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Miles to Go

by greenlights_and_rabbitholes

Summary

A Falice Detective/Cop AU in which FP is an undercover cop primarily busting crime on the Southside and Alice is the high-strung detective trying to repair her personal life. When the Black Hood strikes in Riverdale, the two are thrown together into the Black Hood's sick and twisted game, especially when he makes a personal attack on Alice. Will they be able to unmask the killer and solve his riddles on time? Read on to find out...

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Chapter One - First Blood

MILES TO GO

Chapter One – First Blood

The room was filled with crates all carrying Jingle Jangle. The blonde paced back and forth, waiting for her delivery boys to show up. It was 9:15, and this delivery was due by midnight at the latest. She had been waiting to make this deal for a while, since Clifford Blossom was pegged down from the murder case and she was put in charge of the dealing. Despite her new position of power, it was still risky dealing in this side of Riverdale.

The door behind her opened, and she turned to find a pair of Serpents walking in. One of the men she recognized (she saw him almost every night in the Whyte Wyrm), the other….was new.

“You boys are early.” Penny exclaimed as she walked over to them. “I’m impressed.”

“We know this deal’s important to you. Besides, we need to give our new rookie here some time to know our business.” Tall Boy explained as he nudged the unfamiliar man next to him. Penny smirked and eyed the stranger.

“You can refer to me as the Snake Charmer.” she extended her hand out to him. He didn’t take it.

“Let’s just get this over with.” he replied, rolling his eyes. Penny coldly brought her hand back to her side, and she walked back over to the crates, gesturing the men to follow her.

“These crates need to go to Greendale before midnight. You got other people with you?”

“Just out back, yeah.”

“And only Serpents?” she asked, stopping in her tracks to glare at the men. Tall Boy glanced over at the new Serpent.

His hand began shaking. What if this goes wrong? What if she figures out why I’m really here? It was reminding him too much of what happened in….

“Hey….you alright?” Tall Boy asked him, snapping him out of his thoughts.

“I’m fine.” he mumbled nervously.

“Alright boys,” Penny snapped her fingers at them and whirled her finger around in the air. “Let’s get this shit loaded up.” Tall Boy and the new Serpent began to move towards the crates. But before the new Serpent could get his hands on the crates, Penny took his arm and rolled up his sleeve to examine his forearm.

“Where’s you tattoo? Aren’t all Serpents supposed to have tattoos?” Shit. Is she catching onto me?

“I haven’t figured out where I want it yet,” the stranger spoke, pulling his arm back. He looked at Tall Boy, trying to figure out how to take this next step.

“Should we open up the garage door?” he continued, pointing to the garage door behind his partner. Penny scoffed behind him.

“Tall Boy, please tell me he’s joking.” She was practically chuckling. “Tell me, where exactly did
“Find this one?”

“Unimportant…” Tall Boy defended, which shut her up. “And he’s got a point,” he gestured to his partner, “our car’s out back here behind this door.”

“Would’ve been nice if you stated that earlier, dumbass,” Penny brought her hands together, looking back and forth between the two men. She sighed and moved past the new Serpent towards the garage door. “Fine, just open the door, but we need to get these crates out. We are on a schedule here.”

“Whenever you’re ready.” Tall Boy asked the Serpent. He gave Tall Boy a thumbs up, and Tall Boy pulled the chain, opening the garage door. Penny expected the lot to be empty with only their truck. Instead, she was harshly greeted with blaring red and blue lights and dozens of police officers standing outside pointing guns at her.

“Put your hands up! Stay where you are!”

“What—what the fuck is this?” Penny stuttered as she slowly lifted her hands in the air. She turned to face the new Serpent, but he brought her hands behind her back and pushed her face down onto one of the crates, handcuffing her.

She tried to find words, but she was baffled, shocked. The Serpent, or whoever he was, smirked at her and pulled out something looking like a black wallet. She didn’t even have to guess what was inside, for part of her knew already what he was.

“You’re fucking PD?”

“Consider yourself under arrest, Snake Charmer.” FP replied, showing her his Riverdale Police ID card and pulling her off the crate. He led her over to where the other officers were waiting.

“She’s all yours” he stated as he handed her off to one of the officers, who began stating her Miranda Rights. FP watched as Penny was shoved into one of the cars, glaring at him. Officers behind him began to investigate the crates. Tall Boy joined his side and watched the Riverdale Police at work.

“This is the last time the Serpents do you a favor, Jones,” he muttered so no one else could hear the conversation. “People on the Southside are starting to question your loyalties.” FP rolled his eyes and turned to face Tall Boy.

“Look, I’m not in charge of what Keller gives me for cases. I do this so I can prevent the Serpents from ending up behind bars. I catch real criminals.”

“That’s what you said about Keller last time…” And FP knew he was right. Keller has been making him bounce up and down every corner of Northside and Southside, playing the role of the gang member to turn the drug dealers in. And it’s been happening for almost 7 years.

“How many more cases do you think he’s gonna make you do?”

“I don’t know.” And that was the truth. Tall Boy clapped FP on the back and gave him a soft smile.

“Well, if you’re all done for tonight, could use some company at the Whyte Wyrm.” The offer made FP roll his eyes.

“You realize I’m supposed to be 3 years sober now, right?” Tall Boy backed away.

“You do you, Jones. Have a good night.” He said, waving goodbye as he walked off, FP watching
him.

He’s got a point, he thought to himself. How many more times is Keller gonna make me do his dirty work? Wasn’t I supposed to be done by now?

His phone buzzed in his pocket. FP pulled it out to find no one other than Keller calling him. He slid the “Slide to Answer” button and spoke.

“Yeah, Keller. It’s me.”

“You got the Snake Charmer taken care of?”

“Got her in a car to the station now.” he answered as he began to head over to his truck. With his free hand, he rubbed his forehead, trying to remove the sudden small headache he was getting.

“Good work, Jones. Come by my office tomorrow morning, and I’ll follow up with you on where to go next.”

“Wait, what’s next?”

“To discuss your next job. Just meet me tomorrow at 10.”

He wasn’t in a mood to fight with Keller now. So he just simply replied, “Okay.”

The conversation ended and FP got into his truck. He placed the keys into ignition but didn’t turn the truck on. He needed a moment to think, to breathe.

How many more, Keller?

Minutes later, he turned on the ignition and drove out of the scene.

XXXXXXXXXX

The man waited outside of Pop’s in the early dawn of morning. He had just witnessed his target walking in with his youthful son. He wanted to follow them in, but he figured it would be too soon. No, let them have their moment of peace. Their calm before the storm.

He waited about 10 to 15 minutes before he slowly made his way to the entrance of Pop’s, wielding the gun in his hand.

He watched as the son went into the bathroom. Perfect.

The hooded figure opened the door and attacked.

XXXXXXXXXX

FP nervously sat in Keller’s office, drumming his fingers on the arm rest. Where the hell was he? It was practically 8 minutes after 10.

Tom Keller entered the office, removing his hat and placing it on the table in front of FP.

“Sorry for the wait, Jones. Something’s happened at Pop’s.” he explained as he sat down in his chair. FP stopped drumming his fingers and leaned forward.

“What happened?”
“Not your concern right now. Good thing we’re talking now, because this is the only free time I have for this morning.” FP nodded, sitting back into his chair.

“So what did you want to discuss with me?” Keller let out a frustrated breath, then spoke.

“At the moment, I...frankly, don’t have anything more for you.” FP raised his eyebrow at Keller. So this is good news.

“That doesn’t mean you’re off the hook entirely. I might need you to come onto to something later.” FP scoffed, and crossed his right ankle over his left knee.

“Don’t lose all hope on me now, Jones. I might make this your last one.” But FP didn’t look at Keller. He looked down at his foot and began drumming his fingers again.

“You said that about the last case, Sheriff.” FP replied coldly. Keller sat there with his mouth slightly hung open. He brought his hands down onto the desk and closed his lips tightly together.

“FP--”

“And the case before that.” FP interrupted, bringing his foot back down and leaning forward again. “And the case before, and every other case before.” his voice began to escalate. Before he completely lost it, he clenched his fist, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. He lightly brought his fist down to his knee and opened his eyes. Keller looked pissed.

“Consider this your best interest, Jones.” Keller stated, tapping his finger on the desk. “Be lucky you’re spending your time busting other criminals instead of spending a sentence behind bars, like it was originally planned for you. So lose your temper at me again, and that’s where you’ll end up.”

As much as he wanted to reach across that desk and strangle Keller, the man had a point. If it weren’t for this job, he would never see the light of day. Nor would he even be given the opportunity to see Jughead and Jellybean again.

“Look,” Keller spoke again, softer this time, “I know you want out of this place. You want to see your kids again, I get it.” He stopped for a moment, pondering the right words to say, before he continued, “But I need you, FP. You’re one of the best in this force. If you walk out now....”


“Glad we could see eye to eye on this. Go home and take some time off, FP. I’ll call you when I need you.” he extended his hand out. FP hesitated for a moment before taking it. They shook hands and FP stood up.

“You know where to find me.” he called out to Keller, saluting to Keller with two fingers before exiting.

As he walked out of the office, he bumped shoulders with someone close by. A blonde woman about his age met his gaze. Her eyes were what caught his attention - they were cold. Time seemed to slow down when he saw her. FP didn’t know what to think of her. He couldn’t tell if she was angry, or puzzled, or some combination of both. But for some odd reason, he couldn’t stop staring at her. Had he seen her somewhere before?

He shook himself out of it and continued on his path, out of the station, back to his truck, not even bothering to look back at the woman.

XXXXXXXXXXXX
Who the hell does this man think he is? He just casually strolls out of Keller’s office and bumps into me without an apology? And he just stares…..he just fucking stares……

Part of Alice wanted to go after the man and give him a piece of her mind, but she had to stay focused. She needed to talk to Sheriff Keller about what happened at Pop’s.

Shaking herself out of her thoughts, she turned her heel and strode into Keller’s office. She barely gave Keller any time to acknowledge that she was in the room before she spoke.

“Keller, we need to discuss the shooter at Pop’s.”

“Jesus, Alice. I don’t have time for this now.” he responded, bringing a hand to his face. She sat down across from him and continued.

“It’s obvious this masked….murderer had a motive to shoot Fred Andrews. If we can track him, if you have ME track him…”

“Alice, slow down. We don’t even have a lead on this case yet.” he cut her off, motioning her to stop. “We don’t know why this masked man shot Fred. You’re getting way too ahead of yourself.”

“That shouldn’t discourage me from being ambitious!” Alice, remembering the files she had in her hands, leaned forward and dropped the files on the desk.

“You put me in charge of the Jason Blossom murder case, and look how that ended! With Clifford Blossom behind bars, thanks to me! How is this going to be any different?”

“Alice, are you just wanting to hop on the case to distract yourself from what’s going on with you and Hal?”

That question felt like a jab. She sat back, most of her courage fading. Alice shouldn’t have told him about so much about her personal life. Especially about her separation with Hal. She didn’t answer. She didn’t even look at Keller. She clenched her fist tight, almost to the point where her nails could dig into her palm.

“How’s that going, by the way?” Keller asked. Alice sighed. She really didn’t feel comfortable discussing this right now.

“There’s still some matters we need to settle.” And she left it at that. She released her fist and looked at Keller. “I need this case Keller. Just give me a chance. I can get a lead.”

“And we need time, Alice. I don’t even know if there’s someone available to help you out with this.” Alice stood up and slammed her hands on the table.

“Well, just give me someone, anyone to work with! Hell, I’ll work with the custodian if I have to. Would that be enough to convince you that I am fucking stable enough to catch this maniac?” Her breathing felt heavier and shakier.

Keller stood up from his spot and opened up one of her files. He took a moment before giving her his final decision.

“Let me examine these, then I’ll get back to you. Now, if we’re done here, I have to go question Archie Andrews about what happened.” He began to grab his hat, but Alice placed her hand on top of his wrist, stopping him.

“Then let me do that!” she replied. Keller rolled his eyes and exhaled.
“Okay, fine.” he responded, handing her the examination folder. “He’s at the hospital right now. Just don’t push the boy too much. He’s been through enough already.”

“Thank you.” Alice smiled. Proud of her accomplishment, she walked out of his office and shut the door.

“Jesus…” Tom groaned as he sat down. First FP Jones started questioning his authority, and now Alice Cooper was jumping down his throat about a case that hasn’t even grown yet. They practically deserved each other.

Tom contemplated on what to do. Who ever thought it would be a great idea to attack Fred Andrews at Pop’s seriously had something wrong. But would this person strike again? Who would even be their next target?

But most importantly, what was he going to do about FP? He didn’t need him at the time being for any more drug busting. He was stuck. There was actually nothing he could have FP do.

Unless…..UNLESS……

Tom opened another of Alice’s folders, scanning the information from the Clifford Blossom fiasco. This man was dealing with drugs. Drugs that FP would know about.

Maybe he did have one last job for FP after all….

XXXXXXXXXXX

As the sun began to go down in suburban Greendale, Jennifer Gibson, who was hiding out under the name Geraldine Grundy, watched her student leave from her house. The piano lesson had gone better than planned. He was starting to get better.

She went upstairs to go draw herself a bath. It had been a long day for her, and she deserved it. As the water began to fill up the tub, she headed into her bedroom to change into her robe and fixed her bun.

As she began to head back into the bathroom, she heard a noise from downstairs. Jennifer stopped in her path, her breath hitching.

“Hello?” she cried out. Jennifer contemplated on whether or not to just ignore the noise and head into the bathroom. But she couldn’t let it go.

She let the tub be and headed down the stairs, being sure to go slow.

“Hello?” she called out again. “Is anyone here?” She reached the bottom step, noticing her front door wide open. She looked around - no one was here. Maybe the wind blew it open.

Jennifer hurried to the door and shut it, locking it tight. She leaned against the door and closed her eyes, praying that whatever the hell was going all would just end.

A high pitched noise from the kitchen caught her attention. I don’t remember putting on a tea kettle, she thought.

Jennifer opened her eyes, and for the first time, noticed the dirty footprints on her floor, leading to her kitchen. She followed the path and found her kettle whistling at full steam. That wasn’t what left her unsettled about the settle. What left her unsettled was the message scribbled out for her, taped her microwave.
YOUR SINS ARE MUSIC TO MY EARS.

“What the hell---”

And she was struck in the head with something, sending her glasses flying off her face and knocking her to the floor. Jennifer couldn’t comprehend what was happening; her head felt groggy. She tried to turn around and look at her attacker, but she couldn’t move. The pain was too much.

Her attacker took his foot and flipped her over before getting out of her view. She was looking up at the ceiling, but she couldn't focus. The attacker came back into her view and her eyes widened.

This attacker wore a black ski mask and he held the boiling hot kettle in his eyes.

Jennifer screamed, but not for long as the killer brought the kettle to her head, repeatedly.

XXXXXXXX

The TV blared in the background while FP slept on the couch, cradling his empty Chinese takeout box in his hand. He spent the rest of the day at the trailer cleaning his mess of a bedroom. He ended up shoving a majority of his files in a shoebox and placed that on the top shelf of his closet, next to his army memorabilia. He ordered some food around 5:30 and turned on his TV to distract himself from his thoughts, but eventually, he passed out.

The only times he saw Gladys was when he slept. The incident recurred in his dreams like a broken television that he could never turn off. Her face pierced his mind; it was a blessing and a curse all in one. The way her body fell onto the pavement with those men standing over her. The way her face lost all the light, especially her eyes. All that blood oozing out of her skull from where they hit her…

The phone buzzing in his pocket was what woke him up. He stirred out of his sleep and pulled his phone out. He stared at the ID, puzzled at first, then sitting up straight on the couch before answering.

“Keller?”

“Jones, I need you out here in Greendale. Woman’s been murdered, quite brutally.”

“Wait, what time is it?” he rubbed his face to help wake himself up. FP searched around his trailer to find a flannel to throw on and his combat boots, holding his phone between his ear and his shoulder.

“The murder we think took place around 6:45, about 5 hours ago.”

“Wait. You’re putting me on a murder case?” He heard Keller sigh on the other end.

“Yes, but you won’t be working this one alone. You’ll be with someone. She’s good at her job, but don’t let her attitude drive you off.”

FP stopped tying his shoelaces for a second. Wait, did he just say SHE?

“She? Who the hell did you pair me up with?” That could almost be anyone there, unless it was that...

“Does it sound like I have time to play 20 Questions with you, FP? Just get out here. I’ll send you the address.” Keller hung up and FP finished getting ready. He plugged the address into his map and left the trailer.

XXXXXXXX
Alice stood in the kitchen examining the killer’s note. The other officers behind took photos of the scene and scraped up blood samples. Keller moved past the others and joined her.

“I don’t get it. What sins were she committing?” Alice asked.

“We’re going to have someone from the lab dig up her files. The only thing we know as of now is that she was a music teacher who had to leave her job.”

“What happened?”

“That’s what we need to find out. Could explain a motive.” Keller motioned for her to follow him into the living room.

“Keller, I really appreciate you letting me work on this.”

“Yeah, about that…..” he began, about to break the news on her partner.

However, before he could tell her, she stated, “I got some information from Archie.”

Keller stopped in his tracks and turned to her. “Really? Anything?”

“He said the man wore a black ski mask and had these….distinct eyes. He heard a noise as he was in the bathroom and ran out to find the man firing at his dad. Archie was able to get his dad to the hospital, but he might be in a coma.”

“So?”

“This might be a bit of a stretch, but,” she showed Keller the note, “maybe whoever shot Fred Andrews might have something to do with Miss Grundy.”

“It’s a possibility Alice, but we can’t…..” Keller continued to speak, but Alice became distracted by something else from outside. A run-down truck pulled onto the curb, and out of the truck came a man about her age with scruffy hair…..and a blue flannel….just like the man she saw earlier.

No. This WAS the man from earlier. The one from the hallway. And now here he was with his hands in his pockets out on the lawn without even one care at all.

Alice was stunned. Infuriated. She felt her blood beginning to boil. What the fuck was this man doing here?

“Alice, are you even listening to me?” Keller tried to regain her attention, but her focus stayed on the man outside. She shoved the note into Keller’s chest and marched out the front door.

“Dammit.” Tom exhaled and followed her outside.

Alice made her way over to the man, about ready to pounce at him.

“Excuse me…..hey I’M TALKING TO YOU!”

FP took a moment to examine the scene around him, checking to see if Keller was anywhere outside. He saw Keller’s car on the other side of the street, and noted many worried neighbors standing outside.

“Excuse me……”
He didn’t realize that an angry voice was calling from behind him.

“Hey I’M TALKING TO YOU!” the voice from behind gripped his shoulder and violently turned him around. He was now standing face to face with the woman from the hallway. Her eyes were full of spite fire. FP slowly raised a hand and backed away, slightly.

“Um, can I help you?” he replied as she began to move closer to him.

“Just what the hell do you think you’re doing out here? Do you realize this a crime scene?”

“Look I--” he tried to respond, but she cut him off.

“Oh, don’t act like I don’t remember seeing you come out of Keller’s office! What authority do you think you have?” she spat out, pushing a finger into his chest.

“Alice, Jesus, can you take it easy?” Keller came in to interrupt the situation.

Alice. So that’s her name….

Keller looked at FP and stated, “About time you showed up, Jones. Needed to get you two introduced.”

The two just stared at each other as Keller continued to speak. “Alice, this is FP Jones. I usually have him working undercover on the Southside, but I’ve decided to move him up to this case. FP, this is Alice Cooper, one of my lead detectives. You might have heard about her from the Clifford Blossom case.”

He had heard many stories about Alice Cooper. How she’s good at what she does but her methods are quite….well maniacal. He heard all the horror stories, but could never put a face to her name. Until now…..not leaving his eyes off of her.

Alice broke their gaze and turned to Keller and glared at him. “What exactly is this supposed to mean?” she asked, gesturing to herself and FP.

“What do you think it means, Alice? You two are working on this case together. As partners.”

FP didn’t know how to respond. And neither did she.

“Hold on…” he began.

“Keller, you’ve got to be serious…” she overlapped.

“Look, we have a murderer to catch, and I don’t have time to babysit the both of you right now!” Keller snapped at them. “So can you two please just…..try not to jump down each other’s throats tonight?”

Neither one of them responded. FP clenched his fists and began to back up towards his truck.

“Anything else you need from me tonight, besides…” FP stopped in his train of thought and looked back at her.

“Well, for now, that was it. But I will need you both tomorrow at the autopsy. At 9:30 on the dot. Got it?”

The two didn’t speak. Instead, they both nodded.
“Good. I’ll see you two in the morning. You’re free to go for tonight.” he finished as he turned away from them and went back into Grundy’s home.

FP saw Alice wanting to go follow Keller, but stopping herself in her tracks. FP turned away from her and went over to his truck. He rested his forearm against the top of the truck and rested his head on top of his forearm.

Jesus, Keller…..out of all the cases you could’ve put me on….why this one? And why with her?

Alice wanted to follow Keller into the house, but she couldn’t bring herself to do it. She was flustered about everything.

Just give me someone, anyone to work with…..I am fucking stable enough to catch this shooter!

Goddamnit why did she have to say those words? She turned her head to find FP leaning his head on his truck. She tilted her head slightly, her fist tightening. She straightened her head and made her way over to FP.

The sound of her footsteps must have caught his attention, because now he was staring at her again, and not the way he was earlier. Now he must think that she was a monster. She wanted to speak, but she couldn’t exactly find the words just yet. Her hesitation gave him just enough time to shift his balance and rest his elbow on the door. And he just smirked.

“So you’re the infamous Alice Cooper…..” he began, with that smug voice. She huffed as she crossed her arms over her chest.

“What? You really think I haven’t heard the horror stories?” He took his elbow off the truck and began to move towards her. “How, legend has it, that you scare all of your partners away because you’re so….” he paused, now leaning against the back of his truck. He didn’t complete the sentence, which was starting to tick her off.

“What?” she retorted, now enclosing the space between them. “Because I’m what?” All he did was chuckle.

“Oh…..” she responded, tilting her head. “You think this is funny. Well, I’ve have you know, Mister F....whatever your name is, Jones. As one of Keller’s lead detectives, I have a hell bound to catch this asshole and to give him the punishment he deserves. And I don’t have time to wait around for slacking, sleazy primals like you to slow me down.” That statement got him to stop laughing; she was rather pleased with herself. She continued, “So if you decide to pull your fair share, then…..” she paused, trying to think of what else he needed to know.

He looked as if he was going to speak, so she continued before he could, “Then you better be prepared to do things the hard way, and I mean MY way. And if you can’t live up to that, then you may as well kiss my ass and Keller’s goodbye. Are we clear?” She closed her mouth after her speech and glared at him. She waited for him to respond. But he didn’t say anything, not at first. He just smirked again.

“Don’t act so high and mighty on me, Alice.” Her mouth opened slightly at the response, and she began to slowly back away.

“Are you threatening me?” she gritted through her teeth. He moved towards her, keeping their enclosed space.
“Whether you like it or not, we’re in this together now. So you’re gonna need to find some new tricks to get rid of me, because I’m not leaving anytime soon. And besides…” he stopped, looking straight into her eyes. “We actually could make quite a decent pair, you and I.”

That finally set her off, but it took every nerve in her body to not lunge at him and strangle him. She needed her authority here, now more than ever.

So instead, she said, in a calm but still angry manner, “Goodnight, FP. Now get the hell out of my sight.”

He must’ve taken the hint, because FP backed away and went to hop in his truck.

“See you in the morning, partner.” he replied, giving her one last look before entering his truck and slamming the door shut.

Alice rolled her eyes and looked back at Grundy’s house. She could hear FP’s engine starting, but she didn’t bother to watch him drive off. She was too pissed to even care.

She felt her nails digging into her palms again. She didn’t know if it was her anxiety or her anger towards her newly appointed partner, but this was the first time in awhile since let her nails dig in this far.

She needed this case. But Jesus, why did it have to be with him?

I am fucking stable enough to catch this shooter!

Why him, Keller? Why?

I am fucking stable enough……I am fucking stable enough……I’m stable enough…..

Her knuckles had gone almost completely white, and her nails were starting to draw blood.

XXXXXXXXXXXX
End of Chapter One
Chapter Two – Making a Murderer

Alice stepped out of the shower and grabbed her towel. Her palm still stung from where her nails dug in, but she figured the pain would be gone by the morning. She wrapped the towel around her body and headed into her bedroom.

Maybe Keller was right. Was she just throwing herself into these cases to distract herself from her shattered marriage? Where did she and Hal go wrong?

She was sitting on the floor of their bedroom in Boston waiting for the pregnancy test to be done. Hal pacing around nervously, glancing at his watch.

“Has it been 20 minutes yet?” she asked breaking the silence. Hal stopped pacing and sighed.

“I’ll go grab it.” he left for the bathroom.

She remembered their fight from the night before. Alice and Hal were fighting again about her wanting to go to law school. It would have given her something to do her just months after their marriage. She wanted to do it because this was what she dreamed of since high school. She thought life after college would be easier, but it was hard for her to find work. Beside, she didn’t want to move to Riverdale to spend another waking moment with his parents, let alone work for them at the Register.

After the argument, she threw up in the bathroom for almost the remainder of the night. Then she remembered that her period hadn’t come yet. She went with Hal to the drug store that morning to get a pregnancy test. Now it was just a waiting game.

Hal returned from the bathroom holding the test in his hands. Alice quickly stood up and stared at him.

“Well?” she asked, but he didn’t respond. He just kept looking at the test, his face emotionless.

“Hal? What does it say?” she moved closer to him, placing a hand on one of his wrists. He looked up at her slowly, then turned the test up. There was a little plus sign on the screen.

“We’re gonna need to buy a bigger studio apartment.” He smiled softly.

She felt so many emotions at once. Her eyes were watering up and she placed one hand over her mouth. This was happening. She was really pregnant.

“Hal!” she cried as she hugged him. He lifted her and spun her around, laughing. When he brought her back down, he cupped her face with one hand, muttering “I love you,” and kissed her.

She never wanted to admit to Hal the other emotions she was feeling that day. Yes, she was happy that she was pregnant; but it was pushing back her plans even further.

Maybe that was where it all began. Or was it the two of them and a young Chic having to move to this screwed up town in the first place, all because his parents couldn’t afford to keep running the
"No," she told herself. "Not now." And besides, she couldn’t get her mind off the case. No, it wasn’t the case, it was him. His smug look, his smirk, his cruel laughter. It all became engraved into her mind, and it infuriated her.

She slid on some underwear and grabbed one of her wool sweaters to throw on. Alice turned off the bathroom light and made her way over to her bed in the dark, tossing the towel on the floor. She would grab it in the morning; she was too tired now. She made herself comfortable under the covers before grabbing her phone to set her alarm.

Jesus, was it really 1:17? She set her phone down and rested her head on the pillow. She needed sleep, for this case, on top of everything else, was going to be one hell of a ride.

XXXXXXXXX

There was someone banging at the door while FP was finishing his toast. He got up from his seat and shuffled, still somewhat sleepy, to the door.

"Yeah, yeah, I’m coming!" he called out to whoever was outside his home this early in the morning. He needed to get to the autopsy on time or else he would get stuck facing the endless wrath of Alice Cooper.

He opened the door to find a young Serpent boy with long black hair and light eyes, trying not to freeze in the cooler weather.

"You better make this quick, Joaquin. I need to get to work soon." FP said, letting Joaquin inside.

"So is it true?" Joaquin asked, making his way over to the kitchen and sitting down at the table. "You were the one that got the Snake Charmer arrested?" FP’s eyes widened.

"Who told you?" he stated through gritted teeth.

"Relax," Joaquin responded, raising his hand. "Tall Boy did after our meeting last night, in private." he emphasized.

FP joined Joaquin at the table, clasping his hand together.

"He didn’t bring you up when talking to the others. They were trying to figure out how it all went down and what to do from there. But no, you weren’t brought up once."

"Then what’s the point of you coming here?" Joaquin looked over his shoulder, making sure no one would come bursting through the front door. He turned back to FP and answered.

"You need to be more careful, that’s all. There are a handful of us who known that you’re PD, but what if the rest of the Serpents found out? How do you think they’re going to respond?"

He knew Joaquin was right. FP had only rejoined the Serpents recently for the sake of doing his work with Keller. And if anyone found out why he wasn’t always at the meetings, or avoiding nights at the Whyte Wyrm…

"I hear you," he said, putting his hands down on the table and getting up. He walked over to the closet and pulled out a flannel. "But you won’t have to worry about that as of right now. Keller’s got me doing other business. In Riverdale and Greendale."
“What’s that Sheriff got you up to now?” Joaquin asked, standing up. FP grabbed his keys from the kitchen counter and turned off the kitchen lights.

“He’s having me go after some killer.” He walked out of the trailer with Joaquin trailing behind. He began making his way over to his truck as he continued, “Some dipshit killed a woman in Greendale, and we think he might have been behind the shooting at Pop’s.”

“Don’t tell me you’re working this by yourself.” FP stopped in his tracks. Jesus, he almost forgot entirely about her. He shut his eyes and exhaled in frustration.

“I’ve got a partner……she’s just……”

“What?” he heard Joaquin call from behind him.

What was she? Intense? Terrifying? FP didn’t know exactly how to describe Alice Cooper. She was nothing like he expected, following from their first unofficial meeting. She was attractive at a first glance, yes, but seeing her for her hyperintense personality, he was conflicted. He was almost sort of…..impressed.

FP laughed. He knew exactly what she was.

“She’s a stick in the mud.” And with that, FP got in his car and drove off.

XXXXXXXX

Alice was worried that she wouldn’t make it to the autopsy on time. It was 8:56 and she was running to the building. Alice had overslept her alarm, and it was Chic who had to get her up. She was at least relieved that Chic was able to catch a ride with his friends to school so it could give her more time to get ready. But it still angered her that this happened in the first place.

And she thought her partner was the screwed up one.

She walked past the woman at the front counter, moving her way to the back where Keller would be waiting for her.

“Excuse me, miss?” the woman called out. Alice didn’t have time for this now. She opened the door leading into the back. She expected just Keller to be there and hoped that he wouldn’t be there. At least not on time.

But FP was there alright. He was sitting across from Keller holding a coffee cup in his hands. He looked at her and smirked.

“Morning, partner.” he spoke. But she ignored him, immediately walking over to Keller.

“I’m not too late, am I?” Keller met her halfway and raised his hand to her.

“You’re fine. Our guy’s not ready for us yet. I’m gonna grab some coffee, so if he’s ready, wait til I get back.” He moved around her and headed back to the front area. She looked up at the ceiling as the door closed. She didn’t want to look at him right now. But she could feel his eyes on her. Alice sighed and looked down at FP, glaring at him.

“What?” he asked. “Already eager to start round two?”

“Don’t.” she spat out, looking at the wall in front of her. They were silent for a bit, then he stood up, speaking again.
“Don’t you think it’s weird?” She didn’t respond. She didn’t look at him.

“That I’m the one out of the two of us that was here early? Look at the odds of that.” She was clenching her fist and digging into her palms again. If Keller and the woman weren’t out there, she would be more than willing to give this man a black eye….or two.

“And you’re the one that’s supposed to be the control freak.” She stared at him, cold and hard. And he just smirked. That’s it.

She dropped her bag to the floor and moved forward, about ready to go at him. But then the doctor they were meeting with opened his door and came out into the hallway. FP looked at her for a moment (We don’t need to be making a scene, Alice) and moved to meet the man.

“Are you two with the police?” FP was about to respond, but Alice jumped in front of him and extended her hand out.

“Yes.” She shook hands with him. “Detective Cooper, and this is my….she looked back at FP, not knowing what to label him. She raised her brow at him (You’re call, partner, she thought, mimicking his voice in her head) and he moved to shake hands with the doctor.

“FP Jones. Kind of new to her neck of the woods.” he stated, making the doctor lightly chuckle. Fucking asshole, she thought.

Keller came back into the hallway and joined the trio, holding Alice’s purse in his free hand.

“Dr. Hopper. Are we ready to go?” he asked, handing Alice back her purse.

“Body’s all set up.” the doctor responded, motioning the police to follow him. Keller held Alice back for a moment while FP followed Dr. Hopper.

“Are you alright, Alice?” Keller whispered. “You’re not having issues with FP, are you?”

“Please, not now Keller.” Alice walked away from him and headed into the room.

The autopsy went quicker than anticipated. From Hopper’s investigations, Grundy, whose real name was Jennifer Gibson, had died from serious inflictions to the head while also receiving blows to her rib cage. Hopper theorized that the man who had killed her might have been an ex lover seeking revenge. Alice, who had been recording the audio onto her phone (she always did that in case she needed information for filing later, but she never admitted that to Keller), knew that this didn’t add up.

“So,” Keller began to ask, “is it possible that Grundy’s killer might be…”

“A Serpent?” FP interjected. “Can’t be.”

“Well, it would make sense.” Alice commented, smirking back at him. Keller thanked the doctor and escorted the two out of the room. FP walked ahead of them, giving Alice enough time to talk to Keller.

“Keller,” Alice began, “if you want me to check back up on Archie Andrews…” but Keller wasn’t paying attention. He obviously wasn’t interested, bastard. He moved ahead to join FP and began to talk to him. She could tell he didn’t want their conversation to be heard.

“Can you look into that, Jones? Get some of your friends to find information?” she could hear him asking FP.
“Let me see what I can do.” FP replied, looking back at her. He winked, and left the hallway going back out to the lobby. Alice’s mouth hung open and her finger extended at him. What was going on?

She rushed up to Keller and grabbed him by the arm.

“Um, what were you two talking about? And where the hell is he going?”

“None of your business, Alice. Let’s just go back to the station.” Keller replied as he lead them back out to the lobby of the building.

“Hold on.” she exclaimed stopping Keller in his path. “You said we had to work this case - TOGETHER. AS PARTNERS. Or did you just suddenly forget everything we talked about last night?” her voice escalated.

“Alice, I have FP working on certain things for a reason that are nothing concerning you. Now if you need something to do, we need to run through a suspect list back at the station with Archie, since he saw this masked shooter.”

Alice sighed and walked out with Keller. Okay, so she could go through suspects, but FP…..what was he up to?

Maybe during her lunch break she could catch up to where he was going.

XXXXXXXXXXXX

FP waited outside the Whyte Wyrm in his truck. He examined the Grundy files Keller gave him and looked through witness accounts. No one according to the reports exactly saw what this freak looked like, except he mostly wore all black.

He looked up just in time to see a young girl with tan skin and cotton-candy pink hair making her way to the parking lot, examining her surroundings. She met eyes with him and hurried over to the truck. FP unlocked the doors so the pink-haired girl could climb in. She slammed the door and looked around.

“Relax, Topaz. I made sure no one followed me here.”

“I’m just trying to be safe, FP.” Toni looked over her shoulder before making eye contact with him again. “So is there a reason why you had Joaquin ask me to meet you here? Or were you just looking for me to have an unexcused absence on my record?” She was right. He knew how much school had meant to her. Unlike the other younger members of the Serpents, she took her education seriously.

“I need you and your crew to look into something for me.” He said as he gave Toni the Grundy files. “A woman under the name Miss Grundy was murdered last night in Greendale. She used to work as a music teacher down at Riverdale High.”

“Wait,” Toni began. “Is this the pedo lady that was sleeping with her students?” FP’s eyes widened at her.

“What?” Toni rolled her eyes and continued, shifting in the passenger’s seat.

“Rumor has it that while she worked at RHS that she was having affairs with her students that took music with her.

“The fuck are you hearing all of this?”
“It’s Southside High. Shit spreads around like wildfire there. Also, I know a couple of kids at Riverdale that knew it was happening.” This is exactly why he recruited her to gather information for him.

“Well then…” He began, but didn’t know how to finish. How was he going to report this to Keller? And what would she do if she were to find out?

“I’ll have Sweet Pea and Fangs look into it with me.”

“Thank you.” he smiled at her.

“Okay, I’m gonna go back to school now.” she opened the car door but FP put a hand on her arm.

“Wait, just one more thing. Can you grab the storage keys from the office upstairs?” he gestured to the upper half of the Whyte Wyrm, where their office was. “I need to look at something over where Peabody was arrested.”

“Fine.” Toni sighed. “By the way, if anymore of us find out that you’re acting as a double agent--”

“Yeah, yeah, I know.” he waved her off. “Joaquin already lectured me this morning about it. Just do it for me, will you? And be quick.”

“Okay.” she sassed back at him, exiting the truck and heading into the bar. FP tossed the file onto the empty passenger’s seat. He went to readjust his rearview mirror when he noticed a green convertible entering the parking lot. Shit.

He kept his eyes on the convertible for what seemed like minutes, waiting for something to happen. He couldn’t make out who was in the car.

He didn’t notice Toni tapping on his window dangling the keys from her fingers. FP rolled down the window and took the keys from her hands.

“Thanks. Now get back to school, Topaz. We might need you as the next Snake Charmer some day.”

“That is if I decide to go to law school.” Toni stated. “I’m still set on going to art school for photography.”

“I know.” he smiled. Toni waved goodbye and walked off. FP rolled back up his window and flipped through the keys. Four keys later and he landed on the set to the storage unit where he and Tall Boy met Penny.

He was about to pull out of the parking lot when he heard a slam on his window. He looked up and saw Alice glaring at him. He practically jumped in his seat and set his hand down to keep him upright.

“JESUS!”

“Sorry!” she exclaimed with an angry smile on her face, “Was I interrupting you in the middle of your Serpent activities, FP?” He took the pressure off his hand and rolled down his window. He leaned out the window looking up at her.

“I take it that’s your piece of shit vehicle behind me?” he asked gesturing to the green convertible behind him. “And how exactly did you take time out of your precious schedule to stalk me?”

“Wait, just one more thing. Can you grab the storage keys from the office upstairs?” he gestured to the upper half of the Whyte Wyrm, where their office was. “I need to look at something over where Peabody was arrested.”
“First of all, that piece of shit vehicle is a 2013 make and has been with my family for the past few years. Second, your truck is no expensive carriage either. It wasn’t hard to drive down every corner of the Southside to find it.” Alice crossed her arms in front of her and smirked.

“Wow, good sleuthing Sherlock.” he complimented sarcastically.

“And who, pray tell, was that young woman you were conversing with?” He slowly raised his finger at her.

“First of all, she’s in high school, so don’t you get any fat ideas. She’s one of a few kids I recruited from the Serpents to help me look into some of my cases. I needed to get some information from her.” She crossed her arms, raising an eyebrow at him. He groaned and continued, “So yes, I’m doing my damn job, Warden Cooper.” Alice rolled her eyes at her.

“You don’t believe me? Think I’m just slacking off in a bar? You really want to be nosy and figure out what Keller has asked me to do?” She didn’t respond. FP grabbed the files from the seat and put them up on the dashboard. He patted down on the seat and smirked at her. “Why don’t you come join me then, partner?”

He watched her as she internally debated on whether to go with him. She took a deep breath in then tilted her head towards her vehicle.

“Fine. But we’re going in my car, partner.” Wow. That’s a first.

“Glad we’re on the same terms, but…” he stated as she began to walk away, stopping her in her tracks. She looked back and glared at him.

“Out of the two of us, I’m the only one who knows where we need to go.” he smirked.

He waited for the Serpent and his female companion to leave. He remembered seeing them in Greendale the night before. He wasn’t sure whether to stick around the crime scene after murdering Jennifer Gibson, but he was too curious to see who was onto him.

They seem like an odd pair, the hooded figure thought to himself. Why would the town Sheriff pair these two together?

They pulled out of the parking lot and drove off. He waited a few minutes to let them have a head start. Then he followed after them.

Ten minutes later of driving and awkward silence, they arrived at the garage. Alice spent the minutes of the uncomfortable car ride glancing at the autopsy reports, not daring to look at FP once. She glanced up at the garage, which for the most part had been roped off with caution tape. FP turned off the ignition and began to exit his truck. She looked at him as he was about to leave.

“You coming, Cooper?” he asked, breaking the silence. She huffed, and left the truck.

They made their way to the garage door and he took out the keys to unlock the door.

“Warning you,” he said as he fiddled with the lock, “this place has shit for lighting, so watch your step.”
“I can handle myself, Jones.” she spat out. He looked at her as the lock became undone.

“Okay.” he muttered as he pushed the door open. Alice stood there in the cold. She could feel the temperature dropping, even though it was only around noon. Alice stared at him as he gestured for her to enter.

“After you.” She didn’t respond; she just walked in, taking the ring of keys from him.

The room had been cleared out for the most part, except for a few crates. FP was right about the lighting being shitty; some of the overhead lights began to flicker and one went out.

“Over here.” she could hear FP calling from behind her. She turned around and rushed over to where FP was standing. He glanced over a desk behind one of the empty crate piles, trying to pry it open.

“What exactly is it we’re looking for?”

“A client list.” he responded not looking up at her. “Keller thinks whoever killed Grundy must have been connected to the Serpents, whether it was buying drugs on helping with smuggling. Where are those keys?” he asked, holding his hand out. Alice looked down at the keys for a moment before slamming the ring into his hand. He tested the keys out on whatever was keeping the desk locked. Alice looked around the garage, making sure that no one was going to follow them in and attack them.

“Did you know that she was sleeping with her students?” he asked as he worked with the lock. She glanced down at him.

“What?”

“Had a thing for kids in her classes. Thought of it grosses me out.” He finally got the desk open and examined the different piles of paper, looking for any sign of a client list.

“Are you high on fumes?” she bursted, joining his side and grabbing him by the arm. He stopped his search and glared. “Where did you hear this lovely piece of information?”

“My sources, Coop.” She glanced up at him slowly, then released her grip off his arm. They didn’t speak to each other for a moment, just staring at each other. Maybe FP was proving his worth after all.

“The list?” Alice asked, breaking the silence.

“Right.” FP said, coming back to his thoughts and turned his attention back to the pile on the desk. He scowled through until he found a smaller piece of paper with scribbled handwriting.

“This might be something useful.” he handed the paper to her. Alice took it and looked through.

“What about a Gibson?” he inquired.

“No, just...I can’t read what any of this is saying.” And that was the truth. The handwriting on this paper was too difficult to read.

“Let me see. I can probably decode shitty handwriting.” he took the paper back.

“Remind me again why we’re looking for this Gibson guy?”

“This might sound crazy, but something’s bugging me about this killer.”
“And that is?” she tilted her head up at him. He sighed and continued.

“I think whoever killed Grundy is the same person who shot Fred Andrews at Pop’s.” She didn’t say anything. She was stunned more than anything. He was coming to the same theories she was. Maybe this FP guy was smarter than she thought. She straightened her head, not letting her eyes off of him. FP glanced over behind her and his eyes widened.

“What?” He didn’t answer. “FP, what is it?”

“Get down!” He shouted as he shoved her to the side. A gun shot rang through the air.

It was FP who saw the dark figure walk into the door.

“What?” he heard Alice ask him, but the dark figure was coming towards him. The figure was wearing a ski mask and all black, wielding a gun.

“FP, what is it?” The figure raised the gun at them.

“Get down!” FP shouted, taking Alice by the arm and shoved her out of the way before the attacker could shoot at them. They both landed on the ground as the figure shot the window above them, shattering the glass. FP placed his hand on her shoulder and helped her up.

“What the fuck---” Alice began to ask, but the attacker fired another shot.

“Come on!” FP gritted as he grabbed Alice and ran off behind the crates.

Alice and FP hurried to the other side of the garage, keeping themselves distant from the shooter. They pulled over to a crate where they were out of sight and stopped for a moment to catch their breath.

“Please tell me you’re carrying.” FP whispered as he glanced over his shoulder to see if the figure was following them. Alice took out her gun from her belt and cocked it back.

“You’re an idiot if you think I’m not carrying on me.” she retorted back. “Move.” She pushed him behind her as she stepped out the open space.

“Hey! What are you doing?” The figure appeared from the other end of the space and moved closer to them. Alice raised her gun and fired a shot, but the figure dodged the bullet.

“Shit.” she cried. The figure cocked his gun and raised it at her. Alice was about to fire again when FP dragged her away.

“Are you trying to get us both killed? Let’s go!” The figure fired another bullet above where they were. The two made a run for the entrance and came back out into the open. They ran to FP’s truck and jumped in. FP fumbled with his own keys for a moment before he turned on the ignition. The figure came out of the garage and raised his gun again.

“Drive! FP, FUCKING DRIVE!” Alice screamed. FP put the truck in drive and sped away from the scene as the figure fired more shots.

He almost had them. The figure attempted to shoot the escaping truck, but to no avail. Now he knew what exactly he was going against.
The man is intuitive. The woman is cocky, for sure, but she was brave.

This was going to be fun.

FP decided to go to Pop’s. He knew it would be risky to come here after what had happened, but he figured Pop would help keep them safe for now. Besides, he was hungry.

The two didn’t speak until they reached Pop’s. He turned off the ignition then looked over at Alice.

“You okay, Coop?” She looked at him, nodding slowly.

“Let’s just eat.”

They left the truck and headed into the diner. The bell rang as they entered. Pop Tate stopped mopping the floor and noticed them.

“You two hungry?” he asked the pair. “Go ahead and sit yourselves down anywhere you like. I’ll grab some menus.”

“Thanks.” FP replied. He gently guided Alice to a booth near the bathrooms and sat down.

“Surprised you two came in.” Pop spoke as he brought them their menus. “I haven’t had anyone come in since…..well, yesterday. If you need to answer me to come into the station for questioning...”

“Not now, but thank you.” Alice calmly returned. “I’m sorry about everything.”

“It’s alright, Miss Cooper.” He took their orders then went back into the kitchen. FP and Alice sat in silence as they waited for their orders.

Their coffee came out first. Alice was about to speak, but closed her mouth and sipped on the bitter beverage. She put the cup down and spoke.

“FP, I...”

“If this is about me leading you into a death trap, then---”

“Will you just shut up and listen to me?” she snapped. She took a deep breath and continued.

“Maybe I was a little too harsh to you in the beginning. I didn’t want to come to terms that I would be working with someone…..of your caliber. But you proved me wrong. You’re doing your damn job, and you saved my life today. If you weren’t there, I probably would have been dead.” She stopped speaking and took another sip of her coffee. She was clearly shaken up by what happened, and FP could see it in her face.

“So…..is this a you need to be more careful where you take me next time?”

“No.” she responded, slowly meeting his eyes. “This is thank you.”

Her eyes were vulnerable but steady. She had meant this. She was being real with him.

He gave her a soft smile, and drank his coffee.

They ate their meals and paid the bill at the front counter. They walked out of Pop’s and jumped
back into FP’s truck.

“Do you want to grab your car?”

“Might as well.” she answered as she buckled in. “Also…”

“What?”

“My car kind of is a piece of shit. Hal’s the one who picked it out.”

They arrived back at the parking lot of the Whyte Wyrm when they noticed something on top of Alice’s convertible.

“Is it just me, or is there something on your car?” FP asked. Alice left the truck and walked over to where her car was parked.

There was a small brown paper bag filled with something sitting on the hood of her car, and a piece of paper was wedged in between her windshield and wipers.

“What the fuck?” FP joined her side and went to reach for the bag.

“Wait!” she cried, holding her arm out to stop him. “Slowly.” She lowered her arm and reached her hand out to the bag. She grabbed it and pulled it to her. There was something in there causing it to weigh. She opened the bag and FP put his hand in.

“Well?” Alice asked. FP pulled out three things - a brown wallet, a pair of red heart-shaped sunglasses, and the small paper of scribbling they found at the garage.

“Jesus…” FP muttered. They both glanced over at the paper on the windshield.

“He calls himself the Black Hood.” Alice explained to Keller back at the station. Tom read over the letter as Alice and FP reported what happened to them. “He confessed to shooting Fred Andrews and killing Jennifer Gibson.”

“He claims that they were both sinners.” FP picked up. “He wants to “cleanse the town of its sins.” It’s completely f*cked up.”

“Sounds f*cked up.” Tom finished the letter and placed it down on his desk. “And you’re saying the Black Hood attacked you two?”

“Where I arrested Penny Peabody, yeah.” FP replied.

“Jesus.” Tom stood up and gestured for Alice and FP to follow him out of his office. “We need to submit this into evidence and run any DNA tests to see if we can get a match.”

“Do we need to come out with a public statement?” Alice questioned as they walked down the hallway.

“Not until we get more information. I’m just glad you two are okay. And I’m shocked that you’re
finally getting along.”

The three made their way to the main room where the other officers and detectives were busy at work. Tom pulled aside another officer and headed out to evidence. Alice then turned to FP.

“FP, do you think you could start filing this into the system?”

“Huh?” he asked, confused. Alice sighed and spoke.

“Shit, sorry. I keep forgetting you’re not used to this part of the PD. Okay, I’ll show you how to file it in real quick.” she began to walk to her desk when she stopped in her tracks.

A man who looked around their age with blond hair and hazel eyes stood by Alice’s desk.

“Alice?”

Alice stared at him. FP looked back and forth between her and this man. Oh, this must be…

“Hal?”

xxxxxxxxxxxxx
End of Chapter Two

Chapter End Notes

hello! I'm actually kinda shocked that this is doing so well :) Have you guys seen the newest episode (lol cuz I havent). you know the drill, leave a comment if you like, give some kudos, etc.

Thanks!
Hey pals! Thanks so much for the lovely feedback!

So to kinda give explain the thought process of this....I'm not a particularly huge fan of Halice, but I really do like headcannons for them on Tumblr and I thought that how their marriage was written on the show was just...chaotic as sh*t. So this is my sort of attempt to give them a proper backstory and to try to make them a somewhat healthy-ish relationship. Also, I kinda made my Chic a bit more like Archie in a sense and not like a creepo imposter that did webcamming stuff. So yeah, kinda better Cooper Family. Hope you enjoy :)

Chapter Three - War and Peace

Alice didn’t exactly have the best childhood growing up. Her mom walked out on her when she was 9, and her father was an abusive asshole. He’d not only verbally bring her down, but he had good aim when it came to throwing empty beer bottles at her. She was lucky to spend the remainder of adolescent years with her aunt and uncle when her dad went off to prison.

She found solace in literature and law. She spent almost every day at her town’s library, reading as much as she could. She spent her nights with friends, medicating herself with whatever drink or drug she could. But that all changed (kind of) when she was accepted into Boston University. Once she packed up her car and headed for college, she never turned back.

Alice didn’t meet Harold Cooper until her junior year. They were in the same journalism class together, but barely spoke. That was until one brisk November night, he was intended to go out with one of the girls in her hall, but at last minute she bailed. So when he ran into her at an SAE party, he immediately struck up conversation with her.

“So wait, she just ditched you?” she asked him.

“Well, I figured Cynthia was going to do something like this.”

“Wow, what a bitch!” Alice cackled as she drank from her beer. She wiped the excess beer from her lips with her fingers. “How about this, why don’t we get the fuck out of here and go grab a burger? I’m starving.”

“I would like that.” he smiled.

They spent the rest of that night at a local burger joint down the road and laughed over stories from early high school and college years. Hal grew up in Riverdale and wanted to get far away from his overprotective parents that ran a newspaper. He enjoyed writing and wanted to connect with someone who could share the same passions as him.

That night they found out that they enjoyed each other’s company, and the feelings emerged when she found herself back in her dorm room and Hal’s head between her thighs. She had other
boyfriends in the past, but there was something different about Hal. He was sweet and understanding. And he definitely knew how to give pleasure. A week later, they began dating. A year and a half later, they were engaged.

The two were married in a small church outside of Boston and moved into a small apartment in the outer rings of the city. Two years later, Charles Benjamin Cooper was born. Everything was fine for a while. Alice had a somewhat steady job at a diner downtown while she studied for her LSAT. Hal spent most of his time at a small newspaper company in the outskirts of Boston. But as the years went by, Hal ended up losing his job, and Alice could barely get by to pay rent. And no law school would take her with her schedule. They began to argue more when they came home frustrated from work. He began making promise that he could never live up to. Alice feared that her chances of becoming a lawyer were over. Then she heard of recruiting for the Boston PD, and she immediately jumped in.

By the time she became a full-fledged officer in 2008, Hal’s parents needed him to come back to Riverdale. Their newspaper, the Register, was falling under. Alice grew worried that since she just started, she wouldn’t be able to find work, but Hal reassured her, “We can make things work in Riverdale. This shouldn’t be anything permanent.” Little did she know at the time that life in Riverdale would be something permanent. The three of them packed up and moved to Riverdale. Alice was able to sign onto the Riverdale PD, and Hal’s parents retired to Florida, leaving him the official owner of the Register. Things were finally starting to feel right again. They decided that they were going to give their Chic a little brother or sister. Then came the miscarriage. Then a negative pregnancy test. And another. They kept trying for the first three years, both nothing was happening. There was no luck anymore.

Their marriage hit a toll by the end of 2017. Alice’s cases were getting heavier, and the Register was going bankrupt. The arguing became more frequent. The slamming of doors, Alice crying, Chic eating his meals in his room or staying over with a friend was a new constant. That’s when she began digging her nails into her palms, a childhood habit she stopped until then. Hal moved out of the house over the summer into a Sharebnb. A week or two after, Hal broke the news to her in a booth in Pop’s a week before Clifford Blossom was arrested. It was his parents’ idea, he told her, that it would be best for the two of them to part their ways. Permanently.

And now here they were standing just feet apart in the station, just staring at each other. Nothing but strangers.

“Alice…” he began.

“What are you doing here, Hal?” she interrupted deeply, not wanting her voice to raise in front of these people. She almost forgot FP was standing next to her.

“Can we talk, Alice? Please?” Hal stepped closer to her, but Alice stepped back, almost knocking into FP.

“Um…” FP muttered, “I'll just... go check if Keller needs anything.” and he hurried away. Alice glared at Hal, hesitating. She finally took him by the arm and led him into the hallway.

Alice didn’t make eye contact with him as she let him go and paced the hallway.

“Alice…”

“You really had to pick a time when I was at my busiest?” she blurted, turning her attention to him. “Why are you here, Hal?”
“I just want to talk to you.” he slowly moved closer, trying to place his hands on her shoulders.

“Haven’t we already done enough of that?” she asked him coldly. She knew it wasn’t true, though. Alice attempted to read his face as Hal took a moment to find the words.

“I think we should call it off.” Alice’s eyes widened and she backed away from him. “I made a mistake, Alice. Maybe this was a mistake.”

“What?”

He took a breath before speaking again, “I want to fight for us, Alice because….I still love you.” Hal closed the space between them and he held her face with one hand.

“I love you, I mean it.” He stopped, breaking eye contact with her. There was something else, she could feel it.

“But?” she threw in, and he looked back up at her. “There’s always more with you, Hal. You love me, but what?”

“You need to be more aware of the sacrifices I’m making for this. For you and me.”

No, hell no. Alice pulled away and covered her face with her hands, trying not to lose her temper.

“Hal…don’t.”

“I worshipped you like a goddess for the past 20 plus years of our marriage. I was there for you when you began this job!”

“Don’t you fucking dare, Hal.” she gritted through shaky breaths.

“And how do you thank me and my parents? By making me sacrifice time from my job and family to support you and Chic!”

That’s what set her off.

“You had to make sacrifices? You had to leave…for your family?” She could feel her voice escalating. She worried that the rest of the station might hear her, but at this point she didn’t care.

“Alice…”

“Fuck you, Hal!” she practically screamed. “You know that I was the one that had to make those sacrifices, NOT YOU OR YOUR FUCKING FAMILY, YOU BASTARD!” she pushed him, hard. Alice could feel the tears flowing down. “Get out. Just leave.” she pointed at the doorway. He didn’t move, causing her to move closer to him, her face inches away from his.

“Hal, I swear.” Alice started with a lump in her throat, “If you don’t get the fuck out, I will arrest you for assaulting an officer of the law.”

“Wow.” He chuckled. “You really don’t think I’m not already aware of what you’re capable of. What is Keller going to think of you doing that? What will your new partner think? Does he even know about this, or are you leading him through the dark, like you always do?” Her mouth flew open a little. She blinked at him and tried to speak.

“You don’t get it, do you Alice?” Hal cut her off. “You want to make me out to be the monster, and yet you’ve done just as much wrong as I have in all of this.” He looked at the doorway before turning back to her, leaning into her ear. “And you know damn well the secrets you’re hiding..."
Alice didn’t want to admit it, but Hal was right. She hadn’t fully explained to FP of why she scared away her partners. Or why sometimes she scared herself. Or the things she did to erase those fears in the late hours of the night.

Alice pushed him back, too tired to keep fighting with him. “Just go away.” Alice choked out as she pointed at the exit. And with that, Hal scoffed and he left.

When she heard him shut the door behind him, she slid to the ground and sobbed. Alice looked down at her hands. There were new bloody crescents on her palms and they stung.

Keller found her a few minutes later. Her hands still stung, but the tears were long gone. He didn’t say anything at first when he crouched down to her level. He just let the silence consume the space.

“Go home, Alice.” he finally spoke. Alice didn’t respond at first, but eventually made eye contact with him with no expression on her face. “Go home. Spend some time with your son.”

“What about FP?” she asked him quietly. She almost forgot entirely about FP. He was probably still out in the bullpen waiting for her to help him get the paperwork filed in.

“I’ll take care of it.” Keller replied standing in. “But I’m serious Alice. It’s a goddamn Friday afternoon. Take the weekend off. But come back on Monday ready to move forward with this case.”

He waited for her to respond, but she was lost in her train of thought. Her mind kept bouncing back and forth between her anger at Hal and her concern for FP. But when and why did she become so concerned about a man she just met last night?

“Okay.” she answered.

FP left the station around 7 pm. Keller confided to him about his partner’s early departure (not that he blamed her, of course; she was going through quite the shitty situation with her husband) and had taken time to show FP how to plug everything in on the computers.

Later in the afternoon, Alice texted him:

Alice: FP. Keller gave me your number. Sorry I had to walk out and abandon you. Dealing with some personal shit at the current moment. If you need anything over the weekend, call me at this number. Of if for some reason you need to see me in person, drive down to Elm Street and find the white house with a big red door. That’s where I live. Thank you for earlier. And again, sorry for leaving.

He was shocked that she even texted him in the first place, and second, that it was that heartfelt. Maybe she wasn’t so much of a stick in the mud after all.

When FP climbed into his truck, he felt drained. It was certainly an eventful start to the weekend, and he was ready for a break.

Her arrived back at his trailer and stopped the car. Usually Sunnyside Trailers was a hotspot during the weekends, since mostly Serpents resided in the trailer park. Plenty of FP’s neighbors and fellow Serpents he was acquainted with normally sat outside their trailers sipping on beer cans and blasting whatever country song came on the radio. But tonight, it was quiet. It was odd.

Maybe they’re all at the Wyrm, he thought to himself as he turned off the ignition. But something was off about the trailer park, and he couldn’t quite put his finger on it. He grabbed his pistol from
the passenger’s seat and held it firmly.

He didn’t notice that his door was slightly open until he began his way up the staircase leading into his home. FP stopped in his path and felt the air get colder.

“Joaquin?” he called out, slowly raising the pistol and moving up slowly. He reached the top of the stairs and waited for a moment. “Toni?” Nothing.

With his free hand, he pushed the door open and stepped into the darkness. The only lights source of the trailer came from the moonlight purging in through the shutter blinds. FP leaned forward checking around his “living room” and kitchen, making sure no one was here to….attack.

Relieved to find nothing, he lowered his gun and went to turn on the light switch.

That’s when he noticed the giant brown package sitting on his tiny kitchen table. FP stood there in fear and confusion.

So whoever broke into my home didn’t take anything but left me a gift? How fucking pleasant.

FP moved towards the table and saw a folded-up note resting on top of the package. Whatever was inside starting making a noise. He couldn’t tell if it was a growling….or a hissing.

He grabbed the letter and unfolded it slowly. The paper was written in a dark red material, which left FP unsettled, but the message was more unsettling.

Watch your back, Jones. Snakes don’t shed their skin so easily. - B.H.

No. No, it can’t be.

Without wanting to wait another moment, FP flipped off the top of the package and fell back when he saw a giant black and green snake hissing at him.

“What the fuck?” FP grunted. He got himself off the floor and continued to stumble backwards as the snake began to slowly slither out of its shelter. FP exited out the front door and pulled it shut.

Great. First we have this psychopath running around town. Now, there’s a giant fucking snake loose in my house?

He needed to call someone. Maybe Tall Boy, or Joaquin. Maybe even Keller. But then he remembered the initials on the note. How does the Black Hood know his name? How did he know that FP was part of the Serpents? Anyone could have done this. Anyone could be him.

The only person he could trust now was Alice.

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“Alice, it’s me again,” FP said, beginning his third voicemail to her as he sped down the streets of Riverdale, “I need to talk to you. Just call me back. No, fuck it, don’t. I’m coming to your house now.” He hung up the phone and shifted his focus back on the road.

He reached Elm Street, just as she described, and took a sharp left into the community. The houses down the lane looked too homey, almost too perfect.

White house with a red door, white house with a red door, he repeated like a mantra. He drove down the street for eight more houses until he came across the house that she described. He stopped the truck and jumped out.
He noticed that her convertible wasn’t in the driveway. Maybe it was in the garage, he hoped. FP flew up the sidewalk steps and sped up to the doorway. He stopped before he could knock on the door.

What was he going to say to her? Hey uh, Alice. Sorry to bug you on your free weekend, but our friend the Black Hood just sent me a deadly gift? He determined that he would have to break the news to her slowly but surely.

FP banged on the door and waited. Nothing. He banged again. “Alice?” he called out. “Alice, are you in there—”

The door opened, but he was surprised not to find Alice, but instead a young teenage boy….that almost looked exactly like her. He had her hair, and her eyes, and her bone structure.

FP didn’t know Alice had a child, let alone that it was a boy.

“Are you looking for my mom?” the boy asked, somewhat hesitant. FP stood there dumbfounded until he spoke.

“Listen, kid. I, uh…I’m working with your mom at the station, and there’s something I….where is your mom?” He never usually talked like this to kids this boy’s age. Hell, Joaquin, Toni, and the other Serpent teens were all 16. But this one struck him differently. It hit him for the first time that Jughead would be this boy’s age now.

“I haven’t seen her since this morning. I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright, boy.” FP said as he began to turn away.

“Do you just want to wait here until she gets back?” the boy cried out, causing FP to turn around and look at him.

“You don’t mind? Shit, didn’t your mom teach you not to let strangers into your house?”

“You said you worked with her, right?” The kid had a point. He could just wait there for a while and try to call her and see where she was.

FP joined the boy and entered the house.

“I, um….I’m FP, by the way, kid.” FP mumbled.

“Charles.” the boy responded. “But everyone just calls me Chic.”

FP tried to not think of his own children too often. It had been too long since he last saw Jughead and Jellybean. When he got out of the army and after he eloped with Gladys, he made a promise to himself that if he ever were to have children, that they would never endure what he grew up with, what he choose to do after high school, what he was doing now. Jug was 9 and JB was 5 when Gladys’s parents came and took them away from him after her death. They couldn’t trust him, they told him, that he would just one day snap and hurt someone.

But back then, the only people he wanted to hurt were the Ghoulies that killed his wife and made him watch.

Sometimes he lost himself in the happier memories to distract him from the gut-wrenching ones in
moments of controlled silence. These thoughts occupied his mind as he stared at Alice’s young boy, Chic. FP was sitting on the family’s couch staring blankly around her house before moving his eyes back onto the boy.

Her house was well-kept, too clean, and very doll-house like. It was the complete opposite of his. Yet, the perfection hid something deeper that he had yet to learn about her. He saw it in the forced smiles in the photos of her and Hal from years ago. He saw it now in Chic, who had been pacing around the living room for the past five minutes leaving his mother voicemail after voicemail.

Jug would be his age now, FP kept thinking to himself as he looked at Chic. Jughead would be his age.

“I’m not getting anything.” Chic sighed in frustration as he hung up the phone. “I could try Sheriff Keller, maybe and see if he knows where--” FP jumped up from his place and cut Chic off.

“No! Do not call Keller!”

“Why not?” Chic asked in confusion. FP wandered over to the boy and spoke in a hushed tone.

“Look, kid. Something happened at my place, and the only one I can trust with this information right now is your mom.” Chic’s eyes widened at the statement.

“What happened? Were you robbed? Did someone break in?” Wow, he really was like his mom. Persistent with questions and everything.

“What?” FP replied, not exactly sure how to explain to a 16 year old kid that a serial killer may or may not have planted a slithering reptile into his trailer. How would he even go on to explain it to her?

“No, I…no one robbed me. I just…look kid---”

FP was cut off by his phone buzzing in his back pocket. FP hesitated for a moment looking at Chic. The younger boy gestured to the phone in panic.

“What are you waiting for? Answer it!” he exclaimed, causing FP to grab for his phone.

Please let it be Alice. Please, just please be okay.

He was slightly disappointed to see that it was not Alice lighting up his phone, but instead he was surprised to see that it was Toni. He pressed the green call button and answered.

“Toni, what’s going on? Did you find something?”

“FP, where are you right now?”

“I---wait.” He could practically hear her roll her eyes from the other end.

“Where are you, Jones?” she asked again.

“I’m on Elm Street just…” he looked to Chic. FP didn’t exactly know how to describe Alice, or her son. Were they friends? Co-workers? He continued, “…visiting somebody. Why?”

“You need to get your ass down to the Whyte Wyrm. Now.” FP’s eyes widened.

“Shit. Are the guys fighting again? Nobody called the cops, right?”

“No. But….I found your blonde friend. Your partner from the station.”
Shit. Alice.

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Alice wasn’t sure how or why she decided to go the bar on the Southside. When she left the station earlier that afternoon, she figured that she would go home, read, and call it an early night. But she couldn’t bring herself to enter her house when she pulled into the neighborhood.

Everything about her house brought her mind back to Hal, the last person she wanted to think about right now. They had good memories, yes, but there were just as many bad ones. And now, the bad were outweighing the good.

She considered texting Chic and saying that she needed to work late that night. But with everything going on, he would have figured out what was going on. Fuck, what the hell was she going to do about Chic?

What will happen to my baby boy? My pride and my joy?

She sped off from Elm Street and just drove. She drove around Riverdale and drove to Greendale and back just to clear her mind. There were moments where Alice just felt like driving off the edge of the road and crashing into something. No, suicide wouldn’t be an option - not right now. It wouldn’t be fair to Chic, or Keller…..or FP.

She needed to clear her mind. She needed a drink, more than anything.

So after about 3-4 hours of driving around, she found herself at the Whyte Wyrm, the bar in Southside. Alice knew she would be getting looks from the Serpents, but she didn’t care. She needed to drown in pain in some tequila. Or something stronger than tequila.

So there she was, sitting on a bar stool, three shots of tequila and a glass and a half of Jim Beam, and she was buzzed. No, she was definitely drunk.

The last time she got this drunk was with Hal. It was one of those last moments when they were truly happy together, before everything fell apart. Mayor McCoy was hosting some fundraiser for the high school and they both knew it would be dull. So before the event, she and Hal each downed two glasses of Molbac and arrived completely buzzed. They continued to drink their (one of the only things Alice could remember from that night were those shots that looked like pink milkshakes with whipped cream on top). She and Hal spun each other around on the dance floor, both lucky enough not to vomit everywhere. The last time he told her he loved her (and truly meant it, even if he was drunk) was when they slow danced to some Frank Sinatra song. And on the car ride back to their home, they sloppily made out in the back seat and returned home to have drunk sex.

But that memory felt like years ago, and she was foolish back then. Granted, she was foolish now sitting in a bar full of gang members thinking that she was going to be safe. She became so fazed out in her thoughts that she didn’t notice a Serpent slide onto the barstool next to her and order a drink.

He huffed at her, which caused Alice to turn her attention to him.

“Is there something I can help you with…..ssssir?” she slurred. God, she was a mess. The Serpent just laughed.

“Quite amusing to see a woman like you in a place like this.”

“Izthat supposed be an insult?” she struggled to speak. He twisted his barstool to look directly at her.
“If you want,” he began as he place a hand on her upper arm, “I can drive you home.” Alice shoved his arm away.

“No thanks, asshole.” she spoke. But he didn’t listen.

He grabbed her arm and tried to pull her closer until a young girl with pink hair came out of nowhere and shoved him back.

“Touch her again, and I’ll cut your balls off. Now, go!” The Serpent scoffed at the girl and left his barstool.

“You’re no fun, Topaz.” he spat out as he left. Alice turned to the young girl. Where had she seen her before?

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Toni wasn’t a fan of working the bar Friday nights. Part of it was that she was an inderage girl serving alcohol to her fellow Serpents, but another was all the drunks that tried to grab at her and others. She usually had to be the one to pry off the drunks and kick them out of the Wyrm if they were getting too rowdy.

And tonight was definitely one of those nights. She noticed a member of the Serpents trying to grab a middle-aged blonde woman at the bar.

“It’s just not my day…” Toni grumbled as she walked over to the bar and shoved the Serpent away.

“Touch her again, and I’ll cut your balls off. Now, go!” The Serpent scoffed at her.

“You’re no fun, Topaz.” he spat out as he got up and left. Toni watched him leave before she turned to the blonde. She was clearly drunk.

“You alright?” Toni asked her, but she could tell the blonde’s eyes were dazed. She looked at Toni like she had seen her somewhere.

“You’re…” the blonde struggled to speak, “you’re with FP, rig---”

Fuck. She’s FP’s partner from the police.

Toni clamped a hand over the blonde’s mouth and looked around. Luckily no one heard the conversation, so Toni looked back at the blonde.

“Come with me. And don’t say another word.”

Toni grabbed the blonde’s purse from the bar and helped her off the barstool. She placed an arm around her own shoulders and walked her to the women’s restroom.

“Ignore her, she’s drunk.” Toni made the excuse as she passed by her fellow Serpents, who were trying to figure out what was going on.

The moment they reached the bathroom, Toni led her to one of the stalls and lowered her down, dropping the purse down next to her. She lifted the blonde’s head slowly.

“I really don’t want to do this but…..open your mouth.”

“Wait, wha…” she began but Toni shoved her fingers into the blonde’s mouth, causing her to gag. Toni held the blonde’s hair back as she threw up.
“Get it out while you still can. You’re better off.” Toni stated. She got up from the floor as the blonde continued to vomit.

Moving over to the sinks, Toni dialed FP’s phone. It took about three rings before he finally answered.

“Toni, what’s going on? Did you find something?”

“FP, where are you right now?” she had to raise her voice over the vomiting behind her.

“I---wait.” She rolled her eyes and sighed.

“Where are you, Jones?” she asked again.

“I’m on Elm Street just...visiting somebody. Why?”

“You need to get your ass down to the Whyte Wyrm. Now.” She waited for him to respond.

“Shit. Are the guys fighting again? Nobody called the cops, right?”

“No. But….” she turned back to the blonde. “I found your blonde friend. Your partner from the station. I think she had one too many drinks.”

“You….you found Alice? Jesus, thank you Toni. I’ll be there as quickly as I can. Don’t let anyone near here.” he hung up.

Toni slid her phone back into her pocket then wetted down a paper towel. She came back over to the blonde...Alice, and held her face up.

“This should help.” Toni stated calmly as she place the towel on Alice’s forehead.

“Alice….that’s your name, right?” Alice nodded slowly. She was still drunk, but at least more conscious now.

“Okay, Alice, listen to me very carefully. I’m Toni, I’m a friend of FP’s. He’s gonna come to get you very shortly.” Alice looked up at her.

“FP?” she asked. “I...I saw you with him….you were....”

“I know he’s PD.” Toni replied. “I’m one of the only few Serpents that knows. I was helping him get information about your case. That’s why you saw us together.”

It wasn’t the first time somebody accused her of sleeping with older members of the Serpents. FP was more of a father figure to her, since her own parents left her at her grandfather’s trailer and she joined the gang when she was only 13. It was rough the first couple of months, but FP stepped up to help look after her and other Serpents around her age. And in return, she and the other kids helped him gather information for his work down at the station.

“But nobody else can know about what he’s doing. Otherwise….it could lead to very bad consequences.”

Alice’s eyes were starting to get glossy. She turned away from Toni and threw up again.

They held out in the bathroom for another 10 minutes until Toni’s phone buzzed. Toni looked down and saw a text from FP.
Outside back of Wyrm.

“Okay, blondie. Time to go.” Toni helped Alice stand up, grabbed her purse, and left the bathroom.

FP and Chic made it to the Wyrm around 10 minutes after he got off the phone with Toni. He wasn’t planning on bringing Chic with him, but the young boy wanted to help. And he also figured he could help drive her car home.

FP texted Toni that he had arrived and got out of his truck.

“You think she’s okay?” Chic asked as she joined FP’s side.

“I don’t know, boy.” he responded. They waited in silence until he saw a young figure struggling to lead a woman outside.

“Mom!” Chic cried as he ran over to help his mom, with FP following close behind him.

The young boy took Alice from Toni as FP grabbed her purse.

“Thanks, Topaz.” he turned to the young girl. Toni shrugged at him and looked over at Alice.

“You know her?” Chic asked, a little confused. FP sighed and gestured to Toni.

“Chic, this is Toni. Toni…that’s her son.” Toni smirked and gave a small wave to Chic.

“I’m going back inside. It’s freezing out here.” Toni stated, about to walk away.

“Hang on. Help me get her into the truck.” FP and Toni moved over to Alice. He took Alice’s other arm and wrapped it around his shoulders as Toni took her purse. They walked her over to the truck and lifted her into the passenger’s seat. FP took the purse from Toni and dug for her keys.

“Can you drive her car?” he tossed her keys to Chic. The boy nodded.

“It’s probably out front. Toni, can you show him where?”

“Okay. Anything else you need?”

“No, after that you’re good.” FP climbed into his truck and turned on the ignition.

“I thought you didn’t like working with partners, Jones.” Toni called out. FP glanced at Alice, who had passed out.

“She’s not so terrible.”

FP followed Chic on the drive back to the Cooper home. Chic pulled his mom’s car into the garage as FP parked along the curb. He waited for Chic to come over to the truck before they slowly and carefully pulled Alice out. She had passed out on the ride home.

“Can you unlock the door? I’ll take her.” FP directed Chic. The young boy went up the steps to his front door as FP picked up Alice into a bridal carry. He carried her up to the front door and in through the house.
“Her room is up here.” Chic moved in front of him and led FP up the stairs. He followed the young boy to her bedroom. Chic turned on the lamp on her nightstand as FP slowly lowered her onto the bed. She looked peaceful. How was this the same woman that tried to pick a fight with him the night before? Yelling at him to leave? What changed so suddenly?

“I…” FP coughed. “I’ll be downstairs.” He left Chic alone with his mother.

He sat on the Cooper’s couch with his hands clasped. It had been a long night. Chic came down a few minutes later to check on the older man.

“She should be okay in the morning.” the boy spoke. FP stood up and looked at the boy.

“I should get going. I’ll come check on you two in the morning.” He was about to leave when Chic stopped him.

“Do you just want to stay here tonight? I can get a couple of pillows and a blanket for the couch.”

“It’s alright, boy. I’ve already invaded your family’s space enough.”

“Please?” the boy asked. “Just to help her in the morning?” FP thought for a moment.

“Fine, but I’m staying down here.” FP sat back down as Chic began to head back up the stairs.

“Chic?” The boy stopped as FP continued.

“Did your dad abuse her?” Chic didn’t respond. FP spoke again, “Is your father a violent man?”

“No.” Chic responded, “They fought a lot, mostly….but no. He never laid a hand on her.”

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End of Chapter Three

Chapter End Notes

So….did I succeed at a better Halice backstory? Do we like this Chic? Let me know!
Chapter Four – Warm Bodies

She felt like she was watching the movie reel for ages. The film showed her and Hal on her wedding day. It was a small intimate ceremony with only close family and friends. But nevertheless, a happy day.

She couldn’t get up and leave. The old film reel played over and over again on a constant loop, and Alice felt trapped.

“You see this, Alice?” she could hear him. “Do you see how happy we were together?”

Alice’s eyes were still locked on the film reel. She didn’t even notice Hal appear in front of her.

“We can still be this happy, but you want to throw it all away. You’re giving up on us! On Chic!”

She scoffed.

“I’m giving up? Really, Hal? You’re the one that decided to pull the plug.” She felt herself growing more confident.

“I’m doing what’s best for us, for you! Because I love you!” he yelled back over the reel playing behind them. She could hear their vows being played.

...to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.

“No….that’s not love.” His eyes became darker.

“I don’t need you to make me happy anymore, Hal.” she continued. “I have my job, I have Chic, and……..I have FP, who in every way you’re not….is a real man.”

She didn’t know why those last few words came out of her mouth, but it felt so natural. Like she enjoyed it.

Hal looked hurt, then his face grew angrier. Darker than she remembered.

“I don’t want to leave you like this. But, you’ve just dug your own grave, baby.”
Then Alice, realizing what she had done, turned away from Hal, but bumped into a dark figure behind her. The Black Hood loomed over her like he came straight out of a horror film. He immediately tackled her to the ground and pinned her down. Alice tried to get up but he wrapped his hands around her throat. She struggled for words, losing air. She clawed at him, but he was too strong.

And the video was still playing.

“for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.” the video taunted at her, almost like a curse.

“Mom…..mom!” a voice cried out, but Alice was losing strength. Her vision began to go black and she was losing air. His hands clenched tighter.

“Mom! Mom, wake up! Mom!”

Alice woke up gasping for air. It was just a bad dream. Chic was by her side with his hand on her shoulder. Alice forced herself up and immediately felt nauseated.

“Chic…” she gulped. She pushed him arm away as she got up from her bed and hurried to her bathroom. She collapsed over her toilet and threw up. Her head was throbbing and her breath reeked of tequila. Memories of the day before came flooding into her mind. Why did she think drinking her sorrows away was a good idea?

“How did I get home last night?” she asked, trying to recollect the exact details.

“You were at the Southside bar. Your friend, FP, drove me there to get you and….”

FP….Chic met FP….She remembered seeing him. Her son too. She remembered falling asleep in his truck.

“When did he leave?” she pondered.

“He didn’t.” Chic replied. “He….he’s downstairs sleeping on the couch.”

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It took a while for FP to fall asleep last night. He was anxious about Alice and wanted to make sure she was okay. But he was still in shock about his present in the trailer, slithering loose.

He didn’t remember when he fell asleep but something had woken him up. Somebody was shoving on him.

FP’s eyes slowly opened to find a pale and somewhat hungover Alice Cooper perched over him. He jolted up slightly and felt his heart racing.
Her eyes were puffy and red. Her face was almost chalk white. She looked restless.

“Morning.” he muttered at her. She didn’t respond; she just stared at him.

“I was...uhh....” he began, sitting up all the way. “I was just about to head out.”

“My son says you helped me get home last night.” she stated, monotone. FP was about to respond, but he clamped his mouth shut. Instead, he nodded at her. Alice swallowed with difficulty then locked her eyes on him again. She then moved to sit across from him on the couch.

“You’re not telling Keller about this, okay?” she demanded. He nodded again. “Good. He already thinks I’m a wreck anyway.”

“You’re not the only one, Alice.” he chuckled.

“How.......how did you end up finding me anyway?” she studied him. Fuck, how was he going to explain to her why he came over in the first place? His tongue felt dry trying to find words.

It’s complicated,” he prepared, “but…..something happened at my trailer last night.” Alice’s eyes widened. She went to speak but he stopped her. “Just let me....”

He went on to explain how he ended up driving to her house to meet Chic, then getting the phone call from Toni. He gave Alice a moment to absorb the information.

“So, what exactly happened at your trailer?” she asked.

“I think it might be easier if I show you…”

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“YOU SON OF A BITCH! YOU COULD HAVE AT LEAST WarnED ME THERE WAS A GIANT FUCKING SNAKE IN YOUR TRAILER!” Alice screamed at FP. The creature was still loose in his trailer by the time Alice, FP, and Chic arrived at Sunnyside. She clung onto the railing of his entryway, refusing to let herself go back in.

“I thought I made it clear that someone left me a deadly gift in my trailer!” he yelled back.

“Well, don’t just stand there! GET IT THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!” FP rolled his eyes before hesitantly bringing Chic in with him. The snake was coiled on top of the kitchen counter near his toaster. FP motioned for Chic to grab the hand towel hanging over the sink. FP folded the towel and slowly inched towards the snake. In one swift motion, he pushed the towel onto the snake’s head and grabbed its body.

“Get the box!” he grunted at Chic. Chic grabbed the box and its lit and hurried over to FP. He shoved the snake into the box and threw the lid on tight. The snake was hissing loudly from inside.

FP brought the box outside and passed Alice. “You’re welcome, princess.” he spat out as he dropped the box near the road.

Alice made her way into FP’s trailer and turned on the lights. It was tinier and messier than her home. The kitchen was a tight squeeze and there were no pictures anywhere. How could he function in here?

Alice joined Chic at the small kitchen table and found a note. She picked it up and read it.

“That letter came with the snake.” FP described as her entered the kitchen. “Guess who wrote it.”
Alice then noticed the small initials tailing the note.

“This is the Black Hood’s doing? How does he know where you live? How does he know about….”

“That’s what I’m trying to wrap my head around.”

“Wait, who’s the Black Hood?” Chic interjected. The two adults looked at the younger boy.

“Chic,” Alice started, “you heard what happened to Archie’s dad, didn’t you?”

“He got shot a Pop’s.” he acknowledged. “Everybody at school’s been talking about it. Same about Miss Grundy’s murder.”

“Yeah, same killer.” FP retorted. “But there’s no pattern. Except the fact that they “sinned” or whatever.”

“Archie’s dad I don’t quite understand. He’s a good guy. But, Miss Grundy…” Chic’s voice faded. Alice looked at her son.

“Chic?”

“Some of the kids are saying that Miss Grundy…….she slept with Archie. And Jason Blossom.”

The three found themselves at a booth at Pop’s a half an hour later. Alice was too tired to make anything at home for her and her son, and FP was running low on groceries anyway. The diner was empty except for them. They quietly ate their breakfast and sipped on their coffee.

“I’ll have the check ready for you shortly.” Pop Tate expressed as he cleared off their table.

“Thank you Pop.” Alice replied. “I’m surprised that nobody’s here.”

“I’m surprised that I still have customers.” Pop chuckled. “Ever since the shooting, no one’s wanted to come eat at my diner. It already feels a lot safer with you two here.” Pop walked back into the kitchen, leaving the three at their booth.

“You’re not wrong Chic,” FP broke the silence, “about the Grudny thing. Toni shared similar information with me about her….relationships with her students. Now we have a more definite answer.”

“Okay, so that clarifies why she might have been killed.” Alice interrogated. “But that doesn’t explain why Fred was shot. Especially in here.” Alice looked around the empty diner. She felt a sense of longing in her.

“This place used to be so safe.” she whispered before looking back at Chic. “It was here when I came with your father for spring break during college to meet his family. It was here where…”

“Didn’t there used to be a map up on that wall?” Chic interrupted, pointing to the back wall, now covered with old records and memorabilia.

“Yeah.” An idea struck Alice.

“What? Alice, what is it?” FP asked.
“The map…” Alice muttered. She got up from the booth and went over to where Pop was.

“Pop. Do you still have that map? The old one of Riverdale?”

“I believe I should.” Pop responded. “Wait here.” He moved back into the kitchen. Alice waited for a few moments before he came back out with a large scrolled up map.

“Thank you!” She exclaimed as she took the map from him.

“Do you need it for evidence?” Alice unrolled the map and looked down.

“Not exactly….”

The dining room table at the Cooper household transformed into a workspace. Alice had the map of their county rolled out and pinned down with salt and pepper shakers. She had FP dig out a red Sharpie from her junk drawer so she could write on it.

“Pop’s, where it started.” she thought out loud as she circled where Pop’s was on the map. She traced her hand over to where Greendale was marked on her map.

“Greendale, where Miss Grundy was killed.” she circled the area.

“Then the garage unit on Southside,” FP added in, pointing down to a building just north of Pop’s on the map, “where you and I got attacked yesterday.”

“Now Sunnyside Trailer Park, where you got your present from the Black Hood.” Alice circled both of those places.

“It’s just like you said. There’s no pattern.” Chic examined. “It’s spread all over the place. Grundy’s out in Greendale, and the rest are scattered along the Southside.”

“FP, do you think it’s possible that…” Alice started, then grew silent. She didn’t have to finish that statement for FP to turn to her.

“You think a Serpent is the Black Hood?”

“Well, it was just a suggestion.” Alice huffed. FP clenched his fist then led Alice over to another part of the kitchen.

“Look,” he spoke, “I get it. You’re not a fan of the Serpents. But I know these guys Alice. I’ve been with them since high school, and even after I came back into town. Why would Serpents mess with Northsiders?”

“But you were attacked. We both were. How else would the Black Hood know about your affiliations? So, it’s plausible to think a Serpent is doing all of this…..or maybe a Serpent is feeding information to the Black Hood.”

“All I’m just saying is...don’t jump to conclusions so quickly. There’s a lot more ground we need to cover, and it starts with that map.” FP gestured back to the map on the table.

Alice suddenly felt her phone buzzing in her back pocket. She looked down and her expression dropped. Hal was calling.

“I thought you two were fighting.” FP peered down over her shoulder.
“We still are.” Alice grunted, letting the phone call go to voicemail. She was in no mood to talk to him right now. If he really wanted something, he could leave a message. She set her phone down on the table.

“I’ll be back. I’m gonna grab the mail.”

Alice headed out the front door and went over to her mailbox. She opened the lid and collected her mail. She flipped through only to find junk, coupon magazines, more junk, and….

A tan envelope caught her attention. There was no address but the envelope had “Detective Cooper” written in black marker on the front. She calmly walked into the house keeping her eyes on the envelope. Alice felt her heart rate speed up.

“Alice? You okay?” she could hear FP call out, but she wasn’t paying attention.

Alice sat down at the table and held the envelope in both hands.

“Is that from him?” Chic asked. “The Black Hood?”

Alice didn’t reply. She just opened the envelope and stuck her hand inside.

Luckily there were no surprise gifts or trinkets. It was just a couple of papers - wait no, they were letters. All addressed to her.

Alice flipped the papers up right and began to read.

Detective Cooper,

It gives me great pleasure to finally introduce myself to you personally. I’m assuming by this point, your partner has already received his gift at the trailer park. I bet you’re wondering why you haven’t received something so extravagant as what I sent to Mr. Jones. Well that’s because I don’t think you deserve that. You see, I’ve been watching you for a while now. You’ve captured my interested since you took over the Jason Blossom case. And when you accompanied Mr. Jones to the garage unit on the Southside, I realized that you were quite the worthy opponent. I find you amusing to watch. So let me make my point simple and clear. I attack the people in this town who have sinned, and those who deserve to be brought down to their knees. But you won’t know who I attack next, or where I will come from to make these attacks…..unless you are clever enough to identify my pattern. But I find you a reasonable woman. Are you willing to play?

P.S. if you make word to the Sheriff about this conversation, there will be consequences….

- B.H.

“Jesus, what a psycho…” FP commented leaning over her shoulder to read the letter. Alice sat there with her hands rested on top of the table. She didn’t notice her nails digging into her palms.

“He knows who I am, FP. He knows about us.” Alice’s thoughts blurred. Either this maniac is someone that Alice knew all too well, or they really were a stalker. What did the Black Hood know about her? Did he know about her separation? And the rumors about her? And all those nights she was there at….

You know damn well the secrets you’re hiding.

“Mom….mom, you’re doing it again!” Chic interrupted, sitting down next to her. He placed a hand over hers, causing her to stop her from digging her nails in further. Alice turned over her free hand and lifted her fingers. Her palms were red and her crescents that scabbed over from the nights before were bleeding again. Alice could feel her eyes watering up.
“Alice?” FP’s voice rang into her ears.

She got up from the table and ran up the stairs, going right past him. She couldn’t afford for him to see her like this. Not now.

The first time it happened was three days after Jason Blossom’s corpse was found floating in Sweetwater River. She was stuck at the station examining the autopsy reports for clues. She let Chic know that she wouldn’t be coming home for a while. Alice couldn’t focus on her work; the words blurred on the page. Her palms itched. She needed a distraction. Alice thought about going to the bar downtown but she didn’t want those people staring at her. She certainly didn’t want to be caught at that bar in the Southside either. And she didn’t want to go home.

That’s how she ended up banging on the front door of Hal’s Sharebnb with a bottle of whiskey in her hands. Alice didn’t know why her thoughts brought her here, to her soon-to-be ex-husband. But it was better than drinking alone. He didn’t say anything when he opened the door; he just stared at her with a blank expression. He silently let her in and she flopped down onto one end of his couch, throwing her blue petticoat on the floor and placing the whiskey down on the table in front of her. The space was small. The kitchen and living room were crammed into one half of the apartment. The whole place reminded her of her childhood, of her father. It made her claustrophobic. Hal placed two glasses down on the table and poured their drinks. He slid hers near her and he took the other end cap of the couch.

They didn’t say a word to each other for a solid 10 minutes, just silently sipping on their whiskey. She wasn’t in the mood for conversation in that moment anyway. Hal set his glass down and spoke. He asked questions about her progress with the case, but she didn’t answer any of them. He then tried to bring up Chic. What they were going to do with him, how they would make holidays and birthdays work. She wasn’t here to discuss this matter. “Hal, for once in your life, just shut the fuck up.” Alice barked at him, and her grew silent. The painful minutes past. Alice finished her glass and was tempted to pour herself another. She glanced at him, then set her glass down and got up, almost falling over. “Alice, wait…”

“Do you want me to go, Hal?” she slurred. The alcohol had started to get to her head. Hal stood up and set his glass down next to hers. Was it a yes or a no? Alice stumbled closer to him and placed her forearm on his chest. “Do you. Want me. To go?” she repeated. He looked at her, stroking her forearm. “No.” he coldly replied.

She couldn’t remember who made the move first because everything happened so fast. But they were kissing, the first time they had kissed in a while. His hands were roaming her body, pulling her in closer to him, just like they used to when they first started dating. They were both stumbling back towards the couch, the alcohol lingering in their systems, every kiss becoming more ferocious. His hands found her ass and she felt his nails dig in. Alice broke the kiss and she coiled a hand around his neck, her thumb anchored on his lower lip. She held him there for a moment, then pushed Hal down onto the couch. In a matter of seconds, Alice kicked off her shoes and peeled off her blouse exposing her bra. They stared at each other for a brief moment before she straddled him.

What the fuck am I doing, the voice in her head screamed, but she was too far into it to back out. The kisses were getting deeper, more passionate, making her more drunk. What the fuck am I doing? His hand was undoing her pants, his teeth were nipping at her chest, her collarbone, her neck. She would surely get marks there the next day. What the fuck am I doing? She felt his fingers slip into her underwear, causing her breath to hitch. He whispered something to her, but she couldn’t make sense of it over her moans. What the fuck am I doing? She was grinding into his fingers and undoing his
belt. She gripped hard and stroked fast, causing him to bite her ear lobe. Her nails dug into his scalp. What the fuck am I doing? They finished, but their battle wasn’t over yet. He picked her up and carried her to his bed, removing the remaining clothes off them and pulling her closer to him. What am I doing? What am I doing? Oh god, what the fuck am I doing? It was almost three in the morning when she recollected her scattered clothes off the floor and left. The smell of alcohol and raw sex was so nauseating she had to shower before she could finally sleep.

The second time it happened she walked into Pop’s a week later. She sat herself at the counter and ordered some coffee. She looked around the diner noticing how almost empty it was, except for a few teen stragglers. The door opened behind her and she turned to find him walking in. He looked rugged and exhausted. He stood there for a moment, then joined her at the counter. “Figure out who did it?” he threw in after he made his order. She knew he was talking about Jason’s murderer. She shrugged her shoulders at him then continued to sip her coffee. She wanted to ignore him (she wanted so desperately to forget what happened the last time they were alone together) but she couldn’t help glancing back over at him. Minutes passed, and when he finished, he got up and paid. Alice exhaled when he was about to leave, but she felt his hand rest on her shoulder and him leaning into her ear. “I have some theories. That is... if you’re willing to listen.” She looked at him and that’s when it hit her. Hal needed it just as much as she did. She paid for her coffee then walked out with Hal. They spent the next couple of hours fucking in her car on Lovers’ Lane.

The third time, and every other time after, Alice would show up at Hal’s with or without warning. And he would let her in without a word. And they would fall into the same rhythm. Kissing without lusting for lost feelings. Fucking into the early hours of the morning without those strings holding them together. They made a silent agreement from that point forward - no talking about the separation, no work, no Chic. How would they? They no longer considered themselves husband and wife. Not even boyfriend and girlfriend. They were strangers now, dancing a destructive tango in the night to forget the loneliness and to numb the pain. This was what their marriage became. It made Alice sick.

She tried to forget what she brought herself into and focused on her palms. Her poor, bloody, damaged palms. 20 minutes after furiously scrubbing her palms, Chic came up to her bedroom and sat her down onto her bed. “I’m sorry” she kept muttering and choking out tears into her son’s shoulder over and over, but it didn’t bother him.

She rubbed the damp washcloth over her face and looked at herself in the mirror. She looked like a mess, but she was too scared to look away. She felt disgusted. Alice owed FP an explanation, big time.

FP spent those minutes at the table staring at the map and the Black Hood’s letter, getting absolutely nowhere. He picked up the letter and scoured through until he found a page that was not part of the letter. He finally noticed Alice come back into the kitchen as she inhaled slowly and sat down at the table. She was silent for a moment, then spoke:

“There’s so many secrets. Some secrets….that are so painful, you not only hide them from the world….but you hide them from yourself.” She paused, looking at FP, then continued. “There’s a reason why so many people think I’m crazy. And they have every right to assume so. I’ve driven almost all of my previous partners away because of how horrible I’ve been, and the remedies that I…” she stopped again. She knew too well that she didn’t want to finish that sentence.

“You haven’t driven me away yet.” FP commented. He meant it as a compliment, but she still frowned.
“You can talk to me, you know.” he continued. “Might do you some good.”

Alice hesitated. She had never explained herself to anyone, not even her previous partners. And not ones that she’s only known for less than a week. But there was something different about FP. He was ballsy, for certain, and not afraid to stand up to her. But he was also comforting and protective. She still wasn’t sure if she could fully trust him, but this could be a start.

The words flowed out of her like a running faucet. Alice told him about her marriage to Hal and how she found herself miserable until the PD job gave her a purpose. She told him about the miscarriages and the failed pregnancies and how she feared losing Chic. She told him about the previous cases she worked and all the partners she had before. And finally, she explained the crescents on her palms. She began digging her nails in when she was 11, two years after her mom left. Alice knew it was self harm but she never wanted to admit that. It became a private dangerous secret of hers, only until she noticed Chic doing the same when he turned 13. The only parts she omitted from him were her late night rendezvous with Hal.

Now that some of the weight was lifted from her shoulders, she leaned back in her chair and let out a slow breath. FP didn’t say anything at first; he just sat there across from her trying to form words. She didn’t expect him to respond right away.

Finally, he spoke, “Does Keller know about any of this?”

“No.” she answered. “We….we would run into each other and Pop’s.” she lied. “Check in on Chic. That’s all.” She glanced over at him to see if he could notice her bluffing. But he seemed to buy into it. Alice sighed in relief. She reached for the letters and peered at the page FP had laying on top. It was a single paragraph written more elegantly than the rest.

And thus the words were spoken,
And this the plighted vow,
And, though my faith be broken,
And, though my heart be broken,
Here is a ring, as token
That I am happy now!

A poem? So this Black Hood was educated….had she seen this before?

“You okay?” FP’s word shook her out of her daze.

“Alice barely noticed when FP shifted in his seat.

“This may not bode well with you, but….I think you need to talk to him.” FP broke the silence. Alice felt the papers drop from her hands onto the table. She glared at FP with a fire in her eyes.

“You’re kidding, right? FP, please tell me you’re joki----” she tried to protest but he interjected.

“Look, I’m not trying to delve into your personal life, Alice, but this your goddamn marriage on the line. You can’t keep dodging the topic forever. Have you considered how this could affect your
son?” He lowered his voice and leaned in closer. “Do you realize how much he worries about you? Alice, please. I know you’re scared, and you have other priorities to focus on right now, including this case. But maybe...just try to talk to him.”

Alice didn’t respond. Her mind was racing between the happy memories with him and the recent dirty ones. A part of her wanted to avoid the situation altogether. Just get a divorce and have him out of her life, or only to hold him on loose strings...just in case. But another part of her, the part that she buried months ago, wanted things to work between her and Hal. She wanted to make things right but didn’t know how. She avoided loneliness by having his warm body against hers. It eased pain but it couldn’t take away her longing. For the first time, in a long time, she missed Hal.

Alice grabbed her phone from the table and scanned for his contact. She pressed the number under his icon and waited.

The phone rang once. Twice. Three times. He picked up on fourth. The other end was silent. Would he hang up? Would he just laugh and tell her to go fuck herself? Damnit Hal, just say something.

“....Alice.” She took a deep breath.

“Okay, Hal. I’m ready to talk.”

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Her hands were gripping the kitchen counter. The morning came and she wasn’t prepared. FP had gone home an hour after she arranged to meet with Hal (he figured it would be better if he wasn’t here to watch) and promised to come take Chic out of the house and get breakfast for the three of them. She checked the time on her phone. It was almost nine. Hal would be here any minute now. Her heart was racing.

“Mom, are you sure you don’t want me in here with you?” Chic placed his hand over hers.

“I...I’ll be fine, Chic.” she stuttered. Alice let go of the counter and gave her son a soft smile. “You go and help FP, okay?”

There was a knock at the door and her heart stopped. He’s here.

“I’ll go get it.” Chic left her side and hurried to the door. Part of her hoped it was just FP coming to get her son, but she knew it couldn’t be. She didn’t feel ready. What would she say? What did she have to apologize for? Breathe Alice, just breathe. Chic opened the door.

“Hey dad.” Chic moved out of the way slightly and Hal entered the house. She inhaled and fought to hold in her emotions when his eyes met hers. He held a bouquet of flowers in his hand. Keep it together, Alice, she silently told herself.

Chic coughed and moved behind his father. “I’ll just....um. Let me know when it's okay to come back.” And with that, he shut the door, leaving the two of them alone in the house.

The silence dragged on, their eyes not leaving each other. Alice broke their gaze, staring down at her feet, then she pushed herself away from the counter. She brought her attention up again, He was glancing around the area for a moment. Then he spoke.

“It looks nice in here.” his voice pierced the room, and Hal moved towards her.

“I picked these up on the way here.” he gestured to the flowers. “Don’t worry - I avoided the peonies.” Alice noticed the flowers for the first time.
“You remembered?” her voice cracked.

“You’re still allergic to them, aren’t you?” he softly smiled. Her eyes met his again. This would be harder than she thought.

“I’ll get a vase for these.” he moved past her to grab a vase from the cabinet and fill it with water. Alice sat down at the table, her fingers interlacing and her thumbs dancing. She closed her eyes, concentrated on her breathing. She wanted this to be over already.

Her eyes opened when she heard Hal place the flowers on the table and he sat down in the chair next to her. His forearms rested on the table as he looked at her.

“Hal….” she started.

“Before you….um, just let me…” he jumped in. Alice frowned slightly and gestured for him to continue, breaking eye contact with him.

“What I said to you…..the other day……” he scoffed at himself, “I regret it, Alice.” Her face fell flat and her eyes widened at him. He took a deep breath then continued. “I was hostile when I shouldn’t have been. I didn’t exactly consider how what I said would affect you.” He sounded sincere, but yet again he could be faking it too. Alice didn’t know what to think.

“Since when did you care about my feelings lately?” she interjected, a little too harsh. Hal looked defeated, so she followed up: “That’s not what I….Hal listen to me.” She tried to say something, but nothing would come out. She noticed the hurt in his eyes, making her shift her focus onto her hands. “Whatever….this thing we’ve been doing, it’s fucked up. Yeah, it made you and me feel less lonely…but…..” She stopped to think. What was there to say? I don’t want our marriage to become a series of one night stands? I don’t want Chic to think that we’re animals? Was this even salvageable? A lone tear streamed down her cheek.

“I’ve avoiding this for too long. We both have, Hal. We….we should have done something sooner, and not just…fucked for the sake of feeling something.” The tears were flowing now, but she couldn’t look at him. “We just kept doing it, and there were moments I just wanted to reach out to you and just tell you what was on my mind, but... but I thought that….that you didn’t give a shit anymore and….”

Before she could keep rambling uncontrollably, his hand reached out and rested on top of hers. His touch was soft, not like the ways he touched her the weeks before. It was gentle and warming. She brought her eyes to his and saw that he was tearing up too.

“I meant what I said, Alice. And you’re right. We shouldn’t be avoiding this anymore. That’s why I want to work again. If you…..if you’re willing to, maybe we can do something….that doesn’t include rough loveless sex. It can be small. You know, like….maybe going Pop’s after work one night. Or just a stroll in the park. Maybe you and Chic can come over for dinner later this week.” He slowly raised his hand to cup her face and wiped a tear away.

The softness of his touch brought back memories of when they first starting dating. Yes, they were young and very naive back then, but nevertheless, it was a comfort. In that moment, she wanted to lean in and kiss him, not with lust or sexual desire but with longing. She wanted to taste the saltiness of their tears in a kiss and she wanted to feel his fingers tangle in her hair. She wanted to take him by the hand and lead him back upstairs, into what could be their bedroom again. She wanted to hold him and inhale his scent. She wanted him to press his body against her, to have his hands trace every crevice of her body, to make love to her as if the world was ending and they were the only two lovers left alive. She wanted to love him again. And she wanted him to love her too. He was the only
real love she had. He was what she knew.

But those were only foolish desires speaking from her heart. She needed to listen to reason. No matter how badly she wanted her love for him to come back with resurgence.

“I don’t know if we can go back to the way things were.” He moved his hand off her face and back down onto the table. That part of her face where his hand was now felt cold. “I don’t know if our marriage can be saved. But it’s worth a shot, if we take baby steps.” Baby steps. That sounded like a good motto. Alice stared at their hands then moved hers to firmly hold onto his. She swallowed back tears and nodded.

“Baby steps.” she echoed. Maybe her marriage to Hal was worth saving after all.

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It had been almost two hours since FP left with Chic. There wasn’t really much to do on a Sunday morning except drive around the town for a few times. So they wound up at his trailer, FP cleaning his bedroom and Chic examining the map from the day before. Toni, Joaquin, Sweet Pea, and Fangs dropped by to help rid of the Black Hood’s snake, and FP introduced them to Chic.

After a while, FP and Chic swung by the town’s grocery store to get some food for Alice and slowly made their way back to Elm Street. They pulled up to the curb a few houses away from the house and parked.

“Hey, can you get my phone? She hasn’t texted yet, has she?” FP asked.

“I don’t know.” the young boy responded. “She hasn’t let me know. Hang on, where’s your phone?”

“In the back, boy. Be careful!” he barked. Chic dug around in the back seat of the truck. FP looked up from his dashboard and saw two figures emerge from the Cooper household. Alice and Hal embraced, the smaller one burying her shoulder into the other. Hal pulled back slightly, holding her face in his hands, then, to FP’s astonishment, gave her a lingering kiss on the forehead.

FP’s face fell, but he didn’t know why. He had no attachment to Alice. He was just a coworker. What reason did he have to feel this way.

He watched as Hal left the entryway and jumped into his vehicle, driving away. Alice stayed outside for a few moments, watching the man that left her house leave the neighborhood, then she reentered the house.

“Got it.” Chic readjusted himself in his seat tossing the phone into FP’s lap. “You really need to keep a better eye on your stuff.” FP rolled his eyes and glared at the boy.

Before he could protest, the phone in his lap buzzed.

Alice: All clear. Door’s unlocked for you and Chic.

“That’s her.” FP scoffed, then moved the car into the driveway of the Cooper household. FP and Chic struggled to carry the bags of groceries up to the house, but somehow they managed to push open the door and place the bags on the counter.

“Can you get the rest and lock up, boy?” FP tossed Chic the keys to his truck. Chic ran back out to the truck and FP turned to Alice.
“So?” he pondered. Alice pushed her hair away from her face.

“We’re calling the separation off….for now. We’re gonna take things slow. And if it goes well, then…..” she shrugged her shoulders and chuckled. “Maybe he can come home and we can be a family again.” FP nodded his head slowly, somewhat confused.

“Hey, a little help here!” Chic cried at the doorway. FP turned and ran to help the boy.

Alice placed the flowers on her nightstand. She wasn’t fully ready to recommit herself to Hal, but maybe it was a step towards making their relationship better. She dug out a box from under her bed of memories of her and Hal, a box she quickly threw together after she kicked him out of the house. She placed the box on the bed and pulled out each item one by one. A frame of the two of them a couple of years after they moved to Riverdale. An article Hal published in the Register. A photo of her, Hal, and a very young Chic strolling through the Boston Public Garden. An old beaten up copy of The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Volume 2, a birthday present Hal gave her years before. Poe was one of her favorite poets. Alice flipped through old poetry book, remembering how excited she felt when he gave the book to her. She stopped on a random poem and read through. The words looked familiar. Her eyes widened.

“FP…..FP!” she called out, rushing out of the room with the book in her hands. FP was hunched over the dinner table when her saw her running over to him.

“Hey, are you alrig---”

“That poem the Black Hood sent me. Where is it?” she sped through her words. He slid the letters to her and she placed the book down on the table next to it.

“It’s Edgar Allan Poe. He’s quoting Edgar Allan Poe. That’s why it looked familiar to me. It’s from this poem, Bridal Ballad.” she gestured to the poem. FP glanced over and read aloud.

“And my soul is sorely shaken, Lest an evil step be taken, Lest the dead who is forsaken, May not be happy now. Okay, so we know where it’s from, but what does it mean?”

“If I remember correctly,” Alice theorized, “there’s someone, an old flame, that keeps haunting her when she wants to get married and lead a happy life. The only problem is I can't think of any newlyweds in this town, or maybe the Black Hood is talking about a married person cheating…”

“But he can’t go after Fred Andrews again, can he?”

“Maybe, I don’t know! Unless he means that this person is someone that I know, or…..” her thoughts stopped, coming to a realization. Her breath shortened and she felt dizzy.

“Alice?” FP placed a hand on her upper back, keeping her steady. “Alice, what’s wrong?” She looked at him with fear in her eyes.


It took only 10 minutes of speeding through downtown Riverdale to reach Hal’s Sharebnb. FP drove the distance with Alice yelling at him to speed up. She dialed Hal’s number multiple times, only to leave her with his voice telling her to leave a message after the tone.
“Hal, please. This is the fourth time I’ve tried calling you. I don’t know if you just changed your mind about everything but please, get your ass out of that building right now. I’ll explain everything when I find you. But, just get out of there, honey. Please.” She ended the message and clutched the phone to her chest. She silently hoped that he was still alive and not playing a trick on her.

FP pulled up at the building and Alice rushed out. The woman at the front desk noticed Alice and stopped her.

“Is there something I can help you two with?” Alice moved to the desk and hunched over.

“I need to get into Hal Cooper’s. Is there a spare key or something?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t exactly understand what’s going on?” FP moved next to Alice and tried to ease the situation.

“We’re with the PD. We think someone might be after Mr. Cooper.” The woman shifted in her seat.

“I’m sorry, I wish I could help, but….don’t you need a warrant to search somebody for--”

“To hell with the warrant!” Alice yelled. “My husband’s life is on the line and if I don’t get to him, it won’t end well for either one of us!” She was struggling to control her emotions, and she was tempted to start digging her nails into her palms. FP slowly and gently pulled her away from the desk, telling her to breathe.

“Okay,” the woman hesitated, “He’s on the third floor, last door on the right. I’m not sure if he’s there, but you can try.”

“Thank you.” FP responded. “You haven’t seen anyone suspicious come through, by chance?”

“I don’t know.” she answered. FP waved back at her and he followed Alice up the stairs.

Alice practically flew up the steps and when they reached the third floor, she sprinted down the hallway, FP trying to keep up with her. She stopped at Hal’s door, the same one she kept coming back to all those weeks ago, and knocked furiously.

“Hal?” she called out, but no response. “HAL!”

“Try the doorknob.” FP suggested. She twisted with no luck. She resorted back to banging on the door.

“HAL OPEN THE FUCKING DOOR RIGHT NOW!” Her voice began cracking. FP had to pull back to keep her from collapsing. He body slammed into the door. And again, and again.

“Stay back.” he warned her, then he kicked the door open. It flew open to the empty Sharebnb. FP pulled out his gun and entered slowly. “Hal?” he called out. Alice entered after.

The only noise in the place was from the TV, which caught her attention. It was a video of Alice and Hal on their wedding day exchanging their vows. Just like the one in her dream. She scoffed.

“You think this is funny, Hal?” she called out. The thought made her laugh. “Okay, Hal. Whatever sick joke you’re trying to play on me better stop.”

“Alice…” FP’s voice waivered.

“I mean, seriously Hal…” Alice paced out of the living room, not paying attention to where FP was standing. “I offered to talk things out with you and this is how you repay me? By not answering my
“calls….”

“Alice.”

“By playing this video and hiding on me. I mean, I thought we worked out something. Guess I just made a huge mista—” she stopped next to FP and finally looked up. She screamed.

There on the bedroom was the lifeless body of Harold Cooper pinned against the bed frame. The throat slit and the chest stabbed multiple times. Blood was everywhere. And above on the wall, in blood, read “YOU MAY NOW KISS THE SINNER”.

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End of Chapter Four

Chapter End Notes

......WHOOPS ¯\_(ツ)_/¯ Talk about a cliffhanger. Let me know what yal think!
Chapter Five - The Departed

Chapter Notes

Hello! Sorry I've been away for so long without an update (that school life though....)
Have you caught up on the new season of Riverdale? Anyway, I'm here to bless you all with a new chapter! Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Five – The Departed

It was Christmas 2011, seven years before everything went to hell. Thomas and Prudence Cooper had just announced their retirement to Florida, leaving their son Hal the sole owner. The Coopers were going to have one last Christmas together before the move, but Hal’s parents had both decided it would be best to get adjusted to their new snowbird lifestyle. Alice acted like she was bittersweet to watch her in-laws finally leave Riverdale just three days before Christmas, but inward she was silently rejoicing. She never got along well with Hal’s parents, especially Prudence.

Christmas became the way it was for the three of them again the same way it did in that small apartment in Boston. Hal made his special eggnog recipe (it was just eggnog he bought from the store and spiked with some rum) for him and Alice, and he used some of his new inheritance money to spend on Chic’s presents.

Alice spent the majority of the morning watching her boy tearing open his presents with glee. She remembered work having been hard, so Hal generously offered to make the family’s Christmas breakfast.

“Mom, I love this!” Chic goggled at a robotic toy that Alice had picked out earlier in the week. “Archie and Jason are gonna be so jealous!”

“Chic, go wash up! Breakfast is almost ready!” Hal called out from the kitchen. Chic cradled the toy in his arms and ran up the stairs.

“Be careful!” Alice watched her son and laughed. She slowly rose up from the couch looked out the window. The snow was coming down in flurries. She felt Hal wrap his arm around her stomach and rest his chin on her shoulder. She allowed herself to lean back into him and rested her arm on his.

“This is the first I’ve seen you happy in a while, and not so stressed.” He softly kissed her shoulder, making Alice chuckle.

“So? It’s the holidays, your parents finally left, and I have my boys.” She took her free hand and grabbed for Hal’s, turning around to face him. She stepped in closer and cupped his cheek.

“You’re going to do good things with the Register, Hal. You were meant for this.” He smiled at her slowly. Alice was starting to sense he was up to something. Then, he pulled out from behind his back a mistletoe and held it above their heads.

“Oh my god, Hal.” Alice sighed and laughed, shoving on his chest.

“What?” he egged her on. “You really think I’d stop doing this? I know it works every time.”
“You dork.” She muttered and closed the space between them. They lingered in the kiss and pulled each other in closer. They pair didn’t even notice their son coming down the stair.

Alice pulled away to find Chic, eyes widened and mouth hanging, standing on the stairs.

“I didn’t see anything!” he shouted and bolted back up the stairs, causing Alice and Hal to burst into laughter. She rested her head on his shoulder trying to catch her breath.

“So, I’ve been thinking…” Hal began. Alice lifted her head to meet his gaze.

“What?” Hal turned to the stairway then back at his wife.

“How about we give Chic one more present in the near future? Say….a little brother or sister?” Alice leaned back slightly. Her eyes began to water.

“Hal…are you saying you want to have more kids?”

“Well, I figured since we’re both free from my parents’ wrath, and we still have that extra room upstairs that we could turn into a nursery---” but Alice cut him off when she flung her arms around his neck and kissed him.

It was the best Christmas with Hal she could remember.

But there would be no more Christmases like the one so many years ago. There wouldn’t be anything anymore, because Harold Cooper was dead. He was dead, and Alice couldn’t save him.

She sat numbly in the chair of Keller’s office, not being able to erase the image from her head. She didn’t know how much time had passed, or if she was in a dream.

Hal is dead. Hal is dead. Hal is dead. And it’s all my fault.

Her mind snapped out of her lingo state when the door opened behind her. She turned to the source of the noise and found Keller walking into the room. He removed his hat and set it on the table in front of her with a sigh.

“Jesus, Alice. I don’t even know what to say.” She didn’t respond. She looked up at him for a brief moment then leaned back further into her chair, staring down at the desk. Keller sat down across from her and rested his forearms on the desk.

“Look,” he started, getting her attention, “I know this weekend’s been insane for you….for all of us, really. And...I truly am sorry for your loss, Alice. And Chic’s.”

She couldn’t tell if he was being sincere or not. He knew of her struggles, her ups and downs. Did he really mean it?

He continued, “I just...I need you to tell me everything that happened. And I know you’ll have to explain it to other peo---”

“What is it I have to explain?” she jumped in with a calm manner. “The Black Hood killed my husband, Tom.” Keller frowned and sat up more.

“I thought you and Hal were not being friendly with one another.”

“We were.” she answered quietly, trying to hold back tears. “But….he kept calling me, and....” she stopped. She took a shaky breath and spoke, “So, I arranged for us to talk. And we did.”
“Okay, but that doesn’t explain why that woman from the Sharebnb told us that you were berating her about Hal. Why did you even go there, Alice?”

What would she say to him? Did she need to lie to him the same way she lied to FP? Would she tell him about the Black Hood’s letter? The poem? What choice did she have?

“The Black Hood sent me a letter,” she choked out. Keller’s eyebrows rose.

“What?” Alice struggled to make the words come out.

“He said that he wants me to….play some sort of sick game with him. He didn’t say exactly what, but he wants me and FP to...”

“You don’t need to tell me.” Keller held his hand up slightly. Alice swallowed the lump in her throat. She wanted this to be over already. She just wanted to go home and be with her son? Where was he? Where was Chic?

“And how does this tie into what happened to Hal?” Alice didn’t know how to answer at first. He would need to see the letter eventually. And what about the snake at FP’s trailer?

“I wanted to warn Hal about the Black Hood,” she spun her story, “if he tried to do anything to us. I only remembered after he left. I tried to call him and he wasn’t responding. So I….I panicked, and had FP drive me to the Sharebnb…..where we found him.” she began to zone out. The images came back into her head. The blood on the walls, on the sheets. Hal’s lifeless body laying limp, eyes glassy and bulged out.

“Did he send you anything else?” Keller’s voice broke her train of thought. Alice stared down at her hands for a moment then looked back up at him.

“No.” she lied. She knew that telling Keller was already risky enough. What if the Black Hood found out? Would he hurt Keller? Would he go after Chic? What about FP?

“I think we’ll leave it at that for now.” Keller rose from his seat and gestured for her to stand. Alice crossed her arms slowly and waited for him to open the door.

She walked out of the office, Keller following behind her, and found her son at her desk. He was crying. FP and Keller’s son, Kevin, were on each side of him. When Alice came closer, Chic looked up and stood.

“Mom?” he muttered, and Alice’s heart broke. She never wanted to see her baby boy like this. The tears came out of her uncontrollably and she reached out for her son. The remaining Coopers held onto each other tight and sobbed.

“I tried….” Alice wailed into her son’s shoulder. “I tried to get to him.”

“Mom…” Chic pulled away slightly to hold his mother’s face. “This wasn’t…”

“I’m sorry.” She shook her head. She didn’t notice FP coming next to the pair and placing a hand on Alice’s shoulder. She turned to him and sniffled.

“Mrs. Cooper?” Keller’s son, Kevin, broke the silence, startling them. He moved closer to them and continued, “If there’s anything that my dad and I can do…”

“It’s alright, Kevin.” she responded. “I appreciate it. Chic and I both do.” Chic returned to his friend and the boys returned to their conversation. When the boys weren’t looking, FP leaned in to her so
no one else could hear him.

“Did he ask you about what the Black Hood sent?” he whispered. Alice glanced at Chic and Kevin for a moment, then she turned back to FP.

“I didn’t tell him everything,” her voice wavered. She leaned back to meet FP’s eyes. He looked tired. She felt awful for dragging him through all of this. She tried to speak, but no words would come out, so she clamped her mouth shut.

“When he’s done talking to me,” FP referred to Keller, “I’ll take you and Chic home. Okay, Coop?”

Alice swallowed and nodded. His hand left her shoulder and FP headed into Keller’s office. She could feel her nails scraping at her palms, begging to dive in.

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The bath was warm, way too warm. But Alice didn’t mind. She wanted to feel the burning water on her skin and to inhale the steam. Just anything she could to get this snake in her back to stop slithering and to unclench her jaw.

She became so lost in her thoughts that she didn’t notice the door opening.

“Figured you were in here.” Hal entered their bathroom, catching her attention. He had with him a bottle of red wine and two glasses in his hands. She gave him a small smile then wrapped her arms around her knees, pulling them closer to her. The fresh crescents on her palms stung in the warm water. Hal rested the bottle and glasses on the counter then sat on the floor, leaning against the rim of the bathtub. They had fought earlier in the week over visiting his parents in Florida for the remaining weeks of summer. They didn’t talk much for the past couple of days, and Chic was away at summer camp. Alice felt guilty for screaming so much at him. She may not have liked his parents, but whether she liked it or not, they were still family.

“Long day?” he started. Alice slowly turned her head towards her husband.

“Just stressful.” she spoke calmly, her eyes staying on Hal. She didn’t want to fight with him anymore.

“Maybe going to Florida wouldn’t be so bad.” she noted, resting her hand on his cheek. “If you want to go, we can.”

“Ali…” Hal gently wrapped his fingers around her wrist and ran his thumb up and down hers. She unwrapped herself from her position and leaned on the rim facing Hal.

“I’ll be okay. I can survive your parents for a couple of days. I need to get out of that damn office anyway.” He peeled her hand away from his face and saw the crescents. He looked back up at her with concern on his face.

“I shouldn’t have fought with you about this in the first place, Hal. I promise, I’ll be fine.”

He kissed her palm and clamped her hand shut. He held it there for a moment then reached his free hand out, pulling her towards him. His lips were warm and she could still smell the cologne he sprayed on earlier in the day, but she didn’t mind. Alice wrapped her arm around Hal’s shoulders as they kissed. When they finally parted, their foreheads remained touching, his thumb stroking her cheek.

“I don’t want to force you into anything you don’t want to do.” he muttered. Alice smiled gradually,
raising her head higher to kiss him on the forehead.

“I can find some things to do in Florida. Some of them that can just be you and me.” Hal looked up at her and developed a Cheshire Cat look.

“Well, luckily we got some time for that now.” Alice raised an eyebrow at him, and with that he broke their embrace and stood up. He kicked off his shoes and undid his pants.

“Hal…” Alice grew more concerned at the sight of her husband stripping in front of her. “What are you…” His pants fell to the floor and he peeled off the cardigan, and her mouth hung open.

Without another moment of hesitation, he jumped into the tub, causing Alice to scream and cover her face as the water rippled out of control. They were both laughing hard.

“We’re gonna flood the damn house!” she cackled. Hal moved closer into her and wrapped his arm around her waist, never breaking his smile.

“But the worst thing we’ve done in this house, babe.” he kissed her shoulder, and she rolled her eyes at him.

“You’re an evil man, Harold Cooper.” she smirked.

“Yeah, but I’m your evil man.” Hal said before leaning in. The kiss started slow, then became more passionate every time their lips parted. In a swift motion, Alice straddled him in the tub as his hands found her waist. She held onto his forearms as they continued to kiss. The water was still warm against her skin, but his touch felt like fire. A hand escalated up her back and Alice gasped. She allowed herself to enjoy the moment and giggle as his mouth found her jawline.

The splashing of the water and echoed laughter rang in Alice’s ears, another memory to be buried with Hal’s corpse. The water was burning her, but she needed to numb her pain. Her eyes were still red and puffy from the tears. The steam should have helped, but the alcohol was making it worse. She gulped down the last of her wine and struggled to swallow the bitter drink. The glass slipped from her hand and fell onto the bath mat. Alice pulled her knees into her and rested her head onto them, sobbing. What did Hal do to deserve a gruesome death like this?

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It was almost two in the morning when FP finally fell asleep. The past week had been stressful for sure. First, the attack at the garage, then the snake, and now Alice losing her husband. He was cursing Keller a million times in his head for putting him into this position in the first place.

But Alice. There was something about her that made this whole ordeal seem less maniacal. He couldn’t tell if it was her work ethic or her tenacity, but he was wrong about her being a stick in the mud. And he felt awful for her. And Chic. Seeing her grieve over Hal reminded him so eerily of what happened to him…

Some nights he would lie in his bed and he’d see her. He could feel her arm rest on top of his chest and her head rest onto his shoulder.

“What are you thinking about, Jonesy?” she would ask him. He would smile at his wife coil his arm around her waist.

“Just can’t sleep.” He would face her and absorb it all. Her dark brown hair. The three little stars on the side of her eye. The scar on her chin from when she got in a knife fight as a teenager.
“Gladys, have I ever told you I loved you?” he’d tease. She would smile at him and he swore her eyes twinkled.

“Tell me again.” she would egg him on, prompting for him to kiss her with every ounce of love he could.

He missed her. FP longed for her, and he longed for his children. Alice was lucky that she still had Chic, but it didn’t mean their family would be entirely whole again. Alice Cooper had her issues and her secrets, but at least FP now had something in common with her.

When he woke up around 7 in the morning, he was tempted to fall back asleep til about 8:30. But in that moment, he decided to get up early and pick up his partner.

It was 7:45 when he arrived at the Cooper household, cradling a cup holder full of coffee in one hand and a bag full of doughnuts in the other. He was greeted by Chic at the door and he noticed a sleep deprived Alice sitting at the dinner table. She looked over at him then returned to her numb state.

“Just say it, FP. I look like hell.” FP frowned at her remark, and sat down at the table. He handed her one of the cups of coffee and slid the bag of doughnuts to her.

“I was gonna say you look more well rested than I do right now.” he replied, trying to make her smile. She didn’t respond, she just took the coffee and held it in her hands.

“I’ll need to start making arrangements for the funeral. See if I can get it done this weekend.” Alice brainstormed, taking a sip of her coffee. FP gave her a puzzled look. Her behavior was oddly concerning.

“Alice…” he began, but she slammed her cup onto the table.

“I don’t need you harping at me, FP. I already get enough of it from Keller!” she snapped. FP leaned back into his chair, half in shock and half in guilt. He didn’t mean to set her off. Alice took a shaky breath before continuing.

“Look, I know you’re concerned, but just….please let me handle this the way I know how to handle this.” With that, she grabbed her cup and got up from her seat, quickly snatching a doughnut from the bag.

“That doesn’t mean you should be going through this shit alone!” FP rose from his chair and moved closer to Alice. “I don’t want to change anything about you,” he spoke calmly, “but I want to help you, okay? You shouldn’t be carrying all that weight on your shoulders, especially with this Black Hood crap.” He paused and stared down at his feet. He rested a hand on the table and looked back up at her. “If it helps, I could help plan the funeral for Hal.”

Alice’s face softened. “You’d do that?” He nodded gently. She opened her mouth slightly, but clamped it shut. She forced herself to take a bite of the doughnut.

“Let me get dressed.” she spoke after she swallowed, “then we can talk more.” Alice rested her coffee and doughnut on the table and headed up the stairs. FP grabbed a doughnut from the bag and held it out to Chic.

“She gets like this when she’s stressed.” the boy explained, taking the pastry from FP.

“You holding up okay, boy?” FP asked. Chic nodded, holding the doughnut in his mouth and slinging his backpack on.
“Don’t worry about taking me to school,” Chic held his breakfast in his hand, “I’m gonna hitch a ride with Archie today.” He began to head out the door when FP stopped him.

“Listen, boy. If….if anything bad happens….just let me know.”

“Define bad.” Chic pondered. FP glanced up the stairs, hoping Alice wasn’t eavesdropping, and turned back to Chic.

“If your mom has a panic attack, or…..you know her better than I do.”

“I got it.” Chic nodded. “I’m actually kinda glad she has a good partner like you.”

“The hell’s that supposed to mean?” FP raised his brow. Chic paused for a moment, the spoke.

“She doesn’t really attach herself to anyone at work. You’re kinda the first work partner she’s gotten close to.”

The car ride to the station was silent for the most part. Alice had finished her coffee and breakfast on the way over, trying not to think about Hal. She watched the world go by out the window, her arm resting on the windowsill. FP pulled up to the parking lot and turned off the ignition. She turned to him then caught a glimpse of his rearview mirror. She never noticed something was hanging off it. A ring hanging from a necklace chain. Alice grabbed for the ring and held it in her hand. Was this FP’s?

“You were married?” she asked him. He didn’t respond at first. FP was glaring down at the steering wheel. He held his keys in his hands, pulling them closer to him hesitantly.

“Her name was Gladys. She grew up here in Riverdale, on the Southside.” he started, not making eye contact with her. “I only started dating her after high school, but….she was important to me. We got married, had two kids - Jughead and Jellybean.” He stopped. He gripped the steering wheel tighter and rested his forehead against it.

“So,” Alice questioned, “does that make you….divorced?” He said nothing. FP lifted his forehead off the wheel and looked at Alice. At that point, she knew. He was just like her.

“Widowed.” he finally answered. “She died about ten years ago. And my kids got taken from me.”

She had so many questions. How did she die? Why were his children removed from his custody? How the hell did he end up working for Keller in the first place? But those would all be for another story at another time, she supposed. He grabbed for the ring and held it between his fingers.

“FP…” Alice gasped, “I….I’m so sorry.”

“You didn’t know.” FP replied, attempting to choke back tears. “But now you do.”

“Why are you telling me this?” He let go of the ring and leaned back into the driver's seat, his hands resting on his lap.

“To let you know that you’re not alone. That you’re not the only one who’s lost someone you loved.” Alice didn’t know what to say. She never bonded with any of the partners she worked with in the past, but there was something about FP Jones. In that moment, she realized that they needed each other now more than ever.
She extended her hand out and grabbed one of his, squeezing tight. She looked out the windshield so he wouldn’t see her tearing up. He squeezed back. They stayed like that for a few minutes.

When they finally entered the station, they were both shocked to find a giant arrangement of flowers sitting on Alice’s desk.

“FP…” She was hesitant to go over to her desk. What if this was the Black Hood taunting her? FP gently placed his hand on her back before moving around her desk. She was about to pester him to be careful, but it was too late. He examined the bouquet at every angle.

“Not seeing anything suspicious. Unless you wanna look for yourself, Coop.” She rolled her eyes at him and made the journey around the desk.

It was a bundle of yellow roses. No peonies. No blood stains. No clues from the Black Hood. But she did notice a small greeting card sticking out of the flowers. Alice reached for it and opened the card.

To Detective Cooper and her family, we send our sympathy and mourn for you. - The Lodge Family

“Who’s it from?” FP questioned. Alice stared at the last name. Lodge….had she heard of the Lodge family before?

“Just a sympathy card from one of the families in town, that’s all.” she showed him the card.

“No fucking way.” he muttered, reading it.

“You know who the Lodges are?”

“You don’t? I thought Hal would have told you about them or something.” Maybe Hal did mention the Lodges at some point, but Alice was still drawing blanks. FP shook his head and set the card down.

“Have you at least heard about the new SoDale project happening on the Southside?” SoDale, now that sounded familiar.

“Hal was planning some write-up about it, but,” Alice tried to jog her memory, “he never gave me much detail.” How could she remember? Hal was working on the article during the time of the Jason Blossom case….and their marital issues.

“SoDale is this whole gentrification project that’s breaking ground on Southside...including Serpent territory.” FP explained, “And the one who’s running all of this? The man behind the curtain?” He pointed down at the card, capturing Alice’s attention. “The head of Lodge Industries and the patriarch of this family - Hiram Lodge.”

Alice glared at the bold-faced name. She felt like she was having a goddamn Gatsby, what Gatsby moment. Did Hal ever bring up Hiram Lodge? Maybe she read his name somewhere or saw it on TV. But in all the 10 years she had been in Riverdale, how could she not know who this man was, or let alone what he looked like?

“Jones, Cooper.” Keller’s voice rang out behind them, startling them both. FP and Alice both turned to Keller as he approached them. “You two holding up okay?”

They looked at each other, wondering how to respond to Keller. FP swallowed the lump in his throat, and Alice pursed her lips together.
“It’s…” FP began.

“…holding.” Alice finished. Keller sighed and glared at both of them.

“We’re not gonna have much time to slow down after this. So I need you two to stay alert….and be honest with me, okay? I don’t need you two almost going through a death-like experience again. No more secrets, no more lies. Understand?” The two stood there absorbing the last few words. They nodded, and Keller wandered off.

“That sounds like a good motto.” FP commented. Alice turned to him.

“What?”

“No more secrets. No more lies……we could use it for ourselves too.” Alice turned away. It was a good motto, but she couldn’t face to tell him the truth about her and Hal. Just not yet.

The funeral would occur that weekend at the graveyard in downtown Riverdale. Despite the short notice of the event, FP and Alice were both able to make the proper arrangements on quite the budget. The next couple of days went on normally. No signs of the Black Hood came through, and no murders had struck. But Alice still couldn’t help but to feel a sense of unease. The Cooper house felt emptier than usual - it wasn’t because it was just her and Chic, it was because it felt like it was missing something. Somebody. Alice would wake up in the middle of the night crying because of the recurring dreams of Hal and his dead body. She would dream of the Black Hood, either looming over him or chasing after her. Sometimes, the Black Hood would go after Chic.

She began waking up earlier in the mornings, grabbing coffee from the local shops, working on her speech for the funeral (she was struggling just to get words on the damn page) and reexamining the poem the Black Hood gave her. What did Hal do? Was it to get back at me for digging into this case, or was Hal really a sinner? The questions hung over her, turning her brain into mush long before she would make the hike to work. But she kept to herself, mostly, only because she didn’t want people asking questions. She needed to stay strong just for a little bit longer. But most of all, she didn’t want to drag FP into the hell she created.

“You don’t have to keep doting on me, you know.” she remarked when he picked her up for work and handed her a cup of coffee that Friday morning, one more day before the funeral.

“It’s fuel, Coop. You and I both need it if we’re gonna make it through today.” She was at least thankful that FP hadn’t pestered her too much about Hal’s death. In fact, she was thankful he was around when other people pestered too much. Earlier in the week, a hoard of paparazzi waited outside her home to bombard her with questions about the Black Hood. They even went through the length of following Chic to and from school. It became so bad that FP threatened to have them all arrested if they didn’t leave then and there.

“Well, thank you.” she replied, taking a sip of her coffee and returning to her desk work. The day lulled on, and when the afternoon rolled around, Alice decided to check out earlier to spend some time with her son.

“Want me to drive you home?” FP headed out the door with her.

“What choice do I have? You drove me here.” she teased. She hoped he didn’t take the remark too seriously, but he just chuckled and led them out to the truck. They arrived at her home around 3:40…only to find an unfamiliar vehicle in the driveway next to hers.
“Since when did you get a new car?” he asked her hesitant.

“I didn’t.” she hurried up the pathway to the front door, hoping that this wasn’t the Black Hood’s doing. The door was locked when she checked the doorknob. Alice wrestled for the keys in her pocket and entered her home.

Chic was sitting at the dinner table looking like a deer in headlights.

“Chic,” Alice cautiously approached her son. “You’re home early?”

“Mom…” he began when someone from upstairs came thudding down the stairs. Alice and FP turned to find a woman glaring at them. Her blonde hair was pulled back into an updo. She held a cigarette in her aging fingers, taking a long drag like no one’s business. Alice stepped back into FP, horrified of the figure in front of her. She almost looked like an older, female version of Hal.

“Hello, Alice.” the woman spoke, her voice smoky.

“Sorry,” FP interjected behind Alice, “but who the hell are you? And why are you in Alice’s house?” The woman took another drag of her cigarette and snarled.

“Prudence Cooper. I’m here to mourn my son,” she turned to Alice giving her the glare of death, “who’s dead because of this bitch.”

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Alice and Prudence never got along, even since the day they met. The elder woman saw Alice as inferior and as an evil seductress sent to corrupt her precious Harold. She knew that family meant everything to Hal, but she could never understand why his parents acted like the complete opposite of him. The first time Hal brought Alice home to his parents, Prudence spent the entire night ripping her to shreds about her childhood and her education, referring to Alice as a “white trash slut”. Alice spent the remainder of the night sobbing in the rental car she and Hal picked up from the airport.

Long after retirement, Prudence still found a way to worm into Hal and Alice’s lives, calling at least once a month, sending Chic and Hal birthday presents (none for Alice, obviously), and other nosy deeds. When Thomas Cooper passed away in 2015, the woman was hell bent on trying to have Hal drop everything to come to Florida and weigh on her hand and foot, which Alice found extremely disgusted. She vividly remembered the phone calls of his mother sobbing and sweet talking her son into visiting her. It was what caused a massive fight between the two, but not as bad as the ones to take place in the later years.

And now here was Prudence in her home, walking around and lounging all over like she owned the damn place herself. Alice mentally kicked herself for not thinking that Hal’s monster of a mother would be coming for the funeral; her son was dead after all. Alice quickly made a tray of tea for them, sending FP away for a while to grab dinner. She didn’t want him to see how horrible the elder woman could be. And who knew what she would say about the sight of Alice and FP together.

“The woman is a nightmare, FP.” Alice reassured him as she escorted him out the door. “I don’t want you to get torn apart by her.”

“Alice…”

“I have Chic with me!” she tried to sound optimistic. “FP, please.”

“You call me if anything goes wrong.” he sighed and headed out to his truck. Alice watched as her partner pull out from the neighborhood, leaving her view. How the fuck was she going to handle this
woman alone?

Her hands shook as she made dinner for herself, Prudence, and Chic. The elder woman sat in the living room, sipping on a cup of tea Alice made (she wanted to light another cigarette, but Alice had adamantly refused), as Chic helped his mom with the meal. This was the last idea Alice had on her mind for this weekend. She needed to finish her speech for the funeral. She wanted to spend the night with her son, alone. But now that Prudence was here, it would make the weekend much harder.

She sat at the table, serving food to her mother-in-law and her son. It took all of her strength to not dig her nails into her palms whenever she put down her silverware. Prudence held the glass in her hand and glared at Alice. She huffed and took a sip. Alice’s lips quivered.

“Something the matter, Alice?” the older woman prompted. Alice forced herself to take a bite of her meal.

“Mom?” Chic asked her calmly.

“I’m fine.” Alice gritted through her teeth. Prudence let out a chuckle, stunning Alice.

“Yes?” she

“Charles,” Prudence turned to Chic, “wasn’t this exactly we were discussing when I picked you up from school today?” Alice’s heart was racing now. What was this woman trying to do to her son? She waited for Chic to answer, but he didn’t respond. Prudence huffed turned back to Alice.

“And what, pray tell, were you saying about me?” Alice muttered, struggling to control her temper.

“Well I was just offering to your son to….well, if he wanted to but I would highly recommend….?”

“Grandma…” Chic tried to stop her, but Alice interjected.

“Highly recommend WHAT?” her voice grew more high-pitched, making Prudence smirk.

“Mom, look at me.” Chic rested a hand on Alice’s wrist. “Don’t listen to her.” But Alice wasn’t listening. She kept her attention on the devil woman in front of her.

“WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO CONVINCE MY SON TO DO?” her voice cracked. Her nails scratched at her palms. Prudence casually took a sip of her drink and gave Alice a sinister smile.

“Oh nothing, just….perhaps Charles could come live with me in Florida for a little bit while you….work on getting your life together.”

That’s when Alice lost it.

She slammed her fists on the table and stood up. Chic immediately rose from his seat in attempt to calm her down.

“Mom, please…”

“YOU ARE NOT TAKING MY SON AWAY FROM ME. I WON’T LET IT HAPPEN,” she yelled. Prudence just sat there, watching Alice blow up.

“You think you’re capable enough to continue raising him? Really?” the older woman teased.

“You’re one of the most unstable mothers I’ve ever laid my eyes upon.”
“HOW DARE YOU!” Alice moved around the table and lurched her mother-in-law. “ALL YOU HAVE EVER WANTED WAS TO DESTROY MY RELATIONSHIP WITH HAL AND TO TEAR MY FAMILY APART.”

“My son was a good boy.” Prudence rose from her seat, establishing her power over Alice. “He was smart and wise, and you corrupted him. I was scared for him, as I am now for Charles.”

“And you don’t think I am?” Alice’s voice quivered.

“Oh I know you are, Alice.” Prudence was looming over her now. “I bet your heart breaks every time Charles leaves this house or doesn’t return your phone calls.”

“And…” Alice growing confident again, “AND YOU’RE MAKING ME THE MONSTER?”

“WHY NOT?” Prudence shouted back. “You’re nothing but a white-trash slut pretending to be some brave detective like in the movies. You don’t deserve that title, Alice. And you never deserved my son’s love, especially for what you did to him!”

And with that, the battle was over. Prudence returned to her seat, triumphant. Alice remained standing, broken and on the verge of a breakdown. Somewhere in the midst of the fight, her nails found their way into her palms, and she could feel her raw flesh stinging.

She didn’t know how much time had passed or how long she stood there after the fight, but it was only after Chic shook her back into her senses that she realized that Prudence had left the house to retire to her hotel.

“I’ll clean up, Mom. You…you should probably sit down.” He led her over to the love seat in the living room and sat her down. She felt numb. Torn apart.

“Mom? Mom? Are you okay?” Alice blinked at her son. Did he already clean up that fast? What time was it? She tried to speak, but nothing would come out when she opened her mouth.

“Mom, you’ve kinda been staring off into space for the past 20 minutes. Do you…..do you want me to call FP?” Her eyes began to water. Oh god, what if FP saw her tonight? How she just let herself get ripped to shreds by Hal’s mother? And he still didn’t know about her nights with Hal. What if Prudence found out too? She shook her head slowly, trying to ignore the growing lump in her throat.

“You need to get some sleep. We both do.” Chic helped her up and led her up the stairs to her bedroom. He offered to help get her sleepwear on, but she waved him off.

“I need to finish my speech.” she finally spoke. “I’ll go to bed once I’m done.” She grew silent, staring at the wall behind Chic.

“I’m gonna be across the hall, Mom. If you need anything, just….you can talk to me. I’m still family. I’m still here.” Alice looked back at Chic. His eyes were tearing up too.

“I know.” she brought her hand to his face and cupped it. He held onto her hand and smiled softly. After a while, he left her alone.

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She lost track of time. Her attention wavered back and forth between the half-written speech in front of her and the events that occurred in the past week. Alice struggled to stay awake, rubbing her eyeballs furiously and tapping her pen on the paper to keep herself focused. Maybe if she just rested her eyes for a brief second….No! She needed to stay awake. She needed to get this damn speech
written. But her attention span was slipping further and further away from her.

Alice laid her head down on the pillow, shutting her eyes and letting out a long sigh.

“You’re not gonna sack out on me now, are you?” a disembodied voice rang out from another point of the room. Alice opened her eyes to find Hal standing in front of her vanity fumbling with his tie.

“You’re one to talk, Clark Kent.” she stated. Alice rested herself on her side, watching her husband. He looked like he came out of the 1950s in his outfit, vintage vest and all. He attempted to fix his tie again but failed. Hal turned to her and pouted.

“Can you help me?” he gestured to the tie. Alice rolled out of her position and walked over to him. She fixed his tie and tightened it. He stepped aside, revealing her reflection in the vanity. Her hair was pinned back to one side. She wore a pale yellow dress that ruffled at the bottom and had a white collar. She reached at the pearl necklace on her neck. She continued to stare at herself in the mirror as Hal stood behind her and held onto her waist.

“Everything alright, babe?” he looked down at her. She turned up to him for a moment, then directed her focus on the floor.

“I feel like I’m just letting everybody down,” she spoke honestly, “including Chic.”

“Alice.” Hal turned her around to face him. She moved her hands up to the sides his torso, and he rested his hands on her forearms. “You’re the best damn cop this town’s had in a long while. No matter what anyone says. No matter what my parents say.”

“You’re mother thinks I’m a slut.” she mumbled, staring down at the floor. “She’s probably right. Even after all these years, I don’t deserve you.”

“Hey, look at me.” he rested his fingers on her chin and lifted it up. “I know who you are. What my mother’s been saying is wrong. You deserve every ounce of love in this world, okay?” She stepped in closer to him, her lips dangerously close to his.

“Haven’t I done nothing but ruin you?” she whispered. He leaned in closer.

“Guess you’re worth it, then.” he said, closing the gap between them. The kiss made her cold body feel warmer. She held on tighter to him and one of his hands cupped her face. When their lips parted, she met his gaze and smiled. He returned the gesture and grabbed her hand.

“Let’s go blow them all away.” Hal led her out of the bedroom, down the stairs, and out to a large room filled with almost every person living in Riverdale. Everyone dressed in their vintage costumes from all different decades, swinging around all over the dance floor. A Ella Fitzgerald song faintly played in the background of the scene. Alice found the weight and the burden lifted from her shoulders, feeling lighter and happier. The song ended, and a Frank Sinatra song began. Alice knew the tune almost immediately.

“It’s our wedding song.” Hal beat her to comment. He turned around and held out his hand to her. She took it and allowed him to pull her in close. She felt at peace slow dancing with him, resting her head on his shoulder. Everything was as it should be. No fighting, no stress. Just peace. Something wasn’t right.

“Hal?” she mumbled, lifting her head up to face him. His smile faded slightly.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. Alice went to speak but clamped her mouth shut. Don’t ruin the moment. Enjoy it while it lasts.
“Nothing….just. I love you, that’s all.” she gave him a small smile. His face went completely neutral. They stopped swaying to the music.

“I love you, Hal.” she repeated, hoping for some sort of reaction. Instead, he cupped her face with one hand and pulled her towards him, his mouth hovering over her ear.

“Then why didn’t you save me from the Black Hood?”

Her heart was beating face, her eyes widened in fear. She pulled away from him, not locking her eyes on him, and saw the room around her. The music was still playing, but with a more sinister tone now. The crowd was gone, just streaks of blood everywhere. Oh god, was that….who’s blood was this?

“Hal…” she called out, turning back to him. But she was too late. Hal’s dead body laid on the floor, just the way she found it in his Sharebnb. Blood was oozing out of him. Alice tried to scream but nothing would come out. She tried to back away, run away, call for help, but someone….something, was behind her. She turned and the Black Hood swung a knife at her throat, slitting it wide open.

Alice jolted up on the bed, her hand going to her neck, gasping for air desperately. It was only a nightmare…..She glanced down at the unfinished speech, choking out tears now. How long had she been asleep? What time was it?

She was losing her mind. Hal didn’t die because she allowed him back into her life again. He died….because she didn’t. She held him on a loose string, only letting him inside her when she wanted him to, not allowing the consequences to come back and haunt her. Until now.

Alice got up from the bed, carrying the speech with her, and left her room, heading down the stairs, grabbing her keys, and leaving the house.

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It had been hours since FP last heard from the Coopers. He had no messages from Chic, so he prayed that everything had gone well between Alice and her mother-in-law. There wasn’t much he could do work-wise, and he didn’t want to tempt himself by hanging with the other Serpents at the Whyte Wyrm. So by 8:15, FP simply decided to order some pizza and rent a horror film from the Red Box at the grocery store.

By 10:30, the movie had already ended and FP ran the last of the pizza to his crew of younger Serpents. When he returned to the trailer, he noticed the giant pile of unfolded laundry on his bed. He brought the hamper out into the living room and kept himself busy.

A few minutes went by, and he was about to fold the last of his shirts, when the door flew open. FP rose from his spot, ready to confront his intruder, only to find Alice stumbling into the trailer, shivering and gasping for air.

“Alice.” he set the shirt down, slowing approaching her. She had been crying for a while. She had something in her hand, but he didn’t know what. “Alice….what’s wrong?” She looked up at him, taking another gasp.

“No more secrets,” she took a step towards him, choking out tears, “No more lies.”

“Alice…” he stopped, not wanting to get too close to her, but she kept decreasing the distance between them.

“I should’ve told you sooner. Maybe something would’ve been different.” Alice was now standing
in front of him. He blinked at her, then rested a hand on her shoulder.

“Alice, what’s going on—”

“I lied…” she exclaimed, sobbing. She struggled for words, and continued, “I lied when I said I saw Hal before he came to my house.” Alice broke her gaze from him for a small moment.

She spoke, pausing every once in a while to let out a cry. “I didn’t bump into him by accident at Pop’s. I saw him, multiple times beforehand, because I…..” she looked back up at FP, guilt in her eyes. “I was having sex with him.”

FP stood there, not able to respond. His mouth hung slightly, and his eyes began to tear. So this was what the Black Hood knew. That’s why she fell apart the weekend before. How long had this been happening? Did Keller know?

“I know we were fighting…..” she continued, bringing her hands to her chest. “But I….I felt so lonely, and so numb. So I would let him fuck me until I could feel something.” she rambled through the tears.

“Hey, hey, hey. Alice, slow down.” FP attempted to calm her down. He could finally see what was in her hand. Was that her speech for the funeral?

“But it wasn’t good for me. Or him. That’s why I tried to make things work with him. But….but now he’s dead.” she turned away slightly, her hands shaking. “He’s dead because I let him walk away! I was too scared to bring him back, and it costed him his life. I killed him. I killed Hal!”

FP was now starting to cry too. He felt awful for her. He was confused, but he understood now. He could hear her struggling for air. Both of his hands rested on her shoulder.

“Just breathe, okay?” his voice was calm. She reached a hand up to his face.

“I’m sorry.” she muttered. His moved his hands from her shoulder to her face, cupping it softly. “I….I made a mistake.” she shook her head, then tried to turn away and leave.

“Alice, wait!” FP grabbed her softly and brought her back to him. “Is Chic with you? Is he in the…” Alice held her hands in front of her face.

“No, Chic’s at home. He’s sleeping but…..but he doesn’t…” she let her hands fall, growing more exhausted.

“You don’t understand what I’ve done, FP!” she cried, “You don’t understand what I’m responsible for—” and in that moment, he pulled her into him, embracing her.

Her head rested on his shoulder, his arm wrapped behind her neck. Alice let out another sob and hugged him, tighter.

“It’s okay…” he muttered, letting her bury her face into the crook between his neck and his shoulder. “It’s okay…..” Time seemed to slow down when he hugged her.

FP held onto her tighter, closing his eyes.

Maybe Keller had a reason for pairing the two of them together after all. Alice was not some loveless, uptight monster. She was just a woman who needed to be loved. Who wanted to be whole. She didn’t need a work partner. She needed someone to listen to her. To comfort her during the dark days. She needed a friend. A real friend. Maybe FP was that person.
She stayed with him for the night; he feared of her getting in a car accident that late at night due to sleep deprivation. She opened up to him about what happened at dinner with Prudence, expressing her fear of losing Chic. He said nothing - he just held onto Alice tighter and consoled her. After the emotional confession, he put her to sleep in his bed, and he took the couch for the night, which he didn’t mind. FP woke up the next morning from the sunlight pouring in from the window over the couch, and he checked the time on his phone. It was 7:30 in the morning, just about two and a half hours before the funeral. He sent a text to the young Cooper boy, letting him know of his mom’s whereabouts, and entered his bedroom.

Alice laid on her side in deep sleep. She looked peaceful, yet he could tense the amount of stress she had undergone from the past few days. He knelt down beside the bed where she slept, lightly placing a hand on her shoulder. Alice stirred awake, looking up at him with sleepy eyes.

“Hey Coop.” he spoke softly. She groaned as she sat up in the bed, pushing some of her hair back.

“What time is it?” Alice asked groggy.

“Little after 7:30.” Her eyes widened slowly.

“Chic…does Chic…” she started.

“He knows you’re here.” FP reassured her, “I’ll take you home so you can get ready.” Her face softened, glancing away from him for a brief moment. She closed her eyes pursed her lips together.

“Alice,” he began, “have you told Chic? About any of this?” Alice turned back to him, guilt in her eyes.

“If he ever found out what I was doing with Hal….it would break his heart. I can’t….just not yet.” She paused, then continued, “But….I should, before the Black Hood does.”

It hit FP for the first time. If the Black Hood knew about his loyalties to both the Serpents and the PD, what if he knew about Alice’s nights with Hal? What if the Black Hood already told Chic in some sadistic way?

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She stood in front of the mirror, smoothing down the front of her black dress. Alice took a deep breath, examining her reflection. Her makeup wasn’t helping to cover some of the bags under her eyes. Her hair was softly curled at the ends. She looked tired. She almost looked dead, like she could in that coffin lying next to her dearly departed.

A knock on the door stirred Alice out of thoughts. Chic opened the door and entered.

“You okay, mom?” the boy asked. “FP’s ready to go whenever you are.” Alice calmly nodded. She was grateful that her partner would be standing by her and her son through this whole ordeal. She almost felt that she didn’t deserve him.

“I’ll be down in a couple minutes.” she confirmed, watching Chic exit her room. She turned back to the mirror one last time. She grabbed her speech off the dresser and mumbled the words she scribbled onto the page. Her mind began to race with intrusive thoughts. What if everyone thought she was a joke standing up there crying woe is me to all of Riverdale? What would Prudence say about the speech? What if the Black Hood….

“Stop.” she commanded to her reflection. Her palms were craving the violent touch of her nails.
The car ride to the funeral was silent for the most part. FP offered to drive her and Chic in her station wagon. FP and Chic chatted some during the drive but Alice remained in her daze, staring out the window trying not to let the thoughts in her head overcome her fragile emotional stability. She just needed to get through the next few hours without letting herself fall apart. Without letting Prudence rip her open again to bleed out in front of the crowd. She needed to be strong for Chic. For FP. For Hal.

They arrived at the graveyard, approaching the swarm of black around the casket. A picture of Hal was framed next to the casket, one Alice had picked out herself. Alice scanned the crowd for any signs of her mother-in-law, Chic standing beside her. Unfortunately, her eyes eventually landed on the older Cooper woman, giving Alice the deadliest of flares while smoking a fresh cigarette.

“Don’t let her get into your head, mom.” Chic whispered. “I’m right here.” Alice broke her gaze with the older woman and grabbed for her son’s hand. How the hell was she going to tell him the truth about everything that happened between her and Hal?

The pastor in charge of running the procession gestured for the crowd to settle down. Everyone gathered around the casket, Alice and Chic standing side by side and FP behind them. A chorus of young girls, Riverdale’s Vixens Alice supposed, we’re led in song by a young red-haired girl roughly around Chic’s age.

Alice merely stared down at Hal’s casket during the song. Her eyes glanced up to spot Prudence across from her on the other side of the casket. Alice felt paralyzed - her mind began to wander. If she had just asked him to stay for a few more hours. If she went back with him to the Sharebnb. If she never kicked him out in the first place. Would the Black Hood still have gone after him? Was Hal bound to die no matter what had happened between him and her? What did you do, Harold? Alice fell out of her thoughts when a warm hand squeezed hers. She turned to find FP stepping beside her, giving her the support she needed.

The singing ended, signaling Alice to leave FP and her son’s side. She took the place of the young cheerleaders next to Hal’s photograph, holding the crumpled speech in her hands, never making contact with the crowd. She took a shaky breath, only looking up to FP. He nodded slowly. She spoke.

“I’d like to thank you all for coming.” she read, “My husband, Hal...he was an important figure in this town. He was the source of the news you read every morning. The one to cover games for our Riverdale Bulldogs. The one that gave me my son, Chic, and gave me family. Hal was caring, and smart, and we had......we....” she stopped in her tracks. The remaining words on the page blurred. It was pointless. Why did she need to sugarcoat all of this, when there was a murderer on the loose?

“No more secrets. No more lies.” she muttered, folding the speech and shoving it into her coat. The crowd began to stir. Prudence raised a brow at her. FP and Chic glanced at each other.

“Look,” Alice addressed them all, “I know my marriage with Hal wasn’t perfect. Hell, we were on the verge of getting divorce as of weeks ago. But Hal....he....he was willing to make things right. That’s what I always loved about him.” She felt her emotions seeping out from her, no longer caring who saw her. “I know what you all have been saying about me. I know I didn’t deserve to love him. But it is my sworn duty as a mother, a wife, and an officer of the law in this town, to keep everyone safe. There is a sick bastard out there who stripped my husband’s life away. He’s still out there, and he could go after any of you! But that won’t stop me. I swear, I’ve caught bad people before. And I will do it again! I won’t stop fighting until the Black Hood is found and everyone in Riverdale can sleep in some goddamn peace.”

She stopped, turning to the picture of Hal. She approached it, reaching her hand out.
“I’m so sorry, Hal. I’m sorry I couldn’t save you.” she muttered, tears streaming down. “I’m going to find who did this to you. I promise.” She lowered her hand, gasping softly for air.

“Mom?” Chic joined her side. Alice embraced her son, holding onto him for dear life.

The crowd dispersed once the procession ended. Alice remained silent for the remainder of the event, just holding on tight to her son’s hand. She watched as Hal’s casket lowered into its hole, leaving the land of the living.

“Want me to get the car started?” FP tapped on her shoulder. She nodded, still somewhat in a daze. She let go of her son’s hand so he could accompany FP. She watched them head off to the parking lot, making conversation with Keller along the way.

“You just can’t keep your emotions in check, can you Alice?” Prudence’s voice called out from behind her. Alice turned to the older woman. This was the last thing she wanted to face in that moment.

“You just can’t go through life without tearing others down, can you Prudence?” Alice retorted with thicker skin.

“Oh please.” Prudence puffed away on her cigarette. “It’s the only way I can keep myself from going insane nowadays….especially when it comes to eager-to-please women like you.” Alice lifted her chin at her, strangely not feeling any emotion from the jab.

“I will give credit where credit is due,” Prudence continued, “you did make a good speech. But it still doesn’t redeem you for what you did to my boy.”

“Look,” Alice spoke calmly, “I can’t bring him back from the dead. But I can stop the Black Hood from doing more of what he did to Hal.” Prudence took another drag and snickered.

“God, I suppose this is my punishment for not loving my son enough. I lose him not just to a psychotic killer running loose in this town, but a woman and her son, trying to play hero, catch the bad guy….all because you haven’t let this damn town break you….yet.”

Prudence was right about one thing - from all the bad Alice went through, she never let Riverdale swallow her whole. But there was something…..something rotten was bubbling under the surface of Riverdale. Maybe it wasn’t the town itself….maybe it was….

“Detective Cooper?” an unfamiliar voice called out from behind her. Alice shifted her attention to find a well-dressed man around her age approaching. “I don’t mean to intrude on your conversation, but I was hoping you could escort me back to my car?” his voice was like velvet, smooth and dark. Alice turned back to Prudence, still puffing away. Alice raised her chin at the woman.

“Take care of yourself, Prudence.” she ended their conversation, and walked away from her. She could hear Prudence scoffing from behind but there was nothing the older woman could do to destroy her anymore.

“Sorry about that.” she spoke to this stranger, leading him away from the funeral scene, “Do you remember exactly where you parked?”

“No, but that’s what I have drivers for.” he joked. Alice faced him, growing confused.

“I’m sorry, but do you actually need help with something?” He stopped and smiled.
“No…..” he spoke with honesty, “but you looked like you needed to get away from her. And can I just say, you have a lot of nerve to take on the last surviving matriarch of the Cooper family.”

Her heart swelled at the compliment. This man….this stranger she just met….he paid her a compliment. And praise. “Thanks.” she replied. She allowed herself to smile….the first time she had smiled in days.

“But if it’s alright with you, maybe I can escort you back to your party?”

“That sounds nice.” Alice gestured for him to follow her. They moved on, Alice taking in the silence. With Prudence no longer hounding her, slut-shaming her, it was like an invisible weight was lifted from her shoulders. There was something about the man walking next to her. She couldn’t tell if it was his suaveness or his authoritative stance, but something about him struck her. This man didn’t just get her away from Prudence by accident.

“So,” Alice broke the silence, “you just visiting in town to pay your respects like the other townies?”

“I actually spend most of my life here.” he answered. “I went to Riverdale High with Hal. Big Man on Campus during our years. He was a close friend of mine. He still was, even before his death.”

Alice absorbed the information, trying to find anything that would have led to why the Black Hood attacked him.

“Hal mentioned his high school days so many times….but I don’t think he ever mentioned anything about you.”

“Strange.” he remarked. “I’ve heard a lot about you….but never had the privilege of meeting you until now.” Alice scoffed. What were you doing, Hal? What were you hiding?

“Hal told you about me?”

“Why wouldn’t he? You’re quite a powerhouse in that station.” he laughed. “But I want you to know that you shouldn’t have to go through any of this alone. I want us to become more acquainted with each other. Hopefully the flowers I sent could be a good start.”

Alice stopped in her tracks. The flowers on her desk. The card that came with it.

“Yellow is supposed to be the color of friendship. Well, that’s at least how my daughter explained to me. I wanted to have them shipped from New York….but Hermione insisted that we stay local.”

Alice looked at him, the realization finally coming to her.

“You’re Hiram Lodge?” her voice was soft.

“Probably not what you pictured me to be, aren’t I?” Hiram smiled. “Were you expecting some old white man with glasses and a grey moustache?” he remarked, causing her to laugh. He took her hands and held them, his thumb tracing lines on her skin.

“I’m...I’m shocked, really.” Alice responded, “Why is it that I’ve never seen you around? I mean, I’ve been here for, what? Almost ten years?”

“I also have operations in New York, so I spend a majority of my time there. Also, my wife and daughter are usually more of the public faces for Lodge Industries around here anyway.” He stepped in closer to her, holding onto one of her hands. “But I do like to make an appearance every once in a while. I’m not entirely a vampire.” he teased.
Alice continued to stare at Hiram, half mesmerized and half weary. There was something about Hiram that she couldn’t exactly describe. Would he have the answers to the questions she didn’t know yet?

“Alice!” she heard FP’s voice from behind. She noticed him approaching the pair.

“I guess this is where I leave you.” she felt Hiram let her hand drop. He reached into his coat and handed her a small business card. She glared at the Lodge Industries logo and the small phone number under it.

“If you ever want to talk about Hal….don’t be afraid to reach out.”

“Thank you.” Alice carefully slid the card into her purse. Hiram gave her one last smile before he took her hand and kissed it.

“See you around, Detective.” And with that, he turned and walked away.

Alice felt as if she woke up from a hazy dream. She stood there, watching Hiram leaving the foreground in front of her.

“Hey.” FP’s gruff voice pulled her out of her daze. She turned to him, fluttering her eyes. “Was worried that you wondered off somewhere. Are you okay?” Alice bit her lip and pointed in the direction where Hiram was.

“Finally figured out who the man behind the curtain is. And I’m not talking about the Black Hood.”

“Hiram Lodge? The great and powerful?” FP chuckled, causing Alice to roll her eyes.

“He made a point about something, FP.” she crossed her arms. FP’s face fell and he led her back to the car.

“Anything regarding Hal? Or why he died?” he spoke with a low voice so no one would hear them.

“No…but the fact he was hiding things….from both of us.” FP stopped in his tracks and placed a hand on her shoulder.

“What are you saying, Coop?” Alice took a long breath before speaking, not making eye contact with him.

“There’s a reason Hal was murdered by the Black Hood. And I don’t think it was because he was mine.” She stopped, moving her gaze back to FP.

“We need to find out what Hal’s sin was.”

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End of Chapter Five

Chapter End Notes

Soooo….were you excited to finally see Hiram this chapter? Also, what did you guys think of Prudence? Not gonna lie I definitely wrote her as Jessica Lange via AHS Murder House/Apocalypse. Let me know what you guys think and I should hopefully
have another update soon!
Chapter Six - Sugarman Cometh

FP stepped into the Whyte Wyrm for the first time in years. It was December 1998, 20 years before the Black Hood struck terror in Riverdale. He held onto the sack slung over his back, the heavy weight not bothering him. The general had sent him home for the holidays, but FP figured he wouldn’t even come back to finish his time in the army since his injury. There were some nights FP would lie awake so he wouldn’t have to close his eyes and see the images flashing through his head.

He had only been back in the Southside for a few minutes, but he was not in the mood to step into the front door of his home. He wasn’t ready to face his father, not even after all these years. Forsythe Jones was a cruel drunkard that slung his fists at his son whenever he could. FP vowed to himself during his high school years that he would get out of Riverdale, be the first Jones to go to college, and never end up in a state of disparity. That was, until when he was 17 that the older Jones threw him out of the house. That was when FP joined the Serpents on the Southside, resided in a rundown trailer, and enlisted in the army before his graduation.

He owed the Serpents for taking him in. They were his family when he no longer had any. But his loyalty to the Serpents also became a curse. Before leaving high school, he grew a strong desire for alcohol, one that fell beyond his control, to numb the memories of his father. He also noticed that he was becoming more hot-tempered and struggled to hold his emotions back. He figured that being part of the military would shape him up, help him control his violent streak. And hopefully, once he was done, he could go to college and build a better life. But he still had yet to see this dream happen.

FP dropped his sack on the floor and sat down on the barstool. He rubbed his temple trying to rid of the headache developing. He hoped none of the Serpents would recognize him; he wasn’t ready for a full-hearty homecoming just yet.

“Rough day?” the bartender caught his attention. He looked up and saw a woman about his age cleaning a glass. She had long brown hair, dark eyes, and a scar on her chin. Did he recognize her from somewhere before?

“Just not in the mood to go home, that’s all.” She set the glass down and cocked her head to the side.

“Don’t have a family to go home to?” FP shook his head.

“I have folks….well I did, until they told me to go to hell.”

“Shame. What do you want?” she gestured to the liquor in the back. He kept making mental promises that he wouldn’t go overboard with his intake, but he wasn’t so sure if he could live up to
them. He asked for whiskey on the rocks. The bartender picked up the glass and smiled.

“How much longer are you in town for?” she asked, making his drink. FP shrugged.

“Depends.” he told her honestly. He didn’t know if he wanted to return. But he knew for hell he didn’t want to spend another minute in Riverdale after the holidays. “It’ll at least be nice to get some time alone.”

“Don’t seem like you want to be alone.” the bartender set his drink down. FP chuckled, taking the drink. She rested her hands on the table in front of her.

“Seriously.” she retorted. “I get off my shift soon if you just…..want to talk.” He took a sip and looked at her. He gave her a soft smile.

“You deserve to talk to someone better than me.” She leaned in closer, her forearms now on the table.

“Yeah, well out of all the drunk fucks in here, you’re the only one worth talking to. The name’s Gladys.” she extended her hand out to him. FP set his drink down and took her hand.

“FP.”

The two would later go back to her room in a shitty hostel on the outskirts of the Southside. FP wound up staying in Riverdale, working a low-end job barely making ends meet while Gladys continued her bartending at the Whyte Wyrm to finish paying for community college. Five months after she finished her schooling, they would elope. In October 2001, Gladys would give birth to their son, Forsythe Pendleton “Jughead” Jones III, and four years later, would have their daughter Jellybean. In 2011, the Ghoulies would kill her and send FP spiraling into a murderous rampage, almost ending up in prison, and now working for the Riverdale PD.

He sat on the edge of his bed, holding a photo of his family. FP was never really one to take photos, but it was all he had. What was left. The kids were still young then, and Gladys was still alive. He hadn’t allowed himself to taste alcohol in years. The AA program Keller placed him in did help, but there were nights he was so tempted just to march straight into the Whyte Wyrm and run the place dry. It had to take every bit of strength and mental sanity to keep FP from losing control.

FP folded the photo shut and placed it back in the shoebox along with his other memorabilia in his closet. He needed to stay strong for the remainder of this case. He needed to be strong for Alice. And her boy. It had been a few days after her husband’s funeral, but she seemed hell bent and determined to cheat the Black Hood’s game. Their murderer hadn’t contacted the pair or caused any trouble since Hal Cooper, but that didn’t mean he stopped lurking around.

He heard his phone buzz on the bed. FP reached for it, glaring at the recent notification.

Alice: You busy? Come to the Register. Bring one of your Serpents, or anyone who’s good at hacking computers.

“Jesus, Coop.” FP rolled his eyes. He slid his phone into his back pocket and headed out the door.

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“Are you sure that didn’t work?” Alice berated her son, sitting at his father’s computer attempting to log in.

“I’ve tried everything, Mom!” Chic sighed. Alice figured that if Hal had any information that could
explain his death, it would had to have been on his computer. When Chic finished up with school that day, they searched through the house for anything Hal could have left behind. They went to the Sharebnb, which was unsuccessful since the location had now closed due to the murder. As a final resort, they went to the Register to dig through his computer. And for the past 30 minutes, any attempt was not working.

“Is there not a password sheet in here?” Alice began opening up his desk drawers, but to no avail. A part of her knew that what she was doing was not anywhere near legal. Hell, she didn’t have a warrant to search through here. But another part of her figured that since she was a Cooper by marriage, and that Chic would soon have inheritance of the Register, that she would technically have access to his files.

“Maybe we should just go home.” Chic suggested. Alice flung her head up at him and frowned.

“Just five more minutes? Please? FP should be on his way over to help.” she explained.

“What?” he exclaimed. “You’re dragging FP into this too?” Before Alice could answer, the door flung open, startling both Coopers. FP entered the Register, his teeth chattering from the cold.

“Please tell me you have a good reason to be hacking into people’s computers, Alice.” he threw out. He stepped out of the way to let Toni and Joaquin through. “Also, I brought help.”

“Alright,” the pink-haired Serpent girl joined Alice and Chic. “What are we dealing with here?”

“Look, I appreciate the help, I do.” Alice tried to stop her. Chic stepped out of the way so Toni could have full access.

“Too late, blondie. DeSantos and I are in this now.” she nodded towards the Serpent boy. Alice stood over on the side watching the young girl.

“Actually, I’m just here so your grandfather doesn’t beat my ass for letting you out of sight, shorty.” Joaquin remarked, causing the girl to roll her eyes. FP snickered and approached Alice.

“Okay, what exactly is your game plan here?”

“If Hal was hiding anything, it would have to be somewhere that no one could easily suspect. But since Keller and the others had probably already taken possession of what was in his Sharebnb, there could be something for us here.” she raised an eyebrow at him. FP chuckled at her.

“Shit, Coop. Since when did you become such a rule breaker?” he commented, making her smile.

“Hey blondie.” Toni recaptured her attention. “You allergic to anything?” Alice furrowed her face in confusion.

“Peonies. Why do you need—”

“Chic, when were you born?”

“March 20th?” Toni didn’t respond - she just tapped away on the keyboard. When she finished, she rested her hands on the desk. A moment later, she smiled and turned the dashboard to Alice.

“You’re welcome.” Alice’s mouth hung open. In that moment, she understood why FP had this girl around.

“Damn, Topaz. Is this what they’re having you learn at Southside High these days?” FP hunched
over the desk glaring at the screen in front of him.

“Taught myself, actually.” the girl quietly answered. She faced Alice and Chic and continued, “You guys are lucky that you get to have a good curriculum and the staff that actually gives a shit. If it wasn’t for my financial situation, or the fact that I’m a Southsider, I’d definitely take advantage of learning all I can. Including hacking computers.”

“It’s not just her,” Joaquin added in, “it’s...all of us really. I mean, for a while, we kinda started an underground book club with our English teacher, Mr. Phillips. But that kinda got shut down due to him no longer caring.”

Alice’s face fell. She felt awful for them….all of the kids that FP brought in. She was once in their shoes as a teenager, all before leaving for Boston and meeting Hal. The moment that she turned to FP, a thought came to her. It finally clicked - why he brought these kids into his work. Though Alice didn’t know much about FP’s past (she still had yet to figure out what exactly happened to his wife and children), she figured that he spent most of his life out of luck. She figured that he didn’t want them to go through whatever he went through. They were almost like his own children, and he would do anything to protect them and give them the world - just as Alice would with her own son.

But that thought began to fade when a blurry dark figure caught her attention. There was something.....somebody outside of the Register. The street lamp didn’t provide much light to help illuminate whoever it was, and the lights inside only made the figure more in the shadows. Alice squinted her eyes for a moment, trying to make out a face. She blinked, and the figure became more clear. His eyes were dead. The blood had dried on his face, his body, everywhere. He was still wearing the same clothes he had on when he came to the house.

“Alice?” FP’s voice tried to pull her out, but she wasn’t listening. Her vision began to blur and her ears were ringing. She felt dizzy. Her body was leaning towards one side, but FP’s hold kept her from falling over.

“You stay with your mom, boy! Joaquin, you come with me!” he directed as Alice struggled to regain her sense of reality. Chic sat her down at Hal’s desk while FP and Joaquin ran outside the Register. Toni stood over the Coopers and watched.

“You think it was the Black Hood?” the girl asked.

“How would he even know we were here?” Chic got down on one knee and place his hands on his mother’s shoulders. “Mom, what did you see? Did it look like the Black Hood?” Alice blinked then looked into her son’s eyes with paralyzed fear.

“No….I think I saw your father.”

Before Chic had time to react, FP and Joaquin had returned. Nothing had been outside, not even the Black Hood. The kids gathered around each other in relief as FP came to where Alice was sitting.

“We should pick this up in the morning. Get some rest, Coop.” he advised with a soft tone.

“Wow.” Alice scoffed. “You’re starting to sound just like Keller.” She stared at the desktop with a hint of despair. Unconsciously, she clasped her hands together and fidgeted with her thumbs nervously. She didn’t pick up on it until FP rested his hand on hers.

“We’re gonna find something that will....hopefully explain everything. But it doesn’t have to be at this exact moment. It doesn’t have to be tonight, okay?.” She turned to FP and bit her lip. She knew he was referring to Hal.
“Okay.” she quietly replied.

The five left the Register 5 minutes after the scare. Toni jotted down the password for the Coopers “just in case”. FP drove off with the younger Serpents in his truck and Alice and Chic returned to Elm Street in their convertible. It was getting dark out, and the nights were getting much colder. Only a street lamp a couple of houses away from the Cooper residence lit the path as Alice pulled into her driveway. She turned off the ignition and asked Chic to go collect the mail. She grabbed her purse from behind the driver's seat and exited the car. Chic was standing in front of the walkway to the porch, staring blankly at the front door.

“Chic?” Alice tried for her son’s attention, “Chic, I asked you to go---” she stopped and saw what had caught her son’s attention.

Their red door had been vandalized with a white spray-painted arrow pointing down. Her eyes followed the arrow down to find an open box sitting on the porch.

“Mom….you….you think that this was….”

“Chic, stay here.” Alice commanded, going up her walkway. She stood over the box, peering in. She had seen these items before. No….these were hers.

“Mom?” Chic ran up to stand next to her. “What is it? Another snake?”

“No…” Alice picked up a photograph, one she so hauntingly remembered. “This was my evidence from the Jason Blossom case.”

The days after Jason Blossom’s death, before she began her rendezvouses with Hal, Alice was gathering evidence and lists of possible suspects. She placed everything she had on a corkboard, connecting strings, writing sticky notes, and pinning records everywhere. Then one day, when she came back to work, it was all gone. No notes, no records, nothing. She felt so frustrated and lost, her anxiety manifested in its worst ways, varying from long nights at the station scanning every record to numbing her broken mind with alcohol while she and Hal fucked into the late hours of the night. Eventually, she found that it was Clifford Blossom who had murdered his son when a by-chance anonymous tip led her to Jason’s getaway car in the woods. But the whole damn experience worsened her head. And it made her not spend enough time with her son.

“How does the Black Hood have this?” Chic asked her. “What if he was the one who took it? Didn’t he say that he had…” his voice stopped. He picked up a small folded piece of paper, directed to Alice. “Another letter?” She turned to her son and grabbed the letter, opening it.

“But liars we can never trust,
Even when they say what is true.
And he who does one fault at first
And lies to hide it, makes it two.

Do you want to know what your beloved did to deserve his demise? Bring the Sugarman to me, and you will learn.”

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“The hell kind of name is a Sugarman?” Keller commented reading the letter.

“Maybe some sort of drug dealer? Or a creepy pedo in the neighborhood?” FP threw out the idea. He was confused at first when Alice texted him that morning to come to her house and make sense of what the Black Hood sent her. But once he saw the letter and the box of what he assumed was
research from the Jason Blossom case, it all started to make sense. They both unanimously agreed to bring the letter to Keller and see if he could guide them in the right direction.

“How exactly does this poem up here relate to the Sugarman?”

“It relates to Hal.” Alice spoke up. “It’s an Isaac Watts poem about being….weary of a liar. He knows that we’re looking into Hal’s death…..”

“So we’re thinking he’s using the Sugar Man to pull us in.” FP added on.

“Only problem is….we don’t even know where to start looking.” Keller took a moment to gather his thoughts.

“And you thought coming to me was the best solution?” he retorted, causing Alice to roll her eyes.

“So you’re just let us go out blind into no man’s land? Wow.” she scoffed.

“Look, I don’t have time to babysit you two.” Keller moved past them in a hurry, handing the Black Hood’s letter back to FP, “I’ve got a meeting to get to. Find something relevant, then bring it back to me.” And with that, he left.

“The fuck was that all about?” Alice muttered, plopping into her desk chair. FP rested himself on the desk and reexamined the note.

“Okay, give me your honest impression,” he hunched over resting his elbows on his knees staring down at her, “You think the Sugarman is a drug dealer?” She sighed and ran her fingers through her hair.

“It’s what I thought at first, but I…” she stopped, briefly glancing over at him then turning away. It took her a moment before she finished, “I didn’t want to jump to any conclusions.” He smirked, then pushed himself into a standing position, resting on hand on the desk.

“Look, I know you were only making those judgements about me when we first met…”

“Because you’re a Serpent?” she looked back up at him with guilt. FP sighed and continued.

“Kind of. But, not entirely...for reasons that are too long to explain now.” he skirted around the topic. He gave her support and did not judge her when she told him of her past and her relationship with Hal. Would she do the same for him if he told her the truth? It was not the time or the moment to be explaining to Alice how exactly it was he landed himself in Keller’s collar and leash. “But I think you may be right trusting your gut on this one, Coop.” He noticed her eyes widen at the last comment. She stood up and picked up the note.

“What are you saying?”

“If there’s one thing I know living on the Southside, it’s that it has a bad reputation when it comes to drugs. Ever hear of a little thing called Jingle Jangle?” Alice looked up at him in confusion.

“Who was the dumbass that came up with that name?”

“Somebody who must’ve really wanted heroin in the form of the fucking Pixy Stix candy. The whole Jingle Jangle thing has blown up everywhere on the Southside…..and now the whole business is leaking into Serpent territory.” He moved behind Alice and sat down. FP remembered when he first heard about the Jingle Jangle scare at Southside High. He remembered the scared look on younger members’ faces when they told him about younger Ghoulies bringing them to school.
Sweet Pea had wanted to fight all of them, to tell them to get out of their territory, and Toni, Joaquin, and Fangs had to calm him down. The Ghoulies were always linked somehow.

“So that’s why Keller had you so heavily on the Southside.” her voice pulled him out, and for a moment he noticed the look on her face. A part of him realized that she was finally starting to understand where he was coming from. “He wanted you to protect your home.” He scoffed quietly, glancing away from her.

“Not that easy, Coop. Just takes one criminal and drug dealer at a time.” His mind began to wander. He thought back to the recent busts he executed in the Southside. Some of them lifelong acquaintances, or names he heard of before, and….his thoughts landed in one memory. One person in particular.

“What?” Alice asked him. FP looked back at Alice, his eyes widened. He stood up slowly and he rested his hands on her shoulders.

“Do you remember, Alice? The garage I took you to? When this investigation all began?” Alice furrowed in confusion for a moment, then her eyes widened and her eyes met his again.

“Yes! You think it’s connected to Grundy?” her voice rose in excitement. FP glanced around the station to make sure no one else overheard. He leaned in closer and continued in a hushed voice.

“No quite. But….the one who was there when I did the bust. She was known as the Snake Charmer.”

The women’s ward of Shankshaw Prison was known to be more chaotic than the male ward. When the guards let FP and Alice through, it took almost five to ten minutes to get through the crowd of onlookers and catcalling inmates.

“So is there any last-minute important details that I need to know about Penny Peabody?” Alice asked once in the clear.

“One thing I learned before arresting her,” FP started, “Don’t let her get into your head. She’s known for mindfucking you.”

The guards led them to the visitors area, where the inmates and their guests were divided by a wall of payphones. The pair sat down at their designated booth and waited. Then, guards on the other side of the phones brought her in. She wasn’t what Alice had pictured her to be - she expected Penny to be a more sinister version of Scarlett O’Hara from Gone With the Wind. Instead, she was facing a rough-around-the-edges young blonde. Penny’s features were hauntingly similar to her own. The blonde slouched in the chair, snickering at the pair. She turned to FP and picked up her phone.

“Hiya, Jonesy. Already realizing you fucked up by putting me in here?” she teased. Wow, she’s classy, Alice thought to herself.

“Not why we’re here, Penny.” FP replied, attempting to get them on subject. The inmate slowly turned to Alice, cocking her head to the side.

“Who’s the pretty little blonde next to you? Didn’t know snakes had a kink for Northsiders. Have I seen your face before?” Alice’s face flushed. She knew she couldn’t let this woman get to her, but something about the comment made her uneasy.

“I’m his partner. For the PD.” Alice interjected. “We’re here to ask you a few questions about your
“business in drug dealing.” The blonde on the other side rolled her eyes and leaned back in her chair.

“Course that’s what your here for,” she snickered. “Always about the crimes with you cops.”

“You ever work with anyone who goes by the name of the Sugarman?” FP redirected the conversation. Penny’s eyes widened, then she sat up.

“Sugarman, huh? Is that who that cowboy sheriff has you going after now?”

“Not Keller,” Alice stated, “but the Black Hood.” Penny gave Alice a confused look. This woman was scaring her a little.

“He targets sinners and makes them pay for it.” FP explained. “Adulterers, thieves….drug dealers, even. So I suggest you watch yourself, Penny, or….you might be next.” he smiled.

“FP.” Alice hissed, eyes darting at him in fear.

“You don’t get to make demands, traitor.” Penny laughed, catching their attention from the other side of the glass. “What?”, she threatened him, “You really think I wouldn’t catch on to the fact that you’re really just the Sheriff’s lap dog wearing snake skins? Got a lot a sources in here telling me how you’ve been acting on the Southside. Especially during the whole Blossom ordeal.” It was evident FP wasn’t taking his own advice, for Alice noticed that his jaw was clamped shut. His free hand gripping the rim of the chair. Alice sat there wondering what the Blossom case had to do with FP? How was FP even involved? She turned back to Penny, who had cocked her head to the side again and smiled.

“Wait.” she pointed a figure at Alice. “Now I know where I’ve seen you. Shit, you’re the bitch who busted Blossom and sent him to jail.”

“I’m sorry, but what does Clifford Blossom have to do with any of this?” Alice’s voice escalated. The blonde on the other side raised her eyebrow.

“You’re shitting, right? Clifford Blossom ran a goddamn drug ring, right underneath his maple farming business. Who else do you think I took over for after you caught him for murdering his boy?” Alice sat there puzzled. She only thought the Blossom Family drug business was a rumor, just another piece of gossip swept away when the case closed. But it made sense now. Maybe Jason Blossom wanted to leave when he found out his family’s ordeal. And Clifford shot a bullet in his head in some basement to keep him quiet. How did Alice not pick up on this before? And why was FP still silent?

“Okay,” Penny sighed, “I don’t know who exactly you’re guy is. I’ve never seen a face. I was just the one running the business. You wanna find your Sugarman, go to the tippy top of the food chain. Some Blossom hospitality may give you better luck.” she pouted. Slowly, she turned her head back to FP, smirking. “Awful quiet over there, Jonesy. Thinking about that wife of yours? What was her name? Gladys?”

Alice looked to FP and grew scared. His lips were quivering, his knuckles were ghostly white. He warned her not to be fooled by the Snake Charmer, yet here he was trapped under her spell.

“Shame what those Ghoulies did to her, at least what I’m hearing around this joint. You tell blondie over here what happened yet? Or are you just keeping her in the dark like what you’re doing to every other Serpent in this town?” His face was getting red. Alice didn’t know if he was going to burst and break through the glass to choke Penny, or if he would storm out of the room. She needed to do something before the situation got much worse.
Alice gripped FP’s hand and stated through the phone, “That’s all the information we need. Thank you, Miss Peabody.” She hung up the phone, not breaking eye contact with the woman. Eventually, the guards on the other side lead the inmate away and Alice watched her leave. She turned to FP to see if he was alright, but before she could speak, he freed himself from her hold and walked out in a hurry.

“FP!” she called out after him but he was already gone. She had so many questions. What did the Ghoulies have to do with his wife’s death? What did FP know about the Blossom chaos? How did he end up in this position? She stood up and left to find him.

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He felt lightheaded and dizzy walking out of the room. How the hell did Penny Peabody learn about all of this? Why did he let her into his head? He struggled for breath. He rested his forehead against the wall, but it wasn’t enough. His mind was flashing images of her. And he couldn’t turn it off.

He turned his back to the wall and fell himself sliding down to the floor. His ears rang. His eyes were beginning to water. He couldn’t breathe.

“FP……FP……” a distant voice was shouting but it sounded like a mumble. He felt his heart thumping loud. How long had he been holding his hands in fists? What was happening? A figure came into his view, knelt down, and cupped his face.

“FP!” Alice snapped him back to reality, her hand cool on his burning cheeks. His breathing began to regulate somewhat. He looked up at her slowly. “FP….what’s wrong?” her voice cracked, “What happened?” He opened his mouth, but he was struggling for words. He mumbled slightly and it felt like he was choking.

“Hey, hey, hey…..shhhh…..” her voice soothed him. She rested her forehead against his, her fingers dancing along his cheeks. He felt tears streaming down.

“Whatever…..happened to you,” she started, pausing to try and gather her thoughts, “whatever it was….you did…..or what you were a part of…..you don’t have to be afraid to tell me. You don’t need to do it now. But…..but when you are ready……I’ll be here. I’ll listen…..because,” he noticed that she was starting to cry too, “because I know you did for me…..when I told you about me and Hal. So, I’ll do it for you…..when you’re better. Okay?” He couldn’t make the words come out to respond to her. So instead, he nodded. She smiled softly and wiped his tears away with her thumbs.

“Can you stand?” she whispered. FP held onto her arms as they both stood up. He teetered a bit into her but she kept him from falling over. Their foreheads remained touching, their breathing starting to synch. His eyes met hers, and for a moment, it felt like time had stopped. Something about her presence made him at peace. He realized in that moment that he didn’t need to be there to protect her, but she needed to protect him too. They were in this together.

“Let’s get out of here.” she reached for his hand, and he allowed her to lead him out of the hallway, out of the jail, and back home to Riverdale.

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The news of his father’s death blew up all over school. People kept approaching Chic, giving him their condolences and prayers. But after the third or fourth day of it, he grew tired and just wanted to be left alone. When classes let out for the afternoon, Chic threw on his headphones and allowed himself to get absorbed in his music.

Normally, he would hang out with Archie and Kevin after school, but since the Black Hood arrived,
Archie was too busy helping his dad recover, and Kevin was giving Chic the space he needed to grieve. He didn’t mind the loneliness, however. He didn’t mind the music drowning out his thoughts. He found the music a comfort, especially during the times of his parents fighting and going through their separation.

He numbingly made his way through the crowded halls, humming along quietly to a Smiths song. The hallways began to clear as students left for the day or would head out to the after school activities. Alone in his locker area, Chic casually thumbed through his combination and opened up his locker. He didn’t notice the envelope that was stuffed in there until it fell onto his feet. He stared down at it, slowly sliding off his headphones. He looked up and checked around, making sure no one was in the area. He bent down at picked up the envelope. There was something scribbled in black sharpie on the front.

They slipped briskly into an intimacy from which they never recovered.

“What the hell?” Chic muttered, turning over the mysterious item. He opened the envelope and reached inside. He pulled out a small stack of photos of….was this a couple having sex in a motel? When were these taken, and what kind of sick…..wait….. As he studied the pictures more, a horrifying realization came to him.

These weren’t a random couple. It was his mom and dad.

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“So you were never going to tell me?” Chic was shaking as he interrogated her in the living room, “That you and dad were sneaking around together during your separation?”

“I didn’t know how to tell you!” Alice replied, her voice wavering. It had been a long day for her, especially after what happened with FP at the prison. After the talk with Penny Peabody, Alice brought FP back to his trailer in Sunnyside and stayed with him for the remainder of the afternoon. He didn’t tell her anything of his past (he was still half dazed when he returned home and decided to sleep), but she made sure he ate something before she left. The minute she returned home, she found Chic sitting on the sofa holding a stack of photos, of what appeared to be her and Hal together during their rendezvous, and berating her with questions.

“Then why lie to me?” his voice rose in despair, “Why is it that I had to find out through the Black Hood? Doesn’t this make you a sinner too?”

“I was scared, Chic!” she cried. “I was lonely, and I was numb, and it fucking scared me! That’s why I went to your father!” She plopped down onto the couch and covered her face with her hands. Tears were streaming down, but she didn’t want to fall apart on her son. Not just yet. “I hated him….” she mumbled, pushing her hair out of her eyes and looking up at Chic, “but he made me feel something.”

“You call that love?” Chic muttered, handing her the photographs, “You sneak around some hostel complex to let Dad take advantage of you, and you call that love?” He wiped a tear away with his wrist before continuing. “How am I supposed to defend you, mom? From those people who call you crazy? From grandma? How am I supposed to protect you when you’re going around doing this? What else are you hiding?”

Alice rose up and reached out for her son, but Chic backed away, holding his hands out in front of him.
“Whatever game the Black Hood has you in, I don’t want any part in it. I’m sorry.” he stated before turning on his heel and went up the stairs to his room.

“Chic!” Alice called out but he didn’t respond. Alone in the living room, she fell to her knees and choked out the last of her tears. She reached for the photos on the couch and flipped through them. There would be consequences, the Black Hood warned her, and now she was only starting to see them in full force. He knew all this time, and now he was using this as leverage to break her family apart. And she still didn’t know why he wanted the Sugarman. She still didn’t even know who the Sugar Man was. But the Blossoms did.

Instead of wasting her time moping around following the fall out with Chic, she grabbed her keys and headed out to the Register. Alice sat down at Hal’s desk and plugged in the password Toni gave to her, accessing his desktop. She scanned through his files, trying to find anything Blossom related but to no avail. She opened up his desk drawers, still not finding anything. She decided to get up and scan the whole Register from head to toe. It must have been hours since she arrived because her eyelids were getting heavy and her vision was blurring. Her phone read 1:47 am with a bright screen.

Alice looked up from her phone and she saw him again. His blue eyes and blonde hair were now fading to grey. His skin was turning green, but the blood was still fresh. She was frustrated. Angry. Where was he hiding everything? She picked up a stapler from his desk and launched it at the corpse. He came closer to her but she was in no mood to be held.

“What the fuck did you do, Hal?” she screamed, banging her fists into his chest with rage. He did nothing. He grabbed onto her forearms and pulled her into him. She sobbed resting her forehead on his chest as she felt his arms wrap around her.

“What did you do?” she mumbled through the tears as she swayed with him. “What did you do?”

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He fumbled with his shoes on the edge of the bed. Maybe it was a good thing that he and Alice took the afternoon off from the day before, but he needed to jump back into work. He still needed time to tell her the truth about everything.

FP left the trailer and headed over to her convertible. He hopped into the passenger’s seat and was about to buckle in and grab the cup of coffee she got him when he noticed her face. Alice looked sleep deprived. Her eyes were bloodshot.

“Long night?” he asked. She didn’t turn to face him, but instead she took a sip of her coffee.

“Chic knows now.” she coldly stated, pausing to face him, “About me and Hal.” He choked on his drink and held his hand over his mouth to keep from spilling.

“You told him?” Alice turned back to the windshield at an unusually slow pace.

“The Black Hood did. Photos and everything.” He noticed her hands gripping onto the steering wheel. Her knuckles were turning white.

“He’s fucking with you, Coop.” FP stated his realization, falling back into the seat. “He’s fucking with us both.”

“You think I’m not aware of that by now, FP?” her voice was monotone. “First he takes my husband. Now he destroys my relationship with Chic.” Her grip on the steering wheel loosened, and she slouched back in defeat. FP turned to her, setting his cup down.
“Do you realize how much your boy cares about you?” FP threw out, catching her attention. “Your relationship with Chic isn’t ruined. Just give him some time. And some space. Did you try to talk to him again this morning.”

“I didn’t see him.” she told him truthfully, “I haven’t been at the house since. I was at the Register all damn night.” That would explain why she looked so restless. He figured that she was trying to find anything Hal left behind.

“So….what now?” he asked.

“We talk to the Blossoms. And we go find our Sugarman.” she responded, turning on the ignition to the car and leaving Sunnyside Trailers.

The ride over was silent. She drove with a leadfoot, speeding down the streets of Riverdale. FP didn’t want to tell her this in person, but he was starting to see something in her. Something was wrong. She was suffering, just like he did once long ago. He didn’t know how far off she had been, but she still had Chic to help keep her stable. But how much time did that guarantee before she could finally snap and Chic would be taken from her forever? He was pulled out of his thoughts when they arrived at the monstrous gates of Thornhill. It was like driving through Dracula’s castle - the giant mansion loomed over the hill it resided, and the trees around added to the spookiness.

“Jesus,” FP quietly snarked, “Abandon all hope ye who enter here.” The gates opened automatically, allowing for the pair to drive up to the entrance of the house. She pulled up to the front just across from the ominous front door. He hopped out of the convertible, examining the scene. He wasn’t prepared to speak to the Blossoms - he still felt guilt over what happened to Jason. He felt guilty for not helping the boy when he found out the Serpents were holding him in the Whyte Wyrm. He wanted to do something.

“You ready?” Alice stood next to him, looking up to him for confirmation. She still seemed off, but she was starting to get some of her bounce back. He swallowed the lump in his throat and nodded.

“Let’s get this over with.” he scoffed. He couldn’t help but look up as they walked over to the front door. He felt like he was walking into the set of the Addams Family. Alice banged on the door and the pair waited. Minutes passed, and FP wondered if coming here was a waste of time.

The door opened to reveal a young red-haired girl, the same girl who sang at the funeral, standing with her hand on her hip. She coily smiled at Alice, recognizing her almost instantly.

“Mrs. Cooper! What brings you here?” she spoke quickly.

“Cheryl, I need to speak to you and your mother. About your family’s business.” The girl, Cheryl, lost her smile instantly.

“What is this Serpent doing here?” Shit, FP thought to himself. How did she know what he was? He wasn’t even wearing his jacket.

“FP Jones my partner, Cheryl.” Alice jumped into the situation, “He’s working with me to find the Black Hood. Can we come in?”

Cheryl rolled her eyes and moved to the side. “Entrer.” she bitterly welcomed them in. FP and Alice entered the home and noticed how dark every was. The hallway wounded in every which way and the walls were covered in unsettlingly paintings of the Blossom family. Right in front and center was
a portrait of Cheryl and her late brother, Jason. Cheryl led them into the boudoir, where the fireplace was roaring. The family’s matriarch, Penelope Blossom, sat in the living room sipping on tea. She turned to them as they entered the room and stood up.

“Detective Cooper….haven’t you already solved the case of my dead son and murderous husband?” she smirked, resting her forearm on the loveseat. Alice left FP’s side and made her way towards Penelope.

“Snark all you want Penelope. I’m here on matters for your late husband’s drug business.” she responded, causing the older red-head to chuckle.

“Shouldn’t you be asking the Serpents about that?”

“Well too bad. Our sources led us here.” FP threw in. “Our person of interest is going after someone called the Sugar Man, and we think he has some connection to your family.” Penelope rolled her eyes and returned to her seat.

“If you’re going to ask questions, I might as well be a good host and offer you some tea.” She turned to them, raising her eyebrow. “Well?”

FP went to join Alice, but he heard a small whimper behind him. He turned to find Cheryl silently crying and giving him a deadly glare. She turned on her heel and left the room.

“Ignore my Cheryl.” Penelope called out. “She’s still can’t get over the fact that her only brother is dead. Hasn’t been able to get her life back together.” He turned back to Alice, trying to figure out what to do. He didn’t want to leave Alice by herself with this woman, but he needed to make things right with at least one Blossom.

“You go talk to her. I’m gonna find the girl.” FP strategized. Alice nodded him and headed further into the living room. FP exited as he entered and followed the younger Blossom’s path. He came out to the main hallway where he found the young girl running up the stairs crying.

“Cheryl, wait!” he hurried over to the stairs. She faced him at the top of the stairs, wiped away a tear in anger, then headed off down the hallway. He ran up the stairs and attempted to catch up to her.

“Cheryl!” he called out again. She stopped in the middle of the hallway with her back to him, her fists shaking. He walked over to her and reached out, but she violently whipped around and slapped him.

“Stay away from me, you pleabe!” she spat out at him in tears. “You call yourself PD, but you’re a murderer! You and your Serpent friends were accomplices in the murder of Jay Jay!” He took time to process the comment. He knew very well of what the Serpents did during the Jason Blossom episode, but he never partook in their affair.

He remembered that day in July, just a few days after the boy went missing. FP had meant to pick up Toni and the other younger members from the Wyrm when he thought he heard a noise coming from the basement. The door was opened slightly, so it was enough for him to peer in. What he saw horrified him.

“Since when the fuck did Serpents kidnap Northsider kids? Especially from powerful families?” he confronted Tall Boy about the matter later that evening.

“This ain’t your place, Jones, so I suggest you stay out of it.”

“You need to let him go!” he screamed. “You really want to give the Serpents a bad rep? I swear, Tall Boy, I can phone up Keller and have a squad come out here and get that boy!”
“And you want to wind up in jail? And get exiled?” Tall Boy screamed back at him. “You call that boss of yours, and the Serpents flay you faster than you can repeat the Serpent laws.” That shut FP up fast. He knew the risk of blowing his cover on the Southside. He needed to keep his job, and he needed to keep his place on the Southside. So he was forced into silence. And when he learned that the boy had died, his heart broke. FP hadn’t felt so helpless since he lost Gladys. He knew that the Serpents had Jason, and the boy was now dead. But after digging into Serpent files in the office upstairs in the Wyrm, he found that the boy had planned to leave Riverdale in a getaway car. If he wanted to help the boy in the afterlife while not blowing his cover, he figured the least he could do was aid the PD (well, Alice really) in finding that car.

“I had nothing to do with that.” he quietly confirmed to Cheryl. It was the honest truth, but she wouldn’t take it.

“And yet you did nothing to stop them!” she retorted. “That’s just as worse!” The girl fell silent and continued to cry. FP tried to reach out to her, but she backed away and headed into her room. He stood in the hallway for a brief moment, trying to think of the words to say. How could he gain her trust. She was right about not aiding Jason when he needed help, but he could prevent the Black Hood from attacking more innocent people like Jason.

FP walked over to the room and stood in the doorway. Inside, Cheryl knelt in front of her bed over a box filled with drawings and journals, silently crying. He figured she knew he was there but was choosing to ignore him. He hesitated on coming closer to her, afraid she would lash out again or would accuse him of attempting to take advantage of her. So he decided just to move over to her desk, giving enough space between him and her.

“I can’t bring him back, Cheryl.” he broke the silence. Cheryl glared up at him and wiped away a tear. He took a deep breath and continued, slowly.

“If I could go back and save him from what happened, I would. But…..Cheryl, you can trust me. This man—the Black Hood—he’s going to hurt a lot of people. Finding the Sugar Man—it can be a way to stop it. But Alice and I, we can’t do it unless you help us.” he stopped for a moment, struggling for words. “Cheryl, we can help each other.” The girl rolled her eyes and glared off into the distance.

“How can you help me?” Cheryl muttered. “My father was a murderer. My mother hates me. And my brother is dead.” She looked back down at her box, taking out different drawings. “Jay Jay protected me. He was strong, and smart, and so kind. He always made sure our parents didn’t go after me for being so….deviant. But now that he’s gone, it’s like…..” she stopped, her eyes still staring down at the box.

“It’s like what?” FP asked, but she gave no response. “Cheryl?” he attempted again. Then, she slowly lifted a drawing out of the box, holding it in front of her. She looked up at him and stood up.

“You said Sugarman, right?” Cheryl mumbled. Alert, FP approached her slowly.

“May I?” he reached out for the drawing, and she gave it to him. It was a crayon picture of Cheryl and Jason as children in front of Thornhill, and on the side was a figure drawn in black, labeled as the Sugarman.

“Mommy and Daddy used to tell us that if we were misbehaving, they would send the Sugarman after us. I always thought he was just like….a boogeyman or something. But after learning what my father was doing in the drug business…..I don’t know.”

“Cheryl, have you seen this man before?” FP pointed at the figure in the picture.
“No….but my mother has.”

Alice stood uncomfortably in the living room, looming over the woman sitting in front of her. She never got along with Penelope Blossom, no matter how hard Hal tried to make her. She always criticized Alice for her middle-class status and her ways of her work. In her opinion, Penelope was just a younger, ginger version of Prudence. Forcing herself mentally not to dig her nails into her palms, she took a deep breath and began her interrogation.

“Suppose you’re aware of what your husband was doing beside the maple business?” she started.

“You really think I’m that oblivious?” Penelope scoffed, sipping on her tea. “Of course I knew. I even aiding him in it, at least on the sides. Clifford preferred me to be more arm candy than an actual business partner.”

“So you must know who the Sugarman is. Unless you no longer deal in that sector since I sent your husband away.” Penelope set her cup down and scowled at Alice.

“Tell me, Alice….did you have any pity in your heart when you sent my husband to jail?” Alice stood silent for a moment, confused at the question.

“I’m sorry….what does this have to do with the Sugarman---”

“You have any pity when Hal died?” the woman across from her raised her eyebrow. Her feelings from the night before were slowly creeping back. All the feelings of despair, and frustration, and being left in the dark….

“I loved Hal.” Alice stated, and Penelope laughed.

“Then why go through that silly little separation then? You just must have been desperate to be the one in charge, huh?” Why was she letting this woman get to her? And what the hell did this have to do with the Sugarman?

“I will admit,” Penelope began, “drug dealing isn’t my fortay. We’ve had many Sugarmen come and go over the years….but now that my husband’s away and the Blossoms no longer have control over the drug ring in Riverdale, I’ve found my fine tune in…..other business.” Alice’s eyes widened at the statement. Wait…did that mean….

“You know the days before Hal died, Alice….he came to see me. Crying, practically, over what happened between you two. Sweet man…..but not really strong per se.” Alice was starting to see red. Her mental block was starting to fade; her nails made no hesitation to find their familiar place in her palms.

“What were you doing with my husband, Penelope?” her voice was shaking. She was asking a question she already knew the dangerous answer to. Penelope turned to her and gave her a malicious smile.

“What I’ve found my strength in doing the past couple of weeks. Giving comfort and condolence to the lonely men of Riverdale.”

Her mind screamed. Her hands shook. She felt tears forming at the sides of her eyes. No….she couldn’t believe…..Hal would have never….but he….

“Mother! We need to talk!” Cheryl stormed into the room, breaking the tension between the two
older women, FP following right after the young red head.

“What do you want, nightmare child?” Penelope stood up going towards her daughter.

“Alice?” FP came over to her slowly. “Alice, did you get anything?”

“The Sugarman is real, Mommy!” the girl handed a drawing to Penelope. “We need to do something to help them!” she exclaimed, pointing at FP and Alice.

“Cheryl, please.” Penelope dropped the drawing to her feet, turning to the pair. “Why would you think it’s a good idea to help the police? Especially when they send a Serpent and some….madwoman.”

Alice felt like she lost all control. She wanted to lash out, attack this woman, even….murder her. Instead, she turned on her heel and stormed out of Thornhill.

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“Alice!” FP called out, trying to stop Alice from leaving. But it was too late. What Penelope Blossom did to trigger her, it must have been bad, because Alice stormed out without a word. And her nails were so far wedged into her palms.

“Go.” Cheryl approached him, resting a hand on his bicep. “I’ll talk to my mother about the Sugarman.”

“Thank you.” FP muttered, before leaving the unsettlingly scene in Thornhill. He came back out into the hallway and left out the front door.

“Alice!” he called out again into the open, blinded by the sunlight outside. He searched around the driveway of Thornhill, not finding a sign of his partner. He called out her name one last time before landing his eyes on her convertible. Inside, she was hunched over her steering wheel, clearly in distress. He slowly approached the vehicle and tapped on the window. She looked up at him with red puffy eyes. She unlocked the car and recoiled. FP entered the car and sat down in the passenger’s seat. She didn’t face him; she remained staring the windshield. He didn’t know what happened inside Thornhill; he was too scared to ask. All he knew was that she needed comfort….the same way he needed it the day before. Alice let out a sob and he pulled her in, wrapping his arms around her. He allowed her to rest her head on his shoulder as she continued to sob.

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She sat in the booth at Pop’s, feeling absolutely numb. She needed sleep. No….she wanted to watch Penelope Blossom burned. She slept with Hal. She used her power and her money, and she took advantage of Hal at his weakest. Was that his sin? Breaking his fidelity with Alice? No….it had to have been something else. Alice didn’t know what to think or what to believe anymore.

FP sat down next to her in the booth and set down two cups of coffee. He leaned back in exhaustion.

“So we’re back at square one?” she asked, her voice stiff. FP huffed and ran his fingers through his hair.

“I may have gotten Cheryl Blossom to help us.” he started. He took a sip of his coffee, then continued, “It’s just a matter of time before we get anything though. And I’m not entirely certain that Cheryl and her mom has the best relationship.” She exhaled and repositioned herself to face him. She could feel tears forming again, but she was too fatigued to cry.
“Thank you, FP.” she choked out, then she began to ramble. “I’m sorry….I’m sorry for being such a fucking wreck today. Everything’s just….it’s falling apart, and…..and I still haven’t even checked on you. So much happened to you yesterday, and I still don’t even know---” she was stunned into silence when FP’s hand took hers. She sniffled before giving him a soft look.

“There’s so much that happened to me.” he spoke with a soft voice. “I fell apart. I felt like I was going insane……and I’m worried….that it’s happening to you too.” FP faced her, turning her hand over to see her palms. They were swollen and raw from the fresh wounds her nails made.

“What happened to you, FP?” she asked in sincerity. “Tell me.” He took a deep breath, then went to speak. But, the bell at the front doors chimed and footsteps broke their moment.

“Mr. Jones.” Cheryl rushed over to the pair, stopping as she approached them. They let go of each others hands and left the booth, standing side by side.

“Something the matter?” Alice inquired the young girl. Cheryl handed them a slip of paper.

“That’s your Sugarman. I was able to get my mother to spit out a name.” FP took the slip and opened it, Alice peering over next to him.

“Robert Phillips.” she read the name. Phillips. Why did that last name sound familiar?

“Thank you, Cheryl.” FP looked up at the girl. “There’s gotta be a way we can repay you.” Cheryl looked down at her feet for a moment, then she took a step towards FP.

“Just find the Black Hood and kill him. Okay?” Alice wasn’t sure why Cheryl was behaving like this, but FP nodded at her request. Then, he grabbed a napkin and pulled out a pin, scribbling down his number. He handed it to the girl.

“Just in case you need anything.”

“Thank you.” Cheryl held the number in her hands. She gave one last look to Alice and left the diner. Alice glanced back down at the slip.

“FP….does that name look familiar to you?” she directed him at the last name.

“Phillips.” she saw him struggling. He paced down the aisle of the diner then back towards her. “Why have I….” Then a realization came to him. “Wait.” he looked up at her. In that instant, she figured it out.

“The English teacher at Southside High.”

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The pair stormed into the rundown school with Keller leading them and other officers following behind. Kids in the hallway backed up or ran off in fear. They had no intent on arresting these kids - their goal was to get Phillips. They found their way to the English classroom and entered. Robert Phillips, younger than what either of them had pictured, was in the middle of a lecture on Fahrenheit 451 when the Riverdale PD stormed in.

“Robert Phillips,” Keller commanded, signaling the officers behind them to surround the teacher, “you’re under arrest for the illegal possession and sale of Jingle Jangle.”

“What the hell?” Phillips protested as the officers arrested him. The kids in the classroom began to disperse or stayed in their seats petrified. The officers led him out of the classroom with Keller
following behind reading off his Miranda rights. FP and Alice exited behind the crowd but noticed
the chaos ensuing in the hallway. Younger members of both the Serpents and the Ghoulies broke out
into fights, capturing the attention of the officers. They began to approach the young gang members
and arresting them as well.

“Keller, tell them to stop it!” FP barked at Keller but was ignored.

“I can’t help if they’re starting fights, Jones. You and Alice go back to the station and keep your eye
on Phillips.” The hallways formed into a war zone. Kids were fleeing everywhere. The PD wrestled
with kids and had them against the walls. This isn’t right, Alice thought to herself. She glanced
around and saw a frightened Toni coming out of one of the classrooms. Alice left FP and Keller’s
side and came up to the young girl. She led Toni by the arm and walked away from the chaos.

“Blondie,” Toni tried to get away, “what are you doing?”

“Listen to me carefully.” Alice turned Toni to face her, “Find the others and get them out. Stay in
FP’s trailer until this boils over.”

“I don’t understand. What’s happening?”

“Toni!” Joaquin ran over to them, noticing Alice. “What’s going on?”

“We’ll explain later. Find your friends and go!” Alice directed them towards an exit and watched as
the younger Serpents fled from the scene. Behind her, the chaos began to die down. FP ran up to her
out of breath.

“You okay?” Alice placed a hand on his shoulder.

“Sweet Pea and Fangs just got fucking arrested. I’m gonna need to bail them both out. Where’s
Joaquin? Where Toni?”

“Don’t worry about them. I made sure they got out okay.” Alice stated while leaned in to make sure
no one heard them. FP exhaled and rested his hands on her shoulder blades.

“Thank you.” he breathed heavily. “So, what now?”

“We wait for the Black Hood to come.”

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The rest of the day had been quiet, for the most part. When they returned to the station, FP had to
hassle with Keller to let the younger Serpents out, which after some time and some negotiation, was
successful. After he dropped off Sweet Pea and Fangs back at the trailer, he brought back some
takeout for him and Alice. Now it was only a waiting game for their familiar foe to come.

“We can take shifts, if you want.” FP spoke in between bites. “Just so you can get some rest.”

“I’ll be fine.” Alice stood up from her desk to throw out her container. “Finally was able to get some
sleep last night.” She went quiet for a moment, then spoke again. “I saw Chic this morning.” FP’s
eyes became alert.

“Really?” he sat up in his chair setting his carton down. “How did it go?” She pouted briefly.

“I asked him how he was doing, and if he needed anything. He didn’t say much, though.” She
leaned against the desk and gripped onto the edge.
“Hey, that’s progress.” FP tried to sound optimistic. She stared off into the distance, still exhausted from the days before. He reached for her hand and held onto it. “Give him time, Alice. He’ll come around to see things from your view….eventually.” She turned to him and placed her other hand on top of his.

“I hope so.” she muttered. “I really do hope so.”

The night came and the office began to quiet down. FP and Alice interchanged from doing deskwork in the office and checking in on Phillips. Keller disappeared at some point earlier in the evening, much to both of their confusion, so later in the evening it was primarily just the two of them. Alice checked her calendar, slowly remembering that Thanksgiving was coming up. She had no clue what she was going to do for the holiday; she didn’t even know if she and Chic would even be on good terms to celebrate together.

“You have any plans for Thanksgiving?” she asked FP when he returned from his shift. He slouched down in the chair across from her and chuckled.

“Not really. Probably just gonna watch the parade on TV then check on the kids. Make sure they aren’t fucking around. Why you asking?” She looked up at him and set her calendar down.

“I was thinking….would you like to come over?” FP’s face went soft. She sat up and and pursed her lips. “Just so you wouldn’t have to be alone!” she tried to explain. “Also, I…..” What would she say? She wanted help with the cooking? She didn’t want to be alone with Chic, worrying that the holiday would be ruined by the awkward tension? She made an attempt to speak, then she noticed him smile.

“No, I get it. I’d like that, actually.” he responded, and she took a breath of relief. “And I can help with….whatever you need to cook, too. Only if you’re planning a huge meal or something.”

“That would….be nice.” her voice went soft. She never picked up on how dark his eyes were until then. She never used to do anything of this sort with others she worked with in the past, but there was something about FP Jones…..

The sound of FP’s phone buzzing interrupted the moment. Confused, FP pulled out his phone to find an unknown number calling him.

“What the hell?” FP glanced up at Alice, then slid the answer button. “Yeah, this is FP.” The other person, whoever was calling on the other end, was sniffling and sounded frightened.

“Mr. Jones.” a familiar voice quietly whimpered. FP rose from his spot.

“There’s somebody here.” he tried to console the girl.

Cheryl didn’t mind the loneliness after a while. Any moment she could get away from her mother was practically a blessing. Everyone at school kept pestering her about Jay Jay and what her father did. And while she did adore the attention, she just wanted to be left alone. And her home life at the
current moment was far from being normal. Since her mother began pursuing her career in the sex business, every night felt like Cheryl was living in a brothel. Luckily, Penelope was busy in her room dolling up for her next appointment and made arrangements to be out, so that pretty much left most of the house to Cheryl. She considered calling Tina and Ginger over for a girls night, but instead she just decided to spend the night in the boudoir catching up on reading for school. She found a cozy spot on the loveseat in front of the roaring fire and became engrossed in her book. A sudden banging at the door broke her from her comfort. That’s odd, she thought to herself. Wasn’t her mother supposed to not be bringing anyone in?

“Mother!” she called out. “Your dick appointment’s here!” She heard no response. The banging continued, causing Cheryl to huff then lazily get up from her seat.

“Fine, I’ll get it!” she called out, hurrying to the front door. She opened it to find not a suitor here for her mother, but instead a tall figure wearing a black ski mask wielding an axe. The sight frightened Cheryl. Oh god….was this…..was this the Sugarman finally coming after her? Or was it…..

Cheryl let out a blood curdling scream and the Black Hood swung his axe out. Cheryl dodged the swing and attempted to shut the door on the intruder. But the Black Hood was too strong to be held off. He swung the door open and held the axe in his hands. Cheryl bolted up the stairs and retreated to her room. She remembered that she needed to warn her mother of the intruder, but what if the Black Hood was outside her room that moment? What could she do? She heard the ominous footsteps booming down the hallway and Cheryl clung onto her bed frame in fear. Then the footsteps fading, allowing her some relief. But her mother….oh god. Cheryl eyed her phone on her bed and scrambled for it. She needed to call someone, anyone. She dialed for the first number she could think of.

“Yes?” Cheryl attempted to crouch behind her bed just in case.

“Okay, stay where you are. I’m coming.” FP stated before he hung up. Cheryl began to consider her options. Would she stay where she was and wait for the Serpent to come? Or did she have enough time to run for it, grab her mother, and go? Then she remembered….her bow and arrow were somewhere in her closet? Did she have enough arrows to defend herself or were they all down in the hunting shed?

The sound of the axe swinging at her door made her jump. She let out a yelp and covered her mouth.
her attacker. She slung the rest on her back and loaded the first one into the bow. The blows to her
door had stopped…..it was only a matter of waiting in that moment. The door was kicked open and
the Black Hood stormed in. Cheryl aimed the arrow at his shoulder and fired. The Black Hood
stumbled back with the arrow in his shoulder, allowing Cheryl some leeway to get out of her room.
She sprinted down the hall towards her mother’s room. The first things she noticed were the door
wide open and the streaks of blood on the floor. Then, she noticed that the room had a raw stench of
blood and gasoline.

“Mother?” she called out, fearing that she already knew what happened. Cheryl entered the room
and finally came to terms of the horror in front of her. On display was the fragments of a corpse
resembling the body of Penelope Blossom. Cheryl was too in distraught to scream at the sight. Why
didn’t she come to her mother’s aid sooner? Why did she let this maniac into her house? Distracted
by the scene, she didn’t pick up on the Black Hood coming up behind her and knocking her to the
floor.

Cheryl fell on top of her bow and let out a groan. The Black Hood made a swing, but Cheryl was
able to roll out of the way in time. She loaded another arrow in and fired. This time, the Black Hood
dodged her arrow and swung her axe down. In fear, Cheryl dropped her bow and caught the handle
of the axe (thank god that she knew how to lift girls for stunts during Vixens practice). She was able
to keep the blade of the axe from entering her skull. But her strength was not as strong as his. The
Black Hood knelt down and lifted up his axe, releasing her grip. He raised it again, preparing to
attack the girl, and Cheryl screamed.

A figure from behind the Black Hood knocked Penelope’s jewelry box onto his head, knocking him
out. Cheryl gasped as the Black Hood fell unconscious beside her. She looked up to find FP
dropping the box.

“Cheryl, are you okay?” FP extended his hand out to her and he lifted her off her feet. Half in
distraught, half in relief, Cheryl hugged the Serpent. She let out a sob as she buried her face into his
shoulder.

“Thank you.” she cried as he held onto her. The moment ended however when they both heard the
Black Hood groan and regain his consciousness. Cheryl pulled away from FP and grabbed for her
bow and arrow. The Black Hood stood up and pulled something out of his jacket. He flicked it with
his fingers and a small flame appeared.

“Oh shit.” FP muttered. The Black Hood dropped the lighter and the room began to burst into
flames. “CHERYL, GO!” FP grabbed her and the two ran out of the room. Cheryl and FP fled
down the stairs only to realize that all of Thornhill had been set ablaze. She turned back to the top of
the stairs to see if the Black Hood was still following them. She began to think about her poor mother
and her cruel fate. “Cheryl…” FP led her outside away from the building smoke. They made their
way out of the driveway of Thornhill and stopped halfway between the house and the front gates.
Cheryl watched as her home became consumed by the growing fire. She silently let the tears flow as
she watched. She could hear FP calling for backup but it was already too late for her mother. The
Black Hood had already gotten what he came for.

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Alice splashed some cold water on her face then examined her reflection in the bathroom mirror. It
felt like hours since FP left her alone so he could deal with whatever Cheryl Blossom was going
through. They had their Sugarman, but it was still only a matter of time before the Black Hood gave
her the answers she wanted. She huffed and left the bathroom. The hallway was dark, but she
wanted to check the time on her phone. By the time she reached her desk, she noticed her walkie
“We need backup at Thornhill.” a voice called out. “There’s been a fire. One dead.” Shit. FP was there. Oh god….did that mean….. If the Black Hood went after the Blossoms…..the Sugarman was next. Alice shoved her phone into her pocket and grabbed her pistol out of her desk. She made her way back to wear Phillips was being held. She found the English teacher sitting on his bed reading. He looked up when she came by and set the book down.

“Already here for another interrogation?” he asked. She came up to the bar and held on with her free hand.

“Just shut up and listen to me.” she commanded in a hushed voice. “The Black Hood wants you dead. So if you want to stay alive, you do as I say. Understand?” he nodded, and Alice turned towards where she entered. She held her gun in one hand and dialed for FP in another. She heard the phone ring once….twice….three times….

“Come on, FP. Please be okay.” she muttered. The call went straight to voicemail. “Damnit!” she swore under her breath. Maybe she could try again in a few seconds. She dialed again and waited. Finally, FP picked up on the other end.

“Uh oh?”

“Oh thank god….” Alice sighed in relief. “What the fuck is happening?”

“Alice, I---” the phone and her gun fell out of her hands as Phillips grabbed Alice by the wrist and pulled her face into the bars. She tried to break free from his grip, but he started to wrap his hands around her neck, squeezing the air out of her.

“Uh oh?” FP’s voice rang out. Alice tried to pull away but Phillips was too strong. “ALICE? WHAT’S HAPPENING?” She choked for air and Phillips smiled.

“IT’s you who’s gonna be facing the Black Hood, not me sweetheart.” She felt lightheaded….like she could almost…..

Someone from behind pulled her away and pushed her down to the floor. FP’s voice called out her name again then the line went silent. Half dazed, Alice looked up to find the Black Hood looming over her. There was a wound on his shoulder, and he smelled of smoke. He leaned down and stared at her, breathing heavily. His eyes were light blue, something she picked up on for the first time. Not breaking eye contact with her, he picked up her gun and stood up. Then, he turned away and faced Phillips.

“Wait…” Alice choked out but it was too late. The Black Hood fired a bullet into Phillips’s head. She felt her eyelids getting heavy. What was happening to her? Just as she was about to lose consciousness, the Black Hood lifted her into his arms and led her away from the scene.

End of Chapter Six

Chapter End Notes

HOLLAY SHIT. Was that a thrill or what? Hopefully I should crank out the next
chapter soon so yal aren't left wondering on the cliffhanger!
Chapter Seven - The Kindness of Strangers

HELLO I'M BACK!

So yeah, I've come to bless you with another long af chapter, but this is very detail heavy and kinda crucial to the plot.....and YES WE GET MORE FP BACKSTORY THIS CHAPTER (woop woop). So give it a read and tell me what you think :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Seven - The Kindness of Strangers

It was dark and cold when Alice woke up. She struggled to open her eyes, embracing the darkness around her. She felt claustrophobic in the small space. She wanted to scream out for help, or something…Was she dead? Did the Black Hood kidnap her? Where was she? The latch behind her opened and a bright light poured in. She winced at the light and felt herself being pulled out of darkness, the metal tray she laid on moving rapidly. The light was so bright that it took her a moment to process what was happening to her. A cold hand caressed her face and tilted it to the side. She looked up at him, the smell of his rotting flesh wafting in the air. Yet somehow she wasn’t affected by it. His eyes were greyer now, the blood oozing out of his neck still fresh.

“Hi baby.” the corpse spoke to her.

“Hal?” her voice was dry. He slid a hand under her back and he lifted her up to a sitting position. Was this….was she in a morgue?

“Am I…” she began, looking around her, “Am I dead?”

“No, you’re just passed out.” She slid her legs off the tray and felt her feet touch the ground. He helped her off the tray, holding onto her forearms. “Come on, I want to show you something.” She saw a door opening behind them, leading into somewhere in the dark. He took her hand and led her out of the metal room, out into the darkness.

Although the hallway was mostly in the dark, Alice could make out that she was at the station, going down the hall past Keller’s office. Why would Hal take her this way? Were they going back out to her desk? Was he taking her back to FP? They stopped in front of a door and he opened it. He looked back to her and bent his head in an odd way. He turned back and led her through.

They were in his Sharebnb. The living room area looked clean….except for the walls. The walls on her left were streaked in blood, and on her right…..the walls were filled were newspaper clippings, and photos, all connected through pinned strings….items that looked oddly familiar to her. He stopped and allowed her to go towards his collage.

“You recognize these?” his voice was deeper than before, than she remembered. Alice had to take time to examine these items…..why did they look so familiar? Then it hit her.

“It’s my evidence from the Jason Blossom case.” she said, reaching out for one of the strings. Why was all of this here? What was he trying to show her? She remembered the Black Hood sending
these items back to her, but it never occurred to her why. Then she remembered - the Isaac Watts poem.

“You stole this, didn’t you?” Alice turned back to him. He made no response, his face never changed. He continued to stare at her with those dead eyes. She wanted to march over to him and slap him. She wanted to kick, scream, yell….yet she stay composed, unable to move.

“Why did you do that?” she asked calmly. Again, he said nothing. Finally having the strength to move, Alice walked over to him and cupped his face.

“What happened to you, Hal? You stole my evidence….you slept with Penelope Blossom…..what are you hiding from me?” He looked at her, and she could see the remorse in his eyes. Then, he reached his hands up and touched her face, and he violently pulled her closer to him. She yelped as he leaned in towards her ear.

“These woods are lovely and dark and deep,” he whispered to her in a harsh voice, “but I have promises to keep. And miles to go before I sleep….And miles to go before I sleep.”

She blinked. Why was he quoting Robert Frost? What was he trying to tell her? He pulled back slightly to brush her hair away from her eyes.

“You can figure this out, Alice. I know you can.” his voice encouraged her. She tried to speak, to ask what it meant, but before she could, he kissed her. He tasted of stale blood and dying flowers, but his lips were soft and warm. She found herself responding to the kiss and tugged him closer by his shirt. She missed him. She kept her eyes closed as their lips parted.

“Time to wake up now.” he spoke, then she couldn’t feel him anymore. She felt numb and cold again. After a moment, her senses came back to her. She slowly opened her eyes, her breathing heavy. The voices around her sounded panicked. She inhaled and sat up. She was in an ambulance with the doors wide open. A nurse took notice in her and came up to her.

“Detective Cooper,” the nurse spoke to her calmly. “How are you feeling?” Her neck felt tight, the back of her head was throbbing. Did she get a concussion?

“Fine, I guess?” Alice pushed her hair back and took another breath. Another person entered the vehicle, catching her attention.

“Alice, are you alright?” Keller stood next to the nurse. “The hell happened in there with you and Phillips?” Then Alice remembered what happened. Robert Phillips was dead. The Black Hood came and killed him….but he saved her. Why did he save her?

“The Black Hood,” Alice started, “He came for Phillips. I….I was trying to warn him, but….but he attacked me. And the Black Hood…”

“Jesus….” Keller began to pace the vehicle. The nurse checked Alice’s head and examined the rest of her body. She ran a check to make sure Alice could count the amount of fingers she was holding and if she remembered who the President was.

“Not seeing any signs of a concussion, but you might want to take it easy for the next couple of days,” the nurse explained to her. Alice sat up and looked outside. Most of the officers from earlier in the day, but she couldn’t find the one familiar faced she hoped to see.

“Keller, where’s FP?” she asked him. Keller glanced back outside then turned back to her.

“He’s at the hospital.” he sighed. “He’s with Cheryl Blossom. Something happened at Thornhill. A
fire. The girl’s mom, Penelope….she didn’t make it out with them.” Alice blinked, slowly regaining the memories of what happened. He smelled of smoke. He had a wound in his shoulder. His eyes were so light.

“Is he okay?” her voice started to crack. “Can….can I see him?” She made an attempt to stand up but wobbled. Keller held onto her arm and gracefully led her out of the ambulance.

“You’ll see him in the morning okay?” Alice didn’t know why he was acting so cold with her. A moment later, her eyes widened. Her feet stopped moving.

“You think I killed Phillips, didn’t you?” Keller faced her raising an eyebrow.

“What? Alice---”

“You think I’m making this up?” Alice tried to pull away from him. “I saw him, Keller! I saw the Black Hood!” Keller took a step towards her and grabbed onto her arms.

“Alice, stop!” he barked at her. Her throat went dry, her eyes began to water. He glanced around him and continued in a hushed voice, “I’m not accusing you of anything. But you have been through a lot these past few days and I don’t want anything to cause you to get hurt, okay?” She nodded slowly, feeling her emotions bubbling to the surface.

“Please, you have to believe me...I’m not crazy….am I?” her voice was soft and fragile. He sighed and softened his grip.

“Come on, I’ll take you home. I’ll give you and FP a few days to rest from all this.” He led her to his car and gently placed her inside. She felt numb on the ride back to Elm Street. She didn't notice that they arrived until Keller opened her door and helped her out. She didn’t know if her son was home….oh god, did he know what happened? Keller knocked on the front door softly, but Alice couldn’t bring herself to pay attention. She could hear the door open, Chic calling out for her, asking Keller what happened. He led her to the couch and sat her down. She felt her eyelids going heavy. She wanted a shower.

“I need you to keep an eye on your mom, okay?” she could hear Keller direct Chic. After taking a breath, Alice stood up and stumbled her way over to the stairs. Chic tried to hold onto her, but she slowly regained her balance.

“I’m fine.” she reassured him, then turning to Keller. “Thanks.” she said coldly, before making her way up the stairs, into her bathroom. Alice peeled off her clothes, the cold air hitting her. When was the last time she took a shower? She turned the handle up for warm water and she hopped in. The warm water stung against her skin but she didn’t care. She struggled to process every that was happened….all that did happen. Robert Phillips was now dead….Penelope Blossom was dead now too……and Hal…..her lover, her sinner, her liar. And FP…..poor, poor FP. Did he know what happened? Would he believe her? She finished her shower and numbly moved out to her bedroom in the dark. She slipped on some underwear and threw on an old T-Shirt Hal used to wear. She stumbled over to her bed and allowed herself to sink in, letting sleep take control.

These woods are lovely and dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go….

Alice inhaled sharply as she came out of her slumber. She stretched out an arm and made an attempt to sit up. Her head still felt funny, but it wasn’t in as much pain as it was the night before. What time was it? How long had she been asleep? A soft knock at her door caught her attention. “It’s open.” she mumbled and sat up fully. The door opened and Chic entered with a glass of water and a bottle
of Advil in his hands.

“Hey. I didn’t mean to wake you up…”

“No! It’s fine.” she reassured him, rubbing her face. Chic came closer and placed the water and Advil on her side table.

“I was just gonna drop these off before I left for school. Are you sure you don’t want me to stay home? To look after you?”

“I’ll be alright, Chic.” Alice stood up and opened the bottle. She swallowed two Advil and sipped on her water. She turned to her son and gave him a sad smile. “I’ll be alright.” she repeated. The boy frowned.

“I’m worried about you, mom.” he sounded concerned. He hadn’t spoken to her much since he found out about her and Hal, but for the first time in the couple days, he seemed to be caring again. Did that mean….No, Alice thought to herself. Don’t get your hopes up just yet. A thudding up the stairs broke the moment. Alice glanced towards the door and her heart raced.

“Everything okay up here, boy?” FP rushed into the room and Alice smiled. “Alice,” he saw her, “You’re awake.” Stunned, Alice left Chic where he stood and raced to hug FP. She knew she was only wearing a shirt and underwear, but in that moment, she didn’t give a shit. He held onto tightly and chuckled. A few moments later, she pulled back to look at him.

“Chic and Keller told me what happened. Are you okay? Oh my god, your neck…. ” FP’s hands brushed the sides of her neck and lifted her chin slightly to examine her.

“I’m better now. I was worried about you.” she spoke trying to hold back tears.

“He was about ready to bust open the front door if he didn’t come to see you. Even threatened to climb through a window.” Chic explained from behind them. He sounded like he was smiling. “I should….I should probably go.” the boy rushed out behind them and left. Alice considered going after her son, but she figured it would be best for another time. She turned back to FP and leaned in for another hug. He felt so warm. It was the most she felt at peace in days.

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He watched as she sat at the table nibbling on her toast. FP should have recognized the signs sooner. He should have done something to help her….to say something to her. He had no doubt that she was telling the truth of what happened to her at the station. He believed her….but he was afraid Keller wouldn’t be so kind. If he had said more after Hal died, before her fight with her son, before he left to save Cheryl and left Alice behind….

“Keller’s gonna give both of us some time off.” he broke the silence, clearing his throat. Alice turned to him, almost zombie-like. “He’s giving us til about Thanksgiving….just so we have time to recover.” She set down her toast and pursed her lips.

“FP…”

“I shouldn’t have left you there alone.” he blurted, his voice louder than he anticipated. Her face went pale and she stared off into the distance. “I know saving Cheryl was a priority, but….if only I brought you with me…. ”

“Doesn’t matter.” she responded, facing him. “Phillips would still end up dead. And so would Penelope Blossom.” she stopped, taking a shaky breath. “I didn’t want this to happen….to either one
of them.” she choked out. “I didn’t mean for them to get killed….” He reached for her hand and held it in his.

“I know.” he said reassuringly. FP saw the guilt in her eyes.

“You think I’m crazy….don’t you?” His heart broke at the question. Here was a woman, so strong and stubborn when FP first met her, and here she was at the current moment so ruined, so sad. Her behavior reminded him so hauntingly of his own, all those years ago.

“No.” he finally responded. “You’ve been through a lot, yeah….but you’re not….” Then he went quiet. Would she turn to murder too? Would Keller keep her under a close eye? Would Chic be taken from her? He had to tell her, before it was too late.

“Wait here.” FP let go of her hand and walked out the door. He headed out to his truck and opened his glove compartment. Slowly, he pulled out a photo….one from the night that haunted him into the present. He slipped off Gladys’s ring from the mirror and went back inside the house.

His breathing became unsteady. His hands began to shake. It was the first time in years he opened up about the night to anyone in a while. But she needed to know. He needed Alice to know before she fell down the same path he did. He returned to the table and sat down, placing the items on the table.

“There’s a reason I’ve been working with Keller for so long, Alice.” FP felt the words slipping out of his mouth. “There’s a reason you don’t see my kids around. I should’ve told you about this sooner….maybe it could have helped but….” he closed his mouth and chewed on his tongue. Alice picked up the photo of him and Gladys and glared at it.

“I don’t get it. What does this have to do with….” she stopped. The meaning of his message came to her. She looked up at him, fear forming in her eyes.

“FP? What happened to your wife?”

He closed his eyes and struggled to exhale. He made a tight fist with one hand. The painful memories of that night began to flood back. But he needed to tell the truth. FP opened his eyes, and he began the story.

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It was cold that night, yet Gladys still looked great in that metallic blue mini dress. FP smiled so bright when he saw her come out of the bedroom. It was nearing their twelve year anniversary, and FP wanted to do something special. He began his AA program again and was taking up a job at the drive-in theater. Gladys still worked part-time at the Wyrm but she started to weave her way into PTA groups in the Southside. The two were nervous about leaving Jughead and Jellybean alone in the trailer, but luckily Birdie was kind enough to watch over them. The couple drove off in his truck and headed to Vito’s, one of the fancier places in the Southside. FP had only been in there twice - once after his graduation when his uncle came into town, the second when he proposed to Gladys. They sat down in the booth and couldn’t keep their eyes off each other. He was purely content playing with the rings on her fingers. After their meals were cleared away, Gladys went quiet.

“Everything alright?” FP asked her. She stared down at her hands for a brief moment, then looked back up at him.

“I’m thinking about leaving the Wyrm.” His eyes widened at the confession.

“What?” he muttered. He blinked and tried to make sense of what she was telling him.
“I know that it brings some money,” Gladys continued, “but you’ve been doing so well with your AA program….I don’t want to infringe on that. I’ve been talking with some of the other moms in the area and they’ve offered to help me find some work. I’ve also thought about….going back to my mechanic roots, maybe. You know it’s what my daddy and I used to do back when I was in Toledo.” she smiled, then broke eye contact with him. She had a point - he feared of spiraling down again, and he never dreamed in a million years of losing his wife and his children because of his substance abuse issues. FP squeezed her hand, recapturing her attention.

“Whatever you decide to do, we’ll do it together.” he gave her a soft smile. “No Serpent left behind, remember?” he joked, making her laugh.

“You’re a cliche, Forsythe.” Gladys freed her hand and cupped his face. “But that’s why I love you.” He stroked her hand and rested his hand on her wrist. “I love you too, baby.” he smiled at her, watching as the candlelight made her face glow.

They headed out of the restaurant a while after, and decided to stroll through the streets of the Southside, side-by-side, hand-in-hand. She shivered beside him, and FP took off his jacket and wrapped her in it. Coddled in his warmth, Gladys hugged him by his waist and rested her head on his shoulder. The moonlight made the stars on the side of her eye, which he absolutely adored. FP thanked every star on that face that she came into his life, that she loved him at his best, helped him through his worst, and made him the best version of himself to that date. Little did he know, in that moment, that it was only the calm before the storm that would come. When they returned to the parking lot of Vito’s, they stopped in their path finding a a small clan of Ghoulies approaching them.

“Well if it isn’t Mr. and Mrs. Jones…” the leader gave them a malicious smile, wielding a baseball bat wrapped in barbed wire. Panicked, FP turned to his wife, who dropped his hand.

“What do you want, Malachi?” Gladys stepped forward, crossing her arms.

“I’m owed my debt, Serpent Princess.” the Ghoulie swung his bat back and forth. FP hadn’t kept up much with Serpent news, since he was primarily working in the Northside, but through Gladys, he learned that the Serpents had been dabbling in the drug business with the Ghoulies. Because of this, the Ghoulies were becoming more blood hungry for their dues and for their deliveries. “Your boys failed to get their money to us on time. Now we practically have to go door to door to get what’s rightfully ours.”

FP shook his head and moved up next to his wife. “We can discuss these matters in the morning….all of together in one room.” he attempted to maintain the peace. “Now, can you please move so we can head on our way?”

“Ohhh…..” Malachi snickered, “That’s not how this works, Jones.” He waved his fingers, cuing his fellow Ghoulies to circle around FP and Gladys. FP clung onto her and reached for her hand, not breaking eye contact with the Ghoulie.

“We’ll get the money to you….?” Gladys remained calm, “Just let us talk to the other Serpents first.”

“You don’t seem to get it, do you?” the leader laughed, moving towards them. “I’m done waiting for my dues. Boys…” he snapped his fingers. Before FP could react, the Ghoulies violently pulled FP and Gladys away from each other. FP yelled her name and felt a gun click. He felt the metal pointing at his head.

“On your knees, Serpent scum.” a Ghoulie forced FP down. Shaking, he held his hands in the air. He felt helpless as he watched the other Ghoulies pulling at Gladys. Luckily, she pulled at something from under her dress and stabbed one of the Ghoulies with her knife. She punched another in the
face and tried to move towards FP. Malachi stopped her, swinging the bat towards her but stopping just before her stomach. He pinched her chin and lifted her face up. FP let out a cry and felt the gun pushing at his head more.

“Please…..” FP pleaded, making the Ghoulie tilt his head. “I’ll give you anything. Just….please don’t hurt her.”

“FP….” Gladys spoke softly, a tear falling down her cheek. “I’m alright….I’m not scared…..”

“Convincing plea, Jones….” Malachi released his hold on Gladys and gripped his bat tighter, “but here’s the thing……You don’t get to make demands.”

The next moments were ingrained into FP’s memory for life. Before he could register what was happening, the bat flew up and went straight at Gladys’s face. She stumbled back, trying to bring a hand up to where she was hit. The Ghoulie swung at her again, striking her to the ground, the blood beginning to ooze out. FP’s ears rang at the sound of her skull cracking open. The ringing made his heartbeat louder, overcoming the sound of his screams as he helplessly watched Malachi slamming the bat down on Gladys over and over….

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He sat in his car waiting for the right moment. It had been months since the Ghoulies killed her. Since he laid down on the pavement cradling her dead body the moments after they ran off cackling. He lost control of his mind. He barely remembered her funeral. He heard rumors of Gladys’s parents talking about having Jughead and Jellybean stay with them for the summer. He began drinking again to numb the memories of what happened that night. When he wasn’t drinking, he was out in the woods, practicing his shooting on empty beer bottles. He followed paths of Ghoulie members if they showed their faces in the Southside. They took away his wife….they destroyed his mind. He wanted them dead. He wanted them all to die.

FP stepped out of the truck and held the gun in his hands. He followed the Ghoulies into the garage, shutting the door behind him.

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He sat in the jail cell trapped by his haunted thoughts. His bloodied hands were shaking. His teeth were chattering. He wanted a drink….no, he needed one. What would they do him? Would he be going to prison for life? Would he never see his kids again?

You let her die, his mind taunted him. You didn’t do shit. And now here you are, rotting in a cell. You’ll never see your kids again. You should’ve just drunken yourself to death, you worthless piece of---SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP!

His mind became quiet when he heard someone come in. The stranger shut the door behind him and pulled over a chair. FP clenched his fists and looked up. The stranger…..the Sheriff of the Riverdale PD, sat down and gave him a sad look.

“Mr. Jones….my name is Tom Keller.”

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She sat in her seat, completely numb. She looked up from where she glared down at the photo. She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. Her eyes were watering.

“FP….” Alice finally spoke. She didn’t know what to say….what to think. That’s why he reached
out to her. That’s why he never judged her. That’s why he was now telling her. He didn’t want her to end up like him. FP met her gaze, his hands shaking, silently crying.

“You still have a chance, Alice. You can make yourself better.” he struggled to speak without choking out tears. “Please,” his voice pleaded, “I know you want to find the Black Hood, but….don’t be like me. Don’t make the same mistakes I did.” He stopped, burying his face into his hands. Alice attempted to reach out to him, but he stood up, placing his hands on the table. “You still have a chance….with Chic…..” he started rambling uncontrollably, “I don’t even…..I don’t know if my children are safe. I don’t know if Jellybean started middle school with good friends….I don’t know where Jughead wants to go to college…. ” And in that moment, he collapsed onto his knees sobbing. Alice left her spot and came to FP’s side. She cupped his face and lifted it up slowly. Then, she wrapped her arm around his head and hugged him in towards her chest. FP clung to her, his sobs being muffled into her shirt.

“It’s okay…..” she rested against the leg of the table, gently stroking his back. “It’s okay…..” she went silent. Alice leaned down and placed a kiss on the top of his head. She closed her eyes and stayed there for a while, feeling the tears on her face.

She opened her eyes slowly and checked the time on her phone. Alice spent the rest of the morning comforting FP and taking him out of the house for a walk. Around noon, the two returned to the Cooper household and fell asleep on the couch. She squinted at her phone, reading 4:12….Chic would be home soon. She set her phone down and leaned back into the couch. FP stirred in his sleep beside her, resting his head on her shoulder. Then, his eyes fluttered open, looking up at her. He groaned and tried to stretch.

“Shh….” her voice soothed him, “It’s alright.” His hand pressed on her knee as he propped himself up.

“I needed to get up anyway.” he grumbled. He rubbed his eyes and looked at her. Alice could see the distress in his tired eyes. Behind them, the door rattled opened and Chic entered the living room.

“Is everything okay?” Chic approached them. Alice stood up, her aching bones cracking.

“Yeah, um….” She turned back to FP, still struggling to wake up, then returned her attention back to her son. “I’m doing a lot better now.”

“Okay.” he nodded his head and began to head up the stairs. She remembered FP’s plea….make things right with Chic. Without much hesitation, she reached for Chic and placed a hand on his shoulder.

“Hey, um….do you want to order take-out tonight?” her voice became higher pitched. “Rent a movie from Redbox? Would you like to do that?” she stopped, trying to read her son’s face. “If you don’t want….or if you’re just too busy, that’s fine…”

“No.” Chic responded. “I’m okay with that.” She smiled. It was progress. “Just….let me go put my stuff upstairs…..” She nodded and stepped back. She watched him go up the stairs, then turned back to FP. He stood up, grinning at her.

“Told you he’d come around.”

The weekend was quiet for the most part. FP stayed with Alice and Chic for the first night then
headed back to his trailer the next morning. Alice spent most of her weekend catching up on some free reading, all in effort to not bombard her thoughts of the Black Hood and Hal. To distract herself, she would text FP every few hours just to check up on him. Alice made more progress reconnecting with Chic as well. She learned that he was attempting to apply for a part-time job at the Bijou, the town’s movie theater, to help the two of them financially.

“Is there an interview process you have to go through?” Alice asked him, pester for details, “Does it require any job experience?”

“No, the job’s pretty simple.” he explained to her. “Hopefully I hear back before Thanksgiving break rolls around.”

“I’m so proud of you, sweetie.” she smiled. She was relieved that they were at least able to hold a normal conversation with each other again. It felt nice to not be swarmed with work, or with any thoughts of the Black Hood.

But she still had the dreams. Hal’s voice soothed her as she fell asleep and grew harsh when she woke up. Sometimes, Alice would see him….or a hallucination of him, lurking in the corner if she stayed up late at night or by the doorway if she was at the dinner table with Chic. She tried to ignore him, but there was something so haunting about his presence….or the lack of it really. It made her uncomfortable.

When Monday rolled around, Alice decided to get out of the house once Chic left for school and made her way to Sunnyside Trailers. She pounded on the door of the trailer and waited until a half-dazed FP opened the door. They left together to have a decent meal at Pop’s and stayed there for a few hours. They returned in the early afternoon, watching an old film on FP’s couch. They sat there, not saying a word throughout the film, but Alice couldn’t get her mind off of him….

“Did you see her?” Alice broke the silence. FP turned to her in confusion. Sighing, she shifted on the couch to face him. “When…..when everything happened with Gladys….did you see her?” FP leaned back, processing the question. He glared off into the distance, pursing his lips.

“I still do.” his voice was grumbly. He picked up the remote and muted the TV. He turned back to her, raising an eyebrow. “Do you see him?”

“Everytime I close my eyes,” she pushed her hair out of her eyes, “or if I start thinking about him. It’s like he’s….lurking.” She hugged her knees into her chest. Her palms were sweaty….they ached for her nails to dig in….so she instead squeezed her kneecaps.

“You still trying to find out what his sin was?” FP asked her. She knew he wasn’t acting cruel with his question, but she still felt nagged.

“He stole my evidence from the Blossom case.” Alice let go of her kneecaps, letting her feet hit the rug. “He completely fell apart the last few weeks of his life. The only thing that’s not clicking is….just…."

“A motivation.” he finished her thought. “A why.”

“Exactly!” her voice rose, then went quiet. In the background, the movie went on commercial break, but it didn’t register to either one of them. Alice sighed and turned her attention back to the TV. “Maybe I’ll never find out what Hal did. I just…it’s sad. I’ve been with him for so long….and I still don’t know who he truly is.” She went quiet and watched the commercial on TV. Some new building was being advertised in town….something called SoDale. SoDale….she sat up straight as the logo came on the screen. Lodge Industries, the screen displayed boldly. Then, it hit her.
Hiram Lodge. He knew Hal growing up in Riverdale.

“Alice?” FP caught her attention. She turned to him, her heart racing.

“Maybe there is somebody who knew Hal better than me….someone he grew up with.” she stood up, her eyes scanning the trailer for her purse. She had his number somewhere…. Alice knelt down and dug through her purse. After a while, she felt the familiar business card under her fingers. Satisfied, she pulled it out. His number screamed out at her with its bold font.

“FP, hand me my phone.” she stood up, holding the card in her hand. FP picked up her phone off the couch and tossed it to her. Her hands shook as she punched the number in. What the hell would she say to him? Would he even remember her?

“Lodge Industries. How can I help you?” the monotone voice on the other end greeted her.

“I need to speak to your boss.” Alice rushed her words.

“Miss, do you have an appointment with Mr. Lodge?”

“That’s what I’m trying to set up. This is Detective Alice Cooper. Can I please speak to---” the other end went silent. Alice stood there with her mouth hung open. Did he just hang up on me, she mouthed to FP. He shrugged and curled his lips. She was half tempted to drive down to wherever the man lived and make her point known in person. But that all disappeared when a click came on the other end.

“Detective…” a familiar voice spoke from the other end of the line, making her anger fade. “I was wondering when you would call.”

“Hiram,” Alice relaxed into the conversation, “I hope I’m not calling at a bad time.”

“Oh, not at all. Is there anything I can do for you?” Her eyes darted to FP. Ask him, FP mouthed to her. She took a deep breath and spoke.

“Actually….yes. We need to talk about Hal.”

The pair sat in the lobby of Pembrooke the day after she called Hiram. FP couldn’t help but stare up at the ceiling of the building - it was ten times nicer than any place he’d been to before. Next to him, Alice stared down at her hands, her legs shaking nervously.

“What if this is a mistake?” she muttered. FP looked back down and turned to her. She looked more anxious than usual. He feared that she would dig her nails into her palms. “What if we don’t get anything out of him, and coming down here was just a waste of time---” FP placed a hand on one of her knees, stopping her shaking.

“We will.” he reassured her. She made eye contact with him and bit her lip. Then, she placed her hand on top of his and stroked his wrist.

“I hope so.”

“Hear me out, real quick.” FP exhaled and shifted in his seat. “Just so we don’t have to go through what happened at the prison again, with Penny Peabody….if you feel uncomfortable or….if you need out, maybe we could signal each other or something….”
“Like a code word?” she was catching onto his idea.

“Yeah. Something like that.” he nodded at her. “So, if you or I don’t think this is going well, we can say it to each other or write it down, and in that moment, we’ll leave.”

“Okay.” she mumbled, continuing to stroke his wrist. “So what do you want that word to be?” FP huffed and leaned back in his seat.

“I don’t know…..maybe…..Snake Eyes…..milkshakes…..doors? Okay, I’ve got nothing good.”

“How about….Pop’s?” Alice threw out. “It’s simple, and it just sounds like we’re making plans for later. Does that sound good?”

“Yeah….Pop’s sounds good.” FP smiled. The idea of a code word seemed to calm her down, but she still appeared anxious.

Footsteps boomed behind them, catching both of their attention. They stood up, still unconsciously holding onto each other, as Hiram approached them. His manner was sophisticated and composed, yet he seemed eager. His eyes went immediately to Alice, smiling at her.

“Hope I didn’t keep you two waiting long.” he spoke, still staring at her. Alice went to speak, then her eyes darted down at their hands. FP looked down also, noticing that they were still clinging to one another. They let go of each other and directed their attention back to Hiram.

“No, you’re fine.” Alice rushed her words, clasping her fidgeting hands together. FP began to wonder why she was acting so nervously. “Um….this is my partner, FP Jones.” she introduced him while staring down at her feet. Hiram finally made eye contact with him and his smile grew smaller.

“The cop from the Southside.” he said, offering his hand to FP. “I’ve heard a few good things about you.” Being hesitant, FP took his hand.

“Pleasure.” he retorted. After a few moments of awkward silence, Hiram recomposed himself and regained his pleasant approach.

“Shall we go upstairs? I have tea being prepared.” Alice nodded, and the odd man began to lead them towards the elevator. Alice began to move forward, but FP stopped her.

“Is it just me or does he seem off to you?” he whispered. Not looking at him, Alice gritted her teeth together.

“No, you’re fine.” Alice rushed her words, clasping her fidgeting hands together. FP began to wonder why she was acting so nervously. “Um….this is my partner, FP Jones.” she introduced him while staring down at her feet. Hiram finally made eye contact with him and his smile grew smaller.

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“Is it just me or does he seem off to you?” he whispered. Not looking at him, Alice gritted her teeth together.

“We don’t need to make a scene, FP.” she spoke in a lower register, “We just need to get information.” Hiram looked back at the pair, and Alice hurried over. FP shook his head and moved towards them.

His residence was just as clean as the lobby downstairs. Alice took some time to examine the Lodge’s living room and dining room. The place reminded her of her own home….perfect yet ridden with something under its surface. Maybe FP had a point in being sketched out. This man was attractive and polite, but even then, she figured he was hiding something. Something about his relation to Hal.

Alice and FP took their seats at the dinner table and waited as Hiram directed a member of his staff to deliver the tea. Her hands softly shaking, she pulled her notepad and pen out of her coat pocket and flipped to an empty page. She labeled the page “Interview with Hiram Lodge”, her writing becoming
somewhat lopsided due to her shaking.

“You okay?” FP muttered to her. She looked up at Hiram, still directing his staff, then turned to FP.

“I don’t know.” she spoke in between heavy breaths. Was it a cop out if she wanted to say Pop’s in that moment? No, she needed to be strong. Get the information and go. Hiram came over and sat down adjacent from them.

“Please, help yourself to some tea.” he gestured to the kettle and cups. Alice hesitated for a moment, then reached for a cup. She held it towards FP, but he shook his head. She set the cup down in front of her and poured in her tea. After taking a sip, she grabbed her pen.

“FP, could you record this? Just in case I miss anything?” she turned to him. He looked at Hiram then turned back to her, pulling out his phone. She turned back to Hiram and took a deep breath.

“Just let me know when you’re ready.” FP slid the phone in between them. She nodded and he hit record.

“Hiram, I wanted to thank you, again, for letting us come in to talk to you.” Alice began to speak. “I know you’d probably had a busy schedule, preparing for SoDale and all.”

“You’re fine.” the man responded, smiling at her. “I’m more than happy to help. Whatever questions you have, go ahead and ask.”

She took another sharp breath. She felt so unprepared….she was caught up on her nerves that she forgot to write down a list of questions. After a moment of silence, she began to form a basic list of questions in her head. She started with asking Hiram about Hal in high school. His description of Hal matched to what Hal himself told her when they first began dating. He was involved with the football team, ran the Blue and Gold newspaper at school, well-liked….nothing odd struck out to her yet. If he behaved normally in his younger years, maybe something changed in the later half of his life.

“So when did you and Hal start interacting again….after he moved back to Riverdale?”

“Probably about 2009….2010, maybe. We met for lunch at one point, just catching up. It was unusual….he never came for the 10 year reunion for the Class of ‘93.”

“We were still in Boston.” she explained. “He talked about going, but at the time, Chic was still very young….and money was tight.” She went silent for a moment. Her mind went back to that year when Hal was trying to fight for a promotion at his job and Alice was at home raising Chic in their apartment. It was a rough couple of months financially….but once Hal got the promotion and Alice returned to work, their situation was turned around.

Then her thoughts raced to 2009, when they had been in Riverdale for a little while and the Register was imploding. “Did Hal ever mention to you about...anything concerning the Register?” she asked. His eyes widened slowly as he inhaled, then they went calm again.

“He did, actually.” he sounded remorse. “He told me that his parents were struggling to make ends meet….with the Recession and all.....” he went quiet and took a sip of his tea. Alice turned to FP and raised an eyebrow. “I felt awful,” Hiram’s voice recaptured her focus, “so I….offered up some money. Helped him apply for any necessary loans….was able to help his parents retire so he could take over the Register.” Alice sat back in her chair, absorbing the information. It made sense now….how Hal was able to make the Register better after his parents left….how they practically lived in luxury for that short amount of time, before everything went wrong. Maybe because at the
time, something was wrong… something he Hal never shared with her or Chic.

“Not to make any assumptions, Hiram, but…” Alice paused, thinking of how to phrase her next question without offending him. She continued, “But you seem like someone who makes certain bonds with people. Say… you give them some money, then you have them do work to pay you back.” She watched as his fingers drummed on the table. “You did that with Hal, didn’t you?” He sighed at the question then brought his hands together.

“You’re quite the intelligent detective there, Alice. Got me red-handed.” She turned away from him and set down her pen. Her fingers curled, her nails grazing her palms ever so gently. “But what I had him do for me was nothing major… just some secretarial stuff…” he continued, but she couldn’t pay attention. She could only make sense of certain details - Hal being dragged in for business deals, negotiating for the lot that would be SoDale….

“You done any work with the Blossoms?” FP’s voice brought her back. Her eyes dagaggered to him as he raised the question. “Figured since you’re both big names, and businesses in this town….” He turned away from Hiram and nodded at Alice. Regaining some strength, she picked up her pen and made eye contact with the man.

“We’re just trying to make sense of this because…” she spoke, “Hal took my evidence from the Jason Blossom case. And he had quite the side relationship with the late Penelope Blossom. You happen to know anything about this?”

“I’ve done quite a few deals with the Blossoms, here and there.” Hiram explained. “A couple including your husband. To be honest, I had no idea that Clifford Blossom would be the one that murdered his own son. It struck me hard… I would never do anything of a kind to my own. To my Veronica. And when I did learn… I went to approach Hal. By that time, he wanted nothing to do with the Blossom family… or me. This was all before the Black Hood ordeal began, and before his unfortunate death. I told him he would be safe… that you and your son would be safe. And I decided to break our bond under one last deal…” Alice turned away again. At that point, she already knew what Hiram had made her husband do. “Get rid of anything connecting him to me or the Blossoms.”

She felt lightheaded. Her nails were hungry for her flesh, her blood. She felt nauseous.

“Alice?” FP grew worried. “Are you okay?” he asked her in a low voice. Say it, Alice. Say it and go. NO--- this man had more to explain. He was the why. He led Hal to his death.

“Sorry.” Alice stood up, her hands firmly on the table to keep her from falling over. “Do you mind… if I go use your restroom?”

“She rested her hands on the sink and struggled to breath. She couldn’t even begin to process what she just heard. He did illegal business with the Lodges and the Blossoms. That was why the Black Hood went after him. Hal was a criminal. And a cheater. She wanted to scream. She wanted to cry. She wanted the punch the mirror in front of her. But she needed to stay calm. She needed to calm down. She couldn’t call Pop’s quite yet.

So, Alice splashed some water on her face and scrubbed her hands clean. After drying them, she went to head out of the bathroom when she stopped in fright. A woman about her age with dark hair and dark eyes stood in the doorway glaring at her. Alice gasped and placed a hand over her heart.
She looked at the woman and regained her breath.

“Sorry, I….” Alice spoke to her. “I was just about leave…” then she took a closer look at the woman. Something about her appearance was calling to her. “You’re Hermione, right? Hiram’s wife?” The woman, Hermione, said nothing. “I’m not an intruder, by the way….” Alice tried to reassure, “I’m—”

“I know damn well who you are, Alice Cooper.” Hermione spat out. Her voice was deeper than Alice had imagined. She stepped in closer to Alice. “So you better listen to me. Whatever you’re trying to get out of my husband, you will not like. You have no place in this matter. So if you want to avoid a fate like your husband’s…..stop fucking digging into my family’s business.”

Alice shifted at the threat. She didn’t know what to feel….how to respond.

“You understand, detective?” Hermione gritted her teeth. Maybe she had a point. Whatever business Hal and Hiram were up to, she didn’t want anymore of it.

“Yeah. Loud and clear.” Alice responded, and rushed out. She came back out into the living room, where Hiram and FP sat in silence. They both looked up as she entered.

“FP.” she directed at her partner. “I just remembered. Weren’t you and I supposed to be meeting Chic for dinner at Pop’s?” she threw out the code word, raising her brow at him. He rose from his spot slowly, blinked, then picked up her notepad and pen.

“Yeah! Poor kid’s probably waiting for us to come pick him up.” Alice moved around the table and met FP at his seat. From the other side, Hiram rose.

“Is everything alright?” he cocked his head to the side.

“We have to get going. Thank you for your time.” Alice kept her composure. Then, she took FP by the arm and began to head out the door. Hiram rushed over to them and stood next to her.

“Alice? If there’s something I said that made you uncomfortable, I—”

“I have everything I need.” Alice spoke calmly, trying not to lose her temper. She could see the guilt in his eyes, but she didn’t have it in her to feel any sort of sympathy for him. “I’ll let you know if I need anything else. Have a good holiday, Hiram.” And with that, she and FP left the residence.

When they entered the elevator, Alice shut her eyes and felt her nails dig straight into her palms. She bit her tongue to keep herself from crying. She breathed in and out heavily through her nose. Out of nowhere, FP grabbed her hand, prying open her fingers, and intertwining them in his own. She gasped for air, opening her eyes, and rested her head back on the wall of the elevator. For the rest of the ride down, she held onto his hand and squeezed.

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She was silent in the booth. He worried for her as they finished their meals at Pop’s. After the episode at Pembrooke, FP took Alice for a long walk around town, just to relieve the stress. Later, they reached out to Chic to see if he would like to join them for dinner, but the young boy had made plans to go to the movies with his friends. Alice said she didn’t mind - she didn’t want to face her son with more heartbreaking news just yet. That eventually led them to Pop’s where they sat for a long and well-needed meal.

“Good thing Hiram stays in his little castle for most of the time.” she finally spoke, sighing as she set her cup of coffee down. “I don’t think I want to see him around for a while. Or his family for that
“At least we know why the Black Hood went after Hal.” FP took one last bite of his meal and set his fork down. Pop Tate came over to check on the pair and cleared their plates. FP turned back to Alice and noticed her unusual state of numbness.

“Something else happen in there?” FP tried to pull the information out of her. She tapped her fingers on her cup then looked up at him.

“Hermione told me to stop digging. To stay out of whatever they were doing.” She paused, her gaze moving to the window. It was starting to snow outside. He felt awful for her - she started so strong when the case started, and with every murder…every interview…..she was slowly slipping beneath the cracks.

“You know what my partner would say? What would the woman I met when Keller brought the two of us together say about all of this?” he spoke with encouragement, regaining her attention. She raised her brow in confusion. He smiled and spoke, “She’d say, fuck the Lodges, and continue to dig anyway.” The words made her grin, slowly.

About a half hour later, the two made their way out the doors of Pop’s and towards FP’s truck when something on his windshield stopped them in their tracks.

“Just when I thought we were gonna get a fucking break.” he sighed in frustration. Alice made her way to the truck and picked up what was on the windshield.

“Another poem?” FP joined her side and read over her shoulder.

And may departing twilight keep
All dread afar till morning's back.
That his mother may not lack
Her fill of sleep.

“It’s William Butler Yeats.” Alice muttered, reading the poem.

“Who?”

She rolled her eyes and glared at him. “Google it!” At the command, FP pulled out his phone and typed in the lines of the poem.

“A Prayer for My Son. Okay, how exactly is it that you know all of these poets?” he went to ask her but she didn’t respond. Alice lowered her hands on the hood of the truck and froze. “Alice?” he called to her. She looked up at him slowly, trying to read her face. Then it hit him.

“Chic.”

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It was relieving to have the five day weekend for the Thanksgiving Holiday. Chic needed the time to relax from his schoolwork and to get his mind back on track after everything that happened. His relationship with his mom was improving, but he still wanted to steer clear of anything Black Hood related. When school let out for the day, he tried to convince Kevin and other boys to go to the movies with him, but to no avail. But he didn’t mind - maybe he could use the solitude. But when his mom and FP called to check in on him and see if he wanted to join them at Pop’s, he graciously declined the offer, making his way to the Bijou. There wasn’t anything in particular he was eager to see, so Chic figured it be best just to pick a random movie and go in. The line at the theater was not
too long, so he was able to get his ticket and get to the concession stand with ease.

“Just a popcorn and soda, please.” he handed his money to the cashier behind the counter. The cashier gave Chic his change and wandered off to get his snacks.

“Mom let you go to the movies by yourself?” a voice rang out from behind him. Chic turned his head to find Joaquin joining his side.

“Hey, Joaquin.” Chic nodded and stared down at his hands. He stood there in silence when Joaquin leaned against the counter next to him.

“You know I’m just fucking with you, blondie. What happened? Your friends go in without you?”

“No,” Chic shook his head. “It’s just me.” he brought his eyes back up to the Serpent. He didn’t know what it was….but there was something suave about him. Something that made Chic have butterflies in his stomach.

“Your mom holding up okay?” Joaquin sounded concerned, “Heard she got attacked at the police station by Mr. Phillips.”

“She’s better now. She and FP are on break for a while.” Chic maintained their small talk, then he went quiet again. Even though his situation with his mom was improving, he still had trouble wrapping his head around why she lied to him about seeing his dad.

“You okay, blondie?” the Serpent snapped him out of his thoughts.

“What? Sorry….” Chic responded. “My mom and I….we’re just in a weird spot right now, you know….since my dad died.” The cashier returned with Chic’s popcorn and soda. Joaquin gave his order and the cashier went away again.

“Okay, can I be real with you for a couple of seconds?” Joaquin rested an elbow on the counter and leaned in closer to Chic. “I know your mom seems like your stereotypical Stepford Nuclear Housewife Tiger Mom….but deep down, she cares. A lot.”

“I know.” Chic muttered.

“I mean, it’s not just you….it’s everyone, really. When Phillips got arrested at Southside, your mom got me and Toni out of there before the cops could lay a hand on us.” His eyes widened at Joaquin’s confession.

“She did that?” his voice was soft. Joaquin nodded and smirked.

“All I’m just saying is….be lucky that you have her for a mom. I certainly would.” When Joaquin spoke, Chic couldn’t help but be mesmerized by the Serpent’s eyes. They were much lighter under the fluorescents and neons of the concession stand signs. Yet, they were soft and warm. Joaquin stared Chic up and down for a moment then their eyes met again.

“Anything else you wanna talk about?” the Serpent spoke with a low, velvety voice, leaning in closer. “Something that you maybe haven’t shared with anyone else? Something you’re still trying to figure out?”

The cashier came back, breaking the tension between the boys. Joaquin picked up his popcorn and leaned back against the counter, not breaking eye contact with Chic.

“Well….I’m about to head in. So, I’ll leave you to enjoy yourself.” He began to turn away, then
stopped and faced him again. “Unless you want to come sit next to me. And…we can talk some more. No pressure.” He winked, then walked away.

Chic exhaled. This certainly wasn’t what he expected out of the conversation. Nobody else had ever read Chic like that. Not even his own parents. But Joaquin did have a point….maybe there were some things about himself that he needed to know more about….who he was…..what he wanted….

“Joaquin, wait!” Chic called out and ran over to the Serpent.

The movie was practically a blur to Chic. The plot? Joaquin’s eyes glowing in the dark theater. Action sequences? Their hands roaming. Climax of the movie? The softness of his lips.

“You sure you don’t want me to give you a ride home? I can get you there faster on my bike.” Joaquin threw out of the question as they left the Bijou, both their cheeks flushing red. Snow was starting to fall from the sky.

“I’ll be alright to walk. I’m just on Elm Street.” The two made their way to the Serpent’s bike. Joaquin hopped on and threw on his helmet.

“Well, if you change your mind, you let me know.” Joaquin started up his engine and reached out one last time to run his thumb down Chic’s lips. “See you around, blondie.” he smiled, and drove off.

Flushed from the cold and lightheaded from their time together at the Bijou, Chic smiled and began to head home. He threw on his headphones and put on a recent playlist he made. He hummed along to the song as he walked through town. After a few minutes, he came to the town’s graveyard. Chic figured he could spend a couple of minutes going to visit his father’s grave. He turned on his path and went in. The snow was falling down more rapidly and his footsteps crunched underneath him. He passed a few headstones before he eventually found his father’s…..only there was something off about it. The engraved writing where it read “Harold Cooper” was sprayed painted over….with Chic’s name. Chic slowly removed his headphones and crouched down at the headstone. His breathing became heavier, his heart was pounding. A shadow from behind loomed over him. Chic slowly turned around to find a dark figure wielding a pistol and a black ski mask standing a few feet away from him.

“Oh my god!” Chic screamed. As the Black Hood raised his gun, Chic got up and sprinted away. The gun fired, but he was able to dodge the bullet. Chic raced around the graveyard, zig zagging to throw off his attacker, and made a break for the woods. Another shot rang out, and Chic ducked behind a tree. He waited and shut his eyes, his nails scraping the flesh of his palms. The footsteps behind him died down, and he bolted off. He needed to find a way out of these woods. He needed to get back into town, to find someone to help him. He needed his mom.

His path eventually led him to the highway. Chic looked back behind him and saw no sign of his attacker. He turned back to the road and noticed a pair of headlights approaching him. He took a step forward and waved his arms. The vehicle slowed then came to a stop near Chic. A man sporting a trucker hat and a stern look on his face stared at Chic.

“You need a ride, son?” the man asked him.

“Please, there’s someone after me! Just get me out of here!” Chic pleaded. The man gestured for him to come in, and Chic jumped into the truck. The man drove off and continued down the highway. Chic looked back behind him just to make sure that the Black Hood didn’t catch up to him, then leaned back in his seat and sighed. Almost in a heartbeat, he remembered his mom. What if the Black Hood went for her next? Chic pulled out his phone but noticed how low his battery was. Also, there
was no signal for a decent connection.

“Excuse me, do you have a phone charger?” he asked the man, but the man just chuckled.

“Not your lucky day kid.” his voice oddly struck Chic. The boy looked out the window and noticed the road signs.

“Are we going into Greendale?”

“Gotta make a delivery. Was about to pull over for some gas and a bite to eat when you came around.” Chic looked away from the man and saw the the unusual lump at the back of the truck. He squinted, trying to get a better look. He swore he could almost see deer antlers.

“You running from someone? Police?” the man asked him. Chic repositioned himself, feeling more uncomfortable with every minute passing.

“Not the police….,” he responded, “but someone they’re trying to go after. The Black Hood.” The man clicked his tongue and laughed.

“Black Hood. Lord….that’s all everyone seems to be talking about nowadays. Heard some preacher on the radio earlier this morning, talking about the same man? You know what he said?”

“What did he say?”

“He says, “This is truly judgment day, and he is the reaper, for Riverdale is soulless and corrupt.” It’s like he believes this man is an angel of God doing his dirty work. I haven’t seen anything bad like this since the Reaper haunted that town.” Chic sat back into his seat. Who was the Reaper? Like the Grim Reaper, or something much worse?

The man pulled over to a gas station with a cafe inside. He stopped in front of a pump and turned off his engine.

“Just gonna fuel up, then we can head inside. I’m starving.” the man explained, exiting the vehicle. Chic unbuckled his seatbelt and hopped out of the truck. He felt a buzz in his pocket and pulled out his phone in a hurry. His anticipation fell when he saw it was an unknown number but something about the wording of the text made him more comfortable.

Unknown: You make it home okay, blondie? ;)

Chic sighed in relief at Joaquin’s text. He looked over and noticed that the man wasn’t looking, then he checked the battery percentage of his phone. Quickly, he began to respond.

To Joaquin: Not quite. Got chased by BH, and now in the middle of nowhere in Greendale. Trying to get back to my mom.

He sent the text, then took a picture of the gas station. He sent it, then noticed his phone going black.

“No! Damnit!” he muttered, making sure the man wouldn’t hear him. After a moment, his eyes darted at the trunk. The lump was still there underneath the tarp. Chic moved slowly towards the tarp and reached for a flap. He lifted the tarp and was disturbed to find a dead deer with flies buzzing around. Without making a sound, Chic dropped the tarp and covered his mouth. He breathed heavily, trying to keep his heart from leaping out of his chest.

“Son!” the man called out, scaring Chic. “Better come inside with me. It’ll be warmer.” Chic followed the man into the cafe.
“Welcome back, Mr. McGinty.” the waitress unenthusiastically greeted them as they walked in. “Same order as usual?”

“Sure thing.” the man, Mr. McGinty, turned to Chic. The boy shook his head in response.

“I’m not hungry.” he responded. The man sat down at the table and gestured for Chic to sit. Chic took his seat and sat in silence as they waited for the waitress to return with the man’s meal. When she came out with Mr. McGinty’s food, Chic caught her attention.

“Excuse me, do you mind if I use your phone?”

“What do you need a phone for, boy? Ain’t you got one?”

“I did….but it died. Please, I need to call my mom.”

“Tough luck, kid. Sorry…” she shrugged and walked away. Chic sighed and clasped his hands together in his lap. He watched as Mr. McGinty ate his meal, painfully slow. He wished that his phone still had battery so he could listen to some music…..or find out if Joaquin or his mom knew where he was….

“Noticed you was looking around my truck earlier.” the man broke the silence between them. Chic swallowed the lump and his throat and nodded. He felt like a little kid who got in trouble for taking cookies out of the cookie jar. The man smirked and took another mouthful of food. “Don’t blame you for being curious.”

“You’re a deer hunter?” Chic asked, his voice airy.

“Do it for sport when I ain’t working….but I ain’t a sicko, like that Black Hood. Or that Riverdale Reaper.” It was the second time that night this Reaper was mentioned. Chic thought for a moment, then spoke.

“You keep mentioning this….Riverdale Reaper….who was he? What did he do?” The man put down his fork and sighed. He leaned back in his chair and cleared his throat.

“Back a long time ago, before you were born probably,” Mr. McGinty began, “There was a family living out near Fox Forest. Good family. Mother, father, two kids. One night, they were all asleep, someone broke in. A boogeyman went room to room with a shotgun. Shot ’em all dead. No survivors.” Chic’s mouth hung open at the story. What a terrible tragedy.

“What happened? Did they catch him?” The man grunted at the question.

“Don’t know for sure. Some people say the lynch mob got him. Hung him from the tree near Pickens Park. Others think he hopped a train and went out to California. Started praying to the Devil.” He paused, making direct eye contact with Chic. “Others say he never left Riverdale. Wouldn’t be surprised if it was the same man you’re talking about.”

He felt afraid. Petrified, if he were honest. He didn’t want to spend another minute in this place.

“You bill, Mr. McGinty.” the waitress came back over and handed him the bill. The man smiled at Chic, making the situation more uncomfortable. Finally getting the hint, Chic reached for his wallet, scanning for any change. But he had spent almost all of it at the Bijou.

“I don’t have enough. I’m sorry.”

“Well I got you out of those woods, boy, and I paid for the gas….seems fair that you pay your
share.” Mr. McGinty looked more grimace, and the waitress turned to Chic with the same animosity.

“Please….I….I…."

Behind him, a hand slammed down a twenty dollar bill on the table.

“That should be enough to cover for your meal, asshole.” Joaquin spat out at the man, then turned to Chic. “You okay, blondie?”

Chic nodded, then stood up. Joaquin threw an arm around his shoulder and the two walked out of the cafe.

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“You let me know right away if you see any signs of that boy, okay!” FP hung up the phone, pacing back and forth in the Cooper household. Alice sat numbly on the couch, choking out tears. The moment the pair realized that Chic was the Black Hood’s next target, they raced down to the Bijou in attempt to get her son. But by the time they arrived, he was already gone. They drove down every street of the Northside and the Southside, and after a while, Alice made multiple attempts to call Chic. When they returned to her house, she collapsed in despair and FP began making phone call after phone call to every Serpent he could to help find Chic.

“We’re gonna find him, Alice. It’s going to be okay.” FP knelt down beside her and held onto her hand.

“What if he’s dead, FP?” she struggled to speak through the crying, “What if the Black Hood took him?”

“If that boy is smart, he would have found a good hiding place. He’s probably just waiting until the coast is clear.” he attempted to reassure her. She looked over at him with red, puffy eyes. Her mind was creating so many nasty thoughts, but something about FP’s words calmed her.

There was a pounding on the door, and they both stood up. Alice stayed back as FP went to the front door and opened it.

“Where the hell have you been, Joaquin?” he called out, then went quiet. Alice rounded the corner to see what was happening, then stopped. Behind the young Serpent was her son, cold and shivering.

“Mom?” Chic moved past Joaquin and FP. Alice let out a sob and met her son halfway. They embraced each other and buried their tears into each other’s shoulders.

“I’m sorry, mom.” he mumbled. “I tried to call you….but…."

“Chic, stop.” Alice pulled away slightly and held her son’s face in her hands. “I’m just happy that you’re alive. And that you’re okay.”

“I love you so much.” Her heartstrings felt pulled at his words. Alice hugged her son again, much tighter, then directed her attention to the younger Serpent.

“Thank you, Joaquin. Thank you for bringing my boy home.”

“We take care of our own.” he gave her a sad smile.

“Let me know if you need anything else for tonight.” FP spoke as he clasped a hand on the boy’s shoulder. The pair of Serpents went out the front door, leaving the Coopers alone in their home.
A couple of hours later, Alice came into Chic’s room with a fresh cup of tea. She found her son, freshly showered, reading as she entered. He set down the book on his nightstand and made room for her on the bed.

“Is this the part where you’re going to ground me and take away my electronics for the rest of the year?” Chic joked. Alice shook her head and sniffled.

“No. What you did was stupid, yes….but what you did was very brave. You got yourself out of that situation, and I know that must have been terrifying for you.” her voice began to waiver. He looked down at his bedsheets and brought his knees up to his chest.

“I get it now.” he muttered. “Why you were scared to tell me what was happening with you and dad.” Alice blinked, then licked her lips.

“Chic…..I don’t understand, what are you saying?”

“You didn’t know how I would respond. You were trying to find the right time to tell me. Because there was something hidden that you didn’t know….until now. Maybe the Black Hood went after me tonight, not because of you but……because of me…..because of who I am.” He paused, taking a deep breath, “Mom…..there’s a reason I’ve been hanging out with Kevin Keller more. And why….why I was with Joaquin tonight.”

It took her a moment to process what was happening. What Chic was telling her. Then, it clicked.

“Chic….”

“I was gonna try to come out to you and dad over the summer,” he began to ramble, “but I didn’t even know how to tell you or what to say. And even then, you and dad were fighting….and then….and then the whole Jason thing happened, and now the Black Hood……” he went quiet, tears streaming down his cheeks. He looked back up at her, his voice cracking, “Dad was a sinner…..am I a sinner too? Because I’m gay?” Alice felt a tear go down her cheek. Her heart was heavy. But this was her boy. Her baby boy. She always felt that there was something different about him….something that made him not like most boys his ages…..but nevertheless, this was her son. The only thing she had left of her broken family.

“No.” she spoke, and she pulled Chic in for a long hug. She held him, stroking the back of his neck as he sobbed into her shoulder. They stayed in this position for a while, then she held his face in her hands.

“You are not a sinner, Chic. Who you choose to love does not make you an evil person. You are kind, intelligent, and so, so, so brave. Don’t let anyone diminish that, ever. And whoever you choose to be your husband when I walk you down the aisle, I will stay by your side and support you. Because you are my light, and my joy, and I love you so much, okay?” Chic nodded and his lips wobbled. He hugged her again and she gave him the same amount of warmth. She pulled away slightly and rested her forehead against his.

“You know what your father would say, if he were here?” she asked. Chic shook his head. “You better find a good man who deserves you.” They both laughed at the comment. After a little while, Alice rose from the bed and wiped her son’s tears away.

“Get some sleep. The tea should help.” she lifted his chin with a gentle touch, “If you need anything else, or if you want to talk more….I’ll be in my room.” He nodded, and she place a kiss on top of his head. She began to exit the room when Chic called out to her.
“Wait! There actually was something I wanted to ask you about…..do you know who the Riverdale Reaper is?”

End of Chapter Seven
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Chapter End Notes

Hello again, beautiful hoomans :) so pretty much for that whole McGinty scene, I quoted directly from the episode it was referencing (2x07 just in case you were wondering)... and yeah can I just say, writing that whole coming out scene with Chic was actually super tough to write? Fun fact - I'm bi but I never had a coming out experience like that so that's what made it difficult. do we like the dynamic of Chic and Joaquin? How are we feeling about the Lodges? ANY GUESSES ON THE BLACK HOOD???? Hmmmm....
Hi I'm back :) So this is it, we made it to the halfway point! Woo hoo! Cue the dance music! Give it a read and tell me what you think.

Chapter Eight - Legend of the Riverdale Reaper

“So what exactly did this guy tell you about the Riverdale Reaper?” FP asked Chic. The following morning after Chic’s attack, he came over to help the Coopers prep for their Thanksgiving meal. When he arrived, Alice relayed to him the same information Chic gave her the night before. In that moment, the three hunched over the dinner table with the map of Riverdale laid out in front of them.

“He said the Reaper murdered some family in Riverdale.” Chic explained to them. “Only problem is, he never gave me a when or where. I was too creeped out by him anyway to ask.”

“We should look into this when we get back to work, FP.” Alice spoke with confidence. FP turned to her and pointed at the map.

“You think this is all connected to the Black Hood?”

“I don’t know, but it wouldn’t surprise me. It’s worth a shot.” He could start the see a little bit of her old self blooming between her eyes. It made him smile.

“We should talk to Keller….FP glanced back down at the map and grabbed a marker from the side. “See if we could, I don’t know, go into work this weekend. Scan through some old files. See what comes up.” He began drawing a big red circle around where the police station was located on the map.

“Wow.” Alice exclaimed next to him. He turned back to her and saw her growing evil grin.

“What?” he snorted at her. She leaned into him and her grin grew.

“I knew you’d come around to do things my way.” she giggled and went behind him. FP scoffed as he watched Alice prance around the kitchen checking on the side dishes.

“What just happened?” Chic asked in confusion. Trying his hardest not to laugh, FP moved closer to the boy and clasped a hand on his shoulder.

“Your mom is corrupting me. That’s what’s happening.”

“Hey!” Alice glared at the two of them while pointing a wooden spoon. In that moment, FP broke out into laughter.

The rest of the day and Thanksgiving Day itself were the most relaxing and best spent days that FP had in a long time. He came over early that morning to prep the bird so Alice could enjoy watching the parade on TV with Chic. The dinner was small and simple, but the three still had a wonderful time enjoying their meals. FP ended up staying over the next in the guest bedroom so he and Alice
could try and get to work the next morning. Chic offered to help their search into the Riverdale Reaper and headed to the library downtown. Alice and FP made their way to the station to see what they could find. However, they short-lived journey ended with them being confronted by Keller at the entrance of the station.

“It’s technically after Thanksgiving.” Alice tried to convince him. “So why is it not okay for us to come in?”

“Because you two are supposed to be on break, remember?” Keller sighed in frustration.

“But hear us out, Keller…..” FP backed up Alice’s comment, “We found something that may help us get to the Black Hood. You heard about the Riverdale Reaper?”

“Wait, the what now? Were you two……oh my god.” Keller slowly facepalmed. He took a deep breath and sent eye daggers at them.

“There has to be something in the archives!” Alice gestured into the building behind them. “There has to be records of what happened! Can you at least just let us come in to look at them?”

“Or can we at least come in, like tomorrow or something, so we have the space to look at them?” FP followed. Alice looked to him and he gave her a “have some patience” look. Keller sighed and rolled his eyes.

“Fine. You can come in tomorrow to look at the archives.” Alice sighed in relief and FP nodded. “But I am warning you two right now,” Keller continued, “whatever you’re trying to get from the Riverdale Reaper case….you’re not going to find much. The Sheriff who took charge of the case, Sheriff Howard…..he went insane trying to solve this damn thing. He practically died doing it. I almost lost you two with this Black Hood thing, so I don’t need any more spirals. Are we clear?” FP and Alice looked at each other, then turned back to Keller and nodded.

“Good. Now take the rest of the day off. I expect to see your workspaces clean when I see you two again on Monday.” Keller ordered as he turned on his heel and went into the station. With not much to do, the pair headed back to Alice’s convertible. Just as they reached the car, Alice’s phone rang. She pulled it out and answered.

“Chic?” she responded. He couldn’t hear what the boy was saying on the other end, but it seemed to be good news. “Okay, we’ll head over now.” Alice hung up and looked back at FP. “He found a newspaper article about the Reaper in the library.”

The room where they held archived cases reeked of dust and aging boxes. The lighting at the back of the station was shitty, so Alice and FP had to use the flashlights on their phones to go through the room. The article Chic found the day prior definitely helped them make sense of the story. From what Chic found, the mother of the house, Mary Ellen Conway, was the first shot by the Reaper when he broke into the house. He then found her husband, Jim, in the kitchen and killed him. Then, the Reaper made his way up the stairs and murdered their two children, Tommy and Sue, hiding under their beds. The story was heartbreaking, yet the attack seemed so random. Alice figured it was no wonder Sheriff Howard went insane trying to solve it.

“You think we’re gonna find anything?” FP flashed a light on the rows of old boxes.

“There has to be something in here.” she examined the labels. “Start checking anything between the years 1978 and 1985. The murder would have taken place in that time.”
“On it.” FP moved down one of the aisles and began to examine the boxes. Alice followed in suit and pulled out a box labeled “UNSOLVED CASES JUNE 1981”. She scanned through the files—nothing. She pulled out the next one. And the next one. And the next. And the next. Still, nothing. Growing frustrated, Alice leaned back against the racks and pushed her hair out of her hands. She looked down at the open boxes at her feet. There had to be something, she was sure of it.

A figure came into her peripheral vision and Alice yelped. FP appeared next to her with the light in their faces, smiling. “WHAT THE FUCK, FP?” she yelled as she tried to regain her breath. He whipped out something from behind his back, and Alice’s face lit up. The file was labeled, “Riverdale Reaper, Howard, 1983”.

“Jackpot.” FP enunciated. Beaming, Alice took the file and laughed.

“Where the hell did you find this?”

“November 1983. Towards the back.”

“You’re amazing!” she held up her hand and he high-fived her. Their hands latched onto one another and her eyes met his in the artificial lighting. Her smile softened as she stood there mesmerized. His hand was warm, his eyes calming. She wondered if he felt the same. She blinked, then looked back down at the scattered boxes.

“We should probably pick these up.” she stated, reality coming back to her.

“Shit, right!” FP dropped her hand and bent down to start re-packing the boxes. Minutes later, they reconvened at their desks, peering through Howard’s file.

“I don’t get it….,” Alice said in distraught. “There’s barely anything in here. Wouldn’t they have archived everything that Howard had after he died?”

“Beats me.” FP slouched in his seat. “This was all I could find.” Her mind began to race, trying to remember if Keller mentioned anything about Howard to her before the Black Hood fiasco all began. She remembered seeing photographs of him along the walls when she first joined the Riverdale PD. There used to be a portrait of Howard and his family up near Keller’s space. His family….

“FP, get my computer going.” she commanded as she set the file on the desk. He looked confused, but knowing at this point not to piss her off, he booted up her computer.

“What, is there some magical folder you have squirreled away about Howard?” he asked her dumbfounded. Rolling her eyes, she scooted him out of the way and opened up her file explorer.

“No, but, when I started working here, my desktop was used to store older files from before….,”

“Like an archive.” he started to catch on. She felt so proud.

“So what I’m thinking is….if we go back through the old HR data and find Howard’s information….,”

“We can see if there are any family members in the area that can point us in a better direction.” When he made the connection, she turned to him and smiled.

“FP Jones, you are speaking my language.” she complimented, causing him to chuckle.

“Yeah, well I get it from you, Coop.” he smirked in delight. Turning back to the computer, she found an older HR file and clicked on it. FP pulled over a chair and sat down beside her. After a minute of
scrolling through lists of old employees, the name finally popped out to them.

“There he is! There’s our guy!” FP snapped and pointed at the name on the screen. Alice pressed down hard on the mouse and opened Howard’s file.

“We need to find a recent lists of contacts for him.” Alice scrolled through, eyeballing the documents in front of them. “If any of his family members are still in Riverdale, like you said, we should talk to them.”

“How would we know if any of them are still in Riverdale? If all these files are before you came here?” he asked in seriousness. She scrolled down one last time and struck gold.

“Let’s find out.” she clicked on the contacts lists. They read through the names and the addresses, having no luck because either the family member was dead or was no longer in town.

“Wait, what about her?” FP pointed at one name on the list. “Margaret Howard, the daughter. She’s probably our age….maybe younger? It says here she’s still in Riverdale.” Alice reread the woman’s information and nodded.

“Then this is our lucky day.” Alice printed out the document, highlighted Margaret’s information, and dialed up the number onto her phone, pressing the speaker button so FP could add into the conversation. The phone rang once, twice, three times, four….

“Hello?” the voice on the other end called out. Alice sat there with her mouth hung open. It worked. “Hello? Who is this?” FP smacked her on the arm and gestured for her to say something.

“Hi, Margaret!” Alice began, “This is Detective Alice Cooper….from the Riverdale PD. I was wondering if you would be able to answer some questions for me and my partner….regarding your father.” The other end was silent, then Margaret spoke.

“What do you need to know about him?” she sounded defensive, “Haven’t the PD destroyed him enough? That’s why he died, you know!”

“We need to know what your father did with his case regarding the Riverdale Reaper.” Alice explained in a calm manner.

“Look, whatever my father did doesn’t matter anymore!”

“It actually does, Margaret.” FP came into the conversation. “There’s a killer on the loose in Riverdale. We think it may have something correlated to what your father was looking into. We’re not getting shit here on our side, and you’re one of his only family members left in town.” The other end was silent again.

“Margaret….can you please tell us something? Anything?” There was no response. Alice gave FP a sympathetic look. He hung back his head and pushed the hair out of his eyes.

“Meet me outside the Shady Palm Motel. 10 pm.” Margaret rushed her words. “I’ll tell you what I know. After that, don’t bother me anymore.” And with that, she hung up on them. Alice’s mouth fell open again and she turned to FP.

“Halle-fucking-lujah!” he exclaimed and the two high-fived.

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It was 9:58 later that evening. They waited in her convertible for a solid 15 minutes earlier to scope
out the scene to make sure that Margaret didn’t send them to a false location to throw them off. FP tapped his fingers on the dashboard, impatiently waiting. At 9:59, Alice tapped him on the shoulder and cued for them to get out of the car.

The temperature had dropped significantly as winter came into Riverdale. There was some snow on the ground from earlier, but most of it was now dirty. FP leaned against the hood of her car and blew into his hands to warm them up.

“Let’s just hope this isn’t a fucking prank.” his teeth chattered as he spoke. Alice was practically shivering next to him.

“Well this is the only shot we have.” she stated. “If we get nothing, it’s back to square one.” She examined the area around them. Shady Palm Motel wasn’t one of the nicer places in Riverdale, but it was much more affordable than getting a room at the Five Seasons downtown. He noticed Alice staring off into the distance, then her eyes squinting for a moment, then widening.

“FP…is that Keller?” FP immediately darted over to where Alice was looking and his mouth hung. Standing outside one of the motel rooms in the cold was Tom Keller, nonchalantly checking his watch.

“You’re shitting me. This is where he’s been running off to?” FP’s thoughts wandered. What was Keller doing out here in the middle of the night? What was on the other side of that door? WHO was on the other side? Before he could form ideas, Alice slipped past him and moved towards one of the trees by the outside of the motel.

“Alice, what are you—” FP gritted through his teeth but she was too quick. He huffed then hurried after her. When they made it over to the tree, Alice tried to lean out farther to get a better glimpse of Keller, but FP had to grab her by the arm and yank her back in without drawing attention to them. FP now stood practically on top of her. Alice was much smaller than him, but her body molded almost perfectly into his. He looked down at her, his breath stabilizing and his perception of time slowing down. He could smell her perfume. She looked back up at him, her ice blue eyes becoming much softer. Then, her gaze turned away from his and she repeatedly smacked his arm.

“Ow! What?” he pushed her hand away and looked up to what she saw. Where Keller stood, the door opened, and a figure walked out. A woman they both recognized.

“Is that Mayor McCoy?” FP whispered in shock. The woman, Sierra McCoy, smiled at Keller and the two came together for a passionate kiss. Alice’s mouth flew open and she immediately covered it. FP stood there, still from shock. Tom and Sierra continued to smile at each other as she took him by the hand and led him into the motel room.

“What the fuck?” FP backed away, his hands grasping the sides of his hair. Alice whipped around at him and gave him a glare of “if you don’t shut the fuck up”. His mouth hung wide and he gestured back and forth between where Keller stood and the door.

“I know, FP!” Alice rushed over and barked at him in a hushed voice. “But you go around announcing to the whole fucking town, it’s all our asses on the chopping block!”

“Are you the detectives?” a voice spoke from behind the pair. Alice and FP jumped back and turned to find Margaret Howard standing with her hand against the wall. He looked back at Alice, trying to figure out what to say, then they both turned to Margaret.

“Yes, hi! We spoke to you on the phone!” Alice greeted her. “This is FP, my partner.” she gestured to him, and he waved. Margaret did not appear impressed at all.
“Follow me.” she began to walk away. FP hesitated for a moment, then began to follow Margaret, Alice following behind him. Margaret led them over to the motel’s diner, Paradise Cafe. It didn’t look as nice and clean as Pop’s, but the scene wasn’t too crowded so the three of them were able to get a booth. FP and Alice slid into one side as Margaret took the other. A waiter came over to take their orders, but Margaret shook her head.

“Just a black coffee.” Alice gave the waiter a curt smile.

“Make that two.” FP added on. Once the waiter left, the two directed their attention back to Margaret.

“Can you tell us what your father was like? Before his death?” Alice started. Margaret stayed quiet for a moment, her hands clasped together on the table. She slowly looked up at them and sighed.

“My father was….very dedicated to his work. I was only five months old when the Conway murder happened. From what I remember my mother telling me….he wasn’t obsessed with it at first. There were rumors about a man being caught and buried alive….but that was only a few months after it happened. My father was a good man. And very smart. But that whole case….it changed him.”

The waiter came back with their coffees, pausing the story. The two thanked the waiter then returned to Margaret.

“When did he start look into the case again?” FP asked her.

“Probably when I was about 8 or 9. It started small. Just a bad dream he would have every once in a while. That led to the journaling.” FP turned to Alice, both their eyes wide. They turned back to her at the same time.

“Journaling…..wait, what do you mean?” Alice leaned over the table.

“He was writing down the dreams he was having. And those all developed into the theories he was having….his fears. When he retired, that’s I all I ever found him doing….writing in those journals. Then he started going there.”

“Where?” Alice inquired.

“The Conway’s house.” Margaret’s voice went monotone. “My friends and I….we used to call it the Devil’s House. He went there almost every weekend, searching for missing clues. Hidden evidence. It was his breaking point. By that point, my mother had enough of his maniacal behavior, and she left him. I was so worried for him….but I just felt so helpless. He was beginning to dig his own grave.” Margaret paused, taking a shaky breath. She fell back into her seat and wiped away a tear.

“Margaret,” FP spoke with a soft voice, “are there any journals left? Would you mind if we look through them?”

“Wouldn’t be possible.” Margaret shook her head. “When my father died, my mother…..she got rid of all of them. Either threw them out or burned them.”

“Shit.” FP muttered to himself, leaning back in the seat. Alice opened her mouth to say something, then closed it. She took a sip of her coffee then set the cup down.

“You want to find anything my father left behind….the only place I can think of is that house. But I wouldn’t recommend it. I’ve only been there once in my life, and I’ve vowed never to go back. That place is ridden in evil. Something went wrong there, and it’s rotting the whole thing. It seduced my father…..it killed him.” She went quiet, then sat up, leaning over the table. She glanced up at FP and
Alice, her expression blank. “You two seem like good people….smart detectives. You want my honest advice? Don’t go down the same path he did.” And with that, she got up from her seat and began to walk away.

“Margaret!” Alice called out. The woman turned back to them and gave them a sad smile.

“Good luck with your case, detectives.” she said, then walked out of the diner.

FP turned back around and slid into his seat feeling numb. His fingers reached out for his cup, feeling the warmth through the ceramic. He brought cup to his lips and took a long sip. He set the cup down and rested an arm on the back of the booth, rotating to face Alice. Her gaze was off to the distance, her mouth in a straight line. But her eyes….by this point in their partnership, FP recognized the glow in her eyes. She had an idea.

“What are you thinking about, Alice?” he asked her. He saw her fingers fidget on the table, but she didn’t make eye contact with him.

“If Howard did leave anything behind,” she spoke slowly, “he would have left his research where his wife and Margaret wouldn’t find it. Somewhere he could go back to over and over….looking for the missing pieces.”

He turned away for a moment, chewing on his tongue. Then it hit him, the point she was trying to make. He turned back to her, and this time, she met his gaze.

“You saying what I think you’re suggesting?” he tried to confirm with her, but Alice didn’t shake her head or nod.

“We have to go there, FP. We have to go to that house.”

It was much chillier than what Alice anticipated when she drove out early Monday morning. She and FP spent the remainder of the weekend held up in the library doing more research on the Reaper…..well, only FP talked her out of going to the Conway home straight after their talk with Margaret. But the house stuck on her mind. Even when doing basic research, she could only think about the house. What was it like all those years after the massacre? Was it vandalized due to its abandonment? How was Howard even able to go back over and over again? Was she going crazy….just like him? She woke up around 4:30 that morning, her thoughts getting to the best of her. She needed to get out….she needed to go there.

That’s what prompted Alice to put on a warm winter coat, her gloves, and a beanie, and she texted FP of her plans. She went out the door just as the sun was starting to slowly rise. She arrived just a little distance away from Fox Lane around 5:32. She could see her breath as she stepped out of the car and shoved her pistol into her belt. The sun gave her some light so she didn’t have to worry about making her way to the house in the dark. The soft snow crunched under her feet as she made her path through the wooded area. She wondered if FP would be awake to come join her, but she figured it be best not to bug him. With all they went through in the past two weeks, and what he revealed to her about his life…..he deserved the break. He deserved to sleep in. She then began to think about his family…..his children. Was there something she could do….to convince Keller to let FP off the hook? To give him a chance to see his son and daughter?

Her thoughts were interrupted when she heard the crunching of snow and leaves from a distance behind her. Alice whipped her head around but saw nothing. She continued to go forward but the crunching started up again. “Hello?” she called out, but there was no response. The noise was getting
louder. Her heart began to race. “FP? Chic?” She panicked and went over to a tree. She leaned up against it and pulled out her pistol, glocking it. The noise became louder and louder as whatever….or whoever…..it was came closer. She shut her eyes and held onto her pistol tighter. Growing some confidence, she stepped out and raised her pistol, ready to attack.

“Don’t shoot, it’s just me!”

Alice felt her heartbeat slow down as she lowered her pistol in frustration. Hiram stood still with his hands still in the air. She sighed and gritted her teeth.

“Hiram, what the hell are you doing out here? And why are you following me? I could’ve shot you!”

“Forgive me if I frightened you,” he lowered his hands, “but I was just on my morning run around town. I saw you heading into the woods and I…..” he stopped, pursing his lips. Whatever excuse he was attempting to make, she wasn’t going to fall for it. She placed her pistol back into her belt.

“So what?” she retorted. “You just resorted to stalking me?” He didn’t respond at first. But he licked his lips, then took a step towards her.

“I actually got thinking of how things ended between us the last time we were together.” he spoke, causing her to roll her eyes. “I feel….so guilty….for I made you feel. Everything I did for Hal was not done in malice.”

“But it was, don’t you get it?” her voice went deep. “Whatever you coerced my husband into doing, it got him killed by the Black Hood. You may have done it with good intentions, but…..” she stopped, not knowing how to phrase what she wanted to tell him. “But at the end of it all,” she continued, “you still took part in illegal actions. You had him tamper with crucial evidence.”

“Careful casting stones there, detective.” he sounded wounded, “My reputation and my business were not the sole reason for me asking him to remove that evidence.”

“Then what was it then?” she jabbed at him. He glanced down at the ground, then slowly looked back up at her.

“You.” Hiram responded, and she went silent. “Somehow, I realized….if Hal’s connections to Clifford Blossom and to me were ever released into the public when Jason Blossom was murdered….it would come back to you. And to your son. And I don’t think that would have boded well with Keller, would it have?”

Alice didn’t know what to say. Was he telling the truth? Could she trust him? He took another deep breath and continued.

“Hal cared for you, so much…..even when you two were having your problems. When he came to me for an out, his priority was you and your son. He never wanted to hurt you, or cause you to lose the career you worked so hard to earn.” he paused, taking another step towards her. She considered stepping back, but she couldn’t make her feet move. There was something about his presence in that moment that calmed her, that somehow in a weird way made her feel safe.

“I meant what I said at the funeral, Alice. I feel awful for what happened to Hal, and I never wished for any harm to come into his way. You don’t have to forgive me for what I did, you can choose never to speak to me again, but I just want to understand….I would never do anything to hurt you. I don’t want you to go through all that pain….alone.” his voice was calming. She looked up and stared into his dark eyes. He was telling her the truth, but she wasn’t sure if she was willing to forgive him….yet.
“I’ll be on my way then.” he stepped back, giving her a sad smile. “Good luck, Alice.” He began to walk away. Alice exhaled and turned back to her path. She stayed there for a moment, wondering what to do. An idea came to her.

“Hiram, wait!” she called out. Hiram stopped and faced her again.

“I can’t believe I’m fucking doing this.” she muttered to herself. She shook her head in frustration and stepped towards him. “You said you spent most of your life here, right?” she asked, raising an eyebrow at him.

“Yes. Why?” She clenched her fists then released them.

“You know anything about the Conway home? On Fox Lane?”

“That’s where the Riverdale Reaper was. Did the Black Hood give you something? Is that why you’re going there?”

“Not exactly.” she crossed her arms, being careful not to give away too many details to him. “Can you tell me if I’m at least going in the right direction? Towards the house?” He cleared his throat then pointed to the path she was on.

“If you just keep going down that path, you’ll get to Fox Lane. Then if you take a…. he paused, closing his mouth. He bit his lip then looked back up at her. “Think it might be better if I walked with you. That’s okay, right?” She sighed, starting to walk away. She made a couple steps forward then turned back to him. He was still standing in that spot.

“You gonna take me there or what?” she asked him in annoyance. He nodded and rushed over to her.

The two continued on their path in silence. Alice shoved her hands into the pockets of her coat and observed the scene around her. She glanced over at Hiram then turned away when he made eye contact with her.

“So, does Hermione know you’re here? Helping me?” she let the words slip. Immediately regretting it, she turned to him and went to speak.

“I heard about your conversation.” he admitted. “But you shouldn’t have to worry about her.”

“Why?” she asked in confusion.

“She and Veronica left to go to New York over the weekend. With everything that’s happening with the Black Hood, she figured it’d be best to get her and Veronica somewhere safe….just until everything dies down. Shame, though. They’ll miss the groundbreaking gala for SoDale.”

“When would that be happening?”

“In the upcoming weeks. I was going to try to push for earlier in November when it wasn’t so cold out…."

They came out onto the road, Fox Lane. The road was empty for the most part, sans a few houses that all looked like they were abandoned. He pointed to a house down the road on the right.

“There is it. La Casa del Diablo. The Devil’s House.”

The Conway home was a small two-story structure with its white-paint faded and chipping and its
wooden exterior slowly rotting. Something was looming inside those walls….a secret that Alice wanted to desperately learn. She took a deep breath then began to head towards the house. It looked more decrepit the closer she came. She pitied whatever souls were trapped inside.

“What exactly is it you need in here?” Hiram joined her side out on the walkway.

“The former Sheriff….you know, Sheriff Howard….he spent his last years in here trying to solve the Reaper case. If FP and I can find something…..” she turned to Hiram, “maybe it could explain what the Black Hood is doing….and why.” She looked the house up and down one last time before adjusting her beanie and walking into the house.

The smell of rotten wood and mold hit her first. Alice coughed and covered her mouth. She pulled out her phone to use it as a flashlight as she navigated her way through the abandoned residence. Behind her, Hiram turned on his phone’s light and headed towards what used to be the living room.

“This is where the first kill happened.” he explained. “It was the mother first. Then the father in the kitchen.” Alice went into the kitchen, exploring through empty cabinets, but there was nothing. She returned to the living room to see if Howard left anything on its bare floors. Then, she turned to the stairs, looking up.

“Then the kids upstairs.” she mumbled, making her way up the creaking stairs. Her path led her down a long hallway and eventually to the children’s bedroom. When she entered through the doorway, she flashed her light and gasped. Laying on top of one of the children’s toy boxes was a stack of papers. No…..it was a file full of documents.

“Alice?” Hiram called out in the darkness. He came to her side in the doorway. “What? What did you find?”

“Howard’s files!” she rushed over to the box, picking up the file. She poured through its content, smiling.

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He sat at the counter in Pop’s waiting for Alice to come. FP sipped on his coffee and noted that he was running out.

“Here you go, FP.” Pop took the empty cup from him and poured in some fresh coffee. FP thanked him and began to dump some sugar in when he heard the door open behind him. He turned to find Alice rushing in with a smile on her face…..and Hiram Lodge behind her.

“Alice?” FP got up from the barstool and went to meet her. She shoved a file into his chest.

“This is everything Howard was working on before he died. This is going to help us with the Reaper!” she exclaimed in delight. He held the file in front of him and opened it up. Inside was all of Howard’s research, his notes, and articles from the Conway massacre.

“What? This is amazing! How did you…. FP looked up and still noticed Hiram standing behind them. He went to speak until Alice spoke again.

“Hiram helped me get there.” Alice explained. “I know it’s kind of against protocol but it was with good intention.” FP raised an eyebrow at her then turned to Hiram.

“Umm…” he tried to form some sort of recognition of gratitude, “Thanks for getting her there safe, I guess?”
“Absolutely.” Hiram smiled. “And if there’s anything you two need, please don’t hesitate to reach out.” The man then looked to Alice; FP could sense something in his eyes. He wasn’t sure what it was about this man, but he seemed to give Alice some sort of comfort. Next to him, Alice stepped towards Hiram and placed a hand on his upper arm.

“Thanks….for earlier.” she said, pausing for a brief moment. FP noticed her struggling for words. What were they talking about out there? How exactly did he find her out there?

“I’ll see you around, Alice.” Hiram gave her a soft smile. He stepped away and turned to FP. He gave a small wave, which FP reciprocated. Then, Hiram left the diner. Alice returned to FP, half in caution and half in a daze. They both sat down on the barstools and FP laid Howard’s file open. Pop grabbed a cup for Alice and poured her some coffee.

“So….” FP started, “did Count Dracula explain why he was making Hal be part of shady business deals?” Next to him, she sighed. She rested her elbow on the table and faced him.

“He did. And yes, he did help me get to the Conway house. But that’s only because we ran into each other in the woods.” She slid closer to him and looked at the file. “I’m still not sure I can trust him….entirely. I know he means well, but….”

“You think he’s not telling you everything?” FP finished her thoughts. She nodded.

“I’m going to need to pull a few more strings on him before I can make any final decisions.” she spoke. “But he might be a good resource for us. If we continue playing nice together….we could get what we need to find the Black Hood and bring him down.” FP looked at her and an astonished smile grew across his face.

“Shit, Coop. With that mentality, you could easily become a member of the Serpents.” She smirked and took a sip of her coffee. He returned to the file and scanned through the documents. Her handed her half the pile so it can make their search a bit easier.

“You seeing anything significant? Or anything that stands out?” she asked as they continued to look. All he could find so far was the same notes over and over about “where did we go wrong?” and “what am I missing?”

“Nothing yet.” he responded.

“Keller’s got you on a new case already?” Pop returned to them. They both looked up at him then to each other.

“No, we’re still dealing with the Black Hood.” Alice explained. “But we’re into the Riverdale Reaper….just for research purposes.”

“I remember the whole Riverdale Reaper scare.” Pop frowned. “Poor family. The Conways were good people.”

“We think that the Riverdale Reaper might be acting as a sort of….influence, or it may be a correlation.” FP handed a random photo of the Conways to Pop. The old man squinted at the photo.

“But we’re stuck,” Alice continued, “because the Reaper was never found. So we have no idea what drove him to murder the parents and the two kids--”

“Two? Are you sure it’s only two?” Pop asked. Alice and FP looked at each other in confusion, then turned back to Pop.
“Wait, what do you mean?” Pop returned the photo to the pair and pointed at the children in the photo. There were the two Conway children….but in the middle was another.

“You said there were two. But there’s a third. Unless it was a friend of the children….or their brother.”

“FP, write this down.” Alice commanded him. Pop handed FP a pen, and FP began to scribble down notes on a napkin.

“Okay, so there’s the two kids - Tommy and Sue.” FP wrote down. “So, who the hell is the third? Is there anything written on the back?” Alice flipped the photo to the other side and slid it over to him. Inscribed on the back read “Pickens Day 1983 with Tommy, Sue, and Joseph”.

“His name is Joseph Conway.” Alice explained to Chic, Kevin, and the younger Serpents. The teenagers sat in scattered positions while Alice and FP stood up in front of them in the Blue and Gold meeting room. “Obviously he was the only one to survive the massacre, but we don’t if he was there during the massacre or he left before.”

“What we need to find out,” FP picked up, “is what happened to him. If there’s any record of him in any of the older Riverdale High yearbooks or student records.”

“So, that’s why you need us?” Toni piped up.

“I get Chic and Kevin helping you guys…” Joaquin added in, “but why do you need the rest of us? We don’t even go to Riverdale High?”

“There could be records at Southside too.” Chic explained, making Joaquin smile next to him. Sweet Pea and Fangs rolled their eyes at the pair.

“We’re going to need all hands on deck for this.” Alice brought the group back together. “Whatever you guys can find in the school records can help us find him. And if we find Joseph….that may help us get to the Black Hood.”

“You could try the Sisters of Quiet Mercy too.” Kevin added to the conversation. “I mean, that place is mostly known for its awful gay conversion therapy and care for reckless teens….but it also acts an orphanage too. So we can’t find anything….that might be an option.”

“We’ll look into it.” FP turned to Alice for confirmation. She pursed her lips and nodded. Behind them, the door flung open, scaring all of them.

“Is this where Team Falice and Co. is meeting?” Cheryl Blossom stood in the doorway with her hands on her hips. Alice looked at the girl with her mouth open while FP’s face torted in confusion.

“Cheryl, what are you doing here?” Alice asked the young girl.

“I….may have asked for more backup. If you don’t mind.” Chic voiced from the other side of the room.

“So what’s our plan? How are we going to catch the Black Hood?” Cheryl walked into the room and approached the older pair.

“We’re still doing research.” FP explained. “Cheryl, you don’t have to force yourself to do this.”
“I’m not forcing myself. I want to help.” the girl turned to FP, her face growing remorse. “I’m incredibly grateful for you saving my life, Mr. Jones. What the Black Hood did to my mother, my home… I want him to burn the way they did. So whatever help you need, I’m more than willing to give.” Alice and FP looked at each other then turned back to Cheryl.

“The more help the merrier.” Alice moved to the side so Cheryl could join the others. “Welcome to the team, Cheryl.” The girl regained her smile and moved past the two. She paused, trying to decide where to sit, then made eye contact with Toni. She slowly approached the Serpent girl and sat down next to her.

“Seeming as if we’re the only girls here, I think we should make ourselves acquainted.” Cheryl spoke to Toni in a sultry voice, extending her hand out. “Cheryl Blossom, head Vixen and part-time archer.” Smiling, Toni took Cheryl’s hand and shook it.

“Toni Topaz.”

“Like the gemstone. J’adore.”

“Okay, so do we all know what we need to do?” Alice brought the focus of the group back. The teens looked at the older pair at first in frustration and confusion, then one-by-one, gave them a nod of confirmation.

“Alright.” FP clapped his hands together. “Let’s start getting yearbooks. Sweet Pea, Fangs, Kevin, you come look with me. Toni, Joaquin….Cheryl. You stay in here and do some digging on the computers. And Chic, go with your mom.” The team dispersed with Sweet Pea, Fangs, and Kevin following FP out, and Chic getting up from his spot after giving Joaquin a quick kiss. Chic came over to Alice and the two left the room.

“So are things going well with you and Joaquin?” Alice asked her son as they walked down the hallway.

“Yeah.” he blushed. “We actually had a date the other night at some coffee shop in Greendale. It was kinda cool; it was themed like a dark magic shop.”

“Kevin’s not jealous, is he?”

“What? No… no, he’s practically had eyes for Moose Mason since freshman year.” The two laughed. They approached a glass cabinet filled with trophies and photos of older athletes. They stopped in front of the case and glanced at the photos. Yet, one face stood out to Alice, one she familiarly knew.

“Dad used to have a bowl cut?” Chic asked in shock. Alice faced him and smiled.

“He had it cut by the time he went to college. He absolutely hated it, but I actually thought it was kind of attractive. He only had it one other time before we got married.” she turned back to the photo and her smile faded.

“Mom?”

“You go ahead, Chic. I’ll meet you and the others back in the room.” she reassured her son. He gave her a quick hug then hurried off. Once he left, Alice directed her attention at the photo of Hal. He looked so innocent, so young. The memories flooded back into her, the good, the bad, everything in between. She wiped away a tear, trying to keep her emotions together. From the other side of the hall, the door leading into the school’s gymnasium opened, and a hoard of young wrestlers hurried out. They went off in different directions, but none of them seemed to notice Alice was there. Then,
a recognizable face came out through the doors with the team’s coach, clapping him on the back. Hiram turned and met her eyes, a smile forming. He left the coach and headed her way.

“I didn’t know you taught wrestling to teenagers.” she crossed her arms as she greeted him. He leaned up against the glass cabinet, still smiling at her.

“It’s only a part-time thing. I help out whenever I have free time.” he stated, rotating to face the cabinet. “Told you Hal was the BMOC back in the day. Popular with all the ladies.” he spoke, causing Alice to scoff. “What brings you here?”

“I’m having my son help me with something.” she told him. “We’re making progress with the Riverdale Reaper….but it may take some time before we get anything related to the Black Hood.”

“Glad I could be of assistance.” he rested his back against the glass and tilted his head to the side. She took a moment to scan him up and down without making it obvious. Hiram was an attractive man, and he was good with his words….but there was something about him that she couldn’t put her finger on. Something that she wanted to dig deeper into.

“Penny dreadful for your thoughts, Alice?” She leaned up against the cabinet, not saying a word to him. His smile turned into a smirk. “You still don’t trust me, do you?”

“You’ve got layers, Hiram Lodge.” she spoke. “You’ve been willing to reveal a few to me, but I’m worried that there’s still more to peel back. And I’m worried that there may be stuff that I won’t like.” She stepped in towards him, closing the space between them. He looked down at her, not breaking his smoulder.”Trust is a symbiotic relationship. It can’t work unless we both provide, equally. I tell you about me, and you tell me about you. Got it?” His smoulder fell into a soft smile - she got him. He glanced her up and down.

“You’re quite the little negotiator. Surprised you didn’t become a lawyer.” She was about to respond when the wrestling coach called for Hiram. He replied that he’d be there shortly, then turned back to Alice.

“You free Thursday night?”

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FP sat on the edge of the bed as he waited for Alice to return from the bathroom. She came out in a black lace bodysuit with a black leather bralet underneath. He stared at her for a solid moment. She looked good, but FP didn’t have the balls to tell her.

“What do you think? Better than the other outfit?” she asked for his opinion. He hesitated for a moment, then spoke.

“Yeah….it’s better.” he stuttered. Alice sighed in relief then headed over to her dresser.

“What would look better with this? A leather skirt, or my black jeans?” she began to rifle through her drawers. FP stood up, forcing himself not to stare too long at her. Her stared at her for a solid moment. She looked good, but FP didn’t have the balls to tell her.

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“Whatever you’re comfortable in?” he suggested. “I thought this date with Hiram wasn’t anything huge.” Her face went stiff. She glared at him and pointed a finger.

“It’s not a date!” she grabbed the skirt and the jeans and held them out in front of her.

“Jeans.” he pointed at the black jeans. “You’ll freeze your ass off if you wear the skirt.”
“Good point.” she set down the skirt and struggled into her jeans. “But like what I was just saying, this is for research. Hiram had information about Hal, and he knew something about the Conways….what if he knows something about the Black Hood? Or even about Joseph?” He wanted to tell her that Hiram still seemed sketchy to him. But at this point, she already started to develop some relationship with him….one they could potentially use in the nearby future. She finished fixing her jeans and smoothed out her legs.

“Am I going too far with this?” she asked, her confidence slowly fading. She grasped for her elbows and looked down at the ground. He felt bad for her.

“What, are you kidding? You’re just started with this.” he tried to help rebuild her confidence.

“You’re like….a fucking enigma.” He saw her nose flare slightly as she laughed.

“Sorry, I….I just haven’t been out with anyone….not since Hal.” she went quiet. He looked out the door, making sure Chic wasn’t overhearing their conversation, then stepped towards her.

“You like Hiram?” he asked her. She sighed and let go of her elbows.


“You don’t want to make the same mistakes you did with Hal?” He began to sense the fear in her eyes.

“He likes me, FP. A lot. And he wants me to trust him. What I did with Hal changed our marriage. I don’t want to abuse Hiram like that. I don’t think I want to commit to anything….not until I can get to know him better.” Alice stared down at her feet, clamping her mouth shut. He took another step towards her and reached for her hands.

“You deserve to have some fun tonight, Alice. You’ve worked hard to earn it. So don’t let obtaining evidence stop you from doing so. It’s okay to breathe every once in a while.” She brought her gaze back up to him and formed a small smile.

“I know.” she muttered. “I wish you could go with me. You deserve to have fun too.”

“Yeah….my version of fun can’t be anything alcoholic, so it’ll just consist of me binge eating pizza while yelling at the TV during a baseball game.” She started to giggle at the comment. “See? My night’s pretty lame compared to yours.” he chuckled.

“Doesn’t sound that awful. But I get what you’re saying.” she admitted, beginning to play with his fingers. He looked down and rested his eyes on her crescent scars. He rested his thumb in the middle of her palm and ran it over her scars. He clamped her fingers shut around his thumb, looking back up at her. They stayed like this for a moment.

“I should….” FP mumbled, “I should let you finish getting ready.” He dropped her hands and rested his hand on her upper arm for a brief moment. She smiled at him and squeezed his hand. Then, he moved around her and left the room.

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Alice watched as FP left her bedroom. She was grateful that the two have grown to be comfortable with each other. She was willing to open up to him about her fears, her wants, and he never judged her, and vice versa. She never had experiences like these with her previous partners in the PD. She never opened up, and she never made close connections to her partners, not because she didn’t
care….but because she cared too much…..and she didn’t want them to deal with her messes. What was different about FP Jones?

She exhaled and went into the bathroom. She gave herself a dark eye and a blood red lip that contrasted with her already pale skin. After finishing her makeup, she examined herself one last time in the mirror, taking in her unnaturally dark look. Once she felt satisfied, Alice grabbed her coat and left the house.

The bar downtown was not crowded when she arrived. It was small and didn’t have much lighting. When Alice walked in, she could smell cigar smoke. The place was decorated with some colorful string lights for the holidays. It almost reminded her of the Whyte Wyrm on the Southside, but much cleaner. She noticed only a few women around, mostly chatting with the men, smoking cigars and drinking vodka on the rocks. A few people stared as she made her way in, but she didn't mind. She only had her thoughts set on one person, one face she wanted to see in the crowd. At the bar area, Hiram made small talk with the bartender holding a glass of what she assumed to be whiskey. He turned and saw her, smiling. She approached him and grinned.

“I’m not too late, am I?”

“Not at all.” he gestured for her to sit. She slid her coat off and placed it on the barstool next to her. The bartender cleaned off a glass and turned to her, waiting for her order. She faced Hiram and smirked.

“I’ll take whatever he’s having.” she spoke, not breaking eye contact. The bartender went off to go make her drink.

“Didn’t know you were a whiskey girl.” he sounded shocked. She crossed her legs and placed her hands down on the counter.

“So? I can handle my liquor….most of the time.” she admitted, instantly having flashbacks of the last time she went hard with her alcohol. She did not want to repeat what happened to her at the Whyte Wyrm. The bartender returned with her drink and she thanked him. She turned back to Hiram and took a sip of her drink.

“Alright, so….here we are.” he began. “Tonight I’m an open book. What would you like to know?” She took a moment to think. She had so many questions that she wanted to ask. Where would she begin? She took another sip then set her whiskey down.

“What exactly is it that you and your family do? I know Lodge Industries has to do….something with gentrification and rebuilding neighborhoods. But you also do deals with the Blossoms….what else is there?” He sat there in silence, absorbing in her question.

“Most of what my family started is building communities, like what you said.” he explained to her. “But we also act as a monopolizer….bonding with other major names and expanding our sources of revenue. When my great great grandfather began the business back in the early 1900s, he wasn’t as successful as….say like Rockefeller or Carnegie. But when my grandfather inherited Lodge Industries….he changed how we operated. He secured more deals, made more alliances…..became a tycoon. And my father, Fernando, he followed exactly in his footsteps.” He paused, taking a sip of his whiskey. “He kind of scared me when I was growing up. I enjoyed the luxury and the money, but I was offset by his demeanor…..it almost made me not wanting to go into the business at all. But we all have to make sacrifices, don’t we?” He paused again. She started to notice how uncomfortable he became when talking about his father.

“You’re not really a people-person, are you?” she asked. “That explain why no one around here
barely sees you?” He made a small laugh.

“You’re observant.” he noted. “My grandfather, and my father, were always loud and boisterous. And I….never really was. I think Veronica definitely gets her extraversion and confidence from her mother. I’m not so comfortable in large crowds - it’s the noise of it all. I prefer a small intimate group of people….but my strong suit is one-on-one conversations.” He gave her a small smirk. She actually was shocked that he was being so open and honest with her. How many drinks did he have? Or was he just okay with letting her break down his walls? She turned away for a brief moment and sipped on her whiskey.

“Why Riverdale, Alice?” he broke the silence. She set her drink down and wiped off her lips. She was about to protest, ask why he was suddenly turning the tables on her, but he seemed curious.

“Isn’t that obvious?” she gave a stinted answer. “Hal had to come back to help his parents with the Regi---”

“I know why Hal came.” his voice became low and modulated as he leaned closer in. “I want to know why you came. Why did you come with him, and not just stay in Boston to raise Chic by yourself?” Her breathing became shaky. Alice stared down at her hands, trying to come up with some sort of response. She never really considered why she even came to Riverdale in the first place. Was it because she was just going with Hal? Did she no longer love her life in Boston? Why Riverdale?

“I wanted to be happy.” she let the words come out of her. “I had a good life in Boston. I had a stable job, a loving husband, I had Chic. But no matter what I did for my job and for my family…..I don’t think I was ever satisfied. I was depressed. When Hal convinced me to pack up our life in Boston and come to Riverdale, I saw it as an opportunity for myself….to finally find something that could make me happy……But I’m not so sure I’ve found it yet…..” She brought her gaze back to him. She shocked herself that she was willing to admit this to him…..a man she was only starting to get to know. She only admitted some of her unhappiness to FP, but never to the extent of what she just told Hiram.

He placed his hand on top of hers, wrapping his fingers around hers and stroking her knuckles with his thumb.

“You’re a good detective, Alice. With everything you’ve been through, you deserve to be happy.” She looked back at him, reading his eyes. She could see the sincerity in them, the comfort he wanted to give her, the intimacy….

“Are you and Hermione close, at all?” she blurted out before she could stop herself. She became worried that she spoke too soon, but Hiram just gave her a soft smile. “I mean,” Alice tried to justify, “because you were saying….that you…."

“I know.” he responded. “And I figured you’d be asking. I don’t mind though.” She sighed in relief. “Hermione and I are very different people. She’s bold and not afraid to speak her mind. Everyone loves her. That’s why she and Veronica are more of the face of the company….me, not so much.” he went silent for a moment, continuing to stroke her hand. Then he started again, “I was smitten with her when we first met. What led me to ask for her hand in marriage happened a few years after we attended Riverdale High together. One day, she was doing….something with her accounting firm she was internning at, and she just glowed about it. And I realized then, that’s the woman I want to marry…..at least that’s what I tried to convince myself. That’s what we still try to convince everyone when we’re seen together in public.” She sat there attempting to understand what he was saying. Then it all made sense.
“So…did you get a divorce? Private from the press?”

“No….it’d be too messy, and there would be too many questions. But we found a solution that works best for both of us.” he admitted to her, “We continue to act like the powerful husband and wife duo for the company….and for the sake of our daughter….and then behind closed doors, we live our own lives. Pursue our own desires. Leaving her to tend to her….affairs…..”

“And you?” Alice pressed. He eyed her up and down before continuing his explanation.

“I’m not usually the type to have mistresses on the side…..I did at one point, but it was only brief. But if I were to again…..I can’t just let myself fall into the arms of someone random. I want to be able to bond with her. Share an intellectual connection with her. I want someone….intelligent, attractive, not afraid to hold her own…..be understanding.”

He finished, meeting her gaze again. She blinked, her breathing getting heavy and inconsistent. “You have any more questions for me?” he asked her in a low voice. In the background, an ABBA song started up. Alice looked out to the rest of the people in the bar. A couple of people moved out to the small dance floor and began to sway to the music. She turned back to Hiram and gulped down the rest of her whiskey.

“Come, dance with me.” she grabbed his hands and leapt off from her barstool. He scoffed and stood up.

“Alice….” he tried to protest, but she turned back to him with a pout on her face.

“You may be introverted, but you have to know how to dance. Besides, I don’t want to brave that dance floor by myself. Please?” she jokingly pleaded. He chuckled and glanced out onto the dance floor. He looked back down at her and came closer to her.

“As you wish.” he whispered to her, and he led her out onto the dance floor. As they approached the other people, she could fully hear the song being played, Andante, Andante. They were in the middle of the dance floor, not saying a word to each other. As the chorus of the song came in, he pulled her in, one hand wrapped intimately around her hip, another hand holding hers. She held onto the back of his neck and stared down; she didn’t realize how close they were until that moment. They swayed to the music, keeping a constant rhythm, their breathing becoming in sync. Alice glanced back up and blinked. His dark eyes became more prominent under the lighting. Yet, she felt safe, warm…..more trusting of him. When a more upbeat song transitioned on through the speakers, they both pulled away slightly to meet each other’s gaze. He smiled down at her and let go of her waist to twirl her. She giggled as she whirled around. They came back together and he led her in a slow-paced salsa dance. One foot back, one foot forward, it felt so natural. She let her body flow with the music and flow with him. He pulled her in and rotated them, tightening his hold on her waist. He leaned in and lowered her; she held onto his shoulder as she allowed herself to relax into the dip. He slowly lifted her back up and pulled her in closer. They stared into each other’s eyes, their faces nearly touching. She fully wrapped her arm around his neck and rested her forehead on his shoulder. Hiram pulled in her tighter, his face hovering just over her neck. She could feel his heartbeat against her chest. The next song began and she could feel his breath linger on her ear.

“You ever been through Pickens Park while it’s snowing?” he asked her. She leaned back slightly and shook her head. He smiled and released his grip on her waist, only holding onto her hand. He led her back to the bar to grab their coats, then he led her by the hand out of the bar.

The snow came down as the two made their way to Pickens Park. Alice could see her breath in between the snowflakes. Her hands were becoming numb from the cold. She felt Hiram’s fingers intertwine with hers, his body giving off the heat she needed.
“So?” he broke their long silence. She looked up at the falling snow.

“It’s beautiful.” she confessed. She felt the snowflakes on her red cheeks. She looked over at him and saw the snow sticking to his black hair. He no longer seemed like the seductive, mysterious man she met at Hal’s funeral….in this moment, he was sincere. Authentic. Angelic. He was so close to her, his eyes appearing lighter in the darkness, their faces merely inches apart.

They returned to her car almost a half hour later, the alcohol now out of both their systems.

“I guess this is where I leave you.” he faced her and gave her a sad smile. She let out a huff and brought a hand to his cheek. The night went a lot better than she originally anticipated. She didn’t want it to be over. She leaned in and hugged him, resting her head in between the crook of his neck. He wrapped an arm around her waist and rested the other on the small of her back.

“Thank you.” she mumbled. “Thank you for being so open with me.”

“I’m not sure the details of my marriage will help you find the Black Hood.” he joked. She pulled away slightly and looked him in the eye.

“No, it won’t. But it gives me something else.” she admitted to him. “It gives me reassurance that I can trust you. And that I can come to you if I need help. I know that now.”

“Well I’m glad I could help with that.” his eyes lit up as he spoke. She cupped his face again with one hand, taking a moment to memorize the structure of his face. The softness of his eyes. The lines of his smile. He was beautiful.

“Good night, Hiram Lodge.” she whispered, and she kissed his cheek. She hovered there for a moment, the wetness from the snow stained on her lips. His breath lingered on her neck like a ghost. She shut her eyes then reopened them, leaning back ever so slightly to meet his gaze. But he was focused on her lips. He raised his hand and traced his fingers down her chin. His eyes met hers again, his fingers curling around her chin and grasping on. Their faces were barely an inch apart. Then, the gap closed.

It was death and life all at once. It was purity and sin. Sweet and savory. Dark and light. The cold felt like nothing compared to the warmth of his lips on hers. His body against hers. His stable hold on her keeping her from falling over. She felt dazed, yet she felt so alive. They only broke the kiss so they could catch their breath. Then without much hesitation, they came together again, hungry for more. His fingers snaked up into her hair, she wrapped an arm around his back. Their lips collided, over and over, his tongue slithering between the cracks.

A part of her knew it was wrong. He was married. She had just become widowed. There’s a killer on the loose who targets people for actions like these. But another part of her was silencing all this worry. And in that moment, it was dominating everything else. He kissed her bottom lip, then her chin. His lips danced along her jawline, moving slowly to her neck, burying his face into her hair. Alice didn’t want to rush into in the way she did with Hal. She wanted to take her time. Savour this moment. Play it like a violin. She gasped as he found a spot on her neck, and clung to him tighter. Her heartbeat pulsed in her ear drums, her breathing becoming more like whimpers. His kisses turned into nipping, his teeth grazing that one spot. They sunk in. She let out a moan.

In fear, Hiram pulled away and cupped her face. “I’m so sorry.” he scanned her in panic. “Did I hurt you?”

“No.” she reassured him, stroking his face while smiling. “No.” She kissed him and he responded eagerly. When they broke off, she grabbed onto his coat. “Do it again.”
FP rested his feet on top of the desk early Friday morning, examining Howard’s file again. He wondered where Alice was…if she made it home alright from the night before. He refocused his mind on the picture of Joseph Conway. What happened to that little boy?

He heard the thudding of heels as he looked up. Alice plopped down in the seat next to him and rested a cup of coffee by his feet. The first thing he noticed was the giant scarf around her neck.

“Um….morning.” FP took his feet off the chair and grabbed the coffee. She gave him a smile and reached for the Howard files. She was actually strange….he hadn’t seen her this perky in a long time. “Soooo….” he started, resting his elbows on his knees, “how was your…..research meeting last night?” She darted her eyes up at him then looked back down.

“It was good.” she responded quietly. She began to hum and tapped her foot on the tile. What the fuck was up with her? She tilted her neck back and forth, becoming uncomfortable with her scarf. Then, glancing around the office, she removed it and placed it on the desk. FP turned to her and his eyes grew big. There were two very blatant hickey and a small few ones scattered around her neck. Wait…..NO….. His jaw dropped at the realization. Alice looked up at him and noticed the panic in his expression.

“FP, can we talk for a minute? IN PRIVATE?” she stood up and yanked him up with her by the arm. His mouth still hung open as she led him out of the main area and into the hallway. When they were alone, he was about to voice his shock when she shoved him against the wall and covered his mouth, muffling his screams.

“You make one word of this to Keller and I will have your head! Understand?” she whispered in a harsh voice. He nodded and she let go of him. Not saying a word, he sporadically gestured to the hickey on her neck, his mouth still hanging. “Oh, get your jaw off the floor!” she barked at him.

“It’s not that big of a deal.”

“YOU HOOKED UP WITH HIRAM LODGE! HOW IS THAT NOT A BIG DEAL?” he hissed in a low voice. “What, did he just magically seduce you or some shit?”

“No.” she mocked his tone of voice. “He was a gentleman actually. He bought me a drink and opened up to me about his personal life. Then we danced, went on a walk, and…..” He raised his eyebrows as she got to the last part. Her eyes became angry and bulged. “In case you wondering, NO WE DID NOT HAVE SEX, FP. We just made out….for a while.”

“Yeah, that part wasn’t obvious at all.” he remarked sarcastically. She rolled her eyes and crossed her arms.

“Oh shush, you were the one who said I should go have fun. Did you not?” She did have a point. He sighed and let his hands fall to his sides.

“Okay, fine.” he spoke, admitting his defeat. “Sorry, I just….wasn’t expecting you to come back….looking like Hiram turned you into a human juice box.” He hung in head, feeling embarrassed for lashing out. She placed a hand on his cheek and lifted his face up.

“If it makes you feel better, we’ve got him on our side now.” she smirked at him. “So whatever resources or men he can give to us….we have a stronger chance of bringing down the Black Hood.” She paused, tracing her fingers along her neck. “But you have a point.” she sighed, “I should probably be a little smarter about how I…..do my convincing.”
They made eye contact, and laughed. She took her hand away from his face and hugged him. They held onto one another for a moment then pulled away.

“So, what exactly did you get out of him?” he asked her. She opened her mouth, about to explain, when they both heard Keller’s voice beckoning them from the main area.

“Cooper, Jones. Where the hell did you two go?” The two looked at each other then rushed out together. Before they reached the main area, FP gestured for Alice to cover her neck up, and she pulled the collar of her shirt up higher. They found Keller at their desk space with Hiram next to him.

“Hello, FP….Alice.” Hiram smiled at them, making FP somewhat uncomfortable and confused.

“Hiram? What are you doing here?” Alice stepped forward towards the men.

“Hiram’s been….kind enough to offer us his services to help the PD with a stronger force.” Keller went into detail. “So we can make the town safer….and help you two with the Black Hood case.” Alice turned back to FP and raised an eyebrow. Damn, maybe she did do some convincing.

“Also,” Hiram came back in, “I wanted to cordially invite you all to the groundbreaking of SoDale that will be happening in two weeks. As guests. So, bring whoever you want as a plus one. Friends, family, co-workers.”

“Um….thanks.” FP made an attempt to smile. Alice faced her attention back to the men.

“Alright then.” Keller clapped Hiram on the back. “I’ll be back to get you so we can discuss your plans with the others. You two,” he pointed at the pair, “back to Black Hood business.” They nodded, and Keller left.

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Alice watched as Keller disappeared into his office. She then darted her eyes to the Howard file. THE HOWARD FILE. Shit, what if Keller saw what they were getting into? She turned back to FP and made a head gesture towards the file. He picked up on her signal, waited for Keller to be officially gone, then made a dash for the file.

“Everything alright?” Hiram’s voice got her attention. She looked over at FP, the file in his hand as he sat down on the desk, then turned back to Hiram.

“What? Yeah, I’m fine.” she swallowed the lump and nodded her head. Hiram stepped towards her.

“Am I invading your space too much? I mean, I just wanted to check in with you after last night, and—” her eyes widened at the comment. He thought she was freaking out because of the night before.

“No!” she stepped closer to him and cupped his cheek. “No, it’s not that.” She realized that she needed to explain to him what was happening. She checked her surroundings for any sign of Keller, then she led Hiram back out into the empty hallway.

“Sorry, I…” she began to tell him, “the whole Riverdale Reaper thing….Keller doesn’t exactly want FP and I looking into it. And what we found…..”

“Could get you in trouble?” he finished her thought.

“Exactly.” she nodded. “But I….I enjoyed last night. A lot. I needed it.” She now had both hands on his face stroking his cheeks. “I just need more time before….things get serious. If they get
serious.” She stopped before she could continue rambling and stared down at her feet. “If you want them to be.” He slipped his fingers under her chin and slowly lifted it up. She blinked as she felt his breath on her mouth.

“I’ll do whatever you are comfortable with. I’m okay with taking things slow.” he spoke with that suave tone. She stared down at his lips and smiled. He placed his hands on her hips as he pulled her in. The kiss began slow then heated every time they parted their lips. She wrapped her arm around his neck and allowed him to back her into the wall. He hummed delightfully into her lips.

“Hiram, you ready?” Keller’s voice ended the moment. Hiram rolled his eyes in protest, making her giggle. He looked back at her and grazed his thumb on her bottom lip.

“You want to meet at Pop’s tonight?” he asked, moving his thumb down to her neck. “I promise I’ll be a bit more careful.”

“I’d like that.” she muttered. She leaned into him for another kiss, allowing herself to be lost in another moment. The sound of footsteps broke the moment. Hiram looked out at the end of the hallway, then turned back to Alice.

“I’ll see you tonight.” he kissed her cheek and left her. At the end of the hallway, FP appeared just as Hiram was leaving. FP rotated his head watching the other man go, then slowly, he turned back to Alice and leaned against the wall, growing a Grinch-like smirk.

“Mmmm, mmmm, mmmm……” FP hummed at her. She walked over to him and scowled. “Weren’t you blaming me earlier for suggesting that you should be having more fun?” He began to chuckle to her annoyance. Alice made her way back out to the main area only after snatching the Howard file from FP and giving him a good smack on the head with it.

End of Chapter Eight

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Chapter End Notes

.....yeah, so before yal go jumping down my throat, lemme explain. I've actually been kinda crackshipping Alice with Hiram for a little bit now (for some odd reason i can just see them being a good power couple that could balance each other) and i was kinda sad to not see that much content for them.....so.....YEET.

Anyway, i apologize in advance if i don't get a new chapter out right away (i have finals at my school this week rip) so I will try to get done what I can but please keep up the kudos and the comments. They seriously make my day every time I get the notifications :)

thank you all so much for the support and see you soon!
Chapter Nine - Monster's Ball

Chapter Notes

I'M BAAAAAAAAAAAAACK.

Hi cuties :) how's everyone's week going? I finally got the damn chapter done, and I no longer have to deal with schoolwork, at least for the end of 2018....

Anyway, you know the drill my dudes. Happy reading :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Nine - Monster’s Ball

The week went by in a blur. There wasn’t much to do at the station, since there were no major attacks from the Black Hood. There were only a few scares where a couple of townies came in crying and holding letters saying that they would be attacked for their sins. Turned out it was either only an imposter or just a couple of teenagers playing a prank. Most of the focus was on finding Joseph Conway. The kids spent their time after school pouring through old yearbooks and school records to track down the missing survivor, but with no luck. It was only relief that Keller hadn’t hounded them over it, or tried to figure out what they were up to.

But Alice only had one thing on her mind - one person, to be exact. She never imagined that she could one day be a mistress to a millionaire, but that was before she met Hiram Lodge. He charmed her, and she liked it. Throughout the week, they met for brief amounts of time either at Pop’s or when he would “happen to be stopping by the neighborhood” during his morning runs to sneak in a few kisses. He even joined Alice and Chic one night at Pop’s to aid them in researching the missing Conway child, and the two were able to passionately kiss while Chic was in the bathroom. There was no sex though - it was too risky and their time together was too brief. But Alice didn’t feel the guilt or the shame that she did with Hal. She enjoyed Hiram’s company and he made her feel good, although she still hated having to sneak around with him.

They weren’t able to see each other over the weekend - Hiram ended up having to work most of the time due to the upcoming SoDale gala, and Alice had made plans to spend time with FP researching in Riverdale High’s library. But the two did periodically check in with each other via text, so that seemed to brighten her mood. FP would tease her about it once every so often during lull moments. She would snark at him but wind up laughing.

She appreciated that FP could keep a good secret and help them hide their affair. She was grateful for him, all in all. He had done so much to help her, physically and mentally. She owed him a big one, but how? What could she do to thank him for being the best friend she could ask for? She started to think about his family…..his children. She wanted to help him get back to his children, or at least find a way to allow FP some time to visit them in the future. By the time Tuesday night rolled around, Alice sat down at her laptop with her reading glasses on, and she began researching for family-oriented lawyers in the area that could help FP. Chic was out with Joaquin and the other teen Serpents as they looked into Southside High’s records, so Alice had the house to herself. She adjusted her glasses as she read through reviews from clients. It was a mixed bag of positives and negatives. Skeezy and well-worth-the-money. There had to be someone out there.
A knock on the back door leading out to the backyard made Alice scream. She debated on whether or not to grab a kitchen knife. Was it FP? Was it the Black Hood? A text popped up on her phone and Alice glared at it.

From Hiram: Let me in? :( 

Scowling with some form of a smile, she strided over to the back door and opened it to find Hiram leaning against the door frame.

“What’s happening, gorgeous?” he smirked at her.

“You son of a bitch.” she grinned at him and pulled him in through the doorway. Their lips crashed together and she clung onto him. She broke off the kiss to go shut the door.

“Did anyone see you?” she peered out to her backyard, making sure none of the neighbors were in sight.

“I made Andre drop me off at the end of the street so I could walk through the back.” Taking one last look, she slammed the door shut and leaned against it, smirking at him. She gestured for him with her finger mouthing “Come here”. His body pressed her further into the door as they kissed. She wrapped her arms around his neck and his hand held onto her hips. After a few moments, his lips found her neck.

“I missed you.” he panted in between the nipping. “Every free moment I had this past weekend, I couldn’t stop thinking about you.”

“You sound like a fucking Nicholas Sparks novel.” she laughed. He found a sensitive spot on her neck and sucked there, making her laughter turn into whimpering. He took a moment to catch his breath and examined her face.

“You wear glasses?”

“They’re for reading. I only wear them for long periods of computer work.” Alice explained. She freed herself from her position and sat back down at the table. Hiram took a seat next to her and glanced over her shoulder.

“Child advocacy? This related to Joseph Conway?”

“No……” she sighed. “It’s for FP, actually. I want to help him get back to his kids.”

“I didn’t know he had kids. What happened?” he asked. Alice’s mind began to wonder. As much as she wanted to spend time with Hiram and be able to trust him with her secrets, this was FP’s matter. She turned to face Hiram and reached for his hand.

“Something happened a while ago that broke them apart.” she left the details at that. “But FP’s been working so hard, and he’s helped me out so much.” she paused, staring off to the distance of her living room. “He’s my friend.”

“That’s reasonable.” he stated, adjusting their hands so their fingers intertwined. “Maybe when this whole Black Hood thing’s over, we can do something.” She turned back to him, and her heart swelled.

“Really? You’ll help me?”

“I know FP and I aren’t….quite the best of friends,” he began, “but if it means that much to
you….I’ll see what I can find. But it will have to be when SoDale is no longer my main priority---”
She squealed in delight and kissed him.

“Thank you.” she muttered against his lips.

“Happy to do so.” he leaned in and captured her lips again. “Speaking of SoDale….” he broke the
kiss, “I want to get your opinion on something.”

“And what’s that?” she closed her laptop and rested her elbow on the table. He stood up and clasped
his hands together, taking a shaky breath.

“How would you like….after the groundbreaking……to spend the night together at the Five Seasons
downtown?” She took her elbow of the table and stood up. “I was just figuring….since we haven’t
been able to see each other much…..alone.” As he spoke, he came closer to her and wrapped his arm
around her waist. “So after the gala, we could get a room, order some champagne, dance under the
moonlight, and…..other things. If you’re comfortable with that, of course.”

“It sounds wonderful.” she reaffirmed him, smiling. “And as for the other things….” she rested her
forehead against his, feeling his breath on the lower half of her face. She could smell his cologne and
feel his heartbeat pumping through his chest. She stared down at his shirt and brought her fingers up
to the top button, dangerously close to undoing it. She knew she didn’t want to rush into things with
him, but in that moment…..she was heavily considering changing her mind. “I’d be okay with that.”
she whispered, being honest with herself and with him. He blinked, tightening the grip on her waist.
Their breathing began to sync. She took one of his hands and led it down to her ass. He squeezed,
and she gasped and buried her face into his neck.

“Chic won’t be home for a while.” she began peppering kisses near his ear. “We got the place to
ourselves.”

“Sounds good to me.” he growled and held onto her face. They kissed passionately, his hands
moving to her ass and her fingers gripping onto his shirt. Alice took the lead and backed them away
from the table towards the living room area. She broke the kiss to unbutton his shirt, which he had no
problem in assisting her in. After undoing the final button, she ran her fingers up and down his bare
chest and abs. She teased him by getting closer to him and brushing her lips against his. Before he
could snag her lips, she pushed him down onto the couch. Hiram chuckled as she slowly straddled
his lap. Her bodyweight lowered him into the couch as she kissed him, all while he continued to play
with her ass. His hands slid back to her waist and his fingers sneaked under just the hem of her
sweater, waiting there. She blinked at him, then without a word, she grabbed his wrist and led his
hand under her sweater, up to her breast (she wasn’t wearing a bra because it’s her fucking house
and she could do as she damn well pleased). She bit her lip to suppress the noise coming out of her
throat as he held on, directing his attention to it in wonder. It wasn’t much longer before he sat up,
lifting up her sweater, and pulled her into him.

Alice gasped at the feeling of his mouth enclosed on her breast, sucking on her flesh. His hand snuck
up and held onto the other while he sucked in delight. She hung her head back and panted; she
almost forgot how good it felt. Wanting more, she peeled off her sweater in a hurry, exposing her
whole chest to him. She wrapped her around his head and dug her fingers into his hair as he moved
onto the other. Alice could already see and feel the hickeys forming all around her chest but she
didn’t care. She felt his teeth sink in and a moan escaped from her lips.

She tugged his head up to her by the hair and kissed him, pushing him further into the cushions. His
hands found her hips again and she began to grind into him slowly, causing him to groan in the kiss.
He held on tighter and flipped them over so now she was underneath him, his bare chest pressing
into hers. Another moan came out as Hiram moved to her neck and began leaving red marks.
The sound of a motorcycle pulling in outside the house scared them both. Alice sat up and her eyes darted out the window in fear. Hiram placed a finger to his lips and pulled back the curtain slightly to see who was outside. But she didn’t need to see who it was because she could hear him.

“Chic.” she whispered and they looked at each other. Alice jumped off the couch and grabbed her sweater off the floor as Hiram re-buttoned his shirt. She heard the keys rattling outside the door, he would be in there any moment now. The two dashed back to the dinner table and Alice reopened her laptop.

Chic came into the house and set his keys at the small side table. “Mom, I’m home!” he called out and saw the two at the table. “Hey Mom. Mr. Lodge?” Alice turned to Hiram, not knowing what to say to her son. She hadn’t told him about her new affair, considering that he had no clue about the state of Hiram and Hermione’s marriage. Luckily, Hiram stood up and greeted her son.

“Hello, Chic.” he approached Chic. “Your mom invited me over to help out with more research on the Riverdale Reaper.” he made up on the spot. Chic turned to Alice and nodded his head slowly.

“Well, hopefully you guys found something, because we’re still struggling at the school. Joaquin and I just got out for the night and we were just about to head to Pop’s. I wanted to stop by to grab my wallet, and to see if you wanted to join us?”

“Oh, Chic…” Alice stood up and joined the two. She looked back and forth between her son and her….Hiram. If she said no, Chic would start asking questions. If she said yes, then she won’t be able to have another moment alone with Hiram. Which choice was the lesser of two evils? She sighed and made up her mind. “I actually haven’t eaten yet. And don’t worry about paying - I’ll cover for it.”

“No need to.” Hiram smiled at her, then at Chic. “On me.”

“Thank you, Mr. Lodge.” Chic’s face lit up.

“I should….probably put on something warmer.” she gestured down to her outfit and made her way up the stairs.

“Alice!” Hiram called out, and she turned to face him. “Do you mind if I use your restroom before we head out?” he asked, winking at her.

“That’s fine. Come with me.” she made her way up the stairs. The moment Chic was out of sight and out of hearing range, she and Hiram sighed in relief.

“Close one, am I right?” he huffed. She rolled her eyes and kissed him.

“Yeah. We’re booking that room at the Five Seasons for damn sure.”

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“The Five Seasons, huh? Sounds better than that bedbug infested Sharebnb.” FP grabbed a french fry and shoved it into his mouth as he and Alice strolled through Pickens Park.

“But we’re finally getting to spend some good quality time alone.” Alice tutted. “And I can take my mind off the whole Black Hood thing….at least for a night.”

“Yeah.” he stopped and turned to face her. “Doesn’t it seem weird to you though that our little friend hasn’t popped up in a while? Or even sent you a poem to analyze?”
“You’re right, that is weird.” She snagged a fry from his container and chewed on it. The past few days had been oddly silent. There were a few instances of neighborhood scares, but those turned out to be false alarms. But it still felt unsettling. And it seemed oddly coincidental that everything had been silent since Alice….

“Not to bring up another touchy subject, but do you know what you’re going to tell Chic?” She swallowed her fry and raised an eyebrow at him. “About you and Hiram?” he added. She sighed, processing his comment.

“I don’t know.” Alice shrugged. “It was hard admitting the truth to him about me and Hal. How would this be any different? But this time, he’s married to someone else!”

“Maybe just break it to him slowly. Or have you and Hiram tell him and Veronica together. That’s he’s unsatisfied with Hermione and that you needed comfort after Hal.”

“Maybe.” she nodded, “Be a bit easier if Veronica was still in town.” They continued to walk on, FP munching on his fries as Alice rambled on. “It’s just weird, FP. I thought by now Hermione would be giving me shit for being with her husband over the phone, or fly in to bitch-slap me in person. But I haven’t heard anything. Maybe what Hiram said about their open marriage was true.”

“Maybe it’s a good thing?” he tried to reassure her, but she still looked uneasy.

“God help us all if the Black Hood found out about this. Imagine it - caught red handed as the Mistress of Pembrooke. I’ll practically be flayed alive.” He stopped in his path and placed a hand on her shoulder.

“Okay, I’m gonna stop you right there, Coop.” He looked her in the eye with concern in his voice. “No one is flaying you alive for anything. Not if I’m by your side.” he paused, thinking of what else to say to her. He was still sketched out by Hiram, but he made Alice happy. He gave her the comfort and affection that she needed since the passing of Hal. FP needed to be supporting of her, she needed him as her friend. “This is the happiest I’ve seen you in a while, Alice. Don’t let this Black Hood scare get to you. Okay?” She gave him a soft smile and nodded.

“It’s just scary, that’s all.” she replied. “I’ve forgotten what it feels like to be with someone else….like that.”

“Yeah, can’t relate.” he joked, causing her to steal more fries and laugh.

XXXXXXX

There were yearbooks spread all over the room, flipped open to different pages. Chic held one in his lap, Class of 85, tapping his foot lightly to a new song. Joaquin had introduced him to some indie band while spending time together after working at the Bijou over the weekend, and now he couldn’t stop listening to them. He mouthed the words to the song as he poured through the yearbook. He was so engrossed in his music and his research that he didn’t hear a knock on the door behind him. What eventually pulled him out was a frightening tap on the shoulder, causing him to jump out of his seat.

“Oh! Hi, Mr. Svenson….” Chic pulled off his headphones. The school janitor, Mr. Svenson, nodded at the young boy.

“Don’t mind me, I’m just coming in here to clean.” the older man regarded. He began to sweep the floors around the stack of yearbooks.

“I can move those out of the way if you need me to!” Chic stood up and made a dash for the
“Writing an article for the Blue and Gold?” he inquired.

“No, actually….” Chic picked up a couple of books and held them in his arms. “I’m helping my mom with something….regarding the Black Hood. We think there might be someone who can help….only problem is, we don’t know what happened to him.” The older man furrowed his face and sighed.

“Young mom seems smart. She figured out the Jason Blossom case. Hopefully she can find this Black Hood.” Mr. Svenson continued to clean the room, not paying any more attention to Chic. The young boy stood there, confused. He only interacted a few brief times with the janitor in passing, yet….Mr. Svenson had been working at the school for ages. Maybe….

“Mr. Svenson!” Chic called out, causing the older man to turn his head. “You went here to Riverdale High, right?”

“How else do you think I started working here?” Svenson chuckled and returned to his work. “Why?”

“You know anybody by the name of Joseph Conway?”

The old man stopped his work. He turned to Chic with fear in his eyes.

“Who gave you that name?” his voice lowered, scaring Chic.

“I was just wondering, because…..because…..”

“Because what?” Svenson stepped towards him. “Think he has something to do with the Black Hood?” Chic gulped.

“I don’t know.” the boy muttered. “But he could help us. Whatever happened all those years ago with the Riverdale Reaper could be influencing the Black Hood.” Svenson looked down at the ground for a moment, then looked back up at Chic.

“I’m only going to tell you once, because you seem like a good kid. You don’t want to dig in to this Reaper thing….it’s caused a lot of bad blood in this town. And I don’t think you or your mom should be dealing with the blood on your hands. Got it?” Chic stared at the older man. Something about Mr. Svenson struck out to him. Was it his eyes? The lines on his face? What was it that was screaming out to him? Chic decided to just nod, and the older man backed off.

“Can I just ask you one more question? I promise I’ll leave you alone after this!” Svenson sighed at Chic’s question.

“Make it quick.”

“What year did you graduate from Riverdale High?”

“Good thing you had me hide that in my truck during our break.” FP leaned in. Keller kept droning
on about work ethic and how they all needed to step up their game. The meeting concluded and Keller dismissed them all.

“I expect you all to be productive this month.” he called out as the office began to file out. FP and Alice were the last two to stand and head out. “Especially you two.” he called out to them, stopping them in their path.

“Keller….” Alice rolled her eyes and growled.

“Is there not enough work for the two of you with this whole Black Hood thing? Because all I’ve seen you two do these past two weeks is sit around at your desk not being productive.”

“Really?” FP snorted. “You’re not going to fucking count responding to false alarm calls and teen pranks as being productive?”

“Then what else have you two done?” he scoffed at the two of them, beginning to turn away when he stopped. The two looked at each other then back at Keller. His eyes lit up. “Are you two looking into the Riverdale Reaper case?”

“Tom—” FP stepped forward.

“WHEN I SPECIFICALLY ASKED YOU NOT TO?” Keller’s voice rose. Alice joined FP’s side and became defensive.

“You specifically told us just to be cautious.” Alice retorted at him. “You never once said we couldn’t look into it. And you allowed us time in the archives. Did. You. Not?” she crossed her arms. FP smiled down at her then turned back to Keller.

“She’s got a point.” he smirked.

“Oh my fucking god….” Keller covered his face with his hand and strode away from them. Alice began to feel her phone buzz in her pocket. She saw Chic’s ID light up and answered immediately.

“Chic, what’s up—”

“I FOUND HIM, MOM! I FOUND JOSEPH CONWAY!” he screamed into the phone. Alice moved away and covered her other ear.

“Chic, slow down. What?”

“It’s Mr. Svenson, the school’s janitor! He’s the missing Conway child from the Riverdale Reaper murder!” he rushed his words, but Alice had all the details she needed.

“I’ll be right there.” she hung up the phone and went back to FP. “We need to go. Now.”

“What? He found Joseph?” he spoke in a low voice. She nodded, and the two began to rush out the door.

“Where the hell are you going?” Keller stopped them.

“To go be fucking productive, Tom.” Alice tutted. Then, she and FP turned on their heel and left the station.

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They peered down at the photo of Joseph Conway then looked back down at the photo of Mr.
Svenson in the yearbook. The similarities were too blatantly obvious. The boy had the same smile. The same eye structure. How did he become a Svenson? Why become a janitor at the school? What did he know?


“Did he say anything to you, Chic?” Alice turned to her son. “Give you any information?”

“No,” the boy replied, leaning against the wall. “Other than stay out of it all.”

“Well that’s a big fat no.” FP set down the photo. “You know where his supply closet is? Does he have an office?”

“I think it’s down by the gym. On the right.” Chic pointed to an area behind them. Alice turned to FP and nodded. He picked up the photo and began to head out the door. Alice went to follow him when Chic stopped her.

“Mom….before you go, can I ask you something? And be honest?”

“Is everything okay, sweetie?” Alice stepped towards her son. He looked out to where FP was waiting then looked back at her.

“Are you seeing Mr. Lodge?” She stood there for a moment, then slowly began to absorb what he was asking. Her eyes widened and her breathing slowed. She bit her lip as he continued, “I don’t think it was that much of a coincidence that he happened to be over the other night. And….I saw the hickeys mom. You weren’t just doing research, were you?”

“Chic…” she sighed, worried that he would get angry and lash out. But he said nothing. She took a deep breath and spoke, “You’re right. No more secrets, no more lies. He….he’s been…..”

“He’s married, mom.” Chic calmly stated in concern. “Unless there’s some issue that he and Mrs. Lodge are having….”

“Kind of.” Alice shrugged. “But it’s not because of me. They’ve been having issues for a while…..We were going to find a way to tell you and Veronica, when she returned to town. We don’t want to leave you two in the dark…..especially since I didn’t tell you the truth about me and your father.” she admitted. She exhaled and stared down at the ground, fearing that now Chic would never trust her again.

“Are you at least happy with him?” he placed a hand on her shoulder. She looked up at her son, pursing her lips, then nodded. “Okay, that’s what matters.” he continued.

“I know…..and that I need to be smart. Which I am!” she added, making him laugh. She kissed his forehead and ruffled his hair before leaving him in the Blue and Gold room. She let out an exhale as she joined FP outside the room.

“You told him already?” he asked as they made their way to Svenson’s area.

“He figured it out. But he’s not angry about it, surprisingly.”

“Better than the Black Hood breaking the news to him.” he joked. Alice scowled and punched him in the arm. They walked past the gymnasium, one more door down, and there it was. The door leading into whatever Joseph Conway….Mr. Svenson, was hiding. They stopped, staring at the label on the door. She turned to FP and felt her heartbeat racing. He knocked on the door.
“Mr. Svenson?” he called out. There was no response. He banged on the door again. “Joseph?” Nothing. He reached for the door handle and twisted. The door creaked and opened with no trouble. He let go of the handle and turned back to Alice. She nodded, and they entered the room.

His office was untidy. There were cleaning supplies scattered all through the room and photos hanging on the walls. They examined the photos, looking for any clues. Whoever this boy was all those years ago knew something. He could help them with the Black Hood…..if the Riverdale Reaper was connected to the Black Hood. They wandered over to his desk and peered down. There were scattered papers all filled with unclear passages and random thoughts and….

“Can I help you two?” a voice spoke from behind them, causing them to jump. Mr. Svenson, Joseph, stood at the entrance and frowned at the sight of them. Alice looked up at FP, hoping he would say something, then she redirected her attention to Joseph.

“Mr. Svenson…..” Alice started cautiously, “You are the young boy that survived from the Riverdale Reaper massacre, right? You are Joseph Conway?”

“I don’t go by that name anymore.” he responded quickly and moved towards them. They both stepped back and allowed him to sit down at the desk. “Your son already tried talking to me, and I’m telling you what I told him---”

“Were you there that night? When your family was murdered?” FP began with the questions. The older man looked timid. Alice lifted her hand at FP then slowly approached the man.

“Please, you have to tell us something.” she pleaded in a calm manner. “I know what happened must have been painful for you. But you have information that can help us. How did you survive?” Joseph looked back and forth at the two of them and sighed.

“My family struggled…..financially.” he started. “It was hard, my folks having to take care of Tommy, Susy, and, me, the youngest of them. They didn’t want me to deal with their hardships.”

“Were you adopted by the Svensons before or after everything happened?” FP threw in.

“That was long after.” Joseph admitted. “My folks….they wanted a better life for me. So that summer, they sent me to the only place they knew could take care of me - a church-run group that dealt with orphans and troubled children.”

“The Sisters of Quiet Mercy.” Alice realized. He nodded.

“It was lonely. And I didn’t get why they wanted to leave me in there. So that night, I got out, just so I could see them all, just one last time. But as I was about to enter….I saw him. The son of a bitch who killed them. When the cops brought me back to the Sisters, they started asking me questions about what I was doing. What I saw. Anything that could help….it was all so much at once.” Then he went quiet. He tapped his fingers on his legs and stared down at the ground.

“Joseph,” FP brought him back in, “Did you ever see what the Riverdale Reaper looked like?” The older man slowly grew agitated.

“That’s always the question, isn’t it? Did you see him? What did he look like? At this point, even though I remember every detail of that night, that’s the one part….I gave a description. I don’t even know if it was accurate, but it was something. But I don’t think it was him….the man they caught.”

“Wait, who’s they?” Alice interrupted. What was he talking about? Was there another group? More researchers like Howard?
“Some people in town that wanted the son of a bitch dead. They buried him alive, at least that’s what I heard on the news. But it wasn’t him!” Joseph’s hands began to shake. FP softly grabbed Alice by the arm and took a step back. “I gave them the wrong guy. And now I have to live with all this damn guilt. That I didn’t do anything to stop him. That I didn’t help them catch him. If I could have just done something…..” his voice went monotone. His face went stern. It was starting to scare her. Could it…..could it be possible that…. Alice took a moment to get a better look at Joseph. His body was too flabby. His face was too old. His eyes…..

“I think that’s all I can give you, detectives.” Joseph addressed them one last time. “Now, can you please leave? I have to close up for the day and I don’t want you two trapped in here.” He turned away from them and direction his attention at the scattered papers. Alice stood there, frozen.

“Alice….” FP caught her attention, then, with one last look at Joseph, they left the room. Once back out in the hallway, FP picked up on her quietness.

“Alice…..do you….do you think that…..” He didn’t finish. He didn’t need to; she knew he was wondering if Joseph Svenson was the Black Hood.

“They weren’t his eyes, FP.” she responded. “I saw the Black Hood’s eyes from the night he killed Phillips. Joseph’s don’t match his.”

They sat outside the high school the following morning figuring out what to do. FP offered to come pick up Alice and Chic and to drop the young boy off.

“So, what do we do now?” FP began after Chic left their sight. Alice sighed and turned back to him.

“Unless there’s anything else we missed in Howard’s file….Joseph’s testimony is all we have.” she shrugged. She pulled out the file from his glove compartment and flipped it open. He stared out the windshield and thought. Would it be smart to go back to the Conway home? Was there more hidden files in the archive back at work? What about….

“Is there anything in that file about that group that came to see him?” FP turned back to her, peering down at the file.

“Maybe…” she poured through. Unfortunately they found nothing.

“Well, we can’t get him to talk.” Alice huffed, then went quiet for a brief second. “But that place…..”

“The Sisters of Quiet Mercy? That place Keller’s son brought up?” FP finished her thoughts. “They seem sketchy as shit, but at this point, they’re our best shot.”

“Sisters of Quiet Mercy it is, then.” Alice nodded. She pulled out her phone and began to Google search for their phone number. Once she pressed dial, she turned back to FP.

“You think they’ll talk to us?” Alice whispered as the phone rang. FP shrugged at her. The phone stopped ringing and the line went somewhat quiet.

“This is the Sisters of Quiet Mercy. Can I assist you with something?” an unsettling older female voice came through the speakers. Alice looked back up at FP, raising an eyebrow. He gestured for her to say something.

“Yes, hi.” Alice responded in an almost too cheery customer-service voice. “I was wondering if….if I could make an arrangement to speak with the Sisters. About your services.”
“You’re not cops, are you? We’ve had many come over the years, and it’s all ended poorly.” the woman on the other end threatened. Shit, FP thought to himself. If they couldn’t go in to interrogate the Sisters, how would they……wait. An idea formed in his head.

“Well, I…” Alice started. I’ve got this, FP mouthed to her and took the phone.

“We actually just wanted to come to review your program.” FP spoke in a pleasant tone. “We were looking to adopt and we were recommended by our friends to come view your program.” The other end stayed silent for a moment, then the woman spoke.

“Of course. Can I put you on hold for a moment while I check the schedule?”

“Sure?” Alice responded. The line went blank, allowing for them to speak at full volume. “What are you doing?” Alice snatched the phone back from him.

“Saving our asses.” FP snorted. “In case you forgot, going undercover is kind of my specialty. If we can worm ourselves into seeing the Sisters, we can get what we need then get the fuck out of there.”

“And how the hell would we be doing that?” Alice inquired. Before he could respond, the line went back on.

“There would be some available time for the two of you to come in Sunday morning. After mass, of course.” the woman greeted them. Alice held her breath and FP quietly fist-pumped in the air. “And whom am I expecting to see then?” FP could see Alice’s breath becoming short. He mouthed to her “breathe” before Alice spoke again.

“Of course!” she stated. “The name is…..Mullway. Mr. and Mrs. Mullway.”

“And your first names? Just for the records?”

“Yeah, uhhhh…..” FP responded. Think, FP, just say something….. “Monica Mullway.” Alice glared at him as he spoke. “And I’m her…..husband. Chandler.”

“Then we’ll be seeing you on Sunday, Mr. and Mrs. Mullway.”

“Okay, thanks.” he responded, partially creeped out. The call ended and FP sighed. He turned back to Alice; she still continued to glare at him.

“Really, FP? Chandler and Monica?”

“What did I tell you? Undercover work is my speciality.” he smirked at her. “You can thank me later, Mrs. Monica Mullway.” Alice gave him a scowl that eventually turned into a closed mouth smile. He winked at her, then began to drive away from the school.

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Saturday morning was quiet for the most part. It allowed for FP to sleep in until almost 10, and it allowed for him to not have to stress about work. Yet, he did stress to a degree about what the hell he was going to wear to the SoDale gala later that night. He culled through his closet as he had a Christmas movie playing in the background. Eventually, he decided to wear a black button down shirt that he struggled to iron and he paired it with a pair of black dress pants and shoes. He examined his face in the mirror and for the first time, he noticed how scraggly his beard had gotten. When was the last time he shaved? He ran his fingers through the coarse hairs on his chin and jawline. Was it worth it? Was he trying to impress anyone…..well, maybe…..
He showed up to the gala around 4:45, shifting uncomfortably in his outfit and picking at his newly shaven face. He felt like an outcast amongst the crowd of people under the tent. He hoped that someone he knew could just come over and talk to him. Hell, he would be fine making conversation with Hiram Lodge. Or Keller. But most importantly….where was Alice?

He spotted Keller leaving a conversation with a small group of people and heading his way. He held a glass of champagne in his hands.

“Good day so far, FP?” he smirked. FP waved and rested his elbows on the standing table. Keller set his glass down next to him. “Nice not having to worry about the Black Hood for a day or two?”

“Pretty nice.” FP nodded. Keller had no reason to know about the Howard file or their new discoveries from the Reaper case. But Keller seemed to dig in pretty damn consistently.

“Or have you been thinking about the Black Hood?” he asked. FP huffed for a brief moment attempting to not act out. “You still trying to dig into that Reaper case?”

“Tom….” FP turned to his boss. He went to speak until Hiram appeared between them. He clapped Keller on the back with a smile on his face.

“Gentlemen, I’m beyond ecstatic that you made it.” Hiram looked pleased. Keller turned his attention away from FP, who made a weird look.

“It looks great, Hiram.” Keller commented. “It’s gonna be gorgeous when it’s finally completed.”

“That’s the plan, Tom.” Hiram directed his gaze at FP and looked around him. “FP, where is Alice?”

“Um…..” FP tried to respond. Did she text him when she would be coming? “Stuck in traffic, I guess?” he made up an excuse.

“Well, hopefully she gets here soon. I’m planning on giving you two and the rest of the Police a toast for all of your hard work. I certainly wouldn’t want her to miss it.” When Keller wasn’t looking, Hiram gave FP a mournful look.

“Let me check with her again.” FP pulled out his phone just to avoid the rest of the conversation. Hiram smiled and he and Keller wandered off. Once they left, FP shoved his phone back into his pocket, still no messages from Alice. He scanned the crowd for any sign of her, still no luck. Then, a familiar face approached him, her red hair slightly curled.

“Hi Mr. Jones.” Cheryl gave him a small wave and joined him at the table.

“Hey, Cheryl. I’m surprised you’re here.”

“Somebody has to represent the Blossom family. Or at least what’s left of us.” A waiter came by with a tray of champagne glasses. Cheryl grabbed two glasses and thanked the waiter, then she gestured one towards FP.

“I don’t drink anymore.” he shook his head. She set the one glass down and held onto the other, looking out at the scene around her. “How are you holding up, by the way?” he asked her, regaining her attention.

“I’m fine.” she gave him a sad smile. “I’m living in my family’s other house in town, Thistle House, with my Nana Rose as my legal guardian. But, unfortunately I had to resign my position as HBIC of the Vixens due to the school freaking out about my “fragile mental stability”, or whatever. But….I guess it’s a good thing? I mean, I get to help you find the Black Hood. And everyone is so
great…..especially TT….” she went quiet, forming a shy smirk.

“TT?” FP raised an eyebrow at her.

“Toni, obvi.” Cheryl clarified for him. FP stood there confused for a moment, then it occurred to him what might be happening.

“Relax, Mr. Jones. I’m not going to hurt her.” she reassured him. “I’m cuckoo bananas for her. She understands me, like no one else ever has.”

“Good.” FP left it there. He was in no mood to give Cheryl Blossom the same lecture he normally would give to any guy or girl that began to date Toni.

“But I guess I should thank you, because without Team Falice and Co., I never would have had the opportunity to meet mon petite chérie.”

“Cheryl, not to be a dumbass, but….what the hell does Falice mean?”

“It’s your ship name!”

“My what now?” Cheryl rolled her eyes and pointed at him.

“Falice. It’s FP, you,” then she pointed to her left, “plus Al……” she turned her head and her mouth hung open. “OH. MY. GOD.”

FP turned to see where Cheryl was gawking at…..where everyone had suddenly turned to gawk at. He blinked a couple of times, then his heart skipped. Walking into the gala in a red snake print maxi romper and gold heels was no one other than Alice.

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She knew people would stare as she walked in. Alice had this outfit sitting in the back of her closet for what seemed like months now. She hoped to wear it for her anniversary dinner with Hal, but that was all before the spiralling down of their marriage and everything that happened….now she was giving this outfit a new purpose. A simple but seductive way to drive Hiram over the edge and want her even more.

So she decided to throw on the romper dress, lace up her gold Roman-style heels, and pair it with gold snake jewelry, and headed out the door in an Uber. She offered calling FP to come pick her up and carpool over to the gala together, but she didn’t want to place the burden on him, especially if she and Hiram would still go the Five Seasons later together. She also considered having Chic drive her, but he had a shift at the Bijou and she didn’t want to make him late for work.

Alice climbed out of the Uber, taking a shaky breath, then made her entrance into the gala tent. Everyone turned heads at her, the men and the women. Some people turned to whisper to each other, but at that point, she didn’t care. She made her way through and saw FP standing next to Cheryl at a table. She strutted over the pair and grabbed the extra glass of champagne.

“The hell are you two looking at me like that for?” she snarked. FP said nothing to her; he just continued bobbing his mouth open and closed like a fish.

“OMG! I love this whole getup!” Cheryl squealed in delight, examining her outfit. “We defs need to share our wardrobes at some point!”

“Thanks?” she responded.
“Well, I’ll leave the two of you alone then. Adieu!” Cheryl waved goodbye and headed off. Partly in 
confusion, Alice turned back to FP, whose mouth was still somewhat hung. Something was different 
about his face.

“What?” she snapped him out of his daze.

“Where the hell did you get this?” he gestured to her outfit? “Have you always had this?”

“I’ve had it for a few months….in the back of my closet.” she left it at that, continuing to look at his 
face. She stepped closer to him and brought a hand to the side of his chin.

“Did you shave?”

“I, uh…..” he coughed. “It was kind of getting bad.” he gestured to his face. He blinked at her, then 
his eyes widened. “Is it too weird? I mean, considering that you’ve only seen me with a beard?”

“No.” she smiled. “You look good…..younger really.” she took time to examine his face. He did 
look good….handsome, if she were honest. She wasn’t expecting FP to go out and make himself 
look this presentable….yet here they both were. But she liked it.

The microphone on the stage went off, cueing for everyone in the crowd to come towards the stage. 
Alice held onto her champagne and turned back to FP.

“Are you going to be okay?” she asked him, “With all these people….and this….” she looked down 
at the champagne.

“I’ll be fine.” he stepped closer to her. “The few times I’ve been back inside the Whyte Wyrm to deal 
with stupid shits is much worse compared to this.”

“Okay.” she nodded in concern. He squeezed her hand, giving her a soft smile, then the two walked 
over to the stage area together. They weren’t front and center, but they still had a good view of 
Hiram on the stage. He hadn’t seen her yet; he probably had no idea that she had just showed up. 
Next to her, FP glanced back and forth between her and Hiram, the realization finally hitting him.

“I see....” FP leaned in and whispered to her. “You’re getting all your sinning out tonight before we 
have to get cleansed for the Sisters tomorrow.” She leaned back into him while still looking out at the 
stage.

“T ook you long enough, genius.” she gritted her teeth.

On the stage, Hiram tapped on the microphone, capturing the audience’s attention. “Welcome, 
everyone. I’m thrilled that you all came for the groundbreaking of the new SoDale. This new 
community will hopefully bring in new residence to Riverdale and the Southside.”

“Okay, any second now….he’s gonna look down at you and completely bust a nut.” FP whispered 
to her. Part of her wanted to roll her eyes and punch FP in the gut, but she had to stay 
composed….for now. Hiram continued his explanation about what good the SoDale project will 
bring, and so on and so forth. Maybe it wouldn’t cause so much harm in watching his reaction to 
her….

“I know it’s unfortunate that my dearest Veronica and Hermione couldn’t stand with me here 
today….well due to the Black Hood situation.” Hiram continued, “But I know most confidently that 
we as citizens of this town are in the best of hands. So I would like to toast to the Riverdale Police 
Department for their hard work, and….” then he finally looked down at the crowd and saw her. She 
gave him a seductive smile and a small wave. She knew she was being a bitch, but she didn’t care.
She wanted to watch Hiram squirm. He blinked a few times, coughed, then continued, “And….um, their contributions to this great town. So, here’s to them.” The crowd raised their glasses and began sipping on champagne. “Alright, I won’t hold you up any longer. Go, enjoy your night, everyone!” He left the stage and the crowd dispersed.

They headed back to the table. Alice sipped on her champagne and raised her brow at FP. He was trying not to burst out loud into laughter at the scene.

“Oh shush. I can be flirty when I want to be.” she took another sip of her drink. He glanced around, then his eyes widened at one point. He leaned in and coughed.

“Okay, who are you and what the fuck have you done to Alice Cooper? Because…..this is the complete opposite of how you normally are.” He started giggling.

“Then you might wanna start doing that.” he spoke in a lower voice. “Fuck buddy coming in at your eight o’clock.” he pointed behind her and she turned to find Hiram coming her way.

“I’ll leave you lovebirds to it.” he patted her on the shoulder and wandered off. Alice gave Hiram a coy smile then turned away slightly, giving him a little tease. She twirled her champagne glass in her hand, seeing his reflection becoming larger. She felt his fingers trace the area of her upper back as his other hand found her waist.

“Since when did you have the time to get this little number?” his voice sounded velvety in her ear. She made sure no one was watching their interaction, then she faced him and leaned back against the table.

“I’ve actually had this one for a while, but never really put it to good use…..until now.” He stared her up and down in pure awe. He placed his hands near her waist and rotated her around slowly.

“You take my breath away, mi amante. And I’m safe to assume…..that….” he stopped, pulling her in closer to him. His face was barely an inch away from hers, so close that they could kiss if either one moved. He kept his hands on her waists, playing with some of the fabric on the outfit.

“Yes.” she whispered. “This is all yours to take off.” She lifted his chin with one finger. His eyes looked desperate, hungry almost. He attempted to lean in to kiss her, but she held him back and placed a finger over his lips. “If you behave yourself, Mr. Lodge. You still have to play business man for a few more hours.” She gave him an evil grin and freed herself from his grip. She grabbed her champagne and ran her fingers along Hiram’s jaw. She began to back away, waving at him, watching as he looked more desperate. She turned away, feeling triumphant. Let him go crazy for her. Let him beg for it.

She joined FP at the drink stand, still having that evil grin on her face. He clapped his hands slowly, chuckling in a low register.

“Okay, that was quite the bitch move. But I am impressed.” he complimented her. She stuck her tongue out at him and giggled.

The event went on smoothly. Some townies approached the pair and thanked them for their work on the Black Hood case. Some even tried to pester for details and rattled off their conspiracy theories to them, which just made FP laugh. There was only an hour and a half left of the gala, and FP and Alice found themselves sitting at one of the tables glancing around as some couples danced to whatever the DJ was playing. He looked out and saw a little girl dancing with her parents. She
“You okay?” Alice placed her hand over his wrist. He turned to her and tried to not get emotional.

“You okay?” Alice placed her hand over his wrist. He turned to her and tried to not get emotional.

“Just thinking about my kids, that’s all.” he attempted to sound optimistic, but she could see the pain in his expression.

“FP, I’ve been thinking...what if I could help you find a way to see them again? When this is all over?” She moved to grab his hands and bit her lip.

“Alice....” he began but she interrupted him.

“I’ve been doing some research....lawyers who help with children and their families. I’m thinking....that if we can find someone....maybe a little bit after the holidays....we could try and persuade Keller to let you off the hook, so you can see your kids again.” He didn’t know what to say, or how to respond. When talking about the matter with Keller, all he ever received were “we’ll talk about this later” or “we’ll see after you do this for me”. He didn’t get much help from the other Serpents either.....well, it didn’t help that he wasn’t as involved with them anymore and that he was a potential traitor to the gang. But then there was Alice....someone he’s only known for a short amount of time, and yet they were closer than ever before.

“You’ve done so much to help me, FP. You helped me with Hal, my monster-in-law, and you’ve been so good with Chic. Also, you’ve given me so much support. I want to do the same for you. After all those years of working for Keller and the PD, you deserve this.” She paused for a minute and let out a breath. “I’ve met so many people over the years that I thought I could trust and rely on.....but I’ve never actually had a friend. A good, real friend......until I met you. So do you want me to do that, FP? Do you want me to help you reunite with Jughead and Jellybean?”

He felt his eyes watering. He read the sincerity on her face.

“You would really do that?” he finally choked out, and she cupped his cheek.

“We take care of our own.” she replied. “I know that’s a Serpent saying, but I think it applies to us too. You are part of my own, FP. Now more than ever.” She wiped a tear away from his face with her thumb. He grabbed her hand and kissed her knuckles.

“Sounds like a plan to me.” he formed a soft smile. She beamed at him; he noticed her face glow under the lighting. He began to take detail in her snake jewelry.....it looked good on her. She would have been a good member of the Serpents, he thought to himself. She had the fierceness, the loyalty, the same values he did. Gladys would have liked her too. Alice was a fighter, just like her.

She looked over at the little girl on the dance floor. “Hal and I actually did consider having a girl a one point. He was trying to convince me, that if we ever did, to name her Polly.”

“Polly?” FP chuckled. “That’s actually kind of adorable.”

“His thoughts exactly.” she commented. “But I preferred Elizabeth. Call her Betty for short.” she shrugged. He looked back and forth between the little girl and Alice. The next song began through the speakers. He swore it sounded like Pat Benatar. An idea came to him.

“Okay, that girl’s got the right idea.” he stood up and releasing her hands. “How much longer do you have until your handsome Latin love whisks you away?”

“Not for a while. Why are you asking?”
“How about we have some fun while we’re still here?” he held his hand out to her. She stared down and started to laugh.

“Mrs. Cooper,” he spoke in a snooty rich voice that ended up sounding more like a Muppet voice, “may I have this dance?” She rolled her eyes and stood up, taking his hand.

“Alright. I’ll dance with you, but only because that stupid Kermit the Frog imitation won me over.” He gave her a Grinch-like smirk and pulled her out onto the dance floor. We Belong by Pat Benatar was becoming more prominent the further they went out. She beamed looking up at him. Happiness looked good on her. As the chorus kicked in, he hesitated for a moment on how to go forward. Rolling her eyes, she placed one of his hands on her waist and held onto the other. He smiled down at her as they began swaying to the music together. Time seemed to slow down when he moved with her. She felt warm in his arms, her face glowed, she was soft. She wrapped her arm tighter around his shoulder, allowing her to come closer into him. He could smell her perfume, it was lovely. For a moment, he released his hold on her waist and twirled her out. She spun out and held onto his hand with her arm extended out. He spun her back into his arms and they immediately molded back into their dance. The song ended and the two stopped swaying. They stood there in each other’s arms, looking at one another.

The dance was over, but it was so relaxing and carefree. She felt safe in FP’s arms, warmed up. His brown eyes looked so soft under the lighting. He did look good with a shaven face, she thought to herself, he should do it more often. Her breathing was slowly stabilizing with his. He was so close, and so…..

“Thanks. For the dance.” she finally said. He opened his mouth then closed it, nodding his head.

“No….yeah. I wasn’t too awful, was I?”

“Not in a million years.” she reassured him. Damn, there was something about him that she couldn’t put her tongue on. She pursed her lips and looked out into the crowd. The scene was starting to die down, but there were still a few business representatives around, all waiting for their chance to talk with the one and only Hiram Lodge. She saw him after a few seconds talking to a group of men. He looked miserable. Uncomfortable. He glanced away from the men and looked at her. FP noticed the pair then turned back to her.

“Wait here.” FP whispered to her, then left and jumped into the conversation. “Hey boys. I think I lost my wallet back over by the bar. Could I get you guys to help me out?” The men looked confused, but FP was able to convince them to pull away from Hiram and follow him. He looked back at Alice, mouthed “Go get him.” and winked before he left. She smiled at FP then faced Hiram. She strutted over to him and grabbed his hand.

“Wanna dance, handsome? You look like you need some good company.”

“Absolutely.” He took the lead and brought her out to the dance floor. At this point, because the crowd was no longer as busy, she didn’t care who was watching them. She felt him coil his arms around her, just like he did back from the night at the bar, and felt the heat from his chest. She could hear Nights in White Satin over the speakers, a song she hadn’t heard in years. They were closer now, their faces almost touching, his chest against hers.

Their swaying transformed into the pattern of a tango. It wasn’t rushed or elaborate like a Dancing with the Stars routine - it was slow and methodical with every step. She only danced tango a few brief times - only because she and Hal were forced by Prudence to take ballroom dancing classes
before their wedding. Nevertheless, she at least knew what the hell she and Hiram were getting themselves into. She let the words of the song flow through her veins and allowed him to guide her movement. He was a good lead, just like he was the first night they could behave like this in a public setting. Yet, it felt like the rest of the world had gone away, and it was only the two of them out on that dance floor taking on this passionate, sensual dance. Her heart beat faster when he led her back, to the side, up….she flowed with him so easily. The song slowed down its pace, and she had her back against his chest. Her leg hooked around his waist, and he lunged back, holding on by her thigh. Her hand coiled around his jawline, caressing the side of his face and his neck. He returned back to a standing position, placing a kiss between the crook of her neck and her shoulder. She felt his hot breath linger on her as he turned her to face him. The beat was picking up again, nearing the end of the song; she felt like she was floating on the dance floor and only had him to keep her steady. She clung to him tighter, losing herself and her senses to the heat of it all. The song ended, allowing her to ease her hold on him and to rest her head on his shoulder. She was out breath, but she loved it.

“Say the words, and we’ll go.” Hiram whispered to her, “I trust my men to do what needs to get cleaned up here. It can just be you and me.”

Alice pulled her head back up and looked at him. She saw beads of sweat forming near his hairline. His arm snaked around her waist, bringing her closer to him, their foreheads now touching. She wanted to kiss him. She was half tempted to just pin him to the floor and do crazy things with him right there. No matter who saw them. She didn’t want to wait anymore. She wanted him. All of him.

“Get me out of here.”

There wasn’t much for FP to do when the gala came to a close. There wasn’t really anyone to talk to - Keller had left a few minutes before the end just so he could get some sleep, and Alice….the event, if he were honest, really died down when Alice disappeared with Hiram long before everything had ended. FP knew what they were doing, and where they were, but he didn’t want to be a dick and go bother her. She deserved to have fun and let loose for once.

He offered to help some of the wait staff clean up, but he was sent away, told that they could very well handle the mess. After a few attempts, he bid them good night and headed back out to his truck. He had fun for the first time in a while that didn’t involve work. Or alcohol. But now that the fun was over, he needed to get his head back into the case. He needed to start strategizing what to do about the Sisters and Joseph. And the Black Hood.

The traffic was almost nonexistent, so he returned to his trailer in practically no time. He was ready just to hop into bed then be ready to get up the next morning to make the trip out to the Sisters of Quiet Mercy.

But there was someone sitting on the steps outside his trailer. The figure became a shadow when he turned his headlights off, but he didn’t need the lights to show him who it was.

“There a reason you’re outside my trailer, Tall Boy?”

“Got brought up in tonight’s Serpent meeting, Jones.” Tall Boy stood up and waited for FP to come over to him. “Your involvement of Sugarman’s arrest got out. And the fact that you went to see the Snake Charmer in prison.”

“You realize that’s for my job, right?” he reminded Tall Boy. “I’m not betraying anyone in the Serpents. As a matter of fact, I’m keeping all of your asses from ending up behind bars. Now if you excuse me, I would like to go inside my home and get some goddamn sleep.” He tried to move past
the older Serpent, but Tall Boy stopped him and grabbed him violently by the arm.

“I suggest you watch yourself, FP. Know where your loyalties lie, ’cause God help you if the Serpents found out what you were up to. And I pray that the Black Hood doesn’t try to go after you again. Or that pretty little partner of yours.” His eyes lit up in anger, but he was in no mood or had no energy to fight Tall Boy now. Instead, FP pulled himself free from his grip and glared him in the eye.

“What we do is none of your damn business anymore. Got it?” The older Serpent didn’t respond. He looked FP up and down and scoffed.

“You’re doing a nice job playing the role of a Northsider. Think that sums up your loyalties right there, if I say so myself.” And with that, Tall Boy walked off, disappearing into the abundance of trailers. Part of him wanted to run after Tall Boy and beat him up, but another part of him wanted to go to Alice. To tell her what happened. But that would have to be for another time. Another night.

He entered his trailer and removed his gala attire, only throwing on a t-shirt to wear to bed with his boxers. He didn’t bother to brush his teeth, he just flopped onto his bed and set an alarm on his phone. FP ended up lying awake staring up at the ceiling for a few minutes….a few hours. It took him longer that he anticipated to fall asleep. He didn’t know if it was because he was on edge about his confrontation with Tall Boy, or nerves about going to the Sisters the following morning, or Alice…..

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She texted FP to let him know she arrived at the Five Seasons alive and well. She wanted to see which roads the driver was going down so FP would know how to come pick her up the next morning, but she didn’t end up paying any attention. She spent the entire car ride over on Hiram’s lap making out with him. His hands roamed her body and his fingers became lost in her hair with every kiss. He tasted sweeter than heaven and he felt hotter than hell. She loved it.

They entered the lobby and grabbed the keys from the concierge. Alice had only been to the Five Seasons only a handful of times - she never stayed in the rooms, but she had been to the ballroom and restaurant when Hal hosted a couple of Christmas parties for the Register. They ran over to the elevator, hand-in-hand, giggling like a bunch of teenagers, and pressed the button for the third floor. They kept on kissing as the doors shut and the ride up began.

“I’ve waited all night for this.” he breathed heavy against her lips. “I’ve been waiting for this since we started seeing each other.”

“Good thing you won me over.” she gave him a malicious smile and recaptured his lips. The doors slid open to lead them to the third floor. He led her down the hallway to one of the suites on the left. After fidgeting with the key, he opened the door and moved aside so she could enter.

The scene took her breath away. The room was giant, with a couch, television, wine and drink bar, and the comfiest bed she had ever seen. She ran her fingers along the wooden cabinets of the bar, taking in her surroundings. She wandered over to the window and pulled back the curtain; downtown Riverdale was glowing in string lights and street lamps - she had never seen the town this gorgeous.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” he came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her stomach. He nuzzled his head into her neck and planted little kisses. She leaned back into him, humming in delight, and coiled her hand around to the back of his head. His kisses moved from her neck to her lips as he held onto her tighter. She rotated around so her chest was against his, and she let him back her into the wall near the window. A few seconds into it, she reached for his jacket and peeled it off. He began to
undo the cuffs on his wrists and started to unbutton his shirt, all while coming back for more kisses. Her fingers went through the buttons with ease. She hesitated for a moment, wanting to take her time.

“If this is going too fast, you can tell me.” he cupped her cheek. “I want this to be good for you. For both of us.”

“It is.” she kept her eyes on him while she focused her attention on untying the ascot around his neck. The moment she pulled the fabric off, lacing it between her fingers, he backed away and removed his shirt. He kicked off his shoes at the same time he undid his belt and slid his pants off. She laughed and threw the ascot at him. She moved into him, half naked in his boxers and socks, and wedged her fingers under his chin as she kissed him again. But now he was focused on something else.

“May I?” he muttered. She nodded at the touch of his hands escalating up her back, up to the zipper of her outfit. Without much hesitation, Hiram buried his face into neck, starting up his routine of nipping and sucking on her skin, all while he slowly unzipped her outfit. Alice dug her fingers into his hair and hung her mouth open at his touch going back and forth between removing the fabric from her shoulders and cupping her breasts. She helped him by pulling her arms out of the sleeves and letting the fabric fall to her legs. She stepped closer into him, her bare chest against his. He tilted his head back up to kiss her and he brought his hands down to her hips. He directed his attention to the lower half of her body, his fingers slipping under the gold belt hanging around her waist. He snapped it open, and leisurely pulled the rest of her outfit down. He allowed her space so she could step out of the fabric. Alice lifted her legs slightly, one by one, to take off her heels. When she finished and felt her bare feet hit the floor, she stepped back into him. She felt his hands on forearms, his fingers were now freezing, as he stared at her in wonder.

She grabbed him by the wrist and led him over to the bed, standing only a few inches away from the edge. She guided him closer to her so he could take her into his arms, but he decided to get down onto his knees, focusing on her legs. He placed a tender kiss above knee, moving slowly up her thigh, and repeated the same on her other leg. His fingers tracing the shape of her thigh caused her breath to hitch. When was the last time she was with someone like this? The only time she could remember was….NO. Don’t think about him. Don’t think about what happened with Hal. This was someone new. Hiram was not just a warm body for her to fuck and to let fuck her.

Alice sat down on the edge of the bed. He was only a couple of inches away from her, but his hand still held onto her thigh. Hiram crawled closer to her, his fingers creeping up to the hemline of her underwear. “Hey.” she spoke and lifted his chin. “I know you won’t hurt me. I trust you, Hiram.” she smiled down at him. He leaned up, holding onto her waist for support, and kissed her.

“You’re so beautiful.” he muttered.

“So are you.” she replied, blushing. He kissed her one last time before looping his fingers into her underwear. He tugged at the fabric and slowly slid them off. He moved down to her chest and kissed her cleavage, then her abdomen, her stomach, down further…. 

She found herself reacting to his movement in way she hadn’t in a long time, not even during her recent time with Hal. She forgot that it made her senses go haywire, but it felt good. Her fingers gripped onto his hair, bringing him more into her, and she panted in between unsteady breaths. The sensation overtook her body, and she collapsed onto the bed. He wrapped his arms tighter around her thighs and continued giving her the pleasure she desperately needed. She felt high, drunk, and yet completely sober all at once. Her fears of them getting caught together and her anxiety melted away with every sound that came out of her. It was like there was no Black Hood, no dead “sinners”, no
poetry to analyze in some twisted mind game…..all of that disappeared in her mind. The only thing she could focus on was him. She reacted to his fingers slipping in, beginning a slow rhythm that picked up a pace after a few moments. And to think that she didn’t trust him when they first met. Beside her rebuilding relationship with Chic and her newly forming friendship with FP, she wanted to thank the Black Hood for bringing her and Hiram together. He was lonely and misunderstood, just like she was. He made her feel the bliss and excitement that she lost with Hal a long time ago, and she and Hiram hadn’t even been together for more than two weeks. The passion and the impact of his movements made her swell up inside and grit her teeth, fighting to hold back the last of her moans. A brief moment passed, and she fell apart. Her hips sunk into the mattress, her stomach rose up and down sporadically, and her eyes rolled to the back of her head. She felt hot and somewhat dizzy, but the feeling made her smile. Alice opened her eyes slowly, attempting to catch her breath, as he moved up to meet her gaze. She could taste her raw scent on his tongue as he kissed her.

“I made the right decision to be with you, Alice.” Hiram ran his thumb along her lips and down her chin. “Everything I wanted, what I desired…..it's you, Alice. You check off every fucking box.” She felt like she was tearing up, not from sadness but from joy and……she wouldn’t call it love but it was damn close to it. She grabbed his face and pulled him back down for another kiss. She felt the vibration of his chuckle against her lips, causing her to giggle as well.

“Then what the hell are you waiting for?” her voice went deep as her hand crept down to his boxers. She raised an eyebrow up at him, hoping he would take the hint. Lucky for her, he caught on quite quickly.

End of Chapter Nine

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Chapter End Notes

WELL. THAT. WAS. INTERESTING. Any ideas as to who the Black Hood is? Or any theories? Tell me what you're thinking and I'll try to update as soon as possible! Adios!
Chapter Ten - Nightmare on Elm Street

Chapter Notes

What's this? I'm already updating this quick? WHO IS SHE??

LOL it's cool guys. But it won't be cool for long......because a special friend of ours makes a comeback in this chapter.... :) 

Happy reading friends!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Ten - Nightmare on Elm Street

The Wyrm was humid from the amount of bodies and all the alcohol. They led FP forcefully to the center of the stage and sat him down. He tried to protest, but all the Serpents were yelling, calling him a traitor. Tall Boy silenced them all and came over to FP.

“Forsythe Pendleton Jones the Second, are you aware of why you have been brought in front of your fellow Serpents tonight? Or do you need a reminder?” He placed a hand on FP’s shoulder and gripped down, hard. He winced at the pain. “You’ve been sending some of our own off to the jailhouse. And now some are dead due to the Black Hood.”

“You don’t understand!” FP yelled over the noise. “The Black Hood goes after people like you. I’m trying to stop it from happening! I’m keeping you guys safe!” The Serpents booed him.

“That your reason, Jones? You falling more in line with Northsiders? With a shit Sheriff who has you acting like his bitch because you lost your cool with the Ghoulies?”

“I’m not just loyal to Keller. I’m loyal to all of you.” he directed out at the crowd, who went dead silent. “Please, if there’s a way....I can redo my initiation. Spit out the Serpent laws. Go through the guys beating me up.” He looked out at the crowd, hoping to find at least some Serpents that could listen to him. He saw Joaquin, Toni, Sweet Pea, and Fangs sitting by the bar looking remorse.

“Joaquin….Toni….you guys know what I’m going through. Please. Do something.” His voice sounded desperate, cracking.

“All those in favor of having his skins removed?” Tall Boy turned out to the Serpents. There was nothing at first, then slowly, one by one, the Serpents held up their hands, making fangs. It was almost all of them.

“No.” FP turned back to the teens. They shook their heads.

“We’re sorry, FP.” Toni spoke for them.

“We have to follow Serpent law. There’s no other way.” Joaquin followed up. Then, the teens raised their hands. His heart raced, he felt trapped. FP tried to leap up and run out of the Wyrm, but Tall Boy directed for a couple of Serpents to come up and hold him back down. They ripped off his Serpent jacket and stripped him of his shirt.

“I warned you, son.” Tall Boy flicked out a knife and moved behind him. “But you’ve made your
bed.” He made slits into FP’s skin, causing him to yelp. Then all at once, his skin felt like it was being torn from his bones. The Serpents began to crowd him, all wanting their piece of him. He cried out for help, feeling weak. He screamed and tried to squirm away, but there were too many of them. In the distance, he heard an alarm go off. The beeping grew louder, pulling back into his senses, drowning out the Serpents around him.

The alarm going off was the alarm he set on his phone the night before. The pulling on his skin was the fabric of his bedsheets that stuck to him. He groaned as he woke up from the nightmare, pushing the sheets off him to go turn off his alarm. He rubbed his eyes and swung his feet to the floor, breathing heavily.

He remembered it was Sunday - when he and Alice would be going to meet the Sisters of Quiet Mercy for information on Joseph Conway. “Fuck.” he muttered under his breath and stood up. He felt like shit, but he hadn’t put a drink to his lips, not in a long time. He swore he heard knocking on his door, and he groaned. “Hang on, I’m coming.” He pulled out a pair of sweatpants and stumbled over to the front door. He opened it to find his crew of younger Serpents waiting outside, freezing their asses off.

“Jones. We need to talk.” Joaquin sounded concerned.

“Save it.” FP rolled his eyes. “I already got the lecture from Tall Boy last night.”

“Can you at least let us in?” Toni threw out.

“Please? It’s fucking cold out here.” Fangs shivered next to Sweet Pea. FP sighed and let the four younger Serpents into his trailer. He remembered how they behaved in his dream….how they all looked guilty yet they still sided with everyone else.

“The hell’s got you all on edge?” Joaquin took noticed in his uneasy stance. He blinked at the teenagers then shook his head.

“Tall Boy thinks I’m no longer loyal to the Serpents because of all the work I’m doing to catch the Black Hood. Kind of set me off, that’s all.” The kids didn’t say anything, causing him to roll his eyes. “You guys don’t have to help me, you know.”

“Well, too bad.” Toni stepped forward. “We want to.”

“Yeah, since you’re the one who pulled us into this.” Sweet Pea snarked. Toni shot him a glare then turned back to FP.

“What we mean is…..you allowed for us to connect with you, and we wouldn’t be where we are without you. It’s like we kinda all owe you a life debt or some shit.”

“We may be loyal to the Serpents, but we’re loyal to you too.” Joaquin added in. “You’re like our father figure, if that doesn’t sound too weird.” The comment hit him in an emotional sense. He may have lost Jughead and Jellybean all those years ago, but now he had these teens. These younger Serpents who had bright futures ahead of them, and they were so willing to help at whatever cost. They were the closest thing he ever had ot a normal family. He blinked back the tears forming at the corners of his eyes and coughed.

“Get in here. All of you.” FP waved at the four young Serpents to huddle in. They formed a circle in his kitchen and threw their arms around in each other.

“In unity, there is strength.” he lead them in the last Serpent law.
“IN UNITY, THERE IS STRENGTH.” they all repeated, making him smile.

“You better leave before Tall Boy or any of those other assholes snitches.” FP pointed at his front door. “You want me to make you guys some breakfast or anything? It’ll have to be quick, ‘cause I have to head off for work.”

“We were just gonna grab some Pop’s.” Fangs answered. “But thanks.” Sweet Pea clapped his smaller friend on the back and the two left the trailer, leaving Joaquin and Toni inside with FP.

“New Black Hood kill?” Joaquin leaned up against the kitchen counter.

“No.” FP shook his head, wandering over to shut his door. “Heading out to the Sisters of Quiet Mercy to get information about the Reaper.”

“You really that desperate for details?” the pink-haired Serpent raised her brow. “I mean….they probably have something, but they’re kind of sketchy….and extremely immoral in their practices. Cheryl told me that her mother used to threaten to send her there while she was growing up.” FP nodded at her.

“Point is,” Joaquin pushed himself off the counter and joined her side. “Don’t be surprised if you don’t get the answers you’re looking for.”

“I know.” FP grumbled. “But that’s why I’ve got Alice.”

The natural sunlight coming into the room woke her up. It was the best sleep Alice had in a while…..well, considering all that sex from the night before helped her rest easy. She stirred awake but the comfort of the bed tempted her to go back to sleep. The arm around her stomach and the heat behind her tempted her too. She tilted her head back to find Hiram peacefully asleep spooning her. She returned to her initial position and smiled. Hiram Lodge could have picked any woman to have as his lover, and yet he chose her. This beautiful, mysterious man picked her to be his companion. How the hell did she get so lucky?

In the distance, someone’s phone was buzzing. Shit, was it hers? “Fuck.” she muttered, and she peeled herself out of the bed. Behind her, Hiram grumbled in his sleep and stretched out his arm at the space where she was. Alice wandered over to the couch and found her phone going off. FP was calling. Oh crap, she remembered. The Sisters of Quiet Mercy.

“FP?” she answered the call.

“Did I wake you up, Sleeping Beauty?” he teased her from the other end. “Or did you forget we have our trip to the hellmouth today?”

“No.” she snarked. “But I don’t think my outfit from the night before would be appropriate to wear in front of nuns.”

“You want me to call Chic and have him bring a spare set of clothes for you?” She blinked at the question. Chic was now fully aware of her relationship to Hiram, yet….she didn’t exactly tell him what she would be doing that weekend. But then, a thought came to her.

“I actually have a spare bag of clothes in my locker back at the station.” Alice admitted. When having her rendezvous with Hal, she made sure to keep some extra clothes in case she ended up spending the night at his Sharebnb and didn’t have time to rush home and clean up. Granted, she never used it, but she figured that in that moment, it would be in her best interest. “Do you think you...
have time to stop over there and get it for me? I’ll text you my combo.”

“Got you covered. And I’ll try to grab something for us to eat before we head out.” she could hear FP trying to sound optimistic.

“Thanks.”

“I’ll be there in like a half hour, forty five minutes maybe. See you then.”

The conversation ended. What happened when he got home? Was he having Serpent troubles? She made a mental note to ask him about it later. She let her hand flop to her side, still holding onto her phone, and huffed.

“Duty calling?” Hiram called out from behind her. She turned around to find him sitting on the edge of the bed. She gave him a sad smile and nodded.

“Unfortunately. So no breakfast in bed for us.” She walked back over to him and stood at the edge where he sat. He grabbed her free hand and intertwined their fingers.

“Where’s Keller sending you two now?”

“Sisters of Quiet Mercy, outside of town. But this has nothing to do with Keller. FP and I are going in alone on this one.” she told him, giving him the hint that it had to do with the Riverdale Reaper.

“But we can’t exactly go in as ourselves……I mean, not going in like cops.” Alice let go of his hand to go set her phone down on the dresser. She examined her reflection in the mirror - her hair still held some of its curl but it looked a bit wilder, and the residue of her lipstick had smeared the slightest at the corners of her mouth. She needed a shower. “That’s why FP and I have to go in undercover….as Mr. and Mrs. Mullway, a couple looking to adopt.”

“Mullway?” his voice sounded concerning. She turned back to him and noticed the expression in his face.

“Yeah. Wait, you know a family that goes by the name of Mullway?” she asked, but he was still quiet. Then, it hit her.

“She was your mistress, wasn’t she? Mrs. Mullway?”

He pursed his lips and nodded, looking down at his socks. Becoming consumed by guilt, Alice hurried back over to him and grabbed his hands. She tried to speak, but he looked back up at her.

“You didn’t know, it’s okay.” his voice soothed her worry. “Just haven’t heard anyone using that name in a while. But not to worry. It ended a long time ago.” He lifted her hands and kissed them. He looked up and slowly pulled her closer into him. “And now I have you. And your fiery personality. And your brilliant brain.” His hands escalated up the sides of her body and curled around the middle of her back. “And…..these.” he stuttered out as he began to smother his face into her cleavage. She laughed at his comment and sighed in content at his contact.

“If you want, when you come back into town later, you can come to Pembrooke and have dinner with me.” He rested his chin on the bone in the center of her chest and gave her the biggest puppy dog eyes. “Only if you don’t have plans with Chic, of course.”

“I don’t think so.” she confessed, resting her arms on his shoulders and curling her fingers into his hair. “But I don’t think he’d care all that much about what we were doing. I kinda told him about us - he figured it out on his own, but I just filled in the gaps.”
“Smart boy. Surprised he took it well.” he chuckled. “My Ronnie’s gonna be a little tougher to break the news to. I’ll try and bring it to her easy the next time I see her.”

“And Hermione?” Alice inquired. She knew it’d be a dangerous question, considering that he was still married after all. He lifted his hand and ran it down the side of her face, holding his fingers around her cheek.

“I can handle her. So you don’t have to worry about my family, okay?” She could see the sincerity in his eyes, allowing her to form a smile. He sat up straighter and pulled her face slightly downward towards his own. His lips still had the residue of champagne and her scent, but they were soft and warm. She moved her hand to cup his cheek the further they went into the kiss. They broke it to catch their breath, glowing at each other.

“I need to go shower.” she whispered and freed herself from his hold. She couldn’t exactly show up to the Sisters of Quiet Mercy smelling of raw, blissful sex. She strutted over to the bathroom, giving him a little show. She stopped at the doorway and turned back to Hiram.

“Unless you want to join me. Could save some water.” Alice gave him a seductive smile and winked. She turned away to head towards the shower, with him being not so far behind her.

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He showed up at the Five Seasons with two cups of coffee, some pastries, and Alice’s bag of clothes almost forty minutes after he called Alice. He felt out of place walking into the fancy hotel and heading up to her room, but at that point, he didn’t care. Hiram let FP in and took the bag of clothes from him. He noticed that Hiram was still wearing his shirt and dress pants from the night before. FP sat down on the couch in awkward silence as he waited for Alice to come out of the bathroom. The sheets on the bed were unruly, and her dress was scattered somewhere on the floor. It did seem like a weird scenario in his head to walk into, but nevertheless FP was happy for her. Hiram sat down across from him in one of the loveseats.

“Sorry,” FP indicated to the coffee and food, “I would have gotten you something too….”

“You’re fine.” Hiram smiled. “I was gonna eat back at Pembrooke anyway and get some work done.”

“Cool.” FP nodded, grabbing for one of the cups. He sipped his coffee and waited for the caffeine to kick in. A few minutes passed before Alice emerged out of the bathroom in her fresh pair of clothes. She picked up her dress and heels from off the floor and shoved them into her bag.

“I wasn’t too long, was I?” she looked up at FP.

“No, you’re good.” he stood up and handed her the second cup of coffee. She mouthed “thank you” and sipped on her drink. She walked over to Hiram and brought a hand to the side of his face.

“I’ll try to come over if I’m not too busy.” The other man nodded and kissed her wrist. She dropped her hand and turned back to FP. “You ready?”

“Waiting on you, Coop.” he teased, grabbing the pastry bag and heading for the door. Alice went to follow him but Hiram pulled her back in for one last tender kiss.

“Come back to me in one piece, detective.” FP heard him mutter. She chuckled and gave him a quick peck before turning on her heel and joining FP’s side. He watched as Alice waved goodbye to her lover then shut the door. The two walked over to the elevator in silence, but it didn’t bother him that much. When they entered, Alice reached for the bag and grabbed a pastry, nibbled on it quickly.
“So….” he started. She looked up at him and wiped some crumbs off her lips.

“What?” she spat out.

“You have a good time last night? Was it beyond your wildest dreams?” he cooed, knowing it would drive her nuts.

“You are a menace, FP Jones.” she scowled and took a violent bite of her pastry. The elevator stopped and the door opened. She glanced back and forth between him and the door. “And yes.” she confessed under her breath before hurrying out of the elevator. The response only made him laugh.

The car ride over to the Sisters of Quiet Mercy was filled with some cheesy 80s playlist FP made weeks ago and him attempting to bombard her with questions about her night with Hiram. She didn’t give him much detail in exactly what they were doing, but more so admitting to how she felt about all of it and where their relationship could go.

“So you’re saying that his other mistress was a Mrs. Mullway…..talk about freaky coincidental shit.” he had to speak louder over the music coming from his speakers. “Surprised Hermione didn’t lose her cool over her.”

“I just don’t know what I’m going to do if his family finds out.” she confessed. “I feel…..free with him. And not so anxious all the fucking time. At this point, I would rather get shot by the Black Hood than have Hermione Lodge make my gruesome death look like an accident.”

“No offense to her,” FP started, “but with me and Hiram protecting your ass, I don’t think she’ll be so successful.” She knew he was probably joking, but the sincerity in his voice made her smile.

“Well, thank you.” she squeezed his hand before reaching for the last of her coffee. He stopped at a red light and huffed. Alice was beginning to see the distress in his eyes.

“What?” he noticed her staring at him.

“Did something happen to you last night, FP?” she asked in concern. “You sounded a little uneasy on the phone this morning. Was it something Serpent related?”

The light turned green, allowing for him to go. He pulled over to a gas station on the side of the road and turned off the ignition. What was going on with him. He sat there in silence for a moment before turning to her.

“I think I’m going to lose my skins.” he confessed with his voice cracking. She grew panicked….what the hell did this mean? She tried to asked him, but he kept going. “They’re starting to catch on that I’m the mole. I don’t know how it could have gotten leaked to them….or maybe the Black Hood had something to do with it.” He slumped back in his seat and stared out the windshield. “Snakes don’t shed their skin so easily. That’s what he wrote when he sent that fucking snake to me.” She feared for him.

“What are they going to do to you?” her voice went deep. He stayed quiet, not looking at her. His eyes looked dead. His face went pale.

“When a snake gets hurt, or betrayed, it finds a brutal way to make you suffer. I’ve watched what happens when a Serpent gets excommunicated…..some good people I knew…..it’s heart wrenching. Life ruining. Like some wedged a knife in you and left you to bleed out. Last time I remember seeing a Serpent get cut out was a guy named Mustang. He was a good man, loyal Serpent…..but he got
involved in the wrong business. Putting all of them in danger. When he had his skins removed…..he dealt with the guilt by medicating himself…..about a month later, I found him dead in some motel outside of town.” he paused for a moment, blinking back tears and taking heavy breaths. “Fucking OD’d on heroin. He was lying dead in a bathtub with the needle in his arm.” She sat there speechless. His hands gripped the steering wheel, his knuckles becoming white.

“Sometimes…..I get so scared that if the Serpents severed ties with me, if Keller lets me go without a rhyme or reason…..I’ll relapse. Drink myself to death because I can’t stop, and I won’t know how to. Despite all that hard work to stay sober…..” He started drumming his fingers to calm himself. He looked back over at her, and she saw his eyes getting red…..and wet.

“I don’t want you to get involved, too. I don’t think I could ever forgive myself if you had to bare watching me fall apart. Not on top of everything you’re going through.” He inhaled sharply and rested his forehead on the steering wheel.

She felt so helpless sitting there listening to his fears. She knew that he had been a member since high school, and that he was doing everything he could to keep the Serpents out of jail by his work with the PD. She had no idea that his life and Serpent status was on the line because of everything he’d done. There had to be something she could do…..

That’s when Alice took his hand and rotated his face towards her.

“I won’t. And I won’t let you fall apart on me. If something does happen between you and the Serpents…..you don’t have to submit yourself to swallowing up your misery on the Southside…..you could stay with me and Chic.”

“Alice….”

“Just listen to me.” she felt her voice cracking. “You deserve the same amount of happiness as I do. And if the Serpents try to take that from you just because you’re doing your damn job…..then screw them. You could move in to my guest bedroom. I could help you find a job. I’ll find a way to help you get back to your family.” She grabbed both of his hands, her heart beating out of her chest. She never allowed herself to get this close with any of her partners in the past, but FP needed her. Now more than ever, the same way she needed him “I won’t let you suffer through this alone, okay? I’m with you FP Jones, whatever happens.”

She felt her eyelids and her cheeks become heavy as she tried to hold back tears. A lone tear went down his face, but now he seemed much calmer, more emotional.

“Fuck, I don’t deserve you, Coop.” he choked out. “I already got this from the kids today, but it’s hitting a little harder now. Maybe because it’s you.” he started to laugh.

“Has it really been all that bad?” she asked him for his opinion. “You think working with Keller and the PD was just…..filled with a bunch of mistakes?” He sniffled before returning his focus to her.

“No…..” he admitted. He squeezed her hand, his eyes meeting hers. “They weren’t all mistakes.” His eyes were soft and his lips formed a lazy smile. Her gaze wandered from his eyes to his wet cheeks…..to his lips, staying there.

“Um…..since we’re here,” FP coughed and looked back out the windshield, remembering where they stopped, “you need a bathroom break or anything? More coffee? I’ll fill up on gas.” She blinked, then nodded. She let go of his hands then opened the car door.

“I could use some more coffee. And a restroom.”
The Sisters of Quiet Mercy was larger than what FP had imagined. The greystone buildings loomed over them, and the woodland area surrounding the place gave him dark fairytale vibes. The two saw some of the Sisters residents in their blue and red attire tending to the garden out front with older nuns standing over….freaking him out.

"I'll be damned," he commented to her, "this place makes that asylum from the second season of American Horror Story look like a fucking Barbie dreamhouse." He leaned up against his truck and waited for Alice to come out.

"What were you expecting? Professor X’s mansion with teenage mutants roaming around?" she shut her door and fixed the collar of her jacket.

"Okay, so going undercover is a little different then just going in regularly," he spoke in a low voice so the nuns and the residents couldn’t hear them, "you have to stick to the personality you you create, and you have to be careful about how you phrase your questions. If they catch you in a lie, the mission’s pretty much fucked."

"Anything else?" she looked up at him. Her hair looked softer and fluffier than normal. It stood out against her brown petticoat and blue scarf.

"Make it believable. Especially since we’re gonna be….husband and wife.” he paused for a moment. "Just for this.” he tried to clarify.

“I know.” she smiled. Out of both their vision, an older woman approached them. When FP and Alice turned to her, they both jumped.

"You must be the Mullways.” the woman spoke, her voice eerily familiar to the one who greeted them on the phone earlier in the week. “We were expecting you. My name is Sister Woodhouse. You can follow me.” They watched as the nun, Sister Woodhouse, headed towards the entrance of the main complex. They both hesitated before they followed her.

They walked down the corridors of the building, it was all way too ominous. The walls went up too high, with no windows whatsoever, and there was distant screaming from another part of the building. A young girl ran past them with some nurses chasing after all, scaring Alice. FP grabbed onto her hand and kept them moving forward to keep up with Sister Woodhouse.

"So you were looking to adopt from here?" the older woman turned her head to them. He swore that if she turned her head any further, she could practically give Regan from The Exorcist a run for her money.

"Yeah.” he responded, still holding Alice’s hand. “We figured since this was the only place like an orphanage near town.”

“Well, we’re always welcome to newcomers.” she gave him an evil smile. Part of him wanted to say “fuck it” and get him and Alice out of there. But they needed everything they could about Joseph Conway and that group that came to see him. Their goal was too important to bail out now.

They arrived at her office and they sat down in front of her desk. Along the back were older photographs going back to at least the 70s. He tried to get a good glance to find anyone that looked like Joseph.

“So what made you two decide to adopt?” she asked them. He turned to Alice, not sure what to say. She faced Sister Woodhouse and took over the conversation.
“Well…we just married recently. We both had trouble in our previous marriages, but when we found each other…we knew it was right. Only problem is….I’ve never been able to have children.” He started to form a lump in his throat when Alice fabricated their love story. “Believe me, my former husband and I have tried for many years….but nothing.” It almost sounded too real. Was she pulling from what happened with her and Hal after they had Chic? She began tearing up as she continued, “It was either miscarriage after miscarriage, or no pregnancy at all.” Alice turned back to FP and held onto his hand tighter. “But I’m lucky to have….Chandler. He wanted the same things I did. That’s what brought us here today.” she stopped and gave him a smile. He lifted her hand and kissed it, the emotion of her performance almost too real as well.

“How tragic.” Sister Woodhouse responded. “But luckily there are good people like you who want to rescue these poor children in here.”

“Good thing we found this place.” FP nodded. How the hell were they going to bring Joseph Conway into the conversation without blowing everything. He sat there for a moment, thinking of what words to string together, then redirected his attention at the nun. “Funny, because….we were recommended to come here by our neighbors….the Svensons.”

The old woman’s face went stern. “The Svensons?”

“We were telling them about our situation when we moved in next door to them.” Alice followed up. Damn, FP thought to himself, she was good at this undercover act. “This was the first place they mentioned…..considering this is where they picked up their son, Joseph.”

“The Svensons….ah, now I remember them.” Sister Woodhouse sat down at her desk and placed her forearms down in front of her. “Poor little Joseph, bless him….he was a troubled child. Dealt with so much pain. But the Svensons….you two remind me a lot of them. Wanting to do some good in this wicked, sinful world.” Her phrasing left him unsettled. He was surprised that she was even providing this information to them.

“Do you…..do you remember what Joseph was like, by chance?” FP tried to sound authentic. “The Svensons were just advising us about children in this program….saying that some deal with….personal troubles. Could you tell us what the kids are like? So we know what we’re looking into?”

“Whenever we have a child come into our premise, it is our forsaken duty to cure them and give them….the best treatment we can.” she talked slowly. “Joseph Conway was a very troubled child, from the best of my memory, but we did what we could to cleanse his soul before he went home with the Svensons.” She stopped, then stood up. She turned behind her and pulled down one of the photos from the wall, handing it to them. The photo read, “Sisters of Quiet Mercy, 1985”. There, right front and center of a group of children and nurses, standing in front of Sister Woodhouse herself, was Joseph.

“Poor boy kept mumbling on about this….Riverdale Reaper. How he couldn’t stop seeing his face.” she explained. “None of our remedies worked on him, though. What he needed was a proper family….someone to listen and to care for him. Granted, it was only a little after that photo was taken that the Svensons came to us and adopted him. And there was that group of townies that came in…..”

“Wait, what group?” Alice interrupted. “I don’t know if this is confidential information…..but, who came to see him?” Sister Woodhouse cocked her head to the side; she reminded FP of an older version of Nurse Ratched.

“What makes you ask that, Mrs. Mullway?”
“It was something the Svensons mentioned to us.” FP explained with rushed words. “They said that Joseph couldn’t stop talking about them. About how he got a wrong face.” She seemed to buy his words, because she nodded and returned her head to a normal position.

“That’s reasonable,” she smiled at them grimacely, “There were about five or six of them that came…all major family heads in Riverdale at the time. Lead by two men, a Mr. Lodge and the owner of the Register at the time, Thomas Cooper.” The name drop cause FP to quickly turn back to Alice. She was frozen in her seat, squeezing his hand with all her might. He turned back to Sister Woodhouse as she continued her story, “They raided the place like a gang of vigilantes, pestering little Joseph about what he saw that night. What they did to the the man who they thought was the Reaper broke out all over the news.”

“What exactly did they do?” Alice’s voice was monotone.

“Poor dears, you don’t know what happened? They buried him alive in Pickens Park. Dug up one heck of a grave and shoved him in there, casket and all. Some say it wasn’t him….but to this day we never know. I just hope God had mercy on that man when he died.” She glared back and forth between the pair, her eyes cat-like. Was she starting to catch onto their act? Or had she already suspected that they were bluffing from the moment they showed up?

“But enough about Joseph Conway.” she sounded calm, “Let’s get into why you’re here. Tell me, what kind of child are you looking for?”

The two were able to leave the Sisters of Quiet Mercy after Sister Woodhouse gave them an unofficial tour and had them meet some of the “cured” children. Alice felt so awful for all of those children…..she started to question what the hell those nuns were doing in there, and what immoral practices they were up to. When she and FP left, they stopped by a small diner on the road back to Riverdale. She sat there stunned in silence long after they ordered their food and beverages, her mind racing. She still couldn’t get over the fact that Hiram and Hal’s father were part of the brigade that killed a potentially innocent man.

“What are you thinking about, Coop?” FP regained her attention. She took a sip of her water and swallowed.

“If Joseph did lie to them about who he saw that night, does this mean the Black Hood could go after him? Lying could be considered a sin in the Black Hood’s eyes.”

“Maybe.” he sighed. “But wouldn’t have the Black Hood sent you a poem by now that could tie in to Joseph?” he paused for a moment. He glanced around the diner then returned his gaze. “It’s kind of unsettling that we haven’t heard anything in a long time. Don’t you agree?” She let out a long, shaky breath, then buried her face into her hands.

“I don’t know anymore.” she muttered, her voice sounding distressed. “It would just be comforting to know that this Riverdale Reaper case isn’t leading us into a fucking dead end.”

“It’s alright, breathe. Shhhh…..” he stroked her forearms, calming her down. “When we get back into town, why don’t we just take the rest of the day off and come back to it in the morning? Maybe I can hang out with Chic while you go be with Hiram.” She looked up at him and nodded.

“That might be good actually…..maybe Hiram knows something about his father’s involvement with the Reaper. If not….then, it won’t be that big of a deal. I hope.” She leaned back up and pulled her phone out of her pocket.
To Hiram - Should be back in town soon. How about we follow up with those dinner plans? ;)

She waited a couple of seconds. No response. She waited a couple more minutes. No response. Then he phone buzzed.

From Hiram - Sounds good, my brave little Nancy Drew. See you soon.

She set her phone down on the table and smiled.

“What?” FP nudged her arm. “Already making plans for round two?”

“Shut up, FP,” she looked away from him, blushing.

After their lunch, the two hopped back into FP’s truck and headed back into town. They didn’t talk much, mostly because they were both slightly in a food coma and FP was trying to focus on not crashing into the side of the road. When they arrived in downtown Riverdale, he pulled over to a spot in the street, a little bit away from Pembrooke. She made sure to text Chic and let him know of her whereabouts, then she pulled up her messages with Hiram.

To Hiram - Outside Pembrooke now. I’m ready when you are, handsome.

The two walked over to the complex building as the cold air hit their faces. Alice observed the scene around her. Something was off.

“You okay?” FP tapped her on the arm.

“I’m fine.” she nodded, but she still felt uneasy. The area was unusually quiet. They walked up the steps towards the doors. The closer they got, the more prominent a welp of pain could be heard.

“What the hell?” FP muttered as he pushed open the doors. They walked in to find one of Hiram’s men on the floor in a fetal position clutching his stomach. There was a puddle of blood next to him.

“Andre?” Alice rushed over to the man, Andre, as he cried out in pain. “Oh my god, what happened?”

“He was here….” Andre gritted through his teeth. “The Black Hood.” Her heart stopped. The Black Hood was in Pembrooke?

“He wanted me to give this to you…” Andre pulled something out of his coat and handed it to her. A letter. FP rushed over next to her and began to help Andre stop the bleeding. Alice stood up and unfolded the letter. She hung her mouth open, not able to gasp for air.

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

“Alice? What does it say?” FP called out from behind her, but she couldn’t turn to face him. This was the Black Hood alright…..but did that mean…..

Her feet led the way as she bolted to the stairs and rushed up to Hiram’s floor. She pushed open the door to the hallway and sprinted for his apartment.
“HIRAM!” she screamed as she ran for her life. His door was slightly opened. She forced herself to push the door all the way open. She felt dizzy. She felt petrified.

The Lodge’s residence was ransacked. The chairs by the dinner table were scattered and broken all over the floor, pillows were ripped open over by the couch, and the blood…..whose blood was it…..and where was Hiram? What happened to him?

“HIRAM!” she called out again, her voice wavering in despair. She stumbled over to his bedroom, following the trail of smeared blood, and prayed that his dead body wasn’t flayed across his bed like what happened to Hal. She entered the bedroom and found no dead bodies. No body parts even. But there was that blood that trailed from the entrance of the bedroom to the closet and the bathroom….did Hiram put up a fight against the Black Hood and try to hide? Was he dead? She ran for the closet, nothing. She ran into the bathroom, still nothing. What did the Black Hood do to Hiram?

Alice fell to her knees next to the bed. She threw the letter to the ground and slammed the floor with her fists. “NO! DAMMIT!” she wailed and let out a scream. She felt lost, helpless…..She finally had someone who made her happy and he was ripped away from her. The Black Hood took Hiram away and who knew what tortures the Black Hood could ensue. She continued to scream until her lungs gave out. She crawled over to the edge of the bed and rested her back against it, uncontrollably sobbing. Her nails dug straight into her palms, something she hadn’t thought about doing in a while. Why did it have to be him?

She heard the thud of footsteps coming towards her, but she didn’t open her eyes. If it was the Black Hood coming to finish his job, let him. She didn’t care anymore.

“Alice?” FP held her face in his hands. She opened her eyes, more tears flowing out of her. FP tried to read her face to see what happened, but he must have figured it out.

“He took Hiram.” she choked out, blubbering. She sat up straight and clung to him. She wailed against his shoulder as he wrapped his arms around her, holding on for dear life.

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Keller and the others showed up when FP called for backup and 911 after he aided Andre. When the crew finished examining the disastrous scene in Pembrooke, Keller brought the, back to the station for questioning while the ambulance brought Andre to the hospital. Alice remained motionless on the ride back. FP felt so helpless. He felt awful for her. First Hal, then Chic, now Hiram. What did Alice do to spark the Black Hood into behaving so ruthless and cruel in his ways against her?

The two were brought into separate rooms, no matter how hard FP tried to convince Keller to let them be in the same room. He didn’t want the others to pick at her; she already has enough as it was. When he was asked about his whereabouts, he explained that the two had decided to take a trip out of town just to get “a fresh change of scenery” then had decided to pay a visit to Hiram to thank him for the invitation to SoDale. He worried that his story wouldn’t match to hers, but at that point, he didn’t care. He wanted to get back to her. He wanted to hold her. He…..he didn’t know what he wanted exactly, but he knew he just wanted to keep her safe.

After a few minutes, they let him go. FP immediately rushed out of the interrogation room and waited for the other guards to let Alice out of hers. A couple of minutes passed before she walks out, wiping away tears. She looked up at him, then without hesitation, the two embraced.

“What did you tell them?” she whispered in his ear.
“Just told them we were taking a road trip for fresh air. You?”

“Something like that….” he felt a tear on his cheek as she answered. They both pulled back slightly to look at each other. She reached for his hand, then the two headed back out to the main area of the station, only to stop in their tracks. They found Keller at their desk space, peering over the Howard file.

“Figured you two couldn’t get enough of this case.” Keller closed the file and turned to them. “Tell me…..did you get everything that you were looking for?”

“We think the Riverdale Reaper is tied to the Black Hood.” Alice justified. “He may be going after the sole survivor, Joseph Svenson—”

“Oh I know.” Keller pushed himself away from the desk and walked over to them. “Got a call from the Sisters of Quiet Mercy. Sister Woodhouse said that she felt some of my cops were going undercover to ask her about the Reaper. Well, I don’t really know of any other people doing that…..besides you two.”

“Tom,” FP started, “we can explain—”

“I don’t want to hear about this anymore!” Keller yelled, gesturing for him to stop talking. “Damnit, this is what I was worried about.” his voice escalated as he started pointing his finger at them. “You two spiralling down a rabbit hole you wouldn’t get yourselves out of, some permanent limbo! Do you have any idea what this case did to Howard?”

“We’re well aware of what happened, Tom.” FP interjected, letting go of Alice’s hand. He stepped in closer to Keller and stared him down “But we’re not him! We actually have a good lead, one that Howard couldn’t even get to—”

“THAT’S ENOUGH, FP!” Keller barked at him, getting closer to him. “It doesn’t matter what happened to the Riverdale Reaper or the fate of the Conways, or Joseph! What’s done is done!”

“That doesn’t give you a fucking right to chastise him over it!” Alice yelled. She stepped in between the men.

“Alice…..” FP tried to stop her, but she held an arm to his torso, holding him back.

“I’m the one who decided to look into this.” she explained. “I’m the one who went to the house and found that file.” Her voice was slowing cracking as she stood up to Keller. “Punish me all you want! Strip me of my title. Take away my badge! I don’t care.” she inhaled sharply. “But don’t you dare blame him for this! Don’t blame FP! He’s a good person…..he’s a good partner…..” she paused, struggling to speak while crying. She stood up straight and gave Keller a death glare.

“He’s the best partner I’ve ever had.”

The comment stunned both him and Keller. FP wanted to reach out for her and…..well, he wasn’t sure. But before he could do anything, Keller sighed and threw his hands down.

“Normally, this would be the part where I strip you both of your badges and tell you to get the hell out of my sight…..but there’s still the Black Hood running around. And who knows where the hell he’s going or what he’ll do next.” he paused, letting out an angry breath. “So you better do something to stop him. And when it’s all over…..then we’ll talk.” He said nothing more. He turned his back to them and grabbed Howard’s file, then he moved past them, heading back towards his office.
FP watched his boss leave the room, then he turned back to Alice. She gave him a mournful look with tears in her eyes.

“I meant it, FP.” she said quietly. “You’re the only partner I’ve gotten close to, and….the only one who’s helped me with……everything. You are my best friend.” She looked down at her feet and let out silent tears. He came closer to her and held her face again. Their eyes met, her face was wet and hot in his hands. But her gaze was soft. Loving.

He rested his forehead against hers, their breathing becoming synced up. She placed her hands on his forearms, stroking her thumb along his wrist. They stayed like that for a while.

Chic pulled up to Pop’s in his mom’s convertible about a half hour after FP called him to get his mom. He shivered as he stepped out of the car and walked up to the diner. The door chimed as he entered, the warmth of the diner coming to him. Chic glanced around the diner for any signs of his mom and her partner. Then, he found FP and Alice in a booth by the back of the diner huddled into one another. Her head rested against his shoulder and her arm was around his stomach as he stroked her back. She looked completely distraught, and he looked exhausted.

“Mom?” Chic rushed over to the pair. “What happened? Are you okay?” Alice sat up straight gave him a sad expression. She didn’t have to explain what happened, for he starting to put the pieces together.

“Did something happen between you and Mr. Lodge?”

“Not quite, boy.” FP responded. “More between Hiram and the Black Hood.” Chic stood there as FP climbed out of the booth with Alice going after him. She held onto FP’s hand as she turned back to Chic.

“He’s not dead.” his mom spoke. She sounded hoarse. Her eyes were all red and puffy. “But it’s only a matter of time.”

“I’m sorry, mom.” Chic replied, his heart breaking for her. “I know you cared about him.” He watched as she blinked back tears. She looked up at FP and squeezed his hand one last time before letting it go. She walked over to Chic and hugged him. He returned her touch and held onto his mom. He glanced up at FP in worry, waiting for some direction.

“You two better get home.” FP spoke. “It’s gonna be a long week for all of us.” Chic nodded and led his mom out of the diner. He helped Alice into the car and he took the driver’s seat, starting up the convertible’s ignition.

The car ride back to Elm Street was brutally silent. Chic didn’t know if he could bare watching his mom fall apart again, the way she did with his father. Out of all the people and their families the Black Hood could have targeted, why did he pick them? Why did he pick Alice?

When her son made the turn onto Elm Street, Alice couldn’t help but notice how unusually dark their street was, especially this late at night. There would have been street lamps on, or something. Chic pulled into the driveway and turned off the car. He turned to her and noticed the concern in her face.

“What’s wrong?” Chic asked.

“I don’t know.” she shook her head. The two got out of the car and examined the outside of their
home. They both turned out to the street to see if their neighbors were picking up on the strangeness of the situation. Was there a blackout on Elm Street, she wondered. But this was more than just a random blackout. Something wasn’t right.

“Mom…” Chic grabbed onto her arm. She glanced over at Chic, then she turned to where she was looking. A few houses away, coming into the scene wielding a rifle, was no one other than the Black Hood.

“MOM.” Chic began backing away. Alice stood there, paralyzed. The Black Hood cocked the rifle and aimed it at the Coopers.

“CHIC, RUN!” Alice pushed Chic towards their house. A shot rang out in the air as the two made a sprint for the front door. Chic fumbled with the keys for a bit before he was able to twist the door handle and push the door open. The two hurried inside and slammed the door shut as another shot rang out. Alice locked and deadbolted the door and slowly backed away. What the hell was she going to do? She couldn’t trust Keller to come help her? Was FP nearby? What are you going to do, Alice?

“Grab the fire poker.” she commanded her son. Chic ran towards their fireplace and picked up the metal rod. She threw off her coat and scarf and let them fall to her feet, kicking them aside. He brought it over to her as she dug through her purse. She pulled out her pistol and held it out to him.

“You remember how to use this thing?” she spoke to him calmly. He grabbed hold of it and nodded. “Good, now get behind me.” The two moved behind the pillars separating the entryway of the house and the living room. They waited there, Alice gripping the metal tighter in her hands. They heard the Black Hood approaching the house, his footsteps sounding like thunder.

“What do we do?” Chic muttered. She needed to think of a strategy, and fast. Then, an idea came to her.

“When I get to him, you go out the back door and go next door. To Mr. Andrews. Then you call FP and tell him to get his ass over here.”

“What, MOM NO!” Chic stepped out from behind her. Outside the house, the Black Hood body slammed into the door. The two jumped at the noise, but the door was still bolted shut.

“You’re taking him on by yourself?” Chic spoke over the slamming.

“I almost lost you to this bastard once, I’m not risking it again!” Alice kept her focus on the door, the rage flowing through her. “So do as I say and get yourself somewhere safe!” She could her Chic starting to cry.

“Mom, why are you doing this?” Alice whipped her head towards him.

“It’s because I love you, Chic!” she yelled. They both went silent, the slamming become louder. The deadbolt was starting to lose tact with the door.

“On my cue.” she stroked his face then returned to her place behind the pillar, Chic shaking behind her. Everything went silent.

The door flew open with a violent thrash. The Black Hood stormed into the house and raised his rifle, not aware of where Alice and Chic were hiding. She waited a moment, then she struck. She swung the fire poker at his head and had him stumbling. She aimed her next blow at the back of his neck, causing him to groan in pain and drop his rifle. Alice turned back up to Chic, waiting for him to make his great escape. He stood there in fear.
“GO!” she yelled, and Chic made a run for the back door. As her son left the house, the Black Hood grabbed his rifle and got back up to his feet. His eyes were angry…..pissed. She backed away to give herself space from him. He aimed the rifle at her, but she smacked the rifle out of his hand with the rod. The rifle fell to the floor in a thud, and she kicked it away. She twisted the rod in her hand, her confidence growing.

“Come at me, you son of a bitch.” she growled at him. “What else do I have to lose?” The Black Hood rolled his shoulders forward and lunged at her, swinging a fist. She dodged the blow with ease. While he was hunched over, Alice gave him a swift kick in the side of his ribcage, knocking him to the ground. She re-positioned her hold on the fire poker, ready to throw it down on him like a spear. He leaned up and tossed her arm to the side, knocking the rod out of her hand. She tried to run for the rod, but the Black Hood ran into her and knocked her into the corner of the table. She yelped in pain as he curled his fingers into her hair. He yanked her head back, ready to smash it into the table, but she stomped violently on his foot and sent an elbow into his abdomen. He let go of his hold on her, stumbling back slightly. Alice remembered his rifle on the ground and ran for it. She held the gun in her hands, checking for any ammunition. The Black Hood tried to stand up all the way but the chair he held onto fell underneath him, causing him to fall down. She cocked the rifle and pointed it at him.

“What’s wrong? Karma finally biting you in the ass?” she loomed over him. “You deserve it…..after what you did to Hal. What do tried to do to my son. And now what you’re doing with Hiram. Whatever game you have me playing…..it’s over.” He tried to move, but she wouldn’t let him. “No more secrets. No more lies.” her voice escalated. “TAKE OFF THE FUCKING MASK. NOW!”

The Black Hood didn’t respond. Instead, he reached for the fire poker and jabbed her with it straight into her ribcage. Alice groaned in pain, her stomach rounding, but she still had a firm grip on the rifle. He regained his balance and now wielded the rod in his hands. He swung it up in the air and prepared to slam it down on her. She was starting to get weak, but she still had enough strength to deflect his movement by blocking the rod with the rifle. She held onto each end of the rifle with both hands, lunging back to support her stance. His strength was overpowering her, the metal rod coming down further. As a last minute resort, Alice moved her back leg up and kneed the Black Hood in the groin. The pain was enough for him to lose hold of the rod, letting it fall to the ground. She swung the back end of the rifle at his head and sent him down.

With the Black Hood on the ground, Alice made a headstart for the staircase, limping all the way up. She had to hold her hand against the wall to keep herself from folding over from the pain on the side of her stomach. She turned her head behind her, fearing that the Black Hood was following her up, but there was no sign of him. She hustled over to her bedroom and slammed the door shut. She rested the rifle on her dresser then headed for her closet. Hal had bought a gun at one point when they were living in Boston, fearing of someone breaking into their small apartment. She remembered him still having it when they moved to Riverdale. Did he still own one? Would she be able to find any ammo? Maybe under the bed? She limped over to the bed and knelt down, the pain taking over her body. Alice winced as she pattered all over the floor. She felt a small cardboard box that rattled. Could she be in luck? She pulled out the small box and sighed in relief. There was enough ammunition to fend herself from her intruder. But what about Chic? Oh god…..what if he went after Chic again? Or Fred Andrews?

A rattle outside her bedroom window startled her. She could hear something shaking from the outside. Was the Black Hood climbing up to her window? Did she lock her window? Too late to go run and lock it now. Alice limped back over to her dresser and grabbed the rifle. She placed fresh new ammo inside then backed herself against the wall near her closet door. She cocked the rifle back
and waited, the noise becoming louder and louder the closer whoever it was out there became. Maybe it was Chic getting back into the house, but she couldn’t risk her chances. A dark figure appeared out her window, pushing the curtains to the side. Alice lifted the rifle and began to aim.

“Woah, hey! It’s just me!” FP held up his hands in front of him. She lowered the rifle slowly, taking in his features despite the darkness. It was him. Alice let out a cry of relief and stumbled over to FP. The two embraced, the cold air blowing in through the open window.

“I got worried about you, so I decided to come over and I see if I could spend the night here with you.” he admitted as he pulled away to look down at her. “But when I was pulling into Elm Street, Chic called and said something was happening.”

“He’s in the house, FP. The Black Hood is here.” Another wave of pain hit her and she winced. He held her steady in his arms to keep her from falling over.

“Hey, I got you. It’s okay.” he spoke calmly. The two stared at each other in the darkness, FP’s brown eyes more prominent. He had only been in for a few seconds, but she was already starting to feel…..

Something crashed downstairs. FP and Alice both turned to the door in panic.

“Please tell me you have that damn thing loaded.” he hurried around her and grabbed for a bedside lamp. She walked over to the door, waiting for the right moment to go. There was no other noise coming from downstairs. FP nodded, giving her the cue. She opened the door and let it glide away from her. She turned back to FP and tilted her head outward. The two left her bedroom, moving down the hallway as slow as they could go. FP gripped onto the lamp behind her as she began making her way down the stairs. She raised the rifle in case the Black Hood appeared. But nothing. She stopped at the bottom stair, absorbing the scene around her.

The Black Hood didn’t ransack her living room or her kitchen, but where did that crash come from. She noticed the unusual light coming from one of the windows over her couch. There was shattered glass on that one section of the couch glowing in the moonlight. On the floor in front of the couch was a book of some kind.

“Alice….” FP voiced in concern. She held a hand up to him and moved forward towards the book. She picked it up and glared down at it. The cover was black with nothing written on it. She turned it over to examine every angle, then she saw the red ribbon in the middle of the book. Alice set the rifle down and opened the book, flipping through the pages. They were all filled with writing……poetry. All poems that she knew of……some the Black Hood used in his game. She skipped to the page where the ribbon was held and looked down at the poem.

I love you as one loves certain obscure things, 
secretly, between the shadow and the soul.

What the hell did this mean? He went after her and Chic, but who would he be going after next? Where was the connection? What did any of it mean? Why her?

Why her…..

Her spine straightened. Her eyes widened. Her body was on the verge of going numb. The Black Hood’s killings and attacks weren’t random. Every person the Black Hood went after so far were all connected……not by a common personality trait, or a pattern of “sinful behaviors”, but by a person. Someone they all knew.
“Alice? What is it?” FP approached her. She turned to him, tears forming in her eyes, the book shaking in her hands.

“I figured out his pattern.” she answered in a low, broken voice. “He’s doing it for me.”

End of Chapter Ten
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Chapter End Notes

Whew....that was a fight scene, wasn't it? What's going to happen to FP and Alice? Will they find out who the Black Hood is? Will Hiram be alive?

Hmmmmm.....
Chapter Eleven - The Hanging Tree

HAPPY CHRISTMAS EVE MY LOVELIES!

Consider this a little Christmas present to all of you ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Eleven - The Hanging Tree

He started to tend to Alice’s bruise in Fred Andrews’s living room. After the fiasco at the Cooper household, they reunited with Chic, alive and well, and Fred invited them in. FP considered calling Keller or at least someone…..but considering Tom was pissed off at the both of them, it was obvious at this point that the pair were on their own.

“Usually I’m the one who has to get patched up.” he admitted to her as he carefully dabbed the ointment onto the side of her stomach. Alice kept the one area of her shirt balled up in her fist. “Only rarely is it that I get to play nurse for someone.”

“By someone, you mean one of your kid Serpents?” Alice raised a brow at him.

“Not all the time….Toni, more often than not, is the one that has to patch them up.” he chuckled. Behind him, Fred’s boy, Archie, approached the pair holding an ice pack.

“This should work.” Archie handed the pack to FP.

“Thank you, Archie.” he nodded and returned to Alice’s bruise. The young red-haired boy looked over at Alice, his face getting soft.

“I’m sorry about what happened to you and Chic.” he sounded remorse. “Just when I thought my dad and I had it bad when this Black Hood thing began.”

“We won’t let him near you or your father again, Archie.” Alice responded. Fred Andrews emerged from the kitchen and stood next to his son.

“You two holding up okay?” he looked back and forth between the pair on the couch.

“We’re better now. Thank you watching over my son, Fred.”

“I figured I owed you, Alice…..since you were able to help my own.” he clapped Archie on the back. FP took the ice pack and handed it to Alice.

“You might want to lay down and keep this on. It should help reduce the swelling.” He helped her get comfortable on the couch. She reached up and stroked his cheek.

“Thanks for the patch-up work, Nurse FP.” she teased. He rolled his eyes and stuck his tongue out at her. It was hard for her to laugh without feeling the pain in her stomach.

“You guys can stay here for the night.” Fred addressed them. “It might be safer if we were all
together….just in case the Black Hood came back. I think I have an air mattress somewhere in the garage, and maybe one or two sleeping bags.”

“Fred….” FP stood up and tried to speak but Fred waved him off.

“Please….I don’t mind having the company. Arch, can you bring FP with you go get the sleeping bags and air mattress?”

“On it, dad.” Archie smiled at his father, then he gestured for FP to follow him. He kept up with the younger boy and passed by Fred, clapping him on the back. He felt bad for the boy…..he almost watched his father die in front of him, and now the Black Hood had returned from his hiatus…..and who knew if the Black Hood would try to go after any of his initial victims again.

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Alice watched FP go off with Archie into the Andrews’s basement. Chic was somewhere upstairs trying to make sense of the book of poetry; she thought he said something about Joaquin coming over to stay with them. When it was her and Fred alone in the living room, she slowly sat up, compressing the ice pack into her body.

“I’m sorry you have to go through all this, Alice.” Fred spoke, leaning against the doorway. “When this all started….I thought it was just a random robber wanting to stir up trouble in Pop’s……but it’s getting worse.”

“I don’t know how you’ve managed to move forward, Fred.” she responded. “Is your wound still bad?”

“Not as much.” he gestured down to his ribcage, where he was shot merely a month ago. “But the doctors still have me on medication….and I haven’t even thought about how I’m gonna afford it. And poor Archie….” He stopped speaking, staring down at his feet. He looked back up at her and gave her a small smile.

She always liked the Andrews family……they were good people. They were the first family on Elm Street who greeted her, Hal, and Chic with open arms when they moved in from Boston. Archie was Chic’s first real friend in Riverdale. She highly respected and appreciated the company from Fred and his wife Mary…….Fred and his wife Mary……

“Just one step at a time. Let me know if you need anything else.” Fred was about to head up the stairs when Alice called out to him.

“Fred…..can I ask you something? I don’t know if it’s too personal for you…..”

“Sure.” he didn’t seem to mind. She took a deep breath before continuing.

“Do you know if Mary is still doing her practice in Chicago? With family law?”. She knew that Fred and Mary were going through a separation, the same way she and Hal did. But they seemed to be on decent terms with one another, at least that was what Fred admitted when Alice confronted him for advice that summer. But Mary was a lawyer…..maybe she could FP…..

“No doubt about it. Why? You and FP in some legal trouble or something?”

“Not me….FP. He’s not in trouble, but……Do you think Mary could help him get back to his children? He hasn’t seen his son and daughter in almost 7 years.” she started to ramble, “And believe me, Fred…..I’ve looked everywhere for a decent lawyer and I haven’t found shit.”
“I get it.” he smiled. “How about this? I’ll call her tomorrow morning and get you two contacted so we can do something.” Alice sighed in relief.

“Thank you, Fred.”

“No worries. I don’t mind helping out the only decent person in this neighborhood.” he admitted, causing her to giggle. She and Fred tended to stick together during big Elm Street get-togethers only because the others in the neighborhood were batshit insane.

“You really care about FP, don’t you?” he asked her, catching her off guard. She raised a brow at him. “I mean…...Alice. This is the first person from work I’ve actually seen you care this much about. And be around more just from what I’ve witnessed in these past few minutes. You two actually kind of work well together.”

“Yeah. He’s a good guy. I’m lucky he’s around.” she confessed, starting to blush. It still felt weird admitting the truth about her emotions towards FP, considering the way she confessed it to Keller in the station the day before. But once the words fell from her lips…..it felt right. She didn’t know how or why, but it was comforting. It was closure. He was her calm in this hell hole of a storm.

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Joaquin laid on his stomach next to Chic on the air mattress, flipping through the pages of the Black Hood’s poetry book. Chic peered over his shoulder and wrapped the blanket over the two of them tighter.

“I’m not gonna lie, Mrs. C,” Joaquin looked up from the book and met Alice’s eyes, “but the poetry this freak’s been using is kind of unsettling. He’s jumping back and forth between Edgar Allan Poe, Pablo Neruda, and Emily Dickinson. Have you read half of these?”

“I know them all, Joaquin.” Alice sat up straight on the couch with FP next to her. “He’s using stuff that I know by heart to pull my strings.”

“Jesus, mom. It’s like this guy is obsessed with you.” Chic commented.

“That’s the issue.” FP added in, squeezing her hand. “She’s what ties all these victims together. Your dad, Penelope Blossom, the Sugarman, Hiram….”


“Maybe because Fred is our neighbor.” she started theorizing out loud, “Then he went after Grundy….knowing at that point that I’d be looking into what happened with Fred. Grundy was a way to pull me into the case. To start playing his game.”

“How does that explain the snake in your trailer?” Joaquin turned to FP. “And what about the Reaper case? What are you guys gonna do about Joseph Conway? He could be next.”

“If he is the Black Hood’s next target, we’ll need to keep an eye on him.” Alice spoke up. “It could lead us to finding who the Black Hood is. And from there, we can find Hiram.” FP shifted on the couch to face her. He wanted to find the Black Hood just as much as she did, but he didn’t know if he could bare seeing her get attacked by that psycho again….first at the station with the Sugarman, now at her house.

“Then you and I go together.” he spoke to her calmly. “There’s no way in hell I’m risking leaving you alone with the Black Hood.” His mind kept flashing back to the night of the Sugarman’s death. When he ran to Thornhill to save Cheryl. He was too caught up in saving the young Blossom girl
that he only brushed aside the Black Hood’s wild, light blue eyes. He was slowly starting to remember how the Black Hood’s eyes looked in the blazing fire. He was pissed. Vengeful.

“I would never forgive myself if he came to kill me dawning your blood on his face and that crazy look in his eyes.....”

She blinked at his confession, then looked up at him, her eyes widenng.

“FP….you saw the Black Hood’s eyes too?”

“You talked about them…..I didn’t remember what they were like until now.”

“Light blue?”

“Yeah……and crazy.” His head was swirling. Where had he seen those eyes before? Who did he know that could be obsessed with Alice and his work, and knew about his Serpent identity?

He pushed some hair out of her face then turned back to the younger boys. “We should get some sleep. I’ll watch the door.” He let go of her hand and rose up from the couch. Chic tossed his part of the blanket off him and stood up.

“I can help, Mr. Jones. I don’t mind.”

“Go to bed, boy. You and your mom have been through too much.” The younger Cooper went to open his mouth then closed it, nodding his head. He returned to his spot on the air mattress next to Joaquin and curled up into the younger Serpent. FP glanced back over at Alice, giving her a sympathetic look.

“That goes for you too, Coop.” his voice was soft, “I’ll watch guard.”

“Alright.” she responded and repositioned herself on the couch. FP turned away from their small group and headed out into the hallway. He sat down in a chair by the steps facing the front door. He picked up the baseball bat leaning against the staircase and gripped it. The Black Hood had one hell of a price to pay for what he did to them all.

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“Mom……mom wake up!” Alice stirred away to find her son shaking her shoulders. He had a bright smile on his face that lit up in the living room.

“Chic? What’s going on?” she sat up, the pain in her stomach almost non existent. He helped her off the couch.

“It’s Christmas! Everyone’s waiting for us at home! Come on!” Not losing his smile, he led her out of the Andrews’s house and out onto their street. Fresh snow fell from the sky, building onto what was starting to melt. He led her up their walkway, where there red door was open. Christmas music played from inside the house and the lights glowed. They walked into their home to find the younger Serpents, Kevin, and Cheryl all crowded on their couch around the Christmas tree. FP greeted them at the entrance and beamed.

“There you are!” he looked so happy to see her. “We didn’t want to start the festivities without you!” The kids all cheered behind them. FP grabbed Chic and led him over to the others. She looked around her home - no signs of the Black Hood anywhere, no troubles with her marriage, it was all so peaceful.
“Feliz Navidad, my brave little detective.” a voice rang from behind her. She turned to find Hiram coming down her staircase. Her eyes started to water - he was alive, he was okay.

“Hiram!” she ran over to him and hugged him. He laughed as he returned her embrace, pulling away the tiniest bit to hold her face in his hands. His lips felt warm against hers; they still had the champagne taste to them from the night of SoDale. She missed him.

He smiled down at her, holding her hand, and went to join the group. Alice turned to the tree…..there was someone dressed in a Santa suit hunched over the presents.

“FP?” she called out to the stranger. “Where the hell did you get that suit?” The stranger in the Santa suit didn’t respond. There was something off about all of this. There was no more chatter between everyone in the house - only the Christmas music was playing at an eerie tone. The Santa turned around, wielding a knife in his hand and dawning a black ski mask, the suit was covered in blood and dirt.

Alice stumbled back, petrified. The Black Hood stepped away from the tree, towards her one step at a time. She went to warn the others, to get them out of the house, but no avail - the younger Serpents plus Cheryl and Kevin were all on the floor with either their throats slit or brutally stabbed. Next to Joaquin’s corpse was the body of Chic. She screamed, running over to her son, cradling him in her arms. How did he get into the house? Where was Hiram? Where was FP? She looked down next to her to find FP bleeding out. Cut up and stabbed the same way Hal was. She stood up, helpless and alone, and heard a groan. In front of her, the Black Hood held Hiram in front of him, a knife to his throat.

“No, please no!” she yelled, but it was too late. The Black Hood sliced Hiram’s throat and let him fall to his death. Tears streamed down her face as she stood there in front of her attacker. No, she couldn’t let him win. She knelt down and searched FP’s corpse, hoping he would have something. She found a gun tucked into his Serpent jacket and yanked at it. She stood back up and raised the gun at the Black Hood. He limped over to her, and she fired the gun. Bullets hit him left and right, but there was no bringing him down. She kept coming at her faster. She kept firing until she ran out of bullets, the trigger clicking. Running out of options, she fixed her hold of the gun to knock him in the head. But it was too late. The Black Hood ran straight into her, plunging his knife into where he jabbed her with the fire poker.

Alice woke up, groaning from the pain. She panted and placed a hand over her wound. She heard footsteps rushing over to her, kneeling down to meet her gaze.

“Hey, hey, hey. You’re alright.” FP’s voice calmed her down, stroking her cheek. He placed his hand on her wound, the heat radiating from his touch.

“Just had a bad dream, that’s all.” she shook her head, trying not to focus on the pulsing pain. She glanced around the Andrews’s living room (it was only lit by one lamp in the corner) then glanced down at her son. Chic was still alive, and he was okay. He and Joaquin were glued to each other in their slumber. She sighed in relief, then looked back up at FP. “What time is it?” her voice sounded hoarse.

“Probably like two in the morning.” he took a brief glance out the window.

“FP. You haven’t gotten any sleep yet?” She sat up straight with FP helping her up.

“Too anxious.” he responded in a sleepy tone. She could see the exhaustion in his eyes.

“Sit down.” she pulled him onto the couch. “Can you try to get at least a little bit of sleep?” He rolled
his eyes and sighed, then he leaned back into the couch, resting his head on her shoulder. She couldn’t stop thinking about the dream, all the dead bodies of the people she was supposed to protect. All the people who were dead because of her. What if Svenson was next? What was the Black Hood planning?

“Joaquin’s right.” she whispered so she would wake the boys up. “If the Black Hood was going to go after him…..wouldn’t he have sent us a poem by now? Or something? I don’t know if the book of poetry is going to lead us anywhere?” He shifted his head on her shoulder and looked up at her.

“Why don’t we…..go see him in the morning?” he threw out the idea. “It doesn’t have to be anything major….just check up on him before he leaves for the school.”

“Okay.” she muttered, her eyelids becoming heavy. He shifted next to her to give her more room before returning back to his position. A few moments passed of silence.

“FP?” she whispered.

“Yeah?” he breathed against her.

“Will the nightmares stop? When this is all over?” her voice cracked. “Will we be able to rest easy?”

“I hope so.” he responded a moment later, “I sure do fucking hope so.” He looked up at her, and wrapped his arm around her stomach, pulling himself into her. She wrapped one arm around his hand, her fingers clasping onto the back of his neck, and stroked his back with her other hand. She leaned back into the couch, bringing FP down with her. She tilted her head into his, taking long breaths, and shut her eyes. The weight of FP against her helped ease the pain from her bruise.

The two fell asleep merely minutes later.

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They arrived at Joseph Svenson’s run-down house the next morning. The pair left the Andrews home after Chic took off for school with Joaquin. FP was thankful that he had some decent sleep, and it was comforting that the Black Hood didn’t come to attack them in the middle of the long night. He feared that he may have crushed Alice into the couch as they slept, or that he made her injury worse, but she didn’t seem to care. He didn’t expect her to be soft and warm as he slept in her arms. He didn’t expect Alice to be caring so much about them at all, even from the day they met. But that was all before a psychotic serial killer came into Riverdale.

He pulled up against the curb outside Svenson’s house, taking time to examine their surroundings.

“It almost looks identical to Fox Lane.” Alice commented next to him. “Guess he didn’t want to forget what happened to him after all. It’s a shame.” she went quiet. He turned to her and placed a hand on her shoulder, gently squeezing it. The two exited his truck and headed up the small walk way.

“What are the odds we get him to talk?” he asked her.

“Don’t know if I can guarantee anything anymore.”

“If this doesn’t work, we’ll need to come with a back up plan. As long as it doesn’t involve Keller…..or the Serpents.”

“Couldn’t have said it better myself.” she smiled as they approached his door. He stepped closer and held a hand up, hesitating. Alice nodded her head, giving him the cue to go. He banged on the door.
“Mr. Svenson?” he called out. No response. He waited for a few moments, then went again. “Joseph?” Still nothing.

“Let me try.” Alice joined his side and banged on the door. “Joseph, can you let us in? We need to talk!” They both waited, the uncomfortable silence of the area settling in.

“He didn’t leave for the school already, did he?” she scanned the outside of the house. FP looked out at the driveway and picked up on Joseph’s untouched car.

“No, his car’s still here.” Growing frustrated, he banged on the door one last time. “JOSEPH, IF YOU’RE IN THERE, PLEASE JUST COME OUT.”

“FP….” Alice grabbed on his arm and gently pulled him back. “It’s not worth it.” She sighed and glanced around again. Her eyes lit up all the sudden. “You go check one side of the house over there, I’ll go the other way.”

“Alright.” he patted her on the arm and took off towards the right side of the house. There weren’t many windows, so he had trouble trying to glance into Joseph’s house. The outside was somewhat ungrulling, unkempt vegetation growing along the walls of the house. He reached the backyard, opening up the wooden fence slowly. “Joseph?” he called out as he entered through the gate. The backyard was just as messy with a lawn chair on its side and tall, luminous trees hanging over. He turned to the door leading inside and reached out for it. The door was locked, so no luck there. He went to head back the other way, but jumped as Alice appeared out of nowhere.

“Shit.” he panted, holding a hand to his heart. “You find anything?”

“No. You?”

“Same boat, Coop.” he sighed. “You think it’d be too late to file for a warrant? That is if Keller still isn’t pissed at us?”

“We can try coming back tonight.” Alice moved around him and sat at the stoop leading into the house from the backyard. He sat down next to her and rested his hand on his knees. What else could they do? Wait for the guy to get home from wherever he was? Wait until the Black Hood rolled around and have a shootout? Either way, Joseph Conway…..or Svenson…..or whatever the fuck he was now, was screwed. His mind raced as he thought about the fate of Joseph. The man would never forgive himself for giving the wrong information to that group…..THAT GROUP.

“What about that group?” he perked up and faced her. “Both Hal’s father and Hiram’s were in that group that buried the wrong man alive!”

“So?” she shook her head in confusion. He reached for her hands and held onto them.

“What if Hal stored anything away about what his father did? You were trying to look into what his family did, remember? At Register?”

“He had those files on his desktop.” Alice was starting to catch on. “I just overlooked those during my research…..but it could still be there.” She stood up and beamed. “FP, you’re a fucking genius!” she grabbed the sides of his face and planted a kiss on his forehead. “Come on! While we still have time!”

“Okay?” he laughed as she took his hand and led them out the gate.

They arrived at the Register about fifteen minutes later, practically barging in. Luckily, none of the Register’s other workers hadn’t shown up yet, so that bough Alice and FP some time to get what
they needed. He stood at the back of Hal’s chair as Alice logged into his desktop and pulled up his personal files.

“Dad’s Stuff.” she read out loud. “This should be it. I can’t believe I almost glanced this over as nothing.” She clicked on the file as it displayed a myriad of older pictures of Thomas Cooper and older Register articles. FP moved next to her and knelt down to get a better look. Alice enlarged the documents so the search could be easier for both of them. He scanned the different documents until one photograph caught his eye.

“Click on that one!” he pointed at the picture on the screen, and she opened it. The picture showed a group of five to six people all in front of the tree at Pickens Park, smiling while holding shovels over a clump of dirt. Right front and center was Thomas Cooper.

“That’s them! The group that went to see Joseph!” Alice exclaimed, turning to FP with a smile on her face. “I’ll print this out, then we can get the fuck out of here.”

“Groovy with me.” he high-fived her. The picture came out on the small color print in the back of the Register. Alice held the photo in her hands with FP over her shoulder.

“Hopefully this gets us somewhere.” she looked up at him, her eyes looking somewhat puzzled.

“If it does, we’ll make Howard proud.” his voice encouraged her. “And we can tell Keller to eat his heart out.” The last comment made her smile return with a giggle.

Outside the Register, something along the lines of glass shattered. The two looked out the window; there was no one visibly outside. What is coming from…..They ran out of the Register to return to his truck, only to stand in front of where the noise came from.

The word TRAITOR screamed in its white spray paint along the side of his truck. The windshield was cracked, both windows were smashed.

“FP…..” Alice’s voice went deep. Was someone from the Serpents following them? Was it Tall Boy? Know where your loyalties lie, Tall Boy’s voice sounded sinister in his head. The dream of his excommunication replayed like a broken tape that wouldn’t shut off. He felt Alice grip his hand.

“What?” he faced her in panic. She lifted her finger slowly and pointed back to his car. On top of the hood of his truck was a small wrapped box with a note. “Fuck…..”

They moved over to his truck, taking cautious steps. The label on the box read, “To: FP and Alice, From: Santa”. He watched as Alice picked up the note and flipped it open. He glanced over her shoulder to read what poem they had to mindfuck them.

I'm running out of time  
To face my fears and lies.  
I'm running out of time  
To say all my goodbyes.

“So Joseph is next….” FP came to the conclusion. Alice didn’t respond to him; instead, she reached for the box. “Alice, wait….” he tried to slow her down. She untied the ribbon holding it together and slowly lifted the cover. They both looked down into the box.

“OH MY GOD!” she screamed and dropped the box. His heart pounded as he backed them away slightly. She clung to him, and he held her head away from the terrifying sight. In the small box was a black and blue severed finger.
“We’re fucked, FP.” she paced back and forth in her living room. The fire blazed behind her, but she couldn’t slow down. “The Black has Hiram and Joseph. And now one of them lost their goddamn finger!”

“Well, we can’t trust Keller to help us.” FP stated as he sat on the couch with his elbows on his knees. “And we don’t even know where this guy is located. No secret lair or jackshit.”

“He won’t stop.” her voice escalated. “He’s not going to stop until everyone I know and care about is dead!” The pain in her side started up again, and her mind filled with intrusive thoughts - YOU DIDN’T SAVE HIM, YOU DUMB WHORE. YOU COULDN’T SAVE HAL, AND NOW HIRAM’S GOING TO BE DEAD BECAUSE OF YOU. JOSEPH WILL BE DEAD TOO. YOU’RE THE REASON THEY’RE ALL DEAD. She felt her nails scraping her palms, desperate to dig in. She heard FP stand up and step closer to her. He grabbed her hands dug his thumb under her fingers so she wouldn’t dig into her palms.

“I’m….” she forced herself to speak, “I’m so lost, FP.” She paused, her lips trembling and her faces heavy from the tears. “Hiram and Joseph are going to be dead because of me.”

“Don’t say that.” FP raised a hand and wiped the tears away from her face. “No one is going to be dead, okay? Because we’re going to find them, and we’re going to shoot that fucker dead.” He took a firmer grip of her hands, stroking her knuckles, and took a deep breath.

“We’re going to end this, Alice. Once and for all so no one else gets hurt. But we need to be strong. Not just for the younger Serpents, or for Chic, but for ourselves. And if you can’t be strong for yourself, then at least do it for me.” He stopped for a moment. She watched the tears flowing down his cheeks. She wiped a few away with her thumb, feeling herself get more emotional.

“I don’t deserve you, FP.” she admitted. “You’ve been so good to me. I don’t want to lose you.” His eyes met hers, glossy and red. He was so close to her, his body warm and his chest pulsing from his heart beat. If they just moved any closer to each other…..

She glanced back over at her purse behind them and moved towards it. She pulled out the photo of Thomas Cooper and the other buriers, and she came back over to FP.

“This might be a good start.” she sniffled. “I don’t even know if there’s anyone still alive in this photo. And I’m sure as hell I’m not going to phone up Prudence at this hour. Or ever.” He took the photo from her hands and took a closer look at it. He stayed staring at one particular spot for a while.

“FP, what is it?”

“Cheryl’s grandmother is in this.”

“What?” her eyes widened. He flipped the photo towards her and pointed at one person. She took a closer look and realized that there was only one woman in the photo. The photo was mostly in sepia, but it was blatantly obvious that the woman in the photo was dawning the infamous Blossom red hair.

“I met her when I was at the hospital with Cheryl. After the fire at Thornhill.” he explained. “How did I not pick up on this sooner? She may be the key to helping us find Joseph. And if we find Joseph, we find Hiram. And the Black Hood!”

“Then what are we waiting for?” She took the photo from his hands and ran over to her purse.
“I should warn you,” Cheryl guided them through the dark hallway of Thistlehouse, “my Nana Rose doesn’t open up much about her past. But luckily, I’m here to help.”

“Cheryl, thank you for letting us do this, especially on such short notice.” FP spoke to the young redhead. She turned back to the two of them and smiled.

“Of course! I’d do anything to help my favorite pair of detectives in Riverdale. Hashtag Falice, the ultimate power couple.” she winked and moved forward.

“What did she just call us?” Alice whispered to him. He sighed and rolled his eyes.

“It’s our ship name, apparently. Whatever that means. I’ll explain later.” The pair joined Cheryl in the living room. In the corner, a red Christmas tree glowed with bright white lights. By the fireplace, Cheryl stood behind her elderly legal guardian, Nana Rose Blossom. The woman was much older now than she was in the photo, and her hair had gone completely white sans a streak of red.

“Nana Rose,” Cheryl spoke to her, “these two are my friends from the police. This is FP, the man who saved me. Remember him from the hospital?” The older Blossom glared at the two, her glass-like eyes going back and forth between them. Her eyes rested on FP, blinking at him. She was behaving like a blinking porcelain doll.

“Forsythe Pendleton Jones II. Yes.” Nana Rose spoke. He exhaled at the sound of his full name. He only rarely had people call him by his full name, only because it was his father that went by Forsythe Jones. He preferred FP due to some sense of freedom from his father, yet he still followed the family tradition with Jughead. He gave the woman a small wave. She turned to Alice, giving her a smile.

“Aren’t you the one who solved the death of my grandson?”

“That’s me.” Alice responded quietly. He and Alice would’ve both figured that Nana Rose would be angry at the sight of her, since Alice was the one who put Clifford Blossom in prison and be one of the last people to see Penelope Blossom alive. Yet, she beckoned them to come closer. They both stayed planted in their position.

“It’s alright.” Cheryl spoke to them in a comforting tone. “My Nana is not a cruel person.” At Cheryl’s comment, FP moved over to the older woman, crouching down to her eye level. Alice joined him, still standing.

“Nana Rose,” he initiated, “something bad is happening in Riverdale. SOMEONE bad is hurting a lot of people. And he’s taken captive a person of interest to our case. We don’t know where he is…..but maybe you can help us. If you’re willing…..”

“This isn’t concerning my son, is it?” Nana Rose croaked out. “I thought you already locked him away in prison.”

“It’s the person who attacked me, Nana.” Cheryl clarified. “The one who killed Mother and started the fire at Thornhill.”

“I see.” the older Blossom nodded her head slowly. Alice knelt down beside FP and pulled out the photo from her purse. She handed it to the elderly woman.

“Do you remember this photo being taken?” The photo shook in her hands. She blinked at it a few times.
“That’s me.” she enunciated. “With those other big names in Riverdale.”

“When was this photo taken?” FP followed up. The older woman stayed quiet for a while. Cheryl tapped her grandmother on the forearm, but still nothing.

“Nana? What were you doing in this photo?” she asked her in a concerned voice. Cheryl turned back to the pair with panic.

“We buried a man.” the older Blossom spoke, scaring all of them. “Well, the men buried a man. Didn’t let me take part, of course.” she snickered.

“He was the man you and your friends buried?” Alice inquired.

“Some helpless sucker outside of town.” Nana Rose replied. FP started to worry that they were upsetting the older woman, but she seemed to have herself calm and collected. “A little boy at the Sisters of Quiet Mercy gave us that name.”

“Was it Joseph? Joseph Conway?”

“I think, but I don’t remember much of it anymore.” she confessed. “What happened to that little kid? I hope he found a good home and a loving family. It’s what I did when I picked up Penelope from that place.”

FP turned to Alice, shocked at the comment. Just when he thought the Blossoms couldn’t be anymore fucked up of a family…..

“Nana Rose, do you remember where this photo was taken?” Alice redirected the conversation. The older woman gave a small chuckle.

“Dear girl,” she turned to Alice. “Have you not lived in Riverdale long enough? It’s the big tree out by Pickens Park. I wonder if that grave we dug has grown over…..or is it still there?”

The tree by Pickens Park. If that was where the man Joseph sentenced to death was still there…..maybe that was where the Black Hood could be holding Joseph.

“We have to go, Alice.” he whispered to Alice and stood up. “Thank you, Nana Rose.” he spoke. Nana Rose didn’t acknowledge him; she had her attention at the fireplace. Alice stood up next to him, trying to get the older woman’s attention. Cheryl took the photo from her grandmother’s lap and handed it back to Alice.

“Sorry, she gets distant sometimes.” the young girl explained. “Did you get everything?”

“Yeah. All of it.” FP nodded. “I owe you, kid.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Cheryl shook her head. “Go. Find your missing person. Good luck.”

“Thank you.” Alice directed at her. FP took Alice by the arm and the two ran out of Thistlehouse. “You think it’s Pickens Park?” she asked him as they hustled over to her convertible. She tossed him the keys and he took the driver’s seat.

“If that dead body’s still buried there, then the Black Hood may give Joseph a similar fate.”

“Not if we get to him first.” she stated. He smiled and jammed the aux cord into his phone, turning on her radio. Sabotage by the Beastie Boys blasted through the speakers.

“Let’s go get our guy.” FP spoke over the music. He slammed on the gas pedal and drove off. The
beat of the music hyped up the drive over to Pickens Park. They arrived just as the next song began. He pulled over against the road, a little bit away from the tree in the middle of the park. He turned off the radio and the ignition before he turned to Alice.

“You ready?”

“I think so.” she sounded distant. She stared out the windshield for a few moments, then faced him. “This might sound crazy, but here me out.”

“What haven’t we done that’s crazy?” he joked.

“We have to make this quick. Find Joseph and get out.” she went over her plan. “Ten minutes at most.”

“Is that gonna be enough time? With both of us we…..”

“You stay here.” she interrupted him. “I’ll go over to the tree and see what I can find. If there’s nothing…..”

“Alice, you can’t be fucking serious.” his voice became panicky. She grabbed onto his upper arm.

“I’d rather him kill me attempting to save Joseph’s life than have him kill you.” She paused, staring down at her feet. “Just promise me one thing.” she paused, taking unsteady breaths. “FP, if I’m not back in ten minutes…..”

“Alice, hey.” he took her hands and held them in his own. “You will.”

“But if I don’t,” her voice cracked, “promise me you’ll call for backup. And if something worse…..”

“No, fuck this.” he shook his head. “I’m not letting you go out there by yourself.”

“FP, listen to me!” she yelled, tears forming in her eyes. “It’s me the Black Hood’s going after. I’m not risking anymore lives because of it. So stay here, and wait for me to come back, and you call for backup if needed, okay?”

He started becoming emotional as well. He was not ready to say goodbye to his partner. Just not yet.

“Just come back to me…..please.” he pleaded in a wavering voice, his breath coming out much shakier. “I need you, Alice. I need my partner. You said you were with me, whatever happens. But I’m with you, too. It’s you and me. Okay?” She sat there in dead silence; only their sniffling filled the ambience.

“I never realized your real name was Forsythe.” She spoke with a whisper. “I can see you being a Forsythe. It fits you.” Her lips trembled, and he couldn’t help but stare. He wanted so desperately to keep her in the car. To have them go together. He didn’t want to lose her…..

She gave his hands one last squeeze before she opened the door and exited the car. She started to walk away, further into the wooded path towards Pickens Park. She turned back to him and pulled out her phone. She nodded at him, cueing for him to pull out his and set the timer. Ten minutes. He nodded at her in return.

He pressed start. FP sighed and looked back up, but she was already gone. He rested his head back against headrest and gritted his teeth through the tears. Fuck…..what if she didn’t come back? What if this was all one giant trap? Was the Black Hood waiting for them?
One minute passed, then another, seven and a half more minutes to go. The seconds felt like hours, like days, like a lifetime. Please, Alice, come back. Please be alive. He looked back down at his phone. Five more minutes. Where the fuck was she? Did he not park closer enough? Was she in trouble? And he was still in this damn car doing nothing? Four and a half minutes. Four minutes. No, no, NO.

“Fuck this.” FP muttered, getting out of the car and whipping out his gun. He slammed the door shut and texted Keller.

To Keller: GET YOUR ASS TO PICKENS PARK. WE FOUND THE BLACK HOOD.

FP slid his phone back into his pocket and ran off in Alice’s direction. Fuck waiting. Fuck the ten minutes. It was now or never.

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She wiped the tears out of her eyes after she set the timer on her phone and headed out towards Pickens Park. Alice had to be strong. She had to for Chic. For Joseph. For Hiram. For FP.

She sprinted further into the woods, having a firm grip on her pistol, hoping that she wasn’t running out of time. She made it to the tree in just three minutes and sighed in relief. She pulled out a flashlight and aimed it at the tree.

“No….” Alice muttered at the scene. In front of the tree was a hole in the ground, dug up just like a grave. Over the hole read a tombstone “HERE LIES JOSEPH CONWAY”. Was she too late? Was the Black Hood going to bury Joseph alive?

“Shit!” Alice hustled over to the hole and looked down. A light wooden coffin laid dead center in the hole. She swore she could hear someone moaning in pain on the inside. Could it be Joseph? Was she lucky after all. “JOSEPH?” she called out, but no response. Alice jumped into the hole and reached for the top of the coffin. She flipped it opened and gasped. Hiram wriggled inside with a gag over his mouth and his hands tied.

“HIRAM!” she cried in relief. He looked up at her with joy in his eyes. She started to untie his hands and removed the gag from his mouth. He looked sleep-deprived, but he was alive. He was okay.

“How long have you been in there?” she breathed heavily.

“A little while, I guess.” he laughed. She helped him out of the coffin and climbed up out of the hole. She found one of their missing victims, but where was Joseph?

“Hiram, you haven’t see Joseph Svenson around, have you----” she turned back out and almost fell back in. The Black Hood strutted over to the two of them pointing a gun at them.

“Hiram, go. FP’s out in my car. Go to him.” She tried to push him away, but the Black Hood stayed persistent on the pair. He fired a warning shot to the side of them, causing her to scream.

“Don’t hurt her.” Hiram held up his hand trying to make some peace. “I’ll do what you want…..just put the gun down.” He took a small step backwards and almost fell back into the grave. She held onto his arm for support. They looked at the Black Hood, unmoved. Then, he pointed with the gun at a spot in the ground next to Alice.
“What? What do you want?” she choked out. The Black Hood kept gesturing to that one spot. She finally looked down and noticed a shovel over by the pile of dirt. She realized what the Black Hood wanted. “No…. “ she shook her head. “No…..” The Black Hood took another step towards them, aiming his gun back at her.

“Okay…..okay…..” Hiram spoke to the Black Hood before turning back to Alice. “It’s going to be okay.” He returned into the hole and laid back down in the coffin. Tears came out as she watched him close back up the coffin lid.

“Fuck you!” she spat out at the Black Hood. “It doesn’t have to end like this! What did you do to Joseph?” The Black Hood stood there, his hand holding the gun shaking. He pointed the gun at her furiously…..what was up with him? He looked shorter than she remembered…..and not as lean…..

“Fine. You win.” Alice grabbed the shovel and gathered some dirt, crying harder than before. She dumped the dirt onto the coffin.

“Don’t worry about me, Alice.” Hiram coughed on the inside. “I’m not afraid.” She let out a small wail and dumped another pile of dirt over the coffin. She didn’t want Hiram’s life to end like this….with his mistress burying him alive. She was scared…..she was angry. A rage burned inside her.

She swung the shovel and whacked the Black Hood in the face. The blunt force knocked him to the ground with a groan, giving her enough time to jump back down into the grave and open up the coffin. She grabbed Hiram and led him back out of the hole. The Black Hood still laid on the ground in pain.

“What should we do?” Hiram asked her. Before she could respond, the Black Hood returned to his feet, still holding onto his gun. What the hell would she do now? Take his gun from him? Make a run back to the car with Hiram? And where the hell was……She looked down at the Black Hood’s hand. It hit her that he wasn’t wearing any gloves. One of his fingers was missing.

“Joseph?”

The Black Hood…..Joseph…..backed away at the sound of his name. He aimed the gun at Hiram and fired. Luckily, it missed him, but Hiram still dodged the bullet. Joseph turned towards Alice, not saying a word. He stumbled towards her, picking up pace with every step.

“Joseph!” she screamed. “Hiram, run!” Alice raised her gun, ready to fire. Something hit Joseph and sent him to the ground. She watched him fall, then she turned up to find FP wielding the shovel.

“I told you to wait in the car!” she panted.

“Since when have I ever followed directions, Coop?” FP dropped the shovel and moved closer to her. She hugged him, thankful that he showed up. “Are you okay?” he pulled out, glancing back and forth between her and Hiram.

“I’m glad you two are here.” Hiram laughed. She moved past FP and went to hug Hiram. He kissed the side of her head and buried his face into her shoulder.

“Hey, Romeo and Juliet!” FP called out behind them. “You get a chance to find Josep——”

The Black Hood rose from his feet and pushed FP over. He ran off from where they came and didn’t stop.

“It’s him, FP!” she let go of Hiram facing where the Black Hood ran off. FP got back up on his feet
and picked up the Black Hood’s gun. “Joseph is the Black Hood! He cut off his own finger!”

“Shit.”

FP, Alice, and Hiram sprinted off after Joseph, not taking much time to catch up with him. Joseph ran out into the road and headed towards the bridge looming over Sweetwater River. FP pumped his arms up and down to make himself go faster.

“JOSEPH!” he called out in between breaths. Alice kept a good pace behind him, with Hiram a little bit behind her. The bridge shook as they ran across. Joseph stopped in the middle and looked out over the bridge’s edge. He head over to it and was about to lift himself up.

“JOSEPH, STOP!” Alice raised her gun and stood next to FP, merely a few feet away from Joseph. The older man panted as he gripped onto the bridge, and he gave them a somber look through the black ski mask. It was him all along…..but it made no sense. Was her memory giving out on her?

“Joseph….it’s no use running.” FP directed at him. “Just take off the mask. Please.”

Joseph’s eyes watered, then slowly, he removed the mask with his injured hand. He held the peeled off ski mask in his hand.

“Why?” Alice choked out, still holding up her gun. She had so many questions for him, but she had no clue where to even begin. “Why have all of this? Why the poems? Why did you hurt my family?” Joseph didn’t speak, he stood there silently crying.

“You don’t understand.” he choked out. “You’ll never understand. You should have just left me alone.” His face furrowed and he began to go towards her.

“ALICE!” FP grabbed her to keep her away. She closed her eyes, her finger pulsing at the trigger. Just take the shot, Alice. It’s self defense. You were keeping yourself safe. You were keeping FP and Hiram safe. Pull the damn…..

A gunshot rang out. Joseph groaned and fell to his knees. Alice opened her eyes, her trigger left untouched. Joseph placed a hand over where he was shot, the blood starting to come out. She and FP turned at the sound of sirens and flashing red and blue lights. Tom Keller lowered his gun and hustled over to them. He knelt down over Joseph and handcuffed him.

“Is this good enough for backup?” FP muttered. She faced him and hugged him again. The other cops swarmed the scene to make their checks on the three.

It was over. The Black Hood had been brought down. Hiram was alive. She and FP were both alive. It was over.

But something was off. Something she couldn’t put her finger on. How could Joseph Conway be that equipped to stalk her, send her poetry, and murder all those people, including Hal? His eyes didn’t match the ones that attacked her the night of the Sugarman incident, and not the ones FP saw at Thornhill. He didn’t have the body either….

Was this all a cop out? Was Joseph used as a pawn in some bigger endgame?

Was this the end of the Black Hood after all?

End of Chapter Eleven

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Chapter End Notes

Hmmm.....so has the Black Hood been brought down or he is still somewhere.....

What do you think?
Chapter Twelve - It Came Upon a Midnight Fear

Chapter Notes

Hello my dudes! Happy New Year!

Hopefully this chapter helps you to spring straight into 2019!

Want to give a quick shoutout to some of our readers (Ellen1003, shellyjohnscns, Veridissima, and diiimmmaaa) for the constant support and kudos! Keep it up!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twelve - It Came Upon a Midnight Fear

A hoard of doctors and nurses stopped in one by one to check on FP. He had no injuries of any kind that were severe, but they still had to take a look at his eyes just to make sure. The hospital wasn’t too crowded, but the hubbub of the Black Hood finally getting caught brought a swarm of reporters from the Register and from outside of town. Once the doctors cleared him, FP left his designated room and headed down the crowded hallway. He was surprised Keller hadn’t tried to come and berate him about the whole issue, but in the end, FP didn’t care. He wanted to find Alice….

He pushed through the crowd of reporters as they attempted to ask him questions about the case. Their words blurred in his head, the images of running after Joseph swirling…. He approached one of the open rooms and peered inside the room. Inside, Alice sat in the chair next to Hiram as he sat on the bed getting checked up by the doctors. The two held hands but never made eye contact. As FP entered the room, Alice looked up at him and stood up, letting go of Hiram’s hand.

“Everything okay?” he started to walk over to her, but she met him halfway.

“Better.” she sighed, turning back to look at Hiram. “Just happy that he’s alive.” He could sense the exhaustion in her voice. He wrapped his arm around her shoulders as she came in for a side hug.

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I don’t know…..” she admitted in a low voice. She lifted her head slightly to glance around the room and out in the hallway. Something was off with her.

“Hey…..” he regained her attention. “They have Joseph in another room. He’s not going to try and hurt you…..” His mind raced back to the confrontation at the bridge. Keller shooting Joseph in the side, all that blood…. They needed answers, but would Joseph be even well enough to explain what led him down this path?

“But Keller got him pretty bad.” FP commented. “I don’t know if Joseph’s in any critical condition, but…..”

“Can we talk to him? Just the two of us?” she looked up at him with soft eyes. She was trying to tell him something….but with all these people in the room, and Hiram…..

“You want the closure?” She nodded. He removed his arm from her as she headed over to Hiram. He couldn’t hear what she was saying to him, but he could notice the look in Hiram’s eyes as she
spoke. They were lit up, soft….but puzzling. The other man kissed Alice’s hand and let her go. He waited for Alice to rejoin him and the two left the room.

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“They might have to keep Hiram here for a couple of days.” she explained to FP as they walked down the hallway. “With his kidnapping and the conditions he went under….it’s a safety precaution.”

“Hopefully he can leave before the holidays.” FP huffed next to her. She was beyond ecstatic that Hiram was alive. She was thankful FP stayed by her side and never gave up on her during the whole damn fiasco….. But something was off about all of this. Joseph wore the ski mask, he had the gun, he cut off his own finger and kidnapped Hiram. But it didn’t feel right.

“Do you know where they’re holding him?” she asked FP.

“No clue.” he replied. They moved down to the end of the hallway where they met a couple of officers from the scene. The white board on the door read “Svenson, J.” in a faded red. She peered into the room and found Joseph hooked up to wires on his bed. A heart monitor beeped slowly. He was handcuffed to the bed.

“You shouldn’t be going in there.” one of the officers grabbed Alice’s arm trying to pull her back.

“Let go, asshole!” she attempted to free herself. “We need to talk to him.”

“Well, Keller’s given us strict orders—-”

“You heard her!” FP jumped in and helped free her. “Now can we please talk to him?” The officer sighed and let them pass.

“Hey, are you alright?” he asked her with a whisper. She nodded then turned to Joseph. He looked like utter shit. She felt like she was going to confront Mrs. Haversham before the old woman set herself on fire. The two stayed frozen in there spot, not knowing where to start ro what to ask. Joseph finally glanced over at them, giving them a scornful yet sorrow look.

“FP, shut the door.” she leaned back into him. He squeezed her hand and went to close the door for privacy. Once he returned to her side, they slowly made their way to the older man.

“I warned you two not to dig into this.” his voice was hoarse. He stared off into the distance, not giving the two any eye contact. “I’ve made my bed. Let me lay in it.”

“Not until you give us some answers.” Alice spat out in a low tone. “Especially about what you did to me.” She moved closer to Joseph but still gave herself enough room between them. She crossed her arms and took a deep breath. He looked back over at her, his eyes becoming much more lighter. Where the hell would she even begin? Fred Andrews? Mrs. Grundy? The snake in FP’s trailer? Where could she start to get the closure she needed?

“How long have you been following my work?” she finally spoke. Her voice shook as she attempted to hold back her emotions. Joseph glared down at the bed.

“You’re a big name in Riverdale. How could I not? Everyone else was.” he answered. “You stirred up quite a commotion with the Blossom case….all the kids couldn’t stop talking about it at the school. Even the kid that looked like Jason…..Archie.” He paused, furrowing his face. He was slowly growing emotional, which was unusual for someone so ruthless. “He’s a good kid. So is his father.”
“Then why go after Fred Andrews?” FP joined her side. “Were you meaning to go after Archie and ended getting his father?” Joseph didn’t respond. “And was Grundy because she was connected to Archie?” Joseph still didn’t respond. A lone tear stream down his cheek. She felt her emotional strong stance slipping.

“Why Hal?” her voice cracked. Her face became hot, her cheeks were heavy. The painful memories of seeing Hal dead in his Sharebnb flushed back into her. Seeing Hiram’s room ransacked in the same manner. Almost losing Chic. She clenched her fists tight to keep herself from sobbing right there. Her nails danced along her palms and it felt like knives cutting into her skin. “Why the poems? How did you even get access to all of those poems?” Joseph said nothing for a long time. Her anger grew.

“Answer me!” Alice screamed in tears. FP gently took her by the shoulders and took a couple of steps back. But Joseph still sat there, not looking at her, buried in his silent guilt. FP was somewhat successful at helping to calm her down before they continued.

“Deep breaths, Coop.” he whispered. She faced him and noticed his concerned eyes becoming watery. She nodded then turned back to Joseph. She walked back over to him, closer than she had earlier. She wiped her tears away and pursed her lips.

“You’re an intelligent woman, Mrs. Cooper.” Joseph finally spoke for the first time in that period of silence. “You’ve figured out who’s related to what poem. But you’re missing something…..so major. A why…..a reason.”

“Is this your final game for me, Joseph? You want me to tell you why I think you’ve been doing all of this?” she demanded. The old man said nothing. Alice knelt down next to him and glared. “Well, go on.” she beckoned him. “Give me a poem, you sick fuck.”

“Alice….” FP cautioned her from behind. She raised a hand at him, not breaking eye contact with Joseph.

“You’re going to act like a coward on me now? After you’ve spent the past month cleansing the entire town of sin? Really, Joseph?” The older man slowly glared out to the door as she spoke. “You’re the damn sinner! What is it about me that drove you to do all of this? Do I remind you of your mother…..or your dead sister Sue?” He glared back over at her. “Why did it have to be me, Joseph? Why me---”

Joseph grabbed at her shirt and yanked her in. She yelped at the unexpected action.

“ALICE!” FP screamed and reached for her. But Joseph already had his tight grip on her. He pulled her close to his face, his mouth hovering over her ear. The heart monitor beeped faster, recording his unsteady heartbeat. There was a commotion outside the room from the officers. But Alice couldn’t hear them; she was only caught up in what Joseph had wanted her to hear. He started whispering into her ear….not a poem, but a warning.

“HE’S LYING TO YOU, ALICE. HE WANTS YOU FOR HIMSELF, AND NOBODY ELSE. HE WON’T STOP UNTIL HE IS THE ONLY ONE LEFT. GET AWAY WHILE YOU STILL CAN.”

Her worst fear was just as she predicted. Alice pulled back and looked down at Joseph. He never fit the description of the Black Hood. He wasn’t the Black Hood at all.

FP helped her up and led her away from Joseph. The old man had trouble breathing and groaned in pain, his heart monitor slowly almost to a flat line. The door opened behind them, and a group of
nurses rushed in.

“Let’s get the hell out of here.” FP reached for her hand and the two left the room. Alice breathed heavily, her heart almost flying out of her chest. She covered her mouth with her free hand to keep herself from sobbing out loud.

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He didn’t let go of her hand as they came out into the hallway. The door shut behind them, leaving the fate of Joseph unknown in that moment. Alice let out a whimper, causing FP to turn to her in panic.

“Alice?” he cupped her cheek. He felt her squeezing his hand tighter. “Alice, what did he say to you?” He watched as she lowered her hand from her mouth, about to speak.

“JONES. COOPER.” Keller’s voice boomed from the other end of the hallway. The two jumped and held onto each other’s hands tighter. Keller stomped over to them, a bull look on his face. “Why the hell am I hearing that you two were just in there interrogating Joseph Conway?”

“You really think we’re that stupid, Tom?” FP yelled back. “You ask us to catch the Black Hood, and we did. You only aided us in backup because I asked you to!” Keller rubbed his temple with one hand and let out a long sigh.

“The damage has already been done.” he stated. “The case is close. Which is what both of you……on your own and together…..never seem to fucking understand. You keep digging for more. Missing clues. Demanding for some sort of reward.” The comment hit FP like a jab in the heart. He knew Tom was referring to his demands to be relieved from his work and to see Jughead and Jellybean. FP bit the inside of his cheek to keep himself from lashing out at him right then and there.

“And that’s exactly what killed Howard! He was so smart and yet so damn stupid! And you two are no different from him!” Tom pointed at them and began tearing up. He paused and stared down at the ground. He looked back up at them, his eyes now red and watery. “I won’t let you make the same mistakes that Howard did. I’d do anything to hold onto the two of you.”

Alice sharply inhaled next to him. FP glanced over at her, and he began to sense a fear in her expression. Her mouth was jammed shut, her lips wavered. Tears flowed down her face. What did Joseph say to her that set her off?

“Sheriff Keller….” a nurse opened the door and spoke to him. Tom shook his head and moved past the pair. The nurse shut the door as he came in, leaving FP and Alice alone. She opened her mouth slightly…..she was mouthing something but he couldn’t make sense of it.

“What are you saying?” he whispered, facing her full front and holding both her hands. “Alice….what did Joseph say to you? A poem? Any final words?” Her eyes darted around in fear.

“He’s lying…..” she whispered.

“Who? Keller?”

“He won’t stop…..”

“Alice, what are you saying? What does this mean?”

The door opened with a creak. The two turned to their boss as he walked out. Tom took a shaky breath and spoke.
“Joseph just won’t be able to answer anymore questions for you, I’m afraid. He’s dead.”

Alice had trouble sleeping that night. Joseph’s warning loomed over her, the same way Hal’s ghost did. And now he was dead. Joseph Conway was dead, and she still had no answers. But what did he mean? Who was lying to her? Who wanted her all to himself? Could she even trust him? Or was he just playing a game with her just to spite her in his dying hour?

Chic made her a warm cup of tea when she returned home and stayed up with her until she was ready to get some sleep. She couldn’t rest her eyes until almost about 1:30 am, and yet her dreams taunted her. She was running down an endless bridge, Joseph’s haunted laugh booming in her head. She yelled for FP, she yelled for Hiram, but no one was there. She felt that she was going insane.

When she woke up the next morning, she rolled out of bed and stumbled out of her room, down the stairs, into her kitchen. Chic sat down at the dinner table hunched over a plate of toast as she came in. He stood when he saw her and walked over to her.

“How are you holding up, Mom?” Chic reached out for her arm. Alice shrugged at her son and sighed.

“I don’t know.” she admitted. His face fell, and he pulled her in for a long hug.

“You got the Black Hood, mom. It’s over.” he tried to encourage her, but she felt much worse. How could she explain to her son what happened to her? What Joseph said? Was this Black Hood fiasco really over?

“You want me to make you some toast? Coffee?” Chic asked as he pulled away. She shook her head and headed over to the food pantry.

“I’ll just make myself some cereal. Thank you, though.” Alice reached for a box of cereal and set it on the kitchen counter. She grabbed the milk and a bowl and began making her cereal. Once she finished, she took her bowl of cereal and started to head back to the table.

A knock on the door made her freeze. The bowl of cereal slipped from her hands and shattered at her feet.

“Mom!” Chic leapt up from his seat and ran over to her, watching for shards of the ceramic bowl and spilt milk. The knocking continued, catching his attention. “Stay here, I’ll go get it.” He began to move towards the door.

“Wait, ask who it is first!” Alice gritted through her teeth, her heart racing. Was it Keller coming over to berate her even further? Was it another cop? Was it FP? Was it….

Chic opened the door and stood there in silence. He turned back to her, giving her a look of relief. Moving past Chic, Hiram removed his scarf and smiled at Alice.

“When did they let you out of the hospital?” he asked as he leaned back to look at him.

“Mom!” he spoke softly. Her heart swelled in relief and she smiled. Alice stepped over her mess on the floor and walked over to Hiram. They embraced, bringing her warmth.

“When did they let you out of the hospital?” she asked as she leaned back to look at him.

“This morning.” he admitted. “I was about to head back to Pembrooke, but I wanted to see you. I wanted to know if you were okay.”
“I’m better now…..now that you’re here.” she teared up with a laugh. She reached for his face and kissed him. His arms wrapped around her waist tighter to bring her closer into him. They broke the kiss and touched foreheads, beaming at one another.

“Mom?” Chic called out from the doorway. “Do you want me to go clean that up?” Alice turned back over to the broken cereal bowl on the floor and sighed.

“Chic….” she pulled away from Hiram and went to head back over to the kitchen.

“It’s okay. I’ll get it.” Chic rushed over to the kitchen. “You go spend some time with Mr. Lodge.” He began to work on cleaning up the mess. Part of her wanted to go typical Alice-mode and nag him on using gloves and cleaner to clean, but another part of her stopped her from doing so. She turned back to Hiram and walked back over. He took her hand and led her to the couch, plopping down next to her. She swung her legs over his as he snuck his arm behind her back and held onto her waist.

“Is something bothering you, cariña?” he stroked her knuckles. She looked into his eyes and saw the worry. She cared for him so much…..but could she trust him with what Joseph told her? Would he understand?

“This Black Hood thing’s had me all haywire.” she kept her response at that. “This case is so drastically different from the Jason Blossom massacre. Clifford being the killer made sense…..but Joseph Svenson…..”

“Not what you expected?” he finished her thoughts.

“Yeah.” she nodded. Unconsciously, Alice clenched her fist, her nails digging in softly. Hiram must have picked on to what she was doing, because he recoiled his hand from behind her and grabbed for her clenched fist. His fingers peeled hers back, revealing her palm.

HE’S LYING TO YOU. HE’S LYING.

She pulled her hand away at the voice screaming in her hand.

“Alice?” Hiram grew concerned.

“I’m sorry….” Alice started tearing up, letting go of her fist and resting her hand on his knee. “I’m sorry….”

“Hey.” He shifted next to her and wiped her tears away. “I didn’t mean to scare you. You have nothing to apologize for.”

“I know.” she muttered, resting her face into his hand.

“Is everything okay?” Chic came into the living room at the sound of her distress. Hiram let go of her face and held onto her hand. She nodded at her son and exhaled.

“I’m okay. I think so.” Chic glanced at Hiram for a short moment. He blinked a couple of times at him, making her confused, before turning back to her. Hiram let go of her hands and stood up.

“I’m okay. I think so.” Chic glanced at Hiram for a short moment. He blinked a couple of times at him, making her confused, before turning back to her. Hiram let go of her hands and stood up.

“Now that I remember,” he started, “I also wanted to come over to see if you two would like to come get some breakfast with me…..there’s this little restaurant by the Five Seasons that does amazing brunches. Hermione, Veronica, and I go there almost every weekend.” He looked back and forth between the Coopers. “Only if you want to. No pressure.”
“That sounds nice.” Alice stood up and took his hand. “I would like that very much.” If having brunch with her son and her lover meant getting her mind off the whole manner, then so be it.

Jesus, Jones, this asshole got you bad.” Toni sat on the counter as she accompanied FP to the car shop on the Southside. After the incident at the Register, his truck was nowhere near being ready to ride out in. The truck would need some time to install new windows and remove the TRAITOR spray-painted on the side. And especially with the holidays coming closer…..

“Well, the gift on my car screamed Black Hood.” FP explained to the pink-haired Serpent, “But the actual damage on the truck…..don’t know if it was him or a Serpent.” Toni rolled her eyes and hopped off the counter. She walked around the truck and returned to him.

“I don’t really think the Serpents are that vengeful that they would stalk you and Alice into the Northside just to vandalize your truck.”

“I know.” he huffed at her. She was right in that the Serpents were not the ones that usually caused trouble in town. But there was one Serpent that stood out in his mind in that moment. “But Tall Boy….” he started. “Tall Boy was the one who came over to lay it into me.”

“You think Tall Boy had something to do with this?” she snorted.

“You remember what he tried to do to the Pickens Statue a couple of years ago?” he pointed out. A year or two before the Black Hood incident during the Pickens Day Festival, Tall Boy attempted to decapitate the statue of Pickens in the park due to his rage against the Northsiders. FP had to fight both him and Keller just keep him out of prison. “I’m not saying it was him,” he continued, “but it wouldn’t be surprising…..”

“Hey.” Toni slapped him on the arm. “We got your back, remember? Black Hood or not, we’re standing by you.” He looked down at the younger girl, thankful for her presence. She reminded him so much of JB when he first saw her. He had major respect for her grandfather, one of the original Serpents, and was willing to do anything to help take care of her. He was at least relieved that the Black Hood didn’t try to go after her…..or any of the younger Serpents…..

“Don’t you have finals to go study for?” he snorted. She scoffed at him.

“Barely.” she fired back. “I’ve already made my study guides, and I’m helping to run a study group with the others. Don’t worry about me, Jones.” She patted him on the arm and walked out of the garage.

“Just making sure, Topaz.” he called out in his most dad-like voice. “And everything’s going well with Cheryl?”

“Stay out of my love life, Jones!” she hollered back, giving him a thumbs up.

It would suck not getting around in his truck, but luckily he had his motorcycle stored away behind his trailer. He hopped on his bike once he left the garage and watched as Toni rode off. He turned on the ignition and sped off back to his trailer. He sat outside Sunnyside Trailers, inhaling in the cold air. He wondered about his future with the Serpents, with the PD. Would Keller give him the mercy and let him go….or would he hold onto him longer out of pure spite and anger? And what about Alice? Would ever pair them up for a case again? Would he get the opportunity to see her more after this?

Out of pure impulse, he turned around and left Sunnyside Trailers, heading for the Northside. He drove past Pop’s, where the chaos all began. He sped past the bridge over Sweetwater River, where
they stopped Joseph. He sped past the Register, the Five Seasons, the high school. He pulled over into the roundabout of the school, stopping himself. What was he thinking, attempting to show up on short notice and put her in more worry? He breathed in and out, debating on what to do. Finally making up his mind, he pulled out his phone and pulled up their messages.

To Alice: You hanging in there, Coop? Do you want to try and meet up later?

He waited a couple of seconds. No response. He was worried about her, but he didn’t want to invade her personal space either. If she needed time with Chic, he would understand. He was about to slide his phone back into his pocket when it buzzed.

From Alice: Just got back from brunch with Chic and Hiram. I have time now. Come to the house.

He sped away from the school and headed for Elm Street. He pulled over to the side of the Coopers’ home and turned off his ignition. Alice emerged from the walkway as he slid off his bike. She joined him by the curb and he took a good, long look at her. She looked tired, exhausted, dazed. He noticed the tint of blood on her fingernails.

“Rough time sleeping?” he asked. She swallowed the lump in her throat and nodded.

“I’m trying….to be strong. For Chic and for Hiram.” she croaked. She wasn’t nearly as broken as she appeared when Hal died, but she looked pretty damn close to it. “You want to come in?” she gestured back to the door. He followed her inside and shut the door behind him. The place looked a bit cleaner since the Black Hood showed up and trashed her living room. A square of wood hung on the wall where the window broke. The couch no longer sat against the wall but faced the fireplace, its back to the staircase. He could smell disinfectant and milk from the kitchen. Alice slid down onto the couch and turned on the TV. A Rankin Bass Christmas filmed played, one FP remembered from his childhood. He sat down on the other end of the couch, giving her space. The claymation characters did their little song and dance on the screen, but Alice wasn’t really paying attention to it. He was getting worried. What happened to her and Joseph? Did something happen when Hiram came over to take her and Chic for brunch?

He tried to think of what to say…..or what not to say. He wanted to look into her mind. He wanted to see what troubled her. What she needed. He couldn’t take his eyes off her hands. The crescent scars on her hands freshly cut open.

He started to remember what Alice said to him at the prison. When he had his panic attack after talking to Penny. It worked for him. Maybe it could work for her too.

“Whatever happened to you,” he spoke, “whatever it was……you don’t have to be afraid to tell me.” She glanced away from the TV and met his gaze. He took a deep breath before he continued. “You don’t have to tell me now. But…..but when you’re ready……I’ll be here. I’ll listen…..when you’re better. Okay?”

Her eyes went soft at his words. She closed her eyes and inhaled, nodding at him when she finished. Alice turned back to the TV and turned up the volume before she scooted closer to FP and relaxed in his arms. They stayed like this while the rest of the movie played.

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The week went by without much trouble. Alice took time to forget about what Joseph said to her at the hospital, and…..frankly, everything that happened. She tried to have a positive outlook on the whole manner….the Black Hood no longer terrorized the town. Keller wasn’t pestering her and FP about closing the case. Chic was safe and happy. And she and Hiram were growing closer than ever.
After the panic in her living room, she went to see him the following day and explained the reason behind the crescents on her palms. She worried that he would leave her, thinking that she was too broken and unstable to be his romantic and sexual side partner….but he never once judged her. He kissed every scar on her palms and told her they were beautiful. He opened up to her about his own doubts and fears, going beyond the worry that he would be disappointing his own father and grandfather and every other past owner of Lodge Industries. The Black Hood ordeal must have affected him too, because he seemed much more open with her. Like he wanted to confess his sins or something. But she didn’t mind.

The two spent most of their time together, either going around the shops of Riverdale completing last minute Christmas shopping, going through strolls around Pickens Park, or watching Christmas movies. And the sex between them grew more passionate and bold. She was willing to try new things with him, now that she no longer had the fear of the Black Hood looming over her like a figure of Jesus on the wall.

When she wasn’t with Hiram, she was with FP helping to clean his trailer for the holiday and helping him figure out how he would afford the repairs on his truck. She had some money set aside as a Plan B in case Alice was the one who had to leave the house during her chaotic episode with Hal. She figured that the money could be used more effectively for something else…..for someone else.

“You don’t have to, Coop. Don’t waste your money on me.” FP tried to beg her, but she was bound and determined to help him.

“I’ve already written a check for the amount needed on the repairs.” she explained, holding out the check to him. “Consider it a Christmas present.” she said with a smile. He rolled his eyes and laughed, taking the check from her.

On top of helping FP pay for his truck, she also spent her time emailing back and forth with Mary Andrews, who happened to be coming back into town for Christmas. It was only a matter of discussing when she could meet with FP and figure out a plan to resolve his issue. It would need some time and patience, but Alice was on a right track.

Everything finally seemed to be going well for her. As the weekend before Christmas approached, she was happy. At ease. In love. She actually considered herself falling in love with Hiram….she wouldn’t admit it to him just yet, but she adored him. And he was all hers…. That was until Hermione and Veronica phoned in from New York with other plans for Hiram.

“Remind me what time you’re leaving for Manhattan tomorrow?” she asked as she laid in his arms in his bed. Hiram didn’t want to leave her without having one last goodnight together in Pembrooke.

“I’m aiming for nine, maybe? Ten?” he sighed. “We have dinner reservations in the evening, so the sooner I can beat the New York traffic, the better.” He sounded sad. Alice glanced over on the floor, his almost packed suitcase laid open.

“I hate that it’s such short notice.” he stroked some hair away from her face. “Hell, it would have been better if the girls came back to Riverdale just so we can at least still see each other.” He stopped, taking a shaky breath, “But with everything that’s happened with the Black Hood….they don’t feel safe here. I don’t blame them. And if I don’t at least make an attempt to go and see them…”

“People will start asking questions.” she finished. She knew that their relationship was still private to most of Riverdale. If the others in town ever caught onto the fact that the richest man in town and one of the lead detectives of the Black Hood case were sneaking around in a whirlwind romance, it could be bad blood for both of them. As much as she didn’t want him to go…..it was the right thing
to do. For both of their families.

“It might be good for you to catch up with Hermione and Veronica.” Alice looked back at Hiram, curling into him more. “They’re probably worried sick about you. Enjoy your time with them….don’t be so caught up worrying about me.”

“But I do worry.” he shifted in his spot and cupped her face. “You’ve gone through so much, Alice. I don’t know what I would do if anyone tried to lay a finger on you.”

“I’d beat their ass before you’d get a chance to jump in.” she joked, causing him to laugh.

“My brave, little savior.” Alice held onto Hiram as he rotating them so she was on her back and he laid on top of her. She grabbed for his face and kissed him with a giggle.

“I think I’ll be alright.” she spoke. “I’ll have Chic with me. And I have FP. And you can always call if you get that bored. Or lonely. Or that desperate for me. Or all the above.” she gave him a evil smile.

“You read my mind so well.” he leaned down and kissed her jawline. “But I have something for you. In case you miss me too much as well.” She blinked at him as he lifted the bedsheets and rolled off her. He strode over to his closet and turned on the light. “I found this when I was attempting to pack….”. She sat up in the bed, worried about what he would pull out. Oh god….what if he….

Alice’s eyes widened and her hand flew to her mouth. She let out a cackle. “Hiram…..what the fuck is that thing?” Hiram headed back over to the bed holding a worn-down, loosely stitched stuffed animal monkey. He sat down and rested the toy on her knee.

“This is Mono.” he explained with joy in his eyes. “He was my best friend and comfort when I was growing up. I was practically glued to this little guy. Everytime I couldn’t bring him somewhere with me as a toddler, I cried. Cried.” She giggled at his story, the monkey feeling fuzzy on her knee. “But eventually, I grew up and no longer grew dependent on him….however, I did keep him around and passed him down to Veronica for her playroom.” He lifted the toy from her knee and handed it to her. “And now I’m passing him on to you.”

If she were honest, it was one of the ugliest fucking things she ever laid her eyes on. But it was adorable in the sense that it’s little monkey face with a stitched mouth and buttons for eyes made Hiram happy as a kid. It brought her closer to him.

“I love him.” she commented, squeezing the monkey into her chest and hugging him.

“So, when you hold onto him,” Hiram moved closer to her, his fingers tracing her thigh. “You can think of me. When you’re lonely, or asleep at night…..” he placed a kiss on her shoulder, “with sugar plum fairies dancing around your head.”

“Oh my god!” she cackled, letting Mono fall into her lap as she clung to Hiram. He plant little kisses on her neck and shoulder, giggling in between.

“You want anything special while I’m in Manhattan?” he whispered so close to her ear. “Tell me what you want….Tiffany’s? Kate Spade? A nice complex for you and Chic on the Upper East Side”

“You’re spoiling me.”

“Well, you seem like a woman who deserves to be spoiled.” he complimented her with a smile. His lips met hers. Damnit, she didn’t want him to go.
“What do you think would work on me?” Alice raised an eyebrow. Hiram brought his fingers to her collarbone, following the line of her shoulder blade. His fingers danced up her neck and lifted her chin. He examined her ears one by one before returning to her gaze.

“You’d look good in silver. Maybe even a gold locket to shake things up. Maybe add a birthstone to it. When’s your birthday?”

“End of April.” she admitted. “I’m also a Taurus….explains why I’m so damn stubborn.”

“Means you’re a diamond.” he smiled. “Ruby’s nowhere near its beauty. Well, the ruby’s mine….end of July. A Leo. Fire Sign.” She giggled at his knowledge of the birth months and zodiac signs. “Sorry, Veronica’s really into Horoscopes and Zodiac Signs. That’s why I know so much about it. Hopefully it doesn’t make me sound too nerdy.”

“I think it’s cute.” she complimented him. His face was so close to hers, his hot chest pressed into her own. She held his face in her hand and bit her lip.

“I don’t think I need Mono quite yet….” she whispered, setting the monkey down beside her. “I still have you for one more night. So….tell me what my horoscope is.” He laughed as she pushed him down onto the bed and climbed on top of him.

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FP blew into his hands to warm them up outside. He and Alice sat on a park bench after they finished their carry-out order from Pop’s. He grabbed his garbage and shoved it into the empty bag.

“So Hiram’s officially going back to New York?”

“Just for the holiday.” she explained to him. “It’ll suck not having him here, but I just have to…..grin and bare it.” She gave him a small, sad smile, then she turned away, looking out at the scene in front of her. Alice still hadn’t told him what Joseph said to her….he figured she needed more time. Or maybe it was something irrelevant. Regardless, Alice seemed to be moving past the events and make the most of her time off. Keller firmly gave them time leading up to the holiday to “recover”, but FP wasn’t so sure if it was a good thing. She spent time helping him, which he was extremely grateful for, and she was bonding better with Chic and Hiram. But FP could sense something was still off.

“You gonna be okay for Christmas? If it’s just you and Chic?”

“I’ll make it work, somehow.” she reassured him. He gave her hand a gentle squeeze then stood up. He grabbed their garbage and began to head over to a nearby trash can. “FP, wait!” Alice stood up and stopped him.

“What’s wrong?” he tried to read her sudden expression. She opened and closed her mouth a few times before she could speak.

“What are you doing on Christmas? Anything with the Serpents?” In honesty, FP didn’t know what the hell he was going to do. In the past few years, he usually just watched a few movies on TV and went to check in on the younger Serpents. But having Alice here…..

“Nothing. Why?”

“Spend it with me. And Chic. It was great having you over for Thanksgiving. I don’t want you to spend the holiday alone. Please…..won’t you spend Christmas with me?” His heart swelled. It’d been a long while since he had someone other than some straggler Serpents to spend the holidays with after the passing of Gladys. He was alone…..but now he had Alice. And Chic. Real friends he
could look up to and rely on. They had become so close, not just with Alice alone, but with Chic as well. What would he get her and her boy? Could he even afford anything that fancy for her? Would a Christmas sweater be substantial? FP would have to determine that for later. He swallowed a lump in his throat and held her hand.

“I would like that.”

She teared up and smiled at him.

“And if there’s anything I could do to help,” he continued, almost rambling, “with cooking, or whatever….I had a good time with that during Thanksgiving. I actually have this cookie recipe that Gladys stored somewhere…..it’s been a while and my kitchen’s really shitty, but----”

She clung to him, giggling. He returned her warm embrace, no longer feeling alone.

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Alice woke up to the smell of waffles and bacon on Christmas morning. FP and Joaquin came over to spend the whole day and night with her and Chic, and the four of them somehow completed a Harry Potter marathon while baking cookies. Joaquin came over halfway through the day, and with some pleading on Chic’s part, she allowed him to stay over, only if he split the guest room with FP. Since she stopped thinking so much about Joseph and the Black Hood chaos, Alice had been able to sleep easier at nights. It made her a little depressed, however, that Hiram wouldn’t be in town for Christmas…..but it helped that she had Mono to sleep with at night. She realized that it was more important to spend time with her son. She frankly needed time with her friends…..well, FP if she were honest with herself. And his gift was coming along better than she thought. Mary Andrews arrived back in Riverdale at some point during the weekend, and while the two couldn’t meet in person just yet, Mary felt she was ready to meet with FP one on one.

Alice stumbled down the stairs and heard mumbling in the kitchen. She turned and found FP and Chic getting the table set and making a whole damn feast for the neighborhood. Over by the tree, Joaquin was putting up the last of the ornaments.

“Morning, mom!” Chic beamed when he saw her, “Merry Christmas!” He set the plate down and ran over to give her a hug.

“Merry Christmas, Coop.” FP pulled her in for a side hug so he wouldn’t get waffle mix on her pajamas.

“Guys, this looks….amazing!”

“Yeah, Jones dragged us out of bed to help him get the house ready.” Joaquin stood next to her son. Chic wrapped his arm around the Serpent’s shoulder with a smirk on his face.

“How the hell are we going to eat all of this by ourselves?” she gestured over to the growing pile of breakfast food. The doorbell rang, catching her attention.

“Door’s open!” FP yelled out. He turned back to Alice and gave a “I have something up my sleeve” look. She raised a brow at him as he smiled. “Who said we were eating this all by ourselves?”

Right on command, FP’s crew of younger Serpents and Cheryl, leading them, walked into the Cooper house singing Deck the Halls. Alice had to cover her mouth to keep herself from crying, she was that overjoyed. She looked back at FP, who couldn’t be any more prouder.

“Did you plan this?”
“Getting the kids over was actually your boy’s idea.” he admitted. “But you were right. No one should be spending the holidays alone. It’s a time for family and friends.”

“Can they stay with us, Mom?” Chic asked, practically ecstatic like the little kid he was all those years ago.

“Of course.” she faced the other kids in her house. “Please, come in!” The kids ran over to help get their breakfast ready, bidding her “Merry Christmas” and “Happy Holidays” as they passed by.

“Consider this a Christmas present.” FP whispered in her ear and winked.

The day was one of the happiest she ever lived. She had her son with her. He had Joaquin and their rag tag of friends. She had FP…..she had never been so thankful to have him in her life.

The day went a lot better than FP had expected. He felt a little guilty that his teen Serpents were missing time with their families to be at the Cooper house with him, but they didn’t care - they enjoyed the new company. After breakfast, they gathered around the living room, Chic curled up with Joaquin on the floor, Cheryl and Toni curled up together on the couch next to him and Alice, and Sweet Pea and Fangs standing by the tree, to open up presents. FP helped Alice pick out a nice watch for Chic, a new brooch for Cheryl, and some journals for the younger Serpents. On top of that, FP bought Alice a few books from the shop downtown with Chic’s help, including a copy of The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson. He worried that due to the dark content of the book, she would turn it away, but she loved it. “Shirley Jackson’s one of my favorites.” she told him, “I think you would enjoy her short story, The Lottery.” Once that finished, the kids rallied to play some Cards Against Humanity, which ended with Chic somehow winning to Alice’s shock. The kids then gathered on the couch and started watching Christmas movies while FP and Alice sat in the kitchen sipping on coffee after cleaning up.

“Is this okay?” he asked her in a low voice so he wouldn’t interrupt the movie. “I feel kind of bad for not really getting you enough besides the books---”

“No, don’t.” she grabbed his hand. “This has been one of the best Christmases, FP. Thank you.” He turned over her hand and glanced down at her palm.

“Your palm looks better.” he commented, running his thumb over her crescent scars. Chic mentioned to him earlier how Alice flinched when Hiram touched the area, but he didn’t know why it happened. Was she just sensitive to Hiram’s touch? Or was it…..but she didn’t flinch at his own touch. She seemed calm…..collected….at ease with him.

There was a knock on the door. A notification popped up on Alice’s phone, causing her to smile. She stood up and went to the door. What did she have up her sleeve? FP stood up after her and watched her go to the door. She opened it to reveal an older red-haired woman…..who almost looked like Fred’s son Archie.

“Mary!” Alice hugged the other woman, Mary, at the doorway. “When did you get back into town?”

“On Sunday. I was lucky to get out of Chicago when I did.” Mary Andrews explained. Alice let her into the house and the kids all waved hello. Mary turned to FP and walked over to him.

“You must be FP.” she smiled. “I’m….I’m Archie’s, mom, Mary. Alice has told me a lot about you.”

“She has?” he glanced over at Alice in confusion before he turned back to the redhead.
“FP,” Alice joined his side and took his hand, “Mary’s a lawyer in Chicago. She works with family law.” Family law…..wait, did that mean….

“Alice was telling me about your situation….with your kids.” she rejoined the conversation. “If you have some time today…..or even later on in the week, I would like to sit down with you and make some plans. To help you see your kids again.”

He almost stumbled back. Alice got a lawyer for him…..Alice is helping him get back to Jughead and Jellybean…. FP turned to the blonde with his eyes watering. She squeezed his hand and winked. He pulled her in for a side hug and kissed the top of her head. He rested his face into her hair, breathing heavily and letting the tears flow.

“Thank you, Coop.” he mumbled.

“We take care of our own.” she whispered back to him. He looked back down at her, so tempted just to….

He looked back at Mary and wiped the tears away. He let go of Alice’s hand and approached the other woman. “I have time….if that’s okay! I don’t want to rip you away from Fred and Archie.”

“Why don’t we meet tomorrow morning at Pop’s? 9:30 sound good?”

“That works perfectly.” he beamed.

As the evening came, the younger Serpents and Cheryl filed out of the house, leaving only Alice, FP, Chic, and Joaquin. FP and the younger boys were watching Die Hard while Alice cleaned up for the night upstairs. She came back down to hear her phone buzzing. FP picked it up from where she left it on the couch and looked at the ID.

“Alllllliiiiicccceeee….” he called for her in a sing-songy voice, “Your knight in shining Armani is calling!”

Hiram.

Alice rushes over to the couch and snatched the phone from FP’s hand. She accepted the call and wandered over to the kitchen.

“Hiram, hi!”

“Feliz Navidad, Alice.” his voice melted over the phone. “I hope I didn’t call at a bad time.”

“No! You didn’t.” she sat down at the table with a smile on her face. She missed him, and the fact that he was calling her must have meant he missed her too.

“How is everything in New York?” Alice asked.

“Beautiful, as always. But nothing much has changed around here. If only you were here to see it….”

“And how’s everything with Hermione and Veronica?” She felt like she was opening a can of worms. She started to pick up that he was breathing heavily on the other end.

“Alright.” he replied. “The dinners have been a little awkward, but Veronica’s at least been somewhat optimistic. Hermione…..not so much. I feel bad, really. But luckily I was able to get away
for a little bit to check in on you. How are you, mi vida?”

“I’m doing well.” she blushed at the Spanish rolling from his tongue. “FP’s been so helpful with everything, and…..it’s like everything is finally starting to feel alright again.”

“Couldn’t agree any more.” he agreed in a pleasant tone. “So I got your present, by the way.”

“Is that so?”

“Well…..that would ruin the surprise, wouldn’t it? All I can say is….you’ll be able to wear it soon. If you have a silver dress to go with it, of course.”

“And why is that?” she asked in curiosity. What plans did he have for her?

“My return to Riverdale may be sooner than original.” Hiram answered. “Because I’ve made reservations for you and I to attend a party hosted by some of my business clients on New Year’s Eve.” Alice covered her mouth to prevent from squealing. She was shocked, really…..and completely excited. On past New Years, she either spent the night at home with Hal and Chic, or she went as Hal’s plus one to small get-together for work. But this was Hiram, and he had no qualm in spoiling her and showing off his affection for her.

“You mean it?”

“Why wouldn’t I? I don’t feel so ashamed and introverted when I’m with you, so being with you on New Years can pave a new path for us in to the new year. Besides, I prefer New Years over Christmas in a heartbeat. So does that sound good? Come with me as my plus one?”

“I’d love to.” Alice replied.

“Then it’s a date.” she heard him smiling. There was some noise from the other end that she couldn’t make out. Was everything alright?

“Shit.” he muttered. “I have to get going.”

“Okay. Is everything alright?”

“Yeah, Hermione’s just waiting for me, that’s all. Nothing to worry about, though.”

“I should let you get going, then.” she frowned. How would she know if Hermione and Veronica would be accompanying Hiram on his trip back to Riverdale? What if Hermione already found out about their affair? Alice, stop, she forced her brain to shut up. Don’t let this Lodge scare bombard your Christmas.

“I’ll try to call you tomorrow. And hopefully every other day afterwards.” he swooned, “But if I’m not able to reach you….I’ll be back in town before you know it.”

“I’ll be waiting, Mr. Lodge.” she teased and hung up the phone. She held it close to her and sighed.

“Hey, blondie……” Joaquin turned to Chic, “When were you gonna tell me you’re mom was dating a millionaire?” FP scowled and tossed a pillow at the younger Serpent’s head, causing them all to
Everything was going fine for the most part when FP drove Alice to work that Friday. His truck was ready to be picked up from the shop, and thanks to the money he received from Alice, he could get it out and driving again in no time. He met with Mary Andrews that Wednesday and Thursday to go over his case, and from what it sounded, the situation could potentially be in his favor. Even if he couldn’t fully get Jughead and Jellybean back under his custody, he could at least get the opportunity to have them visit once in a while or he could go up to Toledo to see them. And Alice….their friendship was stronger than ever. She seemed to move on at a somewhat stable pace from the Black Hood situation, and she was grateful that he was around to help. But since the case ended, it would mean that they may not be able to work together if Keller had separate plans for them. And she had the same concerns.

Before they left for the station, they made a plan to go confront Keller right away to see if he could pair them together again. It was a 50/50 shot, but it was worth trying. He mentally reviewed their plan as he pulled up to the station and turned off the ignition. He faced Alice next to him and sighed.

“Be honest with me, Coop. You think we’ll get this?”

“If the Christmas break calmed him down, hopefully…..” she shrugged. They sat in her convertible for a moment in silence before she spoke again. “I finished the book, by the way. The Haunting of Hill House.”

“You finished it that quickly?” he was shocked.

“It’s not that long of a book,” she explained, “and I’ve read it before…..long time ago back in college. I had a really nice copy of it…..that was, until I had to sell it just to help get money for my apartment with Hal in Boston. But no worries….I like the one you got me.” She smiled at him and winked.

“Your boy kinda helped me out with that.” he blushed and pushed his hair out of his eyes. He turned back out to the windshield and examined the scene outside. He didn’t see any sign of Keller’s vehicle in the parking lot. He was usually there before anyone else did in the mornings….

“You ready?” he turned back to her and opened his door. She nodded, and the two exited the vehicle. They walked into the station and headed past their desks, heading straight to---

“FP Jones. Alice Cooper.” an unfamiliar face stood in their path. He was tall and lanky, wearing a Sheriff’s uniform. “It’s a pleasure to meet you two.”

“Sorry….who are you?” Alice asked the man, weary. “We need to talk to Keller.”

“Keller isn’t here right now.” the man told them. “He hasn’t been here all week.” Keller was usually here, except if he was doing whatever it was with Mayor McCoy. What was going on with their boss?

“That doesn’t make any sense.” FP retorted. “Can we please just go talk to the sheriff?”

“You are talking to the Sheriff, Mr. Jones.” the man said with a huff. “The name’s Michael Minetta. I’m taking over as the new Sheriff for the Riverdale PD.”

FP stood there confused, trying to wrap his head around the situation. Keller’s been replaced? When did he resign? Wouldn’t he have said something to them?
“What do you mean you’re taking over?” Alice spoke up. “What the fuck happened to Keller?” She grabbed FP’s hand and squeezed it tight.

“Surprised you two didn’t already know about that, but I don’t blame you guys…..since you weren’t really here.” Minetta sighed, staring down at the ground, before he faced them again, “Tom Keller resigned. The ordeal of the Black Hood caused a lot of backlash against him from everyone in town. He couldn’t handle the pressure, so he walked out.” Sorry excuse, FP thought to himself. But how would that explain why Keller left without saying goodbye? “Luckily I was around the area, so I volunteered to step in for him. I’ve heard some things about you two…..good, bad, little bit in between. But I’m positive that we can all be on the right track together…..”

FP turned away from Minetta and towards Alice….she was frozen. Paralyzed. She looked as if she could throw up. He felt her nails digging into his skin.

“Well, I should get back to it.” Minetta gave them a grimacing smile. “I look forward to working more with you two.” With his last words, he walked away and went into Keller’s…..well, his office. FP was conflicted….confused. His heart pounded heavily. Why would have Keller done this? Was he falling down the same path as Sheriff Howard? He faced Alice - her eyes went glossy, panicked. Her skin turned pale green.

“Alice?”

She let go of his hand and sprinted off to the bathrooms.

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HE’S LYING TO YOU, ALICE. HE WANTS YOU FOR HIMSELF.

Her stomach churned in knots. Her body shuddered. All the thoughts and fears of what Joseph told her…..what she tried so hard to avoid this past week….it was all coming back to her. And it was manifesting into something worse.

HE WON’T STOP UNTIL HE IS THE ONLY ONE LEFT.

Her feet moved in light-year speed. She tried to swallow the lump or whatever it was in her throat. Her eyes fought back tears, but they wouldn’t stop. She wanted to scream, she wanted to cry. She felt that she would end up breaking down.

Where did Keller go? What did Joseph mean….This couldn’t be happening. No…..it couldn’t be…..

HE WON’T STOP. HE WON’T STOP. HE WON’T STOP. HE WON’T STOP---

She hurled over the toilet and vomited. The aftertaste was awful, and it made her continue even more. Alice rested her head back against the stall and sobbed, her nails finding their place in her palms. She covered her face with her fists, curling into a ball. She felt sick. The Black Hood couldn’t be around…..but what if he was?

“ALICE?” someone ran into the bathroom and knelt down beside her. She looked up as FP flushed the toilet and grabbed some damp towels for her. She cried as he cleaned her face and removed her nails from their nasty hold. “What’s going on? Talk to me.”

“We didn’t…..” she choked out, “we….we didn’t get the right one.”

“The right one?” FP asked in confusion. She shook her head violently and reached for his shoulders.
“Joseph was a set up!” she spoke in a broken voice. “He was a scapegoat, FP! Joseph was trying to tell me before he died!”

“Alice, slow down.” he helped stand her up and held onto her waist for support. “What exactly did he tell you?” She let another sob, the memory of his words creeping back into her.

“He’s lying,” she paraphrased. “He won’t stop until he has me…..he wants me to himself and no one else.” His eyes widened at her words. Alice reached up and held his face. Keller leaving wasn’t a random mishap….and certainly not after Joseph’s death. “The Black Hood….he’s still out there, FP. We’re not safe anymore.”

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He laid the pictures down on her dinner table and held the Sharpie in his hand. If the Black Hood still roamed free in this town, it had to be someone they knew. There were photos of Keller, Hiram, and other police on the list. They had to narrow it down to who had been interacting with Alice the most, but the only problem was….who?

“Let’s start with him.” FP grabbed a picture of Hiram. Alice sighed next to him and snatched the photo from his hands.

“Look,” she started, “I had my doubts about him in the beginning. And he knew more about Hal than I did. But he would never do anything diabolical to hurt me mentally or physically. Also…..why would he fake his own disappearance?”

“I’m not saying it’s him,” he responded, knowing that the suggestion of it being Hiram wounded her a little. “But he may know something. And he has all those people working for him. What if one of his own went rogue and did this?” he tried to reason. She frowned at him, then nodded.

“I get what you’re saying.” she spoke softly. “I’ll ask him when he gets back. But he can’t be the only suspect, FP.”

“He’s not.” he then grabbed a picture of Keller and held it. “Which is why we need to consider him too. Keller’s been acting really strange since this whole damn thing began. He didn’t want us digging into Howard’s research on the Riverdale Reaper…..and he was there when Joseph died.”

“He practically shot the poor bastard.” Alice threw in. She set down the photo of Hiram and glared at the photo of Keller over FP’s shoulder. “Out of most of Riverdale….he’s known me the longest. And he knows about your partial allegiance to the Serpents. Which could explain the snake in your trailer and the damage to your truck.”

His mind raced. Keller wasn’t the only one who knew about his double duties to the Southside and to the Northside. His mind went to one person….

Know where your loyalties lie.

“Tall Boy does too.” he gritted through his teeth. “He came and confronted me the night of SoDale. He was there with me dealing with Penny Peabody, and he was the one who told me to back off from the Jason Blossom ordeal.”

“You think Tall Boy could be in on this?” she asked. He planted his fist on the table and turned to her.

“The more I think about it…..wouldn’t surprise me. He’s a goddamn loose canon.”
Alice stared down at the photo of Keller then turned back up to him.

“Since I can’t talk to Hiram until he gets back, why don’t we split this up?” she strategized out loud, “You go talk to Tall Boy…..without starting a fight, and I’ll see if Keller’s even functionable to talk to me.” His heartbeat escalated…..would it be smart to let her go alone? To have him confront Tall Boy by himself?

“FP…..” Alice snapped him out of his train of thought and placed her hand on his shoulder. “We have to do this. I’m just as scared as you….but we have to stop him, FP. We can’t let the Black Hood run free.” her voice shook.

“I know.” he nodded slowly. He took her hand off his shoulder and held it in his own. “Are you sure you don’t want me to go with you?” She stayed quiet for a moment, pursing her lips and staring down at the ground.

“I think so.” she mumbled. He couldn’t even imagine what was racing through her troubled mind in that moment. How could she be so strong with everything that happened? He pitied her….but he also was in awe of her. A dangerous thought came into his head.

“Do you think it’s me?” he asked her bluntly. She looked up at him with watery eyes. He sighed before he continued, “Is there part of you that thinks that I’m the Black Hood?” He knew quite frankly it wasn’t him. Why would he have made up saving Cheryl from Thornhill, or having the snake in his trailer? Why would he go after her own son? But still….he had to ask, if she was starting to doubt everything.

She cupped his face and and held it there.

“If I’m going to be honest with you, FP…..Not in a billion fucking years.” she responded. “You’ve been the only one out of that brute force of the PD and my adult acquaintances that actually cares without being a murderous stalker about it. You’re honest…..and kind…..and you never gave up on me. So to answer your question…..no.” she stopped, a lone tear going down her face. She swallowed and continued, “You’re the only person besides Chic I trust right now.”

He was mentally fighting back tears. He didn’t want her or Chic to suffer anymore. He didn’t want the younger Serpents to face the backlash either. He was ready to face what was about to come.

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Alice pulled up outside one of the houses near the Keller household the next morning, gripping onto the steering wheel. Maybe she should have asked FP to come with her….but he had other battles to conquer that day with the Serpents. Taking one last shaky breath, she stepped out of her car and headed towards the house. She went through the line of trees separating the houses and approached Keller’s front door. She felt her heart slowly dropping to her stomach with every step she took. She shut her eyes, hovering her hand close to the door.

“Tom?” she banged on the door. No response. “Tom?” she tried again, but nothing. She turned to the side of the house…..maybe the back door?

Alice ran over to the other side of the house and noticed that the back door leading into the Kellers home was wide open. “What the hell…” she muttered to herself with nothing much left to lose. She hurried in through the door and entered his home.

The Keller household was much darker than she anticipated, with dark wood and barely any photos of Kevin or his family up and around. “Tom?” she called out, but all she heard was her own echo.
She glanced around the hallway area, not sure where to go, then she saw his office. She hesitated for a moment, then entered.

The walls were covered in newspaper articles…..some from Hal many years ago, all the way up to the Black Hood events. There were scattered photos pinned to the walls, connected by strings, with some note cards over them reading “Lust?”, “Wrath?”, “Pride?”……the sight made her uneasy. He was starting to go insane just the way Howard did. Alice hurried over to his desk and began searching around. Nothing screamed out to her on the top, so she started to dig through his drawers. Nothing, nothing, nothi---- Her heart stopped. Her breathing shortened. Slowly, she pulled out from one of the bottom drawers a black ski mask.

Was this from when Joseph was shot on the bridge? Or…..no. No. NO.

“You’re not going to find anything in there.” a tipsy voice scared the living hell out of her. She stood straight up to find Tom Keller in the doorway, holding a bottle of whatever liquor it was in his hand. He rolled his eyes and moved towards the desk. She didn’t know what to say…..she didn’t know what to think. Tom rested the bottle on the desk and looked up at her. “Hear the news about my departure?”

“Had to hear it from our new boss, Sheriff Minetta.” she spat out at him. “Could’ve been nice if you gave us a heads up, Keller.”

“You and FP wouldn’t have believed me anyway.” he laughed, stumbling around his desk to stand near her. “But, what the hell? Everyone in this damn town has lost their faith in me anyway.” He grabbed a glass and poured himself a drink.

“How many of those have you had already?” she asked in concern.

“None of your business.” he sipped from the glass. Her head reeled…..why was he getting drunk on a weekend morning? What was it he was hiding?

“Why did you shoot him, Tom?” she began her interrogation. “We had the situation handled until you showed up.” He scoffed and slammed his drink down.

“Really?” his temper grew at the slightest, “You’re going to interrogate me for doing my job? This supposed to be paycheck for hounding at you and FP? You think you’re so perfect, Alice….but you’re not. First, you go and investigate into the Riverdale Reaper without my damn permission, then you raid the Sisters of Quiet Mercy for information…..and…..Jesus, I’m just hearing wind about your little….fling you had with Hal last month.” Her eyes widened. How the hell did he…..

“Keller…..” she started to back up from him.

“And just when I thought that was crazy, now there’s rumors of you…..and Hiram fucking Lodge!” No…..how was he getting ahold of this information? “I saw you two….at SoDale of all goddamn places…..you danced with him at SoDale and it didn’t look all that innocent!”

“You’re one to talk, First Man McCoy.” she threw out. She knew it was dangerous, but it had to be said. His face furrowed and his hand curled into a fist. “I saw you with Mayor McCoy in that motel outside of town. So don’t you dare slut-shame me for being with Hal and Hiram when you have just as many vices!” She then grew scared that he would try to lash out at her….reveal his true colors.

But he laughed. He laughed in her face and grabbed his glass for another sip. “You should have just gone to law school, Alice. Become an attorney or some shit.” He slammed the drink down and turned away from her. “But I’m not a First Man anymore. After what happened at the hospital and
my resignation, Sierra called it off. She said she wanted me to get my life together before I even dreamed of having a future with her.” The confession made her feel….somewhat awful. But she still had a hard time believing him, let alone having any sort of sympathy for him.

“I never should have let you on this. I should have just handled all this my damn self.” He looked back up at her and took a step closer, alarming her. She stepped back and around the desk to distance herself.

“Tom….you need to sit down.” she commanded, but he wasn’t listening.

“It’s always about you…..isn’t it?” he sneered. “You pretend you have the perfect life, the perfect family, perfect house, perfect work-life balance, perfect perfect PERFECT.” his voice escalated. He raised a finger and pointed it at her. “But you’re not, Alice. Your marriage practically crumbled, and all your partners hate you.”

“No…” she started to stand her ground. “Not FP.”

“What? That sorry excuse of a cop? I only have him on because he’s like a lost puppy. Always hounding me on when he can go home and be with his kids. Which by the way will never happen.”

“It will!” she yelled back at him. “And we certainly don’t need your permission to do it! And we don’t need you for anything anymore, Tom! So stop lying and tell me why you killed Joseph!”

“He was a sinner, Alice! Just like everyone else, including Hal!” he jeered. Her confidence was slowly slipping….his demeanor was becoming more violent but in a strangely calm manner.

“But you still had to dig into all that, didn’t you? You can never let anything go…. Do you realize what you started? All these people dead……and somehow in some way they’re all connected to you. It’s always about you…….” He stumbled closer to her, and she gripped onto the ski mask tighter.

“You don’t realize what you’ve done….to everyone….to me.”

She froze. What the hell did that mean? Before she could move, let alone react, he stepped completely into her, grabbing her face. His lips were tainted with alcohol and sadness against hers. The kiss was soft, but she couldn’t even reciprocate. She was too scared too. After a moment, she freed herself from his grip. In fear, she looked up into his blue eyes. Tom, realizing what he had done, tried to reach out to her.

“Alice, I’m sorry---”

She slapped him, hard. She threw the ski mask at him and distanced herself.

“DON’T COME NEAR ME, OR MY SON, OR FP EVER AGAIN.” her voice wavered in anger and confusion. He couldn’t be…..it couldn’t be…..but maybe it was. He tried to call out, to apologize, but Alice didn’t want to hear it. She stormed out of Tom’s office and left the Kellers’ house, her anxiety kicking in. Her emotions all haywire. She was on a ledge and she was about ready to end it all and jump.

End of Chapter Twelve

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Chapter End Notes
So......

Who do you think it is? Keller? Hiram? Tall Boy? Maybe all.....just kidding ;)

Also....I've wanted to personally thank you all for the mass amounts of love and support! So as an opportunity for yal to connect closer, I'm giving yal an opportunity to submit fan art and/or fan video for this fic! So please, get creative and show me what you got! You can submit all your work to me at my Tumblr (same username as my AO3 one) and I will try to promote whatever yal have!

Thank you all once again, and I will try to update as soon as possible! XOXO
Chapter Thirteen - Martyrs

Chapter Notes

HERE IT IS. THE BIG REVEAL.... DUH DUH DUH!!!!

Time to see if your theories on who the Black Hood was were correct, or time to see if you were hoodwinked ;) Also....one of our dealry departed gets a blast from the past (won't say who)

You know the drill, dudes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Thirteen - Martyrs

The Night of Jennifer Gibson

The night had been long and grueling. He pulled his keys out of his pocket and opened the door to his Sharebnb. Hal could barely stand on his own two feet, let alone get through the door. He shut the door and placed the keys on his table. He looked down, his hands bloody and stiff from what he had just done.

“Fuck.” he muttered, holding back tears. Hal stumbled into the bathroom, his body ached. He wanted a shower. He left the ski mask in a dumpster somewhere, but God help if someone ever found it. He turned the hose on and watched the water come out. Slowly, piece by piece, Hal peeled the clothes off his body.

Why did it have to be me, Hal thought as he stood in the shower, tears streaming from his eyes. What did Fred Andrews do to deserve getting shot? What did Miss Grundy do that he was forced to kill her?

The blood blended with the water as it dripped down his body and spiraled down the drain. How the hell did he get involved in all of this? He wanted some peace and quiet. He wanted Alice. The sex numbed his head, but it made him detached from her, especially when she pulled away in the early hours of the morning.

He missed her. He needed to tell her the truth.

But how? Would she believe him? Would he ever get the chance to be with his son again? But if he did tell….there would be more blood on his hands. And him….the man behind all of this.

He had to tell the truth…..he needed to tell Alice everything…..he needed to tell somebody…..

The moment he got out of the shower and put on some pajamas, Hal pulled out his laptop and sat down on the couch. He took a shaky breath, then he pressed record.

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I should have gone with her, FP thought to himself as he pulled up to Sunnyside Trailers. He had no problem dealing with Tall Boy on his own, but he felt uneasy about Alice going to face Keller alone. Who knew what he would do to her….. But she hadn’t said anything in a long while, so maybe
everything had been alright, or she found nothing.

He climbed off his motorcycle and headed towards his trailer. When he reached the top step, he peered out into the trailer park. A crew of Serpents lounged around a fireplace, and right front in center was Tall Boy. He made eye contact with FP and smirked. The other Serpents glared at him. FP left the steps of his trailer and moved towards them.

“We need to talk, Tall Boy.” he spoke calmly. A couple of Serpents stood up, getting defensive, but Tall Boy held his hand up to them.

“It’s alright boys, I can handle it.” The other Serpents scowled and moved away, leaving FP and Tall Boy alone by the fire. “Made up your mind about your loyalty to the Serpents, Jones?”

“You know I’ll always be indebted to the Serpents.” he replied. Without them, he wouldn’t have met Gladys. He wouldn’t have taken care of Toni, Joaquin, Sweet Pea, and Fangs. He wouldn’t have gotten his job with Keller, and he wouldn’t have Alice. “But that’s not why I’m here to talk to you, Tall Boy. I need to ask you a couple of questions.”

“You gonna interrogate me, boy?” Tall Boy chuckled. He sat down and looked up at FP with a Cheshire grin on his face. “Alright, Office FP. What do you want to know?” Already having enough of this, FP was just tempted to leave…..but he needed answers. Tall Boy had to know something about the snake and the damage to his truck. FP sat down across from Tall Boy and started.

“I’d like to start with the weekend you helped me capture the Snake Charmer.”

“What about that?”

“Mind telling me what were you up to? Didn’t stop by any rivers to grab any snakes, by chance?” Tall Boy lost his smirk and his face went flat. FP continued, “Someone left a snake in my trailer with a note - Snakes don’t shed their skin so easily.” Tall Boy sat up straight, giving FP somewhat a boost of confidence.

“That note is vaguely similar to one of our Serpent laws - A snake never sheds its skin. Don’t think the Black Hood was able to figure out that one on his own…..unless he had someone helping him.”

“The hell are you trying to imply, Jones?”

“Maybe one of our own is in it with the Black Hood, maybe for a long while now. Otherwise, how the fuck did a snake end up in my trailer? How else would my truck have been vandalized?” Tall Boy looked a little more sympathetic at the last question.

“Heard about that.” he remarked with a frown, but FP couldn’t buy into it.

“Which leads me to this,” he began, “since you are weary about my loyalty to the Serpents, as is everyone else around here…..do you think it’s likely that one of our own has been following me, waiting for the right one to attack?”

“Serpents don’t hurt their own.” Tall Boy responded. “You know that.”

“Then how else did the word “traitor” end up on my goddamn truck, Tall Boy?” FP’s voice escalated in anger. He took a deep breath before continuing, “I’m not trying to point fingers…..but there is someone acting as a mole, and it’s not me. But you might know something about that……” FP raised his eyebrow at the other Serpent. Tall Boy chuckled at the comment.

“You think I did this?” he started to catch on.
“I don’t know…..but you’ve always been one to stir trouble. Start fights. Remember Pickens Day?” Tall Boy’s eyes went wide at FP’s question. “When you tried to vandalize that statue? How is that any different from what happened to my truck? You’ve been nothing but a stickler these past few weeks….how do I know that you’re not just trying to screw me over---”

“You’ve gone mad, Jones!” Tall Boy stood up and violently pointed a finger at him. “Just remember who helped cover your ass for all those busts you had on the Southside! And who kept you from losing your damn job during the Blossom implosion!”

“I got it.” FP glared up at him. “Serpents don’t stand alone. You’ve always been one to protect the pack…..even if that means getting rid of anyone you deem a traitor.”

He should have kept his mouth shut. He feared that Tall Boy would tackle him to the ground and pound him to death. But luckily, Tall Boy lowered his finger and turned away. Then, he marched over to FP and yanked him up, holding onto his shirt between his fist.

“This is your last warning, FP.” Tall Boy threatened in a low voice. “Whatever you’re trying to dig up in this snake pit, it ends now. And I won’t be there to help you clean up the massacre once it ensues.” He glared FP up and down one last time before letting him go. “If I were you, I get rid of that jacket, ‘cause the others won’t let you wear it for much longer.” With that, Tall Boy stomped off, leaving FP alone by the fire pit.

FP shook his head in frustration and headed back into his trailer. Tall Boy was hiding something. He had to have known something. The snake and the truck weren’t not just the Black Hood’s doings. Somebody in the Serpents was working alongside him….right underneath their noses. But he didn’t need to worry about that now….. Right now he needed to get in touch with Alice.

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She sat at the counter of Pop’s gripping onto her cup of coffee as a way to prevent her nail routine. Alice spent every other breath letting out silent tears or gasping for air.

Tom Keller kissed her. He’s known her all this time…..could have been the one to do all of this? And now he regretted it, which is why he resigned? Something had to make him implode……

“What would she tell Hiram? What would she tell FP?

“More coffee for you, Alice?” Pop approached her with the pot in his hands. She sighed and nodded at the older man. He gave her a sad smile and poured her a fresh cup of coffee. “Something bad happen at work? I thought you caught the Black Hood.”

“I thought I did too.” she croaked out. She wiped her tears away before taking a sip. “Everything’s falling apart. The Black Hood’s still out there…..and FP and I don’t even know where to look.” She went quiet for a moment, feeling bad for venting at Pop. “And Hiram’s not even back in town, yet.” she mumbled the last part.

What would she tell Hiram? What would she tell FP?

“My friend will come back.” Pop reassured her, moving away to set down the pot. “Hiram Lodge, I mean.” Her eyes widened…..did he hear her? He turned back to her and smiled. “Whatever business you have with Hiram, I promise I won’t say a peep.” He winked, giving her some reassurance.

“Thank you.” she whispered and took another sip. She sat there for another moment, drowned in her thoughts. Behind her the door open, causing the bell to chime.

“Speak of the devil, and he appears.” Pop commented. Alice turned around and found Hiram
entering the diner. He removed his hat at the sight of her and smiled.

“Alice Cooper, you are a sight for sore eyes.”

Her heart swelled and the dark thoughts disappeared. She laughed and left her seat, running over to him. She cupped his face and kissed him, letting the familiar taste of him warm her up. His taste drowned out everything—-it made her feel safe. She pulled back slightly and looked into his eyes, softer than ever.

“I thought you were still in Manhattan.”

“No….I left.” he shook his head, never breaking his smile. “I just wanted to come back and surprise you. Missed you terribly.”

“I could say the same.” she choked out, leaning up to kiss him again. It must have been unconscious, but she let out a small whimper and felt her tears starting up again.

“Alice….” Hiram held her face in his hands and looked at her, all worried. “Alice, what’s wrong?”

“I….” she stopped. What the hell would she say to him? Help me, I’m going crazy. The Black Hood is not dead and I think it might be my former boss? By the way, he kissed me? Her thoughts creeped back in, making her grit her teeth.

“Something’s gone wrong, Hiram.” she finally spoke. “Not with us…..but with the Black Hood.”

“Hey. Whatever happened….or what is happening…..you can tell me.” he pushed some hair out of her face and stroked her cheek.

Alice shut her eyes for a moment. The images of what happened with Keller, Joseph, and…..everything, it started seeping back into her. She took a deep breath and opened her eyes.

“I think it might be better if I had you and FP sit down for this.” she replied.

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**The Night Before Fred Andrews and Jennifer Gibson**

Hal finished the last of his article and hit print. He leaned back in his chair and sighed, running his fingers through his hair. He was the only person left in the Register, so it meant that he would have to close up for the night before the papers ran the next morning. He looked over his agenda again to see what he had to cover for the rest of the week - the high school’s talent show, updates on Hiram’s SoDale project, the anniversary of the Riverdale Reaper massacre….was there anything else?

Hal got up from his seat and went to the sink to splash some cold water on his face. He rubbed the sides of his head, feeling a slow ache seeping in. Part of him wondered if Alice would show up at his place….or what if she was already there waiting for him? No, she would have been at the station closing up the last of the Jason Blossom case. Beside, she hadn’t been over in a few days. Maybe she no longer wanted to see him for sex. Maybe she already made up her mind to end it all.

His phone buzzed in his pocket. An unknown number was calling. Probably just another spam. He slid the “Answer” button and turned his back to his desk.

“Hello?” he asked, but there was no response. He waited a few seconds and was about to hang up.

“Hello, Harold.” a dark, autotuned voice replied, very much like Ghostface from Scream. His heart dropped. Who the fuck was this calling him?
“Who are you? What do you want?” he tried to keep it together.

“I have something for you.” the voice responded. Hal turned back to the windows of the Register. Was there somebody watching him? He couldn’t make out anything in the darkness. “Look on your desk, Harold.” Following the voice’s command, Hal wandered slowly to his desk, and to his horror, he found a box wrapped up with a red bow on top.

“Go ahead, open it.” He didn’t know what to do. Would he run out into the darkness and find this creep? Or would he dare to open whatever was inside and face his fate? He hesitated for a moment, then he pulled at the bow. He pulled off the lid of the box and looked inside.

“Like what you see?”

Hal reached in and pulled out a black ski mask. Underneath the mask was a shiny, new gun and two sets of pictures. One was of Fred Andrews, and the other…..Miss Grundy? What did this person want?

No…….NO…..

“You want me to kill them?” Hal’s voice went high. The voice on the other end laughed. Had he heard that laugh before?

“Come on, Harold……” His stomach churned. Underneath the audio mix, Hal swore that the voice sounded familiar. It spoke in a way that reminded him of…..

“Fuck this.” Hal put the ski mask back into the box and began to place the lid back on. “I’m taking this to the police----”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you.” the voice warned. “Unless you want to watch your family die, of course.” Hal stopped in his tracks. Whoever this was….whatever sick vendetta he had….Hal couldn’t risk it. Not for Alice and Chic.

“Now are you going to be a good boy and play my game, Harold?” At that point, what other choice did Hal have?

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“KELLER DID WHAT TO YOU?” FP fumed. He was relieved when Alice finally texted him, but he worried that something was wrong. When he arrived at her house, he entered to find Alice and Hiram in living room, and Alice clearly in distress. He thought Hiram had done something, but Alice told him to sit down and to listen while she explained what happened. While he dealt with Tall Boy, Alice had been kissed by Tom Keller.

“He just…..kissed me.” Alice explained. “But I didn’t kiss him back. I froze. FP….I think it might be him.”

“You think Tom Keller’s the Black Hood?” Hiram asked, sitting next to FP on the couch.

“He’s one of the only people in town that’s known me the longest.” she answered, looking back and forth between both of them, “He knew about my situation with Hal….and he didn’t want us going after the Reaper case.”

“I should have known he was up to something.” FP sighed in frustration and leaned back into the couch. “I never should have called him to help us that night.”
“You didn’t know.” Alice stood up in front of them. “But we need to do something, FP. We need to make him confess to what he did.”

“I can try and talk to him.” Hiram stood up and took her hand. “If he is the Black Hood, I don’t want him laying another finger on you.”

“Hiram, no.” she shook her head, cupping his face. “I almost lost you to him once. I am not risking it again.”

“Then let me go.” FP stood up as well. “Maybe during your party thing on Monday night, I can go talk to him.”

“On New Year’s Eve?” Hiram turned to him.

“What, are you suggesting I should delay this? For all we know, he could be planning his next attack!”

“Hiram, can you give us a minute?” Alice turned to her lover. He glanced at FP then turned back to her, nodding. He let go of her hand and moved into the kitchen area. Alice fully faced FP and crossed her arms. “It could be risky, FP. He’s been drinking a lot more….he could lash out at any time.” She stepped in closer to him, taking a shaky breath. “I don’t want to lose you either.”

“I know.” his voice shook. “But let me talk to him. He knows about my affiliation with the Serpents….maybe he might know something about a mole in there.” Alice raised a brow at him. He looked over at Hiram wandering around the kitchen, then turned back to her, placing his hands on her shoulders. “You were right, Alice. From the beginning. There may be a Serpent working alongside the Black Hood. Or at least feeding him information.”

“What? Did you find out who? Tall Boy?”

“No…” he admitted. “He wouldn’t own up to anything. But maybe I can get Keller to squeak.” FP looked back to Hiram and waved him back over.

“So what’s the plan?” Hiram reapproached the pair.

“Here’s the plan. You two go enjoy your New Year, I’ll be the sacrificial lamb.” He stated. Alice looked at him, concerned. Hiram gave him a sad nod. FP turned to Alice, giving her some reassurance. “If I lose my job….or my snakeskins, so be it. Worth fighting for.”

There was a cry from outside the house, startling all three of them. It sounded familiar.

“Mrs. C!” Joaquin’s voice yelled out.

“What the fuck?” FP ran over to the door and opened. Joaquin stumbled in with Chic….oh God….Chic had a wound in his upper arm. Blood was slowly coming out. Toni followed in behind and shut the door.

“CHIC!” Alice screamed and ran over to her son.

“Some rowdy Serpents were talking shit about you guys,” Toni started to explain to the adults. “Chic made an attempt to defend you two….but they didn’t like it so much.” Chic’s cries filled the room. Alice, in straight up full panic mode, helped Joaquin get her son onto the table, then wandered to an area in the kitchen and fell to her knees, about to have a breakdown. Hiram and FP looked back and forth at each other before moving. Hiram stayed near the kids while went to approach her. He helped stand her up and led her back to the group. He had to do something.
“Toni, get the disinfectant from under the sink.” FP directed the pink-haired girl. “Help Alice get the wound cleaned up.” Toni nodded and grabbed what she needed. “Joaquin, you keep him calm and don’t let him squirm too much, or it will make it worse.”

“On it.” Joaquin confirmed, turning to comfort Chic. Alice was able to get herself somewhat together and grabbed some cleaning gloves Toni gave her.

“Is there something I could do?” Hiram asked. FP turned to him and grabbed him by the shoulder.

“Alice has a thing of first aid stuff in her bathroom. Can you go find it?”

“I think so.”

“Okay.” FP patted his shoulder and sent Hiram off. He faced the group again, watching Alice and Toni apply the hydrogen peroxide onto Chic’s wound.

“Hang on, blondie.” Joaquin soothed him. “You’re gonna be okay.”

The boy hollered at the stinging, his head curled into Joaquin’s shoulder.

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She came out of her son’s bathroom with her face clean and her hands no longer stinging or smelling like disinfectant. She moved to his doorway, watching Chic drift asleep with Joaquin crouched on the side next to him. The young Serpent looked over at Alice and wandered over to her.

“I was trying to get him out of it.” Joaquin sighed. “They were gonna get me at first, but your boy…. He’s a warrior.”

“You did the right thing, Joaquin.” she spoke. She stopped for a moment, looking down at the younger Serpent. With all the chaos happening in their lives, Chic seemed happier….more open about what he wanted. And that was due to his involvement with the Black Hood….and starting relationship with Joaquin.

“I don’t blame you for what happened today. You’ve been so good to my son. With the Black Hood……and him coming out. Thank you for everything you’ve done for Chic.” Her words made him touched.

“Thank you, Mrs. C.” he spoke sympathetically. “I like him. A lot. You’re good people. I’ll watch over him for the rest of the night. You get some sleep.” He reached for her upper arm and gave a gentle squeeze. Then, he left and went back over to Chic.

“Just let me know if you boys need anything.” Alice shut the door and gripped the handle, exhaling. She wandered down the hallway and entered her bedroom. Hiram sat on the edge of the bed waiting as she came over.

“How’s your son?” he asked her.

“Fine, for now. Joaquin’s keeping an eye on him.”

“And you?”

Alice shrugged and flopped onto her bed back first.

“I’ve been a lot worse.” She stared up at the ceiling fan in silence, watching the blades swirl round and around. The breeze blowing onto her skin was a comfort. She allowed herself to relax and
closed her eyes, reaching out for his hand. Hiram laid down next to her and took her hand into his own.

“How do you bare it?” he muttered. “How can you go through all of this and still come out standing tall?”

“I don’t always.” She huffed and rolled onto her side, facing him. “If shit happens in the family, we try to find something to make it work, for all of us….even if I have to make sacrifices. That’s what Hal and I tried to do before he died. It’s not just family either, it’s work too. If a case ends in my favor, it doesn’t always mean it ends well for me mentally.” She stopped, trying to think of how to explain her inner thoughts. The talks she had with Hiram earlier before Christmas helped…..but it still wasn’t everything on her mind.

“It’s hard, and tiring,” Alice admitted, “And I just have to pretend everything is fine so no one gets in and sees the ugly truth.” She stopped for a moment, clamping her mouth shut. She never really had the chance to open up about her all of her mental turmoils with Hal…..granted he knew some of it, but not enough. The only other person who knew was FP. But opening up to Hiram was going on no-man’s-land. She didn’t know what the outcome of her unraveling would result in.

He turned to his side, his chest against hers, and rested his fingers on her chin.

“You are one of the bravest people I’ve ever met, Alice,” his voice was soft and smooth. “I don’t think there’s any other cop in Riverdale that’s gone through what you went through. You have scars, yes….but at least they turned out to be beautiful.” His thumb traced her lip with ease. His eyes melted into her head. She felt so calm….peaceful….no longer worrying as much about FP’s fate. She leaned in and kissed him, allowing his hand to gently grasped the back of her head and his fingers to curl into her hair. She pulled him closer to her and rolled slightly onto her back, his chest on top of hers. He broke the kiss and looked down at her.

“What?” she asked. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m ending it, Alice.” he spoke. “I’m ending my marriage with Hermione. I tried for so long to make it work…..but something just never clicked. I don’t think it ever did, even with Veronica in our lives.”

“What does that mean?” her voice went a little high-pitched, her eyes watering. He bit his lip and continued.

“It means she’ll be staying in New York with Veronica…..and I’ll be here in Riverdale. With you.” The realization hit her. He chose her over his own damn wife. And his own daughter. His gaze suddenly went soft.

“I love you, Alice.”

Her heart stopped. She blinked up at him a few times, absorbing every word. I LOVE YOU. I LOVE YOU. She broke down every syllable in her head, making sure she heard him correctly. I LOVE YOU.

“What?” she croaked out. Hiram climbed off her and stood up, pulling her up with him. He held onto her hands as he spoke.

“I’ve struggled, all my life, Alice, to feel any sort of empathy or admiration for anyone. And that’s not from my upbringing….I’ve had that in me for a while. The only time that….I am able to feel those things…..is when I’m with you. Not Hermione. Not even Veronica. It’s you, Alice.” He
paused, his eyes getting wet. He moved his hand to cup her cheek and tilted her head up to look more up at him. “Every time I look at you….it’s like I’m being reborn and seeing a brave new world. I’ve dealt with too many secrets in my lifetime….and I’m ready to bury that behind me. Move on. I want to be able to have those feelings and to love….I want to experience that more with you. And I know that now, because I know that I love you.”

She stared longer into his eyes, not knowing how to respond. She read his expression…..it was so pure and genuine. He was honest, he was helpful….all the things the Black Hood wasn’t. In that moment, she knew Hiram couldn’t have been involved with the Black Hood. Alice allowed herself to smile through the tears, stroking his hands.

“I love you too.” she finally replied. “You’ve made me feel so safe and secure. I’ve had Chic and FP, but not in the ways I’ve had you. And I know that now, too. I love you. Hiram Lodge.”

“Really?” he choked, and she nodded. She wiped away his tears with her thumbs, it felt therapeutic. They pulled each other in and kissed, clinging to each other tight. Her fears of the Black Hood possibly resurging, Keller advancing on her, and Chic getting injured began to melt away.

He pulled out slightly and his eyes went wide.

“I just remembered….your gift.” he smiled. He let go of her and moved to where he left his coat. He dug around for a while then pulled out something. He walked back over to her slowly and held out the box to her. It wasn’t an engagement ring box….it was too large. But whatever jewelry he bought for her wasn’t just anything cheap or disposable.

“Picked this one up for you Christmas Eve. I was going to try and ship it to you…..but I figured it’d be better to give it to you in person.”

“Hiram….you didn’t have to…..” Alice took the box and opened it. Inside laid a pale gold heart-shaped locket a small diamond stud on one of the sides. She stared at it in awe. “This is….I don’t even know what to say.”

“Then let’s see how it looks on you.” he took the box back and pulled out the locket. He moved behind her and led her to the mirror.

“May I?” he lifted the necklace over her head and rested it on her collarbone area. She grabbed her hair and moved it to the side so he could have easier access to the clasp. Once he secured it, he let go, letting his fingers dance on the back of her neck. She stared at her reflection and held onto the heart locket.

“It’s gorgeous.” Alice smiled and leaned back into him. She craned her head back, staring up at him.

“You look gorgeous in it.” he moved in closer and captured her lips. She rotated around so her chest was against his and sunk deeper into the kiss.

“I feel kind of bad,” Alice broke off for a moment, “I didn’t really get you anything.”

“Mi amor, having you is all I wanted.”

“Guess your wish came true then.” she teased and came back in. She took charge and led him back towards the bed and the two flopped down, passionate in the moment.

Alice for that one night no longer had as much fear for what was to come. Sure, she still worried about FP going to see Keller by himself…..but maybe the Black Hood scare was all a giant hoax.
Another intrusive thought leading her astray. She knew now that Hiram couldn’t have played a hand in this nightmare. She was much more sure of it in that moment.

He would never do anything to hurt her.

FP pulled up closer to the curb so Alice could easily get out. New Years Eve finally arrived, but neither one of them were ready for what was to come. Cheryl had decided to host a New Years Party for the younger Serpents and Chic at Thistlehouse, so the older two made sure Chic arrived there with Joaquin and the others safe and sound. That left FP and Alice alone in his newly fixed truck heading downtown for her party. She wore a grey lace dress and a red cover wrap that paired with her new locket, and she braved a painted face. She looked beautiful…..angelic even. He was stunned when he saw her come out of the house with Chic. But there were other things occupying his mind to tell her that.

He didn’t know what would be expected with Tom Keller that evening. Would he try to make FP drink with him while they go down in flames? Or would he end up confessing to it all? Or none of it? The questions rolled through his head as he arrived at the location. He stopped the car and turned to Alice. She had the mirror pulled down so she could check her makeup for any smudges.

“This lipstick’s too much.” she frowned at her reflection. “I look like a goddamn clown.”

“Stop….you look fine. You know Hiram will love it no matter what.” FP reassured her. She sighed and faced him, grabbing for his hand.

“You going to be okay dealing with Keller by yourself?” Alice asked. “Maybe I can call Minetta or…..something.”

“I think I’ll be alright, Coop.” he played with her hand. She hadn’t dug into her palms for a couple of days, so the scars were healing over. She seemed better since the crisis with Chic earlier in the weekend…..but FP couldn’t make any promises. He grabbed both of her hands and firmly held onto them. “Tonight, all you need to focus on is having a good time with Hiram and to start your new year right. I’ll keep in touch with you, update on what’s happening. Then when it’s over, we’ll meet in the morning. Okay?” She didn’t respond, but she gave him a mournful look.

“If we could,” Alice muttered, “Could we use our code word again? Pop’s?” FP looked into her eyes….they were all panicky.

“If you….what are you saying, Alice?” She went quiet, then she turned out to the windshield. She looked dazed.

“Why do I feel like something is going to go wrong tonight?”

He sat up straighter in his seat, softening his hand holding. He wanted to ask what it meant, but she started up again, squeezing his hand tighter.

“There’s this hunch I’m having, FP. I tried to ignore it this weekend, after what happened with Keller. But something’s underneath the surface of all of this. And I’m afraid it’s going to rupture tonight. I think something bad might happen….to you or me, or the kids. FP, I---”

“Hey.” FP interrupted, causing her to turn back to him. He sighed and spoke in a soft manner, “Nothing bad will happen to us, okay?” He let go of one of her hands and lifted her chin. “We’re gonna get through this, Alice. I know we can.”
“I know.” she mumbled, shutting her eyes. “We’ve worked so hard to get where we are. And I’m not just talking about with the Black Hood……I’m talking about us.” She stopped, opening her glossy eyes again. Her lips trembled as she exhaled.

“You are my best friend, FP. You’re the best partner I’ve ever had. I don’t want to lose you.”

He worried for her fragile head. He didn’t want her dark thoughts to ruin this night for her. He wanted Alice to be happy. FP leaned in more and kept a firm hold on her hands. He looked into her eyes and attempted to give her a reassuring smile.

“I’m not going anywhere, Alice. You’re not going to lose me anytime soon.” She blinked and stared down at the lower half of his face. His breathing began to sync with hers in a slow, steady rhythm. She glanced back up to his eyes, then down again.

Then, Alice moved in, cupping the side of his face. She left a long, lingering kiss on his cheek. Her lips felt soft against his growing stubble. He could feel a lone tear on his skin. She hovered over that one area, looking back up at him. He looked down at her, his gaze staying on her red lips. They were closer now….just one inch closer and they could….

Alice lowered her hand and opened the car door. She slipped out and opened her umbrella to block the new falling snow.

“You want me to drive you closer?” he asked, leaning over the cupholders. She wrapped her scarf around herself more and shook her head.

“I’ll be okay. I could use the walk.” she tried to sound optimistic. “Thank you, though.” Someone working the valet came over to her and led her to the staircase leading inside. He watched her leave with the valet man, glancing over into the passenger side mirror. His cheek was marked with her lipstick. Another valet worker waved FP to drive forward and follow the procession out. He pushed the mirror back up and moved up. He stopped, waiting for the car in front of him to go. FP turned back out to the building, watching the attendants arrive one by one. Alice lowered her umbrella and shook off the snow. She met his gaze and gave him one last long look.

“Be safe.” she mouthed to him, looking more sorrow than before. The valet man led her inside, turning her away from FP. He watched her disappear inside.

“You too.” he spoke to no one.

FP drove away from the area and stopped in the middle of an empty street. He pounded on the steering wheel and felt his eyes get heavy with tears. What if something did go wrong tonight? What if this would be the last time he saw her?

An Hour and A Half Before His Death
They moved over to the couch after a while. They stayed quiet for the most part….the talking wore them both out….but they never let go of each others’ hands. Hal looked at her, trying to remember every wave in her blonde hair, the lines forming near her eyes, the softness of her skin. He wanted to tell Alice about his troubles….he shot Fred and killed Grundy for fuck’s sake. And he almost spent the night with Penelope Blossom. Nothing major happened…..just some kissing. But he couldn’t bring himself to do this. Not everything he was risking for Alice and Chic. He tried to call her the day before, but with no luck. He thought he had lost all hope.

But they were talking now. They were heading towards a right path again. What if his confession of
the Black Hood ruined it all? Would she even believe him? Maybe….maybe not….Maybe the confession he recorded could catch someone’s interest. But what were the odds of them finding it in time? Especially if something did happen to him or to her, or even Chic….

Alice met his gaze and frowned.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked him. What would he say to her? How could he prepare for her reaction when they’ve gotten this far? If only there was just a start-over button….

“What if we just…left?” Hal spoke. She raised a brow and shifted to face him. He sighed and continued, “When we get our relationship back on track, what if we took Chic and just left Riverdale behind…..so we could all start over?” Alice opened her mouth then closed it, staring down at their hands.

“What about the Register?” she croaked out. “It’d only be a matter of time before your mom will try to get her hands on it the moment she---”

“I won’t let her.” he grabbed her hand tighter. “The Register belongs to me, not my parents….so it would go to you and Chic if something bad happened to me. But I don’t anything bad to happen….to either you or me. We can just go….put the past in the past….begin our lives again somewhere new.” She sat there for a moment, not responding. He shifted in his seat placed his fingers under her chin, lifting it.

“Do you want, Alice?” he asked her honestly. “I know with work….and….” he struggled to find his words. He looked into her eyes…..there were as beautiful as ever. And yet they looked heartbroken. Was their marriage salvageable, with everything that was happening to both of them? Was there even a fucking chance?

“I’ve done so many stupid things.” he admitted. He wanted to tell her about Fred Andrews, Ms. Grundy, his business with Hiram Lodge and Clifford Blossom, Penelope Blossom, stealing the evidence from her Jason case…..the list was extending. And now there was the Black Hood. And he had a sneaking suspicion of who it could be.

“I’ve fallen apart, and I’m spiraling out of control.” Hal confessed to her. “I don’t know what to do…..”

Alice scooted closer to him and rested her forehead against his own, holding his hand even tighter. “This too shall pass, Hal.” she whispered, her voice like a soothing wake-up call. “This too shall pass…..”

There’s so much I want to tell you, baby, Hal thought to himself. Part of him wanted to kiss her and let his troubles escape. He wanted so badly to have her back in his life. But they needed the repairs. They needed to take this one step at a time.

They stayed in their position, their foreheads touching, their hands interlocked. It was the most at peace he had been in a long time.

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Part of Alice wanted to go back outside to see if FP was still waiting for her…..but the men working the valet area had already led the other attendants of party inside. There were too many of them to get through. By the time she would have gotten out there, what if he was already gone? Too late now.

She clasped onto her little purse tighter, impatiently waiting for her phone to buzz or something. Breathe, Alice, she thought to herself as they took her umbrella. Just have fun tonight. Enjoy your
New Year with Hiram. She took a deep breath and proceeded further.

Alice glanced all around the venue - it was ten times better than SoDale. Business associates, their partners and lovers, and almost every other rich person in Riverdale was in here, walking around or scattered along the stairs and the balcony. She looked for a sign of her lover…where was he? The entryway continued to pack in, making her claustrophobia kick in. She heard his voice first, then she looked over by the staircase. Hiram made his way down the stairs while in deep conversation with a business client. He looked at her and glowed, making her feel better about the situation. He left the client by the bottom of the stairs and strode over to her, never breaking the grin on his face.

“There you are, my little detective.”

“Hi.” she giggle as he closed the gap between them. His lips tasted of expensive whiskey, but she didn’t mind. “Sorry if I’m late. FP and I had to go take Chic to his friends’ party.”

“Don’t apologize, mi amor. You’re right on time.” He took her by the hand and led her into the main ballroom. The place smelt of champagne and flowery perfume. The crowd staggered in bunches of groups by the bars, the tables, and out on the dance floor. Alice looked up - there were black and gold balloons pinned to the ceiling by a black mest net. Whoever was on DJ played good music. Who knew the elite and the rich could throw a damn good party?

A waiter came over to them and offered them drinks. Hiram grabbed two glasses and handed one to her. Alice took one and smiled. She sipped on the bubbly drink watching everyone in conversation. She was slowly starting to forget about her worries….. Hiram moved them over to one of the tables and set their drinks down. She placed her purse on the table, making sure to take her phone out…..just in case.

“Everything alright with FP?” he spoke over the noise. She turned to him and nodded.

“Yeah. He’s going to be meeting with Keller soon.” she replied. It took her mental strength not to begin having a nervous breakdown. Don’t think about it, Alice. Don’t you dare.

“I have faith in him.” Hiram stepped in and took her hand. His voice suddenly went low. “If everything goes smoothly…..maybe we can all get what we want.” He met her gaze and gave her a soft smile. She craned her head back and laughed.

“Okay, you’re right.” she continued giggling: “I shouldn’t try to focus on it too much. New year, new us. Cheers to that!” She took another sip of her drink, making him chuckle.

“Have I already told you that you look like a million fucking bucks tonight?” She held the drink to her lips and stared at him. She set the drink down, smirking, and moved into him.

“Go ahead. Tell me.” she commanded in a husky voice into his ear. He groaned and held her face in his hands. He growled something in Spanish in her ear and began to nip at her neck, making her giggle even more. Whatever the fuck was in her drink, it was putting her in a good mood. She only understood some of what he was saying, but she got the general gist. He looked at her again, his eyes hungry and lustful, and she could do was smirk at him. The music playing over the speakers made her hips crave for movement. Alice took Hiram’s hand and led him out to the dancefloor. She wanted to dance. She wanted to have a good fucking time. After all, she deserved it.

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He determined that he would wait until 11 before he headed over to see Keller. FP spent a majority of the night thus far preventing himself from collapsing into his bed and having a panic attack, or
worse, a PTSD breakdown. His mind went back to the night of Gladys’s death, and Alice’s voice interwoven with the scene. He was able to calm himself down and prepare for his meeting with Keller, but that was only after a half hour of him crying. Later in the night, FP sat at the edge of his bed, holding the photo of his family in his shaking hands. He worried for his children in Toledo. He worried for Gladys beyond the grave. He worried for Alice at that party. He worried for his own damn safety. After a minute or two, FP checked the time on his phone. 10:57. Close enough. It’s go time, Jones.

He rose up from the bed and folded the photo, sliding it into his back pocket. He left his trailer and headed out for his truck. FP hoped that he wouldn’t have to deal with Tall Boy or any of the other loose cannons in the trailer park as he walked around. Luckily, no one seemed to notice, so he was able to slip into his truck without a sound. He turned on the ignition, trying to not let his inner thoughts get to the worst of him, and drove off.

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**Seventy Two Hours Before His Death**

He finished writing out the address on the enveloped and sealed it shut. Hal took a deep breath, staring down at the package. Would somebody believe him? Would it be too late to write a confession for the papers? No turning back now….

His phone buzzed on the table. The unknown number again. Hal reached for his phone and answered, his heartbeat going out of control.

“What do you want now?” Hal went soft.

“I see you got your job done. Good work, Harold.” the voice spoke, still as sinister as before. But he knew that voice’s way of speaking…. “If you’re not too tired from last night, I have another assignment—–”

“Fuck you.” Hal muttered. The voice went quiet, then it laughed.

“Hal….don’t tell me you’re backing out. We just got started—–” No. He wasn’t going to fall for it again.

“I know who you are, and I’m not going to play your damn game anymore….especially in some stupid black hood to kill people.”

“Black Hood? That has a nice ring to it. We can use that when we continue our path together…” the voice droned on, but Hal didn’t want to listen anymore. He was tired, and he was done being played like a goddamn fool. He slowly grew some confidence as the voice finished speaking.

“There is no more “we”. Got it?” Hal threatened. “Find someone else to be your muscle.” And with that, he hung up the phone. Hal rose up from the couch, grabbed his keys, and marched out the door. He headed towards the closest mailbox, clutching the package in his hand, and shoved it inside.

Where could he go from there? It would take a couple of days for the package to reach its destination. What if the Black Hood caused more harm? What if he found someone new to do the dirty work? Time was running out….and Hal needed a plan. One place stuck out in his mind. One person. It may not work, but it could be a start. Hal headed to the parking garage and drove off to the station. He needed to get to Alice and get her to listen. For all he knew, she would be crawling to get this case at that moment.

Have fun playing your game when my wife sends you to jail, motherfucker.
The drive to the Keller household didn’t take much time. The neighborhood was strangely quiet and not crowded, so it was easy for FP to get a spot on the road near Keller’s home. He turned off his truck, running through a list of possible questions in his head. Why did you kiss Alice? Why did you shoot Joseph that night? Why did you resign? What does this all mean, Tom? He grabbed his gun from his glove compartment and exited his truck, making his way towards the house.

FP knocked on the front door and waited. A minute or two passed in dead silence. Was the bastard even home? He huffed and was about to leave when the door opened. He turned around to find Kevin Keller at the doorway.

“Hi, Mr. Jones.” the young boy greeted him. “Is there something I can help you with?”

“Kevin, is your father home right now?” he asked. Kevin let out a sigh and gave FP a confused expression.

“Yeah, but….he hasn’t really come out of his study for the majority of the past couple of days. The Black Hood thing really got to him.”

“That’s kinda what I need to talk to him about. Is now a good time?”

“I guess?” the boy moved aside to let him in. FP thanked Kevin and headed towards Keller’s office.

The door was wide open, the way Alice described it being when she went over a few days prior. He entered the room - Keller was nowhere to be found. The office had been cleaned out for the most part, but there were still some boxes scattered on the floor and on the desk. FP glanced around one last time before leaving. The boy had disappeared back into his room, so FP was alone in the house. He heard a noise coming from the kitchen, striking his attention. He headed towards the direction of the noise….should he have his gun ready? He made slow steps, being cautious and trying not to cause a disturbance, then he went through the doorway.

Tom Keller finished rinsing out a glass and placed it in the dishwasher when FP showed up. Tom turned to him and smirked.

“Let me guess? Alice sent you to finish the job?” he threw out, but FP didn’t say anything. Frankly, he didn’t know how to respond. He didn’t want to kill Tom….but if he tried anything….maybe. But how could he guess it already? Unless he knew FP was coming tonight. Tom rolled his eyes and wiped off his hands. “You probably want some answers before you kill me. Is that right?”

“Something caused you to implode, Tom.” FP finally spoke up. “You leave without giving me or Alice a warning…..and it happens to be around the time when the Black Hood disappears. If I were honest, I don’t think it’s a coincidence.” Tom scowled at him. He moved away from the sink and waved for FP to follow him.

“We’ll go somewhere more private. Don’t want Kevin overhearing any of this.” Tom moved around him and headed towards his study. FP, hesitant all of a sudden, followed him in. Tom slouched in his chair, gesturing for FP to sit down.

“I’m good.” FP shook his head, walking over to the desk.

“Always had to be the difficult one, Jones?” the other man rolled his eyes. He clasped his hands together and placed his elbows on the table. “Where would you like to start?” FP ran over the list of questions in his head….they were all starting to blend together. But one constant aspect stayed clear in his mind. One person he cared about deeply more than anything at this point.
“Why did you kiss her, Tom?” FP started, Alice on his mind. “Don’t think Sierra McCoy would approve of that, for starters.”

“Haven’t you heard? She left me. Unless Alice didn’t share that with you.” Tom answered, then paused. He stared down at the desk lost in thought. “It was dumb of me.....I was drunk, stupidly drunk. Maybe I’ve always had some admiration for Alice. When I first met her, she was outspoken and fearless. But she always had a chip on her shoulder.....don’t know how or why, maybe she had one for a while. Regardless, she’s one of the best I’ve seen in a long time.”

“Sounds to me like you may know some stuff about her personal life.” FP dug in, leaning over the desk. “I don’t know.....like, hobbies of hers, by chance? Reading poetry?” The questions made Tom lean back into his seat and remove his elbows.

“Those were the letters she was getting?”

“They were clues.....indicators of who the Black Hood would be going after. And magically.....you were never around to help us find those people. I’d ask Sierra to back up your alibis.....but since you two are no longer on good terms.....”

“I was with her, FP.” the former Sheriff became defensive. “If I’d really been that obsessed with Alice, why would I have been with Sierra?”

“Like you said.....alibi.” FP smirked. “Also, how would that back up the fact that you have a black ski mask in your desk?”

“I took it from Joseph Svenson after we caught him.” Tom admitted. “When you decided to be a dumbass and go save Hiram Lodge.”

“Hiram stays out of it. Why would he have faked his own kidnapping? What reason would he have to make Joseph a scapegoat? But you were pretty quick to take him down, Tom.”

“You and Alice would have ended up dead if I didn’t come in a shoot him.” Tom stood up, sounding more sympathetic. But yet, he still had no reason to lash out this way. Unless he knew something.....

“Then what about Hal?” FP asked in a low voice. “Would you have done something if Hal tried anything to hurt Alice?”

“What does Hal.....” Tom attempted to answer but went quiet. Maybe FP was finally starting to break down his walls. But not in the way he expected. Tom looked more sympathetic.....more genuine..... “Hal was a troubled man, sure.....but he was never violent. He loved Alice.”

“But you knew their marriage was crumbling to pieces. With the way you described Alice, you’d do anything to make her happy-----”

“I DID NOT KILL HAL COOPER.” Tom yelled. “WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO GET AT, FP?”

“Dad?” Kevin’s voice caught their attention. The older men turned around to find the younger Keller standing at the doorway. “What’s going on?”

“Fuck.....Kevin, I’m sorry.” Tom choked, moving away from his desk to confront his son. “I’m getting more escalated than I need to be at this damn hour.” He turned back to FP and gave him a sympathetic look. “I get it. You’re confused. You’re scared for her. But I did not go into that Sharebnb and slaughter her husband. I liked Hal. I always respected him.” FP wanted to feel bad for him....Tom had to endure heavy amounts of stress in the past few weeks. He patted his son on the
shoulder then moved over to the bottles of liquor on his side desk.

“Promise this will be the last one for tonight. Might help me be able to answer your questions.” he reached for a new bottle FP had never seen before and began to unscrew the cap. “You want some, Jones? For old times sake?”

“Really, Tom?” FP raised a brow, pushing himself away from the desk. There was no way in hell he was going down that rabbit hole again…..

“Right, sorry.” Tom shook his head, waving him off. “Guess I’m going solo.” He poured himself a drink and returned to his desk.

“Dad….maybe Mr. Jones has a point. This Black Hood thing is making you act out. Why are you doing this to yourself?” Kevin joined FP’s side, fearing for his father. Tom sighed and looked back and forth between them.

“Well….if this town wants to see me collapse, so be it.” He raised his glass for a cheers. “Happy fucking new year.” Tom brought the glass to his lips and chugged the drink down. He set the glass on the table with a thud, frightening them. He let out a small cough, probably from what FP figured was the alcohol going down the wrong tube. But the cough turned into more coughs. Harder. Nastier. Like he was choking.

“Dad?” Kevin called out, but Tom couldn’t respond. He tried to stand up but had to place his hands on the table to keep him somewhat steady. FP stepped towards the desk and looked at Tom. His face was going purple….there was blood coming out of the corners of his mouth. Tom fell over.

“TOM!” FP ran over to the man and knelt over. Tom gripped onto his Serpent jacket, coughing up blood. He tried to say something, but all that came out was wheezes. “What? What are you trying to say?” FP felt his heart beating at a hundred miles an hour. Kevin, behind them, starting panicking in fits of tears. Tom lifted his finger and pointed towards his desk. “TOM, WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?” FP yelled. But there were no more explanations. No more alibis of nights with Sierra McCoy. Or admiration for Alice. Tom’s finger fell to the floor, resting limb next to his dead body.

“DAD!” Kevin cried. “OH MY GOD, MR. JONES. PLEASE DON’T TELL ME MY DAD IS DEAD.” FP stayed where he was, completely frozen. Keller is dead. Keller is dead. I have no answers and Keller is dead. POPS POPS POPS ALICE WHERE ARE YOU

“Kevin, I need you to call 911.” FP struggled to stand up, not looking over at the boy. “Get back up.” He turned around and almost fell over. The smell of the alcohol and Keller’s dead body hit him. Kevin didn’t move, making FP more on edge. “GO!” he yelled, causing Kevin to run off for his phone. FP fell onto his knees, begin to hyperventilate. He pulled out his phone, dialing the only number he could trust. He waited…..one, two, three, COME ON ALICE PICK UP, four, ALICE PLEASE, five. Straight to voicemail.

“FUCK!” FP screamed, pounding his fist on the floor. But that didn’t stop him. He sent her one word. One single text message. But it got his point across. He waited, looking around the unsettling scene. His phone vibrated in his hand. ALICE.

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Only one more hour remained until midnight. Alice didn’t want the night to be over; her fears were drowned out by the music. Yet again, she wished that people would stop bombarding her with questions. How did you and Hiram meet? What does Hermione think about all of it? Will you two eventually get married? She had to step outside a few times to get some fresh air, but Hiram made
sure she was hanging in there. For a few minutes, they would either go into a deep conversation or wind up making out. Regardless, he made her feel good. He helped make it easy.

They were back in the main room, swaying to some 80s song when a thought came to her. FP hadn’t made any attempts to reach out to her since he dropped her off. Did he make it to Keller’s? Would he come back…..at all?

“I’ll be back.” Alice gave Hiram a quick peck before she headed back over to their table, fighting to make her way through the crowd. Once she could push herself through, she found her purse and phone buried underneath a hoard of other people’s shit. She grabbed her phone and saw the string of texts. And a missed call notification.

POPS

Fuck.

Alice immediately pressed his contact and waited as the phone rang. FP picked up at the second ring.

“FP,” Alice began in a worried tone, “I just got your text.”

“ALICE YOU HAVE TO HELP. PLEASE.” FP rushed on the other end. He sounded panicked….

“FP, what’s going on---”

“KELLER’S DEAD!” he yelled in between heavy breaths and sobbing. “HE HAD A DRINK, BUT NOT FROM ME. SOMEONE SLIPPED SOMETHING IN THERE, AND IT POISONED HIM. HE’S DEAD ALICE. TOM KELLER’S DEAD…..”

She couldn’t hear the rest of his words, her ears were pounding. Her heart beat slowed then became rapid again. She felt dizzy. Keller was dead. Oh fuck, Keller was dead. Did that mean…..

“Alice?” Hiram called out from behind her. She turned around and gave him a panicked look. He took the phone from her hand and continued the conversation with FP. “Wait a minute, slow down, FP. What happened to Keller? Oh god…” Hiram sounded monotone. His expression blank. Not even an ounce of fear came across his face…..until he looked back up at her.

Alice starting to lose her balance. Her vision went fuzzy and faded to black. She was about to fall over.

“ALICE!”

That was the last thing she heard before she passed out.

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“FP, I’m going to have to call you back.” Hiram told him in a panicked voice before he hung up. FP tried to stop him but it was too late. He clutched the phone in his hand, letting the world crumble around him. Keller’s dead. But what about Alice? Why didn’t Hiram keep the call going? Was she okay?

“I had trouble getting medical help. But I called for backup.” Kevin caught his attention. The younger Keller ran over to the desk area and knelt down beside his father’s body. He gave FP a worried expression, his face wet from tears. “What do we do, Mr. Jones?”

“I don’t know, boy…..” he spoke. FP didn’t know what to do. He didn’t know what to think about
what happened. Did Tom Keller die burying his secret with him, or was he made a sacrificial lamb? A martyr? He looked back over at Keller’s dead body. His finger still pointed towards the desk. Or was it the bottle…. What was he trying to tell FP? Was there something in his desk that could help?

FP leaned over and pulled open one of the drawers. The one he opened was filled with stacks of paperwork, sticky note pads, pens, a package from Hal Cooper------ A PACKAGE FROM HAL COOPER.

FP grabbed for the tiny little envelope and held it. Hal sent Tom something? From when? What was this from?

“Mr. Jones? What is that?” Kevin asked him.

“Guess we’re about to find out.” FP ripped open the envelope and dug in. The only thing inside was some sort of USB and a folded piece of paper. He pulled it out the envelope’s contents, opening the paper first.

To whoever gets this, watch the video. It will explain everything. I’m sorry you had to hear about it this way.
- Hal Cooper

“Kevin,” he turned to the young boy and stood up. “Get your dad’s laptop, or yours….whatever will play this thing.” he gestured to the USB. Kevin nodded and left to search for a laptop. FP considered calling Alice about his find….but what if it was a giant hoax? It could had been from the Jason Blossom case for all he knew. Then why did Tom have this? Why didn’t he share it with Alice?

Kevin came back in with his father’s laptop and placed it down on the desk. FP sat in the chair and opened the laptop. With Kevin’s help, they were able to log in and pull up the home screen. FP gave one last look at the USB, then he plugged it in. The laptop took a moment to read the USB, then the icon popped up. He clicked on it immediately.

“Is there anything on the drive?” Kevin asked. FP stared at the screen for a while. Only one file was on the USB, but it was not labeled. Please don’t lead us astray, Hal, FP silently prayed. He clicked on the file and looked. On the file was a video. A video Hal made….it looked recent. Was this before he died? FP pulled up the video and turned to Kevin.

“This may not be pretty….fair warning.” He told the young boy. Kevin nodded in response. FP turned back to the computer, the mouse hovering over the video. He pressed play.

Hal sat on his couch, clearly in distress. His hair was wet. A shower, maybe? He exhaled, clenching his fists, then he spoke.

“Hello, whoever is watching this. Hal Cooper here….you know, from the Register. My wife, Alice….she works for the PD. But you all know that already. Fuck, just get to the point, Hal.” His whole manner was off. He seemed fidgety and restless. What the fuck happened that made him record this video.

“I don’t know if you’re going to find this video in time….when it all gets worse…..but I have to do this. I have to tell somebody the truth. About what I’ve become involved in.”

“Mr. Jones?” Kevin tried to ask, but FP shushed him, turning up the volume on the laptop.

“I did something terrible today….two terrible things, actually. Around last night, I got a phone call from what I believed at the time to be an anonymous caller. I thought it was a prank….but whoever called me…..he left a package on my desk at the Register. There was a gun….and a black ski mask
inside…..” FP sat up straighter. Hal was visited by the Black Hood. That must mean he knew who it was. How would Hal know….. Unless….. When did he say he received this? “But that wasn’t it…. there were photos of two people. Two people this person wanted me to attack…. to kill.” He stopped, getting emotional. Hal, what did you do? “I didn’t want to…. I’m not a violent person….. but he made me. He threatened my family….. So I had to. There was no other choice. I had to do my job……. I shot Fred Andrews at Pop’s Diner this morning, and then earlier this evening, in Greendale…. I killed Geraldine Grundy.”

His heart dropped to his stomach. That was how Fred and Grundy were connected to Alice. The Black Hood forced Hal to do the first attacks. But then how did he die? Because he ratted out their scheme? Because he loved Alice? What drove the Black Hood to kill him?

“I’m a good person.” Hal sobbed. “I’m not evil. I’m not bad. I was just forced to do a bad thing.” But you did other bad things too, Hal, FP thought to himself. “Alice…. if you’re watching this…. I’m directing this to you. I’m so sorry, sweetie. About everything we’ve been through. And I’m sorry for what I have to tell you. But if you’re out chasing me for this…. you have the wrong guy, baby. You need to find the one who made me do this. The one planning it all. And this is my one chance to help….. but listen carefully to me…..”

The video went on. The blood went through his veins and pounded heavy in his ears. A shock went to his head. FP sat there, blinking at the screen. His heart beat faster. His eyes bulged. He couldn’t believe the words he heard, but they were true. No…. it couldn’t be, there was no way….. but it was. It all made sense. He sat there, numb, frightened….. the panic button was starting to go off.

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Ten Minutes Before His Death
Hal stayed in his vehicle for a few minutes, absorbing the past two hours. He had a chance with Alice. They were going to be alright. He could put this Black Hood thing behind him once and for all. He took a deep breath and smiled.

He left his vehicle and left the parking garage. He headed into the complex building and made his way up the steps. This too shall pass, Hal thought to himself as he reached his floor. The rewind button was close to his reach…. he was lucky to even get a second chance, so he couldn’t fuck it up.

He walked down the hallway…. something was off. The place seemed quieter than usual. It was Sunday, so people are probably just sleeping in. Everything was fine, right? Oh well. Hal pulled out his keys and unlocked his door, not looking into his Sharebnb residence. He turned behind him to shut the door, then turned around…. He froze.

The man in his living gave him a slow malicious smile.

“Hello, Hal.”

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It took her a moment to stir awake. Alice wedged her eyes open….. wherever she was, it was dark. Was she still at the party? Why was it so quiet? She groaned and tried to push herself up.

“It’s alright, you’re safe.” Hiram sat on the bed next to her and stroked her arm. She sat up fully and looked around - they were back at Pembrooke in his bedroom.

“Hiram,” she croaked. “How long have I been out?”

“Just a few minutes. You fainted at the party…. so I got you out of there. You had me worried, mi
amor.” He grabbed her hand and held onto it. She tried to recollect her recent memories….what happened before she…..

“Do you remember anything?” he asked. The call from FP. The one word screaming out at her. Keller….

“Keller’s dead.” her memory came back to her, hitting her like a ton of bricks. “FP called me….someone killed Keller.” She turned to Hiram and grew more panicked. The Black Hood was back…. What if FP was next? Or Chic? She let go of his hand and stood up.

“Alice--”

“I have to go! I have to help FP!” Alice stumbled out of the room, heading out to the living room area. Where was her phone? Her purse? Did Hiram take her stuff? She pushed aside pillows on the couch and dug in between the cushions.

“Alice, what are you doing?” Hiram came out to join her. She felt her breaths becoming unsteady, her heart flying out of her chest. Where was it?

“I can’t….I can’t find my…..did you do anything to it?”

“Do anything to what?” he knelt down beside her.

“My phone!” she replied quickly, returning to her search. No luck. Where the fuck did it go? She stood up, scanning the entire living room again. What if the Black Hood already got to FP? What if he was going after Chic and his friends this very moment?

“Alice, please…..” Hiram spoke to her calmly, “You have to slow down----”

“I DON’T HAVE TIME TO SLOW DOWN!” she turned to him and snapped. “MY SON IS IN DANGER. MY PARTNER IS IN DANGER! I CAN’T LEAVE THEM TO DIE!” She paused, gasping for air, feeling her face get hot, the bags under her eyes getting heavy. “HIRAM, WHERE THE FUCK IS MY STUFF? WHERE DID IT GO?” She wanted to fall over. She still felt dizzy, but there was no time to play the helpless damsel in distress. She needed to get her ass in gear and go get FP and Chic.

Alice started hyperventilating, her nails scraping her palms. “What if he’s dead?” she choked out. “What if they’re both dead? Oh god, Hiram…..” she looked at him, her lips trembling, “We’re not safe.” Hiram looked mournful. Guilty. He walked over to her and held her in his arms. She cried into his shoulder…. She couldn’t lose FP. Not now. Not with everything they’ve been through….

“How do you know that?” she muttered. He stayed quiet for a moment, stroking her hair. He took a deep breath, pushed some hair away from her ear, and leaned in. His lips were so close, his breathing vibrating in her ear drums. Then, Hiram spoke.

“Because I’ve already taken care of it.”

Her eyes snapped open. Her jaw went tight. Her body started shaking. She leaned away from Hiram, staring into his eyes. He looked remorse, but he still stood strong. She pulled away, backing up
slowly towards the wall.

“Those people that hurt you,” he continued talking, “They got what they deserved.”

Her heart beat rapidly. Her eyes were watering. She couldn’t even look at him. Alice turned towards his office and ran inside, slamming the door shut. That didn’t stop him from talking.

“I never wanted you to find out like this. It was every bit of my intention to bury it along with Joseph Conway. I do feel a bit awful for stringing him along….but now he can rest easy, I assume. Maybe this was all a good thing. Maybe death is a way to start over...a helpful tool. A friend.”

She didn’t want to hear anymore. Her ears were pounding. She glanced around his office, her eyes finding a file on his desk.

“There’s a poem I found….one by Clarence E. Flynn. But you know how that goes, don’t you?”

She wandered over to it, holding it in her hands. She flipped it open. What she found scared her.

“Why do you fear me?
I am your friend.
I but guide trav'lers
Rounding the bend
Lead them to freedom
From time and age,
Help them start writing a new page…”

Information about Fred Andrews. Jennifer Gibson. Penelope Blossom. Copies of poems, correlating to their perspective people. Hal included. There were photos of Hal connected to Fred and Jennifer. She couldn’t stop staring at it. Every single page was titled “Operation: Alice”.

“Seek for me never,
Keep your course true ---
When I am needed
I’ll come to you,”

Alice stumbled away from the desk, towards the roaring fire. She wanted to cry. She wanted to scream. Call for help. But there was nothing she could do. The door opened behind her, but she wasn’t ready to face him. She wasn’t ready to face the truth.

“Then I will show you
Roads without end ---
Why do you fear me?
I am your friend.”

Alice slowly turned to Hiram, silently crying. He stepped into the dark room. His face was covered in shadows, except for his eyes sockets, lit by the glowing fire. He stepped in closer, coming fully into the light.

“No more secrets.” he muttered in a somber tone. “No more lies.”

Alice opened her mouth, then closed it. She gripped the file in her hands. Her stomach churned. Finally, she found the words. Her mind started to make sense of it all.
It was him. It had been him from the beginning.

“You’re the Black Hood.”

End of Chapter Thirteen
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Chapter End Notes

#SHOOKETH

Okay be honest, did you think it was Hiram all along, or did i do a good job of leading yal astray? LOL it's fine. But how will it all go down? Will FP go to save Alice? Will Alice be able to get away? How will it all end? Hmm.....
Chapter Fourteen - Judgement Day

Chapter Notes

SO HERE IT IS....THE FINAL SHOWDOWN!

Also, so sorry for being away for so long! I just started my J-Term at school, and homework’s been my priority. But I couldn't just leave yal hanging. So here you go! Mwah!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Fourteen - Judgement Day

FP couldn’t believe his ears. Hiram Lodge was the Black Hood. And Hal knew. Did he die because he was going to rat Hiram out? Or was there something else? He had to rewind the video. Once, twice, just to make sense of it all.

“Listen to me carefully,” Hal’s voice started up again. “There’s a bad man out there, Alice. Someone who’s been manipulating me…..manipulating everyone he interacts with. His name is Hiram Lodge. We went to school together...our fathers were friends. But the Lodge family….they’re bad people. They’re corrupt in their ways. There’s a reason I’ve never introduced you two, baby. He’ll manipulate you and lie to get what he wants. And I think that’s what he’s doing now.....I think he’s the one who called me to make me go after Fred and Grundy.”

“Oh my god……” Kevin muttered behind him, but FP couldn’t get his mind off the whole matter.

Kevin moved behind him and went over to where the bottle sat. He picked it up and took a good look at the logo. His eyes widened, almost dropping the bottle.

“What? What is it, boy?” FP directed his attention to Kevin while the rest of the video finished out. Shaking, the younger Keller handed the bottle to him, his fingers gripped around the logo. FP squinted, then his heart raced.

In silver lettering read one company - LODGE INDUSTRIES.

“Mr. Lodge did this.” Kevin muttered, tears coming out. “He must have sent this while I wasn’t here. Mr. Jones, he killed my father.”

FP felt helpless. His boss was dead on the ground. Hal Cooper died to get the truth out about Hiram’s true intentions…..but in FP’s head it was already too late. HIRAM IS THE BLACK HOOD ALICE IS WITH HIM NO WHAT IS HE GOING TO DO TO ALICE ----

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She wanted to turn away, but she couldn’t stop staring at him. Hiram was the Black Hood, all this damn time. He lied to her. He sent her and FP down this violent, mind-fucking path…..and he was going to get away with it all.

Alice couldn’t speak; the tears flowed down her cheeks in silence. How could she have been this stupid? Why did she think falling for Hiram’s spell could be a good rebound from Hal? She felt

Hiram sighed and looked at her with a mournful expression. “Be honest with me, Alice. Did you ever once suspect that I orchestrated all of this? Even after we started dating?”

Her nails pulsed at her palms. She clenched her teeth together, telling herself mentally to just breathe. But she couldn’t stop staring. Hiram stepped closer, his eyes giving off mixed emotions.

“It was never my intention to have them lay a finger on you through this whole process. I told them, point blank. Of course, my companion was a bit of a rule breaker. You have to believe me---”

“Believe you?” she spat out, backing away. She held out the file to him, gesturing to it violently. “You murdered these people in here.” He took a step closer, making her more escalated. “You put me and FP through hell just to play your stupid game.” He attempted to close the gap between them, but she violently pushed him back. “YOU FUCKING KILLED HAL!”

“Alice…..” he kept his calm.

“AND YOU HAD THE GODDAMN AUDACITY TO GO AFTER MY SON. MY SON! TWICE!” Alice pointed a finger and cried. She gasped for air in between her sobs, her hands shaking. Hiram stepped in and grabbed the file from her hands. She looked up at him, not knowing what to feel for him anymore.

“How long, Hiram? How long have you been stalking me? Gathering the list of people to go after…..and the poems? How did you even find those poems?”

“Like I said….Hal always talked about you. What you liked. What you wanted in a romantic relationship.” She wanted to slug him. He fucking murdered her husband. He caused this stress on her. And he called it love. “Hal was a good man, he truly was….but he was gullible. Just like his father. He loved you so much he was willing to do anything….even commit murder. Or did he not tell you of that either before he died?”

“Why the hell should I believe anything you tell me anymore?”

“Because it is the truth.” he set the files down and took her hands. “The Conways had a plan for my father….to sell him out for whatever business he was doing before I took over. He couldn’t lose it….his family, the business. So he had Hal’s father go take care of the problem…..”

She didn’t want to hear it. Oh god, Hal’s father killed the Conways. He was the Riverdale Reaper. That’s why Howard went insane - he never knew that the killer was just an ordinary man. But then there was Joseph….and he was probably forced into silence by Fernando Lodge….just to be safe.

“My father was able to do it, keep a good alliances with the Coopers. I thought I could too with Hal…..when I had him go after Fred Andrews and Ms. Grundy.”

“Oh my god.” she shook her head. Why, Hal? Why did you let Hiram manipulate you like this?

“But he loved you too much. He couldn’t hurt you more than he already had.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Alice wailed. “So what? You had one of your men go take him out? Because he played whistleblower?” Hiram looked down, then returned her gaze in remorse.

“I didn’t want to resort to it…..but it was better for me to confront him myself.” She felt sick. Hal…..oh God, Hal…..
“What did you do to him?” she asked in a whisper. She didn’t know why she asked…she already knew the answer….

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Hal was paralyzed. He couldn’t make himself move, or even run out the door. He felt trapped.

“How the fuck did you get in here, Hiram? How did you get a key?” Hiram’s smile faded slightly as he stood up, never taking his gaze off him.

“One of the ladies downstairs let me in with a masterkey.” He looked around the room, pacing from the window back over to the dining area. “I’m disappointed, Hal. You have all that money I’ve given to you over the years. Why settle for a shit hole like this?”

“I don’t want your money.” Hal replied, growing some confidence. “I let Alice have more of the money so she and Chic could use it in the future. They need it more than I do.” Hiram rolled his eyes and smirked.

“Always so selfless, Harold.” He stood up and paced around the room. Everything about his demeanor was offsetting. He wasn’t here just to provide Hal with some money. He wanted something else.

“You hear about what happened to Fred Andrews a couple of days ago?” Hiram called out. “Apparently he was shot by a masked vigilante….maybe it connects to what happened in….Greendale?” What was he trying to get at? Would it be smart to call Alice? Or Keller? How did Hiram know…..WAIT.

Of course he knew. Hiram fucking made him do it.

“Hiram, if you don’t get the hell out, I’ll---”

“You’ll what?” Hiram turned to him, his eyes like glass spheres. “Call the police? Do you really think it’s that smart to tell them what we’ve been doing?”

“What YOU made me do!” Hal fired back, pointing a finger at him. He had to get out. He couldn’t get Hiram to leave. Hal clenched his fists and moved into his bedroom…..he needed to get his suitcase.

“Seriously?” Hiram scoffed behind him. “You’re going to skip town? With a killer on the loose? Pathetic…..” he continued to talk, but Hal ignored him for the most part. He didn’t want to hear anymore of it. He was making a plan in his head - pack up, turn the keys back in and close the lease, grab Alice and Chic, and leave Riverdale. If Hiram really was who Hal feared…..it could mean trouble for both of them. Including Alice. But what if he met her? Oh god…..what would happen if Hiram Lodge went anywhere near his wife?

In the background, the TV turned on. Was that…..was that the video from his wedding day? He turned around and saw Hiram standing in front of the TV watching his wedding ceremony.

“What are you doing? Turn that off!” Hal called out, but no response. “HEY DID YOU HEAR ME?” Still nothing. Sighing in frustration, Hal marched over to the living room and stood by the couch, where Hiram had made himself comfortable. His eyes were glued to the screen…..one person on the screen.

“She’s beautiful.” he muttered. Hal looked back and forth between the TV and….this intruder. “Remind me why haven’t let me meet her?”
“You’re fucking kidding, right?” Hal scoffed. “I don’t know, because you’re a goddamn criminal, and a sociopath….and you’ve done nothing but screw me and my family over.”

“Is that how you view our relationship?” Hiram turned to him with sorrow eyes. “No….no, no, no. I’m making you a real man, Harold. I try to…..at least. But you haven’t really made much progress. Especially with Alice.” He turned back to the TV and his eyes glowed in a way Hal never seen them before. Hiram looked enamored, at peace….what did Alice have to do with any of this?

Then he remembered their long talks….Hiram asking about Alice. What she liked. Where she worked. What Hal felt like he was failing at when it came to being her husband. But how would shooting Fred Andrews and killing Ms. Grundy have to….. It clicked. Something inside his head was screaming. This new game Hiram is making him play.

It was to get her attention. To finally come out of the shadows and to have her meet him at last.

“You said Alice liked poetry, right? The classics? Edgar Allen Poe? Emily Dickinson? Well, I started reading them in the recent weeks…..I can see why she likes them. The meanings can relate to so many topics….can explain the actions of so many people…..”

“Why are you doing this, Hiram?” Hal choked. He wanted to cry. He wanted to run out and go back to her. He needed to keep her safe. “Why Alice?” Hiram turned back to him and gave him a mournful expression.

“There’s something about her. Something that I’ve never been able to have at my reach as long as I could remember.” He stopped for a moment, sighing, then continued, “I had someone else go after her and….whoever that Serpent was…..with her a couple of days ago. You’re a key component in this, Harold. Something that can finally allow the two of us to meet.” Hal froze. He knew Hiram was talking about Alice and himself.

“No.” Hal shook his head, slowly backing away. “No.” Hiram went to speak, but Hal went off in the other direction. He wasn’t going to let Hiram Lodge manipulate him anymore. He wanted Alice. He wanted to hold her and apologize for every little thing that he did wrong. She may not forgive him, but she had to listen. She just had to. Hal placed his hands on the bed and let the heavy tears flow.

“I’m not risking my marriage to do anymore of your favors. Alice is too important to me. Chic is too important to me. I’d rather die than live not having her next to me.” He paused, gasping for air between sobs. He took a deep breath and gripped the sheets.

“I can do better. I must do better. For her.”

It was silent, except for the video playing in the background. But he was too focused on his breathing. Hal opened his eyes, letting out an exhale. He let go of the bed and went to turn around…..to find Hiram directly in front of him. Something sharp jabbed into his stomach. Hal grunted, trying to back away, but Hiram held his grip. He finally pushed away, stumbling back towards the bed. He lifted his hand from his stomach…..oh god, was that his own blood? He looked up at Hiram - the fire in his eyes growing wilder. He lunged at Hal again and striked, pinning his down onto the bed.

He attacked, over and over. Hal couldn’t find the strength to fight back. His life was fading. But the video…..someone had to find it. Someone had to learn the truth of how danger Hiram Lodge truly was. Gasping for air between the blood coming out, Hal looked up. Hiram appeared into his view, gripping onto his shoulder.

“I’m sorry, old friend.” he muttered. “But you know the rules. I. Always. Win.” Then he smiled,
raising the knife and going for Hal’s throat.

She couldn’t find the air. Her vision blurred in tears. Hal….

“I didn’t want it to have to resort to it, Alice.” Hiram explained. “But he was becoming a liability in the operation. It was only a matter of time before I had to intervene…..and take care of it myself.”

“No….” Alice choked out. She turned away from him and covered her mouth to smother her cries. She stared into the fire and felt like she would collapse. Hiram murdered Hal himself…..not with a worker in a ski mask…..not even one of the drivers. Hiram did this on his own. The thought made her sick.

“You two were unhappy together.” he spoke. “You tried to make things work for the sake of your family….but I don’t think you two were ever truly in love.” The last comment made her remove her hand from her mouth. What the fuck did he know about love?

“You said it yourself….you were depressed. And you couldn’t even express it to him, no matter how badly you wanted to. You were alone, Alice.” She felt his hand squeeze her shoulder.

“DON’T FUCKING TOUCH ME.” Alice turned violently and threw his hand away. She wanted to smack him and run. To go find FP and Chic. To get as far away from Riverdale as possible. He looked down at her in sadness. Guilt. Was he trying to make her feel sorry for him? Through emotional manipulation?

“How did you know so much about me? Have you been eyeing me since Hal and I came to Riverdale? What were you trying to get out of all of this?” She wanted the answers so badly, but she didn’t even know if she could trust him anymore. He stepped in closer and took a deep breath.

“I told you. The day I took you to the Conway home. It’s always been you. I saw you from the beginning. Before you took on this nightmare….and Jason Blossom. There was a silent cry for something…..and I filled it.” What the fuck was he telling her? She was confused by all of this. She wanted her son. She wanted FP.

“You wanted someone to pay attention to you. To bring out your best potential. But those people were bombarding you. People like Penelope Blossom, and Tom Keller, and even Hal. They weren’t doing you any good….and I wanted to fix that.” But why would you want to get the blood on your hands, Alice thought to herself. It was obvious Hiram didn’t fit the description of the Black Hood, but he knew people who could. Some who were too loyal to him.

“So I created someone who could. But I realized that what I created was hurting you….a monster I couldn’t control——”

“NO.” she spat out. “Don’t you get it? You are that monster. You and the Black Hood are the same fucking person! No matter how many people you have doing your dirty work! YOU DID THIS!”

“And that’s why I’m trying to end this!” He took her hand and held onto it. He handed her the file, looking down at it before refocusing on her. “All the things I said….about how I felt for you. It’s all true. I love you, Alice. I want to love you….the right way. We can do it. We can start over, together.” He directed his gaze to the fire. Slowly, he led her to it and glance down at the file. “We can put this mess behind us. And can run. Begin our new lives.” He edged her closer, implying for her to toss the file into the fire, signaling the end of this dark age.

She wanted to let go. She wanted to move on from the Black Hood so badly. She wanted to be
happy. To be in love.

But not with him. He promised her happiness.....but what if that was a lie too? What would he do to her now that she was all his? What would happen to Chic? Would he have to stay behind and endure the pain himself? And what about FP.....

“This Black Hood fiasco will be nothing but ashes. You don’t have to worry anymore....” Hiram continued, but her eye was caught on something else. Something shiny on the side....stick-like. “No more Blossoms. No more Serpents.” She moved closer to the fire...towards that object. “No more wicked mothers-in-law or spouses who only make you invisible.” She had to play it smart. She had to wait for the right moment. “We’ll be like Romeo and Juliet.....except we get to live happily ever after in the end.”

Alice paused, holding the file close to the file. She took a deep breath. Go time.

“You’re right. I can. Too bad you fucking won’t.”

Before he could respond, Alice dropped the file on the ground, grabbed for the fire poker, and swung it at Hiram. She whacked him in the head and sent him to the ground. He groaned in pain, but it wouldn’t be enough to allow her time to get away. She raised the fire poker again and struck down, harder. Hiram was out, but not dead. Just enough time....

Alice ran over to his desk and searched his drawers. Her purse! She grabbed it and found her phone....or what was left of her smashed phone. Fuck. She looked over at the cord phone on his desk. Of course. Unplugged. She scanned the desk one last time and found her jackpot for surviving the escape from Pembroke. A pistol and a knife. Bingo. She shoved the knife into her purse and held onto the pistol. She heard him grumbling, coming back to some consciousness, making her panic.

_Get out, Alice. GET OUT._

She moved past Hiram, pinning him down with her heel in his back. She grabbed the keys out of his pocket and ran for the door. Once she got out of the office, Alice pulled the doors shut and locked it. With the hammer head of the knife, she jammed the key into the door.....having fun trying to leave now, asshole.

She stumbled to the door, her purse under her arm. Behind her, there was a banging from inside the office, scaring her.

“Alice?” Hiram’s voice called out, panicked. He banged again, growing more angry. “ALICE, LET ME OUT! LET ME OUT! DON’T LEAVE ME!”

She couldn’t wait any longer. Fuck the purse. She grabbed her tiny wallet and shoved it into her dress. Wielding the knife in one hand and the pistol in the other, she stormed out of his apartment.

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“Mr. Jones? Mr. Jones?” Kevin’s voice called FP out of his thoughts. He blinked and stared down at the young boy. “What are we going to do?”

What was there to do? Hiram was going to win, and they would all wind up dead. And Alice.....Alice.....if Alice was smart, she would have found a way to get herself out. She had to be alive. Maybe there was a chance.

“Pembroke.” FP muttered. Kevin’s face contorted in confusion. FP rolled his eyes and yanked the USB out of Tom’s laptop. He held it out to Kevin and spoke. “We need to get this out to the public.
But first we need to find my partner. She could still be alive…. We need to get to her.”

“But what about my dad? We can’t just leave him here!” Kevin gestured to the dead body on the ground behind them. Frustrated and anxious, he shoved the USB into the boy’s hand and began to move around him.

“You wait until the medics come, and you give that to them when they show up.” He began to head out of Tom’s office, pulling his gun out of his belt.

“Where are you going?” He turned back to Kevin and held up his gun.

“I’m fucking ending this once and for all.” He was about to head out the door when the power went out. The house was pitch black, silent. FP struggled to see in the darkness….were there that many people partying on New Years to cause a power outage? Or was it something else? Someone else? He held up a hand to his eyes when Kevin rushed over holding his phone up as a flashlight.

“I guess we’re sticking together then. We have to get the power back on.” Kevin rushed his words. He breathed heavily.

There was a rattle in the living room area, spooking both of them.

“But don’t think this is your normal power outage, boy.” FP held the gun close to his mouth, gesturing to stay quiet. “You stay with me. And don’t run off, or make any noise. Got it?” The younger Keller nodded. Using the boy’s light on his phone, FP and Kevin wandered slowly through the house, towards the direction of the noise. Could it be possible Hiram sent someone after them? To clean up the mess? Would he wind up in jail for good?

They stood outside the doorway of the kitchen, the house now silent. FP leaned in, holding his gun out. There was no one inside. How was this possible. He allowed Kevin to move into the kitchen and FP lowered his weapon. “Stay here.” he told the boy, heading back out into the hallway.

“I told you to stay out, Jones.” the voice made FP jump. Tall Boy stood at the other end of the hall with a smug look on his face.

“The hell are you doing here, Tall Boy?” FP called out. He blinked, waiting for a response, but the other man just chuckled.

“What the hell is that…..” FP stopped. The moonlight beamed on Tall Boy’s face. For the first time, in a long time, he starting paying attention to the other man’s eyes. FP started to back up, gripping his gun tighter. “How did you know I would be out here?” Tall Boy just smiled down at him. The brass knuckle duster curled around his hand.

“Surprised that you weren’t getting my messages loud and clear. Boss wanted me to make it painless…..but you know that’s not how I do things.” There needed no more explanation…..FP already knew who that boss was. And he knew what Tall Boy had done. He sent the snake to FP’s trailer and chased them at the garage. He damaged his truck. He attacked Alice and Chic, and he went after Cheryl in Thornhill. He was the muscle of the operation.

“Mr. Lodge sends his regards.”
Instinct made FP raise his gun, but Tall Boy knocked it out of his hand. The Serpent swung at his face, the knuckle duster cutting the flesh under his eye. FP stumbled into the doorframe and fell. “Mr. Jones!” Kevin yelled. Tall Boy kicked him in the ribcage, making him groan in pain. He knelt down beside FP, about to give him another hit to the face.

But FP banged his head into Tall Boy’s, giving him some advantage in this brawl. He leaned up, punched the Serpent in the throat, and pulled back the fabric on his shoulder. There front and center was a healing wound, one Cheryl Blossom gave him.

“Interested in my battle scars, Jones?” he chuckled almost out of breath. FP sat up straight and put pressure on the wound with his thumb. Tall Boy yelled in pain, allowing FP to push him down and to the side. He grabbed some of the man’s hair, and smashed his head to the floor. He motioned for Kevin to come out of the kitchen. Kevin hurried out and reached for the gun on the floor. FP got back up on his feet and grabbed the gun from Kevin, leaving Tall Boy there.

Where would they go? How much time did they have before Tall Boy would get back up and strike again? They had to get out. They had to get somewhere safe. But Tom. They couldn’t just leave the body there. Was it safe to call Minetta? The others? And Alice……what was Hiram doing to Alice?

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She had to play her next moves wisely. There could be multiple men waiting for her downstairs. Hell, Hiram could be behind her trail in that moment. But Alice needed to get out of Pembrooke. She had his weapons after all. Why not go down without a fight?

She scrambled down the stairs, going from floor to floor wielding her weapons in her hands. There had to be other residents in the building that could help her get to a phone. She had to call Minetta and the other authorities. She had to reach out to FP. And Chic. But what if in some way they were all connected back to him? What if they would just rat her out?

She began to think about the other women in Hiram’s life as she flew down more steps. Did Mrs. Mullway ever learn about his true nature? Did he bump her off when he was bored of her? And Hermione……oh god, Hermione. Was that why she accosted Alice in the bathroom? Not to berate her, but to warn her? To help her? Maybe that was why she took Veronica and left for New York? But what about Christmas? What was Hiram doing in New York?

Two of Hiram’s men stood on the other side of the door as Alice reached the third floor. She leaned back against the wall and felt her heart beat uncontrollably. She closed her eyes and gripped the gun tighter. How the hell would she get out? She was trapped. Hiram would never let her go…….No. She did not belong to him. He would never own her.

Alice opened the door and fired at one of the men. The bullet hit his skull, sending him down. The other guard panicked and tried to grab at her wrist. She swung the knife at his face, slicing his cheek, and tried to move past him. He hit her, making her stumble out of one of her heels, and sent her flying into the wall. She noticed that her lip had been cut open, and wiped the blood away. He lunged out at her again, attempting to get one of the weapons out of her hands. She turned the gun on its handle and whacked him in the jaw with a blunt force. He grabbed her forearm and turned her around, her back to his chest holding her in a headlock. She scratched at his arm, kicking her legs up to try and break herself free. He was too strong. But she was armed. Alice stabbed the guard in the thigh, freeing her from his grip. She hunched over her knees to regain her breath. Finally, she stood back up and slit his throat.

Alice unconsciously dropped the knife by the dead body, contemplating what to do. How many bullets did she have left? She pulled back the glock and her heart sank. One bullet left. Fuck. She fell
to her knees, the panic sinking in.

“Alice?” Shivers went down her spine. She looked over at the doorway and saw Hiram. She couldn’t tell if he looked disappointed or terrified. If he got anywhere near her…. She had to make this last shot count. He moved slowly.

“Alice---”

She raised the gun and shot him in the shoulder. He yelped and held his hand over the bleeding wound. She got up and breathed heavy. Taking off her remaining heel, she hurled it at his head. She couldn’t lose her gun now. Unless she could find something better. Something more lethal.

Alice grabbed the knife and sprinted off in the opposite direction, getting as far away from him as she could. She turned the corner and made a break for the door at the end of the hallway. They had to let her in. Maybe there was a window, a fire escape she could get out through. She began to strategize her course of action in her head. Get out of Pembrooke. Get to the station. Find Minetta. Call for FP and Chic. If they were both still alive.

She banged on the door, but no one answered. Fuck. What would FP do? What would Hal do? Alice took a couple of steps back, then ran at the door, body slamming into it. She did it again, feeling a bruise forming on her arm. She stepped back to go again, then turned around. Another guard aimed a rifle at her. She ducked as he shot the door. He stomped over to her, slinging the rifle behind his shoulder. The rifle. She could use it.

Alice lunged and punched him. She grabbed at his shoulder, trying to slide the rifle off, but he shoved her into the wall. Her head hit the wall with a thud, and she winced. He twisted the knife in her hand and made a nasty slice in her bicep. She screamed, the wound feeling like a death sentence. She dropped her smaller gun and kneed him in the balls. She now had the advantage.

She regained the hold on the knife. He gripped her wrist, almost at the point where he could break it. But that wouldn’t stop her. Alice plunged the knife into his eye socket, pushing it further in. He was dead before he hit the ground. A moment passed, she grabbed the rifle and broke the door open.

She held the rifle up, looking for any more attackers. Her arm was oozing out blood. She found the kitchen and grabbed for a towel. She set the rifle down on the countertop and wrapped the towel around her wound to stop the bleeding. Letting some moments of silence pass, Alice turned around and smiled. A window. She could get out. She made a run for the window.

Andre came out of nowhere and reached for her arm, right where the wound was. “There’s no use running, Alice.”

“Fuck you.” Alice jammed the back of the rifle into Andre’s gut. She freed herself and ran for the window. She struggled at first to open it, but she eventually opened the hatch and pushed it up, looking down. There were no fire escape stairs near her. All there was on the street was a dumpster farther away and a back entrance into the lobby. Fuck it. Alice swung one leg over the edge and took a shaky breath.

“Please….,” Andre coughed. “You need to come with me. Mr. Lodge won’t hurt you anymore.”

She couldn’t stay here. What other choice did she have?

Alice held onto the rifle’s band around her shoulder and turned to Andre.

“You don’t fucking get it. He already did.”
And she jumped.

Tall Boy groaned at the end of the hallway. Time was running out for FP and Kevin. They had to get out. But where? A hand grabbed at his bicep, scaring the living shit out of him. FP jumped and turned around, only to blink at the person.

“Chic?”

“Are you guys, okay?” Chic whispered. Behind him, Toni ran in wielding a flashlight. The kids were both in their party attire. Wait….

“What the hell are you two doing here?” FP hissed at the two.

“We came to rescue you, dumbass.” Toni replied. He turned to Kevin and raised his brow.

“You told me to call for backup. And I did.” Kevin smiled, gesturing to Chic and Toni. Sighing in relief, FP turned back to the kids and nodded at them. At the end of the hallway, Tall Boy groaned and stumbled his way back onto his feet. FP whipped his head and fear, then without hesitation, he led the kids out through the back door. He waited for the kids to leave before he slammed the door shut.

“What happened to Sheriff Keller?” Chic asked. “Is he dead?”

“Did Tall Boy do this?” Toni followed up. FP shoved his gun back into his belt and sighed. He was about to speak when the door busted open behind him. Tall Boy tackled him to the ground, causing the kids to scream.

“Go! All of you! RUN!” FP yelled at the kids, but they were frozen in fear. Tall Boy held him in a headlock, his bicep squeezing FP’s neck.

“You should have just taken that prison sentence, Jones.” Tall Boy growled. “But it’s always been about bad luck for you, hasn’t it? With Gladys, the Ghoulies….. And now your pretty little blonde’s in trouble, too.” FP felt the air leaving his lungs. He couldn’t think about Alice dying….not now. Not especially in the hands of Hiram Lodge.

“Get off him, you asshole!” Toni ran over and swung at Tall Boy. He fell off of FP, giving him some way to climb out. But Tall Boy stepped over him and lunged at Toni. He shoved her down with a blunt force, about ready to attack her next.

“NO!” FP yelled. He leaned up and grabbed at Tall Boy’s jacket. Chic ran over to Toni and helped her up. He used his grip to pull himself back up, but the other Serpent sent him back onto his knees. He punched FP in the face again and laughed. He gripped at FP’s chin, holding him there.

“Hope Gladys saved you a place in hell.”

Something whizzed through the air. An arrow hit Tall Boy in the same area as his wound. He yelped in pain, letting go of his face. FP fell onto his elbows and turned around.

“I suggest you leave my friend alone, you murderous plebe.” Cheryl marched closer to the group, her bow and arrow steady in her hands. Joaquin, Sweet Pea, and Fangs formed a semi circle behind her, whipping out there knives. Tall Boy looked down at her and let out a sinister laugh.

“You wanna fight? You asking to go out the way your Mama Blossom did?” He stepped over at FP
and snapped part of the arrow in his shoulder off. He broadened his shoulders and clenched his fists. “LET’S GO, YOU LITTLE BITCH!” He ran at her.

“CHERYL!” Toni screamed, fearing for her girlfriend. But Cheryl was quick on her feet. She aimed her arrow as Tall Boy ran at her and sent it straight between his eyes. Tall Boy’s dead body fell to the ground in a thud. Cheryl smiled, her Goliath defeated.

FP struggled to get back up onto his feet, but Joaquin helped him up. Sweet Pea and Fangs joined Kevin as Chic left Toni’s side to make room for Cheryl. FP watched as Cheryl ran over to her girlfriend and kissed her. The girls clung to each other, happy that they were both alive and safe.

“No worries.” she smiled at him, her arm around Toni’s shoulders, “You did the same for me. It was only fair.”

“So was it Tall Boy?” Sweet Pea asked. FP glanced around at the kids and swallowed the lump in his throat.

“Kind of. But he was only acting as the muscle. Hiram Lodge is the one pulling the strings. He did all of this.” He looked over at Chic, giving the boy a mournful look.

“Does that mean my mom…… Oh my god. What about my mom? What is he going to do to her?” The younger Cooper teared up, causing Joaquin to go and comfort him. He felt awful for the boy. Everything that happened with Alice and Chic. Hal, then his mother, then this nightmare. Hiram ripped their family apart. But not anymore.

“Then Hiram’s gonna have a price to pay.” FP pulled the gun out and nodded at Chic. “We’re going to get her back. And God help if he laid a fucking finger on her.”

“What about Kevin’s dad?” Fangs asked. “What do we do about this?” FP turned to the trio and inhaled. He was right - they couldn’t just abandoned Tom Keller’s corpse and all go raid Pembrooke. The authorities, Minetta included, would start asking questions.

“You two,” he directed at Sweet Pea and Fangs, “stay with Kevin and get the power back on. Kevin, call Minetta and get him over him. And tell him everything that happened. You were there witnessing it with me. Okay?” With tears in his eyes, Kevin nodded. The Serpent duo lead Kevin back into the house. FP turned to Cheryl and Toni next, “Toni, get Cheryl back to Thistlehouse. And don’t let anyone in.” Lastly, he turned to Chic and Joaquin. “You two….follow me to Pembrooke.” He began to walk back around the side of the house, back to his truck. A hand reached for his arm.

“Um….excuse you!” Cheryl stepped in front of him, blocking his path. He sighed and was about to respond. “I’m not just going to sit around like a damsel in distress when your partner is in danger! I refuse to let the Falice ship sink!”

“Cheryl, I really am grateful for you saving me,” FP tried to reason with her, “But I can’t afford——”

“What else do I have to lose?” she interrupted. “Mr. Lodge did bad business with my family. He cursed the Blossom name. Maybe that’s what led my father to kill JJ. And even though I hated my mother, she’s dead because of him too. I won’t let him take away anymore people I care about.” She lifted her hand and cupped his cheek. Maybe she did forgive him for not helping her dead twin. FP felt awful for her….but he felt touched at her comment. She was becoming more and more like a daughter to him.

She let go of his cheek and smiled. “Besides….I’m in the mood for some hell raising.”
“Cheryl’s right.” Toni joined her side and looked up at FP. Chic and Joaquin stood in between the girls and FP. “I’m coming, too. Lodge doesn’t stand a chance with all of us standing together. No one messes with family.”

He didn’t know how to respond. These kids all mattered to him in some way. He didn’t want to lose them to a madman. He didn’t want to lose Alice either. They filled the gaps that were ripped when Gladys, Jughead, and JB went away. They were all part of his family now.

Wiping a tear away, he glanced at the kids in front of him.

“Stay together. And don’t try anything stupid. Got it?” They looked at each other, then all turned to him and nodded. “Good. Let’s go.”

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They reached Pembrooke in less than 10 minutes. FP parked his truck just a block or two away from the building while the kids parked their bikes along the street. The five rejoined and made their way slowly towards the building. He looked back at the four behind him, realizing Chic was the only one not armed. He handed his gun to the boy.

“You’re mom show you how to use this?” Chic nodded. He took the gun from FP’s hands and curled his fingers around it. “Only fire if you need to.” He turned back to the entrance of Pembrooke, his breath filling in the ominous silence. He motioned for the kids to follow him up the stairs and stopped. He waited a couple of seconds…..nothing.

Slowly, he pushed open the door. The lobby of the building was dead silent. There was no one at the front desk. Or in any of the chairs or sofas. Where was everyone? More importantly, where was Hiram? Where was Alice?

“Girls, go down the left. Don’t let each other out of sight.” FP directed Cheryl and Toni. The two moved past him and headed towards the left side. “Boys,” he turned to Chic and Joaquin, “come with me.” He moved down towards the opposite direction of Cheryl and Toni, back towards some of the lower level offices. Alice had to be here in the building. But was she still in Hiram’s complex? Was he holding her captive? The boys looked into every office, every room, but no sign of Alice. Or Hiram. Something was off about all of this…. They hurried down towards the back doors, leading out to the side of the building. They returned outside.

“ALICE!” FP yelled. Only his echo responded. He hesitated to call out for her again, worried that somewhere in the upper levels of Pembrooke, Hiram and his men would be listening. Then he looked down. His heart fell to his stomach.

There was blood on the ground. Bloody footprints, streaks, went down the alley. No….. no she couldn’t have….. She can’t be…..

“FP?” Joaquin attempted to get his attention. He continued to stare down at the blood path. He felt like he was going to collapse.

“Find the girls and run.” he spoke in a low voice. He turned back to the younger boys, standing still in confusion. “RUN!” he growled, sending the boys back from where they came. He couldn’t have them face this….especially not Chic. The hot, heavy tears began to form as he stumbled in the path of blood. Where was this leading? What the fuck did Hiram do to her?

He fell to his knees and sobbed, his forehead resting on the brick path. FP crawled back into the wall and covered his mouth, squeezing his eyes shut. His body shook. His heart was flying out of his
chest. He couldn’t breathe. His mind flashed images of her dead body. And Gladys’s as well. The two were becoming intertwined as one.

FP screamed. His fingers wove into his hair as he bent over his knees and began rocking back and forth, still sobbing. She was gone. He lost her.

Someone in the distance was coming over to him. He looked up and found Andre looming over him. Part of him wanted to jump up and kill this man. But he didn’t have the energy anymore. At that point, he would rather die than live with the fact that he left Alice to be slaughtered Hiram Lodge.

“I gotta say, Jones.” Andre spoke to him, “your partner went down fighting. I didn’t make her jump, though, Did that all herself.” FP looked up and saw the open window a couple of levels above them. He looked back at Andre and shook his head.

“What did you do to her?” he wailed.

“Haven’t seen her since the jump.” the other man replied. “Wouldn’t surprise me if Mr. Lodge had her now.” FP leaned his head against the wall, forcing himself not to think of her dead body. If she really was dead…. “But I think it might be rewarding on my part if I brought you to him. Imagine the look on his face.” Andre crouched down and stared him in the eyes.

“On your feet, Serpent.” His mind flashed back to that night. That Ghoulie forcing him onto his knees as he watched Malachi swing that bat at Gladys. He couldn’t……he couldn’t watch her die the same way. “I said get up.” Andre grabbed at his shirt and forced him up. He stumbled into the other man, making them go backwards a couple of steps. Andre held him upright by the throat. FP gripped at the man’s wrist, gasping for air. He was too weak to fight back.

“Wow…..not even gonna try to fight me?” he chuckled. “Jesus…..what was Keller thinking in letting a Serpent like you pair up with a woman like her?” The comment hit FP harder than expected. He pushed Andre back and hunched over, regaining his breath. He stared up at Andre, looking more pissed than before.

“You in love with her or something?” Andre wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He began to move towards FP. “Too bad she’ll have to learn that you died like a coward----”

A gunshot rang through the air. Andre flew back into the wall of the other building, the bullet wound bleeding out in his chest. His head hit the wall, and he slid to the floor. He struggled to get up, to breathe even. He was dead merely seconds later.

FP stood up straight. How was Chic able to get a good shot?

“I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU TWO----” FP whipped around to confront the boys but stopped. Whoever shot Andre fully came out of the shadows. She lowered the rifle and looked up at him. Her face had been cut and bruised. There was a towel wrapped around her bicep. She no longer had her heels on. But she was alive.

“Alice?”

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She stood there in the alleyway, relieved to see FP in front of her. Alice thought she would never see him again. But he was here. And she survived that damn fall from the window to save him from Andre.

“Alice?” his voice cracked. She started to tear up. They were both alive.
“FP.” she dropped the rifle. She began to run over to him, and he to her. They held onto each other for dear life and cried in the hug. He looked awful, because of whatever happened with him and Keller, but he made her safe. His fingers curled into her hair, pulling her closer to him.

“You’re alive.” he muttered into her shoulder.

“So are you.” she choked out. They leaned back to have a good look at one another. She cupped his face and smiled, her fingers tracing the side of the cut near his eye.

“He told me everything, FP.” she began to rush. “How he started it with Hal….and how it all escalated….I didn’t…."

“I know.” he nodded, his hands gently holding onto her face. “Hal made a confession. He was going to tell you.”

“It doesn’t matter anymore.” she shook her head. What happened to Hal was in the past. He was dead….but FP wasn’t. “I just…I thought I lost you.” His eyes went soft as he slowly smiled.

“Told ya you wouldn’t be able to get rid of me.” he joked, making them laugh. And to think that she didn’t want to care for him when this all began. But now, he was one of the only things that felt right. He stayed by her, he comforted her, and he protected her.

She thought that Hiram would fill the gaps that were left open by Hal…..but now that she thought about it, maybe it never was Hiram. Or Tom. Maybe it was FP.

She stepped closer into him, her breath syncing with his. Her face was close to his, inches apart. She looked down at his lips, then up at his eyes. His gaze was softer, his hands feeling warm. His heart thudded against her chest. It was calming. Their foreheads touched, she felt his breath against her. She pulled him in closer……

“JONES!” a voice screamed, breaking their intimate moment. They both turned to find Joaquin running towards them, out of breath and crying. “YOU HAVE TO HELP. I CAN’T……”

“Joaquin?” Alice let go of FP and moved to the younger Serpent. FP stood next to her and looked back the boy.

“WHERE THE HELL IS CHIC?”

Her heart stopped. Chic was here too? Joaquin looked at the pair and let out a sob.

“We were trying to run when we heard the gunshot. To go find Cheryl and Toni. I went to turn the corner, and he was gone. I don’t know what happened---”

“Where did you last see him?” she interrupted him, trying to stay calm. But she felt that her heart was breaking. She couldn’t lose her son. Not after seeing FP almost get hurt by Andre. Joaquin took her by the arm and led her back to where she came out from. Alice grabbed the rifle off the ground and tossed it to FP. The three ran back into the building, hurrying with every step.

“CHIC!” they yelled out, one voice after another. They ran into the lobby, the younger girls and Chic nowhere to be found. The three stood in a circle facing outward in the middle of the lobby. Alice looked around the lobby in full panic. She screamed for her son again, only her echo responding. Her heart raced, her nails scraping her palms. FP reached for her hand and held onto it. Chic was the only family by blood she had left. Hiram wouldn’t try to hurt him again…..would he?

The elevator chimed, scaring the three of them. Alice turned and saw its gold doors opening. She
saw Chic standing there, the doors becoming wider.

“Chic…” she sighed in relief and moved closer, then froze. The doors opened fully to find Hiram holding onto to Chic, the knife she used earlier against her son’s throat. “NO!”

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He stood between Joaquin and Alice…feeling absolutely helpless. Hiram had Chic. He had a knife at the boy’s throat. He could strike at any moment. Alice screamed and began sobbing. No….he wouldn’t let her son die. He wouldn’t let Joaquin suffer over that guilt for the rest of his life. FP cocked the rifle and aimed it at the man.

“Let that boy go, Hiram.”

He didn’t answer. He just led Chic out of the elevator, tightened his grip on the boy.

“Mom, I’m sorry.” Chic cried. Hiram shut him up by pushing the knife closer to his throat. Joaquin was freaking out next to FP.

“YOU FUCKING HEARD HIM!” Joaquin started to run forward and attack Hiram, but Alice pulled him back.

“Joaquin, don’t. It will make things worse.” she whimpered. FP kept his aim at the man’s head, hoping to get a good shot. “Hiram….please…..” Alice pleaded. “Not my son…..”

“I didn’t want to, Alice.” the man frowned at her. “But do you really think he appreciates everything you do for him? For all of them?” he gestured to FP and Joaquin. His blood boiled. FP turned to Alice….was she buying into this bullcrap? She looked back at him, her gaze softening. She touched his bicep and stroked with her thumb.

“They do.” she replied, her eyes still locked on FP’s. He smiled at her, his gripping becoming lighter on the gun. She turned back to Hiram and her face went blank. “And I won’t let you take away anymore people I care about. You say that people hurt me…..which is why you had them killed. But you hurt me, too.” FP turned back to Hiram and saw the man break. Hiram’s emotions went from hurt, to angry, to sad. “You started all of this….”

“And I’m ending it.” he gritted through his teeth. FP almost swore he saw Hiram starting to cry.

“Come with me, Alice. We can leave Riverdale….just the two of us.” FP glanced back and forth between them, not knowing what to do. “I didn’t know how to love anyone until I loved you. I won’t hurt anymore people…..I’ll try to be better. I’ll try to be more human…..I just need you to let me finish what I started.”

“Take it that involves me?” FP called out, catching Hiram’s attention. “Is that why you had Tall Boy coming after my ass?”

“I knew he was a liability from the start, believe me, FP.” Hiram explained. Bullshit, he thought to himself. “But he could get the job done. But seeing that he failed…..” he looked FP up and down, then glancing over at Joaquin, “Was it a quick death for Keller? You were there, could you at least spare me the details----”

An arrow whizzed through the air, landing at the wall next to Hiram’s head, making Alice scream. FP lowered the rifle and turned to the source of the arrow.

“CHERYL!”
“Told you I was in the mood for some hell raising.” the redhead spoke proudly. She stood on the
countertop by the lobby desk keeping her grip on her bow and arrow. From around the corner, Toni
joined FP’s side and whipped out her pocket knife.

“Your move, Lodge.” she threatened him. “It’s all of us against you. Let Chic go.” Hiram glared
down at the pink-haired Serpent and laughed.

“Wow. Thomas Topaz’s granddaughter. Would surely be a shame if something terrible were to
happen to you….and your friends.” His smoulder developed into a straight line.

“Toni….” Joaquin grabbed his friend and pulled her next to him. On the countertop, Cheryl loaded
her next arrow.

“You want to say that again, you slimy bastard?” she called out. FP looked around at the kids, then
at Chic. He had to get that boy away. Hiram directed his gaze at Alice, looking sorrow, but FP
couldn’t tell if it was real. He didn’t know if anything Hiram said or did was real.

“Alice, I’m sorry….but I don’t have any other choice.” He turned the blade closer towards Chic’s
throat.

“CHIC!” Joaquin cried out.

“CHERYL,” FP yelled, pointing the rifle at Hiram, “AIM YOUR NEXT ARROW BETWEEN
HIS EYES!”

“On it!” Cheryl responded. The tension continued to escalate….FP and the kids inching closer, and
Hiram wedging that knife closer into Chic. What could be done? Was this how it would all go
down? His blood pulsed in his ear drums, the kids’ screaming being tuned out, Chic’s cries only
appearing as mouthed to him. And Hiram wouldn’t let go.

He almost forgot Alice was there. She touched his arm and moved in front of him. “Alice?” he
turned to her. She let go of his arm and walked forward, in between their group and where Hiram
and Chic stood. The pulsing in his ears slowed as he watched her. “Alice?” he called out again. She
turned her head to face them.

“FP…..stand down.” she muttered. He stood there, frozen. What the hell was she doing? He wanted
to call out, but she spoke again. “JUST DO IT.”

Her command made the lobby silent. The tension started to die down. FP looked into her
eyes….they expressed her fear and remorse. Was she trying to be the piece of resistance? Reading
her expression, he slowly lowered the rifle and set it on the floor, holding his hands up.

“Everyone, stand down.” he directed at the other kids, still staring at Alice. Joaquin and Toni
dropped their knives on the floor, and Cheryl lowered her bow and arrow. She jumped down from
the countertop and joined the the younger Serpents, clinging to Toni.

FP watched as Alice moved closer to Hiram, one slow step at a time. He moved a little to the right to
get a better look at what she was going to do. And Hiram still had his grip on her boy, not backing
down.

“Hiram….” she pleaded in a calm voice, “I get it now. I know why you want to protect me.”

“What is she doing?” Cheryl whispered to him, but he held a hand up to silence her. He noticed her
continuing to move forward.
“This town isn’t safe. It never was. For me or you.” he heard Alice’s voice breaking. She shook her head and proceeded, “We’ll go. We’ll leave Riverdale. Tonight.”

FP didn’t know what to think. He didn’t know why she was telling Hiram this.

“We can put this all behind us. Just like you said. It can be the two of us.” She stood just a couple of feet away from them. “Just….just let my son go.” FP heard her let out a sob. She gestured back to the group as she continued, “Just let them go. In peace. And we’ll never have to see them again.”

Would she actually leave with this man? The man who murdered her husband in cold blood and manipulated her in the form of a manhunt? Or was this all to…. He started to catch on to what she was attempting to do.

He noticed as Hiram looked down at his feet, then back up at her. There were tears forming in his eyes. The hold on the knife against Chic softened, lowering away from the boy. A moment passed, and Hiram pushed Chic away violently, beginning to sob.

She watched as her son stumbled away from Hiram. Chic turned back to his kidnapper, who leaned back against the wall crying, then he turned back to her.

“Mom?” Alice took a deep breath and moved closer to her son. The two embraced, her son’s face buried into her shoulder. “I’m so sorry, Mom. I was trying to find you, and…."

“Shh….” she silenced him, her voice cracking. “It’s okay.” She looked up and locked her eyes on Hiram. Not breaking her gaze, she leaned into her son’s ear.

“Promise me you won’t look.” she whispered. Chic pulled away in confusion. She didn’t have time to explain, she just sent her son towards FP and the other kids. Alice gave one last look to FP before she turned on her heel. With slow steps, she approached Hiram. He hung his head as he sobbed, wailed practically. The knife stayed in his hand, but he had it at a loose grip.

Alice stepped in closer, lifting his head up with one hand. He looked into her eyes…..they showed his remorse. His guilt. Maybe he really did love her after all. Hiram brought his free hand up and cupped her face, bringing their foreheads together.

“I never wanted this for you.” he spoke in a low, but somber tone in between the tears. “I just wanted you to be happy.” His emotions were starting to affect hers. He could change….he could learn his lesson in a jail cell somewhere….

“I’m not a loveless monster.I know that….because I love you. I’ll change for you.” he paused, sniffling. “I can do better. I will do better. For you.” But would he, though? After everything he did.

“I love you, Alice. I’m sorry.” She looked into his eyes, everything starting to sink in.

Alice leaned in and kissed Hiram, She let his tears melt against her face, his fingers keeping a gentle grip on her. She slowly reached for the knife in his other hand. Their lips parted, but they still held onto each other, their foreheads still touching. She let out a small cry, then kissed him one last time. Their swan song.

The knife plunged into his throat. Alice pulled her head back, silent tears flowing. Hiram’s mouth hung at the pain, but he didn’t make a noise.

“I’m sorry, too.” she muttered.
She yanked the knife out, watching as the blood came out at a rapid pace. Hiram didn’t try to fight back, or scream for help. He just slid down the wall, onto the floor, gasping for air. The blood oozed down his neck, his chest, and nothing could be done to stop it. He looked up at her with tearful eyes, hurt by the action but enamored by the final gesture. The only gesture of love he ever had, she assumed.

The light started to fade from his eyes, his gasping slowing down. But Alice couldn’t turn away. She couldn’t speak. She just watched and held onto the bloody knife tighter. The light continued to fade away. And kept fading……and fading…..and fading…..

Then nothing.

The room was silent, except for her sniffling. FP stood there paralyzed, the kids behind him not sure of how to react. He looked back and forth between his partner and the man she just killed. A man who was supposed to love her and protect her. Was Hiram a monster of his own creation? Maybe FP would never know….but whatever it was….it broke them all. But most importantly, it broke Alice.

She dropped the knife on the floor and wailed, falling to her knees. FP walked over to her and crouched down. He held her face in his hands, her fear and guilt seeping into him. Then, he wrapped his arm around her head and hugged her into his chest. Alice clung to him, her wailing filling the painstaking silence.

“It’s over.” he muttered, his eyes getting glossy and wet. “It’s over.” FP buried his face into her hair and allowed her to melt into him. Back in the real world, on the streets of Riverdale, sirens sounded outside the building. The reflections of red and blue lights played on the wall. But it didn’t matter that help was finally here. It didn’t matter that Hiram was dead or that they all lived.

What mattered now was that FP and Alice would both have to live with the consequences and the painful memories of the Black Hood.

End of Chapter Fourteen

Chapter End Notes

Rest in Peace, Hiram Lodge. Or should I say….Rest in Pieces?

How are FP and Alice going to recover from all of this? What will happen as they try to move forward? And what about FP getting to see his kids?

All to slowly be revealed…..when I have the time to write. LOL.
Chapter Fifteen - It's a Wonderful Life

Hey Hi Hello

So here it is....the last chapter!!! (Well, before the epilogue, but we made it!) It's been a long road ya, but I'm so happy of what we've gone through together, and I hope you guys enjoyed this experience reading it as much as I did writing it.

***SUPER DUPER HEADS UP - THIS CHAPTER DOES CONTAIN MATERIAL RELATED TO SUICIDE AND HEAVY HANDED MENTAL HEALTH SO IF THIS UPSETS YOU, YOU CAN SKIP WHEN THE TIME COMES***

Other than that, enjoy reading :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

***WARNING this chapter contains material related to suicide and heavy-handed mental health problems. If this makes you uncomfortable, skip to the end of the chapter or feel free to not continue. If you or an acquaintance is dealing with suicidal thoughts, please reach out to someone or message me. Thank you, and happy reading.***

Chapter Fifteen - It's a Wonderful Life

The days went on after the incident at Pembrooke. News of the Black Hood went all over the country. Riverdale finally made its mark on the world. Reporters and other social-media wannabes crammed everywhere they could to get a word out of those involved. But Minetta only shooed them away when they came to the station for answers. But they didn’t want the news from him. They wanted it from FP and Alice.

But the two had gone MIA from most of the public eye since Alice killed Hiram. They retreated to their homes, FP either in his trailer or staying with her and Chic, and Alice hadn’t left the house. Minetta and the other officers had to come to the house to finish their questioning. “I don’t think you’ll have to go into court,” Minetta reassured her, “if what you’re claiming about self-defense was correct.” She remained in her bed most of the time, not able to get herself out. She only came into the living room sometimes if Chic forced her to eat something, or if FP was there. But even with her friend in the house, Alice didn’t have it in her to leave her room.

The two didn’t get the chance to see each other the first couple of days after it happened. They had to be separated due to their time in the hospital, getting cleared to leave by the doctors, and Minetta heckling them with questions, separate of course. And FP still had to deal with the incident at Keller’s. They didn’t arrest him for Tom’s death, but they didn’t leave him alone about it. Once he was able to get himself out, he went straight to her house. He couldn’t bare to go back to his trailer to keep hiding out on the Southside. He wasn’t ready to face the Serpents. He only felt safe being around her and her son.

“She hasn’t eaten much…” Chic explained as the boy let him in, “It’s just a hassle trying to get her to eat even a piece of toast.”
“And how about you?” he asked. Chic gave him a complex look, then swallowed.

“I’m not sure….” the boy responded. “Joaquin’s been coming over to check up on us. We’re gonna go get some groceries later.”

“Don’t worry about that, boy.” he patted the boy on the shoulder. “I can take care of that.” He took a moment to scan the house. It was clean for the most part, some laundry was left half folded on the couch, but there was no sign of her. It felt empty without her.

“Do you think it’d be okay if….if I saw her?” he asked. Chic blinked, then nodded his head, gesturing up the stairs. FP thanked him, then made his way up. He walked down to the end of hallway to her bedroom. He didn’t want to be a dick and barge in, especially if she was sleeping. So he decided to knock as gently as he could. No response came from inside. Oh god….did she…. He twisted the knob and opened the door. He spotted Alice laying in her bed, staring out her window. She turned to him at the sound of her door opening and blinked. FP let go of the knob and kept his hands by his sides.

“Sorry,” he started, “I just wanted to see if you were okay. It’s been a couple of days.”

“I know.” she responded, monotone. Her voice was practically dead. Jesus….he couldn’t even imagine what must have been going through her head right now. Hiram fucked her up, and now she had to live with the guilt of ending the bastard’s life.

“I’ll….he coughed, starting to head back out the door, “I’ll be downstairs with your boy if you need anything…..” he paused, turning back to her. He couldn’t tell if Alice was about to cry or fall back into a limbo state of numbness. Her face was blank, lacking any sort of emotion, but her eyes….something in her eyes was screaming out to him. She didn’t want to be alone.

“Do you want me to stay in here?” he asked softly. “Just for a little while?” She tilted her head away from him, facing the entrance to her bathroom. Without muttering a word, she nodded.

FP shut the door behind him and cautiously wandered over to her bed. Alice tossed back her sheets and scooted to the side, implying for him to be in the bed next to her. He hesitated for a moment, then he took off his shoes and hopped into the bed, giving her some space. He allowed the sheets to swallow him in as he clasped his hands together and stared up at the ceiling fan. He absorbed this silent sensation, the rotating circles becoming hypnotic, before he tilted his head to her. She pursed her lips and inched closer to him. She looked like she was about to say something, but then she closed her mouth.

“Hey.” he muttered to her, “You don’t have to be afraid to talk to me.”


“I’m tired, FP.” she finished in a whisper. Her gaze grew dismal, exhausted. Alice was trying to stay strong so she wouldn’t wound the people she cared about, including him. But it was bombarding her mental state….

“Me too.” FP replied, and he left it at that. She probably wasn’t in the mood to tell him what was troubling her, but he understood. And he didn’t want to push her either. Alice shifted closer to FP and wrapped her arms around him, burying her head into his chest. He responded by curling his arm around her head, his fingers intertwining in her hair, and allowing her to nestle in.
He understood how she was feeling, the mental obstacles she was facing. Before the heavy drinking, all he could do after Gladys died was stay in his room and sleep. He couldn’t eat a proper meal for days. He had other Serpents taking Jughead and Jellybean to school because he didn’t have the energy to get out of bed. Some nights, little Jughead and JB would crawl into the sheets and join their father. But that was all before they were ripped away from him too.

The pain affected FP and changed him. He became a drunkard, a murderer, a man seeking redemption trapped in a long-term contract with the law. He didn’t want the same for Alice. She still had Chic. She had people who cared. But how much had she already suffer on her own? How long had it lasted? And how much did she have left before she finally snaps?

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It was like she lost the ability to function like a proper human. Alice could hear the people outside her house begging to get in, desperate to hear from the woman who brought down Hiram Lodge. But she had nothing to say, no motivation to go out there and tell them to fuck off. She felt like she couldn’t speak. She couldn’t remember the last time she could open up a book and read more than 10 pages at a time. She only had a handful of showers, starting after the day after FP stayed with her in her room. And Alice only left her room a few times whenever Chic made her go into the kitchen to eat something.

She didn’t know what to tell FP. Or Chic. She didn’t want to have them see what she was going through. She wanted to isolate herself from the world, but it didn’t help with the fucking paparazzi being outside every waking moment like clockwork.

A couple of days after Minetta stopped by for some final questioning, she made herself go down the stairs and wander into the living room. She felt like a zombie, sick and slow. Chic and Joaquin were finishing their breakfast when Alice entered the area. The young Serpent waved her hello then returned to his meal. Silently, she melted into the couch and curled herself into a ball. What could she tell Chic? Was he starting to lose faith in her?

“You want me to get you anything, Mrs. C?” Joaquin’s voice pulled her out of her thoughts. Alice looked over at him and bit her lip. She didn’t want to appear rude or out of it to him. Especially since he was one of the only people there to help her son and care for him.

“Maybe some water?” she asked. He nodded and headed off towards the kitchen, grabbing his dirty dishes along the way. Chic came over to the couch and sat down next to her.

“You should take a shower later. Might help relieve some stress.” She didn’t respond but just nodded. The stress came and went, but Alice was at least thankful that her son hadn’t given up on her yet. But what if he did….oh god, what if he…..

Joaquin set the glass of water down on the table next to her, snapping her out of her thoughts. “Thanks.” she muttered, grabbing the glass. She took slow sips as she looked back and forth between her son and his boyfriend. “You two don’t have to do this…..wait on me hand and foot only just to watch me crumble.”

“Mom….” Chic grabbed her hand and looked into her eyes. “You’re not going to crumble. We’ll help you get back on your feet, whatever happens.” Her eyes watered for the first time in days. Alice didn’t have the energy to cry, she was so tired. But Chic’s words hit her in a way she hadn’t felt since she killed Hiram.

At the same time, she wanted to keep Chic away….to keep him safe. If he ever saw what went on in her head, whatever this illness was plaguing her…. Telling him about her affairs with Hal was one
issue. Falling apart mentally would become a whole other story. One she wouldn’t be able to control.

Alice took a deep breath and set the glass down. “Do you two need rides to school?” she asked the boys, standing up. Maybe the shower could be a good thing. After all, she needed to make herself appear to be somewhat better, but deep down she wasn’t ready. “I can go take a quick shower, and--”

“Don’t worry about it.” Chic replied. “Joaquin and I were just going to go on his bike anyway.”

“I promise I’ll drive slow.” the young Serpent threw in, crossing his arms nervously. Alice stood there, not sure of how to respond. She knew it’d be good to finally get out of the house and spend more time with her son, as well as getting to know Joaquin better. But another part of her didn’t have the energy to do so…..she felt as if she was slowly fading.

“Okay.” she finally responded after a few moments. “I’ll just go ahead and take a shower.” She clamped her mouth shut and began to head towards the staircase. Chic grabbed her hand before she went up and spoke to her.

“Text me if you need anything, mom.” Her eyes continued to water. Alice nodded and Chic dropped her hand, giving her a soft smile. She watched as her son and Joaquin grabbed their backpacks and walked out the door hand in hand.

Alice went through the motions, stumbling up the stairs, peeling off her clothes like pulling back at the layers of her skin, and sliding across the tile floor into her shower. The hot water sprayed onto her, pulling her out of her daze, making reality set in. The memories poured into her like the water dripping onto her skin and her hair. The nights with Hal. The poems used. The dead bodies. Hiram. HIRAM.

Alice had to place her hand on the tiled wall just so she wouldn’t lose her balance as she began to sob. She had so many questions but he would never answer them from beyond the grave. Did he not understand what he did to her? To everyone she cared about? Did he lack that much empathy for the world but only tried once for her?

Why did it have to be me, Hiram? Why me?

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He drummed his fingers on the chair as he waited for Minetta to come in. FP huffed and glanced around the room, noticing the changes implemented. Wasn’t I just in this office meeting with Keller weeks ago?

Minetta opened the door and entered, startling FP. He watched the young Sheriff take his seat across from him, not making much eye contact. Still not looking at FP, he grabbed one of the folders and opened it, leaning back in his chair. FP considered just leaving if it would only be a waste of time.

“So…” Minetta began, still looking at the file, “You had some sort of contract with Tom Keller?” FP went to respond immediately but then closed his mouth. How much did this man know? What did Keller tell him?

He coughed then started to speak, “Few years ago, yeah.” He paused, not sure of how to phrase the rest of his explanation. He went to open his mouth until Minetta looked up at him.

“I am aware of the serious charges you were supposed to face, Mr. Jones.” the other said monotone. FP sighed and fell back into the chair, letting Minetta’s words fill the space. “You murdered members of the Ghoulies on the Southside, to avenge your dead wife?” FP gritted his teeth to keep
himself from biting his tongue, and he stared down at the floor. Without looking up, he nodded.

“ Heard you’re ex-military. Is that why Keller kept you on for so long? He knew what you were capable of?”

“What other choice did I have?” FP looked up at Minetta. The other man placed the folder on his desk and leaned forward, keeping his gaze on him. “Fuck, I wouldn’t have the chance to see my kids if I wined up in jail for life. Do you have any idea what I had at stake? Everything I did for the PD was to get back to them! But now that I think about it, I don’t think Keller would ever let me go….. He’d work me until I drop dead……” Minetta said nothing. FP clenched his fists and chuckled to mask his incoming emotions. Maybe it was a good thing he decided to take the job with Keller. The Black Hood…..Hiram…..would still be running loose. The Southside would be ridden in crime and illegal drug-use. And he wouldn’t have met Alice. He stopped chuckling at the thought of her, and slowly he grew afraid. Why did Minetta want to have this talk in the first place?

“You’re going to put me in jail, aren’t you?” FP croaked, the realization hitting him. “You going to break my contract with Keller and send me off?” The anxiety of the future started to set in. Would they really send him away for the rest of his life over a matter he worked off years ago? Would that mean he wouldn’t be able to see the younger Serpents again? Would he have to permanently say goodbye to Alice?

Minetta must have read his expression because he sighed and frowned. “Do I look like Keller to you?” the young Sheriff responded, making FP confused. He continued, “Yes, I’m breaking whatever hold that Tom had on you…..but that doesn’t include jail time. Seeing that you already have paid your dues through your work on the Southside.” He wanted to cry. He sighed in relief and unclenched his fists.

“But you should be careful about how you make your amends with your family. Keep a clean nose. Get out of that trailer. You’re more than welcome to come back and help, but get a job somewhere else. Hell, Pop Tate could offer something for both of you in the diner.” FP was about ready to thank Minetta when the last sentence registered in his head. Both of you….

“What do you mean both of….”

“Not only am I letting you off of your duties here, Mr. Jones, but I’m afraid I have to let your partner go too.” He was joking, right, FP thought to himself.

“I get me, but why Alice?” he asked point-blank. What did she do to rub him the wrong way?

“In light of everything that’s happened with the Black Hood, a lot of people are unhappy with how you and her handled the case.”

“That’s ridiculous!”

“You want to know what’s ridiculous? The fact that she hid her affair with Mr. Lodge.” Minetta threw out. “And how ironic since he was the one orchestrating all of this.”

“He manipulated her!” FP started getting defensive. “How can you blame her for not knowing that Hiram was a fucking maniacal stalker?”

“Considering the liabilities that the PD has to face following this ordeal,” Minetta explained in a stern tone. “I think it’s best that we have you and Alice go under the radar for a while. I’m afraid that you might have to be the one breaking the unfortunate news to her—–”

“What?” FP sat back, baffled. “Okay, Minetta, listen to me. You can throw me out all you want, but
Alice? She’s one of the best damn detectives in this whole town, even with all the shit she’s been through!” He continued to ramble, not noticing Minetta’s attention turn to the doorway, his confidence fading. “I’m not going to lead her down this path! I won’t do it! She deserves better than this---”

“I’ll do it.” a voice left him paralyzed. FP turned his head to find Alice standing in the doorway in a white nightgown and her hair partially damp.

“Mrs. Cooper. I wasn’t expecting you to come in today.” Minetta addressed her. FP stood up and reached for her hands.

“Alice….” he begged, but she brought her fingers to his lips, silencing him. She shook her head, looking miserable.

“I need the break, FP. We both do.” she whispered. Alice lowered her fingers then turned to Minetta. “When do you need me to clear out my desk?”

“It’s not permanent.” Minetta explained. “Just until we can get everything back to what it was. So you two, just….”

“Minetta….” FP tried to speak up, to protest, but she just kept squeezing his hand. He swore her nails were almost digging into him. Minetta turned to him and raised his brow. FP didn’t know what to do. This job kept him afloat, and it gave him purpose. It gave him reason. He turned to Alice in panic and met her gaze. She fully faced him and raised her hand to hold his face.

“I’ll be alright.” she spoke to him. The rest of the scene and Minetta faded when he looked into her eyes. “You just have to trust me, okay?” Something was off with her, but he couldn’t tell what exactly what it was. Why was she accepting this so willingly?

But now wasn’t the time to fight back. He nodded, reaching for her wrist and stroking it ever so gently.

“Hey, Minetta.” another deputy approached them and stood outside. He gave FP and Alice a strange look before continuing. “Guess this concerns the two of you as well. There’s a young girl waiting outside in the main area. She wants to talk to you two.”

FP and Alice looked at each other then at Minetta. FP turned to the deputy and addressed him. Did Cheryl or Toni do something at school? “Can you take us to her?” The deputy nodded, heading away from Minetta’s room. The two grabbed each other’s hands and followed him out into the hallway, passed the main area, and out towards the lobby.

“Here they are, Miss Lodge.” the deputy spoke out to whoever it….wait did he say Miss Lodge? FP and Alice froze in their tracks to find a young girl in a black cape standing up. She looked at the pair in utter remorse. She was a spitting image of Hiram.

“Veronica?” his voice sounded dead.

“Mr. Jones. Mrs. Cooper.” Veronica approached the pair slowly. Behind him, Alice clung to him tighter. “I don’t mean any harm. I just want to talk.” She paused, clasping her hands together. She looked over at Alice and began getting teary. FP couldn’t tell whether or not the girl was putting on a performance just to win their sympathy….but maybe if Hiram lied to her to? And where was her mother?

“Only if you want to, Mrs. Cooper.” she addressed Alice. FP turned to her and noticed the panic in her eyes. Yet, she let go of him and took a deep breath.
“Alright.”

The trio sat in a booth at Pop’s, FP and Alice sitting across from the young girl. Veronica’s black hair shimmered in the light pouring in from the window. Alice couldn’t help but stare. Was it wise to trust Veronica? After everything that happened? She had his damn eyes.

“I know you both have probably so many questions.” Veronica began after moments of silence. “I’ll try to explain as much as I can….but please, you have to understand. I had no idea that my daddy was up to it all until it was too late.”

Alice couldn’t bring herself to stare at the younger Lodge for another moment, so instead she turned to him. FP picked up on her anxious state and faced Veronica.

“So you had no clue that your dad was the Black Hood?”

“I had my suspicions at first. Fred Andrews getting shot….it seemed so random. Why would anyone go after him? In a place like this?” Veronica paused to look around the diner, taking in the emptiness of it all. She turned back to them and proceeded with her explanation. “Then Ms. Grundy was killed. Then….your husband.” she turned to Alice. Her stomach churned. She had flash images of Hiram slicing up Hal like he was a little kid taking his swings at a pinata.

“Were you aware of what your father and my husband were doing, Veronica?” Alice looked up at the girl, her anger slipping out, “The business they conducted together?” She felt her fingers shaking, aching to go into her flesh. She stopped talking, fearing that she would scare the young girl in front of her. She had so much of Hiram in her. But she also had her mother in her as well.

Veronica looked down at her hands, sadness and guilt consuming her. She brought her eyes back up to Alice and continued, “My mother….she didn’t want me involved in the family business. We knew it was Lodge Family tradition for the child of the owner to inherit Lodge Industries once the predecessor steps down. After seeing what my daddy did….” she paused, exhaling in attempt to keep herself from crying.

“My mom sensed something was off after your husband’s death. She became….on edge. Less trusting of him, and more worried….about you.”

So Hermione was warning her. She did know and was trying to keep her safe. Alice grabbed FP’s hand and fought to hold back her tears. Veronica took a small bite of her meal before she finished her explanation.

“She realized that no matter what we did to stop him, he was too far into trying to win you over. She became scared for me. So, she came into my room and told me, “Mija. We have to leave Riverdale. Your father is going to get us both killed.” The next day, we were gone….in a limo back to New York. We thought we could get away…..”

“Then Christmas came around.” FP finished her thoughts. The young Lodge bit her lip to keep from sobbing.

“He found where we were staying, and made plans to see us. When he arrived….he told my mom that he wanted a divorce….to be with you. She came into my room, sobbing. She told me to pack my stuff and leave. She arranged for me to stay with a family friend, the St. Claire’s, until this thing blew over……” Veronica stopped, leaning back in her seat. Alice saw tears flowing from her face, making her emotional.
“I try so hard….to be a good person.” Veronica cried, “Everything I do, it’s to make up for what my
daddy has done. But with the Black Hood massacre…. No one will believe me. They think that the
whole Lodge family has evil in their blood. I don’t want that legacy anymore….” She felt awful for
the girl. Veronica really was telling the truth. Alice couldn’t be able to respond. She just gripped FP’s
hand tighter. He looked at her for a brief moment, then turned to Veronica.

“We know, Veronica.” he said with sympathy. “You don’t have to be afraid of us. Whatever help
you need, we can provide.” The young girl looked back and forth at the pair and wiped her tears
away, slowly smiling.

“Thank you.” she replied. She took one last bite of her food then slid out of the booth. “I’ll pay for
our meals. And if you need anything else….I’ll be in town for a little while longer. Thank you for
meeting with me.” She gave a sad smile to Alice then turned to pay the bill. But Alice couldn’t get
her mind off of that whole family. Did Veronica come back to Riverdale by herself? Where was
Hermione?

“Veronica!” Alice got out of the booth and joined the girl at the counter. Veronica faced her,
puzzled. “Is your mother in town with you?”

“No….why?”

“Does she know…..Veronica, where is Hermione?” The girl went, not knowing what to say.

“I don’t know.” Veronica responded. “I haven’t seen her since Christmas.”

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Alice struggled to concentrate for the rest of the day. After the meeting with Veronica at Pop’s, she
and FP drove back in their separate vehicles to her house, and the two went on a long walk around
the neighbor, stretching towards the playground before turning back. She remained silent for the
most part, her mind still on Hermione. Did Hiram kill her? Why did she send Veronica away? What
happened to Hermione?

She held onto FP’s hand for most of the walk, his presence giving her some relief. But she was too
scared to pull him into her thoughts. Yet despite everything, he was there. He didn’t run when she
admitted to her marital troubles. He helped her reconnect with Chic. He brought down Hiram with
her. FP deserved to have a better life, even if it meant….

“Hey.” FP pulled her back to reality. “You okay, Coop?”

“Sorry. Just fazed out for a second.” she lied, squeezing his hand. She caused these people to die.
She tore the Lodge family to fall apart. How could she think that FP could stay by her side?

They returned to her house just as it got dark. They walked up her walkway and stopped at her front
door. She turned to him and sighed.

“You want me to stay tonight?” he asked, still holding her hand.

“I think I’ll be alright.” she muttered. Don’t be compelled to look after me, FP, her mind screamed.
Don’t become involved in my mess. Please just---

“I’ll come and check on you in the morning.” he replied. “I have a meeting with Mary Andrews in
the morning, but I’ll be by after it’s over. Is that okay?” She froze in her spot, looking down at him.
She felt her eyes getting heavy, her emotions slipping off her sleeve. He did care. He wasn’t going to
leave. He did care about her. And Chic.
Below, FP stepped up and cupped her face. He tried to ask what was wrong, but he couldn’t find the words. Blinking at him with tears, she took a deep breath.

“Move in with me.” she rushed her words. She didn’t know what made her say it, but it must have popped in her mind. FP went back and forth between hanging his mouth open then closing it. He didn’t know how to respond. She cupped his face and rested her forehead on his. She could feel his breath on her lips.

“You deserve happiness, FP.” she whispered. “You deserve to have a better life outside the Serpents. Outside work. This could be our chance to start over, FP. We both need the break, but….but I don’t know if I can do this alone. And I don’t know if the Serpents will be so friendly to you anymore. I’m just…..I’m scared.” Alice stopped, her words turning into choking out tears. “But I don’t want your fear for me to stop you from finding happiness. I’ll try to be better. I’ll help you get your room setup, find you a job. Please don’t worry about me…."

“But I do.” he admitted, stepping up to stand in front of her, holding onto her tight. He started to get emotional. “I do.” He looked into her eyes, his hand moving up to cup her cheek. She felt his thumb wipe away a newly formed tear. She looked into his dark eyes and noticed how close he was to her, a newfound comfort radiating.

“Let me talk to Hog Eye and see if he can help break my lease on the trailer.” FP confirmed. “Then when I’m done with Mary, I’ll start bringing some of my things over. Is that okay?” his voice soothed her. She became speechless at his touch, his calming nature. So Alice just nodded, shutting her eyes. He tilted her head down and kissed her temple. A little while later, FP brought her back to his gaze.

“We’ll get past this. You and me.” he whispered. His fingers tangled into her head as he lingered there. She didn’t want him to see her demons, yet she didn’t want him to let go. FP eventually peeled away, walking back down the steps, only holding onto her hand. Knowing that it was time, Alice let go of his hand, watching him leave. He returned to his truck and waved her goodbye as he left. Alice stood outside her home for another few minutes long after FP drove off. She couldn’t find the energy to go back into her house and let the emptiness swallow her whole. But it was getting cold out and she barely had anything to cover her up. Eventually, she fumbled for her keys out of her purse and opened the door, its darkness consuming everything. She shut the door behind her and slid down to the floor sobbing. She ran her fingers through her hair and bit down on her knuckles to stop from wailing so damn loud. I want to be better, FP. I’m trying. I’m trying…..

She didn’t know how long she had been on the floor for, but after some time, she picked herself up and made her way up the stairs. Where was Chic? How late was it? She felt like a ghost floating through her hallway into her bedroom. Alice turned on the light and shuddered. Her skin itched. Her head thudded. She needed to get his room ready. Alice turned to her closet and began pulling out the boxes of extra sheets, trying to find something clean. An object fell out of the box, its fuzzy exterior tickling her feet. Mono?

Alice almost dropped the box on herself at the sight of the monkey. How did she still have this? She set the box down and gripped the stuff animal. It felt softer than usual. It reminded her of him. Him. She was tempted to scream and throw the damn toy into the garbage disposal, but something about its middle was catching her attention. There was stuffing coming out. Alice flipped Mono over and noticed a small cut down its back. Was this here before? Hesitating, she reached a finger into the stuffing. She only felt the slippery feel of the cotton…..and something that felt like jewelry. Her heart dropped to her stomach. She slowly recoiled her finger, pulling the object out. She froze at the sight of it. And screamed.
Alice dropped the toy monkey on the floor along with the wedding ring, the blood on it dried over and cotton sticking to it. She backed into her bed and sunk down. Was that Hermione’s ring? Was Hiram planning to clean it up and use it to propose to Alice? What was the ring doing in that monkey? What happened to Hermione?

WHAT HAPPENED TO HERMIONE?

She barely slept that night. She only got up to turn off the light, only to prevent herself from staring at it. That didn’t work. She didn’t have the motivation to shut her eyes, but she also didn’t want the horrible bloody images to pollute her head. Alice stayed on the floor, cradling her knees into her chest. She half considered calling FP but she didn’t want him to know. She didn’t want him to constantly care for her. She was a fucking wreck.

Alice didn’t even know it was the morning until she saw the sunlight beam in against her walls. But she couldn’t get up. She couldn’t open the blinds. She couldn’t do anything. Her eyes were glued on that ring.

“Mom?”

She didn’t hear Chic come into her room, his voice cracked and sounded like he had been crying. Everything was going in slow motion. “Mom?” She didn’t register at first that Chic was kneeling down in front of her. “MOM?” Alice blinked and finally picked up that her son was there. His eyes were red. He was holding the house tablet.

“Mom?” he repeated, helping her up. Chic sat her down on the bed and examined her face. Why was he crying?

“Chic?” she croaked. “What happened? Did something happen with you and Joaquin?”

“No.” he shook his head, looking down at the tablet. His hands started shaking. He looked back up at her and exhaled. “I found something on the news.” Before she could ask any questions, he turned the front of the tablet to her. A New York Post article was headlined with a picture of the Brooklyn Bridge. A hoard of police were standing around a car…..with its trunk open.

“They found a car….at the bottom of East River.” he explained. She scrolled down and read through the article. Her heartbeat pulsed in her ears. She became short of breath. Her son continued to explain what they found, but Alice couldn’t hear a word he was saying. She didn’t want to comprehend it, but it was true. It was Hermione Lodge’s body in that car.

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It wasn’t his intention to set her off. Chic only found the article that morning while eating his breakfast. When he saw Mrs. Lodge’s face on the page, his heart sunk. He felt more upset than he had in a long time, but his mother needed to know the truth. But when he found her that morning to show her the article, he found her room in a state of chaos, the box of bedsheets on the floor and a stuffed-animal monkey in front of her. It was only after he showed her the article that he saw the dried-up bloody ring on the floor.

“Mom?” Chic noticed her starting to hyperventilate. He cupped her face, not knowing what to do. “Mom? What can I do? Tell me!” He started to panic for her. He hadn’t seen his mom in a state of utter shutdown like this in a long time. “Mom, just breathe.” Chic tried to calm her down, but she stood up and pushed his hands away. She sobbed as she ran into the bathroom. “Mom!” Chic ran in after her and stopped in the doorway. He stood there, helplessly, watching as she gripped onto sink, screaming.
“I caused this to happen.” his mom wailed to him minutes later in the living room. After the incident in the bathroom, Chic led her down the stairs and had her stay in the living room while he got her some water. He contemplated on whether or not to call FP and have him come over to help. Maybe Joaquin could come over. Or Sheriff Minetta. He didn’t know what to do. Now his mom stood up having a breakdown. “I’m the reason Hermione’s dead!”

“You didn’t do anything, Mom! Mr. Lodge was a madman! He did this on his own accord!” Chic attempted to reassure her.

“But he did it for me!” she screamed. “All of those things he did, they were all for me! To prove his love for me!” He stood there across from her, wanting to reach out and tell her that she had nothing to worry about. But he feared that he would set her off again. He watched as she shook her head and began to pace the living room, feeling more helpless with every step.

“They’re dead….” she muttered, “They’re all dead…..”

“But I’m here.” Chic finally stepped in and took his mother’s hands. He looked her in the eyes, becoming emotional. “I’m here. And so are FP. And Joaquin. And Cheryl. And all my other friends you saved.” He paused as he noticed her gaze weakening. “Is that not enough?” he spoke low, a tear coming down.

She pursed her lips to hold back a sob. He felt her hand touch his face. He watched her attempt to form a smile.

“You’re such a good boy, Chic.” his mom said in a whisper. She stopped for a moment, contemplating the words to say. “You….You are everything to me. Your father would be so proud of you if he saw you now.” Her gaze became more distant. Something was off with her, but he didn’t know what.

“Mom?” he grew concerned. She held onto to his face with both hands and kissed his forehead. He wanted to ask her what was wrong, but she brought their foreheads together, letting out one last sob.

“I love you so much, Charles. I’m sorry I couldn’t be a better mother.”

He became panicked at her last sentence. She hadn’t called him by his real name in years. “Mom….” He tried to stop her, but she let him go and wandered over to the front door. “MOM.” he called out again, but she wasn’t listening. She grabbed her keys, still sobbing, and opened the door. Chic ran over to the front door, calling out to her as she hopped into the car and drove off. Where was she going? Why was she leaving? Did I do something wrong? His mind raced over concern for his mother. Then he realized that it wasn’t anything he did….but something else…. Did that mean….

“MOM! WHERE ARE YOU GOING? MOM!”

FP almost wasn’t prepared when Mary Andrews came by his trailer. He talked out a deal with Hog Eye the night before that he could pay the lease breaking in a matter of a month….that was if he could find a job. He spent most of the night packing, but he also kept thinking about her. Did Alice sleep okay? Did she need help with anything at the house? Did her boy make it to school? He wound up falling asleep on the couch packing up some of the nick-nacks from the living room. Luckily he woke up on time before his meeting to clear some of the junk out of the way by the time Mary showed up.

“So this is it? You’re really moving out?” Mary asked, wandering through his cluttered space.
“Yeah.” He grew sheepish and somewhat embarrassed. “Alice is offering me to stay with her and Chic until I can get my own lot again.”

“I’m sure she’ll help you find something nice.” she spoke optimistically. She came back out into the living room and sat down on the couch. “How are you two holding up, by the way?” FP sighed at the question. He tried to give Alice the space she needed to recover from everything that happened. But hell…. he was worried about her. She seemed less like herself and more like a walking corpse. Some part of her must have died along with Hiram.

“We’re…..getting there.” he left it at that. But Mary didn’t seem to take much notice. He sat down at the other end cap of the couch as she pulled out her compartment of notes and paperwork.

“Well, I have some good news, FP.” she started as she began to write down something on a small piece of paper. “I’ve been in contact with the lawyers that Gladys’s parents hired all those years ago. I’ve been telling them about the work you’ve done here and how you’re taking your AA program.” His heart began to race. He opened up to her about his commitment to staying sober and working off his contract with Keller, but he wasn’t a hundred percent sure if that info would translate well with the other lawyers. If it was good enough. Mary looked over at him and smiled. “They’ve made arrangements to have me come up to Toledo to talk more about the situation. In person.”

He blinked at her, then smiled. “Wait….so does that mean…..”

“We can’t guarantee anything yet….but we have something. We…. You have a chance, FP.”

FP ran his fingers through his hair, letting out a shaky laugh with wet eyes. He had a chance. They were looking it over. One step closer to seeing Jughead and Jellybean. He wanted to reach out and hug Mary, but he didn’t want to invade her personal space. So instead, he took her hands and squeezed them.

“Mary, I honestly don’t even know what to say. I’m just…..”

“I know.” she responded. “And no need to thank me in any extravagant way. It’s my job.”

“So when are you heading out for Toledo?” he shifted in his seat like a little kid getting to watch his favorite Disney movie.

“I’m thinking about leaving later today and stopping somewhere for tonight.”

“Heard something buzz on the kitchen counter. That’s where he left it? FP hustled over to the kitchen and found his phone vibrating on the counter. Alice was calling him. He smiled and immediately grabbed for it.

“Hey, you!” he greeted Alice cheerfully.

“Hi.” Alice was quiet on the other end. That’s odd, FP thought to himself. Maybe she just had a
rough time sleeping and was just struggling to stay awake. Hopefully the good news could raise her spirits.

“I was just about to call you. I have good news!”

“Really?” she was struggling to sound optimistic.

“Mary’s heading up to Toledo to talk with Gladys’s parents and their lawyers. Alice….” he felt himself growing more ecstatic. “I think I have a fucking shot! If it all goes well, I could see them again! I could see Jughead and JB!” He laughed at the last sentence. He heard her breathe heavily, not sure if she was laughing or crying.

“That’s so great, FP.” Alice responded. His smile continued to radiate at the sound of her voice. Then he heard her let out a sniffle. “I’m so happy for you….” She was holding back a sob. FP’s face fell at the sound of her distress.

“Alice?” FP asked in concern. “What’s wrong? Is everything alright?” Was she okay? Did something happen between her and Chic? And… Wait, was she in a car? Driving?

“I just….” her voice cracked.

“Alice…..where are you? I can come by the house and….”

“That’s fine.” He heard her attempting to smile. “There should be a key under the mat for you. Or Chic can let you in,” she paused, sniffing more. “I….. I won’t be back for a while. So….” She started mumbling incoherent sentences, making him start to grow panicked. He needed to get to her. He needed to know that she was safe. And not attempting to do anything to herself.

“Alice….tell me where you are. I’m coming to get you.” FP headed back into the living room to grab his keys.

“FP…. I just wanted to let you know….. I wanted to thank you. For being so good to me through this whole process. I know I’ve been difficult, and scary, and such a fucking mess…. But you stayed. You stayed, FP. I never deserved to have a partner like you. Be good to yourself, FP. And make sure Chic is okay. And the other Serpent kids.”

“Alice, do not get off the phone.” FP fumbled with his shoelaces tying them as fast as he could. His fingers shook as he made the last loop and almost fell over standing up. He had to get to her. He silently prayed that she wasn’t putting herself in a dangerous situation. He heard her let out a sob, then she spoke her last words.

“Thank you, FP. For everything.”

“ALICE, WAIT----” He heart sunk when she hung up the phone. He almost dropped his phone on the floor. He felt dizzy.

No…. no no no no no he couldn’t lose her. Not now. Not fucking now.

FP bolted out the door and flew down the stairs, almost running into Joaquin and Chic on the way down.

“Mr. Jones!” Chic’s voice startled him. FP grabbed at him and shook him.

“BOY, WHERE THE HELL IS YOUR MOM?”
“We thought she was with you.” Joaquin replied, pulling the blonde away from FP’s grip. Chic looked back at his boyfriend then back at him.

“She just walked out on me.” the younger Cooper teared up. “I didn’t know what to do. Did she come by here?”

“No….” FP muttered. He looked at the boys, his fear increasing. Then he remembered.....the night he met Chic. His mom disappearing to the Whyte Wyrm. And the only way they could track her was..... He looked Chic in the eyes and pulled out his phone.

“You still have that tracker, boy? When we went to find her that night?”

“I think so.” Chic’s lips quivered as he grabbed his phone. The three all looked down at the tracker app and waited for the data to locate Alice. But there wasn’t much time to wait. They needed to find her. FP grabbed the phone and handed it to Joaquin.

“Follow the path on here and go ahead.” FP pointed at the younger Serpent’s motorcycle. Joaquin headed over to his bike as FP turned to Chic. “You come with me in the truck, boy.” Chic followed him into the truck and jumped in. FP watched Joaquin zoom off before returning his gaze to Chic. He grabbed the boy’s shoulder, in any attempt to calm them both down. “We’re going to find her, okay?” The boy sniffled and nodded. FP turned on the ignition and followed Joaquin’s path.

They flew down the streets of Southside and through Riverdale, with no luck. FP spent the past few minutes reaching back out to Alice, but every single call went straight to voicemail. “ALICE, PLEASE. THIS THE FIFTH TIME I’VE TRIED TO CALL YOU. WHEREVER YOU ARE, STAY THERE. WE’RE COMING TO GET YOU. JUST..... ALICE, PLEASE DON’T DO ANYTHING STUPID.” He hung up in frustration, tears coming out of his eyes. He was being hit with mixed emotions, fear, anger, self-hatred. I should never have left her last night, he thought to himself. I should have stayed. Goddamnit, why didn’t I stay? But even no matter what he did, she still would have blamed herself for everything. Chic explained the article that he found on Hermione Lodge, as well as the monkey and the ring. He wanted to rip Hiram’s corpse out from the grave and shred it to pieces for what he made her feel. For the hell he put her through. The hell he put all of them through. But maybe it wasn’t just Hiram that tore her down mentally.... The digging into her palms wasn’t because of him. And neither was the downfall of her marriage. Or anything else in her life.

“Has she been through this before?” FP turned to Chic. The young boy stared at him blankly in confusion. FP rolled his eyes and spoke again, “Has she been through a suicidal phase before? Back when your dad was still around?”

“Nothing that I can remember.” Chic responded in honesty. “I know there would be days where she would be distant and quiet.....and her hands.....scarred with those nail marks. I only know that because I do it too. But.....but I don’t think she’s ever been like this. Even with my dad around.” Then he went quiet. FP didn’t know how to respond. How long was Alice silently struggling? Did she ever open up about this to Hal? To Hiram? To any of her other partners? Was he the only one who knew? Was she ever really happy in the first place? Or was it all an act to mask her pain? Her misery? Her....

Chic looked out the windshield and grabbed FP’s arm. “Joaquin!” he pointed out. FP turned out and saw Joaquin waving to them on the side of the road. Next to Alice’s car.

He pulled over and practically stumbled out of the truck. He limped over, hoping that the car wasn’t wrecked, that she wasn’t dead. Oh god, Alice, please don’t be dead. Please don’t be dead. PLEASE DON’T BE DEAD.
The car was empty. No sign of her anywhere in the area. The only thing Joaquin could find was her phone.

“What do we do now?” Chic muttered in despair behind them. What was there to do? Where did she go? FP’s mind went in multiple directions, all ending with seeing her limp body somewhere in those woods. He looked down on the ground in some attempt to calm down…. He saw footprints in the snow. His eyes followed the path heading in towards the woods. It had to lead out to Sweetwater River, which had now frozen over.

“Get blankets out of the truck.” He ordered the boys not staring at them. “And be ready to call 911.” The boys headed to the truck as FP followed the footprints into the woods. She had to be here. There was no other option. Unless she was mauled by a bear or got kidnapped by some rednecks. But the path kept leading towards one direction. He ran faster, his heart flying out of his chest. He had to find her. But would she be dead or alive? Dead or Alive? DEAD OR ALICE WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU---

FP collapsed by a nearby tree, regaining his breath in between his tears. He called out for her, hoping that she was somewhere hearing him. He waited for a response but nothing. He used to enjoy the silence on a quiet snowy day, but now he fucking hated it. His mind filled the void of negative thoughts and snickering laughter. He wanted to scream. He wanted to cry. He was not going to lose her. Not after what happened to Gladys. He didn’t know how long he had been there, but eventually Joaquin and Chic caught up to where he fell and helped him back up.

“How close are we to the river from here?” Chic asked, his breath visible in the cold air. FP looked out in front of them, and saw a break through the trees. It was the river! But where was she? Where was Alice?

Something pierced the air, alarming all of them. A blood curdling scream coming from the river. He stood there frozen. He bolted out to the river. There could only be one possible source of that scream.

“ALICE!”

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She only started swerving slightly after her phone call with FP. She sped down the highway out by the river. She hoped to stop near the bridge, where they thought the Black Hood had been brought to his demise. But her vision was getting blurry from the tears. Her grip loosened almost sending her off the side of the road. Finally giving up, Alice pulled over half a mile away from the bridge and turned off her ignition. Her palms were going numb from the digging. Her mind was plaguing her. She felt sick. She wanted to go off and never come back. I’m sorry, FP. I’m sorry, Chic. I’m trying for you, but the voices in my head won’t leave me alone. The voices laughed at her. Called her weak. Telling her that she was the horseman of death. The queen of hell.

She pulled the revolver out of her glove compartment and left the car, leaving her phone in the passenger’s seat. Alice didn’t know what the hell she would do with it, she didn’t know why she started stumbling through the woods in nuclear fucking cold weather…..but she needed to get away from the noise.

Alice kept wandering through the woods, one hand gripping the gun and the other continuing her sick pattern. She made her way out of the woods and headed towards the frozen river. She wanted her brain to shut off. She needed to protect FP and Chic from the danger. She wanted to protect them from herself. From the voices.

You murdered us. The Black Hood didn’t pull that trigger or swing that axe. You did. You are the
devil’s wife. The whore of Pembroke. Who would ever love you

She collapsed onto the river’s bed of ice, not from sobbing, but from numbness. She thought the silence could finally take over and help her find a way out of this. But the voices came back, they always came back. All the voices blended into one, laughing at her, manifesting in front of her.

“You really have a thing for problematic people. Don’t you, Alice?” the voice spoke to her. Sounding like the one thing…..the one person she no longer wanted infesting her head. The manifestation knelt in front of her, taking its form in the suit from the funeral. But she didn’t want to look. She didn’t even want to acknowledge it was there. It spoke again, “You letting those nasty thoughts in again, mi amor?”

“Get out of my head, Hiram.” she spoke to this demon, not making eye contact. It knelt in front of her, its eyes glimmering in a malevolent way.

“But that means you’re thinking about me. And everything I did for you.” it formed a small smile. “Isn’t this what you wanted, Alice? For someone to finally come along and give you the attention you deserve? Didn’t you ask for this?”

“I never fucking asked you to kill anyone.” Alice spat out. It was no wonder Hiram could never make any real connections with any of his associates, including Hal. He never knew how to love someone. His father and every heir to Lodge Industries set him up for a life of prosperity and competition. Hiram took it and made it a game of murder. A game he called love. And once he had you, he would do whatever it took to demonstrate that love, no matter who was taken out along the way.

Was her relationship with him all it was? A game? Was it just one complicated dance he led her in, twirling her left and right, following an unsteady pattern, and destroying the dance floor just so it could only belong to the two of them?

“You never should have gotten me away from Prudence that day of the funeral.”

“It wouldn’t have mattered where we met. Don’t you get it, Alice?” It grabbed her hand and stood them both up. The speech went on, but she didn’t want to hear anymore. “We were destined to meet. To fall in love. But the rest of the world got in the way. Keller. Hal. Even FP and your son.”

“Shut up.” she muttered, tapping at the gun.

“No one understood you. No one made you happy.”

“SHUT UP.” Her voice grew louder. It pulled her in closer.

“But I did.” it responded, the velvety voice turning eerie. Not like the way she knew. “Maybe the Black Hood did do some good. After all, you’re finally aware of what kind of affect you have on these people.”

The last sentence made her snap.

“SHUT! UP!” she pushed the demon away from her and pointed the revolver at it. Its face fell, but it didn’t bother to put its hands up. Alice felt the tears forming at the corners of her eyes.

“You want to know what your idea of love taught me, Hiram? Do you want to know what you’ve done?” she shouted at it, but received no response. “Your game taught me that bad people exist, black hood or none at all. Evil is everywhere. It’s in our heads, and it’s a matter of who decides to
turn it on. It’s how it’s used.” She paused, stuck in her train of thought. She glanced down at the ice, noticing little cracks starting to form underneath, then looked back up at it.

She rambled, “But you. You just disguised your evil as an “I love you”. You hid behind a wall and took out anyone who saw that evil. I tried to give you a chance, Hiram! I thought you would be the one fucking thing that could finally make me happy! The one thing that could drown out this nightmare in me! But no….. YOU MADE EVERYTHING WORSE. SO THERE YOU GO! YOU FUCKING WON! YOU BROKE ME, YOU BROKE CHIC, AND YOU BROKE FP!”

Her mind raced to them. FP and Chic. Were they wondering about her? Did they try and track her down? No….no they had to stay away. She didn’t want them to see this. They both deserved better. The other voices came back, calling her a coward. They taunted her. She was mentally screaming back at them. Shut up, shut up, please just shut up---

“THE GAME IS OVER, HIRAM. I’M NOT PLAYING ANYMORE, BECAUSE I’M FUCKING DONE! DO YOU HEAR ME? I’M. DONE.”

With wet eyes and a clamped-shut mouth, Alice pointed the gun on herself, aiming at the side of her temple. I’m sorry, Chic. I’m sorry, FP. I can’t do this anymore.

She squeezed the trigger. Nothing happened. The revolver clicked. She squeezed again. Nothing. Petrified, Alice brought the revolver down and checked it. There were no fucking bullets. She was angry, shocked, but more importantly, stupid. She threw the revolver down onto the ice, making the surface crack even more. She almost forgot it was there. She looked back into its eyes, speechless. It just smirked at her.

“You were right, Alice. Maybe you will never be satisfied.”

Her bottled up pain, her rage, it exploded. She let out a blood curdling banshee-like scream, banishing this figment out of her head. She screamed for the long days and nights she would never get back from this case. She screamed for those who were pulled into this death trap. She screamed for Fred Andrews. For Hermione. For Veronica. For Kevin. For Cheryl. For the Joaquin, Toni, and the other Serpents. For Hal. For Chic. For FP. And finally, for herself.

Her lungs eventually gave out and she stopped. She shut her eyes to catch her breath, then reopened them. It was gone. Her eyes were still wet, and her throat was sore, but she was now empty. Hiram was finally removed from her head. She was so caught up in the feeling of numbness, she didn’t hear the voices coming from the woods, running towards her. She didn’t feel the ice cracking underneath her.

The ice broke, and she was sucked in. The water was freezing, but she couldn’t find the strength to react. It was pitch black. Her arms felt heavy. The water kept pulling at her legs, bringing her down further. The water went into her lungs. Her brain felt like it would explode. She struggled to breathe. But did she want to do that anymore? Her vision started to fade. Could she even get out now? Was it all worth it? WAS IT ALL WORTH IT?

Her eyes starting getting heavy, about to shut all the way. The darkness was consuming her. She couldn’t hold a coherent string of thoughts anymore. Water continued to fill her lungs. This was it.

Something from above was grabbing at her. Alice was losing conscious, but she could feel something taking a firm hold of her arms. Pulling her out of the pitch black. Out of the water. Through the ice. Back to life.
“GET ONE OF THOSE BLANKETS READY! NOW!” FP yelled at the boys as he pulled Alice’s limp body out of the hole in the ice. He laid her on the sheet of ice, his hands shaking from the cold and from the panic. She can’t be dead. She can’t be. He started performing CPR on her, hoping that some form of life would come to her in between the 30 something pumps he was pushing into her lungs. He opened her mouth and exhaled twice.

“COME ON! DON’T YOU DIE ON ME, ALICE!” FP cried as he started over the hand pumps. His emotions were slipping off his sleeve. He couldn’t lose her. He can’t. FP stopped, his hands covering his face as he screamed. He couldn’t control the tears coming out.

“FP…” Joaquin moved him out of the way and set the blanket beside him, continuing the CPR on Alice. FP almost fell onto the ice as he stood next to Chic. He didn’t want to look. He didn’t want her boy to watch either. This is not the end, Alice. Please don’t let this be----

He heard a cough. It took a moment to register that it was not coming from either one of the boys. “MOM!” he heard Chic scream. FP looked down and saw the boys hunched over Alice as she began coughing up water. Relieved, he ran over and knelt down in between the boys. Chic lifted the upper half of her body as he wrapped the blanket around her. Alice was shivering and startled. She met FP’s gaze and her lips trembled. He held her face in his hands.

“It’s okay, Coop.” he spoke in a reassuring tone, in effort to not make himself lose it. “You’re safe now. You’re safe.” Her eyes watered at his words. He lifted her up and hugged her, the wetness of her outfit against his flannel. Chic rubbed her back for a little bit then stood up, Joaquin following in suit. FP eventually slipped his arm under the bottom of her legs and stood up bridal carrying her. She clung onto the blanket and sobbed as he carried her away from Sweetwater River.

“What now?” Joaquin asked as the group made their way back through the woods. Looking out, FP had to make a decision, fast. They couldn’t just easily take her home and pretend like it didn’t happen. She could obtain hypothermia. What if she ran off and tried again? What could he do?

“We need to get her to the hospital.” he finally answered.

Chic took his mom’s car and Joaquin returned to his bike. FP placed Alice in the truck and led them all to the hospital. He had to go quickly, because he wasn’t certain that her heart would continue to beat. She started dozing off between the sobs, and he struggled to keep her awake. When they finally arrived, FP carried her through the emergency room doors.

“HELP! SOMEBODY HELP!” he screamed, catching the attention of the nurses on staff and everyone else waiting in that room. A pair of nurses noticed Alice’s state of being and peeled her away from FP’s hold. Another one carried out a stretcher, waiting for them to place Alice on top. They began to wheel her away, but she looked back up at FP. Her eyes were desperate, scared, not wanting to be alone. He tried to run after them but a male nurse stopped him, saying that he couldn’t go back. FP pushed the hair out of his eyes and sat down in one of the waiting chairs. He couldn’t stop crying.

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She was to be on suicide watch for the next few days. The first night, they would allow anyone to come visit her, not even her own damn son. FP, Chic, and Joaquin wound up staying a Pop’s for most of the night, shaken by the day’s events. He couldn’t eat anything, he just sat in that booth numb. He just watched as Chic curled up into Joaquin, sniffling. He couldn’t imagine what that boy was thinking at the moment. He just witnessed his mom almost die. No. She almost killed herself. It scared all of them. Even her.
He had Chic and Joaquin stay with him at the trailer. After clearing some shit out of the bedroom, he had the boys take the bed while he took the couch. FP barely slept that night - when he did close his eyes, he would either see Alice or Gladys. Their bodies frozen by the river. Heads smashed open. He almost lost her. She almost slipped away.

The three arrived at the hospital the next morning as soon as Alice was allowed to have visitors. FP stayed out in the waiting room while Chic went in to see his mom, Joaquin following in for emotional support. He tapped his foot on the tile floor and clasped his hands together, his nails digging into his knuckles. It took all of his urge not to break down before going to see her. I should have stayed with her. I should have seen the signs sooner. I should have done more.

A hand rested under his chin and lifted up his face. He blinked at the figure in front of him. She had the blue dress on from that night, but her face was not destroyed. She still looked so damn beautiful.

“You did the right thing, Jonesy.” her voice soothed him. He had to look down because it was becoming too much. He missed Gladys. And almost losing Alice was reeling in all of those memories of that night.

“Did I, though?” he muttered. His eyes were becoming heavy and damp. The vision of her knelt down in front of him and took his hands. Her face shone in the pale sunlight. The tears came down, faster than he anticipated. He freed one of his hands to cover his mouth, not wanting to draw any attention to himself. He shook his head and eventually lowered his hand from his mouth.

“I…” FP started, staring into Gladys’s eyes, “I couldn’t save you.” Her face went blank, then became more sympathetic.

“No.” she responded, turning her head to the door down the hall. The door that led into where they were holding Alice. “But you saved her.” FP glanced up and clamped his mouth shut. Maybe Gladys had a point - if FP didn’t make any effort, if he didn’t come to Chic and Joaquin’s aid…..

She turned back to him and cupped his face. “You need each other, FP. She relies on you, and you on her. You have something good with Alice….. Don’t ever let that go. Okay?”

More tears flowed. Slowly, he nodded. FP needed Alice. He needed his partner. And her reliance on him was just as strong. He wanted to say more to Gladys, but something caught his attention. Joaquin had opened the door, eyeing him. FP went to look back at Gladys, but the vision of her was gone. Half in mourning, and half in determination, he stood up as the young Serpent headed over to him.

“Blondie’s almost done.” Joaquin explained. “We wanted to make sure that you had some time to her.”

“Thanks.” FP answered. He leaned to the side to get a glance at the door for any sign of Chic, then returned back to Joaquin. If FP were honest, Joaquin was the one who helped him save Alice. And he had been there by Chic’s side through the Black Hood episode. He was a good kid. He deserved more than a low life trapped on the Southside.

“Thanks.” FP answered. He leaned to the side to get a glance at the door for any sign of Chic, then returned back to Joaquin. If FP were honest, Joaquin was the one who helped him save Alice. And he had been there by Chic’s side through the Black Hood episode. He was a good kid. He deserved more than a low life trapped on the Southside.

“Not just for the update,” FP added on, “but…..but for helping yesterday. You didn’t have to step in and help. You chose to. You helped save her, Joaquin.” The young Serpent stood there in shock.

“She’s a good person. I have a lot of respect for her…..” Joaquin admitted. “I don’t even know what I’d do if she died. I didn’t want Chic to suffer….. I just wanted to help.”

“I know.” FP came closer and patted him on the shoulder. He had been aware of Joaquin’s natural
instinct for wanting to help people. It was practically in the boy’s blood. Behind them, the door opened again, and Chic came out.

“She’s all yours, Mr. Jones.” the blonde said. FP nodded and left Joaquin at his spot. He headed over to Chic and clapped a hand onto the boy’s back.

“How is she holding up?”

“A little shaken.” Chic went quiet. “I wouldn’t try to push anything out of her. She hasn’t talked much. And I’m not sure if she’s willing to.”

His heart sunk. FP wanted to ask her so many questions, but if she wasn’t ready…..if she needed more time….. He nodded and watched Chic head over to Joaquin. He took a deep breath, then headed in.

The room was too white. It felt like a prison cell with a fancier bed and no bars on the windows. He didn’t see her around the bed area as he looked around. He wondered if the staff had given her some warmer clothes. If they fed her. If she was able to sleep…. He heard footsteps behind him. He turned and found Alice emerging out of the bathroom. She looked pale in the hospital gown. Her eyes were distant. She looked like a walking skeleton.

He didn’t say anything to her at first, he was just taking it all in. She kept eye contact with him for a moment, only then to stare down at the ground and walk past him, over to her bed. She sat down with her arms crossed with her eyes on one of the floor’s tiles. The silence was uncomfortable, for both of them. FP wanted to speak, but he couldn’t find the exact words to say. What was even good to say? It gets better? You have something to live for? How do I help her?

“I get….if you don’t want to talk right now.” FP started, making her stare up at him. He clamped his mouth shut for a brief second, trying to find the words to phrase this next part correctly, “I understand if you need time. Space. This is your recovery.” Alice blinked at the last phrase then turned away from him. But don’t cut me off, FP thought to himself. Don’t leave me or Chic behind. We’re always here. His mind was screaming with words he wanted to tell her, but his brain wouldn’t let him speak.

She seemed almost the way he did after Gladys died. Quiet. Reserved. Cutting people off not because he didn’t care but because he didn’t want others to suffer with him. He took a long breath then continued.

“I was broken when Gladys died. I lost all sense of wanting to do…..anything. I didn’t talk to anyone. I couldn’t eat.” he paused, watching her expression go from blank to somewhat sympathetic. He sniffled and wiped his nose with the sleeve of his flannel before he went on, “I almost drank myself to death. All the weeks in AA were just gone. Blown from the piles of beer bottles and hard liquor.” He stopped, his eyes getting wet again and his voice cracking. He exhaled and looked back down at Alice, with Gladys on his mind, “And all I could see was her. She haunted my dreams. Part of me……wanted to be with her. I just…..”

I wanted to die, the voice in his head finished the sentence. He told himself to breathe…..no, it was Gladys’s voice telling him to breathe. Don’t break now. Be strong for her. She needs you.

FP became quiet. How would he continue speaking if he was encouraging her to die? No, it wasn’t what he wanted. Not for her.

“But the job with Keller,” he eventually found the words, “it gave me a second chance. Something to push me to get back up on my feet, to give me…..hope. You don’t have to find it now. That’s not
what I’m trying to say,” FP told her, pausing to take another breath, “I’m guess what I’m saying is…. The voices in your head are wrong. There is a way out. I made it…..I think you can, too.”

He ended his speech there. Alice was still silent, but her eyes started to give away her emotion. She looked like she wanted to speak but was dumbfound. He rubbed his hands together in attempt to warm them up and moved towards the window. He looked out at the view - just the roof to another level of the hospital and the parking lot. He became so intrigued by the view, he almost didn’t hear her voice.

“I saw him.” Alice sounded sick. FP turned to her, in shock and in sadness. He wanted to ask who she was referring to, but she continued, “When I was out at the river. I saw Hiram.” There wasn’t anyone there when I came, the voice in his head wanted to ask. But it was all too obvious - her head must have made him up as a way to scare her.

She proceeded, slowly starting to choke out tears, “The voices….my memories….. It all turned into him……taunting me. I was weak, FP. I didn’t know what else to do. I didn’t want to hurt you…..or Chic. I…..” she paused, wiping away tears, “I just wanted them to stop….”

He watched as she covered her mouth, silently sobbing. He marched back over to her and knelt down in front of her, taking one of her hands. He felt the raw, open scars on her palms as his fingers ran over them like feathers. She sniffled at his touch and bit her lip. When she finally opened up her mouth again, she struggled to breathe.

“I let him take advantage of me.” Alice wobbled and looked down at the floor. FP knew it wasn’t true, none of it was her fault. “I thought that he could make me happy, the one who could shut out the bad thing that was the Black Hood. Turns out he was the bad thing all along. And I didn’t want to look into it because I…..” she paused, exhaling. She looked back up at FP and squeezed his hand. The words she said next stunned him.

“Bad things happen when I use my heart, FP. I’ve tried….with Hal, and Chic. And even fucking Hiram….. But when I do let myself open up, when I do fall in love and trust other people…..I end up getting hurt. And I hurt other people.” she paused, exhaling out her last words. “That’s why I can never let myself attach to anyone. Love….is my weakness.”

Alice became quiet. She pulled a hand free to wipe away her tears. It all made sense now. That was why she was reluctant to make any bonds with her older partners. Why she was hesitant to let her marriage with Hal retake its full form. Why she acted so strong but was silently in pain. She saw her love as something awful…. But FP knew the truth, that it was the opposite. He knew it, but she needed to hear it. Now more than ever.

He stood up and caught her attention. “You’re wrong.” he spoke firmly. “Love is not your weakness, Alice…… it’s your strength. You just haven’t seen it the way I do.” She looked confused at the comment, yet remained unresponsive. He inhaled and carried on, “Your compassion and your love for others kept them alive. Because you cared about them. You were willing to make your marriage with Hal work again because you cared. You connected closer to Chic, you saved the younger Serpents……. I have the chance to see my kids again. Because you care. Don’t you see, Alice? It’s your love…..your loyalty…..” FP stopped, the words forming to how a Serpent would be described. He looked down at his jacket, feeling the snake logo swimming along his back.

Without much hesitation, FP peeled off his Serpent jacket and held it in his hands, looking down at it before returning to her gaze. “The Serpent…..is a warrior.” he explained. He went on to paraphrase the Laws in a sense she would understand, “In fearful times where one would act cowardly, Serpents stand strong. They care for family, dead or alive. They remain true to who they are. It’s rare to find someone outside the gang who displays these qualities….. But you do, Alice. To me…..you’ve
earned your skins.” His heart was heavy, but it was the right move. She deserved all the protection in the world, even if it only meant having a jacket as a physical metaphor.

FP knelt down and draped the Serpent jacket onto Alice. The jacket enclosed on her like a blanket. He adjusted its position on her body and smiled at her. “This is your initiation, Coop. You get to be an honorary Serpent today. And tomorrow. And for the rest of the time that you’re in this place. You hold onto this jacket and let it be a reminder that you can find hope again. And if you can’t give it to yourself now.....” he felt himself becoming emotional. He took a firmer hold on her hands and began to speak from the heart, “then let me give some to you. So when you walk out those doors, I’ll be there. And so will Chic, and the other kids. We will be here for you. There is a way out of the tunnel, Alice. You just have to find your flashlight. Okay?”

FP ended his speech, a tear coming down his cheek. Alice bit her lips and nodded. She let go of his hands and wrapped her arms around his shoulders, hugging him. He returned her embrace and gave her the warmth she needed. They rested their foreheads together, he felt her breath on his lips. Her eyes became softer and not as lost and scared. She seemed calmer, more at ease with him.

A nurse entered the room and told FP that it was time for Alice to head to a group therapy session. He turned back to Alice and helped stand her up, knowing that it was time for him to go. He gave her one last hug and kissed the top of her head. “You can do this, Coop.” he whispered against her hair. “Don’t worry about me. I will always be here for you.” With that, he left the room, rejoined the boys, and left the hospital.

Part of him wanted to stay in this room with her for the remainder of her stay, to keep an eye on her, and to give her every ounce of strength he could. But another part of him realized that this was her recovery. She needed to find strength on her own. He could provide support, but it had to eventually be up to her.

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She counted down the minutes, waiting for the group session to be over. Alice just wanted to go back to her room and sleep. She was no longer in the mood to talk about her insecurities. It was cold, but the nurses wouldn’t let her wear FP’s jacket during the session. Once it was over, she rushed back and threw the jacket on, curling into a ball on her bed and sobbing. She was tired. She was drained. She wanted her son. She wanted FP.

Alice never wanted to put herself and anyone else in this situation. She didn’t want to resort to attempting suicide, but the voices wouldn’t leave her alone. She sobbed into her knee caps, the memories of the past few months playing in her head. Her opening up about her feelings, the fears of almost losing Chic, her relationship with Hiram, her relationship with Hal.....Hal.....oh god, what did his face look like? Why was he slipping so far from her reach? She leaned back against the pillow and shut her eyes, trying to remember Hal, how light or dark his eyes were, the sound of his voice.

Only one memory could come back to her, the last time they were together during the last moments of his life. In the last minutes before he left her forever, they were still at the house. They had fallen asleep for a brief period on the couch after he expressed his concerns and his wanting to leave Riverdale. They woke up and Hal decided that he should leave so she could focus on the case, not wanting to intrude on her time. She remembered he sat across from her on the ottoman tying his shoes up. He wore a doofy smile on his face, but it was a smile she loved.

“Are you going to be okay getting back?” she remembered asking. Hal finished tying his shoes and looked up at her.
“I’ll be alright. I have an article I need to work on anyway.” Part of her wanted him to stay, but she still needed time to process the events of their conversation. Nevertheless, it wouldn’t hurt to try.

“I could give you some details about the Black Hood case, if you want. If this case even goes anywhere.” Hal reached for her hand and squeezed it.

“That would be wonderful.” he smiled, making her fears slip away. She allowed herself to return a smile and curl her fingers into his hand. The little silence between them comforted her. But she felt that it would be too good to be true. Hal’s face then became puzzling, wanting to know more about the Black Hood case.

“So, Keller has you paired up with…..a Serpent?” he asked. She knew he was referring to FP.

“Half Serpent.” she sighed in response. At the time, she didn’t know how to describe FP. When her friendship with him was nowhere as close as it was now, she was still questioning his motives. His loyalty. But he saved her. He encouraged her to talk to Hal. He didn’t seem as bad as the other Serpents. “He mostly does undercover on the Southside for Keller. And…..his name is FP.” She ended her description, not knowing what else to say. Hal raised a brow at her.

“That’s it?” he chuckled.

“What?” she retorted back.

“You’re usually bitching to high-heaven about your partners by now….like how awful or incompetent they are. You’re awful quiet about this one.” She knew he didn’t mean it as an insult, but it felt rather strange hearing the words come out of his mouth. But he had a point - she barely had anything to say about FP. Ask her when they first met, she could have given a full sermon about his attitude and resistance. But now, things were different.

“He saved my life the day you came in. And….he actually recommended that we talk.” she admitted. “I….kind of told him about us. But not everything. I don’t know, Hal. I guess I…..” she paused, not sure where to go. Maybe FP was different from the others, in ways she didn’t realize at the time. “I’m giving him a chance. I’m trying not to be so fucking judgemental all the damn time.” She let go of Hal’s hand and stood up. She crossed her arms and walked over towards the staircase, her head running with thoughts. Behind her, Hal came over next to her and touched her shoulder.

“Maybe you should keep it up.” his voice was consoling. She turned to him, his eyes radiating along with his smile. She could make out the forming crows feet at the corners of his eyes. It aged him, but it made him look swell.

“You really think so?” She reached for his hand on her shoulder and gripped it.

“I think FP could be different.” he smirked. She rolled her eyes at the comment.

“You say that about all my partners.” she muttered. She felt his fingers slip under her chin, rotating her face towards his.

“I mean it. I have a good feeling about him. With his knowledge from the Southside and yours here in Riverdale, you could work really well together. You could get this Black Hood in a matter of seconds. Hell, if it all goes well, you two could practically run your own detective agency together. How about that? Your own PI company?”

Alice laughed. He began the joke about running her own private investigation agency the moment she received her acceptance into the Boston PD in the mail. It was meant to encourage her, even at her worst. She was glad for the memory they could share. But the pain still lingered. Alice gave him
a sympathetic look then leaned her head into his hand. She sighed and let herself relax. She didn’t want him to go.

After a moment of standing there, they left the house, heading out to his vehicle. They stood together on the steps of the walkway, staring at each other. Just say something, Alice. It’s now or never. But she couldn’t find the words. Instead, she coiled her arms around Hal and rested her head on his shoulder. His soft body made her longing for him. Hal leaned back slightly and she wondered if he would kiss her. Instead, he left a long lingering kiss on the forehead.

“You were right. This too shall pass.” he whispered, smiling down at her. Hal gave her hands one last squeeze before he let go from her reach, heading out towards his vehicle, heading away from Elm Street, heading towards his death.

Alice woke up early that morning freezing in her hospital bed. She clung to FP’s jacket and shivered, refusing to let herself cry. She had so many regrets, too many mistakes. Was it even worth joining the police force in the first place? Would she ever lost Hal? Would their marriage still have fallen apart? Yet…she never would have connected more with her son and come to see him blossom in his relationship with Joaquin. She never would have helped those kids and stopped Hiram from his raid as the Black Hood. She never would have met FP.

Hal was right. There was something good about FP, maybe from the beginning. She just never recognized it until now. With everything that happened, good and bad, FP was there. He helped her at her worst and rejoiced with her at her best. He was there. He was the best partner she had.

Hell, you two could practically run your own detective agency together. How about that?

Hal’s voice lingered….. She blinked. Then sat up straight.

Run your own detective agency.

Her heart raced. It was a sign. Hal practically gave her a sign all along. Her fucking flashlight.

Alice wiped her eyes dry and jumped out of the bed. She headed out into the hallway, picking up on the lobby’s emptiness, and wandered over to one of the nurses at the desk.

“Excuse me.” she greeted the young nurse. “Do you have some paper and a pen I could use?”

“Is there a reason, miss?” the nurse asked in confusion. Alice rolled her eyes and continued.

“I just need to write something down. I need to get it down before I forget it.”

“Okay.” the nurse got up and found some scrap paper and a couple of pens for her. Alice took the items over the counter, thanking the nurse, and ran back to her room with a smile on her face.

She sat with her legs crossed on the bed, scribbling down her thoughts and ideas all related to this detective agency thing. She had to remember how much money she had left over from her Plan B funds and from whatever money Hal left for her and Chic. She also had to calculate what her last paycheck from the station would be in order to get a final amount. But after the afternoon passed, she looked down at the start of her plans, more confident than she felt in the past few days.

The next couple of days went by in a blur. Alice became more open in talking with her peers in the group sessions, talking about what she would do with Chic when she would get out. When she wasn’t in therapy, she was back in her room finishing out her detailed plans. With her confidence restored and her mentality on a somewhat steady path towards recovery, Alice could finally feel the guilt from the Black Hood chaos lifted from her shoulders at last. She could finally breathe.
The day finally came when she could leave. The night before, a nurse dropped off a set of fresh clothes that Chic dropped off at the hospital. She felt like herself again in the black jeans and colorful blouse. After fixing her hair in the bathroom, she shrugged on FP’s Serpent jacket, blushing at the comfort of her makeshift security blanket. Would he be waiting when she came out? Where would they go to eat? Alice stepped out and examined her hospital room one last time, thankful that she was granted a second chance. She grabbed her purse and her plans, folding them and shoving them into the pocket of the jacket.

She headed out of the room, hoping to see any sign of people she knew. She glanced over to the left of the lobby and sighed in relief. Chic and Joaquin got up from their seats and started to head over to her. “Hi mom.” Chic greeted her with a smile. Alice ran over to her son and hugged him tight. She eventually pulled away and held onto his face with her hands. “How’s it going, Mrs. C?” Joaquin joined her son’s side, but she was just as happy to see him.

“Come here. You’re family too.” Alice grabbed Joaquin and gave him just as fierce of a hug. After a few moments, he picked up on her outerwear.

“Nice jacket.”

“FP lent it to me.” she blushed. She wondered where FP was. Downstairs? At Pop’s? At her house? Take it easy, she reminded herself. “Are you boys hungry? Because I am!” Alice commented and headed towards the elevator. The boys followed behind her. The three returned to the lower lobby of the hospital heading outside. They made a plan to go to Pop’s to catch up on the past few days’ events.

“Do you need me to drive all of us?” she asked Chic as they were about to head out the door. He turned back to her and gritted his teeth.

“Actually, we came over on Joaquin’s bike.” he admitted. She raised an eyebrow in confusion.

“But don’t worry,” Joaquin jumped in, “we made sure we got you a ride.” Deciding to go along with the boys’ plan, she begrudgingly followed them outside. She glanced around the small parking lot, looking for where exactly it was her ride was waiting for her. Alice eventually eyed a truck by Joaquin’s bike…..a truck she knew. Her heart swelled at the sight of him.

FP left the side of his truck and headed towards her direction. She began to walk over to him, lost in words. She was happy to see him, relieved even. They stopped in front of each other, smiling.

“Hey, Coop.” FP beamed. Every instinct in her body wanted her to reach out and hug him, hold his hand, even…… kiss him. Not wanting to chew up too much more time, she closed their gap and hugged FP. His warmth felt like second nature to her. The one thing she needed since her time at the hospital. She looked up at him and glowed. He just stared down at the jacket on her.

“I’m just gonna say it….that jacket looks really good on you.”

“I’m glad you gave it to me.” she responded, her cheeks flushing.

“Uhh….hate to cut your reunion short, Mulder and Scully.” Joaquin snickered off to the side, holding Chic’s hand. “But Pop’s is calling our name. So we better get going.” Chic laughed at the comments and the two headed over to his bike. Alice watched her son go off then returned to FP’s gaze.

“Shall we?” He took her hands and led her to the truck.

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It felt good to see her happy again. Her happiness was radiating, and it made FP heartwarmed. During the car ride to Pop’s, he caught her up on some of the recent events. He officialized the breaking of his lease in Sunnyside Trailers and made plans to retire from the Serpents. Fred Andrews offered him part-time work at the construction site, which he was grateful for. Also, he applied to work for Pop as a busboy and waiter. The money, he explained, could help to pay for his rent staying with Alice, but she insisted that he used the money somewhere else, perhaps to get a place of his own if need be. He hadn’t heard from Mary much since she left for Toledo, but Alice reassured that hopefully things were going well.

It was great that they could ease back into their routine. It felt easy with her. It felt like the weight of his past and what happened with Gladys was lifted off him, not permanently but with more ease. She looked good in his jacket, it was a shame he would have to give it up soon. But for now, he wanted to let Alice keep it as long as it gave her the comfort she needed.

They finally arrived at the parking lot at the diner. He turned off the ignition and turned to her. She was fumbling for something in the pockets.

“You okay?” FP asked. Alice pulled out what she was looking for - a clump of folded pieces of paper with scribblings on them. She unfolded the papers and stared down at them, taking a deep breath. She handed him the papers, gesturing for him to take it. He grabbed the papers and looked down. It was a detailed plan for a private investigation agency, one they could run. Together.

“It’s a little unorganized,” she began her explanation, “but it’s still a pretty detailed business plan. I might have to recalculate the funds available, and try to find a lawyer to help…..but this could work. It could work, FP.” He examined all the papers, read every single word. The two of them together doing this. No PD rules or Minetta completely up their ass. They could reap their own benefits. She really had this all planned out. He wondered what sparked her.

Before he could pick her brain, she grabbed his hand. He noticed her eyes getting teary as she exhaled. “I got thinking about what you said to me at the hospital. There was a way out of that tunnel. I just got scared…..with everything happening. I was getting pulled in so many directions. But even with all of that……there was one thing. One constant thing that made sense. Chic is part of that, yes…..but it’s more than that.” She paused, gripping his hand tighter. He never heard this kind of confession come out of her before. Not even while she was at the hospital or before any of her other events. Because this time they weren’t geared towards other people or other things. This time, she was talking strictly about him.

She looked him in the eyes. “It’s you, FP. You’re the thing that makes me happy. You’re my flashlight. I never wanted to open up about anything with anyone……but then there was you. You allowed me to express my feelings, to share my deepest fears, to help me with Chic. It’s you. And I think it always has been you. I just didn’t realize it until now.” She stopped, grabbing for the papers again. “So what do you say? You want to make our own rules?”

He was speechless. She cared for him. He was her light out of her darkness. He wanted to cry. He blinked down at the papers, his mind coming to a firm decision.

“Just one thing to add.” FP took the papers and dug for a pen in his glove compartment. On top of the first page, he scribbled one thing: Cooper and Jones, Private Investigation.

He handed back the papers and smiled. A tear went down her cheek as her face light up. He was ready to bring their worlds together. They could do this. Just the two of them. He wanted to….

His phone rang in his pocket. Confused, FP pulled it out. Mary Andrews was calling.
“What’s wrong?” she asked as he glanced down at his phone. He flipped it to her and she gasped at Mary’s ID popping up. She gestured for him to answer it. FP left the car as he began his conversation with Mary outside. Alice glanced out the windshield on the verge of tears….happy ones, of course. She finally admitted her feelings for FP. He knew now how much he meant to her. And he was going to do this with her. She looked down at the plans, now titled Cooper and Jones, Private Investigation, and grinned.

Outside, FP covered his mouth and rested his hand on the hood of the truck, on the verge of tears. What was happening? Concerned, Alice left the truck and stood on the other side of the truck, waiting to find out the news. He had his back to her now, attempting to contain his emotions. “Okay…..okay…..alright. Thank you, so much, Mary.” she heard him end the phone call. He turned back to her, his eyes red and wet.

“What happened?” she asked. “What did she say?” He stayed quiet at first. Then, slowly, he smiled. “The lawyers in Toledo…. They’re going to renegotiate a new contract for visitation. For me. Alice, I’m going to see my kids again.”

She stumbled around the hood, shocked at the news but ecstatic for him. She covered her mouth to keep herself from wailing, but she didn’t mind. FP was going to eventually see Jughead and Jellybean again. He had a future with his kids. She laughed through the tears and she stood there. He remained unmoved, but his eyes still remained on her.

“What?” His was fixated on something. He moved from his spot, standing only a couple of feet away from her. He was breathing heavy, but his smile still remained. “What?”

He glanced up at her eyes then down at the lower half of her face. Then it came to her. FP finally stepped in, held onto her face, and did what they were both waiting to have happen.

His head was still floating from Mary relaying the exciting news. But with Alice here, and her confession of her feelings for him, it finally drove him to do what he wanted to do for weeks. Months.

FP finally moved in and kissed Alice. Her face was cold in his warm hands, her lips tasted heavenly. It was a sensation he didn’t know he needed until this very moment. And she was just as willing to kiss back.

It was a high she never wanted to come down from. His kiss erased those voices in her head, not forever but enough to drown them out for the time being. It brought her the tenderness she had lack for so long. She clung to him tighter and delve in further.

He didn’t want to stop, but eventually they had to part lips so they could catch their breath. He looked down at Alice, her face now red, and she was glowing. They were both giggling, partly from the lack of breath and the rightness of it all. FP knew there was something special about Alice Cooper.
There was something about FP Jones, Alice figured. It was something she wanted to spend the rest of her life wanting to get to know. They went in for more but heard a slow clap from another point of the parking lot. Puzzled, they both turned to find Chic and Joaquin over by the entrance to Pop’s, watching the whole thing. Joaquin chuckled whilst slow-clapping, and Chic just had a smug smile on his face.

FP glared at the two. “What the f…. Were you two out here watching all of this?”

“Kinda.” the younger Serpent teased. He turned to Chic with a Cheshire grin on his face. “You got anything to say, blondie?” Chic looked out to the pair and smiled.

“About damn time, you two.” he muttered.

Slowly releasing one hand from her face, FP curled his finger and stepped out to the boys. “Run, blondie!” Joaquin howled, grabbing Chic by the hand and running into Pop’s. Alice bursted into laughter and cupped FP’s face. He began to laugh too.

She reached up and gave him another kiss, lingering there for a moment. Then, with her arm around his shoulder, and his around her waist, FP and Alice walked into the diner.

Everything was finally the way it should be.

End of Chapter Fifteen

Chapter End Notes

SEE? I TOLD YAL THERE WOULD BE A HAPPY ENDING!
AND YAY FALICE!!!!!

okay so I'll try to push out the epilogue when I'm not crying and dying from schoolwork. Thank you all so much lovelies and have a good weekend! Mwah!
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

IT'S HEEEEEERE! THE EPILOGUE IS HERE!!! HIP HOP HOORAY!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

EPILOGUE

It was six weeks since her time in the hospital. It was six weeks since she drafted those plans for Cooper and Jones, Private Investigation. It was madness setting up the business, officially quitting their jobs at the PD, and getting FP moved in with her and retiring from the Serpents permanently. But those six weeks were some of the best Alice experienced.

Now it was coming up roses for both of them. Thanks to Cheryl’s social media savviness, their little PI business was gaining attention and internet popularity. Opportunities were coming at them left and right, and fans were even starting polls to help them select what to look into. The ideas varied between everything - some game called Gryphons and Gargoyles, a small-town cult that labels itself as The Farm, and even the Sisters of Quiet Mercy. Since both Alice and FP had the experience, the Sisters were their first major target.

She spent most of her day at the Register working furiously on her article, trying to follow in suit to what FP had filmed on his section for their website. She felt that it was too much, or too little, regardless she was too tired to keep on writing. Giving up, and hoping to get out for some fresh air, she found herself hopping into her convertible and heading over to Pop’s. She slung her computer bag over her shoulder and made her way into the diner, the bell dinging as always. Pop Tate greeted her as she entered, making her smile and wave back. She glanced throughout and heard the voice of a familiar someone. The one face she was expecting to see.

“Here you go, ladies.” FP delivered the plates of food to a pair of young Vixens at the booth. He still had to keep his part-time job at the diner just to help make ends meet, but he didn’t mind. “Enjoy your meals!” He bid the girls farewell and began to head back to the counter, seeing Alice in his path. His face lit up at the sight of her.

She strode over to him one step at a time. “What’s happening, handsome?”

“Oh, you know, just….working.” he played into their flirting as he approached her, “Thinking about new ideas for the website. Waiting to see your gorgeous face walk in through the door.” She rolled her eyes at the comment.

“So needy.” she teased, causing him to chuckle. She stepped in and felt his arms coil around her waist. Her day at the Register felt long and draining, yet his kiss brought her some energy. His stubble tickled her healing palms, but it was a sensation she loved. Their lips parted and the two bumped foreheads, smiling at each other.

“You all done at the Register for tonight?” he asked. Alice blinked and let out a hazy exhale.

“I think so. Just trying to make last minute edits to the article….and struggling.”
“Let me look over it.” FP took her hand and led her over to the barstools. He stood next to her and rested his forearms on the countertop while she pulled her laptop out of her bag.

“I’m trying to correlate it with what you had in the video….you know, what they do with those Op-Docs for New York Times. Jesus, I’m rambling.” She rolled her eyes and clamped her mouth shut, waiting for her laptop to connect to the WiFi and boot up her article-in-progress. She felt his hand cup her face and turn to him.

“When was the last time you ate something?”

“I don’t know….I think earlier this morning?” FP gave her a smug look then kissed her forehead.

“Sounds to me like you need some feud.” She blinked at his word choice.

“Feud?” she raised her eyebrow. He let go of her face and moved behind the counter, back towards the kitchen.

“Food. Or Fuel. Yeah…food is fuel.” he started rambling, eventually giving up on his explanation. “You know what the fuck I mean.” And she thought she was going crazy. Her eyes widened and her face lit up.

“Wow. How much coffee have you fucking had today? Shit!” The comment made FP chuckle. He went over to Pop and placed in Alice’s usual order. When he came back, he hunched over her laptop and grinned.

“Let me see what you have.” She blushed and smiled down at her laptop. After a moment of glancing over her writing, she relinquished the laptop to him. She watched as FP scrolled through her article, thankful that he was in her life. Alice wouldn’t have done all of this without him. The past six weeks were long, not just for the two of them, but everyone involved in the Black Hood chaos.

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Following Hiram’s demise, Southside High was shut down due to drug issues and crumbling building reeking of formaldehyde. Without many options, the Serpents were sent to Riverdale High, intermingling with their students. But the young ragtag crew working with FP and Alice seemed to be ecstatic at the transition. The school had recognized their contribution to the Black Hood case and officially labeled them as the Scooby Gang.

Sweet Pea developed a passion for the school’s sports program and joined the basketball team, beating out Reggie Mantle for starting line-up. Fangs joined a theater class and discovered that he enjoyed directing and scene design.

Kevin, still heartbroken over his father’s death, took a while to find his roots. After a couple of weeks trying to figure out what to do, he decided to follow in Tom’s footsteps and join the Riverdale ROTC, alongside his crush Moose Mason. He began also developing plans to direct the school’s annual musical, debating between Carrie the Musical and Heathers. Luckily, Fangs offered his services to help direct, so the process became much simpler.

Veronica decided to stay in New York due to her family’s bad rep in Riverdale and from the press hounding her every 20 seconds over her father’s actions. She will be set to inherit Lodge Industries as its sole heir when she turns 18. But Veronica had started to develop plans to form the company into a non-profit charity organization to help others. She was ready to swipe the slate of her family’s name clean.

Archie came back onto his feet after helping Fred recover. He re-discovered his passion for music
and, with the help of his father, set up his garage into a music studio. He started writing his own
music and found gigs at local Riverdale coffee shops. He was even offered by Josie McCoy to play
as an opening act for Josie and the Pussycats.

Cheryl was finally cleared by the school to rejoin the Vixens, which she was happy about, but she
spent most of her time with Chic, Kevin, and the other Serpents in the Blue and Gold Room. Using
her social media skills, she helped to make the school newspaper available on multiple platforms,
allowing it to gain some notoriety. Through this, she was able to help FP and Alice, her #otp
#powercouple, get their website for the PI business started and acts as their Public Relations
representative for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media outlets.

Toni was overeastic to finally start her education at Riverdale High. She was able to jump into AP
English and World History, already making herself an academic powerhouse. She joined the
yearbook club and worked her way up to be the school’s official photographer. She and Cheryl
became the school’s power couple and continue to thrive together.

Joaquin’s transition to Riverdale was a little rough at first, struggling to find his place in the school,
but luckily he had Chic and the other Serpents by his side. He took his conversation with FP into
consideration - maybe he did have a knack for helping people. After talking with the school’s
counselors, and with Chic helping to do some research online, he began looking into a medical
career, wanting to work primarily with younger kids as a pediatrician. He was able to set up an
internship with a clinic downtown and began taking weekend classes for EMT work and became
officially CPR certified.

Chic no longer had to feel alone at school, since his friends and his boyfriend could start going to
school with him. With Cheryl’s help, he revamped the Blue and Gold and began writing for them
full force. He also began writing more on the side, entering in some teen writing competitions, as
well as helping Archie to produce his music. His relationship with Joaquin became stronger, and he
was relieved to see his mom be happy again in her new beginnings with FP.

The six weeks for FP were amazing and stressful. He was able to get himself fully moved out of the
trailer and into Alice’s home. He had his stuff in the guest room and started by staying in there for the
first couple of days, slowing transitioning into Alice’s room. When he wasn’t dealing with the last of
his Serpent activities, he worked with Alice to develop the PI company with Sierra McCoy, who
resigned from her position as mayor and now taking up her law practice again. He worked part-time
with Pop and Fred to get some money for the company, and on the other days, he was at the Register
with Alice. Once the company was officially up and running, they began their digging into the
Sisters of Quiet Mercy. They spent the first couple of weeks researching the institution and
interviewing families and anyone who had been involved. Once they had what they needed, FP,
with Cheryl’s help, got a film crew out to the location and filmed their project for exposure. They
handed their findings to Sheriff Minetta, and within a matter of days, the Sisters of Quiet Mercy was
shut down for good. It was a hassle, but it was all worth it. His time with Alice brought them closer,
and it made him not so anxious about waiting for the visitation contract between him and Gladys’s
parents. Most nights, he wondered if Jughead and Jellybean would even be willing to see him. If
they had changed for better or for worse because of what happened. But Alice was always there to
keep him breathing through all of his worries. And FP was incredibly fucking thankful. And lucky.

As for Alice, she was just as thankful for him. Since FP moved in with her and Chic, her nights felt
less lonely and more at ease. A few nights after moving in, she allowed for FP to start sleeping in the
same bed as her, and his warmth and allowed her to sleep much easier. It was his light and his
presence that made their relationship so strong. The two had not engaged in any sexual content yet,
since Alice still needed time to recover from Hiram, and FP didn’t want to push her boundaries.
They only stuck to passionately making out or cuddling on the couch, but they didn’t mind. Their
slow pace was what they both needed. Her mind still had those intrusive thoughts, and every once in a while, she swore she could see Hiram’s ghost lingering in the corner. There were some nights that she would wake up screaming and panicking, her nails begging to taste her palms. But FP was always there to calm her down and to lull her back to sleep. Alice still had some tints of her depression flaring every once in a while, but since her recovery, she could find some ways to silence those worries. She focused some energy into Cooper and Jones, but she made sure to save time to bond further with her son and Joaquin, and of course, she saved time to relax and enjoy her time with FP.

The six weeks were long, but it was all worth it. It was worth it as she watched FP finishing her article. His face was glowing from the light on her laptop. It made him more attractive for some reason. Once he finished, he turned the laptop back to her, not saying anything.

“So?” she asked, her anxiety creeping in. Was it good? Bad? Needs more time? FP tapped his fists on the countertop and looked out to her.

“Go for it.” She blinked at him.

“What?”

He rolled his eyes and came back around to stand next to her, holding onto her hands. “I’m serious, Alice. It’s a good article. Just go for it. You know the fans will love it no matter what.” He had a point. Since they went live, people who were fans of conspiracy theories and the supernatural were going crazy over the start up. Whatever they would publish, it would get them notoriety.

“Okay.” she allowed herself to smile at him. She turned back to her computer and glanced over her writing one more time. “And are you sure there are no spelling errors or grammatical mistak---”

“Alice.” FP calmed her down. “Do you trust me?” Slowly, Alice nodded.

She hovered the mouse over the “PUBLISH” button, glancing at the article and the correlating video. Then, she pressed it.

It took a little bit for the article and video to publish, the minutes were grueling. Alice let out an exhale and waited. FP stepped in behind her and wrapped his arms around her stomach, planting a gentle kiss on her shoulder. After a while, the screen refreshed. Then, the article and video appeared. She lit up at the page and laughed.

“Holy fuck, we did it.” Alice muttered in relief. She hopped off the barstool and hugged FP, who was just as rejoiced. He cupped her face and grinned.

“See? I told you we could do it.” he responded suavely, making her roll her eyes at him. He smirked down at her and gave her a quick peck before heading back behind the counter. “We’re definitely going to celebrate tomorrow when we’re both not busy.” She watched as FP went over to the register to check a woman and her son out from the diner. Hal was right, she thought to herself. She and FP really did work well together. All that hard work and effort into these six weeks was finally paying off. They really did it. Their first case on their own. Together.

Alice turned back to her laptop and her mouth hung. People were already responding to the articles. The reviews were radiating in positivity and excitement. They already wanted to know what the two would look into next. It made Alice proud.

After tending to a few customers, FP came back over to her and sighed. “Speaking of celebrations, let me get your opinion on something.” She looked him in the eye and closed her laptop. “What do
you think Chic would be more into? A watch or a typewriter?"

She was at first confused by the questions, but she caught on to what he was trying to ask. It was Chic’s Sixteenth Birthday coming up on the 20th, and FP needed to get him a gift.

“Any one of the two could work.” she replied, shrugging her shoulders. “What’s the need to decide?”

“It’s kind of a Jones family tradition that the boys in the family get a special pass down gift when they turn 16. My dad before he kicked me out…he gave me that watch. I got the typewriter just as a graduation present from my uncle. And since your boy’s about to be 16….” FP stopped, staring down at his arms. “I know that Jug’s still out there….and he’s my boy. My son. But Chic….he’s like a son to me too. I want this to be special for him.”

She was silent at first. It was still hard for Chic since Hal was no longer around to give him that fatherly support. But FP could at least fill in some of the gaps. And Chic liked having him around. When she came to her decision, Alice reached out and took FP’s hands.

“Save the watch for Jughead when you two meet up. I think Chic will really get a kick out of the typewriter.” Feeling more assured, he smiled. He leaned in to kiss her, letting the moment between them last until Pop barked for FP to get back to work.

“I’ll probably be done in an hour or so.” FP explained. “Think you can hold out?” She nodded, mesmerized by his eyes. He let go and returned to work. “I’ll go and see if your food’s ready.”

Alice reopened her laptop and just scrolled through her social media, feeling much closer to FP. The fact that he still had his hopes up about seeing Jughead and Jellybean was heartwarming. Little did he know the surprise that she was planning for him…..

She pulled up her messenger and began typing.

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March 20th rolled around. FP helped Alice decorate the house for Chic’s birthday while Joaquin and the other kids took Chic out for a surprise scavenger hunt around town. The affair started as a small breakfast get-together with the two of them and the kids, and by the time the kids would return, the cake and presents would be served. When the last of the decorations were put up, FP flopped onto the couch and sighed.

“Already giving up by me, Jones?” Alice stood in front of him and crossed her arms. He looked up at her and smirked. She looked beautiful in that light blue wrap dress. Not giving up on his stance, he raised an eyebrow at her. Giving in, she rolled her eyes and flopped down next to FP, making him giggle. “Shush.” she barked, which only made her laugh. She curled up into him and he snuck an arm behind her and rested it on her hip. Her legs found their place on his lap, and he enjoyed it. He sighed in delight and examined the scene around him.

“This feels right, doesn’t it?”

“The decorations? I mean it’s….” he turned to face her, smirking. Eventually she caught onto what he meant. “Oh….” she leaned in and kissed him. He could smell her rosy perfume. Alice broke the kiss, giggling. He kissed her cheek and rested his forehead on the side of her face.

“This might sound weird but….he muttered, “who would have ever thought that….”

“That the being paired up to catch the Black Hood could lead to the possibility of us?” she finished
his sentence. He was shocked - they tried to avoid talking about the Black Hood, due to her
sensitivity of it. But mentioning the Black Hood didn’t seem to bother her in that moment.

“Yeah.” he mumbled, awestruck by her. Alice’s smile mitigated as she nodded. She was glowing.
They brought their foreheads together, comfortably enjoying each other’s silence. Maybe things did
happen for a reason. FP had to give some credit to both Tom Keller and Hiram Lodge - without
them, he and Alice never would have had the opportunity to flourish on their own.

Her phone buzzed on the table. Alice peeled away to grab for it, making FP somewhat cold.
“Everything alright?”

“Joaquin just texted. They’re heading back now.”

“Oh shit.” FP stood up from his spot and helped Alice up. “You want me to get the cake out of the
fridge?”

“Not at the moment…..but when they’re closer, yes.” she directed. They both checked through the
house for any last minute additions, but everything seemed to be in order. FP was happy for her boy,
yet part of him still wondered if he would really like the typewriter. He glanced over at the wrapped
up typewriter by the pile of presents on the floor.

“They’re outside.” Alice called out, giving him the cue. He carefully pulled the cake out and lit the
sixteen candles one by one. After lighting the last one, Alice came over to his side, squeezing his
hand.

“He’s gonna love this.” she whispered, looking up at him. “You did a great job, FP.”

“We did.” he clarified. He gave Alice one last kiss before the kids, led by Chic and Joaquin, walked
into the house.

The afternoon went a lot better than what FP thought. Chic loved how the house looked, and he was
beaming with happiness. He watched as the boy blew out his candles and got to take the first bite of
the cake. Alice was glowing watching her boy be surrounded by the people he cared about the most.
After enjoying some cake, they all sat down at the table while Chic opened his presents, Toni taking
pictures of the affair and Cheryl making a billion posts about it on Instagram. Kevin got him some
new notepads and planners for school. Sweet Pea and Fangs got him some tickets to a baseball game
outside of town. Cheryl and Toni got him a Polaroid camera and a three month supply of roll. And
Joaquin’s gift, which was probably the sweetest, was a signed copy of a CD by one of Chic’s
favorite bands. He and Alice teamed up to also get Chic a new book with more personal messages
written on the front pages. He absolutely loved it. When it was time for FP’s gift, FP carefully lifted
the box onto the table in front of the boy. “Just be careful opening it.” he warned as he backed up
towards Alice. He waited as Chic unwrapped the gift and opened the box, looking down at the
typewriter. He was silent for a few moments, then turned to FP.

“Where did you get this?”

“Been in my family for a while, got it from my uncle.” FP answered. “Figured you would make
more use out of it.” Oh god, he hates it, FP thought to himself in panic. But Chic smiled. He smiled,
and he came over to hug FP.

“Thank you, Mr. Jones.” He felt so relieved. He returned the boy’s hug in full force.

“Happy birthday, boy.” FP teared up. He turned to Alice and saw her grin. She mouthed to him
“Told you.” and winked. He couldn’t help but smile.
The night was pretty peaceful. After cleaning up from the party, he and Alice just went straight to bed while Chic and Joaquin stayed up for a bit testing out his new typewriter. FP didn’t know it was already the morning until he woke up from Alice kissing his cheek.

“Morning, Sleeping Beauty.” she teased him. FP stirred awake and found her already dressed for the day. “Better get up and changed.”

“What is….” FP tried to talk as he sat up. “We going somewhere for breakfast? This early?”

“It’s 7:30, FP. And yes. So get dressed. It’s something special.” He turned to her and raised a brow. She smirked at him and gestured for him to get going. Did she plan another surprise for Chic that he wasn’t in on? Eventually, FP got up and put himself together. Five-ish minutes later, he and Alice came down the stairs and found Chic and Joaquin waiting in the living room.

“You boys know where to go?” she approached them. They both nodded and headed out the door, smiling as they passed FP. He turned to Alice, becoming more skeptical.

“Alright. What’s going on here?” But she wasn't backing down. She stood there with an evil smile on her face and her arms crossed.

“You trust me?” It was clear she was going to win. Accepting defeat, he sighed and let her lead the way.

“Whatever you say, Coop.” Satisfied, she took him by the hand and led him out of the house, out to her convertible. This better be worth getting up early, he thought to himself. As she drove, he started to ponder the possibilities? Was there something going on at Pop’s? At the Register? Hell, was something happening at the station? He wanted to ask her, but she was bound and determined to keep whatever this surprise was a secret.

To his astonishment, they pulled up at the Greyhound Bus Station a few miles outside of downtown. She put the car in park and turned to him. They got out of the car as Chic and Joaquin came over to them.

“It should be getting here any minute now,” Alice looked out, directing her conversation to the boys. “When it pulls up, can you two go greet them?” They? Were they getting visitors? Fans from the website? The boys nodded.

“Um…” FP threw out, catching her attention.

“We have some people joining us for breakfast….from outside of town. I’m going to leave it at that.”

“Okay.” he rolled his eyes at her. Who would be joining them? Reporters? Veronica Lodge?

A bus came into view and pulled into the station. It moved too fast so FP wasn’t able to catch where the bus came from. It stayed stationary for a bit, waiting for the clear to go. Chic and Joaquin on cue headed out to the bus to greet whoever it was having breakfast with them. The bus’s doors opened and people began filing out one by one. None of the riders had made their way to the boys yet. It was making FP more anxious by the second.

A young girl, about eleven or twelve years old, emerged from the bus. The girl came over to Chic and Joaquin with enthusiasm radiating off of her. Something stood out about her, but FP couldn’t tell what it was. Had he seen her somewhere before? A couple of the people who left the bus were in conversation, how they were glad to no longer be in Toledo…… WHAT DID THEY SAY
FP left Alice’s side and began heading over to where the people were coming off the bus. Joaquin noticed him and led the young girl over to him. “Hey, Jones.” he called out, “Got someone who wants to meet ya.” As he got closer, he could make out her features more clearly.

She had Gladys’s face. She had his nose.

His heart was pounding. His eyes were getting heavy. He almost couldn’t believe it. But it was real. This wasn’t just a random little girl. It was his own little girl.

“JB?” his voice cracked. The girl, Jellybean Jones, lit up at the sight of her father.

“Daddy!” She left Joaquin’s side and ran over to FP. He took her into his arms and sobbed. He was mentally pinching himself. This was real. With red, wet eyes, he held his daughter’s face and smiled.

“It’s you. My….my….when did you get so big?” he rambled, making her giggle. She clung onto him again. He picked her up and twirled her around.

This was really his daughter. His little Jellybean. If she was here, did that mean….. Did that mean Jughead was here too?

He set JB down at looked back at the bus. A teenage boy with black hair and a grey beanie stepped off, making conversation with Chic for a bit then turning to face him. JUGHEAD.

“Hi, dad.” the kid, Jughead, became emotional. Squeezing JB’s hand, FP walked over to his son. Jughead moved in as well, meeting him halfway. The two embraced, holding onto for dear life. The father and son were reunited at last. Father and daughter too. JB ran over to them, squeezing herself in. FP sobbed harder. Both of his kids were really here. It wasn’t a dream. It was all real.

“How did you guys….?” FP tried to ask. He had so many questions for his children. How is life in Toledo? Are you two taking care of each other? How did you get the time to come out here?

“Jughead reached out on the Facebook page.” Chic pipped in behind him. “I got him in contact with my mom, and…..we wanted to surprise you.” From the corner of his eye, Alice and Joaquin stood next to Chic. Jughead saw Alice and approached her.

“It’s great to finally meet you, Mrs. Cooper.” he extended his hand out to her, and she gladly took it.

“Pleasure’s all mine, Jughead.” she beamed. FP faced her and his heart swelled. She did this for him. She got his kids back to him. He fucking loved her.

“Daddy….are you dating this lady?” JB asked in confusion. He continued to look at Alice with love and admiration.

“Yeah. I am. And she’s amazing.”

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The ride to Pop’s was consumed with FP asking Jughead and JB numerous questions about their lives. Alice just drove knowing that it was all a good call. She had been in contact with Jughead for a couple of weeks leading up to that day. The kids were both on Spring Break and wanted to come to Riverdale to spend time with their father. With help from Mary, Alice was able to convince the grandparents to let the kids come see FP. It was great watching him be a father again. It’s what she loved about him.
When they arrived at Pop’s, Chic and Joaquin sat with JB in a booth across the way from FP, Alice, and Jughead. They placed their orders with Pop and returned to their conversation.

“So, Jughead, you’re a writer?” she asked the boy across from her.

“Aspiring writer.” he replied. “I’m into the mystery genre. That’s why I was excited to come finally see what Riverdale is like. This place intrigues me. The town that dared sundown.”

“Yeah….that’s Riverdale for ya, boy.” FP teased, slinking his arm around her shoulders.

“And I figured, what better way to examine the mysteries of this place with the serial killer that left this place shook.” She took a moment to process his response. She knew Jughead was referring to the Black Hood.

“You want to write a book about us?” Alice chimed in. Jughead turned to her and nodded.

“I mean, not just because you and my dad busted the Black Hood, but….you guys are kind of a big name on the internet now. You’re like Riverdale’s very own Buzzfeed Unsolved….at least that’s what the others at school say.”

She wanted to desperately bury the whole matter behind her…. But exposing Hiram for what he was, remembering Hal….. If Jughead really was determined to write their story, it could be good for all of them. The closure she finally needed.

“So if you guys are willing, would you tell me all about it?” Jughead asked. Alice turned to FP, hoping he give her some guidance. He held her thigh and gave it a gentle squeeze.

“Your call, partner.” he spoke to her in a soft voice. But it was the reassurance she needed. With the answer in her head, Alice turned back to Jughead.

“Where do you want us to start?”

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THE END

Chapter End Notes

Cue the end credits

HOLY SHIT YOU GUYS. This whole writing experience has been a rollercoaster. But in all seriousness, I really enjoyed sharing this story with all of you :) I think I might make this a stand alone story, but if yal have any suggestions for spin-offs or one shots that deal with the other characters, let me know and I'll see what I can do.

Thank you all so much for following along on the journey with FP and Alice, and with me. Take care of yourself loves XOXO

End Notes
Hello beautiful humans! So yay, I made a Riverdale fanfic (finally, ikr?) as a way to kick off the new season. Since I kinda didn't like how they handled the whole Black Hood ordeal, I figured we could just....start from scratch and write the whole damn thing over again ¯\_(ツ)_/¯. I do hope to keep posting this so please let me know for feedback! Hope you guys enjoyed the first chapter!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!