared. Some people don’t know how to express themselves properly and resort to just blurt- ing out the easiest thing they know how- and sorry to break it to you but Veronica’s is insulting someone else. I know she’s been a great friend to you for all this time but to other people- wait-“

Betty checked her phone, making sure Jughead’s still on the line. He was. But the boy had gone silent.

“Jughead, what’s up? What did you see?”

“Betty...” he struggled to speak, and she could just imagine that slightly constipated face he makes when he’s startled. “Did you see your parents news site today?” He asked calmly.

“No, why?”

He sighed. “Check your phone” followed by a notification that alerted her.

Betty hit speaker phone before opening up the article, and the big bold headlines were already enough to set a fire in her stomach. She gripped the phone so tight until the nail of her forefinger dug into the skin of her thumb.

“Jughead, I’m gonna have to call you back”

“MOM! What the hell is this?!” The raging blonde stormed in pass the front door, stalking straight into their kitchen where she knew dear mother would be cooking up dinner or the next big plan to ruin her children. Either one.

“Now what are you bursting at the seams about, Elizabeth?” Alice turned around and faced her daughter.

“Forced himself on my daughter, isn’t willing to take consequences and wants nothing to do with the babies? mom what the fucking hell is this?” She read word for word, bite for bite off the news article that Jughead had just sent her.

When Alice couldn’t give her an answer, Betty felt that sickening swelling in her throat again and unwanted tears welled up her eyes. Maybe this is exactly what Veronica felt last night. Helpless.
But her first result was insulting, instead Betty has to break down and break something. She screamed louder than she knew how, and threw that stupid new iPhone hard and far, aiming perfectly that it crashed the glass water cooler and smashed it to pieces.

The satisfactory sound of glass smashing to bits, water drowning their pristine kitchen floor, her heart beating and beating and bursting. She lost both hands in her blonde hair, gripping so tightly maybe when she pulled back there’d be gold strands or beads of blood. She doesn’t know. *She can’t live like this anymore.*

“Okay Elizabeth just calm down and let me explain this” Alice tried a softer approach, shocked by the surface of her daughter’s break down.

“Hiram Lodge” she said slowly “contacted your father and I and said we have the opportunity to work together now. He ended up buying Costal Preparatory last night, Elizabeth but even though they’ve won he knows The Blossoms won’t go down without a fight, or the final word. I know about you and Polly crashing that meeting. He saw you both and called me, told me that for a big sum of money- we both get to take down The Blossoms.”

“So you’re writing fake news and you’re in Lodge Industries’ pocket now?” She outraged. “What about your daughter?!”

Before Alice could reply anything Betty turned on her heels back out the kitchen, but this time Alice ran after her and pulled her back.

“Where do you think you’re going, we’re not done talking yet!”

She almost snarled, pulling her arm out of her mother’s tight grip meaningfully. “Well I am. Congratulations, mother. You’ve successfully driven three for three of your children out of your life”

She walked through the still open door, Alice hot on her heels and for once not caring that the neighbours would see them fighting in the front garden. “Don’t you dare talk to me like that Elizabeth Cooper! And where do you think you’re going?”

“To Jughead’s”

“Oh, for lord’s sake.” Alice rolled her manic blue eyes “are you a slut? I hear your phone ringing at all hours of the night, what kind of person-“

“An amazing person!” Betty screamed, shaking her head and shivering with the clarity of it all catching up to her. Alice looks scandalised and angry and she takes the opportunity to leave, not looking back once. Trying harder than ever to not let anything her mother just said get to her and work her up. But words did always hurt her.

(x.x.x.x)
“Oh, this managed to get her back in town? Well I’d say so, it’s gotta be one of your biggest crimes yet” Veronica said into the phone line, freely since she was in company of no one but herself in the exclusive penthouse elevator.

Archie sighed in disapproval at her minor joke. “Don’t joke about that Ronnie. And yes, I got home from football practice and she’s just there- can you believe her? I mean she barely even looked at me after waltzing in there like she’s only been away on one business trip. I haven’t seen her since the Ivy Reps!”

“Maybe she was nervous, I don’t know. What did she ring you off for this time anyway?” Veronica asked coolly.

“Only starting with the way she looked at me. And then she says I’m an embarrassment to dad’s company I mean she’s not wrong, but- anyway mainly my mom is worried that since my dad and Mr Lodge didn’t end things on the best turf that he might drop all those favours he’s doing on me when I ‘attacked’ Chuck.”

“Wait would he do that?” Veronica listened closer.

“You tell me, how brutal is your father?”

Veronica rolled her eyes. Archie’s in that mode he gets when Mary comes home where he won’t stop talking and his humour just becomes a tad bit more dry which Veronica admits she likes, but it comes from his place of unsettlement. Of course he calls her first just minutes after getting home, breaking the news that Mary Andrews is back and she brought baggage.

“She also asked me to move to Chicago with her, said this city is way too dangerous for me” Archie scoffed.

At that one Veronica couldn’t resist to swear. She didn’t care if this might be her future mother in law. “What kind of new honey vape is she smoking? Chicago practically has the highest murder rate this year”

“I know it’s joshing. Anyway I gotta go, family dinner time”

“Good luck, see you tomorrow at school” she says just as the elevator doors open and her soles hit the marble floors of their foyer.

“Okay, love you” Archie greets and hangs up.

Veronica walks tiredly inside, but all of a sudden she’s met with both her parents and a look that’s more worried than disappointed. She halts all curiously, trying to search their faces for any sign of what’s going on.

“Mija, how are the presents coming along? Have you found the perfect one?”

“Dad cut the crap what is going on? And why is there a police bag on our floor?” She looked downwards to their left, and fear struck every part of her body. “Mom you better me tell me right now or-“

“Oh, Veronica. We will do everything to help you, but you need to start being completely honest with us.” Hermione stepped closer and put a hand on her daughter’s arm, trying to be comforting.
“The police are here, they know you didn’t leave right away last night and they know you were with Nicholas in the stable before his accident.”

Veronica couldn’t really comprehend this. If the police are here to arrest her, if they know, then why haven’t they done it yet? What are they waiting for?

“Now don’t worry, I know none of us were expecting this” Hiram went on “It’s mostly about intimidation so I want you to stay calm.”

“Stay calm about what?” She asked snappily.

With a frustrated grunt Hiram produced a white paper folded in four and held it for Veronica to read. “They served a search warrant”

“A search warrant? For what? For where?”

“The penthouse” Hermione nodded, slowly locking eyes with her husband and communicating silently “Our storage space, your room”

“My room?!” Veronica took off before either her parents could stop her, thanking god she’s still in her cheer shoes and running all the way up two flights of stairs in a flurry so strong all she could think about was that they’d caught her. They’d caught her.

“Veronica don’t interfere!” She hears her mother trying to screeching.

What is there to look for or find anyway? Her room is already being inspected and ransacked when she freezes in the doorway. Somewhere behind her Hiram and Hermione have caught up to her.

“Honey” Hermione calls her again. Her eyes are stuck on all these foreign people pulling apart her personal space, her domain, the place even her parents never touch. And she feels like pulling her hair out.

“Make them get out” she says finally.

“We can’t” her father said “you’re a person of interest in a murder investigation, they’re just doing their job”

“In an especially ham-fisted way” Hermione adds snidely, casting a dark look at one of the police officers digging through her undergarments drawers.

“What are they even looking for?” Veronica struggles to ask.

“Things that connect you to Nicholas” Hiram replied, that calm expression on his face wearing off into a more uneasy one “and what happened to him.”

Her parents eventually managed to get her out of there, sitting her down in the living room while boxes upon boxes of things are brought out from upstairs. She’s shaking. And fidgeting, and watching every box just wondering what the hell they’re digging for. How did they find out she was in the stable? Could it be surveillance cameras? Damn it, we should have been smarter about that! Then she worries, are the police at Jughead’s and Betty’s and Archie’s too?

She picks her phone up to call him again but there’s a text message from someone she’d never expect to hear from, not today after all.
Jughead Jones: Your parents aren’t done. They paid mine to write a fake article throwing dirt on The Blossoms and now they’re working together. I didn’t want to tell you over text but I just thought you should know. -B

That’s when she really explodes. It doesn’t matter if half of Los Angeles’ finest are in their home and this is considered ‘bad decorum’ or whatever, she’d kill all of them without a second thought right now with the rage she’s in.

“I always told you we needed to keep a closer eye on her. Now she’s gone and engulfed herself in a murder investigation!” Hermione scolds in the next room over. They’re only a couple feet away from Veronica and she doesn’t know if they’re purposely letting her hear this.

“Maybe her attitude and karma finally caught up to her” Hiram said coldly. They were fighting. About her.

“You’re the one who taught her to be exactly who she is!” His wife hissed in reply.

“You brought this on yourself”

Both adults turned surprised to see their daughter there. Scowling, with that devious expression which could only mean bad things.

“Mija, what are you talking about? And keep your voice down there’s police everywhere.”

“I know about you hiring Betty’s parents, dad. The fake article they wrote? You’re the ones playing battlefield with The Blossoms and you brought me in on this!”

“Veronica, listen to your father. Just sit down and let’s talk about this.”

“Why? So you can feed me more of your lies? You want the school, fine! Take it! But a kid is dead, and you’re writing fake news in the paper ruining Jason’s life, Polly’s life, like petty high
school kids! You already won, you got your stupid deal so you won!”

(x.x.x.x)

It’s in the dark musky night when her room is finally settled, the last police officer has left and she can finally have this part of her life back. She feels like destroying her phone but it’s the last thing she has to call Archie, so she settles on turning it off and leaving it on her study desk. She can’t even look at anybody right now. Everything hurts too much. After a long hot shower, neglecting homework and skipping dinner Veronica loses herself in the only luxury of life she’s permitted to right now - sleep.

It’s not like she’ll ever touch any kind of drug again anyway.

Then of course something has to wake her, interrupting her peace, state of mind slowly wafting off to the land of dreams. A sound of the door opening and bright light streams into her room so fast she winces.

The first thought she has waking up is wishing actual light would bleed into her life, because the darkness won’t let her go. This nightmare can’t seem to let her go.

“I’m sorry honey, it’s me” her mother.

She adjusts her vision and squints hard to finally make out her mother’s figure, a tight skirt and matching blazer, long silky black hair. Still in her high heels.

“Did you just get home?” Her voice sounds rougher than usual.

“A while ago. Had to wait for your father to fall asleep”

Veronica nods, trying to breathe properly. She understands that of course her mother has to wait until daddy goes to bed before talking to her, which means it’s probably the kind of conversation her father doesn’t like - too soft and caring and human.

“Is everything okay?” She asks while her mother makes her way over to the bed.
Sitting on it, Veronica can feel her mother’s warmth and it’s something so odd she can’t quite get it. Mom never feels warm. She’s usually cold and strong, but every now and then Veronica sees that silent softness of her mom and she yearns to move closer to her.

“I was right. We have a shot at getting the search warrant thrown out”

Veronica sinks deeper into the pillows and closes her eyes, still too sleepy. “Yeah it’s good” she mumbles “but they have nothing to find.”

“Actually they did find something”

“What do you mean?” Her eyes shot open and she pushed herself up on her elbows suddenly. *What could they have found? I didn’t do it. At least not... intentionally. Could they have found traces of cocaine in my kit that matched the one Nick took?*

“I got this back channel. They found your VL vaporiser, on the crime scene. And there’s more of that stuff, in this room.”

“Wait you mean *my vaporiser* was on the crime scene with Nick?” She clarified.

“Your fingerprints are all over it and so are Nick’s. The sticker initials also match some other products in your room” Hermione sighed “I have to ask you. Did you have that vaporiser with you last night? Did you leave it behind in the stable?”

“No!” Veronica almost cried “Mom I lost that thing a long time ago, how could it have been on the crime scene? You have to believe me mom please”

She watched for a sign of belief but her mother’s face had gone half cold again, and she couldn’t read it. *Does she believe me?* She has to believe me! Hermione finally sighed in relief. The desperation in her daughter’s eyes is enough to let her know she didn’t do it, but she couldn’t tell her that yet.

“I guess the theory is that he took it from you or you gave something to him”

“Mom if that is the lead they have then I had *nothing* to do with this I swear, I didn’t have it on me and I haven’t for months-“

“Inside their minds, it makes sense” Hermione reasoned.

Veronica shook her head, realising now that this all changes the game. Maybe Nick didn’t die after she gave him the cocaine. Someone obviously planted her vaporiser there and is framing her.

“What about in your mind mom? What do you think?”

“Don’t look so scared, mija. I believe you. I think someone’s going to a great deal of trouble to make you look guilty.” She said finally.

She burst into tears then, maybe because her mom believes her or maybe what her dad said about *karma catching up to her* is true after all. Any hope of getting out of this is spattered, like blood on broken glass cutting her and marking her.
“Mom” she whimpers out, reaching up and wrapping her arms around her. Hermione hugs her back, her toned arms strong and comforting around Veronica. She holds on tighter and cries even harder, the light from outside shining in on them.

Her whole life feels like it just shattered into a hole, and all those past memories feel like a universe away because now she’s drowning in all the blood.

“It’s okay” Hermione whispers, just holding on and soothing her down, but Veronica can’t see an end to this and they stay crying and holding each other for every fleeting moment it’s worth.

Chapter End Notes

Lots of angst, sadness and guilt in this.

Q: Ronnie with the raffles royalties or the core four?

ps. There’s clues of something big to come in Betty’s storyline in this chapter...

Tell me what you think of this chap guyss
Chapter #17 Innocent

- wasn’t it beautiful runnin’ wild til you fell asleep? before the monsters caught up to you

  it’s alright just wait and see, your string of lights is still bright to me

  who you are is not where you’ve been

  you’re still an innocent -

Veronica agrees to having a quaint breakfast with her parents the next morning, yogurt and berries and most importantly coffee to go. It’s really just to smooth situations over about yesterday’s screaming match although if you ask Veronica, she’d say the matter is indisposed. She’s already fidgeting in her size 8 boots and leather skirt before her mother even shuts the fridge, and her father places his newspaper down.

“Slow down mija, you’ll upset your stomach” Hiram advises. She looks at him with the biggest, most endearing eyes and licks her spoon clean.

“Sorry”

“You look beautiful today, where did you buy that top?” He asks in a kinder tone, probably to slow her down as she rushes to put her dishes in the sink and wash her hands.

Oh, so on other days I look ugly?

“Tommy H. I bought it with mom.”

The Lodge’s living room is currently a mayhem of special sorts, it’s decked with boxes and boxes and far from peaceful. Organisers, assistants, planners are walking around with their clipboards and going over fabrics and designs for the Lodge Annual Christmas Party. Hermione goes to talk to one of her assistants about a dress on a mannequin, and Veronica realises this is the first year she doesn’t enjoy the chaos of this all.

“Mom, isn’t that arrangement kind of white? I mean the gold looks good but it needs a touch of green or red. I mean all the drapes are silver too so it needs more Christmas colours. This looks like a New Years setup” Veronica points out to one of the large and extravagant flower bouquets.

Hiram and Hermione exchange looks between them before speaking.

“I always knew you had an eye for this stuff, you’re very observant Veronica.”

“That’s what I’ve been telling you” she rolls her eyes.

“So we should tell you. We’re switching up the Christmas Party this year, it’s going to be on New Years Eve instead.”

“Wait- why?”
“Firstly, it’ll give us more time to spend the holidays with our extended family which we need. And secondly it works as a great launch into our new year, new plans. We’ll announce our purchase of Costal Prep there as well.” Hermione smiled proudly at them from across the table.

Veronica muttered a curse under her breath, really wanting to scream it out loud.

“Well you guys have fun with that” she smiles tightly, swings her bag up her shoulder and starts pouring the freshly brewed coffee into her to-go mug.

“Actually we’d like you to have a part in it too” Hiram says “you can organise a charity, on behalf of Raffles Institution that donates to families in need during the holidays. Get all your friends at school to participate, and you can make a little speech announcing it at our New Years party”

His daughter is already ready to fire back with the best retorts and a strong concurrent, but Hermione stops her before she can let go of her breath.

“You’d get on everyone’s good side honey, and no one in town would-“

“Why do I need to get on anyone’s good side mom?” Veronica snaps “everyone know who I am and I don’t chase people’s approval.”

“Because people are talking and jumping to conclusions” Hiram looks at her sternly.

“About what? What are they saying?”

“What are they saying? Mija everyone in town’s talking about us. The vaporiser, the police marching out of here with boxes. The threats half of our colleagues saw you make on Polly Cooper doesn’t help the notion that you’re fine with violence either.”

Veronica turns around so she can roll her eyes. *Fine with violence. Yeah, I’ll cave their faces in.*

“Just please Veronica. Pick and choose your battles. Get your friends to participate in the charity, okay?”

She’s about to say something to her father when a loud ringing fills their kitchen space and everyone’s eyes land on her buzzing iPhone in the middle of the table. She immediately feels her chest tighten.

“What if it’s Archie and daddy sees? I shouldn’t have left it there!”

Hiram turns her phone around with one finger to face him and takes one look at it. “It’s Jughead Jones.”

She practically flies across the floor to get it, thinking it’s probably Betty calling from Jughead’s phone since she texted her from it last night, and if Betty’s calling she wants to answer.

“Actually, I’d prefer it if you’d have no contact with him until this situation is behind us. Betty, either. And Archie of course” Hiram snatches the phone in his hands before Veronica can get to it. She’s appalled and her jaw tightens seeing her father holding her phone away like that, for some reason. It’s her *private property* and she almost snarls.

“What? What does Jughead or Betty have to do with anything? They’re friends.”

“Yes, friends who’s parents are involved with all this and you need to be careful with who you associate with.”

She looks at her mom but Hermione’s gone silent. “So what, I’m supposed to just cut off my
friends? I can’t do that- would you rather I be friends with Cheryl and Jason, then?” She points her nose upwards.

Hiram narrowed his eyes at her. “You have other friends. I know that.”

“So I’m just supposed to ignore my best friends and not speak to them?” She clarifies.

“Yes”

“Sweetie, listen to me” Hermione cuts in before Veronica and Hiram can start another argument and who knows how bad it could be this time. They can’t have voices raised at breakfast when there’s people all over their house. “You need to build that charity. If not, you’re neighbours are gonna think you’re an immoral person”

“I don’t really care what my neighbours think” she crosses her arms

“They’re not just neighbours, Veronica, they’re potential jurors. And most verdicts are decided in living rooms, and festive parties. Just take your involved friends out of the equation, okay? End of discussion”

Veronica can’t stand hearing another word so she whirls around and picks up her to-go cup, after offering one dark, meaningful glare. She strutted past them both and snatched her phone back out of her father’s hand, leaving for school before they give her a brain haemorrhage.

(x.x.x.x)

It’s cold enough to wear a windbreaker now, the ocean water bites like frost. There’s fake snowflakes in store windows and the current gossip in school is that Jason Blossom knocked up Polly Cooper. Courtesy of Alice’s article claiming that Jason did stuff to Polly and now refuses to show face. It’s become big news locally. Clifford Blossom is very well known and has a lot of influence, and while he can shut down the major news stations, he can’t do anything about the cruelty of high school kids. There’s an anonymous blog everyone’s reading - the cheerleader and the golden boy and look at us now. Nobody knows who’s behind it, but there’s a bunch of photos and things that look like what they aren’t.

Polly and Jason have both been absent from school, and all of them are taking the heat.

Cheryl and Betty are getting bombarded with people asking questions about their siblings every moment, so do Archie and Reggie as they’re Jason’s best friends. Veronica gets the word murderer whispered snidely about her in class which she stops at, tries to think how best to retort, but realises there isn’t any.

The days feel longer despite getting shorter and quickly good looks, popularity and ruling the school became nothing. It meant absolutely nothing anymore.

They were caught in a tangled web of nightmares struggling to break free.
“Do you think somebody found my lighter thing and put it in the stable with Nick?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Archie drops Veronica’s hand once they turn the corner and she leans against his locker, one of his hands next to her head on the metal. “You specifically told me you didn’t have it that night and now, magically it’s what the police find to link you to his murder? You’re parents should hire you a 24 hour bodyguard.”

“Would you really want another guy being with me at all times, all hours of the day and night?” She raises a brow and slowly pulls him in for a lazy kiss.

“Well played, I would hate that” he muttered against her lips.

Veronica chuckled and pushed him off, rolling the dial and opening his locker. “I thought about this all day while the police were in my house yesterday- based on logistics we know a person can’t just magically die from one concussion, right?”

Archie scrunched his nose. “Well, yeah. Even dozens of mild ones wouldn’t be life threatening. It takes like a couple of severe ones at least.”

“We were only gone from that stable for less then ten minutes before the ambulances arrived” Veronica tells him, her eyes wide and expressive. Archie gets where she’s going with this.

“But surely they did an autopsy so they would know..”

“An autopsy yes I understand, but nobody actually said anything about it! For all we know somebody with a motive snuck in and finished the job, and could’ve easily bribed off a doctor to not reveal the real cause of death.”

“That’s true” Archie frowned. “Who or why would anyone do that?”

Veronica took a deep breath and slammed Archie’s locker shut, places his books in his hands and takes the notebook of hers she left in there. “That’s what we have to figure out”

“This sounds like a mystery thriller and I am not a fan of those” Archie shook his head.

“Oh-“ she stops short and halts, pulling Archie by the arm to stop with her. His sneaker squeaks on the linoleum floor. “If you don’t like thrillers, I’ve got one you’ll hate in which my family Christmas party is turning into a New Years party, for damage control they’re asking me to conduct a charity on behalf of Raffles, and by the end I lose all my friends and social standing.”
“Holy... what Ronnie?”

“Can you please convince the Bulldogs to be part of this? I need to at least appease my parents right now” Veronica pleaded. “Plus I still have to organise the damn thing, and find the year end client gifts, and I’m thinking ask Kevin to get the drama club in on this too. So I really don’t have time to-“

He presses a kiss to her lips in the best possible way to shut her up, and even though she doesn’t kiss back the taste of her lips is enough to get him addicted. “Of course Ronnie. You can count on me always.”

Betty is changing before cheer practice which at this point in her life seems totally obscure. The only reason she still goes is to not mar her college applications any more and to stay distracted, though standing in a room of judgemental, gossip hungry cheerleaders isn’t very distracting either. She’s the last one out of the locker room with Veronica, who’s facing her locker and doesn’t even acknowledge the blonde’s presence.

Betty watches her, throwing stuff in and out of her locker. The raven haired girl is standing in booty shorts and a sports bra, her hair pulled up in a ponytail. When she bends forward to take something Betty sees purplish red bruises all over the back of her neck. At first she’s a little shocked, the maroon colour standing out from the rest of her smooth tanned skin. And then Betty’s eyes skim lower and she sees a trail of those same bruises, decorating her upper thighs and stomach and ribs. She doesn’t hold back an eye roll.

“Well it’s good to know some people are still having their carnal desires fulfilled amidst the ongoing murder investigation” Betty leans her lean frame against the locker next to Veronica’s, voice coy and empty.

Veronica turns her head and looks at Betty, then down at her own body. She shakes her head, gripping the metal door. “It’s called having a healthy relationship, Betty not a tramp stamp. And I didn’t kill Nick, despite what you remember. Neither am I going to stand here and take shit from you about promiscuity.”

“Well Veronica!” Betty screams at the same time that Veronica slams her locker shut and starts shimmying into her uniform. “You know what I apologised. I don’t know what else you want. You’re still so mad about the Archie kiss but I told you, I’m sorry! It meant nothing! I was drunk and- and Cheryl was even the one who pushed me in the room to begin with.”
Veronica looked like she might be fighting tears. It’s weird though, she has such fierce eyes that nobody would suspect she’s one marble away from breaking down. “Did Cheryl put a gun to your head and ask you to kiss him? I thought so. Do not try to come between me and Cheryl, or me and Archie ever again.”

She doesn’t wait for Betty’s answer but just struts off, slamming the gym door loudly behind her.

(x.x.x.x)

“Hey, how are you?” Archie pulls his ear pods out as soon as he sees Veronica approaching, black hair flying and a sports brand jacket zipped up over her cheer uniform.

“Relieved” she sighed, walking up to Archie’s car. “That practice is over. Betty said some- stuff to me right before practice and I basically yelled to her that I didn’t kill Nick-“

“We probably shouldn’t talk about this” Archie said suddenly.

“Why not?”

She followed his eyes and right there behind the school building was a cop car and some cameras in the bushes you’d miss if your eyes weren’t trained to spotting them. Veronica glared and hoped they got that in the pictures.

“Look Ronnie you should go home, I know we don’t care but getting photographed together probably isn’t going to help situations.” She looked so disappointed so Archie added “I’ll sneak in the penthouse later. Leave the door unlocked for me?”

“I’m not sure that’s such a good idea”

“Why not?” He faltered in realisation before the look on her face spoke clearly to him. “Oh. Because our parents don’t want us near each other and your parents are being extra observant now.”

“How about tomorrow morning?” She suggests “I’m supposed to take Cheryl to meet Polly at some restaurant near Beverly Hills. Meet me at the halfway point to Thornhill?”

There’s noise coming from the cop car and snapping camera sounds, which they both look at again. Archie nods, but they can barely look at each other before he has to drive off and she walks down to André’s car.
Veronica is halfway home from school, sitting in the backseat at the extra long red light right in front of Hollywood & Highland when her phone rings. She sees it’s an unknown number and worries for a second, her parents had warned her about pestering outsiders peering into her personal life now that she’s a person of interest. The St Clairs have a lot of supporters and this could be some raging angry family member or a nosy reporter, but on the off chance that it’s Betty she picks up.

Yes, she does still want Betty to be her friend despite their fight.

“Hello, is this Veronica Lodge?” A tired, sunken voice drawls over the phone.

“Ye- why? Who is this?”

“It’s Alice Cooper”

Oh.

“Why the hell are you calling me?” Veronica lost all her wariness once she heard the name. As far as she’s concerned, this is the bitch who set all her and her friends’ already prickly lives ablaze with her fake article.

“Veronica I know I’m the last person you want to hear from right now, I-I know that. But this is about Betty. She’s gone, and I don’t know where.”

Veronica felt like she couldn’t breathe for a split second and shifted herself on the seat. “Well she’s been at school like normal so she’s fine” she said tightly.

“After she found out what I agreed to write for your parents she completely lost it and left home, and she hasn’t come home ever since. She won’t pick up my calls, I’ve tried looking for her but-but” the older woman’s sniffles across the line made a static in Veronica’s heart when she cried. She knows that voice. Vaguely, but she does. It’s the voice of a hurting mother and much like her own mother, she knows Alice Cooper is cold as stone to be this beaten down.

“I should’ve never done it, I regret ever driving Polly and Betty away..”

Veronica stays silent on her end of the line, gnawing on her bottom lip while Alice makes incoherent sentences and useless explanations. She’s heartbroken and it breaks Veronica’s heart too, almost bleeding away. Does this world have any easy breaks? Does life have a way out? Or are we all stuck in the troubles we make and doomed for the rest of time. She doesn’t want to but Alice’s pleading replaces her head with her heart.

“Veronica, are you there? Do you know where my daughters are? Are they.. are they okay?”

She takes a shaky breath and answers “They’re okay. You have to know you caused all this chaos.
All of it could have been contained if you hadn’t made situations worse.”

“I do know that” Alice sighed “but I can’t just let them go now. If you know where they are please Veronica, I would do anything you ask.”

She’s shocked and a little proud to have another person under her belt. “I.. can’t help you about Betty, I’m sorry. We haven’t um.. exactly been on good terms. I do know she’ll survive though, she’s smart and a lot tougher than anyone ever gave her credit for. I know I underestimated her, and I wish I never had.”

There’s a desolate period of silence that’s never felt so loud.

“But Polly... I think I can help you.”

“You can?”

“There are conditions though. promise you’ll be calm and collected and considerate. And compassionate. And empathetic.” Now she feels like she’s throwing out the antonyms of Alice Cooper.

The grieving mother she’s speaking to turns into a basket case of thank yous and apologies which, had they been acted upon rather than spoken would have made a great difference. She makes sure to let Alice know she’ll ruin her if she upsets Polly again, and hangs up before changing her mind.

Her car pulls into The Pembrooke entrance and she asks Andre to wait a moment. There’s one more person she needs to leave a message for.

(x.x.x.x)

Betty sleeps better than she has in months, and when she opens her eyes in the morning she sees
Jughead sound asleep beside her. For a moment she doesn’t do anything but look at him. *I always thought his blue eyes were my favourite, but even with them closed he’s perfect.* He’s sprawled out on his back with one arm wrapped tightly around her, keeping her close to him. He’s muttering and mumbling something before stretching and opens his eyes. For a moment he just looks at her in sleepy confusion, but then it fades into peace and a soft smile shines from the sunlight on his face.

“Morning” he doesn’t bother letting her go “you’re pretty. How long have you been awake?”

Betty can’t help giggling. “Just a moment or so.” She lays her hand on his chest and inch her head close enough to kiss him on the cheek.

“You’re still... okay with this” Betty knows he’s referring to her currently living in his house, and their crazy dramatic lives. “You haven’t started regretting it?” She can see the tension in his jaw as he waits for her answer.

Betty shakes her head against the soft pillow. “No. Unless.. you are. With all the hassle of my screwed up home life and the drama...”

“Hey, I am happy” Jughead gives that easy, blissful grin that he only ever shows the people he loves enough to. “I mean not all the time, obviously, with all the stuff going on. But I’ve never been this happy in so long, with you.”

She suddenly doesn’t care that they have morning breath and this doesn’t really feel like the right time to start doing things, because she just wants him a tiny bit closer. She reaches up and kisses him, feeling his answering desire in the way he kisses her back, soft and longing and his hands stroking her beautiful blonde hair.

Just a second before they’d usually break apart and grin at each other, their lips still connected, the bedroom door flies open and they hear the unmistakable tones of Jellybean. “Jughead, you’d better get the hell up now because I need you to.. oh, my GOD!”

Betty pulls away from Jughead and looks behind her confusedly, knowing Jellybean probably thinks this is way more than it actually is, but before they can say anything she’s running down the hall loudly with wild shrieks that echo through the whole house.

“Wow, she has an imagination” Jughead mutters, sitting upright and running a hand through his hair.

“Will she tell your dad something? Will he be mad?”

Betty pulls away from Jughead and looks behind her confusedly, knowing Jellybean probably thinks this is way more than it actually is, but before they can say anything she’s running down the hall loudly with wild shrieks that echo through the whole house.

“Wow, she has an imagination” Jughead mutters, sitting upright and running a hand through his hair.

“Will she tell your dad something? Will he be mad?”

Betty pulls away from Jughead and looks behind her confusedly, knowing Jellybean probably thinks this is way more than it actually is, but before they can say anything she’s running down the hall loudly with wild shrieks that echo through the whole house.

“I want breakfast by the time I’m out of the shower, Jughead!” Jellybean’s voice booms in through the speaker system they have on the walls. Jughead is startled and Betty just laughs, covering her face with the blankets until Jughead starts laughing too.

“She’s so bossy”

“Well you better get to work then.. go! Go and make pancakes or she’ll make you into pancake batter. I’ll be down in a minute”

“Kay” Jughead stands up and shuffles off downstairs to the kitchen. They have a cooking service but Jellybean is especially picky about what consists of ‘home cooked food’ and no matter how
much nicer the chefs can make them she insists on either her dad or brother cooking for her whenever they can.

Betty is about to get up and clean herself up before heading downstairs, but she feels something hard underneath her thighs and moves around to pick it up. It’s Jughead’s phone, that she basically adopted because she can’t handle going back on her own social media. She clicks it to life and there’s the usual slew of Instagram and Twitter notifications, some texts from his dad and Toni. But there’s one particular notification that pops out, she scrutinises and it’s Veronica Lodge.

She knows the two of them haven’t spoken since that night either, but she left Jughead a message and Betty has a sneaking suspicion that she wants to hear it. Whatever Veronica had to say must be important.

She takes a deep breath, preparing herself before swiping the alert and Veronica’s mature and eloquent voice filled her space.

“Look Jug I don’t have long so just listen to me and pass the phone to Betty. I’m taking my best guess she’s with you. I know we’re in a weird place but your mom just called me and, she’s really upset she wants to get in touch with you. I didn’t tell her anything but you should.” there’s a hesitant pause before she adds “I know we’re still mad at each other for whatever reason. But I couldn’t not tell you this. I think our friendship is bigger than that. I miss you, Betty”

The message goes dead and she’s left very much surprised and a tad disturbed, all these emotions brewing inside her while she sits there on the rumpled bed. Her mother, apologetic? No way in hell. Not after everything she did. Betty deletes the message even though she wishes she could save it and hear Veronica all over again, but she gets off the bed and tries hard to pretend it never happened.

(x.x.x.x)
Veronica and Archie meet up two days before Christmas falls, a powdery puff of faux fur around her neck when he sees her at the halfway point to Thornhill. For what it’s worth she has things settled, as settled as they can be. Lodge Industries’ year end client gifts have been mailed off; she decided on a customised writing set with their individual names embossed that she knows will make them feel pretentious and special. She runs and hugs him, and then shoos Andre away before climbing in Archie’s car.

They hold hands over the console and sing along to childhood Christmas carols with the wind blowing their hair, harmonising and synchronising the way only they know best. She has a fancy little outfit on, satin red dress that sticks to her figure and the black faux fur jacket over it. She had a little thought that having secret dates is exciting, after all. And when her parents asked where she was going her answer was merely ‘last minute Christmas shopping’ and they didn’t bat an eyelash at her outfit. They really don’t know her.

Archie stops around the bend that Thornhill is on, texting Cheryl to let her know they’re here. None of them can be seen together.

When Cheryl walks up to Archie’s distinctive fancy wheels, Veronica is leaning against Archie’s chest and has laid herself over his lap with her legs in the passenger seat. Archie whispers something into Veronica’s ear, which makes her blissful expression break into something wildly joyful, like she’s having the best time ever. He just looks at her and smiles, and Cheryl rolls her eyes because they’ve always been like this.

By the time they see her approaching Archie raises his chin from Veronica’s shoulder and unwraps his hands from her waist, and she moves back into her own seat to get out and greet Cheryl properly. They play more Christmas carols on the way to the restaurant which calms Cheryl’s nerves.

“She should be here soon. After you talk things over with Polly, maybe you can help her figure out the situation with Jason too.”

Cheryl nods. They’re sitting in a booth at a sixties styled bakery on the outskirts of town, where its low enough for them to appear together without risking getting photographed.

“Are you nervous?” Veronica asks softly. “It’s okay to be”

“I don’t know. This whole situation’s weird but we always promised we’d never turn into our parents, and if Jason is going to be one I want to be a part of his kids’ lives. That’s the only way to start” As soon as Cheryl speaks the doorbell dings and they turn around to see Polly walk in, five month pregnant with twins belly and all.

“Cheryl!” The tall girl walks over to them, and she looks in some way a bit older than when they last saw her. Her blonde hair is long and willowy, she has on a loose shirt underneath a cream jacket but you can still see her belly poking through, clear as day announcing it.

Veronica and Archie offer peaceful smiles and easy pleasantries to take the stress off both foes turned family.
“Polly” she had already planned this. Meet her, be happy and lend a listening ear, don’t make things awkward. She’s trying her best but she can’t help it, her eyes dart down to the visible bump in Polly’s stomach. Her hand ghosts over it, for the slightest second before she realises how freaky she’s being and snatches it back. “I can’t believe it. It’s you and Jay Jay’s babies”

“Thank you for meeting me Cheryl, and thank you Veronica and Archie. You guys have seriously been the best support system” she smiles gratefully. “Despite what happened”

“I want to help you, Polly. I want to make sure you’re not alone with the babies because I think... I don’t think Jason will be.”

The table falls to dead silence and Polly nods in understanding, she saw the way he looked at her that night at the meeting. He cared but he was torn between their two worlds, and he couldn’t choose. Of course she knows what Jason did to her. Not at the end, but before. When he made her believe he loved her, to the point that she believed everything he did was okay. She knows how badly she screwed her life up with Jason, she knows what it’s like to want someone so bad you start to believe it’s true.

And after all the months of torture torment Cheryl has sent her way, now the tables have turned and she’s the one sitting at this table looking to be of help. She knows she can’t trust anyone anymore, not after losing herself in him... but Cheryl being here makes her want to put a little faith in the fiery haired girl.

After a particularly bumpy and rough beginning the two senior girls were finally deep in conversation, discussing serious things like birthing plans and living arrangements to whimsical name suggestions and the sly mention of godmother. Archie and Veronica finally have eaten enough cake to surpass their daily calorie intake and decide to give Cheryl and Polly some time alone while they walk outside.

“I’m really proud of her, Cheryl. This is all really mature of her, it’s amazing to see.” Veronica comments while skipping over a water puddle and Archie merely steps over it.

“Tell me about it. Who would’ve thought we’d live to see the day Jason is the more irresponsible twin?”

Veronica chuckles. The stores down here are so cute and quaint, pretty little boutiques and music stores with vinyl that Archie can get lost in for hours. Jewellers, trinkets and fresh muffins at the bakery amidst their grey sky. It really does feel like the perfect scenery for just the two of them.

“So what you said about Mrs Cooper wanting Polly to come home, is that real?”

“It is” she nodded “she called me after school and was a mess. I made her promise to behave
though, and Polly seems like she’s happy to go home”

”That’s nice. And Betty?”

Veronica huffed and pieces of her hair flew up. “She never replied to my message. Either Jug never showed her or she doesn’t want to talk to me.”

“Are you sure she’s staying at his place?” Archie asked skeptically.

“Positive. Hey at least they’ll have a merry freaking christmas”

“So what about us?”

“What about us?”

He raises his dark shade of red thick eyebrows at her, making her eyes crinkle with a smile already. “What are our Christmas plans, darling?”

Veronica sighs contentedly, loving that nickname from Archie even though it’s just playful. “Well all my family’s coming in to celebrate. Like all. It’s gonna be a full Christmas dinner at the penthouse, lord knows how many days it’s gonna take me to unwrap all my presents...”

“Oh shut up, you little show off” Archie tapped her nose teasingly and earned a shriek in reply. “Well it’s just gonna be my mom and dad and Vegas. Supposedly Uncle Daniel is coming over but who knows. Still, they’re gonna insist on me having a full out Christmas celebration. And with the rest of your family there.. it seems like I can’t sneak over..” he mutters into her black hair, loving how phenomenal it smells. She gives him that half excited half scolding look.

“No, you can’t. Why don’t we call each other after the Christmas dinner madness is over? We’ll come up with something and meet up somewhere” she’s desperate to have him and they’ve never missed Christmas, so they won’t let their families stop them this year.

“Just let me know and I’ll be there” he beams at her, and she notices his ears and nose have gone red in the icy air. Even his hands are freezing up so she wraps her little fur jacket covered self around him, treasuring his strong, warm body underneath the layers of sweater. Veronica has her arms wrapped around him and they just waddle along aimlessly for a while, until something sparkly catches his eye in a shop window.

“Ronnie look! You like that, right?”

Veronica gasps and they lead themselves into the jeweller’s store to eye the gorgeous diamond ring. Inside it’s so much brighter and Archie can see her delight so much clearer while the store
attendant promotes said item. He can tell she’s fighting to not smile so wide, listening and looking
at the diamond masterpiece. The old woman ends up convincing Veronica to try it on, when Archie
sees that he’s so amused by how just happy his girlfriend looks.

The ring is four and a half carats, it’s oval shaped with rose gold diamonds encrusted and it does
cost five thousand dollars.

“Do you want it?” Archie says suddenly. Veronica is appalled and the store attendant must be
convinced they’re in their early twenties. Or at least legal. “You want it, right? I’ll get it for you”

“Archie, no..” but before she can even muster up an excuse he knows her too well and it’s
Christmas after all - they’re in happy spirits together. He’s already made up his mind after all,
won’t listen to one of Veronica’s reasons for him to not buy it.

”Archie you can’t!”

They get the ring to her size and he pays for it while she’s beaming and bouncing and just wants to
kiss the hell out of him. Archie doesn’t let her have the box until they’re back outside again, where
she still can’t believe this is actually real. Did he just spontaneously buy her a five thousand dollar
ring?

“Come here Ronnie” he bites his lip nervously so his hands won’t shake, placing the flashy ring on
her lithe fourth finger.

*Oh my god,* she can’t even speak. All she knows is feeling like the luckiest girl in the world and
Archie lifting her up in a bear hug that means more to her than the ring ever could, it’s his way of
letting her know they were made for each other. Him and her.

(x.x.x.x)

It’s officially the most beautiful day of the year, the cheerful greetings from strangers and
gathering around the fire. The marble floors are cold and the heater is turned up, bright doe eyes eager to rip open their gifts of sparks and love. Lights decorating every inch of the streets, a magical hue in the air when you’re little enough to still believe in magic. You stare out the window and at the presents under the tree, and realise how lucky you are. Christmas morning almost always feels like a dream. Gone too fast and beautiful in all it’s simple joys. Old folks and families gather around together, rekindling their bond and everyone’s happy.

Except this family.

Thornhill is positively the most extra when it comes to their decorations, there’s a whole reindeer and sled on their big roof. The colony of pale skinned red heads are all accumulating in the ground floor living room, hot chocolate passed in mugs and sound of wrapping paper shredding alive.

“Get on the phone or get in the car, this is supposed to be your babies’ first Christmas but instead you’re absent and you’re never gonna get this back!”

“God Cheryl will you keep your voice down? The entire family’s downstairs!” Jason walks along and follows his twin sister into the interconnection of their rooms, a little lounge area with a large photo frame of them both last year on the wall.

“Good” she throws her empty stocking on the glass table “I want them to hear”

“Why are you making me do this? Since when do you care about Polly?”

Cheryl crossed her arms, having to make a defensive stance for herself since Jason is pretty much a good five inches taller than her and they’re standing face to face. “I didn’t before. But now she’s pregnant with your babies, Jason. Do you understand what that means? You have already fucked your kids lives enough before they’re even born and now there’s nothing you can do about it but try and make it up to her. To them”

Jason clenched his eyes shut, pinching the bridge of his aristocratic nose and cursing about a million different ways. “Fine. I’ll fucking call her. But there’s no guarantee she’ll even care to pick up. Are you happy?”

“Not even a little bit” Cheryl rolled her eyes, walking away into her room but before she could take a long step Jason put his hand on her shoulder and stopped her, spinning around so she faces him again.
“The world doesn’t revolve around your happiness, Cheryl” he spoke harsher than she’s ever heard. Now Jason turns towards the direction of his room, but since she can’t stop him physically she says this instead.

“You’re over, Jason”

“Excuse me?” His feet shift making the floor board squeak beneath.

“You always valued love. And life. But now, the entire Blossom empire is embarrassed that daddy has a son like you after the article Polly’s mother wrote. People know you’re a puppet, daddy’s puppet. And you even lost the one person who loved you. Or two. You had me, Jason.. and you lost me too.”

He stares at her for a moment like he can’t believe she’s for real. “You talk like you know anything about it when all your life all you’ve ever been is an air headed snob, wasting away at your pretentious parties with your self absorbed friends. All of a sudden you realise the world is bigger than yourself, huh?” He took a step closer but Cheryl didn’t budge.

“Oh and as if you weren’t panting to be like me and my friends. You would’ve never existed without me. If it weren’t for me you’d be much farther stuck up mommy and daddy’s ass wouldn’t you? But alas, that is exactly what you are now. You’re not the golden boy anymore Jason so wake up, you lost everything you had and as far as I’m concerned you are dead to me already.”

“Cheryl!” Jason ran after her while she escaped into her bedroom, fast footsteps loud on the wooden floors. “This conversation isn’t over.”

“Yes it is!” She pushed with both hands and the satisfying slam of her bedroom door left him out. He cursed and opened the door, chasing after her but she’s already down the spiral stairs into their parlour.

“Cheryl listen to me!”

“You’re done for, Jason!” She looked over her shoulder “People think you’re a monster who raped his girlfriend and a coward who’s hiding instead of owning up. At least they’re right about the second one” she pulled open the curtains and hopped off their upper floor tier to fall into the near landing. Jason ran so fast to get to her he pushed over a desk and cluttered all the antiques.

He kept following but she only kept running, opening more doors and shutting them behind her before he could tail behind. “Damn it Cher stop it!”
“It is over, Jason. And so are we. You are not my brother. Not anymore.”

She slammed the door and fled downstairs before he could say anything else.

(x.x.x.x)

Dinner is basically over, but Jughead still has mashed potatoes and pork chops on his plate when Jellybean runs to her room and presents a big shopping bag and Jughead and FP both groan, clearly knowing what’s coming.

Jellybean claps her hands in glee and shouts “Christmas pyjama time!”

“Seriously.. for how you’ve harped on being mature all year this tradition should’ve been the first thing to go” Jughead says around a big mouthful of food and rolls his eyes.

“This tradition is never going” she looked actually hurt saying that. Betty laughs as the brunette girl pulls out two pairs of candy striped pyjamas for the boys and she can’t imagine FP and Jughead in those, ever. But her laughter stops when Jellybean places a neatly folded soft satin pyjama set in her lap and she realises she’s being included.

“I get Christmas pyjamas too?” Betty says in surprise.

“Are you regretting this now Betty?” FP snorts

She doesn’t say anything as she rubs the soft satin in her lap and looks up to see Jellybean smiling gently. “Follow me upstairs to put these on and they’ll get the hot cocoa ready”

Jellybean pulls Betty upstairs and for the first time they go right into JB’s room. It’s the first time Betty’s ever seen it. There’s a lot of stuff she expected, like a display of all her dance trophies and a
light pink bedspread with a lot of gold accents everywhere. Photos from her and friends at their recent games, her class and cheer schedules. But Betty also sees things like Pink Floyd on vinyl, and a couple rock band posters on the more secluded walls. She’s shocked. Cheryl and Veronica and Josie sure don’t listen to that stuff. There’s adorable photos of her and Jughead as little children, Burger King crowns on their heads. They’re both sitting on their parents laps, toothless little grins.

“My mom came up with the pyjamas tradition.” She says suddenly and Betty turns around to see Jellybean already changing her top. “Ever since I was born, we have family photos in them every year. Since she left, dad and Jughead see no point to it. But I.. some part of me still wants to hold on to it, you know?”

“Yeah I get it” Betty says softly. Jellybean looks at that same photo Betty did and smiles sadly. “Jellybean.. why did you get me these? I know I’m- staying here for a while but we don’t even really know each other and I don’t wanna intrude on your family’s tradition.”

She shrugged one shoulder, looking out her window instead trying to focus on something else. “You complete a part of Jughead. So.. that makes you kind of like part of our family now. And I would like to know you, even though things are weird at school right now. Wouldn’t you?”

“Jellybean of course, this is all so incredibly nice of you”

She walked over and started parting Betty’s hair into three parts to braid it. “Good. Cause I need someone to wear matching pyjamas with and convince the boys that this isn’t stupid. Or to buy actual Christmas gifts that girls like, don’t you agree” She finishes with a giggle, that bubbly demeanour coming back as she bounced away to get Betty’s pyjamas. “Put them on and let’s go downstairs to get the photos taken!”

Jughead and FP are grouchy and complaining about how unnecessary this is, making jokes about how stupid they look as Jellybean sets up the camera and they take their perfect picture. Betty is secretly enraptured by the family tradition and for once in so long remembers what magical Christmases were like as a kid in Riverdale with Polly, Chic, mommy and daddy. Jellybean brings out the Christmas photo albums and FP’s eyes become bright recalling their old memories. And then the house phone rings and surprisingly both Jughead and Jellybean sprint over to it faster than ever.

“It’s mom!” They both scream right away.
“Woops, sorry mom I have to take this” Veronica jumps up from their fuzzy carpet and escapes to the hallway with her phone, hearing the distant sound of her aunties talking back in the living room.

*Is that that boyfriend of hers?*

*No, they aren’t together anymore.*

“Hey Polly what’s up?” She smiles so big at how oblivious her mother is to her and Archie’s relationship.

“Veronica! Oh my gosh, I’m sorry for interrupting your family time” she sounds happy and light over the phone but Veronica can’t be sure.

“No it’s okay, is everything fine?”

Polly sighed a breath of relief. “More than okay. I don’t know what witching spell you put on my mother, but she’s been totally nice this whole day! I’m glad I agreed to come home.”

“Not a spell Polly, she just doesn’t want to lose you again.”

“Thank you, Veronica. For helping me. You’ve been like my guardian angel through all this and I’ve never done anything to deserve it”
Veronica’s heart fills with a surge of happiness and pride, how come everything seems alright on Christmas day? She’s bursting with joy that this patching up with Alice and Polly worked out well, and it feels like one good deed she’s done this year. Veronica doesn’t reply at all and just stands there smiling, but Polly probably understands.

“Merry Christmas Veronica!”

“Merry Christmas too, Polly”

(x.x.x.x)

Three am. Archie has his head propped on two white pillows, wide awake and tired, phone laying next to him as he’s awaiting Veronica’s call. His parents are fast asleep in their rooms and his stomach still feels a little messed up from the assortment of foods during Christmas dinner. Or maybe he’s anxious. That she won’t-

His phone rings. Archie grabs it so fast he scares himself.

“Ronnie?”

“Hey Archie, I’m sorry it’s so late. I thought my aunt Celia and Sophia would never shut up and go back to their rooms to sleep.” She sighs apologetically.

“It’s okay. I’m still awake”
“Drive to the mall and I’ll walk there? Let’s go to Venice Beach.”

He has serious doubts about his brain when realising he’d let Veronica walk at three in the morning the short distance between The Pembrooke and this shopping mall. She appears out of nowhere with her bright eyes and looks smaller than ever, chin covered by an oversized white turtleneck sweater. Archie smiles at her while she climbs inside his car and rubs her hands together for warmth. This time they don’t play any music, or speak for that matter. They leave the windows down and let the cold air in, Archie is exceptionally happy that she is here and they are together and all he wants is to always have her next to him.

As expected, Venice Beach is completely empty but there are some birds along the sand that make noises. He parks his car and she suggests they go sit on the rocks like they always used to. From here, the moon looks big enough that they could run and touch it. It looks close enough to drop and sink in the ocean deep with their secrets, heart whispers, layers of thoughts.

She sighs and keeps her eyes forward, shivering a little. “I thought you wanted to come out here.”

“I do” she snaps “I want the ambience but it’s cold”

Archie smirks at her stubbornness but he expected this, jogs back to his car and grabs some heavy knit blankets. Lays one out for them to sit on, and huddles them both in the second one so their limbs are practically tangled together underneath it. Now this feels like heaven. Warmth on her body, cold air hitting her face, the sound and smell of ocean waves crashing on the shore and Archie right next to her. She’s thinking deeply, now that I’m older and all too aware of how little magic the real world holds, and putting up decorations is just pretending. But moments like this do feel magical.

“What’s on your mind?” She blushes when Archie nuzzles into her neck and hugs her from behind.

“Not much. But I haven’t given you your Christmas present yet” she reaches into her pocket underneath the huge sweater and feels for the rectangle box.

“Ooh gimme” he looks really young and excited with the blankets around his shoulders and twinkling eyes. She stops to stare for a moment, running a hand through his red hair and admiring how it looks against the dark night sky.

“Here you go. I know you collect them and this is rare, so”

Archie opens the box and sees a gold Rolex watch, one that doesn’t run on batteries but body movement. It’s an antique that probably took her a long time to find and a lot of money to buy, and he’s more than ecstatic about it. “I love it, Ronnie. I love you”

“Agh!” She shrieks when Archie suddenly pulls her into a suffocating tight hug, rocking sideways
like little kids. “Oh my god stop! We could fall to our death! Mature people don’t do this!” But she’s laughing and gripping their blankets from falling around them either way.

“Okay okay now take this, it’s your Christmas present. Merry Christmas” Archie finally stops and hands her another box. There’s a little locket inside, this year’s photos from drama club shoot on each side of it. She smiles at how sentimental he has to be, and how he knows she would like to wear a picture of him around her neck.

“You’re so cheesy’

“I got you something else”

“Wait, what?” Archie looks at her all confused. “I got you a homemade gift and you bought me two?”

“This one is kinda for both of us” she explains, heart thudding and nervous while she hands the other box to him. They’re so close her elbows rest on his legs, and he can the feel the bulk of her sweater.

Archie remains curious but when he clicks the little velvet box open his heart stops. He looks up her like are you sure? “What does this mean?”

“It means I promise you, I promise we aren’t gonna be just another high school couple and we won’t be like our parents and I trust you, I. am always scared of being vulnerable and you know that, so hopefully when you look at this ring you’ll know it symbolises that my heart lives in the same space as yours. Then you don’t have to worry”

Archie is so shocked his jaw almost drops. Veronica has never been so real, so vulnerable, even if it isn’t exactly the level of what she can’t say to him yet. Or hasn’t. He looks at her and back to the black band and back at her again.

“Sorry- if you think it’s weird. I just thought it was cool and, since you got me the ring the other day that we could match and-“

“Veronica I love it. It’s not weird at all, it’s us” he slips it out of the box and on his fourth finger, her breath shakes. “Speaking of the ring, where is it?”

“Oh, I can’t believe I forgot” she pulled it out from her pocket and saw the diamonds gleam magically. “I had to take it off because my parents had a full on haemorrhage when they saw me wearing it.”
He laughed and slowly link their fingers together, letting the big oval rock on hers coincide with the shiny black band on his one. They hold their hands together and just stay silent.

“I know I’m probably too late to say this, but I am sorry for breaking up with you last summer. I loved you too much and I didn’t want to get hurt, but I was selfish.”

“Archie you already-“

“No wait I have to tell you this” he stops her and continues “The thing is Veronica I don’t think there is any one else out there in the world for me, crazy as it sounds. I know we’re too young to know what words like forever mean but that’s what this feels like. I mean I’ve never known somebody so alive, and beautiful and challenging and even when you’re breaking you always make me feel like everything is gonna be fine. I never want to lose that light, Ronnie”

She leans on his chest and suddenly Archie hears her sobbing, her free hand grasping onto his sweater and covering her face ashamedly. “Oh Archie.. that’s not true”

“It is to me” he says carefully.

“Why do you always talk about me like I’m some angel, Archie? I did so many terrible things I- I took someone’s life for god’s sake” she breaks away from him and he can see the stream of tears, the distress on her face, delicate hand holding her own head has the promise ring shining on it.

“You didn’t though. You’re being framed. All of us have made mistakes, okay? I know the guilt is killing you but you don’t have to feel this way. You’re not guilty. You’re not burned out. You are still that bright, amazing girl okay Veronica? You’re still innocent”

She lets him convince her, even though she knows what he’s saying is right but the memories and lies are being confused in her head that even she can’t believe her story anymore. There’s no remedy. But it’s not the end either, and Archie makes her know that with everything he’s saying. He holds her closer and they have no idea how long they’re going to stay out here, but she never wants to leave.

“Archie.. you’re always there for me, even when I don’t deserve it”

Archie doesn’t say anything then. After all, what is there to say? But he holds her close and plants kisses all over her hair and face and they look into the big wide ocean that’s how big the rest of the
world is against them. He tells her again that he loves her, and she’s perfect as she is, and in the face of his moonlit skin all she can do is believe that it’s true.

Chapter End Notes

Dgahjd happy Christmas in August people!! So this last scene was one of the first ones I imagined when first coming up with the idea of In The Name Of Love, Archie comforting her when Veronica is being tortured with guilt.

That Jones family Christmas pyajama tradition is one my family did every year, so I thought I’d incorporate and it was cute.

P.S. I don’t speak Spanish therefore the reason why I didn’t make Veronica’s aunts speak in Spanish cos I don’t wanna mess it up so yeah it’s my own unintelligence problem.

I also realise that the rings are a bit pretentious and bizarre to some people, especially considering their age and the price lol. But I loves it and I’m sure if you’ve read this fic up til this far you’ll realise that they live in a world of dramatics. Tell me what you think I love you all and please stay tuned!

What was the most intense part? The part that made you feel the most?
Warning! Beware of feels ahead! Be sure to leave a comment once you reach the end :)
actually meeting Toni for brunch, not that she can tell her parents that.

“Well before you leave I’m informing you kids that we’re going down to the cabin this weekend.” Clifford puts his hands together and gazes out at their pool, eyes void of expression.

“What?”

“Why?”

Cheryl and Jason both exclaim at the same time. Neither of them want to endure each other’s company for any more than they already have to.

“It’s New Years Day weekend!”

“We won’t even be able to see fireworks at the cabin!”

“Enough!” He rattled the breakfast table in a way that made the maids wince and the kids know he was serious. “We’re leaving for the cabin tomorrow morning at eight sharp. Make a real.. New Years family time out of it” he grumbles and gets up from his chair, of course not looking at them even once.

They’re left in what’s left of the worst breakfast party ever.

“Ugh, can you believe my dad?” Cheryl has the phone presses between her cheek and her shoulder while she stuffs things in a purse. “It’s totally not like him to make a spontaneous trip either. And to the cabin? If he wanted a fireworks view the least he could do was our holiday home on Laguna Beach. Anyway this is officially going to be the worst New Years ever.”

“Hey, at least you won’t be going to this doomed party of my parents” Veronica reminds her on the other end.

Cheryl can’t argue that but she is curious, her father has never seemed so distant and spontaneous before. If anything she’s more mystified than angry.
“It won’t be doomed. Because you’ll be there”

Veronica merely rolls her eyes and huffs through her nose, not needing to give an answer to something as comforting as that white lie. “The special guests table napkins with their names on it go left, and the regular napkins are on the tables on the right” Veronica directs.

“What?”

“I’m not talking to you I’m talking to- oh! Yeah, there’s three tables with six. Look Cher I gotta go, but I’ll call you later. Mwah”

“ttfn” the Blossom girl greets before hanging up.

“Well isn’t this place looking nice?” Hiram walks through the big hall doorway with his hands in his pockets, a proud and wide smile stretching his face. “You’ve done spectacular”

“It’s what you always ask me to be” Veronica quips, but in truth she’s seeking her father’s approval as well. As much as she hates him and their relationship is torn, and this party is just another door unlocked to her life being ruined, every daughter has that instinct want to please her father. To make him proud, and she’s pretty sure she’s done it. The team has been working all morning to set up tables and flower arches, create the stage, and drape glass ornaments from the tall ceilings. This is just the beginning.

It feels weird to be standing in a place so conformed turned into a celebration venue, and she feels guilty for listening to her parents and helping put it together.

“Do you have your speech written already, mija?” Hermione places a hand on her shoulder.

“Almost. I’ll finish it tonight”

“Well make sure to proof read it, and memorise it perfectly. You can’t be reading it off like a script”

“I know mom” Veronica glares at her. Doesn’t her mother know she’s memorised way more than a three paragraph speech in her life? And she has flawless memory?

“I’m just reminding you, my love.” She leans in to kiss Veronica’s cheek and the smell of her rich perfume overpowers their senses. “This night must be nothing but perfect.”
“Lodge New Years Party 2018. Hosted by Hiram and Hermione Lodge, with guests of honour Xander St Clair, Simone St Clair and Evan St Clair. SUNDAY. Join us for the best night of the year. At The Pembrooke Hotel, Los Angeles”

FP put down the invitation card he’d just got in the mail, a black and gold card screaming at him on his breakfast table. He furrowed his brows together not too sure how to feel.

“We’re not going, right?” Jughead piped up immediately.

“What? Why not?” Said Jellybean “We go every year. What makes this year any different?”

“The fact that they’ll be boasting the success of buying my school, Jellybean!”

“It’s not your school, narcissist nancy.” She mumbled and rolled her eyes.

Jughead ignored his sister with a pinch of bitterness and looked to their father instead, seeking his decision.

“Actually Jug, I’m afraid we have to go.” FP sounded defeated, his face not nearly as enthusiastic as Jellybean who jumped up excitedly and left the table with her dirty dishes. The old man sighed, lost in thought.

“Why? Dad, that school is your legacy and The Lodges are using it for their sadistic benefits. You’re gonna make us stand there and clap hands ringing into the new year?”

“It’s not my decision, Jug!” He dropped a hand on the table making it rattle ever so slightly. “I’ve been working with Hiram much longer than you ever dreamed of being in the prep school - so whatever happens we’re still business partners. Betty if you wouldn’t like to go it’s up to you, but there won’t be much company in this house tomorrow night.” He threw Jughead that final look and threw his napkin on the table, padding off.

Betty and Jughead look at each other - conflict written all over. Betty really doesn’t want to go, and Jughead doesn’t want to be there when The Lodges reign in another big win either, but it’s all too complicated to make sense of what you want.
“Do you wanna go to the boardwalk for New Year’s dad? The fair is really cool every year and they shoot fireworks out into the ocean too. I thought it’d be a good way to spend time since mom left again” Archie adds nonchalantly into his and his father’s breakfast. They have a full platter meal and Vegas is jumping up and down, begging for scraps.

“What do you mean Arch - we’re spending New Years at the Lodge’s”

“Wait” Archie finished sneaking his dog a mini blueberry muffin to look back up. “We’re going to that? Aren’t you like.. The Capulets and The Montagues?” He adds quieter.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Fred questioned, an easygoing grin on his face. As Archie could see he wasn’t too bothered by the invitation card that just came in the mail, but he knows better. “You and Veronica gonna run off and leave behind your lives to get married and be together?”

Archie knows it’s a joke, his father doesn’t even know they’re seeing each other. If he did he wouldn’t be making the careless joke. But Archie’s eyes train to the black band on his left hand, and he looks at it in silence for too long before answering. “Huh, no. Just that you were completely against their decisions”

“That’s true, Arch but I was part of it in the beginning, albeit obliviously, my company is still tied in with this and it’ll look bad for me not to be there” he explained.

Archie huffed and took a big mouthful of eggs to stop himself from saying anything. But he couldn’t really stop himself. “How is that fair? That Veronica and I can’t date but I still have to show up to this thing for our parents’ sake?”

He could get into a whole argument and prove his point but nothing felt like ruining this Saturday morning breakfast. At least we could meet up behind a pillar or something… he tries reasoning with himself.

“Well then” Fred dropped his napkin and pushed the chair back, standing up and making Vegas go crazy for more food. Usually when they get up it means he can finish their left overs. Archie’s face fell, well that clearly upset his dad. “Maybe don’t date someone who’s involved in our world” he says finally before leaving.

Archie falls back into his seat and sighs. “Come here Vegas!” The big dog ran over, Archie moving and allowing him to jump on his lap. Those big brown eyes stared loyally into his eyes. Archie ran his hands through the dog’s golden fur, knowing exactly where to scratch him to earn him points and loving bites. “Looks like you’re the only one I can talk to around here.. what is he talking about, right? There isn’t anyone who isn’t intertwined with all this. Literally. And there isn’t anyone besides Ronnie.”
Cheryl starts packing for the long weekend, deliberating between bringing her regular fancy nightwear or just throwing in a bunch of flannel stuff because there’s no one at the cabin - and she’s already made the decision to lock herself in her room once they get there anyway. She decides on the fleeces and thermals for warmth, and has some weird jitters creep up her feet about the prospect of this abrupt weekend away.

“Are you ready yet?” Jason shouts from their room interconnection.

“I’m packing! For god’s sake it’s barely six in the morning, will you give me a minute?” She throws a big pile of reading material to keep her distracted.

Jason makes an angry noise. “You’re just packing now?”

Cheryl sighs impatiently and glares at the open door. “Do you wanna critique every other thing I do as well?” She goes to grab her portable charger when she hears Jason throw the tv remote at her door. “Pick that up you mutt!”

“Jason! Cheryl! Let’s go!” They both hear Clifford shout from downstairs just as Jason is about to argue with her. She sighs exaggeratedly while zipping her bag up and reaching for her mini backpack, leaving the suitcase for one of their helpers to carry down. She makes sure to not look at Jason once on the way down.

They all climb into the family car, instead of a limo which if Cheryl’s being honest makes her feel intimidated because it means her father doesn’t want even a driver out there with them. It also disgusts her because she’s going to have to sit right next to Jason. The first few hours it’s easy, to stare out the window at the hills and beaches with earbuds in bringing her into a different world. But after she and Jason fell asleep, they woke up expecting to be there already - only it was like they were on completely different roads.

Now The Blossoms didn’t go to their cabin much, it belonged to Nana Rose and the furniture is all kind of creaky. But the twins are almost positive that this isn’t the same scenery leading to their cabin. Usually it’s green trees and a wide glittering lake and they drive right up a hill to the cabin, but now it’s like they’re going upstate with even lower temperature and slowly the roads become smaller and less busy. The amount of snaps and pops makes Cheryl question how their tyres are still in tact.

“Uh dad, where are we going?” Jason finally asks, holding onto the arm rest with his knuckles white.
“A different location than usual. It’s new.” is the only answer they got.

“But we’ve been in this car forever! When will we get there?” Cheryl whines. She wishes she could get more than a vague answer but her mother seems to be suspiciously dead asleep.

They were stuck. For what felt like hours more, but Cheryl and Jason couldn’t even tell because their phones were dead. Even her portable charger ran out of battery before they got to this supposed disclosed location. She slowly starts to think this memory will never leave her, the bump in the road every second and the eerie quietness that exuded around them. She had sat on her ass in that car for so long it felt like she was going to lose her mind. It was brutal. It might even be her dying memory, for that’s how engrained the situation became.

The cabin leaves her speechless. She’s expecting something small and woodsy, a fisherman’s den for all she knows with how far their father drove out. It’s a vast split level home with enormous windows offering beautiful views of the lake and the woods. Inside, the cabin features beautiful timber and an amazing natural stone fireplace along with luxury furnishing. Although - they do have to drive through a spiky tall gate before entering property, and Cheryl slowly looks past all the beauty around her to see that the high gates wrap around the entire house.

“What the heck. There’s no signal” is the first thing Jason says. Coming out of the car to stretch his long legs, earphones around his neck.

“Wait you’re phone’s still alive?”

“Barely. It’s five percent.” They break off the conversation before their parents can scold them for being on their phones during a getaway.

A shiny red camaro is greeting them in the foyer, Cheryl and Jason are both awestruck by the colour and the gleam of it. Jason took a step closer to inspect, while Cheryl runs her hand along the hood and feels the hot steel beneath her palm. “I’m getting to drive this first” she whispered to Jason who just rolled his eyes at her. This house is getting more attracting by the second.
“Jason, Cheryl go and put your things upstairs” Penelope says “Cheryl’s bedroom is the red one, and Jason will have the blue one. Ours is right down the hall”

For a fleeting moment Jason looks excited, he even grins at Cheryl and they pick up their bags and race each other all the way up the stairs. He opens the first door at the head of the stairs and the room is mixed with wallpaper and wooden walls, beautiful blue and white embroidered linens on the wood framed bed and possibly the best view from a window seat. “This is my room!” He announces, throwing his bags in.

“Gosh mom and dad this place is beautiful! When ever did you buy it?”

“It’s kind of a hide out. When I can’t make a decision at work, coming here usually does the trick.” Clifford replies from downstairs and Penelope smiles a little ruefully, watching her husband punch in a code next to the doorway. “Sorry, there’s a streak of hunters out here- we are in the middle of the woods. Safety first.”

Cheryl’s room is smaller than Jason’s but it’s perfect to her. The walls are painted a glossy onyx red, and the antique brass bed is covered with ruffly white sheets. There’s also an old fashioned wardrobe and matching vanity against the wall. Just as she turns around to yell that her room is the best, she’s faced with the view of a narrow long hallway, Jason and her parents’ closed doors. The staircase railings are so far apart someone as tiny as herself could slip through with ease, falling to a far lower ground. Suddenly those shivers simmer back in her stomach and she turns back around, looking out the window at the woods to find her solace- but finds none. It’s frosted cold and not a soul in sight, not a clear road for miles.

She takes a deep breath, calming her nerves. *It’s probably just new house spirits lingering around.* Cheryl goes over to her bag on the streamer trunk at the end of the bed and fishes through it to find her phone. After clicking it to a charger on the wall, the screen comes to life but no notifications jump out at her. She goes straight to her speed dials to click on Josie’s contact, but the line doesn’t even beep.

Cheryl blinks. This must be an error. She tries Veronica next, watching the screen only for it to deem *unsuccessful* and jump back out. This isn’t an error.

There’s no signal.
The central of Costal Preparatory High School is buzzing with life by the time nine o’clock rolls around, a sea of twinkling lights, vintage cars and the camera flashes wild by the entrance. The entire school is transformed into one of The Lodge’s masterpieces, your craziest beautiful dream. Every who’s who of Los Angeles is quickly coming to the building and it fills out nicely.

One of the security guards open the door before Betty can reach for it, and she’s gotten used to holding her hand out for him to help her out.

She gets out and immediately there’s flashes from multiple directions. Her hair stands on end, praying those photos don’t show the goosebumps all over her bare legs. She’s gotten used to smiling like a princess as well, and pins one on her lips before climbing the familiar steps with Jughead by her side.

“Oh the Statfords just got here mom and, I have to go and find someone” Veronica whirled around from her mother upon getting a message from one of the guards that The Andrews car is here.

“That’s fine” Hermione answered, distracted by the ornamental lights positioning. “Don’t forget to remind Kurt that the fireworks in the yard go off at midnight if you’re passing outside!”

She laughed “I will”

Veronica made her way across the floor in all her glory, loving that everyone was looking at her with envy and admiration. She loved all the photographers snapping her every angle, and knowing that by tomorrow morning her beautiful face would be on every newsfeed.

“Kurt, the fireworks at midnight! My mother demands perfection” she reminds the middle aged man responsible for the biggest entertainment of the night.
“As always, of course Miss Veronica”

Veronica smiled charmingly at him, red lips matching her red dress, turning around just in time to see him blush furiously at her.

“Are you gonna be alright, Betty?” Jughead leaned down to whisper at his girlfriend. They had just walked into the school and its great hall bordered a king’s ball. The Lodges had outdone themselves and it took their breath away.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine”

FP disappeared to make conversation with people, and Jellybean has her cronies out somewhere in the crowd. The music is good and for as heavy as all this seems, plunging necklines drowning in jewels and shoes so shiny they could reflect, the vibe is pretty light. Jughead and Betty planned to stick by each other the whole night but he sees some kids from school and whispers just a minute, so she finds the refreshments and decides to help herself.

She hasn’t seen Veronica yet. She will at some point, she knows that. But at least Cheryl won’t be here so it’s only one less battle to face. She’s staring into the see of socialites and philanthropists and all these people who have their life figured out, their business all together, and couldn’t feel more obscure. Just another nobody, just another face in the crowd... those helpless thoughts filled and she knows seeing Veronica is going to bring back memories - memories that since Christmas break and sleeping in Jughead’s arms had been wiped to a minimum. She feels like leaving when out of nowhere, an even bigger nightmare appears and she has to blink five times before believing it.

_Ohmygod! Mom?_

“Elizabeth? What on earth are you doing here?”

There’s Alice Cooper, standing in a blue dress across the drinks station that made Betty choke.

“I- I’m here with Jughead. What are you doing here..” she can barely gain her train of thought because the shock defeats her, when another unmistakable voice shrills their ears.

“Mom you need to come see this there’s an ice sculpture - oh, Betty?”

“Polly?!?” The youngest Cooper sets her drink down with a thud before walking around the table “Wait up. What the hell is this?”

“Elizabeth, your mouth lately..” her mother shakes her head

“Nice dress too” Polly notes. It’s a shiny silver one that The Joneses’ personal tailor recommended, she makes the best of all Jellybean’s dresses as well.
“Seriously. What are you doing here?!”

The mother daughter duo exchanged a look before Alice spoke. “Well unless you forgot we do, PR for The Lodges, and this is their biggest event yet..”

“Oh my god” Betty laughs humourlessly, not believing it. “So should I except to see dad here too? And another one of your bombs dropping about something completely untrue in the paper tomorrow?”

“Your father’s in the bathroom” Alice says carefully, eyeing a group of Russian ambassadors and bringing her voice down. “I’m sure he’ll be much happier to see you”

“No thanks” Betty couldn’t even bring herself to care when after all that happened her family and The Lodges are still in cahoots and it bothers her to no end. “I might just leave. I’ve gotten sick to my stomach”

She leaves them there in their bubble of demise and makes long strides across the floor to go and find Jughead.

(x.x.x.x)

Cheryl has finally settled into her bed, comfortable plush pillows surrounding her like a wall from the monsters. She stares up at the ceiling above her and twirls one of the long red tendrils splayed on the pillow, thinking how she would’ve been disappointed with how she’s spending the New Year right now - if it weren’t for the fact that she expected this to happen all along. The entire family had dinner and sat around the warm fireplace, drinking wine until eventually she and Jason couldn’t stop bickering.

A kick under the table, an aggressive hair pull, purposely knocking each other’s food over then Clifford ordered everyone to go to their rooms. Jason had went upstairs without arguing, and Cheryl huffs before going too.

It’s always been like this. Their family’s cursed. Why do they even bother trying anymore?

She lingered by her suitcase, fingers ghosting over book spines before deciding on *Lolita*. Her laptop’s dead, there’s no signal and there isn’t the shadow of a street light out there in the woods for her to go exploring. It really feels like the rest of the world is detached from wherever on earth they are. There aren’t even any owls hooting. It’s dead silence. Until -
Cheryl’s fingers stop twirling and she lets go of the piece of hair, other hand clutching her sheet tightly. What the hell was that? She hears it again. A sound like the door opening. Not a creak, more like someone is trying to jiggle it free. She freezes but her heart is pounding so hard it hurts from inside.

The hunters? *No, but there’s a fence.*

What if their alarms are faulty and the robber made it into the house? She feels like a coward as time seeps by, passes like moon phases and ticks on the clock lost by a million counts. She sinks even deeper into her pillow every time she hears it.

*Tick.*

Again.

Again.

Again.

She prays to the universe that she stays quiet enough, they won’t even know a soul lives behind her door. They wouldn’t suspect a thing.

But Cheryl can’t.

The red head bounces up into sitting position and for the first time sees how *unfamiliar* this room is and how *strange* it makes her feel. Her pale toes hit the wooden floor first, slowly letting weight fall on them and careful not to make a sound. She looks out the window but it’s trees and trees and so dark you can’t even see the rest of the sky. Just darkness. She gulps, terrified that her whole insane family might get murdered in this house and nobody would find their bodies ever.

What if they’re in Jason’s room? Her parents -
Another sound went off. The same one, but louder this time. Like a bang. It shot chills up her legs and Cheryl jumped off the ground like a possessed child. The action scared her even more and her breath shook, reaching for one of the heavy hand mirrors on the dresser and walked slowly towards her door, twisting the knob at a lifeless speed.

Walking down the hallway Cheryl lifts her mirror to face level so she can see behind her, but it only feels like insanity is reaching her when she starts imagining running things and beady black eyes behind her. Just three steps, and it feels like she’s walked a mile.

All the lights downstairs are turned off and the house has zoned to complete obliqueness. She can’t see in front of her. When a ray of lights flash across her face and it surprises her so much she almost trips, but only in enough time to hear the door bang! shut and an engine growling outside. Cheryl screams, really screams and runs back into her room, shutting the door so fast and loud it made the same sound again.

She dropped the mirror from her weak fist, the porcelain and glass pieces smashing on the floor beneath her. She looked at the mess beneath her and -

A car. The car.

Cheryl forgot everything else and ran over to her window to see the car getting away, whoever it was, the thief in the night, escaping. Only when she got there and pushed those windows open, dipping her head out and feeling the sticky air on her skin, it’s her father’s car driving out. And those tall mansion gates, closing behind him. Locking them in.

Cheryl shouts, “Dad! Dad!” but it’s useless because he’s gone. The red station wagon disappearing joining the rest of the dark unseen universe from her window, she loses sight of it before she can think I’m trapped.

We’re all trapped.

He trapped us here!

And then a cold, wooshing feeling pools in her toes and Cheryl is brought back to the fact that there’s gnarly red blood all over the floor. She can only see the red, nothing else in the pitch black house. The coppery smell is so strong it makes her sick. Red blood on the wood floor and flowing
freely down her pale legs, shiny glass pieces stuck and mocking her.

The sound of a mic indicates to everyone that the ceremony is starting, and Hiram and Hermione are standing up on stage with broad smiles, and the entire room stops to look at them. “I hope you all are having a wonderful time! On behalf of Lodge Industries I’d like to thank all of you for being here tonight, at our annual party.”

Archie wondered inside finally, he’d tried to get past the bustling entrance but with many people stopping his father to have a chat, Archie couldn’t leave his side. Only now it felt like his heart was stopping. Up there, Veronica is standing behind her parents and it’s funny to him how beautiful she can get with every passing day. Up there she’s glowing in the spotlights, Archie can’t take his eyes off her.

Veronica has on a rich red dress that’s striking and bold, just like her, he thinks. It’s just about scandalous enough for a big company party while still having her touch on it. All her long raven hair is pulled up in a complex type of bun with pieces framing her pretty face, and Archie just smiles at her, not prepared to be transported to when times were easier and he was bewitched by her.

*He’s just smiling at her, smiling at her like he can’t believe she’s real. “Archie! Look here the ice sculpture just arrived, Archie!”*

*Jughead was bouncing out of control, he’s probably the only fourteen year old who still gets sugar rushes. It’s Christmas so FP let him eat anything he wants, and Archie expected this to happen.*

“So beautiful...”

“I know right! Wait - ARCHIE!” Jughead slapped the red headed boy on his head and it shocked him. “Doofus! Look at the ice sculpture, not Veronica!”

Archie gives him the best apologetic look, but he can’t really be sorry for what he’s feeling. He
and Veronica Lodge had just started dating and it’s already been an adventure. She’s so spontaneous and alive and wild, things he knew about her when they were just friends, but know that he’s dating her it’s a whole other story. She promised to come find him under the mistletoe and he knows what that means, excitement rushing from his heart all over his body.

“God, Jug she is so beautiful. I think -“

“You don’t think. She is. Everyone knows.”

His statement bore truth, right now when Veronica makes her slow and dramatic steps down the long staircase in The Pembrooke’s Grand Ballroom. She’s wearing a red dress and an edible smile, it’s just known that even at fourteen she’s the most beautiful girl in this room.

None of those debutantes with their finery have anything on her.

“That wasn’t what I meant, Jughead” he sighs and locks eyes with her, she’s busy swimming in the admiration but he doesn’t care. “I mean yes, but also something else. I think I love her”

“Huh” Jughead doesn’t sound amused. “Sure you do. Come on, we’ll talk to Veronica later. Let’s look at the ice swan up close!!” He grips Archie’s arm tightly and pulls him along, but then another screeching voice interrupts.

“Juggie Juggie the swan is here! I wanna see it!” Jellybean is jumping up and down excitedly, her white and gold dress all crumpled and there’s some stains on it.

“Noo..” Jughead groaned “Why can’t you go yourself?”

“Because Lily is sick and Jenna’s with her parents. You’re my brother aren’t you? COME ON.”

The scrawny twelve year old girl pulled her brother along, always been stronger and bossier than him anyway, while Archie stood there motionless.

Veronica finally came down from the stairs and she walks straight to him, it makes his heart fill with pride that he’s the guy with this wonderful girl. She’s standing in front of him in a sparkling red dress and jewels in her hair with all their family and friends around, so he thinks this might be the perfect time to tell her the realisation he’d just had. But.. why not just relish in this high now. He can tell her for the rest of their lives.

She pulls him closer by his red tie and then their bodies entangle, her chin resting on his shoulder and his hands finding her. Being overcome with Veronica, the rush and oceans crashing he feels inside.. it’s indescribable. She whispers in his ear that perfect sultry voice “Hey Archie.. I’m glad you’re here..”

Her eyes skim over the crowd and find his, she smiles specially. After all these years they’re still exactly where they were. Crazy about each other.

“And so now we proudly announce that starting August 2018, this year, Costal Prep will officially be in the hands of Lodge Industries. So for the St Clairs, and the Lodge Industries clients, lets toast
to them”

The room erupts in wine glasses toasting and clapping, chatter undoubtedly about the controversial big buy and everything else that’s been circling The Lodges this past month. They’ve just bought a staple piece of Los Angeles land, their daughter’s wrapped up in a murder investigation and previously went under fire for indecency. Nothing looks good anymore.

“Well this is just how I thought I’d feel.” Fred says so suddenly Archie forgot he was there “fifteen years working with The Lodges. And this is how it ends.” He put his glass down and turned to head out, completely done with tonight’s purpose.

“Hey - dad!” Archie goes to reason with him, not sure for what.

The party starts lighting up after that. There’s a mass pool of people dancing right in the middle, those memorised civilised steps, dresses swooshing and stealing looks from across the floor. Hiram and Hermione have left the stage to go and socialise with their guests, but Veronica walks up to the middle of the stage and looks down from it.

She can see everyone from here. The air smells like sweet confection and age old wine, the rain drops pattering the ceiling above them. There’s men in ruffly white shirts, the servers who walk in sync with trays on their palms. Veronica smiles at that. The most comforting face in the crowd is Jellybean, Veronica can see her jet black hair and long legs from all the way up. She can’t find Archie though. Or Jughead. And for whatever reason it worries her.

Some girls from school are here.. she sees Scarlett and Stella with another girl and they’re all laughing, looking young and pretty in their ballgowns. For a second Veronica just focuses on them. Wouldn’t life be easier, if she was one of those normal teenage girls?

“Ronnie”

She snapped out of the daydream vignette and turned around, needing a little more force than usual to do so because of the weight of her dress, to see her mother standing there. “What are you doing up here? Just looking at everyone?”

“Sorry” she walked over and tried to rid the downcast expression on her face “I was just trying to escape any chaos that probably would’ve erupted from my friends after you and daddy announced.. you know. Is everything okay?”

Hermione looks at her daughter sympathetically and sighs “So far. Only we have no idea where
The St Clairs are. They’re supposed to be here by now to announce Xander’s new election.”

Cheryl has stopped the bleeding - paper towels in the bathroom and gauze from her old cheer emergency kit. Now she has a pair of black track pants pulled up underneath her white nightgown, a visible bulge where she’d wrapped the wound with gauze and it still kind of burns. But it’s in tact. She tosses the blood soaked tissues in the trash and there’s still splatters of it on the bathroom sink and back in her room it’s mixed with shiny glass pieces on the floor.

She’s made a decision. Not an easy one, far from it. The kind that lingers in the grey area of a black and white world, too hard for anyone else to understand. She’s going to run away. And she needs to, now.

Asking for help isn’t going to do any favours, not when she cannot trust anybody that could possibly help her. Cheryl has to get out of here and fast, without Jason or god forbid her mother catching her.

She shrugs on a black Adidas jacket and it dawns on her how ridiculous she looks.

The doors are locked of course and there’s also the gate, but there is the Camaro. That could be her way out - but how is she going to get out? She takes a long, doubtful look at Jason’s closed bedroom door.

Last time, brother.. if I run away tonight I’m never coming back, I don’t want to but I just need to cut lose.

I don’t know if I can be safe in this family anymore.

Memories of her and Jason holding hands on the swings flash like gasoline burning her alive, but she can’t think about that right now. Then she feels cold tears drip on her cheeks and wipes them away furiously, there’s no use crying about it.
Walking away feels like leaving behind her entire life, leaving behind the meaning of Cheryl Blossom. Every step away and she keeps clicking insistently on her phone praying for it to come alive, to make an SOS call, anything even though she knows it’s useless. Every step away is one step further away from the girl who had everything.

She hauls her duffel bag on her shoulder with every essential known to mankind, freezing at the security numbers. How the hell is she going to crack this code? It’s not gonna be something stupid like her and Jason’s birthday or BLOSSOM in numerals. It’s just not. She cracks her brain open thinking of a possibility before realising she should go looking in her father’s office.

Cheryl leaves her bag by the door and runs head first into the door next to the downstairs bathroom. She turns the light on in there for a little guidance. Even the small shine makes her skin sweat, staring up at the stairs for any sign of Jason or her mother.

They can’t catch me leaving.. what if daddy planned to keep us here forever?

The light flickers on, and suddenly Cheryl is standing in the doorway of something so horrific, something passionate and criminal. The entire room has been decorated that you can’t even see the walls anymore - with pictures, paparazzi pictures, spy pictures, and articles of The Lodges. She’s so taken aback that it requires a moment before realising where some of these were taken. That day when she went to see Polly, there’s photographs of them in Archie’s car and at the restaurant. Pictures from the Ivy Reps, of Veronica walking outside school and photos of her and Archie that Cheryl doesn’t know when they were taken, somewhere on a beach at night.

Pictures from the last football game when the Bulldogs won. How long exactly has my dad been watching The Lodges? Veronica?

Cheryl’s never been the type to talk to herself- but she can’t escape the initial shock that escapes her chest, and it’s like sickness has been planted in their lives born from this very room.

“Oh my god”

She takes a moment to look at the details of each picture, scraps of news articles fake ones and real ones, The Lodges at their events smiling and proud. Then she snaps out of it only to see the print design of a dress she’s sure she would not forget pinned on a board titled GAME PLAN.

The red dress. The red princess dress that Cheryl’s obsessed over since Veronica never wears red. She recognises it immediately as the dress Veronica planned to wear to her New Years Party tonight. There’s two other prints, one a of a black Armani suit and another sleek black dress.

She realises that these have to be The Lodge’s outfits tonight.

It hits her and frightens her. So much so that she starts reading desperately all the other pieces of
paper stuck on the \textit{GAME PLAN} board, but it all looks like bills and expenses she can’t figure out what for. Then one piece of paper catches her attention, it’s right there in the open laying on his desk which hits the back of her knees with a thump.

It might just be a google search - \textit{chemistry of fireworks}.

She picks the paper up and reads closer, disassembling fireworks, dismantle fireworks, and her eyes flicker back to the \textit{GAME PLAN} and now more words stand out to her. \textit{Midnight, backyard, distraction} and \textit{trap}.

She looks back at the chemistry of fireworks, scans the board again, and Veronica’s rich red dress. He escaped and left us here. More words start to make sense. \textit{Revenge, start over, game over}.

She puts all the messy pieces together in her head but it doesn’t feel so out of reach anymore, it feels completely possible. Her head is spinning with the realisation before she can even gasp and whisper to herself.

\textit{He’s going to burn them all alive.}

\textit{(x.x.x.x)}

“Archie, there you are” she felt her back collide with the cold wall behind her, his finger coming up to shush her lips and one on his own. Veronica’s been looking for him since after the announcement, they promised to meet, and now they’ve finally managed to sneak away.

Or rather, for him to sneak up on her.

“Hey, I missed you” he whispers just inches from her face. She can feel his breath on her skin and
tries not to be affected by it, but she knows he knows better too. “Are you okay?”

“What do you think? If my parents even find out this very moment that I’m with you they’ll kill me. And all our friends probably hate me too, now”

He doesn’t say anything but she can understand perfectly. It’s the face he makes when he doesn’t wanna upset her by saying the truth. And she can feel it weighing down already.

“Tell me” she says simply.

Archie sighs, moving both his hands to stick them in his pockets so he doesn’t feel the urge to touch her. She doesn’t want that now, she wants reality. “Jughead is pissed. I saw him from where I was standing and he looked more than angry, he looked sad. Our other friends, I’m not sure Ronnie but it will probably never be the same after your parents bought this place.”

“He probably feels betrayed” she says monotonously, ignoring Archie’s comment about their other friends. She only cares really about how Jughead feels. “Of course he feels betrayed! Archie, what am I gonna do? There’s no way he or Betty are ever going to forgive me and we’re- the last memory we’ll ever have of each other is us supposedly killing someone Archie. Think of that! How fucked up is that? We’re sixteen and we’re already screwed over”

The shrill sound of Archie’s phone ringing jumps them both out of their skin and cuts Veronica off her tangent. He gives an apologetic look, fishing for his phone in his pocket and silencing it.

“It’s my dad” he mumbles, face illuminated in the dark “He wants to leave this place and is looking for me.”

Veronica can’t even think anymore and she covers her face with her hands tiredly, turning around and pressing her forehead to the wall. Suddenly this dress feels too tight and suffocating and she just feels so *exhausted*, so broken and done dealing with all of this. Not only her heart hurts, but it’s growing and spreading in her whole body and the sad thing is she starts to feel like she’s used to it.

“Hey hey stop, don’t stress out about this, okay?” Archie wraps his hands around her waist and turns her back around, using one hand to tip her chin up and look into her eyes. They’re sad, sad teary eyes carrying the weight of the world in them. That’s not what Veronica Lodge is supposed to look like; her face was made for happiness and riches and all the finery this world could never even compete with. Her face was made for those days like three years ago, when he first realised he loved her, not like this right now.

“What am I gonna do?”

“We are gonna sail through the storm.” She sighs and looks away dejectedly, like she can’t even believe that promise anymore. So he tries something else. “Look at me. We fight the battle, whatever it is. And if it gets too hard I’ll pick you up, get all your stuff in my car and we’ll drive so far away to a place where people won’t have ever even heard of Hiram Lodge and Nick St Clair and Costal Prep school. Okay?”
She says screw it to figuring out the door code and even abandons most of her things, just grabs the lightest, smallest, most important of bags and flies to the fireplace before a minute passes. Something easy, something simple and quick. A candelabra.

Perfect.

It stands tall on the mantle piece and doesn’t have any candles in it, it looks grand and more magnificent than anything in this room. She’s tiny so she needs to stretch a mile to get a hold on it, cold metal and she wraps her palm around it before pulling. She stagers backwards and almost falls when the full weight of it takes place in her one hand, not thinking straight enough to comprehend how heavy it must have been.

Thankfully she doesn’t drop it and now that it’s in her hands, the enchanted thing feels almost bigger than herself. Okay. All I need to do is break this glass and then get to the car and drive out. Fast, before Jason or mummy notices. They’ll hear the noise but I need to leave before they can stop me.

She turns around and the grandfather clock reads that it’s half past ten, who knows how fast he’ll get to the party? She swipes the Camaro key off a hook and feels her blood pumping in anticipation.
There’s a silent auction going on next to where the band is playing, and all the innocent girls fawn over diamonds and pearls and hoping their parents will buy something for them. Maybe in a perfect world some guy would come up and compliment them on how pretty that necklace looks on them, how well it suits, too fitting for them to not have it. Maybe he’ll sweep her off her feet and buy the diamond necklace, maybe it did happen once to one of them. Betty notices an old couple bidding on two trips to Mykonos and Greece, while she storms pass in a flurry.

For a second she is distracted, and blue eyes linger on the opulent wealth right there in front of her in the open. Too distracted that she fully collides with a body and when she looks up and sees who it is, the fury just turns on inside her head.

“Veronica” she snarls while adjusting the skirt on her glittery silver dress. It’s not torn, just a little frayed. Veronica looks completely collected in physicality but her face seems upset, drained somehow. Betty doesn’t know what it is but the sunshine’s seemed to have disappeared from her friend’s face.

The news of Hiram and Hermione buying Costal Prep has just hit the fan and everyone feels a little confused.

“Betty, I need to talk to you” Veronica tries to start, but fails “I know you’re mad and this is a really hard situation but it’s not - anybody’s fault, we need to-“

“No it is your fault Veronica!” The blonde girl screamed provocingly in a way that made more than a few people turn around and stare. “It is your fault. God I wish I just had never met you, Veronica! Everything in my life is ruined - and it’s all you and your family’s fault.” She feels breathless and relieved at the same time, like her chest is so heavy with pressure but her shoulders were laid off some weight. She feels small and big at the same time and screaming at Veronica Lodge is kind of cathartic in a way she never wanted to feel.

Veronica can’t even say anything, she’s speechless for all she’s worth and it’s not like she really knows any solution either. For the first time she doesn’t have anything to say.

“Betty I’m sorry I ever included you in what happened that night, if that’s what you’re talking about”

“Oh, don’t do me any favours. I never wanted to be here anyway, but Mr Jones insisted. So now I’m just going to lock myself in the bathroom and pretend until the night is over that I still have a perfectly, normal life”
she feels her face it’s about as hot as the red dress she’s wearing.

Veronica watches Betty’s glittery silver silhouette disappear into the bathrooms when she feels a buzz on her phone and checks it.

*borrowed phone, mine died. Meet me in the achievements hall? - archie*

She sighs before checking for any sign of her parents, being cautious of them catch her sneaking away. It’s already eleven pm and the fireworks will be going off in an hour. She has to give her ‘announcement speech’ on that charity her parents coerced her into in less than a half hour, she thinks grimly. Veronica walks elegantly across the floor and nods her head courteously at people. She finally heads upstairs and pushes open the door of Costal Prep’s achievements hall expecting to see Archie’s red hair and expectant face.

But instead - there’s the last two people on earth she’d want to be alone in a room with sitting there. Mr and Mrs St Clair.

Veronica can hear her heart beating and it’s not like she can run and hide, either. Their eyes lock viciously on hers right away.

“Uhm..”

“How dare you show your face here!” The woman, so petite and frayed looking drowning in her jewels is emitting rage from every pore in her skin. She stands up and it makes Veronica nervous for a split second that she grips the door frame.

It takes about two seconds for her to realise she’s been tricked and Archie didn’t text her after all, someone purposely set this up. Damn it.

Her throat bobs slightly when she swallows before building some non existent courage and speaking so Mrs St Clair won’t come over and end her.

“I can’t tell you enough how sorry I am, Mrs St Clair. And how despite what you’ve heard - I know - I had nothing to do with Nick’s-”
“What happened to my son?!” A loud sound stung through the room that was Mrs St Clair’s hand coming in contact with Veronica’s face. She felt the burn before it even came and dizziness right after, a swelling, painful sensation on her tender skin. She held the spot with her own hand while the older woman continued. “What did you do to him?!”

Mr St Clair was frozen in shock and so was Veronica, completely stunned to a standstill. They would’ve stood there forever if more footsteps hadn’t appeared.

“What in god’s name is going on, Veronica?” Hiram bellowed from the staircase upon hearing and seeing his daughter just get slapped in the face.

“Calm down, Simone” Mr St Clair held his crying wife closer just as Hiram and Hermione came all the way into the room and closed the door behind them so people at the party wouldn’t hear.

“You could ask Mrs St Clair- though I doubt she has any valid reasons. I didn’t kill your son!” She screams as loud as she can. At the top of her lungs. Frustration, tension pushing out and clawing free.

“Veronica!” Hermione gasped at her daughter. “What are you even doing up here to begin with you’re supposed to be giving your speech”

“How is this my fault? Your sick daughter killed my son, she did..” Simone became a mess before they even knew it and if Veronica had any space for sympathy in her fuelling head she’d feel sorry for the woman.

“I didn’t kill Nick.”

“Veronica do not say another word” Hiram ordered her

“I’m being framed.”

“Oh, so now you’re saying this?” Xander St Clair questioned disbelievingly.

“We know our daughter and we’re trying to fight the case, unfortunately the evidence isn’t on our side but we have always been on yours. Veronica would never do such a thing.” Hermione attempts to assure him, unsuccessfully.
“Well you’re just as much to blame as she is, Hiram” Xander countered back “If it weren’t for your involving the girl in the first place, pretending to have her in the company and making her think she has some power, I would have never lost my son!”

Cheryl finally hears that blaring ringing and it will forever mark the moment when she breaks loose, literally. The engine on the Camaro is growling loudly so it helps block out the other sounds, the other thoughts, the darkness of the night. Really - she has no idea how she expected to see in this dead of night when it’s almost midnight on new years.

The rustle of twigs and dead leaves and pebbles beneath the tyres make it increasingly hard to move, but she steps on the gas because lives depend on it and zooms into the only direction - out.

She does look back, a split second to see the sorrow mansion looking even more haunted then when she first saw it, but that’s the last thing she thinks of it. An open top car is the worst getaway car, that’s for sure. When wind blows so hard things screech and fly up in her face that she only has a second to dodge or avoid. Her duffel is sitting in the passenger seat and her hands are hot iron grips on the wheel, only one thought in mind - get to the party and save Veronica before it’s too late.

She keeps hitting V’s contact at any chance that signal will appear, but it never does, and the chances of reaching out to anybody at all and send a warning is slipping out of loose hands. Her pale skin is practically frozen when a cross roads happen, only she can’t see the cross roads in the goddamn dark and screeches to a stop.

11.24 Her time is almost gone.

How much time do I have?
She goes left and it’s a highway but she’s pretty sure they drove up here. There isn’t any more up. This place hasn’t been visited in years, that’s why a big oak tree has grown twenty feet into the street and her headlights flash on it before she can blink and see what’s happening.

11.30 She tried Veronica’s contact again, and again and again and again. 11.30 what if I’m too late?

The car is bouncing and flying of all rails with the roads in deeper potholes than the rest of the world has seen. She doesn’t care. The potholes and the big oak tree don’t matter but she has to get out of here and back to town. Where am I?!

Is it getting darker or is it just tears in her eyes? She dreads looking at the clock because she knows what it’ll say.

Too late. Too late.

Her hands are even too numb to keep holding onto the wheel, and the deep cut of glass in her thigh is starting to feel like a bullet wound that’ll never heal. 11.45 she’s already crying, and suddenly something so bright and big flashes it’s headlights coming towards her - and it might be a big shot Camaro but some truck going full speed in the dark night has no control of it, she swerves off the road like garbage pushed aside so fast and so hard everything combusted at once.

“Shit!” She can practically feel it, flying almost floating but it’s not. She’s falling, from where she doesn’t even know. Falling tumbling and tossing and turning around until her entire body flips upside down, the car and her phone all going with it.

Now the only thing she can see is the clock. 12.00. And the Camaro’s glass windshield, shattering right before her eyes. One by one. Piece by piece. It happens like a thunder bolt growing bigger and bigger before shattering all at once just like that mirror in her room...

And before she knows it.. her head hits the ground and that’s agony beyond the burning of her
scalp as her mouth fills with blood and her ears start to ring and her vision blurs. She doesn’t think of anything else in that last moment except that *I didn’t get to save anybody... even myself*.

“You know, after all the favours we’ve done for you Xander I’d have some remorse if I was you”

“Remorse? *Me* for you?” He taunted “Hiram you’re out of your mind!”

A loud booming sound pierced and pitched before fizzling, and they all fell to silence. “Is that the fireworks show?” Hermione thought of the only possibility.

Veronica checked her phone and frowned. “It’s not even midnight yet. What the hell?” She runs to the door and pushes to leave, but it’s stuck. The door has always been heavy. But now it’s stuck.

“What? What’s wrong?”

“The door’s locked” she says so delicately it comes out almost a whisper. Both men go over and try pushing the door, ignoring her, only to cough when they step back. There’s black smoke and it’s coming from outside the door.
“I don’t get it dad - why do you even care so much? The Lodges already bought the school, it’s over. Aren’t you exhausted of this feud?”

Archie and Fred are standing in the parking lot outside the party and Fred has his arm resting on the hood of the car, a disagreeing frown on his face. He called Archie out to leave a while ago, but the teenager was persistent and they’ve been arguing ever since.

“It’s not just about the school, Archie. Or any feud for that matter. You know me, I don’t ever like bad blood. But this is about the money they’ve sucked from us and -”

“Sorry to interrupt Mr Andrews, but Archie, have you seen Betty?” Jughead appears with his beanie even lower on his head than usual, probably to cover his forehead from the drizzle. Archie is frustrated and pissed and he and Jughead haven’t really talked since that night with the Nick St Clair thing, so now of all moments is worst.

“I don’t fucking know, Jughead go find her yourself!” He says frustratedly, shocking Fred to pieces. Archie’s never lashed out like that before. Jughead realised his mistake and blinks, trying not to react but just backs away and starts walking to his car too.

Who knows, maybe Betty got caught up with her mom. This night has been eventful enough.

When Jughead is gone Archie turns away from his father and he almost feels like crying, the impossible situation building up inside him. He looks up and doesn’t say a word, eyes on the school before them. The stupid fucking school that adults can’t just be adults about and had to start this war over, now look how much little is left of them.

“Dad - dad do you see that?” He shakes Fred on the shoulder and points up.

“Archie run! We have to get out of here. No, Archie come back!”

The entire hall is circling with flames. Xander knows this place inside and out and he pushes behind shelves to get behind to an exit door, coughing into his sleeve as he does so. There’s too much smoke now to even differentiate it from the floor, the walls, the ceiling. All they see is
Veronica feels useless, that loss of control now completely taking over her as she has nothing else to do but just squeeze her eyes shut and try to breathe. She doesn’t have anything to put the fire out. Or any escape plan or a way to unlock the door. Even her mother is struggling to choke out air, she sees her clutching her throat a few feet away and it scares her even more.

Veronica has to close her eyes so she doesn’t see any of this, any of the people in her life die right then and there. She has no idea where Mrs St Clair is but Hiram is still pushing with all the force to try and jam the door open, banging and breaking and losing hope every second.

“Xander the fire exit! Help get the shelve away!” She hears a voice shout. Desperately. Scratchy and breathless. She lifts her head just a second to see but the line of fire is getting closer to her dress and she quickly tears it off, scrambling up and leaving the torn piece as fuel to the fire.

“It’s stuck! It’s stuck!” Xander shouts back. He eventually gives up and something bursts so he falls to the ground painfully hard. There’s rippling coughs and breathless pants filling through the room but nothing fills their senses more than the smell of smoke everywhere. She really can’t breathe anymore.

Nobody can, and soon they all will stop trying.

It takes every ounce of him to avoid the pools of fire that just seem to appear at every corner but with only one goal on his mind, Archie finds it quite easy. His legs are burning by the time he reaches the second floor and thinks manically where to turn. But voices guide him.
Hiram is falling forward against the door, hands holding himself up trying to still open it somehow to save his family. The action is useless, and his knees give in just as a miracle happens and the door in fact breaks open.

He’s face to face with the boy that loves his daughter, and he has to realise that he’s not even shocked to see him there.

“Help me there’s five people here!” Hiram turns around and sees Hermione and Simone nearest to him, pulling both their arms.

Archie looks in the room and he can’t see anything but flames. He swears he doesn’t even know what to think anymore. How to live, how to breathe if Veronica isn’t somewhere in here and has already lost to the flames. He’s so scared that the fear becomes torrential, flooding and eroding and he cries until he sees that red dress and just a spark of hope rises in him.

“Veronica!” Archie can’t see straight but he knows she’s there, even if the smoke is clouding them.

“Archie!”

When their skin finally meet and he can still feel her, alive, terror and tears in her eyes, he just wants to drop to the ground and thank every part of the universe that still gave her to him. And maybe at least if we both burn now, we’ll burn together right? He grips her arms and pulls her quickly to pick her up. “I got you!”

She buries her head in Archie’s chest. It smells like smoke and her head is throbbing like a headache, like she can’t take in enough oxygen, but Archie is running and moving and her body feels limp already. Is he saving me.. oh god he saved me..

“We’re gonna get out, Ronnie!”
“No Archie, I have to go back in!” She suddenly has strength, the last scrap of it, to struggle free when they’re downstairs. It’s even more chaotic down here where she’s sure some people aren’t making it and she doesn’t want to think - think that-

“What are you doing Veronica?! We have to leave!”

“Betty!” She wailed, moving towards the shadows of where she knows she is “She’s locked herself in the bathroom oh my god Archie - oh my god I need to get her!”

“Veronica I’ll take her - you get out do you understand me?” Her holds onto her face and she puts her hands over his, feeling the intensity in his eyes as the heat become too unbearable already, and they see their glimmering fourth fingers and clasp them together before breaking apart.

She runs before Archie throws her out himself. Maybe she’s always known how selfish she is, to be able to leave him like that, but she didn’t mean too. And when she’s made it to the lot and every part of her is still in tact - she begins loathing it all. The flames look too big now. No, no, no.

And just like that the doorway burst apart with embers - her heart stops and there’s no going back.

“Archie.”
Flares

Chapter Notes

So warning! This chapter has gory shiit, and more painful stuff so beware. BUT at the end there’s something you’ve been waiting for so there’s that :)))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter #19 Flares

- did you see the sparks filled with hope? you’re not alone

’cause someone’s out there, sending out flares -

“Archie!” Her throat feels like it’s been ripped out and burned by an iron, like copper and steel and wishing the flames would just swallow her whole now. This isn’t good. She’s overcome with something, some feeling and it’s the kind of feeling where now that she knows Archie didn’t make it out alive she would go crazy trying to fill the void. The kind of feeling where she’d scream and hurt people because he isn’t here.

Veronica turns around, her back to the school burning to it’s ashes, and for that one moment she just cannot stop crying.

She screams something incoherent and drops to the ground. She feels the gravel beneath her scratch her knees and the satin of her dress pooling around her body. Her eyesight becomes blurry, maybe the tears, maybe she’s losing her mind. She drops one palm to the ground to support herself and it hurts- but not as much as her heart does.

The entire world feels like it’s about to go black and she’s fainted enough times to know she’s about to blank out in a minute. This is exactly how it goes. First, even what’s in front of her becomes a mush of lights and colours. Then the sounds; people screaming and crying becomes a bees’ buzz. Slowly her body stops hurting and it starts feeling numb, and just as her head is about to fall sideways crashing into the ground- in that last split second; her angel calls.
“Veronica!” She knows it’s Archie before turning around. It doesn’t exactly sound like him, more scratchy and sick but she knows. “Ronnie!”

It takes every ounce of strength of her to turn around and see him -

running towards her straight from the husk of a burning building. The fire looks even bigger now, it’s highlighting the edges of the school and she can only tell herself it’s a dream until he actually reaches her.

Archie has the weight of another body he’s carrying in his arms - he skids down on his knees right in front of Veronica and she sees. It’s Betty.

You wouldn’t be able to recognise her from afar. Her skin pale as ice and her dress is burned and torn in patches as well. Veronica runs her hands as gently as possible on the skin of her face, and sees that her swathes of blonde hair have become matted dark completely. She can only open one blue eye and Veronica realises it is her best friend.

Her body drops a bit when Archie adjusts his right hand, extending it so he can reach out and touch Veronica. They don’t say anything. Just sit there on their knees with the world burning around them and looking into each other’s souls paralysed.

They *should* be doing a hundred other things now, but the most important is right in front of them and they don’t even register getting help until the distinct sound of ambulances and firefighters fill their vicinity.

The things blur around while Archie stands up and Veronica follows, carrying Betty’s body which is getting lighter by the second; over to the swarm of fire trucks and ambulances. He sets her down to one of the nurses and somehow expects Veronica to follow Betty in, but she doesn’t. She stands there completely still with pieces of her hair all disarrayed and the jewels on her throat gleaming still in her red dress. She stands there looking around her and slowly feels a tear escape itself.

Archie comes to stand next to her, he just hugs her precious body close to him amidst the chaos, they hold each other and watch it play out. He can’t see his dad anywhere but Archie hopes he didn’t run in after him. Fighting anymore feels useless when they’ve already lost. Veronica sinks her head into Archie’s jacket and she doesn’t feel anything anymore. It only feels like forever.

(x.x.x.x)

She was already in emergency surgery when Veronica was called and told that Cheryl Blossom
had been involved in an accident, and her contact is the one Cheryl kept trying to call while she
was driving. The truck drivers that flew her car across the road called the ambulance, and now
she’s here. For a minute Veronica didn’t know if she was going to pass out or puke. Probably both.
She shifts uncomfortably in the plastic chair and feels the bodice of her dress sticking with nervous
sweat but her face is unreadable.

Obviously the girl sleeping before her is Cheryl, but she’s so battered and bruised and that she
would’ve never recognised her. They cut her hair too, but the most surprising thing is Veronica is
just realising this. Cheryl’s long, healthy red hair had been chopped off where it fell right at her
shoulders. It’s probably to make matters easier, since her hair was really long, but now Veronica
sees it and thinks how mad Cheryl would’ve been. Would be.

She can hear the mayhem happening outside, her parents and Fred Andrews shouting with the
doctors. They’re furious for some reason she doesn’t care to think about. But the thought of Cheryl
waking up alone appalls her, so she sits here at the early tones of the morning to watch her, and
think dully that this is the second best friend of hers she’s seen looking grotesque and disfigured.

The door opens and a police officer approaches the bed and stands opposite her, and Veronica
doesn’t realise in her numb state that she’s staring at the man until he gently smiles at her.

“You’re Veronica Cecilia Lodge, right?”

She doesn’t meet his eyes now and just answers briefly.

“Veronica I’m sorry this is so urgent, but your parents seem to have a hard time comprehending the
situation.. and we need to piece together this case so we can find a culprit”

She would frown, if only she could be bothered to. As always, my own matters and everyone else’s
matters falls into my hands. She suddenly wonders with a crawling sense of dread what she must
look like, because this male officer is staring intently at her and she just has the urge to fix her hair
and wipe the terrific night’s makeup off.

“Veronica, I’m going to need you to tell me everything that you remember happening tonight” he
says gently “Even the insignificant details, the unimportant things. Just everything that comes to
mind. Why don’t you start with the beginning of the day?”

She talks, voice raw and slow and hesitant trying to remember everything. Honestly reliving it all
in her own words knowing what’s about to happen at the end of the story is even more painful and
draining that by the time she mentions the fire she’s over with all of it. “Can I stop now? I need to
go talk to my boyfriend.. please, isn’t this enough already?”

“We can stop now, Veronica. We’ll talk again soon.” As soon as the police officer excuses her
gently Veronica springs to her feet and exits the over heated room.
Outside in the hallway is a little better. It’s a private hospital, therefore busyness is minimal even with half the people she knows all in here. Seeing Reggie and Josie’s faces are comforting, so comforting that she flies over to them first and loses herself in Josie’s hug.

Reggie is wearing a grey sweatshirt and basketball shorts, his eyes wide and searching. When he takes Veronica in he lets go of Josie’s waist for just a moment so she can hug her friend. Then he wraps his arms around both of them too, and while he and Josie look like they’ve been sleeping off and doing other activities together New Years Eve, Archie and Veronica look like they walked out of the fashion show from hell.

“Sorry.. there’s makeup and dust on your shirt” Veronica mutters when they pull back from the hug.

“Hush sweetie, tell me what the hell happened tonight?”

Veronica and Archie look at each other but they can’t find words anyway. The four of them stay silent for a while. Just standing there.

“Here. Have this.” Reggie holds out his hand with two packets of Reese’s peanut butter cups while they’re tranced in silence. Archie breaks a little smile, him and Veronica taking the chocolate and tearing it open right away. “What? Chocolate is comforting” he shrugs when Josie shoots a questioning look.

“Thanks, Reg..” Veronica muttered after a few chews of the peanut buttery goodness. “What happened to everyone else? Where is everyone?”

“Your parents are somewhere here, I just saw them” Josie looks around. “How is Cheryl?”

Veronica sighs while her face takes a dark expression and they know it must be bad. She tries to explain how badly hurt the girl is and she has no idea how she ended up in the accident, they’ll have to wait until she wakes up to get any answers. She doesn’t mention how straight and short her hair looks or how swollen her face is, her skin is. “The doctor said we’re lucky to still have her.. it was so cold and her skin was practically ice.. by the time the paramedics arrived she was barely alive.”

“Oh, Cheryl..” Josie covered her face with her hands “Shit, shit shit. How did all this happen?”

They hug again, all four of them this time until they can stand on their own again.

“Jughead and his family were about to go home just as the fire started, so they were out. I haven’t seen him since” Archie said quietly because he knew Veronica would be asking.

“Shit - Betty, Polly- the babies? Shit I have to go guys, I have to check if they’re okay” It all came
swirling back to her with realisation.

“Go and check on her V, we’ll be right here” Josie assures.

It takes a long time to find out what room Betty is in. She waits for the receptionist to finally talk to her, and then circles around PrinceCourt Hospital like a fool trying to find the ward. More and more people are looking at her and she’s totally sure by now the walking dead is what she looks like; and her feet hurt like someone dropped a cupboard on them so she takes the tall high heels off and leaves them by the wall before heading in slowly, toes hitting the cold linoleum floor.

Betty was in the bed with her eyelids closed, but you could see her pupils moving underneath like she’s struggling to fall asleep. She hears the door open and shut but doesn’t stir, keeps still as possible that it looks unnatural. She didn’t want to open her eyes and face the pain.. but the anaesthesia had worn off and now pain is coming back all over again.

“Betty? I know you’re awake” her voice is so small that Betty has to open her eyes, since Veronica sounds completely different.

She blinks those familiar blue eyes open and sees the same girl that she screamed at last night. The same girl who made her feel welcome for the first time and the girl that made her world colourful. That stood up for her and taught her and was her friend. Her best friend.

The girl who saved her.

But Betty doesn’t know that, so she merely exhales and looks at Veronica.

“You look glamorous” she finally says after swallowing on her dry throat. It’s all she can think of after weeks without speaking.

“Yeah, so do you” Veronica eyed Betty’s hospital gown and the IV drip.

She breathed through her nose and swallows again. Veronica doesn’t move from the door. The sun has probably risen by now but in that room time just stood still. Veronica had a feeling Betty didn’t need her but she did need to make sure Betty was okay, and now that’s done it feels like it’s time to leave. The air feels too weird between them but she does wish to go over and hug her. Maybe hang a guardian angel to watch over her, to ease her pain.

“V.. will you, stay with me?” Betty looks into her eyes for the first time, but she sinks her head down into the pillow and it hurts.
Veronica feels her heart beating evenly again, at least for now. She walks to the bedside and rests her bare arms on the railing, resting her head on them. “I will” she mutters into her hands.

“How bad do I really look?”

Veronica lifts her head and contemplates how to answer the question. She doesn’t look conventionally bad - just like someone who’s been almost smoked to death and miraculously survived. She blinks a few times and settles on “You look brunette”

Betty laughs, the gentlest sound and even then it hurts her ribs to do so. “I know you came back for me.. it had to be. Nobody else knew where I was”

Thinking about it is so confusing because she half wishes Archie hadn’t run back in so as to not experience thinking he had died, but not bearing to let Betty go up with the rest of it either. “I told Archie. He went back in and saved you.” They fight over Betty kissing him, and now he saves her. How wonderful, they’ve come full circle. “I guess I’m not heartless after all, huh?”

“You’re never heartless V.. you look out for everyone. You don’t realise it, but you do. And you lift people up too. The people you love” She smiles weakly and Veronica feels it appropriate to reach for her hand now.

The girl laying there in her bed really feels the weight of her luck now, looking into Veronica’s doll face and she can’t believe how lucky she is to have someone that comes back to her. Memories awash of their strongest moments and it takes her back to the beginning. She moves her fingers slightly so Veronica knows she’s holding on too.

Before they could say anything else her doctor, Doctor Kingston came in the room with a folder in his hand. Veronica sat up straight and ran a hand over her face.

“Sorry to interrupt you ladies, just here to inform that Miss Cooper’s toxicology report came back and as you know she inhaled a lot of smoke that interferes with breathing and could cause trouble, also chest pain. It’ll only be a matter of time before you can be released. I spoke to your mother and she gave me the okay to prescribe you Xanax, and a small variation of other tablets. It will help ease off the pain, make it easier to sleep. She also said you don’t have any allergies, correct?”

“As far as I know” Betty scrunched her nose and grimaced.
“Here are the prescriptions as well as your medical file Miss Cooper” he placed one of the red files on her bedside desk, tapping it once “We’ll have your parents sign some papers just right now and see what’ll work best for you to go home”

He gave a professional smile before turning around and leaving, while Betty looks disturbed and Veronica notices it. “Are you hurting? You should take these then”

She picked up the bottle of Xanax and felt it in her hand, grabbing the bottle of water and a glass too. Then she remembered the last time Betty ate would’ve been over seven hours ago. “Oh do you want me to get something to eat? I’m sure there’s food downstairs, I can-“

“V it’s okay” Betty protested. “I don’t think I can stomach anything right now.. not gonna eat those pills anyway” she muttered a little quieter.

“Why not?”

The blonde girl didn’t say much, she just closed her eyes and gripped the nurse’s button with her fingers trying to fall asleep fighting the pain. It was probably Veronica’s smart instincts but she could tell something was off with Betty. Slowly, she reaches for Betty’s medical file on her table, quietly as possible so she doesn’t notice.

She can’t understand too much of the terms from today’s toxicology, but she flips back the page and sees some of her old ones. Confusion feigns in her brows and lips, curling up when she sees the multiple refills of prescription Xanax pills. It’s obviously been medically prescribed but every single bottle had been ordered during one specific time period. June 2016 to August 2016 was the heaviest. She was getting refills almost every two weeks. And then it tapered off by September 2016, before stopping.

Veronica blinks. She has no idea what it means but if Betty had an actual problem or sickness, she wouldn’t just be taking the pills for that short period of time.

She isn’t an idiot. She knows what people pop for. Distraction, to quiet the noise. Betty’s always shown she couldn’t calm down when they were in a crisis - like the night they saw Nick die, like the night Veronica almost got assaulted by Chuck, like the night Betty kissed Archie...

All this time she’s chalked it up to just not being able to handle emotion. Not strong enough. But now she remembers it a little blurry and maybe..
“I messed up, Veronica. I’m a mess up” she shook her head.

“Okay. Stop”

“You don’t know what I did” Betty whispered finally

Veronica stared at her. “What is it?” She tried to keep her voice calm.

Veronica is about to say her name again to nudge her back into reality, but then Betty’s face looked drained of all its’ colour.

“I killed someone”

“Betty?”

“Hm?” She stirs from falling asleep and squints her eyes. Veronica’s figure looks illuminated by the ceiling light.

“We’re friends, right?” She waits a moment where Betty attempts to crane her neck and nod somehow before going on “Then I need you to be completely honest with me.. about that night you came and apologised to me for kissing Archie. I know you don’t remember it but you said something completely crazy and I need to know now if there was even a twinkle of truth behind what you said. You said.. you said you killed somebody”

“What is there to say? If it didn’t mean anything then it does now, I was a part of what happened to Nick so there’s that.” She replied emotionless.

Veronica wanted to tell her that it isn’t true, they’re being framed, but right now she sees Betty trying to side step the question. And how she’s built up her walls around them, like she’s too afraid of something. Veronica didn’t want that.

“You had prescription pills all through June to September two summers ago, why?”

“That’s none of your business.” Betty replied, blinking away some tears.
“Yes it is, Betty! Be honest with me”

She took a long breath, inhaling from the core of her stomach and letting it pan out. She really never thought she’d have to talk - or even think about this again. It’s so fucking traumatising to remember the nitty gritty details because every time she opens the can of worms in her mind all she can see are the details. The ones not able to be washed away with bleach, rolled up and thrown away to drown at the bottom of the river.

“When I’ve mentioned my brother stirring up trouble.. V, you really can’t tell anyone about this. Not even Archie.” She looked to her raven haired friend straight forward.

“I won’t, you have my word”

Betty sighed and clenched her eyes.. taking deep breaths.. “he was a really bad person, my brother. I mean like a bad omen in the form of a boy. He was always out doing drugs and stealing and bad stuff, I don’t know. But one night.. he brought home the kind of trouble that mom and dad couldn’t save him from. A guy showed up at our house late at night with a shotgun asking for my brother” she started shaking and Veronica reached out to cover her hands with her own.

She took a second, layers of caked up stress and trauma peeling away. “We all woke up, went downstairs. Polly and I were trying to hide behind dad, mom was crying and.. we tried to turn him away but he was on something. We offered him everything we had and he was still holding my brother by the neck to his gun!” She didn’t want to cry again about this matter, she had already cried so much before but couldn’t stop the tears from falling. “I was screaming. Please just go away, please don’t hurt him we’ll do anything! But he wouldn’t leave.. and my mom indicated somewhere behind me at the fireplace poker we had. She looked so desperate and it felt like our only option so I hit him. I hit him, on the head until his whole body was bleeding on our kitchen carpet. He was a stranger, and I killed him because I thought I was protecting my family.”

“I.... Betty I don’t know what to say” Veronica replied at a loss for words. All she knows is Betty looks haunted and this has always been something she’s stored away in her mind.

“My dad told everyone to start cleaning up and we hid the body in this abandoned tunnel.. Veronica I have never let myself live that night down. I couldn’t tell anybody what I’d done and- the pills, they were to help me sleep when I couldn’t. All the time. Every night. I couldn’t sleep. My mom paid off a doctor to write me real prescriptions so it didn’t look shady. But that’s what it was and now... I don’t think I could ever take those again. It’s the most familiar taste on my tongue.”

Veronica felt baffled and put in her place. After all the things she’s seem tonight, after all the things she’s seen in her life, this has to take the cake. Innocent Betty Cooper telling her she murdered somebody in her kitchen with her family is completely madness. For a moment she feels
sick to her stomach but she keeps a brave face.

“Betts.. you need to rest. Try and sleep okay?” She stands up and hovers over the hysterical girl in a hug, letting the scent of ashes and hospital sheets take over. “I am so sorry. I’m here for you. And you’re not messed up, okay? You were just trying to be brave.”

Betty sat on the bed and let the tears keep falling while her hollow feelings started to swallow her whole again.

Veronica never wanted to get to this, but she knows what she has to do with the history on that medical file before it’s too late. It’s a no brainer. They’re all targets here. Whoever framed Veronica is still out there and Betty was a part of it too. Any chance they get to rip her apart will become sensational, and this right here is like a bullseye right in front of their faces. She knows if this information gets out, god forbid purposely leaked, it would only shatter her best friend more.

She looked up and down the hallway but she’s in a different wing and it’d take time to find her parents, so she calls her father instead.

“Mija? Is everything okay? Where are you?” Hiram asked worriedly.

“I’m fine dad, just visiting Betty Cooper’s room. Listen I have to tell you something that might affect her, all of us, and your precious reputation if it gets out. I know The Coopers work for you so I’m sure you can put in the effort to help her right now.”

“What is it, Veronica? You’re starting to scare me” he asked again.

Veronica sighed. “Her medical file needs to be buried, there’s a crime she and her family committed that could be revealed through there and if it gets leaked or bought by somebody they’ll be able to look into it and they could all go to jail.”

“What you’re asking is for me to bribe them first. Do you know how much money that would take, Veronica?” He questioned without seeming too phased by what she told him.

“I don’t know. I’ve never bribed anyone before. At least not anyone with a bigger bank account than me” she adds.
“These doctors? Huh, trust me honey with your trusts combined none of them have a bigger bank account than you.”

“Just fix it dad, please! I’m worried about her seriously” Veronica replied quickly.

“Once you start paying people off it’s hard to stop, you know that right? If you’re asking me to do this I need you to be sure.”

She took a deep breath and exhaled. “Yes. I don’t know what else to do. And I wouldn’t be doing this if it weren’t for someone important to me, and if it weren’t necessary.”

There was a silence on the phone for a minute where Veronica wished he would just comply and save her friend, yet again.

“I’ll handle it. Just tell your friend to keep herself in check.”

“Thank you, daddy.. This means a lot to me too and I’m just- I’m just trying to do what I know how right now. Thank you”

“Mija.. you know your mother and I would break any law, or any person to keep you safe. You don’t have to say thank you-“

“Dad? What’s wrong are you there?”

She hears the background sound of other people talking and she doesn’t know what it is but it sounds chaotic, at the very least concerning. He doesn’t reply until couple moments later and what he says is so brief yet heavy all at once.

“The police. They found who caused the fire. We have to go”
“Mrs Lodge? Where is Veronica? I heard commotion going on and I can’t find her” Archie ran up to Hermione with his eyes wide and chest heaving.

“Oh, Archie. She left with Mr Lodge and the police. I- couldn’t stop her from going. They found the person who did this” she explained plainly. Hermione looked only slightly worried, she had her cashmere grey blankets wrapped around her and wasn’t in the least bit of doubt that Veronica would run off with her father and the police right away.

Archie cursed in his head. He should’ve known too. Veronica wouldn’t hesitate, but it might be dangerous. “Do you by any chance know where they were going?”

“The apple farm in Sherman Oaks. That’s what Mr Lodge told me”

He thanked her gratefully and Hermione nodded before Archie rushed off, clicking the button on his car key before even getting to the parking lot. “Reggie! Josie!” He called to the couple sitting by one of the vending machines “I’m going to find Ronnie. She went with the cops and her dad to catch the culprit.”

“Well let’s go” Josie and Reggie stood up without hesitation, running after Archie to get after Veronica in time.

In his car, they set up Archie’s GPS to the apple farm in Sherman Oaks, but the only one they can find is one that’s been long closed down. They follow it anyway. Archie sits there blinking every two seconds, his eyes barely able to stay awake while he grips the wheel to keep holding on. Every part of him feels like it’s slipping away, it’s seven in the morning after the craziest night of his life. But he keeps following the signs, following the lights.

“Do we have any idea who it is?” Reggie asks from the passenger seat.

Archie glances to him for a second and chews his bottom lip, thinking. “I have my suspects”

“And when you do find out who it is.. what happens next?”

“That is not the thought to be having right now, we’re just going to be with Veronica, alright?” Josie says, resting both forearms on the back of Archie and Reggie’s seats.

“I’m just saying- everyone is screwed! Our lives have fallen apart, half the people we know are in the hospital and for all we know the others are-“

“Stop!” Archie tried his best not to get worked up “I see the police cars trail. This place really is
closed down.”

Reggie and Josie give silent looks at each other while the car moves behind all the other police. Finally they’re parked in a dead woody land, in front of a barn that looks like it hasn’t been entered since 1944. The trees are a glow of red and blue, there’s minimal security around the scene which must be because it was a quick and sudden call.

Archie gets out first, seatbelt zapping into place loudly as he unbucks it and makes Josie and Reggie move to. They’re more cautious, stepping hesitantly on the wet ground trying to stay silent.

“At least we don’t need to worry about calling the cops, right?” Reggie motions ahead.

“I’m just worried about Ronnie” Archie steps over the low fence and makes his way into the property of the old barn, shivering slightly.

“Yeah, where do you think she is?” Josie asks quietly. They duck down and focus but there seems to be no movement. The feeling of anxious waves in their stomachs are making themselves known, gnarly and flipping inside out. A bead of cold sweat, a layer of goosebumps. He tries not to breathe too heavily but it’s hard when it’s Ronnie. She’s in there going face to face with the person who hurt too many people he knows, she loves, though she wouldn’t say it. He wants to be mad at her but how can he when all he’s thinking is, is she okay?

The moment lasts too long when Archie almost wonders if this has been a false alarm. Maybe Veronica is breathing a sigh of relief right now. Is she in one of the cop cars? Is she in the barn? Then suddenly, like lightning in a clear blue sky, something loud and shrill ripples through the air and it attacks him. The scream is pitched and piercing, so loud it startles everyone in the radius.

Archie knows immediately. It’s so not Veronica, but he knows, and he runs before anything can tell him no.

“Veronica!” He shouts after her, bolting into the old barn faster than he’s ever ran. All those years of football and track had nothing on how he ran then, but Archie’s mind is too blank to even register it.

He goes in the barn and the first thing he sees is people. Tall men, and somewhere next to them is Veronica’s tiny frame and Hiram holding her. She’s still shrieking and crying and Archie goes straight to her, not stopping until he sees her face and the shade of complete paleness it’s become. She looks out of sorts, not just sad with streams on her cheeks, but horrified in a way that indicates her shaken to the very core. Like life has left her lively eyes.

He sees her face and for a millisecond wonders what could have scared his brave girl so terribly, but then he turns forward and gasps so loud it echoes in the dirty old barn.
Above them, looming and taunting, is the cold dead body of Clifford Blossom.

His face is looking down on all of them and Archie understands now. He probably looks just like Veronica does. The rope hanging above has cut so deep blood drips down freely. Archie can’t even stand to look at it, all of it, the horror in front of him. His throat feels dry right away and turning back to Veronica, who’s still in such a shaken state of shock she hasn’t stopped crying. His hands have found her back and she turns to face him.

Veronica doesn’t see him at first. She doesn’t realise who it is, Archie? He’s here? Or am I imagining...

She chooses not to believe until he holds her more firmly, and she finally realises its real, he’s real, and collapses into his arms just as Reggie and Josie run in too and gasp seeing it. They’re so frightened, Josie covers her mouth and turns her back on it. Reggie can’t tear his eyes away from it, from him, and he’s fisting handfuls of his black hair trying to block out all the times that man had smiled at him and dropped Jason off at practice and had dinner with them.

Archie hides his face in Veronica’s hair, her dark, soft hair and finds solace in covering his eyes that way. Hiram is the one who sees it first. He tells the Detective Keller right away while the other deputies pull Archie, Veronica, Reggie and Josie away.

A note and it’s written in dark Montblanc. Pinned on the wall behind the lifeless body that hangs before them.

I killed Nick. I lost my Temper because the Lodges Always win. But There’s only so much you can burn. They deserved to burn in that school. but pain I don’t know how else to run from this. I can’t escape The law. Find my family where The hills meeT ice.

- Cliff

(x.x.x.x)

The hospital becomes impossibly noisy after that. No one can put rest to what just happened, and
just like the rest of their lives, it’s cocooned in a tight bubble warped just with them. Veronica is feeling disgusted and disturbed and she has to get away from everyone.

She means everyone.

Her mother, her father. Her friends and the pestering nurses and reporters. Even Archie.

She has to sit somewhere to soak it all in, and the only place for that is Cheryl’s hospital room again. Yes, she does think about how morbid it is. To be sitting in room of the daughter of a man who she just saw’s suicide scene. But it’s quiet, and she just needs somewhere to cry in peace. She doesn’t know why she’s crying, but she knows this feeling inside her is going to be sticking a long time. It’s the strangest heaviness and every time her eyelids close all she sees is Clifford hanging from that rope again.

His pale face, the blood, all that blood...

Veronica sinks further into the hard plastic chair and scrubs her face on the palms of her hands, trying to rid herself of the terror. Soon everything just spills over and her little hiccups turn into ugly, strangling sobs.

*God what has happened.. why did this, all of this have to happen? Every turn there’s something worse coming my way when will this stop?! What did I do.. I can’t.. I can’t live like this anymore*

She watches Cheryl’s heart monitor but can’t even see her chest rising, it’s bundled under wires and a cast and all this stuff that’s covering her best friend. She could have just died right then from all the pain clotting in her chest.

“Veronica?” Her voice is nothing more than a whisper “V..”

Veronica doesn’t move at all. “Cher?”

Her eyes don’t even look open from where she’s sitting and the right side of her face is covered where she hit the ground and broke her cheek bone, but through her scratched, stitched up face she can see her try to put together a string of thoughts. “You here..”

“I’m here Cheryl, I’m right here with you.” She tries to stop crying but doesn’t, not even a little bit because she knows in her heart sometimes that this broken girl before her doesn’t. She knows her father is dead.

*What happened to you, Cheryl?*
Her head lolls towards Veronica and at first she’s unresponsive, still numbed out and hurting in places they don’t even know about, but then her eyes catch sight of something - and they sharpen with sudden terror that has her clutching the white bed sheet. “My dad” she rasps “it was my dad”

There’s nothing for Veronica to do but move slowly towards the bed even though she doesn’t want to. She doesn’t want to get close and have to tell her, do the hardest thing again, face the hardest thing again. “I know sweetie, we know”

She’s not prepared for what Cheryl says next.

“Jason.. he locked jason and- and mom at the..” her words trail off and Veronica creases her brow. Cheryl is still so doped on the morphine that her pale veiny lids stutter close again and Veronica is left touching the iciness of her wrist with an IV in it.

Archie lets his neck rest on the cold metal seat, having to slouch down a little so it doesn’t hurt him. He really has to sleep now. There’s barely any semblance of awake in his body, no fibre alive enough. His dad is talking with people, they’re all talking to people it seems. But he stares at the flickering light above and wonders how they’re all still talking. He needs something to do with his hands. They just tremble and shake beside him, it’s embarrassing. He slips them under his arms and crosses them, blowing out a breath and preparing to wait some more.

“Archie” the voice that says his name is gentle yet stern. Of course he knows it. He closes his eyes and shouts fuck! in his head because seriously- can everyone shut the hell up for two seconds already? Hasn’t all this been enough? He turns around and faces the glowering man.

“Mhm. Yes, Mr Lodge?”

“Archie, I just have to tell you.” Hiram moves from behind him, walks around the metal chairs and sits right next to Archie. He already dreads this conversation, Veronica’s father never liked him
probably because he’s Veronica’s boyfriend. Anytime he’s spoken with Hiram it either ended with tears or getting drunk. Or both. “Everything that happened tonight. It’s... things most people can say they never experienced even in a whole lifetime. But you faced it tonight.”

“We all did” Archie points out. He doesn’t bother to sit up straight or uncross his arms, doesn’t put on the good etiquette like usual. He’s tired. “Me, Veronica, Jughead.. Betty and everyone else here.”

“I know” Hiram looks at him basically telling him there’s more to his first statement, as there always is. “When I was in that room, trapped with the fire, and the most important people in my life were there with me. My wife and my daughter. I know I always say I know everything- something Veronica learned to say too. But in that moment, I didn’t know what to do”

Archie looked down and away. So this isn’t a lecturing talk, it’s a.. vulnerable talk? He feels himself freeze and- for some reason feels uncomfortable too. Maybe it’s the tone of Hiram’s voice, maybe it’s the subject of conversation or his cold stone face has some warmth in it. Whatever it is, he starts to understand why Veronica doesn’t like these situations.

“And then the door opened, and you were there. Archie, I know you- I know you’ve loved my daughter a long time. Maybe I was scared you didn’t protect her or couldn’t protect her, but I can see now you would even risk your own life for her”

“I love her” Archie states simply. He looks back up and Hiram is a mess, just a crumbling, painful mess. It’s good to know somebody else feels that way.

“From now on, I want to make the best of what’s left. And I know the kind of man I want my daughter to be with.” He pauses and breathes “Thank you, Archie. For doing what you did.”

He leaves after that, expensive shoes leaving a trail of mud and gravel when he walks. It might have been simple, and brief, a normal person would still deem it cold. But Archie’s never seen the man so accepting of him in his life.

(x.x.x.x)
They gather themselves and leave somewhere at midday. It took a long time, but eventually Veronica couldn’t care less how much she resembled a can of trash and walked straight out the front doors where all the reporters and photographers could see. Clutching Archie’s hand in hers, they dived into his car and sat in silence until his big house came into view.

She’s sure she cries again somewhere along the way. Archie is careful not to take the route of Costal Prep, but reminders are set everywhere. In the sky, in their minds and hearts. The familiar drum of Archie’s car moving does nothing at all to comfort them.

*How can the sun still shine, when I feel like I’m at the darkest moment of my life?*

Vegas greets them excitedly like he always does. He’s a little more frisky from not seeing Archie for so long, and his tail wags with insistent worry. For the first time Veronica can’t even deal with the dog, she leaves Archie to fill his water bowl and let him find solace in his fluffy fur and adorable eyes while she goes upstairs. If she were the type of person to take baths she would, the situation probably consists as needing one.

Veronica strips off her tight, puffy red dress and she fights her own tears. *Don’t move. Just don’t move. Don’t cry again, don’t make that face again. Just stop.* she lets the hot water cascade down her back and it burns and stings. The entire shower is fogging up, she closes her eyes and lets the boiling water melt her thoughts away, collecting on the base of her head. She scrubs all the dirt, all the dust away until her fingers are wrinkly.

Archie goes in after her, and ignores what’s left of her red dress on the bathroom floor. Someone will pick it up later, he thinks while ripping apart the buttons in his shirt. Archie takes less than half the time Veronica did, before his knees give out and he drops dead asleep right there on the tiles.

“Do you wanna eat something?” He hears Veronica ask as he walks out, towel hanging low on his hips. He can barely see her on the other side of his bed with the covers and pillows like a mountain around her little body.
Archie shakes his head. “Do you?”

“No” she mutters quietly, pulling his t shirt lower on her thighs. They probably should, but anything consumed would most likely be revolted in seconds. He takes time to dry his hair with a towel and pull on some shorts, leaving the wet towel somewhere - Veronica would get mad if she weren’t so tired. He pads over to the bed but before climbing in, goes to his windows and pulls the curtains shut, blocking out all sunlight and disturbances.

When he jumps into bed Veronica can feel the weight of him crawling up, falling in the space beside her and sighing loudly. She moves the pillow between them, remembering how he did that with her teddy bear when they were in her room, so she can move closer to him.

“That really was the night from a psychotic nightmare, wasn’t it?” He blinks through pooling tears, but just stares up and doesn’t face her.

“It was a really long night” she nods slowly “I just wanna surrender right now”

He finally looks at her and pulls her closer, the silkiness of her damp hair cool against his chest. They say someone is out there for you, and you’re never alone. Well he’s lucky because for him, that person is right here. She’s right here with him.

When they wake again it’s already dark out but neither of them know, for Archie’s curtains are still shielding the real world out there. But it feels colder and she runs to turn the heater on before climbing back in bed. Not realising that all her moving had awoken Archie too, and he’s just laying face half-covered by the Egyptian cotton covers. She sees his wide eyes and peels the sheet back, smiling at his handsome face.

“Are you hungry yet?” Is the first thing he asks
“No” she says, chucking afterwards because they keep asking each other that. “Are you okay?”

He looks at her sitting there in front of him, the perfect girl of all his dreams, and reaches out to hold her hand on his chest. It fights all the pain quite spectacularly. “I am now that you’re here”

“What a way to start the new year.. if this in any indication then 2018 is already doomed for us” she sighs. There’s this tingling feeling in her stomach and it comes after all the tears, after all the rain storm and the fireworks cackling. It’s weird because this feeling is almost stronger than all of that, and it makes her cold with realisation. Veronica pulls her hand back from Archie and folds them together.

“I am sorry, you know” Archie watches her look back up at him in wonder “for leaving you in there when my dad called me. For not stopping you from leaving to see Clifford and-” he gulps “for leaving you outside and scaring you at the fire”

“Don’t apologise Archie” she really wishes he would stop. How many times has this boy apologised for everything already? Things he didn’t even do, just seeking her forgiveness. How many times has he saved her already? When she pushes him away and closes herself up; she thinks everyone should be lucky enough to have someone that sticks around even when they beg them not to. Just to have even a piece of her heart, Archie always stayed. Well you have my heart. “None of it is your fault and it’s- it’s okay.”

“How is it okay?” He scoffs

Veronica takes a breath and she tries not to shake but she does. She’s looking at him with such an intensity that it takes his breath away and he doesn’t even know why. There’s truth in those eyes, sincerity, passion and loyalty. It used to scare her so much but now, now her life has been sifted of its’ insecurities and second guesses and self doubt. She doesn’t doubt it even for a second. More sure of this, than anything else in her life.

“Because I love you” she’s almost breathless.
Archie sighs, eyes going to his covers and smoothing it out when he suddenly looks back at her and freezes. “Wait- what did you just say?”

“I love you, Archie Andrews” she says trembling, and he can see in her face that she’s being real and raw and there’s nothing truer than the words she speaks.

He felt his heart literally skip a beat at her words, and the whole world coming to a stop. He couldn’t even believe his ears. *She loves him.*

At his stunned silence, Veronica felt the need to show him and tell him again. She wanted to tell him again, again and again until her heart poured all its fullness out into his. She wanted to repeat it until everyone knew, but right now it’s only him that matters.

She quickly catches his lips with a kiss, hearing him sigh against her mouth and pressing deeper. She pulls back but lets their faces less than an inch from each other. “I have loved you since I was thirteen” she feels breathless when Archie’s hands go under her shirt and snakes up to rest on her back. “I didn’t know it then but I do now, I love you insanely. You’re my first love, the boy I love right now, my last love, my only love..”

He pulls her and flips them over, and it makes her laugh because Archie is smiling above her too. He grins and closes the space between them, all of him covering her, overpowering her, the most electric feeling she has ever felt. “Baby.. do you have any idea what I’m feeling right now?”

*Do you have any idea how long I’ve been waiting for this?*

Archie nuzzles into the space of her neck before kissing there, warmth and sweetness coming from it. It was stupid how much he loved her, like his heart had been wired somehow and it only lit for her.

She feels like she’s flying when he pushes her lips apart with his own and fires that passion in between her legs. She tilts her chin up and tells him with her lips that she wants him just as much, right now and always.

She manoeuvred herself underneath him, wrapping her legs around his waist, arching up against him and brushing against his length. Archie moans into her mouth, pulling back to look into her
eyes. She’s looking at him in a way that’s making it hard to breathe. It was different now, with him, than all the other times. All those fast and desperate, albeit passionate nights they spent felt like clouds she’d now elevated above. Veronica never knew it could feel like this, this strong.

Archie was taking his time to worship every part of her body, showing her just how much she means to him. And all the other emotions pent up inside their bodies let out with each thrust, push and pull between them. Veronica felt full and light, melting under his strong body and the delicacy of his touch. She brings his head to her chest and honestly it feels like she could cry of happiness.

He kissed over every part of her, repeatedly trying to rid of all the pain and grief but even though that would take a long time to leave, maybe never, right now she feels relieved of it just for a moment. The bleating sun bleeds from his eyes and hair and heart, and she knows how bright he is, the sun in her life. How could I have not realised how tightly I’ve held on to you before this? I love you so much.

As she slowly came down from the long high, Archie right behind her, he turned over and snuggled her against his chest. Kissing her longingly, languidly, lips not leaving her skin and hair even when it’s all over. Veronica didn’t mind in the least. She enjoyed how he always had to hold her, and doesn’t bother hiding how lucky she feels at all.

“That was...” he grinned dumbly, unable to find words that might express what they just did or that could do it justice. His fingers drum against her naked back and Veronica moves her legs over his. She listens closer to the beat of his heart. Its always been her favourite sound, the only thing she’ll never get tired off, the thing that gives her peace and solace in the storm. It’s everything to her, just like he is.

“I know” he can feel her smile against his skin and it’s so perfect that Archie gets scared for a moment that things might change. That after this, after what feels like this dream, they might go back to her being scared of it. He never wants this to change, thinks of his parents and her parents and what they had been - playing games and circling each other and how painful it all felt. He never wants them to turn like that again, not after knowing what right now feels like.

“I don’t ever want this to change. Or stop.” He admits freely, holding her back a little too tightly because he’s scared and worried of letting her go. Veronica knows it too, she can feel his body still and she sits back up on her elbows to look into those endless eyes.

“Archie, I will love you until the last star in the universe blinks away” she kisses him again and puts his heart to rest, and maybe, hopefully, wrapped up there together they’ve become stronger to face all the hardships the world has left to offer.
!!! Thank you as always..
leave your thoughts if you enjoyed, it’s always nice to hear your feedback.

So we know now what happened in Betty’s past, but as of now only V does. They also
know that Cliff caused the fire, and veronica and archie are definitely disturbed by
this. And Hiram has finally forgiven and accepted Archie, after all this time.
“Okay” Veronica locked her legs together behind her, swinging the fork in her hand. She’s laying on her stomach with the sheets rumpled around her mid section. “Why do you even watch this movie? Christmas is over. Plus It’s a drawn out, boring mess and there’s not even any colour!”

“Says the only girl in class who stayed awake through the entire Wizard Of Oz in fifth grade.” Archie countered back, but he has a grin on his face while looking back at the television.

“Wizard Of Oz did have colour.” She deadpans

“The point is it was boring, and ‘drawn out’ like you said” he imitates her.

“It was thought provoking.” She said finally, sitting up and pulling the sheets to cover herself. She sits and looks down at her salad with a frown. “I want some of your cheese fries”

Archie makes a face at her and she smiles angelically, knowing he would give in in a second. He sighed, passing the bowl. Veronica makes an excited sound and takes the bowl of food service cheese fries from him, moving to lean against the pillows next to him. They’ve been laying in bed all day or all night, they’re not really sure, both of them hadn’t checked their phones but chose to stay in bed and order some well deserved food.

Veronica sees her reflection in Archie’s wall mirror and she starts smoothing down the mess that is
her dark raven hair, Archie’s fingers had knotted and tangled it up with passion and mindless touches. “Do you think I’m too young to play Princes Anne in like, a modern day adaptation of Roman Holiday?” She asks absently, scrutinising the features on her face and thinking about Audrey Hepburn.

“Who cares? Olivia Hussey was like fourteen when she played Juliet”

“She was thirteen. And that’s because Juliet was an actual child bride, so it pretty much made sense” she laughed. Archie put his arm around her and moved his face closer to hers, smiling down into her twinkling eyes. These are the moments he loves, just them, messing around and not worrying about the outside world. She may make him crazy sometimes, but she’s made him happier than ever too.

“You’re so pretty” he whispered. Veronica smiled back and bit her lip just before he captured it with a kiss. Soft, and tender and perfect for a lazy day in bed. Just as she’s about to move all their food away and press her body to his the unmistakable sound of her phone ringing fills the room. Their lips break apart with a pop, and Veronica turns around to pick it up.

“Hey mom. Oh- oh, okay we’ll be right there. I’ll see you soon. Yes, bye.”

“What’s wrong?” Archie reaches out to touch her body “Other than the existing problems”

“Cheryl’s awake.” Veronica says, her face pale and blank. The thought of going back to that hospital is scary and while she knew this wasn’t over by a long shot, going back to see all that again is making her heart beat oddly. “I mean like awake. And talking. We have to go.”

“Okay” Veronica is already scrambling up from bed before Archie can sit up and get to her quickly. “Hey, look at me. Are you ready for this?”

“It’s going to be fine” she nods determinedly; but through her lips come an air of weakness.

“We face this together, and it will be. Promise.” He kisses the skin on her shoulder and she does believe him, as long as they’re together she can face anything.
When Veronica and Archie get to the hospital it’s still as busy outside as when they left it fourteen hours ago, although many of the people inside have gone home. Fred is there, so are The Lodges and The Coopers. Other than that there are a few outsiders, but Veronica finds it odd when she doesn’t see Jughead at all. Hasn’t he come to see Betty?

“Arch, you should probably stay out here” Fred calls to him as they both approach Cheryl’s room. Right now everyone is most worried about her, and her family’s (or lack thereof) state. Archie stops and nods at Veronica, who casts a look at her dad and Mr Andrews sitting together and-

\textit{how much exactly has changed since all this happened?}

She chooses to ignore it. “Come on, mija” Hermione presses a kiss to her daughter’s cheek before leading her inside the special room. As one of The Blossom family’s known associates and really the only adult figure in Cheryl’s life around, they ask Hermione to come in as well. Standing back inside the room, it feels totally different.

Brighter and busier, but the grey shadows of last night’s depression still linger in its’ corners. Veronica takes a moment to blink and register all the people standing in the room. Detective Keller, as well as another young woman whom she assumes is a deputy. Her name tag says Elen. And Toni. The pink haired girl has her long curls up in a bun on her head, and she’s curled up on the chair next to Cheryl’s bed. She looks tired and is frowning deeply, even with the supposed improving state of Cheryl.

Cheryl on the other hand, is laying on her bed elevated so it looks like she’s somewhat sitting. The cast is still all over her and half of her face covered by that ugly plaster for her broken cheekbone. In the daylight Veronica can see the stitches at her hairline, and she smiles as forcibly as one could imagine.

According to Hermione Cheryl had awoken asking for two people, not wanting to speak with police until they were right by her side. Now they’re here.

“Veronica, you’re here. Good we can start.” Tom Keller finally sits down and leans toward Cheryl while Veronica and Toni exchange some painful eye contact. She feels so stiff she might just snap. “You said you know where your mother and brother are?”

“A mansion somewhere near where I was driving... I was trying to run away because my dad, he had brought us there”

Everyone looks slightly surprised and she knows right away they’re going to go send a search team
to get Jason and Penelope. Veronica crosses her legs and they brush against Toni, who reaches out and holds her hand with a slight pressure. *I should have told you about Cheryl last night, Toni. I’m sorry.*

“He did it on purpose so we couldn’t stop him from burning The Lodge’s party” she stops and takes a deep breath, almost shrieking up from the pain in her ribs and her eyes roll back in such a way that make both of them lean forward and reach out for her.

Detective Keller glances at his deputy that’s taking notes and wonders thoughtfully. “Can you tell me how you found all of this out?”

Veronica swears she’s holding an anticipating breath, while Cheryl just stares at him. She looks so haggard. “He was angry about losing the deal to The Lodges.” she mutters “He was furious about losing, and went crazy when our empire started to fall apart too. Everything with Jason and all the drama- he’s used to always winning. That’s why he did it. And I found out because I saw all his plans, in the office of that mansion.”

Hermione looks so uncomfortable knowing they had that article written about Jason, purposely to rub their win in Clifford’s face. Veronica rolls her eyes and tries to contain all the anger.

“Do you have any specifics of where this location is exactly?”

“I- no. I don’t know. I don’t remember, I don’t want to remember!” Her face turns that practiced tone of mean and menacing.

“Alright, Cheryl. Thank you for talking today. We’ll be going out to get your mother and Jason right away, we’ll talk again soon.” He gets up with Deputy Elen and Cheryl closes her eyes, leaning even further back. The sound of their shoes on the floor and the door thudding close is so loud.. and she can’t even hold her girlfriend’s hand for gods sake, because it all hurts too much to even move!

There is a long silence then. Toni is too overwhelmed to even move, Hermione follows the police out. Leaving the three of them there alone. Cheryl’s eyes are closed, but they can see the shiny tracks of tears escaping down her sore skin. “My dad’s dead... isn’t he?”

“Cheryl, I’m sorry..” they don’t move any closer. Veronica looks at Toni and she’s crying too. “How did.. how did you know?”
“I looked into his mind. It pretty much seemed like the only way out” she says dully.

There’s a knock on the door and a nurse comes in, carrying some clipboard and a kind smile on her face. “I’m here to help miss Cheryl Blossom with her bath today?” She starts without their help, moving to Cheryl’s bed and lets down the railing so she can get closer. For a moment Veronica is in complete horror imagining the injuries under her hospital gown, and makes a disgruntled move to get up.

“No V, Toni.. please don’t leave me” her voice is a helpless whimper.

The two girls look at each other again but they know they have no choice. For a moment she questions how they’re ever going to get Cheryl over to her private bathroom when she can’t even move a limb, but then another nurse comes in with soap suds and towels and locks the door then Veronica gets it. Oh.

They start by peeling off Cheryl’s hospital gown and the nurse instructs Veronica to move to the other side, so she and Toni can both hold her hands for support. The thing is one hand is broken and the other is taped with wires, but they do it anyway.

She’s seen Cheryl naked many times, changing before cheer, sleepovers and dressing up, but this is the only time her nudity absolutely frightens her and it makes her want to clench her eyes shut. Her mid section is wrapped up and stapled where she fractured ribs, her legs are a gnarly shade of blue and black and every part of flawless ivory skin has been cut by the crash and torn apart.

Cheryl whimpers with every dab of water and the minimal movement, while both nurses work as quickly and gently as they can, cleaning her wrappings and the bandages on her arms and legs too. Toni reaches out to the bag she brought and hands the clothes blindly at one nurse, casting her eyes to Cheryl’s and focusing on only that. It’s a painful process, all of it, especially when they have to lift her up and get the clothes on her, and Cheryl is weeping like a weak little girl with tears dripping down her face.

But she’s not... I know she’s not weak..

“Good job Cheryl, now Nurse Katie is going to get your lunch and we can try some, is that alright? You won’t be able to chew solids so well but there’s yogurt or mashed potatoes” The main nurse voices once the entire bath procedure is over, smiling gently while she brushes Cheryl’s hair and Nurse Katie puts the bath things away.
Veronica is about to breathe a sigh of relief that it’s over, but then Cheryl says something and she just about clenches up altogether.

“Can I see myself?”

She can see Toni’s body still as well and Veronica doesn’t know how to react, but the nurse smiles somewhat pitifully and takes a hand mirror from the cart. “Sure honey, if that’s what you want”

It’s like the world is stopping when Cheryl holds the silver hand mirror up to her face and inspects it, looking soulfully into her own eyes. They don’t know what she’s thinking. She raises the mirror ever so slightly and then stops, just staring. She sees her swollen eye and stitched forehead and the bruises that label her. One hand, with three fractured fingers, goes up and touches the sharp ends of her now cropped hair. Her lips part like disgust and surprise altogether, a million thoughts coming to her head.

The room is in silence, until suddenly before they realise it Cheryl’s hurled the stupid mirror in her hand and she screams. It narrowly brushes Veronica and Nurse Katie’s arm, shattering on the floor to a million glittery pieces just like that night in that house. The nurses jump to pick the shards up but Veronica and Toni rush to her side, comforting her while she curls up into a little ball and it hurts. It hurts so damn much, everything hurts, and it’s ugly and crushing and it’s all a reminder of every twisted part of her life.

“Oh my god, Toni...” Cheryl gags and then she’s vomiting too, some black sticky stuff that tarnishes the pristine sheets but she doesn’t stop. Coughing, until her throat is sore with its dryness and she has to lean back and surrender the pain. “God everything is shit! I can’t.” just then Veronica feels Cheryl’s good fingers tighten around her hand and she squeezes back “Fuck! Everything hurts.. I can’t.”

“It’s going to be okay Cheryl” Toni stoops her head down and says softly, but Cheryl doesn’t look like she believes it one bit. “It’s all going to be okay”

She shakes her head and now the scream has passed, silent tears stream down her face and stings it again. Cheryl’s always been a drama queen, crying hysterically about minor issues, but now she’s broken down to a hopeless silence. “This is it.. there is nothing left to hope for”

She only wants to go to sleep and drown away, so her eyes close and she doesn’t see the nurses removing her blanket and placing a clean one over. She doesn’t see Veronica and Toni just stare down at her and cry, holding on while time still lets them.
Archie sees Veronica exit the room and immediately stands up, hands fidgeting in his pockets anxiously. “How did it go?”

She already looked tired, a meek and empty expression in her face. “Not good” she sighs, tugging on the ends of her loose black hair “Cheryl’s not good. Toni is in there, but I had to step out. Did you hear?”

“Yeah” his eyes flicker to hers and she already knows what he wants “They’re going to find Jason and Mrs Blossom, at the place Cheryl crashed. The police are leaving soon and my dad volunteered. I think I should too, right? I mean Jason would want to see a familiar face”

“You’re right” she pulls him in by the red hair on his neck, still overcome with worry about her friend. “Call me soon, okay?”

He knows it’s translation for I don’t really want you to leave me here alone, so he wraps his arms around her and hugs her tightly. “Promise. Will you be okay here?”

She nods because she can’t say anything, and then Fred is calling him to hurry up and the police are leaving. “Okay, I gotta go. Love you Ronnie”

She watches him run down the hallway and is left standing there, hands on her heart, praying he’ll come back. “I love you too”

Veronica is walking back up to Cheryl’s room level, she went downstairs to get herself an unsatisfying coffee from the nearest machine. She makes a right turn and sees her father there, head
in his hands, seeming to be frozen into the pose. “Daddy? Are you okay?”

Her soft voice brings Hiram out of his scorching thoughts. She’s standing a foot away with her curious eyes. “Mija. Please, come sit” he makes room for her and Veronica sits down, setting her handbag on the table and sipping her coffee cautiously. She still has that curiosity in her eyes. She’s always had it, ever since childhood.

“Are you okay?” she asks again.

“The insurance company called. There’s no way to get back what we lost in that fire, um, turns out insurance companies don’t like hemorrhaging money - at least not when it’s ruled an intentional act.”

“Intentional?” Veronica’s face becomes animated with her puzzlement “Nothing that happened was intentional. How could it be?” She sighed

“Not by us, mija, but you know the boundaries between coverage and splurging” he knew Veronica fully understood his words which is why he confided in her to begin with, he could always depend on her to understand all things business and profession. Even at hey young age. “You know what this means for Lodge Industries, don’t you?”

“It means we’re thrown off our entire yearly- if not more - expenses. And all the secrecy and exchanges and firing people was for nothing” Veronica isn’t exactly mad it didn’t turn out the way her parents wanted, but now they don’t have a school and her parents’ efforts went to waste. “Much a feud about nothing” she was baffled.

Hiram raised an eyebrow at her “thanks for the reminder”

“Anytime. Well what are The St Clairs saying?”

“Not much” he sighed “they’re more focused on getting better and staying home with their family. At least now some things have closure and Xander and Simone can be in as much peace”

“You’re talking about Nick?” He looked into her eyes and she wants him to say something like, I never believed you ever did it but he blinks and turns to the little television running in front of them. The news is on, and footage of where Costal Prep school once was is playing. They’re talking about all of it, and Veronica sees her father look more sick to his stomach than she ever has
She tried not to tear up. Parents like Fred Andrews or Sierra McCoy wouldn’t believe for a second that their child had anything to do with a murder, and they would say it, she wants him to tell her he never believed it. But he doesn’t. And she just feels heart broken all over again, asking herself why did I think he would surprise me?

*Why won’t you just love me?*

“Um.. mom asked me to go home with her for a while.” She takes a deep breath and hopes he doesn’t notice her voice change, trying to keep her sadness at bay “I should- I guess I should go.”

She gets up and walks away because he doesn’t say anything, and Veronica just wants to leave before she allows herself to get hurt by his coldness anymore. He still doesn’t say anything, anything at all, and Veronica stops herself at the last moment to look at him. His glassy eyes fixed on the screen, looking just about as crushed as she feels inside.

Leaving the hospital makes her feel bad, leaving Cheryl and Betty, but she gets through it somehow. Sitting opposite her mother in the limousine, who’s swiping at things on her Kindle like it’s a big important matter. Archie calls her on the ride home, he’s making it up these mountains and signal should be gone soon so he tells her not to call and not to worry, and Veronica finds herself laughing at some story he manages to add his goofy humour to. Now, she’s sitting in her room in silence and staring at it. Hermione is downstairs answering phone calls and reading through the mail.

Somehow this room feels different to her. She hasn’t been in it since before everything that happened, and sitting here reminds her of a girl who was oblivious and naive and blissfully ignorant. It shivers her, to think like that. Veronica’s eyes land on the framed picture of her and
Cheryl on summer vacation two years ago and she smiles, remembering how fun that was.

Until the memory turns into something ugly and all she sees is the bleeding, broken body of her friend and the tears when her face crumpled in agony. She remembers two nights ago and the sound of her heart monitor, dirt on her skin, the smell in the room. It flashes so fast and Veronica drops the frame in her hand before she can stop herself.

The following line of photo frames with all her *days I’ll never forget*, taunts her and she has to look away quickly before pushing them all off. But the whole room reeks of it, reeks of a perfect life made of lies and somehow it all feels tainted now. She knows exactly where the drawer is with her well hidden flask and pulls the drawer by its handle until it falls with a loud bang.

*Anything that I was before isn’t who I am now, and I HATE it. I hate all of this!* She hates the purple wallpaper and how it reminds her of before, remind her of the fire and the body hanging from a tight rope. *I need to get rid of this, I don’t want this anymore, I don’t want to feel like this anymore.* the wallpaper is torn from a loose spot behind her bed. She keeps dragging it until there’s a long strip on the wall, and her heart is beating so fast she’s shaking.

Suddenly she’s screaming, hurling things off their surfaces because she can’t hold it in. It feels satisfying but nothing can tide over the pain and distress at all. Not even when the gold frame picture of her and Archie is broken, all the pearls and custom jewellery are scattered on the floor and she’s grabbing the posts on her bulletin board and throwing them at the ground like an idiot.

All those nights in here with all her friends, back when no one was working with their parents and no one hated each other enough to kill them, back when The Blossom twins were perfect and she, Veronica Lodge was perfect. I used to have everything.

When she looks down at her feet and there’s clutters of things, big white holes in the once purple walls, and she must have kicked her vanity chair over because Hermione runs upstairs when she hears a noise.

“Oh dear” her mother gasps from the doorway “Ronnie, what happened?”

She’s too surprised at her own actions to even speak, until Hermione steps carefully over the mess and holds her in her arms delicately.
“The stuff was ruined... I want something new” she mutters. It’s an obvious lie, and she knows her mother can spot it from the way she’s looking at her.

“Honey, it wasn’t ruined”

“Well I just want it gone, okay? I want everything gone. The stupid trash I’ve gathered over the years is like a picture book of people I can’t even think of without feeling like I’m gonna die. I just can’t anymore.”

She sniffs to stop a tear from falling but it’s too late, and one tear makes the rest of her insides fall apart, her true emotions creep out from the dark and attacking her. *Am I crazy, god have I gone fucking mad?!*

“Ronnie look at me, this doesn’t make you crazy alright?” Hermione holds her chin up and looks in her eyes, seeing the entire world and all its’ trauma in them.

“I feel so trapped” she confesses, covering her face when it washes over like shame and humility. “Can I just get rid of all this? Can I just **not look** at this stuff anymore?”

“Ronnie of course” her fingers are feather light and so warm she could melt in them “You can have anything you want.. anything at all. You can get together with your friends and come up with something wonderful, like you always do”

“My friends? I can’t even look at them, mom”

“Okay then” Hermione purses her lips and stays patient “Maybe.. you can talk with Jughead and Archie? You used to be with them all the time before you even met the others” she says softly

“I don’t know.” The truth is she’s drained, and she doesn’t want to see any of her friends or any more doctors and pitiful faces. All she wants is some normalcy back, even if that feels impossible now. “Why do I feel so weak, all the time” she wonders softly.

“You’re not weak, don’t you ever think that alright? I’m right here, it’s okay.. it’s okay” Veronica’s head is spinning until it hurts, squeezing her eyes shut wishing the memory of that night would just disappear.
She makes her way to The Jones’ Pavillion before the sky turns grey again from nightfall. She’s wanted to since yesterday, but after her mother mentioned it the point only reigned clearer. She leaves the tatters of her blank room after picking out the few keepsakes she’s sure of; her mother helped with those, and now the long gravelly driveway leads her vision to that familiar tower. It’s tall and white, and she remembers when Mrs Jones used to live here. She was just a child back then, when her and Jughead were barely friends. But she vividly recalls coming over for trick or treating, the vibrant red roses growing all around the white tower. How you could distinguish Jellybean’s room from Jughead’s from the outside, with their pink and blue curtains. There used to be so many flowers, a beautiful waterfall... and now the flowers have died and the garden just feels like a picture not yet coloured in.

Veronica rings the bell and notices the grass beds the roses used to grow in have overgrown. Jughead opens the door only two minutes later, his hair a moppy mess and one of those t shirts that have long worn out.

“Why are you wearing that?” Veronica grimaces, it’s the first thing she notices.

“Hello there, Veronica”

“Hi. Don’t you have better shirts?”

“Did you seriously come here to criticise my home attire?” His bright blue eyes narrow into slits at her. Veronica sighs, motioning with her head for him to move out of the way so she can go inside. Jughead rolls his eyes and obliges, albeit reluctantly.

“Where’s your dad? And JB?” The inside of the house still feels familiar, it hasn’t changed one bit.
Fred was the one who went on a rampage and remodelled the whole house when Mary left, not FP. He’s still living in the same past. It feels even emptier inside.

“In their rooms. Veronica, can you tell me why you’re really here? Are you okay?” He looks genuinely concerned even underneath whatever gloominess he’s feeling.

“I.. wanted to talk. I need to talk. Archie followed his dad and the police to find Jason and-“ her breath feels so narrow again “I’m going through a lot.”

“I know.” Jughead nods, slowly. He’s never been much of a physical person, especially not when it comes to comfort. But he thinks that if he would, Veronica could probably use a hug right now. She’s never let him even when they were kids, said her dress would get crumpled or he would mess up her hair and get dirt on her. Now he almost wants to smile, because it feels kind of the same. “We can go to my room, if you wanna talk”

“What happened that night? Did you guys leave before it happened?” Veronica questions as soon as they’re in his room, the same room. The last time she was in here was probably seventh grade when she was brave enough to take a risk and lay on Jughead Jones’ bed, probably infested with crumbs and old cookie wrappers. The sound of their laughter still booms off the walls, like bright sunshine and everlasting summer.

“We did. Look I’m sorry I haven’t reached out to you Veronica I just- I don’t know. Maybe we’re all in shock and you know how my dad likes to go into hiding-“

“Perhaps it’s genetic”

Jughead pouts at her. “It’s not like I have a school to go to. And.. I’ve been out of my mind too.” He sits on the edge of the bed and his shoulders visibly slump in that old battered blue shirt. Veronica should know before asking, but makes time out of walking slowly to his bed and sitting on it. There’s these echoes between them of the happier days, days before popularity and the social groups mattered, but now they’ve grown up and Jughead’s eyes look even darker in circles than they usually are.
“Because of Betty” she says quietly “you need to see her, Jug. She’s in the hospital and I’m pretty sure it’s on the to-do list of every boyfriend to visit her”

“I hate to regress to simple snark, but you are seriously giving me relationship advice?”

“Shut up dumb head” Veronica hit his elbow and it gave in quickly, losing his support on the bed “you used to give me advice all the time and you were never in a relationship. After all, I told Archie I love him.”

Veronica swears she’s never seen Jughead’s eyes get so wide before. He immediately looks alive contrasting the whole sickly emo vibe he was sporting when she walked in. And he’s doing that thing when he breathes a little faster because he’s in shock. “I’m.. speechless”

“That’s another topic, okay? Right now Betty needs you”

“We’ve been dating for barely two months, it’s not that serious”

“Is that insecurity I here?” Veronica bounces up straighter and squints her eyes at him. Under her mentally magnifying gaze, Jughead can’t lie to her. He lets out a breath and makes silence an agreeing statement. “Okay. Whatever you two have, it’s special. I don’t wanna get into it but you have never, liked a girl before. I mean you didn’t even do a double take when we saw Megan Fox at the ArcLight.”

“Okay so I feel deeply about her, that doesn’t make us mythic.”

Veronica just wants to scream ‘your girlfriend’s killed someone and you need to get over yourself Betty needs you’ but she couldn’t, no matter how badly it simmered on the tip of her tongue. “When I feel lost the only I want is Archie, and I’m not saying we’re the same. But you just need to see her, okay?” Her hand moves to hold over Jughead’s, while he softens and starts to believe her. He also sees that strong facade, that sculpted mask Veronica Lodge wears fade away like maybe her eyes just speak to him or something. The sky is grey by now and her bright bambi eyes don’t look so fearless, they bear something heavier and deeper than anyone else would understand.

“Okay” he agrees “I’ll see her. You’re coming with me, right?”
“Yeah, of course” maybe it’s this new found emotion in herself or just how she doesn’t care about her crumpled dressed anymore, but Veronica surges closer and hugs Jughead. He hugs her back, just as closely, smoothing the bottoms of her hair that matches his. “Sorry I didn’t go to see you”

“Its okay” she whispers “what do you think is gonna happen to us? I don’t think..” her voice shakes “I can ever forget what I saw that night”

Jughead knows she doesn’t want to move so he won’t see the tears in her eyes if there are any, and he accepts that. “You can’t chain yourself to that memory forever, Veronica. And let it be the detriment of your own sanity, rob you from the happiest you can be”

“It feels impossible” she whispers.

“I promise you we all still have our whole lives ahead of us. We do. It’s only gonna take some time, and when you can let go then you’ll see what’s in store for you is so much bigger than all of this mess.”

(x.x.x.x)

Jughead is up and showered, changed and now standing in front of Betty’s room door just staring at the numbers. Veronica is thoroughly proud of herself for encouraging him enough to get here, and getting tasks done does bring back that momentary sense of grip in an uncontrollable world. The nurse at the front desk told them Miss Cooper is getting released today, and it’ll only be a matter of time before her parents show up and make a whole hurrah. Jughead should go in now.
“Sometime today, Juggyhead” the point of her handbag hits his elbow as she swings it.

“You just interrupted my train of thought. I had a whole plan of what to say to her and you just shocked me and ruined it.” He says plainly. Veronica rolls her eyes and starts to walk away, just as she does Jughead pushes the door open without knocking and goes in.

She waits a long time. They must be talking, and Veronica is too tired to walk down to Cheryl’s room. She texts Toni about it and then texts Josie next, asking about school. She and Reggie are pretty much tiding over the storm while the rest of them stay and rejuvenate themselves. She locks her phone and finally sighs, lingering on the thought of her torn apart room while she walks to the vending machine.

*Junk food? Ugh.* The only thing that looks edible is those gummy bears Archie used to eat whenever he gets sad over his mother being absent. She sighs and puts the quarters in, retrieving a plastic bag of colourful gummys and stands alone in the hallway. *Archie.. what is he doing right now?*

“Ronnie!” Her body is startled by his voice and turns around, sees Archie running down the hallway to her. He looks like a man but his childish way of running, and the innocence in his eyes endears her so much Veronica finds herself laughing before meeting him halfway.

His arms wrap around her waist and picks her up, Veronica latches onto Archie’s neck and lets him lift her, spinning around and making her world shake. He just holds her like that, kisses her, missing the skin underneath her clothes and the smell of her perfume. It feels like they can finally breathe right again, when they’re together. Maybe it’s dangerous to love someone that much but she’d welcome the danger any day.

“There you are” she smiles against his lips, looking up into his dazzled eyes. “I missed you. You okay?”

Archie doesn’t even let Veronica down, he moves his strong arm to hold her up at the top of her thighs, and uses the other to brush those stray hairs out of her eyes. “You know what?” He says matter of factly “I am perfect. I have you”

Veronica tries to hide her face that’s blushing and her fingers curl, making noises on the plastic packet. “What’s this? You bought me my favourite? Aw Ronnie, you didn’t have to!”
She laughs, full of life and joy, and kisses him meaningfully one more time. “You’re my favourite.”

They’re sitting in the backseat of Hermione’s Mercedes-Benz when the sun has already set and visitors hours are officially closed. The four of them, with Hiram, are headed to the police station to clear up some last things. Like the search warrant, considering the fact that Clifford killed Nick and not Veronica. She and Archie don’t talk much, they just leave their hands intertwined in between them. Veronica scoots to the edge of the seat so she can look out the window and stare at the sky. It’s dark, darker than the ocean but not exactly pitch black. Her eyes follow the magnificent full moon like she used to as a child, but now feels a million ways different.

When the car’s parked in the station and her parents go inside, Archie presses a kiss to her delicate fingers. Lips brushing right above the glimmering diamond ring that still takes her breath away. Veronica looks at him and chuckles, leaning back on the leather seats.

“No offence, but since when has this been a good idea? You know, following me here?”

“Are you kidding? Your dad loves me now!” Archie exclaims, sending the both of them to unbelievable fits of laughter. It’s not a long wait, they play games on Archie’s phone to stay off of social media, and change the songs on all her mother’s CDs until the button almost stops working. For a fleeting moment it feels like they’re kids again, and neither of them wants to bring up anything that could ruin this timeless vignette. And then Hiram and Hermione come back inside and they start driving home, still red in the face from laughing so hard.

“Archie, Veronica are you guys hungry? Would you prefer to stop somewhere for dinner first?”

“Oh, if you and dad wanna go straight home it’s fine too.” Veronica shrugs. She’s not that hungry and there’s always room service. Even though she doesn’t really want to leave Archie’s side.

“I would like an early night, actually” Hermione agrees “where are you going to sleep, honey? Your bed’s been dismantled”
Archie’s eye brows shoot up in questioning and Veronica shakes her head, silently telling him to not ask about it. “Uh, is it okay if you drop Veronica and I at the Marina del Ray hotel, there’s this great restaurant in it. We could have dinner first?”

“Yes!” Veronica agrees immediately. “Their seafood platters are to die for.”

“You kids go ahead and have fun. Be safe alright?” Hiram calls out the car window to them, Veronica and Archie already speed walking into the glimmering venue.

“Okay daddy! Goodnight!”

They get the table out by the docks, overlooking the waterfront. There’s only one other couple at the other end of the floor and it’s dark out and the weather feels chilly enough to be enjoyable. Veronica can’t believe how quickly her night turned into this fun date, she leans over her side of the table to kiss Archie on the cheek. Her boyfriend is nothing if not romantic. He orders the seafood platter like she said and three plates of some fancy french toast, along with his main course of ribeye steak. A bottle of Middleton Barry liquor for the two of them, and the waiter doesn’t ask for their IDs when he says their names. He offers a sympathetic look, probably having heard everything from the news.

“How long are people gonna look at us like the poor kids who blew up with their parents demise?” Veronica wonders.

“Soon this will be old news”

“Right, until knowing us another bullet burns at us and we’ll be ‘those poor kids’.”

Eventually she shakes out of the mood she’s in, because the lights are twinkling out there amongst the boats, sky and water looks like it leads to one same path, it’s so beautiful Veronica can’t resist to take a picture of her and Archie with that background.
“So tell me” She inquires, one bite into the mouth watering shrimp “what exactly did you see when you found Jason and Mrs Blossom? Were they like in a house infested with cockroaches? And how long are they gonna be in the hospital?”

Archie looks at her like she’s ridiculous. “They aren’t in the hospital, Ronnie. The mansion was well stocked with food Clifford wasn’t going to let them starve to death. They tried to escape after seeing Cheryl gone but they didn’t know a way out and then Mrs Blossom was freaking out and- “ he runs a hand over his face “It was a whole thing. A whole nightmare. Honestly, I don’t know what he was planning to do.”

“A true golden heart, huh? Sorry, too early for sarcasm?” She bites her fork a little guiltily

“I’m dating you, so it’s never too early for sarcasm”

“Hey!” Veronica nipped the last strawberry and whipped cream before Archie could barely reach for it. He ignores her and sighs.

“I didn’t talk to Jason the entire way home. I didn’t know what to say, I mean should I feel bad for him? Or hate him? Is this all supposed to bring our friendships closer or break us apart for good?”

“Honestly... I don’t know, Archie. But right now I think not talking to him doesn’t make you a bad person, especially after everything he did to us. You could never hate anyone after all, you’re too good” she smiles over the table in that way that could make him leave everything behind, his life, this whole world, just drop all of it if it meant he got to follow her around the rest of his life. He’s crazy about her, especially when she looks at him like that.

Veronica takes advantage of Archie’s fixated eyes and slips his glass out of his fingers, drinking the last gulp before laughing out loud. “Stop stealing all my food!” His face scrunches like he’s really angry at her. Veronica feels light on life, suddenly, just when she’s with him. She gets up from her chair and sits next to Archie, the boats and stars and moon behind their backs. The way her lips linger into his is intoxicating, addicting, and Archie just has to pull her closer and kiss her deeper until they’re both breathless. The taste of liquor is like heaven on her lips, sweet and rich.

They move until Veronica’s sitting on Archie’s lap, and his hand is holding the back of her Parisian dress, wishing on every single star that’s ever shot through this universe that he could keep this moment with them forever. It feels like something out of the best dreams, like she’s too precious to be real. Her chocolate coloured eyes gaze into his when they pull apart, admiring him.

“What you said that night, about driving away together. Did you mean that?”

“Of course” his hand caresses the top of her leg delicately, smiling up at her “maybe New York?
“We could go to Tisch together” she says quietly “get an apartment off campus. We have the money. It could be magical”

“Hmm.. that means we’d have to get through the SATs first” he reminds her. Veronica shoves Archie ever so slightly and he chuckles at her.

“Give me a break, would you?” She adjusts herself on Archie’s legs so they’re comfortable, and pours some more of that special liquor.

“Speaking of, what was your mother talking about? Why may I ask is your bed dismantled?”

Just the thought of it brings her bad memories and her insides squeeze up like someone’s about to wring her out and hang her on the line. “I may have.. had a moment.” He makes that face at her that demands the truth “Okay. I got rid of most of my stuff. All of my stuff. I don’t want it anymore, I can’t. I want something new that doesn’t remind me of the people we used to be. Maybe you think its-“

“No, I get it” Archie takes her hand again and presses a kiss to it, remaining as calm as he always is in contrast to her fire. “But really, all your stuff? You used to love it.”

“Well I don’t anymore. And not all of it, I kept some photo albums. And the teddy bear” she shrugs one shoulder nonchalantly.

Archie almost spits out his food. “You kept Sugar? Babe, I always thought you weren’t sentimental” he teases

“Well one of us has to be. I’ll rip that bear to shreds if you don’t shut up about it anyway, you’re the one that won it for me.” She ponders the situation for a moment while Archie is eating his food. “So.. can I sleep at your place tonight? Unless you, want me to order a mattress from room service”

“Of course not. Wherever my home is, it’s yours okay? My dad won’t mind either. If anything the fire made him realise life’s too short for family feuds when we love each other.”

They finish up most of the food, except the french toast which Veronica chastises him for ordering too much once again. Archie looks at his watch, one of his dad’s old Rolexes and it’s almost midnight. They might have to start school tomorrow or at the very least go in to pick up homework,
and be alert and awake all the same. “We should get going babe, it’s late.”

Archie calls a car and helps Veronica walk back out to the lobby and outside, where it’s gotten even more quiet and empty. The weight of the entire day is starting to make itself known when he finally crashes down in the car, Veronica leaning halfway against his chest. “Just sleep, you’re tired” Veronica whispers to him.

Archie opens his eyes just so he can see her staring at him. “Mm, I should be more excited since my girlfriend’s coming over”

“Don’t you mean coming home?”

He really doesn’t know how he got so lucky, tangled up in the imagination of their lives together one day. But truly, they had started that lifetime together from the first time they’d said hello.

“Right. Let’s go home.”
jeronica’s friendship moment too? And veronica’s meltdown..

tbc.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter #21 Team

- livin’ in ruins of a palace within my dreams, and you know we’re on each other’s team -

2 months later

Veronica can feel the rays of sunshine on her closed eyes, just barely as the early morning tones of colour paint into the sky and the city of Los Angeles wakes up. She’s half awake and still sleepy, not ready to succumb to their packed school day by opening her eyes and chooses to keep them shut a few moments longer. But she’s also aware of a trudging weight on her bed and that it’s coming closer to her, familiar warmth seeping through her cold cotton sheets.

“Ronnie, wake up babe.. I’m here”

She blinks sleepily and rolls around. Pushing her hair out of her face, Veronica can see Archie grinning as he crawls towards her on her bed. “Hey babe.. whatchu doing here? It’s early”

“I thought you’d already be awake” he admits, not looking unhappy as he sprawls on the mattress next to her and cups her soft cheek with his hand, bright twinkling eyes just inches away from her face. She can smell his cologne and the fresh scent of shower gel, meaning he’s just showered and she relishes in how comforting the moment feels.

Veronica glances at the clock and sees that it’s just after six in the morning. “I slept late. I was tired
after studying with Betty last night... what are you doing here?”

“Just wanted to give my girl a proper good morning, since today’s a big day and all..” he brought her head closer with both hands and kissed her neck, slowly and deeply making her whole body feel all tingly. Veronica moaned softly, already turned on somehow.

“I haven’t even brushed my teeth yet!” She smiles and pushes him playfully, feeling Archie’s lips smile against her skin. She’s lost in the darkness with his body covering the sunlight from outside, and it’s the best feeling she’s ever felt.

“I don’t have to kiss your mouth” he mutters, nuzzling lower to her breasts. It makes her laugh for a moment and then she hastily pulled the sheet off from around her waist, leaving her in some pretty (thankfully) lace cut pyjamas. Without hesitation, she pushed him to lay on his back and straddling his hips.

Archie reached a hand between them, rubbing against her with his fingers and feeling how wet she already was. “So I guess this is good morning, Ronnie” he whispered as he looked back up at her, unable to find any coherent words as she yanked her top off and he was swept away by the vision of her beauty, as always.

Veronica was already ready for him, she knew she had to get ready for school soon too so without any preamble she slipped her hands into the loops on his jeans and let them down halfway, getting distracted by Archie sitting up and leaving a hot trail of kisses down her neck, across her chest and torso..

She contradicted herself from before and catches his lips in a kiss before he can go any further, deep and languid that Archie falls back on his back with a soft thud. His hands run down her waist, slipping into the loose pyjama bottoms and cups the curve of her ass.

Veronica lifted herself up and settled over his erection, before slowly sinking down and taking him all the way to the hilt. She gasped, leaning forward and closing her eyes as she took him all in. She opened her eyes again to look down at him completely at her mercy, in her bed, looking up at her with such admiration that made her whole body thrum with energy and arousal.

She starts rocking her hips against him slowly, still lazy in the throes of the early morning, lifting herself up and down. Archie groaned deeply underneath her, one hand on her waist to keep her steady and he drinks her in like he’s never seen anything quite that breathtaking in his life. The other hand reached for her incredibly sensitive bundle of nerves, and she cried out as he began to rub against her. She started riding him even harder, sinking down onto him deeply now and pushing into him easily.
“Ronnie,” he called out to her as he touched her more, moving up and down faster with the deft movements of his fingers against her. A groan came from deep in Archie’s chest, loving how good she felt around him.

Then he started rolling his hips up faster to meet hers, Veronica gasped out his name, head thrown back with how intense the faster pace was. He was reaching places deeper inside her, making everything start to blur as the bed header starts banging just slightly against the wall.

“Archie” she panted, grabbing his shoulders to hold on as he moved inside her. “Archie, more, faster..”

He picked up the pace then, and so did she, beginning to feel like she was about to come apart at the seams. Archie sat up suddenly so that she was sitting in his lap instead, one hand braced behind him now to give him more leverage. His lips caresses her softly, her mouth, her neck, her breasts, his other hand brushing against her clit deliciously making her almost spill over the edge.

He was breathing even harder, struggling to hold on for her, wanting to make sure she came apart around him first. “I love you Archie” she said breathlessly, their hips moving hard against each other “I love you so much..”

Archie made a guttural noise deep in his throat at what she said, as he couldn’t say anything else without making too much noise, quickly flipping them over so he was on top, still inside her the whole way.

“Ronnie” They were both breathless, heart pounding as she looked up at him. “I love you too” he hitched her legs up higher around his waist, going as deep as he could probably go while landing a bruising kiss on her lips.

It felt so good, so hard and intense that Veronica wasn’t sure how he could make her feel all these emotions, and the sensations over taking her body with her toes curling, thighs clamping as if he’d move anywhere. And then her orgasm hit her, a feeling so strong she could only call out his name, gasping for air as he continued to thrust above, kissing her neck again as he came as well. His whole body shuddering above her, they were breathless and spent as the high wore down.

After a minute, Veronica reached her arms up and wrapped them around his neck, hugging him closer to her as she notices the sun had already fully come up. Archie nuzzled deeper into her skin and places lazy kisses on the warm skin of her neck and cheek. They laid there for a few moments not saying anything, just basking in the afterglow in her chilly room.

Archie sighed as her ran a hand through her dark hair against the sheets, obviously having to get back to their reality now. “We need to be at school by seven thirty.. to check in and all that. You probably wanna start getting ready now”
“I do” Veronica sat up, checking her phone and seeing she has exactly as much time as she usually needs to get ready for school. “This was, as always, amazing Archie”

“Mhm..” he gave her a wry smile as he tangled their hands together in agreement. “Race you to the shower?”

“No way” Veronica’s eyes widened, already moving off the bed before he could even try and tempt her. “You are not making me late for school!”

x.x.x.x

The sun is up and blistering, blithe to strong wind currents and salty ocean water. The past two months have felt like careful tip toes into a full throttle run of bliss, watching the days get longer and the nights get shorter while swapping through colour charts and the healing bruises disappear over time. It starts to feel safer, and they stop having night terrors and flashbacks dusted with black smoke and rusty red blood.

While things might not be completely back to normal, far from it, a decent amount of normalcy has spritzed itself into their lives enough to erupt bubbling nerves and flustered cram sessions on the days leading up to the SATs.
It’s thirty minutes to eight when everyone starts rolling into the empty school parking lot. It’s a good day when the other students are gone and bothering with parking passes isn’t necessary. Archie pulls up with Veronica, parking his car right next to one of Reggie’s, a sleek black Vanquish his father gifted. The windows are tinted to Archie and Veronica’s eyes, but they smile to each other knowing Reggie is on his last dial of nerves inside.

Kevin catches them just as they’re stepping up the first two steps into their school building. He sees the couple and grins, adjusting the Desigual across his body. Kevin exudes cheeriness and aw shucks a tad too much for such a timorous day, the moment Veronica glances at him her skin starts to stick with more annoyance.

“No offence babe, but I really need to stop relying on you or Andre to get me places. It’s getting annoying” She mutters half angrily.

“And why don’t you just get your own driver’s license like every normal sixteen year old in this school?” Kevin inquires, his tone laced with sarcasm and investigation that way only Kevin does, hands still on the strap of his school bag.

“Shut up” Veronica shoves him, smiling while pushing the hairs out of her face. It’s so windy today and she didn’t wear a headband. “Had a couple distractions if you hadn’t noticed?”

They check in their cards at security together to get in, and make it to the foyer just like they were instructed yesterday by Mr Weatherbee in his uptight, uber professional way. Reggie has perfected the imitation of it and it’s practically one of his party tricks now, he whips it out whenever they’re not supposed to laugh and sends Veronica and Cheryl into laughter first and trouble second.

Veronica squeals again. “I can’t believe it. This is the SATs, and after we’ll be free! All the caffeine and study songs playlist making has built up to this moment.”

“Not so loud” Reggie protests, his eyes are covered by dark sunglasses tucked under his blue wireless headphones. “I can’t hear the woman’s voice in my ear”

Kevin and Veronica look at each other, brows knitting together and lips straightening, until Archie sighs and raises his hand at their raven haired Bulldog of a friend. “He’s listening to the vocab quizlet on repeat”

Kevin’s jaw drops like he’s scandalised and Veronica turns to slap Reggie on the arm. He doesn’t react. “I can’t even say I’m surprised” she tips her head back and laughs, Archie chuckles too, knowing Reggie’s well versed theory about last minute crash studying and how it’s ‘the most
effective method for a man like himself’. There’s more and more students coming in, most of them are already grouped there in the foyer - complaining about the heat and drinking more coffee, of course.

The hall opens at 7.45 and there’s five more minutes to it when one upbeat blonde runs up to the four of them standing there patiently. “Have you guys seen my mom? Did she run in here, did she talk to anyone? Please tell me she hasn’t ringed someone’s ear off and embarrassed me even more than’s humanely possible yet?” Betty sighs a long pent up breath, her hand going to rest on her knee, face as peach pink as her shirt.

Veronica takes one look at Betty and it isn’t an amused one. “Did someone spit in your Starbucks this morning? Why are you suddenly freaking out”

She takes a beat to catch her bearings before answering in all honesty and ignoring the simple snark of Veronica’s. “My mom insisted on driving me to school and I kept telling her not to, that I’d be late with the traffic and all but you know ever since everything that happened she won’t even let me walk to the freaking mailbox!” She huffs with a roll of her blue eyes.

“So?” Archie’s thick auburn eyebrows shoot up near his hairline and he tugged on his backpack’s straps lightly. “You’re here on time, aren’t you?”

“And that’s obviously the real reason she’s freaking out, isn’t it?” Veronica says sarcastically, tipping her head sideways and avoiding eye contact from any of her friends. She can, in fact now see Mrs Cooper hurrying into the foyer with her big beige purse and the worn pressed expression she wears so well. “Why don’t you want her here?”

“Because” Betty shot an apologetic look at Archie for the crass sarcasm then brought her voice lower like anybody in the vicinity cared to listen. “Jug is taking the test here too, and I don’t want her to freak out.”

Ever since leaving PrinceCourt Hospital, Betty and Polly had both moved permanently back into their parents house. While a lot of the tension had been burned away by orange ambers and valuing family above mistakes, grave mistakes; time has still been the biggest factor in healing wounds. It’s not like they can go back to exactly the way it was either, not when there’s two babies coming along and preparation for it has been magnified tenfold. Unsurprisingly Alice Cooper doesn’t know how to accept things without putting her loud opinion on it.

As for the father of said babies? Considering the fact that Jason has missed every day of school for the past five months, no one is too sure how he would be allowed to graduate. Not that there’d be a point to it. The whole plan was to get into college and then come back and own the empire, but the empire is now nothing more than a speck of dust and a lot of scandal. Then came Cheryl who
couldn’t even bring herself to walk past their house gates much less put on an outfit and care about her appearance. As far as school goes, it just seemed like it was never going to happen for them.

The remainder of them feel ruefully comfortable without the presence of both overbearing Blossom twins and all the stigma they carry on their backs. It feels like they can breathe. And school’s become a normal, healthy environment for now. Getting back into football and playing the guitar again, picking up where he left off which was a rusty state. He forgets how much he enjoyed losing himself in the lyrics and the music, strumming chords on his window seat during the golden hour. Sometimes about insecurity, mostly about love, and knowing Veronica will be right there back at home playing on her piano and singing like an angel. It’s almost like things were back to the way they were, for them. They’re back together, back to their hobbies and striving again. Almost, but not quite. Veronica realised on her own the troubles that simmered within her, and how she’d come to terms with the fact that no matter what she does, no matter how many purging sessions take place that night and all that led up to it will never be forgotten.

So she busies herself with school and cheer, and spends every spare second putting together her spanking brand new bedroom. There was one conversation, with her mother over brunch about taking a simplistic spin on her current ‘high school bedroom’ and going straight out to New York to start putting together her adult home for when she moves there for college.

That idea was shut down fast. You’re still only a junior, you’ll be here in Los Angeles for your whole senior year. No need to rush things. Her mother had ended shortly and took long sips of her chamomile tea, something Veronica suspects to hold more calming melatonin than just herbs. Her father wasn’t too fond of the idea either, grunting about Yale still being an option and not counting her chickens before they’ve hatched.

She likes it now, an eccentric theme of black and white accents, her mirrors and headboard made of gold twisted flowery iron from a boho housing store in Pasadena. There’s only one wall left, the biggest one, that is still that shade of light warm purple. It doesn’t look too girly and adolescent anymore, which she finds to fit better. There’s fluffy purple rugs and marble furniture, and her parents bought her a closet three times the size it used to be.

“Jug’s taking the test here too? He didn’t tell us that” Veronica glanced wearily at Archie. He offered a half hearted shrug, preoccupied with the heavy math book in his hands.

“Since closing down, Costal split and merged with two other schools but.. he didn’t want to make it a big deal that he’s coming here” Betty explained, reaching for Veronica’s warm hand. “That’s why I wanted my mom to just drop me off and leave.”

They start checking in right after, placing phones into little brown envelopes and tossing them in the basket until after testing is over. Veronica sees a good luck Little V❤️ text from Cheryl and three long ones from Josie about how to not stress herself out and when best to take breaks, stretch, breathe and be her extraordinary self. It makes Veronica smile, sending them hearts back before
turning her phone off and putting it away.

The SATs might be the biggest exam of high school, but Veronica ends up not finding it that hard at all. Sure, she’s missed numerous amounts of school days and clinics what with how hectic her life has been the entire year, but ever since it settled down; the image of her and Archie moving into an apartment and going to NYU has been the picture of her perfect imagination. She can just feel it, waking up together, eating breakfast and going to the gym and then spending all day at school and watching movies together before snuggling up to sleep. And if they aren’t tired on weekdays they could even go for date nights at French vegan restaurants, shop at the designer stores, kissing and getting lost in Central Park. It all sounds perfect, but to get there, she needed to catch up with studies.

So she spent every night after cheer practice with Betty, sitting at her kitchen counter or in her study area, snacks laid out and books open. They worked so hard it started to feel less and less like a burden and more and more self improving, while also spending quality time with each other.

“Oh my god” Betty had exclaimed one night, dropping the whole wheat Chocolate chip cookie back in its tray. “What is that? And how did I never notice it before?”

“What?” Veronica didn’t look up from her test quiz, as she was timing herself.

“Stop! Veronica, do you- have something to tell me?”

“Ow! Betty, you just kicked me!” She rubbed the back of her palm ineffectually on her shin, still not understanding the subject of Betty’s excitement.

“You have a ring! V, a diamond ring! Oh my gosh congratulations” she scooted their stools closer and enveloped Veronica in a bear tight hug only one tad too tight, squeezing her. “It’s gorgeous! But why didn’t you tell me Archie proposed?”

Now Veronica laughs. Her face lights up like Betty’s was, all bright and twinklely with her head thrown back in laughter. She takes a full minute to get through it too, while Betty grows increasingly more confused by the situation.

“Oh B, we might live in an out of sorts society, but Archie proposing to me in high school - middle of junior year, is bogus. Relax it’s not an engagement ring”

“But-“ Betty’s blue green eyes were big and scrutinising, flashing from her ring to the look of nonchalance on Veronica’s face. “But its a diamond.”
“Yes, I’m aware it’s a diamond” Veronica yanked her hand back from Betty’s close and inspecting hands, swinging her bare legs underneath the table. “But it’s a promise ring. So no need to start a bridesmaid’s Pinterest board yet B”

“Oh,” she held her left hand to her heart in the most dramatic of ways, reaching for Veronica’s left hand again. Like a million little crystals, the ring glimmered and danced in the orange light surrounding The Lodge’s kitchen. Betty could almost feel a surge of emotion at how beautiful the ring is, or maybe she’s touched by her friends’ intimate gesture. “You are so lucky, V! Let me try it on, seriously”

Veronica let her for a while, but she didn’t like seeing someone else wearing it for too long and made Betty hand it over after she’d snapped multiple pictures for god knows what reason. It might be absurd, like she said, but she isn’t going to deny the fact that she’s been wearing it on that specific finger for nonsensical reasons. Just the thought of it.. one day, if Archie proposed.. it would fit perfectly in the life they’ve planned in New York, and it tastes sweet and exciting and leaves her smiling to herself many moments later.

“I gave him one too” she says suddenly, grinning up at Betty’s surprised reaction before she can even make it. “And- and he says he wants to go to college in NYU now, Tisch. With me.” She clarified, shaking her head slightly like she can’t believe it herself. “We talked about moving in together.. after graduation, I mean it wasn’t totally serious but I think he’s serious.”

Veronica is looking wonderstruck and Betty gapes in awe at her. The ringer on Veronica’s phone goes off for their test quiz and she reaches to turn it off. “Wow. But that is such a long time away, we still have the whole of senior year to get through”

“I know! But I really believe it” she stops herself for a moment, wondering if this is the moment she sounds like a naive teenage cheerleader. “Let me ask you, if I’m being too obsessive or crazy, or weird? I mean what would you do if you were in my position?”

“Listen to me, Veronica. Jughead and I aren’t anywhere near the realm of dreaming about things like that, at all. I know that. But you and Archie? That’s a whole different story. I’m not saying anything about the moving in thing, but don’t hold yourself back from whatever you feel for him because we both know what you two have is real.”

She’s looking at her with those convincing aqua eyes and a blistering grin, and the thrill of it all sinks into her skin and Veronica just lets out a little screech and covers her face with her hands, hiding the smile. “Ugh, whatever!” She pushes Betty’s shoulder almost sending her off the stool. “Let’s just do our stupid equations”

Betty laughs back and they start work in the midst of giggles. Veronica’s heart is thudding happily, feeling at ease, but mostly because it feels like the weight of everything else has been lifted off and she can finally just enjoy this.
The test isn’t too bad for Archie either. He’s smart enough, and the endless amount of study blocks, tuition and clinics has managed to make him confident with these standardised tests. He’s done by twelve pm, fifty minutes before Veronica, Jughead and Betty would be done since he isn’t taking an essay portion. It feels less like a victory but more like freedom, to be out in this parking lot having just taken his SATs. It’s somehow special to be one of the first ones done too, as he sounds off the beeper on his car and gets in. He drives to the nearest smoothie place and gets one for both him and Veronica, sitting around until its almost one in the afternoon and he sees her.

Running out of the school building, literally running, at a full throttle speed to the wide and empty parking space where just like he had before, she feels freedom. Archie opens his arms wide and welcomes her with a hug, never getting used to how tiny she is in his arms as she grips his shoulders tightly. “So proud of us Ronnie” he pats at her hair even though she hates it, holding up the concoction of mixed berries in a plastic cup. “Got you your favourite”

“Best boyfriend ever” she whispers softly into his side, even though she really feels like screaming it out into the whole world. The rest of their friends are approaching with equally relaxed expressions on their carefree faces.

Except Betty, who comes up to Veronica again with that same distressed furrow in her brow that she always wears when something’s wrong.

“Betty? What’s wrong.. now?” Veronica’s voice is cautious.
Betty has her phone in her hand, holding it so tightly that her knuckles are white while some of their other friends have gathered around Archie’s car to hang out as well.

“My mom called and texted like a million times while we were taking the test. It’s Polly.” Her voice drops lower “She’s in labour.”

“What?” Veronica almost shrieks, a sound not to pleasant to have only centimetres away from his ears and Archie jumps away in just as much surprise. “The babies are coming right now?”

“According to her last text she’s getting contractions but they’re still far apart.. but I wanna go to the hospital” Betty says quickly.

“Of course, I’ll take you” Jughead says, slipping a hand around Betty’s waist and holding it. She catches his hand in her own, choosing to find comfort there instead of anxiously fidgeting around like she always does.

Archie offers for him and Veronica to come along if she wants, but Betty says the less people there the less opportunity her mother has to go off and get frustrated at someone for no reason. “Besides, don’t you have that girls night thing with Cher and Josie?”

“Oh- right. I totally spaced” Veronica shook her head in indignantly “But.. it’ll probably be a good opportunity to tell Cheryl about the babies too. If you want me to.”

“Yes, V please tell her for me” Betty looses herself from Jughead’s embrace to hug Veronica, who holds her back with all the gentleness one could have. She really hopes everything goes well with Polly, and for the time they could still pretend it wasn’t too real- now the babies will actually be here. Alive, present creations that’s half Polly and half Jason even though he hasn’t come around to care about it.

“Update me on everything that happens”

x.x.x.x
It’s not very easy to cheer Cheryl up. Never has been, but especially now.

She hasn’t left home since the accident, even her doctors appointments took place at home because she couldn’t bear to get up and go outside. Her body has almost completely healed, steadily over time, but her heart is plunged into a depression so deep she doesn’t know if she’ll ever be able to live life like a normal person again. She avoids Jason, only spending time with Josie when she comes over after cheer practice. Occasionally, she’ll bring Reggie and Archie and Veronica along, but they’ve been busy prepping for the SATs until now. The redhead spends days on her bed, the door locked, watching endless fairytale movies and reading whimsical Judy Blume novels to avoid reality. Despite Archie’s attempt to have a swim day for all of them at Thornhill, buying her new sneakers for hiking and constantly reminding her of how warm and beautiful it is out, Cheryl never agrees. She’s asleep more hours than she’s awake, but yet the exhaustion is never satisfied.

When Veronica and Josie show up at her bedroom door that afternoon, it’s the same. She’s watching one of the first episodes of Glee with a plate of banana pancakes and her pyjamas still on. Being the patient, understanding person she is, Veronica slowly picks the plate up and places it on a table with several other dirty food dishes. They coax Cheryl for a shower, and they all take turns before sitting on the floor with the balcony doors open. It’s evening now, and the fresh air feels good but foreign on Cheryl’s skin.

“So how was it?” Cheryl wondered as Josie started to pick out the dead knots in Cheryl’s red hair from leaving it unattended for so many days.

“Amazing” Veronica says enthusiastically, holding up two dvds. “Pretty Woman, or My Best Friend’s Wedding?” Cheryl frowned at the options.

“Can we watch something less.. romantic?” She asked and Veronica shook her head.

“Anything with even the slightest bit of violence and I don’t want to risk any crying” she told her. They made the mistake of watching Scream 2 and the first bloody scene that occurred resulted in a sobbing, flailing Cheryl, which they didn’t want to happen again. It took almost two very long hours to calm her down completely.
“My Best Friend’s Wedding” she accepted, sighing as Veronica put the movie in. Josie calls for two pints of red velvet ice cream and they eat it happily, straight from the tub, defying every rule they ever made in freshman year of high school.

“Archie and Reggie say goodnight” Veronica says halfway through the movie, setting her phone down when she’d discreetly been texting on it for the past twenty minutes. The two friends had decided to have their own boys night, seeing as their girlfriends weren’t available and no one has exactly been throwing any parties of any sort lately.

“I’m really sorry if I ruined any plans you guys had, asking you to come here” Cheryl pouts into her spoonful of ice cream.

“Cher, I told you it’s fine. We didn’t have any plans anyway” she shrugs nonchalantly, but then makes eye contact with Josie who’s on the other side of Cheryl. She told Josie about Polly being in labour, and neither of them have any idea how to bring it up to their fragile friend, or if they should right now.

“So.. how do you feel about going back to school, Cher?” Josie asks in a soft voice, treading lightly.

“I don’t know” She set the second half empty tub down with a heavy sigh. “I just.. don’t know how I’m going to walk into school, see all the people who know me, and face them knowing every little ugly detail about my life that I don’t even want to believe is true but it is. I mean forget about people at school, I can’t even look at my own brother after everything that happened!”

“Does he try and talk to you?” Josie asks and Cheryl nods, walking over to her dresser to pull out a bunch of crumpled notes slipped under her doorway with the familiar scribbling drawl of Jason’s handwriting. It’s mostly unfinished things, running the gamut from angry harsh words to regretful, pleading apologies. He’s tried calling her too, but with all Cheryl’s ignoring him he’s almost given up. “Maybe.. he really does wanna make it up to you” Veronica doesn’t believe her own words.

“No!” Veronica retracted “No of course not, I’m just saying.. I don’t know what I’m saying”

“What the hell was that look?” Cheryl said sharply, catching the way Veronica and Josie made more meaningful eye contact, like they had more that was unsaid. She’s always been able to spot a secret, and always been one to call it out. “Have you two been talking about me?”

“What? No!” Veronica sighed and looked down at her lap, muttering softly “Polly is in labour right now.”
“Labour” Cheryl repeats, as if she heard wrong “To give birth?”

“Yes, Cher what other kind of labour is there?”

Her face hardened but then she just looked crushed, pulling up both knees to rest her chin on them. Josie has successfully unknotted her hair, which is wavy and hanging almost at her waist now, silky and nice smelling. “I told her I wanted to be there. To be part of the birth, and now I’m not” she said in a soft, sad tone.

“Cheryl” Josie pulled her arm out from beneath her so she looks her in the eye. “It doesn’t matter what you said before. You have to start thinking about what you’re gonna do now”

“I don’t know” she insisted, laying on the floor and pressing a pillow into her face hard. “I’m never going back to school, I’ll just stay here and read.. do online classes or whatever” she spoke through the fluff.

“No, you’re not. You’ve been sad for way too long Cher, it’s time to get back to school and back to life? I promise you the first week back will probably be tough but you’re going to pick yourself up and realise that soon, after graduation? You can get the hell out of this city and never look back.” Veronica tries hard not to sound commanding or forceful, but motivating.

“You think so?”

“We know so” Josie nodded. “Cher, you are way too smart and pretty, and talented to let all of this go to waste. Kevin mentioned the big year end showcase, they’re doing a musical of Little Mermaid and I know one red head who would be perfect for the part. Plus, we’ve been talking about the seniors trip since forever! This year they chose Paris!”

Cheryl smiled lightly and leaned into them, taking another scoop of ice cream, this time less miserable and more thoughtful. She waits until after Julianne and George dance at the wedding and the credits roll, before speaking again.

“Its just, I kind of wish we were one of those people” she shrugs “that aren’t born into a family of ruthless cheaters and liars. Not even privileged. Just.. normal. I mean I’m not saying their lives are perfect, I don’t need perfect. I’d rather be boring.. just functional.”

Veronica looks at her and in her heart she can’t really say she wouldn’t wish the same, but what’s the point in thinking that? They had no choice.

“Cheryl, you couldn’t be boring if you tried.”
“You really think it’ll be okay to go back to school?” She sounds the most optimistic she has in forever.

“I do” Veronica adds “and you will be the perfect Ariel for that musical”

“Aww, you guys love me” Cheryl pulled both of them into the tightest bear hug her arms could manage. They squealed, and Veronica almost wants to break herself free but she remembers how crappy life has been, and how happy Cheryl looks now. She truly hopes everything will turn out right for all of them. “And I love you guys too.”

“Hello?” Archie can hear the grogginess of his own voice as he answers the phone, and Reggie who’s apparently an incredibly light sleeper starts to turn around too. “Shut up it’s just Ronnie go back to sleep” he whispers and shoves Reggie further away.

“Hey” Veronica said calmly, like she didn’t just wake him up at an ungodly hour of the night. “Sorry, did I wake you?”

“Kind of” he sat up and checked his phone, seeing it’s only been an hour since he and Reggie fell asleep. “We were playing Overwatch until really late, and then just crashed. But what’s up? Did something happen?”

“No, nothing at all. I just.. wanted to hear your voice. I couldn’t sleep”

Archie smiles to himself foolishly, in a way that he knows if Veronica were here she would tease him about it. “Oh. Well then, hi. How is my girl?”

“I’m sleepy and tired of Julia Roberts movies” she yawned, and Archie knew she’s smiling too. “But good. We talked to Cher and she’s feeling more convinced to get out of the house.”
“I hope so” Archie lay back, one arm behind his head “and I hope you can go to sleep now too, you know, after hearing my voice”

“If I didn’t love you.. I would totally kill you for making fun of me.”

“Well I’m glad you do, then.”

x.x.x.x

It’s not until the girls wake early the next morning, that Veronica sees a text on her phone from Betty sent just over two hours ago. The babies were born! Healthy and all, Polly is good too thankfully <3 <3 thank you so much for all that you’ve done, V. Come see them soon, all of you!

It immediately excites her. She blabs about it over a fast breakfast, then everyone gets ready and she calls Archie to get himself and Reggie to the hospital too. Even Cheryl is light and smiley this morning, she’s not quite herself being so quiet and calm, but she’s there. They spend a long time figuring out what to wear to a hospital to meet babies for the first time, and they settle on some light summer dresses that aren’t too bright, and boots.

They meet the boys in the parking lot, and the five of them - it feels weird because the group is
incomplete, yet it is, this is how it’s supposed to be - head to the Starbucks first and then a baby boutique. Archie and Reggie look beyond awkward, big muscly men amongst the pastels and cuddly toys, it’s amusing. Cheryl already has a wardrobe of things she collected since first discovering the pregnancy, but Veronica and Josie trifle through little booties and expensive stroller fans.

“What about this, babe? Think this is cute?” She feels Archie’s warm breath against her neck, looking behind her he’s holding two onesies that say ‘it wasn’t me, it was my twin!’ in big bubble letters.

Veronica laughs, Archie’s big hands find themselves around her waist and brings her closer. “Very fitting for Blossom twins”

They all pay for their gifts, Reggie with generic football stuffed toys and such. The five rowdy teenagers make their way through the maze of hallways, the maternity wing being bright coloured and much cheerier than the other wings, balloons and flowers, excited families, couples with rosey cheeked babies riding down the elevators.

Polly’s room is a private one, at the end of the fourth floor. Betty opens the door as Veronica’s knuckles barely brush to knock, and her brilliant smile is contagious, wrapping her in a massive hug and jumping too. “Veronica! Oh, you’re all here! Come in guys”

They pile into the room and Polly is sitting legs stretched out, her blonde hair tied haphazardly in a bun on top of her head. One of the babies is attached to her breast, but she buttons up and snuggles the little blue bundle with a huge smile on her face. “Oh my god, Polly! How are you, how did it go? It took longer than I expected”

“Oh it felt even longer on my end, Veronica!” She’s being kissed on the cheek by Cheryl, and squeezes her hand in return. “So good to see you Cheryl. Almost fourteen hours but I ended up going natural! Go me! It was hard though, poor Betty and our mom had to endure my screams” she grimaces.

“I’m not gonna lie, it was intense. But the babies are here now” Betty is beaming proudly at all of them, her hair down and face glowing bare.

Cheryl hugs Betty too, an image none of them thought they’d live to see. “And so these are them? My baby niece and nephew?”

There’s the clear plastic bassinet with a pink bundle of blankets in it, a face so tiny it could barely be seen. Veronica tugs on Archie’s shirt sleeve to look at it, anticipation in her bones. Polly’s whole face changes as she slides her legs to the side of the bed, handing the blue blanket swiftly into Cheryl’s arms as her eyes light up. “There you go, this is Aunty Cheryl”

Cheryl absolutely admires him, and Veronica does too, she and Josie move to either side of Cheryl and are cooing softly at his adorable button nose, the tuft of baby blond hair and his itty bitty
fingers in a fist by his side. “Is this right?” Cheryl questions “I don’t wanna break him!”

“Do they have names?” Archie finally speaks up after a long time. The boys are awkwardly peering over their girlfriends’ shoulders, as they expected them to.

“Derek and Genevieve Cooper” Polly announced proudly. “Blossom Cooper. That’s still their middle name, of course. Exactly 6 pounds 7 ounces, both of them. Here Veronica, you have to hold one!”

Veronica is hesitant at first, but she glances at Archie who nods encouragingly at her, and she holds her arms out awkwardly. Polly places the little baby, who feels even littler as she’s being held, in Veronica’s stiff arms.

“Hi there Genevieve” she greets using that soft baby voice adults do. “You are seriously, undyingly adorable.” Soon her arms relax, and the baby starts to fit perfectly with the curve of her hand and its little head in the crook of her arm. She realises how much Genevieve looks like Cheryl, or rightly Jason, and can’t help bending down to kiss her smooth skin and inhaling the pleasant smell of fresh baby that overpowers her.

“Ronnie, she’s awake! Look at her blue eyes!” Archie is suddenly excited too, and Veronica turns slightly away from everybody else. “Gosh, she’s so cute”

Veronica is only half listening as the room fills with bright laughter. Even though Jason isn’t here, these babies.. they’re going to be so loved and loved and loved, how could they not? They’re so precious.. and she looks all around her at the people in this room, and then back at the innocent baby in her arms and it makes her believe in the goodness of the world they live in. She makes one final wish then, that the goodness in them will be lasting for a very, very long time.

Chapter End Notes
There you go guys! This is slightly shorter than usual, and sorry for the wait, but I’ve been having major writers block gfig so tell me what you think of this chapter!

And yes, next chapter will be the final one my loves. But don’t worry, much more Varchie content to come ❤️ In The Name Of Love will always be my baby, for more updates, you guys can follow my tumblr @ff16xo

— xo
Forever

Chapter Notes

The last chapter guys! I love all of you, please enjoy this! :”"

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter #22 Forever

- no need to worry, rain falling down

  it’s our happiest story and there’s no one around

  we will go for it and I know you’ll be mine forever -

“Fashion show time” Veronica had said almost three hours ago, a mischievous grin on her face. The girls, all of them; Betty, Cheryl, Josie and Jellybean had taken the Saturday to an extravagant means of shopping, dropping boutique to designer store in the ground of Los Angeles. Now, almost three hours later, they’re only slightly delirious shifting around a Barney’s mass changing room, heavy taste of sugar and citrus juice on their lips.

Betty has seen Josie and Veronica try on so many dresses at this point, she’s surrendered to having an opinion and just letting Cheryl closely critique each outfit, throwing in a ‘looks good!’ and ‘I like this one!’ every three or so dresses. Her legs are stretched on the sofa, heeled sandals locked together, fingers itching on one of the netted headbands Veronica had bought just for options.

“This is too Coachella. And this one looks like someone went through a time machine from Elizabeth Taylor’s house party - I think red. Red will do.” Cheryl nods to herself, surveying three dress choices draped over the lime green sofas.

Betty rolls her eyes, obviously the red one, and sips her drink. Veronica smiles over her shoulder.
cheerfully, hair half up and zipper still undone on her back. She’s standing in some laced up six inch heels and a gold dress that’s three dress code tickets too short, and she looks beautiful. In the radiant white light, her skin looks shiny and smooth and her eyes are brighter and happier than she’s ever been, and she looks beautiful.

“Does it really matter? You will look gorgeous in all of them, guys.. and I don’t think your dates will see the difference between the ruffles on your shoulders or the lace hem being too narrow.” Betty shook out her blonde hair and ranted.

“To be looking perfect is a certain step to falling in love” Veronica says whimsically, she’s joking, merely making excuses for their long trip while stepping away from the mirrors.

“Well if beauty is all one has to offer, will love ever find itself true and everlasting?” Betty says back, raising her voice to a philosophical tone and cocking her head back dramatically.

“Oh hush!” Cheryl throws one of the satin slips at Betty and laughs convulsively, making everyone else bubble with giggles too. Jellybean comes out wearing a white lacy tunic and white stockings rolled up to her knees, fixing her raven hair and admiring herself.

“That looks like the dress Brooke Shields wore in Pretty Baby when she was being sold off.” Cheryl scoffed into her glass of strawberry daiquiri, and subsequently making the beam drop off Jellybean’s face.

“Cher, just because she has a different taste-“ Veronica tried to defend.

“Yeah. *Ugly* taste.”

Jellybean smiled and shrugged at the other girls, sighing as she removes the dress. “Good to have you back Cheryl.”

Veronica disappears into the stalls and reappears a moment later as Betty is on her last nerve, humming an unchained melody when Veronica steps back into the room Josie completely drops the pile of hangers in her hands and gasps. “Oh my god, V. You look amazing!”

Cheryl looked marvellously amazed as well, eyes training from the top of the sleek cut black dress to its thigh high hem, and not finding any words for once. “Yes!” Betty sits up and claps. “This is it! Veronica, please this has to be it. You look crazy hot.”

“I think this is it” she admits, smiling nervously at her reflection. The dress looks good, yes, and it also fits great and is cool and comfortable enough to double as after-party attire. Her stomach feels like a million tiny butterflies are taking flight and her chest feels light, finally picturing herself in this dress on that night with these girls, who are crowded around her in the mirror with more than
approving looks. “Okay. Sold! I have to take a picture now and send it to Archie.”

“Wait- what?” Josie steals the phone out of Veronica’s hand before she can unlock it. “I thought we were all going to surprise our dates?”

“Well you guys can have fun with that, when your dates don’t have matching suits and you end up looking like a mismatched couple on Halloween.” She hums to herself and sends the picture off to Archie, feeling satisfied with how good she looks in the dress.

Every other aspect of their outfits are ready; the jewellery, the stockings and heels and handbags and earrings. Veronica and Betty are having fun, putting together pieces and having a general idea of their look for the night as they go along. But this is senior prom for Cheryl and Josie, they’ve had this planned for years. As of right now, everything is feeling and falling into place; like perfection.

(x.x.x.x)

“This slim fit for the dinner suit is much more complimenting, Mr Andrews, and it’s highly popular nowadays”

“Yes, I like this one the best too” Archie moves his shoulders around, watching the suit jacket move in the mirror, his tailor’s busy hands straightening out the tie and lapel. “I think Veronica will approve of it too.”

Not too far away Reggie has chosen a shiny blue tuxedo without any tie, the first three buttons undone as he fusses over the different shoes displayed. He sighs frustratedly, muttering something about the store not having the right Chelsea shoes and runs a hand through his dark curls.
“Andrews! This Derby is the best out of what they have, right?”

Reggie is not really asking for an opinion but more an agreement, so Archie nods indifferently and glances back at his reflection one last time. From the mirror he can see Jughead far behind him, crouched over boxes of different things wearing a grumpy frown and not his crown shaped beanie. The knit grey thing has long been discarded on one of the plush couches, left as he switched shirts and ties and endured Archie and Reggie’s inputs- the problem wasn’t that Jughead was picky, it was that he’s clueless.

An old Jay-Z tune starts playing in the store when Archie feels a vibration from his pocket, fishing out his phone and seeing his favourite type of notification on the screen. Archie opens up Veronica’s chat and there’s a drool worthy picture of her body in the ‘winner’ dress, the ends of his lips tug upwards naturally.

looking good he texted back, exhaling a breath waiting for her quick reply. He had coincidentally chosen a black suit to match her black and shimmery dress. Veronica replied with three eye roll emojis and one bouquet of flowers, reminding him of the corsage he is still in need of buying.

When they finally make it out of Ben’s Atelier, Reggie is speed walking three paces in front and Jughead is purposely lingering behind. The two of them never wanted to take this shopping trip together, but with Archie as a middle ground; and the fact that their dates are also all friends, the choice became inevitable. Now though, as the sun is right above their heads at a blistering hot twelve in the afternoon, both Reggie and Jughead had had enough of each other and are more than ready to be gone. It’s Archie who catches up to Reggie and grabs his shoulder, smiling sheepishly at both of their grim faces.

“Sorry guys. Just one more stop.”

Jughead groaned out loud. He hasn’t stopped dragging his feet the whole time and Reggie is severely annoyed by the sound, as he sticks close as possible to Archie's side and tries hard as he might to ignore the ‘whiny freak’ that’s following behind them. Being inside this florist doesn’t help much either, it reeks of fresh flowers and is colourful in every corner, the only other customers there are old ladies with tightly held handbags and pressed dollar bills. They can’t wait to leave.

“Andrews... there was like a whole array of gold corsages back there at the entrance! Why didn’t you get one of those?” Reggie questions, lines fast appearing in his forehead from the distress on his face.

“Who’s the whiny one now?” Archie chuckled over his shoulder. His hands are in his pocket and
he keeps looking around. Reggie is right. There were a bunch of nice looking corsages but none of them suited Veronica. It was either too big, and though Veronica screams extravagant, she’s not exactly into the busy look. The rest had too much yellow or white and not enough glitter, none of them just seemed to work. Admittedly they’d been in the florist long enough but Archie knows he needs everything to be perfect for this night.

“Arch.. the guy says the metallic themes are back here” Jughead shouts at them across the store. Archie shrugs and turns back around, following to see the aisle of endless glittered flowers, one of these sure to catch Veronica’s eyes. When they’re flipping on options together and Archie has decided on one- it’s simple and not too big, shiny and striking. Reggie mutters “finally” under his breath and Jughead is holding a pale yellow corsage too, assumably for Betty.

They rush to the counter to book it out of there, but Archie stops one last time despite Reggie’s steel cold glare. He doesn’t think twice about the options this time. Just picks the first bouquet of scarlet red roses, the biggest and most expensive one; smiling to himself while fishing out his credit card to pay for it.

“You’re so fucking whipped” Jughead mutters under his breath. And none of them deny it.

(x.x.x.x)

Thursday has to be the busiest day of Veronica and Betty’s life, since they spent all morning making final decisions on the prom layout, and all afternoon and evening practicing the choreography for tomorrow’s senior farewell. Now, they’re sitting on Veronica’s living room couch in front of the large TV in Victoria’s Secret pyjamas with a platter of tacos on the table, enjoying mindless chatter and some chick flick with Jellybean and her friend Kaycee. The two JV Vixens had agreed to come over for a sleepover tonight, as per request of Veronica for last minute preparations of the Vixens’ uniforms for tomorrow’s performance.
The last task, albeit the biggest, is hot gluing Swarovski jewels on twelve cheerleader uniforms before the sun comes up. And that’s exactly what the four of them are doing.

“There was a question in the Blue&Gold’s ask forum about how to get on a reality show, I really think the kids at our school need some bigger ambitions.” Betty reveals with a giggle, her shoulders hunching forward slightly when her entire body shakes with laughter.

“I wouldn’t mind being on a reality show” Kaycee shrugged.

“Are you serious?” Veronica deadpans, dropping the hot glue gun in her hand and staring down the olive haired girl. “Cameras following you around twenty four seven, while a producer actually tells you what to do, and then have it advertised as your life? If you want attention without talent that’s what Instagram is for anyway” she blows on the freshly glues jewels.

“V is right, Kayc. The stars inflate their net worths anyway, and besides it’s not like any actual career comes afterwards.” Jellybean stated, then tapped her finger to her chin thoughtfully and added, after a beat “Although it wouldn’t be terrible. I mean just think about it- who wouldn’t find our lives interesting? It’s beyond scandalous.”

The girls laughed, more warily than anything, fishing out more bags of jewels until their uniforms glittered just right. As soon as they’re done with one uniform, they drop it on the designated ‘finished projects’ part of the floor and have a taco, although Jellybean only waits after jewelling one sleeve to help herself to another portion. They skirt around the olives, and eventually get tired of how the crunchy shells taste in their mouth, so Betty suggests they order a pizza.

“Go ahead. I don’t have any other type of junk food you guys would like. Use my phone.” Veronica agrees, unlocking her phone and handing it to Jellybean to make the call.

When there’s a ding on her phone and it says the pizza’s here, Jellybean and Kaycee giggle excitedly like they’ve never had a pizza before, making Veronica roll her eyes and Betty stifles an endeared laugh. “Well someone has to put on their clothes and pick it up at the lobby!” Veronica says, looking at Jellybean.

“I don’t wanna go alone” the brunette pouts.

Kaycee bumps her shoulder with hers, already grabbing their robes and fixing her hair. “I’ll go with you.”

“Well hurry up before he leaves!”
As soon as the elevator doors shut again Betty’s cell phone rang and she carefully laid down the glue gun and the uniform she’s working on, walking to the other side of the table to pick it up.

“Who’s calling?”

“It’s Jughead.”

“Ooh” Veronica sits up quickly, rushing to the other side of the table where Betty is standing just as she answers the phone, swiping it out of her hand and hitting speaker just as quickly. “Juggy.. hi baby, oh no Betty is just too busy with one of the hot athletes that just checked into the hotel!”

“I’m not with any athletes!” Betty protested, laughing at Veronica’s obscure attempt at holding the phone high above her head when Betty is, in fact, taller than her. The stupidity of her own action hits her just as she does it and Veronica curses herself, the both of them doubling over in an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

She yelps, shoving Betty away lightly who’s trying to get her phone back. “V! Stop it!” She laughs, unsuccessful since Veronica is apparently at expert at talking on the phone and also swatting people’s arms out of her face.

“Wow, Veronica.. very mature” they can both hear Jughead’s unamused tone on the other end of the line, amongst their own booming laughter. “Can you please give it back now?”

“Ugh fine then grouchy pants” Veronica finally relents, passing the phone back to Betty with a smile as wide as her own. They fall back on the couch together, forgetting about the uniforms altogether for just a second.

“Okay, okay. What’s up Jug?”

“I was just wondering what you guys were doing. And making sure my sister is still actually with you? Veronica hasn’t sent her on some stupid thrill of a dare or something?” They can practically see the condescending look on his face.

Both girls look at each other and their eyes grow wide, Betty’s hand finds Veronica’s on the couch and squeezes it to stop herself from laughing again. “She actually isn’t here right now”

The line goes quiet for a moment.

“She’s picking up a pizza downstairs” Betty says, laughing when Jughead mutters an irritated curse about their antics.
“Well you should have invited me too then!” Jughead whined “You guys are eating pizza at midnight on a school night and left me all alone, bored without any company?”

“Boo hoo, sucks to be a loner” Veronica leans closer to the phone. “Find your own friends.”

Betty rolls her eyes. “Sorry babe. We can hang out all weekend, and we’re gonna have a blast at prom tomorrow, remember?”

“Okay.” He finally agrees “I’ll let you guys get back to your nail polish and chick flicks. Enjoy the whirly girly ride.”

“Thank you” Betty sing songs “I’ll find you in the bleachers first thing tomorrow morning.”

“Don’t let Veronica rope you into staying up late, she’s a penchant for such things.”

“Not for good reason, don’t worry Juggy”

“Alright, love you. Good night”

“Goodnight. Love you too” the line goes dead and Betty sighs, leaning back against the couch with an eased expression on her face. Jellybean and Kaycee still haven’t come up with the pizza, maybe they’re the ones who are busy with athletes checking in. It isn’t until a moment later that Veronica sits up completely straight, her black hair fanning around as she turns her head and looks at Betty in an acute, awed, expression of shock.

“Oh my god. Did Jughead Jones just say he loves you?” Her chest is rising with short breaths, still shaken from laughing so hard for so long, and Betty slowly freezes up like she’s never even realised putting such a thing out there into the world so casually. Her eyes become morphed into wide green orbs, and she slaps a hand over her own mouth. “And did you just say it back?”

“I think.. I think I did!”

Jughead was notorious for being a lone wolf, and having a less than zero tolerance for anybody that wasn’t Toni, Archie, Veronica or his little sister. Veronica couldn’t believe he was truly into Betty, and he loves her too.

“Oh my god!” Veronica exclaims again, grabbing Betty by her shoulders and practically shaking her, surprised and thrilled by the way things are turning out. Betty lets out a strangled, excited squeal and covers her face so Veronica doesn’t see her red cheeks, and they laugh together on the couch until Jellybean and Kaycee finally come back up again wondering what’s so funny.
The following Friday morning, an oddly chilly and light grey skied day is Raffles’ senior farewell, all the students have piled into the gym. Some are still sleepy, makeup hiding tired eyes and sipping on toasty warm cappuccinos at the break of eight in the morning. There’s chatty students, excited for the end of school term coming into view while the beginning of summer starts to make itself known. With many attitudes in the gym that morning, emotional, cranky, agreeable; The Vixens are up and walking with a purpose already - slicked back ponytails high on their heads with soft, flawless curls, freshly jewelled uniforms fitting perfectly.

Veronica has a certain type of giddy energy flowing through her veins as she stretches by her locker, leg held straight up by her face. All the other cheerleaders are being a little noisy; the senior farewell is a big deal and as school comes to a close no one can contain their undying excitement about everything. Betty is still changing, she had gone to find Jughead first as promised. The tones of Principal Weatherbee’s voice on the microphone from the gym floats to their locker room, and Veronica spots Cheryl.

“Make some noise for the Raffles Bulldogs of 2018!” Claps and cheers and the gym goes pandemonium, a girl slaps Veronica on the shoulder as they’re all starting to walk out.

“Hey V! Coach is about to announce us, you better get in front!”

“Yeah just a sec”

The red headed girl is sitting on one of the benches, upper body slumped over in a very un-Cheryl-like manner, her long ponytail falling over one shoulder. Veronica sits down next to her, slowly placing a hand on the top of her uniform feeling the cotton fabric and little jewels tickle her palm. “Cher, you okay?”
She flinches a bit in surprise, and it isn’t until Veronica is right next to her that she see’s her holding in those miserable tears. “Yeah” she lies, wiping her left eye with the back of her hand “Just thinking about my dad. And Jason, and all of it..”

Her lips curl up in a sad little smile on her face. “Remember last year? I thought I had everything planned, exactly what I wanted and how I was gonna get it.” Her voice drops to a solemn whisper “Turns out nothing from my life then even matters to me now.”

Veronica spins her around so her torso is facing her, the skin of their bare knees just brushing against each other while she tangles her in a hug. They might have gotten her out of bed, into this uniform and her hair and makeup all done, and she might still look like the same girl who used to give manic grins cheering her heart out at the football games, but inside the tight fitting uniform Cheryl feels completely small and completely different.

She accepts Veronica’s hug, holding her closer and closer until the rest of the girls are grouped by the entrance ready to head out, and they have to get going to.

“We still got this, Cher” Veronica nods determinedly. She holds Cheryl’s hand and they make their way to the front of the lineup with Josie as well.

“Give it up for the 2018 line up of Raffles Vixens!” The loud band music starts playing and they plaster that animated beam on their faces, immediately feeling the rush crawl into their skins as the crowd roars for them.

“Last performance ever for us, you guys ready?” Josie asks, looking down the group of Vixens and they all nod eagerly, feeling sad but excited at the same time.

Veronica feels Betty’s hand slip into hers at the last minute, and her bright blonde hair sway as she bounced anxiously. “Yup. Let’s do this!”

“The Vixens cheerleading squad has not only cheered on every one of the Bulldogs’ victorious games, but they are undefeated state champions, carrying five gold trophies under their belts. Congratulations ladies! The Vixens squad is led by captain and graduating senior, Cheryl Blossom.” Coach Casey announces into the lively audience, as they come out and lose themselves to the music and choreography on the floor.

Veronica turns and smiles at Cheryl, who at last looks proud of herself, a true smile on her face now. This is the last time performing with all her friends and as much as it’s been a rollercoaster, this part of her life will always remain sweet and forever cherished.
After the music dies down, Principal Weatherbee calls upon every senior to properly bid farewell, the rest of them sitting on the bleachers and calling over to their friends. It almost feels like graduation even though it isn’t, but watching Cheryl and Josie and her other upperclassmen friends receive big bouquets of flowers and showered congratulations of all their achievements feels like the end of something.

“Alright students, listen up!” Coach Raco stands up at the podium and claps his hands together for maximum effect.

The noise of everyone all laughing and talking about how good the farewell went dies down slowly as they all shift their attention back to Coach Raco. Veronica is just belatedly realising that all the Vixens and Bulldogs have been separated off to sit altogether on one side of the bleachers, and she pulls Betty who’s holding Jughead’s hand away from him and they squeal while sitting down next to Archie. Veronica scoots even closer to him, waiting for Coach Raco to start talking.

“I would like to say thank you to not only the seniors, but every one of our Bulldogs and Vixens for having an undefeated year, once again” Coach says cheerfully. “But now that half of them are moving on- we’re gonna have to elect new captains for the coming season!”

Archie nudges her elbow and wiggles his eyebrows at her and Veronica can’t help laughing. She already knows next year is going to be fun, but she’ll miss Cheryl and Josie like crazy too.

“So two of my Bulldogs are handing out the secret ballots, and you guys are going to put your votes in.” The rest of the gym erupts in whispers and everyone starts standing up to peer at them, it’s one of those moments where they feel special to be part of their little team. “Now remember! A good captain is vital to keeping our record at the standard it’s at right now. Choose the person who’s best at leading, has the best skill, and not someone who will throw good after parties!”

They laugh while receiving the little ballots, seeing all the junior Vixens and Bulldogs’ names on it. Everyone starts scrambling to find a pen, reaching into cheer bags and going to the other side of the bleachers to get one from someone else. Veronica and Archie sit with their backs against each other while considering choices, and when she feels his muscles move to bend down and make his vote she decides on hers too.

Archie doesn’t have to think long about his vote, Reggie has been second best on the team and has a huge passion for it, so he seals up the paper and hands it back to the collectors very soon. Veronica ends up putting a tick by Stella’s name. She knows becoming cheer captain will make Stella extra bossy and conceited, but she is a well rounded cheerleader, one of the best and people will definitely listen to her.

It’s a somewhat long process, but it doesn’t feel so as they’re all busy talking about prom and the after party at Reggie’s and their dates and outfits. “It’s going to be so fun!” Josie says to the general crowd, sitting down in front of Veronica and grinning. “I’m really excited to dance! You’ll
“pick me up after Cheryl and go to Betty’s?”

Veronica nods. All of them are going to prom together, and Archie got a stretch limo to drive all of them. “Archie’s going to Reggie’s place and then they’ll get Jughead and come for us at Betty’s.” Reggie comes bounding down the bleacher and plops himself up above Archie, Veronica and Betty.

“There better be a good pre party spread, blondie.” He smiles warmly “Not as good as the one at my after party, obviously”

Cheryl snorts. “Maybe you should get into catering”

Reggie starts his smart retort but he’s interrupted by Coach Raco, voice booming in the microphone for their attention.

“The votes are in!” Coach looks happy with the results. “It was ninety nine percent one sided too, almost every single one of you are in agreement with this choice, so I present the Bulldogs’s new team captain for next year, Archie Andrews!”

Archie visibly jumps in surprise. He wasn’t expecting this, maybe just the slight glimmer of a chance, that it takes a whole moment for him to stand up and look into the cheering audience.

“And your new Vixens captain, give it up for Veronica Lodge! Come on guys, get down here and show everyone their new leaders!”

The football players and cheerleaders are already pulling their hands, jumping, while the rest of the school stamps their feet in anticipation and the band music starts playing again. Archie finds Veronica’s hand and they run down the bleachers, standing by their coaches with utmost happiness. When they’re there in front of the whole school Archie picks her up and spins her, landing a kiss on her lips hearing the roar and feeling the rush of her world spinning around. Feeling the warmth and pride in his kiss she holds on to his neck and hugs him, the smell of his jersey’s detergent and sweat and his hair product filling her senses.

“Well done babe!” She laughs as he lets her down. “I knew it would be you! You deserve it you know, and you’ll be the best captain.”

He can’t really hear amongst the noise but he gets the gist of it and hugs her again. Cheryl brings over her extraordinary captain’s bow and one of the boys bring down the captain’s jersey, and just for this moment of glory., they accept it and soak it all in.

Archie can’t help laughing at Veronica who swaps out the regular bow in her ponytail for a bigger, brighter one and she does a jump and shakes her pom poms exuberantly, whistling and cheering her on. Then all the Vixens and Bulldogs come down from their seats to hug out, dancing to celebrate
this final moment of the year. They’re both lifted in the air and they can’t stop smiling, revelling in the beautiful clarity of it all.

(x.x.x.x)

“Alright dad, I gotta go! I’m gonna be late to pick up Reggie and Jughead.” Archie yells as he runs down the long staircase, being sure to not trip in the shiny new shoes he’s wearing and trying to relax his shoulders.

Fred pops out from his office just as Archie is reaching the kitchen to take a drink of water first. “Hey- you’re gonna be out late tonight, right?”

“Probably” Archie shrugs. “We’re gonna go to Reggie’s later and probably just crash...” he leaves out the part about him probably going back to Veronica’s too, or maybe not. He’s not sure.

“Right. Well look at you” Fred steps even further back, surveying his son’s ensemble like its the first time he’s laying eyes on him. He looks genuinely impressed, that it makes Archie smile too. “Off to prom. Tell me again when you got so grown up?”

“Dad” Archie gives him a stubborn look, backing into the doorway. “There’s still next year senior prom. It’s not the final one or anything”

“Oh I know, but I just-” he sighs and lets off, but Archie knows just what he’s trying to say. “I guess what I’m feeling right now it’s.. realisation”

“Realisation?”
“Of how grown up you are. And how far you’ve come, really, I’m proud of you Arch.” He makes his way over slowly and Archie meets him in the middle, having to bend down just slightly to hug his dad from the recent height difference. While this isn’t the end of anything, in his father’s arms Archie realises he’s forgotten how long it’s been since they actually hugged. It reminds him of being a little boy again, and his heart jumps in waves at the thought.

“Come on let me take a picture of you, your mother would want to see one where you aren’t completely wasted” Fred laughs. He sits there and patiently waits for his father to take the pictures, smiling brightly even though his friends are waiting.

Veronica has her tote bag of makeup products and the clothes bag with her dress in it held behind her back, phone and coffee in the other hand. There’s three hours left before prom starts but she promised Cheryl, Toni and Josie that Andre would drive all four of them to The Coopers Residence to get ready. It was more of a gesture than anything, they want to spend time with Derek and Genevieve and Polly will get to have fun with the process since she isn’t going; killing two bird with one stone.

“Veronica!” The shrill voice of her mother sounds from upstairs, just as she makes it in the foyer. Veronica stops herself, taking a deep breath before turning back around into the penthouse. “Are you leaving so early mija?”

She’s shocked to not only see her mother, but both her parents are there in the living room clad in house robes. She sets her phone and coffee on the counter and nods. “Is this your dress? Has it been steamed? Oh open it up and let me see.”

Veronica sighs at the fuss but she secretly likes it, pulling the long zipper down to reveal her very revealing dress. Hermione doesn’t say anything at first, she probably likes the satin. “Won’t you be cold?”

She has a short imagination of Archie giving her his suit jacket when the air stars getting chilly. “I brought a sweater in the bag, mom”

“Well I know you’ll look beautiful mija. Since that never changes” Hiram says, placing his hands on her shoulders and showing the closest thing to a fond smile. Veronica doesn’t bother controlling her own grin, happy that he’s approving and complimenting tonight. “You know you only need
call if anything happens.”

“Yes, of course daddy.” She gives him a brief hug and Hermione envelopes her next, a warm and fuzzy embrace. “I wouldn’t do anything stupid like get in a car with someone drunk or anything.”

“Where are you going afterwards?” Hermione asks one last time.

Veronica isn’t exactly used to her parents fussing, wether this be post traumatic care for your child parenting, she isn’t sure. But it is just a tad bit annoying. “Just to Reggie’s. Maybe we’ll go to a restaurant. I love you guys, see you later!”

She grabs her things and zooms out of there into the elevator as fast as she can, not relaying that ‘later’ really means ‘tomorrow’, for all intents and purposes.

The girls have fun getting ready at The Coopers’. It’s a little chaotic at first, when their dresses and things are all laid out in the living room (because any one of the rooms simply aren’t big enough) and the babies suddenly wake up with shrieking cries. They don’t mind though, especially not Cheryl who would rather sit and console the blubbering baby while getting her hair curled by Toni. It all feels a little different, from full glam teams in Thornhill’s spa to packed makeup sets on Betty’s vanity. They essentially take over the whole house in the process though.

Betty is sitting in her favourite arm chair while Polly does her make up, while Derek is falling asleep on the electronic sleeper that Alice gifted. Everyone is in a good groove, pinning dresses and whatnot in an oddly comfortable camaraderie.

“I kind of wish I was coming with you guys” Polly says suddenly.

Betty’s eyes flutter open, black liner against the green colour. “I wish you could come with us too Poll, I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t be. Really, I used to have this whole vision of going to senior prom with my high school sweetheart and” her eyes flicker to Cheryl just for the briefest moment as she bites her lip. “I thought I was going to go with Jason too. But the important part was this; the getting ready and doing my hair, dressing up.. but now that I have the twins I’m kind of over the high school thing”
“I guess things change..” Betty says softly “but I still wish you could enjoy this with us”

“This night is for you, Polly” Cheryl declares, smirking at the little basket that holds her baby niece.

“You guys have fun” she nods affirmatively “I’m happy where I am.”

“Well *some* things never change, because this night still calls for a group selfie! Come on girls, we all look gorgeous” Josie holds up her phone and the rest of them squeeze in, bright smiles and even brighter, shimmering dresses.

Veronica hears the sleek limousine pull up in front of Betty’s house gates as she’s buckling her left shoe, the three figures of their dates appearing from the vehicle. “The boys are here! We should get going!”

She can practically feel the excitement in her toes, fervently missing how fun and simply enjoyable school dances could be. “Thank god” Cheryl stands up abruptly, a tight smile on her lips. “My claustrophobia acts up in small houses” she offers an empathetic look to Betty and Polly “no offence.”

“None taken” Betty smiles brightly while opening her house door, laying eyes on Jughead and greeting him with a big hug.

Veronica smiles appreciatively at Archie, gesturing her hands to herself in presentation. He has on this handsome suit, and his hair is done just the way she likes, not too messy but not too sleek and styled, she can tell he took a long time getting ready.

His jaw practically drops seeing Veronica in the flesh, even though he’d seen the dress via picture she looks even better in it now, if that’s even possible. Her cheeks are red with giddiness and the look of admiration on Archie’s face as he presents her the corsage.
“It’s the perfect corsage” she says, touching the gold toned ribbons on her wrist. “Why aren’t you saying anything?”

“I’m just in awe—“ he admits “you’re beautiful”

They share a kiss in the living room before Mrs Cooper comes down the stairs and tells them to get going. Everyone gets one last picture with Polly and the twins, kissing their cheeks goodbye and making it out into the chilly air of the night. “Oh my gosh” Betty gushes “this limo is seriously cool, I’m so happy we all get to ride together to prom!”

Veronica cheers too, making her way to the door before Archie stops her. She catches Reggie winking back at them like he knows something and shuts the door leaving them outside. “What’s going on?”

“We’re not riding with them, come on” Archie tugs softly on her hand, pulling her to turn around just as another smaller, but definitely hotter Maybach comes into view down the long road.

Veronica squeals. Her hands fly up to cover her mouth while she turns to Archie, not believing if this is what she’s thinking. “Archie- you can’t be serious”

“I totally am” he nods, pressing a kiss to her lavender smelling hair and opening the door, ever the gentleman. “Get in, pretty girl!”

The entire car smells of flowers and Veronica can understand why, when she steps in and sees the long stemmed red roses, in a black box in the middle of their seat. The drive seems to be slow, but her heart is racing with the smell of roses in their atmosphere and her breathtaking, fanciful boyfriend sitting right next to her.

“Cheers” he pours both of them her favourite champagne into tiny wine flutes, all the little details of her favourite things are accumulated into this car. The wine tastes sweet on her tongue and her head feels dizzy with comfort, and she can’t stop smiling.

“Archie, you out did yourself with all of this. Seriously” Veronica can already feel like this night is going to be a memorable one. “You are so romantic” she grins.

“Well I wanted to do something special for us” Archie is elated that he managed to surprise Veronica, and even more that she seems to be on cloud nine right now.

“And you did” she sighed, leaning back against the seat in bliss. “The roses.. the car, all of it. Just you, Archie. You made all of this special.”

She swears in the dark light she can see him blush, or maybe it’s just the shadows of his red hair,
but he looks so perfect sitting there and she can feel every emotion from overwhelmed within- to the warmth and gentleness in his gaze. It feels like the last smooth track on a rollercoaster right before it ends, when your head’s still dizzy and your ears are still ringing, but you can finally breathe again.

They can finally breathe again.

Veronica kept her eyes on him, flickering down to his inviting lips, scooting closer to him on the seat until their shoulders brushed. For a fleeting moment they stayed in silence, not wanting to mess this moment up, not wanting to push it too far, before Veronica brought her face closer to his and their lips slanted across each other.

There they were- two people who loved each other just cloaked in an intimacy so intense and powerful, it’s the kind of thing you couldn’t describe even if you wanted to.

“This is perfect” he whispered on her lips. Instead of responding, she smiled brightly and kissed him again with a crashing passion, her fingers finding his ears and her body moving forward slightly towards him.

Veronica almost moved her knees around his lap to get closer to him, belatedly remembering she can’t ruin her dress and pulls him against her instead. He cupped her face with one hand while the other wrapped itself around her waist, their bodies coming in complete contact with each other.

In response, Veronica reached down and grabbed his hand, placing it right beneath the hem of her dress where her bare leg is silky smooth and tempting him. “Are you sure you want to do this here?” He asked between kisses.

“Just don’t touch my hair” she winked, driving him to a level of madness that could only be compensated by kissing her harder and positioning himself just right so he’s completely above her, enveloping her with his bigger frame.

Wrapping her arms around his neck, Veronica pushed her hips up and pressed them against his own. She rocked her pelvis up and down until she felt Archie’s hands slide down to cup her ass covered in the black satin dress, causing her to move even more relentlessly.

Groaning, Archie started to hike her dress up slowly, careful not to tear it in his haste. Realising what he was doing in the fog of alcohol and lust, she lifted her hips up so he could hike her dress up fully- then locking her legs around him tightly.

His hand keeps stroking the long pane of her leg, moving up her thigh to keep her leg wrapped higher around his waist. Veronica let go of his neck to snake her hands down and undo his pants, chest heaving loudly with the simulation when he angles his hip against her rocking ones.
Veronica’s hands went up and undid the buttons on his suit, leaving the shirt on but her fingers crept under to explore the muscles on his chest and stomach, then going around and feeling the ripples on his back when he moved. Their whole bodies are being engulfed with each other, the strong smell of her perfume, the fabric of their still remaining clothes on silk bare skin, and the muttered words of endearment shared between them.

Not to be left out, Archie started palming her breasts through the top of her dress, palming them and squeezing sensuously, running his palm against the hot exposed skin of her chest. Veronica cried out softly and arched her back into him, their torsos coming pressed together. He snakes his hands down to her inner thighs, teasing the skin there and running his thumb up the crotch of her lace cut panties finding it wet with arousal.

“People usually wait for after the prom to do this” he teased, a smile tugging on his lips.

“What, you want me to stop?” Veronica threatened as she pulled him out of his pants with tapping and teasing fingers.

“Hell no” he smirked, capturing her open mouth gasp with a kiss as he entered her swiftly.

Veronica moaned, the sudden rush of pleasure overtaking all her senses and she held on tighter to his neck. “Fuck, Veronica” Archie panted, burying his face into her neck making a huge and devastating effort to not touch her hair splayed out behind her like a dark halo.

“More” she begs him, the spikes of her heels digging into his backside as their hips rutted against each other persistently. Archie quickened his pace and sank deeper and deeper into her wet heat, hitting a previously undiscovered place inside her and hearing her gasp. “That feels so good Archie.. don’t stop” she dug her nails into the back of his neck in encouragement.

Archie slid a hand between their bodies and found her hard clit, beginning to show it attention. Veronica groaned louder as the current swept over her body. They’re getting so loud now she’s sure the driver is aware of everything that’s happening, but he remains silent and oblivious on the other side of the partition. Before she had a chance to catch her breath, he closed his thumb and forefinger around her and pinched gently.

It hit them like a tidal wave, her body spasming upwards, clutching to Archie as he gasped her name on his lips over and over until the high rocked out.
They end up going in a little late, but no one realises as they’re caught up in the excitement and flourish of prom. The cameraman is set up in front of the outrageously big white waterfall and the dark glittery night sky, the upscale decorations Betty managed to pull together with the school’s budget, the amazing music playlist and all the boys in formal tuxes and the girls in their best dresses with their corsages... it’s a tale as old as time but this time, it’s only special because it’s theirs.

Veronica fixes Archie’s boutonnière before they go in for their first picture, everyone gets four each they can choose from. She smiles charmingly for the first one, and then kisses him for the second. When Archie takes her hand and leads her into the ballroom they’ve booked, her heart lifts at the scene of people dancing. They can already tell they’re going to enjoy this, and as far as they can see nothing is going to ruin tonight. They’re going to dance, and laugh, and have fun with hundreds of photos to look back on later.

Cheryl, Toni, Reggie and Josie are already in the middle of the floor dancing. The crowd is moving around them, but they all look gorgeous and move well and it’s no secret that people are watching them. Veronica and Archie grin at each other and join in as well, their eyes shining as they move, wrapped up with their friends and singing the words to all the songs they know. She forgets about everything else out there on the dance floor, seeing Cheryl have fun for the first time in forever, Archie twirling her and sipping punch all together.

She dances her little heart out, feeling hungry after so much activity, so she heads to the food spread and catches Jughead there. “Have you seen Betty?” They both ask at the same time.

Veronica laughs brightly, shoving him in the shoulder while reaching for an empanada. “You can’t lose your date, Jug. She’s probably checking on something with the songs anyway”

Jughead stands there while waiting for Betty to return, and he and Veronica chat while they’re eating and drinking. It feels good to be away from the crowd for a while, just as the lights start going down and Betty reappears out of nowhere looking beautiful in her baby blue dress. It makes her eyes pop and Veronica has to admit Polly did a good job on the makeup. “Hey, V!” She greets
cheerfully before taking Jughead’s hand. “Come on, the slow song is starting.”

The couple disappears out to the dance floor, Veronica watches Jughead put his hands on Betty’s waist hesitantly. She locks her hands behind his neck and the slow song starts, their matching eyes staring dreamily at one another. For a short moment their noses meet and brush against each other, they look so sickly cute Veronica scoffs to herself and looks away.

Cheryl, who is probably going to be announced prom queen- she’s ninety nine percent sure- looks eased and happy too, her curled red hair clipped to the back of her head showing every pretty detail on her face. She and Toni look perfectly complimenting for each other, they’re probably the tiniest couple out on the floor even in their heels. Veronica is going to miss both of them next year, but she’s also happy that they can finally get out of the state and just be together- never looking back and never second guessing.

Tonight feels like some kind of welcoming embrace of their new lives, and it’s never felt so right.

Veronica finally puts her cup down and scans the ballroom of colours and fancy dresses, going to look for Archie.

Josie and Reggie are taking time on the stairwell with pictures and other scatters of people who don’t have dates, standing up overlooking the sea of couples dancing contently, eyes locked on each other. It feels like the songs are lasting forever. She takes a moment to admire the twinkling fairy lights hung from the ceiling, fake glittery leaves creating the vision of a magical dark forest. She’s not aware of the fact that Reggie is standing on the third landing of the stairwell, watching her from his spot.

She’s wearing the corsage he gave her, and they might be each other’s dates, but they don’t acknowledge any of the couple intonations of that. For as long as he remembered, he and Josie sort of happened. They flirted, they hooked up, and now they’re together. Whatever that means.

He’s always thought the pairing happened as a chalk of association, that their friends were all friends so they kind of went together-

but this feeling tonight can’t be anything like that. Josie is going to walk away, walk somewhere- but he runs up the short distance of stairs between them and takes her hand.
“What’s wrong?” Her face is curious and caring, like innocence, and he just feels grateful right now that she decided to go to her senior prom with him. Even if it was just by association, although he really wishes it wasn’t.

His eyes flicker back to the slowly moving couples, their friends all happy and he feels something too, something bigger than himself.

“This is your last prom” he says softly, nodding like he’s encouraging himself to do this. “I want to dance with you.”

He raises his fingers and gently brushes her cheek, just guiding it softly till her lips are on his. It feels inviting, soft, a little like honey. They kiss once, looking back into each other’s eyes. The next kiss is just as soft, but with a clear enthusiastic yes, and they make their way down to the ballroom together.

“Hey there you are!” Veronica finds Archie who’s also seeking her out, being bombarded by some of the Bulldogs. “Come on lover boy our song is playing”

She doesn’t actually know this song, but if it’s any excuse to get Archie here on the dance floor with her.. he wraps his arms around her and she rests her face on his chest, moving along to the dreamy music. His heartbeat thuds as loud as the music in her ears; she forgets everyone else there as she closes her eyes and feels his body against hers.

This could possibly last forever. This slow, timeless scene, where her whole world is here with her and Archie’s hands are low on her waist, the lights fading in and out scenically. Archie is thinking about the fact that they’ve been here- dancing close to each other being a cute sappy couple, probably at every school dance.

“Remember when we were fourteen” he says suddenly, Veronica’s head lifting from his chest. “And you so badly wanted to wear that red dress, but your mom had gotten you a white one. She completely freaked out when we went downstairs.”
“But you took my hand and we ran to the elevator before she could stop me” she nods, looking up at him. “Or in sophomore year when you threw up on the dance floor from drinking so much?”

Archie chuckles at Veronica’s quizzical expression, quickly brushing her hair aside and holding her face. “Yeah. And you left the Valentines Dance early to take me home and sleep it off.”

“You know..” she touches the soft fabric of Archie’s tie, some shy and coy expression on her face. “I never realised that we’d still be here, standing right next to each other, stronger through every difficult step, by junior prom”

The smile he gives her is one that she’d spent the rest of her life striving to see, proud of how far they’ve come together. “So now that things have finally settled down, do you think we could go on a casual getaway together?”

Veronica laughs while Archie spins her, the curls in her hair fanning out as she does, before settling back in his arms and dancing slowly again. “Or I could finally do my drivers ed?”

“Did I tell you how beautiful you look?”

She can’t really answer a question like that. Mostly because of the way he’s looking at her, so intense and genuine that it would’ve scared her, but now nothing is holding her back. Her eyes twinkle as their lips meet in the middle, sealing forever, starting the rest of their time together.

“Shot in the dark- but I think you’re it for me.” She confesses even though they already know it’s true.

“Oh I think that’s crystal clear by now.”

Suddenly they stop dancing, both of them at once, and Archie lays his lips on hers again, focusing only on that this time. The rest of the world feels like it’s spinning to extinction, except them.

“I love you Ronnie” he tells her. Surely, more sure than his ever been.

“I love you too, Archie Andrews”
All she wanted was someone who could see her, see past her issues and see her fully, the good and the bad and all that she came with. He sees her. He, the kind of boy who might be stupid for chasing something - or someone - for so long without thinking twice. But he isn’t stupid because he knows she’s worth it, worth anything in the entire universe. So they will dance together until their very last day.

“Forever.”

Chapter End Notes

You guys! The end! Can you believe it? My heart feels so full for finishing this, first multi chap fic completed.

Firstly, I would like to thank all of you who stuck by this fic and read every chapter, left comments, kudos, the support I’ve gotten has made me happier than you know so just know that it’s all appreciated.

Secondly, I will always be attached to this version of the characters, I love them and it’s the kind of story I wanted to read so I decided to go for it- and with all the mistakes and some mishaps I am very happy with how it turned out.

Thirdly, if you’ve been here from the beginning and never left a comment please do so! I would love to see your thoughts from the beginning to end so go ahead, it’s your chance :)

Lastly I will always be shipping Varchie #1. If you guys wanna talk Riverdale, Varchie, requests, or anything else my tumblr is @ff16xo. Also watch out for the
teaser of my new fic coming soon.

xoxox. ❤️

End Notes

Hey guys ! New Varchie story here .. hoping you all enjoy it . This will be pretty long winded and complicated but it's worth it for my Varchie

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!