i was gonna die young, now i gotta wait for you, honey

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<td>this is gonna mostly be choni focused tbh but the other relationships will be mentioned, it will also follow most of season 2 storyline wise but with some big changes, like cheryl and toni meeting at the hospital instead of at the drag race, basically i'm rewriting season 2 to include more choni, because there wasn't enough of them you're fucking welcome, i hope you guys like it and please leave comments to let me know what you think!</td>
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i was gonna die young, now i gotta wait for you, honey

by endofdaysforme

Summary

riverdale is not a town for the faint hearted. and if the people inside it could, they’d put a warning above every single welcome sign saying “DANGER! TURN BACK NOW!”

but for all the pandemonium, and for all the insane happenings within the small town of riverdale, there’s what will come to exist within the walls of thistlehouse, the beautiful home that belongs to roseanne blossom.

what will come to exist, is a love story for the ages. a certain “romeo and juliet” type of romance that will weather through many tests, many storms, to determine whether it should wither, or bloom. for despite the many similarities between the soon to be two lovers within riverdale and the ill-fated montague and capulet, the modern obstacles they will have to face are far more dangerous than any romeo and juliet had to endure (even if they did ultimately die from self-inflicted poisoning).

--

a rewrite of season 2 to include more choni because really, there wasn't enough.
hello everyone! this is my first fic, so I would tell you to be kind, but honestly, i love constructive criticism, so hit me with it. i just got frustrated rewatching season 2 and realised that cheryl and toni were pretty much barely used until episode 15-17, and then they were dumped again. So I'm rewriting it to include more choni moments! There will be some big changes, but it will follow most of the season 2 plot, I won't lie. I hope you guys will give it a chance, and I hope you guys will leave comments, as I love reading what you think of the story!

fic title from “Die Young” by Sylvan Esso
where chaos and drama reign

to say that riverdale was an uneventful hick town where absolutely nothing of surprise or complete
and utter destruction happened would be like a lie uttered from the words of a presidential candidate
that used said lies to win himself a seat in the white office...no shade intended.

the truth is, riverdale is a hick town where chaos and drama reign. if it isn’t familial homicide, or
secret drug rings disguised as maple syrup farming, or a man running around in a black hood
murdering any and every person who commits a sin within the small town’s borders, it’s the constant
war waging between the northside and the southside, the rich and elite versus the scum and the gang
affiliated, and within those gangs, even more war between turf and territory.

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but first, an insight. an insight into who our two lovers are, and who they will come to be, both with
each other, and as individuals. and in order to do that...we have to start at the beginning.

you see, there are many things cheryl blossom has had to overcome in her life. abusive parents who
treated her like utter trash from the second she was born, deciding that her twin brother would be the
main recipient of their love and affection. a mother who adored her son, but left her daughter in the
dust, picking up the pieces of her broken heart with every slap, every insult that she left in the wind
behind her wake, whispers in the wind that would follow her until even now. a father who never
cared for her either, too focused on grooming his son for glory, a true patriarch of the blossom
family.

the only thing that kept cheryl blossom together during the first sixteen treacherous years of her life
was her twin brother. for jason blossom loved his sister cheryl more than he could ever put into
words. for jason, the three minutes at birth that they spent apart had been the worst of his life, and his
mother, despite her lack of care for his red haired twin, had told him that he hadn’t taken his first breath until cheryl arrived into the world with him, both of them taking their first breath as one.

they had been inseparable. together through everything, for every raise of her mother’s hand, there was jason’s reassuring grip on her shoulder. for every insult her father threw at her, there was jason’s smile, telling her that the words of those who didn’t know her didn’t matter.

and cheryl used to think…how strange, for jason to tell her that her own parents didn’t know who she really was. but now? oh, how very right her insightful and intelligent twin brother was.

emphasis on the ‘was’.

because of course, like all good things in her life, jason was ripped away from her. and like all good things in her life, he was ripped away from her by her parents.

learning that clifford blossom, her own father, the man who held her in his arms as a baby with a tight smile that never disappeared in all sixteen years he had been in her life, had selfishly raised a gun to her beautiful jason blossom’s head and had pulled the trigger without a second’s hesitation after he had discovered his father’s secret drug operation, had destroyed whatever belief in innocence and happiness cheryl had left in her. if jason’s death hadn’t been soul destroying enough, seeing the tape that showed what her father had done had melted away any hope cheryl ever had of living a potentially normal and happy life.

for who could live with the truth that their father had murdered their own brother?

her own father. ripping away the one person who ever loved her. the one person who ever cared for ever. jason was her soulmate. perhaps not romantically, or physically, despite what many of the people in riverdale believed, gossiping behind closed hands and vacant stares. but cheryl blossom has always believed in there being more than one soulmate out there for everyone. and she knows that jason was one of them. there isn’t a day that goes by where she doesn’t miss his smile, or the touch of his hand gripping her shoulder, or the sound of his raised voice as he told penelope blossom to sheathe her claws and step away from his baby sister.

but jason is gone. and so is her father.

hanging himself like a coward. a selfish, sniveling, conniving mess of a man who killed himself before the authorities could punish him for his crimes.
drug trafficking. homicide.

*he murdered his own son…*

the whispers still follow her around town. so do the stares. cheryl hasn’t been able to step foot into pop’s without someone looking at her in surprise in almost a month now.

and if anyone were to find out what had just happened mere hours ago…the stares would never end.

no one can know what she did. no one can know that she had beat her hands against the frozen over ice of sweet water river in a desperation to join her brother, to join jason blossom in death and finally be free from everything that being a blossom had cursed her with. no one can know she’d fallen through, swept away by the current underneath the ice with water filling her lungs like daggers puncturing every single inch of her body, inside and out.

no one can know that she’d come so close, had come so close to finally succumbing to death’s sweet embrace before archie andrews, with bloody, beaten hands from punching the ice to get to her, had brought her back to life.

cheryl blossom had attempted suicide. after the murder of her brother, and the selfish suicide of her father, cheryl blossom had tried to take her own life. had taken the coward’s way out, just like her father.

except unlike him, she’d failed.

no, no…no one can know.

it’s a secret that will die with her, archie andrews, veronica lodge, betty cooper and jughead jones.

for that alone, would destroy any hope penelope blossom had of keeping the blossom name in high regard. not the murder of her son, or the suicide of her drug kingpin husband…no. her daughter’s attempted suicide would be the end of it all.
and cheryl, now with no one left to defend her, wouldn’t dare do anything to upset her mother.

because of course, like a category five hurricane, now that penelope blossom no longer had her husband to berate and punish, no longer had jason to shower with love and affection, all her grief, all her rage, fell upon the one person who she had left to dish it out to.

after all, roseanne blossom was a very old, very ill lady. it couldn’t possibly go out to her.

it’s nothing new for cheryl. being the target of her mother’s anger. she’s used to it.

somewhere, deep in the back of her mind, veronica lodge’s voice echoes, a passing comment made with a scoff that cheryl still hears from time to time like a faded memory.

“god, cheryl. i don’t know how you put up with it.”

she isn’t quite sure, either.

perhaps because some part of her believes that somewhere, maybe, god, possibly, deep, deep down, penelope blossom does love her daughter. does have an ounce of care and affection for cheryl, but so much anger and so much rage has blocked her from feeling it…

she holds onto this hope like a drug, it’s the only thing that keeps her going now that jason’s gone. because if her own mother doesn’t love her, who the hell else will?

the smell of gasoline is prevalent, burning her nostrils like matches held to her face as she stares long and hard into the fire in front of her, her grip on the candlestick in her hand tightening.

cheryl may not know it now, as she stares into the flames and embraces their warmth, her body still trembling slightly from the cold depths of sweet water river despite the hours she spent at the pembrooke with veronica, warming up in front of the fireplace with veronica’s arm around her shoulder, but the events about to transpire will kick-start a series of events that will turn her life upside down.

a series of events that will answer her deepest, most burning question: if her own mother doesn’t love
it was a single thought that entered her mind. a single thought that thornhill manor may be a beautiful home, but the emptiness inside it eats away at her every day, like a cancer. all it is now is a memory. 

a memory of jason. and clifford.

*destroy it. it’s the only way to end it, cheryl. to start over new. to purify yourself.*

two hours and a shower later, the beautiful manor she calls home is covered in gasoline, nana blossom is safe at thistlehouse, and cheryl is waiting patiently in front of the fireplace for her mother to return home.

the click of her key in the door has cheryl’s ears pricking up in anticipation, her nails dig into her palm as she readies herself, her heart pounding at the sound of her mother’s voice.

“cheryl?”

she closes her eyes, breathes in deeply through her nose, forehead crinkling slightly from the smell of gasoline as the sound of keys being thrown onto a table echo from the hallway.

“cheryl?” She calls out again, and cheryl finally answers.

“in here, mother.”

the sound of her mother’s heels clicking on the ground get closer and closer, but still, she doesn’t turn. her heart is pounding against her chest almost painfully, but she knows this is the right thing to do.

it’s insane, and completely and utterly crazy, but cheryl’s never associated herself with sanity, anyway.

how could she? with the life she’s lead?
“what is that smell?” her mother’s voice sounds terrified, and cheryl can’t help but smile.

perhaps now she’ll feel it. perhaps now she’ll feel the sixteen years of fear and despair that cheryl’s felt living in this prison.

“gasoline.” she turns now, her grip on the candlestick only tightening as she looks her mother dead in the eyes, sees the fear and terror shining in them as she holds her head high.

“it’s the only way we can truly start over, be purified.” and before her mother can stop her, she’s throwing the candlestick onto the gasoline soaked rug beneath her feet, her mother gasping in shock and stepping back as she looks up at her daughter in horror.

cheryl lets the flames surround her, and it isn’t long before penelope is screaming, screaming at cheryl in anger and rage, and cheryl pays no mind.

instead, she walks around the flames with ease, not in a hurry, a steady walk as her mother begins coughing, holding her shawl up to her face as she gasps for air, and cheryl rolls her eyes and grabs her mother’s arm, dragging her toward the door as her mother claws at her arm in an attempt to stop her.

“nana-rose-.” she splutters.

“safe, at thistlehouse, mommy. you really think I was going to let the only blossom who ever loved me besides jason perish in a fire?” cheryl drawls, bored already as the flames begin to spread, and penelope tries to pull cheryl back into the house as she screams.

“the photo-.”

“let go of the past, mother! jason and daddy are dead, and you will be too if we don’t get out of here! NOW!”

cheryl manages to drag her mother outside, into the large driveway of thornhill manor as she looks up, a smile instantly lighting her face at the sight before her.
thornhill is ablaze, fire erupting and glass shattering from the flames as they lick the inside of the home cheryl’s grown so accustomed to, the flames roaring in a blaze of orange as smoke burns high above it, and cheryl can only hear a buzzing in her ears as her mother screams at her, slaps her, grips her shoulders and shakes her, can only stare up at the destruction she’s caused with a smile.

no more suffering.

no more horror.

it’s with this thought in her mind, that cheryl watches the smoke rise high above thornhill manor with hope, unaware that just across the small town of riverdale, in the decrepit area of sunnyside trailer park, is someone watching the same smoke rise who she hasn’t yet met, but who will have a far greater impact on her life than she could imagine anyone from the southside ever having.

with chocolate brown eyes wide in surprise and bubblegum pink hair that’s fading curling down her back, toni topaz watches the smoke curl up into the sky from the northside of riverdale with a frown as she stands up from the seat of her bike, a cloud of smoke escaping her mouth from the cold air as she shrugs her leather jacket around her body to keep herself warm.

the smell of smoke is reaching them all the way on the southside, and toni contemplates calling 911, but she has no idea where the fire is even located.

besides, what does it matter, if part of the northside is burning? all of it should, as far as she’s concerned.

“toni! get in here!” the growl of his voice lets her know that he’s mad, mad enough to have her jumping off her bike and hurrying into the trailer in a rush, and as soon as she closes the door behind her, she wishes she’d stayed outside.

her uncle’s back is to her, his grip on the counter top causing his knuckles to turn white as his whole body shakes, and toni tries to cover up the low whine she lets out with a cough.

“i thought i asked you to wash these.” he says quietly, reaching into the sink and pulling out a plastic bowl, dregs of cereal still clinging to the edges of it as toni chews on the inside of her cheek to calm herself down.
it’s not the end of the day yet.” she says in a low voice, and she scarcely manages to duck to the side as the bowl goes flying straight for her head, a shout of surprise escaping her as it collides with the door behind her.

“DID I SAY DO THEM AT THE END OF THE DAY, OR DID I SAY DO THEM STRAIGHT AFTER DINNER!?” he roars, and toni doesn’t even have a chance to answer, the sound of his footsteps echoing around the trailer as she pushes herself against the wall behind her in an attempt to get away, but of course, it’s no use.

her legs are shaking as his fist strikes the door, and then he’s cornering her, hands on either side of her head, and the smell of his breath has her gagging.

a mixture of vodka and vomit, some of it still clinging to the corner of his mouth as toni cringes and inches away from him as best she can, turning her head to avoid his gaze, but all it does is cause him to growl as he grips her chin between meaty fingers and forces her to look at him.

“i took you in when your parents died, i’ve treated you like my own for almost six years and for what? for you to disrespect me, huh? for you to treat my home like dirt?”

she wants to spit at him, to scream at him that all he does is treat her like a slave, not like his child, that all he does is make her feel uncomfortable and scared when he yells at her to clean his trailer, to do his washing, to clean up after his fucking mess-

“ANSWER ME!” he roars, and toni feels his fingers dig into her jaw as she purses her lips and refuses to give in to his request.

she’ll die before she gives him the satisfaction of scaring her.

he scoffs, glaring down at her, and toni feels bile rise in the back of her throat as he looks her up and down, a glint of *something* in his eyes before he shoves her away, gripping her shoulder tightly.

“go to your room, i don’t want to see your face for the rest of the night. GO!” toni doesn’t hesitate, grabs her bag and runs straight for her room on the right at the end of the trailer.
it’s not even a room, really. it’s a single bed pushed right up against the wall, and toni can barely fit inside. if she extends her arms, her fingers would just barely scrape either side of the room. it consists of her bed, and a dresser. that’s it.

god, she wants nothing more than to get the hell out of here.

she hates this.

she could leave, could go and stay with her grandfather. he made it clear to her that his trailer was always open for her, but toni can’t do it. her grandfather refuses to let her sleep on the couch, always giving her his bed, and at his age, toni can’t justify kicking her grandfather out of his bed just to get a good night’s sleep, no matter how much she argues with him that she’s fine taking the couch.

she could stay at sweet pea’s, or fangs’s place, but both their parents are getting pretty tired of housing her, she can see it in their eyes every time she shows up on the doorstep of their trailers.

so she’s stuck here. stuck here until her uncle decides to do one of two things he always does: beat the crap out of her, or kick her out.

she isn’t sure which one she prefers, to be honest. when she gets the crap beaten out of her, she’s at least allowed to stay home because he feels guilty. when he kicks her out, she’s forced to go from trailer to trailer, begging for respite. it’s a blow to her dignity, really.

besides, she’d rather suffer through her uncle’s abuse than watch the crestfallen expression on her grandfather’s face every time he sees the southside serpent jacket that adorns his granddaughter’s body.

it isn’t hard to see that thomas topaz, one of the founding fathers of the southside serpents, isn’t happy with what they’ve become. it’s no longer about protecting the land from the invaders. they’ve gotten caught up in all this other crap that toni wishes more than anything they could stop being involved with. drugs and violence and full blown wars over territory with the ghoulies…

so she endures her uncle’s bullshit. she endures it for him.

but some days…
some days, toni wishes she could go back in time. some days, toni wishes she could go back to that
day six years ago when her father and mother had taken a bike ride to sweet water river and had
never returned. toni wishes she could go back to that day to warn them that they’d end it with their
bodies wrapped around a tree and their ten year old daughter left all alone in the ‘care’ of an uncle
who treats her like shit.

she uses the term ‘care’ loosely.

he doesn’t care about her. and hell, as much as she loves her grandfather, if he really cared about her,
he’d be here stopping jacob from throwing her around like a ragdoll or kicking her out of the trailer
altogether like he usually does.

it’s no secret amongst the serpents that jacob topaz has a temper. it’s been used often for the serpent’s
sake, and has been ignored often when the bruises show up on toni’s skin.

and lastly, her mother and father didn’t care much for her, either. they’d left her all alone to have
some romantic day out and had ended up getting themselves killed. part of toni feels like it isn’t fair
to think these thoughts. another part of her says fuck them. they were happy, the three of them. and
they ruined it all.

she finds herself looking up at the photo on the wall of her parents, tears immediately welling in her
eyes as soon as she does.

it’s the first photo she’d ever taken, the first photo that told her photography was it for her. her father
is smiling down at her mother, his southside serpent jacket on full display as her mother laughs at
something he’s said, looking into his eyes with nothing but love shining in them, and toni swallows
the lump in her throat and looks away, collapsing onto her bed and looking up at the ceiling with a
sigh.

at first, the only reason she’d joined the serpents is because it was expected of her. she’s a topaz, and
the topaz’s were one of the founding families of the southside serpents. she can’t turn her back on her
heritage even if she wanted to. but now…now it’s different. now she has sweet pea. and fangs. the
three of them had formed their own gang within a gang, and toni isn’t shy to admit that those boys
are more her family than jacob topaz ever has or will be.

she finds her fingers trailing over her hipbone subconsciously, the leather of her jacket rubbing up
against the bare skin of her stomach where her shirt has ridden up, and she sighs deeply before
reaching into her back pocket for her phone.

she needs something to distract her.

she finds herself scrolling down to sweet pea’s name, and he answers on the second ring.

“hey. ‘sup, tiny?” he teases, and toni rolls her eyes.

nothing. jake’s being a jackass, as usual. what are you up to?”

“playing halo. mom’s freaking out about the fire on the northside.”

“you saw that, too? looks like it’s big.” toni says with a frown. sweet pea scoffs.

“who cares? hope the whole of northside burns.” toni hides a smile, and she’s about to reply when a loud crashing sound echoes from outside her room.

she sits up immediately, her heart racing as the sounds of sweet pea playing his game echo in her ear.

“shit.”

“what?” sweet pea asks with a grunt.

“stay on the phone with me.” toni says, her voice shaking slightly, and she can hear sweet pea pause the game.

“toni, what’s wrong?” he asks immediately, and toni doesn’t reply, slowly opens her door and peeks her head outside of it.

jacob topaz is on the ground, shaking uncontrollably, and toni is frozen against the door as sweet pea yells at her through the phone.
“toni? are you okay?! what’s going on?!”

“i-uncle jake-he’s-i-.” she’s stammering, unable to form words as her brain tries to process what the fuck is happening-

“i’m coming over!” sweet pea ends the call, and it’s the sound of the dial tone that finally has toni rushing to her uncle’s side.

“uncle jake?!” she grabs his shaking body, tries to get him to stop, but his whole body is rigid, his eyes rolling into the back of his head as foam gathers in his mouth-

the door bursts open, and sweet pea is there, sweat dripping down his brow as he looks at the sight before him in complete and utter shock before he bends down beside toni and takes his flannel shirt off, leaving him in only his white tank top underneath.

“call 911! toni, go!” sweet pea rolls his shirt up and puts it under her uncle’s head before turning him onto his side, and toni tries her best not to cry as she collapses onto the ground, her back colliding with the drawers underneath the kitchen counter as she quickly dials ‘911’ with shaking fingers.

she hates him. god, she hates him, but if he dies…if he dies, she has no one.

and it’s then, with two separate moments, two separate occasions, with toni topaz dialling 911 frantically, and cheryl blossom doing the exact same on the other side of town, that these two worlds collide.

for riverdale is a small hick town where nothing but chaos and drama reign.

and amongst a shooting, a first in many to be perpetrated by the now infamous ‘black hood of riverdale’, amongst an uncle suffering from a sudden epileptic attack, and amongst a manor that burns to the ground while its owner watches on in despair, a love story blossoms.

riverdale general hospital was in for one busy night.
cheryl blossom’s high heels squeak on the linoleum floor of riverdale general hospital as she paces back and forth, her mind spinning at a million miles an hour as she tries her best to just process what is happening.

this wasn’t supposed to happen. the cleansing of thornhill manor was not supposed to end with her mother suffering third degree burns, was not supposed to end with her mother potentially dying-

she just wanted to cleanse them of the pain and suffering. she just wanted thornhill to become a beacon of the ashes of their past, a past filled with murder and betrayal and anger and despair-

why? why on earth did her mother run back in to grab that stupid family portrait-

“HELP PLEASE! HELP, HEY! SOMEONE HELP ME AND MY DAD!” the front doors of riverdale general hospital explode open, and cheryl turns in surprise, her heart pounding against her chest, and only sinking further when archie andrews walks in, stumbling slightly, covered in blood with tears falling down his face as he practically drags a figure beside him-

“oh my god…” cheryl is frozen, unable to move or speak or think as archie andrews drags his father, covered in blood and unconscious, through the hospital, blood dripping onto the black and white floors, staining them with red as bright and vibrant as the color of her lips.

“move back!” a hand grabs her waist and pulls her aside, doctors rushing to archie’s side, and a gurney isn’t far behind, the doctors immediately unloading questions on archie, who looks beyond frazzled, his eyes wide and frantic.

“what happened to him?”

“he was shot.” archie manages to croak out, and the doctors take his father from his side, quickly
lowering him down onto the gurney as they look to archie for help.

“does he have any medical problems? conditions?”

“i-no, he’s-.”

“sir, can you hear me? can you tell me your name?” the nurse asks, looking down at archie’s father with worry.

“his name is fred andrews!” archie says anxiously, trailing behind them as they begin wheeling fred andrews into a surgery room.

“one bullet hole, no exit wound, massive blood loss-.” cheryl watches as archie goes to follow them inside the theatre, watches as the doctor lays a hand on his chest to stop him.

“sir. i’m sorry. i need you to stay here.”

archie, like a lost puppy dog, watches from the door to the theatre with tears running down his face, blood drenching almost every inch of his skin, his hand reaching up as if to reach out to his father as he whispers brokenly from the door.

“i’m right here, dad! i’m right here, okay? i’m right here…right here…” his voice shakes, eventually breaking and fading into despair, and cheryl’s eyes fall only on the cast on his broken hand, the plaster stained in red, the memories of why his hand is currently broken and battered hitting her like a tidal wave as she swallows the bile rising in the back of her throat.

he broke his hand punching the ice in sweet water river to get to her, to save her from drowning…

“archie?” she whispers, voice cracking despite how hard she tries for it not to, and archie is so lost in his own world, eyes focused on his father, that he doesn’t turn to look at her.

“archie, what happened?” she moves closer now, and the sound of her heels clacking on the ground finally has archie turning to look at her, eyes wide and filled with fear as they fall on cheryl wildly.
“cheryl? i…what are you doing here?”

“archie, your father…” she reaches out, her thumb and forefinger closing on the elbow of his riverdale bulldogs jacket to pull him closer, and his bottom lip trembles before he’s embracing her in a hug, a choked out sob escaping his chest, and cheryl feels like she should mind, she should be upset that archie is probably covering her in his father’s blood right now, but he broke his goddamn hand saving her life, and his father may be dying-

“i don’t know what happened, we were j-just at pop’s getting food and then this mugger came in-.”

“a mugger?” cheryl frowns at that, and archie swallows loudly in her ear before he pulls away, nodding once, his eyes distant and hazed as he recalls the moment he saw his father fall.

“he-he had a mask. a black hood on-.”

whatever else was about to leave archie andrews’s mouth is drowned out by the sound of the front doors to riverdale general hospital exploding open once again,

more paramedics pile through, frantically yelling words that cheryl only half hears as they wheel another man on a gurney through.

“jacob topaz, forty two years old, epileptic fit with no history of epilepsy-.” cheryl watches archie run forward, watches as he yells at the doctors for information.

“is that another gunshot victim?” he’s shouting, and before he can even get to the man on the gurney, a tall, incredibly muscular looking boy grabs him by the lapel of his jacket and shoves him back.

“back off, northsider!” he growls, and cheryl’s eyes fall now, on the girl beside him.

her faded pink hair falls in limp curls down her shoulders, stopping at about her waist, her dark skin shining in the fluorescent light that flickers above them, and cheryl looks into her eyes, chocolate brown and filled with concern as she grips the boy’s leather jacket to pull him back.
“sweet pea, stop.” she hisses, and it’s then that cheryl notices the leather jackets they wear are adorned with the insignia of a two headed snake.

they’re southside serpents.

“He wasn’t shot, he’s just…i don’t even know. sick, i guess. what happened to you?” she asks archie, looking him up and down with worried eyes, and archie swallows again, his eyes falling down to his shoes as he shakes his head.

“My dad got shot, i thought maybe yours did, too-.”

“He’s my uncle. and i’m sorry, but no gunshot wounds.”

“Surprising.” cheryl murmurs.

All three pairs of eyes fall on her now, and cheryl watches as the boy named sweet pea clenches his jaw and glares at her.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he hisses.

“You are serpents, aren’t you?” she says coolly, and the girl scoffs and shakes her head.

“Yeah, so?” she says simply, and cheryl’s about to reply when archie runs his fingers through his hair and lets out a huff of frustration.

“I don’t have time for this-.”

“Go to the waiting room, archie. i’m sure they’ll give you news on your father soon.” cheryl says, doing her best to make her tone reassuring as archie purses his lips and nods once before beginning to make his way to the waiting room.

Cheryl’s eyes meet the pink haired girl’s, and they both say nothing as they follow him slowly to the waiting room.
cheryl hesitates before taking a seat beside archie, who already has his head in his hands, his legs bouncing frantically as he looks up at her in grief.

“cheryl, i can’t lose my dad-.”

“you won’t, archie. your father is strong. if anyone can pull through this, it’s him.” she whispers, taking a seat beside him and gripping his shoulder tightly, and archie’s whole face shakes as he tries his best not to cry, tears falling regardless, which he quickly wipes away before looking at her in concern.

“what are you doing here, anyway?” cheryl’s eyes watch the two serpents who make their way to the other side of the waiting room, and she catches a bit of their conversation as the pink haired girl grips the boy named sweet pea’s jacket tightly.

“shit, he can’t die, sweets-.”

“he won’t, toni, don’t worry-.”

“are you okay?” archie’s voice is soft, and cheryl finally peels her eyes away from the two serpents to look at archie, a small smile on her lips as she nods.

“i’m fine, archie. there was a fire at thornhill. i was asleep, recovering from…the incident at sweet water river, when it started. the next thing i knew, mommy was dragging me out of the house in an attempt to save me. she…she suffered horrifying burns…”

the lie falls so easily from her mouth, and archie blinks once in surprise before he’s gripping cheryl’s hand tightly.

“cheryl, i’m so sorry…”

“it’s okay, archie. that home was nothing but a reminder of the pain and suffering the blossom family has had to endure for the last few months. perhaps it’s destruction will bring some good to us. i only wish mother didn’t have to suffer as she does now…” she whispers, and archie’s grip on her hand tightens as he looks out into the hallway where the surgery room is located.
“if they can’t save my dad…”

“they will, archie. in the meantime, you should probably call your friends. you’ll need them during this trying time.” cheryl says softly, and archie swallows the lump in his throat, nods once as he reaches into his pocket with trembling fingers to pull out his phone.

cheryl stands, makes her way over to the water cooler in the far east corner of the room, and she passes the two serpents on her way there.

“i don’t understand, he doesn’t even have a history of epilepsy.”

“he’s an alcoholic, toni, there hasn’t been a single night that you’ve called me and he isn’t drunk and screaming at you, maybe he fell and hit his head or something.”

“shit, he can’t die, sweet pea, he’s all i have left. i can’t stay with grandpa, he’s having enough trouble looking after himself, let alone having to look after me, too-.“

cheryl closes herself off from the conversation, but she can’t help herself from looking back at the pink haired girl in wonder.

the boy named sweet pea had called her toni.

cheryl’s never thought highly of the southside serpents, saw them as nothing more than a bunch of criminals and drug traffickers, and their leader’s involvement in her brother’s death will forever be a thorn in her side, like an itch underneath her skin that will never fade no matter how hard she scratches at it with blood red nails, but she can’t help but be intrigued by the serpent jacket wearing girl in front of her eyes.

cheryl’s quite sure she’s never seen anyone so beautiful before.

as soon as the thought crosses her mind, she can hear her mother’s words echoing in her ear.
“these thoughts are deviant, cheryl! you’re a deviant child, condemned to hell for even thinking of girls in that way! i didn’t raise you like this!”

“family of jacob topaz?” cheryl looks up as the pink haired serpent girl named toni stands up and rushes toward the doctor who called out the name of jacob topaz.

“yes, me! i’m toni topaz, i’m his niece, is he okay?” she asks frantically, and the doctor frowns, but gives her a simple nod.

“he’ll be alright. it looks like he suffered a severe blow to the head, which triggered a seizure. we’re wheeling him into ct now for a scan, just to make sure there’s no internal bleeding in his brain. did you see him fall at all?” he asks, clipboard and pen in his hand, and toni swallows and shakes her head.

“i…no. i was in my room talking to my friend on the phone and i just heard this loud crash, so i walked outside and he was on the ground shaking…”

“hmm, we’ll have to ask him when he wakes up. hopefully there’s no internal bleeding and there won’t be any need for surgery. i’ll keep you updated, miss topaz.”

“thank you, i-.”

“family of penelope blossom?” cheryl’s eyes move from toni to the doctor at the front of the waiting room, and she sighs and makes her way over slowly, cup of water in her hand which she drinks from nonchalantly.

“i’m her daughter, cheryl.” she says simply, and the doctor gives her a small smile.

“your mother is okay, she’s in a lot of pain, however. she’s suffered some third and second degree burns to her face and body, we’ve bandaged them up for her, they should heal up nicely, but there may be some scarring-.”

“that’s not an issue. i can assure you mommy’s already called the best plastic surgeon in the state to make sure her face is back to normal within the next month.” cheryl drawls, and the doctor frowns, but says no more as she looks down at her clipboard before looking up at cheryl.
“the police will be here any moment to get your statement, from what your mother told us between her cries of pain, there was a fire?”

“yes. i was asleep when it started, but i woke up to my mommy screaming at me and dragging me out of the house. she suffered those burns saving my life. i think she feared her heart wouldn’t be able to handle the loss of another child.” cheryl plays the perfect role of saved child, and she isn’t exactly sure why she’s throwing her mother into the heroic limelight, but she’s slowly beginning to formulate a plan in her twisted mind.

if she makes her mother look good, perhaps she’ll finally stop hurting cheryl. perhaps she’ll finally let cheryl be free…

perhaps cheryl will finally be the one in control.

“well, your mother is definitely a hero if that’s the case, miss blossom. she’s resting now, but when you’re ready, you should go see her.”

“of course. thank you, doctor.”

the doctor walks away, and cheryl turns slowly to see archie still sitting there with his head in his hands, his legs bouncing anxiously before her eyes fall on the pair of eyes already on her.

toni topaz is watching her with a raised eyebrow.

“a blossom, huh? should’ve known from the hair.” She says, looking cheryl up and down once, and cheryl doesn’t respond, flips said hair over her shoulder and makes her way over to archie.

she won’t associate herself with a southside serpent, no matter how beautiful she may think they are.

“these are deviant thoughts, cheryl!”

“archie?!” the doors to the waiting room burst open, and cheryl watches as veronica lodge, betty
cooper and jughead jones run in, looking around frantically for their friend before veronica’s eyes land on her boyfriend’s and she’s rushing straight into his arms, archie standing to catch her before burying his head into her shoulder as she holds him close.

“oh my god, arch…” veronica’s voice is trembling, tears welling in her eyes as betty cooper and jughead jones join the hug, wrapping their arms around archie tightly as cheryl’s eyes fall on the other three figures behind the core four group huddled together.

hermione lodge and alice and hal cooper, all of them watching their kids huddled into a group in worry, and cheryl finds herself rolling her eyes despite herself.

of course, everyone would come running for fred andrews.

he was a good man, the complete opposite of what her father was. the complete opposite of what her mother is.

for no one has coming running to see penelope blossom. and if cheryl had a choice, she wouldn’t be here, either.

“What happened?” veronica asks immediately, and archie falls into his tale as hal, alice and hermione gather around him to get the details.

cheryl stands once more, and jughead’s eyes fall on her, a look of confusion on his face that cheryl completely ignores as she makes her way to a more quiet location of the waiting room.

she taps her fingers against her chair anxiously, waiting for the arrival of the police as she feels her phone buzz in her pocket. she quickly grabs it and looks down to see a message from her nana’s carer.

lisa [21:32] “just put her to bed. keep me updated on your mother.”

cheryl ignores the message and continues tapping on the chair, her eyes roaming around the waiting room before they fall, once again, on the two southside serpents, who appear to be watching none other than jughead jones apprehensively.
no doubt checking out the son of their leader.

their leader who is currently in jail for helping cover up the murder of her poor brother.

cheryl’s nails subconsciously dig into the chair until it’s cracking the wood beneath it, her teeth clenching without her knowledge until the doors to the waiting room burst open once more and sheriff keller walks in, his son, kevin, trailing behind him as he looks at the waiting room around him, eyes skimming over cheryl and archie before sighing and gripping his deputy’s shoulder.

“you take miss blossom, get her statement on the thornhill manor fire, i’ll handle andrews and the shooting.” he says, and veronica and betty look around at the sound of cheryl’s name, eyes landing on her in surprise as she stands upon the deputy’s approach.

“cheryl? what are you doing here?” betty asks in concern, and cheryl sighs.

“it’s nothing to worry your mind over, cousin betty. a fire at thornhill.” she says simply, and betty’s eyes widen in horror before the deputy takes cheryl’s attention away.

“care to explain what happened?” he asks, and cheryl takes a deep breath in.

“i was asleep when the fire started. i woke to the sounds of my mommy screaming. she told me there was a fire, and i could barely gather my surroundings before she was dragging me out of the house, away from the flames that began to take over the main foyer. i think it may have been a candle, we’ve been lighting them ever since jason died, a way to keep his memory fresh…perhaps a gust of wind from the window…the next thing i knew, she was on the floor outside, weeping in pain, and i was calling an ambulance.”

“and where was your grandmother during all this?”

“she’s been in living in thistlehouse since daddy decided to kill himself. she couldn’t bear to be in the manor anymore, all those memories…” cheryl whispers, the tears coming to her eyes despite her never calling them, and cheryl’s quite proud of the actress she’s become.

no one can know she’s the one who started the fire.
another secret to take with her to the grave.

“alright, well i should let you know, miss blossom, the firefighters are still working on it, but it
doesn’t look like there will be anything left of the manor. the fire is catastrophic, i’m sorry.” he says,
genuine sympathy in his voice, and cheryl allows her tears to well over, to fall down her cheeks as
she gives him a simple nod before casting her gaze down to her feet.

“is there any way we can speak to your mother?”

“the doctors told me she’s resting, but i can go check on her now and see if she’s up to talking. she
suffered second and third degree burns, so she’s in quite some pain…”

“i understand, miss blossom, but if we wait too long, she may not remember what happened. we
need to get her statement as soon as possible.”

“of course deputy. i’m sorry my statement isn’t much to go on. everything happened so quickly…”

“it’s okay.”

“i’ll go check on her and see if she’s up to talking.”

“thank you, miss blossom.”

cheryl begins making her way to her mother’s ward when she hears her name shouted out.

“cheryl, wait!” she turns to see betty and kevin rushing toward her, both of them looking at her in
concern.

“cheryl? are you okay? what happened?”

“oh, haven’t you heard?” she asks simply. kevin and betty continue to look perplexed, so she sighs
and continues on.
“there’s been a terrible fire at thornhill. i might’ve perished if not for mommy’s heroics.”

“oh my god, is this the apocalypse?” kevin whispers. cheryl ignores him and turns to betty.

“after my…ordeal, at sweet water river, I was asleep when the fire started. i think it was a breeze knocking over a lit candle, catching the curtains…mommy got home from the jubilee and rushed headlong into the blaze, risking her life to save mine. unfortunately she suffered third degree burns and smoke inhalation.” cheryl says simply, and betty blinks a few times in surprise before she looks at kevin in confusion.

cheryl sighs.

“i’m about to go check on her, the police would like her statement and i’m not sure if she’s up for it. you should stay with archie. he needs his friends now more than ever.” betty’s eyes soften, and she nods once before reaching out to grip cheryl’s shoulder.

“i’m sorry about the fire, cheryl. we’re here if you need anything.”

“thank you, cousin betty.” she says softly, and kevin gives her a small smile before they both make their way back to archie, cheryl slowly turning on her heel to make her way to the ward where her mother is being kept.

and lo and behold, a few wards down from her mother’s, toni topaz is standing outside the door, pacing up and down as she runs her fingers through her pink hair frantically, sweet pea watching her with anxious eyes before he looks up at cheryl’s approach, his expression immediately turning stony.

“What do you want?” he growls, and cheryl scoffs as she makes her way down the hallway, heels clacking against the ground noisily.

“I’m visting my mommy, peapod. you’re not the only ones with sick relatives.” she says dismissively, and she swears she sees toni trying to hide a smile as sweet pea frowns.

“peapod?” he grumbles under his breath, but cheryl passes him without a second thought, flipping her hair as she does.
it’s when cheryl’s outside her mother’s door that toni calls out to her.

“i hope your mother’s okay.” she says simply, and cheryl rolls her eyes and shoves the door open.

“i don’t.” she says bluntly under her breath, and she makes her way inside, barely flinching as her eyes land on her mother, covered from almost head to toe in bandages.

enough is enough.

cheryl has the leverage now, and she’s going to use it.

no more horror.

no more violence.

no more abuse.

no more.

penelope blossom is wide awake, her eyes watching her daughter as she makes her way over to her bedside, and cheryl inhales deeply before coming to a stop beside her.

“good. you’re awake.” penelope simply blinks, but cheryl can see her grimacing in pain, and she stalks forward, leaning in close as she does.

“now here’s the reals, baby jane. i’m telling everyone you ran back into that towering inferno to save me, not that hideous family portrait that you love so much, and that what happened at thornhill was a terrible, tragic accident.” cheryl hisses, the anger boiling inside her that despite everything, she’s still making her mother look like the hero.

her mother should be kissing the goddamn ground she walks on.
“if you tell anyone the truth about what happened with the fire, i’ll tell everyone about what really happened in the barn with daddy.” she whispers, and penelope blossom’s eyes widen in horror.

another secret for cheryl to take to the grave.

“you were cruel to me, mother. it was abuse, plain and simple.” cheryl grips the oxygen mask around her mother’s face, fingers curling around the nozzle of it as she squeezes it, and her mother begins gasping for air as she grips cheryl’s wrist tightly.

“So, henceforth, if you breathe, it is because i give you air. if you drink, it is because i’ve poured your cup myself. and if you move, it is quietly, and with my blessing.” she uncurls her finger from the nozzle, and her mother breathes in deeply, tears falling down the sides of her face and into the bandage as cheryl smiles and touches her forehead.

“things are going to be different now, mommy. better. you’ll see.” she whispers softly.

penelope blossom looks at her with the rage of a thousand burning thornhill manor’s, and cheryl looks up just as the deputy knocks on the door and makes his way in.

“sorry to come barging in-.“

“that’s fine, deputy. mother’s awake, and ready for your questions…right, mommy?”

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toni watches cheryl walk into her mother’s room with a small smile on her lips, and she looks back to sweet pea, who still looks confused at the ‘peapod’ comment as toni looks to the ward where her uncle is currently lying unconscious with doctors surrounding him.

“if he has bleeding in his brain and he needs surgery, we’re screwed. he can barely afford rent for the trailer.” toni says with a sigh.
“he’s already screwed, tiny. who do you think is gonna pay for the ambulance drive here and the hospital stay?” sweet pea says with a frown, and toni’s heart drops to her feet.

“fuck.” She says simply. sweet pea sighs.

“don’t stress about it, toni.”

“he’s gonna kill me.” she whispers, falling back against the wall and exhaling deeply.

“you saved his life!”

“or just put him in crippling debt!” she hisses.

“hey!” they both look up just as one of sheriff keller’s deputy’s begins making his way toward them, a frown on his face that immediately turns into distrust as he gets closer to identifying the serpent ironed into their leather jackets.

“what are you two doing here?” he demands, and toni clenches her jaw, raises an eyebrow and squeezes her nails into the palm of her hand to stop herself from punching this guy’s lights out as sweet pea steps in front of her protectively.

“back off, man. her uncle’s sick in there.” he growls, nodding his head to the side where jacob topaz is still being examined, and the deputy’s expression softens for half a second before it turns stony once more as he looks them up and down.

“i have to go question mrs. blossom, don’t cause any trouble.” he warns.

“wouldn’t dream of it, deputy.” toni says with a two fingered salute, and he rolls his eyes at her before making his way down to the ward that currently houses the matriarch of the blossom family.

“so a fire burns down the blossom household and some northsider’s dad gets whacked in a mugging gone wrong all in one night…and they all say the southside is bad?” sweet pea says with a scoff, and toni crosses her arms over her chest with a smirk.
“i think you’re forgetting all the shit that happens on the southside, pea. this shit is an every day occurrence for us. or are you forgetting how many times you’ve yelled at us not to bring you here when you’ve been stabbed?” sweet pea’s cheeks flush red, and he scuffs his steel capped boot to the ground.

“i’d still prefer your dodgy stitches over being thousands of dollars in debt.” he grunts, and toni chuckles before she sighs and looks into the room that houses her uncle.

“if only knowledge on stitching could help with seizures. shit, this is so bad, pea. with f.p gone, who the hell else is gonna help cover this asshole’s bill? i barely earn chump change at the wyrm bartending, and he hasn’t worked a solid day in over ten years-.”

“stop stressing, tiny. it’ll take a while for the bill to come through, anyway. you’ve got at least a month to figure it out. let’s just make sure he gets home first.”

“right…” it’s silent for a while between them before she turns to the left at the sound of a door opening, and sees the deputy and cheryl exiting her mother’s ward, a sad smile on cheryl’s face as the deputy grips her shoulder tightly before he begins making his way back to the waiting room. he only gives sweet pea and toni a solid glare as he passes them, but toni pays no mind, finds her eyes landing instead on the red headed blossom that stands outside her mother’s room, looking through the small window of the door with the tiniest of smirks on her face.

“she looks like pure evil.” sweet pea says in a low voice, and toni finds herself nodding despite not believing it.

there’s something deep in cheryl’s eyes that toni can’t quite put her finger on. it looks familiar…feels familiar.

“you think she’d be great in bed?” sweet pea asks, intrigue lacing his tone as he looks cheryl up and down, and toni glares at him before throwing out a fist to connect with his bicep.

“ow!” he grunts, rubbing his arm with a wince.

“don’t even think about bedding a blossom, sweet pea, not unless you want your head on a pike and placed in the middle of the now ruins of thornhill manor.” toni hisses under her breath, and sweet pea’s outburst of pain catches cheryl’s attention, her eyes turning over to them as her expression turns
“can i help you?” she says simply, and toni’s about to reply with something snarky when the door opens behind her, causing her to spin around frantically.

“there was no blood in his ct scan, so he’s all clear.” toni lets out a groan of relief, her shoulders sagging as if a gigantic weight has just been taken off them as the doctor smiles and grips her shoulder.

“we’d like to keep him over night, he’s awake now, but groggy. he’s asking for you.” toni’s heart sinks, and she exchanges a glance with sweet pea before she swallows the lump that quickly builds in her throat and nods once.

“o-okay.”

“i’ll be out here, tiny.” sweet pea says reassuringly, and toni gives him a simple nod before she makes her way inside.

She walks toward her uncle apprehensively, sweat quickly beginning to build on her brow as her heart pounds against her chest almost painfully.

She makes it to his bedside, and he groans softly, wincing in pain before jacob topaz turns to look at her through fluttering eyelids.

“toni?” he whispers groggily, and toni bites down on her bottom lip before reaching for his hand resting over the blanket of the hospital bed, giving it a gentle squeeze as she nods.

“yeah, uncle jake. it’s me. you had me worried for a second there…” she says softly, and jacob topaz surprises her by giving her a soft smile.

“you saved my life, kid…” he croaks out, and toni doesn’t reply, doesn’t say what she really wants to say...

that part of her wishes she’d left him to rot…
she shouldn’t think that, but she can’t help it. he’s done nothing but hurt her for the last seven years, and he may be her father’s brother, but he’s nothing, nothing, nothing like her father-

“come here. give your uncle a hug.” jacob raises his arms, and toni hesitates, but eventually leans in and-

meaty fingers close around her throat, thumbs squeezing down on her pulse point as toni’s entire body freezes, and she can feel the wind whistling down her windpipe before its closed off completely, her eyes bulging and her nails immediately digging into jacob topaz’s forearm to get him to let go-

“do you know what you’ve fucking done? where am i gonna get thirty thousand dollars to pay for this you stupid fucking bitch?” jacob’s voice is low, frantic and pained as he hisses out the words like venom, and tears immediately begin falling down toni’s face from the lack of air she’s getting as she beats a weak fist against his elbow-

“i’m-sorry-.” she chokes out, but the words only anger him more, his grip on her neck tightening as toni lets out a frustrated whine that comes out desperate and frightened.

“i’m-gonna-kill-you-.“ jacob pants out through tears of anger, and toni, in a last ditch attempt to get him to let go, curls her hand into a fist and swings it around to wallop him in the ear.

it must be painful, because jacob cries out and lets her go, hands cradling his injured ear as toni falls back to the ground, air whistling down her throat painfully and causing her to cough and splutter and gasp as she crawls toward the front door, scrambling to her feet as jacob swears at her from his bed-

“you fucking whore!” she throws the door open and stumble over the threshold, and sweet pea is there, his arms gripping her as she coughs and sobs for air, gripping him like a lifeline-

“shit, tiny, what the fuck happened?” sweet pea’s hands cradle her face, forcing her to look up at tears continue to fall, and her neck is pounding with pain, her whole body throbbing from the lack of oxygen-

she hears a door opening and looks up through tear filled eyes in a panic, wondering if jacob has somehow gotten out of his bed and is coming back for more when she sees a flash of fiery red hair-
“oh my god…” heels clacking on the ground, nails digging into her bicep as she’s helped upright.

“What happened?”

“What do you care, blossom?” sweet pea growls, and toni’s vision finally focuses as cheryl rolls her eyes and pushes sweet pea back.

“ugh, useless. hey, look at me.”

she’s struggling to breathe, her whole body shaking and tears still falling before she feels soft fingers brush away the water staining her cheeks, those hands trailing down until they gently touch her neck-

“she needs ice! quickly, peapod!” cheryl’s voice is insistent, and toni tries her best to breathe as she looks up at sweet pea, who cracks his knuckles-

“get-me-fucking-ice-.” she growls through panted breath, and sweet pea looks at her anxiously, glares at cheryl, but makes his way to the main desk of the hospital as cheryl’s cold palms rest on toni’s neck soothingly.

“come on, t.t., you’ve just gotta breathe slowly…”

“t.t.?” toni croaks out, looking up at cheryl weakly, and she smiles softly.

“toni topaz, right?” she says simply, and toni lets out a choked laugh as sweet pea comes running back with a cup in his hands.

“here.” he hands it to cheryl, who grips toni’s hand and pulls her down onto a chair before grabbing an ice cube from the cup and holding it in her palm, quickly moving it back over toni’s neck.

the relief is instant, a groan escaping her before she can stop it as cheryl bends down and grips her knee with her spare hand.
“here, take more ice, move it over your neck, it’ll stop it from bruising and swelling too badly.” she
holds the cup up to toni, who takes another ice cube and begins massaging it over her neck gently,
her eyes fluttering closed before she feels something extremely cold touch her lips.

she leans back from instinct, opening her eyes in surprise to see cheryl rolling her eyes at her and
holding an ice cube between her fingers.

“eat it. gives you something to distract yourself.” she says, and toni hesitates before opening her
mouth slowly, cheryl popping the ice cube in easily, and toni swallows it around her tongue, lets the
coolness of it sit in her mouth as she leans back in the chair and takes a deep breath in through her
nose.

“there you go…” cheryl’s voice is soft, and the last of toni’s tears escape her eyelashes and fall down
her cheeks as she looks up at sweet pea, who looks down at her in concern.

“What happened?” he begs, and toni lets the withering ice cube rest between her back teeth before
she bites down, the crunching sound filling her ears as she chews on the ice slowly before shaking
her head.

“told you he’s pissed at me.” she croaks out, and sweet pea’s expression immediately turns stony,
anger shining in his eyes as his jaw clenches and he looks to the ward where jacob topaz lies.

“I’m gonna kill him-.”

“That won’t help, peapod. while i have no doubt you are capable of murder, you’ll just get thrown in
jail and t.t. here will lose a friend. think rationally.” cheryl drawls with a roll of her eyes, and sweet
pea glares down at her, about to say something when toni raises her hand to silence him.

“just leave it, pea…” she whispers, and sweet pea crosses his arms over his chest, but says no more
as cheryl’s grip on her knee tightens.

“better?” she asks softly, and toni looks down at her with a small smile and a nod.

“yeah…how’d you know what to do?” she says hoarsely, and cheryl’s expression changes
immediately, her eyes watering slightly as she chews on her full, bright red bottom lip and stands.
“ivory skin bruises a lot easier than you’d think. ice has become somewhat of a companion of mine.” she whispers, and toni’s heart sinks.

that’s what familiar about cheryl blossom.

shared pain of abuse. she’d seen it in her eyes the second they’d met hers.

“thank you.” toni whispers, reaching out to grip cheryl’s hand, and cheryl only gives her a gentle smile and a squeeze of her fingers before she’s tossing her hair back off her shoulder and nodding to the entrance of the hospital.

“you should get out of here before sheriff keller sees those bruises. he’s still here interviewing archie about the shooting, and you know he’ll find any excuse to arrest a serpent.” her mouth curls slightly at the word ‘serpent’, her tone laced with disgust, and toni raises an eyebrow at her in surprise as sweet pea glares at her before holding out his hand for her to take.

“come on, toni. you can crash at mine.” toni takes his hand, and cheryl doesn’t turn back to face them as they turn and make their way to the entrance of the hospital.

“she’s a bigger bitch than penny peabody, and that’s fucking saying something.” sweet pea mutters, and toni sighs.

“she has a right to hate us, pea. we helped cover up her brother’s death.” toni mumbles, and sweet pea shakes his head.

“that was f.p and joaquin, we had nothing to do with it! and also, her father paid them to cover it up!” he hisses, and toni doesn’t say anything, simply lifts a hand to her neck and touches the bruises already forming over her dark skin with a wince.

“shit, tiny...” sweet pea whispers, and toni grips his hand reassuringly.

“i’ll be fine, this isn’t even the worst he’s done.” she croaks out, and sweet pea growls under his breath.
“you can’t keep expecting me to be okay with you living with him when he does this to you, toni.”
he hisses, and toni lets out a deep sigh.

“i’ve got no one else, pea.”

“you have me.” toni rolls her eyes.

“you don’t get it…” sweet pea says nothing more, and toni’s grateful.

because he doesn’t understand.

but toni has a feeling a certain red head they’d left behind in the hospital does.

“ivory skin bruises a lot easier than you’d think. ice has become somewhat of a companion of mine.”

toni doesn’t know much about the blossoms, never bothered to care enough about them to learn more beyond the fact that they owned the largest maple syrup farm in the country, they were filthy rich and that jason blossom, heir to the whole blossom maple farm industry, had been killed by his father after he discovered the secret drug ring behind it all.

toni didn’t know anything about cheryl blossom beyond knowing she was devastated at the loss of her twin brother.

but after the comments she’d made…

“ivory skin bruises a lot easier than you’d think…”

toni can’t help but feel like despite the fact they were raised in two completely different worlds, she and cheryl blossom have a lot more in common than either of them realized.
fred andrews makes it through surgery, and cheryl watches from a distance as archie, now clean of his father’s blood after a shower, is huddled with veronica, jughead and betty, an anxious look on his face as he whispers under his breath to them about what cheryl can only imagine is his fear of his father’s shooter returning, the looks of horror on veronica, betty and jughead’s faces only confirming her suspicions.

the core four, kevin had lovingly dubbed them.

cheryl likes to think of them more as the annoying four.

still, she can’t deny the fact that if it wasn’t for them, she wouldn’t be alive right now. archie had broken his hand saving her life, and it’s only fair cheryl returns the favor.

like a cat moving in the night, she makes her way to the front desk, asking quickly and quietly where fred andrews’s room is located, and as soon as she learns of its location, she makes her way toward it, heels clacking on the ground and she walks to the door that holds fred andrews’s currently unconscious body.

they said it was fifty/fifty on whether he would wake up or not.

cheryl’s never been one to believe in superstition, but she has a feeling she can help swing the odds in his favor.

she opens the door and enters, eyes falling on fred andrews’s limp body on his hospital bed, tubes and needles sticking out of his body, and she can’t help but wince at the sight.

this could have been her if it wasn’t for archie andrews and his heroics.
god, how archie reminds her of her brother…remove the red hair atop archie’s head, and the similarities would still be there.

he was brave, and loyal, and loving, just like jason. but unlike jason, cheryl’s positive that archie got these good qualities from the man currently lying on the hospital bed before her, bloody and broken and clinging to life desperately.

“hello, mr. andrews.” cheryl whispers, her voice small, but her heels loud as she makes her way over to his bedside slowly.

if fred can hear her, which she’s about ninety nine percent positive he can’t, he doesn’t show it, body still limp and heart rate monitor still beeping pathetically as cheryl comes to a stop beside him and reaches down to grip his hand.

his fingers feel warm against hers, but cheryl suspects that’s probably because she always runs at a bit of a colder temperature than others.

either that, or the bite of sweet water river’s frozen lake still rests within her bones.

“scarce have we ever made conversation, mr. andrews. but your son saved my life yesterday. archie broke his hand smashing through that ice to pull me out of the deep depths of sweet water river, and if it wasn’t for him, i would’ve joined jason and my father in death.” cheryl’s grip on his hand tightens slightly, and she swallows the lump in her throat as she ploughs on.

“part of me wishes he hadn’t saved me, mr. andrews. part of me wishes i had died yesterday, whether from drowning in the lake that my brother’s body was dumped in, or burning in the flames that took the home i was abused in…either way, death has always sounded so enticing to me. but I’m thankful…i’m thankful, mr. andrews, because now that archie has saved me…i can save you. perhaps that’s why fate stopped me from dying yesterday, despite the many opportunities death had to take me…maybe i was meant for this, mr. andrews.” she whispers, and with that, she leans forward, pressing a cherry red lipstick kiss to fred andrews’s forehead, pouring every ounce of life that archie had blown back into her lungs into her lips, because if anyone deserves to live, it’s fred andrews-

“cheryl? what are you doing?” she pulls away at the sound of the door opening and archie’s voice, looking up at him as he gazes at her in surprise. she simply offers him a sad smile.
“paying you back for saving me at sweet water river.” she says softly. a look of understanding crosses archie’s face as cheryl steps away from his father and closer to him.

“you gave me the kiss of life, archie andrews. now, i’ve given it to your dad.” she whispers, and archie watches her with what she can only describe as a look of confusion as she smiles at him.

“he’s going to be just fine.” she reassures him, and finally, a smile crosses archie’s face as cheryl looks back at fred before making her way out of the room.

“toodles.” she says with a smile, and the frown on archie’s face returns as she walks away without a second glance.

because cheryl blossom isn’t known for her charity, and she knows this. everyone in this town thinks she’s a monster, unaware that monsters aren’t born, they’re made.

deep down, cheryl enjoys making other people feel good. yes, sometimes scaring people with intimidation and anger makes her happy, too, but the genuine smiles she receives from people she helps always manages to get her heart racing and her blood boiling in a way she can’t explain, only knows that it feels amazing, and unlike anything she’s ever felt before.

it leaves her feeling like she’s floating, far away from the abuse she’s suffered at the hands of her mother, or the neglect she’d been dealt by her practically non-existent father.

if she can help archie andrews’s father survive with a kiss to his wrinkled forehead, she’ll cover every inch of it in cherry red lipstick if she has to.

*the kiss of life…*

she’s steps away from her mother’s ward when she finds herself coming to a stop in front of a different door.

the door that currently houses jacob topaz.
a certain ringing begins to echo in her ears, her blood boiling at the memory of the dark blue blotches that had begun to form over toni topaz’s skin last night.

she knows next to nothing about the pink haired serpent, and even though part of her is intrigued by her, she knows there is nothing about toni topaz that she wants to know.

because toni topaz is from the southside, and toni topaz is a serpent, part of a gang of criminals who helped cover up her beautiful jason’s murder, so truly, toni topaz should be somewhere lower than the heel of cheryl’s boot in terms of cheryl’s ‘care’ scale…

but cheryl had felt a rush of protectiveness flood her the second she’d seen that girl come running out of her uncle’s ward with tears falling down her face and nail marks indented into her skin as her friend clutched her small, trembling body to his gigantic frame.

she may distrust the serpents, may hate them and everything they stand for, but she won’t stand by and watch someone get abused. not when she’s felt the stinging slap of a palm to her cheek and the sharp bite of blood in her tongue…or felt the fire of nails digging into her neck.

so no, she doesn’t care for toni topaz. but she cares for the man inside that room laying his hands on her again.

it’s not her place, and she knows it isn’t. but it’s not like toni will find out…

she takes a deep breath, hand hovering above the door in front of her before the hesitation begins to settle in deep within her.

she shouldn’t meddle. she barely knows this girl, and yes, the anger that fills her heart at the thought of her tiny frame being beaten by a man twice her size is palpable, but this has nothing to do with her.

toni topaz is from the southside, and this situation exists on the southside.

besides, she’s part of a criminal gang, surely the girl can defend herself?
cheryl steps back and away from the door, perfect white teeth worrying her red stained bottom lip before she turns and makes her way to her mother’s ward.

she has enough going on right now to be getting involved with serpent business.

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jacob topaz returns to his trailer three days after he was first admitted to the hospital.

toni would be lying if she said she didn’t enjoy the solitude she’s had over the last three days in this trailer on her own. of course, her grandfather had come to the trailer upon hearing the news and had told toni to stay with him, which toni had declined because again, she didn’t want her grandfather giving up his room for her.

sweet pea had told her to stay at his, but toni had decided that she should at least attempt to win her way back into her uncle’s good graces by looking after his trailer during his absence.

so here toni is, bent down and scrubbing the tub of the shower with sweat dripping down her brow, her ears anxiously perking up every few minutes at the smallest sounds as she dreads her uncle’s return.

her grandfather had told her yesterday that he was being discharged today, and toni had immediately kicked her cleaning into overdrive, desperate to have the place looking spotless by the time he got here.

maybe if he sees how well she’s kept this place clean, he’ll decide she can stay, and she won’t be homeless southside trash like everyone on the northside more than likely thinks she is.

a certain redhead pops into her mind at the thought of the northside, but it’s quickly brushed away as she stands up with a groan, joints popping loudly from stiffness before she turns the water on to wash away the soap covering the tub.

it doesn’t look spotless, but it looks a hell of a lot cleaner than it was half an hour ago.
years of built up mold is hard to scrub off.

it’s the last thing on her list, and she’d woken up early to get it done, desperate to finish quickly so she can get to school before her uncle gets here. she knows she’s just avoiding the inevitable, but still…she’d rather put off seeing him again for as long as she can.

she catches a glimpse of herself in the bathroom mirror as she throws down the cleaning supplies into the bucket on top of the toilet, her eyes roaming over the yellowing bruises on her neck as she purses her lips and reaches up a hand to brush her cold fingers over the tender skin.

it doesn’t hurt so bad anymore. cheryl blossom’s ice trick had worked quite well.

toni lets out a deep breath, and adjusts the sweat soaked bandana on her forehead, loose strands that had long escaped the pink bun above her head sticking to her skin before the sound of a door opening has her freezing in her spot, her heart pounding against her ribcage almost painfully.

he’s here.

it’s the unmistakable sound of his boots hitting the ground that has toni taking a deep breath in before she opens the door to the bathroom and exits it, walking down the small hallway of the trailer into the kitchen.

he looks up at the sound of her footsteps, and toni purses her lips at the sight of jacob topaz looking at her with nothing but murder shining in his eyes, his jaw clenched and his chin held high as he glares down at her as if she’s nothing more than a rodent beneath his boot.

she just hopes she’s not seconds away from getting squashed.

his eyes stay on her for a long time before they roam over the trailer, and he lets out a scoff of disbelief before looking at her with a raised eyebrow.

“what? you thought cleaning up would get you back in my good graces?” he hisses, and toni swallows thickly, but says nothing as he drops his bag and makes his way over to her slowly.
“I’ve got a thirty two thousand dollar hospital bill to my name now, ant. you wanna pay that off, you’re gonna have to clean my trailer for the next eighteen thousand years.”

The second she hears that nickname, a shiver of anger runs up her spine, and Toni doesn’t look at him, keeps her eyes to the ground for fear of what she’ll do to him for what he just said.

No one called her that but her mother and father, and he knows that, the son of a fucking bitch—

“Don’t worry, ant. I’m not kicking you out just yet. No, I’m gonna find a way for you to pay me back my thirty two thousand dollars.”

Toni looks up just as he comes to a stop in front of her, and she finds herself instinctively backing up until her lower back hits the kitchen counter, a small hiss of pain escaping her before she finds herself cornered.

Jacob Topaz rests his hands on the kitchen counter on either side of her, effectively trapping her as she turns her head to the left in an attempt to get away from him, and her body betrays her bravery, tears welling in her eyes before she can stop them as he leans in close to her, all six feet of him towering over her easily.

“You wanna pay off your debt? From now on, every paycheck you earn at the Wyrm goes to me. You clean this trailer from top to bottom every single goddamn day, and…from now on, you live here when I say you live here. If that front door is locked and you’re not in this trailer, you better find yourself a nice spot on the streets to shelter up in.”

His breath is hot against her neck, and Toni grips the counter tightly, still avoids eye contact as fear and anger courses throughout her entire body.

“If I give you everything I earn at the Wyrm, I won’t have money for myself.” She manages to get out through bared teeth, and she knows it’s the wrong move, to expose her anger, but she can’t help it.

She should’ve helped it.

His fingers grip her chin roughly, forcing her to look into his eyes as she grips his wrists in an effort to stop him from doing any more harm to her, and his eyes trail down to the bruises on her neck, a small smile playing on his lips, and Toni can’t quite wrap her head around the fact that he’s actually
“you should’ve thought of that before you put me thirty two thousand dollars into debt, ant.” he says simply, and toni blinks back her tears and glares at him with as much hatred as she can.

“I was trying to save your life!” she growls, and he clearly doesn’t like that answer, because his fingers go from her chin to her neck, digging into the already blue marks on her skin as she whimpers in pain. he pushes her further into the counter, his body practically smashed right up against hers as he hisses into her ear.

“You were trying to screw me over and you know it! you think i don’t know that you’ve wished for me to drop dead every single fucking day since i took you in, you little shit? and what? when it was actually about to happen, you chickened out? you’re pathetic, toni. a complete waste of human skin, and you should’ve died the day my brother did.”

The words cut deep, and toni can’t help it. she’s crying, tears falling down her face, and he grins triumphantly, giving her neck a hard squeeze.

“Are my rules understood, ant?” he whispers, and toni doesn’t reply straight away, causing him to tighten his hold on her neck-

“I said, am i understood, antoinette?” he repeats, more bite in his tone as his fingers squeeze harder, and toni gasps loudly as she nods desperately.

“Yes!” she manages to choke out, and his shit eating grin only grows wider before he throws her back, her head colliding with the back cabinet as she bites back a groan of pain.

He moves away from her, looking her up and down in satisfaction before he walks to the fridge, grabs a beer and a bottle opener and makes his way into the living room, the sound of the cap on the beer bottle being opened echoing in the tiny trailer as toni stands there in complete and utter shock.

She’s so fucked.

Her bartending job at the whyte wyrm is her only source of income, and now all her earnings are going to him.
what the fuck was she supposed to do about food for school?

usually, she’d fall back on the serpents for help, but a) jacob is still technically a serpent despite the fact that he hasn’t done a job for them in months and b) they currently have no leader.

f.p would have a solution for this, he always had a way of keeping jacob tame, but he’s rotting away in jail, and the other serpents steer clear of jacob as much as they can.

again, that famous temper of his has earned quite a reputation…

she’s fucked. well and truly fucked.

she’s still standing in the kitchen, shaking from head to toe as she chews on her bottom lip before making her way to her small bedroom, desperate to just get away from any room that jacob topaz currently occupies.

and now this other rule? she lives here when he says she does? if the door’s locked, she’s out? what the fuck is she supposed to do if she comes home one day to that door not budging?

she needs to start packing clothes in her bag with her now, just in case.

what a fucking mess.

she tried to save his life and this is the thanks she gets.

i should’ve let him fucking die. great job, topaz.

“don’t you have school?” he screams from the living room, and toni grabs her phone from her back pocket and looks at the time.

“shit.”
shit, she was supposed to be showing around f.p’s kid today-

she scrambles to grab fresh clothes, desperate to wash the sweat off her body, which she does in less than five minutes as she dresses as fast as she can, putting on what little make up she owns and fixing her hair before running back into her room to grab her bag.

she pauses before letting out a sigh and grabbing spare clothes, shoving it into her bag as well before dashing out of the front door without even saying goodbye.

she jumps on her bike, turning the ignition frantically as she revs it up before taking off, going a little faster than she should be in an attempt to get to southside high on time.

she makes it with two minutes to spare.

but when she gets there, she finds every single student outside it, all of them throwing papers in the air and cheering as toni comes to a stop in her usual parking spot, her hands gripping her helmet to rip it off as she jumps off her bike and makes her way over to where sweet pea and fangs are standing.

“what the hell is going on?” she yells, and sweet pea looks to her with a grin.

“guess what they found in the basement of the school?” he says as fangs hollers beside him.

“What?” toni breathes, and sweet pea scoffs.

“drug lab. jingle jangle. and guess who was fucking running it?”

“sweets, you know i hate guessing games, just tell me.” toni says with a roll of her eyes, and sweet pea grins and reaches out to ruffle her hair.

“mr. phillips. that motherfucker’s been working with the ghoulies on distributing jingle jangle across the north and southside. they arrested him this morning, but apparently the lab has caused toxic
fumes to run throughout the school-.”

“so they’re shutting it down!” fangs interrupts with a loud cheer, causing a raucous roar to emit from the students around them as toni looks at fangs and sweet pea in complete and utter shock.

“what, the whole school? shit, what happens to us then?”

“isn’t it obvious?” they hear a voice behind them say. All three of them turn, and toni’s eyes land on none other than f.p’s kid.

jughead jones.

jughead adjusts the beanie on his head as he makes his way over to them, each step cautious as he looks up at southside high with a frown.

“gotta say, was kind of looking forward to coming here.” he says sarcastically, and toni raises an eyebrow.

“you’re f.p’s kid, aren’t you?” she asks, extending her hand, and jughead takes it with a small smile.

“jughead jones.”

“the paper i was shown yesterday said “forsythe pendleton jones the third”. wanna tell me how you get jughead out of that name?” jughead’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise.

“how’d you know-.”

“i’m toni topaz. i was supposed to give you the full animatronic tour of southside high, but looks like some of the robots went insane and started killing the guests.” she says with a grin, and jughead looks at the current cascade of students running around them.

“looks like it.” he says with a deep sigh.
“this is sweet pea and fangs.” toni says, nodding to the two large boys beside her, and jughead extends his hand to them, which fangs takes, but sweet pea looks at apprehensively.

“You’re f.p.’s boy?” he says gruffly. jughead clenches his jaw.

“Yeah i am.” he says proudly, and sweet pea scoffs and looks at toni with a shrug.

“ignore him, he’s more brawn than brains.” fangs says, earning him a cheap shot to the ribs from sweet pea as they begin play fighting, and toni rolls her eyes at them before turning back to jughead.

“You said it was obvious what was gonna happen to us before…you never finished your sentence.” she says simply, and jughead sighs and looks up at southside with a shrug.

“There wasn’t much else to say. only that it looks like i’m not leaving riverdale high after all.”

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The whispers that follow cheryl blossom around the second she steps foot into riverdale high don’t go unnoticed.

She sees every wide eyed stare, hears every gasp from the corner of her eyes, and she can’t help the smirk that lights her face up at the thought that, like always, she’s the center of the attention at this school.

Well, not the complete center of attention.

Archie and his father getting shot is also a hot topic, many people stopping archie at his locker or in the hallway to check on him as he reassures them that he’s okay, and that his dad is healing well at the hospital.

The only people who check in on cheryl is josie and veronica.
veronica comes rushing up to her locker after first period, a look of concern on her face as she comes to a stop in front of the redheaded blossom child.

“hey! i thought i’d check in, see how you’re doing? how’s your mother?” she asks softly, and cheryl simply gives her a small smile.

“she’s fine, well on her way to recovery. the manor, however, is in ruins, so i’ve decided to take refuge at thistlehouse with nana rose. mommy will no doubt be moving into thistlehouse with us once she’s discharged.”

“That’s great to hear, cheryl. what about you though, how are you holding up?” veronica’s voice drops low, and cheryl knows what she’s implying with her words as she internally winces before shrugging slightly.

“I’m fine, veronica. the cold chill of sweet water river has long left me now.”

“You’re physically fine, cheryl, i can see that. i’m talking more mentally. god, cheryl, you tried to kill-.”

“I said i’m fine, veronica. let’s just leave it at that and move past it.” cheryl says abruptly, and veronica frowns, deep in thought as she looks at her for a long time before letting out a deep sigh.

“Allright. i won’t pry, cheryl, but if you need anything, please don’t hesitate to talk to me.” cheryl gives her a simple nod, and veronica rubs her arm tenderly with a soft smile before she makes her way over to archie in the student lounge.

Josie corners her during cheer practice, practically skipping over to her as the other vixens stretch, and cheryl can’t help the look of annoyance that appears on her face when josie asks her how she is.

“Josie, you’re my best friend, but i really need people to stop asking me if i’m okay.”

“We’re just worried about you, cheryl. your house burned down, your mother almost died-.”

“trust me, mommy’s used to the flames, she’s felt them every time she’s descended into hell to check
on how things are doing down there as their high ruler.” cheryl says with a roll of her eyes, and josie blinks once in shock.

“did you just call your mother ‘satan’ in a very backhanded way?” she says in surprise, and cheryl sighs and grips her hand.

“let’s just get through this vixen practice, okay?”

the rest of the day drags on, and cheryl finds herself getting more and more restless with each passing moment.

something isn’t sitting right within her. she can’t explain it, but she’s been on edge all day. perhaps the stares and the whispers are finally getting to her…

or maybe, just maybe, in the back of her mind, she knows that jacob topaz is going back home today.

she’d overheard the doctors yesterday telling jacob that he’d be discharged tomorrow when she’d been passing his ward to get to her mother’s, and the second she’d heard it, dread had filled her.

toni’s abuser was going back home.

cheryl can’t help but wonder if the petite pink haired serpent is okay, can’t help but hope that he hasn’t laid his hands on her, and because of that, she’s frustrated.

she’s frustrated because she doesn’t understand why she cares.

she’d spoken all of five sentences to this girl, barely knew anything about her except for three stone cold facts. 1) her name was toni topaz, 2) she was a serpent and 3) she lived on the southside.

that was it.

so why on earth was this girl currently occupying her mind? why was there worry sitting deep in her gut and chewing away at her insides at the thought that toni’s very pissed off uncle was on his way
back to their trailer?

who cares if he hurts her?

apparently, the answer is she does. cheryl blossom cares.

and she has no goddamn clue as to why.

part of her is even contemplating asking jughead to keep an eye on the pink haired serpent, seeing as he’s now at southside high where she has no doubt toni also attends school, but the second that thought had entered her mind, she’d brushed it away.

jughead was prone to asking questions, and she’s pretty sure she’d get hounded with about a million of them if she even mentioned toni topaz’s name in his general direction.

going to the southside is definitely not an option. cheryl would rather take her brother’s place in death than step foot in that cesspool area of riverdale.

there’s always social media…messaging her on instagram to check up on her.

but again, why should she? toni probably hasn’t spared a single second thought about her. she’d probably think it was a prank, or that cheryl had officially lost her mind if she read a message from the redhead asking her if she was okay.

so no, messaging her on social media is also out of the question.

she’s stuck.

cheryl would be lying if she said she hadn’t stalked toni topaz’s instagram after that night at the hospital, a soft scoff escaping her at the number of followers she had.

five hundred and eight compared to cheryl’s six thousand five hundred.
for a serpent, she definitely preferred to keep a low profile.

but cheryl had found her instagram page intriguing. it was clear the girl had a taste for photography, the photos she uploaded were a mixture of professional and standard, all filtered to perfection. some were even polaroid candids, toni’s black painted fingernails making an appearance in every polaroid photo as she held up the small rectangular picture to the camera to take the photo of a photo.

how meta.

her pictures went from beautiful photos of the town of riverdale and it’s skyline, or the landscape of the trees, to photos of her friends, to one with her with her back turned, her southside serpent jacket on full display as her long pink curls cascade down it, and cheryl had found herself staring at the photo in awe for a long time, fingers hovering above the photo, and she’d actually contemplated double tapping it before she’d quickly exited the app and had thrown her phone onto her bed in frustration.

she could always just follow her…it wasn’t strange for her to follow toni on instagram, was it?

the bell ringing pulls cheryl out of her thoughts, her body jolting slightly from the shock before the sound of principal weatherbee’s voice over the intercom echoes around them.

“dear students of riverdale. an incident at southside high has left the school uninhabitable. therefore, effective tomorrow, students from southside high will temporarily be joining us while the school is being repaired.”

groans and shouts of anger immediately echo around her, but cheryl finds herself collapsing back into her seat in shock.

no.

no, no, no, this cannot be happening-

southside high students? coming here?
wait, southside high-

“i expect you all to welcome them with open arms and acceptance.” principal weatherbee says calmly over the intercom before the harsh static indicates he’s done talking, and everyone in her class is complaining as cheryl sits there deep in thought.

it’s not fair. those southside high students were nothing but trouble. underachievers, low lives, complete and total wastes of human space!

but…but cheryl can’t help the excitement that floods her at the thought that toni topaz attends southside high, and could very well be showing up within these hallways tomorrow…

“stop it, cheryl! she’s a goddamn serpent! she’s not worth your time or energy, and you shouldn’t be excited or happy at the fact that southside scum is about to inhabit your goddamn school!”

cheryl bites down on her full bottom lip with hesitation, her thoughts spinning at a million miles an hour as she looks down at her phone.

it’s blowing up with messages from almost everyone in the school, all of them expressing anger and shock on every social media platform they have over the southside high students joining riverdale high, and cheryl licks her lips before she stands slowly to her feet, flipping her red hair over her shoulder as she does.

screw it. these southside high students were not going to bring her down. they weren’t going to come here, period. not if cheryl could help it.

no. she was going to fight this every step of the way.

and she was NOT going to wake up tomorrow feeling excited at the possibility that toni topaz might soon be within her vicinity.

absolutely not.
toni is beyond excited.

southside high had always been a dump, a waste of a school and her education with the lack of resources and general care the entire staff had toward the school and its students.

but now? now she there’s a chance she might actually be able to learn something for once.

just the prospect of having a classroom that didn’t smell like body odor and dustmites, or the idea of finally being able to answer a question in class without someone attacking her later for it…

sure, she’s upset about mr. phillips, the only halfway decent teacher at southside high, being a drug dealer, but ultimately, his arrest had resulted in all of this.

besides, toni would be lying if she said she hadn’t thought of the fact that she may possibly run into cheryl blossom at riverdale high.

toni’s not even sure if cheryl will remember who she is. it’s entirely possible the redhead hasn’t given her a single thought since that day at the hospital, what with everything cheryl has been through in the last few months.

her brother had been murdered by her father, who then killed himself, and a fire had taken her home and had almost killed her mother.

yeah, it’s safe to say that cheryl blossom has more than likely not given toni topaz a single second thought.

but still, there’s always a chance, and toni can’t help but be excited at just the prospect of seeing her or passing her in the hallways.

She can’t deny that she thought cheryl was beautiful the second she laid eyes on her.
of course, it’s next to impossible that anything could ever happen between them. again, toni’s pretty sure that cheryl hates her because she’s a serpent, and the serpents helped cover up her brother’s death, but toni can’t help but want to know more about the redheaded blossom.

that’s why toni topaz finds herself waking up early once again as she gets ready to make the long trek to the other side of town.

the northside.

she tells her uncle about the incident, tells him she’ll be attending riverdale high now, and he says nothing, continues drinking his beer in silence as toni frowns before heading to bed for the day.

when she wakes up, he’s passed out on the couch with two bottles of vodka beside his three bottles of beer, and she rolls her eyes and grabs a blanket from the empty chair in the kitchen and throws it over his body before making her way out of the trailer toward her bike.

She arrives at the same time sweet pea, fangs and jughead show up, and jughead stands there awkwardly, not quite wanting to associate himself with them, but at the same time, having no one else to go to as toni rolls her eyes and waves him forward.

“your dad’s our leader, jughead. you may not be a serpent yet, but you’re one of us.” she says, and jughead frowns, but makes his way over to them as they make their way up the steps and into riverdale high.

“man, there’s gonna be so many northsider heads to kick in…” sweet pea says under his breath excitedly, and toni glares at him.

“you’re not kicking anyone’s head in, the last thing we need is more trouble between the north and southside by attacking each other, sweet pea.”

“oh come on, toni! we gotta have some fun!” fangs says with a grin, and toni punches him in the arm, causing him to wince in pain as he rubs the spot where her fist made impact.

“can you two think rationally for once? we’re leaderless right now, violence is only gonna cause more problems!” she hisses.
“she’s right.” jughead says quietly, and sweet pea glares at him.

“What, protecting your little northside friends?” he growls, and jughead clenches his jaw.

“No, I’m protecting my dad from coming out of jail to a full blown war happening with his serpents! You know he’d tell you to just keep your head down and not cause any problems.”

“Well, he’s not here.” sweet pea says stiffly, and toni rolls her eyes.

“I swear, sweet pea, if you get us kicked out-.”

“Hi there!” they all jump at the sound of a high pitched voice, and toni looks ahead to see a table where a redheaded boy and a gorgeous, raven haired girl stand behind it, smiles on both their faces as the southside high students get closer and closer to them.

“Archie, Veronica…” jughead says with a nod, and archie smiles at him as veronica looks to the others with a warm smile.

“Friends! On behalf of the students and faculty here at Riverdale High, welcome to your new school. To ease this transition they’ve set up a registration desk where you can get your locker assignments, class schedules and a list of sports and extracurricular activities…” toni drowns out the rest of whatever this veronica girl is saying as she feels her phone buzzing in her pocket. She steps behind sweet pea, looking down to see a text from her uncle.

Uncle Jake [08:49]

“You didn’t clean the kitchen. You better not show your face in this trailer for the next four days, ant.”

Toni’s heart drops, and she vaguely hears the sound of someone yelling behind her.

“There’s the school spirit I so fondly remember…” she hears jughead mumble, but everything is static right now.
shit.

shit, she’s homeless for the next four days? what the fuck is she supposed to do?

“wrong, veronica! no one invited southside scum to our school!”

she doesn’t have anywhere to stay, she’s so fucked-

“listen up, ragamuffins! I will not allow riverdale high’s above average gpa to suffer because of classrooms that are overcrowded with…underachievers!”

why the fuck did she forget to clean the kitchen-wait…what did that voice say?

“so please, do us all a favor and find another school to deface with your hard scrabble ways!”

“why don’t you come over here and say that to my face?!” toni growls before she can stop herself, and she’s pushing past sweet pea to get at whoever is saying this about her, her blood boiling in her body and her hand instantly curling into a fist because she wants nothing more than to punch someone’s face in right now-

“happily, queen of the buskers!” toni finally pushes past sweet pea’s gigantic body-

and cheryl blossom is standing in front of her, the look on her face turning from anger and confrontation to complete and utter shock.

holy shit.

“shit…” toni mutters, and cheryl blinks once before the redhead boy toni remembers jughead calling archie steps between them both.

“okay, guys, can…can we just put our northside/southside differences aside?” he says meekly, and some tall asian boy behind cheryl glares at archie in anger.
“you don’t speak for the bulldogs, andrews.” he hisses, and archie rolls his eyes.

“reggie, come on man-.”

“What’s going on here?” toni, who hasn’t taken her eyes off cheryl the entire time, turns to see a dark skinned man standing in the hallway, watching the altercation with a frown as veronica shakes her head.

“nothing, principal weatherbee, we’re just welcoming the southside high students!” she says with a smile, and principal weatherbee raises an eyebrow before nodding once.

“All right, enough pomp and circumstance! everyone get to class! now!” the others begin scurrying off, and toni hears sweet pea mutter something under his breath to fangs.

“That asian kid is the first ass i’m kicking.”

Toni doesn’t even think to reprimand him.

Her eyes are still on cheryl blossom.

And cheryl blossom’s eyes are still on her.

Cheryl’s eyes fall down to her neck, and toni winces and crosses her arms over her chest protectively, the memory of the fact that she’s gonna be homeless for the next four days hitting her as she licks her lips and casts her eyes down to the ground.

“I’m fine, it’s healing.” she says simply, and cheryl says nothing, causing toni to look up at her with a raised eyebrow.

Cheryl stares at her for a long time before she clears her throat and nods once.
“good. i’m glad.” and before toni can say anything, she’s flipping her hair over her shoulder and looking at toni in what can only be described as disgust.

“and mark that down as the one and only time you’ve ever had a conversation with cheryl bombshell, serpent. it won’t happen again.” she says airily, and toni can’t help but smirk as she shrugs.

“pretty sure this is our second conversation, but sure thing, bombshell.” and with that, toni walks away, leaving cheryl “bombshell” blossom watching her do so with a look of shock on her face.

a look of shock that quickly turns into a hidden smile.

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cheryl doesn’t run into toni or any of the southside high students for the rest of the day, and she isn’t sure whether she counts it as a blessing or not.

of course she’s happy not to be in the presence of southside scum, but she can’t help but feel a little disappointed that a certain southside serpent hadn’t crossed her path for the remainder of the day.

for some strange reason, toni stands separate from the other serpents for her. perhaps because cheryl has seen first hand that toni suffers in silence from the same thing she does: an abusive guardian who marks their bodies with bruises that they keep hidden with concealer and foundation to keep up the façade that they’re strong, that nothing can break them.

the others looked the part of southside vermin, large muscular boys who looked like they wanted nothing more than to punch in every single northsider face they could get their hands on, but toni… toni was different.

toni was special.

cheryl hums to herself quietly, looks up at her mother as her bandages get changed for the third time today, soft moans of pain escaping her that causes cheryl to roll her eyes as she scrolls through instagram on her phone in an attempt to ignore her.
cheryl will sympathize with her pain when she decides to do the same, which she’s pretty sure will never happen.

cheryl will never forget her mother telling her to “get over it” when cheryl had cried curled up in her bed for hours after her mother had slapped her ear so hard with a wooden spoon, it had swollen up and bruised within seconds and had stayed that way for well over two weeks.

cheryl’s tempted to tell her to get over the burns currently covering over seventy percent of her body in just the same manner.

but something distracts her.

a notification.

from instagram.

*toni_topaz has started following you.*

cheryl looks at the notification for a long time, her heart pounding against her chest and her lips instantly turning upwards into a smirk as she finally presses a thumb down onto the notification with a shaking hand.

toni’s instagram comes into view, a familiar page that cheryl has seen at least ten times in the last three days as she chews on her bottom lip in hesitation, her finger hovering above the blue follow button beside toni’s name.

she can’t follow her. she can’t.

she’d practically called the girl southside scum to her face and now she was following her on Instagram?

if cheryl does the same, she’s practically admitting defeat. she’s practically admitting that a part of her thinks toni topaz is worth the effort. that part of her likes toni topaz.
and she does NOT like toni topaz.

so cheryl exits out of the app instead, twisting her fingers in her lap as she stares down at her phone with pursed lips and flushed cheeks.

she’ll follow her back eventually. in a week. or maybe two.

after all, she’s cheryl goddamn blossom, and no one gets a one up over her.

especially not a southside serpent.

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toni’s not even sure why she’s done it, but the second she does, she regrets it.

her five minute break ended three minutes ago, and toni knows she needs to get back out to the bar before she risks losing the only thing keeping her uncle from kicking her out of the trailer permanently, but she’d been tossing the thought of following cheryl on instagram for over half a day now.

and now, in a swift moment of feeling impulsive, she’d clicked on the follow button.

and now she’s regretting it.

she’s such an idiot. why, why is she the world’s most impulsive dumbass? why the hell is she following cheryl anyway? the girl hates her guts, had called her southside scum right to her face, and toni still spent over two hours scrolling though her instagram during class today.

what the hell is wrong with her?

“topaz! get your ass out here!” she hears a loud bang against the bathroom door, and she winces at
“Yeah, gimme a minute! Uh, that time of month!” She lies easily, and Byrdie makes a noise of disgust behind the door.

“Ugh, whatever, Topaz, just make it quick! The bar’s getting busy and I needed you out here five minutes ago!” Toni rolls her eyes, looks down at her phone and locks it with a sigh before shoving it into her back pocket and running out of the door.

Byrdie raises an eyebrow at her, and Toni sighs and reaches out to grip Byrdie’s forearm.

“Hey, I know I’m only supposed to be on till ten tonight, but I’m willing to close without extra pay if you’ll do me a favor?” She says sheepishly, and Byrdie narrows her eyes, watches her for a brief moment before she rolls her eyes.

“Your uncle kicked you out of the trailer again, didn’t he?” Toni chews on her bottom lip before nodding hesitantly.

“Yeah…for four days this time.” She says softly, and Byrdie runs a hand through her hair with a sigh before she nods once.

“Alright, you know where your bed is.” Byrdie says, jerking her thumb to what’s technically supposed to be the second story of the bar except there’s no access to it, only a ladder that Byrdie keeps in the back room of the bar so no one can get to the small balcony. Byrdie had put a bed there years ago for Toni, for the days when Sweet Pea and Fangs are unavailable and her uncle decides to do exactly what he’s doing right now.

“Don’t know what to do about a shower for you, though.”

“It’s okay, I’m at Riverdale High now and they have showers there…I’ll just have to get there earlier than everyone else.” Toni mutters, and Byrdie sighs and grips her shoulder before nodding toward the bar.

“Now go do the job I pay you for.”
the wyrm is crazy busy tonight, and it’s almost one in the morning by the time toni manages to clean everything up and lock the doors, the wyrm eerily quiet with no serpents present as she heads to the back room the grab the ladder, her body aching and sore as she climbs her way up to the balcony where a comfy double bed awaits her.

this bed is infinitely better than the cramped single bed at her uncle’s trailer, but toni still hates sleeping here.

it feels no different to sleeping at her uncle’s, the smell of beer and vomit still around her as she collapses onto the bed and finally gets the chance to look at her phone.

as soon as it lights up, her heart drops.

*cherylbombshell has started following you.*

holy shit.

cheryl…cheryl blossom actually followed her back?

toni can’t believe it.

she clicks on the notification, watches it load cheryl’s instagram up, and sure enough, when toni clicks on her own instagram and looks at her followers, cheryl’s instagram is there.

she really did follow her back.

“holy shit…” toni breathes, and she bites down on her bottom lip to stop herself from grinning as she looks up at her battery life-

five percent.

and she left her charger at the trailer.
shit.

“fuck me…” she quickly sends a text message to sweet pea telling him to bring his charger to school tomorrow, makes sure it sends before she puts her phone on airplane mode to preserve the battery.

she shoves her phone under her pillow with a sigh, gazing up at the red ceiling of the white wyrm as she tries her best not to smile.

it’s not a big deal.

cheryl blossom following her back on instagram is not a big deal.

she tries her best to tell herself this, but it doesn’t stop her from falling asleep with her face smashed into her pillow to stop herself from smiling.
i’m ahead quite a bit in chapters, so i’m hoping i can keep posting them every day, but we’ll have to wait and see how much spare time i get to remain a few chapters ahead. i just want to take a moment to thank you all again for the absolutely amazing comments, they honestly make my day and i can’t thank you all enough for supporting this fic! it means the world to me!

the warm water splashing over toni’s skin causes her to groan in appreciation, a smile instantly forming over her face as she dunks her head under the torrent of water with a light chuckle.

she might just start showering at riverdale high more often, the shower at her uncle’s trailer is constantly freezing, and every time she turns the hot water on, the plumbing groans loud enough to echo across the entire trailer park.

she makes her shower quick but makes sure to scrub her hair and body properly, because she’s not exactly sure she’ll be able to do this again tomorrow. she’d already almost gotten caught by the janitor, and she’d rather not have to explain to her new principal that showering at the school was her only option now that her uncle’s kicked her out for four days.

as soon as she’s done, she wraps a towel around her body, running another towel through her hair as she makes her way over to the lockers where her bag is waiting.

she’s lucky her hair doesn’t take too long to dry, about a half hour in the sun and there won’t be a trace of water left in her pink locks-

“well, well, well…not even a day at riverdale high and you’re already stealing our resources.”

toni almost jumps out of her skin, a small yelp of surprise escaping her as she turns to see, of course, none other than cheryl blossom standing at the end of the lockers with her arms crossed over her chest and a look of anger on her face.

and toni almost curls in on herself because right now, she looks like a drowned rat, and cheryl blossom, of course, looks immaculate, red hair curled and held up in a perfect half ponytail, face
flawlessly covered in makeup with her signature cherry red lipstick covering her full lips.

of course she’d be here, witnessing toni looking not at all her best, practically stealing a shower from the school like some homeless crackhead that cheryl more than likely already thinks she is.

fuck my life…

toni’s about to apologize when her eyes properly take cheryl in, and toni can’t help but grin when she notices the cheerleading uniform.

“should’ve figured you’d be a cheerleader.” she says, and cheryl raises an eyebrow.

“head cheerleader, for your information. i run the vixens.” she says with a proud smile, and toni rolls her eyes.

“i’m sure you do…” head cheerleader, she shouldn’t have expected anything less…

“you didn’t answer my question, serpent.” cheryl deadpans, and toni shrugs.

“you didn’t ask one.” cheryl glares at her.

“these showers are off limits, they’re only for students who participate in sports.”

“cheerleading’s a sport now?” toni says in surprise, and cheryl looks unamused as she makes her way over to toni angrily.

“you can’t be here.” she hisses. toni sighs.

she might as well be honest, it’s not like cheryl doesn’t already know her uncle is a piece of shit…

“look, my uncle kicked me out and i have nowhere else to go. it’s just a one time thing, stop freaking
within a matter of seconds, understanding crosses cheryl’s face, and toni purses her lips and pulls clothes out of her bag silently as cheryl leans against the locker with a frown.

“did…did you sleep here, too?” she asks softly, and toni shakes her head.

“no, i slept at the bar i work at, the whyte wyrm.” she says with a sigh, and cheryl chews on her bottom lip as she nods slowly.

“does he kick you out often?” she says in a low voice, and toni rolls her eyes.

“yeah, sometimes. why do you care?” she asks, and cheryl’s expression turns stony, her defensives immediately rising once more as she scoffs.

“i don’t. i just want to make sure you don’t do this again.” toni shakes her head in disbelief.

what was this girl’s problem?

“whatever…what are you doing here so early, anyway?” toni asks defensively, and cheryl hesitates before she shrugs.

“i’m head cheerleader, t.t. gotta make a good impression.” toni raises an eyebrow at her. she knows that’s definitely not why cheryl’s here early, but if cheryl doesn’t want to tell her, she isn’t going to pry her for answers.

“right…well, do you mind giving me some space to get ready? i personally don’t like the idea of walking these hallways with no clothes or makeup on.” toni says sheepishly, holding her clothes up in her hands, and cheryl blinks once in shock.

“you’re…you’re not wearing any makeup?” she says in surprise, and toni raises an eyebrow.

“i did just get out of the shower, cheryl.” she says with a chuckle, and cheryl’s face turns as red as
the hair upon her head as she looks toni up and down as if only now just noticing she’s only in a
towel.

“you have ten minutes.” she snaps before turning on her heel and walking out of the locker room.

toni lets out a deep sigh, but drops her towel and starts shimmying her way into her jean shorts and
tank top before tying her flannel shirt around her waist and sliding her arms into her serpent jacket,
moving her damp hair out from underneath it as she adjusts her snake choker.

she manages to get her make up on quite quickly as well, and within nine minutes she’s zipped up
her boots and is exiting the locker room, cheryl waiting for her outside it with a look of annoyance
on her face.

“floor is yours, milady.” toni says with a grin, and cheryl rolls her eyes.

“i won’t tell principal weatherbee, but consider yourself warned. i catch you in there again and you’ll
be out of this school faster than you can say ‘southside scum’."

there she goes again, calling her ‘southside scum’…

“no problem, bombshell. by the way, thanks for the follow back on instagram.” toni says through
clenched teeth, and cheryl blinks in surprise as toni walks away without a backward glance,
shouldering her bag with a grunt as she waits outside for sweet pea and fangs to arrive.

she doesn’t get it. one minute, cheryl’s showing genuine concern for her and the next, she’s calling
her scum. what the hell does cheryl blossom want from her?

perhaps it’s best if she just steers clear of the redhead. it’s obvious that cheryl hates her and
everything she stands for, and it’s not like toni is going to stop being a serpent any time soon.

they’ll never be friends, that much is clear.

and toni doesn’t particularly like hanging around people who aren’t her friends.
cheryl blossom walks through the hallways of riverdale high like a woman scorned.

the second her eyes had landed on this morning’s edition of the register, cheryl had felt nothing but anger flood her entire body, that white hot anger still flooding her even now as she makes a beeline straight for principal weatherbee’s office.

she won’t stand for this.

she’ll pay for that school to be rebuilt herself if she has to, the southside high students are NOT staying here-

“cheryl! wait up!” cheryl turns at the sound of heels clacking on the ground as veronica lodge makes her way over to her with a soft smile, her hand reaching out to grip cheryl’s elbow as she sidles in close to her.

“where are you stomping off to like a woman on a mission?” veronica asks, and cheryl glares at her.

“did you not read the paper this morning, veronica? those southside high students are here permanently. that god forsaken school has been deemed a health hazard, they’re tearing it down, which means the southside high students are officially riverdale high students!” cheryl hisses, and veronica sighs.

“i know, cheryl, i saw the paper. or more, daddy saw the paper, and his eyes lit up like christmas had come early-.”

“What are you blabbering about, veronica? i have a principal to go shake down.” cheryl drawls, and veronica rolls her eyes, but grips cheryl’s elbow tighter.

“come on, cheryl, they’ve already been here for almost two weeks now, it hasn’t been too bad.” cheryl frowns.
she has a point. surprisingly, no fights have broken out between the southside and northside students…yet.

it’s been almost two weeks since their new vistors arrived, and other than their encounter in the hallway and the shower, cheryl hasn’t spoken a single word to toni topaz.

so no…it hasn’t been too bad.

cheryl still wants them out of her goddamn school, however. like she said, she’ll rebuild southside high herself if she has to.

“again, your point for stopping me, veronica?” she says through clenched teeth, and veronica sighs.

“well, you know how my father’s been working on a project in the southside? a potential housing estate amongst many other amazing things? well, he’s holding a gala opening this weekend for potential investors, and one of them is the st. clair family. their son, nick, is having a party at the five seasons hotel tonight, and he told me to invite the best riverdale has to offer.”

cheryl contemplates her words, all her anger over the current southside high situation erased.

a party?

“but of course, if he wants the best riverdale has to offer, than i have no choice but to be there. besides, it gives me an excuse to get away from my hideous mother and her constant moping. i’ll be there with bells on, ronnie.”

her mother had been discharged from the hospital a week ago, and cheryl hasn’t been able to walk into a single room without her mother there, rubbing ointment and creams onto her burns with a sad look in her eyes that she reserved only for when cheryl was in the room. any chance to get away from her is a blessing in disguise. besides, cheryl’s pretty sure her mother is leaving tomorrow morning for new york to some doctor to fix her burns, so either way, cheryl’s free to do whatever she wants.

“knew i could count on you, blossom.” veronica presses a kiss to her cheek, and cheryl tries her best not to blush as veronica skips away, skirt billowing with each step to expose tan thighs-
“these are deviant thoughts, cheryl!”

cheryl tears her gaze away from veronica’s retreating figure, and almost misses principal weatherbee passing her.

“principal weatherbee-.” she starts, but he raises a hand to silence her before she even finishes her sentence.

“miss blossom, i’ve already heard the complaints from fifty other parents, i don’t need to hear it from you, too! there’s nothing I can do, the southside high students are staying!”

“but-.” he’s gone before she can say anything else, and cheryl curses veronica lodge and her perfect legs under her breath before she makes her way to her locker, practically ripping it open in her anger.

veronica was her friend, and cheryl shouldn’t be looking at her like that. it’s deviant, it’s disgusting, it’s-

“So, you kept your word.” cheryl jumps slightly, turns to find none other than toni topaz watching her with a sly smile as she leans against the lockers, crossing her arms over her chest as she does.

how on earth was she only just thinking that she hadn’t spoken or seen toni for almost two weeks only for her to show up at her locker five minutes later?

“kept my word on what, snake?” cheryl deadpans, and toni raises an eyebrow.

“principal weatherbee hasn’t come grabbing me by my jacket to kick me out of the school yet, so you kept your word about not telling him that i used the showers last week.” cheryl rolls her eyes.

“A blossom always keeps their word, and besides…you were in a predicament, t.t. one, i hope, you’re no longer in…” she trails off, and toni’s expression turns soft as she clears her throat and shakes her head.
“no, he…he let me back in once the four days were up. for how long though, i don’t know.”

well…cheryl can’t see any bruises on her skin, so clearly he hasn’t been too harsh on her…except for the whole kicking her out for four fucking days-

“well then, find another shower to clean yourself off in if he does, because riverdale high’s one is off limits-.”

“i know, for all non-sports students, i get it.” toni says with a chuckle, and cheryl raises an eyebrow at her.

“you could just participate in a sport, you know. then you’d have access to the showers whenever.” she says with a shrug, and toni rolls her eyes.

“yeah, about that…never really been one to participate in sports, like ever.” she says with a grin, and cheryl says nothing.

why is she even trying to help this girl? what is she doing? why is she even talking to her? she’s cheryl goddamn blossom, and she doesn’t associate with southside serpents.

jason…

“so i’m guessing you read the paper this morning…and i’m guessing you’re not too happy about us sticking around-.” toni starts, and cheryl doesn’t even process her words as she slams her locker shut and glares at her.

“no, i’m not. is there something else i can help you with?” she says through bared teeth, and toni stares at her for a long moment.

“What, i can’t have a casual conversation with you?” she asks with a playful pout, and cheryl scoffs under her breath.

“no, you can’t. because you’re a southside serpent, t.t. and i don’t associate with the criminals who helped cover up my brother’s murder.” she hisses, and toni blinks once in surprise, all traces of
teasing gone.

“hey, whoa, cheryl, i had nothing to do with that-.”

“your leader did, so therefore you did. now do me a solid, and leave me the hell alone.” and with that, cheryl closes her locker door and walks away, heels clacking on the ground even louder than usual in her anger as toni watches her go with sadness.

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toni watches cheryl leave in anger, and she finds herself subconsciously pinching the skin on her forearm as she sighs loudly.

she’s such an idiot.

she just wanted to thank cheryl for not telling principal weatherbee about her using the showers, she wasn’t expecting cheryl to attack her like that…

but she doesn’t blame her. she doesn’t blame cheryl at all for her anger and hatred towards the serpents.

toni may not have been directly involved with f.p and joaquin covering up jason blossom’s murder, but she wore a serpent jacket on her back, had the serpent tattoo emblazoned on the side of her body proudly, had followed f.p’s orders when he was in charge…

she may as well have been a part of it.

cheryl blossom has every reason to hate her guts.

god, why didn’t she just stick to her original plan of not talking to or approaching cheryl at all? she’d been doing so well for the last two weeks-

“yo, tiny! you alright?” toni turns at the sound of sweet pea’s voice, and she simply smiles and nods
once before making her way over to him.

“yeah, i’m good.”

the rest of the day passes without incident, and toni doesn’t run into cheryl again at all. but she does see jughead jones leaving the school through the front door and jumping onto his bike, his serpent jacket fitting his shoulders perfectly as toni raises an eyebrow in confusion.

jughead had been officially welcomed into the serpents less than four days ago, after proving himself worthy by passing every single one of the initiation tasks, including the gauntlet, which he’s still sporting bruises and cuts from. so why was his first order of business as a southside serpent running away from the school without telling the rest of them what he was up to?

she finds out by the time the school bell rings signaling the end of the school day when she walks towards her bike, sweet pea and fangs by her side to find jughead driving toward and coming to a stop in front of them. he rips his helmet off and jumps off his bike, his walk filled with anger and his eyes swimming with rage as he looks at sweet pea, fangs and herself.

“hey, where’ve you been?” sweet pea asks, and jughead glares at him.

“i skipped last period to go see tall boy about getting my dad out of jail, and i saw ghoulies selling jingle jangle to some kid near the whyte wyrm.”

“what?” sweet pea hisses, and toni frowns.

“i thought they lost their supply of jingle jangle when mr. phillips got arrested?”

“looks like they found a way to make more. they’re on our turf, selling drugs to some kid from out of town! we can’t let them get away with this!” jughead growls, and sweet pea raises an eyebrow at him.

“alright, well…you’re a serpent now. what do you suggest we do?” he says gruffly, and jughead blinks once in surprise before his anger returns.
“i don’t know, but whatever it is, we have to prove to them that they can’t push us around! the southside belongs to the serpents, sweet pea, we can’t just let them sell drugs in our area!” he exclaims, and sweet pea frowns and exchanges a look with fangs before shrugging.

“fine. meet us at the wyrm tonight, toni’s working and tall boy will be there. we’ll figure out a way to stop the ghoulies from selling on our territory.” sweet pea claps a hand on jughead’s shoulder, giving it a squeeze as jughead swallows the lump in his throat and nods slowly, and toni sighs.

there goes any hope of having a quiet shift tonight…

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“then we walk into the gilded lily, and there’s gal, again!” nick st. clair’s voice is boisterous and loud, and cheryl hates it, but she can’t help but be intrigued by his story.

*the* gal gadot? as in wonder woman herself?

“gal?” archie asks in confusion, and cheryl glares at him.

“gadot. keep up, archie!” she says with a roll of her eyes, and archie shrugs as veronica sighs and hands him her glass.

“archiekins, a refill, s’il vous plait?” she says softly, and nick sits down next to cheryl with a sigh.

“Forget the teetotaling, let’s move to something with a little more kick.” he opens his jacket, exposing colored straws, and cheryl’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise.

she’d heard about this, some kind of substance in straws that all the southside high kids were using…

“is that-.”

“jingle jangle? why, yes it is. reggie here told me about some guys on the southside selling the stuff, and i figured why not make this night more memorable?” he stands up now, pulling out the straws
from his jacket pocket as he looks around at everyone.

“tasters? Who’s up first?” he shouts, and cheryl winces as archie looks up at nick with a frown.

“dude, we told you, we’re not doing-.”

“archie, don’t take this the wrong way but you’re an epic buzzkill!” nick says with a loud laugh, and he turns to veronica in an effort to placate her boyfriend.

“come on, v! like back in the day! aren’t you supposed to be showing me a good time per daddy’s orders?” he says with a grin, and cheryl watches as veronica looks at the others in hesitation before she smiles slyly.

“down, nicky. i’m just getting going. and now that you mention it, i in fact wouldn’t mind a little sugar to spice up this party.” she takes a straw from him, and archie looks at her in surprise as cheryl finds herself hiding a smile.

she always knew veronica lodge had a wild side…

“what? every other night it’s burgers and milkshakes, can’t we just cut loose and pretend we’re normal for once?” she says with a roll of her eyes, and cheryl grins and jumps up to take a straw from nick’s hand.

screw it.

“i’m in!”

“me too!” reggie says, winking at cheryl, who rolls her eyes at him before turning to the one person who’s making this party bearable for her.

“kevin?” she says with a sweet smile, and he grins and clinks his drink against hers before taking a straw from nick’s hand.
“pussycats? care to partake?” nick says, looking to josie, valerie and melody, all of whom nod once before taking straws from him.

“betty?” veronica says, turning to her blonde ponytailed best friend, and cheryl watches as betty shakes her head, her expression gaunt and almost exhausted.

“no, thanks.” she says softly, and veronica pouts.

“come on, it’ll be fun-.”

“i said no, v.” betty snarls, and cheryl looks at her in surprise.

something is definitely up with her cousin…

“okay, relax, betty…this is strictly voluntarily.” veronica says with a frown, and betty says nothing more, just looks at everyone as archie watches nick sit down beside veronica.

“perhaps we should decamp to the bedroom so as to not corrupt the country mice-.” nick starts, and cheryl watches as archie drains his drink and takes his spot back down next to veronica.

“you know what, I changed my mind. i’m in.” he grunts, and cheryl looks at kevin with a roll of her eyes.

men and their testosterone and jealousy…

“bravo, archie andrews! there’s that good strong riverdale stock i’ve been jonesing for!” nick says with a grin.

it takes absolutely no time at all for the effects of jingle jangle to kick in.

within minutes, cheryl feels a rush of energy hit her, her whole body vibrating on a completely different level as kevin looks at her with a wide grin.
“now this is exhilarating.” he breathes, and cheryl chuckles as nick turns up the music, kevin dancing beside her as she swings her hair back and forth before collapsing into kevin’s lap and looking up at him with a wide smile.

“so, kevin…now that your days frolicking in the woods are over, have you got your eye on any cute boys?” she breathes, and kevin chuckles and taps her nose with his finger.

“i don’t kiss and tell, cheryl blossom.” he slurs, and cheryl laughs loudly, gripping kevin’s shirt to pull herself back up as she bounces on the spot.

“come on, i’m so bored, we got invaded with all these southside high students and nothing interesting has happened.” she pouts, and reggie manages to pull himself away from josie for a second to grin at her.

“you want me to knock some southside serpent heads in to entertain you, cheryl? just say the word, baby!” he shouts, and cheryl rolls her eyes and waves at him dismissively.

“ugh, you’re just as boring as they are, reggie. i want gossip, so tell me, kevin…” she pleads, inching closer to him until he rolls his eyes and shrugs.

“there’s a boy from southside high who’s cute.” cheryl’s eyes widen.

“who?” she croaks out, and kevin smiles.

“his name is fangs, i think. he’s always hanging out with that really tall guy and the pink haired girl-.”

“toni.” cheryl whispers. kevin frowns.

“is that his name?” he asks, and cheryl shakes her head.

“no, the…the pink haired girl…her name is toni.” cheryl says more clearly, and kevin raises an
“and pray, tell, how you know that, miss blossom?” he teases, and cheryl chews on her bottom lip to stop herself from smiling.

“i’ve run into her a few times…” she says with a shrug, and kevin gives all of his attention to her now.

“you, talking with a southside serpent? now there’s something i thought i’d never hear…” he says in surprise, and cheryl rolls her eyes with a scoff.

“they’re trash, kevin. all of them. don’t think i’ve forgotten that f.p jones covered up my brother’s death, and his serpents helped.”

“well yeah, but your dad paid them to do that, cheryl.” kevin says softly, and cheryl glares at him, tears welling in her eyes as she swallows the lump in her throat.

he’s right…her father did pay f.p and the serpents to cover up jason’s death for him. to do his dirty work…

kevin clears his throat in an effort to change the subject.

“so, this toni girl…what’s she like?” cheryl hesitates, and is about to reply before something else catches her attention.

betty cooper standing and glaring at veronica with the fire of a thousand suns.

“yeah...i mean it’s all just recycled banter and plunging necklines and throwing shade to distract us all from the fact that there’s really nothing going on underneath.” she deadpans, looking around at all of them as cheryl and kevin turn to look at her in surprise.

“betty, what the hell are you saying--” archie starts, but betty cuts him off.
“what we’re all thinking! that the only reason veronica hangs out with us is circumstance!”

cheryl looks at veronica, sees her looking at betty as if she’s just been slapped in the face, and verbally, she has, as betty continues her onslaught.

“she’s not our friend! the minute someone from her trashy past shows up, she starts using us for drugs, or music, or distraction, and why should we be surprised? like father like daughter, right?” betty hisses, and cheryl hears kevin gasp beside her as veronica clenches her jaw.

“you better shut it down, betty-.”

“or what, veronica? you’ll have your dad put a hit on me? or maybe you’ll do it yourself…because you may have fooled all of them, but not me. try to reform all you want, but you’re a bad person, veronica. you’ll always be a bad person.” betty’s voice has dropped to a whisper, and veronica has tears in her eyes as she holds her head high and glares at betty with betrayal written all over her face.

“why don’t you just go then, if i’m such a monster?” she says simply, her voice shaking slightly as betty scoffs before she grabs her jacket and walks to the front door, leaving without a backward glance at any of them.

“cousin betty has lost her mind…” cheryl says under her breath, and kevin nods slowly, looking at her with shock still written all over his face.

cheryl’s not surprised. betty’s looked a little unhinged the last few days, ever since jughead started sporting a southside serpent jacket with multiple bruises and cuts all over his face. it wasn’t hard for cheryl to put two and two together and realize that jughead had joined his father’s gang.

she curls her lip in disgust at the thought as archie grips veronica’s hand.

“veronica-.”

“i’m fine! obviously she’s not!” she huffs, and she looks at archie before scoffing.

“what? you wanna go after her, be my guest, but i’ll be damned if i’m chasing betty down after
that…whatever it was. in fact, reggie, turn the music up, will you?"

"boy, i’ve already told you, getting your dad out of jail is gonna be a lot harder than you think without the blossom’s forgiveness."

toni sighs as tall boy looks at jughead with a scowl, and jughead’s face is scrunched up in anger as he slaps a hand on the table.

"you seriously think penelope and cheryl blossom will show any forgiveness to my father? you seriously think they’ll stand there and beg for leniency for him when he helped cover up jason’s death?" he hisses. sweet pea shrugs.

"he only did it cause clifford was paying him, man."

"it doesn’t matter! cheryl will never agree to doing that." jughead says through bared teeth, and toni shrugs.

"you never know…i think there’s a soft side to her.” jughead, sweet pea, fangs and tall boy all look up at her in amazement.

"i’m sorry, did you just say you think there’s a soft side to cheryl blossom?” jughead says, blinking rapidly in shock, and sweet pea scoffs and shakes his head.

"why, cause she helped you once? don’t be thick, toni, she’s a bitch, plain and simple."

"wait, cheryl helped you?” jughead is looking back and forth between sweet pea and toni in confusion, and toni rolls her eyes and shrugs.

"whatever, sweet pea’s probably right…forget i said anything.” jughead looks at her suspiciously, but tall boy sighs and runs a hand through his hair.
“look, kid, forget about your father for now. you want the ghoulies to stop selling on our territory, you gotta beat them at their own game.”

“okay…how do i do that?” jughead asks, and sweet pea scoffs.

“drag race.” he grunts, and jughead looks at him in shock.

“wait, like an actual drag race?”

“no, we mean dress up as a woman and lip sync for your life-yes, an actual drag race! you got a car?” fangs asks, and jughead says nothing for a few moments before he growls in frustration.

“no, i don’t have a car! where the hell am i supposed to get one?” he hisses, and toni shrugs.

“tall boy, you have an impala, don’t you?” tall boy’s head snaps to look at her with a scowl.

“hey, that impala ain’t going anywhere near you kids.”

“oh come on, tall boy, you never drive it, anyway. besides, you want jingle jangle off the streets just as much as we do.” fangs says, clapping tall boy’s shoulder with a grin.

“i never said nothing about taking jingle jangle off the streets, boy! but i don’t want the ghoulies to be selling it, the money they’ve been getting from it should be ours.” he growls, and jughead frowns.

“What, you think the serpents should get in on the jingle jangle business?” he asks, and tall boy nods once.

“It’s good money, kid.”

“It’s stupid money! we can’t afford any other serpents getting arrested! we need to pull ourselves out of the drug dealing business altogether!” jughead exclaims, and sweet pea laughs.
“and if we do that, how are we supposed to make our money, jughead?” he asks in disbelief, still laughing as jughead licks his lips in hesitation.

“some other way that doesn’t involve us going to jail!”

“Oh come on, juggie, we’re in a gang, either way, the police are constantly on our asses.” Toni says with a roll of her eyes. Jughead runs his hands through his hair before shoving his beanie back on.

“Look, let’s just deal with one problem at a time. We challenge the ghoulies tomorrow to a street race. If they win, they get to keep selling jingle jangle on the southside, and if we win, they have to stop selling jingle jangle on our territory. Sound good?”

“Malachai’s gonna ask for more than that, jughead.” Fangs warns, and Jughead nods slowly.

“We’ll sort something out, something that makes him happy.”

“Yeah, you better make sure you win it then, jughead, because Malachai’s probably gonna ask for everything. He’ll want territory over the whole southside.”

“He won’t get it.” Jughead hisses, and Tall Boy sighs and leans back in his chair, observing Jughead for a few moments before he nods.

“Fine, take my damn impala. But you better win this race, kid. It’s not only the serpents territory on the line, it’s their future, too. You win this race, you finally prove to us all you deserve to wear that jacket on your shoulders. You don’t…consider yourself unworthy of ever donning the snake skin of a southside serpent again.”
cheryl’s still buzzing with energy by saturday afternoon, and kevin sits opposite her at a booth at pop’s diner, his body still vibrating with the same energy as she drinks from her milkshake with a grin.

“so…i heard you and the rest of the geek squad got drilled this morning by mayor mccoy and your dad?” she says, trying her best to hide a smile as kevin glares up at her.

“pretty much. mayor mccoy looked like she was ready to murder josie. we’re all stuck doing community service and we had to pay a five hundred dollar fine…it was a nightmare. i’m just glad it’s over.”

“mmm, thank god mommy’s out of town getting injections to fix her burns, i so don’t want to deal with her finding out about last night.” cheryl says with a roll of her eyes, and kevin grins sarcastically.

“lucky you.” he says, grabbing a fry and shoving it into his mouth.

“was cousin betty as crazy as she was last night?” cheryl asks, and kevin’s eyes widen.

“she was relatively tame, but i still wanna know what the hell that was about last night. she exploded
at veronica for no reason.”

“perhaps she’s losing her mind a little over her beau joining the serpents.” cheryl says with a shrug, and kevin’s about to reply when the sound of the bell above the door of pop’s diner ringing echoes, and cheryl watches as kevin’s eyes widen and he nods toward the entrance.

“speak of the devil...” he murmurs, and cheryl turns so quickly, she gets severe whiplash up her neck as she looks to the entrance to see toni topaz, that sweet pea boy, the one cheryl figures must be fangs from the way kevin is oogling at him, and jughead jones walk in, all of them talking under their breaths as they find a booth and sit down, their southside serpent jackets on full display on their backs.

“ugh, great, now they’ve invaded pop’s?” she hisses, and kevin chuckles under his breath.

“i may have been looped out on drugs, but i remember our conversation about a certain pink haired serpent, cheryl.” he teases, and she glares at him, trying her best to ignore the red heat that floods her cheeks before grabbing the cherry on the top of her milkshake and ripping off the red ball from it’s stem with her teeth angrily.

she turns back to look at the serpents, and finds toni topaz’s eyes on her, a small smile on her face as she meets cheryl’s eyes, and cheryl's heart starts racing at the sight.

when did she become such a flustered mess over a serpent girl?

she jumps up suddenly and heads to the counter of pop’s.

“i’m getting a drink.” she announces for no particular reason, and kevin cocks an eyebrow at her, but says nothing as she stomps her way to the counter and comes face to face with pop tate himself.

"can i get you something else, miss blossom?"

"a cherry cola, please, pop." she drawls, and he smiles, giving her a small wink and a nod.

"right you are, miss blossom." she taps her nails on the counter top impatiently as pop tate heads to
the refreshments, and she's trying her absolute best to ignore the serpents, but it's hard to when jughead is just so loud.

“...we head down to herk harvey bridge. if they win, the ghoulies get the wyrm, sunnyside trailer park and territory over the southside, and if we win, they have to stop selling jingle jangle across ALL of riverdale, not just the southside.”

“man, this was a mistake. you put the trailer park in the deal, too? are you forgetting that we all live there, jones? you put our homes on the line!” sweet pea growls, his voice practically echoing throughout the entire diner, and cheryl's starting to wonder if there's a single serpent that exists who isn't loud and demanding when cheryl hears the sound of toni’s voice.

“hey, jughead’s got this. right?” she says, voice soft and gentle, and cheryl turns to see jughead looking like he’s on the verge of collapsing, his face a delicate shade of green as he nods once.

what shenanigans have these snakes gotten themselves into now?

toni meets her gaze, and she quickly turns back around, her nails tapping on the counter at a more rapid pace now as she chews on her cherry red bottom lip instinctively.

“excuse me…” she hears the sound of someone sliding out of a booth before boots are echoing on the ground, and she looks up just as toni topaz makes her way to her, a smirk on her face as she rests an elbow on the counter and faces cheryl.

“i thought i asked you to leave me alone?” cheryl deadpans, not even bothering a glance at her, and toni raises her hands in surrender.

“hey, i just wanna order some grub, you just happen to be here.” she says simply, and cheryl frowns, an insult on the tip of her tongue about how she's surprised toni can even afford a meal at pop's when something tugs in the back of her mind.

something that tells her that might be true, and it's not exactly nice to prey on something toni can't control.

...since when did cheryl give a damn about someone's feelings?
"here you are, miss blossom." pop tate places her cup on the counter, and cheryl hands him three one dollar bills before taking it, wrapping her lips around the straw to take a sip as toni watches her with a raised eyebrow.

"well, aren't you going to order?" cheryl says with a roll of her eyes, and toni chuckles before turning to pop tate, but before she can say anything to him, the front door to pop’s swings open, dragging both their attention to it as veronica lodge walks through, her eyes landing on toni in front of her with a wide grin.

“just the serpent i’ve been looking for!” cheryl looks at her in confusion.

"and why, pray tell, would you be seeking the company of a snake, veronica?" cheryl demands, and veronica rolls her eyes as toni looks to the raven haired girl with a frown.

"actually, cheryl, it's for business. i was wondering, or more, my father was wondering, if you and the others would be interested in earning a little extra cash?" veronica says to toni with a raised eyebrow, and toni blinks once in surprise before sweet pea suddenly scoffs loudly from the booth the serpents are sitting at. he looks veronica up and down once before he suddenly waves her off dismissively.

“take a hike, toots. not interested.” he says gruffly, and veronica turns to look at him as if she didn’t even realize he was there (which she probably didn’t), her grin fading as she opens her mouth to spit what cheryl is sure is pure venom at him when toni reaches out and grips veronica’s forearm.

“hey, sweet pea doesn’t talk for all of us. what did you have in mind?” toni asks eagerly. cheryl raises an eyebrow, and toni shrugs at her.

“i need all the help i can get on the money front.” she mutters, and cheryl frowns.

so she was right...god, what was her uncle doing to her that toni would accept a job from a bigger snake than the ones she hangs around with?
“i need some bodyguards for my father’s gala opening tomorrow on the sodale property, you know, where the twilight drive in was? he’s asked me to ask if any of the serpents would be down for making sure no chaos occurs.” veronica says brightly, and toni mulls her words over for barely a few seconds before she's pursing her lips and nodding.

“tell him he’s got one serpent there.” toni says with a salute, and she looks to the other serpents, all of whom avoid her gaze except for fangs, who looks at her with a frown.

"tiny..."

come on, you're really gonna let me go to some rich people party by myself?" toni says with a pout, and fangs looks at her with a raised eyebrow before he sighs and raises his hand.

“yeah, count me in.” veronica claps her hands excitedly, but it's short lived as sweet pea shakes his head and clenches his jaw before nodding at toni and fangs.

“we've been on the northside for two weeks and you guys are already taking jobs from them? screw you both, i’m not working for northside trash. ever. sorry, sweetheart.” sweet pea says to veronica with an air of sarcasm, and cheryl glares at him angrily.

northside trash?

who the hell does he think he is?

she’s about to say something, so tell him that she doesn’t much prefer southside scum taking over her side of town when veronica beats her to the punch with a simple shrug.

“your loss, gigantor. it’s a big payday, jughead?” veronica turns her attention to the beanie wearing fiend, who looks even more green now as he licks his lips and swallows loudly before looking at her.

“uh, i’ll get back to you on that, veronica.” he says with a firm nod, and toni chuckles as sweet pea laughs loudly and reaches across the booth to clap his shoulder.

“yeah, he might be too busy getting his ass kicked by us if he loses today.” sweet pea says with a
grin, and fangs roars with laughter. veronica frowns in confusion, but kevin, who clearly is feeling a little left out, slides out of the booth he and cheryl were at, dropping a ten dollar bill on the table to pay for their milkshakes and fries before making his way over to them.

“uh, what’s going on?” kevin asks, making his way over to them with a smile, and cheryl watches as his eyes land on fangs, a scoff escaping her before she can stop it.

“these hooligans are planning something, god only knows what, and veronica just hired them for the sodale gala tomorrow.” cheryl says with a roll of her eyes, and veronica smiles as kevin’s eyes widen.

“oh, right! so you guys are gonna be there?” he asks, looking to the serpents, and toni shrugs.

“fangs and i will be, anyway.” kevin’s eyes light up even more, and cheryl really wishes he’d be a little less transparent as jughead sighs and stands up from his booth.

“look, this has been great, but we need to get going, we don’t want to be late for the drag race-.” jughead starts.

“ooh, a drag race? count me in, where are we going?” veronica says, clasping her hands and looking at him with excitement, and jughead glares at her before shaking his head as fangs stands up to allow him to pass.

“no way, veronica. you’re not coming.”

“don’t be a buzzkill, juggie!” she exclaims sadly, and cheryl crosses her arms over her chest, her gaze only on sweet pea.

“a drag race? of course, shouldn’t have expected anything less from you serpents.” she hisses, and sweet pea glares at her, burying his knuckles into the table to stand as he slides out of the booth as well.

“can it, blossom. you’re not part of this. either of you. serpent business only.” sweet pea growls, looking to veronica as well, and before cheryl can say anything else, they’re moving past cheryl, veronica and kevin, jughead throwing open the door to pop’s to leave as toni sighs and shakes her head.
"am i ever gonna be allowed to have a peaceful meal here?" she grumbles under her breath, and she looks to veronica, cheryl and kevin before giving them a simple salute and following the boys out of the diner. it's silent for a few moments, and cheryl looks to veronica, can practically see the cogs turning in her mind as she reaches out to grip the raven haired girl's forearm.

"veronica, don't." she says simply, and veronica bites down on her bottom lip before she grins at cheryl apologetically.

“sorry, cheryl, but i can’t miss this.”

and with that, veronica dashes out of the diner, running straight for her car and jumping inside it as kevin looks at cheryl with guilt as well.

“kevin-.”

“sorry, cheryl!!” and he’s running out of the door after veronica, and cheryl watches as toni looks at them in surprise before she looks back into the diner, presumably wondering where cheryl is, and cheryl bites down on her cherry red bottom lip, still clutching her soda before she growls under her breath and drops it down on the counter before stomping her way outside.

screw it. she still has jingle jangle in her system, she can always write off this crazy behavior as that.

veronica cheers as cheryl comes to a stop at her car, throwing open the back door and sliding into the backseat as she glares at her.

“let it be known i’m only doing this because i’m bored and still buzzing from jingle jangle!” she says, tossing her hair over her shoulder, and veronica grins at her.

"live a little, cheryl bombshell." she teases.

“hey!” they turn to see toni looking at them as she swings a leg over her bike.
"you guys don’t know what you’re getting yourselves into!" she yells at them as she grabs her helmet from the handle of her bike, and veronica pokes her head out of her open window with a grin.

“probably not, but we’re still high on jingle jangle, so who cares?” she yells back, and toni raises an eyebrow at them.

“you guys took jingle jangle?” she says in surprise, and cheryl rolls her eyes.

“it’s a long story, t.t. just lead the way!” she says with a dismissive wave of her hand, and toni shakes her head with a chuckle as she shoves her helmet on before turning the ignition on her bike and kick starting it, the fumes exiting from the exhaust of her bike curling into the air as the rumbling sound echoes around them.

"god, their bikes are so loud." kevin says in awe, and cheryl rolls her eyes at him as veronica starts her car and peels out of the parking lot to follow the serpents, and cheryl’s eyes stay on the pink hair that trails down the back of a southside serpent jacket ahead of them.

cheryl can’t believe she’s actually choosing to spend her saturday afternoon in the presence of serpents, but she wasn’t about to be left alone at pop’s diner while veronica and kevin went off on this adventure.

besides, she’d be lying if she said she wasn’t a little intrigued by the idea of a drag race…

riverdale may not be los angeles, but the prospect of living out a fast and furious moment is definitely enticing.

the drive is relatively short, stopping at herk harvey bridge just a few miles from the border between the southside and northside, as cheryl curls her lip in disgust at the sight ahead of her.

a gaggle of what looks like southside serpents and another gang of leather clad rebels which cheryl can only assume is ghoulies, going off what jughead had said, all jumping and cheering and screaming insults at each other like a bunch of five year olds.

and cheryl feels her heart race a little too fast at the idea that she’s getting in the middle of all of this. toni was right, they had no idea what they were getting themselves into. but there's no turning back now.
there’s two cars standing at a stop sign on the road, an elderly looking man with long hair and a serpent jacket standing beside a black impala, and he looks up at the sound of motorbikes, his eyes landing on the four serpents who come to a stop in front of them. cheryl watches as toni swings her leg off her bike and rips her helmet off before hanging it on the handle.

"should we stick by the car?" veronica asks, and kevin swallows the lump in his throat.

"i think that's a smart idea, yeah." he says sheepishly.

“about time, serpent!” cheryl has barely gotten out of veronica’s car before she looks ahead to see a guy with curly black hair from what cheryl assumes is the ghoulies side make his way over to the four serpents, a sadistic grin on his face as his eyes land on jughead.

"i told you i'd be here." jughead says simply, and before the guy can say anything else, jughead turns his back on him and talks to the man beside the impala, reaching out a hand to grip his tightly as they engage in conversation.

“hey, toni! good seeing you again, sweetheart!” the guy says now to the pink haired serpent, all his attention now on her, and cheryl makes a noise of disgust as he bites at toni, teeth snapping together harshly. toni glares at him before giving him the middle finger.

“in your dreams, malachai.” she hisses, and he howls in amusement before grabbing his crotch vulgarly, his eyes still on toni.

“what, am i missing a certain body part that you like, topaz?”

“you mean your balls? yeah, you’re definitely missing those, dumbass!” cheryl can’t help but grin at that.

toni topaz definitely has some sass that she can’t help but appreciate.

“don’t worry, keep talking, toni! you’ll get what’s coming to you!” one of the guy ghoulies behind this malachai guy yells, and cheryl watches as toni’s fist clenches before she’s glaring back at them with bared teeth.
“is that a threat?” she growls, stomping forward, and cheryl tenses before sweet pea easily and swiftly grabs toni around the waist and swings her back around and away from them.

“don’t let it get to you, tiny. we’ll kick their ass in this race as payback.” he says simply, glaring at malachai and his ghoulies as toni huffs before she looks at jughead angrily.

“i swear to god if you don’t win this, jughead…” toni growls under her breath, and he swallows the lump in his throat, his face turning impossible greener.

“i’ve got this.” he says firmly.

“should you maybe call betty?” kevin asks veronica, and veronica scoffs and shakes her head as she jumps onto the hood of her car.

“why? if jughead isn’t concerned with her knowing then we shouldn’t be. i still haven’t exactly forgiven her for last night, either.”

“besides, cousin betty is clearly in the middle of a breakdown, it’s probably best she isn’t aware that her serpent boyfriend is engaging in an illegal street race.” cheryl drawls, taking a seat beside veronica, who grins at her.

"i love that you call her ‘cousin betty’." cheryl rolls her eyes, but is distracted when toni makes her way over to them with a frown.

“you guys really shouldn’t have come.” she says simply, and veronica shrugs.

“drag races are exciting, toni topaz!” she cheers, and toni rolls her eyes before she takes a stand beside the car right next to kevin. jughead finally pulls away from the elderly man with the long hair and makes his way over to the man named malachai.

cheryl’s eyes are on jughead and malachai, but her ears are focused on the conversation happening beside her.
“so we’ve never officially met, i’m kevin keller.” kevin says, extending his hand, and toni chuckles.

“i know, sheriff’s boy. i’m toni topaz.”

“is that guy like your ex-boyfriend or something?” kevin asks, nodding toward malachai, and toni barks with laughter.

“god, no. he wishes. serpents and ghoulies definitely don’t mix, and he’s definitely not my type of guy. besides…i’m more into girls, anyways.” toni says with a smirk.

cheryl feels her heart pounding against her chest painfully as those words reverberate in her brain.

“besides…i’m more into girls, anyways.”

toni…toni topaz likes girls?

“these are deviant thoughts, cheryl!”

“roger that, toni topaz.” kevin says with a laugh, pulling cheryl out of her thoughts, and she chances a glance beside her to see kevin watching her with a sheepish grin as she licks her lips and turns her attention back to the race.

“alright, you ready?” the elderly man yells, clapping jughead’s shoulder, and malachai makes his way over to jughead, extending his hand as he does, which jughead takes with a clenched jaw.

“i win, the southside is ours, including the wyrm and sunnyside trailer park.” malachai says.

“done. we win, you stop dealing jingle jangle in riverdale, permanently. and the southside, including the wyrm and sunnyside trailer park, are completely off limits to all ghoulies.” jughead says firmly, and malachai grins at him.

“you got yourself a deal, kid. over herk harvey bridge, around dead man’s curve. first one back wins.” jughead nods, and malachai howls, the ghoulies following suite as he walks to his car and
throws open the door.

"they're ready, tall boy!" sweet pea yells to the elderly man, and the man named tall boy nods once.

“let’s do it!” tall boy yells, and the ghoulies and serpents cheer once again as both jughead and malachai turns their engines on, malachai revving his engine threateningly and looking at jughead with a laugh.

jughead's gripping the steering wheel like it holds his life in its hands, and technically it does, as toni suddenly begins walking toward the cars.

“uh, what is she doing?” cheryl asks, leaning forward and sliding down the bonnet of veronica’s car, and fangs and sweet pea, who are standing next to tall boy by their bikes, turn to look at her.

“toni’s the flag girl.” sweet pea says gruffly with a shr, and cheryl cocks an eyebrow.

“not on my watch.”

how can she pass up this kind of opportunity?

she jumps off veronica's car and makes her way over to where toni is standing, her hand gripping the red scarf around her neck as toni looks her up and down with a look of confusion.

“uh, i usually do the honors.” toni says, and cheryl notices how toni’s eyes roam over her body as she grins and shrugs, walking backwards through the cars to get to the front of them as she looks at toni.

“not today, cha cha. I was born for this moment!” she says cheerily, and toni scoffs in disbelief, watching her with a small smirk on her face as she walks to the front of the two cars, red scarf in one hand and sunglasses in the other.

“engines warm and ready, gentlemen?” she calls out, her heart racing as she watches jughead simply nod at her. malachai looks her up and down in appreciation before she looks back at toni, who’s now standing beside sweet pea with her arms crossed over her chest in annoyance.
cheryl grins as she places her sunglasses back over her eyes and lifts her arms up high, red scarf clutched in her right hand.

oh, she could get used to this.

the engines roar to life, and she pauses for dramatic flare before she throws her arms down and jughead and malachai take off.

the heat of the cars passing her causes a shiver to run up her spine, and the ghoulies are cheering loudly, chasing after the cars as the serpents do the same, their rivalry forgotten in the heat of excitement and adrenaline. cheryl stands there, watching the cars disappear into the distance before she turns slowly and makes her way back to where veronica and kevin are still seated on top of veronica's car, passing toni as she does.

“sorry for stealing your moment, t.t.” she says simply as she walks past the pink haired serpent, and she watches as toni smirks.

“no, you’re not.” she deadpans, and cheryl grins over her shoulder at her.

“no, i’m not.”

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toni’s pretty sure she’s never been more bored before in her life.

her and fangs look completely out of place in their leather jackets and normal clothing, all the fancy attire of the rich and elite around them making them uncomfortable as fangs gazes at a man wearing a suit that actually sparkles.

“want to bet that suit cost more than your bike?” he murmurs under his breath, and toni sighs and keeps her eyes peeled for any sign of trouble.
god, how she wishes she was still at the wyrm with sweet pea, jughead, tall boy and the other serpents celebrating jughead’s win yesterday.

he’d won clean, and the ghoulies, despite all their anger, had agreed to his conditions. jingle jangle was no longer going to be sold within the town of riverdale.

at least not by the ghoulies.

tall boy had gone on a tangent about how they should take over selling the drug, and he’d made some valid points that had a few of the serpents nodding before jughead had counteracted with the threat of jail time for all of them if they got caught.

that’s one argument toni’s thankful she’s missing out on.

the gala is being held within white tents that look like they cost more than the entirety of sunnyside trailer park, and toni can’t help the wave of nostalgia that floods her, being in the area that used to be the twilight drive in. she misses it, the movie nights with sweet pea and fangs and the other serpents. now it was all gone, replaced with these fancy tents and rich assholes who stare at fangs and toni as if they’re somehow the odd ones out.

this is the southside. if anyone shouldn’t be here, it’s these rich scumbags turning their noses up at them...

she sees veronica across the room, has a maddening urge to slap her for making them do this when she remembers that her father had promised them a thousand dollars each by the end of the night.

she wonders what that feels like, being so rich that paying two sixteen year old kids a grand each just for keeping watch over an event isn’t a big deal.

but she’s thankful, regardless. her clothes are starting to get loose on her now that her meals have decreased dramatically thanks to her uncle taking all her goddamn money, and a secret stash of a thousand dollars will do her wonders right now.

but she’s starting to wonder if this was all worth it.
it doesn’t help that mayor mccoy has been giving them filthy looks the entire day, and toni is begging for this event to speed along so she can get the hell out of here and go back to the wyrm, back to the people she cares about.

"this feels wrong...i feel like we're betraying the southside." fangs says anxiously, and toni sighs with a nod.

"i know, me too. but think of the money, fangs."

“it’s the only thing keeping me going right now, tiny.” he whispers back, and toni finds herself smirking.

“well, that, and how dashing kevin keller looks in his suit.” toni teases, nodding toward where kevin is standing with josie and the pussycats, his eyes moving to where toni and fangs are standing every so often.

toni doesn’t miss the blush that creeps onto fangs’s cheeks, and she chuckles, looking up just as veronica makes her way over to them with a grin plastered on her face.

“i know this isn’t as invigorating as drag races and gang activity, but i hope you guys are enjoying yourselves.” she says, and toni rolls her eyes.

“if we tell you we are, would you know we’re lying?” fangs says with a raised eyebrow, and veronica chuckles.

“touche. still, thank you for doing this for us. my father just needed a little extra security after a few of his own guys pulled out yesterday. something about a stomach bug.” she says with a frown.

“it’s fine, veronica. i mean, we definitely feel out of place, but…it’s fine.” toni reassures her, and veronica gives her shoulder a gentle squeeze before she looks behind toni, and whatever she sees causes the smile to get wiped right off her face.

“uh, excuse me…” she whispers, and toni watches her make her way toward some young man with dark curly hair atop his head and piercing green eyes across the tent at the refreshments table.
“that’s not archie andrews.” fangs says, and toni looks at him in confusion.

“huh?” toni asks, and fangs shrugs.

“she’s dating archie andrews, and that’s not him.”

how the hell-

“how is it you know all the gossip in riverdale high already?” toni asks with a groan, and fangs grins.

“when you keep your head down, you learn a lot, tiny.”

“you’re incessantly annoying.”

“and you’re short.”

“ow, you wound me.” she deadpans, and fangs is about to reply when toni’s eyes move behind him, and whatever is coming out of fangs’s mouth is drowned out by the vision in front of her, the vision that has her heart pounding and her eyes widening.

cheryl blossom makes her way through the tent in a black dress fitted beautifully to her body, her red hair curled to perfection and her lips covered in cherry red lipstick as she makes eye contact with toni, a small smile lighting her face.

toni blinks rapidly, can feel the blush creeping onto her cheeks, and she kind of feels stupid for teasing fangs about kevin now.

she’s…wow.

breathtaking? most definitely. stunning? of course.
beautiful? god, yes…

toni’s about to step forward, but her legs feel a little like jelly, and she’s not exactly sure it would be a good idea to approach cheryl amongst this kind of crowd when the redhead’s gaze suddenly moves from the pink haired serpent to behind her, anyway, something distracting her from toni.

toni follows her gaze to see her looking toward veronica and the boy she’s talking to, the boy’s eyes moving up from veronica to meet the redhead’s, and toni’s eyes move back and forth between the two as cheryl raises her hand and waves at the boy with a flirtatious smile. the boy grins before touching veronica’s shoulder to excuse himself as he makes his way over to them.

and he barges right into toni without a care as he walks past her, knocking her forward a few steps as she catches her footing and glares at him.

“hey, watch it!” she growls, staring daggers into the back of his head, but he ignores her, coming to a stop in front of cheryl as she looks at him shyly, teeth capturing her cherry lipstick covered bottom lip as she does.

toni finds her nails digging into her palm, and she turns away from them to look at fangs, who’s watching her with a raised eyebrow and a smirk.

“You back on earth?” he teases.

“What?” she snaps, and fangs chuckles and shakes his head.

“cheryl blossom walks into a room and you lose all sense of where and who you are. you’ve got it bad, tiny.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” toni says with a roll of her eyes, and fangs sighs and grips her shoulder.

“We’re southside scum, toni, remember? she hates us, all of the northsiders do…” he says softly, and toni bites down on her bottom lip, part of her wanting to ignore fangs’s words despite the truth behind them when hiram lodge is suddenly tapping his glass with his spoon in order to call attention to himself for an announcement.
“Ladies and gentlemen! a new story begins in riverdale tonight! a story about reinvention and aspiration! this building will be the first chapter of that story. luxury apartments, shopping…and even a golf course.” toni frowns at that, and looks to fangs, who looks up at hiram in surprise.

“the southside as we know it will be gone replaced with a new eden.” toni’s heart drops.

what is he talking about?

she feels fangs grip her wrist, and she looks up at him in confusion before turning back to look at hiram. he’s staring right at them, a small smile on his face before he raises the glass of champagne in his hands.

“so let’s raise our glasses to a brighter tomorrow!” everyone in the tent raises their glasses with a cheer, but toni and fangs are frozen in anger.

what the actual fuck?

toni had heard rumors that hiram lodge was looking to buy southside high once it was torn down to build a housing estate, but he’s talking about shopping centers and golf courses?

what is he trying to do, turn the southside into a tourist attraction?

“today, let’s celebrate with a little music!” he says, pointing toward the stage where veronica is standing with josie and the pussycats, who immediately begin belting out a tune, but toni can’t find it in her to care as she looks at fangs in disbelief.

“what the hell? hiram’s gonna completely destroy the southside for his own gain? what about us? what about the trailer park, and the wyrm?” toni hisses under her breath at fangs, who’s eyes are wide with worry as he shakes his head.

“toni, if he buys the whole of southside, we can’t do anything to stop him. shit, we gotta tell tall boy about this. we gotta tell f.p.-.”
“what the hell can f.p do behind bars, fangs? shit, this is bad, we’re getting attacked without a leader, we can’t win this…” toni says anxiously, her heart pounding against her chest as fangs lets out a deep exhale and runs his hands through his hair.

“guess it’s a good thing we took this job after all, at least now we're forewarned.” fangs whispers, and toni looks up at hiram, who's still watching them with that annoying smile on his face as it slowly dawns on her what this all means.

"something tells me he wanted us here for a reason." toni says in a low voice.

he wanted them here for this very reason. his security didn't pull out because of stomach bugs, like veronica had said...

"what are you saying?" fangs asks in confusion, and toni clenches her jaw.

"it's a warning, fangs. a warning to the serpents that if we get in his way, he's gonna cut us down. that's why we're here. to deliver the message." toni says through bared teeth, and fangs looks at her in surprise as toni finally tears her gaze away from hiram with a scoff of disbelief, her eyes roaming the dancefloor subconsciously before they land on something that catches her attention.

cheryl’s dancing with that boy with the curly hair, but something’s…off.

she’s stumbling, her eyelids fluttering as she falls into his arms, and he whispers something into her ear before he wraps an arm around her waist and begins dragging her away from the tents, away from the party to god knows where…

and cheryl can barely move on her own, her feet almost giving way under her as this boy carries her off.

toni's heart is pounding in her ears now, all thoughts of the serpents and hiram forgotten.

“fangs…trouble.” she whispers, tapping his chest and pointing to where cheryl and that boy have just disappeared, and fangs looks to where she's pointing with a frown that quickly turns into shock as he looks down at toni in surprise.
"what the hell? where is he taking her?"

"i don't know..." toni bites down on her bottom lip, and fangs looks up at veronica and the pussycats performing.

“everyone’s distracted, we can get to them-.”

“not everyone.” toni mutters, her eyes on veronica, who’s watching the spot where cheryl had disappeared with a look of concern as she continues singing as best she can.

“should we go after them?” fangs asks, and toni hesitates, chewing on her bottom lip.

it might be nothing…it’s possible cheryl was having a strange reaction from the jingle jangle she’d supposedly taken. toni had heard that the drug stays in your system for three days, it’s possible she was just crashing from the high…

but toni can’t help the feeling that something bad is going to happen if she doesn't intervene right now.

and toni’s always been one to follow her instincts.

“let’s go.” toni murmurs, and her and fangs follow after them, toni keeping her eyes peeled for a sign of bright red hair as they make their way to what used to be the parking lot of the twilight drive in, now a simple asphalt road with lines for designated parking.

“toni!” fangs grips her arm and points ahead suddenly, and toni’s eyes follow the direction he’s pointing in.

nick is jumping into the driver’s seat of a black suv, a smirk on his face as toni’s eyes land on cheryl in the passenger seat.

she looks unconscious, and toni’s heart falls.
“fangs-.” nick takes off, his tires screeching on the ground in his haste, and fangs growls under his breath, his legs on the verge of running after them before he stops.

“i know, i saw! we can’t just follow them, though, toni! the guy’s loaded and we’re gang members, we’ll get slaughtered in court for stalking or…whatever!” fangs says, looking around desperately, and toni watches as the car turns the corner at the end of the parking lot and disappears.

“fangs, we can’t just let him get away!” she cries, and she’s about to chase after the car, perfectly content to keeping running until the soles of her feet are raw and bloody as long as it means she gets to cheryl when fangs grips her hand and pulls her back.

“come on, i’ll drive us!” he yells, dragging her toward his bike-

“wait!” they both turn at the sound of an echoing voice to see veronica and the pussycats rushing toward them, all of them stumbling slightly in their heels as veronica comes to a stop in front of toni and fangs breathlessly.

“did you see where nick took cheryl?” she pants out.

“i don’t know, they got into a car and took off!” toni exclaims, and veronica catches her breath as she nods once.

“he probably took her back to his hotel room at the five seasons, we have to stop him!”

“is he capable of what i think he’s capable of?” fangs asks veronica anxiously, and when veronica hesitates in answering, toni glares at her.

“cheryl was unconscious in that car, veronica!” toni growls, stepping toward her threateningly, and veronica clenches her jaw, but stands her ground.

“i know, i saw her swaying, and i knew something was wrong-..”
“then why didn’t you stop him earlier?!” toni screams in her face, and veronica flinches, glares back at toni just as angrily.

“you think i wanted this to happen?! look the more time we waste, the further away he gets, let’s just go!” she yells, and toni has half a mind to punch her in the face when josie suddenly runs past them.

“we’ll take the van! come on!” josie says, waving them toward the end of the parking lot, where a grey van stands parked, and toni doesn’t hesitate, rushing toward the sliding door to rip it open as soon as valerie unlocks the car and jumps into the driver’s seat.

“watch the equipment!” josie says from the passenger seat, and toni rolls her eyes, but moves the guitar and speaker in her way carefully as she sits down, the others piling into the back as well before valerie takes off as quickly as she can.

“do you think he slipped something into her drink?” fangs asks, gripping the wall of the van to steady himself as valerie drives like a mad woman on a mission, and toni runs her fingers through her hair.

“i don’t know, i took my eyes off them for one second-.”

“hey, you can’t blame yourself, toni. who is this piece of shit, anyway?” fangs growls at veronica, who hesitates before she sighs.

“his name is nick st. clair, he’s from new york. his family’s loaded, my dad was hoping to sway his parents into investing into the sodale project.”

“a project, by the way, which involves turning the southside into a goddamn tourist attraction! what happens to all of us when your dad takes over the whole southside, veronica?” fangs hisses.

“what? no, fangs, he’s not gonna kick you guys out-.”

“how can you be so sure, veronica? you think him hiring us for this event was coincidence? he’s warning us, warning the serpents that if we get in his way, he’ll strike us down!” fangs yells, and toni feels bile rise in the back of her throat as she grips fangs’s hand to stop him.
“fangs, not now, okay? can we focus on getting to cheryl and stopping that asshole from hurting her?” fangs clenches his jaw, his glare still laser focused on veronica, but he settles back into his seat as toni looks at veronica as well, a look of guilt and apprehension on her face as she ponders fangs’s words.

the rest of the ride is silent, toni’s anxiety only growing until valerie finally comes to a stop in front of the five seasons, the car jolting as she pulls the handbrake up.

“can you park here?” melody asks, and toni growls.

“who cares, let’s go!” she shouts, and toni doesn’t hesitate, rips the door open and jumps out before running through the entrance with fangs hot on her heels.

The second they enter the hotel lobby, toni looks around in desperation, ignoring fangs’s whistle of appreciation as he sighs.

“we could never afford a place like this—”

“shut up! what room are they in?” toni asks veronica desperately, and veronica jumps ahead of them, rushing up the hotel lobby stairs that lead to the elevators.

“third floor! follow me!” toni, fangs, josie, valerie and melody all rush after veronica, paying no attention to the other people inside the hotel who look at them in confusion, perhaps wondering what two leather clad gang members, and four girls with cat ears are doing running around like crazy people as veronica slams her finger against the elevator button, the doors opening with a ding. they rush inside, veronica punching the button with the number three on it desperately as the doors close, and toni bounces on the balls of her feet with fury.

when she gets her hands on this nick kid…

“toni, i know what you’re thinking, but don’t rush into this, nick is loaded and the last thing you want is to get slapped with an assault charge.” veronica says firmly, and toni glares at her.

“if he hurts cheryl, he better pray an assault charge is all he has to deal with.” she snarls, and fangs
cracks his knuckles beside her as the doors open and toni rushes out of them. veronica sighs, but leads the way, tearing down the hallway before she stops in front of a room with the number ‘three hundred and twenty five’ on it.

she pushes the handle down, watches as a red light flashes and her eyes widen.

“shit, it’s keycode activated!” veronica cries, pushing herself against the door as best she can, and fangs grabs her shoulder and pulls her back.

“watch out.” toni looks at him anxiously, and he frowns, but extends his hand to make sure all the girls are out of harm’s way before he kicks his leg out with a shout.

the door breaks open immediately, wood splintering everywhere as veronica gasps in surprise, and toni rushes into the room-

“cheryl?!” she shouts, running down the entrance and through the living room before turning right where there’s a bed-

and cheryl is passed out on top of it, nick crawling over her with sadistic grin on his face, his hand moving up her exposed alabaster thigh-

“GET OFF HER YOU SON OF A BITCH!” toni runs forward just as nick looks up at her in surprise, and she grabs a fistful of nick’s hair and drags him off cheryl, pushing him back before her fist strikes out and makes impact with his face.

her knuckles flare with pain immediately, but it’s nothing compared to nick, who screams and clutches his face, blood immediately spurting from his nose as fangs grabs him by the scruff of his neck and throws a punch straight at his midsection, causing him to double over, and toni bares her teeth, wanting nothing more than to punch every inch of nick st. clair’s face in-

“cheryl, oh my god!” veronica and the pussycats round the corner, all of them running straight to cheryl on the bed, and toni hesitates, looks back at fangs, who’s practically pinning nick to the ground as he lays into him with everything he has-

toni wants to help him, but she’s worried about the redhead behind her.
fuck it.

she turns, falling onto the bed beside cheryl and reaching out for her.

“cheryl? hey, cheryl, can you hear me?” toni brushes cheryl’s hair back from her face, watches as she groans softly, her fingers wrapping around toni’s wrist as she looks up at her through fluttering eyelids.

“toni?”

she’s almost incomprehensible, but toni can decipher her name just barely, and she looks up at veronica with worry before she wraps an arm underneath cheryl’s shoulder and lifts her up slowly.

“yeah, it’s toni! it’s okay, come on, cheryl…” toni sits behind her, cheryl’s back pressing against her chest and her head lolling onto toni’s shoulder, and the sight of cheryl’s eyes rolling in the back of her head has toni looking at veronica in panic as the raven haired girl slaps cheryl’s cheek lightly.

“cheryl, you gotta wake up!” she says anxiously.

“val, get her some water!” josie says from her position hovering over veronica, and valerie rushes off to get cheryl water, toni’s eyes landing on melody pacing back and forth as she talks with the police on the phone, and toni’s attention turns back to fangs, who’s still beating nick st. clair, who isn’t even recognizable beneath the blood-

shit.

“veronica, take her! take her!” toni places cheryl into veronica’s arms as gently as possible before she jumps off the bed and rushes to fangs’s side, ripping him off nick st. clair as he roars with anger, driving his fist into every part of nick he can reach-

“fangs, stop! you’re gonna kill him!” toni drags him off, fangs falling backwards on top of her as he tries to shove her off-
“STOP! FANGS, PLEASE!” toni manages to drag him off, jumping to her feet and pulling him up by the scruff of his leather jacket, and nick st. clair spits up blood, groaning in pain as toni turns to look at veronica, cheryl still fading in and out of unconsciousness in her arms as veronica looks up at the both of them with tears in her eyes.

“get out of here, both of you!” she yells.

“i’m not leaving her!” toni growls, rushing to her side and dragging fangs with her, but veronica shakes her head.

“i’ve got her, toni, but the police are gonna be here any minute, and if you guys are here, they won’t hesitate to arrest you! just get out of here, we’ll handle it!” she says, waving them off as josie, Valerie and melody run back into the room.

“the police are on their way!” melody says with a frown, and Valerie sits down in front of cheryl, holding the cup of water in her hands up to cheryl’s lips.

“cheryl…” toni’s voice cracks with emotion as she stumbles toward the redhead, who frowns, groaning as Valerie tries to get her to drink the water, but fangs grabs her jacket and pulls her back.

“she’s right, tiny, we need to bounce!” he says desperately, and toni looks up at him with tears in her eyes.

“we can’t leave her-.”

“toni, i know, I don’t want to leave her either, but if we get arrested, we’re screwed!” fangs whispers, and sweat is dripping down his face as he cradles her face in his bloody and bruised hands and presses their foreheads together.

“i…” toni hesitates again, turning her face in fangs’s hands to look at veronica, who nods once.

“we’ve got her, i promise! go!” she shouts, and toni doesn’t have a choice when fangs pulls her by her jacket before taking her hand, both of them looking down at nick st. clair in disgust before the sound of sirens wailing in the distance echoes around them.
“shit, come on, toni!” fangs drags her away, toni chancing one last glance back to see cheryl opening her eyes and watching them go before they roll back once more, and fangs drags her out of cheryl’s vision, toward the door they broke through before tearing down the hallway where a fire escape is.

“go, tiny!” fangs helps her through the window first, toni grunting from the effort as she pulls fangs through with her, fangs descending the ladder first and gripping toni’s waist when she reaches the bottom rungs to help her down.

“let’s go!” fangs takes her hand, and the both of them run through the back alleyway, the blue hues of a setting sun above them hiding them from view as the sound of their boots clapping against the concrete echoes around them, and toni tries her best to simply breathe through all the emotions she’s feeling as the sirens get louder and louder.

anger, fear, sadness, panic, grief, rage…

*please god, let cheryl be okay.*
fifty eight messages

Chapter Notes

i had this whole update schedule planned for both my fics, but then i realized that i can't exactly plan it considering i ended up working on this fic all last night, whoops.

i will be updating my other fic soon i promise, but i just needed to get this chapter out! i hope you guys enjoy it!

fifty eight messages.

toni knows it’s excessive, but she can’t help it. her heart hasn’t stopped racing since this afternoon, and the fact that veronica hasn’t seen any of her messages on instagram is only causing her anxiety to build further.

she needs to know what happened, needs to know what’s going on and if cheryl is okay…

she and fangs had run all the way back to the twilight drive in to grab their bags and their bikes, somehow managing to do so without running into hiram lodge at all before they’d driven back to sunnyside trailer park with sweat sticking to their bodies despite the cold air surrounding them.

toni had gone to her uncle’s trailer first and had been frustrated, but not at all surprised to find it locked when fangs had told her his mother was working anyway and she could crash at his for the night.

toni had given up messaging veronica hours ago, had simply left her number in her last message and had told veronica to call her immediately when she could.

it’s been six hours now, and the clock is an hour away from striking midnight.

toni is pacing up and down the small living room of fangs’s trailer, hasn’t been able to stop since she first stepped foot into the fogarty household.

what if the cops come knocking on fangs’s door? what if nick remembers fangs being the one to beat
him to a pulp? What if she and Fangs are moments away from having an entire police force on their doorstep, moments away from getting thrown into jail for attempted murder?

All these ludicrous possibilities that keep running through her mind, and the one thing Toni keeps coming back to:

Cheryl needed us. I wasn’t gonna let that asshole hurt her.

More than anything, Toni just wants to know if Cheryl is okay. The silence from Veronica, the not knowing if the redhead is safe is killing her. It’s chewing her up inside, making her constantly walk to the door to grip the handle as if she’s moments away from running straight back to the Five Seasons to find out herself before she growls in frustration every time and finds herself back in this position.

Pacing, always pacing...

The sound of Fangs exiting the shower reaches her ear, and she looks up as he exits, wearing nothing but sweatpants and a tank top as he looks up at Toni anxiously.

“Still nothing?” he asks hoarsely, and Toni simply purses her lips in reply.

She knows he’s scared, he has every right to be, and Toni feels like absolute shit because she can’t tell him he’s safe, can’t tell him he’ll be alright, he won’t go to jail, he’s gonna be just fine...

She feels like she’s put him in danger, even though she knows Fangs doesn’t regret what he’s done. Fangs was always protective when it came to this kind of stuff, which Toni isn’t surprised by considering he’d had to watch his mother suffer god knows how many cuts and bruises from her abusive ex-husband throughout his entire childhood before she’d picked up the courage to leave him behind in Greendale, f.p. embracing her into the Serpents with open arms to keep her protected from him. Sweet Pea had jokingly thrown Toni down to the ground in a playfight when they were younger, and at the sound of her distress and genuine pain, Fangs had almost ripped Sweet Pea’s arm off in retaliation with a snarl and a clenched fist raised inches away from Sweet Pea’s face. It had taken Toni at least ten minutes to convince him that it was a joke and she was fine, and another ten for him to let go of Sweet Pea before mumbling out an apology.

Because Fangs was the kind of guy who would rather die than stand by and do nothing while some lowlife tried to use his masculinity and power to dominate a female, and Toni’s sure that rage he still felt toward his father had been powered through every punch that made contact with Nick St. Clair’s
so no, she’s positive that fangs doesn’t regret what he’s done. but that doesn’t stop the bile that rises in the back of her throat when she thinks about fangs being arrested and his mother crying and screaming in despair as the only thing she’s ever cared about is carted off to jail. she was already upset about fangs joining the serpents despite being one herself, if she found out what he did tonight…

toni’s pulled out of her thoughts by the sound of the refrigerator door being slammed shut, and she watches as fangs, with a bag of frozen peas in his hand, makes his way over to the couch and collapses against it with a deep sigh that turns into a groan of relief as he rests the bag of frozen peas over his bruised knuckles.

“i always forget how bad my hands hurt after a fight…” he whines, leaning his head back and closing his eyes, and toni chews on her bottom lip, ignores the pain flaring through her own hand from punching nick st. clair as she continues pacing.

she just needs to know if cheryl is okay…

“tiny…can we be sure veronica isn’t gonna rat us out?” he asks anxiously, and toni licks her lips, keeps pacing to distract herself from the worry and anxiety still causing her heart to race wildly as she shakes her head once.

“she won’t.” toni says, more to herself than fangs for reassurance as fangs moves the bag of peas to his other hand, and toni pauses briefly to look at him.

he looks so nervous…god, what has she done to him?

“fangs, i’m so sorry…” she croaks out, and fangs blinks once in confusion, tilting his head slightly at her.

“for what?” he asks, and toni feels tears prick her eyes as she blinks them away with a sniff.

“for everything…this is all my fault-.”
“hey! this…god, toni, no! this isn’t your fault at all, hey…” fangs stands up, dropping the bag of frozen peas on the couch as he reaches out to grip toni’s shoulders tightly.

“toni, you can’t blame yourself for any of this. do you seriously think anything would be different if you weren’t there? god, if you weren’t there, i probably would’ve killed him, so as far as i’m concerned, you saved me from potentially murdering someone. i just…” he trails off, swallowing thickly as he clenches his jaw and closes his eyes.

“i couldn’t stop…seeing cheryl on that bed, not moving and barely coherent, and seeing that…that fucking slimy bastard touch her…i wanted to kill him, toni. and if you hadn’t pulled me away, i would have, without a shadow of a doubt. so none of this is your goddamn fault.” he says softly, tucking a lock of hair behind toni’s ear, and her bottom lip trembles, nothing but love for this boy in front of her radiating through her.

“are you okay?” toni asks softly, and fangs smiles, lets her go and falls back onto the couch, grabbing the bag of peas and resting them on his hands again as he does.

“yeah, i’m fine, tiny. my hands feel like shit, and i’m more worried than i’ve ever been in my entire life, but i’m fine. you, however, are not. you need to stop pacing, you’re making me nauseous.” he says just as toni is about to continue her walk up and down the small rectangular living room.

“i haven’t stopped feeling nauseous since we got to the five seasons, fangs.” toni whispers. fangs chuckles darkly in agreement but shakes his head nonetheless.

“look, there’s nothing we can do until we either hear from veronica, or the police come barging in here to arrest us.” toni bites down on her bottom lip at that.

the age old question.

was veronica going to tell sheriff keller the truth?

“honestly, toni, you know i don’t regret what i did, but i can’t help but feel stupid for leaving my fate in the hands of some girl from new york who we don’t even know. we’ve spoken to her, what? a total of three times? how do we know--.”

the sound of toni’s phone in her hand ringing cuts him off, and she looks down at the unknown
number with wide eyes before looking up at fangs, her heart pounding impossibly faster until the blood is rushing in her ears, causing them to ring for a few moments.

“veronica.” she says simply.

“answer it.” fangs says immediately, the bag of peas resting on the empty seat beside him as he leans forward anxiously, and she slides her finger across the screen to answer the call.

“hello?” she croaks out, her whole body trembling with panic.

“toni? it’s me, veronica!” veronica sounds breathless and anxious, and toni’s heart drops at the sound of it, but whatever’s wrong, she’ll deal with later, right now she needs to know-

“is cheryl okay?” she asks immediately, and veronica is silent for a few moments, toni waiting with bated breath-

“she’s…okay. she’s with me at the pembrooke right now. she’s distraught, obviously, but not hurt physically, at least.” toni whimpers and collapses on the couch beside fangs, her knees shaking so badly that she can’t keep herself up anymore as she inhales through her nose in an attempt to calm herself down.

she’s okay, she’s okay…

“what happened after we left?” toni croaks out, her voice cracking from emotion, and veronica takes a deep breath in before launching into her tale, fangs leaning into to toni to hear what she has to say.

“don’t worry, you and fangs are in the clear. sheriff keller didn’t even sniff any serpent involvement and nick was too high on jingle jangle to remember anything. i told sheriff keller that josie and i noticed something was wrong with cheryl and followed her and nick to the hotel, and that when we saw her unconscious on the bed and him on top of her, we just attacked.”

it’s silent for a few seconds, fangs and toni processing her words.

“they believed you? he was beaten to a pulp, veronica.” fangs says in disbelief, and veronica
“we may be women, but we pack a mean punch, fangs. besides, it was four women against one guy, it’s a believable beating. don’t worry, i’m telling you…you guys are safe.” fangs looks at toni before he sinks back against the couch in relief, and toni doesn’t miss the tear that escapes from the corner of his eye as she licks her lips and allows herself to calm down just a little.

her heart at least doesn’t feel like it’s about to explode anymore.

fangs is safe…

“so you told sheriff keller you, josie, valerie and melody kicked nick’s face in, then what?”

“an ambulance came and took nick to the hospital. he’s okay, coherent at least…a broken nose and cuts and bruises, but nothing life threatening.”

toni can’t help but be upset to hear that.

“he’s lucky that’s all he’s walking away with.” she growls in anger, and veronica makes a noise of agreement.

“trust me, i let him know that. i’m expecting a lawsuit against me, but sheriff keller said it’s more than likely gonna get thrown out. we…we all took jingle jangle on friday night at nick’s stupid party, and apparently it stays in your system for three days, so…all our statements are pretty much invalid.”

silence fills the room again, and it takes toni a long time to fully register what veronica has just told her.

once the words really sink in, her heart begins pounding erratically again, not out of fear, however.

this time it’s out of anger.

“wait, what are you trying to say, veronica? that…that cheryl can’t do anything about this? nick’s
just gonna get away with it?” she manages to choke out through contained anger, and veronica doesn’t respond for a good fifteen seconds before she’s sighing loudly in toni’s ear.

“look, i’m not happy about it either, and sheriff keller encouraged us to seek justice despite it. he was with us the entire time we were trying to wake cheryl up, it took us an hour and a half just to get her coherent, toni! but the truth of the matter is, without yours and fangs’s statements, it just comes across as some drugged up scuffle that got out of hand.”

fangs scoffs in disbelief beside her, and toni closes her eyes and tries her best to calm herself down.

this can’t be happening. that slimeball can’t just get away with this-

“then fangs and i will make a statement. we’ll tell sheriff keller we were there, we saw nick trying to-.” toni doesn’t get to finish her sentence before veronica is loudly interrupting.

“toni, you can’t! sheriff keller won’t hesitate to slap handcuffs on you and send you straight to jail, and that’s the last thing cheryl or myself wants!” veronica says desperately, and toni hesitates, doesn’t say anything for a few moments, giving veronica the chance to exhale deeply and calm down before her voice grows soft.

“look, she doesn’t remember much…but cheryl remembers you and fangs being there. she didn’t tell sheriff keller anything, said the last thing she remembers was her and nick dancing, but once we got to the pembrooke, she told me she remembers seeing you when she was waking up, toni. she…she wanted me to say thank you. to you and fangs.”

toni feels the tears well in her eyes, and she looks up at the ceiling to stop them from falling as she shakes her head.

this poor fucking girl, sitting there at the pembrooke, thinking about them after everything she’d just been through…

it’s becoming more and more clear to her now that cheryl blossom is more than the attitude she displays.

“god, tell her there’s nothing to thank us for, veronica. we’re just glad we got to her before nick could do anything…tell her we’re just happy she’s okay.” toni whispers, her voice trembling slightly
as fangs nods beside her in agreement.

“i’ll let her know.” veronica whispers, and toni buries her face in her free hand, the other still holding the phone to her ear as she licks her lips and lets the silence fall over them before veronica is clearing her throat.

“i should go…josie, valerie and melody are still here, and archie and betty got here as soon as they could, too, but…i don’t want to leave cheryl alone right now.” veronica says softly, and toni can’t help but be thankful that veronica lodge and her kind heart exist right now as she finds herself wondering how veronica can be related to a man like hiram lodge, a man who only looked out for himself while veronica put herself at risk by protecting toni and fangs, two people she barely knows…

“no, you should go to her, there’s not much else to say…she needs her friends right now, and i’m glad she has you, veronica.” toni says hoarsely.

“thank you, toni. for everything. i don’t know what would’ve happened if you and fangs weren’t there…”

neither of them reply, both of them thinking of just what would have happened if toni and fangs hadn’t seen nick cart cheryl off to his car…

a shudder runs up her spine, and she licks her lips before shaking her head to rid herself of such dark thoughts as veronica mercifully breaks the silence.

“i’m sorry i took so long to reply, you must’ve been worried out of your mind…i wanted to reply to your messages, but my father was giving me an earful, he’s pretty pissed off. oh, by the way, he has your payment ready, do you want him to come by the trailer park to deliver it?” she asks, and toni’s heart sinks.

“no! just, uh…tell him to meet us at pop’s tomorrow before school. not the trailer park, please.” toni says quickly. if her uncle sees her getting a payment from hiram lodge, she’ll never hear the end of it…

“uh, okay, yeah…i’ll let him know. it’s probably for the best, he’s not gonna have time to go to the southside if we’re dealing with all this st. clair crap. nick’s parents aren’t happy.”
“screw them.” toni grunts, and veronica chuckles.

“right? anyway, i should get back to cheryl. i’ll see you tomorrow.”

“okay. bye, veronica. thanks again for calling.”

“of course. goodnight, toni.” veronica ends the call, and toni looks down at her phone for a long time before she looks beside her at fangs, who simply stares back at her for a few moments with wide eyes before he exhales deeply and nods.

“so…guess we’re in the clear.” he says simply, and toni sighs.

“i guess we are. but keep your hands in your pockets tomorrow when you see hiram. he’s meeting us at pop’s to pay us for the gala and he’s not a stupid man. he’ll put two and two together if he sees those bruises.” toni says, nodding down at fangs’s hands, which are somewhat less swollen now that they’ve been iced, and fangs frowns.

“you really think so?” toni scoffs.

“trust me, your hands are beat, and so is nick’s face. besides, he probably realized we disappeared, it won’t be hard to see what happened. just don’t let him see them.” fangs purses his lips and nods once before he suddenly clenches his jaw and raises his head high.

“are we gonna confront him about his little project for the southside?” he asks roughly, and toni hesitates.

they could, but what’s the point? besides, this is a serpent issue…they need to talk to the others first…

“no. not until we talk to tall boy. besides, you really think he’s gonna be intimidated by a bunch of kids?” she says with a scoff, and fangs contemplates her words before ultimately admitting defeat with a hang of his head.

“right…” his eyes land on her bruised hand, and he brushes the tips of his fingers over them gently,
his touch soothing as toni closes her eyes and allows herself to simply breathe.

“looks like i’m not the only one who has to keep my hands hidden, tiny.” fangs says softly, nodding down at it, and she looks down at her hand, at the blue blotches beginning to form under her chocolate brown skin with a frown before clenching it and nodding.

“i will, don’t worry.” fangs says nothing more, simply grabs the bag of peas and rests it over her hand, and she lets out a soft groan of relief as the pain immediately dissipates, her head sinking back onto the couch in satisfaction.

“man…what a fucked up day.” fangs says with a chuckle, and toni simply purses her lips and allows herself to rest for a few moments as fangs slaps her thigh sympathetically.

“i’m glad i had you by my side through it though, tiny.” he says, and toni cracks an eye open and looks at him in amusement.

“you going soft on me, fangs?” she teases, and he rolls his eyes before shoving her playfully.

“shut up.” he grumbles. toni chuckles, but rests her head on his shoulder tiredly as he rests his cheek on top of her head.

they stay like this in silence for a few moments as toni ices her hand, but when toni looks down at her phone and realizes it’s midnight, her phone telling her it’s officially now monday, it hits her that they have school in the morning and she needs to be up in about seven hours.

“shut, i forgot about school…” she groans, and fangs chuckles under his breath before standing up slowly and holding his hand out for her to take.

“go on, go take a shower and go sleep. my bed is yours.” toni bites her lip and shakes her head.

“fangs…”

“i’m not letting you sleep on the couch, tiny. go on, take a shower and get some rest.” toni smiles, too tired to argue as she grips his hand with her good one and lets him pull her up into a hug, her lips
pressing against his cheek as she does.

“thank you.” she whispers, and fangs chuckles.

“you’re like the little sister i never wanted, toni. i’m always gonna look after you, so there’s no need to thank me. steal whatever clothes you can find in my dresser.” he says gruffly, and toni bites down on her lip before detaching herself from fangs and making her way to the bathroom.

she closes the door behind her and finds herself sinking down to the ground against it, tears welling in her eyes before she can stop them as she takes a minute to process everything that’s happened.

god, her and fangs could’ve gotten arrested, this all could’ve ended so much worse than it did…

but the sight of nick on top of cheryl like that…

toni subconsciously clenches her fist in anger, hissing as pain shoots up her bruised knuckles, and she looks down at it with a frown.

she knows it’s not broken, it would hurt way more if it does, but honestly, the thought that it isn’t broken disappoints her.

she should’ve broken her hand with the punch she threw at nick’s face. sure, she broke his nose, but she’d rather it ended up somewhere in his brain. now that’s a punch worthy of someone defending the girl they care about.

wait.

toni blinks rapidly.

the girl she cares about?

she…no, she definitely doesn’t care about cheryl. not in that way, anyway. she was just stopping a sick, sadistic fuck from hurting an innocent girl. that’s all this was.
that’s all this was.

toni jumps up and takes off her clothes quickly, practically jumping into the shower and turning the cold water on full blast, and the second it hits her skin, she’s shivering from the temperature, but it’s soothing and refreshing, helping her clear her mind after the hellacious night she’s just had.

god, what the hell just happened?

it’s crazy, how quickly toni’s body begins to crash after the adrenaline really begins to fade now that veronica’s called and she knows cheryl is safe. her whole body feels on the verge of collapse, and it takes all her effort to turn the water off once she’s done showering, all her strength to pull herself out and wrap a towel around herself before she makes her way over to fangs’s room.

she pulls out the first thing her hand lands on, a band t-shirt ten times too big for her that she quickly shrugs on before walking to fangs’s bed and collapsing on top of it.

the bed practically reeks of her best friend sleeping on the couch in the living room, and she smiles, feeling comforted as she slowly turns over to lay on her back and look up at the ceiling.

she can't believe that less than a month ago, the thought of cheryl blossom had never even remotely entered her mind and now, the redheaded girl with the cherry red lips is all she can think about.

it's becoming clear to toni now that the 'head bitch in charge' attitude that cheryl wears like a badge of honor on her sleeve is all just a front. a cover up, for the broken, abused, fearful girl who lived inside her.

god, it would make sense that cheryl's bitchiness stemmed for needing to feel somewhat in control of at least something in her life, and why not let that thing be people's perception of her? if everyone saw her as a bitch, at least it was because she wanted them to see her that way.

because everything else in cheryl's life appears to be completely out of her control. her twin brother is dead, her father, too, and her mother, from what toni can gather, has abused her in the past before. for how long, toni doesn't know, but with the way cheryl behaves, it's obvious it's an ongoing thing. she acts like a bitch to cope with the fact that her mother is a fucking monster.
and now to go through this? to have some guy who knew nothing about her try to force himself on her by fucking drugging her? by taking away her control, the one thing toni is positive cheryl craves more than anything else in this world?

it's too much. toni wouldn't be able to handle it. hell, she can barely handle it now and it isn't even happening to her.

she has no idea how the redhead is still standing, but it just proves to her that cheryl blossom is a lot more than a bitchy attitude. she's a strong, beautiful, brave person who had just been dealt all the shitty fucking cards that life had to give.

tonik feels like she could spend all night trying to pull back the layers of cheryl blossom and she'd still only expose about two of them, but right now, curled up in fangs's bed, all she can really think about is how much she wishes she could see cheryl right now…wishes she could comfort her and make sure she’s okay…could hold her and brush her hair back from her face, wipe the tears from her cheeks and tell her that she’ll keep her safe…

and perhaps that's strange, but toni thinks maybe it's normal, to think that about someone after they’ve been through what cheryl’s been through? it's normal to be concerned for the redhead, to want to be there for her through something this traumatic?

a voice in the back of her head tells her no, tells her that veronica probably isn’t thinking about hugging cheryl close and whispering words of comfort in her ear, that veronica is one of cheryl’s closest friends and is probably just thinking about helping cheryl get through this without fantasizing about brushing red locks behind her ear and pressing a kiss to her forehead.

as soon as the thoughts enter her mind, all she can suddenly think about is her lips against the skin of cheryl’s forehead, and she tries to erase them with a growl of frustration as she turns onto her side and tries to will herself to sleep.

she so does not need to get caught up with feelings for cheryl blossom right now…

"after all…nothing really happened to cheryl."
the second those words are uttered by her mother, cheryl feels her whole world collapse.

her knees buckle, her breath quickens, and tears prick her eyes, but cheryl nonetheless gets herself together with a quick blink of her eyes and a clear of her throat, makes her way back to veronica’s bed to grab the coat veronica had lended her as veronica blinks in disbelief.

“cheryl, i...i am so, so sorry...” veronica whispers, and cheryl plasters on a fake smile as best she can.

“don’t be silly! I’m used to it! and besides, you heard what mommy said. nothing really happened to me.” cheryl repeats, almost on autopilot as she slips her arms through the coat and hugs it close to her body.

nothing happened to her.

she wasn’t pressing charges against nick, because nothing happened to her.

nothing happened, nothing happened, nothing happened-

“Nick roofied you, he tried to-.” veronica starts to say in shock, but cheryl cuts her off.

“i’m fine, veronica! everything’s fine.” cheryl reiterates with a smile.

everything’s fine.

nothing happened to her.

“if everything’s fine, then why did you spend the night at my place crying, cheryl? if everything’s fine, why did we spend three hours with sheriff keller last night making a statement against nick over what happened-.”

“momentary lapse in sanity, veronica. i’m prone to those.”
she’s prone to those. hell, she tried to kill herself and burned her house down all in the same night. she’s prone to insane thoughts and wild concoctions of the imagination.

this was just that.

Nothing happened to her.

veronica is looking at her as if she’s not quite sure of what she’s seeing in front of her, her eyes wide and her mouth hanging open slightly as she swallows loudly and shakes her head.

“cheryl, this was not a momentary lapse in sanity, i saw what happened! i was there, and so was josie, and valerie, and melody! you can’t pretend nothing happened, nick needs to pay-.”

“pay? veronica, come on. i mean, can you even imagine me facing off against nick st clair in a courtroom battle royale? i’d be a laughing stock…” cheryl goes to walk away, wanting nothing more than to put an effective end to this conversation, but veronica grabs her hand.

“cheryl, wait…” cheryl closes eyes at the feeling of veronica’s warm hand in her own, and she knows she should be confiding in the raven haired girl who only wants to be her friend, who only wants to help her, but right now, cheryl wants to run away, to keep running until her legs are sore and trembling and bloody and she can’t possibly take another step-

Nothing happened to her.

“it’s not just you, he’s done it to other girls, I mean, hell…he even tried to do it to me.” cheryl’s eyes snap open, and she turns to look at veronica in surprise.

“the night before the gala.” veronica whispers. cheryl swallows the lump in her throat.

this…she shouldn’t go against what her mother said…nothing, nothing happened-

“Did you tell your parents?” she asks softly, and veronica hesitates before she shakes her head.
and cheryl, instead of sympathizing, instead of asking her why, finds anger filling up inside her instead.

so what? she’s the catalyst, is she? the person veronica hides behind to seek justice so that cheryl is the one who gets ridiculed and blamed?

*nothing happened to her.*

“and yet you were happy to fill them in on my after dark drama, weren’t you?” cheryl hisses, ripping her hand out of veronica’s grasp, and veronica’s eyes widen.

“What? cheryl, no-.”

“Well i won’t be a puppet for your thirst for vengeance! you want justice? you go after nick in court, veronica!” she yells, and before veronica can say anything, she’s ripping the door of veronica’s room open and leaving, entering the living room where her mother is waiting for her with a look of anger on her face.

the sight of her face makes cheryl’s stomach turn, just as it always does every time her eyes land on that red hair and those brown eyes that so resemble her own.

“is there a reason why you are yelling, cheryl?” she hisses, and cheryl’s heart sinks down to her toes at the sound of her tone, panic momentarily freezing her before she flips her hair over her shoulder with a shrug.

“no reason. let’s get out of here, i’d like to go home and take a shower so i can prepare myself for school in a few hours. now that southside scum has invaded, i’m looking to maintain my above average gpa so i can leave this god forsaken town as soon as possible.” she draws, and just like that, with a simple flip of her hair and a gaze into her mother’s haunting eyes, cheryl blossom, head bitch in charge and queen b of riverdale high, is back.

no trauma, not a trace of what happened last night evident in her steel gaze.

her mother huffs before looking at hiram and hermione lodge with a small smile.
“thank you again for calling me. we’ll be on our way. as cheryl said, she has school in a few hours, which means veronica does as well. we’d hate to keep you any longer.” she says, with all the tone of someone who doesn’t care if hermione and hiram collapsed dead in front of her right now at her feet.

“of course, penelope…” hermione says, but she looks at cheryl with concern as she marches her way over to her mother, who touches the small of cheryl’s back and leads her out of the lodge’s apartment and into the hallway.

she doesn’t speak a word, but her hand moves from the small of cheryl’s back up to her elbow, gripping it tightly, and cheryl knows as soon as they’re out of sight of the lodges, she’s going to get an earful.

sure enough, as soon as the elevator doors shut and they begin descending to the lobby, nails begin digging into her skin, and cheryl winces in pain.

“you told sheriff keller that the boy tried to rape you?” she says through clenched teeth, and cheryl licks her lips nervously.

“he did, mother. not that you care.” she says hoarsely, and penelope sighs, turning cheryl around to face her, and cheryl can see the look of concern on her face as she tightens her hold on cheryl’s elbow.

“of course i care, for god’s sake, cheryl! but ever since you burned down thornhill manor and your father’s entire…side business was exposed, we have no money! and the st. clair’s made a very generous offer to us to keep this under wraps.”

cheryl’s blood runs cold.

“you…you accepted hush money from them?” she whispers, and it can’t possibly be true, it can’t possibly be real that her mother would be this cruel…

but penelope blossom finally lets her go and holds her head high, letting out a huff of air as she fixes her hair and adjusts the glove she’s wearing to cover the hideous burns on her arm.
“i did, and you will do well to honor it.” she says simply, and cheryl can barely contain the whimper that escapes her as she shakes her head, tears falling down her face before she can stop them.

“you’re choosing money…over your own daughter?” she whispers brokenly, and when penelope doesn’t reply, she licks her lips, the taste of salt from her tears hitting her tongue as she wipes away her tears with a sniff.

“and i thought you could sink no lower, mother.” she says coldly, and cheryl knows it’s coming before it even does.

penelope grips her elbow once more and steers her around to face her before she’s striking her across the face with an open palm, the sting of it causing cheryl to cry out as she clutches her cheek, tears welling in her eyes from the impact.

tiny fissures had begun forming in her heart the first time her mother had struck her at the age of four when she’d accidentally spilled her cereal on the floor during breakfast, and at this point, cheryl’s surprised her heart hasn’t completely shattered into a million tiny pieces from all the abuse she’s suffered, but she can feel another crack form as she keeps her head down and allows her mother to yell at her.

“you’re an insolent child, cheryl marjorie blossom! perhaps if you hadn’t burned down thornhill, we wouldn’t be in this predicament! perhaps i could be there by your side as you sought justice against the boy who did this to you! you have no one to blame for what’s happened but yourself, cheryl! because you’re a selfish, self-absorbed child who only thinks about herself!” she grips cheryl’s chin, forcing her to look at her as cheryl clenches her jaw and looks into her mother’s eyes with nothing but grief shining in them.

“now i don’t want to hear about nick st. clair or that night ever again from you, cheryl. nothing happened, do you hear me?”

nothing happened to her.

cheryl feels worthless. like dirt on the side of the road or cheap plastic used in packaging.

she’s lost all the fire she gained from the flames that took thornhill. she’s back at square one, helpless under her mother’s control, and for a brief moment, she wonders what it would feel like, having a mother who loves her.
maybe it’d feel like waking up on a bright morning filled with sunshine, or maybe it would feel like having a home, arms to run into when you’re scared and afraid like she is now…

instead she receives a threat, a nail biting grip on the arm and a slap. a slap that tells her that she better fall in line, or the abuse she’ll suffer at the hands of the woman beside her will be far worse than what nick had in store for her.

so once again, cheryl, feeling small, insignificant, and utterly useless underneath her mother’s high heel louboutins, bows her head and simply nods once.

“yes, mother.”

penelope makes a satisfied noise, and once the elevator doors open she’s once again gripping cheryl’s elbow and leading her toward the car, as if she’s worried cheryl will cause some more controversy if she lets her go for even a second.

the ride back to thistlehouse is silent, cheryl trying her best not to cry as she bites down on her bottom lip desperately to stop herself.

if her mother caught her crying, god only knows what she’d do to her.

her mother, who accepted hush money from her would be rapist…

cheryl wants to scream. wants to slap her silly and ask her how she could do such a thing, how she could hate cheryl so much as to accept money from the man who almost assaulted her. cheryl wants to hit her where it hurts, ask her how she thinks jason would feel if he knew that she was doing this to his baby sister…

she knows how jason would feel. she knows jason would yell at his mother with the fury of a thousand fire storms and take cheryl by the hand, would touch her cheek and press a kiss to her forehead and promise her that one day, one day, he’ll get her out of here, far away from the clutches of penelope and clifford, to a magical place where they could be free…

but jason’s gone. and that future? that future is just as dead as he is.
she’s stuck. stuck with a loveless mother who somehow still has the upper hand despite cheryl’s best attempts to win one over on her.

so much for things getting better once thornhill burned to the ground…

eye pull into thistlehouse, the screeching of the brakes causing cheryl to wince as her mother pulls the handbrake up and looks at her.

“go get ready for school, nana rose and i will be in the conservatory having breakfast. we’ll wait for you-.”

don’t bother, i’m going to pop’s for breakfast.” cheryl whispers, and penelope sighs, but says nothing as cheryl exits the car and runs into thistlehouse as fast as she can, desperate to put as much distance as possible between herself and her mother.

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toni taps her foot against the tiled floor anxiously, looking up at fangs devouring his eggs and bacon with a grin as toni rolls her eyes.

“do you even have money to pay for it?” she asks, and fangs shrugs.

“i will in about ten minutes.” toni smiles despite herself, and reaches across the booth to grab a piece of bacon as fangs pretends to bite her hand.

“spare a piece of bacon, i’m losing all my fat, fangs.” toni says with a pout, munching on the piece of bacon happily, and her tastebuds are firing off like crazy at the first taste of food since yesterday morning.

god, she’s hungry…

“yeah, you are losing weight, tiny…” fangs says with worry, and she sighs.
“can’t really eat when all my money is going to uncle jake.” she says simply, and fangs clenches his jaw.

“that’s bullshit, toni. he shouldn’t be taking all your money.”

“well, he’s not getting a penny of the grand i’m about to get, so looks like i’ve got fat days ahead of me.” she says with a reassuring smile.

sure, she’s hungry about seventy five percent of the time, but she can handle it. the last thing she wants is fangs and sweet pea getting involved with her uncle. they have enough shit to deal with right now. sweet pea was caught in the middle of what was pretty much a war between tall boy and jughead over this whole issue with the serpents selling jingle jangle, and he’d bitched about it to fangs and toni this morning over the phone. besides, the idea of fangs finding out the extent of her uncle's abuse towards her terrifies her.

if he almost killed nick st. clair for hurting cheryl, a girl he barely knows, god only knows what he'd do to a man who was hurting the girl he saw as family...

“good, i’d hate to see you wither away. besides, i’m probably gonna need someone to help me keep jughead, tall boy and sweet pea from killing each other.” fangs says with a grin, and toni’s about to reply when the sound of the bell above the door of pop’s ringing grabs her attention, and she looks up at the entrance-

and cheryl blossom walks through, her eyes looking incredibly bloodshot, but her face flawless as ever as she heads straight for the counter without even so much as looking around at anyone else.

toni’s heart pounds against her chest, and she feels slightly lightheaded as she takes in the sight before her.

she’s here. she’s okay, she’s alive, she’s breathing, she’s…she’s here.

“fangs…” she nods toward cheryl, and fangs turns, his mouth full of bacon as his eyes widen, drinking in the sight of the redhead before him, and he looks back at toni anxiously before swallowing his mouthful of food.
“should we talk to her?” he asks softly, and toni bites her lip in hesitation.

“stay here…” she slides out of the booth and makes her way over to cheryl slowly, cheryl preoccupied with ordering before she finally looks up at toni’s approach.

“hey…” toni says softly, and cheryl’s eyes widen before she’s swallowing loudly, her gaze dropping to the ground.

“toni…hey.” she whispers, her voice cracking slightly, and toni feels her heart break.

she’s broken, a shell of her former self, and toni wishes more than anything that she could wave a magic wand and fix this whole mess, maybe erase it altogether so that cheryl never even so much as met nick st. clair…

instead, she hesitates for a brief moment before she reaches out and touches cheryl’s arm gently.

“cheryl, i-.”

“i don’t really want to talk about it, t.t.” cheryl says in a low voice, and toni retracts her hand immediately, goes to take a step back before cheryl looks up at her with tears in her eyes.

“but i do want to say thank you. to you and fangs. god only knows what would have happened if you guys weren’t there.” cheryl says, her voice small and filled with heartbreak, and toni blinks back her own tears as she shakes her head.

god, this fucking girl is breaking her heart…

“there’s nothing to thank us for, cheryl. i’m just glad we were there to stop him.” toni whispers. cheryl nods once, her gaze dropping to the ground again, and it’s so strange seeing cheryl like this. she was so filled with confidence in every other interaction they’ve had, always bossy and filled with attitude that had toni smirking with laughter, but now…

Fuck nick st. clair. Fuck that white boy and everything he stands for.
cheryl suddenly sniffs, flipping her red hair back over her shoulder as she smiles at toni as best she
can, perfect white teeth on display.

“you’re up early!” she says with an exhale, and toni raises an eyebrow.

“yeah, we’re meeting up with hiram lodge, he has to pay us for providing security at the gala.” toni
says, clearing her throat and looking back at fangs, who pokes his head out of the side of the booth
and gives cheryl a small wave.

cheryl’s smile softens at the sight of him, and toni can’t help but smile as well. because despite all of
cheryl’s hatred for everything southside serpent, something tells her cheryl is always going to have a
soft spot for the boy who put his life on the line to make sure she wasn’t harmed.

“of course. you did a fantastic job. both of you.” cheryl says blankly, and toni throws caution to the
wind and reaches out to grip her hand.

the second her hand makes contact with cheryl’s, she flinches, her hand drawing back away from
toni’s before she appears to override her instincts and grips it tightly, red nails digging slightly into
toni’s skin, but toni finds she doesn’t mind.

“cheryl, i-.” but she’s cut off by the sound of the bell ringing again, and she turns to see hiram lodge
making his way into pop’s, a smile on his face as his eyes land on toni.

“ah, miss topaz. the woman i’m here to meet. where's mr. fogarty?” he says with a dazzling smile,
and toni simply glares at him as he looks to cheryl, his smile faltering slightly, and cheryl clears her
throat and gives toni’s hand a gentle squeeze.

“i’ll see you at school, t.t. mr. lodge…” cheryl says, nodding her head to him, and suddenly, the
warmth of cheryl’s hand in her own is gone as she makes her way over to a booth, toni watching her
go with a frown as hiram spots fangs and extends his hand to the booth where he's is sitting.

“after you.” he says simply, and toni sighs before walking toward fangs.

“scoot.” she says bluntly, and he frowns and looks up at her before his eyes land on hiram behind
her, and he’s quickly shoving his hands under the table and out of sight with wide eyes as toni sits down beside him, hiram sitting opposite them and pulling two envelopes out of his jacket pocket as he does.

“i’d like to thank you once again for providing security for the gala. you did an amazing job, despite disappearing toward the end of the event.” he says with a frown, and toni can see fangs fidgeting, but she simply shrugs.

“sorry, serpent business.” toni deadpans, and hiram raises an eyebrow, but doesn’t question it, simply bows his head.

“of course. regardless, as agreed…a grand each.” he places both envelopes down onto the table, and when fangs doesn’t reach to take his, toni grabs both of them with her good hand and clears her throat, checking both envelopes under the table to make sure there really is ten one hundred dollar bills in each envelope.

“i can assure you it’s all there.” hiram says with a chuckle, and toni looks up at him with a scowl.

“well, thing is, we don’t trust you, mr. lodge. especially considering you’re planning on turning the southside into your own little personal tourist attraction. something tells me all the people that live there won’t be part of that, will we?” she says in a somewhat calm voice despite her clenched fist indicating she’s everything but calm, and hiram blinks once, a look of confusion on his face before he chuckles once again.

“why, miss topaz, if my plan ends up coming to fruition, what makes you think i won’t guarantee the people from the southside stability? do you think i’m cruel enough to kick you all out of your homes? no, no…i was thinking more about hiring those on the southside to help fill jobs that will certainly need to be filled once the sodale project is complete. after all, the southside has a rich history, and the people there are a big part of it. trying to dislodge them from their homes would be a disgrace, and i can assure you, i am not a disgraceful man.”

toni blinks in surprise.

well, that was unexpected.

“jobs? for people on the southside?” fangs says slowly, and hiram smiles, winking at them both before he stands and adjusts his jacket accordingly.
“something to think about, huh? now, i’m sorry to cut this meeting short, but i have business to attend to...enjoy your breakfast, kids. it’s on me.” he says, reaching into his back pocket and pulling out his wallet to throw down a twenty dollar bill on the table, and toni looks down at it with a raised eyebrow as hiram bows his head once more.

“miss topaz, mr. fogarty…thank you, once again. i look forward to…potentially working with you in the future.” and with that, he makes his way out of pop’s, waving hello to the man himself behind the counter as he exits.

it’s silent for a few moments between the two serpents, and toni can practically hear the cogs turning in fangs’s mind as he frowns before looking at the pink haired girl beside him.

“jobs on the southside? that’s not necessarily a bad thing.” fangs says with a shrug, and toni frowns, thinking over hiram’s words in her mind as she turns to see his car just turning out of the parking lot of pop’s.

“i don’t know…there’s something else afoot here, there has to be.”

“like what?”

“i don’t know, but he’s some rich dude trying to take over an entire part of riverdale, it can’t mean anything good-holy shit.”

toni cuts herself off, the exclamation falling from her lips before she can stop them as her eyes take in a sight that has her heart pounding in her ears and her hands automatically balling into fists of anger.

nick st. clair getting out of a car, a smug smile on his incredibly bruised and beaten face as he make his way up into pop’s diner with the air of someone who’s just gotten away with something terrible.

“no fucking way.” fangs growls, and toni grips his hand to stop him from launching at the boy who enters through the diner with a flourish.

up close, he looks horrible. one of his eyes is swollen shut, the other bruised from his nose, which has bandages over it, but the bastard is still smiling and toni wants nothing more than to slap it right
off his face.

wait.

cheryl…cheryl’s here, too…

fangs is clenching his jaw, his fist curled in anger, but toni grips his forearm, whispering at him as she does.

“stay down.” she says simply, and he nods, sinking in his seat as toni risks exposure by standing up and inching closer to nick st. clair, but he’s not her target.

the redheaded girl who looks up at nick as if she’s just seen a ghost is.

her face is filled with horror, and toni bares her teeth, steps forward with every intention of telling nick to fuck off when cheryl’s gaze turns to her.

and it’s small, but it’s there. a shake of her head that has toni freezing in her spot as nick looks around the diner before his eyes land on cheryl.

“sharon!” nick says, grinning at cheryl widely, and cheryl curls her lip in disgust.

“cheryl!” she hisses. toni watches her stand slowly, her eyes never leaving nick as she glares dagger right into his busted up face.

“what are you still doing in town, nick?” she spits, and nick smiles.

“picking up some fuel for the trip home. how are you?” he asks with a smug smirk, and toni clenches her fist, about to step forward when fangs grabs her hand from his hidden position in the booth and pulls her back.

“tiny, stop.” he whispers, and toni looks at him angrily, but not as angrily as cheryl looks at nick as she steps closer to him, each step holding contained fury that’s seconds away from bursting, like a
soda can that’s been shaken and is about to be opened.

“how am i? how am i? you roofied me! you tried to rape me!” cheryl hisses, tears of anger welling in her eyes, and god, the sight makes toni tug her hand in fangs’s grip in an attempt to get him to let her go so she can pummel nick within an inch of his life once again, but fangs only tightens his hold-

“i don’t think that’s what happened.” he says with a chuckle, and toni growls under her breath and steps forward-

“toni!” fangs practically jumps up from the booth to grab her and pull her back this time, but nick is too preoccupied with cheryl to notice as she glares at him murderously.

“you’re a less than zero monster.” she hisses, and nick scoffs.

“at least i’m not a desperate tart from a truck stop town, hon. let’s not distort reality to cover your morning after shame. you were high, half naked and begging for it.”

“that’s not what happened.” toni growls.

that’s it. she can’t do it anymore.

the anger inside her is palpable, and toni’s never felt anything like this before. not when her parents died and left her behind, not the multiple times her uncle has beaten her or hissed insults right to her face…nothing, nothing, has ever touched the anger she feels right now staring at this absolute piece of trash in front of her.

fangs groans beside her, but she ignores him, and nick turns to look at her, a look of confusion on his face. toni finally rips her arm out of fangs’s hold and marches over to him, her fist clenched tightly as nick looks her up and down.

“and who are you, exactly?” he asks with a smirk, and the mental strain it’s taking her not to launch at him-

“i was working security at the gala, asshole, and i saw you slip something into cheryl’s drink. you’re
lucky the bruises currently covering your skin are the only ones you have, because if i got my hands on you…” she hisses threateningly, and nick raises an eyebrow at her.

“is that a threat of some kind? because i have to say, coming from a young woman as beautiful as yourself, it falls on deaf ears.” He says with what toni supposes he thinks is charm.

she’s about ready to gag, honestly.

“it is a threat, you malignant tumor. and trust me, you don’t want me to act on it. you have no idea what i’m capable of. but you know what? i think i’ll just settle for cheryl making sure you get what you deserve in court.” toni says, and nick’s smug expression returns as he looks at cheryl with a grin.

“sweetie, did no one tell you about the arrangement my parents made with her cobra like mother? she’s not gonna be saying anything about that night to anyone, right cheryl?” he says, walking over to cheryl slowly before he reaches out and brushes her hair back from her shoulder, and cheryl stiffens immediately as he looks at her with a wide smile, and at the sight of tears falling down cheryl’s face, toni throws all caution to the wind and reaches into her jacket pocket for her knife-fangs is behind her now, grabbing her hand to stop her as his fingers curl into the back of her leather jacket, but there’s no need, because toni isn’t moving.

she isn’t moving because she’s pretty sure if she does, she’ll take out the knife her hand is currently curled around and will run straight for him, plunging the blade straight through his heart over and over-

“get your hands off her.” she says in a low voice filled with venom, and nick chuckles, but steps away from cheryl all the same before looking at pop tate, who is watching this entire exchange with a worried expression.

“on second thought, cancel my order.” he tells him before making his way toward toni slowly.

“this hick town was a waste of my time. but maybe i’ll come back one day for the view.” he says, and he reaches out to tuck a lock of hair behind toni’s ear-

he doesn’t get the chance to.
toni’s seconds away from attacking, about to grab his arm and twist it until it pops right out of its socket, but fangs beats her to the punch.

he’s pulling toni behind him and grabbing nick by the lapel of his jacket before he so much as brushes against toni’s skin, pulling him forward until their faces are inches apart as nick looks up into fangs’s eyes in terror.

“you touch my friend, or cheryl ever again, and i swear to god, you’ll regret it. you have no idea who you’re messing with, do you?” fangs growls, and nick swallows the lump in his throat, his eyes widening as fangs throws him back so hard, he collapses to the ground.

“you try and show your face in riverdale again, and i promise you, you’ll have every single southside serpent on your ass. and if you don’t know what that means, ask around about us. what you hear will make you soil those three thousand dollar pants of yours, white boy.” fangs hisses, and nick looks like he’s seconds away from doing exactly that as toni grins and crouches down beside nick, watching as he looks at them both in complete and utter terror.

“you’re in our territory, nicky. and trust me, snakes are very territorial. better run while you still can, we’ve been told our bite is quite…venomous.” toni reaches into her pocket and pulls out her knife, exposing the blade with a flourish, and the second he sees it, nick is scrambling to his feet and running out of pop’s as fast as he possibly can.

toni stands up slowly and looks at fangs, who glares at nick through the door, doesn’t stop until he’s in his car and tearing away at top speed.

“well…i guess he’s not coming back to riverdale any time soon.” a voice says behind them, and toni turns to see pop tate looking at them sternly.

“sorry, pop.” she says apologetically, teeth worrying her bottom lip as pop tate clicks his tongue disapprovingly.

“i told you kids, no gang stuff in my diner!” he says with a sigh, and toni pockets her knife.

“won’t happen again. serpent’s honor.” fangs says behind her, but toni’s attention is taken away by the sight in front of her.
cheryl is standing there, her whole body trembling as silent tears fall down her face, and she looks like she’s too scared to even move.

she’s fucking terrified, and toni feels horrible for what they’ve just done in front of her.

god, this is a side of herself toni never really wanted anyone, let alone cheryl blossom seeing…

“cheryl? cheryl, i’m sorry…” toni whispers, stepping forward slowly, and cheryl purses her lips, a soft whimper escaping her as toni reaches out to touch her wrist, fingers curling around her soft alabaster skin.

“cheryl…i didn’t mean to scare you, i just…i’m sorry.” toni croaks out again, and cheryl simply shakes her head.

“you didn’t scare me.” she breathes. toni bites her lip, and cheryl looks up at her with tears falling down her face before she completely surprises her and throws her arms around toni, crying into her shoulder as toni staggers back in shock before wrapping her arms around the redhead tightly.

“shh, it’s okay. i’m here, shh…” she rubs her back soothingly, her heart aching as cheryl simply clings to the back of her leather jacket, and she hears fangs sigh behind her as pop tate suddenly moves into toni’s line of vision.

“should i call her mother?” he asks in concern, and toni feels anger well inside her at the very mention of penelope blossom.

toni still can’t believe what nick had said. had penelope seriously accepted hush money from the man who almost raped her daughter?

bile rises in the back of her throat at the thought, and she finds herself tightening her grip on cheryl even more, as if she’s afraid of any more harm coming to the redhead in her arms, and truthfully, she is.

*god, she doesn’t deserve this, any of it*…
“no, trust me, that’s the last person cheryl needs to see right now. i’ve got her, pop, don’t worry.”

pop tate nods solemnly, and toni is afraid to move, to do anything that might scare cheryl right now…

she can feel the way cheryl’s breathing against her, and it’s panicked, her sobs growing more frantic until toni makes an executive decision and reluctantly pulls away, cheryl not quite ready to let her go as she curls toni’s jacket between her fingers to try to stop her.

“i’m not going anywhere, cheryl, i just wanna take you outside, okay? for some fresh air, that sound good?” toni says softly, and she can hear cheryl swallow loudly in her ear before she pulls away and simply nods once, her hands gripping the front of toni’s jacket now as toni squeezes her wrists gently and smiles.

“okay, let’s go…”

“i d-didn’t have b-breakfast.” cheryl manages to stutter out, and toni frowns before she looks at fangs, who shrugs.

“i’ll use hiram’s money, screw him. a cherry muffin for cheryl bombshell?” he says softly, and she manages to let out a huff of laughter, a small smile forming on her trembling lips as fangs smiles with the brightness of a thousand suns, holding out the twenty dollar bill hiram had left them to pop tate, who gives them an extra muffin for free.

as soon as they step outside the diner, cheryl’s breathing in deeply, her eyes closing as she simply lets the wind rush over her, drying the tears still falling down her cheeks to her skin as toni stands right beside her, ready to do whatever the girl needs.

“can…can we sit at my car?” cheryl croaks out a few moments later, and toni smiles.

“of course.” cheryl licks her lips, reaches into her bag and pulls out her car keys as she walks over to her convertible with shaking legs, and as soon as she opens the door, she sits down in the driver’s seat with her legs outside of it, resting on the asphalt of the road.

she breathes in deeply, leaning against the seat tiredly, and toni holds the door open and crouches down beside her as fangs leans against the hood of the convertible.
“cheryl, i’m so sorry for what happened in there-.”

“you didn’t scare me, t.t. please don’t beat yourself up about it. i’m upset because…because there’s nothing i c-can do…” cheryl trails off, fresh tears falling down her face, and toni blinks back her own tears as she exhales shakily.

“if fangs and i could kick his ass again, we would have-.”

“no. no, he’s not worth going to jail over…” cheryl whispers, and toni runs a hand through her pink hair with a nod.

“that’s definitely true…” she murmurs. cheryl smiles down at her, blinking away the tears still clinging to her eyelashes, and toni smiles back, tries not to think about how beautiful cheryl looks despite her tears as she looks up at fangs, who is already eating one of the muffins.

“seriously? you just had a whole plate of food.” toni says in disbelief, and he shrugs.

“i’m a growing boy.” toni rolls her eyes.

“give me the other one, you heathen.” fangs hands her the second muffin, and toni unwraps it carefully and holds it up to cheryl, who looks down at it before swallowing the lump in her throat and taking it.

“split it?” she whispers.

“nah, you deserve a whole one.” toni says with a warm smile, and cheryl’s bottom lip trembles.

“mommy says muffins cause fat to build up on my stomach.” she whispers hoarsely, and toni feels anger spread through her.

if she ever comes face to face with penelope blossom, it’s going to take everything in to stop herself from slapping that bitch down.
toni breathes in, contains her anger and focuses on the redhead in front of her now, and he reaches out and rests her hand on top of cheryl’s knee.

“screw your mother.” toni hisses through bared teeth, and cheryl bites her lip in hesitation before she takes a bite of the muffin, chewing on it with a satisfied smile as toni rubs her knee soothingly.

“there you go, bombshell. as if you could resist a cherry muffin, huh?” toni teases, and cheryl chuckles through her mouthful of food before her eyes fall on toni’s hand on her knee.

she brushes her fingers over the bruises on her knuckles, and toni watches as cheryl swallows her food, more tears falling as she licks her lips and looks up at toni with a trembling bottom lip before resting her hand on top of toni’s with a deep exhale through her nose.

“thank you.” she whispers, and toni knows she’s not talking about the muffin.

toni can’t help herself.

she reaches up and tucks a lock of hair behind cheryl’s ear gently, cheryl closing her eyes at her touch before they flutter open to look at her, chocolate brown eyes meeting in a clash of emotions.

“taking care of you isn’t a job to me, cheryl. so stop saying thank you.” she says firmly, and cheryl stares at her, both of them frozen in a moment of unspoken words before a cherry muffin is shoved into toni’s face.

“you gotta have something to eat too, tiny.” fangs’s voice says beside her, and toni glares up at him as he grins down at her sheepishly.

“you haven’t eaten?” cheryl says in a soft voice, and toni sighs.

“not since before the gala, no.” cheryl gasps, her eyes widening as she looks up at fangs before looking down at toni again.
“that was almost twenty four hours ago, t.t. you have to eat something.” cheryl says firmly, and toni shrugs.

“i’m used to skipping meals, cheryl, it’s fine.”

“it’s not fine! please…” cheryl breaks off a piece of her muffin, holding it up to toni, and fangs raises an eyebrow.

“does that mean i can finish mine?” he asks with a grin, and toni rolls her eyes.

“eat it, you grub.” she sighs, and fangs shoves the rest of the muffin into his mouth happily as toni takes the piece of muffin from cheryl’s hand.

“thanks.” she says softly, and cheryl smiles.

“taking care of you isn’t a job to me, toni.” she whispers hoarsely, and toni chuckles with a nod.

“touche.” she says simply, shoving the muffin into her mouth hungrily. it’s silent for a few moments, both of them sharing this muffin before fangs suddenly taps her shoulder.

“hey, tiny, it’s almost nine, we gotta bounce.”

shit.

toni completely forgot they have school.

“are you going to school?” toni asks cheryl, and she finishes chewing the rest of the muffin in her mouth before nodding.

“yes. i’d rather be anywhere than home right now.” she says with a sniff as she wipes her tears away, and toni stands up, groaning slightly as her knees ache with pain from bending for so long.
“yeah, don’t blame you there, bombshell. we’ll meet you there?” a flash of hesitation shines in cheryl’s eyes, and toni feels her heart drop slightly as she purses her lips and bows her head.

“right, sorry…i forgot about the whole northside/southside war for a second there, you probably don’t want to be seen with us-.”

“i’ll meet you there.” cheryl says firmly, and toni looks up at her in surprise.

“really?” she says in shock, and cheryl suddenly stands up and reaches out to grip toni’s hand, her cold fingers interlacing with toni’s easily, as if they were made to rest within them.

“i may not like the serpent king, but his serpents…his serpents aren’t so bad. you and fangs have saved me twice now, t.t. i can’t pretend to hate you even if i wanted to.” she says softly, and toni bites down on her bottom lip to stop herself from grinning like an idiot.

“does this make us friends, cheryl blossom?” toni teases, and cheryl rolls her eyes and drops her hand, but the smile on her face is evident for everyone to see.

“don’t push your luck, toni topaz.”
to say the students of riverdale high are completely and utterly shocked when cheryl blossom jumps out of her cherry red convertible with two southside serpents on their bikes inches behind her would be an understatement.

wild gasps and whispers of shock echo around her the second her foot lands on the asphalt of the parking lot in riverdale high, and they only grow louder as she shuts the door and marches her way over to toni topaz, the pink haired serpent removing her helmet with a small smile at the redhead as she swings her leg over and off the bike she’s straddling.

“everyone’s staring.” toni says matter-of-factly, and cheryl flips her hair over her shoulder and crosses her arms over her chest.

“it’s nothing new for me, t.t. people always stare when i show up.” and it’s such a cheryl blossom thing to say, that she understands the chuckle that toni lets out as she shrugs and looks behind her at fangs, who jumps off his own bike and makes his way toward them both with a grin.

“about time my handsome face got the attention it deserves!” he says airily, and cheryl can’t help but roll her eyes at him with a smile as toni slaps the back of his head in reprimand.

“ow.” he deadpans, before swinging an arm around toni’s neck and ruffling her hair as she protests with a whine.

they make their way up the steps into the building, the stares and whispers following them, but as it turns out, cheryl blossom being in the presence of southside serpents is the least surprising thing that will happen within the small building of riverdale high on this particular monday morning.

but first-
“you okay?” toni asks her, and cheryl purses her lips and doesn’t reply.

past history has taught her that people checking up on her usually led to them asking for a favor, or looking for popularity points as they spoke to the redheaded blossom who walks through the hallways of this school as if she owns them. past history has taught her that no one is really looking for a genuine answer to that question, swiftly moving the subject onto what they desired from her instead.

but looking into toni’s eyes, filled with concern and worry, cheryl can’t help but wonder if this time, it’s different. if this time, someone does really care if she is okay, does really care about her enough to question her happiness with the intent to help her achieve it if she’s not.

toni is a genuine person, and cheryl hasn’t really crossed anyone like her before.

she’s…intriguing.

“cheryl?” toni whispers, a hand reaching out to brush against her forearm, and cheryl licks her lips and smiles as best she can as she nods once.

“i’m okay, toni.” she says in a soft voice, and toni bites down on her bottom lip gently before simply nodding once.

“it’s not much, but if you need to talk, cheryl…i’ll be here.” she says firmly, and cheryl bites back a smile and watches as toni and fangs stop at his locker before making her way to her own.

perhaps there will be time for them to one day sit down and talk properly, but for right now, cheryl can’t stomach talking about anything, but the fact that toni has offered warms her heart for the first time in a long time.

because someone cares. and it may be the last person cheryl ever expected would care, a southside serpent with bubblegum pink hair and a feisty attitude, but it’s someone.

it’s the first morning in a long time where cheryl feels…content.
despite everything that had happened yesterday and this morning, those thoughts don’t plague her mind, are erased and replaced with this moment instead.

a moment with people she can see becoming her friends, who don’t treat her like a victim, or an enemy, who don’t look at her with scared or sad eyes like veronica lodge is doing right now as she rounds the corner and spots cheryl.

cheryl’s blood boils at the sight of her, and she holds her head high and stops at her locker, opening it to block veronica’s face from view as veronica comes to a stop beside her with a sigh.

“cheryl, please don’t be mad at me-.”

“go away, veronica.”

“we need to talk-.”

“i said go away!”

“hey, whoa, what’s going on?” toni’s by her locker in a flash, looking between the both of them in surprise, and cheryl bares her teeth and turns to the pink haired serpent in anger.

“i don’t know, toni. why don’t you ask veronica why she decided to let me hang around vermin like nick st. clair when she knew exactly what he was capable of?” cheryl hisses, slamming her locker shut and staring straight daggers at veronica.

but it’s nothing compared to toni, who looks at veronica like she’s five seconds away from using the pearls around her neck to strangle her to death as she clenches her fists and steps forward.

“i knew it, i knew you were avoiding the question of why you didn’t do something sooner for a reason! what, you thought offering cheryl up would get your dad a good investment deal?” toni’s voice is low, but the venom in it has all the color draining from veronica’s face as she steps back in terror, but her brown eyes are ablaze with anger of such an accusation.
“of course not! god, what do you think i am, a monster?!” veronica cries, and cheryl scoffs.

“cousin betty was right about you, veronica. you only use us for your own personal gain, and the second we’re no longer of value, you cut us off and feed us to the wolves.” she says derisively.

veronica blinks back tears, and cheryl has to admire her strength right now as she stands her ground with her head held high despite the insults cheryl is throwing at her.

“cheryl, you can’t begin to understand how sorry i am for what nick did to you. and i promise you, he is going to pay. i’m going to come clean about what he did, i’m going to make sure he gets the punishment he deserves, we won’t let him get away with this-.”

“it’s too late, veronica. my hideous excuse for a mother has already accepted hush money from his parents, which means this isn’t going to court at all. he is going to get away with it.” cheryl grips her locker between red taloned fingers in an effort to stop herself from crying, but the lump in her throat is building and the tears are falling before she can stop them.

god, how could her mother do this to her…

toni lets out a sigh of frustration behind her, but cheryl still can’t bring herself to turn and face her. not when she’s got tears streaming down her face. toni’s seen her cry enough times today…

“god, your mother is a fucking nightmare.” she growls, and cheryl purses her lips and simply nods.

“that she is, t.t. but what she says, goes. so perhaps i’ll consider forgiving you in the future, veronica, but right now, i’d really like it if you’d leave me alone-.”

cheryl’s words are drowned out by the sound of a loud bang, followed by a lot of yelling, and she jumps in surprise, her, veronica and toni turning around in shock as sheriff keller walks through the doors of riverdale high with about five officers behind him-

and mayor mccoy beside him, looking all the role of a scorned political figure as she marches down the hallway with authority.
and for the briefest moment, panic grips cheryl in her heart, because they must be here for toni and fangs, must be here to arrest them for what they did to nick-

“i want everyone with a southside serpent jacket rounded up right now!” mayor mccoy screams, and cheryl’s heart drops.

it’s over. they’re after toni and fangs, her protectors, the people who saved her life, this is all her fault-

no, she can save them, she needs to get them out of here-

“fangs?!” toni shouts in panic, looking around wildly and cheryl reaches out and grips toni’s hand tightly as she looks back to sheriff keller and his gang of officers, who are pinning sweet pea to his locker as he growls and tries to fight them off-

“toni, run!” cheryl says frantically, because she can’t let them get her, she can’t let this happen, not after everything toni has done for her-

the pink haired serpent turns to look at her with wide eyes filled with worry.

“i can’t leave fangs.” she whispers, and cheryl wishes she wasn’t so brave, wasn’t so loyal as she finds herself squeezing toni’s hand with a shake of her head.

“toni-."

“there!” cheryl looks to see mayor mccoy pointing straight at toni, and one of the officers rushes forward just as fangs exits the men’s bathroom and looks around in shock-

“fangs, run!” toni screams, and she drops cheryl’s hand, running straight for him, but before she can get to him, the deputy who questioned cheryl at the hospital stops her, wrapping an arm around her waist and throwing her against the lockers chest first-

“STOP!” cheryl runs forward, tears falling down her face, because she has to do something, but veronica grabs her hand and pulls her back.
“don’t, cheryl! don’t get involved!” she breathes, and cheryl tries to fight her off, because she can’t let this happen, not after this morning, not after last night, but the raven haired girl’s hold is strong as cheryl’s eyes move to fangs, who gets thrown down to the ground, his bruised hands being pulled behind his back-

this can’t be happening, how did they find out that fangs and toni were the ones who assaulted nick st. clair? cheryl, veronica and the pussycats had made sure their statements were the exact same, this doesn’t make sense…

jughead jones is already being whisked away, his beanie falling off as he tries to fight off the officer gripping his shoulder, and cheryl watches as more men in beige uniforms pile in and begin exploring the lockers of every southside serpent they’ve rounded up, busting them open with crowbars-

and cheryl finds herself letting out a groan of relief despite the panic still flooding her. because why would they be looking through the lockers of people accused of assault?

this is about something else.

“they’re not here because of nick.” she breathes, and veronica’s grip on her hand tightens.

“if they’re not here for nick, then what the hell are they looking for?” veronica demands in a hiss, and cheryl doesn’t reply, watches in despair as toni is pulled away from the locker with her hands cuffed behind her back. she looks pissed off as she tries to shrug out of the deputy’s grip, and her eyes meet cheryl’s, her anger replaced with sadness as she shakes her head once, a message to cheryl not to interfere lest she get arrested, too.

and cheryl wants to cry, because this girl is still looking out for her, still protecting her despite the fact that she’s in handcuffs and is probably seconds away from being arrested…

god, what else could possibly go wrong for them?

mayor mccoy’s heels clack on the ground loudly as she comes to a stop in front of toni.

“we know you and your serpent friends have been selling jingle jangle. nick st. clair called us this
morning with some very interesting details on how he got his hands on jingle jangle last friday night from someone wearing a jacket with a two headed snake on it.”

cheryl’s heart stops beating.

this morning…he told them this morning…

and cheryl can almost see nick st. clair, face contorted in rage over being threatened by toni and fangs, calling the police with a wicked smirk as he fed them this lie that has them all being thrown around like ragdolls, accused of doing something they haven’t done.

“son of a bitch…” veronica whispers beside her, and cheryl blinks away her tears as her looks at toni in despair.

this is happening because of her, because of what toni and fangs did this morning…

god, if this is what nick is doing over a simple threat, cheryl dreads to think about what he would do to toni and fangs if he found out they were the ones who beat him black and blue…

toni glares up at mayor mccoy, but there’s a look of relief in her eyes as cheryl assumes she realizes they aren’t here about the assault, and she winces slightly as the deputy tightens the cuffs on her wrists before gripping her shoulder.

“your silence isn’t helping your situation, serpent.” he hisses, and she scowls at him over her shoulder before shaking her head.

“the serpents aren’t selling any jingle jangle, okay?! that’s the ghoulies, you know, the other gang on the southside that you guys never seem to harass like you do us! you can check our lockers all you want, you’re not gonna find-.”

“jingle jangle! booyah!” one of the officers holds up a ziplock bag filled with straws, so identical to the ones cheryl had consumed that friday night, and cheryl blinks in complete and utter shock.

it isn’t toni’s or fangs’s locker, thank god, but it is a serpent’s…
oh god, this isn’t good-

“that your locker, boy?” sheriff keller growls behind sweet pea, gripping his shoulder and shaking him, and sweet pea closes his eyes and clenches his jaw before he exhales in defeat.

mayor mccoy’s eyes are practically swimming with glee as she smirks widely, her eyes falling back on toni before she shouts out for everyone to hear.

“i guess we’re all taking a trip to the station then, aren’t we?!” she yells, and cheryl watches helplessly as toni is dragged away, her pink hair flying as she struggles against her handcuffs.

“toni…” cheryl wants to run to her, to punch that goddamn deputy gripping her shoulder with all the pressure of a wild bear in the face, but veronica’s grip on her hand is way too strong.

“cheryl, you can’t do anything…” she whispers, and cheryl finds herself agreeing with her silently as toni looks back at her in despair.

she can’t do anything.

she can’t do anything to help them.

toni...

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“i can’t believe this! why would tall boy do this?!”

toni sighs and rests her forehead against the cool metal of the bars containing her within her small prison that consists of herself, sweet pea, jughead and fangs as sweet pea clenches his jaw and towers over jughead in anger.
they’ve been here for hours, and toni is absolutely starving, her stomach grumbling every time she even moves slightly, and she feels weak, confusion and panic becoming her new constant now that she’s experiencing it for the second time in twenty four hours.

they have no idea what’s going on. sheriff keller had thrown them in here over three hours ago and since then…radio silence.

sweet pea’s been ignoring jughead for the last three hours, and jughead has been drilling him nonstop with questions, spit practically flying from his mouth in his anger, and toni likes him, sure, but right now, she’s seconds away from punching him in the face.

she’s cold, uncomfortable, tired, pissed off and scared, which is never a good combination when it comes to toni topaz.

add in the fact that she needs to pee as well, and toni’s surprised she hasn’t murdered the beanie wearing fiend yet. there’s a toilet in the cell, but as comfortable as she is with toni and fangs, and hell, even jughead, there’s no way she’s comfortable enough to drop her pants in front of them.

“i’m just gonna keep asking until you answer me, sweet pea! i can do this for hours, don’t think i’m just gonna back down-.”

“for the love of god, just talk to him, pea, fuck!” fangs yells beside her suddenly, causing her to jump, and both fangs and sweet pea are glaring at each other in a silent argument that they long mastered as kids before sweet pea looks at jughead with wide eyes.

“look, i get that you’re pissed off, but tall boy is right! your dad is gone and we need to start funding ourselves!”

“so what, you think we should just start selling jingle jangle? how long has this been going on for?” jughead growls, and sweet pea rolls his eyes.

“he only gave me some last night to sell, i literally just put those stupid straws in my locker this morning, just my luck that mayor mccoy turns into a serpent thirsty hag today, son of a bitch…” sweet pea punches the wall in frustration, the impact echoing in their tiny cell as jughead glares at him.
“i thought we agreed yesterday at the wyrm that we wouldn’t think about entering the jingle jangle business until i went and saw my dad tomorrow! since when is tall boy the leader of the serpents, sweet pea? he doesn’t make decisions for us!”

“well, your dad isn’t here to lead us, is he?” sweet pea growls, and toni clenches her teeth and turns to them both angrily, her head pounding from all this fucking noise.

she can feel a migraine coming on.

“shut up! both of you! we’re screwed either way, alright? they searched me and fangs and found the grand hiram lodge paid us each for doing security at the gala. they wouldn’t even give us a chance to explain it, so they probably think it’s drug money. no matter what we do or say, we’re screwed.”

silence fills the room, and jughead sags in defeat, his eyes filled with panic as toni goes back to resting her forehead against the metal bars.

god, she’s so fucking screwed.

she’s been arrested three times now since she was fourteen, and her uncle hadn’t exactly had the best reaction to each arrest. when she’d been released after her last arrest, he’d beaten her so badly, she had to avoid sweet pea and fangs for over a week before her injuries faded into obscurity.

sheriff keller’s probably already called jacob topaz and told him that toni’s in here, which means she’s either got one of two things going for her right now: a beating to look forward to, or a jail cell to call her new home.

wouldn’t be the first time…

“we shouldn’t have scared nick st. clair this morning, tiny. that’s probably why we’re in here, he must’ve told them we sold him jingle jangle to get back at us.” fangs suddenly says with a sigh, and toni scoffs.

“yeah, well, we probably shouldn’t have beat the shit out of him last night, either, but i don’t regret it. do you?” she says, looking at him with a wry smile, and fangs grins at her.
“nah. definitely not.”

“wait, what are you guys talking about? who did you beat up? who’s nick st. clair?” jughead says in confusion, and toni rolls her eyes.

“it’s a long story, juggie.”

“yeah, well, looks like we have time, we’ve already been sitting here for hours, we aren’t going anywhere any time soon. what happened?” jughead demands, and toni clenches her fist and turns to look at him in anger.

why does he have such a fucking stick up his ass?

“who died and made you serpent king, huh? look, i get it, you want to live up to your dad and help keep the serpents afloat, but you’ve been a serpent for less than two weeks! sweet pea, fangs and i have been in the game a lot longer than you have, and you don’t see us questioning each other’s every move!” she yells, and jughead glares at her.

“someone has to! especially when every move you guys make is a stupid one! sweet pea listens to tall boy and tries to sell jingle jangle, now we’re all in jail! you and fangs do whatever the hell you’ve done, and that leads to the events that get us thrown in jail! someone needs to restore order because you’re all acting like a bunch of idiots!” jughead hisses.

“dude, you’re out of line, you have no idea what nick st. clair did.” fangs says angrily, jumping up and stepping in front of toni, and jughead throws his hands up in frustration.

“like talking to a brick wall.-.”

he’s interrupted by the sound of a door opening, and they all look up as mayor mccoy and sheriff keller walk in, mayor mccoy looking smug as ever as she comes to a stop outside their cell and glares at them murderously.

“so! care to explain the two thousand dollars we found on you, mr. fogarty and miss topaz?” she says, crossing her arms over her chest triumphantly, and toni sighs.
“it was payment for the security job we did at the sodale gala opening yesterday for hiram lodge. he gave it to us this morning, you can call him and ask him yourself.” toni says bluntly, because she knows they won’t believe her and they’re not about to call hiram lodge to ask him, either.

mayor mccoys scoff only confirms her suspicions.

“a grand apiece for a simple security job? i find that hard to believe. hiram lodge isn’t the kind of man who throws money away.” she says airily.

“look, the dude’s loaded, okay? he probably uses a grand every day wiping his ass.” fangs says, and sweet pea chokes on a laugh, causing mayor mccoys eyes to move to him before they narrow in anger.

“and you? care to explain the jingle jangle in your locker?” she growls, and sweet pea’s smile is immediately erased as he clenches his jaw.

“i’m not talking without a lawyer present.” he says firmly, and toni can’t help but laugh even though there’s nothing funny about their current situation.

“the only lawyer you know is penny peabody, and she’s not worth the favor.” fangs grunts, and toni nods in agreement as sweet pea shrugs.

“whatever, i’m not talking.” he says, and mayor mccoys lets out a sigh of frustration.

“you are weaving an incredibly tangled, and dangerous web, all of you! if you think we won’t keep you locked up in here for days in order to get the information we want.-.”

“look, we don’t know anything, okay?! none of us are selling jingle jangle!” toni bursts out.
she’s cold, she’s hungry, and she wants out of this fucking cell-

“we’ve caught one of you red handed with jingle jangle in your locker, miss topaz.” sheriff keller says with a sigh, and toni glares at him.

“this is such bullshit-.”

she’s cut off by the sound of the door slamming open once more, and the sight before her has her gripping the bars of her cell in surprise, her heart pounding against her chest erratically.

cheryl blossom, veronica lodge, archie andrews, betty cooper and, for some strange reason, reggie mantle walk through the doors of the entrance to the cells, both cheryl and veronica wearing high heeled pumps that clack on the concrete ground loudly as cheryl tosses her red hair over her shoulder with a smile, looking all the part of a heroine come to rescue the day.

“i’d appreciate it if you’d let my friends go, sheriff keller.” cheryl says simply, and toni finds her heart racing.

did cheryl just call them her friends?

“jug…” betty rushes to the cell, her fingers curling around the bars as she looks at jughead anxiously, and he simply shakes his head as his eyes fall on sheriff keller, who closes his eyes and exhales tiredly.

“cheryl, this isn’t the time-.”

“this is the perfect time, actually. you’re holding them with no justification, something you should know, mayor mccoy, considering you’re a former attorney. jughead, toni and fangs had no jingle jangle in their lockers, so why exactly have they remained imprisoned?” cheryl demands, and mayor mccoy scoffs in disbelief, looking at cheryl as if she can’t quite understand how or why cheryl thinks she can get away with talking to the mayor of riverdale like this.

“we know the serpents are selling jingle jangle-.”
“they’re not, actually. reggie?” archie turns around to face the asian boy, who straightens out his bulldogs jacket, looking like he’d rather be anywhere else but here as he rolls his eyes and comes to a stop behind cheryl.

“look, i’d like to point out that i really wouldn’t mind if these southside scumbags stayed in jail because i hate them…” he says, glaring at the serpents in disgust before looking back at sheriff keller.

“but it’s not the serpents selling jingle jangle, alright?”

“and how would you know that, mr. mantle?” mayor mccoy asks, and reggie hesitates, which causes veronica to flick her finger against his ear harshly.

“ow!”

“tell them what cheryl and i overheard you telling dilton doiley, and don’t leave out any details! tell them about how you were bragging to him about how happy you were that nick st. clair lied to them in order to get the serpents locked up so you could keep getting your fix from the ghoulies undetected!” she hisses, and reggie glares at her before looking at sheriff keller with a roll of his eyes.

“look, every time i’ve gone to get jingle jangle, it’s been through the ghoulies on the southside, okay? as far as i’m concerned, the serpents haven’t had anything to do with jingle jangle distribution. i told nick he could get it from the ghoulies, too. i don’t know why he said it was a serpent, but whatever, the dude’s whack, to be honest.”

toni is watching this exchange with bated breath, and mayor mccoy blinks in complete and utter surprise as sheriff keller narrows his eyes at reggie suspiciously.

“So you’re telling me you’ve never purchased jingle jangle from a southside serpent before?” sheriff keller asks slowly, and reggie hesitates before he simply shakes his head.

“No, sir.” he says simply. toni almost groans in relief, and she can’t quite believe that cheryl blossom, veronica lodge and reggie mantle are actually about to save her ass.

what the hell has her life become in the last month?
“you’re not being coerced into saying this by a serpent, are you?” sheriff keller asks, and reggie sighs.

“no, sir. i’m telling the truth.” he reiterates, and sheriff keller runs a hand through his hair before sighing in frustration.

“why didn’t you tell us this on sunday when we met at alice cooper’s house, reggie? i asked you how you guys got your hands on jingle jangle, and you said nick got it from somewhere. why didn’t you just tell me?” reggie looks nervous, sweat beginning to build on his brow as he licks his lips and shakes his head.

“look, the ghoulies are like a pack of wild dogs, man, if they find out i’m ratting them out, they’ll probably kill me! but cheryl and veronica refused to let me get away without coming here and telling the truth.” he says, glaring at the two girls in question as cheryl rolls her eyes and shrugs.

“oh, quit playing the victim card, reggie. no one believes it for a second, especially considering you’re a jingle jangle addict.”

but toni believes him. believes his fear…the ghoulies aren’t to be messed around with, and reggie probably should fear for his life for ratting them out-

“go screw yourself, blossom, i’m already doing community service to pay for it, where’s your punishment for doing jingle jangle on friday with us?” he hisses, and cheryl winces as sheriff keller sighs and raises his hands to silence them.

“alright, enough! i’m not here to deal with friday night, i’m here to crack down on the distribution of jingle jangle. you guys are known for drug dealing, you’re telling me you had no part whatsoever in the one drug that’s taken over riverdale?” sheriff keller says, looking at the serpents in their cell suspiciously, and toni sighs as jughead moves closer to the cell door.

“with my dad gone, the serpents have been…a little lost on what their future holds. losing our serpent king hasn’t been easy on any of us. so no, we haven’t had anything to do with jingle jangle. that’s all the ghoulies, no doubt trying to strengthen their forces so they can strike against us now that we don’t have a leader.” jughead says point blankly, and sheriff keller frowns.

“how does selling drugs strengthen their forces?” he asks, and toni shrugs.
“Drugs equals money, equals weapons, equals power. It’s not hard math, sheriff.” She deadpans, and sheriff Keller nods slowly before looking at them sternly.

“Are you telling me a full blown war is about to explode between the ghoulies and the serpents? Because if so, I need to know. It’s my job to keep this town safe and I’m not gonna stand by while you all battle over territory-.”

“No wars yet, sheriff Keller. Trust me, I’m trying to stop one from happening.” Jughead says tiredly, and sheriff Keller frowns, possibly wondering how a seventeen year old kid can possibly stop a gang war when Mayor McCoy shakes her head.

“One situation at a time! The two grand in your possession, Miss Topaz-.”

“We told you, it was payment from Hiram Lodge for the security job we did for him!” Toni shouts, and Veronica suddenly raises her hand with a grin.

“I can confirm that they did indeed meet with my father this morning to receive the payment. I can call him if you’d like-.”

“There’s no need, Veronica. Kevin told me he saw Toni and Fangs at the gala, I know they were working a job for your father.” Sheriff Keller says with a small smile, and there’s a vein bulging in Mayor McCoy’s forehead as she clenches her jaw, but nods all the same.

“Fine. I suppose we can release Mr. Jones, Mr. Fogarty and Miss Topaz, but you-.” She points a finger straight at Sweet Pea.

“You aren’t going anywhere.” Toni’s heart drops.

“What the hell!?” Sweet Pea growls, and Mayor McCoy smirks.

“There was Jingle Jangle in your locker!” She hisses, moving closer to the bars in her anger, and Toni feels panic begin to settle in her once more.

Sweet Pea can’t go to jail, she can’t lose him-
“look, i’ll use the money hiram gave me to bail him out, alright?” she blurts out desperately, and sweet pea grips her arm and shakes his head, his eyes wide with shock.

“What? tiny, no way, you need that money—.”

“And i need you out of jail, sweets.” toni whispers, and sweet pea’s eyes soften for the briefest moment before he looks up at mayor mccoy angrily.

“look, it wasn’t mine, alright? i was keeping it hidden from a friend. i found it in his locker, so i took it off him and put it in mine so he couldn’t get to it again until i figured out what to do with it. i’m not abusing it and i’m not selling it, either.” sweet pea lies easily, and toni thanks all the gods she knows that sweet pea’s always been quick on his feet, able to come up with a lie or a distraction at the drop of a hat. toni thinks it’s his overactive imagination, sweet pea says it’s just because he’s smarter than she is. toni begs to differ, and this situation just proves it.

toni watches as mayor mccoy raises an eyebrow, the look on her face completely and utterly disbelieving as she crosses her arms over her chest.

“You really think i believe that?” she says with a derisive laugh, and sweet pea shrugs.

“I don’t care if you believe me or not, mayor. it’s the truth.”

“look, a grand isn’t going to cover his bail, anyway—.” sheriff keller starts, but fangs interrupts with a raise of his hand.

“put my money toward his bail too, then.” sweet pea closes his eyes and exhales through his nose, and toni can see that he’s pissed off at them for giving their money away for him, but she simply grips his hand to reassure him that it’s okay.

Yes, she pretty desperately needs that money, but she needs sweet pea out of jail more. she can’t lose him, not now, not ever.

Sheriff keller looks hesitant, and mayor mccoy looks at him in utter disbelief.
“you can’t tell me you’re actually considering this, tom! he was caught red handed selling drugs-.”

“you found drugs in his locker, you didn’t find him actually selling them or using them!” toni retorts, and mayor mccoy’s stare turns cold as she leans in right up to toni’s face.

“and you’d know all about doing that, wouldn’t you, miss topaz? or do i have to remind you of your four week stint in juvie two years ago?” she hisses, and toni’s blood runs cold.

yes…she sold drugs once for the serpents at f.p’s request, and yes, her last arrest had been because she’d gotten caught, and yes…she’d served four weeks in juvie for it.

the memories of the four weeks she’d spent there two years ago flood her mind, and toni blinks back tears as she exhales deeply and closes her eyes.

fuck mayor mccoy for bringing these memories back up…

when she opens her eyes, she can see cheryl and the others looking at her in surprise from the corner of her eye, and toni bares her teeth and pulls herself closer to mayor mccoy, her grip on the bars tight so that she doesn’t reach out and yank a chunk of mayor mccoy’s hair right out of her scalp.

“you can try and antagonize me all you want, mayor mccoy, but at the end of the day, you have no reason for keeping us in here. so let us go.” she says firmly, and the tension in the room is palpable. toni’s pretty sure if sheriff keller wasn’t in the room, mayor mccoy would reach through these bars and strangle her, but instead, she tears her gaze away from the pink haired serpent and looks at sheriff keller expectantly.

“well?” she says harshly, and sheriff keller is deep in thought for a few moments before his gaze moves from toni, to fangs, to jughead, and finally, to sweet pea.

“two grand should cover your bail, but you’ll be doing community service for the drugs found in your locker, sweet pea. it might not have been yours, but it was still in your possession, i can’t ignore that.”

toni almost collapses in relief. he’s not going to jail, he’s not going to jail, oh god…
she turns to look at him, and at the sight of his face, she’s jumping forward to grip his forearm to calm him down. Toni’s pretty sure she’s never seen Sweet Pea this angry before. He’s practically shaking with contained fury, and he looks down at Toni with wild eyes as soon as she makes contact with his skin.

“Just accept it, sweets, it’s better than doing time in juvie, you know that.” She whispers, and Sweet Pea’s nostrils flare before he sets his jaw and simply nods stiffly.

“Fine.” He says harshly. Toni exhales in relief.

“Now you lot wait outside, I need to speak to these four alone.” Sheriff Keller says to Reggie, Archie, Betty, Veronica and Cheryl, and Toni meets Cheryl’s eyes, her expression unreadable as Veronica grips her elbow and leads her out of the room after Reggie, who practically storms out with a grunt of disapproval.

toni finds herself worrying now. What if Cheryl’s not impressed, hearing that she’s served time in juvie? Toni wouldn’t blame her, it’s not exactly something she’s proud of herself, and if Cheryl found out why she’d been incarcerated...

and things were going so well between them...

“We’ll be outside, jug…” Betty whispers, and he smiles at her as she walks over to Archie and the both of them make their way out.

As soon as they’re gone, Mayor McCoy turns on Sheriff Keller like a woman scorned.

“You’re letting them go?” She hisses, and Sheriff Keller sighs.

“Look, Toni’s right, we only caught Sweet Pea with drugs in his locker, he wasn’t selling them, and he’s clearly not high on it, either. We can’t charge him with distribution, but we can charge him with possession, which is exactly what I’m going to do. It’s only fair he gets the same punishment as Reggie and the other kids. We charged them with possession, too, Sierra. Or are you forgetting the fine you paid in Josie’s name?” Mayor McCoy’s hand twitches, no doubt ready to slap Sheriff Keller in the face as she bares her teeth at him.
“do not compare my josie to these snakes!” she growls, and sheriff keller shakes his head.

“i’m not comparing josie, i’m comparing the crime she committed. i’m sorry, sierra, but the law is meant to be fair. now…” sheriff keller walks past mayor mccoy to get closer to the cell and the serpents inside it.

“i say this every time, but i don’t want to see you guys in this cell again. you’re bright kids, i’d hate to see your futures destroyed further with all of this…serpent business. if i so much as sniff any jingle jangle on you, or any other serpent, i won’t be as lenient as i am today. am i clear?”

“yes, sir.” jughead says, and toni, sweet pea and fangs simply nod as sheriff keller purses his lips and reaches into his pocket for his keys.

“in that case, you three are free to go. you know the drill, meet at reception and fill out the paperwork. sweet pea, i need you to come with me so we can sort out your bail, come on…” sheriff keller unlocks the door to the cell, and toni comes to a stop in front of him.

“does the two grand cover his fine as well?” she asks anxiously, and sheriff keller smiles.

“yes, toni. he’s covered.” he says, watching them each file out with a look in his eyes that toni can’t quite decipher before he reaches out to grip sweet pea’s shoulder.

“let’s go to my office, son…” sweet pea simply nods and looks at jughead, toni and fangs with a sigh.

“don’t wait for me. i’ll meet you at the wyrm. and toni, get something to eat, your stomach hasn’t stopped grumbling since we got here.” he mumbles, and toni smiles sheepishly at him, sweet pea returning it with a wink as sheriff keller leads him away. mayor mccoy glares at jughead, fangs and toni before she steps forward threateningly.

“if i find out you were lying to me…if i find out the serpents have been dealing jingle jangle, i will burn those leather jackets to the ground, do you hear me?” she hisses, and before they can respond, she turns on her heel and stomps out after sheriff keller, the door slamming shut behind her.

it’s silent for a few moments.
and then, because of course he does, fangs breaks it.

“well, that was fucking wild, wasn’t it?”

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cheryl shivers slightly from the cold air as she wraps her coat around her body tighter, her breath coming out in a cloud of smoke as veronica sighs and taps her fingers against cheryl’s dashboard impatiently.

“What’s taking so long?” she groans, and cheryl bites down on her bottom lip with worry.

“You don’t think they changed their minds, do you?” she says hoarsely, and archie, who is standing outside cheryl’s car, sighs and shakes his head.

“I don’t think so…” cheryl sighs and falls back against the driver’s seat of her convertible, closing her eyes as her eyes itch from fatigue.

she’s exhausted.

the sun is only just setting over the horizon, and cheryl watches from her side mirror as reggie mantle is finally picked up by one of his fellow bulldogs, the tires screeching on the road as he throws back one last glare at her before they disappear around the corner.

“He’s such trash.” veronica grumbles, and cheryl simply hums in agreement.

after the serpents had been arrested, cheryl had been a nervous wreck. she could barely focus during first and second and period, and in the lunch break, she’d gone to the student lounge trying to find kevin keller so he could call his father and ask what was going on when she’d overheard reggie bragging to dilton doiley about the serpents arrest, his tone cheery and gleeful as cheryl had contained her anger in her left fist to stop herself from punching him.
she doesn’t understand how he could be happy about people like fangs and toni, who were *good people*, getting arrested and thrown into a jail cell without a chance to defend themselves.

but then he’d mentioned how happy he was that nick had *lied*, how happy he was that the ghoulies were safe to keep selling jingle jangle, and cheryl had been about to grab him and drag him to the station when veronica, who cheryl didn’t even realize was in the student lounge, had beat her to the punch, interrogating him with a fire inside her that cheryl’s never seen before that left reggie cowering in fear before she grabbed him by the lapels of his bulldogs jacket, archie weakly telling her to calm down as he and betty watched veronica drag reggie to archie’s car, demanding he tell sheriff keller *everything*.

she still has residual anger for veronica resting inside her from the whole ordeal with nick st. clair, but in this moment, she can’t help but feel thankful that the raven haired latina is by her side. veronica had clearly taken a liking to toni and fangs just as cheryl had if she was fighting this hard for them.

“by the way, how *did* you get out of community service from friday night? sheriff keller knows you were with us…” veronica asks, and cheryl doesn’t answer for a few moments, not willing to dredge up the memories before she lets out a deep breath and turns to face veronica.

“yesterday, when he was getting my statement, he told me he was waiting for my mother to come back in town to tell her about friday, but because of what happened…he said he would let me off the hook. he said i’d been through enough.” cheryl says stiffly. veronica drops her head in shame, simply nodding as cheryl licks her lips and stares straight ahead to avoid looking at her.

she doesn’t need veronica’s pity, or her guilt. she just wants to forget last night ever *happened*.

she just wants toni to walk out of that damn station-

“finally!” betty says from her position beside archie, and cheryl’s eyes focus on the entrance to the station as sweet pea, jughead, fangs and toni all walk out of the door looking incredibly worn out and tired.

“i told you guys not to wait for me.” sweet pea’s voice echoes out, and fangs punches him in the arm.

“no serpent gets left behind, man.”
“what happened?” veronica asks before cheryl can, and sweet pea looks at them both with confusion before toni pushes past him with a sigh.

“he let us go and accepted our money from the gala as sweet pea’s bail money. he’s just gotta do community service, but the rest of us are good…free to go.” she says with a tired smile, and cheryl finds her heart soaring at the news, a smile that can’t be contained turning her lips up as toni meets her gaze before reaching out to grip her hand, and the second her warm fingers make contact with cheryl’s cold ones, goosebumps erupt up the redhead’s spine.

“thank you. all of you. you saved our asses in there.” she says softly, looking to veronica, archie and betty as well, and veronica simply winks at her.

“we weren’t gonna let you guys rot for a crime you didn’t commit.” archie says simply before he turns his gaze to sweet pea and gives him a charming smile.

“looks like we’re gonna be picking up trash together, man.” he says, and sweet pea glares at him before he scoffs and makes his way down the steps of the station without even looking back at him, fangs trailing behind him, and archie’s grin fades, and a look of confusion creeping onto his face as veronica huffs beside him.

“or not…” she murmurs, and toni rolls her eyes.

“don’t mind him, he’s not a very social person…” she murmurs, and it’s silent for a second before the sound of toni’s stomach growling echoes around them.

her cheeks turn red, and cheryl chuckles and grips her shoulder.

“pop’s?” she asks simply, and toni shrugs sheepishly.
“i’ve still got a hundred dollars left from the gala money, so…sure.” cheryl smiles as veronica claps her hands excitedly.

“perfect! well, i suppose we’ll be seeing you all there then! as usual, the core four will be dining together! oh, by the way…” veronica reaches into her pocket and pulls out jughead’s beanie, the one that fell during his arrest, with a wide grin, and jughead takes it from her with a sigh of relief.

“thought i lost it for good…thanks, veronica.” he says, shoving the beanie onto his head with a smile before he sticks his hands into his pocket, betty wrapping an arm around his as archie and veronica also interlace hands and look to cheryl and toni with a smile.

“see you guys later, yeah?” archie says, giving cheryl a soft smile, and she simply nods in response as the core four make their way down the steps, jughead gripping sweet pea’s shoulder as he passes him, and sweet pea simply nods at him and lights a cigarette right outside the station without a single care in the world.

“is he even allowed to do that?” cheryl asks, and toni shrugs.

“nope, but i think you can gather from his charming personality that he doesn’t care.” cheryl chuckles, and toni sighs tiredly before she yells out to sweet pea fangs.

“hey! you guys down for dinner at pop’s?!?” fangs and sweet pea exchange a look before fangs grins at her.

“sorry tiny, we’re heading to the wyrm. but you and cheryl enjoy yourselves!” fangs says, a certain hint of something in his tone that causes toni’s to give him the middle finger as cheryl rolls her eyes.

“children, all of you. now, come on, t.t., i know you haven’t eaten properly since yesterday morning, and i refuse to let you go without having a proper meal.” cheryl says with a flip of her hair despite her soft tone, and toni smiles.

“okay…let’s go.”

they make their way to cheryl’s convertible, and she hesitates with her hand on the door before she takes a deep breath in and turns to face fangs and sweet pea.
screw it. she really doesn’t want to be at thistlehouse right now, so any excuse to extend this evening is valid, and besides…she’s already about to have dinner with one southside serpent, it’s not a big deal if she’s seen with two more of them.

oh, how times have changed…

“get in, beavis and butthead. your bikes are still five miles away at the school, i’ll drop you off.” she says with a toss of her hair, and sweet pea and Fangs look at her in complete and utter shock, sweet pea looking at her as if he can’t quite believe she’s actually offering him a ride before he slowly makes his way over to her with a raised eyebrow.

“what’s the catch?” he grunts in an almost challenging tone, as if he’s expecting her to say ‘april fool’s!’ despite the fact it’s the beginning of december.

and yes, any other day, and if this weekend had never happened, hell, Cheryl wouldn’t even be caught dead near southside serpent trash right now.

but things change. people change.

and instead of being the old Cheryl and throwing out an insult and demanding he get lost, she simply shrugs.

“there is no catch, andre the giant. get in, or don’t get in, either way, i don’t care.” she huffs, looking over at Toni, who is watching this entire exchange with a grin as she sits in the passenger’s seat, and sweet pea bites back a laugh at her dig on his height, an impressed look taking over his rough features before he shrugs and tosses his cigarette, opening the door to the backseat.

“well if you’re willing to let southside trash sit in your car, bombshell, guess i’m okay with riding in a northsider scum’s car.”

“call me scum again and i’ll kick you out of this car so fast, you’ll get whiplash.”

“deal, as long as you never call me southside trash again.”
“deal.”

and so begins the friendship between sweet pea and cheryl blossom.

the school isn’t far, thankfully, only a ten minute drive away, and cheryl finds herself itching to ask the question that’s been on her mind since she’d heard mayor mccoy say it.

toni had spent four weeks in juvie.

it’s starting to dawn on cheryl that she really doesn’t know much about the pink haired serpent, but she wants to, and the only way she’s going to get those answers is if she talks with toni alone.

and now…now was the perfect opportunity to do that. they were about to have dinner together.

isn’t…isn’t that technically a date?

the second the thought enters her mind, cheryl’s palms begin to sweat and her heart begins to race as she closes her eyes for a brief second, her mother’s voice echoing.

“these are deviant thoughts, cheryl!”

“you okay?” toni asks softly beside her, and cheryl opens her eyes and offers the pink haired girl a smile and a nod.

when they pull up to the school, sweet pea and fangs rejoice at the sight of their bikes and jump out.

“thanks, cheryl!” fangs says with a grin, and she smiles back at him just as widely.

“you’re welcome, fangs.” he leans in and grips her shoulder in his bruised hand, and sweet pea watches this exchange in disbelief before he scoffs and shakes his head, lighting a cigarette as he does before he raises a hand to her in thanks.
she guesses it’s as good as she’s gonna get with him, really.

“i should probably take my bike, too. i’ll follow you to pop’s?” toni says softly, and cheryl hesitates before she licks her lips and shakes her head.

“i’ll bring you back, toni, don’t worry.” she whispers, and toni contemplates it, teeth worrying her bottom lip before she exhales and nods.

“okay. let’s go then.” she says with a smile.

the drive to pop’s is silent, and cheryl’s thankful. she wants to save their conversation for when they’re in a more intimate setting, like a booth at pop’s, but cheryl’s eyes keep moving to toni beside her, watching as she closes her eyes and smiles as the wind whips her hair around her face, and she looks so carefree, so innocent, that it takes everything in cheryl not to get distracted enough to veer them off the road.

the last thing she needs right now is a car accident to cap off what’s already been a hellacious four days.

when they arrive at pop’s, cheryl pulling into the only parking spot available, and she knows this means that pop’s is packed tonight. worry takes her over, because they may not be able to talk so freely with so many people there, but toni’s stomach growls again and cheryl can’t help but bite back a smile as she looks to her to see her avoiding cheryl’s gaze shyly.

“we really need to get some food in you.” cheryl says with a chuckle, and toni rolls her eyes and jumps out of the car, cheryl following suite with a smirk on her face.

as soon as they enter pop’s, the whole place is a buzz with chatter, and cheryl is about to ask toni where she wants to sit when toni rests a hand on the small of her back and her entire brain short circuits at her touch.

“do you want a booth?” she asks, leaning in close to cheryl’s ear in order to be heard, and cheryl shivers, can’t help it as she bites down on her bottom lip and nods.
toni leads the way, and cheryl can see kevin having dinner with josie and her pussycats at the far right booth, can see archie, betty, jughead and veronica at their usual booth talking in hushed whispers with worried expressions on their faces, no doubt discussing some major crisis that cheryl has no interest in.

right now, her only focus is the pink haired girl wearing the southside serpent jacket in front of her.

“now, i’ve only eaten here twice, and it’s been for breakfast. so…what do you recommend, cheryl bombshell?” toni says, extending a hand with a flourish to the empty booth she’s stopped at, and cheryl rolls her eyes, but smiles all the same as she slides into the booth.

“have you had the milkshakes here yet?” toni shakes her head, and cheryl purses her lips and nods with determination.

“then we’re definitely getting one today.” she demands, and toni chuckles and nods once as she surprises cheryl by sliding in beside her instead of opposite her.

“yes, ma’am.” cheryl settles comfortably in her booth, and she’s about to talk when josie mccoy makes her way over to them, a look of concern on her face.

“hey, cheryl…toni…are you guys okay? i can’t believe what happened this morning-.”

“your mom’s a hardass, mccoy, but i get why she did it. she just had the wrong people. don’t worry, it’s sorted.” toni says with a tired sigh, and josie purses her lips before looking at cheryl with worry.

“how are you doing, cheryl?” she asks softly, and any other day, she’d appreciate josie mccoy asking her how she’s doing, but right now, she doesn’t want any time that could be spent with toni being wasted. she can’t ignore the fact that she wants to know who toni is, and there may not be another opportunity like this one to get to know the pink haired girl from the southside.

“i’m fine, josie, i promise. you don’t need to worry about me. now excuse us, i have an incredibly hungry friend who needs food in her system, stat.” she says simply, and josie frowns, but thankfully takes it as her cue to leave as she walks back to the pussycats and kevin, who are watching cheryl and toni with surprise looks on their faces, no doubt wondering what cheryl blossom is doing dining with a southside serpent.
they aren’t the only ones. they’re getting a few stares, and when the waitress comes over to take their
order, she looks at them in surprise for a few seconds before she shakes her head and opens up her
notepad.

“uh, what can i get you both?” she asks, and cheryl orders her usual.

“a cherry cola with a side of fries, please.” she says, and toni bites down on her lip and looks up at
the waitress with what looks like embarrassment.

“can i get a cheeseburger with extra fries and a chocolate milkshake?” she asks sheepishly, and the
waitress chuckles and writes her order down before promising them it’ll be out shortly as toni looks
at cheryl with bright red cheeks on full display.

“sorry, i don’t mean to be a slob and order so much food-.”

“don’t be ridiculous, t.t. you haven’t eaten since yesterday morning, and a burger and fries is hardly
‘so much food’.” cheryl drawls.

cheryl couldn’t care less if toni spit roasted a whole pig in front of her and began tearing it apart with
the ferocity of a lion attacking a wildhog. the girl looks ravenous, and cheryl isn’t about to deny her a
big meal after everything she’s been through.

as if on queue, toni lightens up a little before she relaxes into her seat with a sigh, her eyes closing as
she does, and cheryl fights the urge to rest her hand on toni’s thigh as she leans in close.

“how are you feeling?” cheryl asks firmly, and toni scoffs in disbelief and looks at her with a shake
of her head.

“i feel like crap. but i’m happy to be out of that jail cell. i just still can’t believe nick told the police
we sold him jingle jangle, i swear if he ever shows his face in riverdale again…” toni grumbles, and
cheryl purses her lips and leans in even closer, desperate to get the topic off nick st. clair and his
hideous actions.

“toni, there’s something i have to ask…” cheryl whispers, and toni looks at her for a few moments
with a blank expression before she purses her lips and sinks back into her chair, closing her eyes as
she does.
“i know what you’re gonna ask, bombshell.” she croaks out, and cheryl bites down on her bottom lip in hesitation.

“you don’t have to tell me, t.t, but-.”

“you wanna know why i spent four weeks in juvie.” toni concludes, and cheryl feels her whole body tense up, nerves taking over as she chews on the inside of her cheek before nodding once.

“i do.” she says simply, and this time, with a rush of bravery, she rests her hand on toni’s thigh, toni tensing slightly under her touch before she licks her lips nervously. she looks around carefully, making sure no one is listening in to their conversation. when she determines it’s safe, she exhales shakily and looks into cheryl’s eyes sadly.

“i was fourteen. i’d been a serpent for a few months and i was looking to do more, to prove myself to f.p and all the other serpents that i was ready, despite my age, to serve the serpents and keep them alive. f.p really didn’t want to do it, but there was literally no one else, and i wouldn’t leave him alone about it. it was supposed to be a simple job, just deliver some cocaine to greendale, but… sheriff keller and his band of officers were waiting for us over herk harvey bridge, and the next thing i knew, i was in handcuffs. my case went to court, the judge thought it’d be fun to give me a four week juvie sentence, and voila. i did the four weeks, i came back, and f.p told me he didn’t want me touching the idea of selling again. i guess he felt guilty…part of him probably still does.” she says in a rush, and cheryl blinks rapidly, processes her words slowly as she leans back into her seat.

"what was it like?" she asks, and toni sighs.

"hell on earth. i’d rather die than go back there." she whispers. cheryl exhales shakily, because toni clearly doesn't want to talk about it...she's scared she's pushed a button, so instead, she changes the topic.

“so, you’ve been a serpent since you were fourteen?” cheryl asks softly, and toni smiles wryly.

“desperate times. i was getting sick of my uncle’s bullshit, i just needed to get away…f.p told me he’d take me in despite my age because he knows the kind of man my uncle is, and he did.”

“and how…how did your uncle react to you going to juvie?” toni’s jaw clenches, her gaze turning up to the ceiling, and cheryl doesn’t need her response to know it wasn’t good.
“I’m so sorry, Toni…” she whispers, and Toni’s eyes widen as she looks at her in surprise.

“Whoa, what are you sorry for? You just saved my ass from probably serving a juvie sentence again, Cheryl.” She says with a laugh, and Cheryl finds herself smiling at the sound, her heart pounding erratically in her chest as Toni rests her hand on top of the one Cheryl has resting on her thigh.

It’s silent for a few moments before Cheryl decides to ask another question.

“Why do you live with your uncle?” she asks, and Toni’s grip on her hand tightens, Cheryl looking up to see her swallowing thickly as tears begin to well in her eyes.

“He’s my legal guardian. My…my parents died in an accident when I was ten.” She says in a rough voice, and Cheryl’s heart drops.

Oh god…oh god, no wonder Toni always has that hint of sadness in her eyes…She was thrust into living with an abusive guardian with no warning at all, right after losing the two people she probably cared about more than anything in the world…

“Toni, I-.”

“Don’t say you’re sorry, Cheryl. Unless you’re the reason they died, you have no reason to be sorry. It’s…it’s just a shit situation.” Toni croaks out, and Cheryl bites down on her bottom lip to stop herself from apologizing.

“Do you miss them?” she whispers, and Toni gives her a shaky smile.

“Every single day.” She whispers back.

Cheryl feels her heart break for the pink haired girl. Even in her case, with a neglectful father and an abusive mother, Cheryl can’t deny that if her mother were to die, a part of her would cry and weep and mourn the loss of her, despite everything she’s done to cause Cheryl so much pain. Hell, she’d even shed a few tears for her father when he’d selfishly killed himself, because at the end of the day, it was her father. But Toni…Toni’s parents must’ve loved her, only to be ripped away from her so suddenly…
toni suddenly scoffs and shakes her head.

“we’ve got pretty fucked up lives, haven’t we, bombshell?” she says with a chuckle, and cheryl sighs, nodding her head in agreement as toni looks to her in wonder.

“god, you’re so much more than i thought you were, cheryl blossom.” she whispers, and cheryl stares at her for a long time, her heart pounding in her ears as she licks her lips to hide a smile.

“and what did you think i was, toni topaz?” she asks, her tone teasing, but serious at the same time, and toni smiles and shrugs.

“rich bitch with an attitude who didn’t care about anyone else but herself.” she says simply, and cheryl purses her lips, tries not to let the words cut deep as she blinks back the tears that immediately well in her eyes. her mother’s words reverberate in her mind.

“you’re a selfish, self-absorbed child who only thinks about herself?”

god, her mother was right…

she hears toni gasp beside her, and she’s gripping cheryl’s hand tightly.

“cheryl, hey, i…i didn’t mean to make you upset, i just-.”

“it’s not that, t.t.” she whispers. toni frowns, but waits patiently as cheryl closes her eyes and simply lets her tears fall.

“everyone thinks i’m this loveless monster, but it isn’t true…” cheryl croaks out, and toni’s expression is filled with guilt as she shakes her head and leans in closer.

“cheryl, i…i thought that before, but now…now, god, after everything that’s happened, i can see that that isn’t true. you care about people, i mean, god, look at everything you did for me today. you’re…you’re so amazing, cheryl. and i’m so sorry for everything that’s happened.” toni whispers. cheryl
chokes on a sob, the tears clinging to her eyelashes falling as her whole body trembles.

she wants to tell toni, but she’s scared. she hasn’t told anyone about this before, but toni had just poured her heart out to her, it’s only fair cheryl does the same…

but what if toni doesn’t accept her?

but then she remembers…

“besides…i’m more into girls, anyways…”

can…can she finally tell someone her deepest, darkest secret without fear of being judged?

something is telling her to stop, but deep down, she knows she can trust toni. there’s something about her that cheryl’s never encountered before. she knows she can tell her.

the words are escaping her mouth before she can stop them.

“i loved someone…who loved me.” she whispers. toni’s expression is filled with confusion, and cheryl takes a deep breath in and ploughs on.

now that she’s started, she can’t stop.

“i loved someone who loved me…and my mother destroyed it.” she says hoarsely. toni sighs, nodding slowly as she gazes at cheryl sympathetically.

“you mean your brother, jason? i heard how close you guys were…” she says softly, and cheryl’s heart aches at the mention of her deceased twin brother, but she shakes her head.

“no…not jay jay…” she whispers, and she finds herself hesitating, more tears falling from frustration over her indecision before she looks up into toni’s eyes and finds nothing but genuine concern and care shining in them.
she can trust her, they whisper.

“her name was heather.” cheryl finally says in a broken whisper, and within seconds, understanding shines in toni’s eyes as she waits patiently for cheryl to continue.

“she was my best friend in junior high...she used to sleep over every weekend. until one night my mother caught us in the same bed.” cheryl’s sobbing now, her voice low despite how strained and broken her tone is as she swallows the lump in her throat and looks up at toni in despair, the memories of heather watching in sadness as penelope blossom dug her nails into cheryl’s arm and had dragged her out of the bed flooding her mind and causing her heart to ache.

“she said i was deviant.” she says hoarsely.

“these are deviant thoughts, cheryl! deviant behavior!”

and cheryl watches as toni blinks back her own tears, closing her eyes as she shakes her head.

“cheryl, i am so sorry…but you have to know your mother’s wrong.” she whispers, and she leans in closer, her lips quirking up in a small smile.

“you’re not loveless…you’re not deviant, okay?” she says softly, and she reaches out to grip cheryl’s hand that’s resting on the table, her warm fingers curling around cheryl’s and causing goosebumps to rise on her skin as she lets out a soft gasp and looks up into toni’s eyes.

“you’re…sensational.” toni breathes.

cheryl’s frozen, looking at this girl before her with feelings she’s never felt before flooding throughout her body.

happiness over being in her presence, excitement over the unknown future she has with this girl, sadness over her tragic past, but elation at how understanding she’s being right now, gripping her hand and telling her that her mother’s words of harshness are wrong.
“you’re...sensational.”

“alright, i’ve got a cheeseburger with extra fries and-oh...should i come back?” the waitress looks down at cheryl and toni in surprise, cheryl sniffing and wiping away her tears as she detaches her hand from toni’s and shakes her head with a smile.

“no, it’s okay, toni needs to eat.” she says simply, and toni smiles at her softly as the waitress sets down her food in front of her, toni’s eyes lighting up as she pretty much immediately grabs the burger and takes a bite.

the groan she lets out causes cheryl to chuckle, and she chews her food with a smile, closing her eyes and groaning again before she looks at cheryl.

“i’m sorry-.” but cheryl cuts her off with a raise of her hand and a smile.

“don’t be silly, t.t. enjoy it.”

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toni can’t stop staring at her.

it had been late when they’d finally decided to depart pop’s diner, pop himself watching them with a warm smile as he had told them he was happy cheryl was feeling better after that morning, and cheryl had simply grinned widely and told him it was all thanks to the girl sitting beside her.

toni’s heart had leapt at those words, and she knows now there’s no denying it.

she has feelings for cheryl blossom.

and she really, really wishes she didn’t but she’s also really, really happy that she does.

because cheryl blossom...is absolutely magnificent.
they’d talked all night, toni telling cheryl more about why and how she joined the serpents, even confiding in her about her uncle and how he’d hurt her in the past, cheryl swapping her own stories of her mother’s abuse, and it’s crazy, that they’re bonding over something so horrible, but it just feels so good to be able to talk to someone about it without the flinches and the anger and the advice about how she should just leave and get far away from him.

cheryl knows. cheryl understands.

and toni’s never been more thankful that the redheaded blossom had taken her hand and had massaged ice over her neck that fateful day at riverdale general hospital.

cheryl also spoke about jason, toni’s heart filling with sadness as cheryl told her about how close she was with him, and how he’d been the only one who showed her love in the blossom household other than her nana rose, how he’d hold her and press a kiss to her forehead and promise her that one day he’d get her out of this hellhole, far away from riverdale and her mother and father’s grasp.

losing him had broken everything inside her, and toni finds herself wanting nothing more than to put the pieces of her back together.

because, god fucking dammit, she has feeling for cheryl blossom, and now that she realizes it, she can’t stop thinking about it.

they’re in her car now, driving to the school to toni’s bike, and toni wishes the school was three hours away, wishes they could just keep driving and forget everything and everyone, leave riverdale far behind.

but alas, cheryl pulls up to the school, her tires crunching on the gravel as toni gazes out at her bike still sitting there in the empty lot, and she sighs and looks to cheryl, who smiles at her softly.

“i had an amazing time, toni.” she whispers, and toni reaches out and closes her hand over cheryl’s one resting on the gearshift, their fingers interlacing as she licks her lips and looks up at cheryl through her eyelashes.

god, she wants to kiss her so badly right now…
cheryl inhales deeply, looking at toni with careful eyes before she drops her gaze down to toni’s lips, and toni’s heart leaps out of her chest.

is cheryl thinking the same thing?

toni goes to lean in, but a squeeze of her hand from cheryl stops her. she’s anxious, toni can tell, and she isn’t about to make her more upset.

it’s been enough for one night…

“thank you, cheryl. for the station and for driving me here…i had an amazing time, too.” toni says instead, and cheryl visibly relaxes, a smile lighting up her features as she nods once and looks up at the school.

“i’ll see you tomorrow?” she whispers, and toni chuckles and nods.

“i’ll see you tomorrow.” toni finally lets go of her and opens the door, stepping out of the cherry red convertible and raising a hand in goodbye, and cheryl doesn’t leave until toni’s straddling her bike and turning the ignition, kickstarting the engine to life as she peels out of the parking lot and makes her way to sunnyside trailer park with dread.

whatever’s awaiting her, it doesn’t matter.

because nothing, *nothing*…will ever make her regret today.
Chapter Notes

this one is shorter than the last two and for that, i’m sorry, but from here on out for at least two or three chapters, it’s going to follow pretty much the same storyline as the show! so i’ll try and skip ahead as much as i can with only brief descriptions and what not! exciting stuff ahead for our two lovebirds, that i can guarantee you!

i hope you guys enjoyed this one, it hurt to write tbh, i also want to add a trigger warning for abuse in this chapter! the act itself isn't in here, but the aftermath is. i’d skip the rest of the chapter from about midway down if it bothers you! :)

for the first time in a long time, cheryl blossom wakes up feeling excited for the day ahead of her.

since jason’s death, every day has been a struggle, the dark cloud of jason’s demise hanging over her heart and head like an anchor dragging her down, the clouds turning to thunder when it had been revealed that her own father was jason’s murderer, but today…

today the clouds are simply a light grey, a bit of sunshine peeking through as she blinks the sleep from her eyes and stretches the restlessness out of her body, groaning as her joints pop loudly from lack of movement.

she stifles a yawn before looking up at the ceiling with a grin.

the last few days have been chaotic to say the least. and yes, cheryl was known for chaos, it was pretty much her goddamn middle name, but even she needs a break sometimes.

she was looking forward to today being completely and utterly drama free.

wishful thinking, as it would turn out, but hey, cheryl’s the queen of wishful thinking.

she throws the covers off herself before slipping her feet into gucci slippers and making her way out of her room, quickly glancing around lest she run into her mother, who she hasn’t seen since yesterday morning.
she makes her way down the stairs of thistlehouse to the kitchen, content to simply grab herself an apple for breakfast when she passes the conservatory to find her mother talking with some man she’s never seen before.

cheryl frowns, wrapping her nightgown around her more carefully so as not to expose her body. the man doesn’t look menacing by any means, but still, cheryl can’t help but carry a certain distrust for men considering her father murdered her twin brother and the only guy she’s shown interest in for a long time attempted to rape her.

she wills away the thoughts of nick st. clair as she steps into the conservatory with a flourish.

“mother. strange man i’ve never met.” she drawls, coming to a stop in front of them, and penelope blossom rolls her eyes.

“cheryl, this is mr. lazenby, our state attorney. your father as it turns out left a secret will.” she says stiffly, and cheryl scoffs.

“of course he did. but…daddy died almost two months ago.” cheryl says with a frown, and mr. lazenby hums.

“mr. blossom’s will has been kept under wraps while the authorities continue their investigation into his…side business.” he says slowly, and cheryl smiles.

“you mean drug dealing?” she says sarcastically, and mr. lazenby sighs as penelope glares at her.

“does this mean we’re going to be rich again?” cheryl says with a happy grin, and penelope rolls her eyes once more.

“don’t be so gauche, cheryl.” she sighs, and cheryl flips her hair over her shoulder.

perhaps if they’re rich again, her mother will allow her to seek justice against nick st. clair. perhaps if they’re rich again she can see her would be rapist put behind bars where he belongs…

mr. lazenby looks between them both with a frown.
“as i was saying, the will was kept hidden until yesterday, when it dawned on the authorities that mr. blossom’s assets can no longer remain frozen. better to release his will now than later and have it all be useless. per clifford’s instructions, he requested i withhold all information, including the names of his numerous beneficiaries until a public will reading. how does this weekend sound to you, penelope?”

cheryl’s heart drops.

a public will reading?

“this weekend will be fine, mr. lazenby.”

“and what exactly is this will going to reveal?” cheryl asks somewhat subtlety, and mr. lazenby gives her a crooked smile.

“your father’s money, and who his company will go to has all been put in this will, cheryl. i expect to see you there on saturday, bright eyed and bushy tailed.”

cheryl doesn’t have a sarcastic comment to make, simply nods as mr. lazenby stands with a sigh.

“i’ll be on my way. good to see you, penelope. i’ll call you later about arrangements.”

“of course…”

he takes his leave, offering cheryl a small smile as he does, and she doesn’t return it, instead turns her attention to her mother, who purses her lips and looks up at cheryl blankly.

“is there a reason why you came home at almost eleven last night, cheryl?” she asks coolly, and cheryl licks her lips before flipping her hair over her shoulder once more.

if her mother thinks she’s getting a truthful answer, she’s sorely mistaken.
“I have friends, mother. Unlike you.” She says sweetly, and Penelope clenches her jaw before returning the same, sick smile to her daughter.

“I’m sure you do, dear. But come home that late again, and you won’t be stepping foot outside this house for a month. Now, go fetch Nana Rose so we can have breakfast. I have errands to run today now that our Saturday will be occupied with your father’s will reading.”

Cheryl frowns, but doesn’t argue her mother’s deal as she turns on her heel and exits the room, making her way back up the stairs to Nana Rose’s room as she processes the fact that her father has apparently left behind a secret will…

Cheryl can’t help but be slightly elated. If her father had left her money, then he’d finally done something good for her for once. She had absolutely no interest in taking over Maple Blossom Farms, but she could use whatever money her father has left her to get out from under Penelope, find herself a place in Riverdale or far from it that would finally get her out from her mother’s clutches.

But could she really do it?

Every part of her wants to say yes, but she can’t help but think about the woman who’s room she’s currently heading to.

She can’t leave Nana Rose behind to fall under the care of Penelope Blossom. Penelope didn’t give a damn about her, and Nana Rose was fragile. She needed constant care, and the nurses who usually came to aid her only worked for certain hours…

She could take Nana Rose with her, but again, Cheryl would be required to care for her twenty hour seven, and as much as Cheryl loves her Nana Rose, she’s not willing to give up her life for her.

Besides…she couldn’t possibly leave behind all her friends. She couldn’t possibly leave behind, well…

A vision of pink hair dances before her eyes, and she wills the image away with a shake of her head as she knocks on the door to Nana Rose’s room once.

“Nana Rose?” She calls out softly as she opens the door, and Nana Rose blinks at her owlishly from her position on the bed, a soft sigh of relief that Cheryl assumes, it’s not Penelope escaping her as she
smiles at her granddaughter.

“cheryl, would you be a dear and help me get to my chair?” she rasps, and cheryl smiles, nodding once as she walks to nana rose’s chair in the corner of the room and kicks down the brakes before wheeling it over to the bed.

“come on, nana.” she whispers, helping her sit up slowly before taking one leg and gently swinging it over the bed. she does the same with the other, nana rose whimpering slightly in pain as cheryl looks up at her apologetically.

“i’m sorry, nana rose.” she says, and nana rose touches her cheek.

“i’m old, dear. my body’s pain is not your fault.” she says simply, and cheryl smiles before gently lifting her and sitting her down in her chair, adjusting the cushioning around it until nana rose sighs comfortably.

“nana rose, i’m sure mother will tell you when we get downstairs, but daddy apparently had a secret will. there’s going to be a public reading on saturday.” cheryl tells her, and nana rose looks up at her with a frown.

“a will? hmm, yes…i suppose he did need one.”

“everyone needs one, nana rose.” cheryl drawls with a roll of her eyes, and nana rose smiles at her before gripping one of cheryl’s alabaster hands into her blue veined ones.

“i don’t, dear cheryl. i’m going to live forever.” she says hoarsely, and the words send chills up cheryl’s spine, her whole body freezing as she tries her best to smile at her senile grandmother politely.

her grandmother scares her sometimes. cheryl’s positive that she has gypsy blood in her. one time, when she and jason were kids, her nana had told her that jason was going to hurt her badly, and sure enough, three days later, jason had tripped her while they were playing and she’d fallen through a glass table, cutting open her arm in the process, a scar that still exists on her upper arm.

of course, now that cheryl thinks about it, nana rose could have been talking about his death, as well…that hurt cheryl more than any glass table ever could.
“what’s on your mind, my dearest girl?” nana rose asks softly, and cheryl looks down at her with a warm smile before she moves behind the wheelchair.

“nothing, nana.” she sighs.

“you seem happier than you have been in a long time, you know.” she says suspiciously, and cheryl bites back a grin as she shrugs and begins wheeling her grandmother out of the room.

“i had a good night last night despite my hideous weekend.” she says fondly, and nana rose chuckles before she turns her head, trying to get cheryl into her line of vision, and cheryl stops wheeling her and moves into it with a raised eyebrow.

“What’s his name?” she asks, a twinkle in her eyes as she gives cheryl a lopsided smile, and cheryl hesitates before she smiles affectionately, a vision of pink hair and beautiful brown eyes filling her mind once more.

“toni.” she says sheepishly, and nana rose’s smile only grows.

“ah…”

breakfast is a quick affair, cheryl scoffing down the two apples she’d cut up quickly in order to get out of the house as soon as possible, and she presses a kiss to her nana’s temple before rushing out without even saying goodbye to penelope, who truly, doesn’t even notice cheryl is gone until she’s already in her cherry red convertible, excitement coursing through her veins.

toni’s waiting for her at riverdale high.

cheryl still can’t wrap her mind around the fact that she’s getting excited about seeing a southside serpent, but she can’t help it.

last night had been…phenomenal. a stark contrast to the night she had before it. her and toni had talked for hours, and cheryl found herself clinging to every word that escaped toni’s plump lips, listening as she told her about the serpents and what they meant to her, about how she’d met sweet pea and fangs, and even about her uncle…
when the conversation had turned to that, cheryl had found her fury growing with each story that toni had told her.

she couldn’t understand why. why toni’s uncle was so hell bent on hurting her when toni was so…good.

granted, she wasn’t perfect, god, no one was. cheryl definitely wasn’t, and toni had sold drugs and been arrested for it in the past, cheryl knows this despite toni not telling her anything about her time in juvie…so no, she wasn’t perfect, but she was damn near close to it.

she was so easy to talk to, and so easy to listen to, so understanding and willing to understand if she didn’t, and cheryl’s quite sure she has never and will never encounter someone like the pink haired serpent ever again.

there had been a moment, though, before toni had exited her car at the school last night, where cheryl had felt something…deep.

a connection that went beyond anything she felt with heather, her first and only love.

and she’s positive that toni had felt it, too. she hadn’t missed the way toni had gripped her hand, she hadn’t missed toni leaning in, perhaps for a kiss, and cheryl had wanted to…god, had she wanted to. she’s pretty sure part of her has been subconsciously thinking about how those full lips of toni’s would feel against her own for a long time now, but she was scared.

the last relationship she’d had with a girl had ended in complete and utter destruction. heather had been ripped away from her by her foul mother in a horrible and ghoulish way, for penelope blossom had convinced heather’s parents that heather was doing drugs and had influenced cheryl to do some as well, calling their behavior deviant (oh god, how cheryl hates that word) before requesting that the only solution was for heather and her parents to move far away, which is exactly what they did, terrified of penelope and the wrath the blossom family would rain down on them if they didn’t.

of course, cheryl’s positive that nothing could ever convince toni topaz to leave riverdale and her southside serpents behind, least of all penelope blossom despite all her terror and intimidation, but penelope could hurt her in other ways that cheryl can’t even fathom.

and cheryl would rather die than let any harm come to toni because of her.
so perhaps…perhaps it was best if she and Toni simply stayed friends. That way, it didn't look suspicious to her mother, and that way, Cheryl could protect her behind this facade of friendship, even though what she truly craved was something more with the pink haired girl.

tears well in her eyes the second the thought enters her mind. The thought of Toni holding her hand and pressing a kiss to her cheek, or Toni in the bed next to her with her arm wrapped around her waist and her nose buried in Cheryl’s red hair as they slept, but she wills the tears away with a sniff as she tightens her grip on the steering wheel. It’s a sacrifice she’s willing to make for Toni’s safety. It was enough that she was getting abused by her uncle, Cheryl wasn’t going to add her mother to Toni’s mix of chaos.

but friends? Friends they could definitely be.

Cheryl pulls into her usual parking spot at Riverdale High, and spots a few bikes as well, her heart immediately racing as she licks her lips nervously before exiting the car.

A few people stare, simply because she’s Cheryl Blossom and not staring at her is technically a crime as she throws open the doors to Riverdale High and walks through them with an air of finesse that not a single pleb at this school would be able to replicate no matter how hard they tried.

When her eyes don’t see familiar billowing pink hair as she passes Toni’s locker, however, a frown falls over her delicate features, and she finds herself stopping right in the middle of the hallway, her eyes scanning through the sea of heads for any sign of a serpent jacket or pink hair, but she finds none.

Cheryl’s frown deepens, and she abandoned her route to her locker, instead making her way to the student lounge. She ducks her head in quickly, finds only Kevin Keller sitting on one of the red chairs reading a book, and he looks up and smiles at her.

“Hey, Cheryl!” he goes to stand, but Cheryl raises a hand to stop him.

“As pleasant as talking with you always is, Kevin, I’m looking for someone. Have you seen Toni Topaz?” she asks firmly, and Kevin’s eyes widen before a knowing smile takes over his features.

“Uh, no, actually. I haven’t. But if I see her, I’ll let her know you’re looking for her-.”
“no need, i’ll likely find her before you do.” cheryl mumbles, and she exits before kevin can say anything else, her eyes now scanning simply for any southside serpents as she looks for that familiar two headed snake with no luck.

she sighs before swinging her bag off her shoulders and reaching into it for her phone, and she hesitates as her thumb hovers over the little pink and yellow icon, her teeth chewing on her cherry red bottom lip before she sighs in frustration and pushes it, opening instagram up and going to her private messages to type in toni’s username.

cheryl_bombshell: hey, t.t. are you coming to school today?

cheryl sends the message quickly before she chickens out, and she shoves her phone into the pocket of her black jeans as she makes her way over to her locker to retrieve her english book, worry getting the better of her.

it’s possible she’s running late, of course, although toni topaz does not seem like the kind of girl who is late at all, and cheryl is trying so hard not to panic, but she had spent all last night hearing stories about toni’s uncle, she can’t help but think the worst-

the grey cloud is slowly beginning to turn dark once more, and cheryl bites on the inside of her cheek anxiously, her red nails tapping against the locker beside her as she stares into her own one blankly, unsure of why she’s even opened it-

“cheryl, hey.” she jumps slightly at the sound of her name, and she shuts her locker door slightly, turning to see josie mccoy standing beside her with a small smile on her face.

“josie… give a girl some warning, jeez…” cheryl breathes, trying to calm her racing heart, and josie chuckles before she reaches out and touches cheryl’s shoulder tenderly.

“How are you holding up?” she asks softly, and cheryl sighs. she knows she’s asking about the whole nick st. clair ordeal, and cheryl’s been trying very hard not to focus on it at all, but right now, all cheryl can think about is toni…

“I’m fine, josie. everything’s fine.” she says simply, and josie purses her lips, but says nothing more for a few moments as cheryl turns her attention instead to the small mirror glued to her locker door, her eyes roaming her face for any sign of her distress, but as usual, her make up is immaculate. the
only indication that she’s currently having what feels like an anxiety attack is the panic in her brown eyes.

“so…you were with toni topaz last night…” josie says, a smirk lighting up her dark features as cheryl closes her locker door and exhales shakily.

“and?” she says simply with a toss of her hair, trying to initiate a sense of calm in her tone, and josie chuckles.

“never thought i’d see cheryl blossom having dinner with a southside serpent, that’s all.” she says with a shrug, and cheryl rolls her eyes.

the serpents really didn’t have a good reputation, and she knows that she’s partly to blame for it with the way she’s stomped around the school in anger during their first week here, but still…they weren’t as bad as everyone made them out to be.

toni and fangs saved her life, clearly they weren’t as bad as everyone made them out to be…

“she may be a southside serpent, but she saved my life on sunday. the least i could do was accompany her to dinner, josie.” she says firmly instead, and josie’s smile falters as she contemplates cheryl’s words before she nods slowly.

“true…” she murmurs, and cheryl reaches out and grips her hand.

“josie, it’s okay. i’ll…i’ll be okay, i mean. don’t worry about me, alright?” cheryl tells her softly.

josie mccoy has always been a girl cheryl’s admired. after all, if josie wasn’t trying to live up to her father’s reputation by being a music mogul, she was trying to appease her mother in any way possible, desperate to get the attention of the woman who had dedicated her entire life to a city filled with chaos and destruction.

but something that cheryl’s always admired is that despite josie’s biting attitude, she cares about people so deeply…it’s a quality cheryl wishes more than anything that she herself had. josie was willing to do whatever her friends needed her to do…perhaps a quality she picked up from her mother, who did whatever she could to keep this city safe. even if it meant arresting the wrong people as she did yesterday…
josie exhales shakily before she squeezes cheryl’s hand with a smile.

“you’re one of my best friends, cheryl. i just want you to know that i’m here for you.” she whispers, and cheryl’s heart warms at those words, her thoughts about toni momentarily forgotten as she smiles and touches josie’s cheek lovingly.

“you’re the best of us all, josie mccoy. thank you.” she says softly, and josie’s smile only grows as cheryl grips her english book in her hand tightly, her worry for toni returning once more.

“well then, i’ve got an english class to snooze through…” she takes her phone out of her pocket and looks down at it anxiously.

still no reply.

“yeah, i’ve got bio.” josie says, and cheryl purses her lips and nods before looking up at her with a fake grin plastered on her face, all traces of worry gone in this play of pretend that cheryl’s become quite adept at.

“well then! enjoy…” she trails off, her grin instantly fading as the front doors to riverdale high open and sweet pea and fangs walk in, both of them play fighting each other with wide grins.

and toni is nowhere to be seen with them.

cheryl bites down on her bottom lip in hesitation before she looks at josie sheepishly.

“excuse me.” she says simply before tearing off down the hallway toward them before josie can even respond, and she can practically feel josie’s eyes burning holes of confusion into the back of her head as she comes to a stop in front of the two southside serpents, reaching them just as they stop at sweet pea’s locker, still busted open from yesterday’s events. they both look up at her approach, fangs smiling widely at her.

“cheryl, h-.”
“where’s toni?” she asks straight away, and sweet pea tears his angry gaze away from his locker and looks at her with a scoff.

“good morning to you, too.” he grumbles, and cheryl glares at him as fangs rolls his eyes and punches his arm lightly before turning back to cheryl with a small smile.

“she’s out sick today, red. she messaged not long ago saying she wasn’t feeling well.” fangs says with a sigh, and cheryl feels her heart sink.

she knows toni’s not sick. she’d been perfectly fine last night, so cheryl knows that what she’s told fangs is a lie, because god, cheryl’s used that excuse a million times, calling the school and pretending to be her mother on the days where the bruises on her ivory skin were too deep to cover with concealer and foundation…

“maybe she picked up some northside disease from you, red.” sweet pea says sarcastically, and cheryl’s pulled out of her thoughts at his words as she glares at him and crosses her arms over her chest.

“i thought our agreement was that we don’t make jabs at each other anymore, peapod.” she deadpans, and sweet pea shrugs.

“can’t help myself.”

“then consider our deal null and void, treebeard.” fangs chokes on a laugh, his fist banging against the locker as sweet pea nods, impressed.

“treebeard, huh? didn’t take you for a lord of the rings fan.”

“everyone’s watched those movies.” she says with a shrug and a flip of her hair, and fangs shakes his head with a grin before he reaches out and grips her shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze as he does.

“i’m sure she’s fine, cheryl. don’t worry yourself too much. she’ll be back and at it tomorrow.”
cheryl highly doubts that if her suspicions are true.

the bell rings loudly, and cheryl teeth gnash at her bottom lip as fangs smiles at her before making his way to class, sweet pea doing the same without even looking at her again as she stands there, contemplating her next move.

she doesn’t even know where toni lives, she can’t just go rushing to sunnyside trailer park to find her, she’d probably spent most of the morning knocking on the doors of every trailer until she came across the right one, and that’s not exactly the smartest thing to do considering not all of the southside serpents were as good as toni, fangs, jughead, and…well, yes, even sweet pea.

not only that, but cheryl’s never been to the southside on her own, let alone sunnyside trailer park, and the thought of going there terrifies her.

it’s not so much the serpents she’s worried about, but the ghoulies. she’d seen what they were like at the drag race, they’re…animals. horrifying enough to scare the likes of reggie mantle, whose ego was as big as his pride.

but toni was clearly avoiding not only her, but sweet pea and fangs, and there’s only one reason she’d be doing that.

her uncle hurt her last night…he must’ve been pissed about her getting arrested.

the second that thought truly enters her mind, cheryl knows that’s what’s happened here, knows it deep in her bones, and the thought has tears welling in her eyes, a decision slowly beginning to settle in her mind.

this is dangerous, she knows that. if toni’s uncle is home…

a vision of toni, beat up and curled on top of her bed in some trailer park, flashes before her eyes, and her feet are moving on instinct alone as she abandons all hope of going to class, heading straight for the parking lot as she drops her english book to the ground.

she wouldn’t have been able to concentrate, anyway.
toni groans softly, her body aching with every single movement as she hisses in pain and stares up at the ceiling in despair, tears welling in her eyes.

she hasn’t been able to sleep all night, the pain too much for her to handle.

as expected, the second she’d walked through the door of her uncle’s trailer, the surprise of it even opening had lasted about two seconds before fingers had curled into her hair and had dragged her into the living room.

jacob topaz had yelled for at least an hour straight while also pounding his fist and foot into every part of toni he could reach in between, leaving not a single inch of her unmarked before his thick fingers had wrapped around her neck, nails digging into her skin as he choked the life out of her with everything he had.

it was only after toni had been on the verge of blacking out, her eyes rolling in the back of her head and her vision beginning to darken, that jacob had finally relinquished his hold on her and had retreated into his room with a frustrated growl.

she spent at least an hour on the ground, unable to move as she’d cried with every movement her body made, and eventually, she’d miraculously managed to get herself up and make her way to her bed. she’s been here ever since, too afraid and in pain to move a single muscle.

she knows she’s got at least one or two fractured or broken ribs. every fucking breath she takes is painful, like her lungs are being squeezed with each intake, and she knows there’s blood on her sheets now as well, but she can’t bring it in her to move.

she knows he’s not in the house anymore, had heard him messing around in the kitchen before he’d left about an hour ago to go to work, so she’s at least got the place to herself till about five, or possibly even later if he decides to go to the wyrm, which she’s desperately hoping he does.

she needs time to heal a little before she can get the hell out of here.

she tries to push herself up off the bed, her hands digging into the sheets, but all does is cause her body to ache, and she falls back onto the bed with tears falling into her hair.
she reaches for her phone under her pillow with trembling fingers and quickly sends a message to fangs telling him she’s not feeling well, her cover story for every other time this has happened. he sends back a sadface emoji as a reply, and she shoves her phone back under her pillow and licks her lips, the metallic taste of blood hitting her tongue as she tries to just do something.

she can’t lay here forever, and she’s hungry despite the gigantic meal she had last night at pop’s with cheryl.

cheryl…

toni groans softly as she turns onto her side, wrapping her arms around her body as she curls in on herself and tries her best to breathe, thoughts of red hair and cherry red lips invading her mind and making her smile despite the pain currently hitting her like tidal waves.

she still doesn’t regret yesterday. despite the pain shooting through her body right now, despite the fact that she can barely breathe, yesterday had been…amazing.

her phone goes off, and toni grabs it, looking for a message from fangs, but what she sees instead makes her heart drop.

an Instagram notification.

**cheryl_bombshell:** hey, t.t. are you coming to school today?

toni stares at the message for a long time, brown eyes roaming over each letter as if cheryl had personally handwritten them, and she feels tears prick her eyes as she looks up at the ceiling in grief.

she can’t go to school like this. she can barely move, and if sweet pea and fangs saw her, they wouldn’t hesitate in running straight to this trailer to kill her uncle. they’d barely escaped by the skin of their teeth yesterday, sweet pea especially, she’s not putting them in danger of serving jail time again.

besides…she doesn’t want cheryl to see her like this, either. broken and bloody and bruised, weak and cowardice against her uncle to do anything about his abuse against her…
she took all of this for a reason. for a roof over her head, for a grandfather to live in peace without the knowledge of what his son was doing to his granddaughter…

she can handle this pain.

what she’s sure she can’t handle, however, is cheryl looking at her with sadness and despair. what she can’t handle is what she’s sure will happen if cheryl sees her like this.

cheryl protecting her, defending her, perhaps confronting her uncle and telling him not to touch her anymore…

so, she makes a quick decision. she shoves the phone back under her pillow and ignores it, deciding that the best thing she can do for cheryl blossom is to stay away from her. cheryl has enough shit in her life without toni and her fucking uncle, and toni won’t be responsible for any harm coming to cheryl. she’d rather die than watch her uncle even get close to the redhead girl who has so easily won her affections…

her eyes land on her pillow, the red spotting on it that contrasts so wildly with the yellow sheet around it. she needs to get to the shower, to wash off all this blood…

tears immediately stream down her face the second she manages to push herself up into a seated position, and she whimpers, clutching the bloody sheets between her fingers to try and alleviate the pain before she slowly stands on shaking legs.

she’s reaching out for the wall the second she’s standing upright, desperate for some kind of support as she slowly inches her way out of her bedroom and into the bathroom.

each step is torture, her whole body trembling, and she can feel a slick sheen of sweat beginning to develop on her skin as her body shakes, and maybe she is getting sick after all, because her whole body feels very hot right now…

she doesn’t even bother taking her clothes off, she knows it’ll be next to impossible for her to lift her shirt over her head or bend down to remove her pants, so instead, she turns the cold water on full blast and gets in, curling up in the bathtub into a position that doesn’t cause her body to throb painfully as she lets the water fall over it.
a steady stream of blood begins to pool at her feet before circling into the drain with a loud gurgle, and she watches it in fascination for a few moments before the realization that this is *her own blood* circling the drain hits her. she’s sobbing before she can stop herself, each cry wracking her body with pain that only causes her to cry harder.

she needs to get out of here. she can’t keep taking beatings like this. even juvie wasn’t this bad, she’d gotten roughed up a few times, sure, but the bite of a punch from another woman was nothing compared to that of a full grown man, and jacob had spent a good hour kicking and punching her last night…

god, what was wrong with him? a small threat she could understand, a grip of the hair or a squeeze of the neck, but a full blown beating like this? he’s never done this before…

he’s getting more and more violent, and the longer she stays here, the longer toni begins to fear for her life. she’s positive he’ll kill her one day without batting a single eyelash. this isn’t about a roof over her head anymore, this is about survival, and if toni wants to live, she needs to really consider living her life on the streets from now on…

she could stay permanently at the wyrm, that bed above the bar isn’t going anywhere, but her uncle goes there all the time, his glare burning holes into the back of her head every time she’s working the bar while he’s there, and the whole point of leaving here is getting as far away from him as possible. sweet pea and fangs are an option, and she guesses jughead is now, too, but she can’t just keep bouncing from trailer to trailer for the rest of her life…

she just wants stability. is that so much to ask for?

she has no idea how long she’s sitting there for, her eyes closed as she slowly begins to drift off with the water hitting her body gently, before there’s a loud knock on the front door of the trailer, echoing out into the bathroom and causing her to open her eyes blearily.

oh god, she can’t answer the door like this, whoever it is will just have to come back…

another loud knock, and toni groans and grips the edges of the bathtub in an effort to pull herself up, but it *hurts.*

the knocking doesn’t stop, however, and toni grits her teeth and somehow manages to pull herself
up, a hand reaching out to turn the water off before she slowly steps out of the bathtub and begins making her way to the front door.

she hopes whoever is at the door gets a fright when they see her to be honest, that’ll teach them to *keep knocking when no one is answering.*

the person has knocked five more times by the time toni gets to the front door, and she grips the handle and throws it open with a growl.

“what?!?” she yells, and the second her eyes land on her, toni’s knees almost collapse in on her.

cheryl blossom…cheryl blossom here on her doorstep, no, no, she can’t be here-

they stare at each other for a long time, drinking each other in before cheryl gasps loudly.

“toni…toni, oh my god…” cheryl’s voice is filled with worry, tears welling in her eyes as they roam over toni’s beaten face and body, and she steps forward, toni immediately stepping back as she grips the door frame to steady herself.

no, no, no, no,*she can’t be here-*

she can’t be here, if her uncle comes back, god-

“cheryl…what are you doing here?” she gasps out, and cheryl has tears falling down her face as she licks her lips, but stays still on the other side of the door.

“i got worried, t.t., you told fangs you were sick, but i just…i just…i *knew*…” she can’t seem to speak, her body trembling from shock, and toni closes her eyes, tightening her grip on the doorframe as her knees buckle beneath her.

*god, of course she knew, of course she did, but she can’t be here, she can’t...*

“you can’t be here…” toni whispers, finally opening her eyes to look at cheryl in despair, and
cheryl’s eyes suddenly widen as she tilts her head to look inside the trailer in fear.

“is he still here?” she breathes, and toni’s not sure how much longer she’s gonna be able to keep herself upright-

“no, but still…” she’s swaying, and cheryl throws caution to the wind and steps over the threshold, reaching out for her, and toni has no control.

she’s reaching out and gripping cheryl’s forearms desperately as the world spins slightly, a soft whimper of pain escaping her, and cheryl’s nails dig into her arms for a brief second before she’s pulling toni into her arms ever so gently, her lips pressing against toni’s ear as toni buries her head into cheryl’s shoulder.

“let me help you, toni…please.” she whispers in her ear, and toni feels a shiver run up her spine as she rests her hands on the small of cheryl’s back, content to stay like this for however long they have to as long as cheryl doesn’t let her go…

“you’re wet, t.t.” cheryl whispers, and toni sighs against her.

“i needed to wash the blood off, and i…i can’t take my clothes off, my body hurts too much.” she deadpans, and cheryl sighs against her before she lets her go, moving back and gripping toni’s shoulders instead.

“we’ll get you down on the couch and i’ll grab a towel, okay?” toni bites her lip in hesitation, her teeth scraping over a cut as she winces before nodding once, and cheryl wraps an arm around her waist and helps her slowly make her way over to the couch. each step is agonizing, and toni doesn’t want to look weak in front of cheryl, but cheryl doesn’t seem to pay any attention to it, all her focus on making toni feel better as she helps her down onto the couch gently.

“do you have a first aid kit?” cheryl asks, reaching out to brush a lock of hair behind her ear, and toni shivers at her touch before she licks her lips and nods.

“above the fridge.” she whispers hoarsely, and cheryl purses those cherry red lips of hers before she begins navigating her way through the small trailer home.

she returns a minute later, a towel and the first aid kit in her hands, and she sits down beside toni,
gripping the towel in her hands and running it over toni’s body gently before she wraps it around the pink haired girl’s shoulders.

“your face isn’t too bad…” cheryl whispers, and toni scoffs, regrets it immediately as her body flares with pain. cheryl tucks a finger under her chin, forcing toni to look at her delicately, and she keeps her finger there as she reaches into the first aid kit and pulls out rubbing alcohol and a cloth.

her hold on toni loosens as she places the cloth over the bottle and shakes it before she grips toni’s chin gently in order to get her under the light to see. the second the cloth makes contact with her skin, toni hisses in pain, and cheryl bites her lip with guilt.

“i’m sorry…”

“it’s okay, bombshell. just stings a little.” toni says with a soft smile, and cheryl returns it as she quickly cleans the cut on toni’s cheek before moving to the one on her lip, then to the one above her eyebrow. she works quickly, but delicately, and toni feels bile rise in the back of her throat at the thought of cheryl working on herself in this way after a day of penelope blossom wailing on her…

god, if she ever gets her hands on that woman…

“how bad is it?” toni asks roughly, and cheryl bites down on her bottom lip before exhaling shakily, her breath hitting toni’s face, and toni can smell citrus, lemon or an orange perhaps…

“your left eye is bruised pretty badly, but it isn’t too swollen, which is good.” she says hoarsely, and toni nods slowly as cheryl moves her hand up to cradle toni’s cheek, her thumb brushing the skin under the cut that’s lacerated it as toni looks at her with sad eyes.

“was he upset about your arrest?” cheryl whispers, and toni sighs.

“he attacked me as soon as i walked through the fucking door, the prick…” she croaks out, and she can see cheryl contain her fury in her left fist with a clench of it, can see cheryl’s nails digging into her palm, and toni reaches down and grips it, forcing her to unclench as she interlaces their fingers.

“i’m okay…”
“you’re not okay, toni.” cheryl says simply, and before toni can respond, she’s letting go of toni’s hand and reaching into the kit once more to pull out bandages.

she places two strips over the cut above her eyebrow and two on the one on her cheek, and toni winces as cheryl’s eyes roam over the rest of her body slowly.

“are there any other cuts?” she asks softly, and toni hesitates.

“i don’t know.” she whispers truthfully. cheryl frowns, but toni watches her looking over toni’s body for any signs of more blood…

“there’s some blood at the top here, but i think that’s from the cuts on your face…” cheryl says, her fingers brushing over the neckline of toni’s tank top before her eyes move over toni’s arms.

“your arms are bruised…but you can’t see them too much because of your skin color…” she whispers, and toni smiles and closes her eyes.

“thank god for my african american mother, huh?” she says with a light chuckle, and cheryl smiles up at her before she looks down at toni’s legs, an anger shining her eyes before she looks back up at toni with a worried frown.

“toni…is there anywhere else other than your arms and legs that’s hurt?” cheryl whispers, and again, toni hesitates.

there’s no point lying to her, she knows that, but she doesn’t want her to see…

“yes.” she whispers after a long moment, and cheryl inhales deeply.

“where?” she asks gently, and toni licks her lips before she curls her fingers underneath her tank top and slowly begins lifting her shirt.

she sees cheryl stiffen, sees her eyes widen in surprise as toni slowly exposes the skin of her stomach, and when cheryl gasps softly, she knows she’s seeing the marks on her ribs where her uncle had kicked her…
cheryl reaches out, her cold fingers brushing over the scratched and reddened skin on top of the blue and red blotches, and cheryl blinks back tears as she looks up at toni in despair.

“can you breathe?” she whispers, and toni looks at her in surprise.

“how…” she trails off though, the realization dawning on her as cheryl smiles sadly.

“mother’s been prone to break few ribs of mine…” she says in a low voice, her throat bobbing up and down as she swallows thickly, and toni finds herself gritting her teeth as she shakes her head.

she’s going to kill penelope blossom…

“if i ever meet that woman, i swear to god…”

“how do you think i feel right now, t.t.?” cheryl says softly, and toni looks at her with a sigh.

“it’s different-.” she starts, but cheryl raises a hand to silence her.

“it’s really not. stay here, let me get ice.” she squeezes toni’s hand before she stands and makes her way to the fridge, opening the freezer and looking inside it before she grabs what looks like meat, her nose wrinkling in disgust.

“yeah, my uncle isn’t really a frozen vegetables kind of guy…” toni murmurs, and cheryl sighs before closing the freezer and making her way over to her with the frozen lump of meat in her hands.

“then this will have to do. lay back.” toni licks her lips before gingerly lowering herself onto the couch, her face screwed up in pain as her head comfortably lands on the arm rest, and cheryl sits down on the edge of the couch by her waist.

“hopefully this’ll help.” she rests the frozen meat onto toni’s ribs, and the second they make contact, toni groans on relief, the heat radiating off the damaged and broken skin slowly dissipating into a dull throbbing as she closes her eyes and swallows dryly.
“that feels good.” she croaks out. cheryl chuckles before reaching out and brushing toni’s hair back from her face.

“i’ll get you some water, don’t move.”

“couldn’t even if i wanted to, bombshell.” toni grumbles, and cheryl frowns before standing and making her way to the kitchen. she returns a few moments later with a glass, and she sits back down by toni’s waist before slowly lowering the cup to her lips.

“don’t move, i’ll go slow.” cheryl says firmly, and toni stiffens, lets the cup rest against her bottom lip as cheryl gingerly begins to tip it, letting the liquid fall slowly into toni’s open mouth.

she can’t help but groan as soon as the water makes its way down her throat, and she didn’t even realize how parched she was, too focused on the pain to realize she was thirsty.

she’s drained the cup completely within seconds as cheryl removes it from her lips with a questioning look in her eyes.

“more?” she asks, and toni shakes her head, cheryl setting the glass down on the ground before she moves the steak onto toni’s other bruised and battered side.

toni tries her best to relax into the couch as she looks up into cheryl’s brown eyes filled with anger and sadness, and she licks her lips as cheryl brings her gaze up from toni’s bruised ribs to her eyes.

“You can’t stay here, t.t.” she whispers, and toni sighs.

“i know, cheryl…but i don’t have much of a choice. it’s either this or the wyrm, and he’s always there anyway, so either way i’m screwed.”

“What about sweet pea and fangs? or jughead?” cheryl asks eagerly, and toni gives her a wry smile.

“I can’t keep bouncing from trailer to trailer, cheryl. that’s no way to live.” She whispers hoarsely.
cheryl’s frown returns, and she’s biting down on her full bottom lip as she looks up into toni’s eyes with something in her eyes that toni can’t quite read.

“you…you could come to thistlehouse…” she says in a low voice, and toni’s heart sinks.

is cheryl seriously asking her to live with her?

“not permanently, just…” cheryl says quickly, licking her lips before she shakes her head.

“just for a few days until you sort something out.” she says, her tone flustered as her cheeks turn bright red, and god, she’s so cute and toni wants to say yes…

“it’ll only make things worse, cher…don’t worry, i’ll be okay. he’ll leave me alone now, he always avoids me after he does something like this because he feels guilty.” toni reassures her, but cheryl’s eyes are on the bruises on toni’s neck, the anger in her eyes returning before she looks up into toni’s eyes with worry.

“are you sure, t.t.?” she asks firmly, and toni smiles and grips her hand in her own.

“i’m sure. besides, something tells me your mother will be less than impressed if you bring a southside serpent to stay under her roof.” cheryl’s expression turns stony, and she rolls her eyes.

“thistlehouse is hardly ‘her roof’, it belongs to nana rose. besides, i can handle my mother.” she drawls, and toni chuckles.

“i’m sure you can. just like i can handle my uncle.” toni reassures her, and cheryl sighs in defeat as she runs her red nailed fingers up and down toni’s forearm, the feeling almost soothing as toni closes her eyes and hums softly.

it feels so normal…god, toni’s pretty sure she could get used to this if it were possible...

they stay like this for a few moments before cheryl sighs audibly, and toni cracks open an eye to look at her tiredly.
“what’s up?” she croaks out, and cheryl looks at her in hesitation before she’s licking her lips and nodding.

“some lawyer came by thistlehouse this morning, apparently my father has a secret will that none of us knew about. there’s going to be a public will reading on saturday, and…i was kind of hoping you could maybe be there? a friend, you know, for moral support.” cheryl asks sheepishly, and toni can feel her heart pounding in her ears as she contemplates cheryl’s words.

she’s going to say yes, of course, but…moral support?

is that what cheryl sees her as? a friend for her to cling to during such a trying time? toni can’t help but feel a little disappointed that all cheryl sees her as is a friend, but then again, she hasn’t invited veronica, which gives toni a slight smug feeling that she’s bumped the infamous lodge girl off her pedestal in cheryl’s life.

besides, if cheryl needs her to be a friend, then that’s exactly what toni will be to her, even if it does hurt her inside that that’s all they’ll ever be…

she could never fathom not being whatever cheryl needs her to be.

so she purses her lips before giving cheryl the most dazzling smile she can muster despite her pain, both physically and emotionally.

“of course, cheryl. i’ll be there with bells on.”
all too quickly does saturday come knocking on cheryl blossom’s door.

she’s pacing frantically, anxiously, back and forth back and forth in her bedroom with toni topaz sitting on the edge of her bed staring at her with a raised eyebrow and a slight smirk on her face.

“you’re gonna ruin the bottoms of your gucci slippers walking back and forth like that, cher.” she deadpans, and cheryl makes a face at her before she continues her pacing.

cheryl had spent the rest of tuesday morning and afternoon nursing toni back to health before her uncle had come home, and she’d also called the school on wednesday morning to inform them that she was sick so she could spend wednesday playing nurse to toni as well, toni’s many protests falling upon deaf ears when cheryl turned up on her doorstep that morning with a smile and a bag of donuts in her hand.

“i have a 4.0 gpa, t.t. missing two days of school isn’t going to make a dent on my grades. now let me in.” cheryl had said with a shake of the bag in her hands, and toni had bitten her bottom lip to hide a grin before she’d moved aside to let cheryl into her small trailer home.

in between the hours they spent together, watching netflix on toni’s laptop and talking about anything and everything, cheryl, with all her experience of patching wounds and covering them up, had done a remarkable job of helping toni with her injuries, to the point where she finally felt able enough to show up to school on thursday morning, looking worse for wear, but at least not as bad as she was the day after the beating. sweet pea and fangs had, of course, immediately asked her who was responsible before toni had hissed at them to drop it and leave her alone and that was that.

they still throw glances of anger in her direction, and cheryl’s positive that one day, they’re going to get it out of toni. they’re going to find out what her uncle is doing, and when that happens, it’s game over for jacob topaz…

cheryl had hated leaving her on tuesday and wednesday, scared that she was leaving her behind to
only receive more bruises and cuts, but toni had been right about her uncle. he’d been avoiding her at all costs, spending most of his time at the wyrm and coming home late when toni had already curled up under her covers and gone to sleep. toni believed it was because of the guilt he felt at what he’d done, and cheryl had frowned at that, but said nothing.

if he felt so guilty afterwards, why the hell was he doing it in the first place?

toni informed her that she has a shift at the whyte wyrm tonight where she’ll more than likely run into him, and cheryl had felt her heart pound against her chest, a plea for her not to go on the tip of her tongue before toni had gripped her hand and reassured her that the wyrm was probably the safest place for her considering all the other serpents were there all the time. he wouldn’t dare hurt her in public, and definitely not in front of other serpents.

but for right now, toni topaz is doing… better. she was at least moving around a lot more, and her facial injuries weren’t too bad anymore, nothing concealer and foundation couldn’t cover up slightly…

but she was still wincing every time she pretty much moved, and every request cheryl made for her to go to the hospital ended in toni shrugging and telling her she couldn’t afford it even if she still had the grand hiram lodge gave her for doing security at the sodale gala.

but now, it’s saturday morning, and toni is in thistlehouse, sitting on her bed, and cheryl can’t stop smiling.

it’s an odd sight, the southside serpent sitting on her bed wearing a black tank top and a maroon skirt with stockings that covered up the bruises on her gorgeous legs, the boots covering her feet tapping on the ground as she watches cheryl pace back and forth with a frown, and cheryl can’t help but be thankful she’d left behind her serpent jacket at her uncle’s trailer. the second toni had showed up on her doorstep, she’d grabbed her hand and whisked her away upstairs before her mother could see them, but still…cheryl’s positive penelope would’ve probably sniffed out the leather if she’d worn it here.

“cher, what’s got you so riled up?” toni asks softly, and cheryl bites down on her lip before looking up at toni anxiously.

god, she’s never had someone who she can talk to like this before…someone who knows when she’s upset and is willing to listen to her problems instead of just tell her she shouldn’t complain because she has it so good…
jason had always been a good listener, had always listened to cheryl’s problems and offered her a shoulder to cry on, but there’d been an air of fatigue every time she came to him with a certain sadness in her eyes. there was only so much jason could take before he’d start avoiding her solely so he wouldn’t have to listen to her cry and complain.

but with toni, it’s different. she can tell toni anything. the two days they’d spent together, relaxing and tending to toni’s injuries, toni had listened to cheryl talk for hours, her gaze focused and filled with sadness as cheryl told her about her hideous mother and father, about jason and how much she missed him…cheryl had even confided in her about what really happened at thornill, telling her that she couldn’t handle living in a home filled with so much despair and grief, and toni, despite being taken aback at first, had taken her hand and told her that she understood why she did it, that she knew cheryl didn’t mean for her mother to get hurt, she just wanted to be free…

but one thing cheryl hadn’t told her is what happened a few hours before she burned down thornhill manor…cheryl doesn’t know how toni would react to hearing she’d tried to kill herself, and she isn’t sure she wants to see her reaction.

that secret will go to her with the grave, of that she’s sure…unless archie andrews, veronica lodge, betty cooper or jughead jones say anything about it.

but despite keeping her attempted suicide a secret, it feels amazing to have someone in her life who she knows she can do this with…tell them her insecurities and her doubts with no judgement or sneers of derision.

and she knows she can do that now. tell toni how she’s really feeling about this whole secret will thing.

“i’m just afraid, t.t. i’m afraid that my father’s left behind that stupid company in my name, a company that’s only ever brought me grief and despair…that he’s left me money or hasn’t left me money…my whole future is riding on this afternoon and i’m terrified.” she whispers hoarsely. toni sighs, and she holds out her hand, waving cheryl forward twice as she winces from the movement jostling her position on the bed. cheryl rushes over to her, simply because she wants her to stop moving and hurting herself, and grips her hand, alabaster skin meeting ebony.

“cheryl, whatever happens, you’re going to be okay. if your father left the company in your name, then you can always ask that someone else take over until you decide you’re ready. it’ll be your company, you’ll be able to do whatever the hell you want with it. if he leaves you money, then great! you can get the hell out of here when you turn eighteen and penelope blossom won’t be able to say a goddamn thing about it. if he didn’t leave you money, then…he’s an awful asshole of a father, but
there’s such a thing as getting a job, cheryl.” cheryl crinkles her nose at that, somewhat sarcastically, and toni rolls her eyes with a chuckle before giving cheryl’s hand a gentle squeeze.

“You’ve got friends who have your back, okay? I know you and veronica are a bit rocky right now, but that girl is loyal. She won’t let anything bad happen to you. And…” Toni trails off, her teeth biting down on her lower lip, and Cheryl watches her with intrigue as she looks up at Cheryl after a moment.

“And neither will I.” She says softly. Cheryl smiles at that, every trace of anxiety leaving her face as she reaches a hand out to touch Toni’s cheek gently, Toni’s eyes closing at her touch.

How…how did she get so lucky to have this girl in her life?

Toni had many flaws, ones which she had spoken in length about to Cheryl those two days they spent together. She was willingly taking beatings from her uncle just to keep a roof over her head, and to keep her grandfather from finding out one of his son’s was a psychopath. She joined a gang at the tender age of fourteen because she felt like she had no other choice. Seeing as the Topaz family founded the Southside Serpents…she felt it was her duty to become one. She’d sold drugs, gotten caught and had spent four weeks in a juvenile correctional facility…there were many things that damaged her name, but despite all of that, and despite her mother and father dying when she was so young, Toni Topaz is a good person. And Cheryl can’t quite believe that she got lucky enough to stumble upon her that day at Riverdale General Hospital.

But how can Cheryl even begin to condense all that into words?

“You’re sweet, t.t.” She says simply instead, and Toni opens her eyes just as Cheryl grazes her thumb over the wound on her cheek tenderly, wishing this action could erase the wound and all her pain before she clears her throat and flips her hair over her shoulder.

You need to stop, Cheryl…she’s your friend. Nothing more, nothing less…

“Now, we need to discuss an outfit for you.” Cheryl says abruptly, moving away from Toni and making her way over to her wardrobe, and she hears Toni shift on the bed behind her.

“Uh, we do?” She says simply. Cheryl turns to face her with a roll of her eyes.

“Of course, Toni. You can’t go to a will reading dressed like that.” She says, her eyes roaming over
toni’s outfit with a sigh.

“what’s wrong with what i’m wearing?!” toni exclaims, looking down at her clothes with a frown, and cheryl laughs before she shakes her head in amusement and turns back to her wardrobe, flipping through the items of clothing with her tongue stuck between her lips in concentration.

what would suit toni? granted, cheryl’s pretty sure toni would look good in a potato sack if she had to wear one, but still…cheryl kind of wants to show her off…

“cheryl, i agreed to come to this will reading, but i didn’t agree to a makeover.” toni says with a sigh. cheryl makes a noise of triumph as her eyes land on a familiar black see-through shirt, and she reaches for the hanger and pulls it out, turning with a flourish to show toni, who’s eyes widen as she points at it eagerly.

“unless it involves that blouse.” she says sheepishly, and cheryl chuckles.

“nice, right?” she says, making her way over to toni with the blouse in her hands, and toni stands up slowly with a nod and a wince, making her way over to cheryl as she looks toni up and down.

“for the record, j’adore your flannel mesh aesthetic. i’m merely…augmenting it for the occasion.” she says softly, and toni grips the sleeves of the blouse before looking up into cheryl’s eyes with a warm smile.

god, cheryl can’t stop her eyes from falling down to those pink lips of hers…

the door bursts open, causing cheryl and toni to jump in surprise as penelope blossom stalks into the room in all her fury, her brown eyes ablaze as she glares at cheryl with a stern look on her face.

“What is going on in here, cheryl?” she demands, coming to a stop in front of them, and cheryl turns to toni, sees her glaring at penelope in anger for a brief second before she exhales shakily and gives the head of the blossom family a sweet smile.

“Mrs. blossom, hi! i’m toni topaz, i’m a friend of cheryl’s from school…and she’s lending me an outfit for the will reading.” she says simply, and cheryl holds up the blouse meekly as penelope scoffs, her eyes still boring into her daughter’s as she addresses toni without even looking at her.
“and why on earth would you be there?” she hisses, finally turning to look at the pink haired girl with her lip curled in disgust, and cheryl can see toni clenching her fist in anger as she quickly responds before toni says or does something they’ll both regret. she knew her mother would disapprove of her inviting anyone, but cheryl couldn’t help it. she needed toni here…

“i invited her…to be my emotional support.” cheryl says innocently, and penelope looks her up and down before she raises her head up high.

“just make sure you’re downstairs before the guests start to arrive. we need to present a united front against those scavengers!” she says through bared teeth, looking at toni in revulsion once more before she turns on her heel and leaves the way she came.

it’s silent for a few moments a cheryl sighs in relief, and toni looks at cheryl, a hint of sadness in her eyes, but also anger.

“she’s a nightmare.” toni growls, and cheryl sighs.

“isn’t she, though?” she drawls, and toni licks her lips before finally unclenching her fist and looking at cheryl with a deep exhale.

“whatever. you’re gonna get the money your dad left you and you’re gonna get out of here, cheryl. i believe that.” she says softly, and cheryl blinks back her tears as she swallows the lump in her throat and nods, looking to toni with a warm smile.

“now…let’s get you changed.”

twenty minutes later, cheryl and toni are heading down the stairs, both dressed in black, looking all the part of gothic queens pulled straight out of a film about witches as the door opens and the first of the blossom family members begin to arrive, their faces filled with looks of greed and eagerness over what money they’ll soon be inheriting, and cheryl wrinkles her nose and clenches her fist in disgust and anger.

*vultures, the lot of them*…
as much as having the blossom name has helped cheryl in her sixteen years of life, she can’t help but hold a certain hatred for the family she’s now surrounded by. the blossom family was harsh, filled with members just as cold as clifford himself, and cheryl feels a dread within her heart every day at the fact that she’s expected to be just like them. cold, calculated, haunting almost…

“hey, you okay?” toni says into her ear, causing a shiver to run up her spine, and she purses her lips and nods once before gripping toni’s hand and leading her into the main room, ignoring penelope’s glare of anger as she does.

there’s seats already being filled, and cheryl makes a beeline for the first row, dragging toni along with her before pointing to the seat at the far right.

“sit there, i’ll be back, okay?” cheryl says softly, and toni squeezes her hand before lowering herself onto the seat with a smile.

“go greet your guests, i’ll be right here.” she reassures her, and cheryl lets go of her hand reluctantly.

oh, how she’d much rather stay here by toni’s side…

she sighs and makes her way to the front door, taking her position beside her mother, and penelope is hugging one of her redhead relatives by the time cheryl joins her.

“imagine our shock hearing that clifford had a secret will, penelope.” the relative that cheryl honestly can’t even remember ever even meeting says, and penelope’s smile is as fake as the hair that used to sit atop clifford blossom’s head as she nods slowly.

“our shock was just as prevalent. please, the main room is open for the reading, make yourselves at home.” she says, extending her hand to the side where the main room is, and the redhead blossom looks her and cheryl up and down before she makes her way into the main room with a huff.

as soon as she’s gone, penelope looks at cheryl with a hint of anger deep in her dark brown eyes, and cheryl instinctively flinches as penelope grips her bicep with hard fingers.

“why is there some girl who has all the aura of a rebellious anarchist in my home, cheryl?” she hisses, and cheryl blinks once in confusion.
“who, Toni?” Penelope’s lip curls in disgust, and Cheryl sighs.

“She’s my friend, Mommy. I needed someone here for me, is that so much to ask?” she murmurs, and Penelope huffs, letting go of her before adjusting her hair with a gloved hand.

“You could have invited anyone else. That girl… God, she smells like trouble, Cheryl. She has pink hair, for God’s sake!” Penelope growls under her breath, and Cheryl finds herself biting back a smile as she shrugs.

Oh, Cheryl’s liking that pink hair of Toni’s more and more now…

“She’s no more trouble than I am.” She says simply, and Penelope scoffs.

“Well, I guess I have nothing to worry about! I wonder how many houses she’s burned down!” Penelope snaps at her sarcastically under her breath, and Cheryl rolls her eyes, but doesn’t respond as more blossoms begin to pile in slowly.

It seems to drag on for forever, and Cheryl is beginning to wonder how many goddamn Blossom relatives could possibly be left when the last three pile in, and the second her eyes fall on them, she feels a certain iciness creep into her bones.

Hal Cooper and his two daughters, Betty and Polly, make their way through the driveway of Thistlehouse, all of them looking a little disgruntled to be there, but Betty’s eyes light up as soon as she sees Cheryl, a small smile forming on her face that Cheryl doesn’t return.

Of course, Hal Cooper would only acknowledge the fact that he was a blossom when there was money involved…

She knows it’s no fault of Betty’s that her father is a meandering Neanderthal, not Polly’s fault that he’d come sniffing around the blossom household the second money was introduced into the equation, but Cheryl’s not one to focus her hatred solely on one person.

All three Coopers would be feeling her wrath today.
“cheryl, hey…” betty holds her arms open for a hug, and cheryl clears her throat before leaning in and allowing the hug, even though it’s majorly one sided as she pats betty’s back once rather harshly.

“betty…” she says simply, and betty’s smile slowly fades as she pulls back and looks at cheryl in confusion before polly walks forward and gives cheryl a simple one armed hug.

no doubt, polly cooper was also feeling a certain iciness in her heart for the entire blossom family. after all, it was cheryl’s father who took her beloved jason’s life before they could start their own one together…

“it’s good to see you, cheryl…” polly says stiffly, and cheryl simply gives her a tight-lipped smile before her and betty make their way into the main room, betty still looking confused as hal cooper sighs and looks to cheryl’s mother with a warm smile.

“penelope…good to see you.” hal says simply, bringing penelope’s hand to his mouth in a kiss, and penelope smiles at him, her eyes twinkling with a look that cheryl has only seen her give jason before his sixteen years of life on this earth came to an abrupt end.

a look that was so purely-

no, no, that’s impossible…

cheryl is gaping at them both, staring at them in horror as hal gives cheryl a wink and follows his daughters into the main room, and cheryl is frozen in shock for a few moments before she turns on her mother with all the anger of an enraged lioness.

when the hell did hal cooper and penelope blossom have…a thing?!

“mother, please tell me you were not just giving hal cooper the look of a woman sinking ten inches deep in love with her louboutin heels on?” cheryl hisses, glaring at her mother in absolute outrage, and penelope scoffs before turning to face her.

“what would you know about it? you’ve never known love, cheryl…except to rip it apart.” penelope steps forward, her face inches away from cheryl’s, and cheryl can feel her heart pounding in her
chest as her mother sneers at her.

“because you are a jealous, spite filled, starving, emotional anorexic.” penelope hisses slowly, each word hitting cheryl’s heart like the bite of an ice cold dagger as she licks her lips and wills the tears that well in her eyes away.

penelope gazes at her triumphantly, a small smile on her lips as she looks her daughter up and down before nodding.

“get yourself together and get into that room.” she says stiffly, and before cheryl can say anything, penelope makes her way into the main room, her heels clacking loudly on the ground as cheryl is left sitting there to process her mother’s painful words.

she’s trying…she’s trying not to let those words affect her, but how can they not? she was right…

you loved jason…you loved him and he loved you, cheryl…

and now he was dead. buried in the blossom cemetery, six feet under and cold, a body with no soul left…

her mother is right…she’s never known love…the only person she ever cared about in her entire life was gone, ripped away from her, all because she went along with some stupid plan of his to run away with polly fucking cooper-

toni, she needs toni-

cheryl wipes away her tears and makes her way into the main room, her eyes searching for that beautiful pink hair she loves so much-

she finds toni talking with none other than betty cooper, and cheryl feels that rage fill her heart once more as she stalks her way over to them in anger.

her stupid father, her stupid sister, her stupid family-
“enjoying yourself?” she all but hisses as she comes to a stop in front of them, and Toni looks up at her with a frown as Betty’s eyes widen in surprise, her look of shock quickly replaced with a smile as she nods at Toni.

“i was just telling her about how we’re related-.”

“ah, yes, how your great grandfather murdered mine and changed his last name to ‘cooper’ to avoid being convicted for it! a secret kept within the family, to the point where Polly and Jason dated and didn’t even realize they were third cousins! a gripping tale, isn’t it?” she growls with a clenched fist, and Toni is looking at her with concern as Betty sighs.

“cheryl-.”

“unfortunately, story time has come to an end, cousin Betty, and as much as I appreciate you keeping my seat warm for me, I’d appreciate it more if you’d leave and join your own family.” she says through gritted teeth, and Betty clenches her jaw before standing face to face with the redhead blossom, a certain anger boiling beneath those baby green eyes of hers…

“i don’t know where all this rage is coming from, cheryl, but i suggest you reign it in-.” she starts, but Cheryl interrupts her with a huff and a flip of her hair over her shoulder.

“no offence, cooper, but i don’t feel the need to be polite to someone who only acknowledges their blossom blood when there’s money involved.” she says coldly.

harsh, she knows, but screw it. Betty blinks once before she scoffs and looks down at Toni.

“i’ll see you around, Toni…” she mumbles, and she gives Cheryl one last scathing glare before she makes her way over to her sister and father without another word, Cheryl taking her spot beside Toni with a shaky exhale.

okay…okay, maybe she went too far with that-

“cheryl, what happened?” Toni asks immediately, and Cheryl turns to look at her with a raised eyebrow.
“her great-grandfather murdered mine, i don’t need to be nice.” she says stiffly, but of course…of course, toni sees right through her.

“that’s not what’s wrong…” she says with a frown, and cheryl licks her lips and swallows before shaking her head once.

“my mother, she…” cheryl trails off, and toni stiffens beside her, a look of understanding crossing her features as she reaches out and grips cheryl’s hand tightly.

“cheryl, whatever she said, she’s wrong, okay? you shouldn’t have taken it out on betty, though… she cares about you, you know that, right?” toni says softly, and cheryl feels her resolve beginning to snap-

but…she’s right. god, toni’s right because betty cooper had saved her life along with archie andrews that day at sweet water river…betty cooper had wrapped a blanket around her body and had warmed her up on the drive to pembrooke that day, had sat with her for half an hour in front of the fire that gave her warmth, that brought the life slowly back to her body…

great, now she feels horrible, and cheryl blossom never feels horrible for her actions, especially when it involves putting someone in their place-

“dammit, topaz, why are you always right?” she grumbles, and toni chuckles and gives her hand a simple squeeze before penelope blossom wheels nana rose beside her, cheryl’s hands immediately letting go of toni’s as penelope sits down beside her daughter. her gaze moves to the both of them in disgust before she turns to look up at the podium where the blossom family lawyer now stands.

she’ll apologize to betty…eventually. right now, she needs to focus, because right now…god, right now her entire future is riding on what this mr. lazenby is about to say…

mr. lazeby clears his throat as he ruffles the papers in front of him, and he looks down before looking back up at the people in front of him with a smile.

“let’s get started…‘i, clifford cochrane blossom, being of sound mind and body do here inscribe the terms of my last will and testament. firstly, ownership of thistlehouse will stay with our beloved matriarch rosenne blossom.’” cheryl can’t help the exhale of relief that escapes her, and she watches as penelope rests her hand on top of nana rose’s, only for nana rose to rip her hand out of penelope’s
grasp immediately.

if there’s one person who hates penelope blossom more than she does, it’s nana rose.

cheryl smirks, turning her attention back to the lawyer at the podium as he continues reading.

“‘to my wife and partner, penelope, i leave ownership of our greatest treasure, thornill, the exquisite mansion she made a home.’” cheryl practically can feel penelope blossom deflating beside her, and cheryl would leave it alone, but her mother left her at that front door with nothing but heartbreak and sadness and expected her to sit here normally like she hadn’t just called her a loveless monster-

“the charred husk of an empty house…that sounds about right, mother.” she whispers triumphantly, leaning in to penelope to add insult to injury, and her mother stiffens beside her, her face filled with despair and anger.

good. cheryl hopes she feels every ounce of pain she’s inflicted on her over the years by learning her husband had left her only a burned down manor in his demise.

“now…the reason i contacted you and you all travelled to be here.” cheryl sits up in her seat now, and she finds herself subconsciously seeking out toni’s warmth, her cold fingers moving to toni’s lap to grip her hands that are resting there, and toni doesn’t hesitate as she looks down at cheryl’s hand reaching for hers before she grips it with both of her own, a small smile lighting her face. she turns to look at cheryl with an encouraging smile, and cheryl stares at her anxiously as she exhales deeply and looks at the lawyer, prepared for whatever he’s about to say.

“‘any and all remaining assets of my fortune will be divided in half. the first half will be distributed equally to anyone in riverdale who can prove with medical authentication that even one drop of blossom blood flows through their veins.’” mr. lazenby says, looking up at the room, and cheryl exchanges a look of fear with the pink haired girl beside her before she looks across the room at betty and her family, hal cooper seconds away from standing up before there’s the sound of a loud bang-

“i knew it!” cheryl feels toni jump in surprise, her own causing her to rip her hand out of toni’s grip as she looks to the entrance of the main room to find none other than alice cooper walk into the room, her eyes filled with anger, and hal cooper looks at her in surprise.

“alice, what the hell are you doing here?!” he demands, and alice cooper scoffs.
“accusing you publically! you only wanted a divorce so that you could cheat me out of your big fancy blossom pay day!” she hisses, and cheryl closes her eyes, a tear falling down her cheek.

what is wrong with these people? her father is dead, and granted, cheryl didn’t exactly have anything nice to say about the man who fathered her for seventeen years, but this was his last will and testament, and they were fighting over it like bulldogs-

“it’s not just my pay day! the girls share blossom blood, too!” hal says, looking to the cooper sisters, who both sink in their seats as if they’d rather be anywhere else but here.

“my lawyer is going to rip you apart! i will be taking half of whatever blood money you get from this inbred cesspool of a family!” alice growls, and cheryl hears toni laugh beside her, looks at her in shock as alice scoffs.

“yeah that’s right! i said inbred!” she exclaims, and cheryl crosses her arms over her chest with a roll of her eyes.

this woman had no tact, just like those god forsaken daughters of hers- penelope blossom stands and glares at alice angrily.

“oh would you please just leave!?” she hisses, and alice steps toward her.

“shut your face, you half melted ten cent trollop!” she growls, and cheryl feels no inclination to stand and defend her mother as she hears toni choke on laughter behind her.

“this is riveting, i can’t breathe!” she manages to gasp out, and cheryl looks at her with wide eyes, toni’s grin fading slowly under her gaze.

“sorry…” she says apologetically, biting down on her bottom lip to stop herself from smiling, and cheryl turns to see betty’s father wrap an arm around alice’s shoulders.

“alice, not here, please-.”
“get your hands off me, hal!”

Hal Cooper manages to take his wife out of the room, the both of them bickering loudly until they reach the front door and exit out of Thistlehouse, and Cheryl looks at her mother, who sits back down beside her with a shaky exhale.

“that woman is unbelievable.” she hisses, and Cheryl licks her lips, doesn’t feel the need to acknowledge her agreement with her mother because it would surely mean that hell has frozen over as she turns to look at Toni again in despair.

was it so much to ask that the will reading be done in peace?

“hey, it’s okay…” Toni says softly, rubbing the middle of Cheryl’s back gently, and Cheryl sighs and closes her eyes at her touch.

god, if Toni wasn’t here right now…

“thank you for coming, Toni…i don’t think i would’ve been able to handle that without you here…” she whispers, and Toni reaches out and grips her hand once more.

“of course, i’m glad to be here, that was…” Toni’s biting her lip to stop herself from smiling again, and Cheryl looks at her with a roll of her eyes, but a slight smile on her lips. She turns her gaze to Betty, who’s looking at the front door anxiously, and Cheryl feels the guilt hit her like a freight train.

god, Betty was dealing with her parents getting a divorce and acting like absolute lunatics, and Cheryl had just exploded at her…

Hal Cooper makes his way back into Thistlehouse, looking incredibly embarrassed as he sits back down beside his daughters.

“i apologize for that…interruption.” he says, clearing his throat with a smile, and Mr. Lazenby looks at him sternly before he sighs.
“now that the uh, interloper has been escorted from the premises…we can finish our business.” he clears his throat, and cheryl inhale deeply as he looks back down at his papers.

does this is it, oh god, this is it…

“as i was saying…’the other half of my fortune will go to my true heirs, jason and cheryl.’”

cheryl’s heart soars.

finally…finally her father has done something to benefit her. years of neglect and anger, of grooming jason and leaving cheryl behind in the dust, has finally culminated in this. part of him did care…part of him did think of cheryl, and her future…

she exhales shakily, and she looks beside her at toni, who smiles widely and gives her an encouraging nod as she stands. she looks to penelope, who glares up at her, and she can’t help the satisfied smirk that takes over her face as she makes her way over to the podium slowly. mr. lazenby looks at her with a raised eyebrow before he steps aside.

she looks around the room, looking all the part of a blossom matriarch as she smiles and bows her head before sighing.

“as the one true blossom heir, i feel it is my sacred duty to say a few words. the blossoms have been bathing in blood since great grand-pappy blossom killed his brother, the original sin of riverdale.” cheryl looks to the coopers, and as her eyes meet betty’s, she tries to convey some sort of apology through them, and betty must pick it up, because she sighs before giving cheryl a small smile.

bless betty cooper and forever forgiving soul…

“well i stand here before you to say: no more. no more blood. no more madness. no more horror.” cheryl whispers.

she’s never meant these words more than this moment.

she was so tired of the reputation the blossom family had. murderers, drug traffickers, a family of
sinners, of selfish people-

no more. it’s time the blossom name began to cleanse itself…

cheryl’s about to say more when she hears the sound of a door opening.

“hear, hear!” a man says clearly, and cheryl frowns as she looks up-

and when she looks up, all the life in her body simply falls.

no.

no, no, no, no, no, this is absolutely impossible-

“couldn’t have said it better myself.” the man says again, his eyes locked with cheryl’s, and cheryl grips the podium for half a second, but the world is spinning way too fast-

her…her father, it can’t be, it can’t, he was dead, he was gone, it can’t be him-

“cheryl?” she vaguely hears toni saying her name before the ground slowly rushes up to meet her and everything goes black.

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toni hasn’t stopped checking her phone for over four hours now.

she knows birdie is getting pissed with her, can see her eyeing toni angrily from the stage of the whyte wyrm as toni pulls her phone out of her pocket for about the twentieth time today, looking down at it only to see it blank of any notifications.

no missed calls, no messages…
where the hell was cheryl?

toni’s terrified. she has no idea what the hell happened after she was whisked out of thistlehouse by penelope blossom. she doesn’t know if cheryl’s okay, if she’s hurt, or upset, nothing-

“toni! are you deaf?! get me a beer, woman!” hog eye yells, and toni glares up at him.

“shut it, hog eye! you’ll get your beer when i give it to you!” she growls, and hog eye scoffs as he shakes his head and turns back to talk to sweet pea, toni looking back down at her phone before moving to the end of the bar to get out from behind it.

she lifts the part of the counter top before letting it swing shut behind her, making her way to the entrance to the wyrm as she calls cheryl’s number with worry.

it rings about a total of ten times as she steps out of the bar completely, out into the cold night air before cheryl’s voice rings through.

“it's cheryl! i'm off doing something fabu! leave a message if you must!”

a beep.

toni growls in frustration and hangs up, tears welling in her eyes as a cloud of cold air escapes her lips.

she didn’t want to leave thistlehouse. the second she’d seen cheryl fall, she ran to her side, ignoring the pain of her injuries as she’d pulled cheryl into her arms. cheryl had been as pale as snow, no color in her unconscious face as toni had brushed her hair back from her face and tried her best to wake her. but barely a minute had passed before penelope blossom had jumped up from her seat and rushed over to them, all but pulling toni away from cheryl before yelling at everyone to leave, and toni had been on the verge of yelling that she wasn’t going anywhere when betty cooper had wrapped an arm around her shoulders and pulled her away slowly.

“you don’t want to get on penelope blossom’s bad side, toni, trust me.” betty had murmured, and toni had looked back to see penelope looking down at cheryl with her nose wrinkled in disgust.
and god, she so desperately wanted to lift cheryl into her own arms and get her far away from her mother and this strange man who betty had told her looked a hell of a lot like cheryl’s father, get her away from all the drama…

toni has no idea who that man was, but she knows whatever he’s here to do, it isn’t good.

toni rubs her arms from the cold, shivering slightly beneath her serpent jacket as she licks her lips and looks back down at her phone.

what was cheryl going to think, when she woke up and found toni not there for her? god, toni doesn’t want cheryl to think for even a second that toni had abandoned her, and she wants to explain, to tell her that penelope had all but kicked her out…

“hey!” the door bursts open, and toni jumps in surprise, turning to look as birdie glares at her angrily.

“what the hell is the matter with you? you haven’t taken your eyes off that goddamn phone since you got here, and i’ve got hog eye telling me i should fire you for not giving him a beer!” she growls, and toni bites down on her bottom lip before sighing loudly.

“look, a friend of mine is in trouble…i just wanna make sure she’s okay, but she’s not answering my calls or messages,” toni croaks out, swallowing the lump in her throat, and birdie’s expression turns sympathetic as she looks back into the bar before nodding once.

“get out of here, kid. go home, you’re clearly not gonna be able to concentrate, and i need someone who’s gonna be able to tend a bar and be focused doing it. besides, it ain’t like you’re missing out on the money, right?” she says with a chuckle, and toni grins widely.

her uncle will be pissed, but toni’s beyond caring at this point.

“thanks, birdie.”

“yeah, yeah. go on, get out of here.” birdie heads back into the wyrm with a roll of her eyes, and toni’s about to run in to grab her bag when her phone buzzes in her hand, and she looks down with wide eyes-
“cheryl?! cheryl, are you okay?!” toni answers desperately, and she hears cheryl sigh shakily on the other end of the line before she answers.

“i’m okay, t.t. everything’s okay.” she breathes, and toni lets out a sigh of relief as she collapses against the column holding the bar up, a wince of pain escaping her when her bruised ribs hit the concrete.

“god, cheryl, i’m so sorry, i wanted to stay, but your mother kicked everyone out the second you collapsed—.”

“i figured as much. she wouldn’t want me embarrassing the family any more than i apparently already have.” cheryl mutters, and toni can hear the bitterness and sadness in her tone…

“cheryl, can i come over? i just, i wanna see you, i wanna make sure you’re okay—.”

“aren’t you at work, toni?” cheryl interrupts, and toni bites down on her lip in hesitation before she decides she might as well tell the truth.

well, part of it, anyway.

“birdie let me go home early, i’m too beat to work, i could barely tend the bar. cheryl, if you need me, i’m there, just say the word.” toni whispers.

cheryl is quiet for a long time, and toni doesn’t even realize she’s holding her breath until cheryl answers thirty seconds later.

“You’d have to sneak in through the trellis below my window, and don’t come with your bike, the noise will attract my mother’s attention—.”

“I’ll park it a street away and walk. i’ll be there in ten, okay?” toni reassures her.

Okay… i’ll be waiting in my room.” cheryl whispers, and toni sighs as cheryl hangs up, looks down
at her phone for a good minute before she shoves it into her pocket and runs back into the wyrm to grab her bag.

She has to see Cheryl, to make sure she’s okay... God only knows what this man or her mother said to her, and Cheryl doesn’t sound okay, her voice was shaking on the phone...

toni has no idea when Cheryl Blossom’s wellbeing became her number one priority, but she has no regrets as she runs past Sweet Pea and Hog Eye, glaring daggers at the older man as she does, before running into the backroom and grabbing her bag. She exits the backroom only for Sweet Pea to stop her as he grabs her arm gently.

“Toni, is everything okay?” he asks softly, and Toni looks at him, her eyes searching her face for answers on whether or not she can tell him the truth.

Ultimately, she decides she can.

“I’m entering the Hellmouth, sweets. Cheryl’s dad had some secret will that there was a reading for this morning, I was there for moral support when some guy walked in and Cheryl fainted. I wanted to stay but her satanic mother kicked me out. She just called me and she’s... she’s not okay, Sweet Pea. I have to go check on her.”

Sweet Pea blinks once in surprise, but his eyes are suddenly blazing with anger as he looks at the wounds on Toni’s face that are still showing despite her make up covering them.

“Did she do that to you?” he hisses, and Toni’s eyes widen before she shakes her head furiously.

“What?! No, of course not, pea, that was... don’t worry...” she mumbles, and he finally lets go of Toni, his anger slowly dissipating and being replaced with genuine concern before it turns to wonder, and he scoffs and shakes his head.

“A Blossom, tiny? Really?” he says simply, and Toni rolls her eyes, but smiles gratefully, thankful that he’s dropped getting answers on who hurt her.

“Look, I get it, she’s not the nicest person on earth, but there’s so much more to her than the bitchy attitude, okay? She’s a good person, she just... she just has a shitty family. I think we can all sympathize with that.” She says softly, and Sweet Pea raises an eyebrow before he sighs and extends
a hand toward the entrance of the bar.

“go on, princess charming. go sweep your girl off her feet.” he teases, and toni rolls her eyes before punching him in the chest hard.

“shut up.” she grumbles, and he rubs his chest with a wince before he grins, watching her go with a chuckle.

she gets to the entrance, and she’s distracted shoving her phone into her bag when the door bursts open and almost whacks her in the face.

she manages to jump back before it makes too much of an impact, and when she glares up at the person coming through, her heart stops.

jacob topaz looks at her in confusion before it quickly turns to anger, his eyes going from the bar, to her, to the bar again.

“What the hell are you doing? you’re supposed to be working!” he growls. toni takes a tentative step back, her heart racing in her ears as she swallows the lump that rises in her throat.

she hasn’t properly spoken to him since that night, and now that she’s face to face with him…

“I’m going home. i’m not feeling well.” she says in a low voice, and jacob looks her up and down, that guilt shining in his eyes as he takes in her bruised eye with a slight wince before he avoids her gaze and nods once.

“right…i’ll see you when i get home.” he mumbles, and toni gives him a simple nod, her whole body trembling as he makes his way into the wyrm. toni doesn’t look back at him, is still frozen by the door before an image of red hair enters her mind, and she exhales shakily before throwing open the door and making her way to her bike.

she has no idea what just happened to her, she’s never been so frozen in fear before but…seeing him there, in front of her, walking free with bruised hands that hit her body…
she hates him. god she hates him more than she’s hated anyone in her entire life, and part of her has no intention of going home today. she can’t bear to look at him…

that invitation to stay at thistlehouse is looking more and more appealing, but toni knows she can’t take it. if penelope walks into cheryl’s room and sees her there…

toni can’t risk cheryl’s safety for a night of comfort, she just can’t.

maybe jughead wouldn’t mind lending her his trailer for a night…

the ride to thistlehouse is quick, toni going a little faster than she should be as she turns onto the side of the road a street away from thistlehouse, her motorcycle dying down to a quiet rumble as she turns the ignition off and jumps off it.

she hesitates before placing her hands on the handles and pushing it forward. she can’t leave her baby out in the middle of the road, she can always just let it rest outside thistlehouse… penelope wouldn’t be able to see it outside the wall, unless there was cameras…

toni ends up leaving her bike a few meters away from the walls that hide thistlehouse, and she shivers again from the cold night air before she feels something wet and cold hit the top of her head.

she looks up just as snow slowly begins to fall, small little flakes in different geometrical shapes spiraling down and hitting the ground softly, and toni smiles as she catches one on her tongue before she steps through the open gates of thistlehouse.

she avoids the front door, instead, turns to the side of the house and hurries along it, her boots thudding on the asphalt as she looks up at the trellis that leads to cheryl’s bedroom.

she stares at it in hesitation. this isn’t going to bode well for her already injured body…

toni grits her teeth, remembers cheryl’s voice on the phone before she’s exhaling with determination and stepping forward, her fingers sliding through the holes on the trellis as she lifts herself up onto it.

the way up is surprisingly painless, her body only throbbing slightly with each movement, and as
soon as she reaches the top, she extends a hand and raps her knuckles against the window softly.

she sees cheryl sitting on top of her bed, looking morose as ever, but the second toni’s knuckles make contact with the window, she looks up, her eyes wide before she smiles and rushes over to the window, opening it gently.

“toni…” she breathes, an instant grin lighting up her beautiful face, and toni smiles, looks up at the snow falling around her before shivering slightly.

“mind letting me in? it’s freezing out here.” toni says through chattering teeth, and cheryl chuckles before extending her hand for toni to take, her fingers wrapping around cheryl’s forearm, and she can see goosebumps rise on cheryl’s arm from her cold touch before she gently pulls her into thistlehouse as quietly as possible.

“i didn’t think you were actually going to come…” cheryl murmurs, and toni looks at her in breathless confusion, still recuperating from her trek up the trellis.

“i told you i’d be here in ten.” toni says incredulously, and cheryl bites down on her bottom lip to stop herself from smiling before she shakes her head.

“i guess i’m just not used to having a friend that keeps their word, t.t.” she says softly, and toni feels her heart break for the redheaded blossom girl as she takes toni’s hand and leads her over to her bed, both of them collapsing down on top of it at the same time.

“mommy and uncle claudius are resting, he’s taken the guest room.” she says with a wrinkle of her nose, and toni raises an eyebrow.

“i’m guessing uncle claudius is the intruder from today?” she says, and cheryl licks her lips before nodding.

“yes. apparently my father had a twin brother that none of us except for nana rose knew about. he fled riverdale when he was fourteen after my father threatened to kill him.” cheryl says stiffly, and toni blinks once.

“uh…repeat that, please? he did what?” toni manages to gasp out, and cheryl sighs.
“the blossom curse. of all the twins born in the blossom family, one has always met a gruesome end. my father thought he would spare uncle claudius the torturous death by letting him flee. truthfully, i think my father knew uncle claudius would be the one to receive the inheritance of blossom maple farms, so he stepped in to make sure it wouldn’t happen…but he couldn’t bring himself to kill his brother. he had a heart after all, it seems…”

“no offence, cher, but a man who kills his own son doesn’t seem like the kind of man who has a heart.” toni deadpans, and cheryl looks at her sadly before nodding slowly.

“yeah…you’re right, t.t. maybe he did have a heart once, but running a company like blossom maple farms destroyed whatever soul he had left…” she whispers. toni reaches out and takes her hand.

“then thank god he didn’t leave it in your name.” she says simply, and cheryl smiles at her softly.

“i don’t even know what’s going to happen to the company now…perhaps my mother should just take over. i know nana rose is still a main owner, but she’s too senile to run it.”

“look, cheryl, whatever happens to that company, it’s not your problem, okay? let penelope and claudius handle it…you just focus on you. you fainted today, cheryl. are you sure you’re okay?” toni asks, gripping cheryl’s hand in her own, and cheryl smiles and gives her hand a gentle squeeze before nodding.

“i’m okay, t.t. seeing uncle claudius walk through that door…he looks exactly like my father, toni. it just…it rattled me. i was so shocked, it…it was like seeing jason walk through the door. i felt like i couldn’t breathe, like i couldn’t do anything, because he was back-.” tears begin falling down cheryl’s face, speech becoming too difficult, and toni doesn’t hesitate, leans forward and wraps her arms around cheryl tightly as cheryl buries her head into toni’s shoulder and sobs softly into it.

“hey…hey, shh, it’s okay…” toni runs her fingers through cheryl’s hair before gripping the back of her neck gently, her other hand rubbing small circles into cheryl’s back as she grips onto toni’s serpent jacket tightly.

“f-for a second, i-i felt relieved, toni! i felt like for the first time since jason’s death, i wouldn’t have to worry about e-everything anymore! and god, i-i d-don’t want to feel relief over jason’s m-murderer being alive!” cheryl croaks out through her tears, and toni blinks back her own tears as she tightens her hold on the young redhead.
“god, cheryl, you shouldn’t have to worry about these kinds of things…” toni whispers, and cheryl relaxes in her arms, nails digging into her back, but toni doesn’t mind as she leans back slightly to press her lips to cheryl’s ear.

“your father was a monster, but he was still your father. i get it, cheryl, god, i do. there’s days where i wake up and i hate my uncle with everything in me, but i still cried when he collapsed, i still called an ambulance to take him to the hospital, i still worried about him…i still felt relieved when they told me he’d be okay. god, i thought to myself how much i hate him less than twenty minutes ago, but if he were to collapse right now at the wyrm, i’d still look after him…” toni pulls back slowly, and cheryl blinks at her owlishly, tears falling down her cheeks,. toni cradles her delicate face in her cold hands, her thumbs brushing away the tears gently.

“he’s family, cheryl. your father was a monster who murdered your brother, but he was family. it’s okay to feel a little relieved at the idea that he was still alive. don’t beat yourself up about it. i might not have known him or met him, but jason isn’t going to be upset with you for feeling that way. and something tells me that jason loved you so much he’s probably glad that he was the one who fell to the blossom curse, not you.”

toni kind of wants to add on that truthfully, she’s thankful that cheryl was the one to escape the blossom curse, but it’s an insensitive thing to think, and the thought is erased from toni’s mind the second it enters it as cheryl licks her lips, her eyes travelling all over toni’s face before she wraps her fingers around toni’s wrists gently.

“you think so?” she whispers. toni smiles.

“i know so, bombshell.” she whispers back. cheryl smiles shakily, her fingers trailing down toni’s forearms before resting on her thighs, and god…god, toni wants to kiss her right now…

cheryl’s eyes fall on the snow still stuck in toni’s bubblegum pink locks, and she smiles and picks a piece off slowly.

“it’s christmas in a few weeks…” cheryl whispers suddenly. toni smiles.

“yeah…favorite time of the year.” she chuckles, and cheryl’s eyes light up.

“mine, too.” she croaks out. toni goes to move her hands, but cheryl whimpers and grips her wrists
once more, holding her there, and toni can feel her heart pounding against her chest as cheryl’s eyes fall down to her lips and back up to her eyes.

“what if we get caught under a mistletoe?” she whispers. toni’s heart drops.

her mouth suddenly feels very, very dry-

“We’d have to kiss, wouldn’t we?” toni croaks out, subconsciously leaning forward as her eyes drift down to cheryl’s cherry red lips, wonder of what they would taste like filling her mind, and cheryl’s mouth opens slightly, a soft gasp escaping her before her grip on toni’s wrists tightens.

“should we save it?” she rasps, and toni frowns despite her heart feeling like it’s about to explode against her bruised ribcage.

“save what?”

“Our first kiss. for the mistletoe.” cheryl says softly, and toni leans in closer, but cheryl’s leaning in too, and toni feels like she can’t fucking breathe-

“can you wait till then?” toni asks shakily, so close she can almost count cheryl’s eyelashes, and cheryl sighs breathily, the scent of cherries and rosewater hitting toni’s nose as cheryl closes the gap between them.

“not really.” she breathes, and before toni can even react, cheryl captures her lips with her own.

it’s soft, so, so, so, soft, how cheryl’s lips connect with hers, toni’s upper lip caught between her full ones, and toni’s eyes flutter closed. god, she tastes fucking phenomenal, toni immediately addicted to the taste of honey mixed with cherries as her hand on cheryl’s cheek moves to wrap around the back of her neck to pull her in closer as she responds with enthusiasm, and the blood is rushing to her head so fast, but this kiss is everything toni’s been waiting for, weeks of pent up attraction for the redhead girl whose lips are currently kissing hers-

holy shit, she’s kissing cheryl blossom.
toni’s getting way too caught up in her excitement, and she can’t stop herself when her teeth bite down lightly on cheryl’s bottom lip, a soft whine escaping the blossom girl as she tangles her fingers in toni’s hair and straightens up, moving closer to the pink haired serpent without removing her lips from her at all. in fact, she deepens the kiss, toni’s hands moving down to her waist subconsciously as cheryl’s knees rest on either side of her-

“cheryl?”

the sound of her name has them springing apart, and cheryl squeaks as toni practically throws her off before collapsing to the ground and rolling under the bed as the door opens, and god, that fucking hurt, but toni bites back a cry of pain as she looks to the entrance of cheryl’s room. she can only see high heels, but penelope blossom’s voice is loud as she stands at the door.

“who on earth are you talking to? and why is your lipstick smeared all over your face?” penelope says accusingly, and toni’s heart falls as she closes her eyes and begs to all the gods she knows that penelope blossom does not look under this goddamn bed right now-

“i was in the middle of taking my make up off, mommy. you scared me. and as for the voices, i was singing along to music.” cheryl drawls, and toni can practically see her flipping her hair and rolling her eyes in her mind, but she can hear the shakiness of cheryl’s tone, begs that penelope can’t-

“very well. go to bed, cheryl, we have a long day tomorrow making arrangements with your uncle claudius.”

“of course. goodnight, mother.” penelope shuts the door before cheryl even finishes saying goodnight, and toni lets out a sigh of relief at the same time cheryl does, toni rolling out from under the bed and grinning up at cheryl, who peeks her head over the side and looks down at her with a soft smile.

“hi.” she whispers, and toni chuckles.

“hi.” she whispers back. she stands slowly on shaking legs, and cheryl hesitates as she looks at the door before looking back at toni with a sigh.

“you should probably go.” she says softly, and toni looks to the door as well before nodding her head in agreement.
she really doesn’t fucking want to leave right now, but penelope had literally almost caught them making out, and god, if she had caught them...

toni makes her way over to the window as quietly as possible, cheryl close behind her, and she steps out onto the trellis before looking up at cheryl with a smile. cheryl hesitates before she reaches out and grabs toni by the lapels of her jacket, tugging her forward and crashing their lips together urgently. toni groans against her, steadies herself before gripping cheryl’s elbows and kissing her back just as desperately, and cheryl pulls away with a shiver.

“go, get out of this cold.” she says, but the grin on her face that she’s trying so hard to hide is as clear as the snow falling from the sky as toni grins back at her and makes her way down the trellis.

the adrenaline coursing through her veins is electric right now, and toni can’t stop fucking smiling as she races towards the gates of thistlehouse, scurrying out of them and rushing over to her bike.

she’s not even on it yet before she’s pulling out her phone and messaging cheryl.

you [21:32]

“made it. wish i could’ve stayed...i’ll see you tomorrow?”

she watches with bated breath as the three dots indicating cheryl’s reply pop up, followed by the sound of the message coming through.

cheryl [21:32]

“my lipstick’s maple red, by the way. in case you were wondering why it tastes so sweet. see you tomorrow, t.t. xx”

toni’s heart inflates, the grin on her face only growing as she exhales shakily before looking up at the snow falling down around her with a chuckle.

god, she’s got it so bad for that redhead bombshell…

she shakes her head before quickly scrolling through her contacts, landing on the name she wants before calling it and raising the phone to her ear.
he answers on the third ring.

“toni? what’s up?”

“hey, jughead. i need a place to crash. mind if i stay at yours?”
Chapter Notes

“so…cheryl blossom, huh?”

jughead jones’ s eyes are filled with sarcasm, the smirk on his face only intensifying it as toni looks over her bowl of cereal at him with narrowed eyes.

“sweet pea told you?” she deadpans once she’s dropped her bowl back down onto the table, and jughead chuckles as he stuffs his hand into the box of cereal he’s holding and pulls out a handful of the sugary food.

“he said, and i quote…’topaz is falling for that blossom girl, should we do damage control?’” jughead says in his best impression of sweet pea’s unnaturally deep voice, and toni can’t help but chuckle as she raises an eyebrow and takes another bite of her cereal.

“there’s no need for damage control, i’m not falling for her, i’m just…being her friend.” toni lies easily, and jughead nods once as he shoves cereal into his open mouth.

“right, because cheryl blossom has so many of those…” he mutters, and toni rolls her eyes.

“She doesn’t, actually.-.”

“i know, i was being sarcastic.” jughead deadpans, and toni sighs.

jughead, she’s slowly but surely discovering, can be a real asshole sometimes…

“look, i get it. cheryl was practically foaming at the mouth when we came to riverdale high, but…”
recent events have caused her to change her tune, okay? she’s not so anti-southside anymore. she’s just…a girl with a shitty life and a shitty family, is it so wrong to want to help change that for her?”

toni says, standing as she drains the bowl of the milk in it with one gulp before taking the bowl to the sink, jughead watching her do so with a frown.

“wow, topaz, you actually are falling for her.” he says incredulously, and toni licks her lips before turning to face him with another sigh.

“it’s none of your business, okay, jughead? what happens between me and cheryl has nothing to do with you or the serpents, so you and sweet pea need to just butt out and leave me alone. i know what i’m doing.” toni says firmly, and jughead shrugs as he shoves more cereal into his mouth, but there’s a hardness in his eyes as he chews thoughtfully before looking at her sternly.

“fine, toni. but cheryl blossom isn’t the kind of person you take lightly. the only reason we’re worried is because we care. just…tread carefully, okay?” he says, and toni watches him for a long moment before she shrugs.

“whatever.” she mutters, turning around to wash her bowl.

why the hell were they getting involved, anyway? what happened between her and cheryl had nothing to do with them at all, and toni would rather it stay that way…

god, if cheryl had been here to hear jughead say all those things…and she didn’t deserve to hear all those things, because she was a good person, why the hell was toni the only one who saw that? why was toni the only one who saw beneath the bitchy façade to see the girl who was hurting underneath?

she can still taste that maple red lipstick…

jughead sets down the box of cereal he’s holding as he dusts his hands off and grabs his beanie.

“You can hang here as long as you want, but i’ve gotta go. i’m meeting with penny peabody to talk about getting my dad out of jail.”

toni freezes, all thoughts of cheryl blossom erased from her mind.
“penny peabody?” she spins back around, soap flying everywhere as she looks at jughead with concern.

“yeah. she’s my last hope.” jughead says with a loud sigh, and toni bites down on her bottom lip in hesitation before she reaches out and grabs jughead’s arm to stop him.

“jug, getting involved with penny peabody is a big risk. she does one favor for you and she’s got you by the balls for the rest of your life. you’re entering the literal snake pit with that woman and if you aren’t careful, she’ll bite and bite hard.” toni warns, and jughead looks defeated as he purses his lips and nods with a frown.

“i know, toni. literally every single one of the serpents has warned me against going to her for help, but i’m running out of options. dad’s rotting in that prison and the serpents are slowly dying without him. we need to do whatever it takes to get him out.” he says with a clench of his jaw, and toni contemplates his words.

yes, getting f.p out of jail was sorely needed. tall boy has shown no interest in what hiram has planned for the southside, hadn’t even gotten angry at the revelation when fangs and toni had told him, and jughead had called it suspicious, immediately accusing tall boy of working with hiram, but without proof, there was nothing any of them could do…besides, toni thinks it’s a little far-fetched that tall boy would be working against the serpents, the man was more loyal to them then f.p was...

but regardless, tall boy was still running around requesting that they sell jingle jangle despite jughead, sweet pea, fangs and toni almost getting arrested for it, and no amount of arguing from any of the serpents who were falsely accused appears to be changing his mind. the only one who can put tall boy in place is f.p, but with him behind bars…

but penny peabody was not worth it. god, the woman was as conniving as she was manipulative, and toni doesn’t want to see jughead suffer for the rest of his life squashed under the high heeled boot of that snake of a woman…

“there’s gotta be another way, jug…” toni whispers, and jughead rolls his eyes.

“the only other option is asking cheryl and penelope blossom to show him leniency, to forgive him for the crime he’s currently serving. i know you’re getting close with cheryl and everything, but i can’t exactly see her forgiving my father for helping cover up the murder of her brother, do you?” jughead says monotonously, and toni runs her fingers through her hair slowly as she turns over his
words in her mind.

no…no, she can’t exactly see cheryl forgiving f.p for what he’s done, but if she spoke to her about it…maybe she could get through to her…

“let me talk to her, okay? let me talk to cheryl and see if i can convince her-.”

“no way, toni. i’m not gonna go begging a blossom for something! and you’re not going to, either! just leave it be, penny will figure something out, okay?” jughead says with a hint of frustration in his tone, and toni sighs and shakes her head.

“jughead, just give me a day-.-”

“my dad doesn’t have that, and neither do the serpents. let it go, toni.” jughead says firmly, and before toni can say anything else, he’s grabbing his serpent jacket and exiting the trailer, leaving toni alone to wallow in her worry and anger.

this isn’t good.

why won’t jughead just listen to her? he’s never dealt with penny peabody before, he doesn’t know her like the rest of the serpents do, but he’s still ignoring their pleas for him not to go to her? god, he was as hardheaded as he was idiotic…

there was only one thing that was going to fix this, and honestly, it’s the last thing toni wants to do, but jughead’s part of the serpents now, which means he’s family.

she protects her family…

toni hesitates before reaching into her pocket for her phone, and she scrolls through her contacts, looking for the name she needs-

cheryl answers on the second ring.
“good morning, t.t.” cheryl answers happily, and toni bites back a smile, tries to ignore how wildly her heart is racing as she chuckles with a raised eyebrow.

“good morning to you too, bombshell. i hope i didn’t wake you…”

“don’t be silly, toni, i’ve been up since six. is everything okay?” cheryl asks, her cheery tone laced with concern, and toni chews on her bottom lip, choosing her next words carefully before she sighs and shakes her head.

“not exactly. i kind of need help with something, but i don’t want to ask over the phone. can we meet up?” toni asks anxiously, and cheryl is silent for a few moments before she answers.

“of course, t.t. whatever you need…meet at pop’s in say, half an hour?” cheryl says softly, and toni smiles.

“uh…yeah, sure. half an hour, pop’s, i’ll be there.”

“okay…see you then.” cheryl says in that same happy tone that has toni’s heart melting, and she smiles widely.

“see you then, bombshell.” cheryl hangs up, and toni grabs her serpent jacket, pulling it up over her shoulders before grabbing her bag and heading out to her bike.

this might ruin everything between them, but…toni has to try.

f.p was like a second father to her, and she can’t stand by and watch his son get into shit with penny peabody, she just can’t. toni knows f.p wouldn’t approve one bit of jughead going to her for help…

toni has to try.

she has to.

she’s just praying cheryl doesn’t get mad at her…
cheryl looks down at her phone with a frown, wondering what exactly the favor toni is asking for her is as she looks up into the mirror with a sigh.

she hadn’t been able to sleep all night, the taste of toni’s lips lingering on her tongue long after the pink haired serpent had fled thistlehouse, but for once in her life, cheryl is happy about the bags under her eyes indicating her lack of sleep.

for once in her life, cheryl is happy.

but of course, doubts began to slowly creep into her brain, those doubts still playing at the forefront of her mind as she bites down on her cherry red bottom lip anxiously. it’s slowly starting to dawn on her what kissing toni last night meant.

it meant that the pink haired serpent cared for cheryl in the same way cheryl cared for her. it meant that toni reciprocated her feelings. god, it meant that toni likes her…

it meant that for once in her life, cheryl had something real right in front of her, ready for the taking, but…

but god, taking it is going to be risky.

kissing toni topaz last night had been…magical. her whole life, cheryl’s only kissed a handful of people. only one of them actually meant something. kissing heather had been amazing, heart pounding, spectacular…but it had been nothing compared to her kiss with toni topaz.

kissing all those boys from riverdale high, archie and moose and reggie, those had been harmless fun, but were nothing compared to her kiss with toni topaz.

it had been exhilarating, exciting, a million other beautiful and magical things but above all else…
it had been dangerous.

cheryl looks at herself in the mirror once again, dark brown eyes moving over her own face as she swallows the lump that rises in her throat before she stands and makes her way to her closet to get dressed.

she can’t…she can’t start something with toni. yes, last night had been amazing, and that kiss, god that kiss had set every part of her body on fire with electricity she’s never felt in her entire life, but she can’t possibly do this, can she?

if her mother found out that she was kissing another girl, let alone dating a southside serpent, god only knows what she’d do not only to cheryl, but to toni, too. and cheryl can’t do that to her favorite pink haired serpent, she can’t put her in danger of her mother’s wrath…

but that kiss…that kiss had been life changing. cheryl’s never felt more alive than she did the moment her lips met toni topaz’s, and cheryl’s never felt more content to kiss the lips of another before in her life.

toni topaz’s lips were intoxicating.

cheryl needed to talk to her, it was as simple as that. she needed to make sure toni understood what she was getting herself into, because if penelope blossom ever got wind of what was happening between them…

cheryl had already suffered through her mother’s abuse when she’d found out about heather, she’s been through this before, and cheryl would take a thousand more beatings as long as toni was safe, but she’d much rather prefer that penelope blossom never discovered what was happening between them.

maybe the only way to do that was to steer clear of starting something with toni altogether…

but she can’t. she can’t ignore her feelings, and she’ll be damned if she’s going to lose this opportunity to have something good in her life for once…

so she’s at war, these two parts of her, one telling her to stay away from toni completely, and the other telling her to go for it, and cheryl doesn’t really know which side to listen to, but cheryl
blossom is selfish and proud of it. she can’t stay away from toni even if she wanted to. that wasn’t a solution, it would only break both their hearts…

*i need to talk to her, i need her to understand*

“cheryl? breakfast!” her mother yells from downstairs, and cheryl jumps slightly before she checks over her make up once more and stands, grabbing her bag and exiting her room to head down the stairs, where penelope blossom stands impatiently. her eyes narrow as soon as she sees cheryl all dressed up.

“and where do you think you’re going?”

“out, mommy. i’ll be home in time for dinner with uncle claudius-.” cheryl drawls, but she’s barely reached the bottom step before penelope grips her wrist tightly, cheryl wincing and looking at her mother with wide eyes.

“ow.” she hisses through bared teeth, and penelope purses her lips.

“out where?” she growls, and cheryl swallows the lump in her throat.

“breakfast. with friends.” she says sheepishly.

“you mean that pink haired girl from the will reading?” penelope scoffs, and cheryl’s heart drops, but she raises her head high.

“do you have a problem with toni, mother?” she asks stiffly, and penelope glares at her.

“that girl is bad news, cheryl! it’s written all over her face!” she hisses, and cheryl rolls her eyes as she yanks her hand out of her mother’s grip.

“calm down, mommy. i’m going to see betty cooper, we have an english assignment to work on.” she lies easily. penelope smiles and lets go of her.
"in that case...tell betty to tell her father i said 'hello'." she says almost dreamily, and cheryl resists the urge to gag as she makes her way to the front door without looking back at her mother, fearful of what penelope will do or say, and she clenches her fist and makes her way to her car.

this, this was why she thought about staying away from toni altogether, god, her mother had almost had an aneurysm at the mere idea of cheryl meeting toni for breakfast, imagine if she found out about last night…

last night, when cheryl had kissed those perfect pink lips, had melted against them…so soft, so pliant, so warm…

cheryl bites back a smile as she turns the ignition of the car and makes her way to pop’s, her mind still reeling from everything that’s happened in the last twenty four hours.

when she reaches pop’s, toni’s already waiting inside, looking anxious as she sits at a booth with her phone in her hands, and cheryl tries her best not to think about how beautiful she looks, but it’s a damn lost cause as she inhales shakily before getting out of her car.

as soon as she enters the diner, toni’s head snaps up to look at her, a small smile playing on her lips as she stands up, and cheryl fights the maddening urge to kiss her as she simply wraps her arms around toni’s shoulders in a hug.

“hey…” she whispers, and toni chuckles in her ear.

“hi. is everything okay?” toni asks with concern, and cheryl tightens her grip on the pink haired girl as she buries her face into her hair.

“it is now.” she breathes with a smile, and toni rubs her back soothingly before cheryl finally detaches herself and smiles down at the southside serpent, raising a hand to cradle her cheek gently.

“is everything okay with you?” cheryl asks softly, and toni smiles up at her before nodding once.

“it is now.” she echoes, and cheryl rolls her eyes, but smiles all the same before it hits her that they’re in public and they probably shouldn’t be this close…
she pulls away from toni with a clear of her throat, collapsing down at the booth they’re next to, and
toni raises an eyebrow, but says nothing as she sits down opposite the redhead with a smirk.

“something tells me you have something to get off your chest.” she says with amusement, and cheryl
bites down on her lip before she nods slowly.

“i do…” she says anxiously, and toni’s expression softens as she reaches out and grips cheryl’s hand
on top of the table.

“hey, cheryl...what is it?” she asks softly, and cheryl hesitates before she squeezes toni’s hand,
glancing around quickly to find pop’s mostly busy, so no one would be paying attention to them…

“last night…last night was amazing, toni. and i don’t want you to think i regret it because i don’t, not
at all…i like you so much, t.t. but if my mother ever found out about us, she’d destroy you like she
destroyed heather, and i can’t risk that happening, i can’t risk you.” toni blinks once, leaning in closer
to her, and cheryl can see the hurt in her eyes, can see the desperation, and cheryl’s eyes flick down
to those beautiful pink lips she kissed just last night-

“cheryl, i don’t care what your mother does-.”

“i care, toni. i care...you’re the first person in a long time that’s actually cared about me, and i don’t
want to lose that, i don’t want to lose you! but...i can’t stay away from you, even if i wanted to…
that’s why…” cheryl trails off, hesitating once more, and toni grips her hand on top of the table
immediately, her fingers warm against cheryl’s.

“cheryl…” she whispers, and cheryl shakes her head and looks up at her with a smile.

“that’s why i need you to understand...i need you to understand that if this is going to happen, we
can’t tell anyone about it. we have to keep it a secret, at least for now, because if my mother finds
out, she’ll kill us both, toni…and i don’t want you to get hurt…” toni’s eyes widen, hope shining in
those beautiful brown eyes cheryl loves so much, and she purses her lips before she nods once.

“okay, yeah, i-i get it, cheryl, and i don’t wanna do anything that would put you at risk, either, so...
so yeah. we can keep it between ourselves, i’m okay with that.” toni says with a smile, and cheryl
feels her heart soar as she squeezes toni’s hand.
“thank you, t.t. i’m sorry, i…i wish things were different-.”

“cheryl, it’s okay. whatever you need me to be, a friend, or something more…i’m willing to be that. i…i like you too, cheryl.” she says softly with a warm smile, and cheryl doesn’t even bother hiding her smile, her cheeks flushing as she licks her lips before biting down on her bottom one shyly.

“thank you…for understanding.” toni chuckles as she leans back in her seat with a deep sigh.

“i thought for a second you were gonna tell me we can’t be together, and i’m sorry, cheryl, but i would’ve fought you on that every step of the way.” toni says, and cheryl sighs as she watches the pink haired girl for a few moments, observing her thoughtfully before she hums softly.

“part of me thinks i should stay away from you…i’m trying very hard to ignore that part.” she says with a frown, and toni licks her lips and leans in.

“good. ignore it completely, because i haven’t been able to stop thinking about that kiss last night… and how much i want to kiss you again.” cheryl’s heart pounds against her chest, and she wants to lean in so badly, to capture toni’s lips with her own, and she knows toni is thinking the same thing, can see her eyes dropping down to her lips…

cheryl, not here! if your mother finds out-

“these are deviant thoughts, cheryl!”

cheryl pulls back with a sharp inhale, and toni blinks in surprise as cheryl shakes her head before she looks up at toni with a smile.

“so…you called me here for a reason, t.t.” she says firmly, and toni’s smile fades, her expression growing anxious before she licks her lips and leans forward.

“cheryl, i want you to know that i wouldn’t ask this of you unless there was no other option. it kills me to think that i’m about to ask you to do something for me that could probably make you hate me, but…but i have to try…” toni says in a low voice, and cheryl looks at her in complete shock, her heart racing wildly as a million different thoughts enter her mind.
what is toni about to ask her? what if she says they really can’t be together? what if-

“toni, what are you talking about?” she says anxiously, and toni hesitates once again before she runs her fingers through her hair with a sigh.

“the serpents are at war, cheryl. with the ghoulies, with each other, and…without f.p, we’re slowly dying. jughead’s doing everything he can to keep the peace, but he needs his father. we all do. and now he’s running off to penny peabody, who is truly the worst of us all, cheryl…you always called us southside scum, but she…she’s the true southside scum of the serpents. she’s gonna manipulate jughead a million different ways, but there’s a way we can stop that…a way we can help him.”

cheryl frowns, and toni sighs as she squeezes cheryl’s hand.

“god, i don’t want to ask this, cheryl, and i don’t want you to get mad at me, i want you to understand that i’m asking this for my family…” toni has tears in her eyes, and cheryl watches her intently.

“toni, whatever you need…i’ll help as best as i can.” she whispers.

of course she’s willing to help her, whatever she needs cheryl to do, she’ll do it. cheryl cares so much about her, she can’t even fathom letting toni down by saying no…

toni exhales shakily before looking up at cheryl.

“if you…if you go on the stand and tell the judge that you forgive f.p for his crimes, then they’ll let him out, cheryl. he can fix everything that’s wrong, with the serpents, with the ghoulies, with jughead…he can keep us safe.” toni breathes.

cheryl stiffens in her seat.

okay…everything except that.

she’s…is she seriously asking her to forgive the man who helped cover up her brother’s murder?
no, this must be a prank of some kind, something jughead is making her do-

“are you kidding me?” cheryl whispers, and toni closes her eyes as her bottom lip trembles in despair.

“part of me fucking wishes i was, cher, because i don’t want to be asking you to do this, you shouldn’t even have to think about it, you should be happy that he’s behind bars, but we’re dying without him-.”

“toni…do you understand what you’re asking me to do?” cheryl says, unable to keep the anger out of her tone, and toni looks at her anxiously before nodding.

“i know, cherl, i know how this all sounds, and you have every right to hate me for even having the nerve to ask you to do this, but the serpents are my family, cheryl! and i can’t stand by and watch us crumble! we need our leader, we need f.p-.”

“i need jason, but he’s gone, toni! he’s gone because f.p jones threw my brother’s body into sweet water river like he was nothing!” cheryl growls, her anger beginning to boil over now and toni blinks back tears as she nods again.

“i know, god, i know, cheryl, but please…please just hear me out-.”

“don’t. just…” cheryl raises a hand to silence her, and toni falls back into her seat in defeat, her expression crestfallen as cheryl takes a deep breath in through her nose.

how dare she…how dare she ask cheryl to forgive the man who murdered her brother-

he didn’t kill jason, cheryl. f.p jones did not kill your beautiful jason, that was your father and you know it…

but f.p helped cover up his murder, he-
her father. god, everything always falls back on her father…

“how bad was it?” cheryl whispers suddenly, and toni looks at her in confusion.

“what do you mean?” she asks hoarsely, and cheryl swallows the lump in her throat as she looks up at toni.

she wants a solid reason. she wants to know why f.p did this, and if toni won’t tell her, she’ll march to whatever hellhole prison f.p jones is currently at to get those answers.

“how badly did f.p need the money for the serpents? how bad was his need that he was willing to cover up jason’s murder and accept hush money from my father?” she manages to get out, and toni exhales shakily as she licks her lips and shakes her head.

“it’s always been bad for the serpents, cheryl. f.p tries his hardest to look after all of us, that’s why we sometimes do drug dealing and petty theft just to get by. but everything with the ghoulies has been getting worse, and if they get stronger, we get weaker. they want nothing more than to take us all down, put us six feet under, they still want that! clifford was offering him big money, and f.p…i can assure you, cheryl, he wouldn’t have taken that money if we weren’t on the verge of losing everything. f.p wasn’t thinking of himself when accepted that job…he was thinking of all of us…” toni whispers. cheryl closes her eyes, tries her best to just breathe, and she can feel toni watching her anxiously, but cheryl ignores her, ignores everything.

jason…her sweet, beautiful, innocent jason…

was murdered by her father. her father and no one else.

what f.p did…he was doing it to save the serpents, to keep all those who wore those serpent jackets fed and clothed and happy…

people like toni.
had f.p thought of the pink haired serpent, when he’d looked down at jason’s dead body in horror and fear? had f.p thought of toni, or fangs, or sweet pea, when he’d dragged jason’s body to the river in desperation? had f.p thought of his son…of his boy, of jughead, when he’d accepted the hush money from clifford blossom?

a man who murdered his own son…

clifford blossom never thought of jason, or cheryl…clifford blossom held a gun to his son’s head and pulled the trigger without blinking.

but cheryl spent months, literal months crying in despair over jason and who murdered him, and f.p said nothing, watched her suffer in silence…

“He’s a good man, cheryl. he just made the wrong decision. he…he took me in when my parents died, he’s been more of a father figure to me than uncle jake could ever dream of being. he’s looked after me for all these years, and i wish…god, i wish more than anything that he hadn’t taken the money from clifford, but the serpents were dying…are dying…” toni trails off, and cheryl licks her lips before she finally manages to say something.

“I…i need time.” cheryl says hoarsely, finally opening her eyes to see toni watching her with wide eyes filled with concern as she nods furiously.

“O-of course, take as much time as you need, cheryl.” she says huskily, and cheryl purses her lips.

no…no, time isn’t enough. she needs answers.

“I want to see him.” toni frowns in confusion.

“see who?” and cheryl inhales deeply.

she needs to do this.

“f.p jones. i need to see him, toni.”
cheryl grips toni’s hand tightly in her own as she looks up at the maximum security prison in front of her with a racing heart and anxiety causing every part of her body to shiver.

it’s been a week since she had told toni she wanted to see f.p jones, to visit him in jail and get the answers she’s been looking for on why he did what he did. toni had suggested they wait until the christmas break from school, so here they are…on a monday, seven days away from christmas…

her first christmas week without her father, without her brother…only her mother, her nana rose and her new uncle she never even knew she had.

cheryl would rather spend it with toni, anyway. even if they have somehow ended up at a maximum security prison.

the snow surrounding them is deep, cheryl’s boots crunching the ground with each step she takes toward the entrance to the prison, but the sound of toni’s boots doing the same beside her is comforting.

toni had refused to let her do this on her own, and cheryl’s thankful. she needs someone there to keep her tame.

she’s afraid of what she’ll do when she comes face to face with f.p jones, nothing but a bulletproof glass separating them…

they come to a stop closer to the entrance, snow falling all around them as cheryl inhales deeply and looks toward the double doors with security guards standing in front of it.

“this is not how i imagined spending christmas week…” cheryl says with a frown, and toni chuckles as she leans in and presses a kiss to cheryl’s temple.

“christmas is overrated.”
“i thought it was your favorite holiday?”

“it is. doesn’t mean it isn’t overrated.” cheryl rolls her eyes, but smiles as she tucks a lock of hair behind toni’s ear.

god, this girl is amazing…toni had worked late last night at the wyrm, as the weekends were their busiest nights, and cheryl had told her she could stay at home to get some rest, but instead, the pink haired serpent had woken up at six in the morning on three hours of sleep and had told cheryl to swing by the trailer park to pick her up.

“thank you for coming with me, t.t.” toni’s eyes soften, and she reaches up and cradles cheryl’s cheek gently with the palm of her hand.

“you have nothing to thank me for, bombshell. i should be thanking you for even doing this. i know how hard this is…” cheryl purses her lips, looks up at the security guards at the entrance as she sighs and continues moving forward, taking the hand toni has on her cheek into her own.

“i just want answers, toni. if i get those…then i’ll know if going on that stand is worth it.” toni sighs, but squeezes cheryl’s hand as the security guards look at them with a frown.

“can we help you?”

“i’m here to visit an inmate.” cheryl says firmly, and the guard nods once before extending his hand to the door.

“walk straight through, then turn left. you’ll see a desk. tell the receptionist who you’re here to see and they’ll sort you out.”

“thank you.” toni says huskily, and cheryl walks forward and pushes the door open with a deep breath.

her heart is fucking racing, and she’s thankful that her mother doesn’t know where she is right now…
if penelope blossom knew what she was doing, another dead blossom kid would more than likely wash up in sweet water river…

y they take a left at the end of the hallway, and toni leads her over to the desk where a woman is seated, tapping away at a computer until she looks up to see them approaching.

“how can i help you, ladies?” she asks with a smile, and cheryl takes in all the christmas decorations, which only consists of a few pieces of tinsel and a small tree as toni clears her throat and talks for her.

“we’re here to see forsythe pendelton jones the second. my name is antoinette topaz, this is cheryl blossom.”

cheryl can’t help but smile as toni uses her full name. she remembers hearing it for the first time at a roll call during school, her gaze moving to the pink haired serpent in surprise as toni had grinned at her and shrugged.

antoinette topaz…everything about this girl was beautiful.

“alright, we’ll let him know he’s got a visitor. if you’ll just take a seat by the chairs on the left of the desk, a guard will come get you guys.” the woman rasps, and she hands toni two visitor tags as she writes down something in a book, toni taking cheryl’s hand again and leading her over to the chairs to the left of the reception desk.

god, this place is glum…cheryl can’t help the shiver than runs up her spine as she takes in the grey walls and the general aura of despair.

“you okay?” toni asks softly as she drags cheryl down into the seat next to her, and cheryl bites her lip as she looks around once again before shaking her head.

“this place is horrible, toni.” she whispers. toni sighs and nods slowly.

“yeah…kind of reminds me of juvie.” she says, clenching her jaw tightly, and cheryl looks at her in surprise.
“you…are you serious?” she asks incredulously, and toni chuckles darkly as she nods again.

“yeah. grey walls, general atmosphere of hell on earth…this is just like juvie.” toni mutters, and cheryl feels another shiver go up her spine as she clutches toni’s hand tightly.

toni still hasn’t spoken about her time there, and cheryl’s starting to feel more and more like she doesn’t want to know anything about toni’s four weeks in juvie. something tells her it really was hell on earth for the pink haired girl…

“i’m sorry, t.t…”

“it’s not your fault, cheryl. i got caught, i had to suffer the consequences.” toni says with a sigh as cheryl frowns.

yes, she got caught dealing drugs, but she shouldn’t have been doing it in the first place. she was fourteen for god’s sake, what was the serpent king thinking…

“f.p should’ve never let you do it. the drug dealing.” cheryl says, trying to keep her tone free of accusation, but toni sees right through her.

“i pretty much forced him to, cheryl. i was young and an idiot, i wanted to prove myself…trust me, i wouldn’t leave f.p alone for months about it. it’s my fault. i’m just glad it’s over and i never have to go back there…hopefully.” toni adds with a sly smile, and cheryl scoffs.

“you won’t be seeing inside the halls of a juvenile correctional facility ever again, toni topaz. i’ll make sure of it.” toni grins.

“how do you plan on doing that?” she asks, and cheryl glares at her.

“you do anything that puts you in danger of going back to juvie and i’ll never speak to you again.” toni frowns at that, but she sighs and gives cheryl a two fingered salute.

“yes, ma’am.”
“good.”

“cheryl blossom and antoinette topaz?” they both look up at the sound of their names, and toni stands quickly, cheryl following suite.

“yeah, that’s us.”

“follow me.” the guard says, looking them up and down once with a frown before he leads them through the double doors he just came through.

cheryl and toni follow him slowly, still hand in hand as he leads them over to another room, down another hallway, and finally, stops them at a heavy steel door as he holds up a basket to them.

“phones, wallets, jewellery, anything metallic or sharp at all, please dispose them into this basket, it’ll be at the reception desk with your name on it when you leave.” he deadpans, and cheryl and toni quickly begin removing all their rings, bracelets, earrings, belts and anything else that can be seen as threatening before cheryl hands them her bag with a frown, and toni quickly reaches into her pockets and pulls out her phone and wallet, shoving them into cheryl’s bag sheepishly.

the guard looks over them once before he nods.

“alright, through these doors, step through the metal detectors, the guards there will take you to the holding room.”

“thanks…” toni pulls open the door, and cheryl walks in first, heading straight for the metal detectors as her heart begins pounding against her chest painfully now.

f.p jones is close by, she can almost smell him…

she’s nervous. god only knows what f.p will think when he sees cheryl blossom on the other side of the glass, and god only knows what answers cheryl’s about to get, but she needs them.
she needs to know why he’s done this. Cheryl’s not a forgiving person, not at all, and F.P. Jones may never truly win her forgiveness for what he’s done, but if she just knows why...

they pass through the metal detectors easily, and the guard sighs as they come to a stop in front of him.

“Would you like a female guard to search you?” he drawls, and Cheryl blinks once.

“yes.” she says without hesitation, and he rolls his eyes, but nods once before lifting the walkie talkie on his shoulder.

“andrea, get down here, i’ve got two female visitors who need a pat down.” he says, looking back at Cheryl, and Toni steps closer to the redhead almost subconsciously.

“lot of security…” Toni mutters, and the guard gives her a sly grin.

“it’s a prison, sweetheart, what did you expect?” Cheryl glares at him, her fist clenching tightly.

why do all men have this attitude, she’s really starting to wonder if there’s a decent man in this world-

Toni wraps her fingers around her wrist to calm her down but says nothing, and Cheryl relaxes slightly as a female guard makes her way toward them.

“Alright, spread your legs and arms, please.” she says with a sigh.

once they’re both thoroughly searched, the female guard leads them toward another room that’s sealed behind a heavy metal door, and she shoves her key into it and opens it before extending her hand with a smile.

“in you go.”

“Thank you.” Cheryl says, her voice small as she walks into the room to find it’s filled with nothing
but a line of chairs and booths, glass separating the criminals from the visitors as cheryl grabs the closest chair and collapses down into it.

toni steals the chair beside them, and she gives cheryl a reassuring smile as she places it right next to the redheaded girl.

“we don’t have to do this, cheryl…” she says softly as she sits down in the chair, but cheryl shakes her head.

“i have to do this, t.t.” she says firmly, and toni sighs, but nods as she grips cheryl’s hand in her own once again.

they sit in silence for a few moments, and the whole room is empty except for two security guards on either side of the room as a loud buzzing sound echoes around them and the door on the opposite side of the glass opens.

and f.p jones steps through.

cheryl’s heart stops, her eyes falling on the man in front of her, and she tries to contain her anger, but her hand not currently holding toni’s curls into a fist as f.p looks at her in complete and utter surprise.

he looks…haggard. cheryl can guess it’s not easy, being in prison, and it shows on f.p’s face, but she finds herself not sympathizing, instead finds herself remembering the day she was forced to go to the morgue and stare at jason’s dead body to confirm it was in fact her redheaded twin.

his body had been waterlogged, bloated and blue, and it was all because of this man-

“cheryl…” toni says, her tone fearful, and cheryl turns to look at the pink haired serpent, sees her eyes on cheryl’s fist, and when cheryl relaxes it, she sees her nails have pierced the skin on her palm, blood slowly dripping down it…

f.p’s eyes move over to toni, and if it’s possible, he looks even more shocked as the guard leads him over to the booth before gripping the hands currently held in handcuffs.
“no funny business, jones.” f.p simply nods, and the guard unlocks his handcuffs before gripping his shoulder and sitting him down opposite cheryl and toni.

he looks the blossom girl dead in the eyes, and cheryl can see the guilt in them straight away.

good. she hopes it hurts him every time he looks into her brown eyes-

“you’ve got ten minutes.” the guard on cheryl and toni’s side of the room says, and cheryl swallows the lump in her throat and nods once before looking back at f.p.

his gaze moves to toni, who suddenly reaches for the telephone beside the booth.

“i’ll talk to him first, okay? i’ll tell him why you’re here…” she says softly, and cheryl nods again, can’t trust herself to talk as her eyes never leave f.p in front of her. f.p picks up the telephone on his side of the booth, his bloodshot eyes looking at toni in wonder as he raises the phone to his ear.

“antoinette topaz…it’s good to see you, kid.” cheryl hears him say through the phone gruffly, and toni smiles softly as she nods at him, and cheryl can see the adoration in her eyes, can see her staring at this man with gratitude over everything he’s done for her.

he’s given toni nothing but happiness…he’s given cheryl nothing but pain.

“good to see you too, f.p.” toni says simply, and f.p sighs, his expression suddenly filled with concern as he looks toni dead in the eyes.

“how’s jughead?” he asks, and toni sighs.

“he’s doing everything he can to get you out of here, f.p. he’s…he’s gone to penny peabody for help.” f.p suddenly tenses, his eyes narrowing as he clenches his jaw before he closes his eyes and exhales angrily.

“goddamn it, jug…first he joins the serpents when i asked him not to and now this…” he hisses, and toni licks her lips.
“he cares about you, f.p. we all do. the serpents are dying without your leadership. we need you back out there, out of this place.” toni says, and she hesitates before she looks at cheryl.

“that’s why…that’s why cheryl’s here.” toni looks to the redheaded blossom girl with a smile, and f.p looks between the both of them before his eyes focus on cheryl as well.

“put her on the phone, toni.” he says firmly, and toni sighs before she holds the phone up to cheryl.

“you’ve got this.” she whispers. cheryl takes a deep breath in and closes her eyes before she exhales and takes the phone from toni’s hand.

she needs to let go of her anger. she needs to remember why she’s here.

she wants answers.

she holds the phone up to her ear, and f.p looks at her solemnly, a sadness in his eyes as he gives her the smallest of smiles.

“cheryl…” he says simply, and she swallows loudly before she leans in closer to him.

“toni tells me the judge will give you leniency…might let you out of jail sooner if my mother and i forgive you for your crimes against our family.” she says in a low voice, and f.p clenches his jaw, but nods as he drops his gaze away from cheryl guiltily.

“yeah…but i don’t need or want your forgiveness, cheryl.” he says firmly. cheryl blinks.

what the hell is he talking about?

“f.p…” toni starts, but f.p shakes his head, his eyes still on the redheaded girl in front of him.

“what i did…i don’t deserve your forgiveness. i deserve to rot in here for what i’ve done.” he croaks
toni goes to say something, but cheryl grips her hand to stop her, toni leaning back in her seat with a frown at the touch of her hand, and cheryl still doesn’t take her eyes off the man in front of her.

she wants answers.

“why?” she whispers. f.p sighs.

“because i deserve to be in here for what i did to jason-.” he starts, but cheryl interrupts him.

“no…” she croaks out, closing her eyes and shaking her head. f.p stays quiet, and cheryl exhales shakily before opening her eyes and staring at him.

“why did you do it? toni tells me you did it for the serpents, you did it to keep them safe and secure, but why else? why did you agree to throw my beautiful…my beautiful brother into sweet water river to rot?” cheryl’s crying before she can stop herself, the image of jason’s dead body flashing in her mind, and toni’s grip on her hand tightens as f.p looks up at her in despair.

“i didn’t want to, cheryl. but your father…he was a persuasive man.” f.p says with a clench of his jaw, and cheryl waits for him to elaborate.

when he doesn’t, she glares at him with hot tears of anger falling down her face.

“what does that mean?” she hisses, and f.p stares at her for a long time before he looks behind him at the guards. they stare at him, and he leans in with a shake of his head.

“everything i said was true, cheryl. mustang, that idiotic son of a bitch, kidnapped your brother and tortured him in the basement of the wyrm. he was gonna send a ransom note to your father for money, but when clifford learned where your brother was, he came to the wyrm and…and…”

“killed jason.” cheryl whispers, tears falling as she closes her eyes and takes a deep breath in.
she didn’t watch the video that betty cooper, jughead jones, kevin keller, archie andrews and veronica lodge had seen, had refused to even entertain the idea of seeing it…but every day…every goddamn day, she’s seen it in her mind…clifford blossom holding a gun to jason’s head…pulling the trigger-

“i told him…i told him i wanted no part of it, that the serpents weren’t going to help him, but he…he told me how much he was willing to pay. and then…” f.p trails off, and he almost looks afraid as he leans in closer and looks up at cheryl and toni anxiously.

“and then he threatened jughead’s life.” f.p’s voice is shaking, and cheryl looks up at him in despair as his eyes move over to toni, nothing but sadness shining in them.

“he threatened your life, too…” he whispers, and cheryl’s heart drops, her eyes moving over to toni, who looks at f.p in shock.

what? her father threatened toni?

“i…i never even spoke a word to clifford blossom-.” toni says incredulously, and f.p shakes his head.

“he knew i had kids in the gang…it wasn’t just yours and jughead’s lives, it was sweet pea, fangs…all the southside kids…he promised me a war unlike anything i’d ever seen if i didn’t help him, and i couldn’t…i couldn’t let anything happen to you kids.” cheryl can hear the despair in his voice, can see the heartbreak in his eyes, and god, she doesn’t want to feel bad for him, he ruined her life-

but she thinks of sweet pea, of his hard attitude, but his playful banter…she thinks of fangs, how he’d dove headfirst into saving her from nick st. clair’s evil grasp, thinks of his beautiful smile and how much it lights up a room…

she thinks of toni, sitting right beside her, thinks of the taste of her lips, a watermelon chapstick that cheryl can still remember…

“why didn’t you tell anyone?” cheryl whispers. f.p runs a hand through his hair shakily.

“because i deserve to be in here, cheryl. what i did, it was unforgiveable, and i’m sorry. i’m sorry that me apologizing isn’t enough, i’m sorry that i can’t do anything to erase what i’ve done-.”
“stop…” cheryl croaks out, and f.p trails off, looking at her in anguish as cheryl closes her eyes and takes a moment to just breathe.

so…her father had threatened jughead’s life. had threatened toni and sweet pea and fangs, all the kids that f.p had taken in as his own…all his serpents, his family…

cheryl can see why he did it. for what was a serpent king without his serpents by his side?

jason blossom was gone. and nothing cheryl did was going to bring him back.

clifford blossom was gone. good riddance.

but f.p jones…he was still here. he was still alive, and he had a family he loved, a family he cared about…

and that family included the girl cheryl cares about, the girl sitting right beside her, looking at her with worry and sadness, the girl who cares about cheryl just as much…the girl who risked jail time to stop her would be rapist while her own mother took hush money from him…

cheryl opens her eyes and looks at toni with tears falling down her cheeks.

“if f.p gets out of here…if he comes back, can he bring the peace between the ghoulies and the serpents back? can he keep you safe?” she whispers. toni swallows the lump in her throat, and f.p looks between them both in concern.

“why, what’s happening? toni, what’s wrong?” he asks immediately, and cheryl hands the phone over to the pink haired serpent, watches as she looks up at f.p sadly.

“the ghoulies are getting stronger, f.p. they’ve been selling jingle jangle, and jughead managed to stop them by beating malachai at his own game, but they’ve been silent for the last few weeks, which means something big is brewing. tall boy is doing a pretty shitty job of taking your place, he wants us to…get back on the scene, but jughead refuses. he doesn’t want any more serpents thrown in jail, but it’s causing a war between them. we’re fighting amongst ourselves while the ghoulies are putting targets on all our backs, and that’s not even including hiram lodge’s plans for the southside, f.p…
everything…everything’s just going to shit. and we need our leader.” she whispers. f.p sighs in frustration, desperation and anger shining in his eyes as he looks at toni in despair.

“toni, has anyone been attacked?” he asks hoarsely, and toni sighs.

“not yet, but it’s only a matter of time-.” cheryl licks her lips before she takes the phone off toni mid-sentence and looks f.p dead in the eye.

enough.

“i’m willing to go to the judge and tell him that the blossom family forgives you for your crimes. i’m willing to get you out of here, f.p, but i need you to promise me…i need you to promise me that you’ll keep toni safe.” cheryl says firmly.

if f.p gets out, he can keep toni safe, and that’s all that cheryl cares about.

she won’t let some ghoulie trash hurt her pink haired serpent. if f.p can fix this, cheryl’s willing to get him out of jail.

f.p looks at her in shock, tears welling in his eyes as he purses his lips and shakes his head, and toni squeezes her hand tightly.

“cheryl, are you sure?” she asks in a low voice, but f.p clenches his jaw.

“cheryl, you don’t have to do this, i don’t deserve your forgiveness-.” he says, but cheryl interrupts him.

“you don’t. and truthfully…i don’t think i have forgiven you. i don’t think i ever will. but someone i care about needs you. someone i care about needs you back on the playing field, and if things keep getting worse with the ghoulies without you there…” cheryl trails off, thoughts of what will happen to not only toni, but sweet pea and fangs if things aren’t fixed with the ghoulies…

sweet pea was hotheaded, he was bound to set the ghoulies off with a comment eventually, and cheryl knows toni, knows she’ll die to defend sweet pea if she has to-
toni grips her hand tightly, cheryl looking at the pink haired serpent with a small smile as toni watches her with nothing but adoration shining in her eyes.

god, how did she get so lucky?

she can’t lose her. she just can’t…

“you keep toni safe. you keep her safe as if she’s jughead. as if she’s one of your own.” cheryl breathes, and f.p smiles, a tear falling down his cheek as he nods once.

“she already is, cheryl blossom.”

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it’s been silent for a long time.

toni is too scared to talk, too scared to say anything, and cheryl is quiet, watching the sunset over the horizon with a blank expression on her face, tears falling down her cheeks as toni squirms in her seat uncomfortably.

it’s been three hours since they left the prison and f.p jones behind, three hours since cheryl had called the judge overseeing f.p’s case and had asked for a meeting. three hours since toni had sent a message to jughead telling him she’d convinced cheryl to talk to the judge.

he’s been calling her non-stop, and toni had sent him a message telling her she’d call him as soon as she could, but he’s still calling, and her phone is buzzing once more as she sighs in frustration and clicks the button on the side to end the call abruptly.

“it’s jughead, isn’t it?” cheryl croaks out, her voice cracking through the silence like a whip, and toni licks her lips and looks up at the redhead softly.

“yeah.” she says simply, and cheryl sighs before she sniffs and nods once.
“i should go see him.” she says, and toni shakes her head and reaches out to grip cheryl’s hand in her own.

she doesn’t want to leave right now, she wants to stay with cheryl, just the two of them, because right now, toni is still thankful to her, can’t believe she’s actually going to tell the judge she forgives f.p for what he’s done…

all for her.

“we don’t have to go just yet…” she says softly, and cheryl looks at her, more tears falling down her face as her bottom lip trembles.

“cheryl…” toni’s heart is breaking, and cheryl chokes on a sob as toni pulls cheryl into her arms, her tears falling on the bare skin there, and toni rubs circles into her back as she whispers words of comfort.

“it’s okay…shh, i’m right here…”

toni can’t believe that cheryl’s main motivation for all this had been her. yes, things were bad with the ghoulies, and toni had been walking around the southside with her pocket knife curled in her fist at all times for fear of the southside serpent jacket she wore becoming a target, but cheryl had demanded that f.p keep her safe…

cheryl was doing this, all of this, this pain, this despair…she was doing it for her.

“cheryl, you didn’t have to do this for me, you know…” toni whispers, and cheryl sniffs as she pulls away from toni’s embrace with a small shake of her head.

“I didn’t do it just for you, t.t. i did it for fangs, and for sweet pea…and god, even for that beanie wearing hobo.” she cries, and toni chokes on a laugh as cheryl looks at her with a weak smile, a hand moving up to wipe away the tears falling down her cheeks.

“I did it because the serpents are your family, and you’re scared for them, t.t. and…and at the end of the day, my father…he threatened you. he threatened all the serpents because he was a…a sadistic
man. god, what other choice did f.p have when his own son was being threatened?” cheryl says hoarsely, and toni sighs as she leans forward and cradles cheryl’s face in her hands.

it’s not possible. it’s not possible that people can still believe cheryl blossom is a monster when she’s so willingly doing this for people she barely even knew…

“you’re the bravest person i know, cheryl blossom.” she whispers. cheryl sniffs once again, and she smiles.

“f.p can keep you safe, right?” she croaks out, and toni smiles.

“he kept the peace between the northside and the southside for years, and he kept the ghoulies in check as well…if we get him back, he can hopefully end all of this tension.” toni says firmly, and cheryl swallows loudly as she looks down at toni’s lips before she leans in.

and toni feels her heart stop as she closes the gap between them and kisses cheryl softly, the taste of salty tears mixed with maple and cherries hitting her tongue, and toni’s head is spinning as cheryl grabs the lapels of her jacket and pulls her in closer, a soft whine escaping her as she deepens the kiss-

toni’s phone is buzzing again, and she groans against cheryl’s lips before she pulls away, glaring down at her phone before looking up at cheryl with a sigh.

“jughead again.” she whispers. cheryl hums softly before she wipes away her tears and nods once with determination.

“let’s go. his trailer isn’t far from yours, right?”

“cheryl, you don’t have to see him right now, we can stay here until you’re ready.” toni reassures her, and cheryl smiles as she leans forward and brushes her thumb over toni’s lips to rub off her lipstick that’s stained them.

“i’m ready, t.t.”
the drive to sunnyside trailer park is quick, cheryl practically speeding as toni grips onto the dashboard for dear life, but says nothing, and as soon as they’re outside jughead’s trailer, gravel and dirt flying everywhere as cheryl’s car comes to a screeching stop, she jumps out of the car, slamming the door shut behind her.

toni’s barely out of the car when cheryl skips up the stairs and pounds a fist against the front door, and when it opens, jughead jones stands there, frozen in complete and utter shock as he stares at the sight before him.

“cheryl, i-.”

“here’s what’s gonna happen, hobo. i’m gonna go to the judge overseeing your father’s case and i’m going to tell him the blossom family forgives him for his crimes against my brother. in return, your father is going to make sure that toni is kept safe no matter what, and you better help him keep that promise, my favorite welfare baby, or your father’s going straight back to prison, got it?” she demands, and toni bites back a smile as jughead blinks in shock a few times, his eyes wide and almost disbelieving before he clears his throat and nods.

“uh…yeah, yeah of course, i…cheryl, thank you.” he breathes, and cheryl flips her hair over her shoulder before shrugging with a grin.

“you’re welcome! now, i’m off to thistlehouse to have dinner with my hideous mother and my new uncle. are you coming, t.t.” cheryl turns to toni now, and toni grins.

“didn’t know i was invited.”

“mm, neither does my mother, it’ll be fun to see her face when you show up on the doorstep. let’s go!” cheryl grips her hand, and toni exchanges a grin with jughead, who shakes his head, but grins just the same as cheryl leads toni back to her car, toni staring at her with a mixture of awe and adoration.

oh, she’s in for a wild ride with cheryl blossom by her side...
f.p jones is released from prison the week after new year’s day.

the judge had decided that cheryl’s forgiveness for f.p’s role in jason’s death had been enough to grant him early release, and so the serpent king would return to the southside in the early weeks of the new year.

when toni told cheryl the news on the first day of the new year, she could see the redheaded blossom girl inhale shakily, her eyes closing as she swallowed loudly and said nothing, simply grabbed toni’s hand underneath the booth at pop’s they were occupying, and toni had quickly glanced around at the empty diner before she leaned in and pressed a kiss to cheryl’s temple.

the last few weeks had been…calm. toni was finally starting to feel like herself again after the beating she’d gotten from her uncle, was well on her way to a full recovery, and was thankful for it. her uncle hadn’t bothered her, perhaps still feeling guilty about what he’d done, to the point where he’d told her she didn’t need to keep cleaning the trailer everyday if she didn’t want to, his voice quiet as he watched her with guilty eyes.

he was, however, still taking all her earnings she made at the whyte wyrm, but toni didn’t really mind.

toni didn’t mind, because cheryl had become her saving grace.

toni spent christmas day at thistlehouse, with cheryl and nana rose as penelope blossom watched from the darkness of the other room, her expression neutral while toni and cheryl exchanged gifts with bright smiles on their faces.

“it’s not much, but it’s something…i’m sorry, cheryl.” toni had said guiltily, and cheryl’s hand had twitched as if she wanted to touch toni’s cheek lovingly, but instead she’d simply grabbed the pink haired girl’s hand and squeezed it tightly.
“it’s beautiful, t.t.” she had whispered. it was a necklace with a ruby gemstone that cost toni the rest of her leftover money from the gala, but she’d done so happily.

it was worth it to see the awe on cheryl’s face as she’d immediately placed the necklace around her neck, clasping it behind it with tears shining in her eyes.

cheryl, on the other hand, had gotten toni an expensive perfume that toni still hadn’t touched, scared that every spray from the bottle was at least ten dollars wasted. she’d seen it in stores at a value of over a hundred and fifty dollars, and she had looked at cheryl in complete and utter shock.

“cheryl, this is-.”

“a bottle of ma cherie, yes. i thought it was fitting.” cheryl had said in a low voice with a flip of her hair, and god, toni had been so tempted to kiss her in that moment, but penelope blossom’s eyes had been narrowing more and more in suspicion the longer she watched them, and it was in that moment that toni had sighed and turned to nana rose with a smile.

“i got you something too, nana rose.”

new year’s eve had been spent at the pembrooke with veronica lodge, archie andrews, betty cooper, jughead jones, sweet pea, fangs, and a bunch of other students from riverdale high. hermione and hiram lodge had happily let veronica use the pembrooke for the night for a party, and toni didn’t even know the northsiders had it in them to throw a party that wild.

it wasn’t what she was used to, loud and boisterous nights at the whyte wyrm with fangs and sweet pea were what she usually did on the night the new year rolled around, but spending it with cheryl had been the highlight of the entire night.

she knows veronica suspects that something is happening between them. the raven haired girl had been eyeing them the whole night with a smirk on her face, and when the countdown had begun, cheryl and toni had snuck onto the balcony to share a kiss as fireworks exploded around them to bring in the new year.

“thank god last year is done with, t.t. it was the worst year of my life…the only good thing to come out of it was meeting you.” cheryl had whispered, and toni hadn’t said anything, had simply blinked away her tears and had wrapped a hand around the back of cheryl’s neck to bring her in for another
bruising, passionate kiss.

though they hadn’t really had the talk on what exactly they were yet, their relationship remained a secret, and toni was…okay with it. granted, she’d much prefer to walk through the hallways of riverdale high with her hand intertwined with cheryl’s, would much rather they be allowed to kiss in the hallways than behind the bleachers in the gym…but every time they got close to being caught, cheryl would tense up, her whole body going into fight or flight mode, and toni knows what it feels like, to be so terrified of what would be waiting for her at home, which is no doubt what runs through cheryl’s mind every time it happens, the thoughts of penelope blossom finding out making her whole body tremble in fear.

so toni tolerates it. she tolerates the sneaking around because god, she cares about cheryl so much…

part of her thinks that maybe they should slap a secret label of being girlfriends onto their relationship. part of her thinks she should let cheryl decide in her own time.

it takes her three days after new year’s to realize, with cheryl curled up in her arms while they sit in the back of her convertible, that they don’t need to slap a label on what they have. it just is.

they’re at the whyte wyrm now, awaiting f.p’s return from prison. cheryl had crinkled her nose in disgust the second she walked through the doors of the bar, and toni had laughed as sweet pea had grinned at the redheaded blossom girl before throwing an arm around her shoulders.

“welcome to the home of the southside trash, ginger.” cheryl had glared at him with the fire of a thousand suns, and toni had simply gripped her hand to calm her down with a smirk still etched on her face.

cheryl had been looking for any excuse to get away from thistlehouse for a while now, her mother and uncle quickly becoming vultures, constantly asking her where she was going and what she was up to, and toni had frowned when cheryl had told her, wondering when the hell penelope blossom had become so invested in what her daughter was doing with her time, but cheryl had flipped her hair over her shoulder with a shrug, telling toni not to worry so much about her.

she could handle it.

just like she could handle f.p walking through those doors of the whyte wyrm as a free man.
“cheryl, you don’t have to be here for this, you know…” toni whispers for the tenth time in the last two hours they’ve spent here, and cheryl smiles and touches her cheek, her thumb brushing across the apple of toni’s cheekbone.

“i want to be here, toni. besides, he’s only out of prison because of me, i should be here for this so i can receive his gratitude face to face.” cheryl says airily, and toni grins as she wraps her fingers around the wrist of the hand touching her cheek so lovingly.

“there’s the bombshell i remember.” she teases, and cheryl grins, but it quickly fades as she sighs and looks around the place sadly.

"it's hard to believe this is where jason died..." she whispers brokenly, tears immediately welling in her eyes. toni's heart drops.

fuck...fuck, she completely forgot-

"cheryl, i...fuck, i'm sorry-." 

"it's okay, t.t. i wouldn't have come here if i didn't think i could handle it." cheryl whispers hoarsely. toni bites down on her bottom lip, and she grips cheryl's hand tightly in her own, giving it a reassuring squeeze as fangs walks up to them with his usual bright smile, wrapping an arm around both their necks with his head bobbing in the middle of them.

“so…when did this love story blossom, miss blossom?” he teases, and cheryl’s eyes widen as toni shoves him back lightly with a scoff.

“we’re just friends, fangs, cut it out.” she hisses under her breath, and fangs laughs.

“oh come on, you really think i believe that? all the touching you guys do, the little looks…” he scoffs with a playful grin, and cheryl chews on her lip hesitantly as she looks up at toni with a bit of panic shining in her eyes. toni sighs before looking at fangs with a raised eyebrow.

why was her best friend such an idiot?
“just because boys have the emotional range of a teaspoon and can’t fathom the idea of hugging another guy, doesn’t mean girls do, too. friends touch each other sometimes, fangs.” toni says with a roll of her eyes, and fangs’s grin only widens.

“i’m sure they do…” he purrs playfully, and toni growls and shoves him harder.

“get your mind out of the gutter, god!” she whines, and he laughs, but shrugs and makes his way over to the pool table where sweet pea and him are playing a game, smoke billowing from the cigarette caught between sweet pea’s lips.

toni frowns, her eyes moving to cheryl, who is watching the two boys play pool with a look of panic shining in her eyes, and toni wants nothing more than to brush away her insecurities and her doubts, but she knows nothing she says will convince cheryl that being public about their relationship is worth penelope blossom’s wrath, not when toni herself isn’t convinced.

there’s no way in hell she’s going to risk cheryl getting hurt just to get a little liplock action in a crowded bar.

“are we being too obvious, t.t.?” cheryl whispers in a low voice, and toni sighs as she looks up at the redhead girl with a small smile.

“we can slow it down, cheryl. it’s okay. but i can guarantee you, you don’t have to worry about them.” toni says softly, nodding toward the two boys who are like brothers to her, and cheryl’s eyes flick back to fangs and sweet pea cautiously.

“are you sure?” she breathes.

“they’re family, cheryl. if i tell them to keep quiet about it, they will. they’ll do anything to protect me, why do you think i don’t tell them about uncle jake? they’ll kill him if they ever find out.” toni clenches her jaw, her eyes moving past sweet pea and fangs at the pool table to her uncle at the bar, drinking a beer and laughing with hog eye, not even paying attention to his pink haired niece on the other side of the room.

“if i tell them it’s life or death, they won’t breathe a word about us to anyone.” toni says, dragging her eyes away from her uncle to look at cheryl with a smile, and cheryl licks her lips, contemplating toni’s words before she looks at the pink haired serpent sadly.
“i wish things were different.” she whispers, and toni sighs and squeezes her hand.

“i know. i wish it was, too. we don’t have to say anything, cheryl, i promise. we’ll be…a little less obvious.” toni says with a chuckle, and she goes to move her hand out of cheryl’s grip, but the redhead girl stops her with a low whine as she tightens her grip.

“no, stay…please?” she says softly, and toni smiles.

“always.” she whispers.

the doors to the whyte wyrm suddenly burst open, and when jughead jones walks through, toni’s heart stops.

she jumps up from her chair, quickly glancing at cheryl, who tenses up immediately, as jughead saunters down the stairs with a grin on his face.

“ladies and gentlemen of the southside serpents, i ask you all to welcome back…the serpent king!” he roars, and everyone is cheering as the doors open once more and f.p jones walks in, betty and alice cooper trailing behind him awkwardly, his southside serpent jacket looking well at home on his shoulders as he grins at everyone around him.

toni cheers loudly, her heart swelling at the sight of f.p back in the walls of his home. the man was like a second father to her, had looked after her when toni’s uncle had been less than parental, and despite toni’s anger at him for taking the money from clifford blossom, despite her disgust with his involvement in the cover up of jason blossom’s murder…she can’t deny that she’s happy to see him…

he’d been there the day her parents had died, had bent down to look into her eyes with a small smile as he’d brushed away her tears and promised her that he wouldn’t let anything happen to her, that her parents had been serpents and he’d look after her as if she was his own…

but she can’t help but look beside her at cheryl, who looks at her with a small smile before she stands slowly from her seat, and toni knows she’s putting on a brave face, those defensive layers of hers building a wall back up to surround and protect her as she fixes her eyes on f.p with a steel gaze.

betty’s eyes fall on them in confusion, widening as she takes in the sight of cheryl blossom at the
whyte wyrm of all places, and f.p is hugging a few serpents when his eyes land on cheryl as well, his smile fading slowly before he pats the back of hog eye and begins making his way over to where toni and cheryl are standing.

f.p comes to a stop in front of them, and he smiles and grips toni’s shoulder tightly, toni smiling up at him affectionately before he sighs and looks at cheryl with a raised eyebrow.

“never thought i’d see a blossom kid willingly show up at the whyte wyrm.” he says firmly, and cheryl flips her hair over her shoulder, but the tears shining in her eyes are evident.

“i figured i’d be welcome, considering i’m the reason you’re standing outside of a jail cell at all.” she says coolly, and f.p’s grin only widens as he chuckles and nods.

“that you are…so let it be known henceforth!” f.p shouts out at the quiet bar, looking at every single one of the serpents with a hardness in his eyes.

“my first order of business upon my return…if any harm comes to cheryl blossom at the hands of a serpent…that serpent will pay with their life!” he bellows, and toni looks at him in surprise as some of the serpents frown, perhaps not agreeing with f.p, but deciding his rule needs to be followed regardless.

he is the serpent king, after all…

toni feels herself breathing a little easier. at least cheryl’s protected now from the serpents, not that she ever doubted it, but still…

f.p turns back to face cheryl, who looks around at the serpents with a somewhat satisfied smile on her face, and f.p runs a hand through his hair before he nods again.

“cheryl…i owe you my life. and for that, i’ll keep your promise. toni stays safe…no matter what.” he says in a low voice that only the three of them can hear as he grips toni’s shoulder once again, and cheryl’s smile only widens as she bows her head.

“thank you, f.p.” she says softly.
“no, cheryl. thank you. three cheers for cheryl blossom!” f.p yells, and toni grins widely, cheryl looking around in surprise as all the serpents cheer for her loudly.

toni’s pretty sure cheryl’s never had a room of people be happy to celebrate her. the smile on her face says it all.

“now let’s get this party started! birdie, get me a beer!” f.p roars, and the serpents cheer once more as toni claps her hands before gripping cheryl’s bicep, cheryl looking at her with wide eyes.

“thank you, cheryl. so much.” she whispers.

those words will never be enough to truly express toni’s gratitude for the girl in front of her…

cheryl’s eyes soften as she suddenly pulls toni into a warm hug, her lips at the pink haired girl’s ear.

“you’ve given me so much happiness, t.t…it’s only fair i give you some in return.” she whispers, and toni is about to reply, about to tell her that any moment toni spends with her gives her happiness beyond compare, but jughead jones is making his way towards them, betty trailing right behind him, and toni reluctantly pulls away from cheryl with a sigh.

she’ll have to leave those comments for a moment alone with the redheaded bombshell…

he comes to a stop in front of cheryl, exhales shakily before he holds his arms open, and cheryl watches him with a raised eyebrow.

“are you asking for a hug, hobo?” she says in disbelief, and jughead rolls his eyes.

“are you willing to give me one, blossom?” he deadpans, but there’s a slight smile playing on his thin lips, and cheryl sighs, crinkling her nose before she moves forward to wrap her arms around jughead jones’s shoulders.


oh…it’s definitely the end of times…
they’re both stiff for a few moments, and toni and betty exchange a look of silent laughter before jughead relaxes and tightens his hold on cheryl, burying his head into her shoulder.

“thank you so much, cheryl.” he says, his voice muffled against her hair, and cheryl sighs as she pats his back somewhat awkwardly.

“you’re welcome, jughead.” she says simply. they let go of each other, and jughead clears his throat before he reaches out to take betty’s hand.

“i hope you’ll stick around for the celebrations, cheryl.” he says, and cheryl winces visibly, her steely gaze returning as toni bites back a groan.

oh, that so was not the best thing to say…

“no offence, jughead, but i don’t quite feel the need to celebrate the man who covered up my brother’s murder being released from prison in the place where said murder took place. i played my part, now you and f.p need to play yours.” she says coldly, and jughead clenches his jaw angrily, but doesn’t say anything, simply gives her a nod.

“good. toni, i’ll talk to you later.” cheryl gives toni’s hand a squeeze before she picks up her bag from the ground and begins making her way to the entrance of the wyrm. toni watches her go in hesitation.

something’s wrong, she can tell immediately. she’s gotten good at reading cheryl over the weeks they’ve spent together, and the look in cheryl’s eyes had said it all…

she was in pain. not physical…emotional.

she feels a pressure on her shoulder, and she looks up as betty cooper rolls her eyes and pushes toni’s shoulder lightly.

“go after her. i can see you want to.” she says with a smile, and toni bites down on her lip before she’s racing off after the redheaded blossom girl, bursting through the front doors just as cheryl reaches her car.
“cheryl, wait!” cheryl looks up at the sound of her name, and she sighs as toni runs over to her, her boots slapping against the gravel dirt loudly.

“toni, i’m sorry, but i don’t feel much like celebrating-.”

“it’s not that. you don’t have to stay at all, i just…do you wanna get something to eat at pop’s? together?” toni says with a slight pant as she catches her breath, and cheryl’s eyes soften as she lets go of the car door to grip toni’s hand in her own.

“toni, you love f.p. i know you’re happy he’s back, and you should celebrate with him.” cheryl says, looking back at the wyrm with a frown, but toni squeezes her hand and shakes her head.

“not if it makes you upset.” toni says firmly, and cheryl sighs before both her hands move up to cradle toni’s face, her cold fingers causing a shiver to run up toni’s spine as they rest on her jaw delicately.

“i’m not upset, toni. i’m just…sad. i know jason wouldn’t be mad about f.p getting out of prison…i know jason’s hatred would only extend to my father for taking his life, but…i miss him so much, toni. and i can’t sit in there and pretend to be happy that the man who covered up his death is free, i’m sorry.” cheryl chews on her bottom lip to stop herself from crying, but the tears spill over anyway, and toni’s heart breaks as she grips cheryl’s wrists before pressing a kiss to one of the hands holding her face.

“you have nothing to apologize for, cheryl. but i won’t sit in there and pretend to be happy when i know you’re here and you’re not. the serpents can celebrate without me, i’d rather spend my time with you, anyway.” toni says, and cheryl’s bottom lip trembles before she sighs and moves closer to toni, her thumbs brushing across the girl’s cheeks as she presses a cherry red lipstick kiss to toni’s forehead.

toni’s eyes close at her touch, and when cheryl pulls away, toni can’t help herself. she pushes herself up on her tiptoes slightly to kiss her, cheryl gasping wildly against her before she deepens the kiss, mouth opening to capture toni’s bottom lip between her own full ones.

she pulls away moments later, both of them catching their breath as cheryl rests her forehead against toni’s with a smile.

“get in there, toni topaz. celebrate your serpent king’s comeback. i have to go to thistlehouse
anyway, mommy and uncle claudius want to discuss ownership of maple blossom farms with me, seeing as daddy didn’t leave the company in anyone’s name in his will…i’d rather you spend your time having fun than cooped up in that house with my mother gawking at you like you’re dirt.” cheryl whispers as she pulls away from her, and toni shrugs.

“am i cool dirt, though? like, do i get to reside in a sparkly jar?” she says innocently, and cheryl rolls her eyes before pressing another quick kiss to toni’s lips.

“go.” she says with a laugh, and toni sighs, but brushes her thumb just below cheryl’s lips to get rid of the smudge before looking up at her forehead.

“god, your lipstick gets everywhere.” she groans, using her other thumb to get rid of the red mark on cheryl’s forehead from the kiss she pressed to toni’s, and cheryl laughs again, the sound like music to toni’s ears as she grips cheryl’s chin between her forefinger and thumb.

“bye, beautiful. call me when you’re done.” toni says hoarsely, and cheryl smiles.

“i will, t.t. i promise.”

toni doesn’t leave until cheryl’s car is long gone, turning the corner and heading back to the northside, and toni licks her lips, the taste of maple and cherries hitting her tastebuds and causing her to grin before she makes her way back into the bar and over to sweet pea and fangs, who look up at her as fangs smirks widely.

“You got red lipstick…everywhere.” he says, gesturing at his own face as sweet pea roars with laughter, and toni glares at them both before she punches fangs in the arm and makes her way to the bathroom, fangs’s outcry of pain reaching her and causing her to grin widely.

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“so…how was your couple’s retreat weekend?”

cheryl blossom plasters on a fake grin as she comes to a stop at veronica lodge’s locker. it’s the first day back at school now that christmas and new year’s is over, and cheryl had heard that veronica and archie, and jughead and betty had gone to some location in shadow lake for a couple’s only retreat to enjoy their last free week of holidays.
veronica had actually extended the invitation to cheryl, who had politely declined, informing her she didn’t exactly have another half to share the weekend with.

she knows veronica suspects something is happening between her and toni, but she’s wasn’t about to confirm it by frolicking at some lake house with the pink haired serpent by her side in full view of veronica, archie, jughead and betty.

if any of that information got back to her mother, her life as she knew it was over.

veronica blinks up at her in surprise before she purses her lips and shrugs.

“it was…okay.” she says, her eyes distant as if she’s remembering something less than appealing, and cheryl frowns at that, finds herself suddenly no longer seeking an ulterior motive in this discussion as she crosses her arms over her chest.

“what happened, ronnie?” she asks with concern, and veronica licks her lips before she shakes her head and exhales shakily with a smile.

“nothing, cheryl. just chaos, as usual. it tends to follow the core four around…but it’s behind us now.” she slams her locker shut before turning to face cheryl with a smirk.

“what i want to discuss, is betty telling me that you were at the whyte wyrm last tuesday. care to explain why cheryl blossom is hanging out with southside serpents?” she says with a grin, and cheryl rolls her eyes and flips her hair over her shoulder.

damn betty cooper and her forever gossip flapping gums-

“if chaos follows the core four around, then drama follows cheryl blossom around. i’m not one to fan the flames, veronica. i was there, and that’s all you need to know. cousin betty, however, needs to learn how to keep her mouth shut.” cheryl hisses through clenched teeth, and veronica rolls her eyes.

“come on, cher, you think i’m gonna go blabbing to your mother that you were at the whyte wyrm? i am your friend, you know. i’ll do whatever it takes to protect you. i already failed in that once, i won’t fail again.” veronica says, her smile fading as her jaw clenches, and cheryl sighs, but shrugs
“toni wanted a friend there for f.p.’s return from prison, and considering she was there for me for the infamous clifford blossom will reading, i figured i should return the favor. that’s all.” a wicked glint suddenly shines in veronica’s eyes, and she leans against her locker and raises an eyebrow.

“toni topaz…she’s quite the firecracker, isn’t she?” she says with a grin, and cheryl frowns, not quite understanding the double meaning here as she shrugs again.

“she can be sassy."

“She’s also hot as hell.” cheryl raises an eyebrow now, and she can feel jealousy beginning to rear its ugly head as she swallows the lump in her throat and gives veronica a simple nod.

“i suppose.”

“you suppose?” veronica teases, and cheryl grits her teeth.

“I don’t look at girls that way, veronica. it’s deviant.” she hisses, her mother’s words echoing in her mind as she blinks back her tears and grabs her locker door between taloned fingers to rip it open so she doesn’t have to witness the frown that settles over veronica’s face.

“cheryl, there’s nothing wrong with liking toni, you have to know that-.”

“hey, cheryl?” cheryl’s head snaps to the side at the sound of a familiar voice, and she sees toni making her way over to them with a smile playing on her lips. she comes to a stop in front of cheryl, looking behind her and raising a hand in greeting to veronica, who simply smiles before looking at cheryl with concern once more.

“What’s up, t.t?” cheryl asks stiffly, and toni sighs as she leans against the locker door beside her.

“Well, i’m all healed up now, so i was kind of hoping we could revisit that discussion i had with you a few weeks back…about joining the river vixens?” toni smirks, and cheryl’s heart drops.
they did have a discussion…and the image of toni in a cheerleading outfit had cheryl almost drooling as she’d told her she’d think about it.

it was deviant, cheryl knows this, she can’t fathom seeing toni walking around the school in the river vixens uniform, it would fucking destroy any semblance of self-control she has left, but…

but it would give toni access to the showers. it would give toni more reason not to spend time at her uncle’s trailer…

it would mean they could spend more time together…

“these are deviant thoughts, cheryl!”

god, for once in her life, she doesn’t want to hear that fucking sentence when she thinks of the pink haired serpent-

“cheryl?” toni is looking at her with concern, and cheryl licks her lips as a plan slowly starts to formulate in her mind.

she needs someone with her tonight. her mother would never allow her to just invite toni, and cheryl had been about to ask veronica to come instead, but maybe…

“but of course, t.t! your audition is this afternoon, don’t be late!” and with that, cheryl closes her locker door and makes her way to her first class just as the bell rings, leaving veronica and toni watching her with worry as her heels clack on the ground loudly.

cheryl knows she should confide in her friends, especially toni considering she was…more than a friend, but cheryl’s too scared to talk to anyone. she knows veronica and toni are safe, god, of course she does, but…ears could be listening.

god, when the hell did her life become some hitchcockian horror film a la rear window?
something sinister is happening within the walls of thistlehouse. uncle claudius has all but embraced the four walls as his new home, and cheryl’s heard her mother and her uncle talking in hushed whispers when they thought she wasn’t nearby, knows that they’re planning something…

that tuesday after cheryl had returned home from the whyte wyrm (and had had a shower to rid herself of the smell of alcohol and cigarettes before her mother sniffed it on her), they’d discussed ownership of maple blossom farms with cheryl and nana rose, and when nana rose had told them she was still the matriarch of the blossom family and that she owned part of the company, penelope blossom’s mouth had turned into a thin line of displeasure.

however, when nana rose informed penelope and claudius blossom that when she died, cheryl would be inheriting her position of the company, that thin like had become a set of bared teeth.

cheryl told nana rose that she didn’t want to inherit the company, but nana rose had gripped her hand and assured her everything was already in place in her will (and cheryl had cursed herself for even bringing the idea of wills up all those weeks ago), and then had told her in secret, when cheryl had been putting her to bed that night, that there was no way in hell she would let penelope blossom inherit anything of maple blossom farms.

“but what about uncle claudius, nana rose?” cheryl had whispered, and nana rose had scoffed.

“a cowardly boy who fled simply because his brother threatened him? he can’t run a company, dear…but you…you, my dearest cheryl, have all the fire of a blossom resting inside you. who else could burn that hideous manor to the ground but you?” she had said with a twinkle in her eyes, and cheryl had stared at her in complete and utter shock.

she’s still convinced her nana is a gypsy or a witch of some kind…

but this morning…this morning cheryl had noticed the smirk on her mother’s face. had noticed the way her uncle kept pushing nana rose to drink the ‘special blend’ of tea her mother had made…

something was going on, and cheryl’s terrified to be alone right now in thistlehouse.

she needs her friends.

she needs toni.
the afternoon comes rather quickly, and as the river vixens gather in the gym, cheryl informs them it won’t be a rehearsal, simply an audition that has all the river vixens sighing in relief.

“thank god, my ass is still killing me from drills yesterday.” josie groans as she stretches out her body, and cheryl rolls her eyes as she looks to the door just as toni walks through it.

and god, she’s wearing the blue shorts and the yellow and white top of the river vixens rehearsal uniform.

cheryl tries to calm her racing heart, swallows the lump in her throat as toni makes her way over to them with a grin, her hair held back in a half ponytail.

she looks more beautiful than cheryl could have ever anticipated. god, she’s so lucky…

“this is…the oddest sight.” betty mutters, her eyes wide as she takes toni in, and the pink haired serpent rolls her eyes.

“hey, i may be a gang member, but i’ve got some moves. besides, principal weatherbee grilled me about being more involved in extra-curricular activities, even though i’m already part of jughead’s stupid ‘swords and serpents’ club.” toni says with a sigh. veronica grins at her and claps her hands excitedly.

“i, for one, am all for this southside serpent joining the team!”

“relax, veronica. she needs to get through her audition first.” cheryl drawls, and toni raises an eyebrow at her, but doesn’t miss the wink cheryl throws her way as she walks over to the boom box and connects her phone to it.

“any requests, t.t.?” she asks, and toni skips her way over before peering over cheryl’s shoulder at her phone.

“whatever you think will make me look good, baby.” she whispers, and cheryl purses her lips to hide a grin as toni’s fingers skate over her forearm lightly.
“alright, new girl, show us what you got!” josie cheers, and toni grins at her as she makes her way to the middle of the gym in front of the vixens, placing her hands on her hips as soon as she’s far enough for all of them to see her.

“i’ve been at riverdale high for almost two months now, josie.” she says with a roll of her eyes, and josie shrugs.

“still the new girl to me.”

“enough chit chat! go on, t.t. time to show us these moves you keep talking about.” cheryl calls out with a grin, and she looks down at her phone as she presses play on the song she has loaded.

the second the bass of the song is booming, toni takes a few moments to listen to it, her eyes closed and a frown on her face as her foot taps along to the beat.

the song picks up, slipping into a trance beat, and toni’s eyes snap open as she grins and slides across the floor flawlessly-

cheryl watches her in complete and utter awe, the smile on her face only growing wider and wider the longer she watches toni dance. the other girls are nodding, impressed by her dancing, but cheryl can only watch the way her hips move, swaying perfectly with the beat of the song-

one of the girls cheers loudly behind her when toni does a mini moonwalk, coming to a stop with a flourish and a grin as she pants breathlessly, and the song draws to a close, the final beat echoing as the girls begin clapping loudly.

cheryl claps with them, her smile still etched on her face as toni makes her way toward the vixens and cheryl takes her place on the gym floor.

“Well, that was amaze! i think it’s safe to say we’re all in agreement on toni joining the riverdale river vixens?”

the vixens nod in agreement, betty grinning at toni as cheryl claps her hands with a grin.
“well, i don’t think there’s any way you amateurs are going to top that, so, practice is over, vixens! inner circle vixens, hang back…you know who you are.” cheryl says, and betty and veronica grin as veronica grips betty’s hand in her own and drags her forward, josie hesitating before cheryl raises an eyebrow at her, causing her to smile as she steps forward as well.

toni, of course, steps forward as well, and cheryl almost wants to berate her for thinking she’s so important when she’s only just joined the squad.

almost.

“in honor of toni joining our squad, i think we should celebrate…with a mandatory slumber party at thistlehouse!” cheryl says cheerily, and betty and veronica frown as josie looks at toni with a raised eyebrow.

“fancy dressing gowns are appreciated. you’ve all seen the beguiled, right?” toni’s the only one to look at her in confusion, and cheryl almost sighs.

she’s going to be lending a gown to toni tonight, she can feel it.

“dinner at eight. parlor games to follow!” cheryl walks away, grabbing her phone from the boom box as she heads to the locker room with her heart pounding in her ears.

good! now she has an excuse for the girls being at her house tonight, her mother can’t say anything…and they can keep her safe.

josie was her best friend, she knows she can count on her. that girl would go through hell and back to keep cheryl safe. and veronica had all but promised to keep her safe as well, her failure with nick st. clair making her strive to keep the blossom girl protected. cousin betty was…well, cousin betty. they had their differences and occasional spats of anger, but she was still her cousin. she knew she could count on her.

and toni…toni she knew without a shadow of a doubt would believe her. because toni knew. she knew what her mother was capable of. and goddamit, toni was a southside serpent. if anyone could keep her safe, it was the girl who she so readily calls her own…
so she has a good protection squad with her tonight. she’ll be safe.

granted, she wishes it could just be her and toni…

cherly has barely opened her locker to grab her bag when she hears the door open again, and she smells her before she feels her.

cherly had tested that bottle of perfume on herself before giving it to toni, and the smell had been absolutely *divine*. that smell is invading her senses now, a scent mixed with something else that is so purely the pink haired serpent…

warm arms wrap around her waist from behind, and cherly chuckles as toni presses her forehead against the middle of her back.

“How’d i do?” toni grumbles, her voice slightly muffled against cherly’s shirt, and cherly grips the arms around her waist before she turns in them to face the dark skinned girl with a smile, her fingers moving up to tuck under toni’s chin.

“You did amazing, toni.” she says softly. toni smiles.

“I don’t fancy myself much of a dancer, cherly.”

“then why did you want to become a river vixen?” cherly says with a frown. toni grins shyly, her cheeks flushing as she shrugs.

“So i could spend more time with you.” she mumbles, her eyes falling down until cherly grips her chin again, forcing her to look up.

cherly blinks back tears, and she doesn’t care if any of the other vixens walk through this locker right now.

she leans in, toni meeting her halfway eagerly as their lips meet in a soft kiss that has cherly’s heart pounding and her head spinning.
no one…no one has ever wanted to spend time with her. no one’s ever gone out of their way to want to be with her, to have her around…no one’s cared enough to want cheryl blossom by their side, and yet, here is this girl, this beautiful, amazing, caring girl, throwing herself in the deep end just so she can spend more time with her…

it’s on the tip of her tongue when cheryl pulls away from toni, but a quick intake of a shaky breath stops her, the words dying as they’re replaced with panic instead.

it’s too early. it’s way too early, she’s only known toni for a little over two months now, and they’d spent way more of that time as friends than whatever they are now, it’s too early-

she can’t ruin what they have by uttering words she’s positive toni hasn’t heard in a long time.

she’s not ready, i’m not ready-

“everything okay, bombshell?” toni whispers, watching her with concern, and cheryl smiles as she reaches up and brushes her thumb over toni’s red stained lips.

“everything’s fine, t.t. everything’s just fine.”

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toni finds a shiver running up her spine at the feeling of the brush moving through her tangled locks, cheryl’s fingers running through her pink tresses softly as toni absentmindedly chips away at her already ruined black nail polish on her fingers.

this is…not what she expected her first slumber party to be like.

granted, toni’s slumber parties mostly involved sweet pea or fangs, and they weren’t so much slumber parties as toni collapsing onto their beds in despair over being locked out of her own home again by her uncle, but still…
this is different. not bad, but different.

Dinner had been awkward. Toni could feel Penelope Blossom staring goddamn daggers into her soul, and Veronica and Betty had tried their best, along with Josie, to keep the conversation going, but Penelope’s short answers had left a lot of room for imagination on what the widow of the Blossom family was thinking every time she looked at her daughter or the pink haired serpent currently occupying her conservatory.

toni’s mostly worried about Cheryl.

She’s been quiet and distant the whole night, random bursts of cheeriness an act for her cousin and her two best friends, but Toni sees right through her.

Something’s wrong here. And Toni doesn’t know what it is.

They’re all brushing each other’s hair now, like something pulled straight out of a nineties high school drama film, and Cheryl clears her throat behind Toni as she sighs and drops the brush down by her side. Toni turns to look at her with a frown as Betty, who’s brushing Cheryl’s hair, grips Cheryl’s shoulder and gives it a gentle squeeze.

“Is everything okay, Cheryl?” she says softly, her tone laced with concern, and Cheryl chews on her lip in hesitation as she looks up at Toni before she stands and begins pacing frantically.

“Cheryl, what’s going on?” Toni asks, looking up at her with worry, and Cheryl blinks rapidly as she takes a deep breath in before exhaling shakily.

“Inner circle, cousin Betty… I didn’t just bring you to Thistlehouse for a girlish slumber party.” She breathes. Toni exchanges a look with Betty, who frowns and sits up straighter as she watches her cousin with concern.

“The truth is, I’m terrified of being alone here. There’s a stranger in this house… my uncle Claudius.” Cheryl says, her face filled with fear as she twists her fingers in her hands nervously.

“He’s as mad as the sea and ever since he blew in, I feel like I’m in mortal peril.”
oh…

oh!

toni feels like an idiot. cheryl had said parlor games, was this one of them? it didn’t seem right though, but toni’s never exactly had a slumber party with a bunch of girls before, and this seems like some kind of game…maybe…

it’s a weird game to play though…this can’t be one of cheryl’s games…can it?

damn it, toni sucks at this.

“wait i’m confused, is this real or are we playing a game?” toni asks, looking to the others for help, and cheryl sighs.

“all too real, t.t. i fear they’re plotting against me and nana rose.” cheryl whispers hoarsely, and the panic in her eyes says it all.

toni’s heart drops.

okay…okay, not a game. not a game at all. this is bad.

she wouldn’t put it past penelope to hurt cheryl, shit…

“mumzie cultivates esoteric herbs in the conservatory. tannis root, jimsonweed. i’m afraid to eat for fear of being poisoned!” cheryl says frantically, and toni’s seconds away from jumping up and grabbing cheryl’s hand, dragging her away from this place and away from the grasp of penelope blossom, because fuck, she’s scared.

what if cheryl’s right?

“cheryl, are you sure you’re not imagining things?” josie asks softly, and toni has half a mind to snap at her angrily that she has no idea what penelope blossom is capable of, but the truth is, she has no
toni jumps up and rushes over to cheryl’s side, and cheryl smiles gratefully at her as toni takes her hand.

“cheryl, if you feel unsafe here, then we can get you out of here. i’m sure veronica wouldn’t mind you staying at the pembrooke…” toni looks to veronica, feeling a little guilty for throwing her under the bus, but it’s not like she can offer her trailer to cheryl when her abusive uncle is living in it. that’s just throwing cheryl from one bad situation into another.

luckily, however, veronica smiles and nods immediately.

“of course, cheryl, you know you’re always welcome at casa lodge.” she says with a wink, and cheryl sighs as she licks her lips and shakes her head.

“i can’t just leave, toni. not without nana rose.” she whispers. toni bites her lip in hesitation.

she’s right. granted, toni didn’t know much about the matriarch of the blossom family, but toni’s not about to leave a little old lady in the clutches of a woman like penelope blossom, and if toni feels that way, then of course, cheryl would rather keep her life in danger than do the same.

“look, it’s getting late, maybe we should all call it a night and get some rest, okay?” betty says with a smile, and cheryl’s gaze falls down to the ground as she looks up at toni in sadness, ignoring the girls milling around as they prepare a mattress to sleep on at the foot of cheryl’s bed.

“you don’t think i’m crazy, do you, t.t?” she whispers. toni smiles and grips her hand as she shakes her head.

“of course not, cheryl. i know what your mother’s capable of…but you have nothing to be afraid of. i won’t let her hurt you, i promise.” she whispers back. cheryl exhales shakily before she wraps her arms around toni’s shoulders, and toni presses a kiss to her throat as she rubs small circles into her lower back.

if penelope blossom dared harm a single hair on cheryl’s head…
“so, who’s joining cheryl on the bed?” josie asks with a grin, and cheryl pulls away from toni to blink at her in confusion.

“sorry?” veronica clears her throat suddenly and throws toni a wink as she looks at josie with a shrug.

“toni should take it. after all, we’re here to celebrate her joining the river vixens, right?”

toni’s really starting to like veronica more and more every day…

a full hour later, and toni’s really struggling not to fall asleep. cheryl’s bed is fucking fantastic, egyptian cotton sheets and a warm blanket, and fuck, toni had pretty much sunken into her mattress, it was so soft…

but she can feel how tense cheryl is beside her, and toni knows she’s worried about her mother and uncle. she’s willing to stay up all night if it keeps cheryl’s mind at ease.

betty had been the first to crash out, followed quickly by josie, and veronica had looked up at cheryl and toni, bidding them goodnight with a wink before she collapsed on the mattress at the foot of the bed right beside her blonde ponytailed best friend.

a good ten minutes pass, toni blinking away her fatigue to listen quietly for the soft breathing of josie, betty and veronica to know that they’re really asleep when cheryl shifts beside her. toni glances at her in her periphery.

“full disclosure?” cheryl whispers. she turns onto her side to face the pink haired serpent, and toni follows suite, smiling at her tiredly as cheryl rests her head on top of her hand.

“i didn’t want to invite all the girls tonight. but i knew my hideous mother would never allow me to invite just you…” she says softly. toni’s smile only widens, and cheryl glances down at her lips before licking her own.

“which is…what i craved.” she whispers breathily. toni’s breath hitches, and she feels her heart pounding against her chest as she leans forward, cheryl doing the same until their lips connect.
the kiss is soft at first, but it isn't long before cheryl presses harder against her, her fingers skating down to touch the bare skin of toni’s thighs, causing goosebumps to erupt all over toni’s skin as she gasps against her-

a loud crash has them both jumping apart in surprise, and cheryl is jumping out of her bed in a heartbeat, toni right behind her as josie, betty and veronica all look around with wide eyes before also following suite.

cheryl heads straight for the stairs, and toni has no idea what’s going on, just follows right behind her until cheryl’s looking over the banister-

she screams in anguish. and toni’s heart completely falls at the sound.

she rushes to cheryl’s side, looking over the banister to the floor beneath them-

nana rose is on the ground, her legs bent at an odd angle, unconscious as the wheel on her chair continues to spin right beside her, turned onto its side from the fall, and cheryl is still screaming-

“veronica, call 911!” toni shouts, her instincts kicking into gear as veronica immediately pulls her phone out of the pocket of her nightgown, her wide eyes still on nana rose, and toni’s avoiding looking at the little old lady, her stomach twisting every time she does-

“cheryl! cheryl, look at me!” toni grips the redhead’s hand, and cheryl is sobbing, tears falling down her face as she looks down at her nana in despair.

toni knows she’s scared, because god, of course she’s scared, and toni doesn’t know what to do. she reaches out, squeezes her hand before using her other to grip cheryl’s chin between her forefinger and thumb.

she needs to calm her down-

“cheryl! you need to breathe!” toni doesn’t mean to yell, but cheryl is crying hysterically, and she won’t listen-
“we have to help her!” Josie cries, and Toni watches as Betty and Josie begin making their way to the staircase-

“Don’t touch her! You’ll only end up causing more damage!” A voice yells. Toni blinks as Penelope and Claudius suddenly appear from the main room on the floor below, Claudius rushing over to Nana Rose’s side and bending down to grip her wrist before he looks up at Penelope with wide eyes.

“She’s still alive.” He says, and Toni swears…swears it almost sounds like he’s disappointed-

Cheryl’s whole body heaves with a sob as she collapses into Toni’s arms, Toni holding her up desperately as she presses kiss after kiss to Cheryl’s hair.

“She’s okay, she’s gonna be okay, Cheryl…”

She’s still alive, she’s a blossom, dammit, that little old lady isn’t going anywhere, Toni knows it-

“Veronica’s calling an ambulance now!” Betty says, and Penelope looks up at the girls, her eyes falling on Cheryl, who is wrapped in Toni’s embrace, her expression turning stony as she makes eye contact with the pink haired serpent.

The ambulance arrives less than five minutes later, two paramedics rushing in, and Toni still hasn’t let go of Cheryl, her arms wrapped around the redhead blossom girl as she watches the paramedics fuss over her Nana in despair.

God, if this old woman dies, Cheryl will be all alone in this hellhole of a home with Penelope and Claudius…

No. Toni won’t let that happen. Either she’ll get Cheryl out of here or she’ll pack a bag and kick her way into Thistlehouse herself.

She’s never letting Cheryl be alone again.

It isn’t long before they manage to get Nana Rose onto a gurney, wheeling her off to the ambulance parked outside, and Toni finally manages to get Cheryl to her feet, her arm still wrapped around her as
they slowly make their way down the stairs with betty, josie and veronica trailing behind them.

“god, this is so sad…” josie whispers, and cheryl closes her eyes as toni squeezes her shoulder and leads her outside to where penelope and claudius are talking with one of the paramedics.

cheryl whimpers, steps forward out of toni’s grasp as she sees nana rose being loaded into the back of the ambulance, and toni blinks back her own tears as she steps forward to stand beside cheryl.

“she’s gonna be okay, cheryl. your nana is as strong as you are.” toni whispers, and cheryl’s bottom lip trembles as her eyes land on her mother and uncle, her expression becoming stony.

toni’s seen that look before…

“cheryl, what is it?” toni asks softly. cheryl swallows loudly, her eyes never leaving her uncle.

“he’s wearing my father’s pajamas.” she croaks out with a shaky voice.

“What?”

“my uncle.” cheryl turns to face her, her eyes filled with sadness before she looks back at her mother and uncle.

“toni…i think they pushed my nana down the stairs. and i think i’m next.”

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days pass by.

nana rose gets better.

they’ve been running tests on her non-stop, trying to understand what caused the fall, and cheryl
wants to scream, wants to grab them all by the white lapels of their coats and yell in their faces that she didn’t fall.

*she was pushed.*

but her mother and uncle have been hovering around the hospital ever since nana rose had been admitted, and cheryl can’t exactly go accusing them of attempted murder in public. but cheryl has refused to leave her nana’s side, even going as far as showering at the hospital, afraid that if she comes back, she’ll find her nana dead with a pillow smothered over her resting face.

nana rose is all she has left. she can’t lose her, too.

she has to keep her safe.

she feels her phone buzz in her lap, and she looks down from the book she’s reading to see a message from toni in her notifications.

*antoinette topaz [12:43]*

*how’s nana rose doing, baby?*

cheryl blinks back her tears as she looks up at her nana, still sleeping on top of her hospital bed peacefully.

toni had been cheryl’s goddamn rock for the last few days. if she wasn’t at the hospital with her, she was messaging her constantly, asking her for updates and telling her to stay strong. cheryl’s pretty sure she would’ve gone mad by now if it wasn’t for toni.

cheryl ignores the message and instead decides to call the pink haired serpent, scrolling down to her name in her contacts and raising the phone to her ear.

toni answers on the second ring.

“cheryl, is everything okay?” toni says immediately, and cheryl finds herself smiling as she purses
“yeah, t.t. i’m fine. nana rose is doing much better. she’s just resting…” cheryl croaks out, looking up at her nana once more as toni sighs on the other end of the line.

“have they said when she’ll be discharged yet?” toni asks. cheryl shakes her head.

“no, not yet. hopefully in the next few days. they just want to make sure she’s really okay before they let her go back home.”

“of course, they don’t want to let her go prematurely…how are you holding up?” toni’s voice gets softer, and cheryl exhales shakily, looking up to make sure her uncle and mother aren’t anywhere nearby as she smiles.

“i’m okay. i miss you.” she whispers. toni sighs again.

“i miss you, too. school’s almost done, i’ll swing by pop’s and get us something to eat, and then i’ll come see you, okay?” cheryl frowns.

“t.t., do you have money-.”

“i kicked fangs’s ass playing pool last night, i’ve got money, don’t worry. i’ll bring a cheeky milkshake for nana rose, too, the hospital food is probably making her antsy.” cheryl chuckles at that. nana rose was indeed despising the hospital food, constantly complaining every time a new meal came in for her to eat with her medication.

toni had finally gotten her hands on some extra cash, and she was using it to get cheryl and her nana something to eat...

despite all her grief and fear, cheryl feels her heart burst with happiness for a brief moment.

“thank you, toni. for everything.” cheryl says with a smile, and she can practically hear toni’s smile through the phone.
“of course, cheryl. i’ll be there soon, i promise.”

“i’ll be here waiting.” cheryl hangs up after that, turns back to her book, but she can’t read the words, her eyes skimming over the same sentence over and over as the thoughts that plague her mind take up all her focus.

she just can’t believe her mother and uncle have done this. what was their end goal? kill nana rose and herself so they could inherit blossom maple farms? was money the whole factor in their operation? why was her mother so fucking cruel? why was her mother willing to kill her mother in law and her own goddamn daughter just to inherit a company she had never shown interest in when clifford had been alive?

and claudius, god…he was just as bad as his twin brother. at least clifford loved his mother, but this man…cheryl knows he’s the one who pushed her, knows penelope was the brains and he was the brawn…what man willingly attempts to kill his own mother?

what fucked up family was cheryl born into it? murderers and liars and cheats and fiends-

she sniffs away her tears and stands, making her way out of nana rose’s room to try and find her doctor.

she hasn’t gotten an update in almost a day, she needs to get nana rose away from this hospital and away from claudius and penelope…

she spots him ahead, looking down at a chart with a frown etched on his face, and cheryl rushes over to him with a small smile.

“dr. masters? any updates on my nana?” she asks softly, dr. masters looking up at the sound of her voice, and he gives her a small smile as he nods.

“yes. we just got her panel back. there was a trace amount of a paralytic toxin in her bloodstream. tannis root.” cheryl’s heart drops.

god, she knew it, she knew they were putting those herbs in that tea…
“which is strange because it’s so rare, but as your mother and uncle explain it, they’ve caught your nana on more than one occasion chewing bits of tannis root she grows in your greenhouse so…it’s more of her sundowner’s syndrome. we’ll keep her for observation another day, then she should be well enough to return home.” dr. masters smiles, and cheryl looks at him with wide eyes.

no. she can’t go home with penelope and claudius, she can’t go back to thistlehouse, cheryl won’t be able to care for her, they’ll just try to kill her again-

“to my mother and uncle? no, dr. masters, you don’t understand-.”

“cheryl!” cheryl jumps slightly at the sound of her name, and she turns to see her mother stalking over to her, her high heels clacking on the ground as she plasters a fake sweet smile on her face.

“there you are, looking a little worse for wear!” she comes to a stop next to cheryl, who feels her whole body trembling with fear as penelope looks up at dr. masters with a smile.

“poor dear hasn’t slept in days, why don’t we stop bothering dr. masters and i’ll take you straight home?” penelope wraps an arm around her shoulders, and when cheryl doesn’t budge, she applies more pressure, pushing her forward with her teeth gritted.

“come on.” she hisses with that fake smile still plastered on her face, and dr. masters watches them go with a frown as penelope leads cheryl away.

paralytic toxin...they paralyzed nana rose...

penelope leads her out into the parking lot, and cheryl wants to grab her phone, to send a message to toni telling her she’s going to thistlehouse instead-

she left it in nana rose’s room. oh god, why would she do that, she never goes anywhere without her phone and the one goddamn time-

“mommy, wait, i left my phone-.:.”
“you won’t need it.” penelope says stiffly, and cheryl stops in her tracks, looking at penelope with nothing but fear pounding through her body.

what does she mean she won’t need it? it’s her phone, she always needs it-

penelope doesn’t even hesitate, grabs cheryl’s bicep and begins marching her to the car once more.

“come on, cheryl.” penelope’s voice is a lot harsher now that they’re no longer with company, and she tightens her grip, grabbing cheryl’s coat from the backseat of the car and wrapping it around cheryl’s body as she all but forces her into the passenger seat of the car.

the drive to thistlehouse is silent, cheryl still cursing herself in her mind for leaving her phone behind at the hospital, and wondering why on earth her mother wouldn’t let her go back to get it…

she poisoned nana rose…she paralyzed her and threw her down the stairs like she was trash....

she tried to kill her…

“i think i figured it out. you paralysed nana rose with the tannis root, and then pushed her down the stairs.” cheryl says, looking over at her mother in despair, because part of her wants her mother to tell her she’s wrong, that she would never harm a hair on rosaline blossom’s head, but penelope blossom’s mouth twitches as if she’s hiding a smile before she suddenly sniffs, tears welling in her eyes.

“you’ve gone mad. that’s all there is to it!” she cries, and cheryl’s heart is pounding in her ears now.

what is she talking about? what-

“you have lost your mind and…and you leave us no choice.” penelope breathes. cheryl anxiety is reaching mount everest levels of high now as she grips the car door, seconds away from opening it to fling herself out of this goddamn car if she has to, but when she looks to the door, it’s locked.

penelope’s thought of everything.
why did she leave her fucking phone-

“what do you mean, ‘no choice’?” cheryl croaks out, and penelope smiles and reaches over to touch cheryl’s cheek gently, the ice radiating through her cold fingers even though they're gloved, causing a shiver to run up cheryl's spine.

“you think i haven’t seen your behavior for the last few weeks, cheryl? did you think i didn't know that antoinette topaz is a southside serpent?” cheryl whimpers, unable to stop herself, and penelope grins triumphantly for a second before she's sniffing in fake grief once more.

"oh yes, i saw that pink haired vagrant sporting that leather jacket with nothing but pride at riverdale high the other day, and then i find my daughter...choosing to be in her company...intimately...” cheryl closes her eyes, lets her tears fall as defeat washes over her.

her mother knew…her mother knew everything, oh god...

toni...what was she going to do to toni-

“but it’s all right…they’re gonna make you all better.” penelope whispers, and it’s then that cheryl realizes they’re not going to thistlehouse.

they’re on the path to a completely different road.

she's asking the wrong question...she wasn't going to do anything to toni...

“mommy…where are you taking me?” she whispers.

penelope simply smiles.

“all better…”
three days.

three days of anxiety, and fear, and anguish, and despair, and worry, and a million other emotions that toni topaz hasn’t felt since the day her parents collided with a tree near sweet water river.

she doesn’t understand, doesn’t know how someone can be so cruel… why was penelope blossom doing this-

“toni, let us help you…”

toni blinks back her tears and looks up at fangs, his brown eyes filled with despair as sweet pea clenches his jaw and crosses his arms over his chest.

“look, cheryl’s not my favorite person, but if what you’re saying is true, then we’ll do whatever it takes to help you get her back, tiny.” he says gruffly, and toni lets her tears fall over her face before she buries it into her hands with a sniff.

three fucking days…she’d gone to the hospital, and cheryl was gone, nana rose alone in her hospital ward, fast asleep as toni had scoured the entire hospital for cheryl, the burgers in the bag in her hand getting colder with each passing second before she’d finally come across dr. masters.

“dr. masters! hi, i’m toni topaz, i’m looking for cheryl blossom, she messaged me about four hours ago telling me she was going to be here at the hospital, but i haven’t found her…” toni had said, and dr. masters had given her a small smile and a nod.

“no, she left around that time with her mother! she was exhausted, she’s been here all week…i guess her mother decided it was time she got proper rest at home.” he had said warmly, and toni’s heart had
stopped.

her panic had been at about a two at that point. when cheryl hadn’t replied to any of her calls or texts, it climbed to about a four.

when she’d reached thistlehouse, it escalated to five.

when she knocked on the door and penelope blossom answered, looking at her with a smirk that toni wanted nothing more than to slap off her face, it reached seven.

“mrs. blossom, hi…i’m looking for cheryl, she wasn’t at the hospital with her nana.” toni had said politely despite her clenched nails digging into her palm harshly, and penelope had smiled.

“no, she’s gone. boarding school in switzerland. all girls. her flight left an hour ago.”

if her panic was at a seven, it reached about a hundred at those words.

“mrs. blossom, that doesn’t make any sense-.”

“don’t come here again.” and with that, penelope blossom had shut the door in her face, and her panic had risen to about a thousand.

cheryl still wasn’t replying to any of her texts or calls, and toni had been going back to thistlehouse every fucking day for the last three days at least five times a day, pounding on the door and demanding that penelope tell her where the hell cheryl is, but she’s been met with utter silence.

toni knows. she fucking knows cheryl isn’t at some boarding school in switzerland, because cheryl would’ve fucking told her, and her social media hasn’t been updated in days, so penelope’s done something, but what, toni doesn’t fucking know and it’s killing her.

she’s getting desperate, which is exactly why she’s in sweet pea’s trailer, telling them everything, hoping that they’ll join her in breaking down penelope blossom’s door and threatening her to get answers, because toni’s seconds away from doing exactly that.
toni knows it’s not a good idea, that penelope will probably call the police before they even finish breaking down the door, and they don’t need another arrest on their records, but she’s frantic.

god, cheryl had been talking about penelope and claudius planning something sinister, and toni knows they’ve done something, she just knows it. but she can’t just go throwing accusations around…

she’s stuck. what the hell is she supposed to do right now? god, where the hell is she…

“we can storm thistlehouse and-.”

“no, no…she’ll have the police on us the second she hears our bikes coming down the street…” toni croaks out through her hands, and fangs collapses down beside her on the couch with a sigh.

“ask f.p for help, tiny-.”

“what the hell can f.p do, fangs? threaten penelope for answers? he just got out of jail, i’m not gonna ask him to do something that’s just gonna get him thrown back in there.” sweet pea runs his fingers through his hair with a nod.

“she’s right…” toni licks her lips and wipes her tears away before she exhales shakily.

“we need help. not f.p, but…veronica, betty, cheryl’s friends… we need them to help us figure this out, if i can just find out where cheryl is-.”

there’s a knock at sweet pea’s door, and toni’s heart is racing as she jumps up.

“cheryl??” she’s about to rush to the door when sweet pea grips her shoulder to stop her, sighing as he looks at her guiltily.

“it’s not her, tiny. but as for calling her friends, i might be ten steps ahead of you on that…” toni frowns as sweet pea squeezes her shoulder before he lets her go and walks over to the door.
“what-.”

as soon as he opens it, veronica, betty, josie and jughead walk through the door, all of them looking incredibly concerned and worried, and toni’s heart is pounding in her ears as veronica rushes straight over to her, her arms wrapping around toni tightly, and she finds herself collapsing into the hug tiredly, her hands gripping the back of veronica’s coat and digging into the fabric.

“toni, sweet pea messaged us saying it was about cheryl, and it was urgent, what happened?” she asks immediately into her ear before she pulls away and grips toni’s shoulders, and toni looks up at sweet pea in gratitude as he smiles at her softly.

“tell them, tiny.” he says firmly, and she looks at veronica and betty before her eyes move to josie and jughead with an exhale.

“cheryl’s missing.” toni whispers, and veronica’s eyes widen as she turns to look at betty behind her, who frowns.

“what do you mean, ‘cheryl’s missing’?” she asks in confusion, and jughead and josie come closer, josie looking a little out of place as her eyes roam around the small trailer awkwardly. toni sighs.

god, they’re going to think she’s absolutely insane-

“do you remember how paranoid cheryl was at her slumber party, saying that her mom and uncle were out to get her?” toni says worriedly, and veronica, betty and josie nod while fangs, jughead and sweet pea exchange looks of surprise. toni bites down on her lower lip.

it’s a big accusation, but she knows she’s right…

“well, i think they did something to her.” she says firmly despite the panic building inside her, and josie’s eyes widen, her hand flying to her chest in shock as she steps closer, desperate for news about her best friend.

“What kind of something?” she asks with worry. toni looks up at her.
“her mom said they sent her off to some all-girls boarding school in switzerland.” toni explains, and veronica shrugs.

“well, that’s easy enough to check, there’s only one. surval montreaux.” she says with a smile, and toni looks at her in desperation.

“veronica, if cheryl was in the swiss alps, she’d be posting parka selfies every hour. but her social media’s been dead for days.” toni says anxiously. veronica’s eyes widen.

“wait…that’s a sure sign of foul play.” she says loudly, and betty nods with a frown as she looks beside her at jughead.

“jug, that’s not like cheryl…and she sounded really scared at the slumber party the other night…” she says, her tone ever so soft and filled with fear, and jughead sighs before he looks at toni with a nod.

“when you say cheryl said something about her uncle and mother plotting something, what do you mean?” he asks firmly. toni licks her lips.

“her uncle and mother are apparently pissed off that clifford blossom didn’t leave anything about maple blossom farms and who it was going to in his will. her nana has a spot on the board too, but she hasn’t left anything for penelope or claudius, either…i’m guessing they figured that if they get rid of nana rose and cheryl-.”

“they’ll inherit the company.” veronica breathes. toni nods solemnly.

“What kind of fucking up family tries to kill their own members?” fangs growls angrily, and toni shakes her head.

“They’re the worst of the worst, fangs. i’ve never met anyone as vindictive and spiteful as penelope blossom. they already tried to kill nana rose, that fall down the stairs was no accident. god, i’m trying not to think the worst…” toni’s knees buckle, and she collapses down onto the couch once more, her heart hammering against her throat with worry and panic at the mere idea that cheryl was…
no. no, she can’t be dead, penelope blossom wouldn’t stoop so low to murder her own daughter…

but clifford blossom had killed jason, had raised a gun to his head and pulled the trigger without even fucking blinking, and maybe, just maybe, penelope was the same as her sadistic husband, maybe cheryl really was-

“hey, toni, don’t think like that…cheryl’s out there, and we’re gonna find her. whatever you need, toni. i’m in.” veronica says firmly, bending down in front of toni and gripping her knees comfortably, and josie nods behind her.

“me too. even if we have to storm thistlehouse.” she says determinedly, and betty looks to jughead, who takes his beanie off to run his fingers through his hair before he puts it back on.

“we need to be smart about this. we can’t get anyone else involved, especially not my dad. he feels like he owes cheryl, and if he finds out she’s missing, he’ll do something that’s just gonna get him thrown back into jail.”

“that’s what i said.” toni says with a weak smile, and jughead purses his lips and nods.

“alright. time to do some sleuthing. betty?” he holds his hand out for her to take, which she does with a warm smile before she looks at toni and nods.

“we’ll look into it, toni. if we don’t get any answers in the next day or so, then we all storm thistlehouse and tell penelope blossom she can either tell us where cheryl is voluntarily, or we’ll get it out of her in a different way.” she says with a hint of venom in her tone, and toni nods subconsciously as sweet pea chuckles.

“never would’ve pegged you for violence, ponytail.” he says with a grin, and betty shrugs.

“what can i say? must be the blossom in me coming out.” toni smiles weakly, and veronica squeezes her knee as she looks at toni knowingly before she looks around at the others.

“can i have a second alone with toni?” she asks softly, and betty frowns, but nods as she wraps an arm around josie’s shoulders and leads her over to the kitchen of sweet pea’s trailer, her and jughead beginning to plan their investigation as fangs leans over and presses a kiss to her temple before joining them. sweet pea watches veronica with a frown before he, too, moves toward jughead, betty,
josie and fangs. toni exhales shakily, allows her tears to fall over as veronica grips her hands tightly.

“toni, do you think cheryl’s mother found out about you and her?” she whispers, and toni looks down at her with wide eyes, her heart falling down to her toes in despair.

“i…i-.”

“i know something’s going on between you two, and i didn’t say anything because i was scared her mother might find out, too. i figured you two would say something in your own time, but toni…if her mother found out…” veronica trails off, her eyes filled with worry, and toni finds herself gripping veronica’s hands like a lifeline.

she hadn’t even thought of that. she hadn’t…oh god, what if cheryl was thrown into some looney bin, what if she was hurt, what if she…what if her mother had her locked in the basement in an attempt to ‘rid the gay away’, to keep cheryl away from toni as long as possible until she no longer felt any affection for the pink haired girl-

“veronica, if cheryl’s hurt because of me-.”

“hey, no, god, toni don’t think like that. you make cheryl happy, this is the first time i’ve seen her so…so carefree, and cheerful. you make her life better, don’t think for a second that you being part of her life has caused her pain. she cares about you, toni, and i can see that you care about her, too. we’ll find her, i promise.” veronica says determinedly, and toni bites down on her bottom lip before closing her eyes and taking a deep breath in.

“thank you, veronica.” she whispers, and veronica chuckles as she squeezes her hand.

“of course, toni. now, let’s help the scooby gang solve this mystery.”

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it’s been four days, and cheryl blossom can feel herself beginning to wither away.

never has she known this much despair. not even when jason blossom’s life had ended, his body
washing up on the shores of sweet water river, cold and rotted and bloated, no sign of life left in his beautiful eyes that cheryl loved so much…

that despair had been nothing compared to what she feels now. hopeless, weak, defeated…dead.

every minute she spends trapped within the walls of the sisters of quiet mercy, she can feel her soul dying, every second sucking away a little more of her essence until she’ll eventually become nothing more than a husk, a shell of her former self.

four days…it can’t go on for much longer, can it? someone will come for her…

someone…

toni…

god, the thoughts of toni are all that she has, and she finds comfort in the small ruby red gemstone necklace toni gave her for christmas, her hands constantly flying up to touch it as if she can feel toni’s soul through it. it’s the only thing pulling her through this waking nightmare, but even now…even now, she can feel herself beginning to lose those memories. she can’t remember what toni tastes like, can’t remember what her lips feel like pressed against her own…the touch of her skin, nor the smell of her hair…

every electric shock she’d received had fried those memories to oblivion, ensuring her ‘conversion’, as the nuns had put it.

cheryl blossom is dying. and maybe, just maybe, she’s okay with that…if she can’t be with toni, then what’s the point of living?

the sound of keys at her door has her heart dropping down to the floor, and her hands immediately fly up to the necklace toni gave her, clutching it between her hands desperately she keeps her gaze on the small wooden bird at her window sill, bopping up and down, up and down, up and down…

“it’s time, dear. time for another session.” sister woodhouse’s voice is filled with malice, with ill intent and violence, and cheryl closes her eyes, lets her tears fall down her cheeks as she licks her lips and silently prays for reprieve.
she knows she’ll receive none.

“sister woodhouse…i’ve barely recovered from yesterday.” she manages to croak out, her voice hoarse and damaged from hours of screaming in pain. someone help her, please god, someone help her, anyone-

“the only way the conversion will work is if we attack it like a cancer, cheryl. don’t you want to be cured? don’t you want to be the daughter your mother wants you to be?” cheryl’s body is trembling, her knees not even able to keep the weight of her body up, and she’s tired, god, she’s so, so tired…

“please…” cheryl’s voice is pitched five times higher from the tears she’s trying to keep at bay, and her bottom lip is trembling as the tears fall anyway, but still, she doesn’t dare turn and look sister woodhouse in the eyes out of fear that she’ll see beyond the brown orbs and see what lies beneath them…toni’s face, her beautiful smile, her long, pink hair…

“cheryl, we’ve been over this. either you come willingly…or gabriel will be forced to act on god’s will.”

god’s will…otherwise known as cheryl gets dragged to her own personal torture by her hair, meaty fingers curling through her red locks as nails dig into her bicep and drag her-

“just five minutes, please, sister woodhouse?” cheryl begs, finally turning to look at the nun before her who holds her whole life in the palm of her hands, and cheryl’s knees finally give up on her, hitting the cold concrete ground beneath her painfully as she looks up in desperation.

reprieve, just five minutes reprieve from her hell…

sister woodhouse’s eyes soften, and she walks forward, bending down to wipe away the tears that are still falling from cheryl’s cheek, and her eyes close at the nun’s touch, her hands moving up to clasp together in desperation…

“gabriel. you know what to do.” sister woodhouse whispers, and cheryl’s eyes snap open as the sister’s lackey moves from the door, stepping forward with menace in each step as cheryl whimpers and crawls backwards.
“wait, sister-.” gabriel smiles wickedly as his nails dig into her arm, dragging her upward before he’s cupping the back of her neck and dragging her toward the door, and cheryl can’t stop herself. she’s sobbing, her hands curling into fists and digging into her already wounded palms, fresh blood falling down to the concrete ground to join the many dark red stains that paint it-

“please, sister woodhouse!” cheryl begs, pleads, but it falls on deaf ears, and as usual, the other ‘inmates’ of the sisters of quiet mercy begin to scream with her, her cries of pain and sorrow echoing within their own hearts, and the sound is soul breaking, like the cries of death, of the souls trapped in hell, because cheryl can find no other way to describe this castle of oblivion.

it’s hell. hell on earth.

she’s dragged into another room, and when cheryl’s eyes land on the bed with the straps on the metal frame, she screams and turns in gabriel’s arms, desperate to get away until-

a blow straight to the ribs has her collapsing to her knees, gasping for air as it wheezes down her windpipe painfully, and gabriel’s fingers sink into her red tresses, pulling her up and shoving her down onto the bed before she can even get her bearings.

her arm is painfully pulled up, wrist slipped into the strap and tightened as she whimpers and cries, and it has to be over, let it be over, please-

how could her mother do this to her? how, how, how, how-

“This pain, cheryl…this pain is because of your deviance. because of the foul and evil thoughts that fill your mind. you gave in to temptation, to lust, miss blossom. you have sinned, and the lord punishes those who sin…”

she’s helpless, strapped by her ankles and wrists to the bed, and cheryl has felt this pain, has felt it for four days straight-

why didn’t she die, why didn’t she die at sweet water river? damn archie andrews and his heroics, damn him to hell-
“this will cleanse your soul, cheryl. will help you see the light of the lord.” cheryl grits her teeth and glares up at sister woodhouse with nothing but anger and rage.

“fuck you!” she growls, and sister woodhouse’s smile fades as her eyes widen and she raises her palm-

a stinging pain across her cheek before her jaw is forced open by gabriel, a metallic mouthguard that tastes like rust and salt shoved into her mouth as electrodes are placed on her temples-

end it, end it, end it, let this kill her, please god, let this just end this suffering…

“you think of your deviance, cheryl. you think of those horrible, horrible thoughts while you suffer.” sister woodhouse hisses, and before cheryl can even breathe, she feels static run through the electrodes-

pain, pain beyond anything she’s ever felt. worse than the icy cold water of sweet water river sending daggers through her skin, worse than any slap or punch her mother has thrown at her over the years, worse than discovering her dead twin brother’s body, sitting upon the steel table of a morgue, rotting and useless-

her voice box tears once more, and she can taste the blood at the back of her throat as her vision is surrounded by nothing but white.

she doesn’t think of toni.

she doesn’t even think of heather.

she thinks of her mother. she thinks of her father. she thinks of her family that has caused her this pain…

please god, just let it end…
day five.

day five, and toni is slowly losing her mind.

betty and jughead have found nothing, and toni is stuck in this fucking school, forced to attend because of principal weatherbee’s new attendance rule. slip below ninety percent attendance, and you’re expelled.

she’s about to walk out. her feet have been tapping against the goddamn linoleum floor of this english classroom for the last half an hour, and she’s about to walk the fuck out because cheryl is fucking missing, and she doesn’t have time for this fucking bullshit-

“toni…breathe.” veronica’s voice is soft beside her, and toni looks at her with bloodshot eyes that are spilling over with tears, her nails digging into the table as she bites down on a trembling bottom lip to stop herself from screaming.

doesn’t she understand? doesn’t she see that not knowing where cheryl is, not knowing if she’s okay, is ripping her apart? is slowly murdering any ounce of hope and happiness that rests with her? doesn’t she realize that toni is dying here without that redheaded bombshell’s smile? without the warmth of her hand, or the taste of her lips-

“toni, we’re gonna find her.” josie now, her voice to the left of toni, and she shakes her head as her tears spill over, her legs still jumping up and down, up and down-

fuck this. she can’t stay here, she can’t-

she jumps up, rushing to the front desk as mr. ellison looks at her in surprise.

“can i have a bathroom pass?” she manages to get out, and mr. ellison sighs as he reaches under his desk and pulls out a blue card.

“back in five, miss topaz, or i write you up to the principal.” she nods numbly, turning right and
Exiting out of the door before she’s breaking out into a run, desperate to get to the nearest bathroom as her stomach continues turning almost painfully-

She’s barely burst through the door of a cubicle before she’s throwing up, the sound of the contents of her stomach hitting the bowl of the toilet echoing around her as she blinks back tears and sinks against the cubicle door.

She tries to take few deep breaths in, her heart pounding against her chest as she sinks her head back and reaches for her phone with shaking fingers.

She goes to her most recent numbers, pressing down on Cheryl’s name before lifting the phone to her ear.

And just like it has been for the last five days…

“it's cheryl! i'm off doing something fab! leave a message if you must!”

Beep.

Toni’s breathless, anguish gripping her chest and making it hard to breath as she runs a shaking hand through her hair.

“cheryl…god, this is probably the sixteenth message i’m leaving, but i don’t care. i…i miss you so much. and i don’t know where you are or what’s happening to you right now and that fucking terrifies me…” Toni sniffs, wiping away her tears as she swallows dryly and sinks her head against the cubicle door before nodding with resolve.

“But i’m gonna find you, cheryl. i don’t care how long it takes, or what i have to do to do it, i’m gonna find you. and i swear to you, cheryl…i swear to you on my life, i will never let you be alone again. you’ll never, ever feel scared, or unsafe, or lonely…i’m gonna keep you safe. i’m gonna protect you, always. i’ll find you, cheryl. no matter what, even if i have to storm thistlehouse and kick your mother’s face in-.”

“antoinette topaz to the principal’s office. antoinette topaz, please report to the principal’s office.”
toni freezes. she jumps up, ending the voicemail as she flushes the toilet and quickly washes her hands and her mouth out before she’s running out of the bathroom and racing toward the principal’s office with her heart pounding in her ears, and for the first time in five days, she feels hope.

*it has to be cheryl, please let it be cheryl-*

she bursts through the door, panting breathlessly as the receptionist looks at her in shock.

“there’s a call for you, she said it was urgent-.” toni whimpers, running to the counter and ripping the phone from the receptionist’s hand.

“hello?” she croaks out in desperation, and she’s expecting to hear her voice, to hear cheryl, to hear that nickname she loves so much-

“she’s not far away!”

it’s not cheryl.

“i…who is this?” toni whispers, her fingers wrapping around the phone so tightly, she can hear it crackle from the pressure.

“cheryl! she’s nearby!” the voice rasps. toni’s heart stops.

she knows that voice.

“nana rose? nana rose, where is she?” toni’s voice is filled with desperation, and her heart is pounding in her ears, because god, it’s good to hear from nana rose, but she needs to know, she needs to fucking know-

“with the sisters-.”

the phone dies.
the dial tone echoes out, and toni looks at it in shock.

no, no, no, no, no-

“hello? nana rose?!” she taps the tab, tries to bring nana rose back, but it’s no use. she’s gone.

but toni feels more tears fall as she looks up at the receptionist, who is looking at her in complete and utter confusion as she finds herself on the verge of sobbing.

she’s alive. cheryl’s alive, she’s here, she’s nearby, nana rose had said she was close-

toni tears out of the office, running as fast as her legs will carry her back to english just as the bell rings loudly above her.

by the time she reaches the classroom, veronica and josie are exiting it, toni’s things gathered in both their hands.

“toni! what happened?” veronica asks, reaching out to stop toni as she comes to a screeching halt in front of them, and toni doesn’t even bother catching her breath, sweat dripping down her brow as she looks at them with a smile.

“it was nana rose! she called me, told me cheryl’s alive! she’s nearby!”

“what? wait, what did she say? word for word?” josie asks desperately, and toni swallows loudly, her mouth dry as she licks her lips and shakes her head.

“we got disconnected before she could say too much beyond the fact that cheryl was nearby, and that she was with the sisters…” toni breathes, and veronica frowns.

“sisters? what sisters?” she asks, and toni shakes her head again.
“i don’t know. maybe there’s a re-education camp called ‘the sisters’?” toni says with worry, and veronica licks her lips as she suddenly frowns.

“Well, there’s ‘the sisters of quiet mercy’, but that’s more like an orphanage. i don’t think they do gay conversion there.” she says, and toni’s heart drops as josie looks at veronica in surprise.

“gay conversion? wait, why would cheryl…” she trails off, her eyes falling on toni as she begins to connect the dots, and toni swallows the lump that forms in her throat as veronica sighs and runs her fingers through her hair.

“who would know for sure? who would know for sure if the sisters do gay conversion therapy, veronica?” toni says hoarsely, and veronica frowns for a few moments before her eyes widen and she scoffs.

“Oh my god, of course!” she breathes, and before toni can ask, she’s gripping the pink haired serpent’s hand and dragging her down the hall, josie following behind them catatonically as she slowly begins to realize her best friend isn’t as straight as she thought she was.

toni wishes she could help comfort josie, but right now, the pussycat is the last thing on her mind.

veronica comes to a stop at the student lounge, and her eyes scan it desperately before she perks up and drags toni over to where kevin keller is sitting, his eyes moving up as he spots veronica with a frown.

“veronica? everything okay?” he asks, dropping the book he’s reading down on the couch as he stands, and veronica shakes her head.

“not exactly, kevin. notice a certain bombshell missing from the school?” she says, and kevin frowns.

“yeah, but i assumed cheryl was taking time off because her nana fell-.”

“She didn’t fall, she was pushed!” toni growls, and kevin’s eyes widen as veronica sighs.

“It’s a long story, but cheryl’s missing, and we think she’s in trouble. we need to know, if there was a
gay conversion therapy camp somewhere nearby, would it be the sisters of quiet mercy?” veronica says anxiously, and kevin’s eyes widen as he scoffs and nods once.

“yes. it absolutely could be the sisters of quiet mercy. it’s one of the few places in the country that still does conversion therapy. off the books, of course.” he mutters, and toni’s heart drops as anger quickly floods her entire body.

how the fuck was society still like this?

“What the hell decade is this!” she exclaims, and veronica sighs as kevin shakes his head.

“during prohibition, the sisters ran a distillery in the basement. they used to smuggle booze out to sweet water river via a tunnel that still exists today.” he says firmly, and veronica grips toni’s hand, giving it a hopeful squeeze.

“wait, a tunnel we could use to get to cheryl?” she asks, and kevin frowns.

“you think cheryl’s being put through some gay conversion therapy?” he asks in surprise, and veronica rolls her eyes.

“would you put it past her satanic mother to put her through that?” she asks with a raised eyebrow, and kevin sighs.

“no, definitely not, but i didn’t even know that she was…” he trails off, and josie chuckles weakly.

“neither did i.” she says softly, and toni glares at them both.

“we don’t have time for this! kevin, please, is there any way we can use this tunnel to get to her?” toni asks desperately, and kevin nods.

“potentially. gay boys in the program use it to sneak out to hook up with perfectly nice young men like myself in fox forest.” he says firmly, and veronica grips his hand.
“wait, kevin…can you lead us to this secret gay hook up tunnel?” she asks anxiously, and kevin nods.

“i can probably find it, but we should go at night.” he says, and toni feels nothing but hope spread through her as she bites back a groan of euphoria and looks at veronica in desperation.

“who should we bring?” she croaks out, and veronica frowns.

“kevin is a must, and there’s no way i’m not coming-.”

“me, too.” josie says, and toni sighs. she needs her boys, if this goes south…

“we’ll need back up. sweet pea and fangs-.”

“jughead and betty will want to come, too. i can maybe get archie as well, if he can pull himself away from my father for two seconds.” veronica grumbles.

“we can’t all go running through the corridors of the sisters of quiet mercy. it’ll attract way too much attention.” kevin says with a frown, and toni nods.

“veronica and i will go, sweet pea and fangs will stay by the entrance to the tunnel with kevin, josie…we’re probably gonna need your van.” josie nods.

“got it. i’ll stay in the car with jughead and betty, in case we need to make a quick escape.” she says determinedly, and veronica exhales shakily as she claps her hands and smiles.

“well then, let’s all meet at the pembrooke at say, ten? time to put ‘operation rescue bombshell” into motion.”

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she’s reading the same sentence over and over again.
her eyes are beginning to droop, the fatigue in her body slowly setting in as her body jolts once more from the aftershock, the book tumbling down onto her bed as her grip loosens on it from the effect.

she grits her teeth, prepares herself for another jolt just as her body spasms, and she winces as her fingers brush over the wounds on her temples, burns that now mar her pale skin.

she can still smell the flesh sizzling from the electricity.

she hears keys outside her door, and cheryl finds herself hugging her knees to her body as her door opens, and sister livingston walks in.

cheryl breathes a sigh of relief. sister livingston isn’t so bad. it’s sister woodhouse who’s the goddamn devil dressed in a nun’s outfit.

sister livingston comes to a stop in front of her, a small smile playing on her lips as cheryl looks down at the open bible at her feet. at least that might give her brownie points for ‘participation’.

god, please let it give her brownie points for participation…

“i believe i’ve deduced what’s caused this imbalance in you, cheryl.” sister livingston says softly, and cheryl looks up at her, her arms tightening around her knees protectively.

“and what would that be, sister livingston?” she asks in a small voice. sister livingston smiles.

“i’ve spoken to your mother about your brother, jason. and how close you were.” cheryl’s blood boils.

so they’ve spoken to her mother…they’ve told her what they’re putting cheryl through and she’s still adamant that cheryl remain here?

“So close, in fact, that your nana would sometimes mix you up, isn’t that right? she would dress you in jason’s clothes, and he in yours.” sister livingston says, and cheryl glares up at her, her nails
digging into the skin of her forearms as her body jolts involuntarily once more.

“nana’s always been half blind, sister. cataracts.” cheryl says through gritted teeth. sister livingston’s smile fades, and cheryl smiles up at her sweetly.

“but, if there’s anything that’s affected my psyche, it’s the firehose of abuse directed at me by my mother and father.” she hisses, her nails digging deeper until they draw blood as her body jolts again, and sister livingston nods solemnly.

“you’ve suffered many traumas, it’s true…” and all too quickly, her expression turns vengeful.

“but that does not excuse your willful behavior!” she hisses, and cheryl finds herself cowering, any trace of bravery gone as sister livingston stands straight and nods.

“now, you will report to the undercroft immediately, where you will undergo physical therapy until you’re ready to listen.” cheryl’s heart stops.

more physical therapy? no, no, this can’t be happening, she can barely fucking move-

“sister livingston…my body can’t handle anymore…” she croaks out, her body spasming once again as sister livingston lifts her head high and looks down at cheryl in disgust.

“then perhaps it’s time you finally listened to us, cheryl. you can stop the hurt you’re body is going through…just obey.”

obey…follow the rules…be a good girl-

toni. her pink hair, her full lips, the smell of her-

cheryl says nothing.

and sister livingston bares her teeth and grips cheryl by the bicep, dragging her up off the bed as a groan escapes her lips involuntarily at the motion that causes her body to throb so painfully-
“get used to these four walls then, cheryl. they’ll be your home until we squash out any ounce of deviance left in you.”

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“god, what is taking her so long?”

toni paces up and down the lobby of the pembrooke, sweet pea, fangs, josie, kevin, jughead and betty watching her anxiously, and toni can tell they’re all nervous.

well, sweet pea and fangs, not so much. breaking into some old building is a regular occurrence for the southside serpents, but betty looks pale, and josie keeps bouncing her feet up and down from where she’s sitting, her arms crossed over her chest tightly.

“if something goes wrong…” betty whispers, and jughead squeezes her shoulder.

“it won’t. veronica and toni will get cheryl out of there. remember, toni, if you guys aren’t back in twenty minutes-.”

“we call back up, i know.” she says hoarsely, and the sound of heels clacking on the floor has her looking up desperately, and veronica lodge makes her way toward the group wearing what looks like a catsuit-

toni scoffs.

of course. even on a rescue mission, she has to do it in style-

“sorry, i had to wait for my parents to do bed check.” she says with an airy sigh, and sweet pea raises an eyebrow at her as toni rolls her eyes and grips her bag tighter.

“we ready?”
“let’s bounce. kevin, you’re gonna have to give me directions.” josie says anxiously, and he nods.

“got it.” they all make their way out of the pembrooke, making their way to josie’s van as fangs looks at it with a sigh.

“this brings back painful memories.” he says with a weak smile to toni, who tries to swallow the bile that rises in the back of her throat at the thought of nick st. clair.

she didn’t even know cheryl back then, but the need to protect her had been so strong…god, she’d known from the beginning, hadn’t she?

they were going to save her. cheryl was going to be okay.

the ride to fox forest is short, but to toni, it feels like an hour has passed, her legs shaking so badly in the backseat of the van that her knees are knocking together, and she’s thankful for veronica’s presence by her side, her fingers gripping toni’s hand reassuringly as she smiles at her.

“we’re gonna find her, toni.” she says softly, and toni nods once, licking her lips as the road begins to become more bumpy, the van jostling from the effort of ploughing through dirt and grass as trees become more prominent.

“you won’t be able to go much deeper, we’ll have to walk the rest of the way.” kevin says, and josie sighs as she brings the van to a stop.

“how will you guys make your way back?” she asks anxiously, and betty reaches into the duffel bag toni brought to pull out two flashlights.

“jughead and i will hold these out so you guys can find us. keep the headlights of the van on, josie.”

“got it.”

“be careful, v.” betty says softly, and veronica hugs her best friend tightly as jughead squeezes toni’s shoulder.
“if you guys aren’t back in half an hour, i’m calling my dad. he’ll bring every serpent he can get his hands on and we’ll storm the sisters if we have to.” he says firmly, and toni swallows the lump in her throat as she nods numbly.

“come on, tiny.” fangs grips her hand and helps her out of the van, doing the same with veronica as they exit and make their way out into the woods, kevin and sweet pea a few feet ahead of them. veronica looks back at betty, jughead and josie anxiously before she exhales shakily.

“god, i hope we can find them again. i don’t want to get lost in these woods.”

“we won’t.” toni reassures her, even though she’s not feeling very confident at all, but she pushes aside her fear and allows her bravery to step forward.

cheryl needs her, and that’s all that matters right now.

“are you sure she’s here, tiny?” fangs asks, and toni nods.

“her nana loves her, she wouldn’t lead me astray. i swear to god, if i ever get my hands on penelope blossom again…” toni whispers under her breath, nails digging into her palm painfully, and veronica sighs.

“this can’t be legal, what she’s done…” she says, and toni shakes her head.

“cheryl’s not eighteen yet, whatever her mother does to her is free game.”

“Well, one thing’s for sure. she’s not going back to thistlehouse.” veronica says with a scoff, and toni grits her teeth.

“over my dead fucking body, she’s going back to thistlehouse.” she growls, and veronica grins.

“such a protective girlfriend, topaz.” toni rolls her eyes, and fangs chuckles as he looks at veronica.
“you should’ve seen her with her last girlfriend. she was a serpent, and she got jumped by ghoulies once. tiny went off on two of them at once, beat them to pulps.”

“yeah, that’s why amber left me. she said i was ‘too much’. whatever, her loss.” toni grumbles, and fangs laughs loudly.

“true. besides, i like cheryl better.” toni smiles softly at that, and they walk for about five minutes in silence before kevin suddenly begins jogging, waving them forward as he does.

“up here!” he calls out, and toni picks the speed up, veronica and fangs by her side as they come to a stop at a door with a lock on it.

“shit!” kevin exclaims, and toni reaches into her duffel bag and pulls out a crowbar.

“ten steps ahead of you, kev.” she jams the crowbar into the door behind the lock and pulls, and it strains before there’s a loud echo like the bang of a gunshot as the lock pops off and falls to the ground.

“okay, according to my intel, the tunnel that leads from the main residence comes out here.” kevin breathes, and toni nods as veronica sighs.

“okay, that’s our way in then. alright, kevin, you, fangs and sweet pea stay here, if we’re not back in twenty minutes, call back up.”

“got it.” sweet pea says gruffly before gripping toni’s shoulder.

“be careful, tiny. if they capture you and force you into gay conversion therapy, i’ll kill you.” he grumbles before pulling her into a crushing hug, and toni sighs as she grips the back of his serpent jacket.

“they won’t get me, sweets, don’t worry.” she whispers, and fangs joins the hug, pressing a kiss to toni’s temple before he nods.

“go get your girl, tiny.” he says softly. toni nods as veronica throws open the door and turns on the
flashing in her hands.

“come on, toni.” toni takes a deep breath in before she enters the tunnel, the smell of feces and sewerage hitting her nostrils and making her cringe as veronica coughs and lifts the flashlight up to light their way, toni doing the same.

eyes walk for about a minute before they come across a hole with a ladder leading down, and toni looks up ahead at the path blocked off by a grate as she sighs.

“looks like we have to go down.”

“i so should’ve rethought this outfit.” veronica grumbles, and toni rolls her eyes as she makes her way down the ladder, the echo of her boots hitting each metal rung echoing out before there’s a second echo, veronica beginning her descent as well. as soon as they’re at the bottom, veronica looks around, shivering slightly before she looks at toni with a frown.

“okay…when we get to the main building, what happens then?” she asks breathlessly, and toni tenses up as she lifts her head up high.

“we search each and every damn room until we find her.” she says firmly, and veronica exhales before she purses her lips and nods.

“let’s go.” veronica leads them down the tunnel, down a small flight of stairs as they come to a fork in the road, and toni moves her flashlight to the right to see it blocked off by another grate.

“this way.” veronica leads her to the left, and toni follows her at a quick pace, her heart thundering against her chest almost painfully as she tries to draw in slow breaths.

cheryl is here, she has to be…

“here!” veronica grips toni’s hand and leads her up another flight of stairs, and when they reach the top, they come across a door. veronica pauses, and toni throws a protective arm out, pulling veronica behind her as she grips the handle with shaking fingers.
she looks at veronica, who looks at her anxiously, before she pulls the handle down and slowly opens the door. she peeks through the crack and sees nothing but hallways and doors, and she opens it a little more, poking her head out to see if anyone is nearby.

“clear. come on.” toni grips veronica’s hand, pulling her through the door with her as sweat begins to build on her brow, and veronica sighs as they straighten up and begin walking through the corridors.

eye’re all empty, not a single nun in sight as toni tries every single door, only to find all of them either empty, or locked. some of the doors have names on them, and toni feels her stomach twist at the idea that there’s more than just cheryl here, more kids being tortured for simply being who they are…”

god, she’s gonna shut this place down with her bare fucking hands if she has to.

toni checks a room, peeking her head in carefully to find it empty once more before she sighs in frustration and looks at veronica.

“okay, let’s split up. we’ll cover twice the ground.” toni says, and veronica frowns, but nods once.

“okay…toni, be careful.” toni simply nods as veronica makes her way down the corridor to the left, toni taking the one ahead of her.

another empty room. another locked door. another empty room, shit-

fuck this.

“cheryl!?” she throws caution to the wind, yelling out the redhead’s name as she rushes down the corridor in desperation.

god, where is she, this can’t have been for nothing, she has to be here somewhere-

“cheryl!?” she yells again, her voice echoing in the corridor as she comes across another room-
“cheryl?!” she throws the door open, a light ahead of her blinding as she moves to the middle of the room, not even caring if there’s nuns or guards or someone who could strike her down-

“are you in here?!” toni sees bodies sitting on benches in front of her, and she squints as she sees one stand right at the back-

“toni?!”

oh god.

oh god, her voice, it’s her-

“we came to rescue you!” toni calls out, and she still can’t see her, the light is too bright-

“you did?” cheryl’s voice is small, and toni can see the figure move closer, her red hair coming into toni’s sight as she blinks away the bright lights that obscure her vision-

cheryl runs into her arms, and toni holds her close, her eyes closing and tears welling in her eyes as she breathes her in.

she’s here, she’s fucking here, toni can feel her warmth, her shivering body against her own-

“toni…” cheryl’s voice sounds so weak, and toni can’t do anything, just holds her tightly to her own body as she trembles…

“i’m here…i’m here, i came for you…” she whispers, and cheryl grips her serpent jacket tightly as toni pulls away from her, reaching up to cup her cheek, to wipe away the tears that fall down her pale face…

she moves forward, lips crashing against cheryl’s, and god, it’s not that signature lipstick that toni knows the taste of, but it’s still so sweet…

cheryl grips her wrists in her hands, pulling her impossibly closer as toni deepens the kiss, and she
can feel cheryl’s tears falling onto her own face, and it’s so bittersweet, because cheryl’s still shaking against her, and toni knows she’s not okay, but god, at least she’s here, she’s living, she’s breathing—she’s here.

the sound of a door bursting open has them jumping apart as they both turn to see veronica staring at them anxiously.

“cheryl, toni! there are a bunch of nuns coming, we have to go! come on!” cheryl grips toni’s hand as a whimper escapes her, and toni grits her teeth as she looks at cheryl and nods before dragging her out of the room.

cheryl can barely move, it’s evident in the way she’s sluggishly allowing herself to be dragged by toni, and she’s trying not to hurt the redhead, but she can see cheryl wincing with every step.

god, what have they done to her?

they run down one corridor, veronica screeching to a halt as toni’s heart drops before anger floods her.

there’s a group of nuns and guards up ahead, making their way toward them, and toni has half a mind to drop cheryl’s hand and charge at them, knock every single one of them down and kick their teeth in, but cheryl’s grip on her hand tightens, and toni remembers why she’s here.

she has to get cheryl out of here.

“this way!” veronica leads them to the left, and toni can see it’s the door they exited out of, the steps up ahead as cheryl, toni and veronica descend them as quickly as possible, and cheryl is whimpering in pain as toni drags her along.

“come on, baby, we’re almost there!” toni cries, and cheryl grits her teeth and pushes herself forward, her fingers squeezing toni’s painfully as veronica leads them through the sewers.

“do you know the way?” toni asks veronica desperately, and she keeps running, panting breathlessly
as she nods.

“it’s up here! come on!” veronica skids to a halt when they reach the first set of stairs they descended, and toni pulls cheryl up them, cheryl crying out with every step as toni pulls her close and heaves her shoulder up over her neck, dragging her weight along in desperation.

“almost there, cheryl, come on!” toni begs, and cheryl squeezes her neck as her breath begins to come out in wheezes, her face only growing paler and paler-

“shit, veronica, she’s not gonna make it up that fucking drain pipe!” toni cries, and veronica looks back at them anxiously before they come to a stop at the ladder.

“i’ll climb up first and pull her through, we have to hurry!” she exclaims, and she begins climbing as toni grips cheryl’s face in her hands in panic.

“cheryl, baby, listen to me! you need to be strong, okay, i need you to dig deep! you’ve gotta climb this ladder, okay? once you do, we’re home free!” cheryl’s bottom lip is trembling as she shakes her head, and toni is practically holding her up, she’s shaking that badly.

“i-i-c-can’t, toni…”

“yes you can, cheryl! you can, god, you can, i believe in you so much! please, cheryl, do this for me!” toni begs, tears falling down her face before she can stop them as a sob wracks her chest, and cheryl’s face is shaking with the tears falling down her face before she exhales shakily and nods.

“o-okay…”

cheryl curls her fingers around the rung, and she pulls herself up, crying out in pain as she does, and toni’s crying at the sound, tears of anger and despair falling down her face as she sees flashlights to the right-

the nuns.

“cheryl, go! go!” toni turns back to the nuns and glares at them angrily, clenching her fist as they get
“toni, get up here!” Veronica screams, and Toni looks up to see Veronica pulling Cheryl up, grunting from the effort as Toni looks back at the nuns in rage.

She could take them. She’ll pummel every single last one of them into the dirt-

“Toni!” Cheryl’s voice brings her back, the desperation and panic in it causing her to curl her fingers around the rung and pull herself up at lightning speed, and as soon as she reaches the top, Cheryl grips the lapels of her jacket and pulls her close.

“Let’s go!” Toni pulls her arm back over her neck, dragging her along, and she can see Kevin, Sweet Pea and Fangs up ahead-

“Come on!” Kevin yells, and Toni picks up the speed as they finally make it back through the door, all of them breathing in clean air as Kevin swings the door shut and Sweet Pea shoves the crowbar through the holes where the lock was.

“Run, we have to run!” Veronica screams, and the others run ahead as Toni struggles, looking beside her at Cheryl-

Cheryl’s eyes roll in the back of her head, her body going limp against Toni as she looks at her in panic.

“Cheryl?!” She falls to the ground from the weight, Cheryl falling into her arms as Sweet Pea and Fangs turn back.

“Toni!”

“She collapsed!” Toni looks up at them in desperation, and Sweet Pea doesn’t hesitate. He bends down, lifting Cheryl into his arms with a grunt as he adjusts his hold on her.

“I’ve got her, tiny, let’s go!” He yells, and Toni can feel sweat clinging to every inch of her body as she runs as fast as she can, Sweet Pea keeping up pace with her despite Cheryl’s weight in his arms as
kevin, veronica and fangs lead them through the woods, to bright lights up ahead of them-

“over here!” toni hears betty yell, a flashlight waving through the air as toni pushes her feet faster.

they did it. they did it, they got her-

“cheryl, oh my god-.” betty looks at her unconscious cousin in sweet pea’s arms with wide eyes, josie gasping from the driver’s seat as sweet pea growls and ducks into the van.

“move, move!” he yells, jughead and betty moving further back into the van as toni sits down and waves sweet pea over.

“here!” he rests cheryl into her arms, toni holding her close as fangs jumps into the passenger seat and veronica shuts the van door behind her.

“where do i go?!” josie yells, and toni yells back without hesitation.

“sunnyside trailer park!” josie nods as she puts the van into drive and steps on the accelerator, the tires digging into the dirt before they take off at top speed.

“cheryl? cheryl, can you hear me?” toni brushes cheryl’s hair back from her face, and the redhead’s eyes flutter beneath their lids as she groans and leans in closer to toni, her hands moving up to grip the lapels of her serpent jacket.

“am i dreaming?” she whispers, and toni presses a kiss to her brow, wrapping her arms around her and pulling her closer as she breathes her first sigh of relief in almost five days.

“no, bombshell…you’re not dreaming. you’re safe, i promise.”

the drive to the trailer park is mostly silent, veronica explaining to everyone else what happened as cheryl and toni stay wrapped in each other’s embrace, and cheryl is crying, toni can feel her tears against her neck as cheryl curls up closer and closer to her, and she simply murmurs words of comfort under her breath as she runs her fingers through her hair and rocks her back and forth gently.
she’s okay…she’s alive, that’s what matters…

but just how much of her soul did the sisters take?

“we can take her to my trailer-.”

“no, sweets, your dad will kill you if you bring in more strays. and fangs is out of the question, too, his mother worked all day today at the wyrm, we shouldn’t disturb her rest.” toni says firmly.

“we can’t take her back to yours, tiny, your uncle is an asshole.” fangs says gruffly from the front, and jughead sighs.

“take her to my trailer. dad will be there, he’ll want an explanation, but he’ll take cheryl in, you know he will.” toni hesitates, and she looks down at cheryl in her arms.

“baby, are you okay with that?” she whispers, and cheryl nods slowly, her grip on toni tightening as toni smiles.

“okay, jones. your trailer it is.”

“should we take her to the hospital, get her checked up?” veronica asks anxiously, and toni shakes her head.

“if we go to the hospital, they’ll call her mother, she’s a minor.” she growls, even the thought of penelope blossom coming close to cheryl every again making her blood boil, and sweet pea frowns.

“f.p will know what to do, don’t worry, tiny.” he says, and toni simply nods subconsciously.

“alright, we’re here.” josie says, the van slowly coming to a stop, and jughead jumps out first, betty right behind him, followed by veronica and kevin as sweet pea comes to a stop in front of toni and cheryl. he holds out his hand with a soft smile.
“come on, ginger. you’re safe with the snakes, i promise.” he says roughly, but not unkindly, and cheryl smiles as she takes his outstretched hand with a wince, the other gripping onto toni’s tightly.

together, the three of them exit the van, fangs joining them as toni throws cheryl’s arm around her neck to help her walk toward jughead and f.p’s trailer.

the door opens, f.p stepping out and looking at the group of teenagers making their way toward him in surprise.

“dad…we need your help.” jughead says anxiously, and f.p looks at him, clenching his jaw tightly.

“boy, what did you do now-.” he stops short at the sight of cheryl, huddled in close to toni and shivering against her, and toni maneuvers around her to take off her serpent jacket, draping it over cheryl’s shoulders before pulling her back in and rubbing her back as f.p blinks once in shock.

“someone want to explain to me what the hell is going on?” he demands, and jughead sighs as he nods.

“i’ll explain everything, dad, but right now, cheryl needs a place to stay. somewhere safe.” he says softly. f.p looks at his son before he runs his fingers through his hair and exhales shakily.

“toni, get her inside, make her a coffee or something else hot to warm her up. fangs, sweet pea, jughead…you three stay out here, i want an explanation.”

“come on, toni.” veronica waves her forward, and toni grunts as she support cheryl’s weight and helps her up the small steps into the jones’s trailer, betty, veronica, kevin and josie trailing behind them.

“i bought hot chocolate for jug and i the other day, i’ll make her one.” betty says as toni leads cheryl over to the couch, and she nods numbly as she sits down and pulls cheryl into her lap, cheryl slipping her arms into toni’s jacket before wrapping them around her neck and pressing her lips to toni’s pulse lightly.

toni looks up at the clock on the wall. it’s almost midnight.
“guys, you should head home. it’s getting late, and you’ve got school tomorrow. don’t worry, the serpents and i will keep cheryl safe, i promise.” toni says softly, looking up and josie, veronica and kevin, and veronica shakes her head.

“i can’t leave her, toni.” she says anxiously, and cheryl finally pulls away from toni, looking back at her friends with a small smile.

“i’m okay, guys.” she says hoarsely, her nails digging into the back of toni’s neck, and toni knows she’s lying, but if it gets the others back home safely, she doesn’t mind. veronica frowns in hesitation, and josie reaches out and touches cheryl’s knee affectionately.

“are you sure, cheryl?” she asks softly, and cheryl smiles again.

“i’m sure. thank you…for rescuing me.” she croaks out. josie smiles.

“i wasn’t gonna let my best friend rot in some cult house. i’m glad we got you out safe and sound.” kevin smiles at cheryl lightly as he places his hand on top of josie’s.

“if you need anyone to talk to when the time is right, cheryl, i’m here, okay? one word, and you’ve got my ear to rant to.” cheryl smiles, nodding once as josie and kevin stand and make their way to the door. veronica sighs, but stands up and leans forward, and cheryl flinches slightly away from her, but allows veronica to press a kiss to her hair.

“if you need anything…anything at all, i’m a phone call away.” she says firmly, and toni smiles at her and nods.

“thank you, veronica. for everything. we wouldn’t have made it if it wasn’t for you.” veronica smiles, and she grips cheryl’s shoulder before she walks over to josie and kevin, all three of them leaving with one last goodbye. veronica blows a kiss to them both before she closes the door behind her.

cheryl exhales shakily against toni, and she wraps her arms around her tightly, her lips resting against cheryl’s brow bone as she sighs against her.

“How did you find me?” cheryl asks in a small voice. toni closes her eyes, slowly begins rocking her back and forth.
“the second i got to the hospital and you weren’t there, i ran to thistlehouse to find you. your mother
told me you went to boarding school in switzerland, but i didn’t believe her for a second, cheryl. i….i
went back, every single day for the last five days, pounding on her door, demanding her for
answers…i told sweet pea and fangs, and sweet pea called jughead, betty, veronica and josie…
jughead and betty searched for answers for days and came up empty…but at school today, nana rose
called the office asking for me…she told me where you were, cheryl. if it wasn’t for her, god only
knows how long you would’ve been stuck in that god forsaken place-.” cheryl’s grip on her tightens,
and toni shakes her head and presses a kiss between her eyes.

“you’re safe, baby…i promise, you’re safe.” her fingers move up to brush cheryl’s hair back, and
when her thumb brushes over cheryl’s temple, she frowns.

it feels…

no. no, it can’t be…

toni looks down, her eyes scanning over cheryl’s temples, and toni’s heart drops when she sees the
burn marks.

“cheryl-.” she chokes out, her fingers moving over the wounds, and cheryl’s bottom lip trembles as
fresh tears fall down her face.

“oh god…oh god, cheryl!” toni can’t help herself. she’s crying, her heart breaking as she sobs
openly, cheryl pulling her in closer and burying her head into toni’s shoulder as she wraps her arms
around the broken girl, desperately trying to glue the pieces of her back together.

“i’m sorry, i’m so sorry!” toni whispers, and cheryl is squeezing her so tightly, she can barely
breathe, but she doesn’t care, she doesn’t fucking care-

god, electroshock therapy? they fucking tortured her in that place…

“i’m gonna burn that fucking place to the ground, i swear to god, cheryl-.” toni croaks out, and
cheryl says nothing, just continues crying into her neck.
they tortured her, they hurt her, oh god, toni can't do this, she can't handle this-

“toni?” toni looks up to see betty making her way toward them with a steaming mug of hot chocolate in her hands and a frown on her face, and she simply shakes her head, causing betty to sigh as she rests the mug down onto the coffee table in front of them.

“jug and i can spend the night at my place so you guys can have the fold out couch, okay? my mom won’t mind.” betty says softly, and toni smiles at her gratefully.

“thanks, betty.” she whispers. the blonde girl smiles before looking down at her cousin in sorrow.

“cheryl…” she steps forward before sitting down beside toni and gripping cheryl’s legs, letting them come to rest across her lap, and cheryl finally pulls away from toni, blinking away her tears as she looks at betty with a sad smile.

“you’re t-the only g-good blossom left other than n-nana r-rose, c-cousin betty.” she whispers. betty smiles, running her hands over cheryl’s legs comfortingly.

“i know we’re not close, cheryl, and we’ve had our differences in the past, but you’re always welcome at the cooper household. i can’t even fathom the idea of you going back to thistlehouse.” betty says, her jaw clenching in anger, and cheryl shakes her head and buries it back into toni’s shoulder with a shudder.

“i c-can’t go back there-.”

“you won’t. ever.” toni growls.

penelope blossom is lucky toni’s not marching over to thistlehouse right now to fucking murder her.

betty sighs as the door to the trailer suddenly opens and f.p jones walks in with his son, sweet pea and fangs trailing behind him.

f.p looks at toni with concern as he sighs and makes his way over to them and moves the cup of hot chocolate over so he can sit down on the coffee table in front of them.
“cheryl…did your mother send you to the sisters of quiet mercy?” f.p asks softly. cheryl doesn’t say anything, tightens her hold on toni, who looks up at f.p pleadingly.

“f.p, please…can this wait till tomorrow morning? she’s exhausted, she needs rest.” f.p sighs, running his fingers through his hair before he purses his lips and nods.

“you’re right. this can wait. cheryl, you can stay here however long you want. i’m guessing you’re staying with her?” f.p says to toni, and she simply nods as he smiles and looks to jughead.

“you’re out of a bed, son.” he says, and jughead shrugs with a smile.

“it’s okay. i’ll stay at archie’s, or the cooper’s, if alice will let me.” he says with a wince, and betty rolls her eyes.

“you’re staying at mine, jug.” she says simply, and he smiles and nods.

“yes, ma’am. let me pack a bag, and we’ll head out, okay?” betty nods, and he leans in to press a kiss to her forehead before he heads off to his father’s room.

“we should probably head out, too. we’ll be here first thing in the morning to check up on you, tiny.” sweet pea says, clapping fangs’s shoulder, and she smiles up at them and nods.

“okay. thank you for helping me.” she says softly, and fangs smiles.

“ah, you know rescuing cheryl blossom is my main job. couldn’t miss out on the opportunity to do it again.” he teases, and cheryl smiles up at him before holding out her hand. fangs takes it in his own with a small smile.

“thank you.” she whispers, looking to sweet pea, who chuckles and also grips her hand.

“anytime, ginger. i’ve missed your banter.” he says with a grin, and cheryl’s smile only widens before she’s letting go of fangs and wrapping herself around toni once more.
“see you later, tiny.” sweet pea says, and toni nods once as he and fangs exit the trailer.

f.p sighs as he grabs the mug on the coffee table and holds it out to cheryl.

“go on, it’ll help warm you up.” cheryl pulls away from toni, looks at f.p apprehensively before she takes the mug, holding it up to her face and breathing in deeply before she takes a small sip. she adjusts herself until a majority of her back is leaning against toni’s chest, both hands curling around the mug now as she takes another sip and lets out a thankful groan.

toni suspects it’s the first proper thing she’s had in five days, and the thought has that rage surging through her once more…

penelope blossom and those nuns are going to pay for what they’ve done, toni won’t rest until they do…

“alright, i’m ready.” jughead exits the room, a small duffel bag in his hands as he smiles at his father before looking at toni and cheryl sadly.

“if you need anything, call.” he says firmly, and toni nods as he holds his hand out for betty to take. she smiles before leaning in and pressing a chaste kiss to cheryl’s cheek, and she grips jughead’s hand before they both bid them farewell, exiting the trailer until there’s no one left but f.p, cheryl and toni.

it’s quiet for a few moments, cheryl drinking her hot chocolate as f.p watches her sadly, and he eventually moves back and stands up with a sigh.

“my bed’s all prepped and ready-.”

“we can take the couch, f.p, it’s fine.” toni says, and f.p shakes his head.

“no, you guys have been through the mill, take the bed-.”
“i prefer the couch.” cheryl says softly, and f.p raises an eyebrow before he licks his lips and nods.

“uh…okay, then, i’ll be in my bedroom. if you need anything, don’t hesitate to knock.” they both nod, and he smiles before he makes his way to the bedroom. it’s quiet for a few moments, cheryl drinking her hot chocolate until it’s completely gone, and as soon as it’s drained, toni presses a kiss to the back of her head.

“move for a second, cher, i gotta move the table and pull out the couch.” cheryl grips her hand, but pushes down against toni’s knee to stand up, wincing as she does, and toni clenches her jaw before standing and pushing the coffee table as far away from the couch as possible. she grabs the lever and pulls it, the couch springing open and laying flat on the ground, and toni grabs the nearest blanket and pillows and rests them on the bed as cheryl bites her lip and looks up at toni.

“the clothes…” she whispers, looking down at the sisters of quiet mercy uniform, and toni swallows the bile that rises in her throat as she looks up at her sadly.

“i’ve got a shirt in my bag, and short shorts, but they’re denim, they won’t be comfortable-.”

“They’ll be fine, t.t.” she whispers, and toni’s heart lights up at the sound of her nickname, tears springing to her eyes before she blinks them away and nods.

“my uncle will be out of the house by six. i’ll swing by the trailer and get some more clothes for us, okay?” she says softly, reaching into her bag and pulling out the clothes. she hands them to cheryl, who huddles them close to her body before she slowly shrugs off toni’s jacket, a smile playing on her lips as she rests it on the couch. she pulls off the red cardigan, before she reaches up with shaking fingers to unbutton the dress she’s wearing, and toni sucks in a breath before she turns around to give cheryl some privacy, her cheeks turning red despite herself before she feels a hand interlace with her own.

“toni…” cheryl whispers. toni hesitates before she turns slowly, and she looks up to see cheryl crying, her bottom lip trembling, and only the first few buttons at the top undone.

“I’m…i’m not deviant…am i?” she croaks out. toni whimpers.

they got to her...god, they got to her...five days in that hellhole, toni doesn't blame her for succumbing...
toni lets her tears fall, her heart breaking as she reaches up and brushes away cheryl’s tears with her thumb before cradling her face in her hands.

“do you remember what i said that day at pop’s diner? you’re not loveless, cheryl. you’re not deviant. you’re…sensational.” she whispers softly. cheryl whimpers, and toni shakes her head as she tries her best to smile.

"don't let them win, cheryl. don't let them win by believing their lies. you're so beautiful, cheryl blossom, inside and out." toni says hoarsely, and cheryl smiles, toni returning it as cheryl grips her wrists and moves her hands away from her face, moving them down to the buttons on her dress.

“help me undress, please? i can barely move, t.t.” she breathes, wincing slightly as she does, and toni licks her lips.

"where are you hurt?" she asks, trying to contain her anger, and cheryl swallows thickly.

"my whole body just...i can't, toni." she breathes. toni sighs, but nods slowly.

“okay...it's okay.” she unbuttons the rest of the dress, leaves cheryl to shrug out of it until she’s left in only a bra and panties, and toni tries very hard not to stare as she reaches down and picks up her shirt, moving it up and over cheryl’s head before helping her get her arms through the sleeves. cheryl cries softly in pain, and toni leans up to press a kiss to her cheek almost automatically.

“I’m sorry, baby…” she whispers.

“not your fault, t.t.” she breathes back. toni grabs the shorts now, and she bends down, helps cheryl put her legs through before she slides them up to rest on her hips, thumbs brushing over creamy skin before toni buttons them up and lifts the shirt up slowly to press a chaste kiss to cheryl’s stomach.

god, she wants to kiss every inch of this girl's skin, to help her see how beautiful she is in her eyes...

cheryl gasps against her touch, fingers threading through pink hair until toni stands up straight and leans up to press a soft kiss to her lips. cheryl reciprocates it, pulling her closer and deepening the kiss with as much passion as she can muster before toni pulls away and smiles.
“come on…you need to rest.” cheryl sighs, but they both collapse onto the fold out couch, toni throwing the blankets over them before she wraps an arm around cheryl’s waist from behind and buries her head against the middle of her back.

“toni?” cheryl whispers after a few moments.

“mmm?”

silence.

“thank you.” she says softly. toni smiles.

“taking care of you isn’t a job to me, cheryl. so stop saying thank you.” toni echoes from that morning at pop’s, and cheryl’s grip on her hand tightens before she sighs.

“stay with me?” she whispers hoarsely, and toni simply pulls her closer.

“always.”

it doesn't take long at all, for cheryl blossom to break down. five minutes pass before she's sobbing, and toni says nothing, simply cries along with her as she pulls her in closer and presses kisses to the back of her head.

"it's okay...it's okay, cheryl, everything's going to be okay..."

maybe if she says it enough, it'll be true.
it's what a good relationship consists of, right?

Chapter Notes

this chapter is also long, i think most of my chapters are going to be long, i'm sorry! take breaks between reading, haha! this is literally the morning and afternoon after the escape, and it's also going to set up what the next few chapters are going to be, so exciting times ahead! thank you all for the amazing comments and all the love, i can't believe how well this fic is doing! it's my first fic and all of you love it so much, it's so heartwarming! <3

burning pain. the sting of a slap, the shock of electricity-

“you’ve never known love, cheryl…except to rip it apart. because you are a jealous, spite filled, starving, emotional anorexic.”

the fire blazes, smoke curling up into the sky as thornhill manor burns to the ground-

“these are deviant thoughts, cheryl!”

pain, so much pain, her head is pounding, her body is aching-

“you can stop the hurt your body is going through. just obey!”

jason blossom’s dead body on a slab, rotting and bloated and blue, no life in those bright eyes she loves so much-

“cheryl!”

she’s screaming. she can’t hear it, but she can feel it.

the way her voice box is tearing, scratching through her throat until nothing but the taste of blood remains stagnant on her taste buds, and she feels something gripping her tightly, a weight on her
she thrashes desperately. no, no, not again, no more, please no more-

“it’s me, cheryl! it’s me, baby, it’s toni, shh!”

soft lips at her ear, pink hair falling around her face-

toni. her toni…

she’s safe. she’s safe, toni is here, it has to mean she’s safe-

“what the hell is going on?” a voice demands to her left, and she feels the weight on her chest tighten as toni sighs into her ear.

“i’m sorry, f.p, she had a nightmare. i’ve got her.” fingers move through her hair, gentle fingers, so unlike those she felt just yesterday…

“cheryl, breathe, it’s me, it’s toni…” toni whispers, and cheryl takes in a shuddering breath, willing her body to calm down, but she’s trembling so violently…

“i’m s-s-sorry-.”

“no, baby, don’t apologize, it’s okay, just breathe, cheryl…” she licks her dry lips, wincing in pain as it burns her throat to swallow, and she looks up as f.p jones moves into her line of vision, a look of concern on his face. he crouches down with a sigh.

“i’ll get you a glass of water, alright, kid?” he says softly, and cheryl simply nods, doesn’t trust herself to speak for fear of what will come out.

nightmares. she should’ve known they’d come. they’ve been an ever harrowing presence in her life, since the day her mother first struck her, growing worse when jason had died and now…now she’d be surprised if she ever got a peaceful night of sleep again.
“cheryl…you’re safe.”

she’s safe, she’s safe, she’s safe, she’s safe-

“here…” f.p hands her a glass of water, which she takes with trembling hands, raising it to her lips to drink the liquid down gratefully, and she’s a little over ambitious, some of it spilling down her chin as her throat rejects it at first before it slides down painfully.

“she’s sweating.” f.p says with a frown, and cheryl feels a bead of sweat drip onto her eyelashes as toni sighs behind her.

“i’ll take her outside for some fresh air. come on, bombshell.” gentle hands move underneath her armpits, helping her up on shaking legs, and cheryl didn’t know it was possible for her body to feel worse than it did yesterday, but everything hurts so damn much…

her ribs feel like they’re on fire, that damn guard of sister woodhouse’s had taken aim at her every chance he got…

“f.p, can you do me a favor? can you pretend to be uncle jake and tell the school i’m not coming in today? just tell them i’m sick or something, hopefully they’ll accept it…my attendance is at ninety four, if i slip below ninety, i’m out.” cheryl whimpers, the idea of toni being expelled from riverdale high making her chest hurt even more, and she finally turns to look at her beautiful pink haired serpent, her eyes roaming over the face that kept her alive for five days straight.

her full pink lips…those brown eyes, full of life and love…her brows, furrowed with worry as she looks up at cheryl with a small smile and a shake of her head.

“i’m not going anywhere, cheryl. come on, let’s go outside.” she opens the door, a gust of cold air hitting them as f.p sighs and holds it open for them.

“i’ve got you covered, toni.” he says firmly. toni frowns.

“uncle jake leaves for work in half an hour, i’m gonna swing by the trailer before he leaves so he can let me inside to get some clothes for cheryl and i.” toni swallows thickly, and cheryl closes her eyes,
lets her tears fall as she reaches out and wraps an arm around toni’s waist, pulling her in close.

she doesn’t want her anywhere near her uncle, she can’t get hurt, ever, ever, ever-

“yeah, no problem, kid. i’ll make some breakfast for us, alright?”

“thank you. come on…” toni grips the hand holding her waist, and leads cheryl out into the cold air of an early morning.

the second they’re outside, cheryl takes a deep, rattling breath in, her eyes closing as the wind flows over her skin, and toni is shrugging out of her serpent jacket before wrapping it around cheryl’s shoulders, sniffing as she grips her hand again and leads her over to the chairs right beside f.p’s trailer, but cheryl pulls her back to a stop.

“aren’t you cold, t.t?” she whispers, taking in the fact that she’s still in the same clothes as last night, a sheer black top exposing nothing but a bra with ripped jeans showing her dark skin underneath, but toni shakes her head and smiles.

“i’m okay, cher. come on, let’s sit, soak up the sun.” she nods toward the horizon, where the sun is just beginning to peek out, and cheryl squeezes her hand before toni leads her to sit down on the plastic chairs.

cheryl moves her arms into the jacket, the jacket that she can smell is toni’s, her scent clinging to the leather so purely that cheryl finds herself burying her nose into the collar of it even though she has the girl right beside her, holding her hand so tightly…

“i don’t wanna ask you if you’re okay, because it’s stupid to ask. but i am gonna ask you if you think you need a doctor…we’ll find someone who can check up on you off the books so your mom doesn’t find out.” toni says hoarsely. cheryl swallows thickly, her tears drying on her cheeks from the cold air as she shakes her head.

she’s okay…she doesn’t need a doctor. she just needs toni…

“are you sure?” toni asks firmly. cheryl nods, and toni lets out a deep sigh.
“use your words, cher, please…” she says with a squeeze of her hand, and cheryl licks her lips.

“i’m okay. i’m just…i’m sorry, toni, i didn’t mean to wake you up-.”

“no, hey, it’s okay, cheryl…i’ve had my fair share of nightmares, i’m just glad i was there to help calm you down.” toni says softly, her thumb brushing over the top of cheryl’s hand in a rhythmic pattern, and cheryl exhales shakily, looking up at the sun just as it moves over the horizon, blazing sunnyside trailer park with beautiful, orange light.

cheryl closes her eyes, allows the warmth to spread through her body as toni moves her chair closer to the redheaded girl, an arm wrapping around her shoulders. cheryl allows her head to fall sideways onto the pink haired serpent’s shoulder as she breathes in shakily.

she’s so tired…

“we don’t have to talk about it until you’re ready, cheryl. but i just need you to know that i’m here for you. i won’t leave your side ever again, not until you want me to.” cheryl whines at the mere idea of toni ever leaving her, this beautiful, radiant girl who risked her life to save her last night, her fingers tightening in toni’s as she chuckles and presses a kiss to cheryl’s hair.

“i’ll take that as a ‘you’re stuck with me forever, topaz’.” she says, and cheryl grunts.

“you’re damn right.” she grumbles. toni laughs lightly, and cheryl sighs before she licks her lips and sits up straight, looking at toni with a small frown of worry.

“are you sure you’ll be okay to go to your uncle’s trailer?” she croaks out. toni sighs.

“yeah, baby, i’ll be fine. don’t worry about me, okay?”

“i worry, t.t. i don’t think you realize how much i care about you.” she whispers. toni sucks in a shaky breath, a small smile playing on her lips before she leans in and presses a kiss to cheryl’s cheek, her eyes closing at toni’s touch.

god, just the warmth of toni’s lips against her cheek is giving her renewed vigor…
“how much do you care about me?” toni whispers into her ear, her arms wrapping around cheryl’s shoulders to pull her in as her lips rest against the burn marks on her temple, and cheryl closes her eyes, tries her best to breathe in deeply as thoughts of jason flash before her eyes.

she remembers…she remembers that day at sweet water river, a few weeks before they’d begun to plan his escape from riverdale with polly cooper…

“jason, what’s it like? being in love?”

“it’s the best feeling in the world, cheryl. it’s knowing that there’s someone out there who will never judge you, who will listen, and care, and want you and only you. it’s seeing them and touching them and feeling like you’re coming home. it’s knowing that they feel the same way you do…that to them, you’re everything they want…just like they’re everything you want.”

“do you think i’ll ever find someone to love like that, jay jay?”

“of course, cheryl. there’s someone out there who’s gonna become your entire world, someone out there who’s gonna love you more than even i ever could…and i can’t wait for the day you find them, cheryl. you deserve it. you deserve to be happy, little sister.”

“cheryl?” the sound of toni’s soft voice breaking as she says her name pulls cheryl out of that day, the tears falling down her cheeks before she can stop them as she bites down on her trembling bottom lip and turns to look at toni.

“you’re the only thing that kept me going in that place, toni. the feeling of your lips against mine, the touch of your skin…the smell of your hair…it’s all i thought about. it’s all that kept me from succumbing to the darkness. that’s how much i care about you.” she breathes. toni’s lips part in a soft gasp, tears welling before they spill over, falling from her chocolate brown eyes down her equally dark skin as she purses her lips and swallows thickly. she pulls cheryl closer, her forehead resting against toni’s as she closes her eyes and hums softly.

“cheryl, not knowing where you were for the last five days, i felt like i was dying. every second you were gone, a part of me was slowly fading…i left sixteen voicemails on your phone even though i knew you didn’t have it on you because i just wanted to hear your voice… i care about you so much, i need you to know that…” toni’s voice is shaking, and god, those three words are on the tip of her tongue…
but she *can’t*. not now, not in this moment…when they’re both so broken and defeated…cheryl wants to tell her when they’re happy, when she’s *ready*…

when they’re both ready.

“i can never thank you enough, toni. you saved my life.” she breathes. toni smiles, and she pulls cheryl forward, her thumbs still brushing away the stray tears that fall down her cheeks as she kisses her, and cheryl can *feel* it. she can feel that word she was about to let slip from her lips, can feel that emotion pouring from toni as she deepens the kiss, teeth biting down lightly on cheryl’s bottom lip, causing her to whimper-

“toni? cheryl?” toni pulls away, looking up past cheryl as f.p’s voice rings out in the air around them.

“i’ve got breakfast ready.” he says, and toni smiles up at him before she looks at cheryl softly.

“i’m gonna go get us clothes, you have breakfast with f.p, okay?” she says. cheryl’s eyes widen. breakfast? alone? with f.p jones?

she…she can’t-

“*he gave you a home last night, cheryl! the least you could do is have breakfast with the man!*” he also helped cover up her brother’s death-

“*he also promised to keep toni safe no matter what!*”

“is that okay, baby?” cheryl’s pulled out of her thoughts as toni leans in to press a kiss to her forehead, and she takes a deep breath in before she nods.

“it’s okay. just come back quickly.” cheryl croaks out. toni sighs.
“i promise. go, get some food.” she gives cheryl’s hand a squeeze before she’s standing up, a smile still playing on her lips as she makes her way around f.p’s trailer and out of sight, cheryl watching her go in anguish.

she tries her best to breathe in, but panic is quickly settling in, and she feels idiotic, stupid for being so needy, so desperate for toni to be with her at all times-

“come on, kid. let’s get some food in you.” f.p says from the door, and cheryl turns to face him, sees the soft smile on his face as her hands curl around the leather jacket of toni’s that she’s still wearing. she closes her eyes before wiping her tears away and standing, and f.p chuckles as she makes her way up the small steps to the door.

“a serpent jacket looks good on your shoulders, cheryl.” he says with a smirk, and cheryl finds herself smiling as he holds an arm open and waves her in, the other holding the door for her. she walks in, f.p trailing behind her as she looks around the trailer in wonder.

she’d been too distracted before by pain and misery to really acknowledge that she’d spent a night inside a place like this. a place of poverty, cramped and small and barely livable. but this place…

this place has more character than thornhill or thistlehouse every could. it has what they both lack…

a feeling of home.

cheryl’s eyes land on the small dining table that consists of three chairs, and on top of it is a plate of bacon, waffles, a jug of orange juice, and the signature blossom maple syrup. she finds herself wincing as her eyes move over the last name that has caused her so much pain and despair, and f.p touches her shoulder lightly as he pulls back a chair for her.

“it’s not much, i’m sorry-.”

“it’s perfect. thank you.” she says, her voice small despite her apprehension at f.p touching her shoulder, and he seems to notice her tension, his hand moving away instantly as he sighs and nods before sitting down opposite her.
cheryl hesitates before she leans forward and grabs a waffle and two pieces of bacon. she’s not particularly hungry, her stomach still turning from her days spent at the torturous hands of sister woodhouse, but she does feel weak, lightheaded. perhaps a bit of food can help her.

besides, she’s sure toni would chastise her for not eating something, and right now, she’ll do anything to please the pink haired serpent who saved her goddamn life last night.

a smile plays on her lips, and she tries not to think of how badly she misses her as f.p watches her with a smile as well.

“thinking about our pink haired friend?” he asks with a smirk, and cheryl licks her lips and simply shrugs as he chuckles and shakes his head.

“never would’ve pegged toni to fall for a blossom. hell, never would’ve pegged you to fall for a serpent, either. strange, how life works.” he pours that famous blossom syrup over his bacon and waffles, and cheryl simply stares, watches him do it as she contemplates her next words before looking up at him with a smile.

“kismet.” she croaks out. f.p looks up at her with a frown.

“What was?” he asks.

“toni and i. it was fate. we never would’ve crossed paths at all if both of us hadn’t been in dire situations.” she says softly, and f.p raises an eyebrow as he looks down at the bottle of syrup before offering it to her. cheryl politely declines with a shake of her head, and he chuckles.

“yeah, you’re probably sick of the stuff.” he mutters. cheryl says nothing, lifts a piece of bacon to her lips and chews on it. it tastes a little burned, but the flavor hits her tongue, and she fights the urge to moan in pleasure. it’s the first real food she’s had in five days.

her temples itch.

“How did you two meet, anyway?” f.p asks, and cheryl’s thankful for the distraction as she finishes chewing and swallows before answering.
“at the hospital. there was a fire at thornhill manor, and my mother suffered burns. toni’s uncle had
an epileptic attack on the same night, so we were both at the hospital. we barely interacted until…”
cheryl trails off, hesitant to tell f.p about what jacob topaz had done to throw her into cheryl’s arms,
and f.p watches her, his wide eyes expectant.

“he hurt her, didn’t he?” he says with a clench of his jaw, and cheryl purses her lips before she nods.

“he was upset…about the hospital bill. she came out of his hospital room, coughing and spluttering.
he choked her.” she says, her fist clenching beneath the table in anger.

she was there right now, what if something happened to her-

“goddammit, jacob…” f.p growls, running a hand through his hair in frustration, and cheryl
swallows the lump in her throat as she looks to the serpent king with tearful eyes.

“i’m worried he’s going to hurt her-.”

“he won’t. don’t worry. if he does, he’ll have me to deal with. he knows that now. he’s been kissing
my ass since i got out, probably worried about what toni told me about him…” f.p says bluntly, and
cheryl licks her lips.

“regardless, she can’t live there with him anymore.” she says softly, and f.p nods.

“she won’t, cheryl. and you’re not going back to thistlehouse, either. you both are staying here until
we can find somewhere else for you both.” f.p says with a tone of finality, and cheryl blinks a few
times in surprise.

she wasn’t expecting that from the serpent king. why did he care about her?

“i…why?” is all she can manage, and f.p smiles.

“because i promised you i’d protect toni no matter what. and that’s exactly what i’m going to do. but
now…now you come as a package deal, and i will never be able to repay you for doing what you
did, cheryl. thanks to you, i’m here enjoying bacon and waffles instead of slop and stale bread. i
know you don’t forgive me, and you might never forgive me…but the least i can do is keep you both safe from harm. i owe it to you…and to jason…” he mutters the last part softly, and cheryl closes her eyes and allows her tears to fall.

jason…everything comes back to him and his murder…

would her red haired twin be angry, that she’s sitting here, having breakfast with the man who helped cover up his murder? or would he be happy that she was making an effort to be a good person despite the trauma she’d suffered at the hands of penelope blossom…that she had found someone who helped her want to be that kind of person?

she’s not sure. all she knows is that jason loved her…and jason was gone. but it wasn’t f.p’s fault. it was her father’s.

her mother and father…a man who murdered her own twin brother, a woman who threw her into a gay conversion therapy camp just to inherit some decrepit company…money and fame and fortune…

such fickle things, to throw your daughter under the bus for.

“you’re a good man, f.p jones.” cheryl says hoarsely. f.p looks at her in surprise, as if he never expected to hear those words escape cheryl’s mouth in regards to him.

“i’ve heard that from a blossom before…” he trails off once again, and cheryl watches him in confusion.

surely not her mother and father-

“i don’t know if you know this, cheryl, but…jason came to me, a few weeks before his death. he wanted to get out of town, start a life with polly cooper, and i told him i’d get him a car and some cash if he did a job for me.” cheryl sighs.

she knows this…heard it in the police statement read to her by sheriff keller the day they found out clifford blossom had been the one to murder jason…
“i know.” she says bluntly, and f.p shakes his head.

“you know what i told the police, which is only part of the truth. the real truth is…jason came to me first about joining the serpents so that we could protect him and polly. she was pregnant, and he was scared. he didn’t know how your mother and father would react, so he needed a back-up plan. he asked me if he could join us, so that he could stay in riverdale, so polly wouldn’t have to leave her family and he wouldn’t have to leave you. but…” f.p suddenly stops talking, and cheryl looks at him in surprise.

there’s tears in his eyes.

“but i told him i couldn’t let a blossom become a serpent. that i’d rather the serpents die than ever see a child of clifford and penelope wear the skin of a snake of the southside. that’s why he came up with the plan to leave town with polly.” he croaks out.

nails dig into her palm once more, but truthfully…

truthfully, she doesn’t blame him. and truthfully, she’s too tired to be angry…her whole life has been filled with hatred and despair and rage, and she’s tired.

for once in her life, she’s experiencing love, and warmth, and happiness, and she can’t hate the serpents, even if she tried. because toni is one of them…

and she can never, ever hate toni topaz…

f.p jones’s life was entangled with her in so many different ways…but he was providing her with a home, with safety from her mother…perhaps making up for past regrets…

“after everything your father and mother did to the southside, to us…i couldn’t justify letting jason in. and even if i had, even if i wanted to, the other serpents would’ve killed him during the initiation…they would never let a blossom join, cheryl. i thought i was saving his life, but in the end…in the end, if he had joined the serpents instead, maybe he’d still be here.” f.p says in a hoarse voice, and cheryl can see the pain in his eyes as he sniffs and lets out a deep sigh, as if he’s taken a huge weight off his chest telling cheryl the secrets that have been building for almost seven months now.

“i regret it…i regret it every day, cheryl. not letting jason become a serpent. that mistake cost him his
life…i’ve made a lot of bad decisions, but that was one of the worst.” he whispers.

cheryl says nothing. there is nothing to say. jason is gone, and nothing is going to bring him back…

and instead of being angry about what could have been, she has to accept what is. so cheryl says nothing.

but when she finally does, even she’s surprised by what comes out of her mouth.

“you can make up for it.” she croaks out. f.p watches her intently, waiting for her to continue, and she swallows thickly before looking him dead in the eyes.

her next words are words she’s never meant more before in her life.

“you can make up for it by letting a blossom become a serpent.” she whispers. f.p’s eyes widen, and he’s simply frozen in shock for a few moments before he suddenly chuckles.

“i’m willing to review that in the future.” he says simply, and cheryl finds herself smiling widely for the first time in five days.

i’m willing to review that in the future.

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“uncle jake?! uncle jake, open up, come on!”

her fists are aching, but toni keeps pounding on the door, her frustration getting the better of her. it’s been five damn minutes, where the hell is he-

“jesus christ, ant!” the door is thrown open, and toni looks up in surprise.
jacob topaz looks like hell. bloodshot eyes covered with bags and wrinkles, an unshaven face that’s covered in bile and food stains, his nose as red as rudolph’s as he glares down at her with bared, yellow teeth that toni guesses is supposed to be frightening.

after last night, nothing is frightening to her anymore.

“You look like shit.” toni deadpans. he scoffs.

“Tell me something I don’t know. Where the hell have you been?” he growls, and toni rolls her eyes before she shoves her way past him through the door. she’s feeling brave this morning. If she can handle a bunch of torturous nuns, then she can certainly handle an alcoholic uncle who looks like he’s seconds away from having another epileptic fit.

not that toni cares.

“I’m moving out. permanently.” she says firmly, making her way to her small bedroom, and jacob follows behind her, a scoff of disbelief escaping him.

“I’m sorry, you’re doing what now?” he hisses, and toni grabs a spare duffel bag in the corner of her room and opens up her drawer, grabbing a handful of clothes and shoving them inside hurriedly.

she wants to get back to cheryl as soon as possible-

“Stop, you’re not going anywhere, ant!” jacob exclaims, reaching out to stop her, and toni glares at him, her stare so venomous, he stops dead in his tracks.

no one calls her that but her mother and father-

“Don’t fucking call me that.” she growls warningly, and jacob’s eyes widen as she goes back to shoving her clothes into the duffel bag.

“toni-.”
“you’re an abusive asshole, you know that?! and i’m sorry, but i can’t stay here knowing i might wake up one day with your hands around my neck again!” she yells, trying her best to swallow down her anger as she closes the now empty first drawer and opens the second.

“come on, toni, i know i get mad sometimes, but you’re my niece, alright? it’s not like i’m gonna kill you-.”

“really? because you came pretty fucking close that night! i’m still healing from it uncle jake, and it’s been over a month!” goddammit, she’s crying, why the fuck is she so emotional right now-

cheryl, i need to get back to cheryl-

“ant, i need you-.”

“I SAID DON’T CALL ME THAT!” she screams, and jacob’s eyes harden, but toni forces herself not to care as she tightens her grip on the duffel bag, shoving the last of her clothes into it before resting a knee on her bed and pulling the photos from the wall. when she reaches the one of her mother and father, she pauses.

“toni…” jacob’s voice is low, and toni closes her eyes, takes a deep breath in and thinks of red hair and beautiful chocolate brown eyes-

“someone else needs me more, uncle jake. and you’re a grown man, you can look after yourself. i can’t help you anymore.” she takes the photo of her parents, shoves it into the duffel bag with the rest of the photos before she grabs her camera on top of the dresser and makes her way out of the room.

she’s free. she’s free.

cheryl…

she’s barely a few steps away before a hand grabs the back of her neck, and she’s thrown against the counter front first, her hipbones connecting with the countertop and causing a cry of pain to escape her lips before a body is pressed against her back.
fingers grip her hair, tightening into a fist and pulling, and toni bites back a groan as jacob growls into her ear.

“you think you can just run away? you still owe me thirty grand, remember?” he hisses.

oh god, he’s gonna attack, he’s gonna hurt her-

cheryl…cheryl needs her, she can’t be injured right now, no, fuck, fuck, fuck-

enough. fight back, kid. DO IT.

toni blinks back the tears of pain welling in her eyes before she bares her teeth and throws an elbow out behind her. it connects with jacob’s gut, and he doubles over, letting her go and stumbling back before toni pushes him back with all the strength she has.

he tumbles over the chair at the dining table, crashing into the wall behind it, and he looks up at toni in complete and utter shock and for once in his life, fear, as she glares down at him, breathing heavily.

and for once in her life, she isn’t afraid. she doesn’t care if he jumps up and hits her, she’ll be ready to hit back. and maybe it’s because she’s taken seven years of his bullshit, or maybe it’s because she spent five days away from cheryl blossom, not knowing if she was okay, if she was safe, only to find her and discover she’d been fucking tortured and thrown into a gay conversion therapy camp by her mother because she was with toni, but staring down into jacob topaz’s eyes, she finds she just doesn’t fucking care.

cheryl’s words at the will reading have never been more prevalent.

“no more. no more blood. no more madness. no more horror.”

“now you know what it fucking feels like.” she growls shakily, and then she’s leaving, exiting the trailer and stepping out into the cold air, letting it dry the tears on her cheeks as she marches over to her bike. she had hated leaving it last night, and the second her fingers curl around the handles and kick the stand down, she feels a sense of calm wash over her as she begins pushing it away from the topaz trailer toward the jones’s.
back home, to cheryl.

she pushes the kickstand back down once she’s in front of the jones’s trailer, her bike tilting slightly before standing still, and she adjusts her hold on the duffel bag on her shoulder before she marches up the stairs and through the front door.

f.p and cheryl look up at her entrance, a smile on cheryl’s lips that quickly disappears once she takes in toni’s disheveled appearance.

“toni-.”

“i’m okay, i promise.”

“what happened?” f.p asks firmly, standing up from his seat at the same time as cheryl, and toni shakes her head.

“nothing, he’s just…an asshole.” she says hoarsely, bile quickly rising in the back of her throat as she suddenly thinks of uncle jake storming over here and hurting cheryl-

oh god, what has she done-

she sways slightly, but cheryl rushes over to her, hands gripping her elbows before she takes the bag off toni’s shoulders and leads her over to one of the chairs at the dining table. toni collapses into it tiredly as f.p suddenly sits down and grips her chin in his hands, examining her face.

“he hit you?” he asks firmly, and toni shakes her head.

“no, he…he just shoved me against the counter and threatened me.” she whispers hoarsely. she looks at cheryl, sees her clench her jaw as she looks at f.p, who looks at her before he takes a deep breath in and nods.

“eat some food, try to calm down. stay with cheryl. i’ll be back.” f.p says.
“what are you gonna do?” toni croaks out.

“i’m gonna keep my family safe.” he says simply, and before toni can say anything, he stands and grabs his serpent jacket, throwing it on before he exits the trailer with a sigh.

it’s silent for a few moments, and toni grabs a piece of bacon and chews on it hastily, not trusting herself to talk as cheryl watches her with concern.

“what happened, t.t?” she whispers. toni relaxes back into her chair, swallows the piece of bacon before she closes her eyes and shakes her head.

she can talk to cheryl, she knows that…

“he’s a piece of shit, cher. i told him i was leaving and he got pissed off. i packed my bag and i was heading out the door, but he grabbed me and shoved me against the counter…” toni’s hipbones suddenly throb with the memory, and she winces as she reaches down to rub them soothingly.

“did he hurt you?” cheryl asks in a low voice. toni shakes her head.

“no…i mean he grabbed my hair, but i shoved him back before he could do anything. i wasn’t gonna let him hurt me, not when you need me right now.” toni whispers. cheryl hesitates before she grips the chair and scoots closer to her, and toni allows herself to sink forward, her forehead coming to rest on cheryl’s collarbone as she runs her fingers through toni’s pink hair.

“it’s okay…” cheryl coos softly, and toni scoffs against her.

god, cheryl’s comforting her when she’s the one who was literally tortured for five fucking days-

“i should be doing this, not the other way around, cher.” she grunts, and cheryl chuckles before pressing a kiss to the back of her head.

“we’ll help each other, t.t. it’s what a good relationship consists of, right? helping each other?” she
asks, genuine curiosity in her voice, and toni smiles as she moves back and looks cheryl in those beautiful eyes of hers, leaning in until their lips are inches away from each other.

“it sure is, bombshell.” she mutters, and cheryl smiles as she closes the gap, kissing her softly, and toni feels all the fear and anxiety leave her at her touch.

god, she could kiss cheryl blossom’s lips forever…

cheryl pulls away from her with a sigh, her fingers reaching up to cup toni’s face as her nails scratch behind her ear affectionately.

“always so tough. that’s what i get for dating a serpent.” she sighs. toni rolls her eyes.

“shut up, you love dating a serpent.” she murmurs, and cheryl smiles as she suddenly turns to the table, lifting a piece of bacon and a waffle before resting the bacon on the waffle and folding it like a taco.

“my warrior princess.” she says fondly, and toni chuckles.

“just call me ‘xena’, then.” she teases. cheryl smiles widely, and she lifts the waffle taco she’s made up to toni’s mouth.

“open up.” she says. toni raises an eyebrow.

“i’m not disabled.”

“i know. open up.” cheryl repeats, and toni sighs before she opens her mouth, cheryl smiling as she places the food between toni’s teeth, allowing her to take a bite. toni chews thoughtfully for a few moments before she swallows and looks at cheryl.

“how are you feeling?” she asks softly. cheryl purses her lips, her mouth twitching before she simply nods.
“a little better now that i’ve eaten, but…my body hurts. maybe a nice warm shower will help…” she says with a shaky exhale, and toni nods.

“yeah, sure. i literally cleared out my whole room, so, pick whatever you want. it’s all in that duffel bag.” she says, nodding her head back to the bag, and cheryl’s eyes widen as she looks at the bag.

“That’s all you own, t.t.?” she asks incredulously. toni rolls her eyes.

“I live in a trailer park, cheryl, i’m not exactly living the high life.” she says with a shrug. cheryl sighs, but she nods her head as she lifts the food to toni’s mouth once more. toni’s not exactly sure why cheryl’s feeding her, but she goes along with it happily as cheryl pours orange juice into toni’s glass.

It’s domestic, and toni finds her heart fluttering at the thought of her and cheryl in their own little trailer, having breakfast after a night spent sleeping by each other’s sides…

god, she’s in way too deep…free falling without a second thought about it…

“The duffel bag?” cheryl says softly, pulling toni out of her thoughts as she lifts the last piece of food to toni’s lips, and she takes it into her mouth before nodding and turning in her chair, leaning across it to grab the duffel bag and drag it to rest at cheryl’s feet.

She opens it up, roaming through it as toni takes a drink of orange juice, and cheryl suddenly stops, her fingers closing around toni’s camera as she looks up at her a smile.

“I knew you had an affinity for photography…” she says softly, and toni smiles and nods.

“Since i was about nine.” she says with a shrug. cheryl leans forward again, and toni sees her pull out the photographs that used to hang on her wall, toni’s stomach turning when cheryl flips through them with a smile playing on her lips. she chuckles at the one of toni, sweet pea, and fangs, toni with her back turned and her serpent jacket showing as sweet pea and fangs sit at their bikes looking tough, and toni knows she’s going to find the one of her mother and father any minute now-

A soft gasp escapes cheryl, her lips parting, and toni sighs, sinking back against her chair as she swallows the lump that quickly forms in her throat.
“are these your parents, t.t?” she whispers. toni closes her eyes, simply nods once.

“your mother is beautiful, toni.” cheryl says softly. toni opens her eyes, and she sees cheryl looking up at her with tears in her eyes, a smile on her lips as she looks back down at the photo.

“yeah, she was.” toni croaks out. cheryl winces, but doesn’t comment on it.

“when did you take this?” she asks hoarsely, and toni shrugs.

“a few months before they died. it’s the only photo i have of them.” she grunts. cheryl sighs as she looks up at toni once more, resting the photos on top of the table.

“i’m sorry, toni, i shouldn’t be prying, this is a sensitive topic…”

“no, it’s…it’s okay. builds the relationship, right?” toni says with a deep exhale, and cheryl smiles and nods once before toni licks her lips in hesitation.

she wants to talk to cheryl about it. wants to confide in her, tell her that she misses her parents right now more than she ever has before, that she wishes she had her mother’s comforting hugs and her father’s infectious laughter at her beck and call…that, god, she wishes right now they could give her some advice on how to deal with uncle jake and his bullshit, and all of this…cheryl and her crazy mother and the sisters of quiet mercy, and just everything…

but cheryl needs her right now, not the other way around. maybe one day, but not today.

not today.

“you need to shower and change, it’ll help refresh you, yeah? take the bag with you and seriously, pick out whatever you want. we’re about the same size, i’m sure.” toni says, clearing her throat with a smile, trying to contain her tears, and cheryl stands up with a chuckle.

“i’m taller.” she says simply, and toni grins as she stands and grips cheryl’s waist, pulling her in
“not that much taller.” Toni says, even though she has to stand on her tiptoes right now to press a kiss to Cheryl’s jaw, and Cheryl leans her head down to press a kiss to Toni’s lips softly.

“hmm, debatable.” Toni rolls her eyes, but kisses her once more before Cheryl takes the bag and holds it over her shoulder, making her way down the small hallway to the shower. As soon as Toni hears the door close behind Cheryl, she collapses back into her chair, her eyes falling onto the photo of her parents that Cheryl left on top of the table.

And then she’s sobbing.

She bites down on her lower lip to stop herself from making any noise, not wanting to alarm Cheryl as she pulls her knees up and hugs them, relishing in the pressure it puts on her ribs as she takes a shuddering breath in.

God, what did she just do? She’s really left herself without a home now, she can never go back to that trailer... she’s homeless.

Fuck, she’s actually, truly homeless now-

What if her father was here right now? Would he be pissed at her for treating her brother with disrespect? No, Toni’s pretty sure he would’ve kicked Jacob Topaz’s face in if he knew what he was doing to her-

“Toni?” she jumps slightly, turning to the door just as F.P enters, looking at her in concern, and she shakes her head, slamming her forehead against her knees as she chokes on a sob.

“Ah, kid...” F.P grabs the chair Cheryl was sitting on and scoots closer to her, pulling her into his embrace, and she hesitates before she wraps her arms around his neck and cries into his shoulder to muffle the sounds.

“Where’s Cheryl?” he asks softly into her ear, rubbing her back comfortingly.
“s-shower.” toni manages to croak out. f.p sighs against her.

“i’m waiting for you two to catch a break.” he breathes with a chuckle, and toni whimpers as he shakes his head and holds her closer.

“hey, listen to me…he’s not gonna bother you again, okay? consider jacob topaz out of your life, toni.” he says firmly. toni pulls away from f.p, looking at him with bloodshot eyes filled with confusion as she sniffs, and f.p smiles at her before wiping her tears away from her cheeks with his thumb.

“i told him to stay the hell away from you, and that if he didn’t, he could consider himself no longer a serpent and no longer allowed on the southside of riverdale. so that’s that. he cried and begged me to reconsider, and i told him the only thing i was considering was letting you back in to properly kick his ass. he’s done, kid.” toni gasps, her bottom lip trembling as f.p smiles.

it’s…it’s over?

“f.p, i don’t have anywhere to stay-.”

“you’re staying right here with cheryl until i can figure something out for the both of you. come on now, toni, you think i’m gonna let you sleep on the streets? where’s that smart kid i recruited at fourteen?” he says with a playful frown, and toni hiccups with a smile, feeling like that fourteen year old kid again under f.p’s gaze before she shakes her head.

“i shouldn’t have pushed him, but i just got so angry…” toni croaks out, and f.p scoffs.

“you’ve got the topaz anger, toni, sure. but the difference between him and you is that you only let it out to protect yourself and the people you love, just like your dad did. but jacob? he’s psychotic, toni. and you’re far from that. jacob topaz has nothing, but you…what do you have?” f.p asks firmly. toni takes a shaky breath in.

“i have you. i have jughead…sweet pea, fangs, the serpents…” she exhales, smiling widely as she swallows the lump in her throat and nods.

“cheryl. i have cheryl.” she whispers.
“you’re damn right, you do. you have family with the serpents and a girl who can’t even bear being away from you for ten minutes. you’ve got love, toni. and that’s something jacob topaz can’t ever take away from you, you hear me?” toni nods again, and f.p ruffles her hair before gripping her shoulder.

“good. you and cheryl stay here, keep a low profile, i’m gonna sniff around the northside before i start my shift at pop’s, see if penelope blossom has done any digging. if she’s coming to sunnyside trailer park to cause trouble, i wanna know about it before she does. in the meantime…talk to your girl. check in on her, help her move past this. she’s had a fucked up life, toni, you’re gonna need to be strong for her.” toni nods once again, and f.p sighs before he stands and presses a kiss to her forehead.

“jug texted me, he said all her friends are coming over after school to see her. i also crossed sweet pea and fangs on my way to your uncle’s trailer, i told them to give you two some space, they’ll swing by tonight once cheryl’s friends are gone. take whatever food you want, but i’ll pick up something from pop’s for us on my way back after my shift.”

“okay.”

“anything happens, i’m a phone call away.” toni nods, and f.p smiles as he stands up and makes his way to the door once more, exiting the trailer, and toni helps herself to another piece of bacon as the sound of a motorbike roaring to life outside the trailer echoes around her.

it’s silent for a few moments, toni coming to terms with what f.p has said. jacob’s out of her life…he wouldn’t dare break f.p’s orders, he was the serpent king…so jacob was gone. she didn’t need to deal with his shit anymore…

it hurts. but not as much as she thought it would. it’s a good thing. it’s a good thing because right now, she needs to focus.

she stands up, making her way to the bathroom, and she knocks on the door lightly.

“cher? are you okay in there?” toni asks, trying to stop her voice from shaking, and she can hear the sound of the water running for a few moments before cheryl answers.

“yeah.” she says simply. toni frowns, but nods.
“okay…i’m out here, just yell if you need anything.” cheryl doesn’t reply, and toni sighs, hesitating before she turns back to the dining table and begins clearing it.

cheryl’s done by the time toni finishes cleaning up breakfast, and she steps out of the shower, wearing one of toni’s favorite ripped jean shorts and a shirt of some band she used to follow a few years back, the shirt a few sizes too small so that it rides up and exposes cheryl’s stomach.

it’s so unlike cheryl, but god, she looks amazing. toni’s gaze falls on the exposed skin of her stomach, her own turning at the sight of bruises on her ribs.

“cher…” she whispers, walking forward slowly. cheryl looks down, sees the bruises before she licks her lips and sighs.

“i’m okay.” she says hoarsely. toni swallows thickly. those bastards…god, she’s in a gang, and she can’t do anything about the pain cheryl suffered…

it doesn’t matter. the sisters of quiet mercy were going to pay, one way or the other…

she hesitates before she bends down, pressing her lips to the blue and black skin with tears in her eyes. cheryl gasps softly, her fingers running through toni’s hair before she stands up and fully takes in the redheaded blossom girl in front of her.

she looks…absolutely, mesmerizingly beautiful. freckles adorn the skin of her nose and cheeks, and her skin is flawless, free of makeup and not a single blemish in sight. toni figures she must have a dozen skincare products back at thistlehouse that she uses to get this flawless skin, and cheryl smiles as she leans in and presses a kiss to toni’s cheek.

“the water was cold.” she says simply, toni’s eyes falling on her damp hair.

“i know, i’m sorry, trailer plumbing sucks…” she says with a sigh, and cheryl swallows thickly, hesitation heavy in her eyes before she clears her throat and drops her gaze down to the floor.

“toni, i…i need to talk to you about something. can you sit on the couch with me? can…can you listen to me talk? i need to get it out, i need to talk about it…” toni’s eyes widen, and she grips the
“yeah, of course, god…cheryl, of course you can. just…can you give me like five minutes to shower as well? these clothes smell and well, i smell.” toni wrinkles her nose, and cheryl smiles before she bites down on her full bottom lip and nods.

“okay. i’ll make us tea?” she asks, and toni presses a quick kiss to her lips with a smile.

“sure. i think betty has some here for herself, they’ll be in the pantry. if there’s chamomile, make that, it’s-.”

“calming. i know. i’m surprised you do.” cheryl says with a chuckle, and toni winks at her.

“i like an occasional cup of tea. i’ll be back.” toni rushes into the bathroom, practically ripping off her clothes and jumping into the bathtub in order to take the quickest shower possible.

cheryl needs her, and toni knows that her opening up is a good sign. she won’t be able to move past it if she bottles it all up…

she somehow manages to wash her hair and body in less than ten minutes, pink dye mixing with the water and circling the drain as she washes away any residue of shampoo and conditioner, and as soon as it’s all gone, she jumps out, quickly running a towel through her hair and body before throwing on a simple pair of jeans and a grey tank top and grabbing her blue flannel and putting it on as well, leaving it unbuttoned. toni sees her serpent jacket resting on top of the duffel bag, and she picks them both up, carrying them out into the living room where cheryl is holding two mugs of tea in her hands sitting on the folded out couch, a smile lighting up her face when toni walks in.

she throws the duffel bag and her jacket into the corner before she sits down beside cheryl, taking the mug she holds out to her and taking a sip.

it’s chamomile. good.

“whenever you’re ready, cher.” toni says softly, and cheryl nods, takes a sip of her tea as she swallows hesitantly.
they’re silent for a few moments, toni simply waiting patiently before cheryl suddenly takes her hand, interlacing their fingers and bringing toni’s hand up to her lips.

“When i got there, they threw me into a padded room. my room. it already had my name on the door. i think my mother’s been planning this for months…trying to get me out of the picture.” cheryl whispers against her hand. toni clenches her jaw, squeezing cheryl’s hand tightly, but she says nothing.

anger won’t help cheryl right now. listening will.

“on the first day, they injected me with drugs to make me sleep, and put me in a strait jacket, so i wouldn’t fight back. i did anyway. they didn’t like that, so on day two, they threw me into a bathtub of ice and told me to repent for my sins…” thick tears are falling down cheryl’s face now, and toni watches her, tears brimming in her own eyes as cheryl looks up at her in despair.

“on day three, they moved to electroshock therapy. they did that on day four and five as well. before you guys came to rescue me…they had me move sacks of potatoes from one end of the room to the other, then told me i put them in the wrong place and to move them again. their way of getting me to listen…to obey, so i wouldn’t be forced to do the same next time.” cheryl says hoarsely. toni wipes away the tear that falls down her own face as cheryl sniffs and shakes her head.

“They were cruel, toni. and i was so scared they would win…maybe in a way, they did. because i’m sitting here with you, and i feel nothing but happiness, but in the back of my mind, i can hear them…and i’m afraid that now, they’ll never leave me.”

toni’s at a loss for words.

this girl…this girl she cares about so deeply…put through all of that, because of her fucking mother…it breaks her heart. this isn’t fair, this isn’t right, none of it is right, cheryl didn’t deserve any of this…

how? how could a mother be so cruel? how could penelope blossom look at her own daughter and think about nothing but hurting her? her own daughter…

“They kept trying to get me to think of you and heather, and any other girls i’ve looked at in that way when they did those things to me, toni…all i kept thinking about was my mother and father…and how much i loathe them.” cheryl whispers. toni smiles, nodding once as she squeezes cheryl’s hand
“good, cheryl…it’s good that you didn’t succumb to their bullshit, that you knew, and still know… there’s nothing wrong with the way you feel, or the way you are. i meant what i said that day at pop’s, cheryl. you’re sensational.” cheryl smiles, reaching out to cup toni’s cheek with her hand.

“If i had stayed in there, t.t, god only knows what else they would have done to me.” she says brokenly. toni closes her eyes, only opens them again when she hears cheryl crying, and toni takes both their mugs and sets them down on the floor beside the couch before she lays down on it, pulling cheryl on top of her and wrapping her arms around the redhead tightly.

“cheryl, shh…it’s okay, you’re out of there and you’re never going back, alright? ever.” cheryl buries her head against toni’s chest, toni’s fingers running through her drying hair, and she swallows loudly before pressing a kiss to her brow.

“I’m so sorry, baby, i wish i could take your pain away…” toni says softly. cheryl inhales sharply against her, and toni feels her shift on top of her, loosens her hold as cheryl pushes herself up before she’s kissing toni, the taste of salty tears hitting her tongue when cheryl presses herself against her.

toni complies, kisses her softly before cheryl suddenly deepens the kiss, her teeth nipping at toni’s bottom lip lightly as her fingers fist through red hair, and cheryl’s hands are roaming, moving down toni’s body before she’s fiddling with the bottom of her grey tank top. toni’s heart is thundering against her chest, and they slide down the couch onto their sides, cheryl pulling her closer with a desperate whine.

“cheryl…” toni breathes against her lips, and the redhead silences her with a deep kiss as her hands move underneath the grey tank top to the heated skin of toni’s stomach-

toni feels a wave of lust crash through her, and for a second, she loses herself, her lips moving from cheryl’s down to her jaw, kissing and biting until she reaches cheryl’s neck, and god, she’s been wanting to ravage this neck since she first laid eyes on it-

she bites down, sucking the alabaster skin between her lips, and cheryl gasps against her wildly, pressing her body closer to toni in desperation for skin to meet skin as toni’s hands find the small of her exposed back…

“I keep…trying to think of what…oh god, right there, toni…” cheryl groans, and toni hisses as nails
scratch down her back harshly when she sucks at cheryl’s pulse point, biting at it with a wince as cheryl writhes in pleasure beside her.

“i…i keep trying to think of what will make me feel better…what will take my pain away…” cheryl manages to get out between gasps of pleasure, and toni shudders, goosebumps rising onto her skin as she pulls back slowly.

“cher…” she whispers lowly, and cheryl licks her lips, letting them part slightly as she looks at toni with nothing but lust.

“i keep coming back to one thing…” she says, her voice a little stronger now. toni swallows dryly.

“cheryl…are you sure?” she croaks out. cheryl sighs breathily, her eyes roaming over toni’s lips, her eyes, her entire face before she exhales shakily.

“i don’t know, toni…i just need someone to touch me…to not be repulsed by me…to not call me ‘loveless’ or ‘deviant’…” cheryl’s voice is shaking, her bottom lip trembling, and toni moves in closer to her, pressing a kiss to the already bruising skin of her neck softly.

“i need someone to care.” cheryl gasps against her.

toni’s heart breaks.

god, she gets it, she does, but this…this isn’t the right time and definitely not the right place….

“i can do that without us…without us having sex, cheryl. i don’t wanna take that step until we’re both ready.” toni says softly. cheryl’s hold on her tightens.

“i’m ready.” she says, but her voice shakes, and toni smiles.

“are you?” she asks, and when cheryl hesitates, toni’s smile only widens as she shakes her head.

she’s not ready. and god, that’s perfectly fine, why can’t cheryl see that…
“besides, do you really want out first time to be in f.p and jughead’s trailer?” toni says with a raised eyebrow, and cheryl crinkles her nose in disgust, causing toni to laugh loudly as she grips cheryl’s hand in her own with a shake of her head.

“cheryl, we can wait. i’m willing to wait.” she says softly, and cheryl smiles before she leans in and kisses her, a simple brush of her lips against toni’s before toni pulls back with looks her deep in the eyes.

“cher…i know we never really talked about it, what we are, and i know that you were scared for us to be public because of your mother, but…if you want all of that, someone to show you they care about you…i’m more than willing to do that, every day, for as long as you’ll have me.” toni says softly. cheryl brushes her pink hair back, tucking it behind her ear as she smiles.

“what if i want you forever?” she whispers. toni smiles.

“then forever is what you’ll get.” she whispers back. cheryl licks her lips, and she leans in, kisses toni’s lips softly before she whispers against them.

“will you be my girlfriend, toni?” she croaks out. toni chuckles against her lips.

“i thought i already was.” she says, and cheryl smiles and shakes her head.

“publically this time. no hiding behind the bleachers and closed doors. i want the whole world to know you’re mine.” she says firmly, and toni feels a shiver go up her spine at those words.

so possessive…god why is that such a turn on?

“as long as i get to let the world know you’re mine, too.” toni says breathily, leaning in to press a kiss to the bruise forming on cheryl’s neck, and cheryl’s arms wrap around her at her touch, a soft gasp escaping her.

“deal.” she breathes. toni smiles against her skin.
“cher…do you still need to talk about what happened in there?” she asks softly, pulling back to look her girlfriend in the eyes, and cheryl smiles and shakes her head.

“mmm, maybe one day…but not now, t.t. i’m happier than i’ve been in a long time, and i don’t want to ruin it.”

“What do you wanna do instead?”

“keep making out.”

“How juvenile.”

“shut up and kiss me, cha cha.”

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veronica lodge, kevin keller, betty cooper, josie mccoy, jughead jones and surprisingly, archie andrews all arrive at the jones’s trailer at exactly three thirty in the afternoon, a half hour after the final bell of school rings, and it warms cheryl’s heart to know that they came to see her as soon as that bell had rung signaling the end of the school day and the beginning of the weekend.

it also annoys her. because she and toni had been having a good time, relishing in the high of officially becoming a couple, watching random movies on netflix between languid make out sessions that had cheryl squeezing her thighs together for some kind of relief…

toni had been right. she wasn’t quite ready for that step yet. not mentally, anyway. her body, however…

she licks her lips as she watches toni walk back from the bathroom, her hair now dry and falling around her shoulders in soft curls as her blue flannel flies gently with the wind of her walk, and she can feel the others watching her watch toni like she’s a full course meal, a smile lighting her face when toni sits down beside her and sinks back into the couch with her arm laid on the back of the couch around the redhead.
“god, i can feel the sexual tension from here.” veronica teases, and cheryl rolls her eyes as she rests a hand on toni’s thigh.

“if you must know, toni and i are officially girlfriends.” she says firmly. veronica squeals and claps her hands with excitement, kevin, jughead and josie grinning from ear to ear as betty smiles softly and leans over to touch cheryl’s knee.

“that’s great, cheryl! i’m so happy for you.” she says with kind eyes, and cheryl smiles at her cousin before archie suddenly looks at all of them in confusion.

“wait, am i the only one who had no idea you two were even a thing?” he says, looking at cheryl and toni in surprise, and veronica smiles sweetly at him, though there’s a hardness in her eyes that tells cheryl he’s seconds away from getting a verbal beatdown.

“well, archiekins, maybe if you pulled yourself away from my father for longer than half an hour, you’d open your eyes to what your cohorts are up to.” she says stiffly, and archie sighs as he runs his fingers through his hair.

“ronnie, i told you i’m sorry. i would’ve been there last night, no questions asked, but your dad needed me.”

“i needed you, archie. are you dating me or my father?” she says harshly, and archie frowns as cheryl purses her lip to stop herself from smiling when she hears toni cough to cover up laughter beside her.

“can we talk about this later, veronica?” he says under his breath, and she rolls her eyes before looking back at cheryl with soft eyes.

“whatever, archie. i’m not here for you. how are you feeling, anyway?” she asks cheryl gently, and cheryl licks her lips before she nods slowly.

“i’m getting there…toni’s been a big help.”

“i’m sure she has.” kevin says with a grin, and josie slaps his shoulder playfully.
“get your mind out of the gutter, god!” she whines, and toni chuckles.

“no wonder you and fangs get along.” she says, and kevin’s eyes light up as josie rolls her own and looks to cheryl with a smile.

“veronica and i have been looking after the vixens in your absence, but we miss our hbic. when do you think you’ll come back, cheryl?” she asks softly. cheryl hesitates before she squeezes toni’s hand in her own.

“there’s something i have to settle first…and i actually need your help to do it, josie.” she can feel toni watching her in confusion, and josie blinks once before she nods furiously.

“name it. i’ll do whatever i can.” cheryl smiles.

“it’s not so much you, but your mother. i know she’s the mayor, so she can’t exactly do her old job, but i need the advice of an attorney. is there any way she can come here tomorrow?” josie’s eyes widen, and toni squeezes her hand as she sits up straight and leans into cheryl.

“what do you need an attorney for, cheryl?” she asks with a frown, and cheryl takes a deep breath in as she looks at her girlfriend in adoration, squaring her shoulders before looking up at her friends determinedly.

“i need an attorney, t.t., because i’m going to be seeking legal separation from my mother. i want emancipation, so i can finally escape her clutches…and i’m going to need all of you to help me do so.”
as it turns out, getting emancipation is not as hard as cheryl or toni thought it would be.

getting sierra mccoy to get over her general disdain for everything southside and southside serpent alike, however, is a mission and a half, and they end up having to compromise and meet at pop’s diner, cheryl constantly looking over her shoulder cautiously for any sign of her mother on the busy saturday morning they’d chosen to have this meeting. f.p was there, working a shift at pop’s while also looking out for cheryl’s mother as well, and sweet pea and fangs provided back up as well, all the serpents gathering around cheryl and toni’s booth protectively.

sweet pea and fangs had all but adopted cheryl into their small gang within a gang, the two serpents spending all of last night with toni and cheryl once josie, veronica and the others had left, playing card games and sharing stories of their time as serpents. cheryl had listened intently, laughing loudly when sweet pea told her the story of the time toni had stacked it jumping over a gated fence while running from the police, and toni had punched him square in the arm in anger over it.

“you can’t go telling her stories like that, pea, she’ll think i’m an idiot!” she had growled, and cheryl had gripped her chin between her fingers before kissing her soundly.

“i do think you’re an idiot. but you’re my idiot.” she’d whispered softly.

when sierra had arrived at pop’s that saturday morning, she’d scoffed in disbelief, asking them why they were so afraid of her to have so much protection as she’d eyed sweet pea and fangs cautiously, and toni had crossed her arms over her chest and looked at her with a smirk.

“we’re not. we’re keeping cheryl safe from her mother.” toni had said simply, and sierra had frowned at that, finally sitting down opposite cheryl with josie by her side as cheryl launched into her tale.

to say sierra mccoy was horrified is an understatement, but toni knows that sierra believed every word cheryl told her. not only had she more than likely received confirmation from her daughter, but
even people who barely know penelope blossom seem to know of her cruelty, and when cheryl had told sierra she was seeking emancipation, the mayor of riverdale had frowned thoughtfully before nodding once.

“of course, i think it’s about time you escaped the clutches of an abusive household, but i have to tell you from now, it’s not going to be easy, cheryl. not so much the process, but having to go through retelling your abuse at penelope’s hands to the judge. you’ll need to write down statements, cheryl, detailing absolutely everything. don’t leave one thing unwritten. you’ll need to provide sufficient evidence to the judge that your mother is no longer fit to be your legal guardian-.”

“she’s abused cheryl her entire life, and she threw her into a gay conversion therapy camp!” toni had growled, and sierra had glared at her before looking at cheryl sympathetically once more.

“as i was saying…you’ll need to provide sufficient evidence. photos of your injuries, statements about penelope’s abuse toward you…i hope you’re prepared for what follows emancipation, cheryl. you’ll be a legal adult in the eyes of the state. you’ll need to prove to them you can stand on your own two feet financially-.”

“daddy left me a small fortune in his will, and i have every intention of living in thistlehouse with nana rose as her ward. i won’t let penelope and claudius hurt a hair on that woman’s head.” cheryl had said through clenched teeth.

the rest of the morning had been spent doing exactly so, and sierra had told her she’d help cheryl under the radar pro bono, seeing as cheryl wasn’t allowed to touch her inheritance money without her mother’s permission. that was, at least, until she was emancipated. but sierra was happy to help free of charge, regardless, something that had somewhat lightened toni’s attitude toward the mayor of riverdale. she helped cheryl write down her statements, almost twenty pages full of stories and injuries that had cheryl gripping toni’s hand under the booth for support, and when sierra had asked cheryl if she had any scars, to which cheryl had replied with a scoff and ‘obvs’, she’d told her to take photos of them as evidence to her statements.

sunday had consisted of cheryl and toni not even leaving f.p’s trailer, the man himself absent at cheryl’s request, taking refuge in the whyte wyrm while cheryl had exposed parts of her body where scars marred her skin, toni’s camera shaking in her hands with rage at every photo she took. there were so many…a long scar that stretched from cheryl’s shoulder blade down to the middle of her back which had apparently been the result of penelope pushing her up against the wall, the exposed brick scratching cheryl’s back to shreds…thin welts on the back of her thighs from penelope whipping her with a bamboo stick as a child, one at the back of her ear from penelope whacking her with a hairbrush…scars upon scars that toni wishes she could kiss away, along with the memories associated with them…
the rest of that day had been spent with a crying cheryl in her arms, toni blinking back her own tears and whispering words of comfort as the polaroid photos lay at their feet, a haunting reminder of the pain cheryl has been through…

monday had been occupied at the riverdale courts, cheryl and toni side by side with mayor mccoy as they met with a judge, who had looked at the photos with wide eyes filled with concern, and they hadn’t even needed to tell him about cheryl being held captive at the sisters of quiet mercy at penelope’s request. he was convinced from the first sentence of cheryl’s many statements of abuse at penelope’s hands. sixteen years worth of statements and photos of the scars to prove their reality…

“i’ll review these, along with the statements you made, miss blossom, but i can assure you…i’ll be granting you permission to seek emancipation. in all my years, i’ve never seen anything like this…” he had scoffed in disbelief and anger, and cheryl had squeezed toni’s hand, a hopeful look in her eyes as she’d leaned forward.

“truly?” she whispered, and the judge smiled up at her.

“truly. i don’t think i’d be able to live with myself if i allowed you to live under her care any longer, miss blossom. now, mayor mccoy has informed me she is overseeing this case, and usually, i wouldn’t agree with allowing the mayor to personally involve herself in a court case, however… she’s informed me of your situation with your inheritance, and therefore, i will allow it. i will present sierra with the papers in a few weeks’ time, upon which you may serve them to your mother and let her know that you wish to remove yourself from her care.”

monday night had been a celebration. jughead, sweet pea, fangs, toni, cheryl and f.p had all celebrated in the jones’s trailer, f.p bringing them a large meal from pop’s that left them more than fed as toni and cheryl had curled up on the couch in content.

“toni?” cheryl had whispered late last night, her head resting against toni’s shoulder as they held each other’s hands.

“yeah, baby?” cheryl had looked up at her, the smile on her face almost blinding.

“i don’t think i’ve ever been happier than i am right now, t.t.” she had whispered.

they didn’t fall asleep till midnight, toni pressing kisses to every inch of cheryl’s skin that wasn’t covered in clothing.
it’s the early morning of tuesday now, almost five days after cheryl’s rescue from the sisters of quiet mercy, and cheryl and toni had been presented with a new problem now.

toni can’t afford to miss any more days of school, and neither can cheryl. but if cheryl goes back, word will more than likely reach the ear of penelope blossom that her daughter has returned to school, and toni’s not sure if cheryl’s ready for that…

coming face to face with the woman who had caused her so much pain…

toni’s not sure if she’s ready for that, either. if she sees penelope blossom, she’s pretty sure she’s not gonna be able to stop herself from attacking her.

it’s a shit situation, and toni’s stuck. she could go to school and leave cheryl here, but toni can’t bring it in herself to do that, to abandon cheryl when she needed toni the most. she was still suffering from nightmares, twitching in her sleep and biting down onto the blanket to stop herself from screaming as toni had held her and brushed her hair back, and toni doesn’t even want to think of what would happen if she were to leave cheryl alone for six hours of the day…

but if she stays here, her attendance will only continue to drop lower. she’s already missed two more days, which means her attendance is likely in danger of spiking down to below ninety percent, and if that happens, she’s out. no more riverdale high, no more education, no g.e.d…she’ll be well and truly screwed.

“toni?” cheryl’s soft voice pulls her out of her thoughts, and toni tightens her hold around cheryl’s waist, pulling her closer until her forehead is pressed against the middle of cheryl’s back.

“yeah?” she mumbles, pressing a kiss to the back of her neck, and cheryl leans back into her touch, a soft sigh escaping her as she grips toni’s hand around her waist, interlacing their fingers.

“we have to go to school today.” she croaks out. toni inhales sharply, and cheryl turns to face her, eyes filled with despair and fear as toni brushes her thumb across cheryl’s cheek affectionately.

“are you sure, cheryl? we don’t have to at all…” toni tells her, even though she knows it’s a lie, at least on her part, and cheryl licks her lips before wrapping her fingers around the wrist touching her cheek.
“you’ll be there. so will all of my friends…i know you guys will keep me safe.” she says softly. toni nods furiously.

“of course we will, cheryl. we’ll do everything we can.” she says firmly. cheryl smiles.

“i know…without a shadow of a doubt, i’ll be protected. that’s the only thing reassuring me that going to school today is the right decision. besides, i’m going to have to face her eventually, to serve the papers, t.t.” a small smile plays on cheryl’s lips, no doubt the thoughts of her future free from penelope blossom filling her mind as toni leans in and presses a chaste kiss to her lips.

she knows cheryl can flick a switch and turn into the head bitch in charge, she knows cheryl is capable of putting on a front and showing her mother that she’s ready to take charge of her own life. she doesn’t care about that.

she cares about the affects this will do on cheryl mentally. coming face to face with the woman who threw her into the sisters of quiet mercy, the woman who has called her ‘deviant’ and ‘perverse’ for so many years just because she liked girls, the woman who has held cheryl’s head down into a steady stream of water, drowning under insecurities and doubts for so long…

once she’s emancipated, she’ll be free. but at the end of the day, penelope blossom is her mother. the woman who gave birth to her, who gave her life…it’s not an easy thing to wrap your mind around, toni knows that.

what will this do to her mentally? that’s all she cares about…

“i know, baby…but i’m just worried about the toll this will take on you here.” toni says, tapping cheryl’s head lightly. cheryl watches her with a frown, and toni sighs.

“i don’t want you to be in pain, cheryl. that’s all. emotionally, physically, mentally…i don’t want your mother to hurt you anymore. in any way shape or form.” she whispers hoarsely. cheryl swallows thickly, and she watches toni for a few moments before she suddenly curls into her. toni moves to lay on her back as she wraps her arms around cheryl tightly. cheryl sighs against her, her head resting on toni’s chest as she plays with the pink tipped ends of her hair.

“i know, toni, i don’t want that, either. i don’t want her to have a hold on me anymore whatsoever, but…we need to do this. i…i need to do this. i need to continue living my life, because i can’t stay in
this trailer any longer. I can’t put my life on hold because of trauma, or because I’m afraid…what would Jason think?” she whispers brokenly, and Toni’s hold on her tightens as she closes her eyes and lets out a deep exhale.

Jason Blossom…the root to so many of Cheryl’s problems…but also the root to so much of her strength…

“Toni, if I’m being honest…having you by my side, I feel like I can get through anything.” Cheryl whispers. Toni’s heart pounds against her chest, and she rests her chin on top of Cheryl’s head gently, her fingers drawing patterns onto Cheryl’s back subconsciously.

god, this girl…this fucking girl, where did she come from, and how the hell does Toni stop her from ever, ever leaving?

“Then I’ll stand by it. Forever, if I have to.” Toni says firmly, and she can feel Cheryl smiling against her before she leans up, hovering above Toni with a smile as she leans down and kisses her. Toni sighs against her lips, her fingers ghosting the hem of Cheryl’s (or really, her) pyjama top before she touches the smooth skin of her stomach, and Cheryl deepens the kiss with a groan, tongue sliding against Toni’s languidly-

“Alright, I’m gonna head out-okay! Wrong time to walk in!” Cheryl and Toni jump apart, both of them looking up in a daze just as F.P turns around so his back is to them, a hand over his eyes as the other waves behind him dismissively.

“Uh…sorry, I-.” F.P stumbles over his words, and Toni tries to bite back her laughter as she looks at Cheryl, whose cheeks are quickly turning bright red as she moves off Toni with a shy smile.

“No need to apologize, F.P. We’re sorry, this is your home. Or, well…your trailer.” Cheryl says, her voice small and shaking slightly as she looks at Toni sheepishly, and F.P peeks his head around at them, one eye open.

“I…yeah, I guess.” He chuckles, finally turning once he sees the coast is clear, and he ruffles the back of his head awkwardly.

“I’m, uh…I’m off to my shift at Pop’s, I won’t be home till the afternoon…are you guys heading to school today?” he asks with a frown, all awkwardness forgotten, and Cheryl and Toni exchange a look before the redhead takes a deep breath in and nods.
“yes. i can’t stay hidden forever, and now that i’m close to being emancipated, it’s time i started moving forward instead of staying stagnant. if penelope blossom decides to show up at riverdale high today…i’ll be ready.” cheryl says firmly, and toni feels nothing but pride flood her as she reaches out and grips cheryl’s hand in her own.

let penelope blossom fucking try to show her face at riverdale high, toni will tackle her straight into the ground, pound her first into that botox face with pleasure-

“alright. i know you’ve got toni and the boys to watch your back, but if you need anything, i’m a phone call away, cheryl.” f.p says suddenly, pulling toni out of her thoughts as she sees him staring at cheryl with a worried frown, and toni turns to see cheryl watching him with a look of wonder before she simply nods once, a thoughtful frown taking over her features. f.p clears his throat, looking at them both with a sheepish grin before he raises a hand in farewell.

“alright. i’ll see you in the afternoon, uh…continue.” he says, giving toni a sly wink before he grabs his serpent jacket and exits the trailer, the door closing softly behind him. toni rolls her eyes. it’s like getting caught making out with your girlfriend by your father…

cheryl suddenly sighs loudly, and toni looks at her with a raised eyebrow as she meets toni’s chocolate brown eyes with a look of hesitation.

“he’s being so nice, i can’t hate him anymore.” she says with a pout, and toni laughs loudly before she leans in and presses a kiss to cheryl’s cheek, the skin warm beneath her lips.

“he’s trying to make up for past sins, cher. you know he’s never gonna stop trying to help you. he’s officially in your debt.” toni says, and cheryl licks her lips as she nods once, a small smile playing on her lips.

“he is a good man…i’m seeing it more and more now. but it still hurts, t.t.” she says, swallowing thickly as her smile fades, and toni scoots closer to her, interlacing their fingers before bringing her hand up to press a kiss to the back of it softly.

“I know, baby. and maybe it won’t ever stop hurting. i don’t expect you to forgive f.p for what he did, but…i’m so proud of you for seeing past his indiscretions and seeing the man he really is…he’s just trying to look out for his family, cher…” she says in a low voice. cheryl frowns, but nods slowly as she squeezes toni’s hand with a sigh.
“i know. and now that i have someone…someone i care about like family…” she says, looking up at toni softly, and toni’s heart is about to fucking explode-

“i understand.” cheryl finishes simply, and toni can’t help herself. she leans in, cradling cheryl’s face in her hands and kissing her passionately, cheryl’s lips soft against her own before she pulls away with a regretful sigh.

“we have to get ready for school.” cheryl croaks out, and toni can see the lust shining in her eyes, wants nothing more than to act on it, but instead, toni sighs as well before pulling away with a smile.

“right. now…i know cheryl bombshell isn’t going to enter riverdale high after a week long absence with anything other than style and poise. the question is…do i have any clothes that fit that category?” toni says with a frown, and cheryl chuckles, her teeth biting down on a full bottom lip before she gives toni’s hand a gentle squeeze.

“oh, toni…you should know by now…i can make anything work in my favor.”

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the second cheryl blossom’s high heeled boots enter the halls of riverdale high, every head in the hallway turns in shock, a silence taking over before the whispers and gasps of surprise begin.

because not only does cheryl blossom come barging through the door of riverdale high like she never left, a smirk lighting up her features and curling her perfect cherry red lips into a smile, but she walks in hand in hand with a southside serpent.

it must be the end of times, it must be. because cheryl blossom wouldn’t be caught dead in the same vicinity as a southside serpent, let alone holding hands with one…

and a girl as well? something is in the water of riverdale, it must be, none of this makes sense…

toni topaz is grinning widely, her eyes falling on every single pair of eyes that watch the new power couple of riverdale high take their stand at the entrance to their castle, and cheryl tosses her curled hair back over her shoulder, hoop earrings flying before she squeezes toni’s hand in her own.
“well, i believe we have everyone’s attention now, don’t we, t.t.” she says airily with a wide grin, and god, does it feel good to be back.

head bitch in charge once again.

toni’s clothes are a tad too small for her, the jeans cutting off just above the high heeled boots that thankfully, are her size that toni had lent her, and the red shirt she’s wearing is constantly riding up to expose her stomach, unable to quite get over her slightly larger chest size, but cheryl doesn’t mind. she looks fucking phenomenal for someone who was held captive in hell less than a week ago, and the fact that she’s wearing her girlfriend’s clothes only solidifies their relationship in cheryl’s mind. besides, toni’s wardrobe is so goddamn aesthetically pleasing, cheryl wouldn’t mind borrowing her clothes for the rest of her natural born life if she has to.

toni follows close behind her, fingers interlacing with cheryl’s warmly, and cheryl can hear the people around them whispering, can feel their eyes on the both of them, and usually, it wouldn’t bother her. usually it wouldn’t get under her skin, but it fucking is now. because the question burning underneath all those defensive layers is this: what were they whispering about? were they whispering about cheryl, and the fact that she’s currently holding hands with a girl? were they all perhaps shocked that the apparent ‘b’ in queen bee stood for ‘bisexual’ when it came to cheryl blossom? was the captain of the river vixens truly dating some southside serpent with pink hair and an unruly attitude?

she tries to convince herself that she doesn’t care, that none of it matters, because toni is her girlfriend no matter what any of these subpar delinquents think, but years of building a reputation as a bitch is hard to shake off. and cheryl doesn’t like it when people fucking stare at her, at least not in this way.

judging. gossiping…

it’s almost as bad as the day her father had been exposed as jason’s murderer-

“cheryl?” toni pulls her to a stop, cheryl turning to face her in a daze as she tries to shake off the bad thoughts invading her mind, and toni watches her, a frown of concern taking over her face. cheryl licks her lips in hesitation.
she knows she can tell toni absolutely anything, but this time, it involves her. what if she’s not so receptive to the idea of cheryl being a little hesitant to engage in pda?

“it’s nothing.” cheryl says instead, and she goes to move, but toni tugs her back again.

“no it’s not. it’s getting to you.” toni says firmly, and cheryl’s teeth worry the inside of her cheek, an excuse already building on her lips when toni shocks her by looking around at everyone watching them, anger taking over her delicate features.

“okay, i get it! cheryl blossom and toni topaz are dating, big fucking deal! next person i see staring at us will get punched so hard, their grandparents will be seeing stars, got it?!” she roars, her eyes blazing with rage, and cheryl blinks in complete and utter shock as everyone immediately averts their eyes, the fear coming off all of them almost filling the entire hallway with the scent of terror as toni exhales shakily and looks at cheryl with a shrug.

“there, that fixed that.” she says, tossing her hair over her shoulders nonchalantly.

cheryl doesn’t move.

toni watches her cautiously before her eyes suddenly widen, and she licks her lips nervously as she steps closer to the redheaded girl.

“cher? i’m sorry, did i overstep-..” she doesn’t get the chance to finish her sentence. cheryl grips her wrist and drags her down the hallway into the girls’ bathroom, her heart pounding and her body throbbing with something, and when she sees a few girls at the sink checking over their hair and makeup, she growls.

“nothing is going to fix you from looking like troll dolls, you heathens, now get the hell out!” she barks, and the girls jump before they stare at cheryl in shock and immediately rush toward the entrance in fear, all of them whispering under their breath as the door swings shut behind them, and toni watches them go in shock before she swallows thickly and turns to face her girlfriend anxiously.

“cheryl, i-.” cheryl grabs her by the lapels of her serpent jacket and kisses her passionately, pushing her back until she’s hitting the tiled wall behind them, and toni groans against her, hands gripping her waist and pulling cheryl flush against her as her tongue explores the roof of cheryl’s mouth in desperation.
“that…was the hottest thing…i’ve ever witnessed.” cheryl breathes against her between kisses to her full lips, and toni chuckles breathlessly.

“anything to defend my girl.” she croaks out, and cheryl hums at those words, her lips trailing down toni’s jawline, peppering it with kisses before she sucks the skin of toni’s neck between her lips harshly.

her girl, toni saw her as her girl...

cheryl removes her lips from toni’s neck with a loud pop before she bites down on the same spot, and a high pitched whine escapes the pink haired girl, her leg lifting up and her thighs squeezing for some sort of relief, and cheryl fucking knows that toni’s aching to be touched, because god, she is, too-

“toni…” cheryl presses the side of her face against toni’s neck, the scent of that goddamn bottle of perfume she bought toni for christmas invading her sense, and her fingers reach down for the button of toni’s jeans, a desperate need to pull that sound out of toni over and over again taking her over-

toni suddenly wraps her fingers around her wrist to stop her with one hand, the other moving to grip cheryl’s chin between her fingers to push her back until she’s staring at her face to face. toni is panting, but smiling as she shakes her head.

“god, i want to, i do…but we can’t, baby.” she breathes. cheryl whines like a petulant child, because fuck, she knows toni is right, but she’s never wanted something more in her entire fucking life-

toni laughs before leaning in and kissing her softly.

“we’re at school, cheryl, remember?” she whispers against her lips, and cheryl rolls her eyes, but pulls away slightly, choosing instead to place her hands on either side of toni’s head as she leans in and kisses her again.

“are you sure?” she teases, teeth nipping at toni’s bottom lip, and toni groans as cheryl presses
another kiss to the bruise already forming on toni’s neck, an apparent weak spot for the pink haired serpent…

cheryl decides to file the information away in her brain for a later date.

“ch-cher, come on, don’t tease me like this…” toni says in a soft voice filled with desperation, and cheryl sighs and pulls away completely.

“fine…for now.” cheryl says, a twinkle in her eyes before she moves over to the mirror, swinging her hips as she does. she can feel toni’s eyes burning into the back of her head as she leans forward to gaze into the mirror, fixing her hair and removing the smudges of red lipstick on her lips until she looks presentable once more.

one day…one day there isn’t going to be obstacles in their way…no interrupting dad figures or traumatic events or oogling peers to stop them from taking that step…

truthfully, cheryl’s nervous. truthfully…cheryl’s never gone that step with anyone before. she’s had flings, a quick make out or groping session here and there, but she’s never had sex before, and heather had been pulled away from her by her hideous mother before cheryl had gotten the chance to take that step with her.

toni would be her first, something she’s sure the pink haired serpent can’t say about her. which cheryl isn’t upset about at all, it’s just…toni has experience. and cheryl has…nothing. what if she’s bad at it? god, what if toni decides she isn’t worth the time and effort because of her lack of experience-

“i’ve lost you, cher. what’s going on in that head of yours?” toni asks softly from behind her, and cheryl doesn’t get the chance to turn around before toni’s wrapping her arms around her from behind, her chin resting on top of cheryl’s shoulder as she stares at her in the mirror.

cheryl’s about to reply when she takes in toni’s appearance. her pink hair is frazzled, and there’s red lipstick all over her lips and neck, the red contrasting brilliantly against the dark black and blue bruise cheryl’s left on there. cheryl chuckles as she turns in the pink haired serpent’s arms.

“babe, your face is a mess.” she says with a grin, and toni rolls her eyes.
“yeah, thanks for that.” she tears herself away from cheryl, reaching over to the paper towel dispenser and taking a few before wetting them under the tap and using them to wipe off the marks.

“i have a love/hate relationship with that lipstick of yours, bombshell.” she grumbles, causing cheryl to grin widely.

“don’t lie, you secretly love me marking you.” she says proudly, and toni winces slightly as she moves over the mark on her neck before grinning at cheryl in the mirror.

“if the lipstick doesn’t tell people i’m yours, this definitely will.” she says, pointing at the bruise with a sigh. cheryl smiles sheepishly before she leans in and presses a kiss to toni’s hair.

“i’m sorry.” she says softly, and toni chuckles and shakes her head as she wipes away the rest of the lipstick staining her neck.

“don’t be. that was…” toni trails off, her eyes glazing over, and cheryl licks her lips, squeezes her thighs together to stop the throbbing between them before she reaches a thumb out to wipe some lipstick still evident on toni’s jaw.

“come on…we need to see principal weatherbee.” she says hoarsely. toni exhales shakily before she smiles and holds her hand out for cheryl to take.

they’re both presentable, at least by riverdale high standards, and cheryl leads her girlfriend back out into the hallway, cheryl grinning widely as her fellow peers avert their gazes out of fear of toni’s threat.

god she loves having a southside serpent for a girlfriend.

she enters the office with a flourish, flipping her hair over her shoulder and almost whacking toni in the face with it as she moves to the front counter and rests her forearms against it with a raised eyebrow.

“i need to see principal weatherbee urgently.” she says airily to the receptionist, and she looks up at cheryl with wide eyes, perhaps surprised to see her within the walls of riverdale high once more before she picks up the phone and presses the button that puts her through to principal weatherbee.
“what is it?” cheryl hears him ask.

“uh...i have cheryl blossom here to see you.” the receptionist says in a small voice, and cheryl looks up to see the outline of principal weatherbee standing from his chair and making his way to the door of his office. it opens, and he stares at cheryl in complete and utter shock as she steps back from the front desk and makes her way over to him with a wide grin.

“no doubt, mumsie told you i’d moved to switzerland to join some boarding school?” she drawls, and principal weatherbee’s frown deepens as he nods slowly.

“yes, she did, miss blossom. which is exactly why i’m surprised to see you here in riverdale instead of in the swiss alps enjoying the cold weather.” he says dryly, and cheryl rolls her eyes and tosses her hair over her shoulder once again before crossing her arms over her chest.

“well, principal weatherbee, i’m here to inform you that my mother is nothing but a liar and a fiend. i was never in switzerland...instead she sent me off to some depraved hellhole, hoping to squash out my ‘deviant’ behavior. unluckily for her, i have friends more loyal and devoted to me than she’s ever been. i’ve come back, permanently this time, and am seeking emancipation from her. it hasn’t been granted yet, but within a few weeks, penelope blossom will no longer be my legal guardian. do with that information what you will.”

principal weatherbee is silent for a long time, his eyes wide with shock as he processes all of this information, and cheryl watches him impatiently before he finally blinks rapidly and clears his throat.

“i...uh, well...miss blossom, i’ll need to call your mother, regardless...without the papers that say she’s no longer your legal guardian, i can’t do much.” cheryl inhales sharply, but nods all the same.

it’s fine. she can handle it. she can handle her. she’s got this. it’s okay…

“like i said, do with that information what you will.” she says stiffly, and before principal weatherbee can say anything else, she turns on her heel, reaching a hand out to grip toni’s, but the southside serpent is staring at principal weatherbee angrily.

“didn’t you hear what she said? penelope blossom threw her into the worst hellhole possible, and you want to call that woman and tell her of cheryl’s whereabouts? don’t you realize you’re putting her in danger by doing that?” toni growls, taking a step toward the man with her fists clenched
“i’m legally required-.”

“to keep the students at this school safe from harm! you tell penelope that cheryl’s here, and you’re breaching that law big time!” she yells, and cheryl wants to stop her, but watching toni defend her so readily is such a fucking turn on-

“miss topaz, do you have evidence that penelope blossom did these things to cheryl?” principal weatherbee says airily, and toni’s eyes widen in shock before she scoffs in disbelief.

“What are you, a fucking lawyer now?!” she growls, and cheryl’s heart drops.

Okay, swearing at the principal, that’s probably not good-

“You are out of line, miss topaz!” principal weatherbee barks, and toni opens her mouth furiously before cheryl grips her elbow and pulls her back.

“It’s okay, t.t. don’t push it.” she whispers.

“cheryl, this is-.”

“i can handle it. i’ve got you, remember?” cheryl says softly with a smile, and toni’s expression softens for half a second before she looks at principal weatherbee angrily.

“fine.” she grumbles, and she takes cheryl’s hand in her own, dragging the redhead out of the office as cheryl watches her pink hair fly in an almost dreamlike state.

God, she’s amazing…ethereal, beautiful, perfection personified-

“There’s the two lovebirds we’ve been dying to see!” cheryl and toni turn to see veronica lodge and kevin keller watching them with a wide smile, veronica making her way over to them with an excited look in her eyes as she looks down at their intertwined hands.
“we’re finally engaging in pda, are we?” she teases with a raised eyebrow, and cheryl rolls her eyes.

“but of course, ronnie. if you and archie can get away with it, why can’t we?” veronica laughs before nodding, impressed.

“touche.” kevin chuckles.

“the whole school’s buzzing about cheryl blossom dating a southside serpent.” he says with a raised eyebrow, and toni rolls her eyes.

“i have a name…” she grumbles. cheryl reaches out, fingers scratching at the back of toni’s neck softly, and the action causes veronica’s eyes to widen as she spots the bruise on toni’s neck, a wide smirk lighting her face up as kevin shakes his head, completely unaware of the interaction.

“it’ll die down. people will move onto new gossip, and you two will be free to do all the gay pda you want.” he says cheerily, and cheryl raises an eyebrow before looking at toni with a smile.

“see? we’ll be just fine.” toni smiles, and kevin’s attention is taken away by something behind them, his eyes lighting up as he clears his throat and nods at them.

“ladies…” he walks past them, and cheryl watches him make his way over to sweet pea and fangs, his hand reaching out to grip fangs’s shoulder as fangs turns and smiles at him widely.

“They need to pull the trigger on that already.” veronica mumbles, and toni rolls her eyes before looking at cheryl.

“i’ll be back, okay?” she leans up, pressing a kiss to cheryl’s cheek before making her way over to sweet pea and fangs as well, and cheryl watches her go with a sigh before she feels a hand grip her bicep gently.

“I’m proud of you, cheryl.” veronica says softly. cheryl smiles at the raven haired girl as she leads them over to cheryl’s locker, a hand reaching up to touch veronica’s hand.
“thank you, ronnie.” she says gently. veronica smiles.

“of course. i’ve been wanting you and toni to happen for forever-.”

“not just for what you said. for everything…” cheryl comes to a stop at her locker and turns to face veronica with a grateful smile.

“toni told me how much you helped her in the plan to rescue me from the sisters, and you were there in that hellhole, searching the entire building and putting yourself at risk to save me…i can’t begin to thank you enough.” cheryl croaks out.

her relationship with veronica has always been strange, a constant on and off between true friendship and acquaintances, but at the end of the day…veronica lodge risked her goddamn life to save cheryl from that place, and she’s beginning to see more and more why archie andrews and veronica lodge are truly an endgame couple.

they both cared. so deeply and so wonderfully…

she owes her life to the both of them now.

veronica sighs, reaching out to rub her hand along cheryl’s arm sympathetically.

“of course, cheryl. i knew your mother was a monster, but when toni told me you were missing…i just knew she must’ve done something. toni airing her suspicions only confirmed it for me…i was happy that someone else saw it, too. that girl…she cares about you a lot, cheryl.” veronica says softly, looking behind them at the small gang, and cheryl turns to see kevin has left now, sweet pea, fangs and toni play fighting each other before sweet pea reaches out and ruffles the top of toni’s head with a grin.

“truly, veronica? i feel like the luckiest girl on earth to have her affection.” cheryl whispers. veronica smiles as cheryl turns back to face her.

“you deserve someone like her. after everything you’ve been through…you deserve a love like that.” she says firmly. cheryl bites down on her lower lip as she opens her locker, checking to make sure that toni isn’t coming over before she looks at veronica in hesitation.
she knows she can trust veronica, and really…she needs the girl talk. josie isn’t around, and veronica has definitely entered the stratosphere of best friend status…enough so that cheryl feels comfortable talking with her about this.

besides, if anyone will have good advice on relationships, it’s veronica lodge. the girl was practically married to archie at this point.

“we haven’t said it yet.” she says in a low voice. veronica frowns.

“said what?” she asks in confusion, and cheryl sighs.

“i love you.” cheryl mutters, and veronica grins.

“love you too, bombshell.” she teases, and cheryl rolls her eyes as veronica laughs and shakes her head.

“those things take time, cheryl. you’ll say it when you’re ready, and she will, too.” veronica says with a smile. cheryl exhales shakily with a nod.

“i know…i want to say it, but i just…keep stopping myself.” cheryl says, teeth worrying her cherry red bottom lip, and veronica sighs.

“i know the feeling…the first time archie said it to me, i froze.” veronica says thickly, and cheryl looks at her in surprise.

“really?” she asks, and veronica purses her lips.

“yeah…but i got there, eventually. you will, too. like i said, give it time.” veronica says with a smile, and cheryl nods slowly as she retrieves her english book from her locker.

“there’s something else…” she mumbles, and veronica leans against the lockers, crossing her arms over her chest with a frown as she waits patiently. cheryl fiddles with the ends of her hair, looks back
to make sure the coast is clear once more before looking at veronica worriedly.

“we haven’t…taken that step yet.” she says evasively, and veronica’s eyes widen.

“really? wow, i would’ve thought you two had jumped each other’s bones ages ago.” she says in surprise, and cheryl rolls her eyes.

“why, because we’re two girls?” she deadpans, and veronica laughs.

“no, because the sexual tension between you two is crazy. what’s stopping you?” she asks, and cheryl throws her arms up into the air in exasperation.

“honestly? everyone keeps interrupting us!” she growls, and veronica laughs loudly as cheryl bites back a smile before licking her lips.

fuck it. she needs help with this…cheryl’s never had a relationship quite like her one with toni before and she needs help.

“and also…and you can’t repeat this to anyone or i will literally end your life, veronica lodge.” she threatens, and veronica raises an eyebrow and nods.

“message received.” she says simply. cheryl sighs.

“i haven’t…” cheryl trails off, and veronica’s eyes widen once more before she glances around to see if anyone’s listening, leaning in closer to cheryl in shock.

“you’ve never had sex before?” she whispers. cheryl rolls her eyes.

“no, i haven’t. no one in this school is halfway decent to pop the cherry of cheryl bombshell, veronica. that is, until toni came along.” she mutters, and veronica blinks rapidly before she shakes her head and clears her throat.

“wow, there is…so much about you that people get wrong, cheryl.” she says blankly, and cheryl
“Well, everyone seems to think I’m a monster with no emotions, it’s no surprise they all think I’m a sex fiend, too.” she drawls, and Veronica sighs before chewing on her bottom lip.

“The reputation you put out is what makes them think that, Cheryl.” she says softly. Cheryl crosses her arms over her chest.

“I enjoy my reputation as a bitch, thank you, Ronnie. It means no one screws with me, unless they want a firestorm of Blossom rage.” she says, flashing a wicked grin. Veronica rolls her eyes.

“Alright, alright, everyone else can think want they want, but honestly, Cheryl? That’s something between you and Toni. The sex thing I mean…” she says, and Cheryl frowns.

“I know that, I’m just…nervous. It’s obviously different with a girl, and I’m scared I’ll screw it up somehow.” she whispers. Veronica chuckles, and she licks her lips before gripping Cheryl’s hand tightly.

“I don’t think that’s something you need to worry about, Cheryl. Toni will probably show you the ropes, and honestly? That girl is so deep in love with you, I’m pretty sure that even if you do screw it up, she’ll find it cute instead of off-putting.” Cheryl nods slowly, trying to process Veronica’s words and make them stick into her brain, because she knows the raven haired girl is right…

Veronica drops her hand, reaching up to squeeze her shoulder tightly.

“Go at your own pace, okay? At the end of the day…you’re losing your virginity to someone who really cares about you, and as far as I’m concerned, you’ve won the jackpot with Toni Topaz. I can tell you from now, I wish I’d lost mine to a girl like her instead of a guy from New York that I don’t even talk to anymore.” Veronica says, cringing slightly as she suddenly shivers, and Cheryl blinks in shock.

“Veronica Lodge, are you trying to tell me you swing both ways?” she says in surprise, and Veronica grins widely.

“I didn’t kiss Betty Cooper during out Vixens tryout for shock value, Cheryl. I thought she was cute.” Veronica says with a shrug, and Cheryl laughs a little in disbelief, but before she can say anything more, a warm hand intertwines with her own.
“what are we talking about?” toni asks with a smile, and veronica grins.

“shopping. oh, there’s archie! see you around, bombshell!” veronica says with a wink before she’s skipping off down the hallway and into the arms of archie andrews, whose face lights up as veronica jumps into his arms and plants a kiss to his cheek.

“were you really talking about shopping?” toni says with a raised eyebrow, and cheryl grins just as the bell rings above them loudly, signaling the start of the school day.

“hmm, saved by the bell. see you after first period, t.t.” she leans in, pressing a kiss to the pink haired girl’s cheek before she grabs her books and makes her way to class, a grin still etched on her face.

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toni’s sitting in the student lounge when it happens.

cheryl blossom walks into the student lounge with the rage of a thousand storms, her gaze boring into kevin keller’s before she makes her way over to him and stands in front of him with her arms crossed over her chest.

“How could you not tell me?” she yells, and toni jumps up from the couch, pushing fangs’s legs off her lap and making her way over to cheryl and kevin in shock.

what the hell is going on?

“whoa, cheryl-.”

“not now, t.t! explain yourself!” cheryl snaps at kevin, who is looking up at her with wide eyes filled with confusion.

“cheryl, i-.”
“carrie the musical?! you’ve already cast midge klump as carrie! midge klump!?!” cheryl shrieks, looking all the part of a woman gone mad, and toni winces.

yeah, she kind of had a feeling cheryl wouldn’t be happy about this…oh god, this is not good, this is very not good…

kevin suddenly sighs, understanding crossing his features as he stands up.

“cheryl, i held auditions last week-.”

“when i was being tortured in a machiavellian estate, perfect!” she scoffs, throwing her hands up into the air, and kevin pinches the bridge of his nose.

“if i had known that, i would’ve held off, but-.”

“i was born to play carrie white, kevin! that girl’s life is practically my own!” cheryl growls, and toni wraps an arm around her shoulders in an effort to calm her down, a weak smile on her lips.

“cher, baby-.”

“don’t ‘baby’ me, toni! i’m annoyed, and i don’t want you to be a victim to my rage!” she says firmly, raising a finger to silence the pink haired serpent, and toni lets her go, raising her hands in surrender as she looks at kevin sympathetically.

“there’s nothing i can do, cheryl! our first rehearsal is today and i can’t go recasting now! i’m sorry!” kevin says firmly, crossing his arms over his chest with finality, and cheryl bares her teeth and steps closer to him until she’s inches away from his face.

“if i had half the power carrie white does, you’d be doing cartwheels on your head down the hallway, keller!” she hisses, and kevin turns pale as toni grabs cheryl’s shoulders and drags her away forcefully.

“okay, time to cool down-.”
“toni, let go of me-.”

“well, well…i see you’re still up to your deviant ways.”

toni’s heart fucking falls.

no. no fucking way, no absolute fucking way…

cheryl freezes in her arms, a look of complete and utter dread coming over her features, and it isn’t long before she’s shaking, trembling as tears well in her eyes as they close softly.

no. no, this is not happening, toni won’t fucking allow it-

toni bares her teeth and pulls cheryl behind her immediately, turning to face the woman who has caused her girlfriend nothing but pain and torture.

penelope blossom is standing at the doorway to the student lounge, a smirk playing on her lips as she walks forward slowly.

“imagine my surprise when principal weatherbee called me this morning to tell me my daughter had returned to school…” penelope says with a sigh, and toni makes sure cheryl hasn’t turned around yet, her hand reaching behind her to clasp cheryl’s tightly.

she doesn’t want to give penelope the goddamn satisfaction of looking cheryl in the eyes.

“last i remember, she was in the swiss alps, at a boarding school.” penelope says, coming to a stop in front of toni, and she bares her teeth, her fist clenching as she goes to jump forward to rip this woman’s goddamn head from her neck, but two hands grip her shoulders and hold her back.

sweet pea and fangs, right by hers and cheryl’s sides, blocking the redhaired girl from view completely, both their faces contorted in complete and utter rage.
“you know good and goddamn well she was never in the swiss alps.” sweet pea growls, and penelope looks up at him with a raised eyebrow.

“and how would you know that?” she drawls, and toni is being physically restrained at this point by both boys as she glares at the woman before her with murder blazing in her eyes.

she wants to fucking rip her apart.

“because we’re the ones who fucking rescued her, you psychotic bitch!” toni spits out, fangs pulling her back as cheryl’s grip on her hand tightens to the point of pain.

how dare she? how fucking dare she come here, show her face anywhere close to an area cheryl was in? toni’s going to kill her, break her face in half and stomp her until she’s nothing but a bleeding mess of broken bones and torn of limbs-

“my, my, you kiss your mother with that mouth, you delinquent snake?” penelope hisses, and fangs has to physically grab toni and swing her around away from penelope as she launches at her, a growl tearing from her lips-

“what the hell are you doing here?” toni hears him before she sees him, and when she finally manages to wrestle herself out of fangs’s bearlike hold on her, she glances over her shoulder to see jughead jones at the doorway with betty cooper and veronica lodge by his side, archie andrews trailing behind them as well as the core four make their way in the student lounge.

veronica looks ready to commit murder, her eyes boring into the back of penelope’s head before they all come to stand in front of the blossom woman, who watches all of cheryl’s friends protect her with a scoff.

“cheryl is my daughter, and i’ll do with her as i please. now all of you move, before i have you moved.” she says sternly, and jughead crosses his arms over his chest with a grin.

“sorry. no can do. cheryl’s under serpent protection now, which means if you wanna move us…you have to survive the snake pit. trust me, considering how much the serpents don’t exactly like you…i don’t like your chances of survival.” he says firmly, penelope glares at him with the fire of a thousand suns.
“how dare you?” she hisses, stepping forward, and that’s when betty moves forward as well, a similar blossom glare shining in her eyes as she looks her relative dead in the face.

“you’re not getting anywhere near cheryl, penelope. it’s not only serpent protection she’s got on her side.” she hisses, and veronica steps forward too, gripping betty’s hand and looking penelope in the eyes.

“i saw that place, that goddamn seventh layer of hell you threw your daughter into. you’re the lowest of lows, miss blossom. cheryl deserves ten times better than you, which is exactly why you’ll never talk to her again.” she says firmly, and penelope laughs derisively.

“and what? the lodges will make sure that doesn’t happen? what are you going to do, veronica? have your father order a hit on me?” she says with a scoff, and veronica’s jaw clenches, but toni hears a whimper beside her, and she turns to see cheryl crying, tears falling down her cheeks as toni blinks back her own and moves in front of her, her hands reaching up to cradle cheryl’s face in her hands softly.

“she’s not getting to you, cheryl. over our dead bodies.” she whispers softly, and cheryl purses her lips and nods, leaning forward to rest her forehead against toni’s lightly.

“the truth is, miss blossom…you’re not getting through to cheryl. so i suggest you turn around now and leave.” archie says firmly, crossing his arms over his chest as sweet pea and fangs crack their knuckles threateningly. jughead nods toward the entrance.

“you know the way out.” he says simply. penelope stares at each of them for a long time, her high heeled foot tapping on the ground before she smirks and looks over all their heads toward her daughter.

“cheryl, dear…i simply came here to tell you that nana rose isn’t doing so well…it’s in your best interest to come and visit her soon before she…withers away.”

cheryl freezes against her, and toni’s pretty sure her heart stops beating altogether.

oh god…oh god, nana rose, what were they doing to nana rose? she was stuck in that place with no one but claudius and penelope watching her, fuck, fuck, FUCK-
“toni…” cheryl whimpers, and toni wipes away her tears and shakes her head.

“she’s lying, she’s trying to get you back into the house, cheryl-.” toni starts, but cheryl is ripping herself out of toni’s grasp and moving around the others before toni can grab her.

no, no, no, no-

“what are you doing to her, you vile woman?!?” cheryl screams, running forward with her fists raised, and sweet pea wraps his arms around her chest and pulls her back, cheryl sobbing and fighting against him as penelope watches her break down triumphantly.

“perhaps it’s your absence that’s made her so gaunt, cheryl. i’m sure upon your return, she’ll brighten up once more.” penelope adjusts her hair with a wicked grin before her eyes meet toni’s, and the victory shining in her eyes as toni’s knees shaking with defeat.

this can’t be happening, this can’t be fucking happening…

“say hello to your father for me, betty, dear.” penelope says with a smile, and before anyone can say anything else, she turns on her heel and makes her way out of the student lounge, her victory evident in the air in cheryl’s torn cries as the redhead sags against sweet pea, turning in his arms and burying her head into his chest as he brushes her hair back and holds her with sadness heavy in his eyes.

this can’t be happening…
an update so soon, yay! i had a lot of time to write the last few days, so i hope you guys enjoy this one and hopefully i'll have another one out soon! i'm actually working on another fic as well that i'll hopefully be uploading when 'the miseducation of cheryl blossom' is done, but i don't know if i want to make it a multi chapter fic or a really long oneshot...what do you guys think? sound of in the comments below with what you think of this chapter and if you'd prefer a multi chapter fic or a long oneshot!

“cheryl! cheryl, stop!”

toni chases after the redhead as fast as she can, the boots the redhead is wearing clapping on the ground as she rushes down the hallway to the gym, ignoring all the looks of shock as toni does the same.

this isn’t good, god this can’t be fucking happening-

“cheryl!” toni can hear veronica and betty running after her, loud footsteps pounding, and she knows the whole fucking gang is running after cheryl, but she knows it’s only going to overwhelm her-

cheryl bursts through the doors of the gym with panting breaths and sobs, and toni lets her own tears fall as cheryl finally drops to her hands and knees in front of the bleachers, gasping for air desperately.

“cheryl!” toni falls down right beside her, the others coming to a stop at the door as toni reaches out and grasps the girl tightly. cheryl looks up at her with a mess of mascara falling down her cheeks, the black ink staining her skin as she splutters wildly.

toni’s seen this before, suffered this before-

“baby, you’re having a panic attack, please, i need you to breathe!” toni says anxiously, her hands gripping cheryl’s face gently as cheryl shakes her head with a loud sob.
“i c-c-can’t, t-toni!” she gasps out, and veronica rushes forward before toni waves her off desperately, veronica coming to an abrupt stop and looking at her anxiously.

she can do this, cheryl can do this, toni can do this-

“you can! you can, look, watch me! cheryl, watch me!” toni says desperately, and cheryl takes in a shuddering breath, looking up at toni with a trembling bottom lip as toni inhales deeply before exhaling.

“you can do it, come on, baby, watch me, in…out…” toni repeats the action, cheryl gulping down her tears as she inhales shakily before exhaling, and toni nods encouragingly.

“there you go, in…out…” toni breathes with her, cheryl imitating the pink haired serpent as her whole body trembles, and toni looks up at veronica, giving her a small nod as the raven haired girl sighs and moves back to the others, ushering them out quickly. toni can see the worried look on all their faces, but she focuses on cheryl as the door shuts behind them. toni moves behind the redhaired girl, resting on her knees and wrapping her arms around cheryl’s chest as she brushes her hair back from her face.

“lean into me, keep breathing…” toni says softly, and cheryl’s back sags against her chest, her head falling onto toni’s shoulder as she closes her eyes and continues, her breathing getting steadier and steadier as she grips toni’s hand like a lifeline, the other flying up to grip the necklace toni gave her for christmas...

she can do this, toni can do this...

“there you go, bombshell, you’ve got it…” toni whispers softly, her heart pounding against her chest wildly, and cheryl whimpers as toni presses a kiss to her hair.

“i’m so sorry, cheryl…” she croaks out.

god, what the fuck just happened? everything was going so well, cheryl was finally getting back to herself and now this…now fucking this...

what was penelope doing to nana rose? what was that poor little old lady going through in cheryl’s absence? toni should’ve barged through the fucking doors of thistlehouse as soon as she’d saved
cheryl to grab her, too, save her from that wench’s grasp…

cheryl chokes on another sob, but she breathes in once again, exhaling deeply as toni adjusts herself until her legs are on either side of cheryl, the girl planted firmly in her lap.

“keep breathing…” toni rubs her back gently, gathering cheryl’s hair in one hand before moving it to one side as she rests her chin on cheryl’s shoulder, and her girlfriend sighs shakily as she leans into toni’s touch, her breathing now steady and clear.

it’s silent for a few moments, toni continuously rubbing cheryl’s back as the girl breathes in deeply, and she finally lets out one last exhale before she straightens her back and wipes her black stained tears away from her cheeks swiftly.

“i have to go back to thistlehouse, toni.” cheryl whispers. toni freezes against her.

what? wait, what, no, no fucking way, no fucking way, is she fucking crazy, that’s not happening-

“no. absolutely not.” toni says firmly, and cheryl sighs before turning in her arms to face her, a hand lifting to cradle toni’s cheek gently.

“i won’t let nana rose suffer at their hands, not after everything she did to help you get to me, toni. she’s the only blossom i have left, i won’t lose her because of cowardice on my part.” toni clenches her jaw.

no, this isn’t how this goes, she’s not going back there, over toni’s fucking dead body-

“cheryl, staying away from someone who’s abused you your entire fucking life is not cowardice, it’s strength! i know you’re scared and you’re worried, but you can’t go back there-.”

“i have to save nana rose from their clutches, toni. you know i have to.” cheryl whispers desperately. toni opens her mouth, but closes it shut as her shoulders sag in defeat.

because she has no rebuttal. nothing to say, because god, cheryl is right. nana rose needs them and they can’t abandon that little old lady…cheryl loves her so much, and toni would be lying if she said
she hadn’t grown fond of the matriarch of the blossom family, too. that woman was the only blossom other than jason who ever showed any fucking care for cheryl…toni will be damned if she loses the only true family she has left.

but she can’t go back to thistlehouse. god only fucking knows what penelope will do to her, toni’s not losing her again, no way-

“i’ll come with you. sweet pea and fangs-.”

“are one arrest away from juvie, and i’m not letting you get thrown back in there, either. this is something i have to do on my own, t.t.” cheryl whispers.

no, this isn’t right, she can’t want this…

“cheryl, if you go back there and she takes you away again, i…i won’t be able to handle it. i can’t go through that again, do you understand me?” toni says hoarsely, her arms wrapping around cheryl’s waist and pulling her closer as if she’s frightened that penelope will descend from the sky like the fucking demon she is to take cheryl away from her right now.

those five days…toni can’t relive them. they’re already burned into her brain like a branding iron marking her skin, the pain and the anguish and the pure terror over just not knowing…

cheryl leans into her touch, her forehead resting against toni’s as they breathe each other in for a few moments.

i can’t lose her, not again, i can’t, she’s everything…

“toni…” cheryl whispers, and the pink haired girl pulls away, looking into her eyes as tears fall down them, and toni knows she’s crying as well, can see cheryl’s face become a blur as they spill over…

“cheryl, you can’t go back to thistlehouse. please…” she whispers hoarsely. cheryl sighs against her before leaning in to press a kiss to the corner of her mouth.

“i won’t leave nana rose to suffer at penelope blossom’s hands, i refuse to. please, trust me…” toni
wipes away her tears with a scoff and a nod.

“i do trust you, i don’t trust her!” she growls, and cheryl smiles at her softly before she licks her lips and brushes the stray tears that toni missed away.

“i’m gonna be okay, toni…” she whispers. toni purses her lips.

this can’t be how this ends. cheryl was finally on the fucking verge of getting herself emancipated, was on her way to healing from everything that had happened, she can’t just go back there…

nana rose…god, fuck, why did toni care so much about that little old lady?

“cheryl…if you do this…god, if you do this you have to promise me you’ll fight her with everything you fucking have, you hear me? if she tries to take you away again, you sink your claws in and you rip her to shreds if you have to. cheryl, you have to show your mother who’s in charge.” toni says firmly before gripping cheryl’s chin between her fingers gently. the redhead sighs against her.

“i don’t know if i can anymore, toni…i’m not the same girl who burned down thornhill.” she whispers. toni tightens her hold.

“sure you are. even carrie white could stand up to her mother, cheryl. so can you.” toni says with an encouraging smile, and cheryl suddenly frowns thoughtfully, her eyes becoming distant as a small smile begins to play on her lips.

“carrie white…” she whispers, and toni can practically see the cogs turning in her mind, but she brushes it away and grips cheryl’s face in her hands.

she needs her to promise her that she won’t let penelope take her away again.

“cheryl, promise me.” toni says, her tone slightly demanding, and the red haired blossom girl smiles and leans in to press a kiss to her lips.

“i promise, t.t.” she whispers against her lips. toni closes her eyes, resting her forehead against cheryl’s as she tries her best to not panic.
cheryl was a grown woman, toni couldn’t force her to stay. and at the end of the day, she was right…they couldn’t leave nana rose behind to suffer. but god, toni doesn’t like this one bit…she wishes she could convince cheryl to let her come, too, but she knows this needs to be something cheryl does on her own…

fuck, why was this so hard?

“god, i can’t believe i’m missing out on playing carrie white, it’s a travesty of the highest form. i was born for that role, t.t.” cheryl sighs wistfully, pulling away from her girlfriend slowly. toni winces.

uh, yeah…fuck, how the hell is she going to explain this to cheryl?

“uh, about that…” toni trails off sheepishly, and cheryl raises an eyebrow, watching her with careful and observant eyes that have toni looking away from her guiltily.

“what?” toni winces again.

“i was gonna ask you before this whole fucking thing happened if you’d be okay going to pop’s with sweet pea and fangs this afternoon to wait for me, because i…kind of have a thing.” she finishes lamely. cheryl blinks rapidly, not quite processing what toni is saying before her eyes suddenly widen.

“what thing, antoinette topaz?” she says through clenched teeth, understanding crossing her features, and toni sighs.

oh, her full name, she’s in for it…

“rehearsal. for carrie the musical.” she mumbles pathetically. cheryl’s expression turns stony.

“really?” she says, her voice a little higher than usual as she crosses her arms over her chest, and toni grips her hands tightly.
“i’m sorry, cher, but kevin asked me the other day when he came over with veronica and the others, he told me he needs more supporting characters on the show for the ensemble, and i figured it’d help me look good considering my attendance is so shit. he was going to ask you, too, but he figured you had enough going on…besides, i can’t exactly see you agreeing to be a side character when we both know you deserve the spotlight.” toni says with a sheepish grin, trying to earn herself some brownie points, and cheryl scoffs.

“nice try, t.t.” she huffs. toni chuckles, and cheryl looks at her in wonder.

“i didn’t even know you could sing, toni.” she says softly. toni shrugs.

it’s not something she’s exactly passionate about, but she can carry a tune…

“i’m no beyoncé, but i can harmonize. cheryl…if it bothers you, i can drop out of it, i can quit if you want me to.” she says softly, and cheryl sighs and shakes her head.

“no, toni, i’m not going to be that girlfriend who orders you to quit something that might help you just because i don’t like it. besides…if i can’t be on that stage as carrie white, then some talent needs to be up there.” she says with a smile, and toni bites back a sigh of relief as she turns cheryl’s head to face her, leaning in to press a soft kiss to her lips.

“you have to sing for me, t.t. i don’t want the first time i hear you to be on stage with a cacophonous disaster of an ensemble singing along with you.” cheryl murmurs against her lips, and toni nuzzles her forehead against cheryl’s as she nods slowly.

“i’ll sing you to sleep tonight if you want.” she whispers. cheryl smiles against her.

“i’d love that very much, toni.” she says softly. toni pulls back, her thumb brushing the last of the mascara stains on cheryl’s cheeks away as she observes her girlfriend for a few moments.

there’s a sadness, a worry for nana rose growing in those chocolate brown eyes, but the smile etched on her face is genuine…

“i’m sorry, cheryl…about your mom coming here, god, i wanted to hurt her so badly, but i knew it wouldn’t fix things, it would just make them worse…i’m just so sorry.” toni says hoarsely. tears swarm in cheryl’s eyes once more, but she blinks them away easily with a sigh.
“i am, too…” she whispers back. toni nuzzles into her once more, pressing a kiss to her jaw before she sighs and moves up to kiss her. cheryl responds eagerly, sucking toni’s bottom lip between her full ones before the pink haired girl pulls away.

“feeling better?” she whispers, looking into cheryl’s eyes to ascertain the truth. cheryl nods slowly, a smile lighting up her face as toni runs her fingers through red hair.

“good…cheryl, i’m still not okay with you going to thistlehouse. there has to be another way.” she says firmly, and cheryl stares at her in hesitation before she licks her lips.

“i won’t go back, not tonight at least. i…have a plan.” she says slowly. toni raises an eyebrow.

“a plan?” she asks in surprise. cheryl nods, a smile slowly appearing on her face.

“i may not be in the musical, but i’ll have my carrie white moment on opening night, t.t. penelope blossom has no idea of the firestorm i have planned for her…” toni feels her heart pound against her chest with excitement, and she grips cheryl’s hands in her own, a grin spreading across her features.

“okay, please tell this plan involves punching her in the face, because if so, i want in.” she says eagerly, and cheryl laughs, the sound music to toni’s ears as she squeezes the pink haired serpent’s hands tightly.

“not quite…i having something much more sinister in mind…”

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“any requests, cheryl?” toni’s voice echoes out from the kitchen of f.p’s trailer, and cheryl raises her mug of hot cocoa to her lips as she frowns thoughtfully.

she’s not quite sure if there are any songs she’d like toni to sing for her. she’d rather toni choose something that makes her comfortable. she just wants the pink haired serpent to sing for her, the song choice didn’t matter.
cheryl’s been looking forward to it all day, a welcome distraction from all the horror that had occurred in the student lounge at school today. cheryl is worried, more worried than she’s ever been in her entire life. nana rose was suffering, and she was helpless to do anything about it. she knows she can’t go back to thistlehouse now; penelope would likely be expecting her. what if she had the nuns waiting and ready to strike the second cheryl walked through the door?

no, cheryl had to wait…wait a few days before attacking. cheryl doesn’t like the idea of having to wait until saturday to enact her revenge on penelope, but the musical will play a perfect alibi should her mother choose to go to sheriff keller about what cheryl has planned. she’s positive toni will back her up as well, and there’s a certain beautiful irony in cheryl having her carrie white moment the same night midge klump is stumbling around the stage playing the titular character of stephen king’s masterpiece. cheryl had gone to the rehearsal this afternoon to support toni (well, mostly support toni…and also watch the musical fail smugly without her at the head of it) and watching midge flop around and sing off key had been way too much for cheryl to handle.

she lasted about ten minutes before she’d told toni she would be at pop’s waiting for her with sweet pea and fangs, toni watching her leave with a knowing grin on her face.

cheryl’s worried that nana rose won’t be able to hold on until then, but she keeps reassuring herself that nana blossom was not a woman to be trifled with, and if anyone could outlast penelope blossom, it was her. after all, the women shoved her down a flight of stairs and she was still alive…

so, cheryl will wait…nana rose was strong, she wasn’t going anywhere, and someone has to do carrie white justice on the night her musical is set to light up riverdale high. from what she’d seen at rehearsal, it definitely wasn’t going to be jingle jangle addicted trash like midge klump…

“baby?” cheryl looks up, pulled out of her thoughts at the sound of toni’s voice, and the pink haired serpent sits down on the couch with a smile, a cup of tea in her hands as she leans in and presses a kiss to cheryl’s cheek.

“you didn’t answer my question…” toni says softly, and cheryl frowns and shakes her head.

“whatever song you want to sing, t.t. i just wanna hear you.” she smiles. toni chuckles, and she frowns thoughtfully for a few moments before she reaches into her back pocket and pulls out her phone.

“let me see if i can find a song i like…” she murmurs. cheryl rolls her eyes, but drains the last of her hot cocoa before resting the mug on the side of the couch and curling up into toni’s lap. she rests her head on toni’s thighs, a hand reaching out and curling around toni’s knees as the pink haired girl sets
her mug of tea down and runs her fingers through cheryl’s hair while scrolling through her phone with the other.

it’s quiet while toni looks through her music playlist for a song, and cheryl finds her eyelids drooping until she hears toni make a triumphant noise, the sound of her phone being locked echoing in cheryl’s ears.

“i got one.” toni says simply. cheryl smiles, and she goes to sit up, but toni suddenly rests a hand on her shoulder and pushes her back down into her lap.

“no, stay. i’ll chicken out if you watch me.” toni says with a chuckle. cheryl rolls her eyes, but goes back into position facing away from toni as the girl clears her throat and sits up straight.

a few moments pass, but cheryl waits patiently. she knows it’s not easy, singing in front of people-

“i like my girls just like i like my honey sweet, a little selfish...
i like my women like i like my money green, a little jealous…”

cheryl finds herself gasping from the first word that exits toni’s mouth, a shiver running up her spine as she tightens her hold on toni’s knees in an effort to stop herself from turning to face her girlfriend.

her voice is angelic. breathtaking and beautiful and a million other perfect words that cheryl is finding hard to say because she’s at a loss for words or thoughts, everything is just toni and this beautiful voice of hers…

wow. just…wow.

“cause i’m a beautiful wreck
a colorful mess, but i’m funny…
oh i’m a heartbreak vet
with a stone cold neck, yeah, i’m charming…”

tears are springing to cheryl’s eyes, and she has no idea why, but toni doesn’t realize, is still brushing her fingers through cheryl’s hair as the girl buries her head into toni’s lap.
cheryl whines, and she can’t help herself. she sits up, moves her body so quickly that toni doesn’t even have time to stare in shock before cheryl’s straddling her lap and kissing her desperately, her tears falling and splashing onto toni’s face as toni groans against her, hands gripping and digging into her thighs-

“cheryl, you’re crying…” toni whispers against her lips, and cheryl shakes her head, smiling as she kisses the pink haired serpent again.

“your voice is so beautiful, antoinette.” cheryl says hoarsely. toni chuckles softly.

“thank you. do you want me to keep singing?” she asks, pulling away and reaching a hand up to tuck a lock of hair behind cheryl’s ear. cheryl licks her lips and leans in to kiss her again.

“god, yes. i want you to never stop singing.” she whispers. toni smiles, and cheryl begins pressing kisses to her jaw as toni clears her throat and continues singing.

“is it love, all we need? is it love?”

cheryl can feel the vibration of toni’s voice box against her lips as she presses kisses to her neck, over the bruise she gave her just this afternoon as she contemplates giving her girlfriend a matching one on the other side…

“to be the same prophecy…”

cheryl pulls back, her eyes searching toni’s as the girl swallows nervously and looks up into cheryl’s eyes as well…
“is it love?”

she sings barely above a whisper, her voice shaking slightly, and cheryl’s lips part, a soft gasp escaping her as she hesitates before she leans in and kisses toni softly, but before the pink haired girl can really begin to respond, cheryl pulls away, their noses touching as she looks toni in the eyes. toni’s breath hitches beneath her body, and she closes her eyes, swallowing loudly once again before she licks her lips and shakes her head, leaning it forward to rest her forehead against cheryl’s with a sorrowful sigh.

“cheryl…”

she’s saying it before she can stop herself, like verbal vomit she can’t contain, but god, she’s never meant these words more as she looks deep into toni’s eyes…

and says it.

“i love you, antoinette topaz.”

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toni’s heart stops beating.

a shiver runs up her spine, and the words keep playing over in her mind like a broken record player, cheryl’s voice soft and smooth as those words echo in a beautiful symphony that toni wants to keep replaying for the rest of her life.

“i love you, antoinette topaz.”

she has to say it back. she has to. there’s never been any doubt in her fucking mind that she feels the same way because she does, god, she does, but…

“we love you, toni! be a good girl for grandpa and uncle jake, okay?”
“okay, ma! i love you, too!”

toni whimpers, images of twisted metal and broken bodies filling her mind-

“cheryl, i…” toni chokes on the words, her voice box closing on her before she can get them out, and she swallows the lump in her throat as cheryl suddenly pulls away and looks at her in despair and panic.

“i…i’m sorry, i shouldn’t of-.”

“no! no, no, no, i…fuck, i want to, cheryl, i want to say it back because i do, god, i do, i just…” toni can’t even fucking talk, her tongue heavy in her mouth as she tries to breathe in deeply, and she’s on the verge of her own fucking panic attack as cheryl watches her patiently, still sitting in her lap with tears in her eyes and toni fucking hates herself because she knows cheryl is upset that she isn’t fucking saying it back…

what if she says those words to cheryl blossom right now and she meets the same fate as the last person she said them to? maybe not today, but somewhere down the line, with a psychotic mother who’s out for her blood, anything could fucking happen, and toni won’t curse her with that, she won’t-

“toni, what is it?” cheryl whispers. toni’s bottom lip trembles, and she looks up at cheryl in despair, her hands gripping the small of cheryl’s back and pulling her closer, because she needs to do something to show she feels the same way, something to replace those three fucking words she dreads so much-

“i want to say it, cheryl, because i do, i need you to know that. please, know that. i do, i…fuck!” toni lets her tears fall, and cheryl is watching her in surprise, perhaps not expecting this kind of reaction as toni presses the palm of her hands into her eyes to stop herself from crying before she looks up at the red haired blossom girl in a daze.

“the last time i said that to someone, it was my mom. and three hours later, she was dead.” she croaks out. cheryl’s eyes widen, her nails digging into toni’s arms, and the pink haired serpent shakes her head.

“if i say it to you…i won’t let that happen to you, i c-can’t lose you like i l-lost her.” she’s losing it, she’s losing it, fuck, fuck, fuck-
“oh god, toni! no, babe, no…” cheryl’s voice is soft as she wraps her arms around toni’s shoulders and pulls her into her, hugging the girl to her body tightly as her own body shakes with sadness and grief, and toni is sobbing against her shoulder openly, not a single care left for appearing weak or vulnerable as cheryl brushes her hair back and presses gentle kisses to her neck.

“toni, you don’t have to say it back, okay? it’s okay…” cheryl coos softly, rubbing her back consolingly, and toni shakes her head and tries to pull away, but cheryl’s grip is vicelike.

“i d-don’t want you to think i d-don’t feel the same-.”

“i know you do now, you’ve told me, it’s okay! shh…you don’t have to say it back.” cheryl whispers in her ear. but she’s not getting it, she’s not, toni wants to say it…

“i w-want to s-say it-.”

“shh…i know, t.t. i understand, god, i do…” cheryl pulls back and presses a finger against toni’s lips to silence her, and the girl swallows thickly, tears still falling down her face before cheryl cradles her face and brushes her tears away with the pads of her thumbs, sorrow heavy in her eyes.

“the last person i said those words to was jason, and he ended up dead, too. so i understand, toni. but you don’t have to be upset. you’ll say it one day, when you’re ready. but not today, t.t.” toni whimpers softly, and god, she will never be this lucky, not for the rest of her life, to have someone who knows what to say…what to do, how to feel, how to make her feel…

she loves her. god, she does, with everything in her, and one day, she will say it, will get over this irrational fear, but right now…

“it’s okay…i just, i couldn’t keep it in any longer, i had to tell you.” cheryl murmurs, and toni smiles, her bottom lip trembling. cheryl smiles softly before she leans in and kisses toni passionately, her fingers threading through pink hair as toni bites down on her bottom lip gently.

it gets heated way too quickly, toni’s hands gripping the blossom girl’s waist before she lifts her up and lays her to rest on the couch, toni’s body in between cheryl’s legs as she squeezes the pink haired serpent between her strong thighs, pulling her up closer with a heady gasp-
“god, cheryl…” toni breathes against her lips, moving them down to cheryl’s jaw before she sucks in the skin covering cheryl’s pulse between her teeth, and cheryl’s nails dig into toni’s back as she whines, her back arching off the couch as her thighs squeeze toni’s midsection once more.

“toni, please-.”

toni cuts her off with another deep kiss, cheryl moaning against her as toni’s hands move under her shirt, thumbs brushing over the creamy white skin that covers her ribs, and toni’s whole body is shaking with excitement as her fingers fiddle with the hem of cheryl’s shirt-

a phone goes off, echoing loudly in the trailer, and toni growls with frustration and goes to pull away, but cheryl wraps a hand around the back of her neck and pulls her back down harshly.

“they’ll call back!” she hisses, kissing toni deeply as she bites down on the pink haired girl’s bottom lip desperately, and toni ignores the ringing phone as she kisses her back, cheryl’s hands now moving to grip the bottom of toni’s shirt as she pulls it up and over toni’s head with ease.

toni lets her hair fall back around her face with a huff, and cheryl looks up at her with wide eyes that roam downwards, her lips parted in a soft gasp as her fingers touch the newly exposed skin of toni’s stomach. her red nails contrast heavily with toni’s dark skin, and she finds herself shivering as the phone stops ringing, cheryl biting down on her lip before she sits up and lets toni straddle her lap.

“god, you’re so beautiful, toni…” she whispers, snaking a hand into toni’s hair before pressing a kiss to the bruise on her neck, and toni sighs against the redhead happily, her heart pounding against her chest as cheryl moves further down, lips sucking on her collarbone as her fingers fiddle with the back of her bra-

the phone rings again.

“COME ON!”

whoever is fucking calling her is going to suffer a painful fucking death-

cheryl sighs as she pulls away from toni and looks up at her with a raised eyebrow.
“it might be important.” she murmurs. toni sighs, but moves her legs off cheryl with a mournful groan before making her way to the coffee table. it’s her phone that’s lighting up, sweet pea’s name at the top of the phone, and she glares at it murderously before answering it.

“WHAT?!” she growls.

“hello to you, too. get to the wyrm right now, and bring cheryl with you. f.p said it’s okay. emergency serpent meeting.” sweet pea says gruffly. toni clenches her teeth.

what the fuck for? emergency serpent meeting? it’s never something good, but does it need to be right fucking now-

“right now?” she hisses.

“yeah right now! get your ass down here, tiny!” sweet pea barks, and he ends the call before toni can say anything else, a growl of anger escaping the pink haired girl as she resists the urge to throw her phone across the room.

“What’s wrong?” cheryl asks breathlessly, and toni watches her stand up, wiping her lips with her fingers as she does before she comes to a stop in front of her girlfriend.

“emergency serpent meeting at the wyrm. i’m sorry, cher.” she whispers. cheryl bites down on her bottom lip, her eyes suddenly widening in panic.

“i…where-.”

“hey, no, you’re coming with me. f.p said it’s fine. i just meant, sorry that we…got interrupted. again.” toni deadpans. cheryl sighs in relief, and she chuckles as she grips toni’s chin between her fingers and kisses her, her other hand moving down toni’s stomach before a finger curls into the belt loop of her jeans and tugs her closer. toni whines, her hands gripping cheryl’s waist as she deepens the kiss, but the redhead pulls away with a sigh.

“do you think it’s something bad?” she asks softly. toni sighs and interlaces their fingers tightly.
“only one way to find out. let’s go.” toni moves back to the couch, grabbing her shirt and shoving it back on before she grabs her serpent jacket and shrugs it on as well. cheryl sighs as she grabs the spare bomber jacket of toni’s, shoving it on unceremoniously as she walks to the front door with a grumble, and toni knows she’s feeling just as frustrated as toni is.

eyes getting so close…

toni walks to her bike, and cheryl sighs as she comes to a stop in front of it.

“here’s hoping i’m better on it this time around…” she mumbles, and toni grins widely.

cheryl had ridden on toni’s bike to school this morning, and toni’s pretty sure she has bruises on her waist from how tightly the redheaded blossom girl had gripped her, but she hadn’t screamed, which toni saw as a definite plus.

“second time’s a charm, baby. safety first.” toni hands her the red helmet f.p had lying around in the trailer, and she shoves it on with a sigh before toni puts her own helmet on and swings her leg onto the bike. cheryl wraps her arms around toni’s waist, her head resting on toni’s shoulder as the girl revs the bike up and takes off slowly toward the whyte wyrm.

cheryl’s a lot more relaxed than she was this morning, and her grip on toni loosens a little as toni watches her smile in the mirror, her eyes closing as she lets the wind hit her skin gently. toni cruises leisurely for cheryl’s sake, and by the time they reach the wyrm the sun has well and truly set over the horizon, the stars blinking above them beautifully as toni swings off the bike and holds a hand out for cheryl to take.

they walk into the whyte wyrm hand in hand, and at least fifty pairs of serpent eyes look up at their entrance, some of them smiling, some of them frowning, some of them scoffing.

cheryl’s grip on her hand tightens, and toni sighs as she leads her toward sweet pea and fangs, who are close by the stage that f.p and jughead are standing on, both of them looking at toni and cheryl with smiles.

“nice of you to join us,” f.p says, and toni shrugs as she sits down at a seat and pulls cheryl into her lap. a few of the serpents are eyeing the blossom girl with reproachful glares, perhaps wondering what a non-serpent was doing at a serpent meeting, and toni tightens her hold on the redhead as she looks up at f.p and jughead patiently.
she knows not a single serpent in this place would harm a hair on cheryl’s head thanks to f.p declaring her protected under serpent law now, but still…

“as a majority of you know, thanks to toni and fangs’s intel, we now know that hiram lodge plans to turn the southside into his own personal tourist attraction. he’s promised us jobs in return for us allowing him to take the southside hostage, a deal i can assure you, i have no plans on taking. jughead is friends with hiram’s daughter, veronica, and according to her…his plans are a lot more sinister than we realize.” f.p looks to jughead, who clears his throat and looks around at the serpents with a rage in his eyes toni’s never seen before.

“hiram lodge plans to turn southside high into a prison. he’s gonna raze the entire southside and build his own empire, complete with a revenue, and somewhere to put the people who don’t fall in line.”

“you mean us?” sweet pea growls, and a few of the serpents begin murmuring as cheryl’s hand suddenly tightens in toni’s.

“yeah, sweets. more than likely, he means us. if we don’t give him what he wants, we’re probably going to be the first inmates of his little prison.” jughead says with a clench of his jaw, and toni can hear the murmurs beginning to get angry as cheryl suddenly looks up at jughead with worry.

“what did veronica say about this?” toni asks. jughead sighs.

“she’s not happy. that’s why she told me, gave me the heads up so the serpents would have some warning. archie isn’t happy about it, either. not so much the prison, he thinks that’s a good idea, but…he doesn’t want the serpents to lose their home.”

“so what’s the next step, then?” fangs asks firmly, and f.p runs his fingers through his hair as he looks around at the serpents with worry.

“i’m sorting it out. but hiram lodge isn’t our only problem. the ghoulies are getting more frenetic, and i have no idea why. two of our own have been beaten within the last two days, jumped by ghoulies, which means whatever they have planned, they’re getting close to executing it.”

“how can we be sure hiram isn’t working with the ghoulies?” cheryl says suddenly. the serpents looking at her in shock, as if they’re surprised she’s even daring to speak, and f.p blinks once before he looks at cheryl patiently, waiting for her to go on. she clears her throat and stands slowly, but her
hand is still interlaced with toni’s as she gives it an encouraging squeeze.

she wants to hear what cheryl has to say.

“it would make sense for him to be. he hires them to take the southside serpents out, and they no longer pose a problem for him and his project. he probably thinks there’s no chance you can survive a war against two enemies attacking from both sides.” cheryl says firmly, her eyes flicking over to toni with worry, and f.p raises an eyebrow and nods at her.

“do you think we can?” he asks. cheryl inhales deeply, and she looks around at all the serpents before licking her lips and nodding slowly.

“i think…snakes attack harder and smarter when they’re cornered. i think hiram has a tendency to underestimate his foes…why do you think he ended up in jail in the first place?” cheryl says with a smirk, and f.p nods, a small smile lighting up his face as he turns to look at the serpents as well.

“cheryl has a point! hiram could be working with the ghoulies to bring us down, which means we need to be smarter about how we defend our turf! from now on, no serpent stands alone whatsoever! we walk in groups, ready for any kind of attack! in unity there is strength!” f.p shouts, raising a fist in the air, and the serpents do the same, all of them curling their index and middle fingers into fangs as they do.

“in unity there is strength!” toni yells along with the serpents, and f.p nods slowly as he drops his hand with a sigh.

“as for hiram lodge…you let the serpent king handle him. if it’s a war he wants, it’s a war he’ll get. the serpents won’t go down without a fight…time for him to learn that the hard way. meeting dismissed!” he calls out, and the serpents begin to disperse, all of them sticking together in groups as f.p jumps off the stage and makes his way toward cheryl, toni, sweet pea and fangs, jughead also trailing behind him.

“you made a good point, cheryl. hiram could definitely be working with the ghoulies to distract us from his plans.” f.p says, and cheryl shrugs.

“i know how a rich, narcissistic mind works. what do you plan to do?” she asks with worry, and f.p purses his lips.
“i’m keeping an eye on him, and the ghoulies…if something goes down, i wanna know about it first.” toni nods slowly, and jughead sighs as he adjusts his beanie and looks to the entrance of the wyrm.

“i should go, betty, archie and veronica are waiting for me at pop’s, and i’m sure veronica wants an update on what’s going on-.”

“don’t tell her anything, boy! she’s a lodge, she could be working with her father for all we know!” f.p hisses, gripping the lapel of jughead’s serpent jacket and toni frowns.

veronica wouldn’t do something like that…would she? toni considered her a friend, but…at the end of the day, it was her father…

cheryl licks her lips, but says nothing as jughead clenches his jaw, but nods once.

“alright. i won’t say anything.” f.p exhales deeply, and he lets go of jughead before nodding at all of them.

“get home, travel together. sweet pea, fangs, go with jughead to pop’s, i don’t want him travelling anywhere on his own.”

“dad-.”

“you’re the serpent king’s son, jug, you’re the first person they’ll come after.” f.p says firmly, and sweet pea stands and nods.

“we got him, f.p, don’t worry.” jughead sighs, and the three boys disperse and f.p makes his way to the bar to talk with some of the older serpent members. cheryl sighs, and toni pulls her back into her lap slowly, her hands gripping cheryl’s waist as the redhead tucks toni’s pink hair behind her ear.

“you okay?” toni asks softly. cheryl leans down to kiss her softly.

“no. now i’m worried about you. what if ghoulies decide to jump you?” she says with worry, and toni smiles against her lips before kissing them again.
“i won’t go anywhere alone, cher. you’ll be with me, always, and so will the boys. i’ll be okay, i promise.” cheryl bites down on her bottom lip, and toni reaches a thumb up to stop her from doing it, pulling her bottom lip out from her teeth and caressing it with the pad of her thumb.

“now…about your little plan to go to thistlehouse on saturday…”

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saturday night is here, and cheryl stares up at the familiar home of thistlehouse with her heart pounding against her chest painfully.

she doesn’t have long. opening night for carrie the musical is less than two hours away, and she absolutely refuses to miss seeing toni up on stage. she’s still pissed that she’s not part of the musical at all, but it didn’t matter in the end. toni was getting the chance to shine on that stage, and cheryl couldn’t be prouder.

but first…first she needed to have her own moment of dramatic flair and chaos.

she lifts the heavy bucket of fake blood up, a soft grunt escaping her before she takes a deep breath in and pours it over her head.

the second it hits her skin, it almost suffocates her, falling all over her entire body like congealed glue as cheryl shivers underneath the steady stream of chemicals and red paint. the smell fills her nostrils, a mixture of two things cheryl’s never smelled before as she resists the urge to gag and instead, relishes in it.

she’ll get her carrie white moment. screw the musical. cheryl blossom was born to have a carrie white moment.

because toni had given her inspiration that day on the bleachers, unsurprisingly. the pink haired serpent was always a source of inspiration for cheryl, but the way she’d said those words…

“even carrie white could stand up to her mother, cheryl. so can you.”
enough. toni was right. cheryl was still that girl who burned down thornhill, still the girl who cut off her mother’s oxygen, who told her, word for word, how it was going to be from now on…

“so henceforth, if you breathe, it is because i give you air. if you drink, it is because i’ve poured your cup myself. and if you move, it is quietly…and with my blessing.”

head bitch in charge. it’s time she started fucking acting like it.

cheryl still can’t believe toni was so goddamn supportive of what she was doing right now, even going shopping with cheryl yesterday to get the fake blood from some stupid halloween store on the southside, and cheryl smiles as she realizes that toni’s crazy just might match her own…it’s just that toni is way better at taming it than cheryl is…

the blood is dripping onto the driveway, and cheryl runs her fingers through her hair, looking down at her body covered in the sticky cheap movie make up madness as she walks toward the front door of thistlehouse quietly.

she opens the door softly, her bare feet padding against the wooden floors sneakily as fake blood drips onto the wood heavily, and she hears a voice echo from the main room.

“claudius? is that you?”

her mother. perfect.

cheryl grabs a candle stick from the table beside the door, watches the flames atop the candles dance before her eyes as she turns slowly, and her heart begins pounding against her chest with anger when her mother enters the hallway. she jumps back in complete and utter terror, words escaping her, and cheryl swallows down her anger, her rage for everything this woman has down for the last sixteen years and instead focuses on the terror in her mother’s eyes.

the sight invigorates her.

no more. no more terror. no more pain.
head bitch in charge.

“do you know whose blood this is, mommy?” cheryl says slowly, making sure each step has purpose as penelope cowers in fear before her.

“this is jason’s blood.” she hisses, pain and grief for her dead twin brother flooding her, and she knows he’s watching her right now, probably smiling with tears of joy shining in those beautiful eyes of his over his sister finally taking control over her life.

she had said those three words to the girl she loved just a few days ago, and now she was taking back her life from the woman who so readily looked to destroy it every day that she lived.

this is her goddamn carrie white moment.

“this is daddy’s blood…and the next blood to be spilt will be yours.” cheryl comes to a stop halfway down the hallway as penelope whimpers and staggers back.

“cheryl, dear god!” she cries, tears welling in her eyes as she watches her daughter step forward in a threatening manner, covered head to toe in blood, but cheryl doesn’t care.

let her suffer. let her cry in anguish over the pain she’s caused her daughter for sixteen long years… let her realize that the saying ‘you reap what you sow’ is being demonstrated right in front of her… karma is a goddamn bitch, and cheryl’s had that five lettered word used to describe her for almost ten years now.

“you’ve been in cahoots with daddy’s twin, you tried to kill nana rose and then you shipped me off to a ghoulish nunnery!” cheryl growls, stalking forward once more as tears fall down penelope’s face, and each tear is a fucking victory, cheryl’s whole body buzzing with an energy similar to what she felt when she was high on jingle jangle.

screw drugs, this was her new favorite high.

“but your depraved gambits are finished.” she comes to a stop a few feet away from penelope blossom, whose eyes flicker to the flame of the candles in fear, and cheryl has no doubt she’s
remembering the smell of her skin sizzling, the utter pain and anguish of the burns that marred her body-

good. let her feel that pain for sixteen years straight so she can finally understand and take responsibility for what she’s done.

if she thinks cheryl is mad for what she’s doing, she has no one to blame but herself. she created the monster she sees before her.

*let her see, cheryl...let her see who you really are.*

“if you so much as pluck one hair from nana rose’s little head, i’ll end you. i burned one house down, i’ll happily burn another.” cheryl inches closer, the flames coming dangerously close to penelope’s face as she flinches and moves away with a fearful cry.

“nightmare child! what do you want from me!?” she cries with a sob, and cheryl grins.

“from you? one thing. in a few weeks’ time, mommy, you’ll be served court papers. court papers demanding my release from your wicked hold, effective immediately. when you receive them, sign them. because i want to be emancipated. i want thistlehouse all to myself, and my nana. and i never want to see you or uncle claudius inside this house ever again.” cheryl says firmly. penelope gasps, her eyes wide with fear and shock as cheryl smiles and leans in closer.

“start packing, mommy. you and uncle claudius are pig people…and should live amongst the pigs.” she whispers. penelope whimpers, staggering back before cheryl twitches her wrist, feigning a loose grip on the candles as they come dangerously close to falling-

“okay! okay…” penelope cries, raising her hands in surrender as her knees buckle, and when she collapses onto them, her hands raised and clasped together, begging for reprieve, cheryl’s heart crows with celebration.

*you’ve got her right where you fucking want her.*

*jason would be so proud*...
“enough, please! cheryl…” penelope gasps, her fingers reaching out to curl into cheryl’s pink dress covered in blood, and cheryl leans down until she’s face to face with her tormentor, the flames flickering between them in a dance of red and yellow.

“when i return from the musical, you better be long gone from this estate. nana’s carer will be arriving in five minutes, she’ll make sure that you don’t come anywhere near her while you’re packing.” penelope swallows thickly, her eyes moving from the flames to cheryl’s eyes as she whimpers.

“wh-where am i supposed to g-go, cheryl?” penelope breathes. cheryl scoffs, and reaches a bloodied hand to grip penelope’s face between her fingers.

“frankly, my dear…i don’t give a damn.” she says bluntly with a grin, and before penelope can say another word, cheryl lets her go and moves to the stairs, climbing up them slowly with blood still dripping off her body as she makes her way to nana rose’s room.

she can hear penelope crying downstairs, but all she cares about right now is getting to nana rose, making sure she’s okay-

“nana rose?” she calls out softly. she opens the door gently, and her eyes land on the little old lady in her bed, her eyes moving to the door before they widen with a gasp.

“cheryl?” she croaks out, and cheryl smiles and makes her way over to her slowly. she looks sickly, that’s for sure, her skin a lot paler than normal and her body looking frail, and cheryl tries to contain her anger as she gets closer to her.

“it’s me, nana. i’m sorry for all the blood…” she says softly, and nana rose is still looking at her in shock as cheryl bends down close to her, careful not to get any of the fake blood on her.

“i doubt mommy and uncle claudius have been treating you well in my absence…” she whispers sadly. nana rose’s expression turns stony.

“They’ve given me one meal a day and kept me locked in this room in solitude. i’ve missed you so dearly, cheryl…but i guess my message to toni got through…” she croons softly with a smile, and cheryl grits her teeth and closes her eyes in anger.
one meal a goddamn day…

*head bitch in charge, cheryl. you’ve got this.*

“yes, nana rose. toni got your message and saved me from the sisters. it’s okay, nana rose. i’m not going anywhere anymore. i’ve emancipated myself from mommy, and kicked her and uncle claudius out of thistlehouse. it’s going to be just you and me now, nana. i promise.” she whispers. nana rose’s eyes widen, a soft gasp escaping her as she processes cheryl’s words before she’s suddenly smiling, a wicked glint in her eyes.

“oh, my dear girl…i knew you had that blossom fire in you.” she says cheerily, and cheryl smiles widely.

the blossom fire…one good thing to come from her family.

“your carer will be here soon, she’ll make sure mommy doesn’t come anywhere near you while she’s packing, okay? she’ll look after you until i come back. toni’s going to be in a musical tonight, nana rose.” she says proudly, and nana rose’s smile widens.

“oh, do bring her with you for a visit one day, cheryl. i quite like her…” nana rose says fondly, and cheryl’s smile only grows wider.

“of course, nana rose. i’m quite fond of her, too…”

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cheryl smiles as she walks down the hallway toward the green room, her body fresh of any blood and her heart soaring with happiness.

penelope had already been packing by the time cheryl got out of the shower, and nana rose had been having a marvelous dinner thanks to her carer, who had brought some of her own dinner with her. cheryl had given the carer strict instructions to call the police if penelope came near nana rose, cheryl making sure her voice reached the vile woman packing upstairs as nana rose had watched her with pride.
getting to wear her own clothes again, driving here in her convertible...god, cheryl’s never felt more alive...

she hears a soft voice singing, and she knows it’s toni’s, her heart soaring impossibly higher as she slowly opens the door to find toni topaz sitting in front of a mirror, looking nervous beyond anything.

“i thought i heard an angel singing!” cheryl says cheerily, and toni grins widely and looks in the mirror at her approach.

“i come bearing grand bisous! both literal…” she stands behind toni before gripping her shoulder and pressing a kiss to her cheek, placing the rose in her hands with a smile.

“and figurative.” she whispers against her ear. toni smiles, looking down at the rose with nothing but affection and adoration shining in her eyes before she looks up at cheryl in the mirror.

“so...how did it go with your mom?” she asks, placing the rose down onto the table as she looks up at cheryl with a hint of worry that’s quickly erased when cheryl grins.

“raves across the board for my performance.” she says happily. toni raises an eyebrow, a smirk lighting up her features as she grabs an eyeshadow brush and dips it into the palette in front of her. cheryl sits down beside her, watching her with wonder.

“also, she and uncle claudius will be decamping from thistlehouse...to live with the ghost of my dead father.” cheryl says softly, watching the pink haired serpent fix her eyeshadow before she drops the brush and turns to look cheryl up and down.

cheryl can see that same lust shining in her eyes from days ago, and she smirks as toni licks her lips before leaning in slowly.

“you...are so hot right now.” she says huskily, her eyes dropping down to cheryl’s lips. the redhaired girl grins and raises an eyebrow.

“tell me something i don’t know.” she teases. toni smiles, and cheryl’s eyes drift down to her lips, her own teeth biting down on her own before she leans in closer.
“see you after the show.” she whispers, and she presses a quick kiss to toni’s lips before she’s getting up and moving toward the door, but toni grabs her hand and drags her back down, pulling cheryl into her lap until the red heaired girl is straddling her. toni leans up, kissing her passionately as cheryl grabs her face and deepens the kiss with a moan, her nails digging into the back of toni’s neck harshly. toni’s tongue slides against cheryl’s, her hands gripping and moving up creamy thighs before moving to cheryl’s back to pull her flush against her body, and cheryl reaches down and grabs the bottom of toni’s shirt, seconds away from pulling it up and off her body-

“actors to the stage in two minutes!” kevin keller’s voice booms outside the room, and cheryl and toni both groan loudly in anguish as toni pulls away from cheryl regretfully.

“god, why does this keep happening?” she whines, and cheryl laughs breathlessly, her claw-like grip on toni’s shirt loosening as she leans her forehead against toni’s.

“another night, t.t. after all…once mommy and uncle claudius move out tonight, we can have thistlehouse all to ourselves.” toni’s eyes widen, and cheryl can see her mouth practically foaming at the idea.

“god, yes-i mean, yeah, that sounds good.” toni says with a clear of her throat. cheryl chuckles, and she kisses toni softly before pulling away and standing.

“good luck, t.t. i’ll be in the crowd.”

“i’ll be looking for you.” toni says back with a wink, and cheryl rolls her eyes, but makes her way over to kevin to sit beside him. he looks up at her approach with wide eyes that immediately look guilty, and he clears his throat before looking at her sadly.

“cheryl, i really am sorry.-”

“save it, keller. i’ve had my carrie white moment already. thank you, however, for casting toni. getting to watch ma cherie perform on stage is still just as rewarding as taking on the lead role.” cheryl says with a smile, and kevin lets out a sigh of relief before he reaches out and grips cheryl’s hand in his own. cheryl sees jughead record the stage with the camera, his tongue between his lips in concentration, and cheryl rolls her eyes.

how that boy can switch from dorkazoid to serpent second in command is beyond her…
the musical kicks off without a hitch. cheryl’s eyes are immediately drawn to toni the second her scenes come on, and it’s such a sight watching toni fucking topaz, a southside serpent with pink hair and a bad attitude, prance around on stage and sing at the top of her lungs, but she looks like she’s having the time of her life, and the image causes cheryl’s heart to burst with happiness, her hands clapping so hard, they’re turning red every time scenes with toni end. her eyes land on cheryl every time, her smile widening as she blows her a kiss and skips off stage until she’s called onto it again.

veronica, betty josie, and archie are good as well, cheryl supposes, but toni is all she cares about in this moment. for a few days, she had felt regret over telling toni she loved her so quickly, but now… now she’s glad the girl knows how she truly feels.

and she knows… knows toni feels the same way, understands her hesitation to say those words again to someone she cares about after losing her mother so viciously, which is why cheryl doesn’t mind if toni doesn’t say it back. she knows… and that’s all she needs.

the final scene begins, betty’s mother, alice cooper, playing the role of carrie’s mother as she sings for her daughter’s forgiveness, and cheryl twitches in her seat impatiently, wanting the play to be over so she can see toni again-

“All right, carrietta, it’s time to come out of your closet!” alice says, and the backdrop lifts up slowly to reveal midge on her knees, singing to her mother-

wait. no. that’s…that’s what’s supposed to happen-

midge is covered in blood instead, her body pinned to the wall with what looks like knives, her eyes wide and staring-

“uh, kevin, did you reblock this scene? why isn’t she on her knees singing?” cheryl says frantically. it was supposed to be alice pinned to the wall, and that blood...that blood looks nothing like the fake stuff she just washed over her body less than two hours ago, it looks...sickeningly real...

it’s then that her eyes land on the message beside midge’s body, written in red, dark blood on the wall.

“the town of riverdale is full of sin. fred andrews was the first…midge klump, the second. beware for my third. B.H.”
“i…” cheryl turns to kevin, who looks pale as jughead lowers the camera and looks at midge in shock.

“i don’t think that’s part of the show…” he whispers in a panic, and cheryl looks back at midge’s body, her heart falling as it slowly dawns on her what the message means.

fred andrews was shot all those months ago…he was the first…and midge, midge was in front of them, held to the wall with knives…dead…

oh god…the shooter, he was back, the one the media had called ‘the black hood’, oh god-

“oh my god…” kevin croaks out, and cheryl swallows the bile that rises in the back of her throat as she looks at midge’s body in despair.

“somebody should help her. for god’s sake, help her!” she screams, and other people are beginning to tag on now, cheryl’s eyes falling on alice cooper as she turns and looks at midge in shock before she screams. cheryl sees toni poke her head out of the curtains, her eyes on midge’s body in horror-

“toni!” cheryl jumps up from her seat, and at her movement, everyone begins running in a panic for the exit, screams and shouts echoing around her, but cheryl makes a beeline for toni, jumping up onto the stage and rushing to the pink haired girl-

“cheryl, what the hell is going on?! is midge okay-.”

“she’s dead, toni, we have to go!” cheryl grips her girlfriend’s hand tightly, pulling her away from the stage desperately as toni looks back at midge’s body in horror.

“oh god…oh my god, cheryl…”

cheryl swallows back her tears and tightens her grip on toni. only one thing matters right now.

getting her girlfriend, the love of her life, her toni to safety.
the black hood is back...we're all in danger.
from the moment toni topaz’s eyes met cheryl blossom’s that day so many months ago at riverdale general hospital, toni would have never been able to predict that having her brown skinned fingers interlaced with cheryl’s pale ones would bring her so much safety and security. yet now, with both their hands resting on the gearshift and neither of them willing to let the other go, toni feels, for the first time in a long time and despite the fact that there’s an apparent serial killer on the loose…safe.

from the second cheryl had grabbed her from the stage and rushed her to the exit of riverdale high, they’ve kept their fingers interlaced, refusing to let go of one another, needing an anchor in all the chaos and confusion that was running rampant in the small town they called home, but right now, all toni can think about is keeping cheryl safe, and she knows…she knows that all cheryl is thinking about is keeping her safe, too. because nothing makes sense right now.

midge…midge was dead. her young life snuffed out at sixteen by a man toni thought was just a robber, some guy looking for chump change from the most popular diner in riverdale who just happened to place fred andrews in the firing line of his gun. but now…now, it’s all too real. this wasn’t a one off accident. this man’s actions were intentional…this man, whoever he was, was a murderer. a serial killer.

god, a serial killer in riverdale, how the hell was that possible?

“toni…” cheryl’s voice is soft, slightly muffled from the wind billowing around them as she drives at top speed toward the southside, but toni can hear the panic in it, and her heart drops at the sound. it’s so similar…so similar to that day toni had found her at the sisters of quiet mercy, had held her in the back of the van as they made their daring escape, cheryl whimpering her name in fear and terror, and god, toni had told herself she would make sure she never, ever heard her name spoken in that tone from cheryl ever again…
“cheryl, we’re gonna be okay. i promise.” toni manages to croak out hoarsely, the tears pricking at her eyes threatening to spill over before the wind quickly dries them, and perfect white teeth chew at a full bottom lip as cheryl looks between the road and toni anxiously.

“the message on the wall beside midge’s body…he said ‘the town of riverdale is full of sin’…what the hell did he mean by that?” cheryl asks worriedly. toni licks her lips, her panic beginning to kick into overdrive as she leans in closer to cheryl across the gearshift.

she doesn’t have an answer. for all those crime books she’s read in her life, a light hobby to take up her time, toni has no idea what the motivation behind this black hood’s actions are…what the hell had midge ever done to deserve what had happened to her? pinned to the wall by knives, her blood dripping to the ground as her soulless eyes lay wide and staring…

“i don’t know, cher…but it doesn’t matter. from now on, we stick to each other like glue, okay? i’m not gonna let anything happen to you.” she says firmly, her fingers squeezing cheryl’s softly, and cheryl’s lips quirk into a small smile, toni’s words clearly having an effect on her before she exhales shakily.

“what about nana rose? i can’t leave her in thistlehouse with only her carer to protect her, toni.” cheryl says, her tongue darting out to wet full lips, and toni frowns, pursing her own lips anxiously as she watches the whyte wyrm come into view slowly. the lights are on, as they always are, but toni knows every serpent is bound to be in there by now, looking to f.p for guidance on what to do now that a serial killer is running loose in riverdale…

f.p had left one nightmare and dropped himself right into another.

cherl turns the wheel of her convertible to enter the parking lot as she slows down, and toni licks her lips before looking to cheryl with a small smile.

“i think she’ll be okay, cheryl. she’s an old lady-.”

“and midge was a sixteen year old girl.” cheryl whispers brokenly, tears welling in her eyes, and toni
wince before she can stop herself.

god, midge…toni didn’t know her that well at all, but she’d gotten to know the girl a little during rehearsals this week…she was a beautiful, kind, honest girl, and now she was dead…what the hell was going on? who was this black hood and why…god, why did he choose to kill poor midge of all fucking people?

cheryl’s frown of worry is deepening with each passing second, and toni finds herself questioning if nana blossom would be a target of the black hood…if he was after ‘sinners’, nana rose hadn’t really done much to earn herself that title lately, but she was a blossom, after all…

“call your carer, tell her to lock thistlehouse down and not to open the door for anyone or anything, okay?” toni tells cheryl quickly. cheryl nods, exhaling shakily once again as she finally detaches her hand from toni’s and bends closer to the passenger seat to grab her purse. she pulls her phone out, toni smiling at her as she does.

“you got it back?” she says softly. cheryl rolls her eyes.

“penelope blossom’s always been horrible at hiding things…physical things, anyway. jason and i used to steal cookies from her ‘hiding spot’ all the time. there’s so many unread messages and voicemails, but i figured i’d get to them later…i didn’t want to miss the show.” cheryl says, and toni’s glad she’s distracted by her phone so she doesn’t catch toni’s wince of panic.

she’s about ninety nine percent sure a majority of those voicemails are from her…

cheryl holds the phone to her ear, the anxious look on her face prompting toni to lean forward and tuck a lock of red hair behind cheryl’s ear as her girlfriend smiles and grips her hand tightly once more.

“lisa? it’s cheryl…have mommy and uncle claudius left?” cheryl asks hoarsely once her call is answered. there’s a response, toni unable to hear it from this far, but she watches cheryl’s face carefully as the anxiety is replaced with a triumphant smirk before she purses her lips and nods.

“okay, good…listen, there’s been an attack at the school, and i’m worried the person responsible is walking the streets, looking for his next victim. don’t panic, okay? just lock all the doors and stay inside with nana rose, if someone knocks, don’t answer. keep yourself and my nana safe, please…” cheryl pauses, and toni can hear a frantic voice on the other end as cheryl swallows thickly and
“I know, Lisa, I’m scared, too…just stay inside the house, and don’t go anywhere. You’ll stay with us until Sheriff Keller and his band of buffoons catch this killer. I’ll be home as soon as I can.” Another pause, and Toni frowns as Cheryl lets out a sigh of relief and smiles as she nods slowly.

“Thank you, Lisa. Stay safe.” Cheryl sighs as she ends the call, and Toni’s frown deepens as Cheryl looks up at her with a tired smile.

“Does Lisa have family she wants to check in on?” Toni asks, and Cheryl shakes her head.

“She has a daughter, I believe, but she lives in Greendale with her father. They separated years ago…I trust Lisa with my life, she’s kept Nana Rose safe and happy all these years, but…” Cheryl trails off hesitantly before she looks at Toni anxiously.

“I want to get back to Thistlehouse as soon as possible, T.T. I’ve already been absent while her life was in danger once, I won’t do it again.” She says softly, and Toni looks up at the Whyte Wyrm ahead of them before she nods slowly and turns to face Cheryl with a smile, her hand reaching up to brush her thumb across the apple of Cheryl’s cheekbone lightly.

“You’ve got it, baby. We’ll just go inside for five minutes, find out what’s going on and then we’ll go, okay?” Cheryl nods with a purse of her lips, and Toni’s about to get out of the car when the sound of bikes rumbling pulls her attention to the road.

Sweet Pea, Fangs, Jughead, and surprisingly, Archie in his truck, all pull up to the Whyte Wyrm, gravel and dirt flying in the wind around them as they come to a slow stop. Toni frowns, and she quickly exits the car, Cheryl doing the same as the boys jump off their bikes and make their way toward him. Toni sees Betty and Archie exit the truck, frowns of worry on both their faces as Jughead makes his way toward Cheryl and Toni with a sigh of relief.

“Good, you guys are here. Are you okay?” Jughead asks with concern, Sweet Pea and Fangs also rushing over as he comes to a stop in front of them.

“I figured F.P. would want us here-.”

“He does. I told Dad what happened on the phone and he told me to round all the serpents up and get
them here as soon as possible. I panicked when I couldn’t find you guys, but Sweet Pea told me he saw you guys leave as soon as everyone else did.”

“you stayed back? What happened after we left?” Cheryl asks with a frown. Jughead shakes his head.

“the mayor is freaking out, Sheriff Keller and the rest of the police force have shut down the school, told everyone to go home and lock their doors until they sort this out.” Jughead says with a sigh. Cheryl looks at Toni with worry, and the pink haired serpent grips her hand as she looks up at the three boys in front of her.

“What do we do?” she asks.

“We go see what F.P has to say, and then we head home, do what Sheriff Keller says. It’s the only thing I can think of.” Fangs says with a sigh, his face pale as he swallows thickly. He seems shaken by this whole thing, the panic in his eyes almost as bad as the day they’d come across Nick St. Clair, and Toni’s eyes subconsciously move past the boys to Archie and Betty. Archie has his head in his hands, his phone to his ear as he talks into it, and the look in his eyes is almost murderous as Betty rubs his shoulder sympathetically.

“How’s Archie holding up?” Toni asks softly. Jughead sighs.

“Not well. He’s been looking for his father’s shooter for months now…I think he thought that chapter was over, and now this guy’s back…” Jughead trails off, and Sweet Pea scoffs behind him.

“Doesn’t matter, he’s not gonna get what he wants.” Sweet Pea says gruffly. Jughead clenches his jaw and glares at Sweet Pea angrily as Cheryl frowns.

“What are you talking about, Peapod?” she asks. He scoffs at the nickname, but simply shrugs.

“He wants to ask the serpents to help him find the Black Hood.” Sweet Pea says in a slightly menacing tone, and Toni raises an eyebrow in surprise.

“Since when is catching serial killers something we do?” she asks. Sweet Pea scoffs, and Jughead shakes his head and looks at each of them sternly.
“whatever my father decides, that’s what we do. he’s the serpent king, if he says we’re helping archie, then we are.” he says firmly. sweet pea rolls his eyes, but says nothing more, and cheryl suddenly wraps an arm around toni’s shoulders, jerking her toward the whyte wyrm slightly. toni takes the hint, and she sighs and nods at jughead.

“then let’s go see if that’s what he wants.” she says simply, and she pulls herself out of cheryl’s grasp and instead grips the redhead’s hand, leading her toward the entrance to the bar with the others tailing behind her slowly.

eyes to thistlehouse sooner rather than later…cheryl’s anxiousness over her grandmother was only going to grow, and toni herself feels a little worried about the fragile matriarch of the blossom family being alone with only a middle aged woman to protect her…

as soon as they enter the bar, it’s pandemonium. there’s serpents everywhere, all of them yelling as f.p tries to calm them all down from the stage. his eyes are filled with worry, bloodshot and tired as he yells over the top of them, but a silence rings over the entire room at their entrance, every pair of eyes turning to look at them in surprise. f.p’s eyes widen at the sight of them, and he’s immediately jumping down from the stage and rushing over to them, his eyes on jughead and jughead only as he grabs his son by the shoulder and pulls him into a bone crushing hug.

“jug, thank god…are you okay?” he asks anxiously into his ear, and jughead pulls away from his father with a nod and a warm smile.

“i’m alright, dad.” he says softly. f.p lets out a sigh of relief, his hand moving up to cup jughead’s neck affectionately before his gaze turns to his other serpents and surprisingly, cheryl.

“are you all okay?” he asks, and when sweet pea, fangs, toni and cheryl all nod, he looks to betty and archie behind jughead before looking at his son once more.

“it’s a goddamn shitstorm, jug. the serpents think that this black hood, whoever he is…” f.p trails off, his eyes falling on archie cautiously before he continues.

“they think this black hood is working with hiram lodge to take us down, too.” he says firmly. betty’s eyes widen in surprise, but before she can say anything, archie’s stepping forward and shaking his head.

“i don’t think so, mr. jones. the black hood shot my father and killed midge, and neither of them have
any connection to the serpents whatsoever. besides, even if i’m not happy about it, hiram wants the southside only, he doesn’t want all the serpents dead…” archie says with a clench of his jaw, and toni sees jughead roll his eyes as f.p scoffs.

“the southside and the serpents are one in the same, archie.” f.p says firmly, and archie narrows his eyes, but says nothing more as toni watches him incredulously.

it’s no secret that archie has been working closely with hiram lodge, perhaps as a favor to his girlfriend, but toni didn’t think he would be this far up hiram lodge’s ass…

toni’s attention is pulled to fangs, who squirms suddenly, his face growing even paler as he swallows thickly. toni frowns, but she sees sweet pea clench his fist and glare at archie angrily, and her hand immediately flies up to rest a calming hand to his chest, his eyes falling to her before he relaxes slightly and falls back. f.p stares at archie for a long time, observing the red haired bulldog before he looks at jughead once more.

“what happened as soon as midge’s body was found?” he asks. jughead frowns.

“everyone started rushing toward the exits, sheriff keller was already there, he jumped up onto the stage and told everyone to get home, lock the doors and stay inside. mayor mccoy was ushering people out, but she ran up to the stage and started yelling at sheriff keller, she didn’t seem happy… after that, i just grabbed betty and archie and got out of there.” jughead says hoarsely, and f.p licks his lips before running his fingers through his hair once more.

“then that’s what we do. all of you, get home, lock the doors, do everything that sheriff keller told you to do. stay inside, don’t go to pop’s, don’t go anywhere. we’ll sort this out in the morning, alright? and none of you go home alone, i want you all in groups, you hear me?” they all nod slowly, and archie suddenly sighs in frustration.

“i need to talk to you, mr. jones-.”

“it can wait, archie. at least until tomorrow, right now, i want you to get home to your father, he’s probably worried sick about you.” f.p says firmly, and archie frowns, but steps back and nods once as f.p turns back to the serpents and takes a deep breath in.

“i’ll sort this lot out. get home.” he goes to walk away, but cheryl suddenly steps forward.
“f.p, wait…” cheryl reaches out, grabbing the sleeve of the serpent king’s jacket and pulling him back as he looks at her in surprise. she takes a deep breath in before talking.

“i went to thistlehouse before the show and…in grand fashion, told my mother and uncle claudius to evacuate the premises. my carer just informed me that they’re long gone now, so i’ll be moving back there to keep an eye on my nana.” she says softly. toni sees betty and archie look at cheryl in surprise, sees jughead smirk, and sweet pea and fangs look at cheryl with pride as f.p frowns and watches the redhead carefully.

“she didn’t hurt you, did she?” he asks. cheryl shakes her head, and f.p sighs, running his fingers through his hair as he does.

“you should’ve told me, cheryl, i would’ve gone with you-.”

“it’s something i needed to do on my own.” cheryl whispers. understanding crosses f.p’s face, and cheryl smiles at him lightly.

“f.p, i’m fine. i just wanted to say thank you…for all your hospitality. you saved my life by taking me in, and i don’t think i’ll ever be able to repay you for it.” she says, and toni’s never heard her sound so genuine before…

it’s such an odd sight, cheryl blossom with her thumb and forefinger gripping the sleeve of f.p’s serpent jacket lightly, the two of them exchanging understanding looks, and toni didn’t think this would ever be possible, yet here it is, right before her, like an artistic masterpiece, a sight unseen or unheard of…

cheryl blossom has grown. cheryl blossom has become someone capable of forgiveness and kindness despite all the horror she’s faced in her life, and toni…fuck, toni couldn’t be any prouder…

f.p chuckles, and he looks to toni, giving her a look that toni can’t quite translate as he reaches out to grip cheryl’s shoulder.

“no repayment needed, cheryl. not after what you did for me…” he says simply. he looks to toni, nodding at her once before looking back at cheryl.

“take toni with you to thistlehouse tonight. i’ll feel better knowing you’ve got a serpent by your side
“to protect you.” he tells her, and toni smiles widely as cheryl gives her a small wink before looking at jughead with a smirk.

“i guess this means you can have your couch back, hobo.” cheryl teases, and jughead laughs loudly, shaking his head as betty suddenly pouts and wraps her arms around his waist.

“and i was having fun playing house with him…” she croons, looking up at him in adoration, and jughead smiles softly and leans in to press a kiss to her temple. toni bites back a smile, and archie suddenly bounces on the balls of his feet before clearing his throat and leaning in close to the happy couple.

“i need to get back to my dad, betty…” archie says anxiously, and betty looks back at him with a frown before she looks up at jughead sadly.

“he’s right, we should go, jug…”

“yeah, course. get her home safe, archie.” jughead says firmly, and the red haired boy nods as betty leans up to press a kiss to jughead’s lips softly before following archie out of the door and back to his truck. jughead watches them go, doesn’t turn back around until the door swings shut and hides them from view.

“i’ll meet you at the trailer, dad. i’ll go with sweet pea and fangs.” f.p nods, and cheryl sighs before she turns to look at toni with a smile, her hand reaching up to touch toni’s cheek affectionately.

“should we go back to the trailer park to get our things first, ma chérie?” she asks softly. toni’s surprised by her words, but she presses a kiss to the palm of the hand holding her cheek.

“are you sure? we can just go straight to thistlehouse-.”

“and leave you without clothes? don’t be silly, t.t. it’s not like it will take long.” cheryl says with a smile, and toni shrugs as she looks to jughead.

“guess we’ll be swinging by casa jones then.” she says with a grin.
and with that, jughead, sweet pea, fangs, cheryl and toni all head to sunnyside trailer park, the boys trailing behind cheryl’s convertible with their bikes rumbling loudly behind them until they pull up to the jones’s trailer. as soon as cheryl’s convertible comes to a stop, toni jumps out, content to dash inside with jughead and pack her shit quickly, but one look at fangs has her stopping, her eyes watching him with a frown.

he…really doesn’t look okay. his eyes are wide, panic deep within them as he gets off his bike, and toni hesitates before she looks at cheryl and leans across the car door toward her.

“hey, do you mind grabbing our things? i need to talk to the boys.” she asks softly, and cheryl frowns, but nods as she gets out of the car and heads into the trailer with jughead instead, her eyes glancing back at toni in confusion as she does. toni makes her way over to sweet pea and fangs, both boys now off their bikes, and toni can see sweet pea watching fangs with a frown as well as toni reaches out and grips fangs’s jacket in her hand lightly.

“hey, are you okay? you don’t look so great…” she asks firmly. fangs’s eyes widen, darting back and forth between sweet pea and toni in panic as sweet pea frowns and looks at him as well.

“yeah, tiny’s right, you look like shit, you’ve been pale ever since we got to the wyrm.” sweet pea says gruffly. fangs clenches his jaw, and toni sighs and grips his shoulder comfortingly.

“is it midge?” toni asks softly. she’s not exactly sure why fangs would be shaken by it, they’ve seen ten times worse as serpents, and he also beat the shit out of nick st. clair, but then again…it was still a dead body…

fangs purses his lips, but says nothing for a long time until sweet pea suddenly looks at him in shock.

“dude, please don’t tell me you actually fucked her?” he says anxiously, and toni’s heart drops. what?! fangs and midge? but…wait, no this isn’t possible? how-

“fangs?” toni can only breathe out his name in shock, her eyes wide and staring as tears well in fangs’s eyes before he’s wringing his hands and running them through his hair.

“this is bad, right? i mean, if sheriff keller finds out, i’m screwed!” fangs hisses under his breath in a panic, and toni is so frozen in shock, she can’t even process what is happening as sweet pea growls
and runs his fingers through his hair.

what the fuck? when did fangs even start something with midge? toni knows she’s been a less than stellar friend the last two weeks or so, but fuck, she’s been so preoccupied with finding cheryl and nursing her back to health after all the bullshit she went through, she hasn’t had time to really check in on her favorite boys, see how they’re doing…

*fucking fangs and midge*?!

“you hooked up with midge? fuck, fangs, when?!” she exclaims in a soft whisper, looking behind her to make sure cheryl and jughead are well inside the trailer and not listening in to their conversation, and fangs grips his hair and shakes his head.

“it was one fucking time, tiny! i…i was helping kevin with the musical, and you know things with him have been going well…earlier this week, we tried to start something, but he’s caught up on some other guy from the school, so i just got frustrated and…midge was there, and she’d been flirting with me the whole week and she liked me-.”

“So what, you decided to have sex with her?! fuck, fangs!” toni growls, her heart pounding against her chest as she grips her hair in frustration.

what the fuck was he thinking?! this girl was dead now, if anyone found out fangs was linked to her-

“It’s not like i knew this was gonna happen, toni!” fangs whines as he throws his hands up into the air in exasperation, and she shakes her head as sweet pea suddenly growls under his breath and reaches out to grab them both by the shoulders and pull them in close.

“Listen to me! we keep our mouths shut! no one finds out about it, you hear me? you’re a serpent, fangs, they’ll find any fucking excuse to pin this on you, so *no one finds out*. i mean it, tiny, don’t breathe a word of this to cheryl-.”

“I won’t! i promise!” toni says with a frantic nod, still trying to wrap her mind around the fact that fangs slept with *midge*, and fangs nods as well as sweet pea wraps a hand around both their heads, pulling them even closer until all their foreheads are resting against each other, and toni knows this is serious for sweet pea…he only does this when he’s asking for help, or forging something deep between the three of them that only exists within their gang within a gang, a bond that’s helped them become the family they are now…
her brothers. through thick and thin.

“we keep each other safe, that was the rule we made all those years ago, we aren’t turning back on it now, got it?” he hisses, and they both nod against him as he presses a kiss to both their foreheads before he grips toni’s face in his hands, his eyes filled with worry.

“get cheryl to thistlehouse, keep her safe, tiny. we’ll call you in the morning, alright?” toni hesitates, caught between wanting to stay with sweet pea and fangs now that this revelation has come to light. she can’t leave them now, fangs would probably spend the whole night worrying, keeping his eyes peeled for that flash of red and blue outside his trailer, but she can’t leave cheryl to go to thistlehouse on her own…not after everything she’s been through…

“sweets…” toni has no idea what to say, but sweet pea doesn’t give her the chance to, shaking his head as he gives her a small smile.

“hey, cheryl’s one of us now. we might be keeping her out of the loop on this but she’s still one of us. go, tiny, keep her safe. she’s been through enough as it is, she needs you by her side.” he says softly, and toni is surprised by how gentle he is right now, so used to sweet pea’s tough exterior, but it appears the redhead blossom girl who has so easily won toni’s affections also has formed a soft spot in sweet pea’s heart, and as it turns out, fangs’s, both boys encouraging her as they nod toward the jones’s trailer.

“go on, tiny.” fangs croaks out, the panic still evident in his eyes as toni hesitates before throwing her arms around him tightly.

god, why was this boy always getting himself in trouble…

“keep your head down, fangs. you’re gonna be okay.” she whispers into his ear. he nods against her as he exhales shakily, and toni pulls away from him with a sad smile before sweet pea grabs the handles of his bike and begins wheeling it toward his trailer, fangs following suite not long after as toni stands there, trying her best to wrap her mind around everything she just heard.

fuck, midge and fangs? how did toni not even see this? she was with them in rehearsal all fucking week…what was going to happen now, what if sheriff keller found out about it? fuck, everything was so up in the air right now, it’s making toni’s stomach twist and turn more than it has in a long time…
that serpent jacket they all wore so proudly on their backs were targets, toni’s known this from day one, but the thought of fangs being accused of murder…being thrown into a jail cell when the boy wouldn’t dare hurt anyone as sweet and innocent as midge klump…

she swallows the bile that rises in the back of her throat and she hears the sound of a door opening behind her. she wipes away her tears quickly before she plasters on a fake smile and turns. cheryl exits the jones’s trailer with toni’s duffel bag over her shoulder, a small frown on her face as she observes toni standing in the middle of the grass looking a little morose and panicked.

“ready?” toni asks breathlessly, and cheryl’s frown deepens, but she nods all the same as jughead leans against the door with a sigh.

“if you need anything, call us. dad and i will come straight away.”

“thanks, jughead.” cheryl says with a smile, and she makes her way down the steps back toward the convertible, toni also making her way toward the car as jughead gives them both a small wave. cheryl dumps the duffel bag into the back seat and jumps into the driver’s seat, toni collapsing beside her with a heavy sigh.

“everything okay, t.t.?” cheryl asks softly, reaching out to take her hand, and toni licks her lips and swallows before nodding and giving her hand a squeeze.

“yeah, cher…everything’s fine.”

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toni’s quiet the entire car ride to thistlehouse.

cheryl has no idea what’s on the pink haired serpent’s mind, and for a second, she’s worried she’s done something wrong, but when toni reaches over and grips her hand tightly about five minutes into the ride, cheryl relaxes into her seat and gives her hand a reassuring squeeze, causing the serpent to smile widely as she exhales loudly and relaxes into her seat as well.

so no, cheryl’s positive whatever is wrong has nothing to do with her, but it does make her question
what is causing her girlfriend to sigh and mope so terribly. she figures it’s obviously what’s happened to midge, the memory of seeing the girl’s dead body pinned to the wall by knives making cheryl shiver unintentionally, but it has something to do with sweet pea and fangs as well, cheryl can feel it…

she knows she shouldn’t pry, the three were like a family, a bond between them that, cheryl sometimes finds herself thinking, may be even stronger than the one she shared with jason, but she’s worried. she saw fangs and sweet pea as her own family now, and she can’t help but fear that whatever is causing toni’s panic is something that might put them all in danger…

“toni, are you sure everything’s okay?” cheryl asks once again softly, just to make sure, and toni simply nods as she purses her lips and closes her eyes with a sigh.

“yeah, cher…i just wanna focus on keeping you safe tonight, okay?” she says hoarsely. cheryl bites down on her lower lip, but says nothing as they pull into the driveway of thistlehouse slowly. the lights are off, and cheryl reaches into her purse to pull out her phone and send a message to lisa letting her know she’s outside. toni jumps out of the convertible and grabs her duffle bag from the backseat, and a few moments after cheryl sends the message, the porch light flicks on, illuminating them with light.

cheryl and toni walk to the front door just as it opens, and lisa lets out a sigh of relief as cheryl walks toward her with a smile.

“thank god you’re okay, miss blossom, i heard what happened on the news…that poor girl…” lisa says softly, wrapping her robe around herself more tightly as cheryl nods solemnly.

“They’ve closed the school down, at least until they sort this out i suppose. is everything okay here?”

“yes, miss blossom. i’ve put roseanne to bed, and your mother and uncle have left as well.” lisa says with a smile, her green eyes crinkling from it. cheryl nods, and toni adjusts the duffel bag on her shoulder with a grunt before cheryl walks inside, grabbing toni’s hand and dragging her in as she does.

“thank you, lisa. you’re welcome to stay in the guest bedroom tonight, we’ll be safe as long as we keep all the doors locked.” lisa’s eyes fall on toni, and she raises an eyebrow before looking at cheryl in surprise.
“you’ve brought a southside serpent with you.” she states, and cheryl chuckles and looks to toni with a warm smile.

it’s so strange to her, that people take one look at toni and the jacket on her shoulders and only think ‘southside serpent’, when in reality, she’s so much more than the snake skin that covers her body…a kind, beautiful, amazing person, and the person cheryl loves, the person that cheryl hasn’t been able to stop thinking about from the moment her eyes first landed on her at riverdale general hospital all those months ago…

“lisa, this is toni, my girlfriend. she’ll keep us safe tonight.” cheryl says, and if lisa is surprised by those words, she doesn’t say it, simply blinks once in shock before smiling at toni and nodding.

“i’m sure she will.”

with that, lisa heads to the guest bedroom downstairs, and cheryl tightens her grip on toni’s hand as they make their way upstairs to cheryl’s room. the moment they’re inside, cheryl sighs tiredly and collapses onto her bed, groaning softly at the feeling of a soft mattress and egyptian cotton sheets. god, she’s missed her bed so much…she’s thankful to f.p for giving them respite, but that couch of his was nothing compared to this…

toni chuckles and falls down beside her, dropping her bag at the foot of the bed as she does.

“thank god we don’t have to sleep on that couch anymore.” toni says with a grateful sigh. cheryl grins widely and props herself up onto her elbow to look at toni with a smirk.

“who said you’re staying here permanently, t.t.?” she teases. toni’s eyes widen, and she groans and buries her head into her hands in embarrassment.

“god, no one, i’m an idiot, i’m sorry, cher-.” she doesn’t get the chance to finish her sentence. cheryl pulls her hands away from her face before leaning in and kissing her deeply, her hand moving up to cup toni’s jaw as the pink haired serpent sighs against her lips lightly. cheryl pulls away with a loud smack, her nose brushing against toni’s as she smiles and rubs toni’s bottom lip with her forefinger.

“don’t be silly, toni. you’re welcome to stay here for as long as you want.” she whispers against her lips. toni smiles, and she leans up slightly to kiss her before she shakes her head.
“thistlehouse belongs to nana rose, cheryl, she’s the one who decides if i stay or not.” she says simply, and cheryl rolls her eyes and shoves toni lightly as she collapses back onto the bed and faces the ceiling.

“then i guess you really are staying here, cause nana rose adores you.” she says with a grin. toni moves beside her, and cheryl blinks up at her as she hovers over cheryl with wide eyes.

“really?” she says in shock, and cheryl laughs lightly with a nod.

“mhmm…she told me she ‘quite likes you’.” cheryl says softly, reaching a hand up to curl around the back of toni’s neck, and toni smiles and leans in, resting her forearms on either side of cheryl’s head as her body weight falls on top of the red haired girl lightly.

“at least i’ve impressed one of your family members.” she mumbles. cheryl laughs, scratching the back of toni’s neck lightly before she licks her lips and looks toni in the eyes.

“if jason was alive, he’d quite like you, too, i think.” she whispers, her heart slowly hammering against her chest in pain at the idea of jason and toni meeting…he’d be taken aback by her pink hair, but he’d probably ultimately think it was cool…toni would probably be astounded by how different he was from cheryl, kinder, more relaxed and chilled out than his twin counterpart…

“i think i’d like him, too…” toni whispers back, her eyes filled with sadness at cheryl’s heartbreak, and cheryl inhales sharply before pulling the girl down the rest of the way, their lips meeting in a passionate kiss that’s filled with so much softness…

i’m so lucky…so fucking lucky to have this girl…

“i love you, toni.” cheryl whispers against her lips, and toni inhales and pulls away, her teeth chewing on her bottom lip with worry, but cheryl smiles and reassures her with a shake of her head and her thumb brushing across toni’s chin.

“you know it’s okay not to say it back, i told you it is, toni…” she says softly. toni sighs in frustration.

“i want to, so badly…but i just can’t stop thinking about…” toni trails off, her voice raising a few pitches as tears well in her eyes, and cheryl sits up slowly, pulling toni into her lap as she does as she
hugs the pink haired serpent to her body tightly.

“it’s okay…i understand…” cheryl whispers into her ear. the last time cheryl had said those three words, they had been to jason…he was gone now, dead, just like toni’s mother, so cheryl understands…probably better than anyone, she just wishes toni could see that…

“let’s unpack your clothes and get you sorted, t.t.” cheryl murmurs, knowing that the girl needs a distraction to take her mind off things, and toni nods against her neck with a sigh before she pulls away from cheryl and grabs the duffel bag.

unpacking toni’s clothes doesn’t take too long, both girls able to do it in under ten minutes with how little clothes toni has, and cheryl clears a small space for her in her closet, toni sighing at the amount of clothes cheryl has before raising an eyebrow and looking at her girlfriend with a grin.

“i can borrow your clothes right?” she asks, and cheryl grins back.

“of course. whenever you want.”

there’s something about her and toni sharing each other’s clothes that cheryl’s deeply in love with…the possessive nature of toni wearing something of cheryl’s and vice versa…a way to say that they belonged to each other and each other only…

at the bottom of the duffel bag is toni’s camera, photos of sweet pea, fangs, and her parents, and cheryl helps her pick a spot on the wall to stick them to, not even caring if they chip the paint or cause marks. she wants toni’s life displayed in this room, and the pictures are already giving the room so much more light and positivity than cheryl could have imagined…

her mother had refused to let cheryl hang up any posters or pictures of her friends, the room remaining a perfect sentiment to gothic art that cheryl does love, truly, but she’s hated never being able to make the room her own.

then again, she’s never really had friends to stick photos of up on the walls…

“shit.” cheryl’s pulled out of her thoughts by toni’s exclamation, and she looks at the pink haired serpent to see her looking down at the duffel bag with wide eyes.
“what is it, t.t.?” cheryl asks, rushing over to her with worry, and toni looks up at her in panic before she exhales shakily and reaches into the duffel bag.

she pulls out a blue dress and a red cardigan, and cheryl’s heart drops.

her uniform…the uniform she was forced to wear at the sisters of quiet mercy…

“i’m so sorry, cheryl, i didn’t realize i shoved them in here when you got dressed the first night…” toni says apologetically, and cheryl’s eyes remain frozen on the pieces of fabric, her mind spinning at a million miles an hour…

toni says nothing, simply drops the clothes on top of the duffel bag on the floor before she cradles cheryl’s face in her hands and pulls her down to kiss her softly, cheryl gripping her hips and pulling her closer with a groan as her tongue slides into toni’s mouth desperately.

“cher?” warm fingers grip her cold ones, and cheryl closes her eyes at toni’s touch, trying to will away the memories before toni suddenly touches her cheek softly.

“look at me.” she whispers. cheryl exhales shakily, but finally opens her eyes, looking down at her girlfriend with panic. tears quickly well in her eyes and fall down her cheeks, and toni brushes them away so carefully, that cheryl finds herself whimpering at the action.

“she’s safe…toni saved her, toni was going to protect her, toni loved her…

toni says nothing, simply drops the clothes on top of the duffel bag on the floor before she cradles cheryl’s face in her hands and pulls her down to kiss her softly, cheryl gripping her hips and pulling her closer with a groan as her tongue slides into toni’s mouth desperately.

“she’s not deviant, she’s not loveless, she’s nothing that her mother and the sisters said she was, she’s not-

“cheryl…” toni pulls away breathlessly, their foreheads resting against each other’s as they try to catch their breath, and cheryl swallows the lump in her throat, her bottom lip trembling as toni sighs
against her.

“do you want to talk about it?” she whispers. cheryl shakes her head against her, pursing her lips with a whimper.

“i…i don’t want to remember those days i spent in there, toni, please…”

“okay, okay, we won’t, shh…” toni pulls her in for a hug, her arms wrapping around cheryl’s neck as the red haired girl buries her head into toni’s shoulder and holds her tightly.

she doesn’t want to remember the pain, the suffering, she wants to forget it all ever happened, but those burn marks are still on her temples, perhaps scarring her for the rest of her life and why can’t she just forget it all-

toni…toni’s here and she loves you, you don’t need to dwell on what happened, live in the present…

“cheryl, i can’t…i can’t say those words just yet, but i…i want to show you. i want to show you that i do…i wanna take your pain away, i want to show you that what they did to you, it doesn’t define you…” toni’s rambling slightly into her ear, perhaps caught up in the moment, but cheryl’s drinking in every word, desperate for a closeness with the pink haired girl, desperate to feel something other than what she’s feeling right now…

“these are deviant thoughts, cheryl!”

“you’ve never known love, cheryl…except to rip it apart. because you are a jealous, spite filled, starving, emotional anorexic…”

“i’m not deviant…i’m not loveless…” cheryl finds herself whispering, and toni smiles and pulls back, cradling cheryl’s face in her hands once more as she presses a soft kiss to her lips.

“no, cheryl. you’re not. you’re the most beautiful person i know, inside and out…” she breathes. cheryl whimpers again, and toni teases her with a brush of her lips against her jaw, her nails scratching at the back of cheryl’s neck with a soft hum.
“let me show you, cheryl…” she whispers into her ear, and cheryl feels her eyes roll into the back of her head before she’s licking her lips and nodding, her hands pulling toni impossibly closer as her body throbs with need-

she needs a distraction. she needs toni…

“show me…please, toni, show me…” she croaks out, and that’s all it takes for toni to kiss her passionately, her fingers curling into cheryl’s hair and pulling her closer as cheryl whines and grips the lapels of toni’s leather jacket, moving it off her arms in a desperation to get the clothing off her.

cheryl can feel her body shaking with nerves, because if they’re going to do this…god, are they going to do this?

the serpent jacket falls to the floor at both their feet, toni never removing her lips from cheryl’s as she grips the hem of cheryl’s shirt and begins to lift it. they pull apart with a loud smack, toni practically ripping the shirt over cheryl’s head before she throws it across the room and pulls cheryl back to her lips, and cheryl is fucking trembling against her, but she can feel it in her heart that she doesn’t want her to stop-

toni spins her, cheryl falling down onto the bed with a slight squeak as toni laughs breathlessly and hovers above her, kissing her way from cheryl’s lips down to her jaw with bruising pressure. cheryl groans at the feeling, the blood flowing to every inch of skin that toni bites down on with a throbbing rush, and cheryl finds herself grabbing toni’s shirt from the musical, white and long sleeved with a little rainbow on it, and how fucking fitting, cheryl thinks, pulling it up and off her body before throwing it across the room to join her own.

toni smiles down at her before her lips return to cheryl’s neck, her tongue lathing over the wounds she’s created, and cheryl squeezes her thighs underneath the pink haired serpent for some form of relief because fuck, this feels so good-

“cheryl, are you sure about this?” toni breathes into her ear, and cheryl feels a shiver go up her spine, goosebumps immediately covering her body as she purses her lips and nods once.

“yes, please toni…”

toni’s hand moves around the small of her back, fingertips brushing over creamy skin before they touch the lace of her bra, and cheryl takes the hint and arches her back off the bed, toni reaching with
one hand to unhook her bra before she peels it off her slowly. cheryl’s heart is fucking pounding against her chest wildly, and she knows she’s shaking almost violently from fear and lust and a million other emotions, because no one’s ever seen her like this before, and oh god, this is it, it’s happening, it’s really happening-

“oh my god…” toni straddles her, sits down on her hips and looks down at the sight before her, cheryl half naked on the bed, breathing heavily from anticipation and truthfully, fear, but the lust in toni’s eyes…

her hands move up cheryl’s stomach, thumbs caressing her ribcages and just brushing under her breasts, and the action causes cheryl to groan, her back arching up to lean closer into toni’s touch…

“you’re so beautiful, cheryl…fuck, i feel like i can’t touch you, i don’t feel worthy enough…” toni says with a chuckle, and cheryl whines and shakes her head, because god, cheryl’s stopped herself from going this far with anyone else because they haven’t been worthy enough, but toni…toni is, she is and cheryl wants her, she needs her-

she can’t help herself. she sits up slightly to grab toni by the back of her neck and pull her down for a kiss.

“touch me…please, toni…” she begs breathlessly against her lips, because she fucking needs this, and toni inhales sharply before kissing her passionately, her fingers curling around cheryl’s wrists to pull her hands up over her head. her nails scratch down cheryl’s arms, her kisses moving down to cheryl’s neck once again before her hands move up and down the sides of her body, and then-

she cups cheryl’s breasts, thumbs brushing over both nipples, and cheryl arches into her touch and bites down on her bottom lip to stop herself from groaning too loudly. god, how can it feel so good already, how-

“cheryl, you’re shaking…” toni whispers, moving back to look her in the eyes with concern. cheryl finds herself swallowing thickly, and toni’s eyes widen, as if she’s connecting the dots in her mind as she lifts a hand up to brush her thumb across cheryl’s cheek softly.

“cher, have you done this before?” toni breathes. cheryl hesitates, her heart dropping because she doesn’t want toni to know, but her lack of reply confirms toni’s suspicions, apparently, because she gasps slightly and looks cheryl in the eyes with surprise.
“you haven’t?” she asks softly, and cheryl licks her lips before simply shaking her head, and she’s crying, she knows she is, can feel those fucking tears falling before she can stop them because she feels humiliated for waiting for so fucking long-

“hey, baby, no, it’s okay, don’t cry, i’m not upset, i just…if this is your first time, i don’t wanna hurt you, cher.” toni says with a soft smile, and god, cheryl loves her, she loves her, she loves her, she loves her-

“if it goes too far, or you want me to stop at any point, just tell me, okay?” toni says, pressing a kiss to her jaw, and cheryl nods desperately before toni pulls away again.

“use your words, cher.” she says firmly, and cheryl fucking whines, she just needs to be fucking touched-

“okay, okay, yes! toni, please-.” the pink haired serpent cuts her off with a desperate kiss, her hands once again massaging cheryl’s breasts before her lips move down her body slowly, teeth biting down on cheryl’s collarbone as her fingers weave through pink hair-

when toni takes a nipple into her mouth, cheryl bites down on her knuckle to stop herself from screaming in pleasure, her other hand curling into a fist in toni’s hair causing it to pull on pink strands, but toni groans at the action and swirls her tongue faster, her fingers moving down to fiddle with the button on cheryl’s shorts-

toni’s so soft with her, but there’s a roughness to her actions as well, her fingers gentle, but insistent as she moves her mouth down to press kisses to cheryl’s ribcage, and cheryl spreads her legs to accommodate the girl further, toni falling off the edge of the bed purposely to sit on her knees before she grips cheryl by the hips and tugs her closer.

cheryl’s breath hitches at the action, and toni smiles up at her before she slowly begins pulling down cheryl’s shorts, cheryl lifting her butt up off the bed with a grin to let her despite how much she’s shaking in anticipation. toni throws them behind her, and she moves up to remove cheryl’s underwear-

“wait…” cheryl breathes, and toni immediately stops, looking up at cheryl imploringly before she sits up, and toni moves back until she’s standing, cheryl gripping her hips to tug her closer.

“you’re wearing too much.” cheryl whispers, leaning in to press a kiss to toni’s bare stomach, and
toni smiles before brushing cheryl’s hair back from her face affectionately and looking down at her.

“you want my clothes off, just say the word, cher.” she breathes, and cheryl hums against her skin before she reaches behind toni’s back and un Hooks her bra with one hand. cheryl’s heart is racing, her mind foggy as she slowly pulls off toni’s bra, and once it’s gone, cheryl stares at the pink haired serpent in awe.

no one could be this beautiful, it wasn’t possible…

her thumbs brush over brown nipples, and she finds herself wondering what they taste like as toni gasps softly, closing her eyes she runs her fingers through cheryl’s hair with a smile, but before cheryl can do anything, the pink haired girl cradles her face in her hands and forces her to look up.

“let me take care of you first, cher.” she whispers. cheryl licks her lips, but nods once, and toni smiles and leans down to kiss her softly, using the kiss to push cheryl back down onto the bed. her bare breasts brush against cheryl’s own, causing both girls to groan as she moves back down, kissing the valley between cheryl’s breasts before she smiles up at her widely.

“these are amazing, by the way.” she says gruffly, her hands moving up to cup cheryl’s breasts again, and cheryl smiles and bites down on her bottom lip to stop herself from groaning as she brushes toni’s hair away from her face.

“i’m glad you like them, t.t, they’re the only pair i have.” she teases. toni chuckles against her skin, but she looks up at cheryl before she suddenly moves up again and nuzzles her nose against cheryl’s, brushing her lips against cheryl’s gently.

“don’t be nervous.” she murmurs, tongue snaking out to brush across cheryl’s lower lip, and cheryl licks her own lips and nods once, inhaling deeply before exhaling shakily in an effort to rid her nerves as the pink haired serpent smiles above her.

“ready?” she breathes. cheryl smiles.

toni…toni, toni, toni, so patient and thoughtful and kind…the perfect person for cheryl to give herself to…

“ready.” she whispers. toni presses another kiss to her lips before she moves back down, and she
places a kiss just below cheryl’s bellybutton before she curls her fingers into cheryl’s underwear and begins tugging them down. She’s resting on her knees on the ground again as she slides the fabric off cheryl’s legs, and instead of throwing it behind her, she rests it on the bed politely, cheryl chuckling despite her heart pounding against her chest, but her smile quickly fades as she watches toni take her in, eyes roaming over her now completely naked body in fascination.

Their eyes connect, and cheryl knows that all toni is thinking about is making her feel good. Fuck the scars covering her body from penelope’s abuse, from the sisters and their wicked ways…

The scars that marred her body made her beautiful in toni’s eyes. She was beautiful in toni’s eyes.

Someone found her beautiful…

Toni kisses her way up cheryl’s legs, hooking them over her shoulders until her heels are digging into toni’s back, and when toni’s breath ghosts against cheryl’s center, her hips buck up almost subconsciously, her fingers digging into the sheets as her back arches off the bed in anticipation—

Toni’s hands rest on her hipbones, pushing her down before she sucks a dark spot into cheryl’s thigh harshly. Cheryl whimpers, her body throbbing and she needs her, god, how can she keep teasing her like this—

Soft thumbs spread her open before a tongue licks up her folds insistently, and cheryl gasps despite herself, eyes flying open in surprise at how fucking good it feels—

“Oh god, toni!” Her hands immediately rest over toni’s on her hipbones, gripping her wrists tightly as toni interlaces their fingers, and she licks her once more, tongue dragging so softly, but so beautifully—

“Fuck, you taste so good, cher…” Toni whispers, and she moves her tongue against her once more as cheryl groans loudly—

“There’s other people in the house, cheryl.” Toni says with a laugh, pressing a kiss to her thigh as the girl beneath her whimpers and nods furiously.

“R-right, sorry—”
“don’t be. but maybe grab a pillow?” toni says with another breathless laugh, and cheryl can feel her cheeks turning red with embarrassment as she reaches her arms up to grab a pillow at the head of the bed, pulling it down to her face to hide behind it for a moment.

she can do this, she can be quiet-

“okay, keep going.” cheryl whispers, resting the pillow beneath her head as she looks down at toni with a smile, and the pink haired serpent raises an eyebrow before she continues. cheryl’s head falls back against the pillow as she bites down on her lip to suppress a soft moan.

god, this feels fucking amazing, why has cheryl waited so long-

for this, cheryl...for this moment, not some random fuck from a guy who doesn’t even care about you...for this, for a girl who loves you, for someone who loves you-

she knows she hasn’t said it, but toni’s showing her right now, and cheryl can fucking feel it-

toni’s lips suddenly close around her clit and suck softly, and cheryl turns her head, one arm wrapping around the pillow and holding it up to her face to scream in pleasure against it as her other hand moves to wrap into toni’s hair and pull-

she can hear toni groan against her, but she feels it as well, the vibration running through her, and holy fuck-

“oh my god...toni, don’t stop, don’t stop, please, please-.” cheryl’s voice is so fucking high, escaping her in a squeak as toni’s tongue suddenly begins licking against her clit as well, and she’s alternating between both, cheryl’s whole body trembling as her thighs squeeze around toni’s head-

she can’t hold it, she can’t-

“don’t stop, toni-.”
cheryl’s masturbated before, because of course she has, she’s a teenager, and after nights of groping sessions ending with her being left unsatisfied, she needed something, but nothing has ever been as good as this, god-

she can feel that familiar build up in the pit of her stomach, brought on so many times from just her hand, but this time, it’s toni’s mouth bringing her there, the mouth and touch of someone she loves-

toni’s pushing her hips down onto the bed again, and cheryl interlaces their fingers for a brief moment as toni licks her faster, her climax rushing to her headfirst like a freight train, and she tries to move her hands to grab the pillow to silence what’s sure to be an explosion of sounds that’s seconds away from erupting from her, but toni’s hold on her hands tightens-

“let me hear you, cheryl.” toni whispers huskily, apparently changing her mind about how loud they can be, and before cheryl can protest, toni sucks her clit into her mouth once again-

her thighs squeeze around toni’s head, the girl’s name escaping her lips in a torn cry as every muscle in her body tenses and throbs, her back arching off the bed as her nails dig into toni’s wrist-

it’s bliss. pure bliss and euphoria and something cheryl never thought she’d ever feel in her entire life, but it’s addictive, a drug that she can’t get enough of, and toni’s tongue is still moving against her, cheryl’s body twitching with every lap of her tongue-

toni doesn’t stop until cheryl’s body relaxes back onto the bed, a slick sheen of sweat covering her naked body as she pants for air desperately, and toni kisses her way back up to cheryl, wet, open mouthed kisses placed on her body before she hovers above the red haired girl beneath her with a smile.

“you okay?” she whispers, cheryl still breathing heavily against her, and cheryl smiles lazily, blinking up at her girlfriend tiredly before she leans in and kisses her. the taste of herself on toni’s lips causes her to groan softly.

she’s right. she does taste good.

“god, toni…that was…” cheryl laughs, lost for words, and toni smiles and kisses her again before she pulls away and looks into her eyes.
they’re still heavy with lust, and cheryl grins widely before brushing toni’s hair back from her face and leaning up to whisper into her ear.

“your turn?” she whispers seductively, and toni whimpers into her ear before she’s nodding furiously.

“i…yes, fuck-.” cheryl doesn’t give her time to finish her sentence, instead grabs toni and flips them over until the back of her head is resting on the pillow now, and cheryl smiles and leans down to kiss her before she looks into toni’s eyes hesitantly.

she has an idea of what she’s supposed to do, she’s done it to herself on multiple occasions, but doing it to someone else…

“i’ll talk you through it, don’t worry.” toni breathes with a smile, and god…

god, cheryl loves her…

she unbuttons toni’s jeans, kissing her insistently as she does before she moves down to remove them, and toni helps her, shimmying her hips as cheryl practically rips them off her body. she stares at toni’s bare legs, smooth and dark and god, so beautiful…

she has scars, too, cheryl notices…small ones here and there that cheryl finds herself frowning at, but she figures it’s a conversation for another time, another place…

right now, all she can focus on is giving toni the same pleasure she just gave her.

cheryl’s fingers hook into toni’s underwear, and cheryl can feel herself shaking from nerves again. what if she fucks it up? what if she does something wrong and toni’s turned off her completely-

toni suddenly grips her wrist tightly.

“cheryl, i can see you doubting yourself. stop it, okay? stop putting pressure on yourself to be perfect, whatever happens, i’m not going anywhere, okay? don’t be scared, please…” toni says softly, sitting up slowly to cradle cheryl’s cheek in her hand lovingly. cheryl bites down on her lower
lip in hesitation before she sighs and nods against toni’s hand with a smile, and the pink haired serpent returns her smile and leans in to kiss her before she lies back down with a deep exhale. cheryl licks her lips and finally removes toni’s underwear, sliding it down dark skinned legs before placing them on the bed as well, and toni chuckles as cheryl steps back to appreciate the fucking masterpiece in front of her.

leonardo da vinci could only dream of painting something as beautiful as antoinette topaz…

“come here.” toni croaks out, curling a finger forward at her, and cheryl swallows thickly before moving between toni’s legs, the girl wrapping them around cheryl’s waist, and when cheryl’s stomach brushes against toni’s wet center, both girls groan, cheryl slightly stupefied at the fact that toni was this fucking wet already-

“god, you’re soaked, t.t.” cheryl whispers, her forehead connecting with toni’s collarbone with a loud thunk, and toni chuckles and runs her fingers through cheryl’s hair.

“of course i am, cheryl, the fucking noises you were making…” toni groans, and cheryl feels a shiver run up her spine at the sound.

fuck, she needs to hear that again, she needs to-

“toni, i…” cheryl hesitates, because she isn’t really sure what to do, but toni smiles reassuringly and grips her wrist, leaning up to kiss her before she pushes it down her body softly.

“i know you’re nervous, but you don’t have to be, okay?” she whispers against her lips. a shiver runs up cheryl’s spine, and she closes her eyes and nods before she leans down to kiss toni softly, her lips trailing down to suck in the skin of the weak spot on toni’s neck-

toni groans again, and the hairs on the back of cheryl’s neck stand up at the sound as she sucks harder, biting down on it and relishing in the high pitched whine that escapes toni as her thighs squeeze cheryl’s waist-

she moves her hand up to brush across toni’s nipple, smiling against the skin of toni’s neck when it hardens at her touch, and she kisses down her collarbone, biting it softly before she kisses just above her left breast-
“cheryl, fuck…” toni’s fingers wrap in her hair, pushing her down a little impatiently as cheryl smiles and takes a nipple into her mouth, swirling her tongue as toni’s back arches off the bed with a soft whimper.

“cher, please-.” toni’s grabbing her wrist again, pushing it down to where she needs her, and cheryl smiles against her again, drunk off the power she has over toni right now.

god, this is incredible-

cheryl cups toni’s center, and as soon as her fingers meet a gush of wetness, she groans and removes her lips from toni’s breast with a pop, her lips moving up to suck the skin of her neck once again, because god, cheryl wants to mark every inch of her, make it known that toni was hers and no one else’s-

cheryl starts with what she knows, fingers feeling for toni’s clit, and when she finds it, she slides her fingers against it lightly, toni shivering against her before she groans and pulls cheryl up to her lips once more, kissing her desperately.

what happens next, cheryl doesn’t even intend. it’s just that toni is so wet, that cheryl’s fingers slide down too far from her intended target, and before she can pull back, her index finger slips into toni-

the girl gasps wildly, hips bucking as she digs her nails into cheryl’s back, and she hisses at the pain, but finds herself staring at toni’s face in awe.

her teeth are biting down on her lower lip, her eyes fluttering closed as her body arches off the bed, and cheryl moves her lips down to her neck once more, kissing her throat as she swallows down her nerves and curls her finger up-

“fuck!” toni buries her head into the crook of cheryl’s neck, her teeth biting down on cheryl’s skin with a groan, and cheryl’s eyes roll in the back of her head at the feeling of toni clenching around her finger-

“toni…” she manages to gasp out, and the girl clings to her tighter, cheryl exhaling shakily before she whispers into the pink haired serpent’s ear.

“keep going?” she breathes. toni whines as she nods furiously.
“yes, yes keep going, cheryl-.” she’s cut off by cheryl’s teeth biting down on her earlobe, and cheryl’s heart is fucking pounding as she thrusts her finger in again, curling it until she feels the ridges of toni’s g-spot-

“right there, right there, oh my god!” toni gasps into her ear, and cheryl’s floating on fucking cloud nine from the noises toni is making, soft grunts and gasps as she thrusts faster and harder-

she’s doing this, she’s giving toni this pleasure right now, holy shit-

“a-add another finger, please-.” toni whines, and cheryl swallows dryly as she inserts her middle finger to join her index, a groan escaping her as toni clutches around both fingers greedily-

“god, toni…you feel amazing.” cheryl breathes into her ear. toni laughs against her, pulling back with a whine until her head is resting against the pillow again, and cheryl looks down at her as she curls her fingers, watches toni’s eyes roll into the back of her head as her hips buck up-

cheryl pushes her knee up to rest behind the back of her hand, thankful for the years of vixen training that’s made her so flexible in this moment as she uses it to elevate her thrusts, and once she moves in deeper, toni’s thighs squeeze her waist so hard, cheryl’s positive she’ll have bruises as her nails dig into cheryl’s back, a wild gasp escaping her-

“i’m c-close, cheryl-.”

“what do you need, babe?” cheryl asks, because god, she wants to push her over the edge, she fucking needs to-

“thumb-use your thumb on my c-oh fuck!” toni doesn’t finish her sentence as cheryl thrust her fingers in harshly, but cheryl catches her drift, lifting her thumb to press against the soaking bud of toni’s clit-

two, three insistent rubs against it, and toni is trembling beneath her, a loud whine cut off by cheryl’s lips crashing against hers, swallowing down her moans, and god, toni is fucking cutting up her back right now with her nails, scratching so deeply, but cheryl doesn’t care, can only relish in the feeling of toni trembling against her body, twitching as her hips buck up crazily, and she’s clenching, she’s clenching so rapidly around cheryl’s fingers-
cheryl has never, ever, in her entire life, felt that rush of need, the rush to want something so readily for the rest of her life, but she’s positive, *fucking positive*, that she could spend the rest of her life doing this with toni. it’s like a drug, her eyes watching toni’s face scrunch up post orgasm in bliss, the way her brow furrows and the way she wraps a hand around the back of cheryl’s neck to pull her down for a kiss as her legs finally detach from around cheryl’s waist to collapse onto the bed tiredly-

“holy shit…cheryl, where the fuck did you learn how to do that on your first time?” toni breathes against her lips, and cheryl finally removes her fingers from inside the pink haired serpent, both of them shivering from the loss as she smiles and kisses toni softly.

“you literally talked me through it, t.t.” she says with a light laugh. toni rolls her eyes.

“barely. you’re just a natural pussy pleaser, bombshell.” she says with a grin. cheryl laughs before biting down on her neck in reprimand.

“language.” she teases, but she can’t help but grin widely. she was *good*, she’d made toni feel good, she had nothing to worry about…

toni rolls her eyes, but presses a kiss to her brow before wrapping her arms around cheryl and pulling her down against her chest, cheryl’s thumb brushing across her ribcage as her head rests against toni’s breast.

“you swear a lot during sex.” cheryl mumbles, pressing a kiss above the breast her head is resting on, and toni laughs lightly and looks down at her.

“does it turn you off?” she asks with a raised eyebrow. cheryl whines and shakes her head furiously.

“no, god no.” toni smiles, and cheryl leans up, kissing her with a soft hum as toni runs her fingers through her hair.

“shit, what time is it?” toni whispers huskily, pulling away from her to grab her phone on the bedside table. she lights the phone up, and cheryl frowns when she sees it’s almost two in the morning.

“damn. we should get some rest, god only knows what’s waiting in store for us in the morning.” toni
she just had sex…for the first time…with the girl she loved…after so many years of whispers and people calling her every name under the sun behind her back, cheryl’s finally gone that step…and instead of losing her virginity just for the sake of it, she waited patiently for the right person and she got…fuck, she got this…

she’s never been more happy that she waited.

“thank you, t.t. i couldn’t have asked for a more perfect first time.” she whispers against her hairline. toni smiles and pushes herself up slightly, looking at cheryl with nothing but adoration as she leans down to kiss her softly.

“i wish i could say the same. my first time was horrible, but this…this was amazing. thank you, cheryl. i’m just glad i could make your first experience with sex a good one.” she says with a wink, and cheryl rolls her eyes, but chuckles all the same as toni rests her head against her chest once more.

"goodnight, toni." she whispers.

"goodnight, cher." toni whispers back.

and as both girls drift off to sleep, happier than they’ve ever been in their entire lives, the uniform of the sisters of quiet mercy lays at the foot of the bed on top of the duffel bag, completely and utterly forgotten.
soft fingers running up and down her back is what wakes cheryl blossom up in the early hours of sunday morning.

for a few moments, she’s confused, a soft frown taking over her delicate features as she buries her face into her pillow with a soft groan of displeasure. for a few moments, she thinks it’s her mother, seconds away from digging her nails into her back and hissing into her ear to wake up and get nana rose prepared for breakfast.

but slowly, the memories begin to hit her…her mother no longer lived in thistlehouse, cheryl’s truly terrifying rendition of carrie white making sure of that, and the person soothingly drawing patterns into her back…

“toni?” cheryl’s voice is husky, thick with sleep and a little wary as she turns her head to the side and is met with the most beautiful sight she could ever possibly imagine waking up to.

antoinette topaz’s eyes are filled with adoration, her pink hair no longer in braids and a slight mess as the curls fall over her shoulders and spill onto the white sheets covering her body, and her pink lips, slightly swollen from last night’s activities, curl into a smile, her eyes blinking lazily as they trail up cheryl’s naked body before falling on her chocolate brown eyes.

“good morning…” she whispers, her voice cracking slightly from lack of use as she leans in to press a kiss to cheryl’s temple. cheryl smiles tiredly at her touch, her arms moving up to hug the pillow closer to her face as she exhales deeply with a soft hum.
“it is.” she says happily. toni chuckles before her eyes roam over cheryl’s bare back with a look of guilt, her teeth gnawing on her bottom lip sheepishly.

“so…your back is a little scratched up.” she says with a sigh, and cheryl only now registers the hint of pain as she turns onto her side, but she finds herself grinning.

for the first time in her life, the marks on her body weren’t from abuse, from hate or destruction or anger. they were marks of pleasure, toni’s pleasure…

she shivers at the memory of toni’s nails digging into her back, and cheryl ignores the throb between her legs, reminds herself that toni isn’t going anywhere, that they’ll have plenty more moments just like that in their future…

their future…

“i’m sorry, cher-.”

“don’t be silly, t.t it barely hurts.” cheryl reassures her, reaching a hand up to touch her cheek as she brushes her thumb across the apple of toni’s cheekbone. the pink haired serpent smiles, and she presses a kiss to cheryl’s palm before gripping her wrist and leaning in closer, her head collapsing onto the pillow as she comes face to face with cheryl. her hand moves around cheryl’s body to her back, fingers caressing the marks softly as she closes her eyes.

“it’s early. we can go back to sleep if you want, i didn’t mean to wake you…” toni whispers. cheryl leans in closer until their foreheads are touching, and she plays with the tips of toni’s pink hair subconsciously, eyes roaming over the face she’s so easily fallen in love with before she licks her lips and shakes her head.

“you didn’t wake me up, it’s okay. besides, i have a feeling we have a big day ahead of us.” she sighs, frowning at the thought of what’s in store for her once she leaves the safety of thistlehouse, and toni’s eyes blink open, a look of hesitation crossing over her features.

“we need to go to the trailer park today at some point. i need to see the boys.” she says hoarsely. cheryl frowns, but simply nods once.

“okay, t.t. whatever you need.” she says softly. toni licks her lips, looking into cheryl’s eyes for a
few moments, and the red haired girl finds herself frowning.

something’s wrong…

“What is it, toni?” she breathes, a soothing hand trailing down toni’s arm before she interlaces their fingers, and toni purses her lips before she suddenly turns onto her back to look up at the ceiling. she shakes her head slightly, exhaling shakily before turning to look at cheryl with worry.

“I promised the boys i wouldn’t say anything, but i don’t like the idea of keeping things from you, cher. i…i want us to work, more than anything, and sweet pea doesn’t know you like i do, he wants to keep this between me, him and fangs. but i can’t lie to you, i…i won’t.” she croaks out. cheryl quickly feels panic begin to rise in her, and she props herself up onto her elbow to look at toni with worry.

she knew something was wrong yesterday, had a feeling it had something to do with toni’s family… from how panicked and scared toni looked, cheryl knew it must have something to do with fangs and sweet pea, the two boys who toni had no hesitation in calling her brothers despite their lack of blood relation to each other…

“What happened?” she asks firmly, but not demandingly, because she’s still learning how to be a good person, how to be patient and listen and not get mad when she doesn’t get what she wants, and toni hesitates for a long time, looking down at their interlaced hands and playing with cheryl’s fingers nervously before she licks her lips and looks into cheryl’s eyes.

“fangs and midge slept together during rehearsals for carrie, and we’re worried if sheriff keller finds out, he’ll become suspect number one in her murder.” she whispers.

cheryl freezes.

fangs and midge? but…how? cheryl thought fangs and kevin were getting close, she’d seen the moments they had together during rehearsal, the both of them sharing looks that cheryl couldn’t help but smile at every time she saw them…

but fangs and midge? cheryl didn’t see that coming at all…

“Cheryl, say something.” toni says anxiously. cheryl opens her mouth to speak, but no words come
why…why did sweet pea feel like he couldn’t trust her with this information? what did he think she was going to do, deliver fangs to sheriff keller with her index finger pointed accusingly at him? yes, midge was a river vixen, her classmate and someone that she ultimately was fond of, but fangs…god, fangs had saved her life on two separate occasions, all cheryl cared about was protecting him…

it’s not toni’s fault sweet pea doesn’t trust you, don’t get mad at her, cheryl…

but why didn’t toni tell her this last night? did toni not trust her enough to tell her something like this?

we just witnessed a murder, of course she wasn’t going to bring it up! she didn’t want to worry you, she told you she wanted to focus on protecting you!

cheryl purses her lips, finally shuts her eyes and tells the two sides of her brain currently at war to shut up before she looks down at toni and exhales shakily.

“why would he be suspect number one if it came out that he slept with her?” she says instead, not wanting to cause an argument with her girlfriend over all the doubts swirling in her mind right now, and toni exhales deeply and shakes her head.

“i don’t know, because he’s a serpent? we could be the nicest gang on planet earth, cheryl, and we’d still have a target on our backs, and sheriff keller is probably getting a rainstorm of hell from the mayor and everyone in town. the sooner he can arrest someone for her murder, the better.” toni says hoarsely, and cheryl can see the tears beginning to brim in her eyes from panic.

she’s scared. god, of course she is, she could lose fangs…

beautiful, amazing fangs, the boy who saved her so many times without even knowing her…

“but midge’s body had a message beside it signed by the black hood, and fangs isn’t the black hood, toni, he can’t be--.”

“of course he isn’t, cheryl! but we’re serpents! you saw how quickly mayor mccoy blamed us for the
distribution of jingle jangle, she’ll probably have no issue with pinning murder on us, too! none of us exactly have clean records…” toni trails off, her jaw clenching, and cheryl feels her panic quickly return.

toni…toni going back to juvie…

“What are you going to do?” cheryl says in a low voice, avoiding toni’s gaze as she tries to swallow down any feelings of anger and despair. right now, toni is scared, and cheryl needs to help her, not make her feel worse…

toni scoffs, laughing without humor as she rests a hand on her forehead.

“I don’t know…pray that sheriff keller doesn’t find out about fangs and midge, pray that his name doesn’t even come up in this investigation…”

“Well, no offence to sheriff keller, but he hasn’t exactly done a great job as of late, considering the scooby gang are the ones who discovered my father killed jason, not him, and the black hood is still running around a free man…” cheryl mutters. toni simply sighs, and cheryl watches her for a few moments in hesitation before she clears her throat and speaks up.

She’s not mad. she’s not. she just wants to know why…

“Why didn’t you tell me this last night, toni? and why would sweet pea tell you to keep this from me?” she asks slowly. toni closes her eyes, swallowing thickly as she shakes her head. cheryl can practically see the war waging in toni’s mind, and the pink haired serpent is silent for a few moments before she looks up at cheryl sadly.

“You need to understand, cheryl…for the last five years, it’s been myself, sweet pea and fangs. just the three of us, fighting to survive, keeping each other safe…we’re a family, cher. those boys are like my blood brothers, so when sweet pea asked me to stay quiet about it, i didn’t even hesitate. but now…” toni trails off, her voice cracking slightly as she reaches down and interlaces their fingers once more, a smile playing on her lips.

“Now i have someone else. now i have you. and after last night…i want you to be part of my family, cheryl, and i know deep down that if i want that to happen, i can’t keep things from you. that’s why i told you.” cheryl’s heart stops.
toni wants her to be part of her family?

the thought warms cheryl’s heart, almost heals all the goddamn cracks and tears that years of abuse from her mother and father had caused, but despite it all, there’s still that voice in the back of her fucking mind…

why didn’t she tell her last night?

if toni wanted cheryl to be part of her family…god, if she wanted that, toni needs to trust her, why can’t she see that…

“toni, it’s not only keeping secrets, you need to learn to trust me, too.” cheryl says hoarsely, voicing her opinions. toni’s eyes widen as she nods her head furiously.

“i do trust you, cheryl-.”

“then you would’ve said something to sweet pea. you would’ve told him and fangs that they could trust me with this information.” cheryl says firmly, and she’s trying hard to keep the steel out of her voice, but she’s still learning…she’s still learning how to be patient, how to be a good person, and sometimes she fucking slips up.

it’s simple, isn’t it? the reason toni didn’t say anything to sweet pea was because she herself didn’t trust cheryl.

she didn’t trust her…

toni looks at her in surprise, blinking rapidly before she lets out a shaky breath.

“cheryl, i’m sorry i didn’t tell you sooner-.”

“it’s not even about that, toni! it’s about trust…it’s about you not trusting me, that’s why you didn’t tell me sooner! do you really think i would ever do anything to put fangs in danger? he’s saved my life twice now!” cheryl can hear her voice rising, the heat in her body growing from anger, such a contrast to how it was last night, and she doesn’t want to get mad, but fuck, she thought they were
okay, she thought they were perfect-

toni doesn’t trust her.

“cheryl, i know you would never do anything to hurt fangs, where is this all coming from?!” toni exclaims, sitting up slowly and reaching out for her girlfriend, but cheryl finds herself inching away from her touch, turning her back to the pink haired serpent as those voices in her head get louder and louder-

she doesn’t trust you. and why should she? you’ve never known love, cheryl. except to rip it apart. because you are a jealous, spite filled, starving, emotional anorexic…

her mother’s voice, her mother’s voice, why won’t it leave her alone-

“cheryl-.”

“go away, toni.” it comes out softly, not at all filled with the venom cheryl wants it to be filled with, because deep down, she doesn’t want toni to leave, she doesn’t want her to go, she can’t go, she can’t leave, ever, ever-

these are deviant thoughts, cheryl!

toni is quiet for a few moments beside her, but eventually, she shifts underneath the blankets, no doubt throwing them off herself as cheryl closes her eyes and tries her best to just breathe.

“i’m…i’m gonna go shower.” toni mumbles, her words coming out shaky, and cheryl can almost hear the tears in her voice-

what did you do, cheryl, what did you do-

you’ve never known love, cheryl…except to rip it apart.

she hears the sound of the door to her en suite closing, and it doesn’t take long before she’s sobbing,
thick tears falling down her cheeks as she heaves in shaky breaths and curls her knees up, hugging them to her chest in despair.

this is her fault, completely her fault, there was no need to get angry, why, why was she so upset about toni not saying something-

she doesn’t trust you!

no, no, she does, it wasn’t about that, it wasn’t-

cheryl gets up, throwing the covers off herself and making her way to the door of the bathroom, seconds away from barging through it and begging toni for forgiveness because she needs her to know, she needs her to understand…

it’s hard. god, it’s so hard for her to kick her old habits, to not be a bitch and get mad at every little thing, to not stomp her foot and throw a tantrum, it’s fucking hard.

it’s hard to kick the old thoughts, to shake off the sound of her mother’s voice telling her she wasn’t worthy of love, that she was deviant and despicable and a million other horrible things, it’s hard to try not to curl up into a ball and die every time she fucking remembers that her father, her own fucking father killed her twin brother, murdered him without even blinking-

she doesn’t know how to do this. she doesn’t know how to be a good person. how to sit down and listen and try to understand things from someone else’s perspective. she doesn’t know how to compromise, how to not get upset when she hears something that she doesn’t like, she doesn’t know how to be okay with not having control over what people think about her, she doesn’t know how to handle not having control over anything, because having control has been the only thing keeping her sane all these years, a semblance that she had least had something fucking going for her-

she wants to change, she wants to be better for toni, and she’s trying, but she’s not perfect, she’s not, fuck, toni-

she hears the sound of a phone going off, and cheryl blinks owlishly, turns her head to the side where her phone is lighting up on the bedside table. she sniffs, grabbing a robe from the hook on the wall beside her dresser and putting it on, tying the rope around her waist to keep it wrapped around her body firmly. she makes her way to the bedside table, grabbing her phone and looking down at it to see it’s an sos message.
emergency town meeting at the jubilee at nine am. attendance is MANDATORY for ALL citizens of riverdale. mayor mccoy and sheriff keller will be present to discuss recent events.

cheryl reads the message at least four times, her mind taking a few moments to process the words because of the battle currently waging inside it, and a few seconds later, toni’s phone lights up as well, the same message coming through.

cheryl’s eyes land on toni’s wallpaper on her phone, a photo of her and cheryl lying on the couch at f.p’s trailer, the tip of cheryl’s nose pressed to toni’s cheek and a wide smile on her face, mid-laughter. toni’s laughing as well, eyes crinkled and teeth shining, and cheryl blinks back tears as the memory of when they had taken that photo quickly floods her mind. it had been that day that they’d spent taking photos of cheryl’s injuries for her plea to be emancipated from penelope, toni holding her close for almost three hours as she had cried into toni’s chest in despair, until finally…after hours and hours of tears and sobbing, toni had managed to make her smile by telling her some stupid joke that cheryl can’t even remember anymore…

cheryl chokes on a sob, biting back a smile as toni’s phone fades to black, and cheryl looks down at the number fifteen hovering over her calls…

the voicemails.

she’s not sure what compels her to do it, but before she can stop and force herself to focus on the problem at hand, cheryl finds herself opening them, in need of a distraction, holding the phone to her ear as the first one rings through.

“you have fifteen new messages.”

BEEP.

“hey, cheryl, it’s toni, i…i’m at the hospital and i can’t find you, like anywhere. your milkshake is melting, get your cute butt back to nana rose’s room.”

cheryl isn’t sure what happens next, just feels her knees give out on her as she collapses onto the bed. toni…the day she disappeared, toni was supposed to meet her at the hospital. god, what had gone
through her girlfriend’s mind when she found cheryl wasn’t there?

her hands are shaking as she blinks back tears and moves onto the next message.

“cheryl, seriously, it’s been like three hours, are you at home? i’ll swing by, okay, just hang tight…”

cheryl licks her lips, pressing the button for the next message.

god, are they all from toni? had she really spent all those hours wondering what had happened to her, where she was, if she was okay?

“okay, cheryl, i’m trying really fucking hard not to freak out right now. your mom told me you’re at some boarding school in switzerland? she’s lying, r-right? you…you would’ve told me…fuck, cheryl, what’s going on? please, just call me back!”

she sent her messages while she was stuck in that place…while she was being tortured physically and mentally, toni was suffering as well…oh god…cheryl can hear the panic in her voice, so similar to her tone when she’d found cheryl in that hideous nunnery…

“it’s been five hours now, cheryl…i’m scared. i…i just need to know if you’re okay, please, please just call me, or message, just anything…god, cheryl, where are you?”

she knew, she knew from the beginning, she never doubted that cheryl would just leave her without saying goodbye…

“your mother is being a pain in my ass! i’ve been knocking on her door for a fucking hour straight and she’s refusing to answer the door! look, cheryl, i don’t care how many times i have to knock, i’ll let my knuckles bleed if i have to, i’m gonna get answers, i’m gonna find you. whatever she’s done, i’m not gonna let her get away with this!”

how is her mother still alive? the anger in toni’s voice is something cheryl’s never had the misfortune to hear before, full of rage and gravelly, and cheryl can almost picture toni outside the door to thistlehouse, pounding on it with a closed fist, screaming at the top of her lungs for penelope to tell her where cheryl was…
“cheryl, it’s…it’s been a full day now, i don’t know what’s going on, but i swear to god, i’m gonna find you. god, i just…i need to know you’re okay, please, please pick up the phone…”

cheryl feels her chest heave with a sob. toni sounds so broken, so afraid and scared, and it had only been a day. only twenty four hours without cheryl blossom by her side and toni topaz was losing it…

how could cheryl ever doubt that toni trusted her? god, what has she done…

“i can’t sleep. i can’t sleep not knowing if you’re safe, if you’re okay…i tried your mom again, but she’s as stoic as ever…i’m sorry, cheryl, i swear to you, i’m trying everything i can to find you…fuck, i’m so sorry…”

toni’s crying, cheryl can hear it in her voice, in the way she sniffs loudly before the next voicemail rings through.

“i’m asking sweet pea and fangs for help…i hope you don’t mind, baby…i just can’t do this on my own, i need help, whatever your mother’s done, fuck, she’s done it well, there’s no trace of you anywhere, your social media accounts are dead, i…i need help, cheryl. and the boys, they care about you, too. they’ll help me, i know they will…we’re going to find you, baby, i promise.”

cheryl pauses for a moment. fangs and sweet pea…they helped her. they fought by toni’s side as well to save her. and cheryl had just blown up about them not trusting her…

and why should they? god, at the end of the day, cheryl wasn’t a serpent, she wasn’t part of their family…but cheryl finally felt like she was becoming a part of their family, only for them not to trust her with something as big as this?

but that was the point of all of this, wasn’t it? cheryl can’t always get what she wants, and if she wants their trust, she has to earn it…not throw a goddamn temper tantrum and get mad at her girlfriend…her amazing, beautiful girlfriend who she loves…

she clicks on the next voicemail, exhaling deeply as she does.

“the boys are gonna help me, cheryl. we’re gonna find you, just hold on, wherever you are…no matter what it takes, what we have to do…we’ll barge through those goddamn wooden doors of thistlehouse if we have to…”
cheryl finds herself smiling at those words, and she hears the sound of the shower turning off inside the bathroom, but she keeps going…she can’t stop now, she needs to hear everything…

“cheryl, this is the like the tenth message i’ve left…wherever you are, i hope you’re hearing this…my voice telling you that i’m right there, right by your side. you’re not alone, cheryl. not ever again.”

more tears start to fall now, cheryl unable to stop them as her heart pounds against her chest. how bad had those days been for toni? not knowing where cheryl was, if she was okay, it’s evident how much hurt toni was going through in her voice with each voicemail, her tone getting more and more desperate and filled with anguish…

penelope blossom…at the end of it all, she was to blame for fucking everything. her abuse made cheryl this way, desperate to have people accept her and trust her so openly when she’d done nothing to earn it. her abuse made cheryl almost force herself on others, desperate for some semblance of family and love, because she never experienced it herself. and now toni was upset, and cheryl…

god, what did she do? why did she get so upset over something so small, why…

“hey, it’s uh…it’s becoming pretty obvious to me now that wherever you are, you don’t have your phone on you…but i just…i need to keep leaving these, i need to hear your voice, cheryl. even if it is just for a few seconds…i miss you, baby. but sweet pea and fangs are gonna help me, and i’ve got the scooby gang and josie on it as well. they wanna help, they wanna find you just as much as i do, and we are, okay, we’re gonna find you, cheryl. i promise.”

there’s still silence in the bathroom, and cheryl licks her lips and sniffs back her tears as she moves onto the last few messages.

“hey, cheryl, it’s veronica…toni just told me everything, and i promise, we’re gonna do everything we can to get you back, okay? just hang on tight…toni, she…she really cares about you, cheryl. we all do…stay strong.”

cheryl blinks down at her phone in surprise. veronica left her a message…veronica had thrown herself into the rescue mission, and cheryl hadn’t even so much as messaged her lately…she’s been a bad friend…
and what about josie? and betty? and even jughead and archie? kevin? all of them had saved her, too, why was cheryl so selfish? why was she always so focused on herself? she’s trying…but she’s not trying hard enough, fuck…

“jughead and betty haven’t found anything yet. i thought they were good at this shit, but apparently not. fucking useless. i think we’re gonna have to do something drastic here, cher, and maybe you won’t agree with it, but…if it helps us find you, i don’t care.”

ccheryl looks down at her phone, blinking a few times in shock. what drastic thing was toni talking about?

she hears movement on the other side of the bathroom door, and cheryl licks her lips and presses the next message.

“cheryl…god, this is probably the sixteenth message i’m leaving, but i don’t care. i…i miss you so much. and i don’t know where you are or what’s happening to you right now and that fucking terrifies me…but i’m gonna find you, cheryl. i don’t care how long it takes, or what i have to do to do it, i’m gonna find you. and i swear to you, cheryl…i swear to you on my life, i will never let you be alone again. you’ll never, ever feel scared, or unsafe, or lonely…i’m gonna keep you safe. i’m gonna protect you, always. i’ll find you, cheryl. no matter what, even if i have to storm thistlehouse and kick your mother’s face in-.”

that message ends abruptly, and it dawns on cheryl how serious the situation could have gotten. god, toni had been prepared to walk right into thistlehouse and threaten her mother…what if she had? had toni even thought of the consequences, or had she almost gone completely insane with fear and panic over where cheryl was?

she takes a deep breath in and finally clicks on the last message.

“cheryl, we know where you are! you have your grandmother to thank for the intel! we’re coming for you, okay? i know you’re not hearing these, but it doesn’t matter, because we’re coming to get you! just stay strong, cher. we’re almost there.”

the door opens.

ccheryl clicks her phone off and looks up, and toni exits the bathroom and looks at cheryl with bloodshot eyes, her body now covered in jeans and a grey crop top as she sniffs once and purses her
lips. she’s been crying, cheryl can tell…

“you’ve never known love cheryl, except to rip it apart.”

she’s wrong. her mother is wrong. she knows what love is. god, she has it standing right in front of her…

penelope blossom is wrong. and god, cheryl’s about to prove it.

“do…do you want me to leave-.”

cheryl doesn’t let toni finish her sentence. she jumps up, running across the room and jumping into toni’s arms, crashing their lips together as toni stumbles back with a grunt from the impact before she wrap her arms around cheryl and holds her close, deepening the kiss with a loud groan.

she’s an idiot. a complete and utter idiot for even starting this fight, for not believing for a second that toni didn’t care about her, or trust her, or love her-

“i’m s-sorry-.” cheryl breathes against her lips, and toni whimpers, her bottom lip trembling as she buries her head into cheryl’s shoulder, her arms squeezing her so tightly that for a brief moment, cheryl can’t even breathe.

“no, i’m sorry, i should’ve told you-.”

“toni, please…” cheryl pulls away, cradling the pink haired serpent’s face in her hands as she wipes away the tears that fall down her cheeks with her thumbs. toni’s eyes are red and puffy, and the sight itself has cheryl blinking back her own tears.

god, she hates seeing toni cry…

enough. no more goddamn pain, no more bullshit. it’s tine cheryl was honest. it’s time she laid all her cards on the table. she’s getting mad about toni not trusting her when cheryl has been doing the exact same goddamn thing. it’s time for toni to know everything.
“please listen to me. don’t say anything, just listen. can you do that for me?” cheryl asks hoarsely. toni purses her lips, but nods, and cheryl takes her hand, interlacing their fingers before leading her over to the bed and sitting her down on top of it. she takes a deep breath in before diving in, desperate to get everything on her chest off.

“i need you to understand something, toni. my whole life i’ve been abused and ridiculed by my mother and father, and the only person who ever showed me love was jason. when he died, i thought there was no chance of me ever finding someone who could love me like he did ever again…” cheryl croaks out, but she smiles and reaches a hand up to touch toni’s cheek affectionately.

“until i met you. you’ve changed so much of my life, toni, and i’m trying…i’m trying so hard not to be the brat i used to be, to be a better person to you and for you, to be the person worthy and deserving of claiming your affections, but sometimes…sometimes i slip up. i’m not perfect, toni, but i’m trying. i’m sorry for getting upset over something so silly, t.t. i know you trust me and i know that the bond you have with sweet pea and fangs is something i can’t compare to even if i wanted to. what we have is so different, but…i’d like to be part of that family, toni. and i know in order to that, i need to earn their trust, not just expect it because we’re dating. so i’m so sorry for getting upset, i should’ve talked with you first, told you how every day…” cheryl feels her voice close up, and she blinks back tears as she looks up at toni with a sad, watery smile.

“every day is a struggle to rid myself of my mother’s cruel words. every day is a struggle to remind myself that i’m not loveless, or a monster, like she’s made me believe for the last sixteen years. and every day with you, i’ve been getting closer and closer to believing that, but some days it’s hard. so when a stray thought enters my mind, like the thought of you not trusting me, i get nervous, and i get upset that i’m going to lose you, and i wish it wasn’t this way, but i’m trying. please understand that, toni…”

toni watches her for a long time, eyes wide and searching every inch of cheryl’s face as she takes in her words before she exhales-

and smiles.

“thank you for telling me that. but i need you to understand…i do trust you, cheryl, and i know that you won’t do anything to put the serpents in danger. and i see you changing every single day, becoming a better person and fuck, cheryl, you don’t understand how proud that makes me. just the fact that you’re apologizing right now, the old cheryl would’ve never done that.” toni reaches up and tucks a lock of hair behind cheryl’s ear, her smile only growing wider as she leans in closer to the redhead.
“i can see how hard you’re trying, god, you’re so amazing, cheryl…and i know you’re not perfect, but you’re pretty fucking close, okay? at least to me, so don’t…don’t think that i’m gonna leave over one little fight, because i’m not. i understand your frustration, i really do. and i’m gonna talk to sweet pea and fangs about it because at the end of the day, i want them to trust you, too, and i know they can. i’m just…it’s not fair, cher.” toni trails off as she swallows thickly, and cheryl’s heart pounds against her chest painfully.

“i’m sorry, too.” cheryl whispers. toni sighs, leaning in closer as her hands reach up to cradle cheryl’s face, and the redhead leans in to her touch until their foreheads are resting against each other, a shaky sigh escaping her as well.

they’re okay…they’re gonna be okay. one little fight wasn’t going to take down cheryl blossom and toni topaz, of course it wasn’t…

“cheryl, i wanna tell you something.” toni whispers. cheryl looks up at her, and toni licks her lips nervously, her eyes filled with panic, but also…excitement.

“i…god, i can’t believe i haven’t said this sooner, and i’m sorry it’s taken me so fucking long to get over my stupid fears and say it, but being in that shower, knowing you were out here, upset at me, it broke my heart, i…i can’t live with the thought of you being mad at me…”

toni takes a deep breath in, and when she takes cheryl’s hands into her own and looks into her eyes, cheryl knows her next words are the most honest she’s ever spoken in her entire life.

“i love you, cheryl blossom.” toni whispers.

cheryl’s crying before she can stop herself, tears falling down her cheeks and bottom lip trembling as toni reaches a hand up and brushes them away with her thumb.

“i’m not scared to say it anymore, cheryl. fuck, that whole time in the shower, all i could think about was the fact that i hadn’t said it yet, and that if…if my mother could see me now, stopping myself from telling the girl i love how i feel, she’d probably hit me for being so stupid, for getting into a fight with you having never even told you how i do. she’d want me to tell you…she’d want me to tell you that i love you, and i do, cheryl, i love you so much…”

cheryl takes the words in, lets them sit deep in her heart as toni’s smile lights up her entire world.
toni loves her. *toni loves her.*

current

that day, that day at sweet water river, one of the last days she had with jason by her side, the discussion they had…

“jay jay was right…” cheryl breathes. toni furrows in confusion, and cheryl wraps a hand around the back of her neck, pulling the girl to her lips and kissing her passionately as toni slides her tongue into cheryl’s mouth with a groan, hands gripping her waist before she crawls on top of her. cheryl falls onto her back, pulling the pink haired girl on top of her, but cheryl pulls away and cradles toni’s face in her hands as she tries to catch her breath for a few moments.

“i asked jason once what it was like…to be in love. he told me it was knowing that there was someone out there who would never judge you, who would listen and care and want you and only you. he said…that touching them and seeing them was like coming home. he said it was the best feeling in the world, t.t, and when i asked him if i’d find someone who would make me feel that way one day, he told me…he said i was gonna find someone who would become my entire world…that i’d find someone who would love me more than even he could…he was right, toni.”

toni gasps against her, fingers digging into cheryl’s waist as she runs her fingers through pink hair with a smile.

“it’s you, toni topaz.” she whispers.

toni stares into her eyes for a long time, chocolate brown eyes searching cheryl’s own before she surges forward and kisses her, lips urgent as her fingers fiddle with the robe cheryl has on, and before cheryl can do anything, toni’s untie it and pulling it open, hands searching cheryl’s naked body in a desperate need to get as close to the redhead as possible-

“wait, toni, what time is it?” cheryl breathes as the pink haired serpent kisses down her neck, and toni growls as she bites down on her neck playfully.

“who cares?” she grumbles. cheryl chuckles, which quickly turns into a whine as toni sucks a bruise onto her neck, but she reaches up with one hand to grab her phone, lighting it up as she does.

it’s almost nine.
“t.t, we have to go to the jubilee, mandatory town meeting.” Toni pulls away from her neck, an eyebrow cocked in confusion as Cheryl pulls the message up and shows her. Toni pouts, looking down at Cheryl with a whine, and Cheryl grins and sits up quickly so that Toni is straddling her lap. She presses a quick kiss to her girlfriend’s lips before reluctantly sitting her down on the bed as she makes her way to the bathroom.

“I’ll shower and we’ll go, okay?”

“ugh, fine. but we’re continuing this when it’s over, cheryl.” Cheryl grins at that, and she’s inches away from the door when Toni calls out.

“Cheryl?” She turns, facing the pink haired girl as she bites down on her bottom lip before smiling back at her.

“I love you. and i really am sorry for not telling you about fangs and midge. i’m gonna talk to sweet pea, tell him to get his head out of his ass and start trusting you because…because i do, and that’s all that matters.” She says firmly.

Cheryl smiles widely. because yes, she’s still learning to be a good person, and she’s still learning that she doesn’t always get what she wants, and that’s okay.

but damn…does it feel good when she does.

“thank you, toni. and for the record…i love you, too.”

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The jubilee is packed as soon as Cheryl’s convertible finds the only parking spot left available, bodies slowly moving inside as Toni scans the parking lot for any sign of motorbikes.

She sees sweet pea and Fangs’ ones, and doesn’t bother to check the others. They’re the only ones that matter.

Toni was gonna fix this. Cheryl was right, they could all trust her, they fucking could, she was so
stupid for keeping this from her girlfriend-

her girlfriend. her girlfriend who she fucking loves more than anything in the world, the first person to ever make her feel this way, full of happiness and light, and she almost lost it all over the stupidest thing…

“come on, sweet pea and fangs are here.” toni jumps out of the car, rushing over to the driver’s seat and pulling open the door before holding her hand out for cheryl to take with a smile, which she does. cheryl interlaces their fingers, and toni relishes in the warmth from it all.

they got through their first fight…they talked about it openly, instead of closing each other off and ignoring each other, like toni’s done so many times in the past…

cheryl is it. she can feel it in her goddamn heart, cheryl was fucking it…

the both of them make their way toward the jubilee, ignoring the stares they get from students and parents alike as toni scans the crowd for black leather-

“tiny! over here!” sweet pea’s gigantic hand can be seen waving above the crowd, and toni squares her shoulders and exhales deeply.

alright, kid. fight for your girl. fight for your relationship. knock sweet pea’s head off if you fucking have to…

“come on.” toni mutters before dragging cheryl over to them quickly. they bump into almost everyone, stares of anger thrown their way, and as soon as they come into view of the two serpent boys, sweet pea eyes cheryl a little apprehensively. he looks down at toni with a sigh.

“we need to talk.-”

“you can do it in front of cheryl. i told her everything this morning.” toni says firmly, sweet pea’s eyes widen, and fangs whistles underneath his breath as toni prepares herself to possibly get punched-
sweet pea bares his teeth, and as soon as he crosses his arms over his chest, toni knows what’s happening and bites back a grin.

*oh, he’s so on.*

they’ve done this at least a hundred times before, and toni can see cheryl standing beside fangs, watching them with complete confusion as they stare at each other in complete and utter silence.

she’s not gonna break, she never does, he always loses these-

sweet pea cocks an eyebrow. toni doesn’t blink, curls her fingers into a fist, but doesn’t waver, and almost a full two minutes pass before sweet pea purses his lips, his eyes watering slightly. toni smirks, and sweet pea curses under his breath and rolls his eyes before blinking rapidly.

“fine, you win.” he grumbles, rubbing his eyes with a wince.

“good.” toni deadpans, crossing her arms over her chest as she blinks as well.

“What just happened?” cheryl whispers to fangs, and he grins widely and throws an arm around her shoulders, giving them a gentle squeeze.

“tiny always wins the silent stand-offs.” he mutters back to her. cheryl rolls her eyes, and toni grins at her before turning back to sweet pea.

“We can trust her, sweet pea, you know we can.” toni says simply, and sweet pea sighs, looking at toni with a mixture of hesitance and anger before he turns to look at cheryl with a raised eyebrow.

“look, it’s not that i don’t trust you, red, it’s just that…it’s been us three for the longest time, and how do i know you’re not gonna accidentally let something slip to kevin-.”

“I won’t, sweet pea. i would never do anything to put your or fangs in harm’s way, not after everything you’ve both done for me.” cheryl assures him softly, and sweet pea blinks in surprise before he chuckles and runs a hand through his dark hair.
“jeez, you didn’t even use my nickname, i guess you are serious.” he says with a small smile, and cheryl offers him one back.

“i am.” she says simply, trying to convey that she understands the seriousness of the situation. toni bites back a smile, nothing but affection and love pounding through her body as fangs sighs, and he looks up at sweet pea and toni before shrugging.

“look, i’m fine with cheryl knowing. she’s with toni, and if toni trusts her, then so can we. just as long as no one else finds out…” he says in a hushed tone, looking around quickly for any prying ears, and cheryl and toni both nod vigorously.

“of course. it stays between the four of us.” cheryl says firmly. sweet pea licks his lips, and he grabs toni’s arm and tugs her forward slightly before leaning in closer to cheryl and fangs.

“if that’s the case, then i have good news. i think we’re in the clear. i heard sheriff keller talking with mayor mccoy when i got here, he hasn’t got any suspects yet-.”

“big surprise.” cheryl mutters with a roll of her eyes. sweet pea hides a smile as he continues.

“but he said something about going over jughead’s footage from the night of the musical. they confiscated his camera-.”

“Oh, fuck.” fangs whispers suddenly, his eyes wide and filled with panic. toni’s heart stops.

“What?” she demands, looking at him in shock, and fangs swallows thickly and looks at the other three with tears welling in his eyes.

“I…jughead came into midge’s dressing room right before she went on stage to get one last interview from her and…he walked in on us arguing-.”

“arguing? about what?” sweet pea growls. fangs shakes his head, and toni can fucking see him shaking in fear-
“she wanted to talk about that night we slept together, and i-i was telling her i just wanted to forget it ever even happened! she got mad-.”

“did it look like you were arguing on the tape?” cheryl asks firmly, reaching out to grip fangs’s shoulder, and he shakes his head wildly.

“i-i don’t know-.”

“alright everyone! if you can take your seats, please!” sheriff keller’s voice booms over the speakers of the jubilee, and toni jumps slightly in surprise, tries to calm her racing heart down as she grips cheryl’s hand in her own.

god, this is bad, this is so fucking bad-

what if sheriff keller found the footage on that tape of them arguing? what if he really did suspect fangs? god, what if fangs was thrown in jail for something he didn’t even fucking do-

“sit down, don’t draw attention to us.” sweet pea hisses under his breath, and he leads them over to four empty chairs, toni trying to swallow down the bile rising in her throat as each of them collapse down into their chairs. fangs immediately begins jigging his legs nervously. toni exhales shakily, squeezing cheryl’s hand and looking at the red haired girl to see her staring at toni nervously.

ey could lose fangs, they…god, they can’t lose fangs, she can’t lose fangs…

“what if sheriff keller finds that footage?” toni whispers in fear, and cheryl leans in and presses a kiss to her temple.

“it’s gonna be okay, babe, just stay calm.” cheryl says softly into her ear. toni leans into her touch, trying to get strength, or just something from the interaction, and they both look up at the same time just as mayor mccoy comes up to the stand, looking incredibly strained and tired.

“thank you all for coming. as you’re aware, we’ve had a disturbing and distressing event occur last
night at riverdale high during the production of ‘carrie the musical’.” mayor mccoy takes a deep
breath in, her voice shaking slightly before she surges forward.

“midge klump was brutally murdered by the man who calls himself ‘the black hood’. sheriff keller
has been working tirelessly all night to get as much as evidence as possible from the crime scene.
now, i know that miss klump’s death has caused a lot of fear, sadness and panic over the safety of the
people of riverdale, but i can assure, our amazing police force are doing everything they can to find
and apprehend this so called ‘black hood’ and bring him to justice.-.”

“is that so, mayor mccoy?” a voice rings out. toni blinks in shock, joining the rest of the crowd in
looking behind them to where the voice came from-

hiram lodge suddenly stands up, unbuttoning his vest as he does with a smile on his face.

what the fuck? what is he doing?

toni’s eyes move down to veronica beside him, her eyes wide and filled with shock, and it’s obvious
both veronica and her mother are surprised by his actions, both of them watching hiram move out of
his seat and begin walking down the side of the room toward the stage. every single pair of eyes are
on him, and toni feels cheryl squeeze her hand.

“mr. lodge, i’ll kindly ask you to leave all questions until the end-.” mayor mccoy begins, her jaw
clenching in anger over being interrupted as she watches him make his way down the aisle coldly,
but hiram lodge once again speaks up and cuts her off.

“oh, i have no questions, sierra. only statements of truth.” hiram says with a smile on his face, and
toni frowns, looks to sweet pea and fangs to see the same looks of confusion on their faces.

what is going on?

toni looks further back to see f,p watching hiram with a stern look on his face, jughead looking at his
father in concern right beside him, and toni suddenly feels worry grip her.

what if he’s about to say something about the serpents? he wants nothing more than to get rid of
them…
oh god, if hiram found out about fangs and midge…

hiram gets up onto the stage and looks out to everyone in front of him, raising his hands and making his voice louder so that everyone can hear him.

“people of riverdale! how much longer are we going to continue to allow tom keller to keep disappointing us? fred andrews was shot inside pop’s diner months ago, and what has sheriff keller done to apprehend the man responsible? clearly, nothing! considering he’s still free and has just murdered an innocent sixteen year old girl!” hiram says loudly, looking back at the sheriff and mayor mccoy, who are both containing looks of anger.

toni lets out a sigh of relief and relaxes back into her chair, but she’s still cautious. the serpents aren’t hiram’s targets in this moment but clearly sheriff keller and mayor mccoy are. the question is…why?

“and i suppose you think you could do a better job, hiram?” mayor mccoy seethes with a scoff. hiram chuckles and raises his index finger, shaking it at her as if he’s telling off a five year old for stealing from the cookie jar.

“no, sierra. i’m just saying that the incompetence of sheriff keller is beginning to truly show. first it was jason blossom, his murder going unsolved for months on end, only to be solved by a bunch of teenagers!” hiram’s eyes land on cheryl in the crowd, and toni feels her girlfriend tense up beside her, her grip on toni tightening almost painfully. toni glares at hiram angrily before gripping cheryl’s forearm with her free hand and giving it a reassuring squeeze.

son of a bitch, why was he bringing that up again…what did he gain from hurting cheryl by bringing up her brother’s death again?

toni looks beside her, sees cheryl’s eyes brimming with tears as she swallows thickly, but before toni can do anything, like run up to that stage and punch hiram’s lights out for making cheryl cry, hiram’s talking again, his voice echoing over the silent crowd, all enraptured with his speech.

“and now it’s this ‘black hood’? fred and archie andrews have been living in fear for months, terrified of this man returning to finish the job he began, while sheriff keller has been doing what, exactly, to apprehend the man responsible for almost killing an innocent father? am i the only one questioning our sheriff’s ability to do his job?” hiram says, looking to the crowd expectantly.

whispers immediately begin echoing around the room, and toni can see some people nodding, looks of anger on their faces…
what the fuck? what was hiram’s endgame here?

“what the fuck, man?” sweet pea says in shock, and toni sees fangs look to the left, her gaze following his to land on kevin keller, who is slowly standing in his seat. toni can see the look of anger and rage in his eyes, mixed with confusion as he doesn’t take his eyes off hiram lodge.

he’s being forced to watch this man rip his father apart…

“hiram, that’s enough!” mayor mccoy barks into the microphone, and sheriff keller reaches out a hand to pull her back from it, his tone calming as he looks at hiram with a frown, but hiram laughs and looks to her with nothing but a cold glare in his eyes.

“why, sierra? because i’m exposing the man you’ve secretly been sleeping with for over five months now?” he says firmly.

shocked gasps fill the entire jubilee, and toni blinks once, twice, three times, trying to process what the hell hiram lodge just said-

mayor mccoy and sheriff keller? what the f-

why were their so many secret fucking relationships?!

“josie…” cheryl turns in her chair, her eyes scanning the crowd for one of her best friends wildly, and toni’s eyes fall back onto kevin, who looks like he just got smacked in the face by a football.

he’s completely and utterly dumbfounded.

so is mayor mccoy and sheriff keller.

both of them are looking at hiram in complete and utter shock, but one look at the guilt on their faces tells toni that hiram is telling the truth.
“i…that has nothing to do with-.” mayor mccoy splutters, and hiram’s voice is loud enough to speak not only over her, but the entire crowd that’s now whispering in shock.

“perhaps your secret love affair has been blinding you to the fact, sierra, that sheriff keller no longer deserves to lead the police force he’s been tasked with! perhaps you yourself, have been incompetent as mayor!” he says, and suddenly, there’s shouts of anger and agreement all over the jubilee, people yelling at mayor mccoy and sheriff keller in anger and rage-

“mom!” toni’s head turns so quickly, she almost gets whiplash, and she doesn’t even know what to focus on anymore, confusion and shock taking over her whole body, but cheryl is looking at the back of the room toward the voice that just shouted, and toni’s eyes land on josie, who is running toward the stage, tears in her eyes-

cheryl rips her hand out of toni’s grip and rushes toward the pussycat, toni right behind her as just reaches the aisle when josie runs past. cheryl manages to catch her, arms wrapping around josie tightly as she begins pulling her back in fear.

“josie, don’t! you’re only going to make it worse!” cheryl says into her ear, and josie is sobbing, tears falling down her face as she tries to fight cheryl off desperately.

“cheryl, let go of me!” she cries. toni looks up at the stage to see mayor mccoy looking at josie in despair, tears falling down her cheeks as she looks at toni in desperation, and what a strange occurrence, for mayor mccoy to be asking toni topaz for help…

toni gives her a firm nod, and she turns to look at cheryl sadly.

“get her out of here, cher.” toni murmurs. cheryl gives her a look of understanding, her gaze moving up to mayor mccoy, who simply gives her a curt nod. cheryl gives her one back and begins dragging josie out of the jubilee, toni looking up at the stage to see sheriff keller and mayor mccoy making their way off it as quickly as possible, the shouts of anger following them.

hiram lodge stands in the middle of the stage, a triumphant grin on his face as he straightens his vest and hops off the stage as if he’s just won the lottery. and perhaps he has, because whatever he had planned has clearly worked…
his eyes land on toni, and he blinks once before giving her a smile and a simple nod. toni glares at him with as much hatred as possible.

he’s up to something, there’s no way he’s done this for no reason, the son of a bitch-

god, is he even aware that he just destroyed two families? does he even care that he has?

“tiny, let’s get out of here, come on.” toni hears sweet pea whisper into her ear, and he’s gripping her by the elbow of her serpent jacket and dragging her away quickly, fangs right behind them as they move through the crowd.

at least this provides a distraction from the whole fangs and midge thing, but still…god, what must kevin and josie be thinking right now?

toni’s eyes land on veronica at the back of the room as they pass her, tears falling down her face as she looks up at her father on the stage in disbelief, and toni feels her heart break for the girl.

how is it possible? how the fuck is it possible that veronica was related to that complete and utter lowlife of a man-

sweet pea explodes through the doors, and toni’s eyes land on cheryl and josie, who is still holding the girl back as she desperately tries to get back inside the jubilee-

“josie!” they all turn at the sound of a voice, and toni watches as the mayor of riverdale lets her guard down and rushes toward her daughter, who finally breaks free from cheryl’s grasp and runs toward her mother, jumping into her arms with a sob.

“mom, it’s not true, please tell me it’s not true!” josie cries, and sierra mccoy blinks back tears as sheriff keller looks to the entrance of the jubilee in panic, eyes scanning for his son-

“where’s kevin?!” he yells. fangs hesitates before he looks to the others and runs back inside just as f.p and jughead exit the jubilee, both of them with concerned frowns on their faces as f.p makes his way toward the mayor and sheriff keller.
“i think it’s best you all get out of here.” f.p mutters to the sheriff, who frowns and shakes his head as jughead comes to a stop beside toni and cheryl.

“i’m not leaving without my son-.” the doors burst open again, and kevin and fangs rush over to them all, kevin glaring at his father in open anger as he comes to a stop in front of him.

“please tell me he’s lying, dad-.”

“i’ll explain everything, we both will, but right now, we need to go!” sheriff keller says firmly, gripping his son’s shoulder, but kevin shrugs out of his touch and glares at his father and mayor mccoy in disgust. he looks at fangs, who gives him a sad smile.

“i’ll see you later.” kevin murmurs under his breath, and without looking at his father, he makes his way to the parking lot.

“kevin!” sheriff keller yells after his son, his eyes filled with sadness and guilt. f.p sighs and gives the sheriff a curt nod.

“go sort this out before the mob gets out here. i’ve got the serpents keeping everyone inside for now until you make it out of here safely.” he says firmly. sheriff keller looks at him in gratitude, perhaps surprised by his generosity, and mayor mccoy surprises them by giving f.p a firm nod, her arm wrapped around a still crying josie as she leads her toward their car in the parking lot. kevin is waiting by the sheriff’s cruiser, his arms crossed over his chest in anger, and sheriff keller sighs before making his way toward his son, his head bowed in defeat.

it’s silent for a long time between the serpents and cheryl, all of them watching as the mayor and sheriff who have just been exposed leave the parking lot with their kids, and toni finds herself wondering if the kellers and mccoys were going to survive all of this…

“he did that for a reason. whatever hiram has planned, it isn’t good…” f.p says suddenly. all of the serpents and cheryl look at him with a frown, and f.p suddenly waves them all forward. he reaches out and grips jughead and sweet pea’s shoulders, pulling them in close, and toni wraps an arm around cheryl’s waist as fangs does the same on the other side of the redhead, fangs reaching out for jughead and sweet pea reaching out for toni to close the circle.

“this isn’t just about the southside anymore, i can feel it. hiram wants the whole of riverdale in his goddamn palm, this was just the start. taking us out, that’s just the beginning for him…from now on,
we stick to each other like glue, you hear me? i’m gonna need all of you to be vigilant at all times, because there’s a storm coming, kids, and i won’t have any of you caught in the eye of it. we stay low, slither in the grass and keep ourselves hidden, don’t do anything that’s gonna draw attention to us, alright? keep your heads down and your fists clean.”

you all nod furiously, and toni sees f.p look at cheryl with a small smile before he looks at each of them with determination.

“in unity there is strength!” he barks, and toni bites back a grin when she hears cheryl repeat the words with them.

“in unity there is strength!” they all chant. they pull apart, cheryl looking a little flustered as toni wraps an arm around her waist and pulls her in close. the doors burst open, and they look up just as the crowd begins to exit, some of them still murmuring under their breaths in disbelief over what just happened.

god, even toni still can’t quite believe it.

“serpent meeting at the wyrm right now. spread the word.” f.p tells them, and toni sighs as sweet pea and jughead enter the crowd, their eyes searching for the leather jackets of their crew. toni sees cheryl’s eyes fall on archie, betty and veronica, who is in a very clear argument with archie, her eyes wide as she makes crazy hand gestures at her boyfriend, who is trying to calm her down. betty is looking at archie in surprise, and cheryl sighs and bites down on her bottom lip before looking at toni in hesitation.

“go to the serpent meeting, t.t. i think…i think it’s time i started being a better friend…and it starts with helping veronica try to get through this.” she says softly. toni blinks in surprise, but she smiles and leans in to press a kiss to the corner of cheryl’s mouth.

“okay, baby. i’ll call you when it’s over?” cheryl smiles and nods, and she gives toni’s hand a gentle squeeze before making her way over to betty, archie and veronica. veronica’s bottom lip trembles as soon as her eyes land on cheryl, and toni sees her throw her arms around the red haired girl in despair, cheryl hugging her close as archie sighs and runs his fingers through his hair. toni hesitates, but she feels a hand grip her elbow, and she turns to see fangs watching her sadly.

“come on, tiny, we gotta get to the wyrm, i’ll give you a ride.” she sighs, but nods once, looking back once more at her girlfriend to see her rubbing veronica’s back consolingly, and she finds herself smiling proudly.
cheryl blossom giving a shit about other people…she has changed. and god, toni couldn’t be prouder.
over the next week, the small town of riverdale descends into chaos.

mayor mccoy and sheriff keller’s entire affair is exposed in the days that follow the crazy event at the jubilee, revealing a five month long relationship that literally no one else knew about, not sheriff keller’s estranged wife, not mayor mccoy’s husband, not their children, either…

josie had come over to thistlehouse a few hours after the jubilee incident and had cried in cheryl’s arms for over three hours straight, and toni had watched cheryl work tirelessly between josie, veronica and kevin on the phone, all three of their friends distraught over everything that’s happened.

monday had been met with a text message from the school telling them that it was to be closed down for the next week while the crime scene was still being investigated, and veronica had taken that opportunity to come knocking on the door of thistlehouse to rant to toni and cheryl for hours about how she doesn’t understand what her father is doing, or how he could so easily destroy two families without blinking an eye.

but despite everything, the question toni has is this: if no one knew about this affair, how the fuck did hiram find out about it?

it’s a question that may never be answered, something toni has trouble coming to terms with, but regardless, hiram’s actions have caused a domino effect, each piece falling down one right after the other.

it started with sheriff keller resigning that monday afternoon, the disgraced officer holding a press
conference at the front of the station to announce his resignation to the cheers and jubilation of many watching, including midge klump’s mother, who added insult to injury by slapping sheriff keller across the face when he tried to apologize to her.

“you were supposed to be protecting our children! you should be ashamed of yourself!” she had screamed through her sobs, and toni had watched sheriff keller swallow down tears as kevin had gripped his father’s shoulder and led him away.

the day after that, midge’s funeral was held, toni gripping cheryl’s hand in her own tightly as they watched their fellow river vixen’s body get lowered into the ground six feet under. toni’s been to plenty of funerals before…her parents included…but something about burying the body of a sixteen year old girl just felt so fucking wrong. cheryl had spent that night crying in toni's arms, the mortality of their lives hitting the both of them rather sharply and instantaneously...

the next day, sierra mccoy stepped down as mayor of riverdale, informing the people of the small town that she was resigning in order to focus on her family. toni’s still not sure how sierra escaped that particular mob unscathed…if the people of riverdale were mad at tom keller, they were even more enraged with sierra mccoy…her and josie were lucky to make it out of that press conference alive, but f.p had brought a few serpents with him, all of them forming a protective circle around the mayor, much to her surprise.

"why are you protecting me?" she had asked f.p through all the yelling, and f.p had simply smiled at her.

"you helped cheryl get out of her mother's clutches. it's the least i could do."

and so now, on a bleak thursday night and almost a week after midge’s death, the town of riverdale is stuck in limbo. no mayor, no sheriff…and toni, along with the other serpents, is still trying to understand what exactly hiram’s endgame here is.

kevin had informed them that some sheriff from another town was set to take over today, and it’s obvious that an apparent mayoral campaign was about to begin now that sierra had stepped down…a town couldn't stay without a mayor for long without completely and utterly falling apart, and riverdale was already well on it's way there.

toni has no idea what’s going on, or what absolute and utter chaos they’re all in for in the next few days. toni doesn’t see the storm that’s fast approaching, ready to crash with thunder and lightning and destroy everything she holds dear. everything was about to fall apart, and she was completely in the dark about it all…
but right now…right now she’s thankful.

she’s thankful because cheryl is sitting behind her in the bathtub of her bathroom, massaging her aching back and shoulders gently as the bubbles around them slowly begin to dissipate. the bath bomb cheryl had used had been a muscle relaxing one, and the smell of lavender is evident throughout the entire room as toni groans loudly, cheryl’s thumb digging into a knot in her back. she hears cheryl chuckle behind her before she’s pressing a kiss to the back of toni’s neck.

“feeling better, babe?” she hums softly. toni purses her lips, closes her eyes and leans back until her back is pressed against cheryl’s chest, the red haired girl still massaging her as she presses a kiss to toni’s temple.

she’d spent all day at the wyrm, working a shift while simultaneously talking with f.p, jughead, sweet pea and fangs to try and brainstorm possible ideas on what hiram was up to. f.p had decided to take advantage of their week off by putting the serpents to work, but by the end of it all, they had still come up with nothing, and with the added stress of fangs’s situation with midge, toni’s entire body had been throbbing in pain by the time she got to thistlehouse. she had walked through the door of cheryl’s bedroom to find her girlfriend had already drawn her a bath, and toni had almost cried right then and there.

what the hell would she do without cheryl blossom?

“yes, i most definitely am. thank you, cher…god, i needed this…” toni mewls, and cheryl’s hands move down to begin massaging her lower back gently.

“i could tell from the messages you kept sending me all day.” cheryl teases. toni smiles, resting her hands on cheryl’s knees that are bent on either side of her small body to accommodate her and scratching at her skin lightly.

“mmm, you were messaging me back…i’m guessing veronica’s still not doing so great…” toni says with a frown. cheryl had been on the phone with veronica when toni had left that morning, and toni hadn’t gotten a message from her girlfriend until late in the afternoon, cheryl telling her that veronica had ended up coming over, betty was unavailable according to veronica, and cheryl had tried her best to help the raven haired girl calm herself, but veronica’s frustrations at not only her father, but archie for defending her father’s actions, has made the girl reach boiling point.

toni was trying to see things from archie’s perspective…he had a reason to be upset with sheriff
keller for not finding the black hood sooner, after all, the black hood had almost killed his father, but the fact that he was so readily taking hiram lodge’s side when his own daughter saw the evil of his ways...

cheryl sighs against her, her nails digging into toni’s skin slightly in her frustration.

“no, but that can be expected…she just doesn’t understand what her father’s motive here is. they’ve been arguing all week, he keeps telling her she’s not seeing the bigger picture, and she keeps telling him that the bigger picture shouldn’t involve destroying two families…it doesn’t help that archie’s defending hiram at every turn. i don’t know, it’s all a mess. the best i can do is offer her a shoulder to cry on.” cheryl says firmly, and toni nods.

“of course, baby, don’t get involved in family stuff, especially when it comes to the lodges. just be what veronica needs right now: a friend.” toni says anxiously. she doesn’t like the idea of cheryl getting involved with hiram, the man was a goddamn wrecking ball, and after everything cheryl’s been through…toni would rather die than let cheryl get caught in his destructive path...

cheryl hums in agreement, and toni turns to face her with a smile.

“look at you go, working so hard to help your friends.” cheryl rolls her eyes, but toni can see the happiness that shines in them as she pouts playfully.

cheryl’s enjoying helping her friends, is enjoying being the person for josie and kevin and veronica to cry and complain to, toni can tell. slowly, but surely, toni is beginning to know cheryl better than the back of her hand. she knows the girl gets happiness from helping others. she puts on this front of being a selfish bitch, but it was a mask she used to cover up so much pain and suffering. truthfully, cheryl hates seeing other people in pain, especially the people she cares about...

god, what a contrast to the other blossom family members…granted, she didn’t know jason at all, but toni suspects that cheryl got all her good attributes from her loving twin brother…what made jason and cheryl so different from clifford and penelope? how could a man who would murder his own son and a woman who would throw her only child left into a gay conversion therapy camp have two kids that were the complete polar opposite of them? brave and loyal and loving kids who didn’t let their pasts or their parents define their characters?

another question toni’s pretty sure she’ll never get the answer to…
“it’s exhausting. i hate being a good person.” cheryl whines, breaking toni out of her thoughts, and the pink haired serpent grins widely.

“no you don’t.” cheryl smiles, and her nails dig slightly into toni’s skin in reprimand, her teeth sinking down into toni’s shoulder in a teasing bite that has the girl whining in mock pain.

“hmm…no, i don’t.” she says softly, the kindness in her brown eyes evident, and she wraps her arms around toni’s shoulders, hugging the pink haired serpent close. it’s quiet for a few moments, the both of them simply enjoying each other’s presence, and toni can almost feel herself nodding off. falling asleep in cheryl blossom’s arms is slowly becoming her favorite thing to do…

“you know, t.t, i’m realizing something.” cheryl whispers into her ear, effectively pulling the girl out of her stupor. toni hums softly, nuzzling her head against cheryl’s cheek affectionately.

“mm, what’s that?” she asks, pressing a kiss to the girl’s jawline. cheryl’s hands move down her arms slowly, teasingly, and she eventually interlaces their fingers and holds them above the water to look at them thoughtfully with a frown.

“i’ve seen you completely naked twice now, and yet, i still don’t know where your serpent tattoo is.” cheryl says, pressing kisses to her shoulder as she does. toni smiles.

“my amazing body must be distracting you every time.” she teases. cheryl grins, and toni chuckles before she shifts in cheryl’s arms.

“it’s right here, bombshell…” toni lifts her right arm, wiping away water and soap from the side of her body as she runs her fingers over the place where she knows there’s a small two headed snake imprinted onto her skin just where her bikini line is on the side of her body, right on top of her ribcage. cheryl ducks her head under toni’s arm to see, and a soft gasp escapes her as she looks up at toni in surprise.

“it’s always been covered by your bra…sneaky.” she teases, and toni laughs before shrugging.

“i was fourteen and thought it would be badass to have it there, so…” cheryl smiles and leans down, her lips pressing to the ink on toni’s skin in a soft kiss, and toni bites down on her lip in an effort to stop the wave of lust that slams through her, but cheryl begins moving her lips across toni’s side and up her back in open mouthed kisses-
"did it hurt?" she whispers. toni shrugs, a soft groan escaping her when cheryl's teeth bite down on her earlobe and tug slightly.

"n-not really." she manages to choke out. god, she needs to stop...they haven't had sex again since their first time, but right now...god, it's all toni can think about-

“mmm...if you could go back and get it somewhere else instead, where would you get it?” cheryl murmurs into her ear. toni swallows thickly, trying to clear the incredibly dirty thoughts running through her mind right now as she tries to process cheryl’s words.

“um…not sure. maybe on my hipbone…or my shoulder blade.” toni’s eyes close as cheryl’s lips brush over her shoulder blade, her nails scratching over toni’s hipbone lightly. she’s silent for a long time before she suddenly sighs breathily into toni’s ear.

“and if i were to get one? where do you think it should go?” cheryl whispers. toni’s eyes snap open in confusion, and all thoughts about lifting cheryl out of this bathtub and taking her to the bedroom are erased immediately at this new revelation.

cheryl wants a serpent tattoo?

cheryl…cheryl wants to join the serpents? is that what she’s trying to say?

“wait, what? cher…” toni turns to face her girlfriend, effectively moving out of her grip as she stares at her in complete and utter shock.

this is the last thing she was expecting to come out of their conversation. cheryl wants to join the serpents? but…what, since when? they haven’t even remotely discussed this-

why do you think she’s bringing it up, toni?

toni stares at her for a long time, eyes roaming over cheryl’s face, but she doesn’t find any hesitation or doubt. only excitement, a smile tugging at cheryl’s lips as she reaches out and pulls toni’s body closer to her own once more.
“i’ve been thinking about it for a while…would you be opposed to it?” cheryl asks softly, a bit of panic showing in her eyes now. toni swallows the lump that rises in her throat, and cheryl reaches up, brushing her thumb over the apple of toni’s cheekbone gently.

cheryl blossom becoming a southside serpent? what the actual fuck…

toni sucks in a deep breath, trying to hide the shock on her face but she fails miserably.

that…was not the answer she was expecting. she stays silent, wanting cheryl to continue, and the red haired blossom girl exhales shakily, a single tear escaping the corner of her eye and falling before she quickly wipes it away with a trembling bottom lip.

“toni…i’ve lost my entire family. my father and my brother are dead, my mother is a monster…all i have left is nana blossom, and even she’s well on her way to joining my long list of dead relatives…” cheryl’s voice is hoarse, shaking with emotion, but she takes another deep breath in before looking up at toni sadly.

“being with you…and sweet pea and fangs and god, even f.p and jughead…it’s the first time i’ve
ever felt like i was part of something real. i don’t have a family anymore, toni, but being part of yours...maybe it’s a chance for me to have a fresh start, to finally rid myself of the curse being a blossom has given me...i guess i just wanted to give myself something to cling to, a...a family to die for. i just want to be part of a family that i know will care for me as much as i care for them.” cheryl breathes the last few words, her eyes closing as she wipes away her tears, and toni blinks back her own, completely and utterly speechless.

it never really dawned on her…but cheryl has lost her entire family now that she’s days away from being emancipated from her mother. god, how is this girl still standing…

being a serpent, being part of toni’s family…having a family of her own that actually cared about her…how the hell could toni even think to deny her that?

but it was dangerous, god…the amount of close calls toni’s had, not to mention the arrests, the time spent in juvie…

“if you don’t want me to become a serpent, toni-.” cheryl starts, but toni grips her hands quickly with a furious shake of her head.

“no, no, cheryl…it’s not that, i think it would be great, it’s just...being a serpent is dangerous, cher, i need you to understand that. it’s not just being a family, or willing to die for the people who wear that serpent jacket, the stuff we do…it’s not easy, and sometimes you’re not going to agree with what we have to do, but if it has to be done then we don’t have a choice, cheryl. it’s not going to always be smooth sailings, there’s gonna be times where you have to do things that you don’t agree with. it’s not always going to be game nights at f.p’s trailer with the boys, you know that, right?” toni says firmly, squeezing her hands in an effort to get her message across. cheryl frowns, but she nods slowly.

“i know that, toni. do you think i don’t realize that? do you think f.p and joaquin wanted to help cover up jason’s murder? they had no choice...they did it to keep the serpents alive.” cheryl says thickly, her eyes falling down to their intertwined hands in grief. toni purses her lips and reaches up to tuck a finger under cheryl’s chin, forcing her to look up into her eyes.

“they did...but being a serpent is hard, cheryl. it’s fighting to stay alive, it’s nights spent with bloody knuckles and a bruised body, it’s…” toni trails off with a shake of her head. it’s not that she doesn’t want cheryl to join…

“i just don’t want you to get hurt, is all.” toni finishes lamely, a heavy sigh escaping her. god, the idea of cheryl facing off with ghoulies, coming home with broken knuckles and a busted lip…bruises
and bloody from a fight…

hasn’t she suffered enough beatings?

apparently not, because cheryl smiles knowingly, and she leans in and presses a quick kiss to the corner of toni’s mouth.

“i know, babe. and i understand that completely. if you don’t want me to become a serpent, i won’t. but i just need you to understand why i want to become one. being part of something like that…i think it’s what i’ve been looking for all my life.” toni hesitates, her thoughts beginning to muddle together as she bites down on her lower lip anxiously.

cheryl becoming a serpent…it wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world, not by a long shot. but the second she’s given that serpent jacket, she becomes a target. not only to the ghoulies, but to whoever the new sheriff is going to be and every other goddamn police officer in riverdale. her money won’t mean shit…she’ll forever be known as southside scum…

god, cheryl wanting to become the very thing she once hated…falling in love with toni had changed a lot for her, hadn’t it?

“you’ll have a target on your back, you know that, right? the second you put that serpent jacket on, it’s not only the ghoulies who will come for you, it’s the entire goddamn police force, too. people are gonna look at you differently, cheryl, you won’t be that rich girl with an entire company’s fortune in the palm of her hand, you’ll…you’ll be southside scum, just like the rest of us.” toni says firmly, and she’s surprised when cheryl’s lips quirk up into a smile.

“becoming the very thing i once despised…how irrevocably hypocritical of me.” she teases. toni rolls her eyes, and cheryl chuckles.

“i understand, toni. i promise. but if i’m always with you, or sweet pea and fangs…i know i’ll be safe.” she says reassuringly. toni exhales shakily, but smiles nonetheless as she leans in and presses a kiss to cheryl’s forehead softly.

“if you want to become a serpent, cheryl, i’m not going to stop you. i want you to do whatever makes you happy.” cheryl sighs, leaning in to press her forehead against toni’s before she reaches up and wraps her hands around the back of toni’s neck.
“you already make me happier than i could ever have imagined being, t.t. but i think…i think this could make my life feel complete.” she whispers hoarsely. toni licks her lips and swallows thickly before finally nodding once.

“in that case…you should definitely get your serpent tattoo on your shoulder blade so i can kiss it every single night. it'll also hurt less there.” toni says with a smile. cheryl’s grin is instantaneous, and she crashes her lips against toni’s with almost bruising pressure.

“thank you, toni.” she whispers. toni sighs again, but she smiles nonetheless.

“you’re welcome, cheryl. you know i love you, right? whatever makes you happy makes me happy.” she whispers back. cheryl presses another slow kiss to her lips.

“i love you, too.” she says softly, looking deep into her eyes as she says it. she leans in to kiss her again, and as cheryl’s hands grip her hips, she moves up to cradle cheryl’s face in her hands, tipping the red haired girl’s head back as she moves above her and kisses her deeply. cheryl’s arms immediately wrap around her waist, pulling her closer as water sloshes everywhere around them, and toni chuckles before she pulls away and presses a kiss to the tip of cheryl’s nose.

“southside serpent girlfriends…has a nice ring to it.” she teases. cheryl laughs, pressing another kiss to her lips before she moves down to wrap pillowy lips around her pulse point, sucking on it harshly, causing toni to whine as she digs her nails into cheryl’s shoulders with a shaky exhale.

okay...those thoughts from before are returning now...

“i think we’re done in here, right, t.t?” cheryl gasps against her, toni's fingers digging into her hair and tugging on it slightly as she bites down on her pulse point deliciously.

“god, yes. bedroom. now.” toni murmurs. cheryl pulls the plug on the bathtub but before toni can drag her out of this bathtub and into the bedroom, she pushes toni away slightly and stands, stepping out of the bathtub and raising a finger to toni’s lips when she tries to stand as well.

"you stay here while i dry off." she teases, leaning in to press a soft kiss to toni's brow before she's grabbing a towel and wrapping it around her body. toni watches her go, biting down on her bottom lip as she does, and cheryl glances over her shoulder at her, giving her a small wink as she does.
"don't even think about falling into bed with me soaking wet like that, t.t. those sheets are egyptian cotton." she says simply, and with that, she closes the door behind her, leaving toni a soaking wet mess inside the bathtub as all the water drains for it and gurgles down the pipes loudly.

toni blinks in confusion for a few moments.

she's confused as to why she's still sitting in this damn tub-

"fuck." she jumps out of it, grabbing a towel and quickly drying herself off before she pokes her head out of the door to see cheryl also drying herself off, the towel wrapped around her back, and toni licks her lips and steps forward slowly, her arms wrapping around cheryl from behind as she presses a kiss to her shoulder blade.

right where she suspects cheryl will get her serpent tattoo...

"i'm dry." she says hoarsely. cheryl scoffs and turns in her arms, raising an eyebrow as she looks toni's naked body up and down.

"we'll see about that." she says simply. toni chuckles, and cheryl reaches up and pulls her hair out of the bun it's in, her hair falling around her face and shoulders in messy curls that have toni staring at her in complete and utter awe.

god, she's lucky...she's so fucking lucky, to have someone this devastatingly beautiful...

toni kisses her, unable to stop herself as she captures a pillowy bottom lip between her own, and cheryl groans against her, her hands reaching up to pull out the clip holding toni's hair up. she tosses it to the other side of the room, hands intertwining and tugging on toni's pink curls in a perfect rhythm as toni pushes her back down onto the bed slowly, their naked bodies intertwining, locking into place like fucking puzzle pieces-

"i am...so in love with you..." toni breathes into cheryl's ear, her teeth closing around an earlobe and tugging, and cheryl whines underneath her, back arching off the bed as her nails dig into the muscles of toni's back breathlessly.

"god, toni..." the sound of cheryl moaning her name has the pink haired serpent shivering in pleasure, and her lips move down to cheryl's neck, nipping at the skin harshly as her hands roam
over cheryl's body, taking in each curve, each feature, mapping them into her brain so she never, ever forgets what it's like to feel cheryl blossom's body against her own...

"toni..." cheryl's voice is soft now, and toni ducks her head out from her neck, removing her lips from the skin there with a loud pop and looking into the girl's eyes with a small smile. cheryl reaches up and brushes her thumb across toni's cheekbone affectionately.

"just so you know...i am so in love with you, too." she whispers, her lips curling up into a beautiful smile that has toni's heart soaring with affection.

"good, or else this would be really awkward." she teases. cheryl laughs loudly, her head tilting up slightly, and toni laughs as well and presses a kiss to the bruises quickly forming on her neck.

"god, you bruise so easily, baby..." she says huskily, her hands reaching up to brush cheryl's hair back from her face, and cheryl hums softly, squirming slightly under toni's touch with impatience that causes toni to grin widely.

"yes, well...after years of having the worst kind of bruises on my body...at least these ones are made with love." she says gruffly, and toni sighs, leaning in to press a kiss to her full lips with as much tenderness as possible.

"i'll be gentle-."

"god no, don't be, toni. i like it when you're not gentle. these bruises don't hurt at all, and besides..." cheryl's cheeks suddenly flush with embarrassment, and she ducks her head before looking up at toni shyly.

"i like looking into the mirror and seeing bruises on my neck, knowing you put them there with your lips...it makes me feel loved. and it also lets people know that i'm yours. and you're mine. forever." toni's heart almost aches with affection, and she licks her lips before looking down at cheryl with a raised eyebrow.

"did you just say you like it when i'm not gentle?" she asks teasingly. cheryl purses her lips, and toni laughs quietly before kissing the tip of her nose.

"a discussion for another time. right now...i wanna focus on making as many love bites on your skin
as possible. if my girl likes them, my girl is gonna get them."

"god, yes please..."

------------------------

the last week or so of cheryl’s life, her mornings have been filled with nothing but perfection. waking up to toni’s arms wrapped around her waist, or to the pink haired serpent fast asleep beside her, or even to her girlfriend tracing patterns into her skin…every morning since toni had essentially all but moved in to thistlehouse, cheryl’s mornings have been blissful, filled with content and love.

except for this particular friday morning.

if cheryl had known that last night would be the last peaceful moment she and toni would have together for a long time, she would have spent every second of it cherishing each breathy sigh, each lingering kiss, every bite of toni’s teeth and each touch or stroke of toni’s fingers against her skin… but she hadn’t. she didn’t know…she didn’t know what was fast approaching…all beginning with-

a loud bang wakes cheryl up for the first time in a long time, and the second she hears it, dread and panic drips through every fucking inch of her body, memories of a long time ago where every morning would begin with that causing her body to freeze in complete and utter fear.

god, even the sound of the door bursing open sounds the exact same, what if everything has just been a dream, a fantasy, her girlfriend a made up person to deal with the pain of what she’s about to endure-

“cheryl!? cheryl, where are you?!”

she feels movement beside her, and cheryl almost breathes a sigh of relief when she sees toni jump up beside her, eyes wide and filled with panic.

not fake, she’s real, everything’s okay-

everything’s not okay, her mother is about to burst through this door and find them naked in bed
together, oh god-

creryl tries to swallow down the lump in her throat as she practically leaps out of the bed and grabs a robe, using it to cover up her naked body quickly.

“is that your fucking mother?!” toni growls, anger blazing in her chocolate brown eyes that cheryl’s never, ever seen before, and cheryl simply nods numbly as toni also grabs a robe to quickly dress herself in, her eyes poised firmly on the door the closer those footsteps get to it. toni reaches into her bag and grabs something before she scrambles over to cheryl, grabbing the red head’s wrist and tugging her behind her small body with her eyes never leaving the door.

“i’ll kick her ass if she even comes near you.” toni growls, and cheryl finds herself smiling at this five foot tall girl standing in front of her, ready to tear out penelope blossom’s jugular if she comes close-

penelope blossom’s abuse of her was well and truly over…

“cheryl?! you better have a good explanation for this!” penelope’s voice sounds absolutely livid, and cheryl licks her lips nervously as she reaches out and grips toni’s hand tightly.

what is she doing here, how did she even get in, fuck, cheryl needs to change the locks on that fucking front door-

“cheryl?!” her bedroom door bursts open, and cheryl jumps as it slams against the wall with the force of penelope’s wrath. toni immediately tenses up, cheryl gripping the girl’s arm in a vice-like hold as penelope blossom staggers slightly, looking around wildly before her eyes land on her daughter and the girl in front of her-

“YOU!” penelope charges forward, her eyes dead center on toni, and the pink haired serpent suddenly exposes what’s in her palm-

she flicks open the pocket knife in her hand immediately.

“come any closer, and i won’t hesitate to use this on you.” toni hisses, and cheryl’s eyes widen as she takes in the silver steel of the blade, her heart pounding against her chest painfully.
god, toni was *not fucking around*-

penelope’s eyes also dart down to the blade in panic, her feet taking two cautious steps back before she glares up at toni in disgust.

“you insignificant trash! move out of the way, i need to talk to my daughter-.”

“then talk. but take one more step forward and you’re gonna need to visit a plastic surgeon again.” toni says firmly through clenched teeth, raising the pocket knife just a little higher, and cheryl sees her mother scoff as she looks behind toni at cheryl in complete and utter anguish.

“What is this!?” penelope cries, tears in her eyes as she waves the piece of paper in her right hand up in the air, and cheryl can see the outline of the word at the top, her heart immediately soaring with glee.

it’s the papers. the emancipation papers, they’ve arrived…

“First, you kick me out and you bring this serpent *filth* into our home! and now you’re…you’re serving me court papers?!?” penelope shrieks. cheryl sighs loudly, and she grips toni’s wrist and tugs the girl backward in an effort to get her to stand down, but toni refuses, moving an arm out to stop cheryl from stepping forward. cheryl bites back a smile at toni’s protectiveness and looks up at her mother with a raised eyebrow.

“Oh mumsie. enough. they’re emancipation papers, i told you they were coming.” cheryl deadpans, keeping her grip on toni’s wrist in case she attacks. the last thing she needs right now is toni getting arrested for attacking her mother…

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“Nana rose, cheryl!? you really think that that senile crone would be a better guardian than your own mother!?” penelope cries in despair, and cheryl rolls her eyes as toni scoffs and shakes her head.

“If you seriously don’t see anything wrong with how you’ve treated cheryl for the last sixteen years, then you are completely fucked up, lady.” toni growls, and penelope glares at her angrily, is about to open her mouth to say something when cheryl interrupts.
“think twice before insulting toni again, mommy. i may remove my hold on her and let her do what she wishes with you if you do. just sign the papers and leave them here so i can deliver them to the judge and be done with it-.”

“no! absolutely not, if you think i’m going to just roll over and accept this, cheryl, you are as deluded as i thought you were!” penelope barks, anger flashing in her eyes, and toni is fucking shaking in anger beside her as she steps forward. cheryl tightens her hold, dragging the pink haired serpent back and looking her in the eyes as she tucks a finger under her chin in an effort to calm her.

“i’ve got this, toni.” she says softly. the pink haired girl’s eyes soften, but when they fall on penelope, there’s a look of caution, and cheryl turns back to face her mother, taking a deep breath in and she tries her best to be the person she knows she needs to be to confront this woman.

head bitch in charge, cheryl.

“the judge has practically already awarded me emancipation from you, mother. he took one look at my case and decided that my staying in your care for even one more second was an abomination to the justice system. you have abused me…for sixteen years. sixteen years of your insults…of your punches…of your wounds.” cheryl steps closer until she’s face to face with penelope, and she can feel toni close behind her, refusing to leave cheryl’s side as penelope swallows thickly, her eyes locked in on the pain shining in her daughter’s eyes.

“no more.” cheryl whispers in a quiet voice filled with determination.

no more. no more of penelope worming her way back into cheryl’s heart with her crocodile tears and her bullshit. no more of penelope making her feel worthless and useless and loveless…deviant. god, just…no more.

“cheryl…” penelope’s voice cracks, and a few tears actually fall, but cheryl feels nothing for them. she’s pretty sure penelope could fall to her knees right now and beg her not to do this, and cheryl would still feel nothing. she’s done feeling sorry for penelope blossom. the woman sat idly by with the knowledge that her husband had murdered jason, had watched cheryl walk around thornhill like a ghost without her twin brother, half her soul missing…that was the worst abuse of all…

“you threw your last stone in the glass house of our relationship when you forced me into that nunnery, mommy. the glass has been fragile all this time, but what you did…that broke it. i feel no sympathy for your pain over losing your daughter.” cheryl takes a deep breath in, the words
penelope said to her that day in the elevator after the sodale gala incident echoing in her mind, and she smirks as she takes just one step closer...

“you have no one to blame for what’s happened but yourself, penelope. because you’re a selfish, self-absorbed mother who only cares about herself. and i won’t let myself suffer at your hands any longer.” penelope whimpers, the paper in her hand trembling, and cheryl looks down at it before glaring back at her mother, trying her best to will the tears away before they appear.

she’s shed enough tears for the blossom family and its members...

“sign the papers. for once in your life...do something right by me.” she says firmly. penelope lets out a shaky breath, and her eyes fall on toni behind cheryl, her glare returning to almost blazing levels of fury.

“you’ve torn my family apart.” she hisses, and cheryl feels anger flood her as toni scoffs before stepping forward and taking cheryl’s hand in her own.

“like she said...you have no one to blame but yourself.” toni says stiffly. penelope scoffs, looking down at their intertwined hands with a smirk playing on her lips as she looks at cheryl once more.

“you truly think this...serpent will care for you for the rest of your life, cheryl?” penelope says derisively, a soft laugh escaping her as she wipes away her tears and looks her daughter up and down, and cheryl sees her eyes widen at the sight of the bruises on her neck from toni last night...a night filled with passion and love...

“such deviant behavior...and for what, cheryl? she will leave you...as soon as she finds a new toy to play with. and you’ll be left all alone, with nothing and no one by your side.” penelope whispers airily, her chin raised high as if she thinks her words are going to affect the girl in front of her.

and perhaps, once upon a time, they would have. perhaps, once upon a time, cheryl would take penelope’s words to heart, would cry and weep and let everything penelope had forced on her wash over her in a cascade of negativity and pessimism.

now? her words were empty.

she has toni now, and that’s all she needs.
cheryl smiles.

“even if that’s true...i’d rather be alone with no one by my side for the rest of my life than spend one more minute with you as my mother. so sign the papers...and leave. you’re not welcome on this property anymore, and if you think i’m wrong, why don’t you go ask nana rose who she’d prefer to have in this house after you tried to kill her.” cheryl hisses. toni squeezes her hand almost painfully, and penelope clenches her jaw, a mixture of emotions evident in her eyes and on her face before she’s reaching into her purse-

toni tenses up beside her, and cheryl finds herself panicking for a moment before penelope simply pulls out a pen. toni and cheryl both visibly relax as penelope places the paper on the door, signing it so harshly, she almost rips the paper. she caps the pen before turning back to cheryl and throwing the paper right at her face, cheryl gripping it with her spare hand with a blink of surprise as penelope huffs loudly.

“you will regret this, cheryl. i swear to god you will.” she hisses, voice filled with venom and rage. toni’s eyes widen, and she brandishes the pocket knife and steps forward.

“is that a threat?” she growls, and penelope winces and steps back in panic before cheryl grabs toni’s shoulder and tugs her back. as much as she wants to watch toni carve up her mother’s face, she doesn’t want toni getting thrown back into juvie…

“even if it was, t.t, it doesn’t matter. as of twenty seconds ago, she’s no longer my mother.” cheryl smiles, and she looks at penelope before nodding to the door curtly.

“now remove yourself, penelope. or i’ll have to call our new sheriff to do so forcefully.” she says with a tone of finality.

at those words, however, penelope smiles, a sinister smile that has the hairs on the back of cheryl’s neck rising for reasons she can’t understand, but penelope says nothing as she turns on her heel and leaves cheryl’s bedroom, the sound of the front door slamming shut echoing from the main entrance only moments later.

toni immediately turns to face her girlfriend, hands reaching up to cradle cheryl’s face as her eyes search it for signs of panic or anxiety, ready to leap into action like the goddamn superhero she is.
“cher, are you okay?” she asks softly. cheryl reaches up, long fingers wrapping around toni’s wrists with a sad smile.

surprisingly…she is. she’s done being sad about penelope blossom…done being sad in general. for once in her life, she had a reason to be happy…and cheryl wasn’t about to waste it over someone who didn’t deserve it.

“i’m okay, toni. with this…it’s official.” she holds up the paper, looking down at it almost lovingly, and toni leans up and presses a kiss to her lips, soft and gentle as ever.

“i’m so proud of you, baby. standing up to her like that…so proud.” toni croaks out, tears in her eyes as she wraps her arms around cheryl’s neck and pulls her into a hug. cheryl sighs heavily against her, arms wrapping around toni’s waist before she buries her head into the pink haired serpent’s shoulder, breathing in her scent and finding comfort in it.

god, what would she do without toni topaz?

“miss blossom?” cheryl looks up to see lisa standing at the door, her eyes wide with concern as she looks at the two girls with worry.

“is everything okay?” she asks. cheryl pulls away from toni, sniffing away her tears as she nods once.

“everything’s fine, lisa. can you get nana rose prepared for breakfast, please? toni and i will be down in a moment to help you prepare.”

“of course.” she goes to leave, but cheryl bites down on her lip before calling out once more.

“and lisa? thank you…for staying here permanently until we can find a full time carer for nana rose. i know we’re paying you for it, but it’s still a generosity that knows no bounds.” cheryl says with a soft smile that lisa quickly returns.

“you’re welcome, miss blossom-.”
“cheryl. please.” she tells her. lisa chuckles, and for some reason, her eyes land on toni before she bows her head.

“you’re welcome, cheryl. you know, whatever this is…i approve. she makes you better.” lisa says, nodding at toni with a smirk. toni grins widely, and lisa chuckles again before she takes her leave, cheryl looking down at the pink haired serpent with a raised eyebrow.

“did you hear that? i make you better.” toni teases, and cheryl rolls her eyes, but wraps her arms around toni’s waist with a smile.

“mm, she’s right. you do.” she says softly. toni’s grin widens, and cheryl presses a quick kiss to her lips before pulling away.

“don’t take that as a reason to get cocky. now put that knife away, seeing you get all territorial is a major turn on, and i already promised lisa we’d help her with breakfast.”

“what, we can’t have a quickie?”

“you’re insufferable.”

toni chuckles, but she gives cheryl another kiss before she shoves her pocket knife into her bag. cheryl quickly begins applying her make up for the day, finishing it off with her signature red lipstick as toni applies her own make up in the bathroom. twenty minutes later, the both of them make their way down to the kitchen, fully dressed, to find lisa is standing in the middle of it, watching the small tv by the counter in shock.

“lisa? is everything okay?” toni asks with worry, and cheryl frowns as lisa turns to look at them with wide eyes.

“is she really going to run for mayor after what her husband did?” lisa says in surprise. cheryl and toni exchange looks of confusion before they both step forward at the same time, and what they see causes cheryl’s heart to drop down to her toes.

hermione lodge, smiling and waving to a crowd not seen on camera with hiram by her side, the words ‘hermione lodge to run for the mayoral office’ captioned below her smiling figure.
“oh my god…” cheryl manages to choke out. toni swallows loudly, her eyes wide and filled with panic as she looks at cheryl weakly.

“guess we know what his plan is now.” she says hoarsely. cheryl is in complete and utter shock, and she can see veronica on the tv as well, standing behind her parents, looking as morose and upset as ever. it's quite clear to her that veronica had no idea this was happening, she hadn't mentioned it yesterday at all, and her face is telling the story on national television, filled with disdain and anger-

a loud knock at the door startles them both, and cheryl sighs as toni clenches her jaw.

“your mother again?” she growls. cheryl shakes her head.

“no. mother wouldn’t knock. stay, help lisa with breakfast, i’ll see who it is.” she presses a quick kiss to toni’s cheek before she makes her way to the front door. it’s way too early for all of this, god, it’s barely even eight-

she throws the door open and is met with the sight of betty cooper, looking incredibly troubled, with bloodshot eyes and dark circles under them as she swallows thickly and looks at cheryl with doe eyes filled with despair.

“cheryl…i need your help.” she croaks out. cheryl frowns, but immediately looks over her shoulder to check that no one is listening before she steps over the threshold and closes the door slightly behind her.

“betty…is everything okay?” she asks softly, taking in the girl’s appearance. she looks almost sick to her stomach, her fingers twisting nervously before she wipes away the tears gathering in her eyes. the skin around them is red raw, and cheryl reaches out, brushing a thumb across the area with worry. betty slightly flinches at her touch before she sighs and shakes her head.

“not really. there’s no one else i can talk to, no one else who might understand what i’m going through.” betty whispers, and cheryl’s frown only deepens as she drops her hand.

what is going on?
“dear cousin, you look harrowed. what is it?” she asks softly. betty hesitates before she licks her lips.

“cheryl…before you found out that your dad was the one who shot jason…did you know that he was the murderer?” betty asks in a low voice. cheryl’s heart drops, and she crosses her arms over her chest with a sigh.

truthfully…part of her knew her parents had something to do with it, but god, of course cheryl didn’t believe it. she didn’t want to believe it…

“subconsciously, yes. why do you ask?” she deadpans, not understanding why betty was bringing up old wounds, especially right now when she’s just dealt with her mother barging in here-

“i think…there’s a chance that my dad…that somehow…he might be the black hood.” betty breathes, her voice trembling as fresh tears fall down her face. cheryl blinks in shock before the truth of her words hit her, and she licks her lips before sighing sympathetically.

“oh…oh betty, i don’t know. no offence, but your father doesn’t exactly seem like the type to go on a murder spree, he gives off all the stealth of a marshmallow man. wherefore comes this accusation?” she asks in confusion.

hal cooper, the black hood? it just didn’t fit…not at all. although it would make sense in a way, her mother always did fall for the psychopaths…

“just…intuition. cheryl, i don’t want my dad to be a murderer, it would destroy our lives even more! but…i don’t know, i can…i can feel it in my bones.” betty says in a hushed whisper, her hands wringing in panic and confusion, and cheryl truly feels for the girl, her heart aching at the sight of her poor cousin in such distress. betty did so much to help her when she was stuck at the sisters of quiet mercy…

“if you’re coming to me for advice, fine. let’s get you to the po-po, maybe this new sheriff has half a brain!” cheryl says, but betty shakes her head viciously.

“no, no, not yet! i need to be sure before i involve anyone else. also i know it’s hard to explain, but if my dad is the black hood, i need to be the one who confronts him, who stops him.” betty says, wiping her tears away once more as her face sets with determination. cheryl frowns. she understands…after all, when her father’s crime had been exposed, cheryl was the one who confronted him…
a shiver runs up her spine at the memory, but she quickly wills it away and nods once at Betty. This is about her right now…

“in that case, absorb my hard learned advice. We need concrete proof or a confession or both. First up, buy yourself some time while you investigate. That means pretending everything is normal.” She tells her firmly. Betty smiles sadly.

“Yeah well, luckily that’s my speciality.” She murmurs. Cheryl sighs.

This was dangerous, Betty couldn’t do this on her own…if her father really was the black hood, and he found out that Betty knew…

“You’re playing a very dangerous game, Betty Cooper.” She says softly. Betty’s eyes widen, and she swallows thickly before shaking her head.

“I don’t think he would hurt his own daughter.” She says in a low voice filled with fear, and Cheryl scoffs.

“And I never thought my dad would shoot his son in the forehead. But that’s the world we live in.” Betty’s bottom lip trembles, and Cheryl sighs, taking one last glance at the door of Thistlehouse, her mind on Toni inside the kitchen, helping Lisa with breakfast, in the dark on everything happening out here…

But Betty needs her. Betty, who helped save her from the Sisters of Quiet Mercy, Betty, who was there at Sweet Water River when she tried to kill herself…

It’s time she returned the favor.

“How can I help, cousin Betty?”

------------------
the sound of her motorbike grumbling to a stop echoes across the air of the parking lot of pop’s diner, and toni shuts the ignition off before kicking the stand down and jumping off it, removing her helmet and shaking her hair out of her eyes in the process.

she can see fangs and sweet pea’s motorbikes close by as well, and she frowns before resting her helmet on the handle and making her way inside the diner, rain slowly beginning to pour almost the exact second she walks in. she spots sweet pea and fangs by a booth and makes her way over to them, sweet pea’s eyes widening as he takes in the lack of a certain red haired bombshell beside toni.

“where’s red?” he asks, frowning in confusion. toni sighs.

cheryl had left quite abruptly this morning, simply shoving a piece of toast to her mouth and pressing a kiss to toni’s lips before telling her that betty needed her help with something dire, and she’d be back home as soon as she could. toni had asked if she wanted her to come with, but cheryl had told her she could handle it before scurrying out of the door. toni had caught a quick glimpse of betty at the doorway, and at the sight of the girl looking so distressed, had messaged cheryl immediately asking if jughead had broken up with her. it was the only explanation toni could think of for why betty was so upset, but cheryl had sent her a simple text saying that wasn’t the case, and that she couldn’t talk about it and she’d be home soon.

that had been that, but toni’s been worrying about her girlfriend all day. she hasn’t received a single message since this morning…

whatever was going on, it was big enough to make cheryl completely ignore the girl she was so in love with.

toni pulls her phone out of her jacket pocket, quickly sending a message to her before sitting down in front of sweet pea and fangs.

you [18:53]

“hey, cher, just checking in…everything okay?”

“tiny? what’s going on?” sweet pea asks. toni locks her phone as soon as it sends and looks up at him with a sigh.

“nothing. betty needed help from cheryl for something, she’s been with her all day. i’m just worried.” she says with a frown. sweet pea sighs, clenching his jaw before he quickly looks around the diner to
check if anyone’s listening in. when he confirms no one is, he leans in closer to her, and toni’s eyes widen as she takes in the panic and worry in his eyes.

“yeah, well, we got more pressing issues, toni.” he says under his breath. toni frowns.

“why, what’s going on?” she asks in confusion, looking between sweet pea and fangs. both boys sigh, and fangs leans in as well, his voice low but filled with fear as his leg bounces up and down anxiously underneath the table.

“that new sheriff started yesterday, and from what i’ve heard, he’s a hardass. he spent the entire day yesterday at the school looking for clues, and this morning he called jughead in and questioned him about the stupid camera with the footage from the musical.”

toni’s heart drops.

“and on top of that, hermione lodge is running for mayor, which means whatever hiram has planned is fucking working. shit is sideways, toni. if hermione wins that election, the serpents are screwed.” sweet pea gravels, his jaw clenching tightly in contained anger. toni licks her lips and nods.

“i know, i saw the news this morning…who’s running against her?” she asks. sweet pea scoffs loudly, and fangs smiles weakly.

“fred andrews. the debate is happening tomorrow night.” toni chuckles, running her fingers through her hair as she nods slowly.

“if fred wins, we might be okay. him and f.p go way back.” she says firmly. sweet pea rolls his eyes.

“get real, tiny. fred has no chance of winning, not against hermione lodge at least. hiram’s gonna do everything in his power to make sure his wife wins.”

sweet pea has a point, toni knows that…but god, if there's even a glimmer of hope here for them...

“what did f.p say?” toni asks. fangs shrugs.
“he said lay low in the grass, don’t attract any attention to ourselves.” he murmurs. toni purses her lips and nods.

“okay, then that’s what we do.”

“yeah, kinda hard to do that when sheriff minetta has possession of footage that could incriminate fangs in midge’s murder, toni.” sweet pea hisses. toni looks to fangs, and at the sight of him swallowing back tears, she bites back her own and reaches out to grip his hand.

god, this was such a mess, what the fuck were they supposed to do?

“how are you holding up?” she whispers. fangs licks his lips and shakes his head.

“not good. i haven’t slept in days, i’m stressing the fuck out, tiny.” toni hesitates, giving his hand a squeeze before she looks at sweet pea.

they have to do something here, maybe get fangs out of town for a bit until the heat dies down...

“sweets, we should tell f,p about this. maybe he can get fangs out of town for a while-.”

“and what? make him look even more guilty?” sweet pea growls. toni sighs.

“They can’t reach him if he isn’t here-.”

“no way, tiny! no one else can know, it’s enough that you brought cheryl into this!” he hisses, and toni glares at him angrily.

“don’t start with that shit again, sweet pea-.”

“i’m not mad about it, toni, but you should’ve consulted us first!” he says firmly, and toni’s about to reply when her phone goes off. she looks down to see a message from cheryl, and she opens her
phone quickly.

cheryl <3 [18:58]

“everything’s okay on my end, babe. what about you? xx”

“jesus christ, can you pull yourself away from her for two seconds?” sweet pea says with a roll of his eyes, and toni glares up at him.

she's so sick of his bullshit, for fuck's sake, what was his goddamn problem-

“do you have a problem with my girlfriend, sweet pea? cause if you do, you better tell me so i can kick your ass now instead of later.” she deadpans.

“god, how many fucking times do i have to tell you-.”

“guys!” they both turn to look at fangs, who is looking outside the window with wide eyes filled with dread, and toni just now registers the flash of blue and red, her head spinning so fast, her neck flares with pain from whiplash as she looks outside to the parking lot of pop’s diner to be met with a sight that causes her heart to completely fall.

two police cars with their lights flashing, four officers stepping out of them and the one at the forefront must be the new sheriff, his gaze dead center on the diner in front of him as the rain pours heavily around him, and toni swallows the lump that quickly rises in her throat before looking at fangs in panic.

he needs to run, he needs to leave, get out of pop's, out of riverdale-

“fangs, get out of here-.”

the door opens, the bell above it ringing loudly, and sheriff minetta walks in, his eyes scanning the entire diner before they land on the serpents.

a sick smile lights his face up, and toni’s heart is pounding against her chest, each step the sheriff takes toward them causing his boots to squeak on the ground from the rain as he comes to a stop in
front of them.

it's over, it's over, they're here for fangs-

“mr. fogarty…if you’ll come with me, please. we have some questions for you regarding midge klump’s murder.” sheriff minetta says firmly.

the entire diner goes silent. toni is frozen, each breath escaping her in a gasp, and she watches as everyone turns to look at them, eyes filled with shock and confusion.

for what did the serpents have to do with midge klump's murder?

this was bad...this was so bad, after the serpents involvement with jason blossom's murder, everyone would immediately believe that fangs had done something, fuck, fuck, fuck-

her eyes land on reggie mantle right at the last booth in pop's, who stands up in his seat, his eyes trained on the back of fangs’s head, and the fire and rage in his eyes causes her to stand slowly, scared for what's going through the head bulldog’s mind.

his eyes are screaming murder.

“don’t do this here, please.” she whispers, looking at sheriff minetta almost pleadingly, because he can't do this here in front of everyone, god...with all the rage the town feels toward tom keller and sierra mccoy, two people they can't attack, who better a target for their physicality than a southside serpent boy accused of murder?

but sheriff minetta scoffs at her in complete and utter disregard before looking down at fangs once more.

“now, mr. fogarty. either willingly or by force, take your pick.”

oh god, oh god, oh god-
“you killed midge?” reggie yells out, his jaw clenching in anger as the other bulldogs at his table begin to stand, and fangs’s face is pale, completely white as his whole body trembles. he swallows thickly, standing up slowly on shaking legs as he does.

“look, i didn’t do anything.” he manages to croak out. toni moves out of her booth and grips fangs's hand in her own, her other reaching up to curl into the lapels of his jacket protectively, and sheriff minetta raises an eyebrow at her before looking back at fangs once more.

“mr. fogarty, i’m being polite here, but if you don’t make a choice within five seconds-.”

“back off, asshole.” sweet pea growls, standing up with a clenched fist, and toni immediately turns around and rests a hand on his chest to hold him back, grabbing a fistful of his jacket and pushing him further into the booth.

“sweet pea, you’re not helping-.” she starts, but sheriff minetta growls in frustration behind her.

“both of you are not helping! now step aside! mr. fogarty, i won’t ask again.” sheriff minetta hisses, and fangs licks his lips nervously, staring back at the bulldogs waiting for him at the other exit-

sheriff minetta grabs him, slamming him down onto the table beside their booth chest first as he grabs fangs’s hands and pulls them behind his back. sweet pea pounces, and toni literally digs her heels into the ground and pushes him back by the chest to stop him, tears streaming down her face from panic and grief and god, this can’t be happening-

“no! you can’t get arrested too!” she screams, pushing against sweet pea’s chest to stop him, because she can't deal with it, she can't deal with losing both her brothers in one fucking day, she's not going to lose sweet pea as well-

she looks up to see the other bulldogs holding reggie back, the anger in his eyes palpable as he glares at fangs with a look that could kill.

“you’re dead, vixen killer!” he roars, and fangs shouts in pain as sheriff minetta locks the cuffs around his wrists and pulls him up, pushing him toward the door as he looks back at sweet pea and toni in complete and utter fear-

“fangs!” toni finally lets go of sweet pea, running after the sheriff as he pushes fangs out into the now
pouring rain, and every single person in the diner is gathering around the windows to watch as sweet pea and toni throw the door open and step out into the pouring rain.

“call f.p!” fangs shouts, tears falling down his face and mixing with the rain, but toni keeps running, sweet pea close behind as they come to a stop in front of sheriff minetta.

“wait, stop! you can’t detain him, you have no fucking proof!” toni screams, reaching out to grab sheriff minetta's arm, but sweet pea grabs her hand and pulls her back, one look from the new sheriff at them causing them both to sag in defeat.

he was a hardass...oh god, fangs, this was so fucking bad-

“unless you both want to join him, i suggest you get back in that diner and enjoy your dinner. now!” he growls, and fangs looks at them in complete and utter despair before his head is shoved under the car door, sheriff minetta slamming it shut the second he’s safe inside.

toni rests her hand against the window, wishing she could sink her hand through it and pull fangs out of this nightmare, and he looks up at her sadly, tears still falling down both their faces.

not fangs...anyone but fangs, he didn't deserve this...

"we're gonna get you out, fangs! you're going to be okay, i promise, just stay calm!" she yells. fangs nods slowly, and toni steps back as sheriff minetta takes off, his tires squealing against the rain slicked road.

toni can’t move. can’t breathe, can’t speak, can’t think-

what does she do? fuck, what is she supposed to do, fangs can’t go to jail for murdering midge, he can’t, this is bad, this is so bad-

“what do we do, tiny?” sweet pea yells, watching sheriff minetta drive away with worry, and toni swallows the lump in her throat, closing her eyes and taking a deep breath in before she nods.

she needs to stay calm...she needs to stay calm...
god, she needs cheryl...

cheryl's not here, toni. you're on your own for now. breathe, and focus...

“we go to the wyrm. we find f.p. we tell him what’s happened! come on!” she grabs sweet pea by the lapel of his jacket, dragging him toward their bikes as she tries to will her heart from racing and her mind from filling with thoughts of the worst.

that fangs was going to go to jail for murder…and there was nothing she could do about it.
cheryl bursts through the doors of the whyte wyrm, panic and worry gripping her as betty trails behind her. they’re met with the sight of almost every serpent looking up at them in surprise, perhaps wondering what a blossom and a cooper are doing barging into the doors of their bar, but cheryl ignores every single one of them and runs straight toward the barstools where she can see f.p, jughead and sweet pea are sitting in a circle, all of them with their heads down and looking as somber as ever.

all cheryl can focus on is the lack of pink hair that should be with them.

“where is she?” cheryl croaks out as soon as she comes to a stop in front of them. sweet pea’s jaw clenches, and cheryl can see the pain and anger in his eyes as he nods toward the women’s bathroom.

"in there. she hasn't come out since we got here half an hour ago." he says gruffly. cheryl watches as betty pulls an upset jughead into her embrace before she runs straight for the bathroom, pushing the door open so hard, it smacks against the wall loudly. she can hear the sound of loud sobbing as soon as it reaches her ears.

her heart breaks, completely and utterly shatters at the sound, and she opens the second door, heeled boots clicking on the tiled floor loudly. she sees three cubicles before her, only one of them closed and locked, and she takes a shuddering breath in before she makes her way over to it slowly.
"toni?" she says softly. She lifts up a closed but shaking fist to knock on the door three times as she blinks back tears.

"toni? It's cheryl…" she whispers. She hears the sound of boots hitting the ground before the cubicle door is thrown open-

All Cheryl sees is a flash of pink hair before arms immediately fly out and wrap around her neck tightly, her vision obscured by thick curls, and Toni is crying loudly into her shoulder, her arms only tightening around Cheryl's neck with each passing second. Cheryl tries to blink back her own tears, but fails miserably, her tears falling down into Toni's pink hair in sadness.

"toni...i'm so sorry, babe, i'm so, so sorry…" Cheryl whispers in her ear, her lips pressing a soft kiss to Toni's neck in an attempt to comfort her.

Betty and Cheryl had been at the register, looking for clues on whether or not her father could possibly be the black hood, and Betty had been in the process of scanning through her father's work journal when Betty had received the call from Jughead telling her that Fangs had been arrested for Midge's murder.

He told them they were at the Wyrm, that Toni was completely and utterly inconsolable, and Betty and Cheryl had immediately abandoned their investigation to get here, worry for not only her pink haired serpent, but Fangs as well, causing Cheryl to speed way too fast in her convertible, Betty clinging to the dashboard for dear life the entire time.

"what happened, t.t?" Cheryl murmurs into her ear, her hands rubbing gentle and calming circles into the exposed skin of Toni's lower back. Toni whines, swallowing thickly as she pulls away and sniffs back her tears. Her eyes are bloodshot red and puffy, and if the severity of the situation didn't exist, Cheryl would think she looks so cute, but she hates seeing Toni cry, could barely stand it on the days after she had been rescued from the sisters of quiet mercy...watching Toni cry for her had been hard enough...

"i w-went to p-pop's to m-meet up with sweet p-pea and f-fangs and then the n-new sheriff just c-came in and arrested h-him! we t- tried to g-go to the station but they w-won't let us in t-to s-see h-him-." Toni hiccups in short breaths, unable to get her words out properly at all. Cheryl immediately reaches out to cradle Toni's face in her hands in an attempt to calm her down.

"toni, you need to breathe, okay? breathe in deeply, try to calm down." Cheryl tells her firmly, trying
to get her to listen, because she can tell Toni is seconds away from a panic attack, can see the symptoms arising-

toni just sobs once more, her nails digging into Cheryl’s forearm harshly as she takes a suddering breath in.

“i c-can’t lose f-fangs, ch-cheryl-.” she gasps out, and Cheryl grips her chin between her fingers tightly.

“you’re not gonna lose fangs, Toni! we’re gonna get him out of this, just breathe, babe, please…” Cheryl brushes back the hair clinging to Toni’s cheeks from her tears, and Toni chokes out another sob before she finally, finally takes a deep breath in and exhales shakily. Her whole body is trembling against Cheryl’s as the red haired girl pulls Toni to her chest lightly.

“there you go, keep breathing…” Cheryl whispers softly, her fingers running through soft pink curls as gently as possible.

“cheryl…” Toni’s voice sounds so small, so weak and defeated, and god, Cheryl hates this, she hates Toni being so upset, she hates that fangs is currently rotting in a jail cell, she hates that she wasn’t here to help, but Betty needed her...

fangs is going to be okay…we’re going to fix this.

slowly but surely, Toni begins to relax, her breaths becoming longer and more stable, but she’s still trembling in Cheryl’s arms, and Cheryl sighs before running her fingers through Toni’s hair once more, the girl lifting her head up with a small sniff to look at Cheryl in despair.

"cheryl, i’m..."

"shh...just keep breathing, t.t. let’s go see if F.P has any solutions, okay? we can’t lose hope now, Toni. we push through our sadness, our anger, and we come up with a way to fix this. fangs isn’t going down for Midge’s murder, not when he’s innocent. come on.” Cheryl interlaces their fingers tightly, and Toni actually gives her a small smile before she’s leaning up on the tips of her toes to press a kiss to the corner of Cheryl’s mouth.

“what would i do without you?” she whispers against her lips, and Cheryl smiles and wraps a hand
around the back of toni’s neck to kiss her once more with passion, their lips melding together like goddamn puzzle pieces as toni whines against her.

“i ask myself the same thing every day, t.t. now come on, we’ve got work to do.” cheryl gives her a determined nod, and toni licks her lips and returns it as she gives cheryl's hand a squeeze, as if to say 'i’m ready'. cheryl drags toni out of the bathroom, making her way back over to the bar to where the others are still standing. they look up at their approach, and cheryl sees f.p make his way toward them from the entrance to the wyrm, his mobile phone in his hands. f.p looks frazzled, his hair a mess and his eyes bloodshot as he comes to a stop in front of them.

“sierra mccoy just called…she said she’s going to represent fangs pro bono. guess she thinks she owes us one for saving her from the mob a few days back.” cheryl hears toni groan with relief beside her, and she turns to see toni's knees are shaking, her hands gripping cheryl's for support. the red haired girl wraps an arm around toni's shoulders to hold her up, her own eyes closing as she lets out a deep sigh and nods.

“good…mrs. mccoy is good at what she does.” she reassures them. f.p purses his lips.

“i sure hope you’re right, cheryl…it doesn’t look good.” f.p says firmly, his hands gripping the counter of the bar tightly.

“why, what did she say?” betty asks in a hollow voice, her arm wrapped around jughead's waist. f.p runs his fingers through his hair and turns to face all of them with a worried look in his eyes.

“she said they’ve got fangs on camera with midge in her dressing room before the musical started. there’s no audio, but it looks like they were arguing-.”

“They hooked up and midge kept wanting to talk about it but fangs just wanted to forget it ever happened, that’s probably what they were arguing about.” sweet pea says gruffly, waving his hand nonchalantly as if it isn't a big deal.

f.p’s expression turns stony.

“you knew about this?” he asks in a low voice, turning his whole body to look at fangs. cheryl exchanges a worried glance with sweet pea, and she tightens her hold around toni’s shoulders as sweet pea hesitates before he stands tall and raises his chin high.
“fangs told me in confidence-.” f.p suddenly growls and grabs sweet pea by the lapels of his jacket, spinning him around and pinning him to the counter of the bar, and cheryl’s heart almost leaps out of her throat as toni tries to shrug her off-

“f.p, stop!” toni yells, but cheryl pulls the pink haired serpent back, her heart pounding against her chest as f.p screams right into sweet pea’s face.

“YOU KNEW?! I COULD’VE HELPED HIM, SWEET PEA!” f.p roars as he shakes sweet pea angrily. sweet pea’s expression is filled with regret, but also rage, his hands gripping f.p’s wrists to get him to let go, and jughead grabs his father and pulls him off sweet pea, his beanie almost flying off with the effort.

“dad, stop! this isn’t helping fangs!” f.p glares at jughead, who pushes his father back and stands between him and the serpent boy. f.p points at sweet pea in anger.

“anything happens to him, that’s on you, boy!” he hisses. cheryl swallows thickly, her arms still straining from the effort of keeping toni close to her even though the girl is no longer struggling against her, and sweet pea’s bottom lip trembles as she straightens out his jacket and glares at f.p angrily.

“if you’re gonna blame someone, blame your son! why the hell did you give that tape to sheriff keller?” sweet pea barks, glaring at jughead angrily, and jughead looks at him with wide eyes before he scoffs in disbelief.

“it’s not like i had a choice, sweet pea, it was evidence in a crime scene-.” jughead steps forward, getting right up in sweet pea’s face as an anger similar to the one in his father’s eyes shines in his own, and cheryl can’t believe their fucking stupidity-

“pointing fingers isn’t going to help fangs, either! we need to talk to mrs. mccoy and see what our options are!” cheryl yells over the both of them, her hold on toni finally relinquishing in her effort to be heard. toni grabs her hand, squeezing it tightly as f.p breathes heavily, looking between each of them before he takes a deep breath in and nods.

“she’s right! sierra's the only one who can help fangs now, there’s nothing we can do. i’m gonna go meet her at the station, all of you…just go home, get some rest, i’ll keep you updated.” sweet pea opens his mouth to argue, but cheryl gives him a quick shake of her head, watches as he clenches his jaw before sinking back against the bar in defeat. f.p makes his way to the entrance of the wyrm, straightening out his jacket and exhaling deeply as he does, and jughead sighs and takes off his beanie to run his fingers through his hair before he puts it back on.
“dad’s right, there’s not much we can do. at least he’s safe in police custody for now. we should get some rest…something tells me tomorrow is gonna be a big day.” jughead says, clenching his jaw as he grips betty’s hand in his own. sweet pea scoffs, but says nothing, and cheryl makes eye contact with her cousin, who gives her a simple nod. cheryl sighs before pressing a kiss to toni’s temple, her hand moving up and down toni’s back comfortably.

“check on sweet pea, make sure he’s okay. i’ll be back.” toni simply nods, her eyes on sweet pea and sweet pea only, and betty says something to jughead before she presses a kiss to his cheek and follows cheryl to the end of the bar out of earshot of the others, the both of them leaning in close to whisper to each other regardless.

“What do we do, cheryl? i want to help fangs, but i can’t just stop my investigation, i need to know if my father is the black hood…” betty says in a hushed voice. cheryl purses her lips and nods.

she knew betty would say this…she understands her need to uncover the truth about her father’s indiscretions, and cheryl wasn’t about to tell her that she needed to stop.

“I know, but truthfully, cousin betty…there isn’t much we can do for fangs, and if we actually do uncover the truth about the black hood’s identity, it would go a long way to helping him. if we catch the black hood, we catch midge’s killer, and fangs will be free. the only thing i’m worried about is leaving toni…she needs me, betty.” cheryl says softly, looking up to see the pink haired serpent is hugging sweet pea tightly, the both of them clutching each other, and it’s almost like you can sense that something is wrong…that something or someone is missing…

toni needs her right now. god, after everything she had done to be there for cheryl for the last few weeks, cheryl can’t just abandon her now…it would be so wrong, god, so, so wrong…but letting betty do this by herself was out of the question. betty was her cousin…betty was family…

“I…i can do this on my own, cheryl-.” betty says, swallowing thickly, and cheryl immediately shakes her head.

“no! i’m not leaving you to uncover your father’s potential side hobby of murder on your own, cousin! you’re family…maybe the only family i have left other than nana rose, i won’t leave you to go through something like this by yourself.” she says firmly. betty sighs loudly, her hands reaching up to play with the back of her ponytail anxiously, and cheryl finds herself smiling at her fondly before she bites down on her bottom lip and nods.
"i’ll talk to toni tonight, hopefully she’ll understand…in the meantime, you should get some rest, maybe stay with jughead tonight, just so you feel safe." cheryl says, reaching a hand out to rub betty’s arm comfortingly, and the blonde haired girl smiles before she leans in and hugs cheryl close, the action surprising the red head slightly before she eventually leans in to her touch.

she's been giving and receiving a lot of hugs in the last few weeks...it's different. not unwelcome...but different.

“thank you, cheryl. for everything…”

“of course, cousin betty.” cheryl says with a smile. betty pulls away, and she gives cheryl another small smile before she makes her way over to jughead, who’s waiting for her at the entrance now. they both exit hand in hand, jughead giving cheryl a small wave before the door closes behind them.

cheryl sighs before she turns to face sweet pea and toni, making her way over to them just as they finally pull apart from each other reluctantly.

“are you okay?” cheryl asks sweet pea with worry. the boy’s eyes fall down to the floor, where he scuffs his boot on the wood before looking up at cheryl in despair.

“f.p’s right…toni said we should tell him and i didn’t listen to her. if we had told him, fangs wouldn’t be in this situation, f.p would’ve gotten him out of town-.”

“this isn’t your fault, sweet pea. not one bit. fangs is going to be okay, mrs. mccoy will get him through this.” cheryl says softly, reaching out to grip his gigantic hand in her own. it feels different, having a rough, calloused hand grip her own, but like before...it's different but not unwelcome. sweet pea purses his lips, nodding once as he squeezes her hand, and toni sighs and rubs her puffy, bloodshot eyes tiredly.

“god, how did everything get so fucked up so quickly?” she groans. cheryl nods solemnly in agreement.

god, today has been a long day…

“i don’t know, t.t. but i think we need to do what f.p said. go home, get some rest and wait to hear from him for an update.” cheryl says firmly. toni swallows loudly before she nods, and sweet pea
reaches out and grips her shoulder before pulling her in for a hug and pressing a kiss to her brow.

“go get some sleep, tiny. we’ll go to the station in the morning to see him.” toni nods against his chest, and as soon as she detaches herself from him, cheryl hesitates before she steps forward, her arms wrapping around sweet pea’s neck. the scent of cigarettes and cologne hits her nose, so different from toni’s scent, but there is something similar there...cheryl isn’t sure if it’s the smell of the leather of their jackets, or perhaps it’s something that’s just so persistently southside, a scent that lingers in their blood and will likely never disappear, but it surprises cheryl how much it smells like home.

that smell that is so distinctly toni...here, on the boy she once called 'scum'...

she can feel the serpent boy stiffen in surprise before he’s wrapping his arms around her waist and relaxing against her.

“you get some rest too, peapod.” she murmurs into his ear. sweet pea chuckles, and when she pulls away, he gives her a small smile before he’s reaching into the pocket of his leather jacket and pulling out a cigarette.

"thanks...red." he teases. cheryl rolls her eyes at him, but smiles all the same as she holds her hand out for toni to take. the pink haired serpent interlaces their fingers, and cheryl sees her watching their interaction with a small smile on her face. she can tell toni is happy that cheryl is starting to get along well with sweet pea, is truly starting to become part of the family...

she’s getting closer and closer to the day she puts on a serpent jacket of her own...

they walk out of the whyte wyrm hand in hand, just like betty and jughead did, and cheryl is about to lead toni over to her car when she notices that toni’s bike is parked right next to sweet pea's.

“do you wanna leave your bike here, tt?” cheryl asks, coming to a stop as she turns to face her girlfriend. toni sighs, her eyes darting back and forth between the bike and cheryl's convertible for a few moments before she shakes her head.

“no, i should keep it on me just in case. i’ll be right behind you, bombshell.” toni slips her hand out of cheryl’s as she makes her way to her bike, and the red head already misses the warmth of toni’s fingers in her own as she sighs and makes her way to her car, her eyes moving up to her rearview mirror to observe toni jumping on her bike the second she’s in the driver’s seat.
today...has been a long day...

cheryl struggles to stay awake the entire ride to thistlehouse, her eyes drooping every once in a while, but the sound of toni's motorbike rumbling behind her keeps her awake long enough to reach thistlehouse in one piece. as soon as she's parked in the driveway, however, it takes everything in her to actually get out of the car, her whole body sagging against the seat, defeated with fatigue. she closes her eyes and takes a deep breath in, and she can see toni getting off her bike slowly behind her car, watches as she takes her helmet off and shakes her hair out of her eyes. cheryl smiles fondly, finally finds the energy to push the car door open and step out. toni makes her way over to her, and cheryl can see toni is just as exhausted, her eyes heavy and filled with despair. cheryl presses a kiss to her temple, unable to help herself as toni leans into her touch with a soft sigh.

"i don't know if i'm gonna be able to sleep today..." she croaks out. cheryl purses her lips and wraps an arm around her shoulders.

"i'll put some sleep assist oils in the diffuser, okay? come on, t.t..." cheryl leads her to the front door, her other hand digging into her coat pocket for her keys, and as soon as cheryl puts her keys into the door and opens it, she pricks her ears for any signs of distress. when she's met with only silence, the only source of light the chandelier hanging above the stairs, she nods to herself and grips toni’s hand in her own, turning to lock the door once more before leading her extremely exhausted girlfriend up the stairs and to their bedroom.

cheryl pushes the door open and immediately makes her way over to her dresser where a diffuser is resting.

“i’m gonna shower.” toni says in a small voice behind her. cheryl turns and watches her with a frown, but nods all the same as toni picks up her duffel bag and makes her way into the bathroom, closing it shut behind her, but not before cheryl can see the pained expression on her face.

she's still trying to be so brave...still trying to be strong in front of cheryl...

cheryl considers following after her, but decides that maybe her girlfriend just needs a moment alone to process everything that's happened…

cheryl certainly does.
she sets the diffuser up with some oils that will help them get some sleep tonight, watches as the mist exits out of it slowly and the smell of lavender fills the air, and she smiles and ends up picking up fresh clothes so she can shower in another bathroom in the house, desperate to get the filth from today off her body. as soon as cheryl’s under that stream of warm water, she finds herself sighing loudly, her fingers reaching out for a facial scrub so she can use it to take her make up off.

god...today had been a fucking long day...

the more cheryl and betty had looked into hal cooper and his strange habits, the more convinced cheryl became that hal cooper could actually be the black hood. when they had gone through his diary, betty had noticed that he was ‘away’ the morning that fred andrews was shot, and that the night of the musical, he had a ‘business trip’ as well…

and cheryl had found that odd. for what husband wouldn’t show up to the musical that not only his daughter, but his wife were stars in?

betty had told her that hal and alice had been rocky for a while now, ever since the whole polly being pregnant with jason's twins situation, but that they had decided to put off their divorce to try and fix their relationship for polly and betty’s sakes. but cheryl sees no hope of the coopers coming back from something like this, and truthfully, it hurts her to think of betty, and even polly and her twins, getting caught in the crossfire. after all, those twins were jason’s kids, and even though an opportunity hasn’t exactly arisen for cheryl to meet them yet, between being kidnapped and thrown into a nightmarish nunnery and being emancipated, she still cared deeply for them…

she’s scared for betty, for all of them. but now, this was about more than just her cousins and brother’s children.

if she and betty can prove that hal cooper is the black hood, then fangs would be let go. this isn’t just about comforting betty, this is about fangs’s future now. and cheryl will be damned if she’s going to let that boy wither away in jail when she has the proof of his innocence within her grasp.

if cheryl wanted to become a serpent...fangs needed to become her family. and if there's one thing cheryl does, it's protect the people she sees as family...with all the ferocity she can muster...

cheryl finishes showering quickly, finds herself changing into a red nightgown before making her way back to her bedroom. the smell of lavender is so potent, and cheryl finds herself already becoming drowsy as she cuddles up under the covers, but she forces herself to stay awake, sits upright in bed until she hears the water turn off in the bathroom. five minutes after it does, toni steps out, dressed in sweatpants and a tank top, fresh face of make up, and cheryl can't help but think...
cheryl looks up at her girlfriend with a sad smile.

“feeling a bit better, t.t.?” she asks softly. toni licks her lips, her eyes roaming all over cheryl's face before she shakes her head, her shoulders sagging in defeat. cheryl sighs and opens the blankets up, patting the spot beside her and opening her arms up for her. toni sighs and makes her way over to her, crawling under the covers before she curls up against cheryl’s chest. cheryl immediately wraps her arms around the pink haired serpent, her lips pressing a kiss to toni’s brow as she does.

"talk to me, babe. what's going on in your mind?" cheryl asks her softly. toni lets out a shaky sigh, and it's quiet for a few moments before she finally begins talking.

“i’m so worried, cher…what if they find fangs guilty?” toni whispers, her voice cracking slightly with emotion. cheryl shakes her head vehemently.

“toni, one little piece of footage doesn’t prove fangs is guilty of murder, not at all. it just makes him a suspect, but if there’s no fingerprints, no other clues to indicate that fangs was responsible, then they’ll have no choice but to let him go. innocent until proven guilty is the saying.’” cheryl says with a firm nod, but toni scoffs and shakes her head against her, her fingers curling into the silk of cheryl's nightgown almost in reprimand.

“We’re serpents, cher. they don’t give a shit about proof. the second we’re suspects, we’re guilty, that’s how it works.” toni grunts. cheryl frowns and reaches her hand up to rest over the top of toni's that's resting on her ribcage.

“toni, i know it seems impossible, but right now, the best thing for us to do is just get rest. if we stay up all night dwelling on possibilities and trying to come up with solutions, we won’t be able to do anything that could actually help fangs tomorrow. which, speaking of…” cheryl hesitates for a moment, white teeth chewing down on a bare bottom lip before she sighs and squeezes toni in her arms lightly.

there's no point putting it off, and cheryl's not going to surprise her with this tomorrow...not during everything else...

“do you think you can handle things without me?” she asks sheepishly. toni stiffens in her arms, and
she pushes herself up to look at cheryl in surprise, owlish eyes blinking at her rapidly.

“why?” she croaks out with a frown. cheryl reaches up, her thumb brushing across toni’s cheekbone affectionately and almost apologetically as she smiles sadly.

“that thing i’ve been helping betty with all day? it’s something really big, toni…something potentially life changing for her, and as much as we both want to be there to help fangs, we need to finish what we started. i wish i could tell you more, but it isn’t my place to do so.” cheryl explains slowly. toni takes in each of her words, her expression growing only more and more confused the more cheryl talks until she licks her lips and simply nods.

“so…so something really big is happening that could change all of our lives, and you have to go and help betty with something that you can’t tell me anything about?” toni says, her expression turning stony with each word she says, and cheryl’s heart drops.

okay...okay, that's definitely a warranted reaction, but still...

“toni, i…i know it sounds bad, but she needs help-.”

“no. no, it’s fine, it’s…whatever, cheryl. i’ll message you to keep you updated.” toni grumbles, and with that, she turns around, her back to cheryl as she pulls the covers over her body and rests her head on the pillow with a soft grunt.

cheryl blinks for a few moments in shock.

she knows toni has every right to be upset, but it still hurts.

does she think cheryl wants to do this? god, of course cheryl wants to be there for her, of course cheryl wants to help her and help fangs, but betty's dad could be the fucking black hood, could be responsible for fred andrews almost dying...for midge actually dying...murdered in cold blood...

she licks her lips before she reaches out and grip’s toni’s arm gently.

there’s no way she’s letting toni go to bed upset. she has to get her to understand...
“toni…don’t be mad, please…you know i want to help fangs-.”

“no, it’s fine, betty comes first. like i said, it’s whatever.” toni mumbles into her pillow. cheryl sighs and tugs on her arm once more.

“toni, you come first. you always will. but betty…she’s family, t.t.”

“no, cheryl! that's not the answer i want! i...god, i never come first, okay? the only person who should ever come first in your life is you. but i was hoping i would be a close second, because you sure as shit are for me! and you know what? if you wanna be a serpent, cheryl, then that means fangs will be family, too!” toni says angrily, turning to look at cheryl for a brief moment during her speech before she’s facing away from her girlfriend once more. cheryl blinks back tears, nodding slowly as she grips the sheets between her fingers anxiously.

she was right...of course she was, when hasn't she fucking been right-

“i know that-.”

“cheryl, i don’t want to sit here and tell you that you have to choose, because you don’t. i would never, ever make you choose. i said it’s fine, just drop it.” toni says with a tone of finality. cheryl bites down on her bottom lip, and her tears spill over before she can stop them, but she raises her chin high and shakes her head.

because she is not letting toni go to bed mad at her.

“no.” she says firmly. toni sighs, and cheryl grips her arm and forces her to turn so that she’s looking at her, toni grunting at the action in surprise.

she’s not going to shy away from confrontation, no matter what her history with it is. she’s not going to let toni go to bed mad at her. for once in her life, she has something worth fighting for, and cheryl will be damned if she’s going to let this cause a rift between them…

toni’s eyes move up to the ceiling, avoiding cheryl completely, but cheryl reaches out and touches her cheek, forcing her to look cheryl in the eyes.
“toni, this thing with betty…it could help fangs. you have to believe me and trust me when i say that i can’t tell you what this thing with betty is, but it really could help clear fangs’s name. so when i say i want to be there to help fangs, i mean it. but maybe helping betty can help him, too.” toni rolls her eyes, but cheryl grips her chin between her fingers tightly with a soft growl of frustration.

"toni. do not roll your eyes at me. i'm not going to fight with you right now, i absolutely refuse to do so. i understand your anger and frustration, and i apologize deeply for it, but don't think for a second that i won't see fangs as my family when i become a serpent. but i'm not a serpent yet, toni. and betty...she's a blossom by blood. and she's also my friend, someone i care about...and she really, really, really needs my help. veronica is busy dealing with her mother and this campaign, archie is helping his father, kevin is still dealing with the blowout of his father's affair being exposed, jughead is helping fangs... betty has no one. someone has to be there for her." cheryl whispers.

toni’s expression softens as she takes in cheryl's words, and she a hand up, her fingers curling around the wrist of the hand gripping her chin softly.

"alright...i'm sorry, i shouldn't have gotten mad-.”

"i understand why you did, t.t. it's okay." cheryl says with a smile, her grip on toni loosening until she's simply cradling the girl's cheek affectionately. toni lets out a shaky sigh, but her eyes narrow in suspicion as she licks her lips and looks cheryl in the eyes.

"is betty okay at least? what's going on?" she asks in concern. cheryl hesitates before she shakes her head.

"i can't tell you, t.t. it's not my place to. but she's really not okay, and what she's dealing with...it's something that could turn her life upside down in the worst way possible." she says sadly. toni blinks once in confusion, and she suddenly props herself up onto her elbows, her eyes roaming over cheryl’s face in panic.

“cher, is what you’re doing dangerous?” she asks with worry. cheryl swallows thickly, and again, she hesitates, but she doesn’t answer, can't bring it in herself to out of fear that she'll end up blurring out everything.

"toni, i-.”
“cher, i don't want vague answers or any of that bullshit, i just want you to be honest with me. so i'll ask again. is what you’re doing dangerous?” toni asks more firmly this time, her hand reaching out grip cheryl's shoulder. cheryl bites down on her bottom lip before she simply nods once.

“it is…which is exactly why i can’t let cousin betty do it on her own.” she says hoarsely. the rage returns in toni's eyes, but it's mixed with confusion and worry as well as she scoffs and shakes her head furiously.

"so what? you-you think i’m just gonna be okay with you both going off and doing something dangerous tomorrow? cher, i’m already stressing the fuck out about fangs, i don’t need to be worried about you too tomorrow!” toni exclaims, her grip on cheryl's shoulder tightening so much, the red head finds herself wincing in pain slightly, and toni immediately loosens her hold, but the concern and anger in her face is still there. cheryl sighs and grips toni's hand in her own tightly.

“i know babe, i know, i’m sorry, i just…i have to do this.” cheryl whispers, giving her hands a squeeze. toni sighs, running the fingers of her free hand through her pink hair with frustration.

"cheryl, this...fuck, this is too much, i..." toni trails off, tears in her eyes once more, and cheryl leans in, resting her forehead against toni’s temple as she closes her eyes and exhales shakily.

“i’m sorry, t.t. i don’t want to stress you out, that’s something i would never want…but betty’s family, and if i’m trying to turn over a new leaf...be someone better than before…i have to do this. please, toni...don't be mad.” cheryl opens her eyes to see toni’s bottom lip trembling, and she shakes her head against cheryl for half a second before she whines and turns her head to kiss her passionately, teeth biting down on cheryl’s bottom lip lightly as she pushes her down onto the bed. cheryl responds enthusiastically, a hand reaching up to snake under toni’s shirt, nails digging in and scratching down the tanned skin of her back, and the pink haired serpent hisses against cheryl’s lips, her bite getting harder as cheryl groans underneath her.

“toni…” cheryl breathes, the both of them pulling away at the same time, and they rest their foreheads against each other breathlessly, toni licking her lips before she presses a soft kiss to cheryl’s own. it’s still charged, a heated moment that cheryl wants to continue, but toni pulls away slowly, her teeth biting down on her full, pink bottom lip with worry.

“i love you, cheryl. so much…please be careful tomorrow. if anything happens, call me-.”

“i know, i will, t.t. i promise. and you have to keep me updated on fangs, please-.”
“i will. i will, i promise.” toni breathes back. cheryl sighs, and she wraps a hand around the back of toni’s neck, scratching lightly at the small baby hairs there affectionately. toni smiles softly, and she presses a kiss to cheryl’s lips once more before she falls back down beside her.

“turn over, i wanna hold you and not let go for the next eight hours.” she mumbles, and cheryl chuckles and turns over onto her side, toni wrapping an arm around her waist while the other moves under cheryl’s neck. cheryl wraps a hand around her inner elbow, nails tracing patterns into her skin with a red nail as toni presses her forehead against the exposed skin of cheryl’s back.

“i love you, toni.” cheryl whispers. toni sighs and kisses her spine, the action causing a shiver to run up it.

“i love you too, cheryl.”

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it’s way, way harder than toni could have ever anticipated.

not having cheryl by her side right now, it’s killing her. she’s been stuck at the station with f.p, sweet pea, jughead and sierra mccoy for the last three hours, and things have been…okay. fangs had been questioned within an inch of his life all last night until sierra had arrived and told him not to say another word. fangs could legally only be held for twenty four hours, according to sierra. without any concrete proof proving that fangs was the one who murdered midge, sheriff minetta would have no choice but to let him go as soon as the twenty four hours since his arrest were up.

they’re so close now…only four or so hours away, but it’s the waiting that is absolute torture. sheriff minetta has been gone all day, apparently at the school to look for anything at all that proved fangs’s guilt, and toni’s terrified. she knows she shouldn’t be, fangs wasn’t guilty and sheriff minetta wouldn’t find anything, but fuck, if sheriff minetta was enough of a monster to plant evidence, fangs was screwed.

when she had brought it up, f.p had looked at sierra anxiously, and the former mayor had frowned before looking to fangs immediately.

“if he comes in here with anything that doesn’t seem right, you tell me straight away.” fangs had nodded desperately, his fingers curling around the bars of his jail cell in despair, and toni hates seeing him like this. his eyes are bloodshot red, and she knows he hasn’t slept in days, can see the bags
under his eyes…

god, she needs cheryl…her red haired girlfriend had been messaging her all day, checking up on her every half an hour for updates, and toni had obliged, telling her everything she knew, but when she did the same, cheryl had only replied with vague answers, telling her they were close to uncovering something that could help prove fangs’s innocence.

toni has no idea what to think. she’s thankful to cheryl and betty for doing whatever they are doing to help find the black hood, but she’s fucking worried. whatever they were doing was dangerous, cheryl had said so herself…and if anything happened to her, toni isn’t sure she’ll be able to handle it…

no…she knows she won’t be able to handle it…the thought of something happening to cheryl has her stomach turning, bile rising in the back of her throat and panic seizing her chest immediately. she can’t lose cheryl, not after everything…she just can’t…

“You okay, fangs?” f.p calls out, breaking toni out of her thoughts, and she looks up to see her best friend swallow thickly, his throat bobbing up and down at the action before he nods slowly.

“Hanging in there.” he says with a small smile. f.p runs his fingers through his hair anxiously, and he looks up at toni with a sigh before he's grabbing his serpent jacket and sliding his arms through it.

“I need to go check on what’s going on out there…can i trust you three to stay here and keep an eye on him?” he says, looking at jughead and sweet pea as well, and they all give him a firm nod. f.p looks to sierra, who looks down at her watch before looking at him with a smile.

“A few more hours, f.p. as soon as his twenty four hours are up, we’ll get him out of here.”

“The question is, can you get him out safely, sierra? there’s still a lot of people who are upset about fangs being arrested for midge’s murder, there’s already a mob out there ready to take his head off…” f.p sighs, and fangs looks to sierra helplessly, his eyes moving between all of them in panic.

“There’s a mob out there?” he says in fear. toni licks her lips and looks at f.p worriedly.

There was a mob outside, the serpents and sierra had a lot of trouble getting into the station without hearing insults thrown their way…toni was hoping that the crowd would disperse as the day went
on, but it only seems to be growing bigger...every time she looks outside the window, it seems like the crowd has only grown.

“the debate between fred andrews and hermione lodge is happening tonight...i’m sure the crowd will dissipate before fangs is released.” sierra says with a clench of her jaw, perhaps in anger over the fact that she’s being replaced as mayor so quickly.

“either way, i want some serpents here in case things go south. you three, stick to him like glue. i’ll be back as soon as i can.” they each nod again, and f.p reaches his hand through the bars, fangs standing from his bed to grip it tightly.

“you stay strong, boy, you hear me? we’re gonna get you out of this in one piece.” he pulls fangs forward, f.p resting his forehead against the bars as fangs does the same with a clench of his jaw, but nods firmly to let f.p know he understands. toni blinks back her own tears as she scuffs her boots on the ground anxiously.

god, this was torture...just a few more hours, she knows, but she hates the waiting...

her phone vibrates in her lap, and the second her eyes spot cheryl's name, she's opening the message frantically.

cheryl <3 [14:57]
any updates, babe? xx

toni sighs loudly, and she’s considering simply calling her girlfriend when she decides against it. she doesn't want anyone listening in on their conversation, especially if whatever cheryl and betty were doing was dangerous...

she quickly taps out a reply.

you [14:58]
f.p left to find out what’s going on outside the station...we’re worried we won’t be able to get fangs out safely, there’s a mob outside. are you okay? what’s going on with you?

toni looks up as soon as she sends the message, and she can see jughead watching her with a frown, his arms crossing over his chest as he leans against the brick wall beside the bench that toni is sitting
“betty and cheryl still together?” he asks firmly. toni nods once, looking down at her phone to see the three dots appear before she looks up again at jughead.

“do you know what’s going on? has betty told you anything?” toni asks, her voice hoarse either from lack of use, or simply from stress. jughead’s frown only deepens as he shakes his head.

“she told me it was something to help fangs and that it involved her family…that’s all i know.” jughead says with a sigh. toni nods, but says nothing as she processes this new piece of information.

so betty hadn’t told jughead that what they were doing was dangerous…which she understands, because jughead would probably lose his shit if he knew, but now toni at least has one more clue. whatever it is, it involves betty’s family…

but what side? her father’s, or her mother’s? it must be her father, that’s why cheryl was getting involved…betty was a blossom on her father’s side, it would make sense for cheryl to want to help her if it involved her father, a fellow blossom…

stop prying, toni. cheryl will tell you when she’s ready. just as long as she’s safe…

her phone vibrates, and she looks down once more.

cheryl <3 [15:03]
i think we’re getting close to what we need...if we can, we’ll come by the station soon. stay strong, babe...fangs is going to be just fine. i love you. xx

toni licks her lips, and at jughead’s loud exasperated sigh, she looks up at him once more. his eyes are on her phone, and toni raises an eyebrow before he meets her gaze with a sly smile.

“sorry, not trying to pry, i’m just worried about betty...what did cheryl say?” he asks with concern. toni shrugs.

“that they’re getting close to what they need, whatever that means…she said they’ll come by the
station if they can.” she murmurs before typing out a quick “i love you too” and sending it to cheryl.

jughead simply nods, and toni rests her head against the brick wall, exhaling deeply as she closes her eyes and tries her best to just relax and breathe.

she just hopes whatever cheryl and betty are doing will be over quick…and that whatever it is, it doesn’t involve them getting hurt…

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“betty…are you sure about this?”

betty cooper lets out a shaky breath, her eyes brimming with unshed tears before she quickly wipes away the ones already falling down her cheeks with a sniff, and cheryl has well and truly never been more fond of betty cooper than she is in this moment.

the girl was a goddamn soldier…the knight on the chessboard of this twisted, fucked up life they all led...

“i have to confront him, cheryl…about his diary, about the phone calls i was getting from the black hood…if it really was my dad doing all of that to me, i have to know why. the black hood kept telling me that we were one in the same, he’s been trying to prove all along that i’m just like him…if my dad is the black hood, it makes sense why he was doing that. and as much…as much as it hurts me, i’m not going to let him get away with it, especially if fangs is taking the fall for something he did…” betty purses her lips and looks up at the jubilee with worry, and cheryl follows her gaze with a heavy sigh.

“you’re a brave girl, betty cooper. but you don’t have to do this alone…” cheryl says softly, turning to face her cousin once more.

the evidence piling up against hal cooper was growing…other than his diary, betty had discovered that he was renting out a room at a hotel nearby, one that he had apparently been staying at during his and alice’s divorce, and betty had been curious as to why he was still renting it out if they were putting a hold on their divorce to try and work things out.

so of course, it called for a good old breaking and entering, and upon doing exactly that to the room
that hal was renting, cheryl and betty had discovered…a lot.

an axe, for starters. a loaded colt pistol, a few hunting knives…

and a black hood.

betty had spent a good hour crying in cheryl’s arms in the back of her convertible, and granted, cheryl usually rented out that particular spot to toni, endless nights spent making out in the back of her convertible making her cringe at the fact that she was now holding her crying cousin in her arms in the same spot toni had sucked a bruise so harshly into her neck it had actually become swollen for days, but she can't help but feel horrible for her cousin. as much as cheryl had tried to reassure her that this didn’t exactly mean hal was the black hood, that she needed to get a true confession from him first…she couldn’t deny that the evidence against him was insurmountable.

hal cooper is the black hood.

it’s so reminiscent, so similar to what had gone through cheryl’s mind when she had discovered her father had killed jason…and even though cheryl has been through exactly what betty is going through right now, she has no idea how to even begin to help her.

cheryl’s still struggling with the truth that her father had killed jason in cold blood. clifford blossom, despite how heinous his crime was, had had a reason for killing his son…his drug business meant more to him than his own family, something that cheryl will forever despise him for, but what was hal cooper’s reasoning for murdering midge klump? what had midge ever done to deserve being so brutally murdered in front of an audience of people?

cheryl knew that’s what betty wanted an answer to more than anything…but she was worried to let betty enter the jubilee alone. the debate was going to start any minute now, and she didn’t want betty causing a scene in front of so many people…her father was a cold hearted murderer, god only knew what he’d do to betty if she exposed him in front of so many people…

“i have to do this alone, cheryl. i have to know why he did it...why he shot fred, why he killed midge...i just...i need to make sure he doesn’t get away.” betty says hollowly in determination. cheryl purses her lips.

“then we should call sheriff minetta, tell him we have proof-.”
“not yet! please, cheryl, i…i need to do this! i need to confront him first.” betty says with a clench of her jaw. cheryl hesitates, her gaze moving up to the jubilee nervously once more before she exhales shakily and nods.

she knows there's nothing she can do to convince betty that telling sheriff minetta is the right thing to do. the rage betty is feeling right now...cheryl's felt it before. she knows what betty is going through...

“okay, fine. but just know, this is going against everything i think we should do, cousin betty.” betty nods once, swallowing thickly before she reaches out and grips cheryl’s hand in her own.

“i know. thank you, cheryl. for everything. i don't think i would've gotten through these last two days without you...but you should get to the station, i know you want to be with toni and i won’t keep you from her any longer. just tell jughead...tell him i love him and i’ll explain everything when i see him, okay?” betty says in a soft whisper, her voice cracking with emotion as she looks up at jubilee with a mixture of dread, but determination. cheryl gives her hand a gentle squeeze before she nods.

“of course, betty. please be careful.” betty nods, and she gives cheryl a small smile before she’s exiting her car and making her way to the jubilee. the sound of the passenger seat door shutting causes cheryl to wince for some strange reason, and cheryl watches betty make her way up the steps, her hands twisting nervously with the sleeves of her sweater as she does. cheryl watches her for a long time, torn between what she should do and what she wants to do.

she wants to get to the police station, wants to see toni...to hold her and kiss her and try to take her fear and pain away with each kiss she presses to her lips...she wants to make sure fangs gets out of the station safely, to repay the boy who has saved her life twice now by saving his own...

but, as her eyes watch betty cooper step through the doors of the jubilee, her shoulders slumped in defeat and despair, she can’t help but feel like she should be walking in there with her. betty was about to confront her father, who was a murderer... she shouldn’t be doing this alone...

cheryl was alone when she confronted her father, and god, it had been the most terrifying thing she’d ever done in her life. she was so scared...so scared that her father would pull a gun from his waist and shoot her without a second’s hesitation like he had jason in a desperation to keep his deepest, darkest secrets contained...a pandora's box of pain and suffering that would destroy everyone if it was unleashed...

“you did a bad thing, daddy. and now everyone knows.”
she couldn’t let betty do this on her own, she couldn’t-

cheryl takes a deep breath in before she’s turning off the ignition of her car and exiting it, and god, everything in her is telling her to get back in that car and drive to the station, to be with toni, to help her girlfriend, but toni’s got the other serpents, she’s got sweet pea and jughead and f.p...betty has no one...

archie and veronica were busy with their parents, helping them with the debate, which cheryl finds so strange, that the couple are somehow still together despite their parents fighting each other for the position of mayor of riverdale, but the point of it all is that they don’t have time for betty right now, and yes, the same is true for cheryl, but she’s trying to be a better person, dammit, and betty cooper had saved her from the sisters of quiet mercy along with the others...had defended cheryl from penelope blossom that day she had come marching into riverdale high...had helped archie save her life at sweet water river, had been the one to call cheryl and tell her that clifford had murdered her beloved jason, had begged her to get out of the house lest she met the same fate as her twin brother...

she can’t let betty do this alone-

“fancy seeing you here, cheryl blossom.” cheryl has barely even taken two steps away from her convertible, her gaze moving over to someone who’s leaning against one of the banisters of the jubilee front entrance.

his olive skin shines under the lights coming from the jubilee, the smirk on his face curling his lips upwards, and cheryl looks up at his light brown hair with a frown.

he looks strangely familiar…

“well, there is a debate for the mayoral election happening here…whoever you are.” cheryl says nonchalantly, flipping her red hair over her shoulder, and he laughs loudly, reaching up to run his fingers through his hair as his chocolate brown eyes look at cheryl with amusement.

he looks...he looks like...

cheryl pauses, her heart dropping down her high heeled boots to somewhere beneath them as she licks her lips and stares at him once more.
she's finally coming face to face with him...she had seen him from a distance that day at the whyte wyrm, when f.p had been released from prison, but now...now she's finally meeting him.

and god, a fear unlike any other overtakes her at the sight of him. because if he was willing to hurt toni like he did...god only knew what he'd do to her-

“you’re jacob, aren’t you? toni’s uncle…” she breathes. her whole body is trembling, and despite her sheer clothing, she knows it’s not from the cold…

the man smiles, and he steps forward just as cheryl takes a step back.

“yeah…i’m sure you’ve heard some great things about me.” he murmurs, taking another step forward.

cheryl takes another step back.

“your sarcasm is palpable.” she deadpans despite the sweat beginning to build on the palm of her hands. what is he doing here, what does he want with her…

what if he wanted toni?

“ant gets it from somewhere, kid.” jacob says with a chuckle, his eyes glinting with a danger that has cheryl reaching for the handle of her convertible.

“and her kindness? her compassion? her ability to love? where do you think she gets that from? because it certainly isn’t from you.” she hisses, her anger getting the better of her, and god, she knows she shouldn’t be antagonizing him, but right now, all she can think about is the day she had showed up on toni’s doorstep to find her covered in blood and bruises…the way she could barely move a step without pain, the way she had carried herself so gingerly for weeks while she healed…

the man in front of her had been responsible for that…for all the bruises on her skin, for some of the scars on her body…it was all him…
he had hurt her, he had hurt her toni…

“where was her compassion when she left me alone in that trailer, cheryl?” jacob says with a raised eyebrow, but there’s an anger in his eyes, seen in the way he clenches his jaw, and cheryl swallows loudly and shakes her head.

“She doesn’t owe you anything. not after everything you’ve done to her. now if you’ll excuse me…i have somewhere to be.” cheryl pulls on the handle and gets back into her car, and she’s surprised when jacob makes no effort to stop her.

"i thought you were here for the debate!" he shouts over the sound of the engine kickstarting as cheryl turns the ignition harshly.

"i changed my mind." she yells back. she peels out of the parking lot, watches as jacob raises a hand in farewell, and her tires screech on the ground as she exits the parking lot of the jubilee and heads straight for the police station.

Her heart is pounding in her chest, and she finds herself looking in the rearview mirror repeatedly despite the fact that she knows jacob can’t possibly be following her. god, she has no idea what to do right now…

What the fuck was jacob doing there, what did he want from her-

betty…betty needed her and now cheryl was leaving, she needs to turn back, she needs to-

She hears the sound of a loud engine in front of her before she’s blinded by headlights, and cheryl can just barely make out a black impala before her whole body is thrown forward and the sound of metal smashing together echoes loudly around her.

Her head connects with the steering wheel, and pain shoots up her whole back and neck as her body is thrown back and forth way too quickly. the seatbelt cuts into her collarbone, digging in harshly, and she collapses onto her seat with a loud groan as soon as the impact ends. she can tell she’s blinking blood out of her eyes, but everything is blurry, fading quickly as her head lolls to the side involuntarily.

She’s not sure how she’s even alive right now.
she can just make out the smoke rising from the engine of her now ruined convertible, and tears mix with the blood as she whimpers in pain, unable to move or breathe or think beyond one thought-

*this was jason's car...*

cheryl tries to reach up to grab the handle of the door, to open it so she can get out, but she can't feel her arms, or her legs, or fucking *anything*, and she's praying that someone from the jubilee might've heard the accident, is on their way to help her right now-

she can hear footsteps, and she whines as she tries to force herself to stay conscious, but she's fighting a losing battle-

"damn, kid...that's one hell of a bump you've got there."

fingers grip her chin, nails digging into her skin as her head is turned to the side, and jacob topaz's face just barely comes into focus. he's smirking at her widely, yellow teeth shining underneath the lamp light. he leans in and presses a kiss to her forehead, and god, cheryl is trembling from shock and panic and a million other things, but her vision is starting to black out now, and she knows she can't fight to stay conscious even if she wants to, can barely feel her limbs as she feebly attempts to push jacob away...

"don't worry...ant will be joining the party soon..." jacob grunts as he pulls open her door, and cheryl whines as he reaches across from her and unbuckles her seatbelt, his hand gripping her bicep and tugging her out of the car harshly.

"hey, be careful with her." cheryl hears a gruff voice say, and before cheryl can do anything, she's being lifted into jacob topaz's arms, her head falling back heavily as the darkness finally takes over completely, but not before jacob's words suddenly ring in her mind once more.

"*don't worry...ant will be joining the party soon...*"

oh god...

*toni...*
toni looks down at her phone for the hundredth time, and when she still sees it empty of any notifications, she growls under her breath and calls cheryl’s number immediately for the fifteenth time.

it rings for almost a full minute before it goes to voicemail.

“it’s cheryl! i’m off doing something fabu-.”

“dammit, cheryl!” toni hangs up, tears immediately welling in her eyes because this is too fucking similar to when cheryl had been thrown into that treacherous nunnery. what the fuck was going on?

where the fuck was her girlfriend?

jughead looks up at her anxiously, and he makes his way over to her and grips her shoulder.

“she’s still not answering?” he asks with concern. toni shakes her head, and jughead frowns, is about to pull his phone out to call betty when the doors of the holding cells burst open and sierra and f.p walk through, looking determined, but incredibly frazzled as they do.

“his twenty four hours are up, we’ve gotta get him out of here now!” f.p shouts, turning back to look at sheriff minetta, who is behind them, looking enraged, but ultimately defeated as he makes his way over to fangs’s cell. he clenches his jaw as he looks at fangs and raises a finger to point at him.

“if i find out your responsible for that girl’s murder, so help me, mr. fogarty-.” he hisses.

“i didn’t do anything to midge!” fangs yells angrily, gripping the bars of his cell and getting right up in sheriff minetta’s face.

“not another word, mr. fogarty! my client has been held for twenty four hours, you are legally required to let him go if you have insufficient evidence to accuse him of murder. let my client go.
now!” sierra barks, coming to a stop in front of the new sheriff with authority. sheriff minetta glares at her, but ultimately unlocks fangs’s cage. toni runs forward, sweet pea and jughead doing the same as they immediately envelop him in a hug.

he's out, he's gonna be okay, he wasn't going to jail...or at least not yet...

f.p reaches out and grips their shoulders tightly as sheriff minetta looks at sierra.

"i need you to come sign his release forms." he deadpans, and sierra exchanges a look with f.p before they're both leaving the holding cells, leaving the serpents alone. f.p swallows thickly before he grips the back of fangs's neck tightly.

"listen to me. i hit up joaquin, he's gonna get you some place safe until this all dies down. his car is outside, we just need to get you to it, alright?" f.p tells him. toni's heart drops.

"f.p, he can't just leave town after being accused of murder, it's just going to make him look guilty as sin!" toni hisses. f.p glares at her.

"i don't care about him looking guilty, toni, i care about him staying alive! that goddamn mob out there is out for blood, serpent blood! we need to get fangs to safety, that's the number one priority!" sweet pea nods, gripping fangs's shoulder as toni hesitates before she licks her lips and nods.

"okay, fine. what do we do?"

“we’ve gotta get him out of here right now, the debate is over which means that mob outside is only gonna grow bigger."

wait, the debate was over? it was possible that cheryl wasn’t answering because she was at the debate, but if it’s over…

where the hell was her girlfriend?

“f.p, did you see cheryl or betty at the debate?” toni interrupts him. f.p frowns, but shrugs all the same.
“I saw Betty. She was at the back for most of it, but once it was over, she was walking over to her mother and father. She didn’t look very happy.” F.P says, looking up at Jughead, who frowns before he licks his lips and nods.

“I’ll check on her once we get Fangs to safety.” He says in a low voice, his grip on Fangs’s shoulder tightening. F.P nods, but Toni reaches out and grabs his jacket desperately.

Cheryl, where was she-

“Cheryl? Did you see Cheryl?” She begs. F.P stares at her in shock before he shakes his head.

“No, Cheryl wasn’t there.” He says firmly. Toni’s heart drops.

Cheryl wasn’t there...Betty was but Cheryl wasn’t...Where was she, where was her fucking girlfriend-

She looks up at Jughead almost pleadingly, and he swallows thickly before he reaches out and grips her shoulder.

“Cheryl can look after herself, Toni...we have to get Fangs out of here safely. That’s our number one priority, alright?”

Toni hesitates, but one look at the complete and utter panic in Fangs’s eyes has her exhaling shakily before she nods.

god, she can’t believe she’s being forced to fucking choose right now...But really, she doesn’t have a choice...god, Fangs needs her, but Cheryl, Cheryl wasn’t answering her phone, Cheryl could be in danger-

but if Betty was okay then that had to mean that Cheryl was, too...

Fangs needs you, Toni...
“okay.” she whispers hoarsely. jughead gives her an encouraging smile, and f.p sighs and waves them forward.

“come on, let’s go.” f.p leads them out of the holding cells, but as soon as they make their way to the front entrance of the station to leave, they all take in the sound of anger and shouting. f.p stops them, a hand held up as he inches forward and looks through the doors with wide eyes.

“dammit…they got here quicker than i thought they would.” he murmurs. he ushers them back into the lobby, and toni sees sheriff minetta and sierra mccoy exit a room. jughead runs up to sheriff minetta anxiously.

“we can’t take fangs out the front, we have to take the side entrance.” he tells him. sheriff minetta looks like he couldn’t care less as he shrugs and crosses his arms over his chest.

“crowd’s out there too, so pick your poison, serpent.” he deadpans before he walks off. toni watches sierra look at him in disgust, and she’s staring at him in anger.

he’s supposed to be the sheriff, he was supposed to be protecting them...fuck...

sweet pea looks out of the window of the station with wide eyes, and toni catches a glimpse of the mob.

there's at least over a hundred people out there, all of them screaming and shouting about fangs being a murderer...oh god...

“What do we do, man?” sweet pea asks, his voice shaking with fear for the first time in a long time since toni has known him as he looks back at jughead. fangs whimpers, tears in his eyes as he looks at jughead.

“I don’t wanna die!” he cries out. toni can’t help the tears that fall down her cheeks, but she tries to stay strong, reaches out and grips fangs’s hand in her own tightly.

fangs wasn't going to die, he was gonna be okay, he was...
jughead closes his eyes and takes a deep breath in, and p_reaches out and grips jughead’s shoulder tightly. he looks up at the other three before he looks to his son once more with determination.

“what do you wanna do, jughead?” he murmurs. jughead blinks in surprise, perhaps wondering why his father is letting him take the reigns, but he licks his lips and turns to look at fangs before he’s nodding.

“hey, you’re not going to. look at me, okay?” he grips fangs’s face in his hands before he leans forward and rests his forehead against fangs’s, who nods, swallowing loudly as jughead pulls back and looks at toni and sweet pea.

“we keep a protective circle around him. dad, are there serpents out there?”

“of course, boy.” f.p says gruffly.

“tell them to get to the entrance. we need as many serpents around us as possible. we gotta get fangs to the car, get him to joaquin as quickly as possible.” f.p nods and makes his way outside, and the sound of the angry mob gets louder for half a second before the doors swing shut and block it out once more.

”okay…we make sure no one gets to him, alright?” jughead says breathlessly, reaching out to grab sweet pea’s shoulder before he pulls him forward.

“we stand together so none of us falls. in unity there is strength!” he yells, and the four of them huddle closer together, resting their heads against one another.

“in unity there is strength!” toni yells with the three boys in front of her, and her heart is racing, out of fear for fangs, out of worry for cheryl, out of fucking everything that’s happened over the last few days…

in unity there is strength.

“alright…let’s do this!” jughead yells, and toni moves to fangs’s side, sticking by his side like fucking glue as jughead leads them toward the entrance.
the second the doors open, it’s chaos.

there’s yelling, a lot of it, bodies immediately rushing to the entrance to get to fangs as f.p and a few other serpents push past the crowd to form a circle around him. toni pushes past as many people as she can, feels her small body getting pummeled and scratched by the angry mob that’s so desperately trying to get to fangs, but she keeps pushing forward, trying her best to get to the wherever jughead and f.p are leading them...

to wherever joaquin is...where fangs's safety is...

“MURDERER!”

the word is bellowed into her ear as nails scratch down the side of her cheek, and she pushes whoever it is back angrily, can feel the blood dripping down her face as fangs’s hold on her hand tightens.

she'll suffer a hundred more scratches to keep him safe if she has to...

"keep pushing forward, we're almost there!" toni hears f.p yell, and jughead pushes more people back ahead of them, but the crowd is just getting closer and closer-

the crowd is too much.

they’re surrounded, arms grabbing and reaching for fangs over the top of them, and toni feels someone rip her away from the group of serpents, her body staggering sideways and out of the circle as her hand falls out of fangs's easily-

“TONI!”

she throws a fist out wildly, feels it connect with something before her knuckles throb painfully-

a gunshot.
it echoes in the air, and toni immediately raises her hands over her head and ducks down for cover, her whole body shaking in fear as she acknowledges the fact that it’s definitely not her that was just shot-

her eyes fall on fangs.

fangs, who is standing, until he isn’t.

toni sees the patch of blood that forms on his grey shirt, watches as he looks down at it in surprise, before he’s falling backwards into the arms of jughead and sweet pea.

his name escapes her lips in a torn cry, and even though her legs feel numb, her whole body propels forward in a desperation to get to him-

fangs, fangs was shot, no, no, no, no-

arms wrap around her chest and pull her away from fangs, and toni screams, screams and screams and doesn’t stop screaming as she kicks desperately at the person dragging her away, but her screams are drowned out by the other people screaming as the crowd disperses in fear over the gunshot-

“sorry about this, ant.” a voice breathes into her ear, and toni’s whole body goes limp as dread moves through her body like ice.

she knows that voice…

oh god, oh god-

a sharp pain in the side of her neck, and before toni can scream, the drowsiness takes over, the corners of her eyes already fading to black.

the last thing she sees is jughead screaming for help with fangs bleeding out on the ground before everything turns dark.
whow, this chapter is A LOT. trigger warning for violence and blood, i'm sorry :( shit is getting SUPER intense now, but i promise it's a good one!

loud, boisterous shouts of glee and excitement. that’s the first thing cheryl blossom hears when she finally comes back to consciousness.

she feels a lot of heat coming from somewhere nearby, and whatever it is, it’s causing sweat to drip down her face and into her eyes. she’s laying on her side, can feel the pressure of her body resting on her left arm, and she tries to lift her hands up to push away the sweat and hair from her face, but she can’t move them from behind her back.

her hands are bound, thick rope cutting into her circulation and scratching her porcelain skin, and a soft whimper escapes her lips as more sweat pours down her face.

no…not sweat. the faint metallic smell, like iron…it’s blood. her blood.

she was injured.

she tries to cast her mind back…to remember what happened.

her convertible…jason’s convertible…nothing more than twisted metal at the front now…ruined and damaged and-

she was hurt. she is hurt…she can feel it now with each breath she takes, the searing pain that spreads through her ribs with each intake, the blood slowly falling down her face and the way her head is pounding, and she tries her best not to panic, not to cry as she slowly blinks her eyes open and allows the blood to trickle down her eyelashes and onto her cheeks. her vision is blurred, too blurred to focus and her wrists are aching from how tightly the ropes are cutting into her skin.

what happened? what is going on? why is she tied up?
a car accident…a black impala colliding with her convertible…pain, excruciating pain…

jacob topaz lifting her up into his arms, carrying her away as she faded into darkness…

she’s been kidnapped.

she’s been kidnapped by toni’s uncle.

oh god.

she can’t panic. she knows that. if she panics now, then jacob gets exactly what he wants, which must involve toni, and cheryl would rather die than let anything happen to her pink haried serpent…

she knows how he works, has learned it from the many days toni had spent talking about her uncle to cheryl, about his abuse, his love of power and the way he held it over toni for so many years…

she couldn’t give him any power. and if she chose to relinquish her control over the situation, to show weakness with fear and terror, he would pounce on her.

stay in control, cheryl. deep breaths. don’t be scared. show him he has no hold over you…make toni proud.

the thought of her girlfriend has tears welling in her eyes. was toni okay? was toni perhaps wondering where she was? why she hadn’t replied to her messages? how long was she unconscious for? was toni looking for her? was toni okay?

so many questions…god, her head hurts…

she misses toni…

“ah…you’re finally awake.”
cheryl jumps at the sound of a voice in her ear, bile quickly rising in the back of her throat as blunt nails dig harshly into her bicep and pull her up in a standing position. she groans, her head throbbing and her ribs aching with the movement. her vision isn’t so blurred anymore, and she can just make out the green hues of shrubbery and bushes underneath the moonlight before a face enters her periphery.

a very unwelcome face, indeed.

cheryl takes in jacob topaz’s face, at first, in wonder, her slightly dazed and confused eyes roaming over his features and trying to find any hint of the girl she loves so dearly in them.

toni has the same eye shape as her uncle…the same eye color, chocolate brown, but god…jacob topaz’s eyes hold none of the love and warmth that his niece’s eyes do…they’re cold, and bitter…filled with hatred as his angered eyes glint in the firelight behind cheryl, a wicked grin lighting his features.

“good. i was worried for a second there, red. i thought we might have killed you.” his words are murmured softly, but his grip on her bicep is anything but, nails digging into her skin and causing a whimper to escape her lips as she looks around her current vicinity with a deep inhale through her nose.

there’s other people, all of them with black paint on their faces and leather jackets adorned with studs…

ghoulies.

she’s in ghoulie territory. why? jacob topaz was a serpent, why would he…

\textit{oh, god…}

“what do you want from me?” cheryl manages to croak out, and god, she sounds weak and she hates it, and maybe it’s out of fear, or maybe it’s because she can barely blink without the pain of her head hurting her…the smell of smoke from the fire behind her quickly filling her nostrils and only causing her head to hurt more. jacob sneers, a scoff of delight escaping him as he tugs her back against his chest and presses his lips to her ear.
“you’ll learn soon enough. come on, blossom. i think it’s time for a little reunion.” he hisses. cheryl has no idea what he means, but he’s pushing her forward, his hand curling around the ropes that tie her hands together as the other pushes her forward by the shoulder. she stumbles over her feet, the taste of vomit stagnant in the back of her throat as she tries to swallow it down and keep moving.

each step takes all the energy out of her, zapping her clean with each clomp of her heeled boot on the ground, but she grits her teeth and keeps walking, too scared of what the repercussions will be if she stops.

he wants something from toni, and if i don’t do what he says, he’ll hurt her or me…either way, just obey, cheryl…don’t show your fear, but obey…

the ghoulies surrounding the fire are watching her, some of them hollering, others reaching out to grab her, nails raking her black denim jeans, eyes wicked and almost psychotic with delight as they roam over her body, but jacob pulls her away from their touch and snarls at them as soon as they get too close.

“she’s part of the plan! you can have her after!” he growls. cheryl’s heart stops, a sob rising in her chest and tears immediately welling in her eyes at his words.

what did he mean? god, what did he mean, no, he can’t be this cruel-

memories of nick st. clair flood her mind, memories of a blurred hallway and the faint recognition of an uninviting hand touching her thigh, and when the acid taste in her mouth becomes too much, she doubles over, coughing and spluttering as she dry heaves.

her head hurts, god it hurts, where’s toni-

“jesus christ!” jacob steps back, perhaps scared she’s actually going to vomit, but when her dry heaving turns into sobbing, he growls in frustration and grips the back of her neck, pulling her up harshly.

“enough dramatics, come on!”
he’s leading her away from the group of ghoulies by the fire, and cheryl almost lets out a sob of relief until she realizes he’s taking her toward the bushes, somewhere isolated with no other body in sight…

it’s not the ghoulies she should be afraid of.

toni never said anything about her uncle doing something like what nick st. clair almost did to her, but there’s always a chance…

please…please, let toni or the other serpents come, let them save me, please…

but they were preoccupied with fangs, weren’t they? the serpents were in the middle of a war of their own, they wouldn’t have time, and nor would anyone but toni care enough to go looking for a missing rich girl who had shacked up with one of their own…

fangs…god, was he okay? what about betty? had she confronted her father? this was the worst time for all of this, god…

cheryl, you idiot, you should’ve walked into the jubilee, you would’ve been safe there…

she feels like such an imbecile now, getting back into her car alone while there was a whole mass of people inside the jubilee for the debate…police officers would’ve been there too, there would’ve been no chance of any of this happening…

a foolish mistake, cheryl…just like leaving your phone at the hospital when mother threw you into that hellhole…

the cold air hits her now that there’s no fire nearby to warm her, a shiver running up her spine as it hits the exposed skin of her stomach, and it’s only now she realizes that her red coat that was protecting her from the cold the whole day has been removed, only toni’s shirt that was one size too small protecting her from the icy bite of winter’s last chill.

there’s couches surrounding a bin fire ahead of her, abandoned and looking worse for wear, and the faint smell of salt water hits cheryl’s nose, no longer disguised by the smell of smoke and fire.
salt water…she knows this place. had seen it so many times before…they’re at the docks by sweet water river, the docks on the southside that jason had always wanted to explore as kids, but their mother had forbad them from ever going to…

caryl’s seen them so many times from a distance…and now she’s here. and in the worst situation possible…

if only jason was here…

*he isn’t here, cheryl. and neither is toni. get your shit together and find a way to save yourself.*

save herself…god, cheryl wasn’t capable of that, she wasn’t…

“sit down, don’t move.” jacob growls, the heat from the fire making her feel warm once more as his hands grip her shoulders and force her down onto one of the filth infested couches hastily, and cheryl purses her lips and does as she’s told, sinking back into the couch tiredly as her head throbs painfully once more.

“my head…” she croaks out, swallowing thickly as jacob scoffs without even turning to face her, a small smile on his lips as he stands by the fire to warm his hands.

“you’ll be fine, princess. now be a good girl and sit there quietly.” he murmurs, the blaze from the fire lighting up his eyes. there’s no emotion…nothing behind them to indicate that he feels bad for hurting and kidnapping his niece’s girlfriend. nothing to show guilt for betraying his family and working with the ghoulies.

god, cheryl needs to get in contact with toni, let her know that her uncle had defected, that he was working *against* the serpents now-

“LET GO OF ME!”

cheryl’s heart drops at the first echo of that voice.

it’s her.
it’s her, she’d know her voice from anywhere, has burned the soft whimpers of her name from pink, luscious lips to her memory…

“no…” she tries to stand up, toni’s name escaping her lips in a whimpered sob, but jacob growls, his hand reaching into his pocket as he turns to face her, and the fire from the bin catches the flash of silver in his hand.

cheryl’s eyes land on the pocket knife inches away from her face, a heavy gasp escaping her as her heart pounds erratically, and she’s falling back onto the couch with a trembling bottom lip, her tears betraying the angered glare she gives him.

oh, how she hopes he rots in hell…

toni’s here, she’s here-

that means they got her, too.

oh, god, no, please no, don’t hurt her-

surely she’s been through enough in her sixteen years of life for god or whoever was up there to grant her this one wish…

cheryl’s never been into faith or religion, and after suffering so much at the hands of women who worshipped their so called god, cheryl never wants to get involved in faith and religion. but right now, she’s praying to every deity she’s heard of to get herself and toni out of this.

“i won’t hesitate to hurt you, red. i said stay still.” jacob voice is calm, but cheryl feels like that’s not an indication of anything good, and the sound of scuffling and dirt shifting meets her ears. she turns her head to the left, her eyes narrowing as she spots movement behind a gate and green shrubbery, and as soon as it moves closer and into her line of sight, her heart drops immediately.

that ghoulie leader from the drag race.
malachai, toni had called him.

the look on his face is filled with glee, enjoyment over the struggle in his arms that fights back with everything she has, and cheryl can almost see the fleas on him, the dogged *wretch*, but when she sees small fists that are bound together pound into his chest and sees pink hair flying, all insults and anger leaves her body and is replaced with panic and despair.

no…no, no, this isn’t happening, no, anyone but her, god, please-

“TONI!” cheryl forgoes any warning that jacob had given her, her own life no longer something she’s worried about as she pushes her legs, heeled boots digging into the dirt ground, to stand with a hiss of pain, newfound adrenaline pumping through her veins.

cheryl can’t lose her, anyone but her, she’s already lost *so much*, please, god, not this, anything but this-

toni stops, fists freezing mid-way to malachai’s chest as she turns her head with wide eyes that fall on cheryl, and god, the look on her face is heartbreaking.

a million different emotions cross her eyes, only fueled by the light of the fire, in a matter of milliseconds. despair, confusion, grief, shock, surprise, anger, sadness, panic, fear…

all for a beat of a second before she’s running forward.

“CHERYL!”

god, the scream of her name, it hurts, it hurts to hear-

“no you don’t!” malachai’s laughing maniacally, enjoying the thrill of this new chase as his arms wrap around toni’s body and pull her back, and toni is screaming, fighting with everything in her, legs kicking and tied hands flailing-

a growl she’s never heard before tears from her lips, and suddenly, she forgets that her hands are tied, that she has nothing to defend herself with because *how dare he touch her*
“you don’t like obeying orders, do you, red?” jacob hisses in her ear, a hand gripping the back of her neck as she’s pulled into his side roughly. cold steel rests against her pulse point, and cheryl freezes, her arms straining and hands burning as the ropes twist into her skin further. she doesn’t dare move, the cold steel a slight bump away from cutting open her skin.

she’s shed enough blood today…

instead, she bares her teeth, glaring at jacob from her periphery vision.

“if you hurt her-.”

“i’ll make sure she suffers. now shut up!” nails dig into the back of her neck as he squeezes her, her breath seizing in her throat as her eyes fall on toni, who is still fighting in malachai’s arms before her eyes fall on her uncle holding a knife to the throat of the woman she loves.

toni whimpers, her eyes falling on cheryl before she’s suddenly sagging in defeat in malachai’s arms, all the fight leaving her as the threat to cheryl’s life looms over them like a dark cloud. cheryl feels a heavy sob threaten to escape her, and the look in toni’s eyes convey one message and one message only as tears immediately begin to fall down her tanned cheeks.

i’m sorry.

it breaks her. it fucking breaks her, and cheryl wants nothing more than to run to her, to brush those tears away from her full cheeks with her lips and to tell her that none of this is her fault, that she’s going to find a way to get them out of this together, but her head hurts so goddamn much she can barely keep her eyes open, and malachai is laughing as he looks up at jacob triumphantly, and everything…

everything is falling apart…

“looks like we found this snake’s underbelly, huh?” he grins wickedly, his eyes landing on cheryl, and god, he’s practically undressing her with his eyes, the fucking filth. jacob scoffs into cheryl’s ear, causing her hair to shift, and toni’s eyes fall on her uncle, nothing but pure, unadulterated hatred shining within them.
“you work with fucking ghoulies now?!” toni hisses, her shoulders shifting as she tries to shrug out of malachai’s grip to no avail, his hold on her only tightening as he yanks her closer to him. jacob laughs quietly, his grip on cheryl’s neck intensifying as he looks at his niece.

“didn’t have much of a choice, ant.” he croaks out. cheryl can smell the alcohol on his breath, a mixture of vodka and beer, so similar to the smell of boys who had pushed their tongues into her mouth during parties when she’d been so in denial, and toni’s expression changes, shifts into something cheryl can’t quite understand. when she speaks, her voice is filled with despair and grief.

her uncle…this is her uncle, threatening her life and the life of someone she loves…god, what is going through her girlfriend’s mind right now?

“uncle jake…what happened to you?” toni whispers brokenly, more tears falling down her cheeks that cause cheryl’s heart to only break further, and cheryl feels jacob topaz shift uncomfortably behind her as if he’s perhaps feeling some remorse before he’s laughing darkly.

“you happened. now shut your mouth and don’t cause any trouble, ant. i swear to god, i’ll hurt her if you do.” the blade presses further into her skin, but cheryl feels a rush of bravery as she holds her head high.

if he expects her to sob and plead for her life, he’s got the wrong girl.

cheryl blossom didn’t beg.

she glares at him out of her periphery vision as she scoffs derisively, trying to convey some level of boredom at his antics.

“let him do his worst, t.t. i lived with penelope blossom for sixteen years, you think a little blade scares me?” she drawls nonchalantly despite how badly her knees are shaking.


ever the little actress, cheryl, good girl…

toni’s eyes move to her, and cheryl almost smiles at the absolute pride that shines within them, but cheryl knows she’s still scared for her, for both of them as malachai laughs and shakes his head. he pulls toni to his chest tightly, not an inch of space left between them as he reaches a hand up and tucks her pink hair behind her ear. he sniffs it sadistically, his lips pressing to her ear and only
following her when she tries to inch away from his touch, a look of disgust on her face.

“Looks like you got yourself someone just as feisty as you, sweetheart… god, I can’t wait to have my way with you both…” he rasps, his hands trailing down Toni’s body and-

Cheryl forgets all about the knife at her throat and the man holding her neck when Malachai’s hands move over Toni’s breasts roughly.

She doesn’t feel the headache pounding through her brain, or the way her body pulses with pain with each movement.

*all she sees is red.*

She’s growling and lifting a perfectly heeled boot up and stomping down onto Jacob Topaz’s foot, the roar of pain he lets out going unnoticed because of the loud ringing in her ears over what she’s just witnessed.

*how dare he touch her-*

The knife drops, making it’s indentation into the dirt with a dull thunk, but Cheryl pays no attention to it as she runs forward, Malachai’s eyes widening in surprise before Toni throws an elbow back and connects with his stomach, and she’s loose, they’re both free, and god, she’s so close-

Electricity. Static pain that shoots from her back and courses throughout her entire body as she collapses to her knees, and she no longer has control over her limbs as she falls onto her back in a spasm and a cry of pain, her arms jerking from their position bound beneath her body.

She sees the stars for only the briefest moment before she’s suddenly seeing white walls and the most terrifying face hovering above her-

“*you think of your deviance, Cheryl. You think of those horrible, horrible thoughts while you suffer.*”

Those eyes, those sadistic eyes, the pain, no, she can’t be back there, kill her, someone kill her, please, just end it, end it, end her life, she can’t stay here-
“STOP! STOP, PLEASE!”

toní’s voice. toní’s voice unlike cheryl’s ever heard it before. there’s no emotion to describe it. terror is too simple. anguish is too small. it rips through the air and settles deep into her heart.

it’s for her.

cheryl never wants to hear toní sound like that again.

the electricity ends. the white walls fade…the stars return.

cheryl’s mind doesn’t.

she’s gasping for air, the pain of everything flooding her in a cavalcade of memories that she wanted nothing more than to bury underneath the surface like unwanted treasure. she can feel her body trembling as she squeezes her eyes shut and tries to stay in the present, because right now, her present is more daunting than her past.

wake up, cheryl, you’re not at the sisters, you’re in a much fucking worse situation, toní needs you-

“god, if i knew how much trouble you’d both be, i would’ve gone for the blonde with the ponytail.” her eyes snap open to land on a face she’s never seen before as it swims in and out of vision, hovering above her with a cheshire cat like grin.

how applicable. alice down the rabbit hole…cheryl thrust into a world of gang wars and kidnappings…

she swallows the bile at the back of her throat and blinks back the tears of pain. her nails are scratching into the dirt, pinned underneath her body, which is twitching again, from impulse or from memory of that place, she isn’t sure, but the face above her isn’t sister woodhouse’s.

wicked green eyes that are framed by long, wavy blonde hair. pink lips turned up into that snake like
grin as she holds up a black rectangle device that sparks with blue electricity when she presses down on it. cheryl twitches, unable to stop the whimper of panic that escapes her as the woman smiles.

she can’t feel that pain again, please never that pain again-

“stings like a bitch, doesn’t it, red?” she says cheerily, as if they’re discussing something so simple instead of downright traumatizing. it’s not the sting, it’s the memory associated with it-

you’re not at the sisters, cheryl, stay here, stay present…

the woman turns and looks to the right of where she’s standing above cheryl, who follows her gaze with bared teeth to see toni on her knees with malachai standing above her, one hand grabbing a fistful of her hair and the other holding a knife to her throat, and cheryl’s blood runs cold at the sight of a drop of blood trickling down toni’s tanned neck.

he hurt her, the sick son of a bitch, i’ll kill him-

thick tears are streaming down toni’s face as she looks at the woman above cheryl with bound, shaking hands raised in surrender.

“you c-can do whatever you want with m-me, penny, i’ll-i’ll give myself to you, just d-don’t hurt her! i’m b-begging you, please!” toni’s panicked, her breaths escaping her in short bursts, and there’s that tone again, that tone that rips through cheryl’s entire existence, that tone beyond words to describe pain and despair, and god, this is the most vulnerable cheryl’s ever seen her. even when she’d been beaten to a pulp by her uncle and cheryl had surprised her at her trailer, toni had a defensive layer up, a brave face slathered on like a mask to protect cheryl from seeing any weakness.

right now? there’s no mask in sight. toni is petrified.

but she’s not scared for herself. beautiful, amazing, selfless toni has not a single ounce of fear for herself. god, she’s scared for cheryl…

they really did find toni’s underbelly, after all. it was her.
it’s the most utterly beautiful and the most utterly destroying thing cheryl’s ever felt, to be someone’s saving grace and their downfall at the same time…

the woman named penny chuckles, taking in toni’s words with an impressed nod.

penny peabody. cheryl remembers toni telling her that penny was the most vindictive and unpredictable serpent, the snake charmer...a woman who did you a favor and expected your life in return...

it would make sense that she would be sleeping with ghoulies.

we’re so screwed...

the smirk on penny's face is almost crazed as she nods once, looking down at cheryl before reaching down to brush her hair from her face with a single polish chipped finger.

“aww…she really loves you, red, doesn’t she?” she croons, her finger tracing the outline of cheryl’s jaw tantalizingly. cheryl licks her lips as she inches away from penny’s touch. her throat is tight, and her body is still twitching, but she needs to say this, she needs to-

“whatever you want…just don’t hurt her.” she manages to get out, her voice cracking shakily.

it’s an unfortunate realization that shakes her, but the truth of it is undeniable. as much as she’s toni’s underbelly, toni was her everything. cheryl wasn’t going to lose her by the docks on the southside of fucking riverdale, this was not how their story ended…

penny rolls her eyes and lets out a disgusted scoff.

“god, you two are sickening.” she mutters before she stands up straight and moves out of cheryl’s line of sight. cheryl blinks back more tears as penny’s voice rings out.

“come on, guys! they’re two little girls surrounded by men and, well…me and old sparky here. untie their hands and let them have their reunion, they’re not going anywhere. if they try…well, at least it’ll make for some good entertainment.” penny says, and cheryl jumps at the sound of electricity
sparking through the air once more, her stomach twisting in knots as she whimpering and shuts her eyes.

*stay present, cheryl…stay present, please…*

please let them untie her, please, please…she needs toni, she needs to feel her, to *touch* her, she’s her anchor, she *needs her-*

she turns her head with a groan of pain to see malachai baring his teeth in anger as he stares at penny, but ultimately, he grunts and bends down, places the knife at toni’s neck to her hands instead to cut the rope with a sour expression on his face. toni’s eyes fill with hope, never leaving cheryl’s as a shadow passes over her. she looks up to see jacob glaring down at her, and he bends down with a soft growl and grips her shoulder, pulling her up into a seated position. cheryl bites back a cry of pain as it shoots through her body and head as jacob moves behind her, and cold steel hits her wrist, moving back and forth languidly-

as soon as the ropes are cut loose, the blood rushes to her wrists as she swings her arms forward to rest in her lap with a soft groan, her fingers massaging the skin of her right wrist, and she barely has time to get up before she hears the sound of boots scuffing on dirt rapidly. a flash of pink enters her vision and a small body impacts harshly with her own, causing her to grunt in surprise.

small arms wrap around her neck, as knees land on either side of her body, straddling her. the smell of leather and something else that cheryl cherishes so *fucking* much invades her senses, and a loud sob echoes in her ear as toni topaz holds cheryl blossom as tightly as she possibly can without causing any more harm to the girl. cheryl whimpering, burying her head into toni’s shoulder and breathing in her scent as her fingers dig into the leather of toni’s serpent jacket harshly.

*she’s here, she’s here, cheryl, she’s in your arms, god, finally-*

“i’m s-s-sorry, baby, i’m so f-fucking sorry!” toni cries, her fingers reaching up to wrap into cheryl’s hair, and cheryl can feel something wet hitting the skin of her shoulder, knows it’s toni’s tears of despair at the fucking situation they’ve been thrown into, but right now, she’s trying to calm her racing heart as she allows toni’s scent to anchor her to the present.

the memories of the sisters of quiet mercy fade, are replaced with the touch of toni’s skin beneath her fingers, the scent currently invading her senses, the feel of her breath against her neck…
her anchor...

cheryl shakes her head against the pink haired serpent and presses a kiss to her neck desperately as she exhales deeply.

“it’s not your fault, t.t…not one bit.” she whispers. toni takes a shuddering breath in.

“if w-we weren’t d-dating you wouldn’t b-be here-.”

“stop that. stop that immediately, toni. there’s no other place i’d rather be than by your side.” cheryl growls lightly, her fingers gripping the back of toni’s leather jacket and digging into it harshly.

how could toni think that? even for a second, she understands why, but god, cheryl doesn’t regret their relationship, not for a single second-

toni whimpers, but doesn’t reply, simply holds cheryl closer, and cheryl’s lips touch something wet on toni’s neck. at first she thinks it’s her tears, but when the iron taste hits her tongue, horror sweeps through her.

it’s toni’s blood.

oh god…oh god, they were in ghoulie territory. they were being held hostage…

they could die tonight.

god, so many months ago and this would’ve been a blessing in disguise, cheryl’s eagerness to return to jason’s side getting the better of her, but now? now…

she doesn’t want to die. not now, when she has something finally worth living for-

“toni, whatever happens…i love you so much…” she chokes out, because she needs to tell her, she needs her to know, if she dies tonight without telling toni just how much she fucking loves her-
toni’s grip tightens impossibly more, her head burying into cheryl’s hair as she groans.

“don’t you do that, i’m getting you out of this, cheryl!” she whispers. cheryl has no rebuttal, just presses kiss after kiss to the non-bloody and exposed skin of toni’s neck underneath her sweat matted hair, and toni murmurs something that cheryl doesn’t quite catch, her mind too focused on the feeling of toni’s pulse thrumming erratically beneath her lips-

“what?” she breathes, finally pulling away at the same time toni does. cheryl finally takes in her girlfriend’s face, the tear marks leaving stripes of wiped off make up down her cheeks, some of the stripes stained black from mascara. her brown eyes, usually so soft and filled with love, shine with nothing but panic and despair, and cheryl reaches up and cradles toni’s face in her hands, soft thumbs brushing away the tears as her pink haired serpent sniffs once with a trembling bottom lip.

“baby, fangs was shot…” she croaks out, fresh tears falling and the words escaping her in pained whine.

cheryl’s entire world falls, crashes at the bottom like fragile glass that shatters the second it hits the floor.

fangs…fangs was shot, that beautiful boy who saved her life not once, but fucking twice-

she closes her eyes, tears immediately falling down her cheeks as a heavy sob escapes toni loudly.

“i d-don’t know if h-he’s okay, these assholes g-got me before i c-could do anything, ch-cher-.” she chokes out, shaking her head in cheryl’s hands as her small fingers curl around cheryl’s forearms desperately.

not fangs…please, not fangs…

“toni...” cheryl doesn’t know what to say, is at a loss for words, because she can’t tell her everything will be okay when she doesn’t know if it will, can’t reassure her that they’re going to make it through this when they’re so stuck right now, and toni equally looks lost, doe eyes bloodshot from crying, so cheryl does the one thing she can.
she leans forward and kisses her, thankful for the lack of red lipstick covering her lips as she captures toni’s full, pink ones with her own. red is the last color she wants to see on toni right now…there’s been so much blood already shed today…

toni whimpers against her, her fingers grasping at cheryl’s hair again as she pulls her as close as possible, and it’s passionate, but soft, filled with anguish and the knowledge that this might be the last time their lips meet.

cheryl deepens the kiss at that thought, tears falling before she can stop them as she tries to commit the taste of toni’s lips to her memory, to leave an imprint that will survive death and the afterlife and anything that exists beyond that…

toni pulls away breathlessly, her forehead resting against cheryl’s for the briefest moment before the pain hits cheryl and causes her to flinch back with a wince. toni’s eyes widen before her eyes fall on the cut to her forehead, the anger in her eyes returning as she reaches up to brush her thumb against the skin caked in blood beneath the wound.

“What happened?” she whispers thickly. cheryl swallows the lump in her throat down difficultly, her head throbbing as if to remind her of the accident.

“th-they hit my car. i ran into your uncle at the jubilee and i figured the best thing to do was get into my car and get to you…but another car rammed the front of the convertible before i could get far. i hit my head on the steering wheel, i think…next thing i knew, i was here.” cheryl whispers, trying to remember as much as she can, but unfortunately, it isn’t much. it is, however, enough to set toni off.

toni’s jaw clenches, her body tensing in cheryl’s arms as her teeth grind noisily. her nostrils flare as she closes her eyes and exhales through her nose shakily in an effort to calm herself down, and cheryl joins her attempt, pale hands moving up and down denim covered thighs soothingly.

“I’m gonna kill them, cher, i swear to god.” she hisses, but cheryl grips her chin between her fingers and shakes her head.

“We’re in no position to be killing anyone, t.t. they have us hostage, not the other way around, which begs the question…toni, what do they want?” cheryl asks with a frown. toni’s teeth clamp down on her bottom lip with worry for a brief second before the sound of a voice cracks through the air.

“finally, red! now you’re asking the important questions!” penny says loudly. cheryl and toni both
blanch in surprise, so caught up in their reunion that they’d forgotten about their audience/captors, and they both turn to look at her, neither of them letting go of each other as penny grins at them widely and steps forward. malachai and jacob also move forward, and cheryl’s eyes land on the third man that’s joined them. he has long brown hair that’s balding, and he has to be at least in his late forties to early fifties. cheryl swears she’s seen him before at the whyte wyrm, gripping f.p’s hand in welcome…had seen him at the drag race too, helping jughead…

toni’s hold on her tightens as a soft groan of anguish escapes her, her body sagging a little in defeat.

“you too, tall boy?” she croaks out. cheryl blinks once in surprise when it hits her that she’s right.

this man was a serpent as well…

“nothing personal, kid. just business.” the man named tall boy says gruffly.

“yeah, keep telling yourself that, you fucking prick.” toni growls, and cheryl subconsciously finds her grip tightening on the pink haired serpent to stop her from doing anything rash, like attacking this man or her uncle beside him.

“hiram lodge is paying us good money to wipe the serpents out, kid. we’ve been a dying breed for a long time, toni, ever since f.p got thrown in the slammer and his son came barging in all high and mighty, acting like he fuckin’ owned us when he hadn’t even worn the serpent skin for a week. talking about trying to make the serpents clean…” tall boy scoffs, shaking his head as malachai laughs and cracks his knuckles threateningly, his gaze never leaving toni.

he looks ready to devour her, and cheryl finds herself toni closer worriedly.

“he’s gonna run us into the ground with that bullshit, toni. best to jump ship before he does.” tall boy says with a shrug. toni scoffs in disbelief.

“jughead was trying to bring the serpents back to what we were. what the uktena created the serpents for all those years ago! protecting the family! keeping the people of the southside safe! i’m not surprised you forgot that, tall boy, but you, uncle jake? you’re part of that history!” toni growls, her eyes falling onto her uncle, who blinks once in surprise before he bares his teeth in anger.

“don’t talk to me about history, ant! after a certain someone put me thirty thousand dollars in debt,
hiram offered to pay it all off for my services, and after f.p left me out on my ass, i didn’t have much of a choice! it was either this or suffer crippling debt, so don’t lecture me about the uktena! this is all your fault!” jacob hisses, stepping forward angrily with each sentence until malachai grips him and pulls him back. cheryl feels toni stiffen in her arms at her uncle’s words, but before she can say anything, penny stalks forward and bends down beside them to look them in the eyes, her smirk only widening.

“enough semantics! as long as you two behave and stay wrapped up in your little love bubble, we aren’t gonna hurt you. we just need you long enough to offer good old f.p a trade: your lives for the southside.”

and there it was. the reason for everything. the reason for their captivity. the reason cheryl was sporting a headache the size of a continent and the reason her convertible, the last goddamn thing she had of jason left, was destroyed.

they wanted the southside, to drive the serpents out and make it ghoulie territory permanently. and if f.p didn’t agree, cheryl and toni were looking at a very short future ahead of them.

their lives for the southside.

“we would’ve taken his son, but jughead sticks to his father’s side like glue, and after jacob told me you two spent more than a week living with f.p in his trailer, i figured he’d have a soft spot for you both.” penny says with a shrug and a grin.

cheryl licks her dry lips, her heart hammering in her ears and only causing her head to throb more.

they were so screwed…

would f.p take the deal? part of cheryl wants him to, of course she does, it’s her own life at stake here as well as toni’s, but the southside…the southside was the serpents home. where were they supposed to go if the ghoulies took over?

oh god, this is so bad…

cheryl interlaces her fingers with toni’s, giving them a squeeze as toni purses her lips and blinks rapidly to stop her tears from falling.
she was about to lose her home, and cheryl had no idea how to comfort her.

“what does hiram want with the southside?” toni croaks out, looking at penny in despair. penny simply shrugs.

“i don’t ask questions when money’s involved, smurfette. best guess? he just wants you guys gone so he can do whatever he wants with it. the serpents are in his way, with their pride and their bullshit territory wars…f.p takes that offer, no serpent blood is shed and everyone goes home happy.” toni says nothing, simply observes penny for a long time before she tilts her head to the side and lets out a small scoff.

“you and i both know that’s not true.” she whispers in a low voice. penny gives her a lopsided smile, her eyes roaming over toni’s face almost fondly.

“you’re smarter than you look, pinky. it’ll be a shame to see you go.” she says before she stands with a sigh, making her way over to the fire to warm up, and cheryl closes her eyes and inhales sharply through her nose, ignoring the throb of pain in her ribs and her whole body as she reaches a hand up to turn toni’s face to her once more.

“f.p won’t take that deal, toni.” she whispers. toni licks her lips before she presses them to cheryl’s forehead, one hand gripping her hair lightly and cupping the back of her head to push it forward against her mouth.

“he will…but it won’t matter, cher. if hiram’s paying them to wipe the serpents out, it won’t matter what decision he makes. the serpents are getting wiped out.” she murmurs against cheryl’s skin.

cheryl whimpers before she can stop herself, her hands gripping toni’s hips as she buries her head into toni’s shoulder.

fangs was already shot and likely dead or dying, and now the rest of the serpents could join him. f.p, jughead, sweet pea…toni…

“there has to be another way…” she whispers. toni pulls back, and the way she’s looking at cheryl, god…it’s like she’s trying to burn every inch of cheryl’s face into her memory, her fingers reaching up and slowly tracing the outline of her jaw, her cheeks, her nose, her brows…
it’s so soft…so unlike anything she’s ever had before, just like the last few months of her life since Toni came crashing into it have been so unlike anything she’s ever had before...

love. happiness. euphoria. peace…

if they die tonight, they die. just as long as Cheryl gets to spend the time she has left exactly like this…Toni in her arms, her eyes roaming over that beautiful face she loves so much…

“i wish there was, baby…i wish…i wish we had more time.” Toni breathes, her fingers coming to a stop over Cheryl’s lips.

more time…

toni moves her fingers away and kisses her, lips soft as Cheryl’s fingers rest on the exposed skin of her lower back, cold to the touch, but covered in sweat…

“never would’ve thought you’d fall for a blossom, ant.” Jacob says behind them suddenly. Toni pulls away, her expression turning stony as she turns in Cheryl’s arms to face him, his expression filled with amusement as he watches his niece with a raised eyebrow. The light of the fire from the bin casts a red glow on his face, but despite it, Cheryl can see the tired bags under his eyes, the sickly look of his pale, washed out face.

he doesn’t look well. not that she cares.

“yeah, never would’ve thought you’d throw your own fucking niece under the bus, but i guess the Topaz family is all about surprises today, huh?” she hisses, glaring at him as she slowly pushes herself off Cheryl’s lap to stand. She holds her hand out for Cheryl to take, warm fingers meeting her pale ones as she helps Cheryl up slowly.

“You okay?” she whispers, worried eyes meeting her own. Cheryl grunts with a simple nod, closing her eyes and taking a deep breath in to try and get through the pain as she stands on her own two feet, one arm looping around Toni’s waist for support. Jacob watches them, and for a second, Cheryl
swears she sees something akin to envy in his eyes before he crosses his arms over his chest and shrugs.

“thirty thousand dollars is a lot of money.” he says simply.

god, how can he not care about what he’s done to his own flesh and blood?

toni’s glare is murderous.

“family is priceless. but you wouldn’t know anything about that, would you? god, have you even taken a second to think about your father? about how disappointed he’s going to be-.”

“shut your mouth, ant!” jacob barks, conflict and anger shining in his eyes that are so like toni’s, his hands clenching into fists against his biceps. cheryl squeezes toni’s waist and pulls her close, lips pressing a kiss to her temple in a desperation to get her to calm down, but toni bares her teeth and steps forward, is only pulled back by cheryl’s hand in her own.

“how many times have i told you not to call me that?!?” she yells, and this time, cheryl has to put effort into tugging her back, toni’s small body stumbling back into her arms as she wraps them around her chest.

“toni, don’t, please.” she whispers into her ear. toni relaxes only slightly in her arms, but she’s still staring at jacob with the fury of about ten thousand suns as he barks with laughter and steps closer to her, and cheryl notices no one is holding him back at all.

*they want him to goad her, oh god-

toni had mentioned to her that jacob topaz’s unpredictable anger had been a source of good and bad for the serpents at times…she can see it in penny’s eyes, in tall boy’s stature, in malachai’s wicked grin as they all watch toni and jacob stare at each other with fury.

a topaz showdown. the perfect entertainment.

“why? because my brother called you that? because he thought toni was too masculine, because he
thought ant was cute, that it suited his little ‘angel’ better? because i had to sit and watch his life get better and better while mine only sunk lower and lower?” jacob growls, his eyes wide and filled with madness, and cheryl’s arms tighten around toni once more as she scoffs in anger.

toni had the same anger, cheryl knows she does, but toni could contain it, she has to contain it, please-

“So what? you were jealous? that’s why you’ve made my life fucking miserable for the last six years?!” toni screams, one arm slipping out of cheryl’s grasp. jacob laughs loudly, but there’s no humor in it as he shakes his head and points his index finger to his temple.

“Are you fucking stupid, ant?! i loved my brother! he may have had a better life than me, but he fucking deserved it! he was a good man! and you’re a constant fucking reminder that he’s gone! if your fucking mother hadn’t insisted they go on a stupid fucking picnic that day and that you stay behind, then maybe you would’ve fucking died with them and i wouldn’t have to look at your face every single day and be reminded that the only reason my brother is dead is because of your whore of a mother-.”

a succession of things happen next.

cheryl is so astounded by the hatred behind jacob’s words, that for a second, the briefest fucking second…her grip on toni slips.

her grip on toni slips and the pink haired serpent flies forward and out of the safety of cheryl’s arms. cheryl doesn’t even know what she screams, only knows that she is due to the ringing in her ears and the way her mouth drops open as she tries to claw toni back into her arms, her fingers scratching down toni’s serpent jacket and even catching a few strands of loose pink hair, but it’s futile and does nothing.

because toni is fueled by rage, and she isn’t thinking straight, isn’t thinking about the fact that she’s running straight for a man who hates her, who has hurt her so many times in the past-

toni’s hand is pulled into a fist, and it’s like it happens in slow motion.

her fist swings forward and cheryl is frozen and watching in terror as jacob’s face contorts in complete and utter rage. one hand grips the wrist of the fist flying to his face and the other wraps around toni’s throat.
cheryl feels the life fucking leave her.

jacob lifts her with a scream of rage and slams her down onto the ground back first, toni’s neck snapping back against the dirt loudly as she groans in pain before he’s pinning her to the ground by the throat and squeezing-

cheryl screams.

she screams and once she starts, she can’t stop.

“STOP!” she moves forward on shaking legs, doesn’t notice malachai until he’s inches away from her, and she’s so close to tearing jacob topaz apart when malachai wraps his arms around her and pulls her back. cheryl fights him with everything in her, kicks and screams and begs and pleads as he laughs maniacally into her ear, and cheryl wants this to end, wants this pain to stop, please-

not toni, not toni, please, god, PLEASE GOD NOT TONI-

“watch!” malachai growls, gripping her chin in his hands and forcing her to watch as jacob topaz squeezes the life out of toni’s body, the look in his eyes crazed as spit drips from his mouth-

“you-fucking-bitch-.” jacob is crying, tears falling down his cheeks as toni’s face quickly turns blue, then purple, her nails digging into jacob’s arms in an attempt to pull him off as she squirms underneath his body, whines of panic escaping her-

he’s going to kill her, he’s going to kill her-

“JACOB! STOP!” cheryl screams so hard, her throat aches, but god, malachai is holding her so strongly, and penny is grinning as tall boy watches almost uncomfortably, and cheryl looks at him, tries to appeal to him-

“YOU KNOW HER, STOP HIM!” she screams, but tall boy simply clenches his jaw and turns his face away as jacob doesn’t listen, is in a trance as toni’s hands begin to feebly scratch at him, her eyes rolling into the back of her head as her body relaxes underneath him-
“SHE’S YOUR BROTHER’S DAUGHTER, JACOB!” cheryl screams, tears streaming down her face as jacob finally looks up at her, his face contorted in anguish.

“He’s your brother’s daughter, he wouldn’t want you to do this!” cheryl begs, has nothing left in her as her body sags into malachai’s because she’s so tired and beaten and hurt, and toni

he loved his brother, he’s hurting his brother’s daughter

“don’t do this, please, please don’t do this!” cheryl’s voice is hoarse, but jacob’s hands are relaxing around toni’s throat slightly

“she’s your brother’s daughter…please…” cheryl sobs, falling to her knees as malachai drops down with a grunt with her from her weight, and jacob’s bottom lip is trembling as he finally looks down at toni before lifting his hands

toni gasps loudly before she’s coughing wildly, her whole body trembling as she clutches her own throat with wide eyes that are streaming with tears

jacob stands up breathlessly, glaring down at toni with a clenched jaw before he goes to move away from her, and cheryl sobs with relief, pushes malachai off her before she’s crawling toward her girlfriend

“toni! toni, fuck-.” cheryl reaches her, hands gripping toni’s face as she helps her sit up slowly, and toni’s breaths are ragged and slow, but she’s breathing, she’s fucking breathing

she’s not dead, she’s not dead, she’s alive, she’s breathing, she’s alive

“you-fucking-psychopath-.” toni chokes out through bared teeth.
cheryl’s heart stops.

jacob turns slowly, his fist clenched as he growls and steps forward-

“NO!”

cheryl doesn’t know why she does it, but she’s pushing toni to the ground as she jumps on top of her protectively, her whole body covering toni’s small and shivering frame. she raises a hand in surrender, looking up at jacob with every ounce of fear and begging she can muster in her face as she swallows thickly.

“no more!” cheryl chokes out, shaking her head as toni grips her hand and squeezes it tightly. jacob’s fist is clenched, his nostrils flaring as he glares down at cheryl-

“you want a punching bag, use me! just not toni, please, not toni!” cheryl cries out hysterically, her hands clasped in front of her in prayer, begging for repent, for jacob to show reprieve, please god, let him show reprieve-

the look in his eyes is wicked, and cheryl knows it’s coming, will gladly take it in toni’s place as she closes her eyes and waits for the impact of a fist against her face-

“HEY!”

the impact doesn’t come.

cheryl opens her eyes to see her own shaking hands are raised in front of her, but beyond them, she can see penny gripping jacob’s pulled back fist in her hand, a look of anger shining in her eyes as she glares down at cheryl and toni.

“you can wail on your niece all you want, but strawberry shortcake here is off limits! or did you forget who her mother is? she’s already fucking bleeding, you’ve done more damage than you were meant to! penelope blossom said she’s to remain unharmed!” penny growls angrily.
“she…she had a hand in this, didn’t she?” cheryl says hoarsely. when penny simply smiles, it’s all the confirmation cheryl needs.

her mother…her mother did this…was part of this…her kidnapping, her pain, toni coughing and spluttering beneath her-

a whimper escapes her, but she feels a hand grip her own again, and she closes her eyes and exhales shakily as penny pulls a fuming jacob away. cheryl allows herself to relax only slightly as she turns and pulls toni’s hair back from her face.

“toni?!” the pink haired serpent spits out blood onto the dirt and looks up at her with hooded eyes, each breath sucking down her throat painfully. she winces and shakes her head, tries to talk, but cheryl can see the bruising around her neck even in the dark-

“don’t talk, just breathe.” cheryl whispers. toni nods numbly, her head falling forward to rest against cheryl’s shoulder weakly, and cheryl holds her close, tries to focus on the fact that toni is alive, she’s breathing, she’s here-

her mother had a hand in all of this, was working with hiram to destroy the southside, the serpents-

of course she was. of fucking course she was, because penelope blossom was put on this earth to destroy anything that made her daughter happy. god, hiram probably knew everything about cheryl and toni, this was bad, this was so bad…

“cher…” toni rasps out. cheryl inhales shakily, a hand wrapped around toni’s head as she presses a kiss to her hair.

“toni, just breathe, please, i need you to keep breathing…” cheryl whispers, the last word escaping her in a sob, because right now she needs to feel toni breathing, needs to feel toni’s life to keep herself from fucking breaking down, and toni says nothing, just nods against her as she keeps taking shuddering breaths in.
cheryl turns to see jacob and tall boy walking away, jacob's whole body shaking as he spits on the ground. cheryl watches him go in disgust as penny sighs and runs a hand through her hair, the other pulling her phone out of her pocket.

“i think we should hurry this up before something like that happens again…” she mutters. cheryl pulls toni into her lap protectively, turning her until her back is resting against cheryl’s chest to give her more space to breathe, and the pink haired serpent clutches her hands with a shaky exhale.

“she’s…calling f.p…” cheryl can barely hear her, her voice hoarse and almost completely gone as she winces and rests her head against cheryl’s shoulder. she closes her eyes as she inhales with another wince, her teeth bared and covered in blood. cheryl nods once, her lips resting against toni’s temple.

“shh, don’t talk, t.t., you don’t want to cause more damage…” toni scoffs, but it quickly turns into a cough as she licks her lips. cheryl rubs her thighs, lips pressing against every inch of toni’s skin she can reach-

she’s breathing, she’s alive, she’s breathing-

“hey there, boss! nice to hear your voice! heard some shit’s gone south for you…how’s fangs?” penny says wickedly.

cheryl and toni both look up at her with worry, cheryl trying to read her facial expressions, but she’s not giving anything away.

fangs, they were talking about fangs, god, was he okay, please let him be okay-

penny grins before she looks down at the both of them with a pout.

“aww, what a shame…he always was such a sweet boy…”

toni whimpers.
cheryl’s forehead connects with toni’s shoulder in defeat.

he’s dead. fangs is dead-

“oh don’t worry, girls, he’s not dead…at least not yet. surgery’s always such a fickle thing…” penny says with a shrug and a lopsided smile.

toni sobs with relief, her hands flying up to her face with a groan, and cheryl swallows the lump in her throat and bites down on her trembling bottom lip.

thank god.

fangs was strong, he would make it through the surgery, he would, he was gonna be okay-

“oh, just talking with my pals, cheryl blossom and toni topaz! i’ve got them here with me…looking a little worse for wear, but still alive…barely. whether they stay alive, now that’s up to you, serpent king…” penny begins pacing, her gaze moving up to malachai as she hands him her stun gun and points at the girls. malachai grins wickedly, and cheryl’s heart begins pounding erratically-

not again, please not again, she can't do it again-

but malachai doesn’t attack them, simply hovers over them as penny grins and comes to a stop in front of them before she bends down beside them to meet their gaze.

“he doesn’t believe me, girls. wanna give him some proof? or should i force you to?” she turns the phone to them, and the stun gun sparks to life in malachai’s arms, causing cheryl to jump as toni shakes her head furiously.

“don’t, please…” she croaks out, gripping cheryl's hand tightly, and cheryl looks up at penny pleadingly.

no more pain, please, for the love of god...
“no more, please…whatever you want us to do, we’ll do, just don’t hurt us anymore…” cheryl whispers hoarsely. penny’s grin widens, and she gives cheryl a thumbs up and mouths ‘good job’ to her.

cheryl feels her stomach turn, bile rising in the back of her throat as penny listens to what f.p has to say before she laughs.

“that’s a good boy, f.p. here’s the deal. you give myself and the ghoulies the southside, give up the serpents claim on the wyrm and sunnyside trailer park, evacuate as soon as you can, and we don’t kill the southside easter bunny and her precious little jessica rabbit. meet at the wyrm in say, an hour? i think that’s plenty of time to make a decision…”

penny listens to f.p’s reply, her gaze never leaving cheryl and toni before she’s chuckling, and a huge grin is spreading across her face.

“looks like i underestimated your attachment to these two, didn’t i? see you in half an hour, serpent king.” penny hangs up, looks up at malachai, who grins wickedly as toni whimpers against cheryl in anguish.

“looks like you just lost the southside, antoinette.” penny says triumphantly.

cheryl closes her eyes and lets her tears fall as she pulls a sobbing toni closer to her body, despair sweeping through her like a tidal wave.

it’s over…

they lost.
“cher, are you okay?”

worry grips the pink haired serpent as she bends down in the back seat of the jeep they’re currently being held hostage in, her eyes on the back of cheryl’s head as she reaches out her bound hands to rub cheryl’s back.

cheryl is taking in shaky breaths, her body slightly twitching underneath toni’s hands as she simply nods and sits back up slowly.

“i think my injuries are catching up with me now that the adrenaline is fading.” she pants, her head falling back against the seat as she winces and bites down on her lower lip. toni tries to contain her anger.

she was going to kill penny for using that fucking taser on her…

she leans in and presses a kiss to cheryl’s cheek before resting her head on her shoulder.

“we need to get to a hospital after all this is over, you might have a concussion.” toni mumbles. cheryl sighs.

“if we’re still alive once all of this is over.” she murmurs sadly. toni closes her eyes and lets out a deep exhale.

she’s not going to even bother reassuring her girlfriend. toni has no idea if they are going to be alive once this night comes to an end…
god, how did everything get so fucked up so quickly? how did her and cheryl end up here? how is it even possible that just two nights ago, they were so deeply in love, had spent the entire night with their bodies intertwined, whispered ‘i love you’s and breathy gasps and now…now they’re here? both of them injured and hurt and so, so, so fucking scared…

how did everything change so rapidly?

she opens her eyes and focuses her glare on the back of the head sitting in front of her.

jacob topaz is sitting quite contently in the passenger seat beside penny peabody, his eyes completely avoiding the rear view mirror so he doesn’t have to stare at his niece, the one he almost fucking murdered with no hesitation? toni feels her neck throb slightly, and she reaches a hand up to touch the heated skin with a soft groan.

she was close to blacking out, the corners of her eyes fading as jacob’s hands had only squeezed harder with each passing second…he had come so fucking close to just ending her life…after everything he’s done to her for the last five years, he hadn’t even hesitated in wrapping his hands around her neck to squeeze the life out of her, the son of a bitch.

jacob topaz should be thanking his lucky stars that cheryl was there, because if she hadn’t been…

god, the thought of toni dying with cheryl watching…bile quickly rises in the back of toni’s throat at the thought of cheryl holding her dead limp body in her arms…the girl’s been through enough, fuck…

cheryl grips toni’s bound hands with her own tied in rope, her fingers cold to the touch, and toni feels her anger immediately melt away as she sags in defeat against her girlfriend.

god, this was so fucked up…

toni doesn’t care how this night ends for her, she just needs cheryl to be safe…

the thought of cheryl dying tonight because of a war she had no part in makes toni sick to the stomach. the serpents weren’t her problem, none of this had anything to do with her…it wasn’t fair. toni feels horrible.
if cheryl wasn’t dating her, she wouldn’t be here…she wouldn’t be used as a hostage, wouldn’t have been injured and beaten up like she is now…would probably be at thistlehouse with her grandmother, enjoying a cup of tea and relaxing after watching the debate at the jubilee…

it wasn’t fair.

for a horrible, brief second, toni finds herself wishing that cheryl hadn’t helped her that day at the hospital after jacob had once again almost killed her…for a brief, horrible second, toni imagines what it would be like if that had never happened…her and cheryl would probably be mortal enemies or complete and utter strangers…toni would for sure be dead right now, no one there to stop her uncle from choking the life out of her…

cheryl wouldn’t be here, being held hostage and injured…she wouldn’t be suffering like she is right now…probably wouldn’t have been put in the sisters of quiet mercy by her wicked mother…

“toni, i love you.” cheryl whispers suddenly. toni feels guilt grip her heart. so many things that cheryl wouldn’t have suffered if she never met toni…

“you shouldn’t.” she croaks out before she can stop herself. cheryl grips her hands tightly.

“don’t say that.” she says hoarsely, her voice shaking with despair. toni bites down on her bottom lip to stop herself from crying. she hates that she’s thinking this, about a life without cheryl, because the very thought seems so absolutely insane and impossible, but cheryl would be so much happier…she wouldn’t be scared like she is right now, terrified for her own life…

toni sighs, finally lifts her head up lethargically as she gives the red head a small smile.

but then again…if cheryl and toni had never met, no one would’ve been there to save cheryl from nick st. clair…no one would’ve been there for cheryl when her uncle and mother had conspired against her and her grandmother…

“don’t say that, toni.” cheryl whispers again, her voice soft, but almost petulant, like a child. toni swallows thickly.
god, cheryl was the epitome of everything good in life…despite her past, despite all the bad things cheryl has done, she was working so hard to be better, and she was still here, declaring her love for a girl who got her kidnapped and tortured…

you don’t deserve her, toni. you really don’t.

“whatever happens tonight, cher…these last few months, being in love with you…they’ve been the best of my life. i need you to know that.” toni says, wincing slightly at the pain it causes her throat to talk, but she needs to say this. despite everything…god, these last few months, toni has never been happier.

she loves her. she loves cheryl blossom with every inch of her goddamn soul…and despite the guilt she feels, she can’t ever regret falling in love with her.

cheryl’s bottom lip trembles, tears leaking out of the corners of her eyes as she leans in and kisses toni’s lips softly.

“you’re the best thing to ever happen to me, toni. don’t ever doubt that.” she whispers hoarsely. toni kisses her again, unable to stop herself as cheryl’s tears fall down toni’s cheeks and mix with her own tears…

“god, are you two trying to reenact romeo and juliet back there? i’d cheer you on if i wasn’t so repulsed.” penny grumbles from the driver’s seat. toni finally pulls away from cheryl to glare at her.

this fucking bitch…

“shut up. you didn’t need to bring cheryl into this.” she growls, the pain in her throat only worsening with the action. penny rolls her eyes in the rearview mirror and turns to look at them as they come to a stop at a red traffic light.

“we weren’t going to. her mother said she’d make a good hostage because of how “close she’s gotten with those snakes.” looks like she’s not too happy about the company her daughter keeps now.” penny grins.

cheryl’s mother…god, toni should’ve kicked her face in weeks ago. how could she do something like this to her own daughter? why did she have such a problem with cheryl dating a girl? how could
one person be this fucking homophobic? or did it run deeper? was penelope perhaps getting payback on cheryl for burning down thornhill?

whatever her motivation was, it didn’t matter…the lengths she was going to ruin cheryl’s life is astounding.

“whose company i decide to keep has nothing to do with her anymore. she’s no longer my mother.” cheryl says stiffly. penny shrugs.

“like i care, kid. i’m just following orders, like a good little soldier, just like i did for the serpents. only difference is i’m actually getting paid this time.” penny says with a grin. toni blinks before she shakes her head in disgust.

she’s always hated penny, had completely avoided ever doing anything for the so called snake charmer, had cursed sweet pea when he’d accepted a favor from her and had ended up having to do about twenty different things for her in return. the woman was a goddamn witch.

“if anyone drove the serpents into the ground, it was you, with your bullshit favors. you’re the only real snake here, penny.” toni’s voice cracks, which pisses her off because she wants to sound angry, not hurt, and cheryl grips her hands with a squeeze.

“stop talking, toni, you’re injured.” she says softly.

“yeah, stop talking, toni. unless you want more bruises around that pretty little neck of yours.” penny says with a roll of her eyes. toni glares at her, but cheryl’s hands squeezing hers convinces her to settle back into her seat with a huff.

she needs to stop…she can’t do anything that puts cheryl in danger, she’s done that enough…

cheryl sighs and presses a kiss to her temple.

“my mother…she’s the reason i’m here, toni. not you.” cheryl says in a low voice. toni looks at her sadly, a little surprised that she seems to know exactly what’s going through her mind, and cheryl reaches up and brushes her thumb over toni’s lips, the other hand scratching her jaw gently.
“i know you, t.t. you think me being here is your fault. it isn’t.” cheryl whispers. toni bites back a whimper, but before she can say anything, penny speaks once again.

“it kind of is, i mean, you only got close to the serpents because of her.” penny says with a laugh as she continues driving once the light turns green. cheryl’s the one to glare at her now, her expression murderous.

“why don’t you focus on getting us to the wyrm in one piece?” she snaps. toni bites back a smile as penny lifts a hand without looking back at them to give cheryl the middle finger, which causes the red head to laugh derisively.

“so mature-.”

“everyone shut up! another word out of you two and i’ll kill you!” jacob growls, finally turning to face them with his face contorted in rage. toni bares her teeth, glares at him with nothing but hatred as anger floods her entire body. his gaze flicks down to the bruises on her neck before he’s turning back around, his neck tense and his fist curled on top of his thigh as it bounces up and down angrily.

oh, how badly toni wants to punch his fucking face in-

“toni, don’t give him a reason to hurt you again, please.” cheryl says desperately, her hands gripping toni’s fists and forcing her fingers to unclench. jacob turns to look at cheryl with wide eyes.

“what the fuck did i just say?” he says angrily. toni growls and kicks the back of his seat angrily with the heel of both her boots.

“DON’T YOU DARE EVEN FUCKING LOOK AT HER-.”

“EVERYONE CALM DOWN!” penny screams over the top of her, the car coming to a screeching stop as she grips the taser on the dashboard and turns to glare at them. it sparks to life, and toni feels cheryl jump beside her, a soft whimper of panic escaping her.

“we’re almost there, now shut the fuck up and behave!” penny hisses. toni can feel cheryl trembling against her as she buries her head into toni’s neck, her hands gripping the lapels of her serpent jacket tightly, and toni’s instincts are telling her to grab that taser and shove it into penny’s neck, but instead, she raises her hands in surrender, sinks back into her seat as her throat throbs painfully from
her screaming.

cheryl can’t get hurt again, she won’t let that happen…

she’ll sew her mouth shut if it stops her from getting hit with that thing again.

toni doesn’t speak, just lets out a sigh at the sound of cheryl whimpering into her neck, and she lifts her arms to loop them around cheryl’s body to hold her close as she presses kiss after kiss to every inch of her face she can reach. cheryl’s grip on her jacket tightens as she nuzzles her nose into toni’s neck, breathing her in as she tries to calm down, and toni lets her, couldn’t even dream of denying her-

“god, i can’t wait to see f.p’s face when we surprise him. son of a bitch has turned everything upside down for us since he came back, it’ll be good to see karma catch up to him.” penny says with a wicked grin. jacob scoffs.

“his son isn’t any better. hopefully we can wipe them both out tonight.” he seethes. toni closes her eyes and rests her chin on top of cheryl’s head, tries to focus on the feeling of cheryl’s cold lips pressed against her bruised neck…

*stay calm, toni. don’t do anything that’ll put cheryl at risk, please…*

“When he sees how many serpents have defected, he’s gonna realize that refusing hiram’s offer was a mistake.” penny says firmly.

toni’s head snaps up.

“What offer?” she croaks out despite herself. jacob turns to glare at her, but penny laughs and looks at her through the rear view mirror, one hand raising to tell jacob to stand down.

“It’s an honest question, jacob…i’m not surprised she doesn’t know. f.p keeps a lot of secrets from the serpents, smurfette…after all, you didn’t even know what he and joaquin did to jason blossom until he was arrested, right?” she says with a smirk. cheryl digs her nails into toni’s jacket now, a soft whine escaping her, and toni grits her teeth and presses a kiss to cheryl’s brow.
“what offer?” she repeats more firmly. penny scoffs and shakes her head.

“hiram offered the serpent king three million dollars to relinquish the serpents’ hold on the southside, and f.p told him to stick the three million where the sun don’t shine.” penny tells her.

toni’s heart drops.

three million dollars?

“and if that wasn’t bad enough, jughead then told him he was going to write an expose on hiram in his little school newsletter, to which f.p replied “see you in the funny pages.” safe to say hiram decided to get rid of them another way…and now they’re suffering the consequences.” penny says with a grin before she turns to face toni with raised eyebrows.

“three million dollars, kid. he could’ve bought all the serpents homes on the northside with that money. but no…his pride mattered more. you want someone to blame for your current situation, pinky? blame the serpent king and his beanie wearing son.” penny says airily before she turns to watch the road once more.

dead silence fills the car. toni’s at a complete loss of words.

penny’s right…f.p could’ve given all the serpents stability with that money, could’ve gotten them out of the southside and out of this fucking life…god, three million dollars? it could’ve ended all of this gang war bullshit…

but f.p was doing something jacob and penny never did. he was respecting the uktena tribe, respecting the reason they formed the serpents in the first place…and toni can’t be upset at him for that. the uktena were her family, her history, her tribe…they formed the serpents to protect the people of the southside, and f.p was determined to make sure that they continued that tradition…protect the southside and its people, that was the serpent way…

but three million could’ve done a lot for all of them. it could’ve protected them in the long run…but they would’ve lost their land, the southside, the place they call home…

the uktena fought for that land, toni. they shed their blood, they lost their own to protect the southside…f.p wasn’t going to give it up for money…
“he made the right choice.” toni says firmly, lifting her head high. screw penny, screw jacob, and screw hiram lodge. toni wasn’t about to roll over and give up the land her people fought for over green paper. money was money…family was life.

cheryl grunts against her neck, and toni frowns before cheryl presses a kiss to the skin beneath her ear, as if to affirm her agreement with toni’s statement. toni bites back a smile as penny raises an eyebrow at her in the rear view mirror.

“yeah, let’s see if you’re still saying that after all of this, pink starburst.” she mumbles. cheryl grips her tighter, and toni focuses her attention back on her girlfriend, her lips resting against the crown of cheryl’s head silently.

they don’t dare speak, both of them too afraid for themselves and each other, and the rest of the ride is silent, toni holding cheryl close and pressing kisses to her forehead as the red haired girl does the same to her bruised neck.

toni can almost feel herself beginning to doze off, her eyes fluttering shut every once in awhile as her grip on cheryl slackens from fatigue, and for a brief second, she imagines they’re simply in the back of cheryl’s convertible, at the outlook on the southside on one of their many nights they’ve spent there, gentle kisses and caresses that ended with them always snuggling in the back seat watching the stars twinkle high above them…

she feels the familiar bump and gravel of the whyte wyrm beneath the car, and all traces of exhaustion are gone as toni inhales sharply and gazes out of the window. the whyte wyrm slowly comes into view, toni’s eyes landing on the sea of bodies that stand at the entrance.

serpents. a sea of black jackets with the serpent emblazoned on the back, and right at the front is f.p, jughead and sweet pea on either side of him. toni can’t make out the looks on their faces just yet, but she sees sweet pea stand straight as he clenches his fists, sees f.p raise a hand to grip his shoulder and hold him back as the swarm of snakes watch the jeep pull up warily.

toni swallows the lump in her throat with a wince, her heart truly beginning to pound now as she licks her lips and lifts her arms up and off from around cheryl’s body. panic grips her when cheryl doesn’t move, and she looks down to see the red head dozing off with her eyes rolling in the back of her head against toni’s chest.

she might have a concussion, she can’t fall asleep-
“cher? cher, wake up!” toni shakes her almost violently, and she groans, her brow furrowing as she blinks her eyes open slowly. toni cradles cheryl’s face in her bound hands as she presses a kiss to her lips.

“cher, we’re at the wyrm. i need you to listen to me. stay close to me, don’t leave my side, you hear me?” she says firmly, her voice only cracking slightly as her fingers dig into cheryl’s jaw slightly to make sure she listens. cheryl blinks rapidly, toni’s words slowly processing as her eyes widen and she looks outside of the window. she whimpers at the sight before her, and toni presses another kiss to her lips, more urgent this time. she pulls away before resting her forehead against cheryl’s.

“We’re gonna be okay, cher. i promise you, i’m gonna do everything i can to keep you safe.” toni croaks out. cheryl nods numbly as the sound of more cars, pulling up behind them echo around them, engines revving loudly as the sound of ghoulies cackling and cheering also echo into the night sky. toni closes her eyes and takes a deep breath in.

This is it.

penny turns in her seat to face them, a smug smirk on her face as she licks her lips and looks them up and down.

“don’t try anything, or i’ll jam this right into those pretty little necks of yours, understand?” she says sternly, raising the taser in her hands once more. toni nods curtly, and cheryl purses her lips as penny exhales shakily and looks to jacob.

“ready to be rich?” she says with a wicked grin. jacob grunts, says nothing as he takes his seatbelt off and opens the door roughly. toni swallows thickly, watches as jacob opens her door and simply stands there.

“out. move it.” he growls. toni looks to cheryl, grips her hands in her own before slowly shuffling out of the car. jacob eventually gets frustrated with her snail pace and grabs her bicep, forcing her grip out of cheryl’s as he drags her out the rest of the way, and she pushes him back and almost stumbles as her feet land on the dirt.

“don’t touch me.” she hisses. jacob rolls his eyes, but reaches out to grab cheryl, pulling her out roughly as she immediately stumbles into toni, who grabs her tightly and holds her close. he slams the door shut and pushes them both forward, and toni glares at him as penny makes her way around the car and reaches one arm out to drag cheryl forward, the other holding the taser in her hands.
“no funny stuff.” she sings. Toni wipes away the sweat at her brow as Penny brings Cheryl to a stop in front of the jeep, the headlights causing their shadows to look larger as they loom over the serpents in front of them.

“on your knees.” Penny murmurs. Toni and Cheryl exchange glances, and Jacob growls and kicks his foot out to connect with the back of Toni’s knee, causing her to buckle and fall onto them harshly.

“fuck!” she growls.

“she said on your knees.” Jacob hisses into her ear.

“fuck you!” Toni spits out. Penny grabs Cheryl’s shoulder and forces her down beside Toni, the both of them glaring up at their captors before they turn to look at the serpents in front of them.

Toni’s eyes land on Sweet Pea, trying to convey a message to him about Fangs, wanting to know if he’s okay, but Sweet Pea is glaring at Penny murderously, his expression filled with rage. Toni’s eyes move to Jughead instead, sees him looking at her with worry, and she mouths Fangs’s name desperately, watches as Jughead sighs before he gives her a small nod.

Toni almost weeps with relief.

fangs was okay...

Jughead gives her the smallest of smiles before he clenches his jaw and looks at his father.

f.p is watching Toni and Cheryl with a neutral expression on his face, but Toni knows him well. She can see the sadness and guilt in his bloodshot eyes as he swallows thickly and looks up at Penny and Jacob behind them. If he’s surprised to see Jacob there, he doesn’t show it, his eyes simply narrowing stonily.

“good to see ya, boss!” Penny calls out with a grin. Toni hears the sound of raucous cheering, and she turns her head left to see Malachai making his way toward them, a spiked bat twirling in his hands as he looks up at the Whyte Wyrm longingly.
“i’ve been wanting that bar for a long time, f.p!” he calls out wickedly, and toni’s eyes follow him as he comes to a stop behind cheryl and toni, his bat held threateningly on his shoulder. toni’s heart hammers against her chest, the thought of that spiked bat connecting with the back of her head making her stomach turn as she looks at cheryl. she’s crying softly, her bottom lip trembling as she looks at malachai apprehensively, and toni reaches out and curls the pinky of her right hand around the pinky of cheryl’s left.

“stay strong. i’m right here, baby.” she whispers. cheryl nods numbly, turning back to face f.p, who looks down at them with the briefest look of despair before he returns his angry gaze to penny and jacob.

“They’re just kids, penny! your problem is with me, not them!” he yells out, the serpents behind him all tensing up at his words. penny scoffs as she reaches out and curls her fingers into cheryl’s shoulder, her nails digging in slightly and causing the red head to wince. toni shifts slightly, ready to pounce on her, the fucking bitch-

malachai lowers the spiked bat in his hands until it thumps down onto her shoulder lightly, a soft chuckle escaping him as toni winces from the pain.

“hey, i don’t have a problem with you, serpent king! hiram lodge does, and he’s paying big bucks, much bigger than your pockets hold.” she says with a grin, and toni watches in despair as she runs her fingers through cheryl’s hair, brushing it away from her face to make sure f.p sees what he’s done to her and toni. cheryl inches away from her touch, her pinky tightening around toni’s as she closes her eyes and lets her tears fall.

toni watches f.p desperately, wanting him to do something to stop this, but f.p’s eyes widen before he closes them and sighs, realization sweeping through him at what penny has just said.

this is his fault…toni doesn’t think that, not one bit, but she knows f.p does…

“He’s paying you and the ghoulies to wipe us out.” he states, opening his eyes and looking at penny with finality. penny finally relinquishes her hold on cheryl to clap loudly, a sarcastic cheer escaping her as she laughs.

“bingo! such a smart man, serpent king! well…only when you want to be, huh?” she says with a shrug. she moves to stands between toni and cheryl, malachai stepping back and taking the bat with them as her fingers reach down to twirl a piece of toni’s hair between her fingers. toni glares up at
her and flinches out of her touch angrily. penny raises an eyebrow at her, but says nothing as f.p takes one step forward, jughead and sweet pea following him anxiously.

“so what’s the deal? you and the ghoulies get the southside…the wyrm, the trailer park, everything…and if we give it up willingly, cheryl and toni won’t be killed? they’ve done nothing wrong, penny! they’re just kids!” f.p yells, his jaw clenching angrily. toni looks up to see penny roll her eyes with a scoff.

“soldiers are always dying for a war that isn’t theirs, f.p. these two aren’t any different…unless you take the deal.” she says wickedly. f.p exhales through his nose anxiously, his eyes moving from cheryl and toni to jacob beside them. his shoulders sag in defeat.

“jacob…turning your back on the serpents…on your own flesh and blood…” he says, nodding down to toni, who can’t help the scoff that escapes her as jacob clenches his jaw and shrugs.

“you made it clear which topaz you prefer, f.p. i’m just looking out for myself. and i’m not the only one.” jacob nods behind him, and f.p follows his gaze, watches as tall boy slowly comes into view, his arms crossing over his chest as he sighs.

f.p truly looks defeated now, his eyes blinking in shock as sweet pea growls and cracks his knuckles.

“tall boy? really?” f.p says, his voice shaking slightly. tall boy swallows thickly, his eyes downcast as he purses his lips.

“you’ve lost your edge, f.p. ever since your boy became a serpent…i won’t stand by and watch you burn us to the ground. and neither will they.” tall boy nods toward the serpents behind him, and toni’s heart drops.

a handful of serpents begin moving, making their way across the invisible line that divides the ghoulies from the serpents, and f.p watches in complete and utter shock as they cross that line and join the ghoulies, removing and dropping their serpent jackets as they do.

fuck…oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck-

“son of a bitch…” toni whispers.
it was more than just jacob, tall boy and penny…fuck, how deep were hiram lodge’s pockets?! how did he get this many serpents, how was this possible, fuck, fuck, *fuck—*

*this can't be happening, please...these people are my family, they can’t...*

hog eye crosses the line, dropping his serpent jacket with a scoff, and toni watches as he clutches jacob’s forearm in camaraderie. hog eye who she grew up with...hog eye who always got pissed at her for never giving him a beer, but it was a fun game between them...

this can’t be happening...

toni’s thankful for the ones that remain loyal, at least fifteen or so serpents looking on in shock and anger at the ones who have betrayed them, but toni knows there’s way more than fifteen ghoulies behind them, and now some of their *own* have joined them, they’re so screwed-

they were going to die. they were going to die tonight.

*cheryl-

“feeling hopeless yet, smurfette?” penny whispers into her ear triumphantly. toni swallows thickly, flinches as penny grips her shoulder and digs her nails into the leather of her jacket.

“tell you what…you defect from the serpents, join us right now, and i’ll let you and red here go…you can go home, to that fancy mansion of hers and you can be *safe.*”

toni’s heart drops.

safety…cheryl being safe, that’s all she wants-

“decision’s yours, toni.” penny breathes, causing a shiver to run up toni’s spine.
no, she can’t, she can’t take that offer, no way-

cheryl…

she doesn’t get a chance to tell penny to go fuck herself.

“oh, go to the fiery depths of dante’s inferno and take your deal with you, you self-centered cow of a woman!” cheryl growls. toni turns to look at her in surprise, blinking rapidly, and cheryl is looking down at the serpent jackets that have been dropped to the ground like trash in anger, her eyes moving to penny in rage as she bares her teeth.

“if we die tonight, we die as serpents, not traitors!” she hisses, raising her head high. toni grins, unable to stop herself as she looks at cheryl with nothing but pride.

god, this girl was made to be a southside serpent…and she was toni’s girlfriend…

whatever comes, if they die tonight, toni doesn’t care. at least she dies with the knowledge that cheryl fucking blossom was her soulmate. the red head returns her smile as penny scoffs and laughs derisively, looking at her in surprise.

“you’re really putting your life on the line for them? you’re not even a serpent, red!” she says in disbelief.

“who said she isn’t?” f.p calls out. penny looks up at him in surprise, and toni’s heart is fucking hammering against her chest as she meets f.p’s gaze to see him grinning widely, his arms outstretched as he looks back at the remaining serpents behind him, loyal as ever in their snakeskin.

“we just lost a few cowards, good riddance…we could use the numbers!” he yells.

oh my god.

was that…did this make it official?
wait, toni didn’t want it to happen like this, fuck, she wanted cheryl to have a proper initiation, with all the serpents cheering as she slipped her arms into the leather of a southside serpent jacket-

sweet pea bounces on his feet, his expression *hungry* as jughead clenches his jaw and takes a deep breath in.

“in unity there is strength!” he roars.

“in unity there is strength!” the serpents behind him scream back. toni inhales sharply.

no time, no time for a proper initiation, this was it-

penny laughs, but toni can see the fear behind her eyes as she shakes her head.

“you’re outnumbered, f.p! don’t put serpent lives at risk! just give up the southside and no one gets killed!” she exclaims. f.p shrugs.

“like cheryl said! if we die, we die as serpents, not cowards or traitors! if you really think we’re just gonna roll over and let you take over, you clearly haven’t been paying much attention while you’ve been one of us! you think i don’t know that if i accept your offer, you won’t run me down regardless? i know how hiram lodge works!” he roars, his hands clenching into fists. penny growls, and toni sees her stand in her periphery.

“is that your final answer, serpent king?!” she roars. f.p says nothing, his eyes falling to cheryl and toni, and fuck…fuck, their lives are on the line-

she sees malachai raise his bat-

“cheryl, get down!” toni screams before she can even process the fact that cheryl is seconds away from *dying*, and cheryl immediately falls forward flat on the ground as toni instinctively jumps on top of her, and god, she *feels* the bat just brush over the back of her head as malachai swings it violently, the rush of wind causing a shiver to run up her spine-

“GIVE THEM HELL, SERPENTS!” f.p screams, and after that, it’s chaos.
toni feels like an earthquake is rumbling underneath her feet as ghoulies and serpents both rush forward to meet on the battlefield, the sound of fists pounding into flesh and shouts of war echoing in the night, and toni looks up wildly, can only see a blur of black leather jackets-

she can feel cheryl shaking against her-

“cheryl, come on!” toni jumps off her and grips her elbow, forcing them both up onto their feet as quickly as possible. her legs burn with the effort, but right now, toni doesn’t care.

cheryl, she needed to get cheryl to safety, that’s all that matters, it’s all she cares about-

toni runs toward the wyrm, dragging cheryl behind her as she avoids the fights that have broken out around them.

she needs to get to the back room, she’ll have her emergency bag there with a pocket knife-

“TONI!” rough hands grip her shoulder tightly and she flinches, growling as she spins around with her fists raised and swinging despite the fact they’re tied up -

“it’s me!” sweet pea yells, grabbing her hands to stop them from hitting his face, and toni fucking whimpers in relief at the sight of him, can already see a cut above his brow as he grabs her and cheryl by their bound hands and drags them through the fight until they’re beside his bike at the entrance of the wyrm.

“get down!” he drags them down onto their haunches before he flicks open his pocket knife and begins cutting at the ropes around toni’s wrists quickly, dragging them forward roughly.

toni says the first thing that comes to her mind.

“fangs-.” toni starts with a shaky voice, but sweet pea shakes his head.

“he was still in surgery when f.p got the call! he’s gonna be okay, tiny, right now, we need to focus
on ourselves!” he says hurriedly, grunting as her ropes come undone, and toni hisses and rubs at her chaffed wrists with a wince as he immediately moves to cheryl, gripping her hands and sawing the knife back and forth against the ropes. as soon as cheryl’s ropes fall, toni wraps her arms around sweet pea tightly, hugging him close with relief.

god, if she loses him tonight, she won’t be able to function. fuck, fangs was in surgery, and she knows sweet pea loves a good fight…

both of her boys are in danger, god, please let them get through this-

sweet pea grunts from the impact, but hugs her back just as tightly.

“thank god i haven’t lost you, tiny.” he whispers. toni swallows thickly before she pulls away. sweat is dripping from sweet pea’s brow, mixing with the blood as he frowns and looks back out at the fight around them.

“you gotta get out of here, we’re outnumbered.” he says frantically, his eyes wildly watching the fight before him. toni nods thickly.

“you need to tell f.p to stand down, we can’t lose anymore serpents! if we lose the southside, we lose the southside, it’s not worth the lives that will be lost-.”

“he knows that, toni! he’s got it all planned out, don’t worry! the fight is a distraction, just get yourself and cheryl somewhere safe, you’re both too hurt to fight!” sweet pea says anxiously. cheryl looks at him in surprise.

“i’m okay, sweet pea-.”

“no, cher, he’s right, you’re hurt, we should get you to the hospital!” toni says with a frown, her eyes moving to the cut on cheryl’s head before she grips her hands tightly in her own. cheryl can barely stand on her own two feet, and as it is, she’s swaying slightly sitting on the back of her calves, her jaw clenched tightly as she shakes her head.

“i’m fine-.”
“listen to me! no one is gonna die tonight, the fight is a distraction! look…” sweet pea grips both their hands, and toni knows he’s itching to get back out to the battle as he digs into his pockets and pulls out the keys to his bike.

“take my bike and get to the hospital, fangs’s mother is already there.” he hisses under his breath. toni hesitates.

“sweet pea-.” she starts, but sweet pea shakes his head.

“you have to! it’s part of the plan, toni, please!” sweet pea says in a rush.

“what about the other serpents-.”

“everyone is safe, your grandpa, my dad, they’re all okay! i’ll tell you everything later, just please, get you and cheryl to the hospital!” he says, his tone a little more frustrated now. toni bites down on her lower lip before she nods.

“okay, okay!” sweet pea sighs in relief and leans forward to press a kiss to her forehead.

“go, get out of here!” he yells, and before toni can say anything else, he’s jumping up and making his way back into the fight, his fist smacking against a ghoulie’s face with a roar. toni hesitates, her eyes on the fight in front of her, and god, she can’t even tell serpents apart from ghoulies anymore, bodies hitting each other with such ferocity-

“toni…” cheryl grips her hand tightly, and toni closes her eyes and takes a deep breath in before she nods and squeezes her hand back.

she needs to get cheryl to the hospital…nothing else matters.

“let’s go!”

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“and how did you obtain these injuries again, miss blossom?”

cheryl sighs loudly.

“car accident.” she mumbles with a wince as a light passes over her eyes, almost burning her retinas. doctor masters hums before he clicks the light off and nods.

“well, it looks like you’ve got a mild concussion from what i can tell, the light sensitivity and the tenderness, so i’ll give you a prescription for some pain medication, and i recommend you get as much rest as possible, miss blossom. if the pain only gets worse in the next few days, come back, alright?” she nods once as doctor masters smiles warmly at her and nods at her forehead, which is now clean of blood and bandaged.

“that’s not deep enough to need stitches, but still, be careful with it.” cheryl nods again, and doctor masters is about to say something else when the door behind them opens and toni walks in.

cheryl feels herself immediately relax at the sight of her pink haired girlfriend, and toni smiles at her as she makes her way over to her slowly.

“i just checked in with fangs’s mother…fangs is still in surgery, but the doctors say he’s pulling through really well so far…” she murmurs, coming to a stop beside cheryl and reaching out to grip her hand. doctor masters frowns and nods.

“the gunshot injury…yes, it was quite severe, but he was still conscious when we put him under for the surgery, which is a good sign.” toni rubs her bloodshot eyes tiredly with a small nod as doctor masters looks at her neck with worry.

“like i said, keep ice on that to help with the bruising, and if you cough up any more blood, come back to the hospital.” he reiterates from before sternly. toni nods once and gives him a two fingered salute.

“got it, doc.” she says firmly.

“your discharge papers will be at reception, you’re welcome to leave whenever you want.” he says with a smile, and with that, he takes off his gloves and makes his way to the door, throwing the gloves into the bin before he exits the examination room. toni sighs and steps between cheryl’s legs,
tucking a finger under her chin to raise her head with a deep exhale.

“are you okay?” toni whispers, her eyes filled with worry. cheryl says nothing, grips the lapels of her jacket and pulls her into a tight hug, her head pretty much resting against toni’s cleavage, but in this moment, it’s anything but sexy.

she wants to say not really. she’s so tired. granted, she’s got a concussion and her whole body is aching, she should be tired, but more than anything, she’s worried.

were f.p, jughead, sweet pea and the rest of the serpents okay?

“are you?” cheryl murmurs instead, pressing a kiss to toni’s collarbone before pulling back to look up at her slightly. the pink haired serpent purses her lips and doesn’t reply.

neither of them are okay.

they had come straight to doctor masters upon arriving at the hospital, and after explaining her emancipation from her mother and toni telling him that her uncle was ‘out of town’, doctor masters had agreed to do a check-up without alerting any of their guardians. after briefly examining the bruises on her neck and determining they weren’t life threatening, cheryl had told her to go check on fangs, and at first, toni refused to leave cheryl’s side until cheryl had told doctor masters not to examine her until toni left. toni had left in a huff, leaving cheryl grinning widely.

the girl was loyal, and cheryl’s never loved her more.

she pushes herself up to press a kiss to toni’s lips.

god, they made it out alive…cheryl still isn’t sure how, is just thankful that they did…

she’s still trying to wrap her mind around everything that’s happened in such a short amount of time…betty’s father was the black hood, fangs was arrested for midge’s murder and was then shot for it, jacob and penny had kidnapped her and toni, a war was currently raging between the ghoulies and the serpents…
hiram lodge. hiram lodge and her mother were working together, had formulated the plan for toni and cheryl to be kidnapped…

cheryl’s heartbroken by her mother’s deception, and she wishes she wasn’t, she wishes she could proudly say that her mother’s actions no longer had an effect on her, but it’s still her mother…

she wants to talk to toni about it, but she knows she can’t. it’ll only upset toni more…

“do you think everyone’s okay?” cheryl asks instead, unable to bring it in her heart to say anything.

again, toni doesn’t answer, instead leans in to capture cheryl’s lips in a kiss. cheryl hums softly, tries her best to cherish the few seconds where toni’s lips are pressed against hers before toni pulls away all too quickly.

“cheryl, i love you.” toni whispers against her lips. cheryl smiles and kisses her once more.

they almost died tonight. she could’ve lost toni, she can’t lose toni, ever-

she’s not gone, cheryl, she’s right here, in front of you, telling you she loves you, and she does, she loves you so much, you thought it wasn’t possible, but she’s here-

“i love you too, toni.” cheryl whispers back. toni smiles before she kisses her again and they’re interrupted by the sound and feeling of a phone buzzing in cheryl’s front pocket. she frowns, pulling away from toni to look down, reaching into it to take out her phone, and her eyes widen when she sees betty’s number at the top.

oh god...betty, she completely forgot about everything they’ve been through the last two days-

“hello?” she croaks out as soon as she answers.

“cheryl?! thank god, no one else is answering their phones, are you okay? are you with jughead?” betty asks in a frantic voice. cheryl’s head throbs as she winces and rubs her eyebrow tiredly.
“i’m okay, betty. god, so much has happened…but are you okay? what happened with your father?” cheryl asks anxiously. it’s betty’s turn to sigh now, and cheryl feels her heart sink.

“he was arrested an hour ago.” she murmurs.

oh god...

"betty...betty, i’m so sorry..." cheryl whispers. betty hums softly.

"i know, i am, too. i’m with my mother at archie’s house, trying to calm her down...” she whispers.

cheryl’s heart aches for the despair that’s evident in betty’s voice...her family's been torn apart, and cheryl's had first hand experience with it, a family ripped apart by a murderous father...but she has no idea how to comfort betty right now.

her father was the black hood...

"betty..."

“it’s fine, i’m okay, cheryl. he’s in jail where he belongs, that's what matters. have you seen jughead?” betty asks urgently. cheryl sighs.

god, cheryl can't bring it in herself to give betty more bad news, she can't...

“a lot has happened, betty…and i don’t feel comfortable telling you over the phone. how soon can you get to the hospital?” she asks. betty inhales sharply.

“fred’s with my mother, archie and i can be there in twenty or so minutes...cheryl, why? you're scaring me-.”
“i promise i’ll explain everything, betty, just get here as soon as you can. toni and i are both here.” betty's silent for a long time before she finally responds.

“okay…see you soon.” betty says with worry, her voice shaking slightly. cheryl hangs up and looks down at her phone with a groan when she notices the huge crack at the top of it, no doubt caused by how much she’d been thrown around today, but finds herself smiling when she sees her wallpaper.

a picture of toni, her back turned to cheryl and the blankets covering her bottom half as her naked back is on full display. there’s scratches from cheryl’s nails all over her back, her pink hair fanning out onto the pillow, and cheryl sighs dreamily, wishes she could take them back to that day, cheryl waking up to toni naked and fast asleep beside her after a night full of love and passion…when things were simpler…

“What’s going on with betty’s father?” toni asks in confusion. cheryl’s attention is pulled away from her phone as she looks up at her girlfriend in despair. toni’s frowning, and cheryl doesn’t even know where to begin.

she forgot toni didn’t know anything but betty’s father…

she wraps her arms around toni’s hips and pulls her closer.

“betty’s dad is the black hood, toni.” she whispers in a low voice. toni stiffens against her, her eyes widening in surprise as she blinks rapidly at cheryl.

“What?” she breathes in shock. cheryl sighs with a nod.

“That’s what betty and i spent all that time trying to figure out, babe…they arrested him an hour ago, apparently.” cheryl says softly. toni exhales shakily, a look of complete disbelief on her face before she reaches out and runs her fingers through cheryl’s hair softly.

"god...i've never met the guy, but knowing betty and the kind of person she is...the coopers are the last people you'd expect to be capable of murder..." toni whispers. cheryl swallows the lump in her throat.

"it's the blossom blood in them...has to be." cheryl mutters. toni raises an eyebrow and shakes her head.
"not all the blossoms are bad...you and jason turned out okay." she murmurs. cheryl scoffs and looks up at toni with a sad smile.

"i burned my house down and threatened my mother-:" 

"she's abused you for the last sixteen years and threw you into a gay conversion therapy camp, and authorized you getting kidnapped! she deserved it." toni hisses. cheryl sighs again, and toni shakes her head and presses a kiss to her forehead.

"what i'm trying to say is...it's not blossom blood that's bad. betty's father is just a psychopath, like your father was. the sins of the parents don't follow the children, or however that saying goes. god, poor betty...” she says sadly. cheryl sighs and simply nods once.

“her and archie are on their way…” she says hoarsely. toni nods, her fingers falling down to cradle cheryl’s face before she tucks her thumbs under cheryl’s chin and tilts her head up.

she kisses her passionately, inhaling deeply through her nose as she does, and cheryl responds eagerly, wants nothing more than to just get lost in the feeling of toni’s lips on her own.

tries to pretend that they aren't in a hospital, aren't nursing injuries...that they're safe, at thistlehouse, or even on holiday, far away from riverdale and all it's bullshit...

was veronica aware of what her father has done? was hiram currently watching the war that was unfolding between the ghoulies and the serpents with a gleeful grin? was penelope blossom by his side, watching with concern for her daughter, or happiness that she was finally getting rid of a thorn that had been in her side for the last sixteen years?

“ god, everything is so fucked up…” toni murmurs as she pulls away, more to herself than cheryl, and the red haired girl simply nods and leans up to press a kiss to the bruises on toni’s neck.

they look horrible, blue and blotchy against toni’s tanned skin...

“does it hurt?” she whispers against her skin. toni licks her lips and shakes her head.
“not too much.” she mumbles, putting on a brave face. cheryl sighs, but grips her hand and interlaces their fingers with a tired smile.

her brave little serpent...

“let’s go to the waiting room. archie and betty should be here soon.” toni purses her lips and nods, and cheryl jumps off the bed she’s sitting on and leaves the room with her hand in toni’s, the both of them making their way to the waiting room.

toni introduces cheryl to fangs’s mother, who looks distraught with fear and panic, and the introduction is brief before silence takes over, worry gripping the three of them too much for any small talk to be made. cheryl keeps toni’s hand intertwined with her own, can feel the pink haired serpent gripping her hand tighter and tighter with each passing minute that a doctor or f.p and the serpents don’t come through that door to relieve them of their stress.

this is all too much...too much for them to handle.

ten minutes have passed before reprieve finally arrives in the shape of archie and betty, who both burst through the door and look around the waiting room wildly before betty's green eyes land on her cousin.

“cheryl!?” betty rushes over to her, and cheryl gives toni’s hand a reassuring squeeze before she lets go of her girlfriend and stands up on shaking legs, only to be almost knocked down as betty wraps her arms around her and hugs her tightly.

“cheryl, thank god, are you okay? what happened?” betty says frantically, pulling back in shock and looking at the bandage on cheryl’s forehead with wide eyes filled with concern.

and so, cheryl takes a deep breath, forces betty down into the seat beside her, and launches into her tale. she tells betty everything that happened since she walked into the jubilee to confront her father, and toni tells them everything that happened on her end, cheryl also hearing for the first time how a mob had formed outside the station, that f.p had tried to get fangs out of town with joaquin when fangs was shot by someone in the crowd...how she had been trying to reach him when her uncle had taken her...

betty and archie listen intently without interrupting, playing the perfect audience, which cheryl is
thankful for. she hates repeating herself, and she has no wish to repeat anything about the night they’ve just been through. more than anything, she wants to erase it and pretend it never happened, but it’s hard to do so when the night is still going...

god, where were the serpents?

betty looks sick by the time toni and cheryl are done talking, her face a delicate shade of green as she swallows thickly and looks up at archie with tears falling down her cheeks.

“archie...jughead could be in trouble, we have to go to the wyrm-.” she starts, but cheryl and toni both reach out to grab her at the same time.

"no!” they both yell. betty jumps in shock, and cheryl squeezes her hand with a shake of her head.

“cousin betty, it’s too dangerous! i...i know you’re scared for jughead, i understand completely, but he’ll be here soon, i know he will. you don’t want to get involved, trust me…the ghoulies are ruthless, and if you run out there now, you'll only be a distraction.” cheryl says, gripping her hands in a desperation to keep her cousin close. she can't lose anymore family members, her twin brother was dead, her father had killed himself, her mother was a fucking monster...not cousin betty too, she can't lose her...

betty purses her lips, and cheryl looks up at archie to see he’s fuming, his knuckles white with out tight his fists are as he looks at cheryl angrily.

“hiram did all this? kidnapped you and toni? hurt you both?” he says through clenched teeth. cheryl gives him a solemn nod, unsure of what else to say, and archie simply clenches his jaw and nods once before he looks down at betty.

"when jughead gets here, i’m gonna make sure he’s okay, and then i’m gonna go get ronnie away from her father.” he says firmly.

cheryl feels her heart drop.

oh god...veronica was with him, probably completely unaware of everything he's done tonight...how was veronica going to react? if her reaction to hiram revealing sierra mccoy and tom keller's affair is anything to go by, then cheryl knows she's definitely not going to react well at all...
betty nods numbly, her hands still tightly grasped in cheryl’s own as she swallows and looks at her cousin once more. cheryl gives her a small, reassuring smile as toni shifts behind cheryl uncomfortably.

“archie, hiram is dangerous, the last thing we need is you getting yourself in trouble-.” toni starts, but archie scoffs as he runs his fingers through his hair and nods.

“i know, trust me. i know, toni. but i won't sit by and let my girlfriend be unaware of what her father's doing...” archie says firmly. toni purses her lips, but says nothing else, simply looks at cheryl and grips her shoulder with a comforting squeeze. cheryl keeps her firm hold on betty, who is looking at the clock on the wall now, as if she's painfully counting each second that jughead isn't here, which she probably is. archie begins pacing after awhile, and cheryl interlaces her fingers with one of betty's hands and rests her head on toni's shoulder tiredly.

"you're cold." toni grunts, a hand reaching up to rub against cheryl's bare arm, and before she can say anything, toni's shrugging out of her jacket and draping it over cheryl's shoulders, the red haired girl slipping her arms in slowly and sniffing in the scent of leather and something that's just so toni before she returns to her previous position with her head on toni's shoulder.

"thank you, t.t." she whispers. toni simply rests her lips against cheryl's hair in response.

they stay like this in silence for a few moments, and cheryl can feel herself dozing off when toni presses a kiss to her brow and gives her a gentle nudge.

"don't fall asleep yet, baby, wait till we get home so i can keep a better eye on you." she murmurs. cheryl purses her lips and nods numbly, tries to keep herself awake, but it's hard. with each passing moment she finds herself wanting to slip into a slumber, to forget everything that's happening and just rest...

it feels like a lifetime, but after half an hour, the doors open slowly and a doctor in scrubs comes out with a weary smile as fangs's mother jumps up from her seat as if someone's lit a fire under it.

"please...please tell me my boy is okay..." she whispers in despair, coming to a stop in front of him. the doctor smiles and grips her shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze as he nods tiredly.

“mr. fogarty is one tough young man. he pulled through the surgery just fine, we managed to stop the
bleeding and remove the bullet...he’s gonna be sore for a while, so he’s gonna need plenty of rest, but i can assure you, miss fogarty, he's going to be just fine.” he says softly.

ceryl's heart soars.

fangs...the beautiful boy who saved her life not once, but twice...her friend, someone she could talk to, someone who makes her laugh all the time with his boyish charm...

he was going to live. and god, if there's anyone who deserves to live, it's fangs fogarty...

fangs’s mother begins sobbing as she throws her arms around the doctor, tears of joy falling down her cheeks as he pats her back with a chuckle. cheryl looks at toni, who is also crying as she sinks back against her chair with a shaky exhale. cheryl squeezes her hand tightly before leaning in to press a kiss to toni's temple.

"he's gonna be okay, babe..." she whispers. toni swallows thickly, tears leaking out of the corners of her eyes as she nods slowly.

cheryl closes her eyes, thanks every god she knows for keeping fangs safe, for keeping toni safe, for keeping her safe-

a loud bang causes them all to jump in shock, and cheryl's eyes move to the front door to see f.p jones walking through with sweet pea and jughead right behind him, all of them looking a little worse for wear with cuts and bruises and blood stains, but all of them alive, breathing, moving-

“oh my god! juggie!!” betty runs forward, tearing her hand out of cheryl's as she jumps into her boyfriend's arms, and jughead staggers back but wraps his arms around her tightly and buries his head into her shoulder with a wince. cheryl can see the cuts all over his face as she stands, can see the black eye as she moves her eyes to sweet pea, who similarly is covered in cuts and blood, to f.p, who is sporting a swollen brow and a bruised cheekbone-

“what happened?” toni croaks out, making her way over to them with cheryl and archie trailing behind her. f.p swallows thickly, tears shining in his eyes, and cheryl doesn't need sweet pea to say anything, can see it in both their heartbroken expressions, but he does anyway, shattering them all with a reality that cheryl's not quite sure they're ready to face yet.
“we lost the fight. the wyrm, the trailer park, the whole southside...it's ghoulie territory now.” he says, his voice shaking with anger and grief and a million other things as fangs's mother gasps behind them in shock. f.p looks to her before he's stepping toward her, his voice low as he comforts her and hugs her close, and cheryl's heart is hammering against her chest as she closes her eyes and lets her tears fall.

“oh god…”

all the serpents had just lost their homes, their trailers...they were no longer welcome on the southside, oh god…what were they going to do?

she can feel toni trembling beside her, and she opens her eyes and looks to her girlfriend to see her staring at sweet pea with a trembling bottom lip as she steps closer to him and reaches out to grip the lapels of his jacket.

“i-it’s over? w-we lost?” she breathes out in despair, eyes wide and filled with tears. sweet pea wraps his fingers around her wrists softly before he nods once.

"we lost the southside, but the serpents, we’ve still got them, toni. no one died tonight, it's a fucking miracle, but no one did. there...there was just too many of them. we retreated as soon as f.p got the okay that the serpents who stayed behind were safe.” sweet pea murmurs. toni frowns in confusion.

“the serpents who stayed behind? why didn’t everyone come to fight-.” toni starts angrily, but f.p. suddenly grips toni's shoulder as he clenches his jaw and looks at her sternly.

“i told them not to join the fight. i told them to evacuate the trailer park instead, get all the kids and the elderly to safety. there was no way we were going to win this, toni, and even if we did, hiram would find another way to take us out. my number one priority is and always will be the safety of our people…” he says firmly. toni purses her lips and simply nods once as f.p looks at cheryl and sweet pea with a sigh.

"they’re at the lakeside, it’s the only place under uktena tribe protection that can’t be touched by anyone other than an elder…your grandfather’s overlooking it, making sure everyone’s safe.” he says, nodding at toni, who licks her lips and simply nods once again.

“no serpents died tonight, and that’s all that matters. it’s a tough pill to swallow, losing the southside, but it would be harder to do so if we lost lives in the process. a few of us are battered and bruised…
but nothing major. it's a goddamn miracle.” f.p says, running his fingers through his hair as he looks at jughead, who is with betty and archie, the three of them whispering under their breath about something that cheryl can't be bothered to care about right now.

“the lakeside…are you sure we can stay there permanently?” toni asks with a frown. f.p returns her frown, but eventually nods once.

“it’s a temporary solution until i find something else. we can’t be attacked there, it’s on the northside, so the ghoulies can’t touch us there, and it’s under uktena protection, so the police can’t kick us out as long as thomas approves us being there. right now…it’s the safest place we’ve got.” f.p says firmly. toni sighs, and she squeezes cheryl's hand tightly before she's swallowing thickly, a look of guilt in her eyes as they drop down to the ground in shame.

“i’m so sorry, f.p...if we hadn’t-.” toni starts hoarsely, but f.p immediately shakes his head as he tucks a finger under her chin to raise her head high.

“hey, don’t you start! none of this is your fault, or yours, cheryl. we’re just glad we got you both out of there alive.” f.p says sternly, giving them both a small smile as he reaches out to grip their shoulders. his grip is warm, filled with care as cheryl returns his smile, finds it so strange that less than a few months ago, she hated this man with everything in her being…and yet here was, showing more care than her mother ever did in all sixteen years of her life...

“how are you two? what did the doctor say?” f.p asks with a frown. toni sighs.

“we’re fine, bruised and battered…cheryl has a concussion, so i gotta keep an eye on her.” toni says firmly. cheryl rolls her eyes, winces when it hurts her head and simply purses her lips instead as she presses a kiss to toni's temple.

“i’m fine.” she reassures her. f.p chuckles, and he pats her shoulder sympathetically.

“She’s right, cheryl, you guys have been through enough tonight…you should get home and get some rest, the fight is over...for now. the ghoulies got what they wanted, they won't be harrassing us for a while, so you’ll both be safe. swing by the lakeside tomorrow morning, see your gramps, kid. he's worried about you.” f.p says to toni. she frowns, but nods once before he runs his fingers through his hair and lets out a deep, shaky exhale.

"there'll be a mandatory serpent meeting in a few days time, i'll wait till everyone's settled
"really?" she breathes. F.P chuckles and squeezes her shoulder again.

"kid, when all of this shit dies down, you're the first person I'm putting a serpent jacket on." he says firmly. Cheryl feels like she can't breathe, but for the first time in her life, it's for a good reason.

She was becoming a Southside Serpent...it was really going to happen...

"the leather does look good on you..." Sweet Pea says, nodding down at Cheryl's arms, which are currently draped in Toni's jacket. She straightens it out with a grin.

"everything looks good on me." she teases, her voice shaking slightly with excitement. Sweet Pea rolls his eyes, and Toni takes her hand and presses a kiss to her knuckles.

"then let's make it official." she whispers. Cheryl smiles, nods once before she leans in to press a kiss to Toni's lips.

She's gonna be a Southside Serpent...

"nothing would make me happier, t.t."
the town of riverdale quickly descends into madness following the events of saturday night, and toni had kind of hoped that she and cheryl could spend the day after relaxing at thistlehouse, the both of them sore and beyond exhausted to do anything but exactly that.

but of course, it was all wishful thinking. because instead, their sunday is filled with more chaos.

cheryl and toni had gotten back to thistlehouse at around one in the morning after leaving the others at the hospital with fangs, the both of them collapsing onto cheryl’s bed and immediately falling asleep with toni setting an alarm for every two hours to check on cheryl, only to be fully woken up at seven in the morning by a text message to both their phones issuing another mandatory town meeting at nine that morning.

they had dragged themselves out of thistlehouse, feeling like complete and utter shit, but ultimately happy to be alive. nana rose and lisa had been less than happy to see cheryl and toni both so bruised and battered, but cheryl had simply told her that something big went down and she’d explain everything when she got home.

the meeting at the jubilee, however, had brought another story forward for cheryl to tell that evening when they returned to thistlehouse.

as soon as a majority of the small town of riverdale had been gathered in that hall, sheriff minetta had announced that hal cooper had been arrested and confessed to being the black hood, and toni had thanked the gods that alice and betty weren’t present as shouts of anger had filled the jubilee. hal cooper? but it couldn’t be, he was a good man, a suburban father, a good citizen, it had to be that southside serpent who was shot-
before any of the serpents could make a rebuttal to those claims, however, sheriff minetta had dropped another bomb on them all.

by arresting midge klump’s mother for attempted murder.

confusion had taken over everyone, until midge’s mother had stood and admitted that she had been the one to shoot fangs.

it’s news that shocks all of them, but news that also leaves toni feeling heartbroken. because she wanted to be mad about it, wanted to rip apart the person who hurt the boy who was like a brother to her. instead…she sympathizes.

god, if her daughter had been brutally murdered, and someone had been arrested under suspicion of said murder, toni would want revenge, too. and the guilt on that woman’s face when sheriff minetta had slapped those handcuffs on her, the tears running down her cheeks…

toni’s pretty sure she’ll never be able to erase that image from her face.

fred andrews and hermione lodge had also taken the opportunity to inform everyone that due to the recent “gang violence” (f.p had scoffed at that, glaring at hiram standing next to hermione with every serpent in that hall wishing death on him), the election would be fast tracked and held right then and there. the town couldn’t survive without a mayor, as evidenced by everything that had happened, so the election was being brought forward as soon as possible. everyone of age had quickly voted while cheryl, toni and the rest of the serpents had gone to the serpents new home on the lakeside, where over a dozen trailers were currently resting, some of them setting up power for the trailers to feed off of and lighting bonfires to protect them from the cold air.

toni had finally introduced cheryl to her grandfather, who had welcomed them both into his trailer with open arms and a smile. toni had hugged him tightly, feeling guilty over jacob’s betrayal, but one look at the bruises on her neck and thomas topaz had held her close, tears in his eyes as he murmured apologies into her ear.

“it’s not your fault, grandpa. i’m just…so sorry, i…” toni didn’t really know how to finish that sentence, but thomas had sighed and pressed a kiss to her forehead.

“jacob was always weak, little bird. i’m just sorry his violence has caused you pain.” he had
whispered into her ear.

It was around midday when they all received the message from Riverdale High telling them they were expected in the hallways of the school bright and early tomorrow morning, a loud groan coming from pretty much every Riverdale High student on the lakeside because of it. Cheryl and Toni had gone to the hospital with Jughead and Sweet Pea to visit Fangs, and F.P had finally met them there with a bag of food from Pop’s at around six, telling them that the results of the election would be announced tomorrow. F.P had also promised a mandatory Serpent meeting as soon as Fangs was discharged from the hospital, to which Fangs had frowned.

“I won’t be discharged till the end of the week.” He had said with a wince, and F.P had reached over and gripped his shoulder with a shake of his head.

“That’s okay, son. There’s no rush…The Ghoulies got what they wanted, they won’t be coming for us any time soon…Right now we gotta focus on regrouping. As soon as everything’s stable for the Serpents, we’ll have the meeting.” He had exchanged a glance with Jughead that Toni didn’t quite understand, but regardless, she had walked over to F.P and pulled him aside and out of earshot of Cheryl to ask him for a favor.

F.P had grinned and promised her he’d get it done.

Now, it’s Sunday night, a full twenty hour hours since everything had collapsed, and Cheryl and Toni are huddled up in Thistlehouse on Cheryl’s bed, the both of them simply clinging to each other tightly as Toni presses kisses to every inch of Cheryl’s skin she can reach with the red haired girl curled up against her chest.

Toni doesn’t want to move. She’d rather they both stay here for as long as possible, maybe even forever, wrapped up in each other with no pain or suffering or worry…

It hurts Toni to even think about this weekend, about everything they’ve been through. The fact that Cheryl had been put through all of that just because of her association with the Serpents makes Toni feel sick, her stomach turning every time she thinks about it, but she knows there’s nothing she can do to turn back time, and even if she could…God, she wouldn’t. Just thinking about Cheryl not being a part of her life…

The truth of the matter is that even if Cheryl had never met Toni, she’d still be in danger. Her mother was doing everything she could to make Cheryl’s life miserable, and yes, maybe she’d be safe from everything happening with the Serpents but ultimately? Toni would be…empty. What would Toni’s life be if Cheryl never came crashing into it? She wouldn’t have anyone to love like she does her…God,
what would that even be like?

at least this way, cheryl had back up…the serpents were ready to accept her as one of their own, which meant that no matter what happened now, cheryl had protection. what if she hadn’t met toni, hadn’t become friends with the serpents? she’d be left with no one and nothing to help her, and god, just the thought of cheryl being on her own…

toni can’t even fathom the idea of living in a world where she wasn’t by cheryl’s side…a world where she didn’t love cheryl blossom.

“cher?” toni whispers against her hairline. the red haired girl hums sleepily, but moves her head up to look at her with a frown.

“yeah, babe?” she asks hoarsely. toni licks her lips before she shakes her head and kisses cheryl’s brow.

“i love you. i just need you to know that.” she mumbles. cheryl smiles softly, bare lips curling up before she kisses the corner of toni’s mouth.

“i love you too, toni.” she whispers back. toni smiles, and cheryl pushes herself up further to press a kiss to her lips now, humming softly against her before she pulls away with a sigh.

“i can’t believe we’re being forced to go to school tomorrow.” she grumbles. toni rolls her eyes.

“i know. such bullshit…we can skip if you want…we’re both injured, weatherbee can’t say shit.” toni grunts out. she really doesn’t feel like having every single riverdale high student staring at the bruises on her neck, and god only knows what weatherbee has in store for them now that everyone knows the serpents had clashed with the ghoulies and lost the southside…

were they even ‘southside’ serpents anymore?

cheryl smiles, her fingers brushing over the bruises on toni’s neck that have been throbbling all goddamn day.
“do you want ice again? it helped with the pain this morning…” cheryl whispers, noticing the slight wince on toni’s face despite how hard she tries to hide it. toni purses her lips and shakes her head.

“no, i’m okay.” toni croaks out. cheryl sighs, but doesn’t press the issue, simply frowns before she leans in and presses her cold lips against the bruises. toni sighs in content as cheryl kisses every blue and purple blotch tenderly, her fingers brushing through red hair as she smiles and closes her eyes.

“That feels good.” she hums. cheryl smiles against her before she continues, her fingers brushing the skin underneath toni’s t-shirt just as gently.

god, how she wishes they could just stay here like this forever…no serpents or ghoulies or masked serial killers or elections or crazy mothers and psychotic uncles…just them two, wrapped up in each other without a worry in the world…

toni’s phone buzzes suddenly, and she sighs and simply extends her hand to grab it from the bedside table, not wanting to move far from cheryl’s lips against her neck. she sees the message is from f.p, and she grins widely as she reads the message.

serpent king [21:23]

*it’ll be done in a few days. perfect timing for her initiation.*

toni quickly clicks her phone shut as cheryl kisses her neck softly.

“who was it?” cheryl asks. toni purses her lips and shakes her head with a roll of her eyes.

“sweet pea sent a message saying he can’t wait for you to officially become a serpent. he said he’s gonna hold it over you for the rest of your life, the fact that you used to hate us.” toni says easily, and it isn’t a complete lie. sweet pea had teased cheryl at the hospital saying he was going to hold it over cheryl’s head that she used to call them names and yet she was now joining them, to which cheryl had given him the middle finger and told him that she’d changed her tune, smiling widely at toni as she had said it.

she hates keeping things from cheryl, but she wants the favor she’s asked of f.p to be a surprise for when cheryl was officially initiated into the serpents. she can’t wait to see the look on cheryl’s face-

“toni, are you sure you’re okay with me becoming a serpent?” cheryl whispers suddenly. toni frowns
and looks down at her, following her eyes as her fingers curl into toni’s shirt to pull herself up until she’s hovering over toni a little. she brushes toni’s pink locks away from her face affectionately, and toni grips her wrist and presses a kiss to her palm with a smile.

“of course i’m okay with it, baby. i mean, it’s dangerous being a serpent, and this weekend just proved that…i’m gonna be worried sick pretty much every day, but…if you feel like the serpents are your family, i’m not gonna deprive you of becoming an official part of it. you belong with us, cher.” toni says softly, and it’s true. god, after everything they went through last night, toni’s incredibly fucking nervous about cheryl becoming a serpent. it was just going to put a bigger target on her back, but cheryl needed this, and toni understood that. she wasn’t going to stop cheryl from getting something that she’d always wanted: a family.

cheryl smiles at that, her fingers brushing over toni’s jawline before she’s tracing every inch of her face fondly, her brows, her lips, her nose…

“i’ve never belonged anywhere, t.t…so for you to say that…” cheryl trails off, her voice cracking slightly as tears well in her eyes, and toni curls a lock of red hair behind her ear before she leans up slightly to kiss her, lips gently brushing over cheryl’s in a soft kiss filled with love.

“then let me say it again. you belong with the serpents, cher. you have a family now, in f.p, and juggie, and pea and fangs…in me. we’re willing to die for you, cheryl…that’s what being a serpent is. so, you have to be willing to die for us, too.” toni says in a low voice, but any doubt is erased when cheryl nods without hesitation.

“i am.” she says simply, not a trace of a lie in her tone.

toni’s pretty sure she’s never felt more proud than in this moment. just seeing how far cheryl has come…from the bitchy, head cheerleader who used that persona to cover up her despair and her sadness over a life filled with abuse and horror, to the woman she is now…someone who cares about others, who uses the abuse she’s suffered from a family that didn’t care about her to only fuel her love and compassion, a woman who was proud to stand with the people who she once thought were her enemies…a woman capable of forgiveness and love…

“i’m so proud of you, cheryl.” toni whispers. cheryl smiles.

“thank you, toni. you’ve given me so much these last few months, i don’t think i could ever thank you enough for how much you’ve changed my life. and…” cheryl exhales shakily, interlacing their fingers before she licks her lips and smiles.
“and i can’t wait to become a part of your family. being a southside serpent…i know it’s only going to bring us closer, t.t.” she whispers. toni leans up and kisses her deeply, nothing but love flooding her body before she pulls away and nudges cheryl’s nose with her own playfully.

“good… then what is the first law?” toni says with a smile. they’d spent their time at the hospital going over the serpent laws with sweet pea and fangs, the three of them patient as cheryl had dedicated each law to memory, and she’d done so rather quickly, but toni wanted to make sure…

cheryl hums softly, moving up to rest her knees on either side of toni’s body to straddle her before she’s bending down and pressing a kiss to toni’s lips with a smile.

“no serpent stands alone. and you never will, toni. not anymore…i’ll be by your side, always.” she murmurs against her lips. toni smiles fondly as she reaches up to brush cheryl’s hair away from that face she loves looking at so much…

“and the other serpents?” toni says with a raised eyebrow. cheryl smiles down at her and nods.

“can also count on me. but you’ll always come first, toni.” she says softly, but toni shakes her head, palms smoothing over cheryl’s alabaster thighs gently. she’s wearing nothing but her bra and underwear underneath her red silk robe, and toni tries not to get distracted as she roams her eyes over cheryl’s body before meeting her eyes.

“second. i always tell you, cher, the number one priority in your life needs to be-.”

“myself. i know, t.t.” cheryl mumbles, casting her eyes down with a heavy sigh. toni knows it’s hard for cheryl to put herself first, after years of penelope blossom whispering in her ear that she was useless and loveless…toni doesn’t blame cheryl for clinging to the first ounce of love she’d received from someone, for wanting that love to be the only thing in her life that mattered…but toni wanted cheryl to know her self-worth, to put herself first before anything and anyone else, including her…

she knows it isn’t going to be easy, getting cheryl to overcome something like that, but toni knows she can do it. god, cheryl was so strong…so beautiful and powerful and a million other amazing things, toni still can’t believe that she was hers…that cheryl loved her just as much as toni loved her back…

*focus, toni, you’ve gotta help her nail down the laws for her initiation…*
“What is the second law?” Toni asks huskily with a clear of her throat. Cheryl bites down on her bottom lip, deep in thought before she suddenly brightens up and leans down to press a kiss to Toni’s jawline, making her way down Toni’s neck with a deep breath in.

“If a serpent is killed or imprisoned, their family will be taken care of.” Cheryl says firmly. Toni nods as Cheryl sits back up to look down at her, and Toni can see the lust shining in her eyes, can feel how her hands move under Toni’s shirt, nails digging into her stomach playfully before she licks her lips and looks down at Toni with a smirk.

Oh no…no, no, no, she wasn’t going to distract Toni so easily-

“What is the third law?” Toni breathes, determined to make sure Cheryl knows them inside out perfectly, but God, her heart is fucking pounding as Cheryl leans back down, her teeth scraping across Toni’s collarbone painfully before she kisses the red marks lightly.

“A serpent never sheds its skin, or shows cowardice…” Cheryl trails off, and Toni just knows that she’s thinking about the ones who betrayed them last night…the ones who shed their serpent jackets so readily to join the ghoulies…

Toni ignores the hurt in her heart, instead focuses on the feeling of Cheryl’s nails digging into her skin as she licks her lips and squirms underneath Cheryl’s body with a clear of her throat.

“What is the fourth law?” Toni says firmly, her jaw clenching in anger as her hands move down to rest at her sides, clenched into tight fists. Cheryl sighs against her, but Toni’s thankful that she says nothing, simply hums softly before she’s moving further down Toni’s body.

All anger is quickly erased as Cheryl lifts Toni’s shirt up, pressing open mouthed kisses to her ribs in an effort to buy her time to think of the answer, and Toni knows that’s what she’s doing, bites down on her lip to stop herself from smiling or moaning or grabbing Cheryl and pinning her down to the mattress-

“Come on, cher, you know this…” she mumbles instead, gasping lightly as Cheryl moves under her shirt to brush her thumb across Toni’s nipple. The red haired girl blushes as she bites down on her bottom lip and looks up at her girlfriend, and Toni can see how hard she’s trying to think of the answer-
“oh! no serpent is left for dead.” she says triumphantly. toni smiles and nods, reaching up to brush cheryl’s hair from her face before her girlfriend bends down to press a kiss to her stomach. toni runs her fingers through cheryl’s hair as the girl hooks her fingers into the band of toni’s pajama shorts. toni’s breath hitches, her teeth clutching her bottom lip before she exhales shakily.

“i know what you’re doing.” she says huskily. cheryl looks up at her innocently.

“i’m not doing anything.” she says with a shrug. toni rolls her eyes.

“yes, you are. don’t distract me, cher. what is the fifth law?” toni says, trying to sound stern, but it just comes out shaky and just a pitch higher because cheryl is moving further down her body, kiss after kiss touching toni’s skin before cheryl suddenly rests her chin on toni’s stomach just below her belly button ring and looks up at her with a sad frown.

“a serpent never betrays it’s own.” cheryl mutters, the look in her eyes filled with confusion and despair… enough. toni isn’t going to let cheryl’s initiation be clouded by people who had hurt the serpents…

“They weren’t true serpents, cheryl. they were cowards. they went against every single law, they broke our trust…they don’t matter to us anymore. all that matters is you…and the fact that you’re going to be one of us. you are a true serpent, cheryl…as long as you get the last law down.” toni teases with a smile. cheryl purses her lips in hesitation before she returns toni’s smile, her nails scratching down toni’s arms lightly.

“then ask me what the last law is.” she says with a smirk. toni’s about to when cheryl suddenly hooks her fingers into toni’s pajama shorts, her body moving down with the fabric as she pulls it off toni’s tanned legs…

“wh-what is the sixth and final law?” toni stutters out, gasping as cheryl sucks a bruise on her inner thigh, teeth clamping down on the skin, and fuck, toni can feel the blood rushing to that spot, tries to ignore the throbbing between her legs because she just needs one last answer-

“hmm…in unity, there is strength.” cheryl says clearly, removing her lips from toni’s thigh with a loud pop before she does. toni simply gives her a smile and a nod, and cheryl hooks her fingers into toni’s underwear next, and toni doesn’t even bother holding back anymore.
cheryl knows the six laws, she’s fine, they can totally have a quickie-

“cher…” toni lets out a soft moan as cheryl trails kisses over her hipbones, her hand gripping toni’s shirt to push it up and expose the skin before she’s moving toni’s underwear down her legs as well. toni kicks them off as cheryl chuckles, licking her lips as she does before looking up at toni with lust filled eyes.

“do you want me to stop?” she asks, her voice hoarse.

“god, no!” toni manages to breathe out with a shake of her head, and cheryl breathes in deeply before she’s nodding to herself and hooking toni’s legs over her shoulders.

toni’s heart stops.

“whoa, cher, wait…” toni props herself up onto her elbows, raising an eyebrow as she does despite how fast her heart is racing because…this is uncharted territory for her girlfriend. granted, they’ve only had sex twice now, but cheryl hasn’t gone down on her yet… she didn’t want cheryl to do anything she was uncomfortable with.

“you don’t have to-…” toni starts, but cheryl shakes her head, drops toni’s legs and moves up to press a finger to her lips to silence her.

“i want to, toni. god, after everything that’s happened this weekend…all i can think about is loving every inch of you. just tell me if i’m doing something wrong, and let me know if you like what i’m doing, okay?” cheryl says firmly, and there isn’t an ounce of doubt or hesitation in her voice, only confirming to toni that she was telling the truth.

she wants to do this.

toni simply smirks at her before she bites down on the finger at her lips playfully.

“if i’m able to talk, if your fingers are anything to go by, i might be incoherent by the end of this.” toni says with a chuckle. cheryl grins triumphantly before she’s pressing a quick kiss to toni’s lips.
“lay back, babe.”

toni slowly settles down onto the bed with a shaky exhale, her eyes moving up to the ceiling as she feels cheryl move back down her body and grip her legs to rest them over her shoulders once more. she groans in anticipation as cheryl blows cool air over her center, her back arching slightly off the bed before cheryl rests her hands on toni’s hipbones and pushes her back down onto the bed.

“ready?” cheryl croaks out. toni simply grips her wrist on her hipbone and gives it a gentle squeeze for confirmation, and she hears cheryl breathe in a little nervously before a hot, wet tongue trails up her center-

“fuck, cher!” toni’s fingers run through cheryl’s scalp a little harshly, her hips jutting up and almost smacking into cheryl’s jaw as her legs squeeze around cheryl’s head, and toni has no idea why she’s having such a visceral reaction, but god, she doesn’t want her to stop-

“shh, relax, t.t.” cheryl says huskily, only turning toni on more as she licks her lips and nods once, not moving her eyes from the ceiling. cheryl licks up the length of her once more, and toni bites down on her bottom lip to stop herself from moaning, her fingers clutching the sheets instead so she doesn’t hurt cheryl. the girl still has a concussion, and toni had almost knocked her out with that reaction…

god, toni knew her tongue was fucking magic, but this-

“toni, talk to me, please?” cheryl says nervously, pressing a kiss to her left thigh, and toni moans softly and nods vigorously as she looks down at her.

“k-keep going, you’re-fuck, you’re perfect-god, yes!” toni’s head falls back onto the bed with a loud thump as cheryl picks up where she left off, a triumphant smirk on her face as she does. toni knows she’s simply going off what toni has done to her, and toni can’t help but feel a little smug that this was the kind of pleasure she’s been giving cheryl-

it’s barely been a few minutes, but toni can feel herself reaching her climax almost embarrassingly fast-

“i’m c-close, baby-.” cheryl moans at her words, her tongue working faster and toni can’t hold it in anymore. she lets out a strangled cry as her thighs lock around cheryl’s head, wave after wave of
pleasure causing her to cry the red haired girl’s name as she continues licking her softly, her nails scratching down toni’s stomach playfully before the pink haired serpent finally falls back down onto the bed with a breathless pant.

cheryl moves up her body with open mouthed kisses, a smile still evident on her face as she ends her journey of exploring toni’s body with a kiss to her lips.

“That good?” she asks with a grin. toni laughs, resting a hand on her forehead before looking at cheryl in awe.

“You were made to pleasure women, cheryl blossom, i hope you realize that.” she pants. cheryl laughs loudly as she kisses toni once more, a hand reaching up to cradle her cheek softly.

“That’s gratifying to hear, t.t. thank you.”

“No, thank you. jesus…” toni’s body is still throbbing with the aftershocks of her orgasm, and she finds herself wrapping an arm around cheryl’s neck to pull her down to her chest with a tired sigh.

Her heart is still hammering against her chest, and cheryl hums softly at the sound, her head tilting up to press a kiss to toni’s jaw.

“We have to make a stop at the courthouse tomorrow, toni.” she says firmly. toni frowns, looking down at her in confusion.

The courthouse? what…

“I haven’t had a chance to deliver the emancipation papers yet.” she murmurs. toni sighs in recognition before she nods.

Right…of course she hasn’t, what with unmasking a serial killer and getting kidnapped…

Emancipation papers. signed by penelope blossom…the one good thing she’s done for cheryl in sixteen years…
those papers were cheryl’s freedom.

“of course, baby. we’ll go before school, okay?” she promises. cheryl smiles, a look of complete joy in her eyes as she bites down on her bottom lip.

“once they’re delivered, it’s over, t.t. she has no legal hold on my life anymore…i’ll inherit the money daddy left me, and i can hire a full time carer for nana rose…” she says, and god, the look in her eyes…it’s like the idea of it all is overwhelming her…

“you’ll be free, cheryl. free to be yourself, to do whatever you want…i can’t wait, baby.” toni whispers. cheryl kisses her deeply, smiling against her before she pulls back and looks at her with a wicked glint in her eyes.

“what do you say to another round?” she whispers. toni blinks rapidly in complete and utter shock, and cheryl laughs and gives her a quick kiss before she hovers above the pink haired serpent.

“we don’t have to if you don’t want to, it’s just that…well, f.p said it’s not necessary for me to do the serpent dance, considering the wyrm is no longer serpent territory…” cheryl winces, and toni tries to ignore the stab of pain in her heart before it’s quickly erased by cheryl leaning in to whisper into her ear.

“but i’d like to give you a private show, t.t. what do you say?” she husks seductively, her teeth biting down on toni’s earlobe harshly.

toni’s pretty sure she gets whiplash from how quickly she nods her head.

“god, yes…”

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the days that follow are surprisingly peaceful.
They had stopped at the courthouse to deliver the emancipation papers before arriving at school, and the judge had informed her that Penelope Blossom was officially no longer her legal guardian. As for her father’s fortune, it would take two weeks to process everything. Cheryl had been a little miffed at the fact that she had to wait a little longer to afford a full-time carer for Nana Rose, but Toni had gripped her hand and told her that Lisa was worth the extra money they were paying her to stay, which Cheryl didn’t exactly disagree with... besides, it was Nana Rose’s money that was being used to pay Lisa...

Regardless, walking into Riverdale High with nothing but happiness filling every ounce of her soul, something Cheryl’s pretty sure has never happened when she’s walked through those double doors, she can’t help but find that she doesn’t care about the numerous amounts of stares they get as soon as they walk through. Everyone is, of course, eyeing the bandage on her head and the bruises around Toni’s neck, looking at the pink haired serpent in awe and even some of them in disgust, but Toni isn’t bothered, and therefore, neither is Cheryl.

Veronica had come rushing up to them with tears streaming down her face and an apology on her lips, and Cheryl and Toni had simply embraced her and promised her that they didn’t blame her for her father’s sins. Once the raven-haired girl had calmed down, she informed them that she had made a deal with her father, and Cheryl had stared at the Latina in awe as she told them that she had bought the Whyte Wyrm with hush money that the St. Clairs had apparently given Veronica after she threatened to talk to the police about what Nick had tried to do to her and Cheryl, had swapped the Wyrm for Pop’s Diner with her father. She was now the legal owner of the small restaurant, and there was apparently a basement beneath the establishment that used to be a speakeasy, one that Veronica intended to refurbish as a new hangout for the serpents.

Toni had expressed her thanks to the girl, tears in her eyes as Cheryl had pressed a kiss to her temple with a smile.

They had friends... and with their friends, they could overcome anything.

On Tuesday, Cheryl had gotten a call from the tow truck service on the northside that her convertible was there, and that there was nothing that could be done to repair it. Cheryl had spent the whole of Tuesday night in Toni’s arms weeping over the loss of Jason’s car, the last thing she truly had of it... she asked them not to destroy it, instead asked them to simply drive it to Thistlehouse so she could keep it in the garage. Perhaps one day, with a skilled enough mechanic... she could repair it.
the rest of the week, cheryl and toni had spent at the lakeside, helping the serpents set up their trailers to make the lakeside their new home. thomas had ensured them that no harm could come to them on the lakeside, that it was still under uktena tribe protection and that as long as the elders still lived, the ghoulies could not step a single foot onto the territory. they were safe there…but that didn’t stop a lot of the serpents, including toni, looking over the lakeside to the southside opposite them…the place that was no longer their home.

“the southside may have been taken from us, but the southside will always be our home. the southside is in our hearts! that’s what matters!” f.p had yelled during a gathering at the bonfire during sunset, and the serpents had roared with agreement, cheryl pulling toni close to her side as she reached her other hand out to sweet pea. he had taken her hand with a smile, giving it a squeeze before he’s pressed a kiss to both their brows affectionately.

the only person missing had been fangs, but thankfully, he was released from the hospital on friday morning with strict instructions to rest as much as possible. sweet pea had borrowed his father’s car to drop fangs off at the lakeside, f.p telling them to return after school for a mandatory serpent meeting before giving cheryl a small wink.

cheryl’s been thinking about it all day. the wink hadn’t meant nothing, she’s positive of it. today was the day…

she was going to become a southside serpent.

toni has remained tight lipped, but there’s been a glint in her eyes all morning, and even now, with the both of them impatiently waiting for their last class to finish, toni keeps looking back at cheryl with a smile that cheryl wants nothing more than interpret correctly. is she becoming a serpent today? or was the meeting something else?

finally, after what feels like a decade, the bell rings loudly, and cheryl and toni both jump out of their seats and rush toward the door, toni gripping cheryl’s hand with a grin as sweet pea waves them over at the entrance to the school.

“hey, wait!” they both come to a stop and turn as josie runs toward them, her eyes wide in shock as she jogs toward them. she ignores the stares of the other students, something both josie and kevin have had to put up with all week, and comes to a stop in front of them.

“where are you guys rushing off to?” she asks breathlessly. toni shrugs.
“emergency serpent meeting.” she mumbles. josie sighs and nods once before she looks at cheryl with a wide smile.

“wanna go to pop’s then, cheryl? we can get some lunch while you wait for your beau to return.” she teases, bumping toni’s hip with her own. toni gives her a soft smile as cheryl sighs and shakes her head.

“actually, i…kind of have to be at this meeting too, josie. i’m sorry.” cheryl says apologetically.

josie blinks a few times in surprise before she’s looking at cheryl with wide eyes.

“oh, are…cheryl, are you a southside serpent now?” she asks. cheryl frowns at the tone of her voice, and she knows she’s not making it up when she sees toni look at josie in surprise.

“like it’s a bad thing?” toni asks with a scoff. josie licks her lips, but raises her hands in surrender.

“no, i’m just…surprised, i guess. uh, have fun.” josie says nothing more, begins walking away as cheryl watches her go with a frown.

what kind of reaction was that? did josie have a problem with her joining the serpents? why? after everything the serpents had done for her mother after her affair had been exposed…

“i told you people were gonna start seeing you in a different light…” toni mumbles, her hold on cheryl’s hand tightening. cheryl sighs, tries her best not to think about how her best friend has essentially given her the cold shoulder as she turns to look at toni with a smile.

“it’s fine. let’s go, before we’re late.”

cheryl clambers onto the back of toni’s bike as sweet pea peels out of the school’s parking lot, toni right behind him. cheryl closes her eyes and simply feels the wind on her skin, her cheek pressed against the leather back of toni’s jacket…
she’ll be wearing one of her own soon…maybe even today.

why had josie reacted like that, though? did she seriously have a problem with cheryl joining the serpents? cheryl needed to text her, ask her what was wrong, as much as it annoyed her that josie was having any sort of negative reaction to cheryl doing something she wanted to do, she knows it's only going to hurt the both of them more if she pushes her away. she’d rather talk to josie about this properly than let the friendship between them crash and burn…

they arrive at the lakeside ten minutes later, cheryl’s arms loosening around toni’s waist as she swings her leg off and reaches for her phone in the pocket of her black shorts.

you [15:20]
hey…are you upset about me joining the serpents? if you are…i don’t know what to say, josie. this is something i really want to do, not for toni, but for myself…i hope you aren’t mad. i don’t want this to ruin our friendship…

“everything okay?” cheryl looks up just as toni removes her helmet and swings her right leg off her bike until she’s sitting on the seat facing cheryl, the helmet resting in her lap as she looks at cheryl with a frown. cheryl simply nods, clicking her phone shut as she shoves it into her back pocket with a smile.

she wasn’t going to let whatever josie’s problem was interrupt her happiness over becoming a serpent…cheryl’s wanted this for so long now…

“yeah…everything’s fine.” she unclips her helmet and hands it to toni, who smiles as she takes it and rests it on the back of her bike. she hangs her own on the handle before she spreads her legs and opens her arms for her girlfriend. cheryl smiles and steps forward, standing in the space between her legs as she hugs the pink haired serpent to her chest and runs her fingers through her hair.

“t.t…am i becoming a serpent today?” cheryl murmurs. toni presses a kiss to her collarbone before she pulls back to look at cheryl with a wide smile.

“you sure are, baby. you ready to recite the laws?” she asks. cheryl takes a deep breath in nervously before she nods.

she knows the laws, she’s been repeating them all week to make them stick in her brain…she’s got this. but this made it official.
she was getting her jacket today.

toni takes her hand and jumps off the bike, leading cheryl toward the small crowd of serpents by the lakeside, some of them skipping rocks as the others enjoy a few beers. it’s so familial, the way all the serpents are laughing with each other despite everything they’ve lost…so strange, that a gang like this were always so positive…

cheryl wants nothing more than to become part of their world. and now she was moments away from doing so…

f.p is standing with sweet pea and jughead, all three of them looking up at their approach as f.p smiles and reaches out to grip cheryl’s shoulder.

“you’re becoming a southside serpent today, cheryl blossom. i hope you’re ready.” he says softly. cheryl holds her head high.

“i am.” she says simply. she has to prove herself in front of the serpent king...

cheryl’s positive that part of her will never forget what f.p had done to her family, to jason…but has for forgiveness…

she understood why he did what he did, now that she sees the serpents all around her…if f.p had failed them, so many people would fall…she understands now. but the truth of the matter is, he did play a part in jason’s death…and cheryl can’t forget that no matter how hard she tries.

he was a good man…a good man stuck in a horrible situation. and now that cheryl’s been in a few of her own, she gets it.

f.p nods with a chuckle, looking at her fondly before he nods at sweet pea.

“go get fangs, he won’t want to miss this...besides, i’ve got another announcement to make before we initiate cheryl.” f.p winks at her, but cheryl frowns at the thought of this other announcement, and so do sweet pea and toni. jughead, however, sighs in resignation as he gives his father’s shoulder a squeeze. f.p simply gives him a small smile before he’s walking away toward a few of the older
serpents, and toni grips cheryl’s hand in her own.

“what other announcement?” sweet pea asks in confusion. jughead shakes his head.

“you’ll find out in a second.” he murmurs. the red head turns to face her girlfriend, and toni surprises her by leaning up to kiss her softly before she pulls back.

“i’ll be back, okay?” she whispers. cheryl nods once, and toni lets her go and makes her way toward f.p, who turns to face her with a smile and a nod. cheryl watches them with a frown, feeling a little confused and left out on whatever is going on when she hears jughead chuckle behind her.

“don’t worry, it’s nothing bad.” she turns to face him, and he smiles at her softly, the bruises on his face shining under the sunlight as he squints his eyes and reaches out to squeeze her arm.

“i’m glad you’re joining us, cheryl. we could use the numbers and…” jughead takes a deep breath in before his smile grows wider.

“and i think you really fit in with us. the serpents would benefit greatly with a blossom on their side.” he says firmly. cheryl smiles before she rolls her eyes and crosses her arms over her chest.

god, if you had told her a year ago that she’d be standing with jughead jones, about to join his gang of delinquents…it seems like such a long time ago that jughead jones didn’t even have the pleasure of taking up a spot in her mind and yet now…

“and to think, less than a year ago i was slapping you across the face and beating my fists against you.” she says, a hint of regret lacing her tone. she hadn’t hurt him that day she had learned that f.p was arrested for jason’s murder, but she still reacted without thought, slapping jughead right across the face…

jughead’s smile fades as he shakes his head with a sigh.

“hey, don’t worry about it. after everything you went through, losing jason, thinking my father was the one who did it…i understand why you did. i’m actually surprised you didn’t kick my ass harder.” cheryl blinks back her tears with a watery chuckle, and jughead’s smile returns as he gives her a simple nod.
“to new beginnings.” he says, holding his hand out for her to take, which cheryl does without hesitation.

“to new beginnings.” she whispers, giving his hand a squeeze as she shakes it. her phone buzzes in her back pocket, and cheryl behind her for it, frowning as she looks down at the message that comes through from josie.

josie mccoy [15:27]
i’m not mad, cheryl! i’m just surprised more than anything…but if this is what you want, then i support you! how about we talk about this at lunch tomorrow? bring toni with you!

cherl smiles at the little kissy face emoji after josie’s text, and she sends a quick one back confirming that she’ll let josie know about lunch tomorrow as soon as possible.

everything was fine, she shouldn’t have doubted josie, the girl’s been by her side for years now…

“everything okay?” jughead asks. cheryl smiles up at him and nods.

“yeah…josie’s just is surprised i’m joining the serpents…” jughead chuckles, and he’s about to say something when someone yells out to the left of them.

“hey! look who i found!” cheryl turns as sweet pea and fangs make their way toward them, fangs grinning widely as he limps toward them with a slight wince taking over his features with each step. as soon as he’s close enough, cheryl wraps her arms around him in a gentle hug, fangs sighing against her tiredly.

“How are you feeling?” she asks softly, worry for the young boy gripping her, but he sighs before he shrugs.

“eh, getting through it. i’ll be okay…i heard someone’s becoming a serpent.” he teases, punching her shoulder lightly. cheryl smiles, and sweet pea reaches out and grips her other shoulder tightly.

“We’re happy to have you, red.” he says gruffly. fangs grins.
“ditto.” cheryl smiles at them fondly, tries to blink back her tears, but one slides down her cheek before she can stop it.

they really want her to join…they want her to be part of their family, to have her join their gang-

“hey, no crying, red! come here!” fangs says with a chuckle before he pulls her into a hug, sweet pea joining in before he eventually reaches out and grabs jughead to drag him into it as well.

cheryl rests her chin on fangs’s shoulder, trying her best not to hurt them as she wraps her other arm around jughead’s neck. her chest is pressed against sweet pea’s body, and all three boys are hugging her so tightly, she almost…

god, she almost feels like it’s jason hugging her…the same love he gave her being felt in this embrace…

“wow, i feel left out!” cheryl pulls back to see toni making her way back toward them, a wide smile on her face, and cheryl feels nothing but affection flood her entire body at the sight of her.

this girl has changed her life so much…how did cheryl get so lucky to have toni crash land into her life and fall in love with her so readily? it all just seems too good to be true…

fangs reaches out and drags toni into the group hug as soon as she gets close enough, cheryl letting him go to wrap her arm around toni’s waist instead.

“shut up and get in here, tiny.” he grumbles. toni chuckles as she leans closer to press a kiss to cheryl’s cheek. the five of them stay wrapped in each other’s embrace for a few moments before jughead chuckles and pulls back, looking at each of them fondly.

“southside five, huh?” he says with a grin. fangs and toni laugh as sweet pea grins and ruffles the beanie on jughead’s head.

“you’re damn right we’re the southside five.” he says proudly. cheryl can’t help but grin.
“i like the sound of that.” she says with a smirk. toni grins at her, about to say something before they hear the sound of a loud whistle behind them. they all turn to see f.p standing on a small wooden stack near a flag that has a woman and the word ‘serpentina’ written at the bottom of it. he whistles loudly again, getting the attention of the serpents around him.

“listen up now! all right, listen up!” f.p yells. all the serpents gather around now, the ones at the lake stepping away from the water as f.p looks around at all the serpents with a smile. cheryl’s heart skips a beat, and she crosses her arms over her chest to try and calm her nerves, digging her nails into her bicep as she does.

this is it…

“some sixty years ago, the very first serpent meeting took place on these same riverbanks!” f.p shouts as he looks to thomas topaz, who gives him a smile and nod as he raises the beer in his hand. cheryl sees toni smile fondly at him before they both turn their attention back to f.p.

“it makes sense that this is where we gather now! where i…” f.p trails off, swallowing thickly as his attention suddenly turns to the five kids standing to the right of him.

“where i say my goodbye! jughead, would you step up here, son?” f.p says, clearing his throat as he raises his hand to wave jughead forward.

cheryl’s heart drops, and she looks at toni in surprise, watches as the pink haired serpent looks at jughead with a similar look of complete and utter shock on her face. jughead sighs and slowly makes his way toward his father, the look on his face filled with sadness, but acceptance. cheryl has no idea what’s going on.

says his goodbye? f.p…f.p was leaving? but why? what happened? the serpents needed him now more than ever, he couldn’t just leave…

f.p smiles at jughead sadly before he’s looking at all of the serpents once more.

“i’m retiring from the serpents!” he yells. there’s shouts of surprise, of anger, of shock all around them, and cheryl sees fangs and sweet pea exchange frowns, feels toni grip her hand and squeeze it tightly-
what did this mean? was cheryl not becoming a serpent today after all? oh god-

“whoa! i know it’s sudden, and i know…i know it’s not what some of you want to hear! i’ll still be around, i’ll still be helping the serpents as best as i can! but only as a soldier!” f.p says firmly, and he grips jughead’s shoulder, giving his son a smile before he claps his hand against jughead’s chest.

“now, my boy…my boy has never stopped fighting for this crew! he’s the one who came up with the plan that saw us all survive saturday night! the one who drove penny and the ghoulies away from the wyrm with a molotov cocktail without fear or hesitation! which is exactly why i’m giving you the mantle.” f.p turns to look at jughead now, pride shining in his eyes, and jughead jones raises his head high as he gives his father a firm nod of acceptance. f.p smiles before he’s looking at sweet pea, fangs, toni and cheryl, and he gives toni a small nod before he waves her forward. cheryl watches as her girlfriend smiles at her before she’s making her way forward, pulling something out of her bag as she does.

what the hell is going on?

“and now, as your first official duty as serpent king…” f.p holds his hand out, and toni hands him what looks like a red leather jacket with the southside serpent insignia on the back of it-

cheryl’s heart stops.

oh god.

oh god, this is it.

a red jacket? they got her a red jacket-

cheryl laughs weakly as fangs chuckles and grips her shoulder with a wide grin. toni turns and makes her way back to cheryl, winking at the red head as she does, and fuck…

fuck, cheryl fucking loves her-

“i think you know what to do with this. take it.” f.p says to jughead, who grins before he takes the
jacket from his father’s hands.

jughead jones was the new serpent king.

there’s loud cheering all around, some of the serpents looking a little apprehensive, but the rest looking happy with the choice of their new leader, and toni comes to a stop beside cheryl.

“a red jacket, t.t.?” cheryl whispers in her ear. toni laughs and turns to face her.

“you really think we were gonna let cheryl bombshell represent the southside in anything but her signature color?” she teases. cheryl blinks back her tears, nothing but gratitude gripping her as she shakes her head and kisses toni passionately.

“all right. all right.” jughead says, raising a hand to stop the cheers, and he looks to f.p with a bright smile.

“all i can say is…i love you, dad.” he says softly. f.p blinks back tears as he nods, and jughead looks around at the rest of the serpents proudly.

“and the serpents will not die out! not on my watch!” he yells. the serpents roar in approval, and jughead nods before he looks to cheryl and holds his hand out for her to take wordlessly. cheryl takes a deep breath in before she makes her way toward him with a smile, toni, sweet pea and fangs cheering and clapping loudly behind her.

she comes to a stop in front of him, and jughead grins as he leans in close to whisper into her ear.

“are you ready?” he asks kindly. cheryl purses her lips and nods numbly.

she’s got this.

“what is the first law?!’ jughead yells, his grip tightening on the red jacket in his hands. cheryl bares her teeth and yells right back at him.
“no serpent stands alone!” she screams. the serpents roar in approval, and jughead raises his hand to silence them.

“what is the second law?!” he screams.

“if a serpent is killed or imprisoned, their family will be taken care of!” more screams of approval.

“what is the third law?!” jughead shouts, but the smile creeping onto his face is evident as cheryl smirks.

“a serpent never sheds its skin, or shows cowardice!” cheryl screams that one as loudly as she can, and the serpents only get louder as jughead nods his head, the grin on his face only widening proudly.

“what is the fourth law!?”

“no serpent is left for dead!” she hears sweet pea roar loudly behind her, and jughead holds up the jacket, cheryl’s eyes falling onto the serpent curled around the back of it.

hers, that is hers…

“what is the fifth law?!”

“a serpent never betrays it’s own!” cheryl turns to look at toni now, watches as she raises a fist and screams in approval along with the other serpents. cheryl smiles at her before she looks back at jughead, who holds his head high and gives her a nod before he holds his hands up to silence the serpents, all of them falling quiet at the signal of their new serpent king.

“what is the sixth and final law?!?” jughead yells, his voice clear and concise.

cheryl feels nothing but pride sweep her.

“in unity, there is strength!” she roars. jughead raises the jacket high and looks to the other serpents.
“in unity, there is strength!” he screams. the serpents repeat the mantra as loud as they can, cheryl joining them, and the serpents begin shouting as jughead holds open the jacket and gives cheryl a small nod.

cheryl takes a deep breath in before she turns and slides her arm through the right sleeve.

it fits like a glove.

the jacket immediately warms up her skin as she slides her other arm in, and she shrugs the jacket forward until it’s resting over her shoulders comfortably. she pulls her hair out from underneath it, the red of hair contrasting brilliantly against the jacket as she looks out to toni, who watches her with prideful tears in her eyes and a gigantic smile on her face.

“serpents! our newest member: cheryl blossom!” jughead shouts, and the serpents all around her scream in approval, some of them raising their drinks to her as f.p watches her proudly.

she’s done it.

she’s officially a southside serpent.

“now let’s celebrate!” jughead yells with a laugh, and music immediately begins playing out over speakers next to the trailer of one of the serpents, all of them rushing forward to shake cheryl’s hand and welcome her into their family. cheryl learns a few of their names, smiles at each and every one of them and thanks them before she finally reaches the five people she cares about more than anything.

sweet pea cheers and wraps his arms around her waist, lifting her and spinning her around in a circle as cheryl laughs and hugs him close.

“welcome to the crew, red!” he whoops, putting her back down with a grin. fangs laughs and hugs her close, simply swaying slightly on the spot before he presses a kiss to her hair.

“you’re officially one of us, cheryl!”
“it’s about time!” jughead says, giving her a small wink as she pulls away from fangs with a smile. f.p chuckles beside him and raises his drink to cheryl.

“i agree.” he says simply. cheryl smiles at him sadly, and she moves forward, hesitating for only the briefest moment before she wraps her arms around both jughead and f.p in a hug.

“thank you.” she whispers into both their ears. jughead rubs her back warmly as f.p chuckles in her ear.

“no, cheryl. thank you. you’ve done so much for the serpents, especially after everything i’ve done to your family…i can’t thank you enough.” f.p whispers. cheryl pulls back with a sad smile.

“why did you retire?” she asks softly. he sighs, returning her smile with fatigue.

“it’s about time i step down. i’m getting old, cheryl…making bad decisions left, right and center. i almost accepted penny’s deal without any plan of attack, and jughead…he’s the one who came up with the plan to have serpents stay back and clear out the trailer park, the one who threw a molotov cocktail to get penny and the ghoulies away from the wyrm long enough for us to clear out…he’s a smart kid. if anyone can lead us, it’s him.” he grips jughead’s shoulder proudly.

“don’t worry, cheryl. dad’s not going anywhere…and besides, you should be celebrating. someone’s waiting for you.” jughead says, nodding behind her. cheryl turns to see toni making her way toward cheryl, a small smile lighting up her beautiful features. cheryl’s heart pounds against her chest at the sight of her.

she’ll never get over just how fucking beautiful toni topaz is…

“you’re officially a southside serpent now, cheryl blossom. how do you feel?” toni asks, wrapping her arms around cheryl’s waist and looking down at the jacket around her shoulders with a smirk. cheryl wraps her arms around toni’s neck before she leans forward to rest her forehead against toni’s lightly.

“i’ve never been happier, toni.” cheryl whispers truthfully, her heart hammering against her chest with emotion. she blinks back tears of happiness, but they fall regardless, and toni reaches up and brushes them away with her fingers gently.
“i love you, cheryl. and i’m so unbelievably proud of you.” she whispers, gripping the lapels of cheryl’s jacket.

cheryl smiles, and she leans in and kisses toni deeply, her hands reaching up to cradle toni’s face as she pours every ounce of gratitude, of passion, of love into this one kiss as she can. toni pulls her closer with a whine, and cheryl finds herself thinking only one thing.

that no matter what lies ahead of them, no matter what happens now…her and toni can get through this.

together.

they both pull away with a gasp, breathing each other in before cheryl smiles and closes her eyes, resting her forehead against toni’s once more.

“i love you too, toni topaz.”

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